*Participate*

*Submission to the Civil Society Section of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights consultation on ‘The human rights approach to participation of persons living in poverty in decisions that affect their lives’.*

## Key messages in response to this consultation

* *Participate* is a programme of participatory research work. It is about opening spaces for knowledge from the margins to be given greater weight in development decision-making. It is about challenging the way decisions are made, who they are made for, and how they are accountable to the people that they will impact.
* Participatory research generates real stories of people’s lives and what is important to them. It also offers methods for collective analysis.
* We would like to engage in a longer term dialogue with the Civil Society Section of the OHCHR to work towards our shared vision for an informed and empowered citizenry involved in transparent and accountable governance processes. This is integral to decision-making that is inclusive of the voices and perspectives of people from all sections of society.
* The first phase of our research synthesis process is underway and will draw out key lessons and patterns from existing participatory studies that have taken place over the past 5-7 years on how people living in poverty see change happening in their lives. The preliminary findings of this synthesis and analysis process will be available in early February 2012 and we would like to share these with this consultation process.
* We have developed criteria for participatory research which are shared in this paper. They provide a foundation stone for embedding meaningful participatory research in development policy and practice; we would like to work with the Special Rapporteur to develop guidelines on how to increase the participation of persons living in poverty in domestic policies as well as in international development.
* We will be attending ATD Fourth World’s participatory workshop to inform their participatory action research on the Millennium Development Goals from 24-26 January 2013 at ATD Fourth World international centre in Pierrelaye, France. We look forward to being able to continue this conversation with Magdalena Sepúlveda in this space**.**

Please contact Thea Shahrokh ([t.shahrokh@ids.ac.uk](mailto:t.shahrokh@ids.ac.uk)), Research Officer on the *Participate* initiative for more information and to start a further engagement in this issue.

## Background to Participate

The Participate initiative has been established to ensure that the most vulnerable and marginalised communities have the opportunity to shape post-2015 policymaking and that a future global framework reflects the priorities of those directly affected by poverty and injustice. It will fill a crucial gap in the current policy context and provide a more accurate insight into the realities of how people experience poverty and how they think change is possible at ground level. The initiative will draw together an extensive body of participatory research that has been carried out or is in the process of being carried out that can provide an invaluable contribution to post-2015 discussions.

#### Participate aims to

* Bring perspectives of those in poverty into decision-making processes
* Embed participatory research in global policy-making
* Use research with the poorest as the basis for advocacy with decision-makers
* Ensure that marginalised people have a central role in holding decision-makers to account in the post-2015 process
* Generate knowledge, understanding and relationships for the global public good

#### Key activities include

* Reviewing lessons from large-scale consultation processes
* Facilitating a global Participatory Research Group
* Analysing and synthesising recent and current participatory studies
* Encouraging policy-makers to spend time living with and hearing from people in the poorest communities
* Creating a Ground Level Panel to mirror the work of the High Level Panel
* Putting cameras in the hands of the poorest to make their own films that tell their own stories
* Building partnerships with NGOs and other agencies doing research in the poorest communities

## The role of participatory research in development decision-making

The participatory studies in *Participate* will show marginalised people’s experiences of the policies and practices associated with the pursuit of the MDGs, and their views on the future prospects for positive change.

Of central importance in the role of participatory research in the reframing of development decision-making is the knowledge generated regarding the real stories of people’s lives and what is important to them. This knowledge provides detailed insight into how and why things happen to people in communities where there are large numbers of people living in poverty, and what it is that makes the problems that they face intractable. Through participatory research you are able to understand more about how development interventions are experienced, whether or not they make a difference, and if so whether it is positive.

Of particular significance here is the way that participatory research reveals the many unintended consequences of development interventions which show up statistically as successes. A participatory approach called Reality Check that has been used to evaluate development interventions through a longitudinal process of research immersions, has uncovered unanticipated outcomes that are outside the scope of traditional impact assessment methodologies. In Bangladesh (SIDA, 2007-2011) this approach revealed how new legislation to curb abuse and harassment of girls led to increasing bullying of boys and increasing issues of low self-esteem. In Nepal (DFID 2012) the approach showed that promotion of cash vegetable growing in eastern Nepal by development agencies led to plummeting market prices and whole harvests being abandoned. In addition to unintended consequences these approaches have also revealed inadequate response to real needs, and again reflects the importance of ensuring that development interventions, are catalysed by the contextualised realities of people’s lives.

