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ATD Fourth World - Contribution to the UN OHCHR report on the protection of the rights of the child in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Resources serving as the basis for inputs

The present inputs draw primarily on the results of a participatory research project, carried out from 2011 to 2013, to provide people living in extreme poverty with the means to evaluate programmes and policies that implemented the MDGs and to make proposal towards the Post-2015 development agenda¹. Also included in the present paper are findings from a previous research project on the connections between extreme poverty, violence and peace,² as well as inputs from the Tapori Children’s Movement, led by ATD Fourth World.³

1. Key lessons learned from implementing the MDGs that contribute to ensuring the protection of the rights of the child in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Extreme poverty must be recognized as both a cause and a consequence of multiple human rights and child rights violations. The stigmatization of impoverished groups and individuals increases the intensity and persistence of poverty, as recognized in the UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights.⁴ Children and their families are denied access to fundamental human rights, resources and a dignified life either through active discrimination or careless neglect.

In developing strategies to meet the MDGs, the knowledge and experience of children and adults living in extreme poverty were too often simply ignored by project organizers. As a result, projects and services not adapted to their needs often pushed them into even further into destitution. In addition, by minimizing the agency of people living in poverty, ill-adapted projects break down their ability and will to organize themselves, undermine their self-esteem and capacity for self-reliance, and often lead to a deterioration of their social and economic position. There is a vital need to guard against these processes in anti-poverty programmes and in the framing of future development objectives, if SDG 1 is to be achieved.

¹ The research project involved over 2,000 people from a dozen countries, a majority of whom live in poverty or in extreme poverty. In the process, participants met and held dialogue with a variety of partners including academics, representatives of non-governmental organisations and trade unions, policy-makers from national governments and international organizations; The research led to the publication [Challenge 2015: Towards Sustainable Development that Leaves No One behind, 2014](#) • ISBN 979-10-91178-15-0, available in English, French and Spanish.

² See [Extreme Poverty is Violence, Breaking the Silence, Searching for Peace](#), • ISBN 979-10-91178-00-6

³ ATD Fourth World, *Yes, I love to learn!*, (under production, translated from the French *Apprendre? Oui, on aime!*, Editions Quart Monde, 2014).

⁴ Human Rights Council, A/HRC/21/39, September 2012. See http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/OHCHR_ExtremePovertyandHumanRights_EN.pdf, paragraph 18.

For effective policies and programmes, the multiple and overlapping insecurities that confront children and their families living in extreme poverty must be taken into account. Inadequate housing, precarious jobs, irregular income, poor health, and lack of legal identity combine to hamper the well-being of children from very poor backgrounds. These obstacles put them at increased risk of discrimination, stigma, violence, ill health, little or no education, and prevent them from enjoying their rights.

Typical of this interconnection is the situation of families living in informal settlements. Their evictions rarely take place at times that allow the children to finish the school year. If ever re-housing is proposed, the relocation sites are generally far outside the city. Parents have to struggle to find jobs and make a living, and to find schools willing to enrol their children. All this makes learning and school attendance even more challenging, especially when the children are adjusting to a new environment, finding ways of being accepted by new classmates and making new friends.

The vicious circle in which many families are imprisoned is expressed by this statement by a Tapori group in the Central African Republic: *“If you don't learn well, you fall into poverty. Then our minds are on our parents. We're sad. We want to help them... I can't learn when I'm hungry, we focus on our stomachs.”*⁵

Concerted action by different sectors, in consultation with those most affected, is indispensable in order to achieve sustainable development that ensures the enjoyment of children's rights.

The main obstacles to access to education for children living in extreme poverty must be addressed, as revealed by the mixed results in achieving the goals of Education for All (EFA) and MDG 3 on universal primary education. ATD Fourth World's MDG evaluation confirmed that one stumbling block is the lack of legal identity. Obtaining administrative papers (birth certificate, residence permit, etc.) is a challenge for families who experience chronic poverty. This situation adversely affects the enrollment of the children in school. When undocumented children manage to attend school, they often face administrative barriers to taking official examinations; even when they complete their education, many do not receive their final school-leaving certificate.

Early childhood care and pre-school education (ECCE) are essential to the emotional, linguistic and cognitive development of children. However, when they exist, these programmes are usually not affordable for children from very poor backgrounds. ATD Fourth World's experience in Haiti show how much ECCE fosters the children's social skills and prepares them to enter school ready to learn. The *Bébés bienvenus* (“Babies Welcome”) programme is aimed at children from birth to 3 years old, and a pre-school welcomes children up to the age of 6. Parents and other family members are actively involved, taking part in facilitating the *Bébés bienvenus* sessions, and participating in the parents' committee and monthly meetings. Teachers visit the families at the end of the school day. The programmes have found ways of breaking down barriers facing families living in poverty by partnering with other local organizations in providing affordable health care, helping parents to acquire identity papers for their children and ensuring that pupils finishing the pre-school programme enroll in a local primary school.

