Artisans of Peace Overcoming Poverty

Volume 1: *A People-Centered Movement*

by Diana Faujour Skelton

with Eugen Brand, David Lockwood,
and Jacqueline Plaisir

ATD FOURTH WORLD

Endorsements

"Fourth World Street Libraries effectively engage children in learning through the use of books, computers, and art. Parents openly express their enthusiasm for Street Libraries, and their descriptions of the activities that take place in these centers of learning clearly reveal the children's eagerness to learn. Indeed, as places of learning, Street Libraries stand in sharp contrast to the local public schools. The importance of the Fourth World Street Libraries in these neighborhoods cannot be overstated."

—William Julius Wilson, the Lewis P. and Linda L. Geyser University Professor at Harvard University

"When I was president of Senegal, on the occasion of the first commemoration honoring the victims of extreme poverty on October 17, 1987, I was struck by the nobility and the devotion of ATD Fourth World. This organization founded by Joseph Wresinski is a message of hope and of faith in human dignity for all of us."

—Abdou Diouf, former President of Senegal

"The long involvement and practical experience of ATD with the world of poverty has made of it the principal interlocutor and partner of impoverished families across the world. It is therefore with an authoritative voice that it can affirm that extreme poverty is violence and the violence of contempt and indifference causes chronic poverty. It is based on this involvement and experience that ATD can say, with great solemnity, that the people living in extreme poverty have a unique contribution in striving towards peace between different peoples and communities across the globe."

—Cassam Uteem, former President of the Republic of Mauritius

"ATD Fourth World truly deserves global recognition and the stimulus which attributing the Nobel Peace Prize would represent. Its members are creators of peace, capable of healing countless wounds from helplessness, from indifference, from exclusion. ATD Fourth World: thank you for your tireless action, for the generosity, for the hands outstretched and the arms open, at the forefront of human solidarity. Thank you for initiating decisively a new page on reciprocal attention, on sharing, on compassion.

"The past is already written and all we can do now is to recount it accurately; but the future is ahead of us and it is our supreme duty, from this moment on, to shape it in another way. The great transition is from use of force to use of language. ATD Fourth World is on the front line to make this possible."

—Federico Mayor Zaragoza, President, Foundation for a Culture of Peace, and former Director-General of UNESCO

"ATD Fourth World's action is based on the active participation of the victims of poverty. Its approach includes the concepts of recognizing the words and the know-how of the excluded, and removing victims' guilt by involving them in the re-appropriation of their fundamental rights."

—Geneviève Garrigos, President, Amnesty International France

"Since its founding [. . .], ATD Fourth World has been fighting to ensure universal respect for the dignity and human rights of the very poorest around the world. While most of us believe we understand what is meant by extreme poverty, our understanding often fails to capture the full extent of violence, social exclusion, discrimination, indignity, and voicelessness suffered by poor people as a daily part of their lives. [. . .]

"In international fora, ATD Fourth World speaks together with extremely poor people rather than for them, and underscores the value and importance of the experience and knowledge of people living in poverty. The organization is deeply involved in making the voices of the poorest heard."

—Donald Lee, President, International Committee for October 17

"It's amazing how art has a way of connecting people. ATD Fourth World uses art to create true and lasting relationships."

—Robert Alejandro, Connecting With Art, and author of *Botanic Chic*

"ATD Fourth World has recognized the obligation to earn the right to speak in the name of the poor. It is not something that one can immediately assume—as advocates and social scientists often tend to do. One has to develop and continue to earn the right to speak in the name of the poor. That is an enormously important formulation that ATD Fourth World tries to live by and with.

"The essential theme of ATD Fourth World, for me at least, is that one can realize important aspects of one's life by commitment to helping others. That commitment should not only be regarded as a duty; it should be felt as an opportunity. For me, the profound message of ATD Fourth World is that in helping others, we most help ourselves."

—S. M. Miller, professor emeritus, Boston University, activist and adviser to poverty and race organizations

"For 60 years, ATD Fourth World has authentically engaged thousands of those living in extreme poverty across the world to name what they know about their life experiences, engage in dialogues with others who are committed to eradicating poverty in the world, and thereby influence the development of real solutions for poverty.

"True to its core values, ATD Fourth World uses a unique Merging Knowledge approach in partnership with those living in extreme poverty to build knowledge and make peace. Using thoughtful, facilitated processes, those living with economic hardship and social exclusion generate knowledge about the root causes and consequences of extreme poverty, as well as the ways their communities support each other, create pathways of peace, and intersect with powerful people and institutions with the responsibility to ensure the public good."

—Donna Haig Friedman, Professor, University of Massachusettes-Boston, former Director, Center for Social Policy

"I have worked with ATD for nearly twenty years. This extraordinary organization has worked tirelessly over the years and throughout the world with those who are in extreme poverty. They have profoundly affected the discourse on poverty. Today there is much discussion in the U.S. and elsewhere of poverty as a problem of social exclusion, a message that ATD and [its founder] Fr. Wresinski started vigorously voicing back in the 1950s. [. . .]

"A key part of ATD's success has been its willingness to work with elites, particularly those in governmental institutions, for institutional change. They are able to do this, in part, because they believe it is critical that no one be demonized: the poor, government officials, or elite actors more generally."

—Christopher Winship, Diker-Tishman
Professor of Sociology, Harvard University

"ATD Fourth World is an essential point of reference for the effectiveness of the constant and varied efforts to water the seeds of a new community, to cultivate their growth over the long term, and to bring back the joy of living."

—Boutros Boutros-Ghali, former Secretary-General
of the United Nations

This is Volume 1 of three volumes of *Artisans of Peace Overcoming Poverty*

- Volume 1: A People-Centered Movement
- Volume 2: Defending Human Rights
- Volume 3: Understanding the Violence of Poverty

See pages 111-113 for details about Volume 2 and Volume 3

Other publications by ATD Fourth World

- *The Roles We Play: Recognising the Contribution of People in Poverty,* featuring photography by Eva Sajovic. (London, UK: 2014)
- *Challenge 2015: Towards Sustainable Development That Leaves No One Behind,* edited by Brendan Coyne, Xavier Godinot, Quyen Tran, and Thierry Viard. (Paris, France: 2014)
- *Not Meant to Live Like This: Weathering the Storm of Our Lives in New Orleans,* edited by M.G. Olsen, Karen Stornelli, and Maria Victoire, and with a foreword by William Julius Wilson. (Washington, DC: 2012)
- *Extreme Poverty Is Violence—Breaking the Silence—Searching for Peace,* by Anne-Claire Brand and Beatriz Monje Barón. (Vauréal, France: 2012)
- *Come With Us: Let's Make the World a Better Place,* a DVD by children from the Tapori Movement. (Geneva, Switzerland: 2009)
- *Unleashing Hidden Potential: How Parents, Teachers, Community Workers, and Academics Came Together to Improve Learning for Children in Poverty,* a CD-ROM by Carl Egner, Denis Cretinon, Jill Cunningham, Colette Jay, and Haruko Yamauchi. (Landover, MD: 2007)
- *How Poverty Separates Parents and Children: A Challenge to Human Rights,* edited by Diana Skelton and Valérie Brunner. (Méry-sur-Oise, France: 2004)

Artisans of Peace
Overcoming Poverty

VOLUME 1

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About Volume 1
A People-Centered Movement

ATD Fourth World is a movement of resistance to the violence of poverty. At the heart of this resistance, beyond the struggle to survive, is people's commitment to solidarity for building a better future for all. What links all the people who have chosen to be part of ATD Fourth World is not an ideology or a social, humanitarian, or economic theory, nor is it a shared political party or religion. What links them is a shared belief in the importance of people.

Artisans of Peace Overcoming Poverty introduces partners in peacebuilding whose efforts have too often remained unrecognized. In Haiti, these are people like Merita Colot, who lived in a "no-go zone" and made a point of opening her door for child development projects; Jean-Hugues Henrys, a doctor who refuses to leave for greener pastures and who fights brain drain by encouraging young people to remain despite hardship; and Michèle Montas, then Special Adviser to the UN, who sought out people like Merita and her neighbors so they could provide insights from their experience on how to rebuild the country in such a way that no one would be left behind.

Some people choose to join ATD Fourth World's Volunteer Corps and become long-term witnesses and partners of excluded populations. Learning by doing, alongside children and young people, parents and grandparents, in villages and urban areas, they create with others an ethical lifestyle that challenges inequality, consumerism, and traditional hierarchies. Jacqueline Page, a volunteer in France, writes:

> *There's no point in being glad that a TV crew came to film the housing project's new face, or that a local lady with her cane and lapdog came to visit a street she had never before looked twice at. The point is first of all to live together as a community, and then to take part in a common struggle for society to be fair. The point is*

changing how we look at one another, how we conceive of the world. The point is being able to believe in the future.

Readers will learn about and understand the efforts of people committed to solidarity in Haiti, Madagascar, the United States, Guatemala, and elsewhere. This understanding in turn supports and encourages not only those named in this book, but all the people around the world who strive to overcome the injustice of poverty.

This book is rooted in participatory research that ATD Fourth World members conducted on the violence of extreme poverty and that showed just how much people living in poverty do to search for peace, to go beyond violence, and to build a sense of community.

Through narratives, photos, and video links, readers discover the acts of courage, as well as the creativity, experience, and insights of people living in poverty. This publication is also available as a free eBook, aiming to introduce to as wide an audience as possible these artisans of peace who are vital partners in overcoming poverty. To find out more, get involved, or make a donation, please go to **www.atd-fourthworld.org.**

Preface
The Origins of ATD Fourth World

In the tradition of movements of humanity toward social justice for all, ATD Fourth World seeks to eradicate extreme poverty through building peace and understanding among all people. Its founder, Fr. Joseph Wresinski (1917–1988), defined ATD Fourth World this way:

> *The families and their plight have inspired everything I have undertaken for their liberation. They took hold of me, they lived within me, they carried me forward, they pushed me to found the Movement with them. They imposed on us the obligation to make the poorest the center and the driving force of all our action. [. . .] A society that is allowed to leave one single person without work, without education, without housing, without political participation, without prayer or knowledge of God, will deprive others in the future. It is a society, a school, and a place of worship without foundations. While some children and adults are able to escape from the bottom—the rich will usually succeed in keeping up with changes—the humble people, the individuals and families without many reserves, will fall into the abyss. This is why we should do away with partial struggles, in order to reverse priorities. By making the most disadvantaged the starting point of our thinking and the driving force of our action, we are building a community in which life is good to all. The underprivileged raise the alarm on today's scandal; they also predict and announce the scandal of tomorrow.*[1]

ATD Fourth World was founded by people living in extreme poverty, not by outsiders working on behalf of or alongside them. Wresinski was

1. ATD Fourth World (Producer) (1989). "I Bear Witness to You" [Video] http://bit.ly/ATDJeTemoigneDeVous and Anouil, Gilles. *The Poor Are the Church: A Conversation with Fr. Joseph Wresinski, Founder of the Fourth World Movement*. Twenty-Third Publications. Mystic, CT, 2002. Pages 131 and 155.

born into extreme poverty. After his sister died of malnutrition, after working throughout his childhood and leaving school at age 13, and after then struggling to be able to return to school as an adult, it was a shock to Wresinski in 1956 to discover hundreds of families in a muddy emergency housing camp struggling in conditions as harsh as those of his own childhood. More than a thousand people had to make do with only four outdoor water pumps. Children died each winter from either the frigid cold in their sheet-metal huts, or fires when makeshift heating efforts went tragically awry. Each year, some of these families managed to escape the situation, finding housing elsewhere; and each year it was the worst-off among the families who remained there, stuck in an impossible situation. It was together with the most disadvantaged among these families in Noisy-le-Grand, France, that Wresinski founded ATD Fourth World.

While our members today come from many countries and from different backgrounds, the way in which we were founded has shaped the way we work: continually seeking out people who may be the most isolated or stigmatized by situations of persistent poverty and together continually re-centering our approach. This population became the starting

The emergency housing camp of Noisy-le-Grand, France,
where Joseph Wresinski founded ATD Fourth World in the 1950s.

Noisy-le-Grand, France, in the 1950s.

point and remains the driving force behind bringing people together from a wide diversity of social and cultural backgrounds and of beliefs and convictions. Beginning in 1957, little by little, one person at a time, generation after generation, this uniting of people to act for peace continues today with hundreds of thousands of people in over one hundred countries.

From the time that Wresinski and the residents of this emergency housing camp first founded ATD Fourth World, they were determined to be a citizens' association based on:

- the absolute ethical necessity of leaving no one behind;
- the refusal to accept the humiliation of hand-outs;
- the determination to make each and every person's voice, thinking, and experience heard;
- the right of each child, youth, adult, and family—and people living in poverty with their collective identity—to be able to develop in freedom, individually and with others.

When they first went to the administrative office where French nonprofits are registered, they were turned away. Some of them had criminal

records; all lacked support from people with social standing. Yet, the rejection was ironic in the nation that is proud of being the birthplace of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

When Wresinski chose the name "Fourth World" for this organization, it was a historical reference to that same kind of experience: people being discounted because they lived in extreme poverty. At the time of the French Revolution, in April 1789, one of the nobility—an architect named Dufourny de Villiers—authored a document about what he called the "fourth order." France at the time was divided into three estates: the clergy, the aristocracy, and the commoners. The third estate, which was supposed to include everyone not in the first two, gained political rights that year. They were allowed to express their grievances in official written records and to elect representatives to the first national assembly. But people living in extreme poverty were excluded from these rights because they did not pay enough taxes. Dufourny argued against this discrimination. He acted in favor of rights for all, and thought that the voices of people such as day laborers, the ill or infirm, or widows were essential to build a free and fraternal society. To Wresinski, the term "Fourth World" was one that people living in extreme poverty and those in solidarity with them could use to describe themselves with pride, as well as a term recalling the importance of every person's right to a political voice in society. He used it to refer to people in both industrialized and developing countries who are treated differently and marginalized because of their persistent poverty.

The year 1957, when ATD Fourth World was founded, was also the year that the European Economic Community was founded. The EEC aimed to "preserve peace and liberty [. . . and] to lay the foundations of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe."[2] The EEC lifted the hopes of the families enduring the deprivation of the Noisy-le-Grand camp—hopes that would be disappointed, as European institutions were created without dialogues that included all the peoples of Europe, regardless of economic background or education. When Wresinski repeatedly asked how people living in poverty could contribute to designing the foundations of this "ever closer union," he was always told, "We must set things

2. Treaty Establishing the European Community, Rome, March 25, 1957. The EEC eventually led to today's European Union.

1980s, Paris: an early Fourth World People's University, a forum in which people in extreme poverty can speak with complete freedom about what motivates them and gives them strength.

up first. We'll see later what to do about the poor," or "You'll see, economic growth will eliminate poverty." In 1982, on meeting a delegation of our members living in extreme poverty, the European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, Lord Ivor Richard, observed: "In Europe in fact, the poorer people are, the less political representation they have."

Today, more than ever, we see how much the European Union needs the contribution of all its residents, 80 million of whom are "at risk of" poverty[3]—people who have no possibility of civic participation and whose rights are systematically violated. Thanks to valiant efforts by people at the heart of European institutions, as well as members of ATD Fourth World, a tradition began in 1989 of a bi-annual Fourth World People's University where policymakers, diplomats, members of the European Parliament, and people living in poverty learn to think together and work on questions crucial to the peace and liberty of Europe.

3. According to the European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=961

Also in the decades following the founding of the United Nations, the UN was developing new policies based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its ambition for "the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want, [. . .] the highest aspiration of the common people." And yet, almost a half-century later, opportunities to create the conditions necessary for people living in extreme poverty to think together with UN policymakers have remained few and far between. Over the years, however, many of these policymakers, as well as members of ATD Fourth World and other partners, have chosen to pioneer efforts to reach this aspiration. In 1996, people living in extreme poverty collaborated with academics and UN experts to contribute their analysis and proposals to the Despouy Report on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty. This painstaking work led to the UN's adoption in 2012 of the Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, written together with the intelligence and creativity of people living in poverty on three continents.

For instance, in Latin America, ATD Fourth World took root in 1979 in Guatemala in the midst of that nation's 36-year-long civil war. As in other countries, dictatorship and torture locked many into silence there. However, for people living in extreme poverty the silence did not end with the 1996 peace accords. Careful listening through the years of experience in Noisy-le-Grand and elsewhere showed us that deep, persistent poverty locks people into silence just as armed conflict does:

> *When people are trapped in extreme poverty, the feelings of powerlessness, guilt, fear, and anger, as well as the loss of hope for the future, condemn to silence those who try to survive. Faced with the danger that any show of opposition will make the situation worse, and faced with the possibility of making enemies, or that their proposals will be completely ignored or used against them, those who live in extreme poverty find themselves condemned to silence: "You learn not to get upset because it can go against you." It is a silence imposed on those who think they will be given no consideration, who suffer from fear, who are accused of worsening their own circumstances.*[4]

4. Anne-Claire Brand, Gérard Bureau, Martine Le Corre, Beatriz Monje Barón and Rosalbina Pérez. *Extreme Poverty Is Violence—Breaking the Silence—Searching for Peace*. (Vauréal, France: Revue Quart Monde Publications, 2012). Page 56.

Guatemala: ATD members changing the White Rose of Peace on October 17, the World Day for Overcoming Poverty.

In their daily lives, many Guatemalan women and men continue to resist the violence rooted in the injustice of poverty, in order to build links among people in the heart of their communities. Following years of courage and perseverance, October 17, the World Day for Overcoming Poverty, has become a time when all of them can draw strength from the public recognition of their commitment as members of our movement. Each year on this date, one of them is chosen by the government to change Guatemala's White Rose of Peace, a daily ceremony begun after their civil war in order to show the nation's hope for lasting peace.

Beginning in the 1980s, people in several African countries established ATD Fourth World teams. In 1981, fifty of these people joined a seminar we organized at UNESCO in Paris. Women and men from Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Senegal, and elsewhere shared their pride in Africa's traditions of community, solidarity, and brotherhood. In getting to know people living in poverty in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Paris, the Africans reacted with concern, both for the people and the neighborhoods, and about the implications for their own situation. They asked, "If Europe has completely abandoned some of its own citizens, how can we believe in the sincerity of northern promises of solidarity with the global south?"

It was also the discovery of poverty in France that led them to question their own traditions of solidarity. They had discovered that even in their own cities and villages, there were people who fell through holes in community solidarity networks. From children living in the streets to adults accused of witchcraft, some people were distrusted and shunned by others. This is why they initiated ATD Fourth World in Africa, where today there are teams and active members in 11 countries. The African

associations join ATD members in Southeast Asia; South, Central, and North America; the Middle East; and the Indian Ocean.

It is these women and men, these young people and children, who in villages and neighborhoods around the world have dared to pool their courage, their minds, their solidarity, and their creativity—sometimes at the risk of their lives. All of them have shaped ATD Fourth World as a movement that gathers people from all backgrounds in order to think, act, and live together differently. The following chapters show how people who have been discriminated against because of poverty have an experience and a discernment that can lower the barriers separating members of the human family.

