

Submission to the Commission on Global Poverty by the International Movement ATD Fourth World¹

SOME CHALLENGES OF POVERTY DEFINITION AND MEASUREMENT

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Introduction

On October 4th 2015, the World Bank, followed by many national and international newspapers, announced that it had adopted a new International Poverty Line (IPL) to reflect inflation across countries, and that - for the first time in history - less than 10% of the world's population will be living in extreme poverty by the end of 2015.

At the same time, Europe is confronted to an unprecedented flow of refugees fleeing war and destitution, arriving on its borders by hundreds of thousands, mainly from Middle East and Africa, while hundreds of them have drowned in the Mediterranean. In France, shelters for homeless people are overcrowded, whereas slums have reappeared in many places across the country and their residents are sometimes violently evicted by the police, just like in the sixties, when the government implemented a slum clearance policy.

How does this match with the statement that there is a historic reduction of poverty in the world? Does it not sound like a typical case of cognitive dissonance, that describes the state of simultaneously holding two or more conflicting cognitions? How can we reduce this uncomfortable state by creating a consonant or consistent cognition system?

In its first part, this working paper will make some suggestions to reduce the shortcomings of present global poverty measurements. In its second part, it will address the question; “who decides who is poor and what is poverty?” and make some further suggestions.

1 The International Movement ATD (All Together in Dignity) Fourth World is a movement of solidarity among and in collaboration with the most excluded families around the world. Founded in 1957 by Joseph Wresinski, ATD Fourth World brings together women and men from all cultures and social classes and is active in 34 countries. It is an international non-governmental organization with no religious or political affiliation.

2 The author is very grateful for the comments of several colleagues in the International Movement ATD Fourth World who helped improve this paper. They include Diana Skelton, Deputy Director General, Janet Nelson, Vice President, Cristina Diez, Main Representative to the UN in New York, Wouter van Ginneken, representative to the UN in Geneva, Monica Jahangir, assistant at the headquarters.

1. REDUCING THE SHORTCOMINGS OF PRESENT GLOBAL POVERTY MEASUREMENTS

It is not surprising that the World Bank statement of a historic reduction of extreme poverty does not match the perception of practitioners nor of people trapped in poverty in OECD countries, since these countries are not included in the World Bank calculations. The International Poverty Line was designed in 1990 for developing countries, not for developed ones. Yet, this is never recalled when new figures are disclosed. The result is that people trapped in extreme poverty in OECD countries are made invisible in global statistics.

a) Making people living in poverty visible in OECD countries

Since Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been adopted by the United Nations and are proposed to all countries, whether developing, emerging or developed, it is crucial to define poverty indicators that make extreme poverty visible in all countries, including OECD countries. Yet, in the UN Millenium Development Goals database, not any single measurement of extreme poverty was available for the United States, nor for European Union countries, where existing poverty has been exacerbated by the current economic crisis and austerity policies. In New York, one person out of five – 1.4 million people - depend on food pantries and soup kitchens for their daily food³. In Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain, it is common knowledge that many people have been impoverished and children are going hungry. “*States have failed with the poorest families*”, told us Clara from Spain, who has been evicted from a flat and lives in a lorry with her husband and their children. Yet she does not exist in global poverty statistics.

Suggestion: When releasing its figures on global poverty, the World Bank should always remind its audience that OECD countries are not counted, or define other indicators that make poverty visible in these countries.

b) Tracking poverty on several poverty lines?

“What does it mean to hold the line constant at 1.25\$ PPP adjusted, when prices are changing, as are exchange rates? Should we use the standard PPP indices or make correction for the fact that they do not consume the same baskets of goods as the average person in society?” asks the Commission on Global Poverty.

Goal 1.1 of the SDGs is “by 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less that \$ 1.25 a day”. This implies that the UN General Assembly did not necessarily endorse this measurement as the standard for the future. This wording reveals the dissatisfaction with this definition in many circles. The

³ <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/1-5-new-yorkers-rely-charities-food-article-1.1723671>

World Bank has decided to adopt a new IPL of \$1.90 a day, in order to reflect inflation across countries, to make the IPL consistent over time and to preserve the integrity of the “goalposts” for international targets. Countries like Brazil have officially regretted that this decision was made without any consultation of Member States.

