



***Taking seriously the commitment to "leave no one behind"  
in the SDGs and the fight against climate disruption***

We welcome the efforts of the international community to set a new agenda for the development of humanity and our planet. This unprecedented effort will have a tremendous impact on the lives of millions. The commitment to “leave no one behind” has been rightly emphasized in the documents regarding Sustainable Development Goals and Financing for Development. Yet, we feel that this commitment has been repeated without a clear understanding of all the transformative shifts it demands in mindsets, behavior, national policy choices, and global governance. The principle loses its meaning unless it is paired with a commitment to foster participation and to address inequalities, discrimination, and social exclusion.

The poorest communities are exposed to two forms of violence This paper outlines both forms: the violence of their life circumstances facing exclusion, discrimination, and a high vulnerability to climate disruption; and the violence of unintended consequences from development policies or projects to mitigate climate change. When these projects are designed and implemented without the participation of people in poverty, the effects can work against them. In conclusion, this paper offers some recommendations for the post-2015 agenda that would foster climate justice.<sup>1</sup>

**1. ADDRESSING THE VIOLENCE THAT PEOPLE LIVING IN EXTREME POVERTY ENDURE**

**a) Reaching the poorest: an old promise still unmet**

In 2000, world leaders promised in the Millennium Declaration to “spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty.” Yet, the achievements of the MDGs have not benefited all people equally. In his 2011 evaluation of the Millennium Development Goals, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon stated, “The poorest of the poor have been left behind.”<sup>2</sup> In May 2013, a group of UN Human Rights Council independent experts stated: “One of the weaknesses of the MDG framework has been its blindness to the issue of inequality and to the most marginalized members of societies. Its focus on aggregate figures and overall

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1 Further post-2015 recommendations can be found in ATD Fourth World's report: “*Challenge 2015: Towards Sustainable Development that Leaves No One Behind*,” Chapter VII. <http://atd-fourthworld.org/challenge-2015/>

2 Ban Ki-moon, addressing the UN Economic and Social Council in Geneva, 7 July 2011.

progress failed to account for growing social and economic disparities and incentivized States to prioritize aggregate progress and the ‘low-hanging fruit’ rather than giving special attention to the most vulnerable groups.”<sup>3</sup>

A former head of multilateral and bilateral development institutions considers this blindness to extreme poverty “willful” and points out several causes.<sup>4</sup> The first one is cultural: most bilateral and multilateral agencies are accustomed to defining their goals and desired impact in terms of averages. The statistics of large-scale projects may therefore show an overall reduction of poverty even when the poorest people have sunk still further into impoverishment. Another reason for that voluntary blindness is that taking the poorest into account is a complex goal and one rarely made explicit. Performance incentives are frequently those used in banking: staff are rewarded for making big loans, quick disbursement, fast results, and high visibility. This diverts resources from the small, local civil society organizations that have the best expertise for ensuring genuine participation by people in poverty. Organizing valid social impact assessments would require time, money, and specialized professionals who are able to take the most excluded people into account and enter into dialogue with them.

In fact, staff in public development institutions are not often given the right incentives for addressing extreme poverty. In order to address the voluntary and involuntary blindness to extreme poverty, experienced individuals (professionals, NGO representatives or local residents) could be appointed by project directors in every development project, to ensure participation on the ground by building links and trust with people living in poverty, and conveying their expectations to project leaders and funders.

#### **b) Addressing the stigmatization and discrimination of people trapped in extreme poverty**

While extreme poverty is often described solely in terms of various material deprivations, it is also the cause of denying people's human rights and dignity. For example, for many years now stigmatization and discrimination have been used against indigenous minorities in the Americas, the Roma peoples in Europe, outcasts in Asia, and descendants of slaves in Africa and the Americas. This is sometimes compounded by social programs, which are sometimes run in ways that dehumanize people in poverty, and that may even become programs to drive them away. It is well documented that throughout history, States have supported programs directed against people in poverty through enforced sterilization, deportation, and forcible removals of children from their parents because of their poverty. In addition, living in poverty makes children and adults particularly vulnerable to all kinds of abuse and exploitation. In recent years, several heads of State have apologized for the sheer barbarity of these policies and for the