I

Thirty Years in Haiti

At the heart of resistance to the violence of poverty, beyond the struggle to survive, is people's commitment to solidarity for building a better future for all. This is true wherever we are present, whether in Haiti, Guatemala, Poland, Spain, the Central African Republic, the Philippines, or elsewhere. The unique source of this movement was the encounter more than fifty years ago in Noisy-le-Grand between a man born into deep poverty and 250 families who had been abandoned on the outskirts of Paris—the city of lights, the city where the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed, a city flourishing in the certainty of progress. Wresinski said, "Everything began from our shared life together, never from a theory." The life he shared there connects with the lives of people and communities—in Haiti and on every continent—who search every day for ways to reach out to people who are unseen. It has grown into a movement of resistance as it is enriched by each new encounter. People connect with one another in new ways, weaving a social fabric that can free everyone from fear, shame, and silence.

1. Haiti: 1984–2009

In the courtyard of the Fourth World House, thirty young people get ready to leave. Their backpacks are filled with books and craft materials. They will walk for an hour before arriving at the heights of Martissant, in the southern zone of Port-au-Prince. There they will start the Festival of Knowledge with children and adults of the Peace Mountain neighborhood, whose name carries hope. Some of the young people are preparing for this encounter with a hint of apprehension because this area has such a bad reputation; others in the group grew up there. They remember our full-time, long-term volunteers who stopped by their homes to invite them to come to a Street Library or to join in a Tapori activity.[5]

5. Tapori, run by ATD Fourth World, is a worldwide network of children whose motto is "We want all children to have the same chances."

The heights of Martissant in south Port-au-Prince, where young people ran activities with books and art materials prior to the 2010 earthquake.

These young people still remember the small area in front of Merita Colot's house where the activities took place. Each time, the area was full of children, and often their parents would stay to hear the story being told. Twice a week, from 1997 to 2006, this was the atmosphere in front of Merita's house. Children and adults came here to be in a relaxed atmosphere. Merita was a simple and joyful woman. Discreetly, she learned the letters of the alphabet along with the children, while caring for those who needed her. Thanks to those afternoons over the years, more than 500 children were able to prepare to enter primary school with confidence.

Merita represented her neighborhood on our Committee of Neighbors and made links with our teams in other countries. These links among all our members shape our dialogue with regional and international institutions. Our hope is that lasting partnerships with these institutions can make it possible for populations in extreme poverty to contribute their knowledge as, together, we address the major challenges of the world today. As a member of the Committee of Neighbors, Merita encouraged others to open their homes, as she did, to mothers with babies so they could join in our new action, "Babies Welcome." This program was a regular hour stolen from the urgency of everyday life for mothers to play with their

Ms. Merita Colot.

children while observing their development and learning ways to keep them healthy.

In 1984, when ATD Fourth World Volunteer Corps members first arrived in this neighborhood after living in the rural Fonds-des-Nègres community, the urban population was suspicious: "Who are they? What are they doing here? Why are they interested in our children?" But after a while, Merita, Lucienne, and other parents dared to get involved because they hoped to create a future for their children by finding others who would stick by them in the long run. So, with no guarantee of the outcome, the parents dared to risk getting to know the volunteers. Lucienne said:

> *No matter how hard I tried, I had never been able to afford school fees for my children. So I asked the volunteers if they could join the Street Library. I never regretted it. Little by little, we parents began to trust the volunteers because they kept coming several times a week, unlike everyone else who came here. The volunteers hike all the way to the people at the top of the hill, carrying bags full of books and crayons. They share what they know with the children. They sit next to the people who are the most tired, in order to listen, to chat with us, to show that what they learn from each person matters. They don't hesitate to run to the hospital with a terrified mother and her baby, and to wait with her for the doctor. Often, too, the volunteers have shared the community's sorrow in times of illness, injury, or mourning. When this happens, everything is wiped out, you have*

to start from scratch. Together with us, the volunteers tried to open access to health care for everyone.

In 1992, a Haitian nonprofit called SOE[6] helped extend health care to everyone by opening the St. Michel Health Center in the heights of Martissant. In partnership with ATD Fourth World, SOE recruits health agents from within the neighborhoods and trains them to offer welcoming intake and quality care. Years later, the SOE program coordinator repeatedly stressed to the volunteers that "without the trust you built with the population, we would never have been able to set foot in this district—we couldn't have."

SOE and its staff have remained highly engaged in this partnership with us: developing health projects; demonstrating the value of the knowledge of traditional healing practices of patients, health agents, midwives, and nurses; and offering all of them regular training sessions. Because of their strong links to the population and their enthusiasm for residents' wealth of experience, the staff members have become a force for resisting the health center's perpetual lack of means. Several times the center has been in jeopardy because of the difficulty in finding partners ready to support work over the long term. Most health-care funding is designed for short-term projects, often in emergencies or epidemics. Once, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) considered supporting SOE's plan to open an obstetrics unit in the health center. But in the end, this NGO preferred to open its own clinic—where it proceeded to hire the same midwives who had been trained for years by SOE to support mothers who would not be comfortable giving birth in a formal clinic, such as that of the NGO. Despite these challenges, SOE has remained faithful to our partnership, strengthened by years of local experience and relationships.

Living with fear: "We became examples for the neighborhood so there would be peace"

The actions in Port-au-Prince—Street Libraries, "Babies Welcome," and the training of local health agents—still continue, and have been shaped over the years by key partners and the parents themselves. Not only do

6. Service Oecuménique d'Entraide: Ecumenical mutual-help service.

The four paintings in this chapter are by Fourth World Volunteer Jacqueline Page.

these and other projects propose a path to education and health, but at the same time they also help create a community spirit by supporting those who, with humility and discretion, are committed to their neighborhoods. Forming a community is a challenge when you struggle to survive day to day. But community is vital for sharing moments of joy, just as for coping with hardship. All the work done toward forming a community was thwarted in 2000–04 when weapons were delivered to young people who felt the need to organize themselves to protect their neighborhoods in the absence of the police. Neighbors then found themselves mired in overwhelming conflict. In less than a decade, this violence has divided neighborhoods, with many families losing loved ones, and with any recourse to justice compromised by a widespread lack of confidence in a weak judicial system.

Because of this situation, in 2006, the UN armed forces and the national police set up their headquarters in a brand-new building in this district. The building was meant to become the only public school in the area, but had not yet opened its doors to a single child. The would-be school became a militarized headquarters in an area without any other

public building. The pride and hopes raised by the construction of the school were dashed when it was militarized. Still worse, the unintended consequences of the "disarmament" campaign carried out from this headquarters served only to bring still more weapons to the area. The approach chosen to "disarm" young people was to offer them short-term public works jobs. However, the income from these jobs went to phantom organizations set up by gang leaders who then used the money to purchase more guns. Once again, the population was caught in a stranglehold.

"Gunshots in the City, the Old Man Listens."

In 2006 Ivanite Saint Clair, another member of our Committee of Neighbors, lost her daughter to gang violence despite the heavy presence of police and soldiers. Ivanite was able to overcome her despair thanks to friendship, solidarity, and encouragement. Little by little, she began returning to our meetings: "I came back to the meetings [because] if you don't participate in anything, your mind stays full of problems. When I meet other people, we talk, we think about things. You regain your strength."[7] From 2009–11, she took part in our participatory action-research on the links between poverty, violence, and peace:

> *There are also other families who lost loved ones and who wanted peace like me. If you look for revenge, there can no longer be peace. We became examples for the neighborhood so that there was peace. If you keep fighting, arguing, fearing each other, there cannot be true peace. When we live in misery, violence is around us more. We live in fear; this makes our situation worse. But even if you search for peace, there are people who will humiliate you. They consider you as nothing because you do not speak loudly.*

7. Anne-Claire Brand, Gérard Bureau, Martine Le Corre, Beatriz Monje Barón and Rosalbina Pérez. *Extreme Poverty Is Violence—Breaking the Silence—Searching for Peace*. (Vauréal, France: Revue Quart Monde Publications, 2012). Page 64.

Young people also made sacrifices and took risks by refusing to enter the circle of violence. Faced with the constant danger of being enlisted in gangs, most of them had to leave home to escape, often interrupting their schooling. Others had no choice but to remain, so they invented ways to build bridges, as did Jean-François, an artist. Whenever there is a truce, he sings for peace, although he knows how fragile it is. He said, "What is most important is that we are human beings. We must live as humans. Every human being is a chance for humanity. This means we must live like everyone else. We need to come together so everyone's rights are respected. I have no money, but still with my music, I can share my message. I can say that everyone has the right to live and that if we come together, we can build communities. That's what I do."

There is also Laurent. No one tries to involve him in gangs because of his fragile health. He had very little schooling, but he always tries to learn everything he can and then teach others. He can read and write a little, and knows a few phrases in English and Spanish. He knows how to repair electrical appliances, and he especially likes to talk to other young people as a way of being part of neighborhood life. He says he learned from Merita: "She's the one who taught us the most. She told us that when a community needs our help, we must answer the call. When a person is sick in the night, everyone gets up, children and adults in the neighborhood, to see what they can do. And we think together how we can save

"Haiti, the Strength of Life: Carting Cement Bags."

"The Water Chore."

that person's life. When we got older, and were 10 or 11 years old, she told us that this is how we should help in the community. And it is really true, this is what we do." Merita always talked to the young people around her, encouraging them to protect the community and avoid conflicts.

The period 2006–08 was a particularly bleak time in these beleaguered neighborhoods. Instead of bringing security, the "disarmament" programs created suspicion because of incentives paid to informers. Nor did the presence of UN peacekeepers bring security. In 2007, the scandal broke: "Blue Beret" UN soldiers had committed sexual abuse against minors. Although the soldiers were found guilty, to this day the families of the minors have not been allowed to bring charges and have heard nothing about whether the soldiers were ever prosecuted in their home countries.

Assistance programs did not always reach the most vulnerable families, sometimes because staff were intimidated by self-appointed local "representatives" who were in fact known to their neighbors as bandits

and opportunists with no interest in the common good. In addition, the most vulnerable families were often hidden in the shadows of more dynamic families. It is in this context that the entire low-income district of the heights of Martissant—declared a "no-go zone" since a 2004 coup d'état—seemed to have collapsed in on itself, with no way out. All UN personnel and bilateral aid agencies were "advised not to go there under any circumstances." Humanitarian aid and development workers, who could go only with a military escort, stopped serving this district.

To be able to meet others and fight their isolation, our members living in the area decided to meet together outside the district, and to bring their children to "Babies Welcome" and our pre-school program, now held elsewhere. Our volunteers continued to visit the families in Martissant who faced the harshest challenges in their everyday lives.

October 17: World Day for Overcoming Poverty

Each year, without fail, these families, friends, volunteers, and all of us come together on October 17 to observe the World Day for Overcoming Poverty, a day for people from all backgrounds to hear the voices of those who live in poverty and whose voices are rarely heard. The day was first observed when the Commemorative Stone in Honor of the Victims of Extreme Poverty, shown on the next page, was unveiled on the Plaza of Liberties and Human Rights in Paris, France.

Some 100,000 people were present on that day. The date of October 17 was soon marked by people living in extreme poverty and others around the world. This stone was later replicated at the United Nations and in public places in many countries including Burkina Faso, Canada, and the Philippines. In 1992, the UN General Assembly recognized this date as the World Day for Overcoming Poverty—which may be the only international day to have been born not in a conference room, but in low-income communities.

In Port-au-Prince, those who attend the annual October 17 events include national and municipal officials, ambassadors, academics, and NGO directors. They join in because they carry within them the same conviction as that engraved in marble, that we must come together if we hope to guarantee human rights for all. On this day, they listen to

OCTOBER 17, 1987
ON THIS DAY, DEFENDERS OF HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHTS
FROM EVERY CONTINENT GATHERED HERE. THEY
PAID HOMAGE TO THE VICTIMS OF HUNGER, IGNORANCE,
AND VIOLENCE. THEY AFFIRMED THEIR CONVICTION
THAT HUMAN MISERY IS NOT INEVITABLE. THEY PLEDGED
THEIR SOLIDARITY WITH ALL PEOPLE WHO,
THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, STRIVE
TO ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY.

"WHEREVER MEN AND WOMEN ARE CONDEMNED
TO LIVE IN EXTREME POVERTY, HUMAN RIGHTS
ARE VIOLATED. TO COME TOGETHER TO ENSURE
THAT THESE RIGHTS BE RESPECTED
IS OUR SOLEMN DUTY."

— FR. JOSEPH WRESINSKI

people rooted in the experience of always lacking what they need, of never having any recourse, of being left behind. They listen to people sharing how they struggle for recognition of their inalienable dignity, of humanity's indivisible dignity. People living in poverty, whether in Haiti, Manila, New York, Antananarivo, or elsewhere, are always coming together in the face of urgency. That urgency in London might be to meet conditions that would prevent one's child from being placed in foster care; in Barcelona, it might be yet another eviction and the need to find some kind of shelter; in Ouagadougou, it might be the urgency of reshaping a school system so that it can welcome children in conditions that will unleash their full potential. The urgency of all these situations—like that of avoiding stray bullets in yesterday's Haiti or in today's Central African Republic—takes the present hostage and makes it impossible to think of the future.

The October 17 events in Haiti are organized in partnership with ATD Fourth World and three other nonprofit organizations: the Foundation of Knowledge and Liberty (Fokal), the Open Hands School, and the Lakou Center. Children aged 7 to 16 who live and work in the streets go regularly to Lakou, a safe place where they can participate in various activities including our Street Library. Each October 17, these children are at the heart of the ceremony. Like the adults, the children speak, bearing witness to their lives, and sharing their aspirations and their efforts to overcome poverty.

In 2007, Merita traveled from Haiti to the October 17 ceremony in Paris, at Trocadero Human Rights Plaza, where this tradition first began twenty years earlier. She joined thousands of people, including sixty other delegates from different countries around the world. They too were our members, and so even before meeting, they knew of her commitment to supporting families in her neighborhood. Merita said, "I knew I had many friends in the world, but I discovered that there were many more." Back in Haiti, Merita told others, "We can be proud of how far we have come, but we must continue to get together." This was her life's work: welcoming others to her home, in the worst moments of uncertainty, to dispel fear and mistrust and to create links that support people's efforts to live together in harmony. Several months later, just a few minutes before she died, Merita was trying to make peace between two young people who were arguing. Everyone was shocked by her death, and some said, "Now

Trocadero Human Rights Plaza in Paris: October 17, 2007.

Trocadero Human Rights Plaza in Paris where in 2007 Merita from Haiti joined thousands of others on October 17, World Day for Overcoming Poverty.

our neighborhood is lost. Without Merita, how can we avoid conflicts?" But there were others who were already watching over the neighborhood. As Ivanite put it:

> *For us to live quietly, there's always someone among us who advocates for peace. When we do find peace, it is a blessing for us all, because peace is pride too. A symposium: "Like a song in the heart of the country!"*

A symposium: "Like a song in the heart of the country"

The following year, members of our Committee of Neighbors, the team of volunteers, and our Council of Friends decided to create an opportunity for dialogue with a wide cross-section of society. The group was concerned about the daily struggles of the worst-off families to defend their children's future, and about the spreading fear caused by a series of gang kidnappings that struck many families throughout the city. We sought to counter the disintegration of society by identifying reference points for building community life and solidarity. Drawing strength from three decades of commitment, our members wanted to lay a new milestone in our journey toward all sectors of society, to achieve the overall goal of implementing all rights for all people by building solidarity.

To this end, in February 2008, we convened an international symposium in Port-au-Prince entitled "Extreme Poverty as a Challenge to

Democracy: What Is the Relevance of Joseph Wresinski's Thinking?" We wanted an equal exchange between academic knowledge from various disciplines and the knowledge and experience that comes from life in extreme poverty. Our goal was that no single form of knowledge dominate. During the conclusion of the symposium, Michèle Pierre-Louis, president of Fokal (and later Prime Minister of Haiti), said:

> *Joseph Wresinski helped us understand that the poorest are first and foremost human beings, like all of us. Capable of love, hate, suffering, and thinking, capable of the best and the worst. They are not different from us. What must be understood, and this is also the relevance of Wresinski's philosophical reflections, is the effect and impact of the condition of extreme poverty on those who live it, and on human beings who live in conditions of extreme insecurity.*
>
> *This understanding can come only from meeting with them. It cannot be abstract. It is this understanding that will create gateways, bridges, and avenues that my country needs, linking cities to villages and laborers to academics. This understanding will determine interventions, initiatives, and actions to reestablish democracy with everyone. This is for me the most important philosophical horizon of thought and action of Father Joseph Wresinski.*

Adrien Delva, a member of our Council of Friends, wrote in a preface to the report on the symposium:

> *All while we were preparing this event, and throughout it, we were mobilized to examine the place—at every step—of the poorest families among us. Their opening remarks were prepared by their ongoing work on thinking about democracy, participation, violence, education. Their remarks were also prepared by their ongoing commitments to our actions for sharing knowledge and for bringing people together. Their contribution is the cornerstone of knowledge about deep poverty, knowledge that we all carry together within this movement. This knowledge is what gave us confidence to dare speak with academics. This symposium is one step in a process. The knowledge of activists[8]—that has been forged in the daily ordeal*

8. Fourth World activists are people living in extreme poverty and making efforts to defend others.

of affliction and humiliation, but that also reveals the power of hope and courage—is a knowledge that we believe is necessary to achieving the fullness of human rights and finally managing to live with one another in serenity, each taking responsibility for his own life and being held accountable to those most in need.

The challenge facing us all is the direct encounter and creative dialogue among academics, Fourth World activists, and those committed alongside them, both volunteers and allies.[9] It is probably too early to say that we have achieved what we set out to do. However, a first step has been taken because we have shown that dialogue is possible and that it produces new knowledge that is indispensable to finding solutions for the challenges our country faces. Now it is up to us to constantly develop the links between the Fourth World and academia so that the struggle of the poor may shape the world around us.

A few days later, in an evaluation meeting, one resident of Martissant said, "I did not know what a symposium was. This is a great word. A word not too small to say who the poor are. These past years, it was as if Port-au-Prince had its head down. This symposium was Haiti with its head held high! I was proud of my country. It was good there. It was like a revolution, like a song in the heart of the country. In the symposium, all social classes were there. People regained their confidence. Now we can once again call our country 'Dear Haiti!'"

One ally's choice: Trying to stem the tide of brain drain

In an overwhelmed country, allies, volunteers, and activists want to join with others to find a way beyond the daily pressures to discover what the country needs. Collectively, they search for ways to build together, develop a common vision, and prepare a solid foundation for future generations. Members of our Council of Friends need courage to challenge stereotypes about poverty held by their social and professional associates. They show tenacity by working for years to strive for peace amid wide-

9. Fourth World allies are people of all walks of life acting in solidarity with people who live in extreme poverty.

spread need: insisting that rights are for everyone; defending each person's inalienable dignity; recognizing the unique potential of each person; and challenging hand-outs that infringe on dignity and short-circuit the future of those in the most desperate situations of poverty.