It seems that the issues raised by the the Commission on Global Poverty have been comprehensively addressed in the research working paper on the “Global Count of the Extreme Poor in 2012”, just released by twelve World Bank senior economists, that “*describes various caveats, limitations, perils and pitfalls of the approach taken*”.⁴ Of course, we welcome the Bank's efforts at greater transparency on the IPL upgrading process. Yet the reliability of an IPL that was defined arbitrarily 25 years ago remains disputable.

How was this IPL designed? In 1990, three World Bank economists noted that six countries among the poorest were all within one dollar of a poverty line per person. This similarity served as the basis for the original “dollar-a-day” global poverty line, without any in-depth international research on the relevance and meaning of it. World Bank directors found this poverty line a very convenient tool to rank countries and adopted it. This decision is related to the twofold nature of the Bank, which is a research body comprising a lot of high level economists – more than in any other institution - and a bank that has clients, economic interests, and distributes loans and grants. In the design of the IPL, its convenience for bankers has prevailed over the relevance for all other stakeholders including the primary ones, people trapped in extreme poverty. The good side of it is that the measurement of extreme income poverty for the world as a whole has attracted considerable interest over the last two decades and has perhaps helped putting poverty on the global agenda. Its simplicity and the communication power of the World Bank have proven very effective to spread this IPL all over the world and have it adopted by the UNGA.

Yet, in our long lasting commitment with people trapped in extreme poverty all over the world, we never heard any of them define extreme poverty in their own words as living on less than 1\$ or 1.25\$ a day. World Bank senior economists devoted a lot of time and intelligence to demonstrate the legitimacy of the IPL, to make it consistent over time and to make their calculation transparent. However, they overlooked the importance of dialoguing with people trapped in extreme poverty in very deprived neighbourhoods on different continents, in order to learn from them what is extreme poverty and to think with them on how it could be measured. It would be comparable to writing about gender problems without ever talking to women.

Many academics and practitioners, at very high levels in the UN system and in NGOs,

⁴ *A Global Count of the Extreme Poor in 2012. Data Issues, Methodology and Initial Results*, Policy Research Working Paper, WPS 7432, Francisco H.G. Ferreira and alii, World Bank Group, Washington, D.C. Oct 2015. pages.

have spoken against this “deeply flawed and unreliable measure of poverty⁵”, its very low level, sometimes denounced as a famine line, and the irrelevance of considering one single monetary dimension of poverty, when all international institutions recognize that poverty is multidimensional. The simplicity of the dollar-a-day approach – its greatest triumph – is also a major limitation. Poverty is a complex phenomenon: any attempt to capture it in a single number will inevitably be an over-simplification that will not provide with a useful tool for policymaking. Economists estimated that changing this poverty line by only 10 cents can change the number of people in poverty by 100 million⁶. This demonstrates how arbitrary it is to define a single IPL. A simplistic definition and measurement of poverty runs a high risk to lead to simplistic responses, where money is viewed as a solution to every problem and where people living on \$ 1.91 a day are regarded as having moved out of extreme poverty, which makes little sense.

“Should we track poverty on other lines such as \$4 or \$10? Or be concerned by the depth of poverty below the line?” asks the Commission on Global Poverty.

Since the SDGS repeatedly state that no one should be left behind, it is important to make visible people who are financially lagging far behind the mainstream. Yet, the aforementioned working paper by World Bank senior economists on the global estimates of the extreme poor, using a monetary metric, shows how sensitive they are to the introduction of new Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) conversion factors, and the number of complex and disputable assumptions that need to be made to come up with a consistent result. Tracking poverty on other lines, such as \$4 or \$10, would just replicate the same problems and weaknesses.

In fact, we are concerned about income poverty, not because people have less than \$1 (or indeed \$2, \$3 or \$10) a day, but because they do not live what we would consider a decent life. After two years of negotiations, Heads of States adopted an agenda for sustainable development that recognizes the multidimensional nature of poverty. More and more Member States from the North and the South are using multidimensional measures of poverty. If the World Bank wants to keep its relevance in this international context, it should evolve towards a more multidimensional approach.

