

LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD

Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World



International Movement ATD Fourth World
107, avenue du Général Leclerc - 95480 Pierrelaye - France

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“Keeping the promise”

Such is the title of the report¹ of the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000. This report documents facts, sometimes encouraging and often alarming, regarding the progress made towards achieving these goals. It formulates suggestions for accelerating the anticipated changes, particularly regarding sustainable development.

As the articles in this issue demonstrate, Permanent Forum correspondents take on the challenge of sustainable development in their daily work. How does their experience shed light on the observations made in the Ban Ki-moon report?

For example, the report highlights the fact that the first victims of climate changes are vulnerable populations who have contributed the least to the problem.² This corresponds to the experience of the Ogiek people of Kenya, and is what Stephen Corry, director of Survival International, speaks out against: *“The world’s tribal people, who have done the least to cause climate change and are most affected by it, are now having their rights violated and land devastated in the name of attempts to stop it.”*

Sandra P., from Nicaragua, views the development of means of communication from the perspective of the rural community in which she’s based. While the Ban Ki-moon report argues that advances in technology provide an opportunity to accelerate poverty reduction,³ Sandra adds a nuance: *“Now more than ever before, there is an urgent need to think about the consequences of these changes and become aware of them. It is not enough for one person or family to escape from a life of poverty, to have a decent life. We must create a new world working with the poor themselves.”*

The Agro-Ecological Learning Centre in Brazil is concerned about a *“standardization of agricultural systems”* which will soon lead to the disappearance of *“family-based agriculture that protects health, quality of life and the independence of small farmers.”* This concern has led it to take action. Its action, particularly



with youth, illustrates the report’s affirmation that harnessing private sector potential begins with the farmer in the rural village who is the private sector’s backbone.⁴

Also with disadvantaged youth, the association Friends of the Earth-Togo wants to incorporate economic, environmental, social and human dimensions into its activities. These youth are much like those in Brazil who *“know they must adopt an ecological approach and maintain a social and environmental balance. These young people need people to believe in them, praise them, and support them. But the support of their local community is insufficient, a larger network is necessary.”* This call for support confirms one of the key success factors indicated in the Ban Ki-moon report: civil society and community involvement and empowerment enhance the likelihood of success by giving individuals and communities the ability to take charge of their own lives.⁵

Ban Ki-moon urges the international community to dramatically increase the pace of change so that the promises of 2000 translate into real progress for the world’s poorest people.⁶

Progress for the world’s poorest people or with them?

Huguette Redegeld

1- Published in February 2010 in preparation of the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York in September 2010. (A/64/665)

http://www.un.org/french/documents/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/64/665

2- Paragraph 37

3- Paragraph 96

4- Paragraph 112

5- Page 19

6- Paragraph 61

● Learning to Manage Local Resources

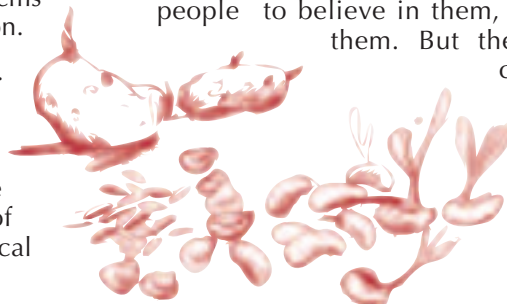
The multinationals are extremely powerful, and want to force Brazil to standardize its agricultural systems so as to be able to produce huge quantities of transgenic foods, to be sold at the price they have determined at the time that best suits them. Family-based agriculture that protects health, quality of life and the independence of small farmers will soon disappear. We are aware of this, and so, to protect our heritage of seeds for corn, beans, cotton, rice, potatoes, manioc, etc., we founded the agro-ecological learning centre.

Working with underprivileged youngsters, in a region that is itself very underprivileged, our first step was to undertake:

- a study of the local climate, plants and wildlife;
- a study of the local population's needs.

We also aim to develop environment-friendly systems for agricultural production and commercialisation.

To do this, we needed to train these young people. This we did by organising working groups (reading, discussion, analysis, structuring); workshops for awareness-raising, mobilisation and selection; practical implementation (choice of the area to be cultivated, organisation of equipment); discussions with members of the local



community, particularly the oldest; and practical on-site research. We wanted to keep our options open for future actions. We have also sought the support of local communities, state and private sector bodies.