Insufficient and inadequate school infrastructures in rural settings or disaffected urban areas are another cause of inequality. Overcrowded classes, low pay and frustrating working conditions of the teachers affect the learning of the pupils. Private schools or tutoring are alternatives proposed, which families in extreme poverty cannot afford. The tendency entrenches the idea

⁵ ATD Fourth World, *Yes, I love to learn!*, (under production, translated from the French *Apprendre? Oui, on aime!*, Editions Quart Monde, 2014).

that education is a commodity, compromising the ambition of equity as stated by the international community and national governments.

As already revealed in other studies, education is supposed to be free, but in practice parents have to buy uniforms and make various contributions for school maintenance. A mother from Peru said: *“The school board always asks us to pay for photocopies of files and other teaching materials. Failing that, our children can’t enter the school.”* Textbooks are expensive and often change editions, making it impossible to buy them second-hand. These indirect and ‘hidden costs’ of education, plus the money for each child to pay the school’s canteen or buy lunch and pay for transportation, combine to create a heavy financial burden on families in poverty.

Bullying in school and in other settings is very frequent, and can affect children very deeply and prevent them from learning. Often children living in poverty are one of the targets of bullying, and this causes great suffering, mental blocks, and shame. As a child from Mauritius said: *“I don’t learn well when my friends make fun of me....When my friends are mean to me.”*⁶ Since bullying is a learned behavior, it is crucial to train teachers how to instead work with students and parents towards cooperative learning, in order to help all children to excel academically while also strengthening community inclusiveness.

The Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights call on States to ensure that primary education is truly free and compulsory, considering that the right to education is at risk when these direct and indirect costs of education become prohibitive for people living in poverty. They also remind States that they should take steps to “progressively ensure the availability, accessibility, adaptability and quality of education in all forms and at all levels.”⁷

Social protection systems are essential to protecting children’s rights. Only 20% of the world’s population have adequate social security coverage, while more than half lack any kind of social security coverage at all,⁸ other than relying on family members or mutual help in the neighbourhood. These support networks are often not sufficient when people living in extreme poverty are faced with serious health problems, nor do they provide the financial security that is essential in order for children to be in school rather than working, and to alleviate the stress of their family’s daily struggle for survival that prevents children from being able to concentrate on learning. Countries need to put into place social protection floors, as recommended under Goal 10.4 of Agenda 2030.

Access to health care is not only a question of affordability and accessibility, but also of respect of people’s dignity by healthcare workers. Healthcare is a major issue worldwide, despite differences between developing and developed countries. In 2010, the Social Barometer of the Brussels Health and Social Observatory found that 40% of the poorest households had postponed or renounced medical care for financial reasons.

Stigma and discrimination against families living in extreme poverty can bar their children from accessing healthcare. In Bolivia, although healthcare is free for children under five, many families do not use the available services, relying instead on traditional healers who are not humiliating. Women participants in the action research in La Paz recounted being mistreated by doctors and healthcare staff: *“We endured insulting remarks such as, ‘Why did you give birth to so many children, like a rabbit?’”* A mother said: *“I would rather die at home than be treated like this in health centres (...).”*

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Human Rights Council, A/HRC/21/39, September 2012. See http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/OHCHR_ExtremePovertyandHumanRights_EN.pdf, paragraph 88.

⁸ “International Labour Standards on Social Security,” <http://www.ilo.org/global/standards/subjects-covered-by-international-labour-standards/social-security/lang--en/index.htm>

Healthcare staff should be better trained not only on the technical side, but also on the human side of healthcare. They should become familiar with the circumstances of people living in poverty, be trained to treat all patients with respect and educated to use language patients can understand.

2. Approaches to implementing the 2030 Agenda to ensure the protection of the rights of all children and leave no child behind

a. Ensuring equality and non-discrimination

The Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights identify three main ways to fight discrimination.⁹ A first channel is to modify laws and regulations to ensure the equal protection under the law of people experiencing poverty. France adopted in June 2016 legislation that outlaws discrimination for reasons of social status – in other words, against the poor.

Secondly, states and other actors must take all appropriate measures to modify socio-cultural patterns, with a view to eliminating prejudices and stereotypes. Discrimination is often ignored or denied by public opinion. In order to counter discrimination against people experiencing poverty, educational and training programmes must be put in place, not only at school, but also for public officials, the media and all professionals working with impoverished communities and children and their families. People experiencing poverty must be empowered to resist and denounce the stereotypes that harm them.