The data collected within the participatory research process has relevance and integrity as it is situated and contextualised within a wider location and community context. Without the benefit of understanding the systemic features of the context within which people live, data can be disembodied, decontextualised and policy-irrelevant. Participatory visual processes can reveal and communicate powerfully about experiences from the margins by providing further contextualised examples of the complex and nuanced understanding of the subjective aspects and consequences of development. Participatory research processes which draw substantively on group analysis processes enable deliberation and interrogation of ideas and issues building a deeper understanding than traditional surveys and qualitative depth interviews.

**Please see Appendix 1 for an in depth exploration of the Theatre for Development (TFD) participatory learning approach facilitated by the Theatre for Development Centre in Nigeria.** TFD practice allows community members to create their drama and serves as a platform for engaging all members of their community to discuss critical community problems and agree on what actions are necessary.

The evidence base being built through participatory research is far from anecdotal. For example, Reality Checks which have been supported by a number of donors (which have been carried out in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, Mozambique, Mali, and Malawi) have involved in-depth work with 700 people in three districts, and 300 local service providers. This provides a depth of understanding of both the issues that are important to people, and how people’s lives play out. The *Participate* Initiative will synthesise major participatory studies from the past 5-7 years, as well as those ongoing, in relation to their implications for the post 2015 framework.

A key consideration for a future global development framework, and resulting interventions is how they will be monitored and what systems will be put into place for accountability.  This requires creating mechanisms for people living with poverty to hold governments and international institutions to account. Significantly, examples from citymakers (homeless population) of Chennai suggest that institutionalising community-led report cards on state actions can keep government engaged in community needs. Participatory monitoring is empowering in nature and also strengthens communities’ awareness about their rights and the responsibilities of governance institutions. Mechanisms for ensuring that these accountability mechanisms are intrinsically connected to the new global framework and development decision-making will help ensure that the legitimacy lacking in the MDGs will be built at the heart of the post-2015 process.

# Beyond 2015 Participatory Research Group

Beyond 2015’s Participatory Research Group is a consortium of not-for-profit organisations who are working within *Participate* to coordinate and strengthen participative research projects which engage people living in poverty directly in the post-2015 debate. These are typically participatory programmes facilitated by local community organisations under an NGO umbrella, and are currently underway.

*Please see Appendix 2 for a list of the participatory research group members and an overview of their work.*

Please see Appendix 3 for an outline of the participatory action research of Praxis, India

The group will draw these initiatives together to produce rich, in-depth qualitative evidence, co-produced with people living in poverty on what their priorities are, what they see as pressing development needs, and thereby what they might need from a post-2015 framework. A meta-analysis which synthesises all of the key patterns will be carried out - led by the Institute of Development Studies, at the University of Sussex - validated by contributors, and streamed into a series of outputs including briefings and films aimed at decision makers. IDS is also providing methodological support and facilitating methodological learning processes.

While there is a specific policy focus for this work it will serve a number of further purposes (a) as a global public good for use within a wider development arena (b) as a foundation stone for embedding meaningful participatory research in development policy and practice, and (c) as useful for the organisations involved and participants, themselves.

The following criteria have been agreed as a guide to what research will and will not be included in the work of the group. We hope that these principles will support the Special Rapporteur’s objective to provide guidelines on how to increase the participation of persons living in poverty in domestic policies as well as in international development. We would be very interested in entering a dialogue on this with a view to working collaboratively on our shared goal moving forward.

Please see Appendix 4 for an example of how these criteria have been applied to ATD Fourth-World’s participatory action research processes.

