



Unleashing the Transformative Potential of the 2030 Agenda through Participatory Approaches: Empowering the most vulnerable, transforming policies and institutions

The International Movement ATD (All Together in Dignity) Fourth World is a movement of solidarity among and in collaboration with the most excluded families around the world. Founded in 1957 by Joseph Wresinski in France, ATD Fourth World, active in 34 countries, brings together people from different cultures and social classes.

With the goal of leaving no one behind, all our projects are designed and planned with people living in persistent poverty and aim to bring their voices to all decision-making spheres, including at the global level.

ATD Fourth World has had general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 1991 and consultative status with UNICEF and UNESCO since 1970.

It has permanent delegations at the European Union and the Council of Europe. It acts as the secretariat of the Intergroup Extreme Poverty and Human Rights at the European Parliament.

It is also recognized by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organisation of the Francophonie (IOF).

Our engagement with international institutions, together with a focus on the inclusion of people in poverty, has resulted in the recognition that extreme poverty is both the cause and the consequence of human rights violations.

For more information, please visit our website:

<http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/>

Contact: monica.jahangir@atd-quartmonde.org

Executive Summary

- In a world where inequalities are on the rise, where democratic institutions are distrusted, and where an increasing segment of the population is ignored by government leaders, paying special attention to the most vulnerable groups is a **question of human rights and social justice and compels us to look into the systemic obstacles that prevent them from participating fully in the economic, social, and political life of their country.**
- Reaching the **furthest behind first** is at the core of Agenda 2030 and central to our action. For more than sixty years, the International Movement ATD Fourth World has accumulated knowledge and expertise in reaching out to the most deprived people in the global South and the global North, **creating conditions that enable them to participate** in programs and policies that affect their lives.
- The knowledge and skills of people living in poverty are rarely seen, acknowledged, or valued. Against the odds, they fulfill many important roles, often supporting others and making **significant economic and social contributions**. Policies and projects that affect them should recognize their contributions and aspirations from the start.
- People living in extreme poverty have little control over their own lives. Their options are limited; they are disempowered not only by their circumstances but also by the actions of institutions. In order to empower their communities, the structures and institutions working with them must **adapt to ensure that no one is left behind.**
- **To achieve real, lasting change, the capacity of all stakeholders must be strengthened and institutions must be transformed at the same time.** This includes promoting local ownership of projects in vulnerable communities; making institutions more effective, responsive, and inclusive in their decision-making processes; and implementing innovative systems that are open and transparent. In order to monitor progress and evaluate changes, institutions must be held accountable.
- **Measuring multidimensional poverty:** The \$1.90-a-day measure of poverty takes into account only a monetary dimension and not the variations in average income levels. **Governments should look at many other dimensions**, including shame, exclusion, discrimination, the absence of political power, and modifying factors such as gender and duration, among others.
- The participation of all stakeholders should be built into all steps of any project from design and implementation to evaluation. Based on a human rights approach, encouraging community-based accountability and **strengthening review mechanisms for Member States as they implement the 2030 Agenda** are also vital to ensure no one is left behind.

PUTTING INTO ACTION THE KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE 2030 AGENDA

Leaving no one behind by reaching the furthest behind first

Since its inception in 1957, ATD Fourth World's actions and ethics¹ have been built with the experience and knowledge of people living in extreme poverty. Their challenges and aspirations guide ATD Fourth World's actions and reveal the importance of leaving no one behind. Knowing that *everyone has experience and knowledge to contribute to society*, ATD Fourth World continues to reach out to the most excluded communities. Together, we create spaces where collective knowledge is built in order to contribute to programs and inform policies that affect their lives.

"We would like others to stop making decisions for us, to stop thinking for us, and to stop doing things for us, but to do these things with us." Angélique Jeanne, member of ATD Fourth World in Normandy, France, at the 15th European Fourth World People's University in the European Parliament on 6 February 2019.

A significant outcome of this experience is the recognition that extreme poverty is a cause and a consequence of multiple violations of human rights. This key insight, shared by international human rights experts, formed the basis for the UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights.² In 2015, the adoption of Agenda 2030 marked great progress, as eradicating extreme poverty for all people everywhere by 2030 was now a universal commitment grounded in international human rights and in the moral imperative of leaving no one behind. (A/RES/70/1 Paragraph 10)

Today, four years into the implementation of Agenda 2030 and according to the UN Secretary General's Progress Report 2019, the world is not on track to leave no one behind. This demands urgent action.

Empowerment and participation

Empowerment is central to unleashing the transformative nature of Agenda 2030. The experience of ATD Fourth World demonstrates that participation of people living in extreme poverty is a key condition for their empowerment.

Therefore, **participation** is one of the main requirements to unleash the transformative potential of the Sustainable Development Goals.