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3 Statement by 17 Special Procedures mandate-holders of the Human Rights Council on the Post-2015 development agenda, 21 May 2013, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13341&>

4 Jean-Michel Séverino—member of the High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, former Vice President of the World Bank and former Director General of the French Agency for Development—as cited in “*Challenge 2015*,” pages 91-92.

voluntary blindness and silence that prevailed in their countries.<sup>5</sup>

A Peruvian mother who took part in ATD Fourth World's *Challenge 2015* research stated: “The worst thing about living in extreme poverty is the contempt: that they treat you like you are worthless; they look at you with disgust and fear; and they even treat you like an enemy. We and our children experience this every day, and it hurts us, humiliates us and makes us live in fear and shame.”

As stated in the Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights,<sup>6</sup> States and international institutions must take measures to ensure equal protection under the law of people living in extreme poverty. Accordingly, laws and regulations must be modified, mindsets challenged, and accountability in institutions promoted by creating complaint and remedy procedures. Positive measures must be funded in sensitive areas such as employment, education, housing and health in order to ensure equal access of people living in poverty or extreme poverty.

### **c) Reducing the high vulnerability of the poorest to climate disruption**

By 2025, predictions show that 47% of the world population will live within water stress areas. This risk falls most heavily on people and communities in poverty because of the lack of private and public investment both in the least developed countries and in low-income neighborhoods in countries with medium and high development. Inhabitants of these places are extremely vulnerable to climate disruption, since they live in makeshift homes that do not resist typhoons or cyclones, that become cesspools when they are flooded, and that lack decent sanitation. In addition, because the roads and transportation in their communities are bad, they are more easily cut off and isolated in times of disaster.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) confirms this, noting: “People who are socially, economically, culturally, politically, institutionally, or otherwise marginalized are especially vulnerable to climate change and also to some adaptation and mitigation. [...] Differences in vulnerability and exposure arise from non-climatic factors and from multidimensional inequalities often produced by uneven development processes.”<sup>7</sup>

The poorest communities are hardest hit by the consequences of development from whose benefits they have been excluded. This is a terrible injustice. The international community therefore has a moral obligation to ensure that climate agreements and adaptation and mitigation actions include poverty eradication as a primary objective, acknowledging that its direct bearing on the post-2015 agenda.

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5 “*Challenge 2015: Towards Sustainable Development that Leaves No One Behind*,” Appendix B.

6 Adopted by the UN's Council on Human Rights and welcomed with satisfaction in December 2012 by the General Assembly.

[http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/OHCHR\\_ExtremePovertyandHumanRights\\_EN.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/OHCHR_ExtremePovertyandHumanRights_EN.pdf)

7 IPCC Fifth Assessment Report (AR5), WG11 phase 1, “Climate change 2014: Impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability.”

## 2. ADDRESSING THE POTENTIAL VIOLENCE OF THE SOLUTIONS TO CLIMATE DISRUPTION

Decades of deregulation led to the economic and financial crisis of 2008, to a surge in national and international inequalities, to climate disruption and the depletion of natural resources. Today, major transformative shifts are required to shape a better development model. In order to live up to key principles and statements already enshrined in international commitments, it is high time to implement regulations that will reduce destabilizing inequalities, strengthen economic and social stability, and secure environmental sustainability.

### a) Does fighting climate change hinder fighting poverty?

Ideally, anti-poverty strategies and programs to protect the environment should be integrated with each other, or better still designed as a whole in order to build a new development pathway. Too often, however, they remain designed separately and conflict with each other on the ground.

This is the case in France's Val d'Oise district where dozens of families who had parked their trailers there for generations were evicted with no possibility of being rehoused. The official reason for these evictions is to comply with environmental protection and biodiversity preservation. Now, several years after these evictions, most of these families are still homeless and their children have lost access to education.