The young people have acquired a good understanding of the difficulties and potential of their region. They have acquired technical knowledge, which combined with practical skills has strengthened commitment in the relevant communities and municipalities to take account of local realities and the aspirations of young farmers. This dynamic process has highlighted the value of local history and culture, thanks to discussions with the older community members. The young people have learned to manage their own projects, and know they must adopt an ecological approach and maintain a social and environmental balance. We have seen that these young people need people to believe in them, praise them, and support them. But the support of their local community is insufficient, a larger network is necessary.

*JOSÉ C. DE O.
AGRO-ECOLOGICAL
LEARNING CENTRE, BRAZIL*

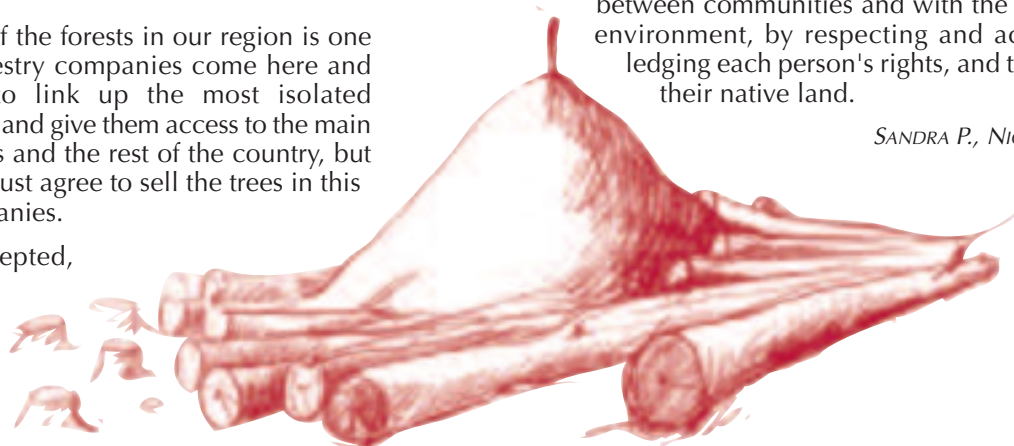
● Change is Possible

Life is changing little by little in this region, thanks to the arrival of mobile phones which make communication possible. But the signal cannot reach everywhere in these mountains, and so the local people go higher up the hills, or use a path between two hills, or walk through the fields, until suddenly they find the signal and are able to communicate with others, as if by some miracle. The mail also works, but access to Internet is still very limited. A local priest has a mobile Internet connection, which he lets me use when he leaves for a mission. This is how I am able to write to you today.

We know that now more than ever before there is an urgent need to think about the consequences of these changes, and become aware of them. The sense of solidarity between those living in poverty is not always present. It is not enough for one person or family to escape from a life of poverty, to have a decent life. We must create a new world working with the poor themselves. In that sense, we have still not found the solution.

The terrible destruction of the forests in our region is one example of this. The forestry companies come here and offer to build roads, to link up the most isolated communities and families and give them access to the main road leading to the towns and the rest of the country, but in return these families must agree to sell the trees in this area to the forestry companies.

The local people accepted, without thinking about the consequences of selling their trees, or knowing the market price for the



timber. The forestry companies build tracks which in winter become virtually impassable mud pits, making any journey on foot or horseback a nightmare. The ancient virgin forests, which still existed prior to 1990, the official date of the end of the war in Nicaragua, have today become vast meadows, acquired by rich cattle ranchers. As for the poor, who used to own small farms, nowadays they have become agricultural workers on these large properties, or have taken refuge in the last national reserve, cutting down trees and burning the land.

In addition, we are continuing our work to educate the young people. We are trying to develop a new awareness, but this is very difficult. This year, with a team of four young men and four young women, we have set up a discussion workshop on sexual equality, the rights of each individual and non violence. Most of the participants are interested in these themes, although they are new to them, and despite the male chauvinism and violence that is part of their lives. I believe that through these themes, it is possible to create change and openings. It enables me to imagine better relations in the future between people, between communities and with the natural environment, by respecting and acknowledging each person's rights, and those of their native land.

SANDRA P., NICARAGUA

● Placing People at the Centre of Development

The association called "Friends of the Earth-Togo" (FoE Togo) takes action to protect the environment as part of a sustainable development approach.