They are of many different occupations: teachers, seamstresses, engineers, doctors, school principals, community education coordinators, entrepreneurs, farmers, and students. What they have in common is that they have all refused to emigrate from their country to another place that might seem more comfortable, safer, or more rewarding. Instead, they remain in the midst of many needs, supporting people in extreme poverty in their profound rejection of any assistance that undermines respect for human dignity and blocks the future. They are committed to creating bridges between this movement for peace and the society around them: neighbors, public institutions, universities, schools, cultural institutions, and organizations defending human rights. The goal is to enable two different worlds to meet, in order to change how others look at people whose lives are the most marked by poverty.

One of these allies, Jean-Hugues Henrys, is a medical doctor and a university professor. He leads a tough fight to prevent the brain drain away from Haiti. It can be challenging for students to complete their degrees, but those who succeed are quickly hired by international NGOs for short-term contracts that then qualify them for foreign visas. Jean-Hugues says, "Some 84% of Haitians with a university degree leave the country. In medicine each year, 80% of trained students leave. The remaining 20% is

Our pre-school program in Haiti.

only 80 doctors per year for the entire country! If at the end of a semester, two of the students resist the call of 'elsewhere,' I have had some success in the task that I owe it to myself to continue." Jean-Hugues is also worried about another aspect of international collaboration:

> *In Haiti, we are very concerned about the debates on aid, assistance, partnership, etc. In recent years, twice the UN has sent forces to Haiti to "stabilize" the country. [. . .] It seems to me that beyond fighting poverty at an individual level, and beyond the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a reflection should be led on how Wresinski's thinking about citizenship could be applied to the conduct of international relations.*

That was in 2008. Jean-Hugues, like families living in the no-go zones and like many other Haitians, was already observing the disaster caused by the blindness of humanitarian and development aid—aid deprived of the minds and the vision of those whose approach to fighting poverty is forged in their daily struggle for survival.

Yet, while the central issue of the February 2008 symposium was to explore an appropriate form of governance that would draw on the intelligence of people in extreme poverty, the financial crisis that shook the world the following month was a brutal reminder of how far the world's economy was from taking into account those who are forced to constantly live their days and nights confronting situations of unemployment, low-paid jobs, or imposed uselessness. While crowds demonstrated in major cities against the skyrocketing cost of basic food, hunger weakened those without money or those who did not have rural relatives who could send them produce.

Due to the political crisis, the Haitian economy was already weak. In addition, in 2008 the country was hit by three cyclones in less than a month. To meet the urgent needs of the affected families, humanitarian aid was intensified by the large numbers of NGOs already present. But because of the immensity of the needs, the fear of venturing into hard-to-reach places, and the UN edict banning access to the no-go zones, the poorest families living on the heights of Martissant were less often targeted for aid. Micro-credit projects supported the efforts of low-income people despite the high interest rates charged, but the most disadvantaged peo-

ple were turned away from them. Nor could they receive contracts for short-term "cash-for-work" projects, because this required having connections or paying a "commission."

Our team needed to be in dialogue with many different NGOs so that they would agree to invest energy with the hardest-to-reach families. It took creativity to support the most vulnerable people in their efforts to earn money, and to enable a hundred of their young people to access a vocational training that had in fact been designed for them, but that had been made inaccessible to them by the previous recruiting practices.

2. Responding to disaster: During and after the earthquake of 2010

After the catastrophe

It was in this difficult context, aggravated by a new political crisis, that the tragedy of January 12, 2010, struck. For almost half a minute, the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince was rocked by a catastrophic earthquake. More

After the earthquake, everyone worked together to clear the rubble.

than 250,000 people lost their lives. Many houses, most public buildings, and most businesses were damaged beyond repair. As the Haitian writer Dany Laferrière said in an interview: "After the earthquake, what saved the city is the energy of the poorest. Thanks to them, Port-au-Prince remained alive." Downtown, children who live in the streets, and who are often despised by others, did not hesitate to endanger their lives to rescue people trapped under the rubble.

Residents in the most impoverished neighborhoods, used to being left to their own devices, did not wait for outside assistance. They responded with solidarity. For example, three days after this fateful event, while aftershocks continued to pound the earth, a mother preparing cakes with what she could recover from her damaged house sold them more cheaply than usual so that everyone could afford to eat. They organized ways to share what little they had, while overhead the sky was roaring with airplanes and helicopters bringing humanitarian aid that would not reach their districts. The courage of these forgotten people, and their intelligence in finding ways to stay connected to one another amid complete chaos, remained—like most of their lives—invisible or imperceptible to the journalists and emergency workers arriving from around the globe.

From the very first days, after serving as the first responders in their own neighborhood, Laurent, Jean-François, and the other young people from the heights of Martissant came to the Fourth World House to ask, "What can we do?" They had learned the value of solidarity from their own lives, but also from Merita and other adults in the neighborhood. In the weeks and months that followed, they were completely at the team's service. They were the ones who spread out by the dozen to meet each family throughout the entire district and to identify needs.

One of these Haitian young people, David Jean, returned one day, upset. When he thought he had visited everyone in one part of the district, a mother, who was herself utterly exhausted, shared her worry for an old lady and a child still higher on the hill. So David continued climbing to discover a house half destroyed. An elderly woman was outdoors. She had lost a leg. There was a child about three years old playing at her side. David explained that he was identifying families' needs. The woman was touched and surprised that he had found her, because she rarely saw anyone else except for occasional visits by one neighbor further down

the hill. When David returned the next day as promised, with food and a tarpaulin for shelter, the woman began crying, "My boy, you have not forgotten me, when there are so many people in need!" David returned several times and spoke to neighbors, who were encouraged to begin visiting this isolated grandmother.

Our volunteers were able to persuade another nonprofit to come without military guards to this area despite its label as a no-go zone, now more off-putting than before to outsiders. The nonprofit agreed to distribute nutritional supplements for children if we first established a list of names and ages. Our hope was that this could be transformed into a lasting commitment around health care and early-childhood education. The list, of some 5,000 children, was made thanks to the young people who grew up there. For days they visited each home. Concerned that each family should receive a fair share, they talked to anyone who might create tension during the distribution, which took place without any UN soldiers present.

Instead, it was the young people who ensured that everything went smoothly when the distribution began. Every day they spent time chatting with the people waiting in line. When parents lacked identity documents for themselves and their children, our volunteers, who knew them all well,

ATD members make plans to visit families in the heights of Martissant.

supported a complex dialogue with the NGO to reconcile the spelling of the names on the list with the facts. The distribution went smoothly, with no incidents of conflict, because everyone knew that the process had included every family and that there was no competition for help.

To learn more about post-earthquake Haiti, see "Rebuilding for Everyone with Everyone" at http://bit.ly/ATDHaiti

Despite the success of these painstaking efforts, one day the nonprofit's project manager announced, with a heavy heart, that her NGO could not continue the operation. The nonprofit's donors preferred that aid be distributed in more accessible parts of the city where the process would be quicker and high target figures could be reached, thus fulfilling someone else's vision of efficiency. It was a cruel disappointment to all the young people and families.

Nevertheless, our team kept looking for other partners with whom to launch projects for solidarity that would respond to pressing needs while also reinforcing the attention paid by families we knew to those struggling the most. For instance, when families received a portion of food here or there, it was not uncommon for them to share with those who had not been able to make the trip to a distribution point, or who hadn't managed to register for a program. The same solidarity came into play in a "cash-for-work" and a cash transfer program that we did manage to join, in partnership with another NGO. The selected individuals often gave a share of the money they received to other families close to them. In times of great need, it is the links built over years, the knowledge of how families had really been living before the catastrophe, and the commitment of all these families and young people that make it possible to share in ways that unite us in peace.

A UN call for "Unheard voices thinking about Haiti's tomorrow"

Soon after the disaster, it was these same families who asked that our program of early-childhood education resume. This was possible just a few weeks later, in March. At the same time, many young people and adults

participated in a consultation entitled, "Unheard Voices Thinking About Haiti's Tomorrow." This consultation—a contribution to a conference of donors being held in New York—was organized at the initiative of Michèle Montas, a public figure in Haiti and then Special Advisor to the Special Representative of the United Nations. ATD Fourth World was one of the ten participating organizations from Haiti.

Concerned about the future of the country, our members stressed the need for everyone to think about the future in a spirit of unity. They expressed their hope that in the reconstruction, those who have no power because they are too poor will be taken into consideration and this will be a real step to rebuilding, breaking down prejudice and barriers between people:

> *Since the earthquake, everyone has been affected, the rich along with the poor. I wish that, for the reconstruction, our whole people would be as one, with no divisions.*

Following the earthquake, under a makeshift awning, members quickly took up again our "Babies Welcome" program.

They drew attention to the humanitarian projects that, instead of supporting the efforts of the community, often pit people against one another, empowering some and reinforcing the dependence of the most vulnerable families, because these projects are not designed with a true knowledge of the realities of life in extreme poverty:

Every zone deserves respect, as do all those who live there.

They called for building trust with young people who feel left out:

When no one trusts you, you have no role to play.

They spoke of their own sense of responsibility:

The young generation already has a role; it has to become aware of it. Whoever is aware will be at the service of others and of his country . . . but many young people leave the country because there's no work here, no future. What they learn here, they leave to do elsewhere. Young people have to become aware. Today's youth are the adults of tomorrow.

This was an opportunity for our members to share their vision for their community, as a basis for reconstruction. They wanted to look to the future without dwelling on the many negative effects of the realities they experienced. As members of ATD Fourth World, they were experiencing a unique solidarity, receiving hundreds of messages from around the globe, messages in every possible color, shape, and language, as tangible signs of how all of us want to share whatever we can. More than ever before, the Fourth World House was a place for renewal, a haven amid the ruins. Our teams in many countries reorganized their daily work so that more volunteers could make themselves available for several months to reinforce the efforts of our team and all our members in Haiti, and to learn from one another, pooling our knowledge.

In December 2010, Ricardo Seitenfus, on leaving his responsibility as the representative to Haiti of the OAS (Organization of American States), outlined a sad state of affairs concerning bilateral aid in the country. He evoked Haitians' long-suffering history as the first black people to create a free nation, liberating themselves from the yoke of slavery in 1804. This

story continues to be written with their blood and sweat. He concluded by calling for a new vision of aid re-centered on human dignity:

> *On January 12, I learned that there is tremendous potential for solidarity in the world, even if we should not forget that in the early days, it was the Haitians themselves, with bare hands, who tried to save those near to them. Compassion was very important in the emergency. But charity cannot be the driving force in international relations. The driving force should be autonomy, sovereignty, fair trade, the respect for others we should have. [. . .] The lessons we preach have long been ineffective. Reconstruction and support for this society with such wealth is one of the last great human adventures. Two hundred years ago, Haiti illuminated the history of humanity and human rights. Now Haitians should be given a chance to confirm their vision.*[10]

Three years later, Haitian filmmaker Raoul Peck concluded his documentary, Fatal Assistance, with biting language:

> *The dictatorship of humanitarian aid is violent, arbitrary, indiscriminate, pretentious, and arrogant. It is a paternalistic monster sweeping away everything in its path. It pretends to solve the problems that in fact it is busy maintaining.*

In the course of our history, we have learned with families—those who struggle every day against the urgency of deep poverty, their heads filled with dreams that can seem crazy but are in fact simply their aspiration to enjoy their fundamental rights—what Joseph Wresinski expressed in 1968: "The poorest do not ask us to slow our progress but instead they force us to go faster, to see infinitely further, and to be more ambitious than we are."[11]

Haitians carry a universal human ambition to care for others, an ambition not to be constantly struggling for survival, forced into extreme

10. Robert, Arnaud. "Haïti est la preuve de l'échec de l'aide internationale." Le Temps. 20 December 2010.

11. In an article entitled, "The violence against the poor."

October 2010: Some of the Haitian delegates with others from Honduras and the United States, at the Commemorative Stone in Honor of the Victims of Extreme Poverty in the garden of the United Nations headquarters in New York.

poverty and facing impossible choices. Members of ATD carry this ambition toward the horizon. In October 2010, we asked them to send a delegation to an international assembly. They managed to obtain identity documents and passports when the country was still on its knees and most ministries destroyed in the rubble. They dared to believe that the United States Consulate would understand their need to meet and think with others. They were right to believe it, and this is how ten adults, teenagers, and children living in the no-go zone of Port-au-Prince were awarded visas to participate in our international assembly in the United States, "It Takes a Child to Raise a Village." Every one of them was granted a visa, as it should be, despite an era when refusals are almost automatic for those who cannot prove they have means considered sufficient to live on in the host country. They were well aware and proud of their responsibility to all the others in whose name they traveled, those who are too buffeted by poverty to tell anyone of their courage and their daily efforts to defend the right to live in dignity. They were moved and curious to discover the

United States, their minds haunted by so many compatriots who sailed across the same gulf on fragile rafts, hoping to conquer the future that was taken from them, so many of whom lost their lives. Like Merita and others before them, these ten delegates had the chance to be part of an international gathering that opened minds and hearts

Their first port of call in the United States was New Orleans, where they met families who had lost their homes during Hurricane Katrina. They could understand these families' feeling of abandonment when they realized that, five years after the disaster, the city had still not rebuilt enough low-income housing to make it possible for many of the poorest of those evacuated to return from the distant places where they had been scattered. Together with delegates from New Orleans, the group continued on to Washington, DC, where they joined delegates from Cameroon, Canada, and Honduras, and from different parts of the United States for the assembly, "It Takes a Child to Raise a Village." Together, they marked the World Day for Overcoming Poverty, and were able to meet with a U.S. congresswoman and a State Department official. Some of them also went to the United Nations in New York where they met with the UN General Assembly president and a UNICEF official. In these meetings, and in the assembly where adults and children experimented together with theater, song, and artwork, each delegate was able to renew the courage needed to sustain us all in the harshness of daily struggles, whether in the United States or in Haiti, despite the great contrasts in context between daily life in each country. Learning from one another, all the delegates had something to contribute to the quest for everyone to live in dignity.

• • •

Haiti's people—the descendants of those once enslaved by the mighty—affirm in their hearts that they are part of humanity.

Haiti's people—through their struggle day after day with extreme insecurity, instability, chaos, chronic shortages of everything, and a human family that is torn asunder—refuse what is unacceptable and observe what is essential.

Haiti's people—to participate in rebuilding their own country and in changing the world—introduce us to a quest for meaning and for peace.

We are led by Haiti's children, youth, and adults—its artisans of peace—who know from experience that no one can free herself or himself alone, that no one can free others alone: it is together that we can free one another.

Yvenson, one of ten delegates from Haiti who attended the October 2010 international assembly, "It Takes a Child to Raise a Village."

To learn more about the Haitian delegates, see "Yvenson, a Young Delegate from Haiti" at https://vimeo.com/25226501.

To hear all the international delegates from the assembly sing a song they wrote together, see "It Takes a Child to Raise a Village" at http://bit.ly/ATD2010TaporiWeRthPeople

II

People Choosing to Work Toward Peace

If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.
— African proverb

We do aspire to go fast. The urgency of extreme poverty continues to claim futures and lives year after year. But the question of going together with each and every person is a fundamental one. Policymakers or community organizers sometimes ask why we are "bottom-dragging" and "wasting time by reaching out to people who don't come to meetings, or who don't open their mouths." One of our members in Switzerland, Nelly Schenker, answers them this way:

> *If we stop in our tracks and turn to go see someone who is behind us on the road, it's not because we are going backwards. It's because that person has an experience and a knowledge that none of us has. We are still going forward, toward a society where we can learn from everyone's unique experience.*

What links all the people who have chosen to be part of ATD Fourth World is not an ideology or a social, humanitarian, or economic theory. Nor is it a shared political party or religion. It is a shared belief in the importance of people. The more people are left out, criticized, and crushed, the more we learn from them that social exclusion, oppression, discrimination, and stigmatization must end. It is also from them that we learn a solidarity that can be stronger than what divides people and peoples. This conviction is inscribed in the history of humanity by all those in the past who have carried and lived it, often risking their lives. This is a unique heritage that inspires all those who have waited and wait still for people to be treated as the core of the world. We are among the descendants of this dynamic that drives humanity forward.

It is for exactly this reason that our movement is first and foremost one of people. People are our most treasured asset. Our members are

from extremely different social backgrounds, worlds that usually never intersect. All of us learn, starting from our deep mutual respect, to link our commitments together. This forms an interactive network linking experience, knowledge, and commitments that are not only brave but almost unknown and unrecognized, a network linking people in neighborhoods that have been forgotten because of deep poverty with society's decision makers and professionals—those at local, national, and international levels who prepare and decide on questions affecting everyone's future.

1. The people of ATD Fourth World

In building a movement of people, the first challenge faced by Joseph Wresinski was that of remaining rooted in extreme poverty with all the people who, without waiting for anyone, are already searching every day for ways to put an end to it. The courage and actions of these families, individuals, and neighborhoods constitute our legitimacy and guide the choices we make together. To make visible these hidden commitments, we bring together people living in extreme poverty from different countries. Despite the challenges of obtaining identity papers and overcoming language barriers, there is a powerful recognition of having experiences and an identity in common. To support our members' courage, we invest in personal development and collective training for them, as well as trying to ensure that no one is left alone when facing a challenge.

Wresinski's second challenge was in mainstream society. Just as in very low-income communities, everywhere there are women and men who refuse to accept the injustice of extreme poverty and are trying to fight against it. They too can feel very much alone. Wresinski linked together the commitments of these two groups so that they could reinforce one another.

After the earliest years, Wresinski identified a third challenge. He saw that many initiatives taken in the heart of extremely poor communities bear fruit, but then little by little they may leave those communities behind. Maria Montessori, for example, first pioneered her method of education while working with children of "desperately poor families" in the San Lorenzo slums of Rome. Over the years, however, this method has increasingly been used in private schools, accessible mainly to a privileged few. This shows the potential benefits to all of innovation with people

living in extreme poverty—but for them to be left behind later is unfair. Wresinski knew that we ran the exact same risk: of developing projects with only the most dynamic people in low-income communities, and eventually leaving others behind. To guard against this risk, he founded a full-time Volunteer Corps.