**Criteria for Participatory Research**

**Essential**

* The research is with those living in the poverty or who are from marginal, vulnerable or excluded groups.
* The research is not a one off.  It is embedded in a longer term relationship, or it will be the foundation for a longer term relationship.
* Participants will be centrally involved in identifying the key questions, and in making sense of the “data”, they won’t only be participating in data collection.
* Researchers will support participants to help ensure this involvement is meaningful, not tokenistic.
* Participants will be invited to validate any findings, and have the ability to withdraw any of their contributions from the research.
* Participants will be given feedback about what happens to their contributions and where possible what outcomes have emerged from the process.
* Researchers will have an interest in critical reflection, documenting and sharing methodologies.

**Desirable**

* Researchers will have an interest in or existing experience of using creative/visual methods
* Participants will be supported to do their own advocacy with the research findings
* Participants will be involved in decisions about what participatory research methods will be used

# Lessons from large-scale consultations with people living in poverty

Previous global consultations with people living in poverty have promised new opportunities for those most marginalised to influence the decisions that affect their lives, and for relationships to be built between ordinary people and the institutions which make those decisions.

However, for many these processes have been experienced as ‘extractive’ listening projects, as opposed to ongoing conversations – with people left feeling that their voice has been used for political ends which are not their own. There are considerable lessons to be learned about what to do, and what not to do. If the future of development is to be characterised by a tangible degree of ‘ownership’ by those who are affected by it, then it is crucial to learn these lessons.

As such, for the November High Level Panel meeting on the post-2015 development agenda we presented a review of lessons from these past consultations, which showed that there is important learning to be made both regarding the process of consulting and also on the way people’s realities are translated into policy.

*For full report see Appendix 5 titled ‘What do we know about how to bring the perspectives of people living in poverty into global policy-making?*

**Participatory approaches to consultation generate unique knowledge of people’s realities to inform decisions about how to address poverty, exclusion and injustice.** Participatory methodologies bring to the policy process the complex and rapidly changing realities of people living in poverty. They have added a diversity of perspectives and broadened the kinds of actors who engage in policy processes (e.g. children in urban slums). This has led to an increasingly multi-dimensional understanding of poverty.

Large global consultations which have attempted to engage people in participatory ways have had mixed success, and there are important lessons to be learnt from them:

**When synthesising people’s voices and realities they must not be disembodied, de-contextualised, or homogenised.** The process of synthesis acts to exclude some perspectives. This can mean that people’s ‘voices’ used in policy-making are taken out of context. There is also a challenge in synthesis of homogenising the experience of poverty. To understand the complex realities of people’s lives, dissonance is as important as patterns of similarity in synthesis.

**Participatory consultations can exclude significant and important elements of the population, in particular, the voices of those who are poorest and of those who do not participate in formal spaces are often missing.** In almost all cases spaces for participation have been exclusionary. Many large-scale consultations have equated listening to the poorest as listening to NGOs. However it is important to go beyond the level of NGOs and reach citizens and the spaces within which they organise directly.

**A commitment from policy-makers to question established ways of looking at social, economic and political issues is important for meaningful change.** Unless fundamental challenges to the way in which development is constructed are seen to be a legitimate part of a participation process, it is difficult to see how the fundamental change required to make it responsive to the very poorest can come about.

**Spaces for policy influence in participatory consultations cannot be closed or predetermined, they must allow for ideas to emerge from the ground up.** Participation is often restricted to the development of policy proposals which already have predetermined narratives. This closing down of policy space is further compounded by the fact that real decisions are often made in terms of budgeting and financing where participation is highly restricted. In addition, the agendas of those with power over the process of the consultation (for example, the sponsoring institutions) can have influence over which messages are communicated.

**There must be mechanisms for holding global decision-making and policy implementation to account at the local-level.** To ensure accountability, those closest to the issues must drive the participatory process and set the agenda. National-level coordinating mechanisms can help ensure ongoing local ownership and accountability at the country level and provide a space for reflection and reassessment of decisions.