- Environment Programme

Our association is participating in the five-year TMF4 project (2006-2010), launched by Friends of the Earth International. The aim of TMF4 is to reduce poverty through sustainable development and conservation of biodiversity. Biodiversity is a natural asset. Unfortunately, today this biological asset is the victim of unprecedented piracy and greed. This project is intervening at just the right time to help fight against this phenomenon.

- The Sustainable Development Programme

The purpose of this programme is to integrate the economic, environmental, social and human aspects of activities aiming to achieve human progress. The programme must place people at the centre of this development, and improve their living conditions. This is only possible if particular attention is paid to strengthening the links between the issues of poverty and the environment. The association is therefore concerned with issues such as:

- Environment and poverty,
- Women and the environment,
- Social support for communities (the needs of which must first be ascertained),
- Follow-up mechanisms [awareness-raising, information about conservation of biodiversity, capacity building of communities (enabling them to make rational choices, to take decisions and to engage in long-term action)].

As part of this programme, we are implementing a project to supply water to the Fiokpo canton. Water is a vital requirement for human development. Yet for the population of the Fiokpo canton, access to drinking water is a need that has not been satisfied. Sustainable development can only be envisaged if this fundamental need is satisfied,

and this is the reason for this project, which reaches 14,000 people. The aim is to solve the problem of access to water for this population, most of whom are farmers, and who obtain water from sources polluted by household refuse and agricultural waste (manure, fertilisers, pesticides). In addition, this project aims to reduce the impact of water-borne diseases (diarrhoea, dysentery) on the population of the canton.

- Community Development Programme

Many activities are being carried out in this programme by means of international volunteer work camps: reforestation and restoration of plant cover in order to combat deforestation and desertification; modernisation of health facilities to improve human health in rural areas, and lessons given to schoolchildren to promote education in rural areas.

EXTRACTS FROM THE WEBSITE OF FRIENDS OF THE EARTH – TOGO
(FORUM CORRESPONDENT MR AMEGADZE KOKOU ELORM)



● The Ogiek People, Caretakers of the Forest

Catherine, a member of the Ogiek Welfare Council in Kenya, tells us: "There is a lot that I wish to share with you from what I have personally experienced with the Ogieks, the forest-dwellers, hunter-gatherers. They are an indigenous, minority people in Kenya who are about 20,000 population wise. Like other people, they are not so much farmers, but due to global changes and the huge effects of logging that have changed their life style, some [have now become farmers]."

The Ogiek have a unique way of life well-adapted to the forest. They are traditionally hunters and gatherers, who survive mainly on wild fruits and roots, wild game hunting and traditional bee-keeping and are therefore friendly to their environment on which they depend. "Ogiek" literally means "the caretaker of all plants and wild animals". Their adaptations and their traditions have made them successful foresters and the greatest environmentalists of any community in Kenya. The survival of the indigenous Mau

forest is inextricably linked with the survival of the community.

Catherine continues: "The reason why I love the Ogiek with passion is that they taught me to fight with undying spirit that eventually bears lasting fruits. I have witnessed, seen and traveled with them and felt the pain of exclusion from their own mother country. I have seen them with no hospitals to take their sick children, no maternity hospitals for mothers, no shops, no land to plough and grow crops for their needy and growing children, no accessible roads to where they live. They live like forgotten people in their own country. It is so painful to explain the kind of life I saw them living, seeing young kids dying of treatable diseases just because these Ogiek never went to school and the forest they depend on for the medicinal herbs is being destroyed in their face, to create room for political elite land for commercial purpose. It's a pity!!"

The theft of Ogiek land, coupled with the destruction of their property and forcible eviction has left the Ogiek seriously impoverished with an uncertain future. Their very

survival as a people is threatened. Recognising these threats, the people of Mau East through their Council of Elders have over the years lobbied both the colonial and independent Kenya governments for the restoration of their rights as a people.

The Ogiek Welfare Council [which was initiated by the Ogiek Council of Elders for this reason] envisages a just and equitable society where all people enjoy basic human rights and live in dignity. The mission of the Council is to fight for the constitutional rights of the Ogiek people, to promote their well-being and to preserve their environment, culture and identity. Already various committees of elders have been formed to address the different issues



affecting the community. Capacity building of the Council's finance function is being conducted... The issue of long-term self-sustainability is being addressed and various ideas from the elders are being pursued. Rehabilitation of the community's habitat is being undertaken through the creation of indigenous tree nurseries. This is expected to accelerate with the onset of the rainy season. OWC hopes that its programmes will be of benefit to all the 20,000 or so people in the Ogiek diaspora.