Fourth World activists: "The voice of hope reborn"

To the activists of ATD Fourth World—people like Merita and Lucienne, who grew up in extreme poverty and who chose to reach out to and support others in even more difficult circumstances—Wresinski entrusted the responsibility of leading the liberation of their people:

> *It is you who will be the first to guarantee your freedom; you are in charge of changing your own lives. Being in charge, for you, means continuing to get training, to study, to meet, to think about your condition, to require that schools adapt to your children, to insist on work that gives you independence and guarantees a decent life to your families, to insist on professional training programs open to those of your background. You should insist on having a right to culture, and to freedom of worship.*[12]

One of these activists was Kay McLaughlin from Scotland. Kay, her husband, and four small children lived in a damp top-floor flat. As more children were added to the family, it became increasingly difficult to fit them all in and to carry the stroller up four flights of stairs. As a child, Kay had attended a school for the deaf, but at the time very little education was provided there beyond the basics. Kay learned to lip-read, helped neighbors to grow flower gardens, and became a first-class dressmaker who did alterations on clothes for a charity shop. For her own children, she made clothes that looked brand new from other people's cast-offs. But she deeply regretted that she had so little education. She would have loved to study literature. Kay did make time to write poems, such as this one, composed for the World Day for Overcoming Poverty:

12. From a speech made on November 17, 1977, at the Mutualité Conference Center in Paris, France.

When the Fourth World met in Paris
And told the world how we live,
We tried to tell the people
That we have so much to give

But will the people listen
To the voice of hope reborn?
Or will they shrug their shoulders
And look on us with scorn?

We told of people's hardships
And how they live in fear
We told of people's sufferings
And tried to make it clear

We want a better future
And the world a better place
For our children and their parents
With no poverty in trace

Kay was one of the activists who helped to develop Fourth World People's Universities held at the European Union, and who encouraged her neighbors to overcome their fear and join in. Joyce MacMillan, another activist, said after Kay's death, "She gave us a lot of good advice to help us. We all listened to what she said. She is sadly missed, and I, for one, take many a quiet five minutes to think about the advice she gave me."

Like Kay, Jean-Marie Lefevre, who became an activist in Cherbourg, France, was frustrated by his lack of education. He had grown up in foster care. Of his birth family, he said, "We were judged by our appearance, because the curtains weren't always clean. We were strong as a family, but they couldn't understand that there was something else besides the curtains." Like many children in foster care, he struggled with education: "I wanted to become a priest. It was never to be, though, seeing the level of studies I had. I was told that I didn't know what I was doing. The strong desire remained with me, but the studies were long, and I only had the minimum level." Instead he was put into vocational training to learn plumbing, but he did not enjoy it. He went on to odd jobs and seasonal work on a fishing boat.

Mr. Jean-Marie Lefevre, in 1987, working at a fish market in Cherbourg, France.

When he was 26, Jean-Marie read about ATD Fourth World and told his brother, "That's what I want to do, to fight against poverty in the footsteps of this man, Father Joseph Wresinski." Jean-Marie began helping run a Street Library[13] in a housing project that was disparagingly referred to by others as "the towering inferno." This began two decades of his involvement as an activist, until his death at age 48. As part of an ATD Fourth World research project, he and other activists collaborated with academics over several years and co-authored *The Merging of Knowledge: People in Poverty and Academics Thinking Together*. In the book, Jean-Marie explains his motivation for becoming an activist: "People I meet now, who are judged as being incapable—that was me twenty years ago. I was considered someone who just let things go by, who wallowed in poverty. How could I forget who I was? If no one had believed in me, what would I have become?"[14]

13. A consistent, regular, outdoor cultural workshop with storytelling and arts and crafts activities.

14. *The Merging of Knowledge*. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007). Page 307.

An alliance between the accepted and the unaccepted: Challenging the ethic of colleagues in Switzerland

While people living in extreme poverty make choices every day to look out for one another and to defend the inalienable dignity of all, Wresinski also called for allies. These are people like Jean-Hugues Henrys or Adrien Delva—of all walks of life (students, teachers, musicians, administrators, homemakers, scientists, labor leaders, and others)—who choose to get involved in ATD Fourth World. Their responsibility, Wresinski said, was to push society to change so that respect of all rights for all people would be the guiding thread of policy and all public life:

> *[We appeal] not only to the government but to all citizens, for it is they who finally determine the choices and main direction of any society. Confronted with exclusion, the Fourth World reminds us, established members of society, that a new alliance must be formed: an alliance between the accepted and the unaccepted. [. . .] To be faithful to this alliance, we will follow through completely our challenge to any of society's projects that excludes the weakest. We will impose, in every field, the participation of the most disadvantaged.*

Sorbonne University, 1983: Joseph Wresinski appeals to the "free and well-instructed" to partner with people in persistent poverty.

Following through, in fact, means denouncing everything that puts a person in a situation of inferiority and leads to his rejection by others. We will impose on the government a project for the whole of society in the name of defending the most underprivileged and the respect of their rights.[15]

Many allies find ways to challenge their professions. Jürg Meyer, for instance, was a journalist and senior editor at the largest German-language daily newspaper in Switzerland, the Baseler Zeitung. After many years, Meyer looked back on the situation there:[16]

A lack of common ground and natural contacts between journalists and the poor exacerbates the tendency to portray the poor through caricatures: either demonizing them as the cause of all evils in our society, or showing them as angels and victims of all wrongdoing of society. [. . .] This can happen with any social group, but the weaker groups cannot find the strength to respond publicly. [. . .]

Little by little, I began to take a stand against prejudices and practices of my profession that were wronging the most disadvantaged people. [. . . In morning meetings] I was able to point to articles that did not meet [ethical] principles when it came to the least powerful people. I pointed out unjust, unverified accusations that publicly offended the dignity of families, their neighborhoods. [. . .] I spoke of the consequences that an article had had for a specific family or neighborhood, when I heard about it through ATD Fourth World. [. . .] I wrote news stories about infringement on the rights of the poor, and their efforts to have their rights reinstated. [. . .]

Mr. Jürg Meyer

15. Speech on November 17, 1977, at the Mutualité Conference Center in Paris, France.

16. In an article co-authored with Bruno Tardieu and published in *Artisans of Democracy* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000), pages 75-85.

Disadvantaged people throughout the region noticed that an article was for once neither humiliating nor accusing. I received a number of letters from people who wanted their stories of injustice published. This became a new untapped source of information. [. . .] Journalists started to reflect on their practice and its impact on the poorest citizens. This process challenged and changed the very ethic of the newspaper. [. . .] The contributions of people in deep poverty are not easily made, and when they are, they often go unnoticed. They cannot emerge and be noticed without a specific commitment to bring them to light.

The Fourth World Volunteer Corps: Collective responsibility so that no one is left by the wayside

The Fourth World Volunteer Corps is made up of people—like David, and his teammates Nerline and Rosana in Haiti—who choose to link their lives over the long term to those of families living in poverty. Learning by doing, alongside children and young people, parents and grandparents, in villages and inner cities, they create with others an ethical lifestyle that challenges inequality, the excessive consumption that drives modern society, and traditional ideas of organizational hierarchy.

Via an ethos of equality, collective responsibility, and interdependence, all volunteers receive the same basic stipend linked to the cost of living in the country in which they are based, regardless of seniority or responsibility. They are also available to live and work full time in differ-

Members of the Fourth World Volunteer Corps gathered for a General Assembly in 1999.

ent low-income communities, both in their own countries and abroad, and to change responsibilities and location according to ATD Fourth World's priorities and needs to reinforce specific teams. These changes are the fruit of shared responsibility and collective reflection. To these volunteers, Wresinski spoke of their responsibility to continually seek out and join people at risk of being left out and abandoned by society:

> *You should delve ever more deeply into the middle of groups that are becoming newly excluded today, always looking out for others who have been forgotten. [. . .] You are the ones who can guarantee that the excluded will be the first to benefit from change, and that change will be radical enough to leave no one behind. You should guarantee that we see our challenge through to the end, that the most disadvantaged people will never be left by the wayside.*[17]

Today 460 people, of 34 different nationalities, are part of ATD Fourth World's full-time Volunteer Corps, many of them for ten, twenty, or thirty years, and some even longer. Together with activists and allies, they work in small teams where they support one another and share their responsibilities, their failures, and their successes. The identity of our Volunteer Corps is built upon this determination to recognize, understand, and be transformed by the reality of life for the millions of people who have no choice but to try on a daily basis to resist the worst consequences of poverty. Witnessing the courage and hope shown by people suffering extreme forms of discrimination pushes Volunteer Corps members to build bridges between people living in poverty, other citizens, and decision makers. It inspires them to invent a wide range of innovative actions and partnerships to combat poverty.

The Volunteer Corps forms a global community of people coming from many walks of life and from many cultures and countries, who bring with them a wide range of ideas and beliefs. This diverse array of life experiences, viewpoints, and sensitivities provides an invaluable source of creativity, as all volunteers learn from people in poverty. This diversity is also a challenge that requires a deep regard for the quality of human relations. This means taking the time to learn to understand one another across very different educational backgrounds, cultures, and languages,

17. Speech on November 17, 1977, at the Mutualité Conference Center in Paris, France.

and different ways of looking at the world. Valuing its diversity helps the Fourth World Volunteer Corps to build a worldview that is based as much on human understanding as on an awareness of international trends and events.

2. Youth activism

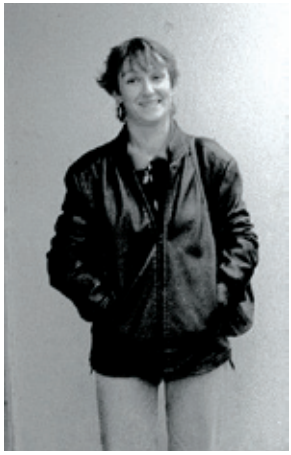
Feeling useless no longer: Choices made by young people in France and Senegal

In May 1973, for the first time, Joseph Wresinski assembled 300 teenagers and young people who came from low-income housing projects all across France. In the rural district of Ain, he addressed them with an impassioned appeal:

> *You're not just anyone! You are among those who have inherited the world's misery. It's been dumped on your shoulders and it stops you from lifting your heads and revealing the truth to the world. Here in this field, there are only 300 of you to represent the others, all the others, those who weren't able to come and who are frustrated because of it, those who have the same worries as you, the same determination. You want it to be possible to truly live in your housing projects; you want there to be joy in the projects! You want every chance in life that other young people have, you want things to change. [. . .] We are with everyone who, in one way or another, has something to teach us, and with people who have something to learn from us too: we are young people who want to gather together young people from everywhere who carry in their hearts something that will change the world.*

The May 1973 youth gathering.

In the crowd listening to him was Martine Le Corre, who still remembers today the impact his words had on her:



Martine Le Corre in 1973.

I was 18. I had ended up believing that I wasn't worth much, that I was a "misfit," "antisocial," just dirt poor and nothing but poor. [. . .] Finally someone was throwing down a challenge for me and for others: a massive challenge, a battle, a struggle. It wasn't something personal. Father Joseph was asking me to go to battle for everyone else like me, to struggle for my own liberation with this Movement. He talked about a demanding struggle, an ambitious one whose compass would be the poorest among us. [. . .] I discovered that I was smart. I understood that we were human beings who could hold our heads up, that we had courage, experience, endurance, resistance, intelligence, knowledge, common sense, and hope. All those words, until that day, I had never felt allowed to use them about myself. [. . .] Today I want that freedom for every one of my people, wherever they are. This affects us all.

Around the world, young people continue to be made to understand, like Martine, that poverty has made them "misfits," that they are useless and that nothing is expected of them. When society trusts them, these young people can and should hold their heads high, come together, and bring others together around them so that the world will change, so that never again will a single person or population be abandoned or shunned by the human race. This was Wresinski's challenge, one taken completely to heart by Martine, who in the years since then has assumed overall responsibilities in ATD Fourth World: running a People's University; developing the innovative Merging Knowledge approach; being a member of the national leadership

Martine Le Corre in 2012.

The flood-fighting brigade in Pikine, Senegal.

team in France; and advising on the steering committee for an international participatory action-research project.

In Pikine, Senegal, young people have also taken up Wresinski's challenge. There on the outskirts of Dakar, the district of Guinaw Rails has flooded increasingly often since 2005 because the groundwater is rising. Many families have deserted the flood zones, but those with the least security have no choice but to stay put. The local youth members of ATD Fourth World formed a "flood-fighting brigade" to dig drainage canals, and to ensure that the families who are "the most exhausted" are not abandoned and no longer have to endure their homes being underwater. One of these young people, 19-year-old Mamy Silla, shares why she chooses to help others:

> *I live in the north of Guinaw Rails with my parents and brothers. [When I was 11] our home was completely deluged by the heavy rains: our sleeping quarters, the toilet, the courtyard. We were miserable. We climbed on the beds to eat. We couldn't even get to the toilet because there was water everywhere. This misery has continued every year since. But one day God made a miracle: in*

2011 we met ATD Fourth World, a movement that helped us. I want to be part of it because it is part of the life of the community here. It supports those who are worn out so that they can again take up their responsibilities. This movement is attentive to families. I feel it has a respect for individual and collective values.

It made it possible for me to get out more. I used to just stay in, with the floodwaters, or to accompany my mother to work, or to go to school. Now I've been able to get out and meet new people. [. . .] Little by little, I discovered new things, I attended meetings. Today I go to another neighborhood to help run a Street Library. It pleases me to be able to support children's intelligence so that they can live in peace. The things that families in that neighborhood go through remind me of my own family's situation. That pushes me even more to keep returning to meet them.

To learn more about how young people take action, see "Dakar's Flood-Fighting Brigade: a Hands-on Commitment" at http://bit.ly/ATDDakar

No one too small to make a difference: Children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

All around us, there has been war for the last ten years. A lot of children have lost their fathers. Misfortune and poverty have come into our homes. Many people have found asylum in the homes of cousins or friends; by doing that, friendship triumphs over poverty. But some people still live in tents or in collective houses and even in abandoned factories. Ilda knows people who live in a grocery store that is only ten square meters. A family of twelve lives there. They sleep on concrete. The people around them each help in their own way, but they need more than that to get their smile and their dignity back.

—Marko, Jelena, Alma, Ilda, Nazira, Alyana, Merlin, Zinaïda, and Florentina, children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

These children and hundreds of others in Bukavu, DRC, have chosen to reach out to others in order to bring smiles back to their region. In

the mid-1990s, two Congolese young people, Luc Tabaro and Faustin Ndrabu, first learned about Tapori, a worldwide children's network run by ATD Fourth World. They had been looking for ways to contribute to rebuilding their country. When they found Tapori, they said, "This is a way to build peace." They began inviting children to make friends with others who did not have friends: children living in the streets, children accused of witchcraft, child soldiers, or the children of soldiers, all of whom may be feared and avoided. Today, René Muhindo, one of the young people now running Tapori, says, "Tapori children respect everyone. Even if they cross paths with a person who smells bad, Tapori children will have the courage to stop and greet him."

One of the children adds, "I used to steal and to avoid school. Tapori has helped me to get along with others instead, and with my family." Another child, Mulema, says, "I am handicapped, but my dream is to play as others do. When you ask about meeting kids I don't know, I think of soccer games. Usually when teams are being chosen and kids don't know each other yet, you look at other kids' clothes and shoes to decide who to choose. Good players are often left out, just because they are barefoot. But in our Tapori soccer team, we take everyone—and it's made us the best team. A child may have no shoes, but when he's given a chance you see what he can do. This is how I learned not to judge anyone without knowing them."

Building friendship among children of very different backgrounds can take many steps and needs time. Emmanuel Ono Kayeye remembers how his feelings were hurt when other children called him "a weirdo" or said, "No, Ono, you know we don't want you to come swimming in the river with us. You're so dirty, you'll make the river dirty!" Then, little by little, René Muhindo—who was also still a child at the time—made friends with him and invited him to join a Tapori group. When Ono hesitated anxiously, René said, "You know, I used to think I was the most unhappy kid in the world. My head was filled with all my worries. But with this group, I read the story of a child from Guatemala who had a hard life. He didn't have a lot of time to play, but he was proud to be able to help his family. This story gave me courage. I learned that when we get together, we can work out our difficulties. You'll see, too, if you come to the meeting with me."

Young people and adult friends who run Tapori groups
in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

At the meeting, Ono was surprised that every one of fifty children had a chance to talk and that the adult facilitator even asked Ono what he thought. Ono became active in the group. A few years later, when the group was cleaning a water source, one of them insulted a homeless child who wanted to help. Quickly, Ono told the group, "When I was your age, no one wanted to play with me. The other kids said I was crazy. Only René believed in me. He brought me to this group." The children were very surprised. Ono was like a big brother to them. They had not imagined that he had ever been left out by the others.

To learn more about the Tapori group in Bukavu, see "We're Children Fighting to Eradicate Poverty" at http://bit.ly/ATDChildren

Among the different children together in Tapori are the children of Gisèle Batembo Faida, the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development in South Kivu province. She writes:

> *For almost five years now our own children have invested in getting to know the lives of other children in the world, their joys as well as their sufferings. Like visits of comfort and beatitude, letters are exchanged among Tapori children, along with pictures representing peace and joy. We support this choice, which is not an accident or a*

> *convenience, but the result of so many efforts and sacrifices by this movement to benefit all people suffering from misery, violence, and a lack of peace. We parents support our Tapori movement for this struggle of the very poor day by day to resist the violence of poverty by building peace.*

When the Tapori groups first started, adults found it so unusual that young people were organizing like that on a completely voluntary basis that some of them did not believe it. Faustin recalls: "A few of the parents were sure we must be somehow making money on the backs of the children. But now they have seen that our income never changed; we're the same as we used to be."

Another facilitator, Olive Chiragane, adds, "Others tell us that it's a waste of time to volunteer. They ask how we can study if we spend so much time with the children. But we learn so much from the children themselves." Pascal Chirhalwirwa—who volunteered to coordinate all the Tapori groups in Bukavu until work supporting independent media led him to the Central African Republic in 2008—says, "When there are funding possibilities from the European Union or other sources, associations spring up like mushrooms. They'll get the funding, and then when there's no more funding, they close up shop. Tapori has been around for ten years even though there was no money. The fact that people are in it for their own interest and not for the money has allow us to keep going."

Some of these inspiring children and young people—like Merita and the other delegates from Haiti who were able to be part of international

Children at the 2009 Tapori Assembly preparing a gift offered to Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Kyung-wha Kang, at the UN in Geneva. Of this "friendship vehicle" the children said, "We have to make sure it goes on every road, so that no one is forgotten, especially those who have the most difficulties."

events so that others could benefit from getting to know them—took part in special Tapori assemblies at the UN in Geneva marking the 10th and 20th anniversaries of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The first of these events, in 1999, was hosted by Mary Robinson, then High Commissioner for Human Rights. On that occasion, the children offered her a sculpture that was made with stones from the places where they live around the world and that represented their courage. Staff of the Office of the High Commissioner, who continue to pass this sculpture every morning, have said that it serves as a reminder of the meaning and importance of their own responsibilities.

The second Tapori Assembly, in 2009, was hosted by Kyung-wha Kang, then Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights. The children from Bukavu told her, "As Tapori children, we organize visits to build friendship. To reach all the children and their families, especially those whose lives are most difficult, those who always stay hidden away, who suffer because of extreme poverty, we must go down all the tracks so we don't forget anyone."

Mrs. Kang replied, "What I sense from you is the courage that comes from youthfulness. This is what we have to learn from you. Human rights take a great deal of courage because governments don't like to be criticized about what they are doing or not doing to protect the rights of their people. So we need you to constantly remind us to have that courage."