IN FOCUS: Learning How to "Leave No One Behind": a training program in the Central African Republic (SDGs 1 and 16)

In 2016, ATD Fourth World in the Central African Republic launched a new training program on how to reach people who have lived on the margins for many years if not all their lives. Twelve young adults, themselves from marginalized communities, attended the training course in social and cultural outreach, which focused on developing their capacity to create or renew social ties with people mired in the daily violence engendered by poverty and aggravated by political tensions. Today, the training program is in the process of becoming officially recognized in the Central African Republic, so that "Social and Cultural Mediation" can become an established profession and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds can be empowered to contribute to a society that leaves no one behind.

Several conditions must be met to ensure a fair and non-exploitative process that can foster the empowerment of people living in extreme poverty and *enable them to speak for themselves* and participate in decision-making processes that directly affect them. These conditions include building a feeling of trust, creating an environment that is safe and secure at the mental and physical levels, granting time to prepare for the process, verifying that the language used is understandable by all, ensuring that vulnerable groups not be put

¹ To learn more about our history, vision, and actions, please visit : <https://www.atd-fourthworld.org/who-we-are/>

² The UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights were adopted by the Human Rights Council in 2012: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Poverty/Pages/DGPIIntroduction.aspx>

at risk, and guaranteeing confidentiality when needed.³

It is crucial to *acknowledge that specific preparatory steps need to be taken by the practitioners or academics working with these vulnerable groups*. As stated in the UNDS handbook *Leaving No One Behind*, “It should also be acknowledged that engaging meaningfully with the most marginalized and excluded groups may take extra time and resources on the part of UN staff themselves. This requires UN staff to build their own capacity and adapt their behaviours”.⁴

When people living in poverty can participate meaningfully in research and programming, the knowledge created contributes towards more sensitive policy design at national and international levels and ultimately towards the eradication of poverty.

At the international level, in a recent research project led by the International Movement ATD Fourth World and Oxford University, people with direct experience of poverty, academics, and practitioners worked together as equals to meet the challenge raised by the 2030 Agenda: *to define all the forms of poverty everywhere*.

This research process — termed Merging Knowledge® — took place in three countries in the global South (Bangladesh, Bolivia, and Tanzania) and three countries in the global North (France, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America).

This process has been transformative not only for the participants but also with regards to the results: a new set of dimensions emerged, showing that even if poverty is different according to the context, the experience of poverty is similar in both North and South. This research provides the international community with a global

understanding of poverty in terms of three interrelated sets of dimensions:⁵

1) Poverty is first and foremost a lived experience, characterized by three elements:

1. *Suffering in body, mind, and heart*
2. *Struggle and resistance*
3. *Disempowerment*

“Dependence has different forms and different levels. It is most extreme when my need is critical and my survival lies in the hands of others. I have no choice, I must depend on others or on an institution. I endure”.

Co-written report of Merging of Knowledge® session, France

2) Poverty is relational. It is the result of:

4. *Institutional maltreatment*
5. *Social maltreatment*
6. *Unrecognized contributions*

“Out of sight, out of mind government thinking. Resources are just enough to set people up to fail. The human-to-human aspect of services is missing.”

Practitioner USA

“Being victim of prejudice, first considered as poor, but not as a human being. Having the label of poor. There is a duality: on the one side, people living in poverty are invisible, on the other side they are visible because they are stigmatized.”

Academic peer group, France

3) Poverty is characterized by privations:

7. *Lack of decent work*
8. *Insufficient and insecure income*
9. *Material and social deprivation*

“Some pupils came to school without tucking their shirts into their shorts and a teacher punished them. He did not know that they did so to avoid shame by hiding their torn shorts and lack of underwear.”

Practitioner, Tanzania

This research will also lead to developing new tools for measuring poverty. In the words of Angel

³ Section 2 of the handbook “*Making Human Rights Work for People Living in Extreme Poverty*” presents the key principles for engaging with them: <https://www.atd-fourthworld.org/making-human-rights-work-people-extreme-poverty/>. ATD Fourth World will soon be publishing a report about the conditions for the meaningful participation and representation of people living in poverty in institutions.

⁴ Leaving No One Behind, a UNSDG operational guide for UN country teams, Interim Draft – 18 March 2019, page 54.

⁵ To read the full research report, please visit: https://www.atd-fourthworld.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2019/05/Dim_Pauvr_eng_FINAL.pdf

Gurría, Secretary-General of the OECD: *"For the first time, the ATD–Oxford University research places a bridge across this gulf in the measurement approaches between rich and poor countries allowing us to see poverty through a single perspective. At the OECD we will work hard to develop additional measures that capture the most intangible and pernicious dimensions of poverty such as disempowerment and stigma."*

INITIATIVES FROM THE GROUND: TRANSFORMATION OF POLICIES, STRUCTURES, AND MINDSETS

When the right conditions for marginalized groups to fully participate are put into place, their knowledge can lead to a meaningful transformation of policies, structures, and mindsets.

Transforming policies and programs based on people's needs and skills

In France, a key initiative launched by ATD Fourth World involved the establishment of "Areas with zero long-term unemployment", a pilot project conducted in ten targeted areas under a law adopted in February 2016. It is based on three critical propositions:

- that no one is unemployable — there is work appropriate for everyone;
- that there is work available, many of the labor needs of society being unmet;
- that there is real money-saving involved in making work available, as long-term unemployment is a cost to the state.

