



Turning Rhetoric into Action

**Building effective
partnerships to
combat extreme poverty
and exclusion**

*A background document for the
Round-Table dialogue on
October 17, 2008
International Day for the
Eradication of Poverty*

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ATD
FOURTH WORLD

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Foreword

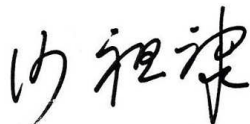
Poverty is more than inadequate income or human development. Poverty is also about lack of voice, power, and representation. One effective way to address these various dimensions of poverty is through the empowerment and participation of poor people in decision-making that affects their lives. It is important, therefore, that government at all levels should be fully accountable to their citizenry for the policies they develop and the actions they implement. It is also imperative that the design of decentralized agencies and services they provide reflect local conditions, social structures, and cultural norms and heritage.

We need a true partnership between all stakeholders in the development process. People living in poverty have the biggest stake in ensuring that this partnership works and that the development process is inclusive. That is why they should be involved at every stage of any project to reduce poverty -- from planning, to implementation, to monitoring and evaluation.

This background document focuses on how to reach out to those most entrenched in poverty and how to create the necessary conditions for their full and meaningful participation in the development of policies and programmes. A key message is the need to promote, protect and fulfill the rights of people living in extreme poverty to participation at all levels and stages of the decision making processes.

It also highlights the role of participation in enabling the access of all people to fundamental rights and describes the conditions necessary in order to do this well. Practical case studies are included that demonstrate participatory projects at each level (local, national and international), highlighting lessons learned and practical steps for others to use in facilitating participation.

My Department strongly supports efforts to reach the poorest members of society to empower and enable them to be true participants in the fight against poverty so that we can build 'a society for all', with rights and responsibilities for each individual. Civil society is our important ally in our shared commitment to poverty eradication.



Mr. Sha Zukang
Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs

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1. INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

This toolkit serves as a background document for the round-table dialogue 'Turning rhetoric into action: building effective partnerships to combat extreme poverty and exclusion', taking place in New York on October 17, 2008. It also serves as the framework of a more comprehensive document that will be developed with the participation of other organisations experienced in participatory projects and research in tackling poverty. It responds to the growing awareness that despite large efforts to include people living in extreme poverty in the development of policies and programmes, the participation of the very poorest people continues to present a particular challenge. The obstacles in ensuring genuine participation too often results in anti-poverty initiatives settling for reaching only the most dynamic or vocal members of a community, tokenism, or giving up on participation altogether. In spite of frequent public acknowledgement of the necessity and importance of participation, it is too often stated behind closed doors that the resources, intent and commitment required means it falls off the list of priorities. Once key policy makers are resigned to the perceived impossibility of genuine participation of the poorest members of society, the exclusion of the very poor is exacerbated.

This toolkit focuses on how to reach out to those most entrenched in poverty and create the necessary conditions for their full and meaningful participation, in order that policies and programmes take into account the views of all members of society, and not just of those who are perhaps easier to reach. It puts forward the need to promote, protect and fulfill the rights of people living in extreme poverty to participation at all levels – local, national and international – as well as at all stages of the decision

making processes, including planning, implementation and evaluation. It also highlights the role of participation in enabling the access of all people to fundamental rights and describes the conditions necessary in order to do this well. Practical case studies are included that demonstrate participatory projects at each level (local, national and international), highlighting lessons learned and practical steps for others to use in facilitating participation.

Objective and audience

The main purpose of the participation toolkit is to offer guidance to all those who wish to reach out to people living in extreme poverty and social exclusion – governments, international bodies, local and regional NGOs, community leaders and institutions. Recognizing that people experiencing poverty possess knowledge on the barriers that keep them from lifting themselves out of poverty, this toolkit will lay out how to provide meaningful opportunities for those living in poverty to be listened to and involved in projects aimed at improving their conditions. It is intended to be a practical guide to how to go about enabling the participation of very poor people in decision-making processes affecting their lives. It takes into account the difficulties, obstacles, risks and potential shortcomings that may be encountered.

The report is based on three premises:

- Meaningful participation of those with direct experience of extreme poverty is key to developing effective policies, programmes and projects to overcome extreme poverty and social exclusion;
- Meaningful participation by people in extreme poverty is possible with careful planning, consideration and organization on the part of those who wish to involve them, and;
- Such participation requires the involvement of the poorest and most excluded people throughout every stage of the process.

"It's not that we don't care, but we're never consulted. When the politicians get it wrong the most vulnerable are the worst affected and that pushes us even further away. We want those who decide and make the laws to come down a level and we should move up a level to them. That way we'll meet in the middle"
(UK member of ATD Fourth World with experience of poverty)¹

2. BACKGROUND

2. Background

In order to tackle the not only persistent but also increasing problem of poverty, it is necessary to concentrate on more than just economic growth or the improvement of social or welfare services. A partnership approach to tackling poverty is also needed. The best informed experts on poverty are those who face it on a daily basis. They must be listened to and associated in the planning and management of any efforts undertaken on their behalf. This is a major undertaking but is not beyond the resources nor the energies of government or non-government organisations, nor communities. It calls for strong planning and evaluation at international, national and local levels.

2.1 Who are the poorest citizens?

Over the past few decades many different subcategories of poverty have been defined, which divide people into different headings according to their background and particular situation. This is necessary and useful in order to identify and apply appropriately different responses to different situations. However, this categorisation has led to claims from each group, or from those representing them, that their particular type of poverty is the most extreme. This can be said to lead to a certain 'competition' between these groups which is not

beneficial for the general fight against poverty, nor for the individuals concerned. Once it is felt that a particular group is the most affected, those who are in situations even more difficult risk being further isolated and forgotten. It also renders those who do not happen to fall into any of the categories invisible, and less important because they do not conform to any particular group. It is generally these people with whom ATD Fourth World finds itself.

In industrialized countries, it is the victims of inter-generational poverty who have been born into situations of disadvantage, trapped in their situations and under-represented due to their non-conformity with any group in society. Increasingly, it is also members of some immigrant populations who have been left behind, unable to achieve social inclusion, whilst other members of the same population prosper. In developing countries, it is those who have so few resources that their very existence is precarious – every day is a struggle to provide the bare necessities for themselves and their children.

ATD Fourth World does not advocate for a particular group or type of poverty, but contends that in each group the poorest people should be sought out as far as possible. Unless special efforts are made to include those most entrenched in extreme poverty, the gap between them and those who are better off will grow even deeper.² ATD Fourth World encourages all those concerned with poverty eradication to ensure that the planning of any programme strives to take those living in extreme poverty into consideration.

In 1996 the following definition was taken up by the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the Despouy Report on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty. (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1996/13)

"The lack of basic security connotes the absence of one or more factors enabling individuals and families to assume basic responsibilities and to enjoy fundamental rights. The situation may become widespread and result in more serious and permanent consequences. The lack of basic security leads to chronic poverty when it simultaneously affects

"We are human beings and among human beings we can dialogue. We are poor but we have the same capacities and the same rights as everyone else. We mustn't accept the fact that we are left out."

(Peruvian member of ATD Fourth World with experience of poverty)³

"Meaningful participation in decisions which affects one's life is a human rights issue. It is both a means to the enjoyment of human rights, and a human rights goal in itself."

(International Human Rights Network, 2000)⁵

several aspects of people's lives, when it is prolonged and when it severely compromises people's chances of regaining their rights and of reassuming their responsibilities in the foreseeable future."

It is this definition that we will be referring to throughout the document when using the terms the 'most excluded', the 'poorest people', 'extreme poverty'...

It is this accumulation of disadvantages that underlies the definition of 'extreme poverty' and those that are referred to as the 'poorest people'. Large numbers of people throughout the world, in both north and south, live in poverty more extreme and more persistent than is generally recognised. They live in destitution often because they are born into it and have limited means of escape. Their precise number is unknown. The statistics and definitions that are used in the global fight against poverty, particularly those used to measure progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, are related to income and consumption, and therefore are very limited. This approach to measuring poverty, used in isolation, fails to reveal the human suffering behind the numbers. National definitions are often more accurate and useful and progress has been made in recent years to go beyond mere statistical indicators (see for example the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion a biennial report produced by all European Union member states. See also participatory research on poverty indicators in Belgium in which the participants revealed additional necessary elements ignored by current indicators.⁴⁾

The very poorest people do not just lack money. They are also likely to be homeless, live in sub-standard housing, or in dangerous or illegal

dwelling. They also tend to suffer from bad health, to leave school without knowing how to read or write and consequently have trouble finding sustainable work. With such an accumulation of disadvantages they spend their lives struggling to survive, a struggle largely unrecognised. They are pushed into areas that others rarely penetrate: inner city slums, the suburbs on the outskirts of towns and isolated rural dwellings. Geographically segregated and socially isolated, they are cut off from the cultural, political and social life of their countries. It is this exclusion more than material want that traps those experiencing the greatest poverty.

Limiting, therefore, definitions of extreme poverty to income and consumption statistics, not only neglects to recognise the existence of poverty in rich countries but in doing so fails to address the real reasons for extreme poverty, rather skimming the surface of a much more profound and complex issue.

If we are serious in achieving the goal of eradicating poverty, all projects and initiatives should aim to reach and enable the participation of the most excluded, those who are often declared to be 'too hard to reach'. Failure to do this further excludes those who are in most need of support, exacerbating and prolonging the situation of the most vulnerable members of society. The poorest members of any society need to be sought out and their efforts to overcome poverty discovered and supported. To allow for maximum efficacy, actions taken in the fight against poverty should incorporate these efforts and build upon them.