The independent Expert Advisory Group on Data Revolution for Sustainable Development (IEAG) offered the UN Secretary General several key recommendations for actions to be taken in the near future, the first of which is to develop a global consensus on principles and standards⁷. In fact, after more than ten years of international negotiations where people in poverty have been associated on several continents, a consensus has been reached on the Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human

5 David Woodward <http://newint.org/features/special/2010/07/01/poverty-line-definition/#sthash.jVoDbmVJ.dpuf>

6 Andy Sumner and Peter Edward « New Estimates of Global Poverty and Inequality: How Much Difference Do Price Data Really Make? » May 2015 <http://www.cgdev.org/publication/new-estimates-global-poverty-and-inequality-how-much-difference-do-price-data-really>

7 <http://www.undatarevolution.org/>

Rights⁸, that were adopted by the Human Rights Council in September 2012 and welcomed by the UN General Assembly in December 2012. The Guiding Principles demonstrate that extreme poverty is a result of human rights violations, and clearly set out the various factors that lead to extreme poverty and that then maintain people in that condition.

Suggestion: We suggest that research should be carried out with all stakeholders on rights-based poverty lines in each country, which correspond to the same level of outcome indicators regarding human rights. This would enable international comparisons⁹. The Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights constitute the international basis on which rights-based poverty lines could be elaborated in each country.

c) Measuring the proportion of people too poor to be captured in statistics

Other calculation issues are often overlooked in the discussions about the IPL. For its latest global poverty estimates, the World Bank used income and consumption distributions from 1.165 surveys covering 132 developing countries. Yet, what remains unseen is that most of the surveys carried out in rich or poor countries fail to collect data from other than “registered” households or residences, which automatically excludes people living in cemeteries, under bridges, in shanty towns, informal settlements, on dumps, etc. or that belong to minority populations that the government does not want to recognize¹⁰.

In Madagascar for instance, no census has been carried out since 1973, which makes all distributions based on household survey data extremely fragile. In this country, we demonstrated that 70% of the 750 people who lived along a dump and scavenged to make a living were not registered by local authorities. 70% of this group in dire poverty, only ten kilometres far from the capital, had no official existence, neither for local and national authorities, nor for international development agencies. To come up with this result, we had to use a very participatory method relying on the collaboration of the inhabitants, without which it would have been impossible to identify who was living there on a regular basis.

It appears that many people seem to be “too poor” to be captured in statistics on poverty. UNICEF states that one in three children under the age five have not had their births officially recorded. 230 million children do not officially exist, thus excluding them from education, health care, etc.¹¹ On the other end of the spectrum, elderly people are also

8 See <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G12/154/60/PDF/G1215460.pdf>

9 See David Woodward, in the afore quoted article.

10 For example, the 2014 census in Myanmar did not allow the Rohingya – a Muslim ethnic group who are not recognised as having Burmese citizenship - to register as such, due to fears on inflaming tensions between different religious and ethnic groups. The Guardian, “Burma census is not counting Rohingya Muslims, says UN agency” 2 April 2014.

11 UN News Centre, « One in Three Children Do Not Officially Exist », 2013.

“invisible” in statistics. In the latest 2015 Global AgeWatch Index released in September this year, a total of 98 countries – mostly in Africa - were excluded because of a lack of data on older people's quality of life¹².

In France, in-depth local research has led the National Observatory of Poverty and Social Exclusion to estimate in 2005 that 2% of the population – mainly the most impoverished – were not counted in the census¹³. It is very likely that this proportion has increased dramatically with the inflow of refugees, many of whom are not officially registered. We cannot forget our meeting with an expert on poverty in Europe providing data to the OECD, whom we met to share our concerns about the exclusion of the poorest of the poor in poverty statistics. She explained to us that taking this people into account in her household surveys would be “too complicated and too costly”, which is the attitude of too many poverty experts.

Suggestion: In order “to leave no one behind” in statistics, we suggest that specific area surveys should be regularly implemented in developed and developing countries in order to measure the proportion of people who are not captured in national census and household surveys and are therefore unrepresented in official statistics.