A third channel includes positive measures – such as affirmative action – that must be taken in areas such as employment, education, housing and health to ensure the equal treatment of persons living in poverty or extreme poverty. In France, ATD Fourth World is currently running an advocacy campaign that involves long-lasting actions in these three fields with many other partners, including trade unions and other civil society organisations.

In addition to these areas underlined by the UN Guiding Principles, ATD Fourth World contends that States need to recognize that there are different types of families and ensure that children are not discriminated against because of their family configuration, with special attention to children living in poverty. Monoparental families and other types of families are particularly at risk of poverty.

b. Investing in children

To ensure fulfillment of the right to education and achieve inclusive and equitable quality education for all, in keeping with SDG 4, the international community, governments and other stakeholders, including the private sector, need to:

- Remove all financial barriers to equitable access to learning; prioritize Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and ensure that programmes are affordable to children from the most disadvantaged background.
- Introduce measures to end the pervasive discrimination of disadvantaged students and parents by school teachers and staff, as well as by fellow students; and put into place accountability and arbitration mechanisms to address stigma and discrimination; the new Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children should be supported.

⁹ Human Rights Council, A/HRC/21/39, September 2012. See http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/OHCHR_ExtremePovertyandHumanRights_EN.pdf, paragraphs 18 to 22.

- Build a conducive environment for parents and communities to become partners in the education of their children, including families with experience of poverty and social exclusion.
 - Design curricula that are appropriate to cultural contexts, reflecting ethnic, gender, and rural/urban differences. Teachers and educators must ensure that learners develop their potential and equip them with academic knowledge as well as critical thinking and interpersonal and communication skills. School programmes should provide children with the skills they need to improve their situation within the context in which they are living. Informal pathways to education and vocational training should be recognized and supported by local educational institutions and programmes.
- c. Children and families living in poverty as new partners for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda

The international community, national governments, local authorities and grassroots actors need to recognize that children and their families living in extreme poverty have valuable knowledge that can contribute to the design of effective policies and development programmes to meet the SDGs. Agenda 2030 offers the opportunity to introduce people living in poverty as new partners in promoting development, creating cooperation, and initiating new forms of shared knowledge between people living in poverty and people in mainstream society, including academics, professionals, and policy-makers.

This new participatory approach to producing knowledge will contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of poverty and exclusion, and lead to policies and programmes that are more adapted to the reality of those who are the most difficult to reach, and more effective in protecting the rights of the child.

d. Accountability and monitoring

If the child-related SDGs are to be met, appropriate indicators of poverty will need to be developed. \$1.25 a day should no longer be considered as a reliable global measure of extreme poverty, but simply as a measure of income, which has to be proven relevant in the countries where it is used.

Today, many UN Member States are applying multidimensional measures of poverty in their national capacities, and using the UNDP Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) that measures deprivations experienced by households in the areas of health, education and living standards. However, this index still has two main shortcomings: it is not designed and calculated for developed countries, and it does not encompass a measurement of discrimination and social exclusion. Applying multidimensional measures of poverty will help to identify and reach out to the poorest children. These indicators should be developed in consultation with people living in poverty, in order to ensure that the reality of their conditions is accurately captured.

In addition, the poorest 20% of people in every population group - be it at a national, regional or municipal level - should be taken as a benchmark, whatever the definition of poverty. For any given campaign, policy or action, the impact on the bottom 20% must be seen as a reference to evaluate its effectiveness. The SDGs and their targets should be considered to have been achieved only if they are met for all relevant groups.

The participation of people living in poverty in the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of legislation, policies and programmes that affect them and their children is a key condition for the good governance of public institutions and for sustainable development programmes. The right to participate is not only the right to speak without shame and without fear of reprisals, but also to be empowered to effectively express one's

views through capacity-building and human rights learning. Transparency and access to information in terms that are easily understood are key to genuine participation.

Mechanisms need to be developed between individual sectors so that coherent and complementary strategies can be put into place to address the multiple and intersecting factors involved in the protection of the rights of the child – such as legal identity, health service provision, education, housing, management of migration and displacement, provision of livelihoods and employment - in keeping with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

e. No child left behind

All countries have committed themselves to a universal agenda. They have also committed themselves to recognize the right of all people to live in dignity. Development strategies, in order to be inclusive, have to be conceived and implemented with a priority focus on those most difficult to reach.

The first care providers for children are their parents, family and community. Implementing social protection floors would reinforce parents' capacities and enhance their children's enjoyment of their rights. ILO Recommendation 202 on national social protection floors obliges governments to respect the rights and dignity of persons covered by social security guarantees. Their design, monitoring and implementation mechanisms should include the participation of trade unions, civil society and those living in extreme poverty.

The goals of Agenda 2030 will not be reached unless the experience and knowledge of those who are the most affected are drawn upon in the design of policies and programmes that can effectively ensure that development is sustainable and ensure that no one, no child, is left behind.