2.2 People living in poverty and their participation: achieving access to fundamental rights and the exercise of responsibilities for all
"Whereas a world in which human

"However, only the very poor know everything about injustice, the denial of human rights and the suffering of extreme poverty. Their message is not marginal, on the contrary, it is vital, central....since it says everything about what our societies are not and everything about what they should be."
(Joseph Wresinski in speech to the UNESCO in 1980)⁶

beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people."

(Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

To be deprived of participation means not having a voice, not being counted and not being considered. It means that it is impossible to fully exercise one's rights as a citizen. It is the situation in which most people who struggle with poverty - particularly extreme poverty - find themselves.

The non-participation of people living in extreme poverty is a denial of their fundamental rights which prevents our societies from making progress in the fight for human rights for all. Even when their participation is sought after it is a great challenge to reach out to the most excluded as a group due to the depth of their isolation. This can be attributed to the shame and stigma associated with living in poverty, making those who experience it fearful of participating in civil society activities and events - from exercising their right to vote through to speaking to school teachers or social workers. It can also be due to a lack of will on the part of certain individuals and groups as to their participation. These factors prevent people who live in poverty from accessing their fundamental rights.

Participation however should not be restricted to consulting people living in poverty uniquely in areas that concern only the issue of poverty directly. It is certainly necessary, but people living in poverty wish to be considered as equals. They have the desire to participate and to bring their experiences and thoughts to all aspects of life. It is the fundamental right of all human beings to participate in the society in which they live.

2.3 Benefits derived from enabling the participation of people living in extreme poverty

A wealth of research, projects and initiatives has been carried out in the area of participation and the benefits that enabling active citizenship in the area of public policy can bring is quite evident.

• Increased efficacy

An enormous amount of energy from individuals, public authorities and private institutions is wasted if the individuals who are directly concerned in the issues are not properly included in the projects or when such projects are designed without their input. The same can be said of conferences, seminars or debates on the subject of poverty and how to eradicate it. Not including them in the debate is an omission of a particular expertise which can complete the information and knowledge that already exists from other sources. This could also be interpreted as a denial of their rights as citizens as well as a failure to recognise the value of their particular knowledge, born of experience. Their contribution to the discussions risks being rendered dependent on professionals who speak on their behalf.

If efforts are made to truly listen to people living in poverty and to allow for their genuine participation, it is possible not only to understand better the steps needed to make institutions be of real service to all people, but the participation will also enable real empowerment. The potential exists for a rights based approach where its very implementation will not only break down the walls of exclusion but also build a new knowledge base for the fight against poverty, one that comes from the experience of poverty itself combined with that of other actors.

• Strengthening of institutions and those who work within them

The participation of people living in extreme poverty within institutions

"The first time you speak at the UN, a kind of dignity falls from the sky and that never leaves you."

(New York member of ATD Fourth World with experience of poverty speaking after participating in an event at the United Nations)⁷

"...Many local councillors are starting to see how working closely with communities and civil organisations can strengthen their to do their job rather than undermine it..."

(Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability, and Logolink, 2008)⁸

working towards poverty eradication creates a better understanding of poverty. This consequently results in better policy making as will take into account the first hand experience of the people themselves.

- **Personal development of the individual participants**

Enabling participation also has an impact on the participants. Being connected to a group of people who have lived similar (and dissimilar situations) can bring empowerment and strength. Knowing that you are not alone in your struggle and that others can relate to your experience or hearing and learning from people with different experiences allows for a new perspective which further understanding and reflection. This coming together allows the individual to voice their thoughts and opinions and acts as a training of sorts. It enables the participant to develop a reflection on the situations of people living in poverty as a collective, as opposed to a uniquely individual perspective. This builds the ability of people who are not used to being asked their opinion, or even to be listened to, to become able to speak on the situation of poverty as a delegate, representing the reality of a wide range of people and not only a personal experience. This process alone empowers people in their everyday lives and is an important element in the path out of poverty and social exclusion.

- **Progress towards more just and peaceful societies**

In many parts of the world, there is an increasing gap between citizens and the institutions that represent them. In other parts, countries are still struggling to develop functioning democracies. The aspiration remains to create societies that are built on a foundation of respect for the dignity of all members of society, social inclusion, and the principles of freedom, justice

and peace, as stated in the various human rights conventions, in which all members are able to participate, including people living in poverty. In every part of the world, there is a need to strengthen accountability and trust in democracy and democratic institutions. Confidence that all citizens will be treated fairly, and provided with equal opportunities to benefit from decent work, access to basic services, and legal protection. are the basic building blocks for peaceful and prosperous societies. If carried out in a meaningful and effective manner, participation is one way to allow citizens to move closer to the decision making process and to become active contributors to the development process.

“Respecting the equal dignity of all citizens require the experience of those who have been considered to have 'no voice' for too long to be taken into account. This must be the first precondition to participative democracy”
(Bouchet, Taken from ATD Fourth World, 2007)⁹

3. MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

3. Meaningful participation

A wealth of work already exists on participatory citizenship whereby individuals are empowered to come together to make change for the common good through becoming actively involved in the thinking and planning process of public policy. There are already many different types of legislation that exist which refer to participation as an essential approach to improving the development of policies put forward by policy makers, and ensuring that they better correspond to the realities lived on the ground.

Participation is not a ground breaking new concept; it is one that has been a positive step forward in the fight against poverty and one that has gradually advanced and picked up recognition in recent years. However, a gap still remains in ensuring that the discourse around participation and the very efforts made to put it into place move from impressive rhetoric to a meaningful reality, especially for those in extreme poverty .

3.1 Shortcomings in the present participation processes

Despite significant progress in policy recognition in many countries around the world, shortcomings still remain in the current practice around participation. A multitude of risks and seemingly insurmountable obstacles stand in the way of achieving a satisfactory process. Many actors who work in this field - particularly the participants themselves - report experiences of coercion, window dressing, consultation fatigue and lip service which increases scepticism and mistrust in institutions and governments. Add to this the stringent time limits of governments, donors and policy making processes, which do not match the pace of local realities, and we find at this present time that the prioritisation of participatory processes

are far from being a regular part of the development of policies and initiatives. As it stands now, participation is an 'add on' to the decision making process rather than what would ideally be an inherent part of it.

3.2 Quality of the process

As was outlined in the preceding chapter, many benefits stand to be derived from genuine participation, and in order that these benefits are reaped, the quality of the process is of the utmost importance.

The work carried out by Roger Hart¹⁰ on children's participation gives an interesting insight into the qualities inherent in meaningful participation. His work is primarily focused on children but the concepts can also be applied to participation in a wider context. He illustrates the different levels of participation by means of a ladder with each rung representing a different level of participation. The bottom rungs are the more negative forms of 'participation', including: 'manipulation' where children are used to carry messages already thought out by adults; 'decoration' attempting to create an illusion of participation when this was not the case; and 'tokenism' where articulate youth are chosen to talk in a public venue but in reality have not had enough opportunity to critically reflect or consult with their peers, etc. Hart argues that we should aim to move away from these bottom rungs of participation towards a more meaningful and effective process. The higher rungs of the ladder illustrate 'ideal' types of participation which should be applied to different contexts and situations. The very top rung puts forward a model where children themselves feel sufficiently competent and confident to initiate and realise a project on their own, using adults only as a sounding board for advice if and when needed.

Applied to the situation of people living

"People living in poverty and vulnerable groups must be empowered through organisations and participation in all aspects of political, economic and social life, in particular in the planning and implementation of policies that affect them, thus enabling them to become genuine partners in development."
(Copenhagen Summit, 1995)¹¹

"Governments and donors frequently neglect the possible role of poor clients in sustaining better services. Neither governments nor donors are accustomed to asking the poor for advice."
(World Bank, 2003)¹²

in poverty this top rung would be relevant in cases where a community association or group of people initiate a self help project. It would not be relevant, however when addressing participation in the context of policy development or the improvement of access to services. What we would be aiming for in this case is a true collaboration and partnership between governments and people experiencing poverty themselves. Therefore, the third rung of Hart's ladder 'adult-initiated, shared decisions' would be most appropriate in this latter case, whereby governments would create projects in which the decisions would be shared between themselves and the participants and in which people living in poverty would be meaningfully involved in every stage, namely the planning, design and implementation.

Numerous examples exist at the grassroots level in which there was effective participation throughout projects and even though the outcome may not have been exactly as each person had originally imagined, the participants were satisfied as they had been involved at every stage and had taken a collective decision together. This contrasts with the more frequent type of 'participation' where participants are consulted briefly before a decision is taken behind closed doors or decisions are taken with no participation at all but with a claim of having involved key stakeholders - a window dressing exercise. Ideally, meaningful participation should be part of decision-making processes at every level – from the design of projects that allow for partnership between participants and governments at national level, to collaboration between relevant parties at local level.

3.3 A change in approach

In order for benefits to be gained, certain changes are necessary in the methods of working and in the attitudes and approach of individuals who work

in the development of policies and programmes. As the Development Research Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability (2007) argues, this would effectively be a question of redressing power balances. The very act of participation itself is one of true empowerment, 'one which aims to enable the most disadvantaged and excluded groups and communities to be heard...'. Therefore this requires a strong will from all concerned – from the side of the citizens whose trust in political institutions is in need of bolstering, and also on the side of government officials who need to be willing to bring greater equality to the power relations between themselves and citizens.