2. WHO DECIDES WHO IS POOR AND WHAT IS POVERTY?

Deciding who is poor and what is poverty raises big issues of power, justice and dignity. “*Even in extreme poverty, a person has ideas. If these ideas aren't recognised, people fall even deeper into poverty*” stated a participant from Burkina Faso when we assessed the Millenium Development Goals with people in poverty in 12 countries¹⁴. This is a very simple and strong way to underline that the process of building knowledge on poverty without associating people who live it results in increasing their voicelessness and powerlessness.

a) A big debate within and among institutions

In the late 1990s, the World Bank launched a major outstanding research in 50 developing countries, conducted by Deepa Narayan and others, that led to the release of three books making up the “Voices of the Poor” series: “Can Anyone Hear Us?“, “Crying out for Change”, “From Many Lands”. The first book was prefaced by the World Bank President and post-faced by Amartya Sen and other well-known experts. This was undoubtedly a success in communication. Yet, the approach raised resistance

12 Mark Andersen, « *Poor monitoring renders millions of elderly people worldwide 'invisible'*, » September 9th 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/datablog/2015/sep/09/global-age-watch-index-2015-elderly-people-invisible-helpage-international>

13 National Observatory of Poverty and Social Exclusion, France, 2005-2006 report.

14 *Challenge 2015: Towards Sustainable Development That Leaves No One Behind*, International Movement ATD Fourth World, April 2014, downloadable at <http://atd-fourthworld.org/challenge-2015/>

within the Bank and the impact on its operations was weak. Why?

In the Voices-of-the-Poor building process, the stance of researchers was to consider people with an experience of poverty as the primary experts on poverty. Researchers collected their thinking on the diverse dimensions of poverty, on their sufferings, on the shortfalls of the institutions meant to help them. They displayed this information in a consistent and lively way, and drew from it proposals for change. This was an empowering process that gave a voice to people trapped in poverty and led the researchers to write the following: “*There are 2.8 billion poverty experts: the poor themselves. Yet the development discourse about poverty has been dominated by the perspective and expertise of those who are not poor ... The bottom poor, in all their diversity, are excluded, impotent, ignored and neglected; the bottom poor are a blind spot in development*¹⁵.”

The stance of World Bank economists who designed the IPL and update it over time is completely different. They are the experts who, in Washington DC, decided on their own 25 years ago what is global poverty and how to measure it. They direct and monitor the complex and unique machinery to collect data and produce figures. They do not need the voices of the poor at any stage of the process. Does not this approach, meant to foster the fight against poverty, reinforce the power of technocracy and leave people trapped in poverty powerless and voiceless? Does it not undermine the usefulness of the standard and its relevance for policy, when it is clearly not based on a careful assessment of the reality it is intended to measure?

Many other stakeholders, UN agencies, practitioners etc. have expressed their discomfort or dissent with the unidimensional measurement of poverty and its estimation. A document from the European Commission about World Bank and US approaches to absolute poverty stated in 2011: « The \$ per capita concept is used by the World Bank for the Millennium Development Goals, and the US poverty standard was originally based on a food expenditure ratio and has been updated only in real terms since the 1960s. They are both more or less arbitrary income/consumption thresholds. The EU can develop better ones¹⁶.” More unity among major stakeholders will definitely be needed to assess the SDGs.

In the Global South, many researchers wonder why they should accept a definition of poverty in their own country from economists in Washington DC and its measurement in US dollars. Many have denounced what they consider to be a form of hegemony or colonialism from Western Countries. Others have simply said that they need measures of poverty that are complementary to the IPL. This is probably what is behind the increasing success of the Multidimensional Poverty Index.

15 Deepa Narayan, *Voices of the Poor: Crying Out for Change*, Oxford University Press for the World Bank, 2000, p. 2 and 264.

16 European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *The measurement of extreme poverty in the European Union*, Manuscript completed in January 2011.

b) Lessons from the Multidimensional Poverty Index

“Should we collect and collate data on the many human and social dimension of poverty that go beyond the money metric? Should these be aggregated or left as vectors?” asks the Commission on Global Poverty.

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is an answer to that question. In 2007, Sabina Alkire, Director of the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), and Professor James Foster created a new method for measuring multidimensional poverty. The authors say it is intuitive and easy to use in twelve steps. They use a counting approach to identifying 'who is poor' by considering the range of deprivations they suffer (e.g. education, health, living standards), choosing indicators for each dimension (ex. years of schooling, body mass index), giving equal weights or different weights to the indicators, applying a poverty threshold etc. The method reveals the intensity of poverty by distinguishing between people or groups of people who suffer, for example, two deprivations or four deprivations at the same time. It can be used to create national, regional or international measures of poverty, using dimensions and indicators that are tailored to specific contexts¹⁷.