# Appendix 1

### Participation Works: Stories from Nigeria

***Author: Theatre for Development Centre, November 2012***

**Erema and Otuasega (Niger Delta) – Making Development through Participatory Approaches**

The Theatre for Development Centre (TFDC) has worked in the Niger Delta since 2003. Its first work was an exploration of citizenship rights and the connection to development and access to resources by Niger Delta indigenes. The premise of the research was that as citizens, Nigerians have rights claims. In the Niger Delta, such rights claims were defined first and foremost in regard to whether they benefitted enough from the oil resources. In the second instance, they questioned whether they could say with confidence that they were citizens of Nigeria and therefore questioned the validity of being described as Nigerians. At the time of the research between 2003 and 2005, many young persons had no belief in Nigeria. In our visit to Otuegwe, one of the riverine communities, a middle-aged man of about 45, looking lean, malnourished and with threadbare clothes hanging on his body said:

*“Look at me! Do I look like a Nigerian? How am I a Nigerian when no one listens to our problem? Nobody develops our communities; we have no food; we have no drinking water!* *(Pointing to the brown water of the creek) Do you know that that is where we defecate and also fetch our drinking water from!* *Tell me, after they have taken our oil and abandoned us, you ask me if I am a Nigerian!”*

This lamentation and the picture painted about the community in part explains the background to the militancy and violence that characterized the Niger Delta for a long time before the Amnesty of 2009. It is also significant to observe that at centre of this lamentation is the fact that no one is involving them in the development decisions that affect their lives.

At the end of the citizenship research after ten years, our analysis showed that: one, we were able to hear intimate stories about people’s lives and desires because we used approaches that valued and validated people’s knowledge. Secondly, it was clear that the gap in the Nigerian development process was lack of participation to make development respond to real needs articulated by ordinary Nigerians rather than needs perceived to be important by government.

The follow-up project by the TFDC, titled ‘*Local Voices and Choices: Securing the Future through Participatory Actions’ (*funded by CordAid, Netherlands*)* has worked with women and youth in the past three years to move the youth away from violence to a peaceful approach to demanding rights and development dividends. The project has also worked with traditional rulers and the community development committees (CDCs) to pay attention to women’s issues and to include women in decision-making bodies in the community. The tools for the project were theatre for development, participatory video and PLA tools. PLA tools such as transect walk offered a picture of the community and insights into development infrastructures, locations and the politics of service provisioning. Other tools in the corpus such as problem tree and pair-wise ranking provided opportunities to engage in cause-effect analysis and deciding priorities respectively. Theatre for development (TFD) practice allows community members to create their drama and serves as a platform for engaging all members of their community to discuss critical community problems and agree on what actions are necessary. The participatory methods used included community forums, where the community deliberated on matters of importance; using scorecard to outline areas of administrative success or *Impacts:*

i. One of the outstanding examples of impact that everyone pointed to is the way women can now exercise their voice in various meetings so much so that one female is now a member of the Community Development Committee (CDC) and holds the post of treasurer in Otuasega. Also, in the Youth Organization, a female member is in a leadership position as Assistant Secretary (Rivers State).

A number of the persons the team talked to noted that a new trend of inclusive deliberation has emerged in the discussion of communal issues and engagements. For example, the CDC in Otuasega has instituted the Supreme Assembly made up of the CDC members, Youth and Compound Chiefs as part of the deliberative process. These developments are outstanding because they never happened before the *‘Local Voices...’* project.

At the end of this project in September 2012, we heard and we observed that great as this innovations are, respondents are still clamouring for wider deliberation because the experience from the past have been that the compound Chiefs do not convene meetings of the various families within their compounds in order to communicate supreme assembly decisions to the rest of the people. We judge this clamour to be an indication of making voices heard, and an act of claiming rights.

Some testimonials to participation:

* As a youth member, I now understand that there is need to carry others along in building a better community.
* As a result of the openness and allowing everyone to participate, the workshop has given us a different approach to leadership, and that it is possible for a leader to change the life style of members in a community. If we leaders apply these skills on leadership and motivation, advocacy and accountability in our various communities it would go a long way in reducing problems on ground.
* The training has imprinted good qualities on being a good leader and exposing some of the bad happenings in Erema community concerning their leadership predicaments. It has therefore helped in expanding one’s knowledge on how to lead, for as a leader you are rather the servant to the subject.
* The participatory processes (training and meeting community members) really helped each community to develop a concrete action plan and through team building there would be more community participation and accountability. In Otuasega, we used advocacy well and all court cases in the community have been withdrawn.