There is much support among citizens' groups for the right to participation to be enshrined in some form of legislation and for national governments to have a clear policy for participation with an aim of establishing systems that would allow for it to be mainstreamed, rather than occurring on an ad-hoc and occasional basis.

"To promote, according to national practice, the participation and self expression of people suffering exclusion, in particular in regard to their situation and the policies and measures affecting them. To promote dialogue and partnership between all relevant bodies, publics and private."

(Objectives in the Fight Against Poverty and Social Exclusion adopted by European Council, Nice, France in 2000)¹³

"Even if the political will is there, there is an inherent fault with the design. There is a lack of recognition that people can help in designing better policies."

(Research and Development Centre on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability, and Logolink 2008)¹⁴

4. CREATING CONDITIONS FOR THE PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE LIVING IN EXTREME POVERTY

4. Creating conditions for the participation of people living in extreme poverty

The previous section focused on the gap between rhetoric and practice in the area of participation and the need for a change in approach. When it comes to enabling the participation of people living in extreme poverty and social exclusion, there is a range of factors that must be taken into consideration. Firstly we must understand the potential barriers.

4.1 Barriers to the participation of people living in extreme poverty

• The all consuming demands of survival

The reality of the lives of people living in poverty serves as the first major barrier to their participation to take into account. Given the insecurities in their lives, much of their energy is taken up by the day to day struggle to survive. Examples include obtaining the material resources to survive, coping with possible eviction from their homes, dealing with debt situations, coping with children's school problems and the possible risk of being separated from them due to 'inadequate parenting', meeting the requirements of various services... and so on. People living in poverty spend a considerable amount of their time working to meet such daily challenges which very often demoralize and humiliate them because they are not well received or their efforts are judged insufficient by those in authority. These factors need to be considered when attempting to facilitate their participation necessitating flexibility and consideration of the practical challenges they encounter.

• A little known population

People who live in extreme poverty and social exclusion are a little known population. Seeking them out and

trying to reach out to them to gain their trust and confidence is a great challenge. They live on the edges of society, hidden away in fear and shame, often surfacing only in the most desperate of situations so that those who come into contact with them often see a one dimensional view that does not provide enough information to really know or understand their lives. They are excluded, living outside of the mainstream understanding of the world. For many, poverty results in a lack of education which means that they are denied the opportunity to learn how to express themselves or to develop a reflection on their situation. It often means that they have a serious lack of self esteem and confidence, and live in fear of not understanding others and of not being understood themselves which is reinforced by a collective history of exclusion.

All of this adds to the difficulties in first of all reaching out to these people and subsequently trying to understand their lives. All of this should be taken into account when seeking out their participation. A significant investment in time and means must be allowed for. Organisations that already have a close proximity to people living in extreme poverty should be identified and partnerships established with them on a long-term basis.

• Lack of expectation of the contribution of people living in extreme poverty

The position of individuals and families living in extreme poverty is affected by the way society views them. Because they live on the margins of society, and have often benefited from only a minimum amount of schooling, they may not fully understand the social and economic systems that govern the society in which they live. They are thus often viewed as 'ignorant,' and so treated with pity, condemnation or condescension. This leads to proposals that are generally based on

"We should refuse assistance given without consultation. Aid must not destroy human dignity and creativity. It requires taking the time to talk with people living in poverty in order to understand what they want. It also requires a first-hand experience of the reality of people's lives. Otherwise, people will say that the project doesn't work."
(Senegalese member of ATD Fourth World with experience of poverty)¹⁵

"What I have inside me is a lifetime of experience. I understand poverty because I live it, but no-one asks for my views and if I tried to give them, who would listen to me?"
(UK member of ATD Fourth World with experience of poverty, 2000)¹⁶

charity and goodwill which unintentionally reducing them to a life of dependency and assistance. They are seen as useless in society and consequently their potential contributions are left unsolicited and their efforts to resist extreme poverty unrecognized.

People living in extreme poverty themselves, therefore, are not only unaccustomed to expressing their thoughts and opinions but they are also in no way used to being listened to or their contribution asked for. In turn, this may reinforce their fear and mistrust of individuals and institutions with whom they come into contact.

This failure to expect their contribution to social, economic, civil, political and cultural issues, neither encourages those experiencing extreme poverty or institutions to invest in their participation nor makes it possible. An inclusive approach is necessary whereby all stakeholders recognise the potential contribution of very excluded people and make the appropriate investment in both time and resources that will allow this overlooked knowledge to impact on the development of strategies to overcome poverty.

4.2 Identifying what enables meaningful participation

Overcoming the many challenges outlined above requires a genuine investment in time and resources as well as careful planning. However, the results can be considerable, not only in improving anti-poverty strategies, but also in the improved integration of excluded people and groups into their communities. From the participatory projects that have been carried out up until now – by ATD Fourth World and other organisations - it is possible to identify certain prerequisites which can serve as guiding principles in facilitating this participation. In order to facilitate meaningful participation, a

certain approach is necessary whereby all participants share the same objective: to allow everyone to find their place and to contribute to a project together.

- **Reaching out: time and flexibility**

As mentioned in the previous section, people living in extreme poverty are very difficult to include in participatory projects. Much of the time they are hampered by their everyday reality, or are too apprehensive to take part. Sufficient time must be allocated in any project that aims to include the very poorest people to allow for the development of trust and confidence and to overcome challenges in participating. For example, home visits are often necessary to secure the participation for those who are unable, or initially reluctant, to come to organised meetings. One-to-one support work should be incorporated into the design of a project to ensure the full involvement of all. Flexibility in all of these aspects is absolutely key and priority given to the participation of all participants. In this respect, the role of NGOs and community groups who are already close to people who live in poverty and who conduct this outreach and empowerment work on a daily basis is extremely useful, if not essential.

- **A will to create equal partnerships**

As stated earlier, the lives of people living in extreme poverty are little known or understood. Therefore, bringing together members of society from diverse backgrounds should be seen as an opportunity to learn from one another. It seems to be a given in society that the very poor have a lot to learn from others but what is less evident to many is how much professionals can also learn from very excluded people. In order to create an environment where a real exchange of knowledge can occur, a general change in approach and mindset is required. The experience of many

*“Humiliated because of their poverty - which often is exacerbated by neglect from other community members - poor people feel inferior and ashamed of their situation. Even when the rest of the community does not actively exclude them, they may choose to cease mixing with other people.”
(Narayan et al, 2000)¹⁷*

NGOs has shown that, when pooled with other types of knowledge, the practical understanding that comes from listening to the concerns of those living in poverty is more complete and representative.

- **Creativity**

Creativity is key in creating the conditions necessary to allow for exchanges of information to take place at a level of equality. People living in poverty have a knowledge that is valuable and from which others can learn. However, their life situations place them immediately at a disadvantage. It is very important to address this power imbalance when designing projects that aim to include meaningful participation of very excluded people. It is often necessary to avoid traditional formal meetings in favour of more informal means of exchange. Thinking outside the box and organising events or activities with this aim in mind is one of the most important ingredients to a successful participatory project or event. Case Study 3 (see section 6.3) provides more details and ideas about how to create a project or event that aims to ensure exchanges on a basis of equality and dignity.

- **Respecting and ensuring everyone's freedom**

The very nature of such a project means that the different participants are from the beginning in a situation of inequality: in power, position, knowledge and means of expression. Therefore it is imperative that we take the means necessary to ensure that the people involved are as free as possible from any kind of dependent relationship with the people with whom they are working. It should be ensured, therefore, that the participants in the dialogue do not have any interpersonal power imbalances, for example, donor and recipient of aid.