Catherine concludes: *"I am proud to be associated with the struggle of the Ogiek, believing that one day, their rights and struggle will bear lasting fruits."*

CATHERINE K.
AND THE OGIEK WELFARE COUNCIL
(EXCERPTS FROM THEIR PROFILE ON WWW.OGIEK.ORG), KENYA

Letters to the Editor – Letters to the Editor – Letters to the Editor –

- “The consumer association ASCOVI, which defends people's right to healthy food, is concerned. Let's take a concrete example: the decision to prohibit throwing away or even buying plastic bags of drinking water. The provincial government has taken measures to prohibit the selling of water in plastic bags. This measure cannot realistically be applied because the people who sell bags of water do not have other jobs or sources of income outside of this commercial activity. Plastic bags pollute nature. The State's water is often unfit for consumption. For these reasons, it's difficult for decisions concerning environmental matters to succeed. We don't have information or awareness-raising activities in sustainable development issues.

Our environmental primary school has had huge financial problems due to the monthly rent, so the school had to be closed. People keep asking when we are going to reopen it. This school had been a big success because the students showed remarkable environmental knowledge in their fieldwork projects. We are in the process of looking at the different possibilities for getting the experience

going again. The environment is a particularly urgent issue right now in our country because there is no clear, specific plan to address it.”

Patrice MM., President, ASCOVI, Democratic Republic of the Congo

- “I am happy to forward you the report about the Shabnam children's summer camp 2010. Children from many difficult situations were the beneficiaries of the camp. There were around 43 children, from age 5 to 15. The song writing and music mix [workshop] was handled by Mr. S. who helped the children to understand different [styles of] music for various circumstances and how to mix nuances. The above training ignited the children to contribute something more significant: they came out with a theme called Birds Save the Planet. Birds like chicken, myna, pigeon, parrot, crow, and sparrows try to save the planet earth against global warming, human greed, unkind attitudes, etc. This CD has come out so well and runs for 15 minutes. Oh, one must hear the dialogues of crows talking about brotherhood, sparrows about the destruction of natural parks and

greenery which has almost made them extinct, and chickens crying about broken-home family situations. We went out for a lovely nature hunt and spent the day with deer and butterflies, and at the close of the event the child was presented with an educational kit... The children are so excited...”

Dr. M.R.H., Shabnam Resources, Chennai (Madras), India

- “I am 20 years old and I'm in my fifth year of secondary school, in the science program. I got to know the ATD Fourth World Movement in 2008 during a work project cleaning canals in the Kokoro neighborhood where I live with my family. I got to know children, adults, and youth from other backgrounds. I also got involved as a street library facilitator in my town. During one of our monthly evaluations, we discussed a message sent by Haitian youth who are also facilitators. Their message was on “our responsibility as facilitators”. I learned that the role and responsibility of a facilitator is to build dialogue, be a role model and build love among people.”

Firmin Grâce à Dieu T., Central African Republic

You too can share your observations and experiences through the website: www.atd-fourthworld.org/-Permanent-Forum-on-Extreme-Poverty or by email to permanent.forum@atd-fourthworld.org

The “Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World” is a network of committed people who want to develop friendship and exchange knowledge about what poor and very poor people teach us, i.e. people who suffer from multiple disadvantages in the areas of education, housing, employment, health and culture; those who are criticised and rejected the most. This forum invites people to join a worldwide movement to overcome extreme poverty, to rebuild communities with people living in extreme poverty, inspired by their lives. This movement expresses itself in the *Letter to Friends Around the World*, which publishes the texts written by its correspondents three times a year, in French, English, Spanish and Portuguese. The Permanent Forum is run by the International Movement ATD Fourth World, an international NGO whose headquarters are in Pierrelaye, France. Those who join the Forum do so in their own right, and do not have to become members of ATD Fourth World.

Our e-mail address is: permanent.forum@atd-fourthworld.org Internet : www.atd-fourthworld.org Subscription \$8/8€ per annum - Support subscription: \$10/10€ per annum.

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HÉLÈNE PERDEREAU'S
COMMITMENT IS TO
ILLUSTRATE THE TEXTS
OF THE LETTER
ON A FREE-TIME BASIS

PAGE SETUP:
LYDIE ROUFFET