# Appendix 3

### Participatory Action Research for Informing Collective Action on Urban Issues

***Author: Praxis India, September 2012***

Since 2007, Praxis has been working directly on urban poverty issues in the slum areas of Chennai Municipal corporation areas of Tamil Nadu, India. It hosts the secretariat of Citizens Rights Forum for Chennai- which is a network of like-minded organisations and individuals, with the objective of finding solutions for problems in urban areas and effecting actions on such issues through collectivization. Over the period, the activities have expanded to other districts within Tamil Nadu, India.

**Context of Rapid Urbanisation in Tamil Nadu**

Tamil Nadu is one of the highest urbanized states of India. Its population is 72.1 million, according to the 2011 census. Over the three decades, from 1991 – 2011, its urban population has increased rapidly from 19 million (34%) to 34.9 million (48%). If these trends continue, forecasts suggest that, by 2026, 54 million people constituting nearly 74.8 percent of the state population would be residing in urban areas. *(Ref: NIUA and GoI (n.d) PEARL group cities: Retrieved June 6, 2011, from India Urban Portal.* [*http://www.indiaurbanportal.in/CityNetwork.aspx*](http://www.indiaurbanportal.in/CityNetwork.aspx)*).*

There are about 30,12, 838 slum dwellers in 62 wards of Tamil Nadu as of 2001 census. There are 7,47,936 slum dwellers in Chennai City (CCA) alone *(Ref: Pg 66, Development Plan for Chennai metropolitan Area, April 2006).* As per the 2001 census, the total urban homeless population is 7,78,599 people with Tamil Nadu having the highest of 7.3%, Delhi with 3.1% and Bihar with 1.6%. Extreme poverty topped the list of reasons why people come to the streets with the highest being in Chennai with 73.75% *(Ref: Pg 28, Executive Summary, India Urban Poverty Report: 2009, http://data.undp.org.in/poverty\_reduction/IUPR\_Summary.pdf).*

**State Actions on Urban Issues**

Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission of the GOI mandates the State Government to ensure that all cities with populations of above 5 lakhs, to have one homeless shelter with a capacity of 100 persons for every one lakh population to remain open 24 hours a day and 365 days a year. The order emphasised that these shelters based on the population norms should be operational latest by March 31st, 2011.

Since then, periodically, the Supreme Court has been regularly reviewing the implementation of its directions for the urban homeless by all state governments.

The Office of the Supreme Court Commissioners contacted the Government of Tamil Nadu to undertake joint inspections of homeless shelters across the state. Thereafter joint inspection teams were constituted which visited 22 permanent night shelters in the 10 City Corporations They also held discussions with residents of the shelters and homeless found sleeping in the open during the period.

The joint inspection process reveals that most of the shelters put up in the City Corporations have lower occupancy levels except for the shelters in Madurai and Coimbatore. Of the 22 shelters in the 10 city corporations 8 were not functional because the homeless communities refuse to use the shelters put up by these corporations. The reasons for lower occupancy of shelters were identified.

**Action Research Component and Stages**

To resolve the issue of lower occupancy of shelters, the Office of the State Advisor to the Supreme Court Commissioner identified civil society organisations closely working with the homeless communities for joint enumeration and detailed enumeration of the homeless and needs assessment to be conducted at night time and at daytime (to identify those who work during night time) to inform the policy and programme for homeless.

**Stage 1: Participatory Enumeration Exercise**

Praxis, under the aegis of Citizens Rights Forum, in cooperation with Commisionerate of Municipal Adminstration is organising the Joint enumeration exercise. The study is anchored by the Sanitary Worker, Sanitary Supervisors and the Sanitary Inspectors of the Corporation under the leadership of Praxis.

The studies revealed that there are seasonal/permanent intra and inter state migrants; they are living in the streets for generations and they comprise of population comprising of elderly men and women, orphan, street children, single women, mentally ill and beggars. For each category the needs are different and hence the interventions should also be different.

The study revisited the enumeration undertaken by Government of Tami Nadu and filled the gaps and provided people-centric recommendations to the homeless intervention of the state by evaluating the existing shelter programmes in place.