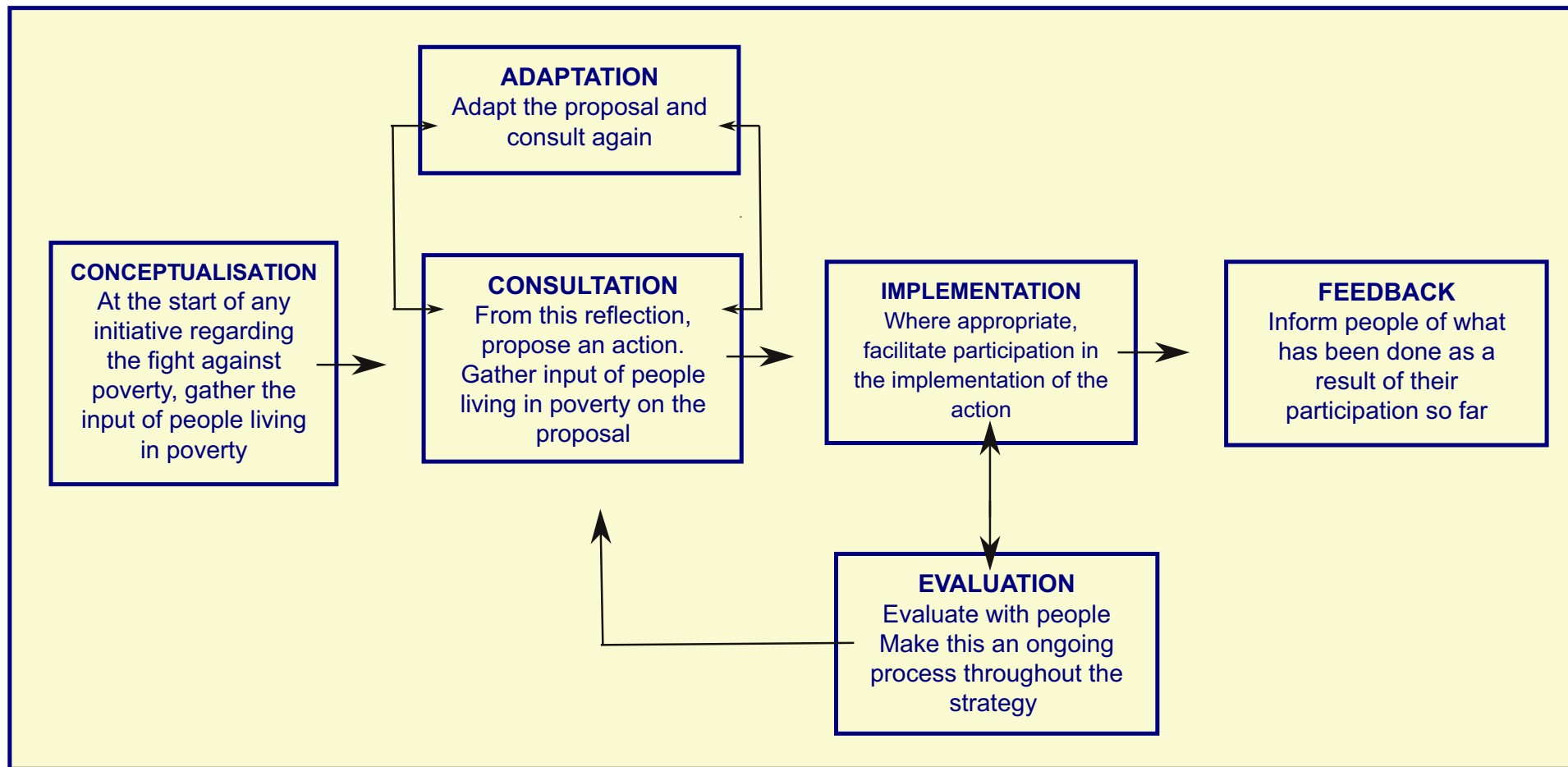
- **Involvement at every stage**

To succeed in achieving a truly participative approach, the participation of people living in poverty should be an integral part of the process rather than an add-on at any given stage. Any project that aims for poverty eradication – at local, national or international level - should include the input and experiences of those who have direct experience of it; from conceptualisation through to implementation and evaluation. This process should be an ongoing cycle in order that the solutions that are proposed and put in place can be constantly evaluated with those whom they are designed to benefit. The case studies presented in this document (see section 6) illustrate how this participation is possible at different levels and at different stages. The participatory model that we advocate is one that strives to create the mechanisms that allow for these types of participation to be combined to create one overall process from beginning to end. The model takes into consideration all of the conditions necessary to enable the meaningful and respectful participation of those who have direct experience of poverty. ATD Fourth World is unaware of the existence of this full participatory process (from reflection through to evaluation stage) in public policy and programme development. The following page (see figure 1) presents an illustration of what could be taken to be the 'ideal' process.

“An important step is to become aware of your own failure to understand [a person living in poverty] or their way of thinking. It is amazing to find yourself deaf and blind. It is essential to realise and accept our own ignorance in order to learn how the other thinks.”

(Academic participant, Fourth World-University Group, 2007)¹⁸

**Figure 1: Meaningful Participation Process in Decision Making
From International Institutions and Texts to Local Projects**



EXPLANATION

- Each box represents a stage. Each stage must be implemented to complete a meaningful participation process.
- The participation of people experiencing poverty and other relevant actors must occur at every stage.
- This process including each stage is to be applied at every level - international, national and local

*5. Toolkit for enabling
meaningful participation in
consultations, conferences,
seminars and events*

5. Toolkit for enabling meaningful participation in consultations, conferences, seminars and events

5.1 Holding a consultation

Holding a consultation or organising a conference is only one part of the participatory process. For a full participatory process, people living in poverty need to be involved prior to this stage and after in a continuous cycle.

- Approach organisations that have a grassroots presence and work close to people who live in situations of poverty. Once the contact has been made, discuss the idea of the consultation with the organisation - ideally with the participation of someone who has experience of poverty - to work out the best way to implement it. (See box 1: 'Outreach')
- Provide participant friendly background information on the subject of the consultation. Take the time to explain the objectives of the consultation, the institutions involved and the positive outcomes to be gained from participating. (See box 3, 'Briefing').
- Plan enough time to allow for adequate preparation before the consultation.
- Address the need for adequate interpretation/translation in all necessary languages.
- Allocate extra time in case of necessary home visits to those whom the grassroots organisation feels should be consulted, but who may not be able to attend a group meeting.

For information on facilitation of the consultation and follow up refer to boxes 4 and 5 respectively on the following page.

5. Toolkit for enabling meaningful participation in consultations, conferences, seminars and events

5.2 Organising a conference, event or seminar

See step 1 of 'Holding a consultation'

- Organise a steering group of people with experience of poverty and other relevant actors in order to plan the conference or seminar.
- Allocate enough resources – time, money, people - to allow for a thorough preparation process (see 'Organising a delegation') with the participants who will be taking part in the conference.
- Provide adequate interpretation/translation in all necessary languages.
- Ensure that all participants – NGO representatives, researchers, government officials, etc. - are aware of this participation and encourage them to take this into account and be supportive of those who have less experience in participating in such conferences.
- If workshops are anticipated, ensure a good balance of professionals, civil servants, government officials, NGO representatives and people living in poverty to take part in the workshop. The same should be applied in the case of speakers.
- To ensure good dialogue, allocate sufficient time to the working groups. Limit the number of speakers and the length of time that each person speaks. Brief the speakers to encourage them to 'de-jargonise' their language in order to facilitate the participation of all participants.

For information on the facilitation of working groups and follow up refer to boxes 4 and 5 respectively on the following page.

5. Toolkit for enabling meaningful participation in consultations, conferences, seminars and events

5.3 Preparing a delegation to a meeting or conference

(For grass-roots organisations working with people living in poverty)

- Bring together groups of people that are, as much as possible, representative of the different backgrounds, genders, races and ethnicities that are found among those living in poverty. Where people are not able to attend, plan for home visits in order that their input will still be included.
- Plan for several meetings: to introduce and discuss the event/consultation, to discuss the subject matter and to reflect on what message the group wants the delegation/speaker to transmit. (See Box 3, point 3.3 for further explanation).
- Take into account all aspects concerning the facilitation of preparatory meetings (see box 4).
- Aim to be as representative as possible when choosing the delegation or speaker, taking into consideration the aim to include the most excluded and affected people. Where it is not possible to include people with experience of extreme poverty in the event itself, ensure that their input is included in the preparation either through participation in the preparation meetings or through home visits.
- In preparing the delegation/speaker ensure that it is clear that they are participating in the event/consultation as representatives of a wider experience not only of their own situation. The aim is to transmit the experience that reflects the preparatory discussions beforehand.
- Aim to create a group feeling of trust, security and support.
- Use writing as a form of support if necessary (see box 3, point 3.4).
- Review all aspects of preparation beforehand (see box 3) .
- Provide moral support where necessary to ensure that the delegation, or speaker, does not feel isolated.

5. Toolkit for enabling meaningful participation in consultations, conferences, seminars and events

5.4 Overarching principles

Box 1: Outreach

In all of the case studies provided (see section 6) and in successful participatory projects the first condition that allows for meaningful participation is an already existing long-term presence with individuals and families that has generated trust and confidence. As explained in section 4 of this document, people living in extreme poverty may not be able to engage easily and once identified, an investment is necessary in order to build up their confidence to participate in exchanges with other sectors of society. This investment should not be underestimated.

Actions:

- Seek to create partnerships with organisations that have a close proximity and relationship with people who live in situations of poverty. Establish a working relationship and approach together with the organisations which are best placed to advise on what works best with the people that they know.
- Ideally ask for the participation of one or more people with experience of poverty in this working relationship whilst taking into consideration the conditions that may be necessary for this to function well.

5. Toolkit for enabling meaningful participation in consultations, conferences, seminars and events

Box 2: Intergrating participation from the outset of the project/event

In order for the participation to be meaningful, it is essential that it is an integrated priority from the outset of the process rather than appear as an add-on at the end. Due to the time and flexibility that is necessary to enable such participation, it is important to plan this from the beginning of the project to take into account various considerations.

Practical Considerations

As illustrated in the case studies provided (see particularly section 6.5) one of the defining factors for success in participatory projects and events is the time and flexibility given to the project and the necessity to go at a pace that corresponds with the experience and capacities of its participants. People living in poverty are faced with numerous daily difficulties. This must be accounted for in the design of a project. Their lifestory and background must be taken into consideration in a respectful way.

Actions:

- When planning the time schedule for a project, account for the extra time that might be required due to unexpected difficulties in the lives of the participants.
- Be willing to take the time to go at the pace of the individuals concerned. If it takes longer for some people to understand or to communicate their ideas, take the time required until they do. Invest in ensuring that everyone feels ownership of the project. Provide support where necessary.
- Be prepared to reimburse costs of childcare and travel immediately or in advance. Alternatively provide transportation and on-site childcare services.

5. Toolkit for enabling meaningful participation in consultations, conferences, seminars and events

Box 3: Preparation

Whether it be for a seminar, conference or consultation, careful preparation is essential to create meaningful participation.

3.1 Briefing

Time should be allocated to allow for people to come together to understand the objectives of the consultation or event, and to be free to ask any questions they may have.