As for René, his childhood involvement with Tapori deepened. Having chosen as an adult to be a Tapori facilitator, he is struck by how far the children lead others:

> *There was a man no one dared talk to. People said he practiced witchcraft. But some of the children began fixing his home, which had been leaning to one side. When we asked the children why they asked us to go to his home, they answered, "Because we're children, and he has children who are just like us." We realized later that the man was very poor. He kept to himself and had no one to talk to. That meant that anyone could say anything about him. The children initiated a development project! Everything we do in the neighborhoods is thanks to them.*

The Tapori children in Bukavu, and around the world, are linked by the Tapori newsletter and its website in fourteen languages. Through these

December 2009: Tapori delegates present their friendship vehicle to Mrs. Kyung-wha Kang at the United Nations in Geneva.

connections, and in each of the villages, cities, and neighborhoods where they live, they are able to get to know one another and to build friendship that knows no bounds.

To learn more about the 2009 Tapori Assembly, see "By Getting Together, We Are Changing the World" at http://bit.ly/ATDTapori

3. Community

A forum that leaves no one isolated: Building solidarity in Lebanon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo

If any movement is to be strong, vigorous, and sustainable, it requires that people choose to act in solidarity, to pool their intelligence, and to encourage one another. This choice, made by our members, has made us determined to find, reach out to, and learn from other individuals or groups who may be isolated or alone in making the same choice. Everywhere around the world, there are people who long ago made that choice:

to stretch a meager meal still further so the neighbor's children won't go hungry; or to take risks to stand up for people who are being wronged and humiliated. The depth of these daily commitments is often hidden behind broad community development initiatives.

Wresinski was also mindful of the loneliness inherent in making these choices. In his early years in Noisy-le-Grand, it was often difficult to find any kind of understanding, support, or recognition. So, early on, Wresinski began reaching out to, and staying in touch with, people around the world who were in some way refusing to accept the injustice of extreme poverty. This communication grew into a network of correspondence linking almost 3,500 people or organizations in 130 countries: the Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty.

Members of the Forum are not usually members of ATD Fourth World and remain completely free in their expression and initiatives. Through the correspondence, a newsletter in four languages, and a website that includes 26 languages, the Forum is a resource for them to pool their knowledge about what works, to encourage one another, and to gain recognition for what are sometimes very small but valuable efforts. Our goal is that the regularity of correspondence can make it possible for them to be less isolated and to take strength from one another to go further in forging their identity and developing their action. The Forum's newsletter can also help members to gain in visibility wherever they are based.

In Beirut, Lebanon, one Forum member, Sarkis Matossian, is a shopkeeper in a working-class neighborhood with refugees from many neighboring countries. One day, Sarkis realized that a young mother and her baby were sleeping on an outdoor balcony. Not only was their homelessness unsafe and unjust, but it was invisible to neighbors and passers-by. Sarkis wanted to change this. Together with other residents of the neighborhood, he started a small nonprofit group called Beitouna, "Our house": a place where everyone is welcome and where the shared priority is looking for ways to reach out to and support people in the most difficult situations. Of his links with others through the Forum, Sarkis says, "Joseph Wresinski's work inspires me. Although he died in 1988, I feel like I've met him. What was new to me as well was discovering people who did not grow up in poverty, but who made the same choice to change their daily life in order to reach out to others. The people around me give me strength."'

Beirut, 2010: Mr. Sarkis Matossian, standing at the right, with other members of Beitouna, "Our house."

Another member of the Forum, Therese M., lives in the Democratic Republic of the Congo where she has been a midwife since 1997. She writes:

> *I do this work to help people who have little means. I am authorized by the health services to deliver babies in my home. I usually deliver six or seven babies every day. If a woman goes to the hospital, the delivery costs $15. I charge only $6. Even so, war has caused so much poverty that some women just can't afford to pay me, not even $3. Still worse, some of them don't have so much as a scrap of clothing for their newborns to wear. Nor can they afford to eat decently during their pregnancies. In these situations, I always give them some clothing and baby food. But my working conditions don't allow me to earn much, seeing as I spend money on medicine too. [. . .] I learned my trade working for years in a hospital. So now I've trained two other mothers in my neighborhood in midwifery. Today, they are delivering babies and earning a living. This is why I teach others what I learned.*

Since 1981, we have also organized regional and international seminars where Forum members can express their experiences, concerns, and hopes in a framework designed to help question and rethink public policy. In 1989, when the Berlin Wall fell, public opinion in Europe was split: was Western Europe growing larger? Or were Europe's two halves joining together? It was East and West German members of the Forum at the time who decided, together with ATD Fourth World, to prepare a

seminar where participants—with observers invited from as far away as Africa—would share their hopes and commitments for shaping a new Germany, one that would be freed of poverty.

When this seminar took place in 1992, the participants were able to inaugurate, at the foot of a remaining section of the Berlin Wall, a replica of the Commemorative Stone in Honor of the Victims of Poverty. They were guided by the conviction that honoring the victims of this wall was a way of continuing to commit themselves to building a world where all walls, both visible and invisible, would finally come down.

In this same spirit, members of the Forum on both sides of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict helped to inspire a seminar with others from throughout the Mediterranean region. After two years of preparations—in Algeria, Egypt, France, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Spain, and Turkey—participants convened in Marseilles, France. On arriving, a few participants said that the participation of Israeli members of the Forum was unacceptable. What made it possible for the seminar to proceed and to produce new commitments was that every one of the participants was finally able to agree on how rare—almost nonexistent—opportunities are for exchanging freely about overcoming poverty as a way toward peace.

Members of the Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty live in 130 countries. **To learn more** about some members in Rwanda, see "The Hills of Hope" at http://bit.ly/ATDForumRwanda

At the foot of the Berlin Wall, 1992: Inauguration of a replica of the Commemorative Stone in Honor of the Victims of Extreme Poverty.

Continuity and change: In each community and from one continent to another

Displacement and rootlessness are part and parcel of extreme poverty. Some families are evicted or burned out; others live in tents or trailers that are regularly banished from one town to another; and still others repeatedly see their makeshift informal shelters destroyed by urban planning authorities. These unending displacements are why our work is often mobile. A Fourth World Street Library, for instance, might be moved from one part of a city to another in order to follow a family who lost its home. In this context, and given the deep-rooted nature of extreme poverty, continuity over time is essential to building relationships of trust. In our work, this continuity is often provided by allies and activists who make long-term commitments in their own communities.

At the same time, the availability of Volunteer Corps members to move from one team to another over the years makes several things possible:

- By changing teams, volunteers are allowing themselves to shift off-center, to see things in a new way, and to learn from the activists and allies who welcome them;
- In every place unique ideas and traditions are born. Having our teams change makes it possible for our members in one place to learn from those on the other side of the world;
- Most important, an international approach can challenge mechanisms of exclusion and discrimination that are very deeply rooted in local contexts.

There are villages and neighborhoods in every country where certain people and families are shunned by others. In Bukavu, René spoke of the man accused of witchcraft; elsewhere people may say, "The kids in that family will always fail in school," or "I don't want those people anywhere near my children." For people who have grown up feeling the weight of these judgments, not only on themselves but on their entire families, it can be very hard to change the way they see themselves. Having a volunteer come from another country specifically to meet them, and to tell them about similar situations of exclusion elsewhere in the world, can make it

possible for people to begin seeing themselves as worthy of participating in public life.

More broadly, we know that each member of ATD Fourth World shapes what we do around the world. Time and again, people living in extreme poverty who do not share a common language or culture say strongly how much they recognize a deep bond among one another. Our teams in different countries are not a series of independent local teams, each affiliated with an overarching international organization. Rather, no matter where we are, all our teams are interdependent, each of us belonging to a worldwide movement and, together, building a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to ending poverty.

This is why it is essential that people like Merita in Haiti and others be able to meet regularly to work on different questions. Just as academics or experts in medicine, social work, or any other field need to meet at international conferences to hone their collective intelligence, people living in poverty around the world sharpen the world's intelligence when they are able to cross borders to consult one another. The challenges involved in making this a reality are enormous: identity papers and passports are hard

Dimas Pérez Vanegas, a Volunteer Corps member from Guatemala, telling a story at a Street Library in Haiti in 2010.

to obtain if your parents' papers are not in order or if you were not born in a hospital; visas are often refused because of the suspicion that anyone without a decent income must be seeking to emigrate permanently. But over three decades of our movement's international assemblies, never once have any of our members overstayed their visa. Although they know only too well the harsh realities awaiting them at home, they also feel a responsibility to share news with all the neighbors who chose them to join an international delegation, so that their intelligence and their experience could be pooled with that of others from around the world.

III

Inventing Ways to Live in Peace Together

1. Thinking together

"**We can and must** end poverty in our time" has been the call to action of Graça Machel, Jeffrey Sachs, and other prominent figures fighting for social justice. Just how do people living in extreme poverty themselves hear that call? It speaks to them strongly—while also raising a major concern. They rejoice in the hope that finally others will join them in their daily efforts to resist poverty that damages their health and may cost them their lives. Their most cherished hope is to offer a better future to their children. "May this misery stop with me, my body, my life," they say.

At the same time, however, they are concerned about whether the world has truly understood the gravity of the causes and consequences of extreme poverty. Since childhood, they and their families have been stigmatized and marginalized by others. Their characters have been forged

Ivry Gitlis, in 1988, playing classical music in a trailer camp in France.

by constant belittling and humiliation. Hearing the words "end poverty," they sometimes wonder, "Does that mean getting rid of poor people?" Every society looks for ways to solve the problem of poverty. But those "solutions," usually designed without consulting people born into poverty, have led to demolitions of shanties and low-income housing that leave entire communities homeless. They have led to policies meant to encourage women to give birth in hospitals by withholding birth certificates for those who do not, depriving their children of any legal existence. They have led to international adoptions and foster-care systems that splinter families and that can sometimes condemn children to an eternal sense of rootlessness.

Hearing the words "end poverty," people enduring it wonder whether others understand the breadth of the challenges facing the world in terms of social, economic, and environmental justice, and the nature of change needed. Just as families can take several generations to become more and more entrenched in deep poverty, the world has, for many generations now, developed attitudes toward "the poor" that will take a long time to dislodge.When Joseph Wresinski was growing up, while his immigrant mother struggled to raise her four surviving children, Wresinski witnessed well-intentioned women doing charitable work by offering her aid—but at the same time humiliating her again and again. This drove his determina-

Working and Learning Together: in this fair-trade workshop in Guatemala City in 2011, women weave baskets from recycled paper.

tion to found a movement where people would not only see one another as equals, but would also learn how to think together, to create together, to act and work together in new ways. The decades since ATD Fourth World was founded in 1957 have been a time of constant experimentation to develop conditions under which people with little or no formal education can think and act together on an equal footing with policy experts and academics, and can bring innovation to the fields of good governance and peace, employment and sustainable development, health care and human rights, art and music, and children's development and education. The goal is to recognize and take into account the knowledge gained in resisting poverty on an equal footing with other forms of knowledge. This opens new pathways toward building peace in neighborhoods and villages, and in society in general.

From silence, to Fourth World People's Universities, to Merging Knowledge

There is violence that you can't forget but have to keep quiet about.

— Moïse Compaoré, Burkina Faso

It is very difficult to speak up when people humiliate you, and many times you're embarrassed. Later, when you go home, you feel very sad. Because you were not able to speak up, nobody else will know what you wanted to say, and you're left powerless to express yourself. It is very difficult to think that you might always live isolated from everyone else. And I couldn't stay quiet any longer. I had to find the strength to defend myself.

— Julián Quispe, Peru

When it's not possible to speak to anyone, I return home with my unshared thoughts.

— Parfait Nguinindji, the Central African Republic

Extreme poverty and social exclusion humiliate people, cause them to lose confidence, and barricade them into silence. Their relationships with others are stifled. When people lose the strength to protest their reality, or when they know that their words are unwanted by others, silence can become a leaden weight on their hearts. Compounding the weight

of silence, people know that even the right to free speech is not enough. What are the conditions for public expression to become a source of strength in which people's inherent dignity is recognized? In the 1960s, Wresinski noted:

> *When you can't understand the chain of events, near and far, that has caused you to be in a certain social position, you have no recourse other than to attribute it to fate, to your own unworthiness or inferiority. You can even blame your loved ones. When, on the contrary, you can develop with those of your own background a common thinking, an analysis of situations similar to your own, your life fills with light and strength, you can plan to make changes and to spread solidarity. [. . .] All the more so because the thinking of the poorest is almost always a search for their history and identity, and they alone have direct access to an essential part of the answers. It is these questions about history and identity, far more than about needs or rights, that they ask themselves. They ask these questions because they know, dimly but profoundly, that in the answers lies their path toward freedom.*

Understanding the events behind one's own situation, and exploring keys to one's own identity and history are fundamental steps toward being able to speak freely and contribute to collective thinking. Poverty and exclusion cause people to internalize their situations completely. They blame themselves for everything, feeling imprisoned by fate, sometimes without even being able to put this into words. Gérard Lecointe, an activist from France, says, "When you live in the streets, when you're destitute, every day is the same, then it's the next day and the day after that, and days go by. You have nothing left inside, no foundation. You know the next day will always be the same, always."

Our approach is to invite people living in poverty to reflect on their own life experience in a context where they can trust others not to manipulate their words and be certain that nothing they say will endanger their loved ones. This work leads to awareness. To understand fully one's own realities of life, it is important to be able to choose how to put them into words, to think about the causes, and to share this with others. Another French activist, Christine Lelièvre, lives with her extended family in several trailers. When the entire family was under threat of eviction, she

was invited to reflect with others in a People's University on the question of violence:

> *We're not used to looking around us. We didn't see violence. We really need to think, to be questioned. There are times when you can no longer see what's around you. Violence is in the way we're treated every day. We undergo it day after day with the evictions. It marks you, inside.*[18]

At our People's Universities, activists can accord one another the recognition needed for each person to develop their identity and to contribute to building knowledge. This recognition among peers contributes to a form of freedom through the heightened awareness of a common existence. One activist said, "When I heard that people were living in the woods, or in caves, or in wooden shanties, or completely homeless, the penny finally dropped. I saw that people weren't ashamed of the way they had to live, and they had the courage to talk about it."

At the same time, interactions with allies and others from diverse social backgrounds can strengthen this recognition. These interactions are essential for people with no experience of living in poverty to gain new knowledge and insight. For example, one ally says, "My first insight was that I understood nothing and knew nothing about the daily lives of people in poverty.[. . .] The problem of children put in foster care was my first major discovery. Of course I'd heard that it happens, but never from the point of view of their parents. I had never even questioned the legitimacy of foster-care placements."

By reflecting with others on their own experiences, and on the basis of the heightened awareness developed, people build "emancipatory knowledge" that can change their way of thinking and give new meaning to their lives. One condition is a context that makes it possible to feel pride instead of shame. "What is the strategic moment of 'reversal' that enables the excluded to play an active role?" asks French sociologist Alain Touraine. "Does it happen when a person is first regarded positively? Or does it happen when a person has the chance to disagree with others and to offer analysis? In fact, both are necessary." It is for this transformation

18. Defraigne Tardieu, Geneviève. *L'université populaire quart monde: La construction du savoir émancipatoire*. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Paris-10, 2013.) Page 270.

Creating conditions for "emancipatory knowledge"
at a People's University in France.

to take place that we created frameworks where people in extreme poverty and others could think together: People's Universities, and workshops for Merging Knowledge and Practices.

Fourth World People's Universities: Going beyond stereotypes to recognize one another

> *Being together means gathering people to do something, to share thoughts. It makes me feel like I am among the humans. It's an occasion to learn different things from others. For example, one day a carpenter I usually just greet came to my home to explain his problems. It was an occasion to discuss together, somebody asking my ideas, my advice. Having somebody coming and expressing his feelings, depending on my help, made me feel more human.*
>
> — Selemani Yasini, Tanzania

More than thirty years ago, we launched People's Universities where people in extreme poverty can speak with complete freedom, not of what humiliates or shames them, but of what motivates and gives them strength.

Mr. Selemani Yasini (right) at a People's University in Tanzania.

Throughout each month, members of ATD Fourth World prepare to work on a specific question they chose together. After three weeks of preparations in small groups, the fourth week is spent all together with a guest invited because of her or his professional expertise in a particular area. It is the strength shared during the preparations that makes it possible for people in extreme poverty to speak to one another in solidarity, careful to embarrass no one, and to feel on an equal footing in order freely to address professionals or representatives of institutions. Today People's Universities exist in Belgium, Bolivia, Canada, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Tanzania, and the United States. Similar projects exist in Burkina Faso, Germany, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, the Philippines, Senegal, and the United Kingdom. In Luxemburg and Poland, preparations are under way to start People's Universities.

People's Universities are forums for meeting others, exchanging ideas, and thinking together. While the dialogues begin among people living in extreme poverty, they are later joined by people of varied backgrounds. When everyone comes together, the group may number up to a hundred people, all of whom have prepared beforehand for this two-hour dialogue. All participants prepare by working on the same question, but from their personal experience and point of view. Themes chosen together might be education, human rights, the media, art, the environment, housing,

family cohesion, decent work, discrimination, health, immigration, peace, or other issues vital to everyone. There are several results:

- An ethical dimension encourages changes in behavior toward people living in extreme poverty
- These forums recognize hidden expertise, increase public awareness and dialogue, and provide opportunities for people in poverty to speak out and gain confidence in working with others to effect positive change. This has implications for public policy, governance, and rethinking the conditions needed for all people to contribute to their communities and to their countries.
- On a philosophical level, the dialogues give new recognition to knowledge gained from experience and to the collective building of knowledge. In this way, People's Universities break with the past, both by being planned by people from very disadvantaged backgrounds, and by producing knowledge in a new way.

The usual learning dynamic is reversed in People's Universities. It is not the facilitators or guest experts who are teaching others. People living in extreme poverty are the ones initiating the building of collective knowledge. It is their very experience of what it means to struggle with deprivation and discrimination that gives them tools for understanding poverty and how to fight it. Their experience of human rights violations highlights the flaws in governance in every country.

This learning dynamic takes time, however. People who are asked for the first time to join a People's University are invited not in the name of their "poverty" or other negative values. Rather, they are asked as challengers of poverty, as people who stand up for others, as members of ATD Fourth World. One activist in France, Paulette Liard, says:

> *I first came to the People's University after meeting ATD Fourth World in an activity in my neighborhood. I discovered that what other people were talking about was the same thing I was living. I stopped feeling ashamed. Today, I feel respected. I've found my place. People look at me differently now. But I'm not the one who's changed.*

People's Universities are not for reliving tragedies and sufferings, but for developing a deeper understanding of life. Participants say they feel they are leaving behind the chaos of incomprehension and gaining a

A Fourth World People's University in Cusco, Peru:
Thinking together about human rights, from experience first.

chance to look for meaning together with others. Emma Poma, an activist in Bolivia, said that before joining the People's University, she had been sure that she would die without ever having had a chance to speak of the things she carries the most deeply in her heart. Dialogue is enriched, first in small groups, and then with others whose experience may be academic or professional. Confronting theoretical knowledge with knowledge from lived experience produces new knowledge. People who would otherwise never have met one another develop new social relationships and connect issues in new ways. Guest experts, in their own work, can benefit from the dialogues. Thus People's Universities not only produce knowledge, but also strengthen diverse communities and offer guidance for policymakers.