Some of the tools used were mapping tools to identify homeless population, shelter homes as well as services within homes. Certain participatory tools were used to rank quality of services provided at homes.

**Stage 2: Setting up Shelter Monitoring Groups**

The action part of the research was the attempt to form a standing committee of communities that would regularly monitor the services offered at the shelter. Such monitoring groups are being formed in three cities of Tamil Nadu. The urban poor, especially women, will be part of this group.

Presently it is at varying stage. The initial members are being introduced to simple monitoring tools to play a standing watch-dog role to quickly turn-out simple report cards that provide evidence-based information on status of shelter homes.

**Stage 3: Training CBOs and NGOs in the cities on JNURM policies, progrmames, rights and entitlements**

Simultaneously, trainings and sensitisations through campaign approach is being underway, primarily to create support systems for the Shelter Monitoring groups. The campaign will help make visible issues of homeless population.

**Stage 4: Creation of Knowledge and Action Hubs in three Cities**

By integrating NGOs, CBOs and Shelter monitoring groups into a standing network think-tank, a hub is being formed that can anchor periodic status reports and report cards to feed into the reports of Joint Inspection Committee of Supreme Court as well as to the state planning commission for rolling out policy changes and measures.

Currently Praxis through campaign approach has facilitated evolving of status reports simultaneously in three cities, which would be used to formalize the knowledge and action hubs in these three cities.

**Methodology**

While the above are the four stages of achieving the final result of formation of Knowledge and Action Hubs in three cities, the activities are being rolled out simultaneously with the process of strengthening community participation. The initial Joint enumeration exercises were done using college students of the local colleges primarily to create a structured materials on the urban issues, which can be used as sensitization material. Use of participatory tools by trained students helped arouse interest among urban poor on the need for creating a self-mobilised group that can monitor the programmes being implemented for them.

As the next logical step to consolidate our work into creating knowledge and action hubs in each cities to build community teams that would engage in research, monitoring, policy dialogues, and political action. The tentative period will be three years, by when the three cities will have active monitoring groups of communities playing the role of watchdog. It will also be explored to see that we could twin these hubs with another city to do a global south - south exchange (so, twinning can be with the inner city of a developed country as well). Methodology will ensure that both the essential and desirable parts of the IDS criteria will be taken care of.

# Appendix 4

### Application of the criteria for participatory research to ATD Fourth World’s work for their expression of interest for joining the Beyond 2015 Participatory Research Group

***Author: ATD Fourth World, September 2012***

**ATD Fourth World's participatory action-research project on the Millennium Development Goals: "Towards a sustainable development that leaves no one behind: the challenge of the post-2015 agenda."**

This note sets out the ways in which the participatory action-research project being carried out by ATD Fourth World meets the criteria specified by the Beyond 2015 campaign in order to become part of its Participatory Research Group.

1. **The research is with those living in poverty or who are from marginal, vulnerable or excluded groups.**

ATD (All Together for Dignity) Fourth World strives through all its projects to work alongside those most affected by extreme poverty, who through an accumulation of deprivations, are unable to exercise their fundamental rights or fulfill their responsibilities. Engaging with the most marginalised people and populations necessitates a long-term commitment between the organisation and those with whom it intends to work alongside. The trust that results from such a long-term approach has enabled ATD Fourth World to build partnerships with the most excluded people and families within communities, creating projects that are truly inclusive. Whether these be early childhood education projects in Haiti, a youth empowerment project in New York or an adult literacy project in Dar Es Salam. The aim remains constant: to enable the most marginalised people to regain their dignity and rights and reassume their responsibilities to their family, community and society.

For example, the research is carried out in Madagascar with waste-pickers and slum dwellers. In the Philippines, it is carried out with people living in shacks, in cemeteries, under bridges or between containers. In Mauritius, it is carried out in fifteen places that are among the 130 “pockets of poverty” registered by the government.

The participatory research is rooted in this approach to engage those experiencing the most severe poverty in an exercise to generate collective knowledge that may contribute to both their own community and wider society. In each site (Burkina Faso, Madagascar, Mauritius, the Philippines, Peru, Haiti, Guatemala, Bolivia, Brazil and Belgium) the project brings together people living in extreme poverty, the majority of whom are already engaged in ATD Fourth World projects within their communities or towns.