Actions:

- Allocate sufficient time to allow for an adequate understanding of the particular event that participants will be attending.
- Adapt working documents to a language which is accessible and has meaning for your audience. This includes translating them into another language, if necessary.
- Organize the briefing in a location in which the participants can be made to feel comfortable, and which is easily accessible unless transportation is to be provided.
- If the consultation is to take place with a particular institution or department of government or NGO, their role and function needs to be fully explained.
- Explain the reason why such an event is being organised and discuss the relevant issues that are at stake so that participants understand why their involvement is necessary and important.
- Ensure that participants know what to expect and that expectations are not raised too high. It is important that people realise that their participation in such event may not necessarily change their own particular situation but rather that it is a small step in an overall process.

Tip: An interesting exercise that could be used in this part of the preparation is simply to check for understanding. Once an idea or concept has been explained, go around the room and ask each person, or pair if some people are reluctant to speak, to restate what has been explained in a manner which makes it clear that it is not a test but more to see whether it has been explained well enough. This serves two purposes: not only to check for understanding but also to allow for someone else to explain it in a different manner which may aid others in their understanding.

5. Toolkit for enabling meaningful participation in consultations, conferences, seminars and events

3.2 Preparing a contribution that is representative of the group's experience

One of the most valuable lessons that has been learned through ATD Fourth World's long experience of developing participatory projects is the value of preparation with other people who live in similar situations. This provides enormous support and security to people as it places them in a situation where they are not speaking only from personal experience – which can leave them vulnerable - but rather speaking as part of a group experience. There are also other potential benefits to both the group and the individual, including allowing the individual to realise that they are not alone in their experiences, and that their particular experience is not the only story that needs to be told. It demonstrates the importance of trying to provide a more holistic picture. In terms of the group it allows other people's voices to be heard and emphasizes that even though not everyone will have the chance to participate in the event, their voice will still be represented.

Actions:

- Hold small preparation groups before the event or conference where the issues that are to be discussed can be worked on with others. If people are unable to attend these preparation groups, consider carrying out home visits so that their input can still be included.
- Take the time to ensure that what people are trying to convey has been fully understood.
- Decide with those groups which messages are most important to be transmitted.
- Choose delegates to voice those messages on behalf of themselves and the group.

3.3 Use of different means to support participation to help put the group's message across

- By producing a written contribution, people can prepare and formulate their thoughts about what they want to convey beforehand. It also provides the means for other people who have also been included in the reflection to contribute and ensure that their points are conveyed. Special attention should be paid to those with literacy difficulties.
- Other techniques include using art to produce collective or individual works to portray a message. Drama and forum theatre can also be powerful tools and also offer the possibility of audience participation.
- Take into consideration those who may not be used to presenting in front of large audiences. Practice well beforehand and give training and support to those for whom this may be the first time.

5. Toolkit for enabling meaningful participation in consultations, conferences, seminars and events

Box 4: Facilitation

Any event that intends to include people with experience of poverty in a meaningful way should take principles of participation into account. The following aspects are important to consider when organising such an event.

- **Creating equality**

The bringing together of people from different backgrounds will in itself put people in situations of inequality (please see the case study in section 6.3 for more information). Although difficult to avoid, there are steps that can be taken to mitigate its consequences. This is important in order for people to feel more comfortable in participating and help recognise the importance of everyone's contribution. The way in which the event is organised, the facilitator and the other participants all play a very important role in creating this environment.

- **Be creative**

Rather than placing people with experience of poverty into an already defined methodology or facilitation style, it can be more beneficial to use more innovative methods. This could lead to a more creative and accessible way of creating dialogue and may be beneficial for all concerned. This is explained further in the case study in section 6.3.

- **Role of support workers**

Allow space for support workers – someone who has participated in the preparatory process with the participants - but ensure such workers do not interpret their role as becoming a spokesperson for the person with experience of poverty.

- **Balance of participants**

To avoid the participation becoming tokenistic, aim to create a good balance in the number of participants. Ensure that there is always more than one person with experience of poverty in each discussion or breakout group.

- **Setting the dialogue at an equal level**

If a working group is planned to begin with several presentations, it is good practice for a presentation to come from someone with experience of poverty. This sets the tone of the discussion at a level of equality from the start, providing the setting for dialogue to fully include those with experience of poverty and can also help overcome a reluctance to join in the discussion.

5. Toolkit for enabling meaningful participation in consultations, conferences, seminars and events

Actions:

- Plan for a balance of speakers between researchers, government officials, NGOs and people experiencing poverty.
- Prepare with speakers to ensure they adapt their presentations to a language accessible to all.

• Group size and timing

If the event includes discussion or breakout groups, it is essential that the size of the group allows for this and that sufficient time is given over for the discussion itself. In such cases it is better to avoid long and numerous interventions. A rough guide would be to allow for a maximum of 30 minutes of presentations and to allow for at least one hour discussion time.

• Facilitator

Whether it be in plenaries or small working groups, in conferences or in an informal consultation, the facilitator is key to enabling effective participation and creating an atmosphere of solidarity which aims to place all participants on an equal level. The chair has a crucial role in giving everyone space to express themselves. A chair should recognise the courage needed to raise your hand and ask to speak particularly when you have little experience of taking part in such events.

Action:

- Be pro-active about giving each person a space to speak. In working groups and consultations this can be done at the beginning by inviting each member to give a contribution. At the end of the event the facilitator can encourage to speak those who have not often taken the floor during the discussion.

• Setting groundrules for participants

Every person who attends the event has an important role to play in allowing those with less confidence and experience to take part and the facilitator should make this apparent before beginning the event. They play a key role in supporting people to fully participate and to creating an atmosphere of equality (refer to case study in section 6.4). It is important that each person takes care not to dominate the discussion, speaks in a language that is understandable to all (such as avoiding jargon as much as possible) and takes active steps to include those with less experience.

Action:

- Draw attention to this aspect when invitations are sent out. Participation in events of this nature may be new to many actors in all fields and care should be taken to inform them of their role.

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Box 5: Follow-up

The importance of sending follow-up information to those who have taken the time and effort to participate should not be underestimated. Let participants know how their input was noted and taken into account. One of the most frustrating aspects of participation for people living in poverty is the frequent lack of feedback after they have participated in a consultation or event. In order for participation to be complete, this last aspect must not be overlooked.

Actions:

- Send a follow-up letter and a summary of the event that took place, or;
- Organise a meeting to bring people together to give relevant feedback.
- If concrete measures are put in place as a result of the consultation or event, ask people for their views on the proposal and involve people in its evaluation.
- Integrate continuous, participative evaluation into the design of any project.
- Provide participants with further means of being involved. Where possible, continue working in partnership with them.

6. Case studies

Case Study 1

Project	Access of the poorest citizens to the right to birth registration
Location	Senegal
Level	National
Description	Campaign which influenced national government policy/practice
Organisation	ATD Quart Monde (ATD Fourth World)
Conditions	Time, patience, support (moral and practical), outreach mechanisms, long-term presence, trust, confidence
Means	Home interviews, meetings with local officials, follow up support to involved families
Outcomes	Special consideration given to certain categories of the population, increased number of birth registrations, expectations raised for other members of the community, raised awareness among people who were not being reached and in government agencies who had difficulty reaching them.

Background

Following ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the protection of the rights of the child became an objective for the government of Senegal.

Article 7 of the Convention states that the birth of a child shall be registered as all children have the right to a name and a nationality, and that States Parties shall ensure this right be implemented. A child that is not declared does not exist in the eyes of the law or any administrative structure and cannot, therefore, benefit from the laws that have been put in place to protect them. A non-registered child is at greater risk of exploitation and has great difficulty to access school or health services.

According to UNICEF, the percentage of births registered in Senegal for children under 5 is 55%.¹⁹ In 2003, a birth registration campaign was launched by the Senegalese government. A concerted effort was made to inform and raise awareness throughout Senegal through such means as television and radio announcements, and cultural activities. However ATD Fourth World observed that many of the families with whom it was in contact in very poor areas were not taking advantage of this campaign in spite of the low rates of birth registrations in such neighbourhoods.

Aims

To ensure that all sectors of the population including the very poorest parents could benefit from the birth registration campaign.

Process

The project consisted of three stages:

(1) An information gathering and awareness raising strategy: In the initial phase ATD Fourth World carried out interviews with groups of people that they knew from running projects in very poor neighborhoods. The first objective was to inform people about the campaign. Parents were also asked why they had not registered their children in order to gain a full understanding of the problem, and subsequently build a knowledge base from which future proposals could be made.

The first problem identified was that despite the efforts of the Government, the most excluded populations remained unaware of the campaign. Using outreach techniques, going door-to-door, and interviewing people one-by-one, ATD Fourth World volunteers corps members were able to begin reaching families children who had not been registered. As a result, awareness of the campaign grew by word of mouth. It emerged that rather than out of ignorance or indifference, parents did not register their children as they had to prioritise day-to-day survival. Parents also spoke of: the time needed to complete the lengthy formalities required for birth registration; lack of money to pay hospital fees to issue the birth certificate; the necessity for both parents to have identity cards in order to register their child; and home birth where the parents either were not aware of the necessity to register the child or simply did not have the means to carry out the formalities.

(2) Meeting officials to raise awareness of barriers faced by families living in poverty: Meetings were organised between government officials and

people experiencing poverty. These enabled officials working on the campaign to hear directly about the specific difficulties very poor parents faced. As a result solutions were found to overcome barriers and practical means were put into place to support people to register their children (see 'outcomes' below for more details). Sufficient time was taken to allow the most disadvantaged parents to engage in the campaign having overcome their fear and mistrust. This allowed parents to find the courage to explain why they had not registered their children and to speak out in front of others about this – something quite exceptional in Senegal where discretion is the norm.