The project shows that it is possible to offer any long-term unemployed person who wishes to participate a permanent job that corresponds to his or her skills, that meets the needs of the area, and that incurs no extra cost to the community, largely by reallocating existing public budgets.

One beneficiary of the project testified: *"We all experienced the difficulties of unemployment, the suspicion in the eyes of others, being excluded. However, through this initiative, we stick together to make it work."*

The first full year of the project trial has already made it possible to hire 500 job seekers in ten areas of 5,000 to 10,000 inhabitants. This represents 25 percent of the total number of people who are hit by long-term unemployment in these areas. A new law is now needed to allow a second trial phase and expansion of the project to new areas.

Transforming schools by creating the conditions for parents, teachers, and school administrators to meet and take time to understand one another

In Tanzania, ATD Fourth World conducted a participatory project from 2015 to 2017 entitled *Promoting inclusive access to primary school education taking into account the views of people living in poverty*. It involved teachers, school administrators, students, and parents from 14 schools within and outside Dar-es-Salaam. The recommendations drawn from the research have generated changes:

- Involving parents in the children's education has improved their performance;
- Providing school meals has enabled students to study more effectively;
- Opening an adult literacy class has addressed the wishes of the parents and supported their access to education.

"The success of this project has been substantial. There is more solidarity now between people living in poverty and teachers, local authorities, and other stakeholders in the educational system. Parents living in poverty are kept informed about their children's progress. Through this collaboration, children have come to feel that school is a safe place."

Salma Mosha, ATD Fourth World Tanzania

Transforming political institutions by creating spaces for sharing power and knowledge

In Europe, ATD Fourth World partners with the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee to host the European Fourth World People's University sessions every two years. It also regularly contributes to the European Parliament Intergroup "Extreme Poverty and

Human Rights". These are unique spaces where people from different social backgrounds (people living in poverty in Europe, European policymakers, and civil society representatives) come together to discuss and influence policies. In February 2019, in the context of the European elections, three themes were discussed at the European Fourth World People's University sessions: the indicators of poverty and social exclusion used in Europe; the impact that various national and European policies have on family life for citizens in poverty; and people's legal status or lack thereof.

"Poverty is unfortunately still very high in Europe, with 22.5 percent of EU population at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Poverty is not only economic but multidimensional: for this reason, thanks to the constant input of the Intergroup on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights that I had the honor to co-chair during this term, the European Parliament has put forward some concrete proposals to fight against the root causes of poverty, by directly involving the people experiencing it."

Silvia Costa, Italian member of the European Parliament, co-chair of the Intergroup "Extreme Poverty and Human Rights" at the 15th European Fourth World People's University in the European Parliament on 6 February 2019.

During this People's University session, multiple recommendations were made to the European Union to fight against inequality and eradicate poverty.⁶

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2030 AGENDA AND ITS REVIEW PROCESS

Drawing on our grassroots experience, our participatory research, and the cultivation of relations with academics, practitioners and policymakers at national, regional and global levels, we propose some recommendations to accelerate progress towards realizing Agenda 2030. For the voices of the most vulnerable groups to be heard and their knowledge to be harnessed, their participation must be built into the process at all levels as the Agenda is implemented. Our recommendations follow.

- Because it is the people who are directly affected by poverty who best know the

obstacles that keep them disempowered, their participation in building knowledge and designing, implementing, and evaluating policy is vital. To develop anti-poverty policies that are relevant and effective, people with a direct experience of poverty should be equal partners at each stage of the process.

- Governments should further develop multidimensional measurements of poverty by taking into account the new dimensions uncovered in the "Hidden Dimensions of Poverty" research.
- Eradicating extreme poverty involves looking beyond income and exploring integrated approaches to ensuring the indivisible rights to education, healthcare, housing, decent work, and livelihood, and recognizing the contributions of people living in poverty. It also entails challenging social and institutional maltreatment.
- The ways in which the SDGs are interconnected should be highlighted, and methodologies to leave no one behind should be showcased.
- The links between the SDGs and human rights should be a key focus in the monitoring of Agenda 2030; such as the inclusion of international labor and human rights standards, and calling on UN Special Rapporteurs on Human Rights and members of treaty bodies including CEDAW, UPR, CRC, and CESCR.
- More opportunities for vulnerable groups to meaningfully contribute to global accountability processes such as the HLPF and the VNRs sessions should be created.
- The participation of vulnerable groups in the work of United Nations Country Teams and local and regional UN agencies should be encouraged in regard to planning, implementing, and monitoring Agenda 2030.

⁶ To read these recommendations, please download the report "Towards a Europe that leaves no one behind" here: [https://atd-](https://atd-vierdewereld.be/cms/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/04/2019-04-09-EN_Memorandum_UE_2019_Web_.pdf)