In 2010, UNDP decided to adopt this MPI, which identifies overlapping deprivations at the household level, in the domains of health, education and living standards. According to the latest updates of the Global MPI, released in June 2015 and covering 101 developing countries, 1.6 billion people are living in multidimensional poverty around the world¹⁸. This new poverty measurement tool has not been adopted across all UN bodies and SDGs continue using the 1.25\$ indicator. Nonetheless, countries such as Colombia, Mexico, Chile, Philippines and Nigeria have been using multidimensional indicators in their national capacities. Compared with the IPL, the big advantage of the MPI is that it is designed by the administration of the country, which can define the dimensions of poverty to be tracked, their respective weight, the population to be targeted, etc. The Multi-dimensional Poverty Peer Network (MPPN), formed in 2013, brings together countries that support policy makers to develop multidimensional measures of poverty. For the first time this year, the Global Monitoring Report 2015/2016 produced jointly by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, has detailed findings from the global MPI and brought forward the need to monitor multidimensional poverty¹⁹.

OPHI and the MPPN have proposed a Multidimensional Poverty Index 2015+, to support

17 OPHI and University of Oxford, *Measuring Multidimensional Poverty: Insights from Around the World*, May 2015

18 Sabina Alkire, « *If we want to end poverty, we need to be able to measure it properly* » June 22th 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jun/22/end-poverty-measure-development-goals-sanitation-education-nutrition>

19 World Bank and IMF, *Global Monitoring Report 2015/2016*, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/global-monitoring-report>

poverty eradication and track the success of the Sustainable development Goals. It would complement the monetary poverty measures by revealing the disadvantages that people in poverty experience, the intensity of their deprivations and inequalities among them.

This Multidimensional Poverty Index is undoubtedly a progress. Yet it still has two main shortcomings. The selection of the dimensions of poverty and their weights are made by analysts, who are researchers, administrative staff, etc., without people who have a direct experience of poverty. In this sense, they remain too arbitrary. Besides, whether these multiple dimensions should be aggregated into one single index or left as separate vectors is a matter of debate that should associate people with a direct experience of poverty.

c) Measuring discrimination, oppression and social exclusion

Another main shortcoming that affects most research on poverty indicators is that they fail to encompass measures of discrimination, oppression and social exclusion. Amartya Sen's Capability Approach made him argue that 'the ability to go about without shame' is a relevant basic capability which should figure in the absolutist core of the notion of absolute poverty. Research on poverty and shame led by Professors Robert Walker, Grace Bantebya-Kyomuhendo and Dr. Elaine Chase demonstrate that poverty is linked to contempt and shame in very different cultures and continents²⁰.

In a participatory research-action entitled *Extreme Poverty is Violence* carried out by ATD Fourth World over four years in 25 countries, very disadvantaged people have expressed the extent to which extreme poverty is a hidden form of violence and revealed the scale of human rights violations they experience, as described in this excerpt from its executive summary:

« The true dimensions of extreme poverty have been trivialized, often being described solely in terms of a lack of food, income, housing and knowledge. When placing oneself in a position of understanding and learning from the victims of such conditions, another reality emerges: acts of violence carried out in tandem with the denial of fundamental rights. Material deprivation reduces people to mere survival; insecurity causes families to break up; exploitation robs people of their potential; humiliation, exclusion and contempt reach a point at which people living in extreme poverty are not recognized as human beings.»

During this research, a mother from Peru, Edilberta Bejar, stated: *“The worst thing about living in extreme poverty is the contempt, that they treat you like you are worthless, that they look at you with disgust and fear and that 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”²¹.*

²⁰ Walker, R. 2014. *The Shame of Poverty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chase, E. and Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, G. (eds.) 2014. *Poverty and Shame: Global Experiences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

In recent years, several heads of State from developed countries have publicly repented for the sheer barbarity of policies implemented against people in dire poverty, which is documented in our report on the evaluation of the MdGs²². Historians show that throughout ages, a line of contempt, shame and even hatred has separated the so-called “deserving” from the “undeserving” poor, which often distinguishes poverty from extreme poverty. This is an important dimension of extreme poverty that needs to be taken into account, as emphasized in the UN Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights.

c) Considering people in poverty as co-researchers

In our review of existing research on poverty measurement and indicators, we have seen none where people in poverty are considered as co-researchers from the beginning to the end of the process, as they should be. Yet, this requires a profound shift in the knowledge building paradigm, that was triggered 35 years ago by Joseph Wresinski, the Founder of ATD Fourth World.