(3) Provision of practical support to help families obtain birth certificates: For ATD Fourth World it was not enough that people be aware of this right - people needed to be supported in the protection and promotion of their rights. One of the main success factors of success was the fact that ATD Fourth World had already a significant and long term presence in very poor neighbourhoods of Senegal and enjoyed a trust and confidence that had already been built up over years. Families therefore readily accepted support from volunteers corps members. Without such pre-conditions, it would have been very difficult to enable the participation of very excluded people in the meetings with officials and in the overall project.

Outcomes

(1) Special consideration given by officials to people living in poverty: Very poor parents, accompanied by volunteer corps members were successful in working with officials to reduce the administrative procedures that families faced to register their children. By officials giving special consideration to very disadvantaged parents, simplifying the procedures and in some cases waiving the registration fee, they were able to benefit from the campaign and register their children.

(2) Constructive dialogue between officials and people living in extreme poverty: Solutions were proposed that corresponded to the real needs of people as a result of the meetings organised in which parents highlighted the problems they faced in the presence of government officials.

(3) Increased number of birth registrations: As a result of the campaign in six poor neighbourhoods of Dakar and the surrounding area, 161 adults and children were able to obtain birth certificates because of the collaboration between ATD Fourth

World, the Senegalese authorities and the families themselves. The evaluation of the work highlighted that without the active participation of ATD Fourth World, as an NGO, a substantial part of the population would have remained unaware of the campaign. Moreover, parents are now convinced of the importance of registering their children and understand what needs to be done to undertake the process. They stressed they would register all their children without waiting until they are older.

(4) Faith in the process: Parents were encouraged to believe and have faith in the process on seeing the successes of others. One meeting was very successful where a group of parents, despite not being able to fulfill all the criteria necessary (such as both parents needing to have an identity card), were able to complete the process in dialogue with the officials. This encouraged other parents to engage in the process and register their children. As one of the parents stated: "I now tell poor families about how useful the birth certificate is, what you have to do to register the child and I go with them to the Town Hall so they register their children."

(5) Renewed strength and courage: Providing moral support to parents gave them the courage and strength to face the difficulties in order of getting their children registered.

Success factors

Outreach work, support, long-term presence, time and patience.

Case Study 2

Project	'Las Lavanderias' – Public Laundries in Coroico
Location	Coroico, Bolivia
Level	Local
Description	Planning and construction of a local community service utility
Organisation	Movimiento ATD Cuarto Mundo (ATD Fourth World Movement)
Conditions	Time, patience, support
Means	Outreach work – home visits, neighbourhood meetings, consultations with the community, collective running of the project.
Outcomes	The construction of a washing facility that corresponded to the needs of all the community including its very poorest members.

Background

In the impoverished neighbourhood of Aponto, in the small city of Coroico, Bolivia, the only source of public water was the stream. Access to the stream depended on land ownership and was thus limited for many of the poorest people in the neighbourhood. These landless people, the majority of whom earn their living by washing other people's clothes, were dependent on the inconsistent and unpredictable authorization from the local landowners for both their personal water and for the water needed to work. Furthermore the places the women could find water and wash clothes were unsafe with broken shards of metal in the ground. This was particularly dangerous for the children who often accompanied their mothers.

Aim

To construct a public and free laundry facility for the community that corresponded to their needs.

Process

(1) Organisation of community meetings: During the planning phase of 'Las Lavandarias', monthly meetings were held with all the partners to ensure that the desires and needs of the poorest people in the community were being addressed. The partners included local and international members of ATD Fourth World, the town hall and parish of Coroico and most importantly the people of Aponto themselves. Additionally these meetings provided a forum for the very poorest in the community to express themselves and their hopes and needs, thus beginning to bridge a gap that had existed between them and the rest of the community.

(2) Outreach consultations: Despite the neighbourhood meetings, there remained many poor families and individuals who were not comfortable attending them. They tended to be the

most isolated or excluded in the community. Many felt too ashamed of their living conditions to participate in large meetings. In order to ensure that these people would be able to contribute to the project, and thereby enable all citizens of Aponto to be part of the project, the architect, and ATD Fourth World members took the time and effort to visit the individuals and families that were unable or unwilling to attend the large public preparation meetings. With the construction plans and the project in hand, it was possible to learn what were the needs and aspirations of even the most isolated members of the community. The consultation process with the families and individuals of the neighbourhood introduced an important new aspect into the design of the project. This enabled the architect to understand the importance for the facility to double as a site for children, parents and others to gather. Mothers often supervised young children even when they were busy washing clothes. Therefore it was crucial that the laundry provide an open and safe environment where children could accompany their parents by also serving as a social gathering place where children and families could meet in a welcoming environment.

(3) Participatory implementation: In 1997, after two years of project assessment and fundraising, construction began of 'Las Lavandarias'. The very construction of the washing facility was also a collective endeavour for all stakeholders with the majority of the facility being built by its future users. In June 1999, the end result was a laundry facility with four washing stations, a public toilet, a maintenance/surveillance house and an open social pavillion overlooking the laundry space. A Tapor²⁰ kiosk in the social pavillion served as a place for reading and art activities for children run twice a week.

Outcomes

(1) **Free access to safe water source:** Many of the women who use the facility are pleased to have an accessible site to do their washing and work and at the same time to be able to socialise with others and to care for their children.

(2) **Dignity and confidence:** By building this laundry facility, the citizens of Aponto not only gained access to water, they also gained dignity and confidence in their community and in themselves.

Success factors

Outreach work, participatory implementation, community meetings, participation of people living in poverty, including the poorest people, at all stages of the project

Case Study 3

Project	'Jeter les bases d'un Québec sans pauvreté' (Laying the groundwork for a Quebec without poverty).
Location	Quebec, Canada
Level	Provincial
Description	Elaboration of a provincial law proposal
Organisation	Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté (Collective for a Quebec without poverty)
Conditions	Recognising practical difficulties, support from other participants in the group, support from an outside organisation which provided a link to other people in similar situations.
Means	A petition, testimonies and proposals created together with people living in poverty sent to parliamentarians, organization of meetings with parliamentarians, actively involving people with experience of poverty at every stage, creative methods to allow for a real exchange, use of existing international instruments, mobilisation of different groups of people.
Outcomes	A law was adopted based on a proposal developed with the collaboration and input of people experiencing poverty.

Background

The Collective for a Quebec without Poverty is made up of 32 national organizations and 15 regional collectives, forming a diverse coalition of different organizations from trade unions to religious, women's and poverty groups. It was formed in 1998 with its first action being to take the lead on a consultation project amongst the citizens of Quebec which served as the first base for the elaboration of a law on the elimination of poverty.

Aim

Elaboration of a provincial law on the elimination of poverty

Process

(1) Consultation: The Collective wanted the proposal of the law to be developed from people's experience. To allow for this, a consultation was carried out in all regions of Quebec with people from different backgrounds including those with experience of poverty.

The aim was to ask people, based on their own experience and knowledge, what they thought would be the most effective aspects for such a law. The consultation was sent out by all the members of the collective and returned around 20,000 comments and 5,000 suggestions contributing to the drafting of a first proposal.

The proposal was based on three principles founded on the recognition of human rights:

i) The eradication of poverty must be a priority of the Government until such time as Quebec is a society without poverty

ii) Priority must be given to the improvement of the lives of the poorest fifth of the population rather than the richest fifth.

iii) People experiencing poverty and the associations that represent them must be implicated in the conception, implementation and the evaluation of these measures.

(2) Petition: This proposal was finalised and adopted by the Collective in April 2000. A petition was then organised and signed by more than 215,000 people and 1,600 bodies of various backgrounds. The petition included the voices of people who had experience of poverty. Testimonies were used that had been presented at past commemorations of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, celebrated each year on 17 October.

(3) Submission: This draft was submitted to the National Assembly whereby the Collective asked the Members of Parliament for an outline of a law that would be based on the proposal of the Collective. Many people with experience of poverty signed the petition and were involved in the development of the proposal.

(4) Lobbying with the participation of people experiencing poverty: 167 submissions were presented to the Parliamentary Commission one of which was prepared with people experiencing poverty through numerous meetings. In order to carry out the analysis of the proposed law, 7 members of ATD Fourth World, including

people with experience of poverty, planned a consultation. They visited 5 different groups in various locations in Quebec (Montreal, Thetford-Mines, Sherbrooke, Lavaltrie and Rouyn-Noranda) to gather opinions on the proposed law. Everything was recorded and written up from these discussions and a final submission written that was to be presented to the Parliament.

Before being submitted, it was circulated to contributors to ensure that people were satisfied with what had been written. The involvement of people with direct experience of poverty at every stage was key in this process: from formulating the questions, preparing and delivering the presentation at consultation meetings, through to finalising the written document. The submission presented many different proposals, all reflected upon and written together with people who had direct experience of poverty.

(5) Organisation of various events:

Citizens Forums: more than 400 people were brought together to discuss the subject of 'changing society by including people experiencing poverty'.

Citizens 'Agora' (Round-table): during the hearings held by the Commission on Social Affairs of the General Assembly on the planning of the law, an open debate was organised on the problem of poverty.