Collective learning among people living in poverty and others on issues that concern society as a whole is a way to break through barriers of mutual ignorance about one another. People whose worlds are usually far apart are able to develop a dialogue that dispels prejudice and fear. This process is also a way to build co-responsibility for finding new approaches that are useful to everyone, whether poor or not.

Wresinski rose up against the academic bulwark that excludes the thinking of people living in poverty from recognized collective thought. The knowledge they build from their experience is irreplaceable for comprehending the world. When the thinking of academic experts does not

consider their thinking, it loses its relevance for analyzing the whole of society. People's Universities make it possible to transform the balance of power linked to knowledge. No longer is it the person with the most diplomas who teaches others; instead all participants, from any background, can change themselves by listening to and exchanging with others, building the reciprocity necessary for cognitive governance. It is this cognitive governance that enables people with highly diverse perspectives to come together in order collectively to solve problems.

When power is equally balanced among different sources of knowledge, cognitive governance can produce new knowledge that is relevant to understanding and changing society. By building collective knowledge, People's Universities make it possible to break cycles of misunderstanding and distrust. They make it possible to overcome ignorance of how others live, and to reconstruct analyses of the world that are truncated because they lack the contribution of people living in extreme poverty. This is a dynamic that builds peace by making it possible to understand sources of violence, injustice, and ignorance, while finding ways to rebuild together.

Reciprocity and respect: Young people express their views at a Fourth World People's University in France.

Workshops for a Merging Knowledge approach

During the time Wresinski was first experimenting with building collective knowledge in Noisy-le-Grand, Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* called on educators to develop themes that would engage dialogue rather than tell learners to memorize passively. Freire felt that people who had been forced to remain silent in the past should become masters of questioning to help others understand the world better. Some practitioners of adult education developed this approach into the field of participatory action-research. To this day however, in the world of academic research, people living in extreme poverty have continued to be objectified and treated as statistics. Wresinski denounced this in 1980, saying:

> *Scholars [. . .] regard [them] as sources of information to be used for their own purposes. [. . .] They have, to some extent, subordinated [people living in poverty] to their own exploration as outside observers. [. . .] More seriously, these researchers have often, unintentionally and unwittingly, upset or even paralyzed the thinking of their interlocutors. This happened essentially because they did not recognize that they were dealing with a thinking that followed its own path and goals.*[19]

The most traditional forms of social science try rigorously to weed out bias. But when studies are consistently designed by one population to use on a very different population, all the conditions of research become biased. The very words chosen to question people may have quite different meanings to researchers and to people living in extreme poverty. In the years since that speech by Wresinski, there has been a rise in interest from policymakers and academics in qualitative testimonies from people living in poverty. But in the vast majority of cases, this interest is solely in a person's first-hand experience, not in their thinking or analysis. In some cases, this interest reduces the words of people living in poverty to illustrations of other people's theories or even of policies that are ill-adapted to the realities of extreme poverty. This, in itself, can be a form of violence: hearing only one part of what people have to say, and then turning it

19. Wresinski, J. "A Knowledge That Leads to Action." (Paris: Introductory Speech for UNESCO's Standing Research Committee on Poverty and Exclusion, 1980.)

At a Fourth World People's University in 1981: Joseph Wresinski encourages people in poverty to collaborate to build purposeful knowledge.

against them. Reducing people's words to illustrations can hinder their development of purposeful knowledge—such as knowledge produced in order to contribute to fighting injustice and ending social exclusion.

The traditional western approach to knowledge has been an individual one based on competition: for grades, for professional recognition, for research grants. But collective knowledge is beginning to become recognized as one of the world's natural resources, as people crowdsource projects by drawing on the knowledge of as many contributors as possible via the internet. More and more people recognize that there is a wisdom in crowds that can go further than what individuals would be able to achieve on their own.

Collective knowledge is increasingly important for the world, but the conditions and the very violence of extreme poverty have prevented many people from developing their minds and contributing to the world's collective knowledge. In that same speech in 1980, Wresinski spoke of how social science research itself often contributed to harming the search for identity of people living in poverty:

> *Those who assume that human beings reduced to total poverty are apathetic—and consequently that they do not think, and that they retreat into dependence or the simple struggle to survive day to day—make a serious mistake. They ignore the strategies of self-defense that the poor create to escape the influence of those on whom they are dependent. [. . .]*
>
> *To hinder the poorest by using them for information rather than encouraging them to develop their own thinking as a genuinely autonomous act is to enslave them. [. . .] To talk to them only of their needs, or of those "social indicators" which characterize them, without helping them to better understand their own history or the common traits of their lives is just another way of trapping them. [. . .] The only identity the poor have is through what they need, what they lack. [. . .] Is this right when we consider that their historical identity is one of immeasurable resilience and inalienable dignity and furthermore that it is an identity that carries an essential message to all of society?*[20]

Overlooking the knowledge that comes from the experience of those living in extreme poverty emerges as one of the principal reasons that development policies fail. Our experience shows the need to create knowledge jointly with those who live in extreme poverty. Their experiences and ways of thinking—both individual and collective—have spanned generations. Recognizing this knowledge and merging it with the knowledge of others who are committed to eradicating poverty can better shape our action. To do this requires creating shared ownership at every stage of a project. To this end, and starting with our long-term experience with People's Universities, we developed the Merging Knowledge and Practices methodology, starting in the late 1990s.

This approach builds on Wresinski's thinking about three forms of knowledge: rooted in practice, rooted in lived experience, and rooted in academia. Pioneered by two research projects where people in poverty and academics collaborated, Merging Knowledge consists of workshops where people with complementary kinds of knowledge can work on an

20. Wresinski, J. "A Knowledge That Leads to Action." (Paris: Introductory Speech for UNESCO's Standing Research Committee on Poverty and Exclusion, 1980.)

equal footing to learn from one another in a more intense and long-term way than in People's Universities. While outside experts in a given field may participate for only a few hours in a given People's University session, the Merging Knowledge approach requires that all participants collaborate throughout a project.

The workshops are usually a partnership between people living in poverty and a specific group of professionals or researchers working on an issue relevant to changing social conditions in their field. Each workshop begins with sharing lived experiences, and then, together, analyzing them to develop a conceptual understanding. The workshops may be run over just a few days, over several months, or even years. Each participant must recognize the knowledge of the others. One participant, a business leader discovering Merging Knowledge in Boston, commented about the beginning of this process:

> *I had no other choice than to speak from raw emotions. [Poverty] is a subject most people avoid as no one wants to experience, witness, or hear about extreme poverty. There is no shortage of reading materials on the matter so my immediate reaction was guilt. How could I know so little about the world around me? How does this happen? How can this continue in this day and age? [All of us participating as leaders] were in agreement that there has to be a solution. [. . .] Feeling helpless, we sought advice. If we could listen with an open mind and learn, then advocate, that would be a start. We would have to abandon our current theories, prejudices, and biases. To let go is no easy task, nor is rejecting what we have learned or have come to terms with on our own. This is where the journey of Merging Knowledge began for me.*

Julia Tripp, an activist who is part of the same project, reacted differently:

> *In the beginning when the idea of Merging Knowledge with others from very different backgrounds was proposed, I thought they would find us—with the lived experiences of homelessness, drug addiction, HIV/AIDS, incarceration, and mental illness—frightening, different, and unapproachable. I knew that they represented people who had*

Ms. Julia Tripp.

achieved educational and financial success. I felt ready to keep my thoughts to myself until I felt I could trust that they would not think of me and my peers as inferior to them. I felt that I should leave "my fightin' activist self" at home. I came as just me. I let my humanness show; I came out from behind my defenses and experienced this collaboration as my real self.

We do come at issues of poverty somewhat differently. They may not have really known what happens to people that makes some struggle more than others. [. . .] But what they are seeing [is] that when we are included as thinkers—we think! [. . .] We're better able to create solutions that tap both sides of knowledge and create more informed decisions—together! We [. . .] have more in common with [them] than we thought.

If I had been a secretary at their company, or if I served them hamburgers behind a counter, I do not think my ability to see them as human beings equal to myself would have happened so quickly. I felt somehow superior because of my lived experience and thought that they probably "didn't have a clue," while knowing they probably thought the same thing. We all have "clues," just maybe not the final answers. Doing this [. . .] underscores why this collaborative approach should become the norm for decision-making. Our meetings are full of humor and insight!

Key principles of the Merging Knowledge approach

The name of the Merging Knowledge approach, originally chosen in French, was translated into English by Moraene Roberts, an activist in London. She felt strongly that the words should reflect what happens when two streams merge into a river: they can no longer be separated. Each stream is forever mixed with the other, and the river rushes forward more powerfully than before.

Ms. Moraene Roberts.

- **People living in poverty shape every step of the work:** They should have the chance to contribute their thoughts and analysis. Under no circumstances can other actors of knowledge replace them or speak in their name based on their intellectual ties or their proximity to people living in extreme poverty. No one may reinterpret what they think someone else "meant to say" from their own point of view. Instead, it is important to ask that person to restate their point in their own words. Each person's expression should be preserved in his or her own words without being paraphrased by others. Identifying areas of disagreement should be encouraged so that it is possible for each person to face the experiences and knowledge of others and to develop reciprocal understanding.
- **Sharing ownership of research:** All participants should consider themselves, and should be considered by others, as co-researchers actively formulating research problems and questions, analyzing the information collected, and ultimately elaborating collective knowledge. Each person's own rhythm of understanding and expression should be respected so that everyone can participate meaningfully and reach the end of what they want to say, with their words correctly understood.

- **Belonging to a working group composed of "peers":** Each participant should have the opportunity to work with others with similar life experiences so that one's personal experiences can be expanded upon, consolidated, and confronted. This enables knowledge to be produced that goes beyond one's own experience. Time for individual reflection should be preserved so that each co-researcher can develop his or her own thoughts before exchanging with others who have different experiences. To do this, it is necessary to encourage the development and explanation of one's own thoughts, as well as to formulate one's own questions.
- **Instilling trust, respecting an ethical framework, and being committed to change:** It is crucial to respect the confidentiality of spoken and written words, particularly those expressed by people who face many insecurities and challenges as a result of living in extreme poverty. All co-researchers must be able to trust that their words will not be manipulated or used against them. Similarly, the ethical framework for dialogue should include: active listening, taking time to understand and respect what others have to say, the willingness of each co-researcher to challenge her or his own reflections, and the conviction that all knowledge is a work in progress. The goal of this process is not simply to document situations of injustice, but to make a commitment to strive toward positive social change. It is this commitment that makes it possible to build mutual trust.

A Merging Knowledge partnership is ongoing between ATD Fourth World and the University of Massachusetts Center for Social Policy. Donna Haig Friedman, the center's director, writes:

> *The wisdom coming from living in persistent poverty is essential to effecting change in our communities. Too often, policy decisions are made with the best intentions but are based in purely academic or abstract concepts that lead to ineffective outcomes, largely because the decisions do not incorporate real-life knowledge from those who live and breathe poverty on a daily basis.*
>
> *Our Merging Knowledge process is a crucial endeavor toward poverty eradication in our communities because it bridges*

knowledge from individuals living in poverty to the knowledge of those who make the decisions: business leaders, thought leaders, and policymakers, thus creating a new, grounded, and functional knowledge. The process breaks stereotypes and stimulates new ways of thinking. The evolving dynamics of the Merging Knowledge process are eye-opening, inspirational, and highly engaging for participants, whose willingness to be honest—and therefore vulnerable—with one another creates trust. This trust allows participants to have sincere, truthful conversations about difficult topics and discuss the real issues that underlie them, discovering commonalities along the way. The Merging Knowledge process bridges a gap in our communities on a deeply personal level, which is a vital component of effecting large-scale change.

Dr. Donna Haig Friedman.

In France, our Merging Knowledge and Practices workshop runs reciprocal training sessions for professionals in various fields: medicine, social work, psychiatry, education, personal development, housing, psychology, and community development. In each session, trained activists and others of our members work with professionals in a single specific field to re-examine the framework of their approach, starting with the knowledge of people living in poverty. One of the fundamental conditions is that the activists and the professionals involved in a given session must not come from the same cities or districts. This way everyone can speak freely without the fear of later meeting in a professional setting where one might become dependent on the other. Another condition is that the exchanges always be focused on constructive change, avoiding confrontation.

Another Merging Knowledge-inspired project was our participatory research to evaluate the progress made on the UN's Millennium Development Goals. In order to make proposals for the post-2015 development

agenda, people in extreme poverty, academics, and practitioners carried out this research in Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Haiti, Madagascar, Mauritius, the Philippines, and elsewhere. It culminated in a seminar held at the United Nations in New York in June 2013.

The violence of poverty and the widening gaps in our societies shape reality; certain people grow up knowing not only that their opinion is unwanted but also that their parents before them were never once asked by others, "What do you think?" Approaches inspired by Merging Knowledge make it possible for these people to express their thinking, for others to learn to understand and exchange with them, and ultimately for our societies to be enriched by enhancing our collective wisdom with the voices that remained unheard in the past.

Our work is focused on taking steps for people of different backgrounds to recognize one another's dignity, to learn to think together, to develop collective knowledge, and to progress in co-responsibility for learning to work together, to live in communities together, and to face the world's challenges. This is a crucial step toward peace.

ATD Fourth World members in the Philippines merge knowledge in 2013 as part of our action-research project to evaluate the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

To learn more about the Merging of Knowledge and Practices, see "Working Together, Yes, but How?" at http://bit.ly/ATDMrgeKnwldge

To learn more about our Filipino members engaged in action-research to evaluate the MDGs, see "Families in Poverty: Key Partners in Development" at http://bit.ly/ATDPhil

2. Working together

Striving toward decent work: Collective approaches to excellence

Opportunities for participating in the world of work are initially founded on family and community bonds. Low-wage earners lose security during the course of their working lives because of the progressive effect of age and harsh conditions on their physical health. The struggle to survive means that children have to work from a very young age, as explained by Bolivian activist, Juan Carlos Baltazar:

Mr. Juan Carlos Baltazar.

I've been working since I was 6, helping my mother. We needed the money because there were eight of us, and I was the oldest. I used to sell cigarettes and chewing gum in bars. It was dangerous for me because I'd be out until 11 p.m. or midnight and the drunks would sometimes humiliate me. [. . .] If you don't have motivation to fight on, you might find yourself in a downward spiral, unable to get out. It can overcome you, but you've got to keep going.

In industrialized countries, jobs are increasingly outsourced, condemning more and more people to unemployment. One member of ATD Fourth World in France recalls, "I used to have big problems. When you don't have work, you get in trouble. With nothing to keep you busy, you're done for." A worker in Belgium says:

Recently there was a slowdown in the company I work for, and I was laid off for a month. I'm used to being busy. Having too much time on my hands threw me completely. Suddenly I couldn't manage to do much of anything. Weeks lost their beginning and their end. What was the point of a weekend? I would never have thought that I would feel that way so quickly. The insecurity, the fear for the future, having no idea if I'd be rehired, all that knocked me off balance. It must be horrible for people who feel useless. And there was something strange. In that situation, you hope that the company will get new contracts as quickly as possible so you're hired back. But there are so many competitors. So when a competing business goes belly up, it's good for the boss; it's good for me. It gives us all a new wind and a future. But we forget that for the other company's workers, the hell is just starting. The more you think about it, the worse it is. And when your own boss starts laying people off, you can end up competing with your best friend. Is it just every man for himself at a time like that?

Social inequality can make life harsher for everyone, even those whose incomes go up but who find themselves building more and more barriers to protect themselves, their families, and their goods. Similarly, educational inequality makes the world a poorer place, even for those who are highly educated but forever deprived of the hidden potential of the others. While inequality can impoverish society in general, collaboration and cooperative work and learning can enrich everyone.

For instance, it is increasingly clear that more innovative paths toward excellence, innovation, and progress can draw on the wisdom of groups. Collaborative learning that truly leaves no one behind can enable an average group of students to achieve extraordinary results.[21] Crowdsourcing has developed resources like Wikipedia—imperfect but self-correcting, multilingual, and continually updated in ways that no printed encyclopedia could ever hope to match. In *The Wisdom of Crowds*, James Surowiecki shows how the diversity of a crowd increases its knowledge so that it can make a more informed decision than any single member of the group could.

21. Bahrampour, Tara. "Calculus Students Made the Forbidding Familiar." (New York Times, August 23, 2000.)

Today more than ever, we need to diversify and increase our collective wisdom in order to cope with the many environmental, economic, and human challenges we face. And yet a billion people in the world never have the chance to contribute to the fount of human knowledge because they live in extreme poverty. In Africa this may mean having only a few years of schooling; in North America it may mean schooling that is continually interrupted by getting burned out of one home, evicted from another, and remaining the outsider who is bullied in each new neighborhood. Despite these obstacles, it is possible, through innovative projects, for people living in some of the most difficult situations of poverty to develop their own capacity for excellence.

In all countries, there is an urgent need to transform the way we produce goods or provide services and the way we work together. Taking up this challenge leads us toward peace. Driven by the creativity of people living in extreme poverty, we have been experimenting with a variety of approaches to working and learning together in a context that respects each person.

In the 1980s, this experimentation was carried out together with very disadvantaged young people, many of whom had dropped out of school. Some were scraping by with informal odd jobs while others were becoming chronically unemployed and feeling useless. Links of mutual trust were forged among these activists, allies, and volunteers of similar ages through "Learning Clubs" and through projects done with skilled professionals at the heart of the world of employment: artisans, engineers, construction workers, vocational educators, and others. This led to the projects "Courtyards of 100 Trades" in West Africa and "Houses of Trades" in Western Europe, places for people from entirely different worlds to share with one another their knowhow, skills, and knowledge. Young people without qualifications were able to get to know working professionals while gaining skills and training. These were places where all young people felt respected and free. Knowing that others had ambitious plans for them made it possible for young people to develop a positive self-image despite having been confronted with failure since childhood.

Those investing their time in this adventure alongside the young people began to rethink human activity and to wonder: What might society look like with a people-centered economy? Couldn't society be organized to benefit all people by beginning with these young people, their parents,

and an entire population humiliated by aid and dependence? How could life change for people eternally trying to avoid having to beg, people whose working conditions often destroy their health and could even cost them their lives? In 1994, to mark the International Year of Families, we held an international congress in New York where participants affirmed:

> *Human activity is what restores a person's honor and active role toward others. This is why we refuse to accept that ever again men and women be condemned to silence and uselessness. We will mobilize our energy to learn languages, to create possibilities for expression, and to share knowledge in the most isolated places. We want everyone to have access to all the modern means of learning, developing, and working. We want men and women without work or training never again to be considered as though they don't matter. We will act with them so they can develop their abilities, for themselves and their families, and can work toward building community.*

During this congress, a delegation of our members was received by then–UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali. He invited ATD Fourth World to prepare a contribution for the 1995 World Summit for Social Development that would soon be held in Copenhagen. The summit's goal was to formulate policies for "the conquest of poverty, the goal of full employment, and the fostering of social integration." Mr. Boutros-Ghali said, "In Copenhagen we need to affirm that without social development, there will be no economic development."