1. **The research is not a one off.  It is embedded in a longer term relationship, or it will be the foundation for a longer term relationship.**

As mentioned above, project participants living in extreme poverty are currently engaged at local level through ATD Fourth World projects, such as "People's Universities" and similar projects which offer spaces for people in poverty to have a voice and develop their own thinking and knowledge among peers, and also provide a forum for a dialogue between people living in persistent poverty and people from wider society. It therefore builds on previous engagement that participants have had with the organisation, and which will further strengthen their capacity for future engagement that will be envisaged at the project's conclusion.

As an example, project participants living in informal settlements in Manila have chosen to research the issue of housing, including the impact of forced evictions and resettlement programmes. This is in part because at the project's conclusion they wish to have greater knowledge of how they work with service providers and policy makers to improve housing conditions and appropriate, sustainable resettlement programmes which reflect the conditions they have identified. ATD Fourth World will continue to support participants once the research project has concluded to achieve these aims.

1. **Participants will be centrally involved in identifying the key questions, and in making sense of the “data”, they won’t only be participating in data collection.**

In each project location, the themes selected for research have emerged from discussion forums or in-depth conversations with people in extreme poverty. Decisions were then taken by each group of people in poverty, with facilitators, to concentrate on certain MDG-related themes, including: income poverty, cash transfers and conditionalities (Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Madagascar); decent work (Guatemala, Madagascar); education (Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Haiti, Mauritius, Philippines); gender equality (Bolivia, Madagascar); child and maternal health (Bolivia, Haiti); housing and environmental sustainability (Brazil, Mauritius, Philippines). Participants have also identified as cross-cutting issues the effects of discrimination and the conditions for meaningful participation.

The research is grounded in the "merging of knowledge"[[1]](#footnote-1) methodology, a participatory method developed by ATD Fourth World that has at its centre those living in poverty at each stage of research – from design through to evaluation. This research centres on providing people living in extreme poverty with a space for exchanges, where they can pool their ideas and construct progressively a collective knowledge and identify those rights which have been left unmet by existing policies and programmes or because of their absence (economic, social and cultural, as well as civil and political). As a group, they will then draw up proposals in order to address the issues they have identified.

In summary, the participatory research project is the exact contrary of an “extractive” process, that would extract knowledge from the poor to have it interpreted solely by researchers. The project is truly interactive, aiming first and foremost at empowering people trapped in extreme poverty through a long term knowledge-building process, in which academics and practitioners are associated. It is part of ATD Fourth World central aim to permit people to resist the shame of extreme poverty and regain their dignity

1. **Researchers will support participants to help ensure this involvement is meaningful, not tokenistic.**

The facilitators in each location have long-term experience in working with very disadvantaged people and populations. One of the key criteria for the research is to ensure enough time is given to participants for their involvement to be meaningful and a source of pride. As a first stage, this involves participants from a background of extreme poverty appropriating the knowledge they have of their own situation and confronting it with that held by others (the final stage being to confront it with people from backgrounds other than poverty, including from a policy or academic background – as explained in qu. 6).

It also involves the use of peer groups, whereby people living in poverty work together to develop their knowledge collectively, yet ensuring that the work progresses in a manner that respects the needs of those who need more time to integrate ideas and express their thoughts.

As an example, not all the participants in the research in Bolivia are Spanish-speaking so the working method ensures that those who prefer can express themselves in Aymara and that their thoughts are then understood by the group as a whole. It is important to note that it is not the researchers alone who ensure that participation is meaningful, but a collective effort that the participants' peers also contribute towards to ensure nobody is left behind.

At each stage of the work, facilitators ensure that the material recorded accurately reflects what has been expressed by the participants. Transcriptions, for example, are always read back to participants, who are given the opportunity to clarify inaccuracies, retract or give further explanation to their contribution.

1. **Participants will be invited to validate any findings, and have the ability to withdraw any of their contributions from the research.**

At each stage participants retain full control over the knowledge to which they are contributing in the research project. This includes the data collection through to the analysis phase.