Breakfasts with Members of Parliament: Every year since 2001, Members of Parliament and people with experience of poverty have been brought together over breakfast on the 17th October – the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. The aim is to sensitise the Members of Parliament to the realities of what people living in poverty experience and to allow for exchanges to take place. Different techniques are employed to allow for a real exchange with the Members of Parliament. One example is a "Monopoly" game being played whereby the streets were changed for days of the year. Each player (the MPs and the people with experience of poverty) was allocated the amount of money that a person receives on social benefits and they had to make it around the board (of 31 days) without spending all their money. On some of the days a crisis would occur, such as a need for money for new shoes for their child or money for the repair of a broken washing machine. Once they ran out of money they had to find solutions to how they would manage. An interesting discussion followed after the game whereby people had the chance to explain how they had managed in the past with situations such as this. It was an interesting way of sensitising the MPs to what it means to live in poverty.

(6) Inclusion of people experiencing poverty in the Collective's Advisory Committee: An in-depth reflection on the necessary conditions for implementing the law was carried out. In 2006 the first meeting of an advisory committee on the prevention of poverty and social exclusion was held. The committee took the commitment to include at least 3, and a maximum of 5, people living in poverty (out of 15 participants) in the work that was carried out. In order to allow for the real participation of people in poverty, a discussion took place amongst the Committee to see what conditions would be necessary for this. Practical considerations were taken into account – for example reimbursing time that had to be taken off work and enabling people to have access to internet. An important factor to the success of this participation was the support of the other 12 participants of the Committee who were sensitive to the difficulties that people who live in situations of poverty often faced and who made an effort to take this into account when working together. Another positive factor was the support provided to the participants by organisations, such as ATD Fourth World. This generally consisted of preparing together before each meeting with the Collective, carrying out group work in order for the experiences of others to be heard to take to the Committee a collective experience rather than one formed entirely on the basis of personal experience.

(7) Reference to international instruments: The success of this initiative was also due to existing international instruments on civil and political rights that have been signed by Canada. The project has been inspired by such instruments, following the commitment made by each state at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen. The final report on human rights and extreme poverty by Leandro Despouy submitted to the United Nations Sub-Commission on Human Rights in 1996 (also based on the experience of people living in poverty) - inspired the involvement of people with experience of poverty in the elaboration, implementation and evaluation of legislation that concerns them. The 1999 United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms also heavily supported the action of the Collective. The understanding and subsequent use of international law was extremely beneficial in influencing the Government.

(8) **Widespread mobilisation:** The widespread support for the law across all regions of Quebec was an important factor in successfully passing the legislation.

Outcomes

(1) Passing of a law designed with the recommendations of people experiencing poverty creating a statutory instrument in the fight against poverty. Even with a change of government, the law remains in place requiring each Government to put in place measures which: recognise human rights principles; aim to improve the lives of people living in poverty by involving them in the process; and which obliges the Government to measure the effects of these legislative decisions.

Success factors

The input of people experiencing poverty in the initial drafting of proposals and involving people living in poverty at every stage: carrying out consultations, organising events, and participating in the Collective Committee.

Case Study 4

Project	Voices for a Change: Finding solutions to the experience of poverty in London ²¹
Location	London, UK
Level	Local
Description	Participatory approach to research
Organisation	ATD Fourth World, supported by Child Poverty Action Group, City Parochial Foundation and Oxfam GB.
Conditions	Solutions sought to overcome practical difficulties, suitable pace adapted to needs of participants, time and flexibility to enable real participation of all participants.
Means	Strong support from project workers to enable peer researchers to feel part of the project, use of professional trainers to build confidence and skills, time allocated to outreach people living in poverty, long-established relationship with peer researchers.
Outcomes	A substantial contribution to the anti-poverty debate in London, policy recommendations grounded in the reality of people who have direct experience of the situation, support and weight given to existing research, demonstration of the possibility of involving people living in poverty from the research planning and conception stage to data collection, analysis and dissemination.

Background

The research field is full of studies outlining the causes of poverty in the UK and proposing recommendations for its eradication. Few, however, have taken a participatory approach to the research. This approach adds real value by allowing people with experience of poverty to be involved throughout the research project: both in the richness and relevance of the research itself and in the benefits it brings to the participants. The project was run in partnership with local NGOs working in the anti-poverty field, who offered added value in terms of research expertise, a dissemination network and financial resources to fund the work.

Aims of the project

To gain an insight into how poverty affects the lives of London's poorest and most socially excluded people, who do not traditionally contribute to research, in order to ascertain what would support them to move out of poverty.
To make policy recommendations informed by the knowledge of people with first-hand experience of poverty to local and central Government policy makers with a poverty and social exclusion remit.
To give a voice to people with experience of poverty in London who have not previously had the opportunity to express their views on poverty.
To train people with experience of poverty to become poverty researchers and spokespeople on behalf of those experiencing poverty.

Process

(1) Selection of peer researchers: Voices for a Change invited a group of 18 potential participants to become peer researchers. All were living in poverty but they had diverse experiences, owing to a broad spread of age, ethnicity, gender and disability. Most of them had previous experience of ATD Fourth World's participatory policy development work, but none of them had any experience of research. This past experience and relationship of trust already established with the organisation contributed to the project's success. It is unsure whether such a project would have been possible with people living in poverty new to the organisation and its work.

(2) Training and supporting peer researchers to be part of the project: Professional trainers were used to support the peer researchers to carry out their role. Courses in confidence building, presentation skills and interviewing techniques were specifically tailored to the particular needs of the group.
Following the training sessions, 12 members of the group decided to become involved as peer researchers. Over the 15-month project, only one participant dropped out due to family circumstances. This high completion rate was in part due to the pace of the project being set in order for all of the peer researchers to feel at ease with their role in the project and to ensure their effective participation. A volunteer corps member supported the ongoing participation of

peer researchers through regular phone calls and home visits, particularly if they had difficulty in attending meetings or understanding an aspect of the project. The project also recognised that the peer researchers faced many obstacles to participation because of the complications of living in poverty themselves and supported them accordingly (help with receiving or applying for welfare benefits, providing money for transport in advance to get to meetings).

(3) Drafting an interview guide: Sufficient time was allocated to work with the peer researchers to draw up an interview guide that they would use to interview people living in long-term poverty. Peer researchers used their own experience of poverty to ensure questions were not overly intrusive or stigmatising and allowed interviewees to feel at ease and tell their story in order to build up a picture of what it meant to live in poverty.

(4) Recruitment of interviewees: Peer researchers were asked to think about people within their own communities who they felt were struggling and marginalised. London-based volunteer corps members also recommended names of people known to their projects who were experiencing deep poverty. A local NGO working with refugees and asylum seekers was asked to refer migrant workers or asylum seekers living in long-term poverty to be interviewed by peer researchers.

(5) Carrying out of interviews: Interviews were carried out by the peer researchers working in pairs. A leaflet presenting the project and a consent form for respondents was prepared by a small group of peer researchers with a volunteer corps member. In addition, an information pack was put together that included information on support available from ATD Fourth World, and a short list of local service providers able to offer support with housing, debt, employment and children's services.

(6) Analysis of interviews: The interviews were then analysed and the peer researchers were supported to formulate policy recommendations. In analysing the findings, the project was able to identify the positive achievements of people living in poverty that provide the foundations for them to overcome it. It also allowed the identification of factors which prevent people from moving out of poverty. By accentuating people's assets and providing solutions to resolve the barriers which keep people within poverty, the report offers those within the poverty lobby further insight into what can make a positive difference to the lives of

London's poorest people and families.

(7) Dissemination: A conference was organised attended by over 60 people, over 40 of whom were policy makers from local and central Government or NGO representatives, and around 20 people with experience of poverty. Two of the peer researchers presented the findings of the report and two people from local and central government were invited to respond. Small group discussions followed. The research is being disseminated to different local and national government civil servants and also to NGOs in the poverty field and the research community. It will also be sent to different academic journals and sector periodicals for review.

Outcomes

(1) Transferable model for involvement of people experiencing poverty: The project is one of few fully participatory peer research projects involving people experiencing poverty. It demonstrates that it is possible to involve people living in poverty from the research planning and conception, through to data collection, analysis and dissemination.

(2) Recommendations grounded in lived experience: The policy recommendations made are grounded in the lived reality of those who formulated them. They give weight to evidence collected by more traditional research means that obtained similar findings.

(3) Impact on the peer reviewers and interviewees: The project has given the participants the confidence and skills to effect change in their own lives: by moving into employment; taking up training opportunities; and volunteering in projects within their own community.

(4) Impact on interview respondents: The project provided those interviewed with an opportunity for their voices to be heard and acted as an empowering experience. Six of the people who were interviewed attended the launch conference, the first time they had attended such an event.

Success factors

Involvement of people living in poverty at every stage (creating the questionnaire, carrying out the interviews, analysing the results and presenting the findings), pace of the project adapted to the needs of the participants, ongoing support.

Case Study 5

Project	Commemoration of October 17, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty at United Nations HQ, New York
Location	United Nations
Level	International
Description	Participation at the United Nations
Organisation	International Movement ATD Fourth World
Means	Comprehensive preparation at the local and international level with various partners. Clear focus on the need to prioritise participation of people with experience of poverty.
Outcomes	Central role of people living in poverty in adherence with the original tenets of the International Day, encounters between people in poverty and policy makers, exchange of views on policy, empowerment of people living in poverty by being listened to and having space to express their reality of their lives.