Throughout these years of initial experimentation, several other nonprofit organizations agreed to take on one of the actions we had initiated. Although some of them were able to maintain projects that remained faithful to people living in the most extreme situations of poverty and exclusion, others lacked the resources to do so because of either leadership changes or different funding choices. In some cases, it was a challenge for leaders to see past stereotypes and to develop an understanding of people in extreme poverty. Even in projects that did succeed in keeping the same priority, the challenge remained of how to develop and maintain a sense of engagement for all the participants. Even in a very diverse group it is possible for participants to believe in one another when this sense of engagement can be sustained.

Professionals sharing risks with the long-term unemployed

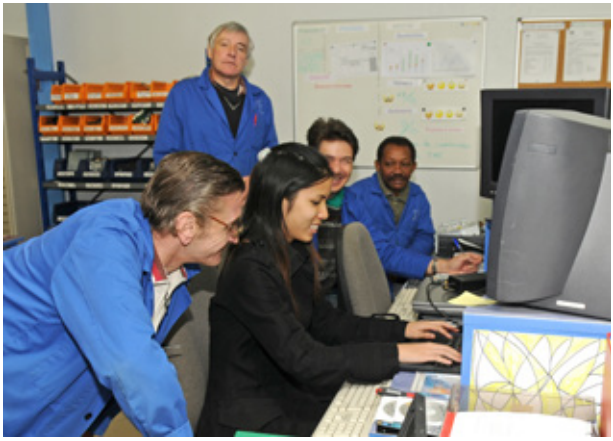
How do people without access to decent work understand the meaning and the cost of the ways they spend their time and invest their energy on behalf of others? We addressed this question in our contribution to the Copenhagen summit, "Rethinking Human Activity to Fight Extreme Poverty and Exclusion." In addition to hunting for ways to earn what money they can, the long-term unemployed are often unnoticed volunteers, inventing ways to reach out to neighbors in hard times. Understanding this is the starting point for progressing, not only on the question of decent work for all, but also on how to share knowledge, training, and culture. As our own understanding progressed, in 2002 we began a new experimentation in Noisy-le-Grand where Wresinski first founded ATD Fourth World. This project is a fair-trade business called "Working and Learning Together: Economic Solidarity Initiatives." (TAE)

TAE[22] hires chronically unemployed and untrained people to work alongside people who do have experience or qualifications. Together they develop a new approach to work and to relationships in the workplace so that each person has a place and feels comfortable. Their business refurbishes used computers, sends out teams for construction work, and provides office-cleaning services. In addition to ensuring that each worker is continually learning and is able to do the work well, all the workers come together regularly for the kinds of rewarding and team-building activities (such as celebrations with family members, or maintaining a shared garden) that are unusual for blue-collar workers.

David Régnier, an engineer by training, spent six years running TAE. He writes:

> *The professionals who made the choice to work here did so because they want to implement and evaluate our business plan together with women and men who have been marked by exclusion, or marginalized as workers since their youth. It's a great security for us that these professionals chose to share the risk of working in this*

22. TAE stands for the name in French: Travailler et Apprendre Ensemble. (http://bit.ly/ATDTAEEcoSolidaires)



Working and Learning Together, Noisy-le-Grand, France: an economic solidarity project founded in 2002.

way while our business tries to earn enough to succeed in today's economic context. [. . .]

We decided to work in such a way that no one person is alone in any responsibility. The roles are shared among everyone, and each of us rotates to be trained for different tasks and then to train others. [. . .] Our challenge in the coming years is to enhance our dialogue with the directors and employees of other businesses, encouraging them to think of their workplace as not only an economic entity, but also a place for building community and ending exclusion.

Chantal Caudron, one of the women working at TAE, says:

For someone like me who hadn't had much work before, I needed a supportive team, and I found it here. I had no idea before how to use a computer, but now I've learned to repair them. We work—and we also do theater or write poems. This makes me feel that we're just like other people.

Another adds:

I wouldn't want other families to go through what I did, being out of work for ten years. I don't have a diploma and it's really hard without one. What I like best here is the teamwork, it's friendly. People matter here, more than in a typical business. This gave me a chance to learn again how to work in today's society. I learned again to be a fighter,

to believe in myself. Since I started working here, I've opened up and now I have a real dialogue with my kids; I understand them. I can save my family. Two of my children are still in foster care, so I do have to keep fighting on a personal level, but now I'm able to talk about it in a better way.

Bringing people together in one project: The pedagogy of non-abandonment

In Tanzania, a member of ATD Fourth World decided to experiment in a different way. When Reuben Mtitu first left his village for the capital, he worked hard as a badly paid unskilled laborer, but he escaped this fate when he invented a lottery machine. Although this earned him money, he says, "I didn't think it was a good thing to make money off the backs of others," so he decided to return to his village, return to his family's profession of blacksmith, and establish a training center for young people with his brother's Kisangani Smith Group, where they learn their trade as blacksmiths by forging tools for local farmers.

Blacksmiths are sensitive to the destruction of the forest because they are big users of charcoal. For this reason, Reuben and his group started a reforestation project in 1998 with the aim of creating their own supply of wood. Six hundred and fifty acres of trees have been replanted to date, and some members of the group are cultivating different species of plants in a nursery, caring for a little stream, and changing its course in order to construct a natural irrigation system for the nursery. No experts or engineers have come to share their knowledge with the group. The members of the Kisangani Smith Group base their work on experience born of observation.

This work led them to think about bringing hydroelectricity to their blacksmith forge and eventually to three surrounding villages. Starting with a little waterfall, they created a water main to drive a turbine. Out of a forge set up to train young people, a community development project was born. For Reuben it's clear that every person in the village should be involved in this project and that each one of them will benefit from it. This dynamic rests on an essential foundation: the capacity to bring people together in one project and then draw on their technical creativity

Tanzania: Mr. Reuben Mtitu (left) and others from the Kisangani Smith Group with a nursery of trees they planted to create a sustainable supply of charcoal for their forge.

and local knowledge. Reuben reflects, "ATD Fourth World were the ones who gave me motivation and encouragement. They showed me that with solidarity and unity we can manage to make anything possible."

We initiated another kind of experimentation in Madagascar. A group of young people—some living at a garbage dump and others in a very disadvantaged district where, as activists, they had long run Street Libraries for children—made a commitment to help one another complete our computer training program. In 2007, we began in partnership with the Alcatel-Lucent multinational telecommunications company and a Malagasy internet provider, DTS-Moov (DTS). Alcatel provided free WiMAX equipment, and DTS provided free internet connections. One of the young people said, "We'd never seen a computer before. Touching one gave us the chills. We didn't know if it would blow up right in front of us if we touched the wrong thing."

The idea that none of them would be left behind—the pedagogy of non-abandonment—became a strong motivation, and they went out of

their way to work together, making sure that each of them understood every lesson before moving on, and visiting those who had missed a class to help them catch up. This approach enabled them to make such progress that, despite not having completed high school, they all did well during an internship with a company. Their supervisor said he considered their work on a par with college-educated computer technicians. Tolotra, one of the young people, says:

> *For our first internship in a big company, I was scared during the interview, afraid I wouldn't be able to answer their questions—but I did. During the internship, they made us welcome like their own employees. That made us feel brave. The difference between working at this company and the garbage dump is that here we meet people who know a lot, but who can also stay down to earth. We learn with them. Now they trust me with administrative papers. I want to tell other businesses to trust us more because there are other young people like me.*

This experimental project, which three groups of young people had completed by 2013, has been possible thanks to the commitment of everyone involved:

Madagascar: Young people who had been sorting garbage for recycling—often at night when the trucks arrive—supported one another to succeed in our computer training program.

- Young people who, before coming to class each day, visited others to encourage them to come along or to share what they were learning with anyone who had not yet mastered those skills.
- The organizing team, whose main goal was ensuring that young people weren't prevented from participating because of the challenges of their daily lives: fatigue from working multiple jobs, frequent accidents at the garbage dump, an illness, or a birth in their family. Whenever anyone's attendance was interrupted, the team followed that person especially closely to understand the circumstances and offer support.
- Both the employers and the employees in companies that hosted internships for these young people, such as the Telma Group phone company, took the risk of rethinking some of their ways of working in order to make sure these young people could find a place in the company and gain in self-confidence.

This pedagogy of non-abandonment must remain rooted in the realities of the young people and their families, as well as in the realities of the workplace. When it is continually evaluated and adapted with people in poverty and with employers, it can transform reality, leading to

Madagascar: in another ATD Fourth World project, members of a fair-trade cooperative make metal products, such as this charcoal stove.

innovation and developing technical creativity. When the contract for this partnership was first signed by DTS, its CEO, Patrick Pisal Hamida, said, "To bridge the gap between the scarcity of technical resources and integration into the internet world is the challenge we have taken up. Access to the world of communications for the most deprived is a priority and an integral part of the DTS enterprise culture. This action will strengthen links with the local population and will extend our educational role."

The former president of the European Investment Bank, Philippe Maystadt, agrees with the importance of finding new ways to end long-term unemployment and create a new kind of growth:

> *You say, "The poorest twenty percent of the population should be the touchstone to judge the effectiveness of the anti-poverty policy." I think it's correct to point that out, because there is what I call the cherry-picking risk. This means taking measures that will enable the population at risk of becoming poor to escape it. A striking example was in a recent report about the implementation of Europe's 2020 anti-poverty strategy. An overall goal was set, with a percentage goal for each country. It's clear that some governments are trying to meet their goal by trying to get the most recently unemployed people back to work, and thus the risk is forgetting about the long-term unemployed and those who are no longer even entitled to unemployment benefits. That's the cherry-picking risk. [. . .]*
>
> *Government authorities talk a lot about smart growth, and emphasize strategies of training, research, and innovation. That's good. Sometimes they also talk about sustainable growth, a radically different growth that is more sparing of raw materials and energy. That implies a fundamental change in our ways of producing and consuming. But what is rarely spoken of, and often forgotten, is inclusive growth. That means we cannot leave certain groups or regions behind. All three of those elements have to be taken into account together. Otherwise, things don't hold together.*

Louis Gallois, former CEO of the European Aeronautic Defense and Space Company N.V., and now the independent administrator of PSA Peugeot Citroën, says that the question of extreme poverty and employment remains to be more deeply explored. "The business world can't wash its hands of the long-term unemployed. But we need to understand better

how to move forward creatively, in both the north and the south." He plans to initiate a circle of critical thought together with ATD Fourth World so that people living in poverty, business leaders, and economists can address this question.

For the young people, the professional setting was a world apart. Despite having acquired training and certification, they still had many fears. Employers were also afraid of the long-term investment required. Some of their other employees had stigmatizing attitudes. All parties needed to get to know each other gradually during the internships and at events such as the World Day for Overcoming Poverty. Companies gave their employees time to accompany the young people, train them, and guide them in their search for work through regular mentoring.

The process of mentoring had a deep effect on many mentors, who had never before been in contact with people in poverty. For a period of six to twelve months, they became close partners with them, each sharing their knowledge. Not only were the lives of the young people changed, but also those of the mentors, whose previous fears and prejudices faded away and whose sense of social responsibility was in many cases awakened by the young people. Through their mentors, many young people found work and also gained social and life skills that greatly increased their capacity to continue finding work.

To learn more about this youth training project with its pedagogy of non-abandonment, see "New Technologies for All in Madagascar" at http://bit.ly/ATDMada

Most of the young people had not even finished their primary school education. Through a holistic, student-centered pedagogy of non-abandonment and their own passion for computers, after three years they became competent in many areas of computing such as data entry, office applications, desktop publishing, and maintenance. Internships enabled businesses to recognize the students' abilities. Despite the young people's weak academic credentials, this program's positive reputation led potential future employers to advise them on how to hone specific skills during the job application process.

One young person hired as a data-entry operator discovered that all her colleagues had finished their schooling. She was the only one who

had only a primary education. She was very pleased to discover that she was as competent as they were and that they all helped her to get used to the work. Now she is the fastest in her company and receives bonuses every month. The success of this project with young people in some of the harshest situations of poverty has led to the creation of a network of NGOs using the same pedagogy and process of gradual integration of young people into the workplace in the fields of plumbing and catering.

Business leaders and professionals dared not only to get involved in these projects, but to risk their own economic success on the challenge of moving forward with everyone. None of us were ever educated in how to work in this way. As the young people in Madagascar showed, when we do learn to include everyone, we begin on an innovative path toward excellence, one that can draw not on competition, but on the wisdom of groups. The creativity of collaborative work and ongoing learning that truly leaves no one behind can enable humanity as a whole to achieve extraordinary results. Instead of competing to exploit the planet's abused resources, we owe it to ourselves to enable every one of the "bottom billion" people to contribute to our collective knowledge, in the hope that one day the human race as a whole will achieve excellence as we find new ways to produce goods, provide services, and live in peace together.

3. Creating art and music together

The act of creation and its impact on people: Sharing the means for cultural expression

Everyone is called to create, because everyone is called to create his own life. We must know who we are in the realm of being, and we must know what we will do in life. This is an act of creation that belongs to each person. Every domain has room for imagination and creativity; those aren't reserved for art and cultural projects. When you make something, no matter how small, there's a thought behind it. It might be an idea, or an intuition, or a desire. This is why I consider the practices of artists on the same level as any other kind of expression (whether spoken or written) and as any competence that responds to a need and allows the human conscience to evolve. I think creation is an innate need, a kind of instinctive refusal of

chaos, ugliness, and mediocrity. Creation contributes to a person's equilibrium and, by extension, that of society.

— Jeanpierre Beyeler, Volunteer Corps member and visual artist

While creative expression has long been a crucial way for people to resist and denounce violence and oppression, it is not a priority for international development work. Following natural disasters, the aid shipped in is water, food, and medical supplies. There might be some school kits as well. But for the most part, people say, "Anything else can wait until later; it is less important." For people living in extreme poverty, however, "later" does not come—the crisis is long term. The need to create in the face of chaos is universal. It's what our members in Haiti did following the 2010 earthquake. When no more lives could be saved in the rubble, they gathered in the courtyard of ATD Fourth World and together created a mosaic showing one of their country's famous multicolored tap-tap buses.

Despite the strong need to create, people enduring the violence of extreme poverty have the least access to paintbrushes, to music lessons, to creative writing. We believe that it is worth investing heart and soul in musical and artistic creativity because that creativity can bring about transformations. That creativity can liberate each one of us, making it possible to see ourselves in a new way. That creativity can level the playing field, enabling people with very different levels of formal education to communicate. And that creativity can change the way that society looks at people living in poverty by showing us that because we are all part of a common humanity, we can live together differently.

Street Libraries always include a time of creativity, like here in the Philippines.

Striving toward peace requires the creative expression of people in extreme poverty and artists, as well as collective art to express that we belong to a single human race.

Creative projects have included Street Libraries and Story Gardens, where children read books and do crafts while sitting on the ground in fields or on sidewalks, alongside the banks of creeks or at garbage dumps. With books and art materials, musical instruments, cameras, or computers, these activities may take place on an inner-city sidewalk in New Orleans, in a field in the mountains of rural Peru, under a bridge in Manila, or in a House of Friendship in La Paz, Bolivia. A concert pianist may perform outdoors in a run-down housing project, or a painter may bring an easel to depict a line of families waiting to visit prisoners.

At a Story Garden in Gallup, New Mexico (USA), parents can stop to read and discuss illustrated stories with their children, and gather around to browse through large photographic books that both highlight the local area and open up the world beyond. Children can roll giant dice to answer questions about what they've read, and engage in craft activities that further exercise their imaginations and language skills. Karen Stornelli, a volunteer who runs this action, writes:

> *A man, looking worn out and tired, approaches me carrying a small child on his shoulders. He glances at the books on the mats next to me and asks for a place to sit. As he holds his child in his lap, I hand him a board book for toddlers. For several minutes he silently points to an image on the page. The toddler imitates him and points at the same image, both looking attentively. Page after page, they read the book this way. A true interaction without words, and a great reminder that communication can be approached in many ways.*
>
> *Choosing the weekly Gallup flea market as the location of the Story Garden was not a difficult choice for us. For many area residents, the Gallup flea market is the main—and often only—social event of the week. Three hundred vendors come from around the county—from the Navajo Nation, the Zuni Pueblo, and beyond—all of which are rural, small, and sometimes remote communities. Many people have no neighbors within walking distance. They come to the market to buy or sell jewelry, bread, auto parts, pottery, children's toys, farmers' produce, traditional medicines and products, and much more. They have lunch, catch up with*

New Mexico, USA: The Story Garden at the weekly Gallup flea market is a family time that cultivates literacy skills and imagination.

family and friends, and visit the market, sometimes for hours every Saturday. They often do this as a family, with children of all ages alongside parents and grandparents.

It is an ideal setting for an inter-generational project aiming to reach families who have little access to libraries, preschool programs, and other social and educational activities. So, while books are the tools of the trade at the Story Garden, discussing, imagining, expressing, and interacting are what bring the Story Garden to life, ultimately supporting parents in building a foundation for improved language development for the area's children.

Charo Carrasco Cuba is also a volunteer who runs the Story Garden, which has reached 520 children. Together, Karen and Charo write:

We've had the chance to start building a relationship with Tonya, 8 years old, Kyle, 12, and their siblings, parents, aunts, and

grandmother, since the family sells Navajo jewelry and traditional fry bread weekly at the Gallup flea market. Tonya loves horses, like a lot of other girls. Kyle loves to draw. Normal kid stuff. But their lives haven't always made it easy for them to do what they love and for us to know how to connect with them. They have been regular participants at the Story Garden for over a year. Their family, like many others, has experienced lots of daily struggles. Close family members are going through incarceration, homelessness, and separation from loved ones, and the children are dealing with these challenges too.

In the Story Garden, Tonya often started activities and books, but had a hard time finishing them. She lost interest quickly and jumped to something new, often leaving before completing anything. She clearly had trouble making progress in her reading. Tonya still tends to push the limits on certain days and is often sullen when she arrives. These are often the same days when she shares a difficult situation the family is going through. Over the past few weeks, we have invited Tonya to take a special role in helping us out. She helps with the craft activity, and has enjoyed showing books to younger children. She has thrived in this role, which has helped her approach stories and crafts with more patience and less frustration. We see the Story Garden starting to be a moment of peace and learning for her.