In a locality of South-East Asia, informal settlements are being demolished by authorities in order to clean up the waterways. Thousands of families who make their dwellings along the creeks and under bridges have been displaced and relocated 50 or more km away from their previous homes in areas with far fewer opportunities for earning a livelihood. These relocations worsen poverty because children are cut off from their previous schools, and adults cannot afford to commute back to their previous community and thus lose their source of income.

Hurricane Katrina exposed persistent poverty in New Orleans where many inner-city residents endured squalid living conditions. While many were able to flee, those with the fewest resources, lacking automobiles or money for transportation and lodging, stayed to wait out the storm, with tragic results. The neighborhoods destroyed by Katrina, despite their impoverished conditions, had once offered a sense of community where people felt at home. Many people had never lived any place else. When they became displaced, overnight they lost the network of security they had woven. The plight of the impoverished families seems to be ignored in the rebuilding of the city of New Orleans.<sup>8</sup> As one displaced adult put it, "They haven't thought about the poor people... Rent has become very high. Housing projects are torn down. All is gone. It's difficult to start over."<sup>9</sup>

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8 Katy Reckdahl, "10 Years After Katrina, New Orleans Public Housing Still in Limbo," 15 June 2015, <http://nextcity.org/features/view/10-years-after-katrina-new-orleans-public-housing-still-in-limbo-iberville>

9 William Julius Wilson, *Not Meant to Live Like This*, ATD Fourth World publications, 2012, xviii – xix.

In Antananarivo, Madagascar, ten years ago an environment preservation policy was implemented with financing from international institutions. Families who had been living in a flood zone at a garbage dump were transported by truck to an arid rural zone. However, because this rural site had no schools, health centers, or opportunities for work, the families had no choice but to return to the dump where they remain today. The annual flooding there in January and February 2015 was particularly catastrophic. Some people drowned, and some children became severely ill. The homes they had built with great difficulty have collapsed. They are again living in cardboard huts. Without the efforts of the local ATD Fourth World team, these people would have been totally forgotten by NGO rescue squads and by international institutions as well.

### **b) Building INDCs that foster climate justice**

At a time when all countries are invited to send the UN their INDC (Intended Nationally Determined Contribution) to combat climate change, the challenge is to make sure that these policies do not have adverse impacts on people living in extreme poverty. On the contrary, since these people are suffering first and worst from the consequences of climate change when they have done least to cause the problem, they should be prioritized in climate actions to foster climate justice. Climate justice is a call to change the system, not the climate, and to address root causes, rights, reparations and participatory democracy.

Linking the fight against poverty with preservation of the earth and its climate opens new avenues for rethinking the economy such that it respects people and preserves the planet. For example, the indispensable transition towards a more environment-friendly economy offers opportunities to create new decent jobs that should be made accessible to people trapped in extreme poverty through adequate training schemes. Support to small agricultural producers and workers of the informal economy, who make up the largest group of people living in poverty, could at the same time help spread more environment-friendly techniques, increase food security and stimulate economic development. Likewise, millions of decent jobs financed by public and private funds could be created in order to provide clean drinking water and sanitation for all, good quality education and healthcare services, social housing, and the legal identities that hundreds of millions are denied.<sup>10</sup> By meeting the needs of the worst-off and increasing their purchasing power, such policies would reduce inequality, strengthen social cohesion and stability, and stimulate economic development.

A positive example comes from a urban park project in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. The local NGO which conducted the project, Fokal, has made it a point to involve residents of the neighborhood in the construction work, as well as in redesigning the area hit by the earthquake. Pedestrian walks and meeting spaces have been built, public lighting and waste collection have been installed, and job training for youth has been put in place. The public park is now an oasis of calm, peace, and harmony in the middle of one the poorest and most violent areas of the capital city. The park is highly appreciated and cared for by

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<sup>10</sup> UNICEF noted in 2013 that one in three children lacked official existence: nearly 230 million children under the age of five had not had their births officially recorded, excluding them from education, health care, etc.

all, and very poor families speak highly of it and of the renovation project.