In 1980, Wresinski convened at Unesco a conference for academics and practitioners that generated a new approach to building knowledge with people trapped in extreme poverty. In his address *A Knowledge That Leads To Action*²³, he stated that: “*From the beginning, our Movement has held that in order to fight effectively against poverty and exclusion the following questions must be posed: What kind of knowledge do the poorest people need? What kind of knowledge do practitioners and action teams need? What kind of knowledge do our national societies and our international communities need?*” Obviously, the first question, which is of the utmost importance, is most often overlooked.

Wresinski contended that academic knowledge of poverty and social exclusion is only a partial knowledge. It needs two other autonomous and complementary components to build a comprehensive knowledge about poverty and social exclusion: the knowledge which the poor and excluded have, from their firsthand experience, of the twin realities of poverty and the surrounding world which imposes it on them; and the knowledge of those who work among and with these victims in places of poverty and social exclusion. This groundbreaking statement gave birth to the Merging of Knowledge (MoK) Methodology,

21 *Extreme Poverty is Violence. Breaking the Silence. Searching for Peace*, Anne-Claire Brand and Beatriz Monje Baron, International Movement ATD Fourth World, 2012.

22 *Challenge 2015: Towards Sustainable Development That Leaves No One Behind*, International Movement ATD Fourth World, April 2014, Appendix B, The Historical Persecution and Exploitation of People Living in Poverty, downloadable at <http://atd-fourthworld.org/challenge-2015>.

23 J. Wresinski, “*A Knowledge That Leads To Action*”, Opening address to UNESCO's Standing Research Committee on Poverty and Exclusion, Paris: 1980. Downloadable at : <http://www.joseph-wresinski.org/A-Knowledge-That-Leads-To-Combat.html>

that has been developed over the last twenty years by ATD Fourth World²⁴.

The Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights state in paragraph 36 that: *« Persons living in poverty must be recognized and treated as free and autonomous agents. All policies relevant to poverty must be aimed at empowering persons living in poverty. They must be based on the recognition of those persons' right to make their own decisions and respect their capacity to fulfil their own potential, their sense of dignity and their right to participate in decisions affecting their life²⁵. »*

Obviously, these principles should be complied with in the process of defining poverty measurement, where people trapped in poverty should be regarded as free and autonomous agents, and empowered during the process.

d) A proposed research on determining the dimensions of poverty and how to measure them with the primary stakeholders

With Oxford University, ATD Fourth World has been preparing for one year a research project with the advice of a high level Academic Board. Partial funding has been granted by the French Agence française de Développement (the French equivalent to DfiD) and complementary funding is expected from international institutions, including the World Bank. Here is a brief outline.

Key objectives

The project seeks to facilitate and advance global thinking about the nature and measurement of the dimensions of poverty through engaging the international policy community with the experiences, views and reasoning of people facing poverty in diverse cultural and development settings.

By merging the knowledge of people in poverty with scientific understanding and the perspectives of practitioners and the general public, the research will be able to foster a common view as to:

1. The dimensions of poverty: their salience and relative importance in different contexts; and the extent to which they are complementary (additive) or substitutable (with trade-offs between certain dimensions)
2. The implications of these findings for existing understandings of poverty and its constituent dimensions, the development of appropriate policy responses, and the specification of comparable national poverty measures and indicators.

Moreover, the project will foster a better capacity to work and think across social and educational boundaries for all participants, provide certified training for people with direct experience of poverty, and evaluate the specific process of collaboration in order to

²⁴ See the *Guidelines for the Merging of Knowledge and Practices when working with people living in situations of povtrty and social exclusion* at: <http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/Guidelines-for-the-Merging-of.html>

²⁵ <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G12/154/60/PDF/G1215460.pdf>

replicate it in other contexts.