Her older brother, Kyle, spent his first couple weeks at the Story Garden being disruptive and ignoring us—until the day he showed his love for drawing! He asked for paper and a pencil. A few minutes later, we were amazed to discover an elaborate rose, well shaded and colored. He told us that he had learned by observing his uncle draw. He was visibly proud of his work. The next week we began bringing books that help kids learn to draw, always inviting Kyle to try his hand at it. His behavior changed for good that day. Now he's more open, participative, and excited about the creative activities we propose. The strength of the Story Garden lies in the family-oriented approach. Being aware of and sensitive to the struggles a family goes through helps us to adapt weekly to the particular needs of the child, and to take advantage of each opportunity to offer Tonya and Kyle a space to develop their skills—and, most important, to be kids.

Street Libraries in Asia and South America.

Street Library in Europe.

The Story Garden, Street Libraries, and Festivals of Shared Learning nurture children's desire to learn and develop their creativity. We also run projects with teenagers and adults—including creative writing workshops, painting workshops, and choirs—where everyone has the chance to discover that they have something unique to share with others. The goal of these projects is to share culture, art, beauty, and creativity for the development of each person. Because art has the capacity to transform the way people see themselves and one another, a movement to end poverty needs collective artwork and the creativity of artists to express a common humanity.

In 2009, forty of our members from five different countries joined local residents in the Appalachian Mountains of southwest Virginia, where we have a project called the Learning Co-op. This was the venue for a week-long seminar, "Free to Be Together to Create to Be Free," a festival of creativity with time for quilt-making, bluegrass jam sessions, tin-can puppet-making, collages, weaving, and improvisation of every kind.

Participants co-authored a poem:

I never dreamed I had a talent.
Until I came up on the Mountain.
I saw many people
from different countries.
They had traveled near and far.
Across the ocean, through valleys,
rivers and the countryside.
There I found my myriad of talents.
Each superior to me.
Space to expand. Space to be.
- BUT -
Open minds. Open hearts.
Learn to trust.
Trust ourselves. Trust others.
Your note, your color is awaited.
By the symphony of the world

Our hope is to make it possible for people who have never felt welcomed to feel comfortable enough with themselves and with others to

Quilting at the ATD Fourth World Learning Co-op in Appalachia.

dare to imagine and create. This can be challenging. Jeanpierre Beyeler continues:

> *When we start an artistic workshop, a person is faced with a challenge from the gestures, voices, or looks of others. This person may suddenly feel directly and intimately confronted with things familiar from childhood. Emotions can surge and block creativity: the fear of being judged, the anxiety of failing. "I'll never manage it, I don't know how." The person is faced again with his vision of himself, which may be: "I'm nothing, I'll never make it." [. . .]*
>
> *The opposite can happen as well. I've seen people relax their bodies, compose their gestures, and release their hands. The beauty of those moments is dazzling and fleeting. Often without words, those moments can become touchstones in the daily chaos. [. . .] The greater the external difficulties in our society are, the more vital it is to offer tools that reinforce the inner potential of each person. This nourishes an understanding of existence, of the self within society, so that we don't gulp down whatever others say and can resist the external events that are beyond us.*

At an art and creativity seminar, painting and poetry were key elements: "Trust ourselves. Trust others. Your note, your color is awaited."

Essay: "Dreaming Permit"

The following essay was written by Jacqueline Page, a Fourth World Volunteer Corps member and a visual artist. Since the 1990s, she has been part of our teams in Thailand, Haiti, the Central African Republic, and elsewhere. This essay is based mainly on three years from 2010 to 2013 that she spent "living, understanding, and endeavoring" in the community of Noisy-le-Grand (France). When a demolition permit was posted on the walls of the housing project there, she designed and posted a "Dreaming Permit" alongside it.

It's already dark out; I'm on my way home. A 16-year-old in a hoodie—someone I've seen before; he's often hanging out with others in the evening near this door—approaches me for the first time, tapping me on the shoulder, "Can I ask you something?" Rummaging through his pockets, he gets out a threadbare wallet and opens it to take out a key chain with a tiny frame. "This is my father. Be careful, this is the only photo. Could you paint a big portrait of it? He's dying." The small ID photo is already damaged. The boy has to trust a grown-up to paint the portrait. But it will get painted. How could it be otherwise? Life is too hard for the kids who live in such hard conditions that—even in 21st century industrialized France where images are overabundant and commodified—a family can have no pictures of Dad. His father died three days later. The portrait was painted—along with one of his mother, who had died three years earlier and whose one photo had been taken during a Fourth World People's University.

A foundation for a joyous and constructive future

In the 1980s in a Bangkok slum, a fire unleashed an irrevocable tragedy. Various local nonprofit groups got together to offer help to the newly homeless families. Their survival was no longer in danger. But being alive also means feeling emotions, treasuring souvenirs, having a full heart. So the fathers and mothers there asked my teammate

Haruko and me for photographs: copies of photos lost in the fire, pictures of their children on happy days. In the mud under emergency tents, planning personalized albums for each family, there was laughter and joy. A joyful heart is one at peace, the heart of a person who can look toward the future.

Back in Noisy-le-Grand, a few days after the father's death, his younger son, age 7, asked whether he could paint one of the walls of the housing project. His eyes lively and sparkling, he said, "I'll paint an airplane with the whole family! The plane's gonna blow up, but the hero will save everyone!" So we let him paint his idea. The brightly colored plane, in a radiant sky, flies toward a somber wall, above which the portraits of both his parents are smiling. The hero was not painted, but in [one] photo, the boy hiding his eyes certainly reflects him. As he and his brothers grow up in this housing project with its joys and

"I'll paint an airplane with the whole family!
The plane's gonna blow up, but the hero will save everyone!"

troubles, I hope that having the pain of his loss recognized and distilled this way will lay the foundation for a happy and constructive future.

One moment of happiness—a chance for everyone

When I lived in the Central African Republic, together with a local painter, Blandine Feimonazoui, and the children from the neighborhood, we all painted the walls of a health clinic in a charity home. We covered the dismal green walls with multicolored poems. Happy with our accomplishment, still laughing and shouting with excitement, we were tidying up our materials as best we could. Suddenly, there was silence. One of the patients, a girl of about 8 looking shaky and fragile, stretched out her finger to the wet shapes and colors. Under her light but surprisingly firm touch, and her starry eyes, in an instant the wall became a work of art. Then the girl returned to the infirmary where other ill children were afraid and crying. Thank you, little girl, for having made time stop, for a moment of suspended peace.

How can you grow up in conditions of such insidious violence?

I came to live in the Noisy-le-Grand housing project in 2010 so that the building I lived in would not be immediately walled up when other people moved out. The first thing I noticed was the surreal pink color that the buildings were painted. Then the garbage bins. Then the children. Later a sign was screwed to the eaves of the building: "Demolition permit." So it wasn't surprising when a child wondered, "Will it be knocked down with me and my family still inside?" But what can we do for our children? How can they grow up in this climate of violence?

In Belgium, ATD Fourth World runs a "House of Knowledge" where Christian loved to come to paint, talk, and practice theater exercises. It was on stage that he was brave enough to say that when he and his wife were both ill, their son was put in a foster-care institution. Unhappy, the boy repeatedly ran away to visit his parents. So the

Noisy-le-Grand, 2012:
A young resident with her painting.

judge assigned the boy to a more distant institution—where he committed suicide. Christian's wife died as well. Now Christian is upset that the city is about to put a locked gate around an abandoned house next door. When he insists that it should remain a place where children have free rein to play, it would be easy to think him hopelessly naive about the rule of law—and yet, aren't children and their capacity for wonder a springboard for everyone's future? In his generous soul, scarred by tragedy, Christian knows this ancient wisdom that no law should overrule.

The Noisy-le-Grand housing project is slated for demolition. From now on, whenever residents move out, more windows and doors are walled up; it's a kaleidoscope of crooked cinder blocks, gray or painted in Barbie pink, and the brown or gray steel-clad doors. I've been living here for three years now. This is where I chose to live and to paint, in a housing project that was first scheduled for this destruction more than fifteen years ago. I was sure that here we could bear witness to miscarriages of justice, and to the bravery of the residents in their daily struggles. Bearing witness is a political act.

One afternoon, the doorbell rang: their eyes black and laughing, they were high and mighty three-and-a-half-year-olds asking to paint. The way forward opened up. I had no more time to plan designs. Since that day, I've been caught up by the children continually ringing the doorbell, by running workshops with them outdoors and indoors, morning, noon, and night, our only limits being their desires and my strength. The father of one of them began sketching and painting too. He set up a workshop in a tiny storage space adjoining his home. We organized an exhibit of his work.

With other adults and children, we still paint the walls and the bricked-over windows. One of the mothers asked me to help her decorate her apartment by painting friezes of flowers; another chose to paint festival scenes. Several of the parents requested portraits of their children.

In a housing complex set for demolition,
"high and mighty three-and-a-half-year-olds" wanted to paint.

I attend birthday parties, celebrations, and impromptu concerts of great rhythmic talent. So when, in October 2012, we held an exhibit at the nearby Chelles Cultural Center, "The Beauties of the Ghetto," it showed nothing of the violence, injustice, and all the harsh realities that repeat themselves in the residents' lives, sometimes tragically. Instead, the exhibit was a hymn to jubilation and aspiration, to generosity and creativity. It showed that wonder can be the foundation for change.

Painting doesn't stop life's hardships

One little girl comes regularly to ask for milk, yogurt, sugar, or other food or small items. The other day when she knocked, she said, "I came because there's trouble at home." So this time, I got out the modeling clay. Other children joined us; then the girl's mother. All of us had fun. This girl and her family say:

> *"I'm 7 years old. I've known Jacqueline since she first arrived. I painted. I made pictures for everyone in the projects, even the Romanians or the English who might come here. I made pictures on walls and on wooden boards, tiny pictures, and pictures that are bigger than me. I put Strawberry Shortcake on my house; that's the prettiest picture. Léa, my neighbor, painted Tigger, and my sister did Hello Kitty.*
>
> *I moved into this building, but it was better before, when we lived in a house, because we could go outside and do what we wanted to and have a cat and kittens. Now when I look out my window, I can see a painted dolphin. I saw hearts. I see garbage dumpsters too and I want to paint them to see more colors. There's one real tree with pretty flowers on it, not a painting, it's real. And there's Hello Kitty, with an umbrella, a beach ball, and the ocean."*
>
> *"I'm 5 years old. I paint. I always paint with Jacqueline, and I drink herbal tea, and I eat toast. I don't like going to Jacqueline's house because when I have no socks on, she doesn't want me to take off my shoes, but I do like painting in her house anyway. I go there a lot.*

Old music plays there and sometimes I dance. There's my cat and the kittens. There's stars and hearts. There's books in the bathroom. There's lots of books in the stairway. And I like when there's games at Jacqueline's house. She's strict, but I like her. I made fish and a cat mask. I painted on the wall of my house."

A family prepares to render more colorful
the bricked-over windows facing their apartment.

"I'm their mother. When you see the paintings, you can tell it's the end of 116 [that's what we call the neighborhood]. Frankly, the sooner we leave, the better. But leaving is crap too, because this is where I got a chance to start over, where I could have an apartment after we were homeless. It's a shame 116 is being knocked down, because everyone is leaving and who knows if we'll manage to stay in touch with everyone. There was shouting, but it was still a good atmosphere.

The paintings are pretty to look at. They're nice, and frankly, we're lucky to have had this. It passed the time, the children had more to do, and it's pleasant to look at—a lot nicer than gray bricks! From our window, we can see the dolphin. I really like the dolphin. When I see the bulldozers coming, I'll go take it down to save it. With the paintings, you know the children were here. The paintings are

the new symbol of 116. It's better than the alternative. Plus, everyone joined in, grown-ups and kids together.

Usually not everyone does get involved, even for a demolition. I held out for a while. I've seen plenty of demolitions, but this is the first time I saw anything like this for a demolition. Usually, you're just staring at bricked-over walls."

"If we hadn't painted, the neighborhood would have been dead for us, our neighbors, and all the residents."

What if respect matters more than how you live?

Yesterday Rodrigue wasn't doing well at all. He was gathering wood and wanted to "burn everything down!" The neighbors stopped him in time. To be on the safe side, they decided to burn down together all the wooden partitions just outside their row houses, the ones they had

set up as well as they could to give each tiny yard some kind of privacy. Rodrigue is a dynamic man, the head of a family. He had just visited the temporary housing he is being told to move to when his home is demolished, and he realized the extent of the barely-hidden extreme poverty in which he would have to continue living. So Rodrigue had decided to do something to make others give him some respect.

A little while after the fires, the landlord had the area cleaned, especially the row houses that had already been bricked over. But in haste and error, some of the still-occupied yards—now without the wooden partitions—were emptied as well. Card tables and lawn chairs, awnings and toys, were all carted off to the dump. Rodrigue's driving force—his pride and determination to improve life for his family—had turned against him. He felt disrespected once again because of the mistake made by laborers in their haste to follow the landlord's orders without hesitation.

Now the neighborhood is almost empty of residents. The ones still living in these row houses seem to me the most dynamic, those who

Their homes slated for demolition, Noisy-le-Grand residents painted murals in 2012.

"We can live without dough, but we can't live without freedom."

dared to refuse other housing. Did they choose well? These same families say that painting the walls is just hiding misery, and it's true. Some think that the colors changed the nature of the community. So for a while, we all stopped painting. I live here, you live here, we live here. There's no point in being glad that a TV crew came to film the new face of the housing project, or that a local lady with her cane and lapdog came to visit a street she had never before looked twice at. The point is first of all to live together as a community, and then to take part in a common struggle for society to be fair. The point is changing how we look at one another, how we conceive of the world. The point is being able to believe in the future. Searching together for peace—but not at any price.

When Momo comes to show me his pictures and poems, asking if I agree with such-and-such a sentence, I talk to him about freedom

and the responsibility for our freedom. Yes, Momo, your freedom is to write about what's wrong; just as my freedom is to believe in reconciliation. So when you write on the wall of the building, "We can live without dough, but we can't live without freedom," it's not my responsibility to give you my agreement. But it is possible for me to quickly paint some stalks of wheat, a grain I would never have thought to paint without the reality of your writing.

A cheerful tale to tell

I don't know whether the paintings in this community are already traces of art. What I do know is that they would not be here without me. And yet they were not imported from outside; they grew, little by little, along with life here, its hopes and hardships, clashes of personalities, apprehension about the future.

Some people are happy about the paintings. Others will use them to express their suffering. And yet, no one has taken a marker or paint or tar to destroy them. It's impossible—it would be like destroying one's own child. Even Rodrigue refused the paintbrush I offered him to erase the red letters announcing, "Here, an old man liked to look out," because the old man had died just one week after having been forced to move out.

"Here, an old man liked to look out."

Because hope is alive

I don't know whether these paintings are traces of peace. What I do know is that they are part of a search for how to live together as a community, a search that is completely beyond us. I dare to hope they are a cheerful story to tell, one that shows what is possible. And when a child snuggles in his father's strong arms, saying, "You're a star, Dad," because he just painted the front of the house, then hope is not just possible; it's alive, and there to be seen.

About Volumes 2 and 3

You may also be interested in the following volumes of *Artisans of Peace Overcoming Poverty*.

Volume 2
Defending Human Rights

- **With the United Nations:** In a low-income neighborhood of Guatemala City, where many people lock themselves indoors in fear, some residents have the courage to come outside to prevent young people from hurting one another. In Thailand, Peru, and around the world, our members have advocated for the indivisibility of all human rights. This work in different communities, followed by extensive collaboration with experts, led the United Nations to adopt, in 2012, the *Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights*, co-authored by people living in poverty.
- **Poverty-Based Discrimination:** Implementing these Principles means tackling prejudice and discrimination against people living in poverty. In 2013–14, our members in France challenged stereotypes in public opinion and engaged in dialogue with policymakers, leading to an expansion of existing antidiscrimination law to include "victimizing inhabitants of disadvantaged neighborhoods, particularly as linked to a place of residence and to a person's real or imagined origins."
- **Horizontal Governance:** Within ATD Fourth World, we make decisions based on interdependence and cooperation within a common ethical framework. This is how we share responsibility for choosing common ambitions. It is also how we evaluate commitments like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), set by the United Nations in 2000 to eradicate extreme poverty.

Were these promises kept or not? How did people confronted with the most extreme poverty gain in freedom, responsibility, and solidarity? With the participation of two thousand people in more than twenty countries, we evaluated the impact of these worldwide goals.

- **Preventing Burn-Out:** We must all sustain our collective will to continue our journey together. For people who were born into extreme poverty, as for people who choose to join them, it is vital to build links of solidarity that make it possible to reach out to others.

Volume 3
Understanding the Violence of Poverty

- **Syrian Refugees Made Welcome in Lebanon:** As refugees flood into a beleaguered low-income neighborhood, residents see that the newcomers are afraid to trust anyone. Parents and young people whose own lives are difficult nevertheless find time to reach out and build a new community that finds strength in its diversity.
- **Understanding and Reclaiming the Past:** History was written by the powerful, leaving mostly unwritten the stories of countless people forced into exile or homelessness. In the Philippines and in the United States, recording and understanding the courage and hopes of homeless families enable us to reclaim our collective history. In Switzerland, the experience of families in poverty who were subjected to unilateral decisions that removed their children from their care prompted the government in 2013 to revisit its own past and to acknowledge its responsibility.
- **The Violence of Poverty and the Search for Peace:** People living in poverty are feared as a source of violence, banished from public spaces, and kept at bay by gated communities. Few see their efforts to reach out to one another, to build solidarity, and to search for peace. Our participatory research with people who know firsthand what it means to be victimized by stereotypes led us to a new understanding of the violence of poverty, of the chal-

lenge to break the silence about this violence, and of the choices people make to work for peace.

- **Courage Amidst Conflict in the Central African Republic:** During the conflict that started in 2013, our members took great risks to support their most vulnerable neighbors and to continue organizing Street Libraries with children. In this landlocked country with limited communications infrastructure, people's thirst for training and for learning about the world is striking. Since the 1980s, over decades of instability, we have had a Volunteer Corps team there bearing witness to the strength and creativity of Central Africans.

ATD FOURTH WORLD

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ALL TOGETHER IN DIGNITY

"When I was president of Senegal, on the occasion of the first commemoration honoring the victims of extreme poverty, I was struck by the nobility and the devotion of ATD Fourth World, [...and its] message of hope and of faith in human dignity for all of us." —**Abdou Diouf**, *President of Senegal, 1981–2000*

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"ATD Fourth World's [...] approach includes the concepts of recognizing the words and the know-how of the excluded, and removing victims' guilt by involving them in the re-appropriation of their fundamental rights." —**Geneviève Garrigos,** *President, Amnesty International France*

Artisans of Peace Overcoming Poverty introduces partners in peace-building whose efforts have too often remained unrecognized. People committed to solidarity in Haiti, Madagascar, the United States, Guatemala, and elsewhere help us to understand their efforts, encouraging all those around the world who strive to overcome the injustice of poverty. Rooted in participatory research conducted by ATD Fourth World on the violence of extreme poverty, this book uncovers just how much people living in poverty do to search for peace, go beyond violence, and build a sense of community.

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