Implementing national social protection floors (as provided for in the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Recommendation 202) is no doubt an efficient way to combat poverty and inequality, and to increase people's resilience in the face of climate change. It would ensure that all individuals, including the most vulnerable, receive a basic level of social protection, enabling them to better cope with unemployment, underemployment, illness, old age, and extreme events resulting from climate disruption. Social protection floors must be adapted to each country and not jeopardize traditional means of mutual assistance and solidarity. Their design, monitoring and implementation mechanisms must include the participation of trade unions, civil society and those living in extreme poverty.<sup>11</sup> Innovative systems will need to be developed to cover those working in the informal sector, which in many countries represents the majority of the population.

Different studies have demonstrated that there is a fiscal space and national capacity to fund social protection floors in virtually all countries, even the poorest.<sup>12</sup> Given that illicit financial flows from Africa range from at least \$30 billion to \$60 billion every year<sup>13</sup> (an amount that doubles the Overseas Development Assistance inflows), tax cooperation should be the priority. According to the ILO,<sup>14</sup> funding for social protection floors can be increased through a set of different measures supported by the United Nations and International Financial Institutions policy statements, such as: fighting illicit financial flows; re-allocating public expenditures; increasing tax revenues; increasing social security contributions; increasing aid and transfers; restructuring debt, etc.

### **c) Involving the most vulnerable people in the design and implementation of policies and projects so that they work for them, not against them**

During our participatory research with people living in poverty to contribute to the post-2015 agenda, which is the basis for this paper, people from a South Asian country spoke of their insecure informal work and their lives in informal settlements under bridges, in cemeteries, or amid shipping containers. They said: *“Who wants this kind of life? We dream of a better life, including decent housing and a full education for everyone. We make an effort to move on, but we cannot do very much alone. We need support. We also wish to contribute to development, excluding no one, leaving no one behind. We want to work together as partners. This is how everyone's dignity and rights can be respected.”*<sup>15</sup>

If we were to summarize their ambition, we could say that people trapped in extreme poverty aspire to a world where everyone has equal opportunity to exercise all human rights and live in harmony with the environment. In this world without poverty, all people

11 As underlined in the common statement issued by ATD Fourth World, the International Trade Union Confederation, and Social Watch: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/leave-no-one-behind-the-agenda-of>

12 Ortiz and Cummings, “Finding Fiscal Space,” in *A Recovery for All*, UNICEF, 2012.

13 African Union Assembly Special Declaration on Illicit Financial Flows, 31 January 2015: <http://ti.au.int/en/sites/default/files/Assembly%20Declaration%20on%20Illicit%20Financial%20Flow%20-%20English.pdf>

14 ILO, World Social Protection Report 2014-15.

15 Participants in a seminar evaluating the MDGs in January 2013, Brussels.

will be able to develop fully their potential and be known and treated with dignity, as whole human beings. In this vision, every country's most valuable resource is people and their knowledge, skills, experience, culture, energy and inventiveness. In this sense, people in poverty aspire to be part of genuine and inclusive partnerships; they hope to be considered valuable actors and not merely recipients of aid.

If the post-2015 agenda is to be universal and truly transformative, the participation of the poorest and most marginalized people should be the measure of its success.

## **CONCLUSION: SOME MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

Among our many recommendations for the post-2015 agenda,<sup>16</sup> these are key for tailoring development and climate action to the needs of the most vulnerable:

- Place a special emphasis on the bottom 20% to make sure that no one is left behind. In other words, targets should be considered achieved only if they are met for all relevant income and social groups, including the most vulnerable.
- Tackle climate change together with people in poverty and as part of an effort to eradicate extreme poverty.
- Ensure that climate change finance is directed at the most vulnerable populations, in order to foster climate justice.
- Implement social protection floors.
- Ensure that people in poverty are able to benefit from training and job creation in the context of transitioning to a green economy.

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<sup>16</sup> Full recommendations: “*Challenge 2015: Towards Sustainable Development that Leaves No One Behind*,” Chapter VII. <http://atd-fourthworld.org/challenge-2015/>