A vital part of the analysis will be carried out through national (Madagascar, Mauritius) and regional seminars (Belgium – including ATD Fourth World members and partners from France, Poland, Philippines and Spain; Burkina Faso– including ATD Fourth World members and partners from Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Mali and Senegal; and La Paz - including ATD Fourth World members and partners from Brazil, Guatemala, Haiti and Peru). These will enable participants living in poverty to pool the knowledge they have produced with that of seminar participants from an academic or policy background. This "merging of knowledge" enables common conclusions to be developed and recommendations to be formulated that benefit from two distinct sources of knowledge: from people with lived experience of extreme poverty and people with academic, policy or practice knowledge. These will take place from October 2012 to March 2013.

The conclusions and recommendations therefore are not only "validated" by participants living in poverty, they are the result of a long-term process to which they have contributed from the outset through a process of co-producing knowledge with peers and with policy "experts".

It will also be ensured, consistent with the methodology ensuring people in poverty retain control of the knowledge they produce, that they may retract or withdraw any part of their contribution.

1. **Participants will be given feedback about what happens to their contributions and where possible what outcomes have emerged from the process.**

Throughout the project, facilitators in each location will be in constant dialogue with participants to ensure their contributions accurately reflect their views and experience, as detailed above. The recommendations and conclusions from the national and regional seminars will also be fed back to participants. This is in part possible due to the outcomes from the seminars being produced by ATD Fourth World facilitators in each location who retain contact with the participants from a background of poverty.

The contributions from each national and regional seminar will be compiled into a final project report to be produced by the overall project coordinator, based at ATD Fourth World's international centre in France. The main lines of this report will be validated during an international seminar, convened at our headquarters in mid-January 2013, with a balance between participants from the North and the South, and from a background of extreme poverty and other backgrounds.

The content of the report will then be finalised following an international working seminar to take place in New York in June 2013. Those taking part in the seminar will include representatives from among the people in poverty who have contributed to the project, as well as policy experts (from UN agencies, CSOs and academia) engaged in the post-2015 discussions. In this way participants from a background of poverty will be involved in elaboration of the research up to the final phase.

The final report will be disseminated within each project location to ensure all participants are fully aware of the final outcome of the work they have contributed towards.

1. **Researchers will have an interest in critical reflection, documenting and sharing methodologies.**

ATD Fourth World is both interested in sharing its experience of undertaking participatory research with people in extreme poverty, as well as looking at how it can develop further this area of work from interacting with partners engaged in similar work. In this sense we are extremely interested in engaging with the Participatory Research Group. We will be in a position to share initial findings from the work in the ten locations by March, although the final conclusions will emerge in late Spring 2013.

1. **Researchers will have an interest in or existing experience of using creative/visual methods**

As part of the research, ATD Fourth World has launched a multi-media website, Unheard Voices, which highlights the views and experiences of people living in extreme poverty. Research participants are directly contributing to the content of this website[[2]](#footnote-2). Videos designed with the contribution of people living in extreme poverty have already been realized in Madagascar, the Philippines, Senegal and Belgium. Others are underway in Mauritius and Bolivia.

1. **Participants will be supported to do their own advocacy with the research findings**

Part of the interest among participants of contributing to this participatory research is the opportunity to enhance advocacy work to bring about change in their lives and that of their community. As well as presenting their findings to policy experts through national and regional seminars, their findings will also be used on a longer term basis as part of their involvement in ATD Fourth World's ongoing advocacy work with people in poverty in each project location. In this sense there will be a legacy that will emerge from the project, taking it beyond the project's own lifetime.

1. **Participants will be involved in decisions about what participatory research methods will be used**

An array of methods have been chosen by participants, alongside facilitators, for use in each location in order to generate both individual and collective knowledge. These range from personal and group interviews to collect information on the theme, through to the use of video, again both personal and in group. These will be used to generate a collective knowledge that is validated by the group of participants.

1. See http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/Guidelines-for-the-Merging-of.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See for example http://www.unheard-voices.org/objectifs-du-millenaire-a-partir-de-lexperience-des-plus-pauvres-manille/?lang=en [↑](#footnote-ref-2)