Considering people with a direct experience of poverty as co-researchers

Research will be conducted in five countries, one in each continent: Tanzania; Bangladesh; Bolivia; Canada; and the United Kingdom, and employ a deeply participative research technique, Merging of Knowledge, developed over the last twenty years by ATD Fourth World.

Merging of Knowledge (MoK) with people with a direct experience of poverty is a process where they are recognised as co-researchers, on an equal footing with other participants. In a MoK process, knowledge is identified, brought forth and refined in a careful and deliberative democratic process within small working groups. Yet it is recognised that time and support is required for those with least voice to build the levels of self-confidence and mutual trust required for a co-construction of knowledge. Merging of Knowledge can be distinguished from other approaches to participatory research by its commitment to autonomy of each group of peers (people living in poverty, practitioners, academics), building knowledge and reciprocity between peer groups engaging in data collection and analysis, and in knowledge production.

The research will be undertaken by national teams comprising people in poverty together with practitioners (providing services or advocating of people in poverty), academics and members of the public. These national teams have co-developed the research strategy. Each is coordinated and supported by local ATD Fourth World and research staff under the guidance of an international steering team and a scientific advisory board.

An ambitious project

Within the bounds set by resources and capacity, the project seeks to draw upon as broad a range of experience of poverty as is possible. Covering countries in the global North and South, it seeks to reach people living in poverty including those in extreme poverty and/or who are excluded through disability, illness, homelessness, statelessness; to acknowledge that poverty may differ across the life course and by gender and place, notably across the urban/rural divide; and that it may be shaped by relations with others. The views of men and women in poverty when in the life-stage of work and raising a family will be sought in all countries with the experiences of other groups being selectively captured in different countries.

The research is both modular and staged. The core modules comprise work with:

- Men/women of working age across all study countries and in rural and urban sites
- Children and adolescents (in two countries, rural and/or urban)
- Older people, elders (in two countries, rural and/or urban)

Each module will entail identification and work with different peer groups including people in poverty, practitioners in contact with people in poverty, members of the public (possibly including journalists), academics and decision makers. Within each module, stages of outreach, recruitment and preparatory engagement will be followed by key knowledge building stages during which peer groups will be repeatedly convened. The groups will sequentially identify the dimensions of poverty, incorporate alternative

perspectives, rate and rank dimensions and formulate the logics for doing so, explore the conjunction of dimensions and the possibility of substitution between them and consider practical ways of measuring each dimension. Knowledge generated from the peer groups will be ‘merged’ through analysis, discussion and reflection within national research teams with emergent conclusions being submitted to critical review by the initial peer groups or their representatives. It is envisaged that upwards of 80 peer groups will be convened on multiple occasions and that as many as 3,000 persons will participate in various components of the research.

In the design and implementation of the research, equivalence is to be prioritised over standardisation, while consistency will be achieved through an initial seminar bringing together the international steering committee with the coordinators of national team, the making and exchange of progress videos by national teams and regular online and in-situ exchange between the international and national teams.

Effective programme management

The work of the national research teams will be coordinated by Dr Xavier Godinot (ATD Fourth World) and Professor Robert Walker (Oxford University) under the guidance of the scientific advisory panel comprised of international experts. Methodological counsellors will be available to advise the national teams and the research process will be independently evaluated.

Concluding suggestion: Setting up an international supervisory body on poverty measurement

The major innovations brought by the SDGs, the universality of the fight against poverty in the Global North and the Global South and the commitment to leave no one behind in development, call upon innovative ways in which global poverty can effectively be measured, everywhere and in all its dimensions.

We suggest that the Commission on Global Poverty works on the creation of a new international body, established under the auspices of the United Nations, with the specific mission of advising and supervising global poverty measurement. It would try and create a consensus among participants on the principles to be complied with, the dimensions to be measured, and how to do it. This international body would comprise experts from the World Bank as well as from UN agencies, academics and civil society experts from different cultures and continents. It would in particular comprise representatives of NGOs, grassroots organizations and social movements that bring together people in extreme poverty and give them a voice at local, national and/or international level. Only in this way can the reality of extreme poverty be effectively understood and addressed.