Background

First marked by ATD Fourth World together with human rights defenders from diverse backgrounds in 1987, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (IDEP) was officially recognised by the United Nations in 1992, and first commemorated at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in 1993. In 1996 a replica of the commemorative stone, the original is found in the Trocadero Plaza in Paris, was laid in the gardens of the United Nations, a gift from the Government of France on behalf of people living in extreme poverty around the world. It has since become a gathering point for events to commemorate October 17. Each year, the event is co-organised by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the International Movement ATD Fourth World, and co-sponsored by the NGO Sub-committee for the Eradication of Poverty and the Missions of France and Burkina Faso. In some years, other partners are involved, including the Millennium Campaign, the Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) and the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) of the UN.

Aims of the project

To create a landmark commemoration at the UN that places at its centre the testimonies from people living in poverty in North and South
To highlight the link between extreme poverty and human rights
To give a voice to people with experience of poverty in front of governments, UN secretariat, NGOs and other policy makers
To give an opportunity for people with experience of poverty to represent their communities at the international level.

Process

(1) **Partnership with the UN** and other stakeholders to organize the commemoration
ATD Fourth World and NGO partners work with the United Nations to design the IDEP commemoration so as to give a central role to testimonies from people living in poverty. An effort is made to ensure that these testimonies reflect the reality in both North and South. The themes of the testimonies are developed at the grassroots level, rather than imposed, so as to reflect the reality of the lives of the delegates and their communities. United Nations protocol often means that there are difficulties in balancing the testimonies with statements by high-level speakers and dignitaries, and so careful attention is required to ensure that the testimonies remain central.

(2) **Selection of delegates:** ATD Fourth World and NGO partners work with their local teams to select delegates who have an experience of poverty and who are able to represent their communities. Support is given to enable the delegates to travel, in spite of the many challenges often facing them, which may include help with childcare, care of family members, time off work and preparation of papers, including passports and visas.

(3) **Preparation at local level:** The testimonies are developed in each local communities through a series of consultations with the support of the local ATD Fourth World organisations, who work with the delegates to develop a theme on which they would like to speak. Efforts are made to reach out to the most vulnerable members of the community to ensure that their input and experiences are reflected in the testimonies. The delegate is

encouraged to write a testimony that reflects not only their personal experiences, but those of his or her wider community as well. Accompanying the delegate would normally be a supporter of ATD Fourth World, or a member of its volunteer corps.

(4) Travel arrangements: Volunteer corps members and supporters assist with the logistics of the delegation. Delegates often need to obtain the documentation required to get a passport (for example, a birth certificate) and time needs to be allocated for this. Delegates face additional challenges in obtaining visas, especially because of the difficulties in proving ties to their country, as they are unlikely to have formal work, or own property. This means that extra care has to be taken when applying for the visa to give the best chance for applications to be successful.

(5) Preparation as a group in New York: Delegates arrive several days before the IDEP commemoration, in order to acclimatize to New York, and to prepare as a group. Time to get to know each other and to exchange experiences is very important. This time together permits delegates to feel part of a Movement, a member of the 'Fourth World', whose experiences of living in poverty have many common threads and empowers delegates for what is often a challenging experience. To leave one's family and community behind to speak at the United Nations is a major undertaking for people whose voices are infrequently heard. The delegates are normally divided into small groups to read over their testimonies, shortening them if necessary according to the time available, and to practice delivering them in front of an audience.

(6) Presentation: The delegates are accompanied by volunteer corps members working for the ATD Fourth World team in New York, providing moral support as well as to help introduce them to other participants in the commemorations.

Opportunities for informal exchanges before and after the commemoration can be an important part of the dialogue between people living in poverty and decision-makers.

Outcomes

(1) Recognition within the UN commemoration of the IDEP of the value of contributions from people from a background of poverty, not just traditionally recognised experts, given the right conditions for their participation²².

(2) Recognition of people living in poverty: With a diverse audience, the messages contained in the testimonies affect policy makers and ordinary citizens alike. Delegates are recognized for their efforts to overcome poverty, not as victims.

(3) Voice of people living in poverty heard: Delegates are able to take back to their communities the knowledge that the realities of their situations and their efforts to fight poverty have been heard at the United Nations level. This recognition of their contributions is important in terms of empowerment and solidarity.

Success factors

Partnership work with UN and NGO agencies, time taken to prepare with delegates locally and at the event as a collective group,

Case Study 6

Project	The Draft Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights ¹ .
Location	International (United Nations, Thailand and France)
Level	International
Description	Consultation with people living in poverty to produce a first draft on a potential international text against extreme poverty.
Organisation	United Nations/International Movement ATD Fourth World
Conditions	Willingness of appointed experts on extreme poverty and human rights to listen to testimonies of people living in poverty and consequently take these contributions into account, long-term presence of ATD Fourth World at the United Nations in Geneva, training, preparation and support for participants with experience of poverty.
Means	Participation of ATD Fourth World (often in conjunction with other NGOs) in the work of the Sub-Commission. Organisation of grass roots visits and meetings between people living in poverty and the experts on extreme poverty and human rights.
Outcomes	Emphasis placed on the indivisibility of human rights, non-discrimination and participation of people living in poverty in the initial draft of the Guiding Principles, better understanding on the part of Sub-Commission experts of the reality of social exclusion in northern as well as southern countries. A potential international text that is, at least partially, anchored in the realities of people experiencing extreme poverty.

Background

In 2001 the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights (OHCHR) asked the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights to examine the possibility of developing International Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights.²³ A group of five experts were subsequently mandated to carry out this work and a proposal to create draft guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights was adopted in Resolution 2006/9.²⁴

Aim

To facilitate the contribution of people experiencing poverty in the drafting of Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights.

Process

(1) Meetings between people experiencing poverty and the experts: In March 2005, a consultation was organised in Bangkok, Thailand with people living in poverty and was attended by one of the five experts of the Sub-Commission, a member of the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand and a representative of the OHCHR headquarters in Geneva. Three of the experts also attended a European seminar held in Paris in September 2005, where over 60 participants from Belgium, France, Spain, the UK and Poland were present. This seminar focused particularly on the

participation of people living in poverty and served as dialogue with the experts of the Sub-Commission. The experts remarked that the consultations confirmed their conviction that in order to eliminate poverty and to guarantee access to human rights for all, it is essential to think together with and listen to those who have direct experience of poverty.

(2) Grassroot visits to Thailand and France: The experts were invited to visit communities in Bangkok and Trappes (France) and an exchange took place between people living in extreme poverty (including those who were not able to attend the organised meeting) and the experts. This allowed the experts to witness the living situation of the participants and also the different projects in which the communities participate, such as the 'Cafe Rencontre' (the Meeting Place Café) in Trappes, where people living in poverty come together to prepare for the People's University.²

(3) Setting the conditions to enable dialogue: Means were taken to ensure that the conditions were present to allow for genuine dialogue: a relaxed setting, extra time was allocated for an informal exchange before and after the consultations, and both parties were prepared beforehand to receive the other group. The

communities were well briefed on who the experts were and the aim of their visit, and the experts were asked to speak, act and dress in an informal manner to put participants at ease. The importance of using layman's terms in the dialogue was also emphasised and translation was provided in Bangkok in order that participants could express themselves comfortably in their own language.

(4) Preparation: Adequate preparation was carried out before the meetings between the experts and people living in poverty. The ATD Fourth World team based in Bangkok carried out in-depth interviews with two different communities with whom they had a long history of working. These interviews gathered the input of people living in extreme poverty and also acted as preparation for the visits of the member of the group of experts. In Trappes members of ATD Fourth World organised group work with the participants in order to discuss the issues beforehand.

Outcomes

(1) The initial draft of the Guiding Principles emphasises the indivisibility of human rights, non-discrimination and participation of people living in poverty and the importance of ensuring the protection, promotion and fulfilment of all human rights for all people including the very poorest (rather than the minimal rights approach).

(2) Recognition of discrimination: The dialogue that was held between the experts and those with direct experience of poverty led to a better recognition of the 'stigmatisation of people living in poverty and their associations'²⁵ as a form of discrimination. This consequently resulted in a stronger presence of these issues in the guiding principles.

(3) Stronger recognition and importance have been given to the contribution of people in situations of poverty: "Thanks to all those who contributed to the elaboration of the guiding principles...especially the persons in situations of extreme poverty, with the hope that these principles encourage them in their daily efforts to preserve their dignity and regain their rights."²⁶

(4) Recognition of issue of poverty in the North: Experts from different parts of the world now recognise the commonalities between poverty in developing and industrialised countries, and how poverty is a violation of rights in all countries, not only those in the south. There is a better understanding of the effect that poverty has on people in rich countries.

Success factors

Consultation and exchanges took place before the first drafting of the text (involvement in the reflection stage of the text), experts met people living in poverty from both the north and the south, experts made grassroots visits, adequate preparation was carried out beforehand.

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- 18 Fourth World-University Research Group (2007) ,*ibid*.
- 19 See: http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/senegal_statistics.html
- 20 Taponi is a worldwide network of children from all backgrounds whose motto is: "We want all children to have the same chances." See: <http://www.taponi.org>.
- 21 See: <http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/Our-Voices-for-a-change.html>
- 22 See in particular paragraph 42 of report of the UN Secretary General in to the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (see: <http://www.un.org/events/poverty/2006/sgreport.html>).
- 23 For further information see <http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/UN-Draft-Guiding-Principles-of.html>
- 24 People's Universities are monthly meetings bringing together people living in poverty people and relevant professionals to disucss a range of topics, including human rights issues.
- 25 Resolution 2006/9 in Report of the Sub-Commission A/HRC/2/2, p.33. See: <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G06/138/77/PDF/G0613877.pdf?OpenElement>.
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