

# LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD

## FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



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- LETTER N° 99 -

## DARING TO LEARN FROM PEOPLE IN EXTREME POVERTY

More frequently around the world, we hear people living in precarious situations say, as one man from Burkina Faso told us, *“Even in extreme poverty, a person has ideas. If these ideas are not acknowledged, people sink even further into poverty.”* All people, regardless of their living conditions, look at the world, experience the world, and think about the world. Living in extreme poverty gives some people a unique point of view, a unique way of approaching the world.

However, too often we see that people experiencing extreme poverty are not present when others make decisions that are going to impact their lives. They are not involved when development projects are designed, as if they are not part of the future of this work. They are not asked whether projects are relevant to them, as if their ideas and experiences do not enable them to give valuable advice.

In 2012, the General Assembly of the United Nations stated in **“Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights”** that the full participation of people who are most excluded should be an absolute priority. The handbook concerning this issue spells out the conditions that would enable them to contribute to all aspects of society. These conditions include access to health, food, housing, education, work, and vital resources.

Everywhere we are seeing organizations and other groups of women and men join the people who are most rejected by society so that they dare to participate in their communities. We know from first-hand experience that when these people have the opportunity to belong to a group in which they feel respected and free to be themselves, they dare to take the time to think, to speak up, and give their opinions. When this happens, an entire community re-assesses the way it looks at its priorities, strategies and financial commitments. Not only is poverty reduced, but the entire community moves forward and grows.

**Daring to learn from people in extreme poverty means changing the future together.**

Isabelle Pypaert Perrin, Director General, International Movement ATD Fourth World



# « MAKING HUMAN RIGHTS WORK FOR PEOPLE LIVING IN EXTREME POVERTY »

*“We must all work together to advance the rights of those living in extreme poverty and ensure that their voices are heard and their dignity respected.”*

Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights (2008-2014)

**IN 2012 THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL ADOPTED THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS.**

**These Guiding Principles** are based on good practices collected from governments, national institutions, United Nations agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) around the world.

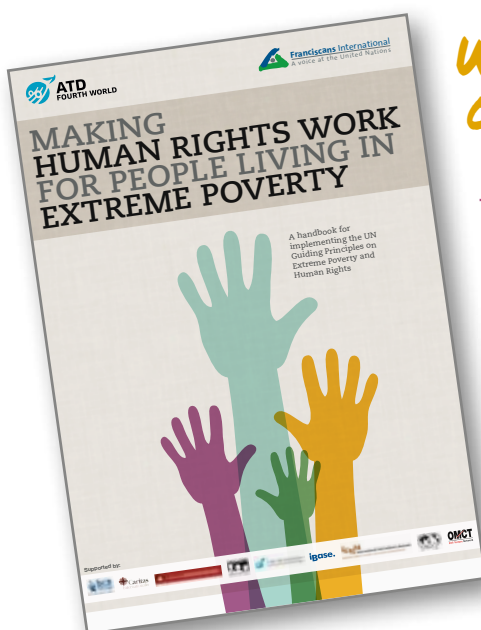
**They re-affirm** that people living in extreme poverty are rights-holders and should be recognized as actors in the fight against poverty.

**They spell out** the States' main obligations towards those living in extreme poverty, as well as steps that can be taken by international organizations, businesses, and civil society organizations to respect, protect, and fulfill their rights.

**They are global in scope.** They are applicable to all countries and regions at all stages of economic development, with due regard to national specificities.

**They have been adopted** by the Human Rights Council and therefore have the support of the international community of States.

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



## WHY A HANDBOOK FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THESE GUIDING PRINCIPLES ?

**The purpose of this handbook** is to assist those working directly with people living in extreme poverty to understand the latter's situation from a human rights perspective. It suggests actions that can be taken with local governments and other sectors of society to ensure that they are respected and protected.

**It is intended for** all local actors, both those who work for the State such as social workers, community organizers, teachers, or urban planners, as well as those who work for non-governmental organizations, religious institutions, or community associations.

This handbook is not a list of every action that can and should be taken. Instead **it presents a guide** to what can be done depending on the situation of the people concerned, and the issues that matter the most to them.

[http://bit.ly/UNGuidePrincpls\\_HANDBOOK\\_frmATD](http://bit.ly/UNGuidePrincpls_HANDBOOK_frmATD)

**GAIN PEOPLE'S TRUST IN ORDER FOR THEM  
TO OVERCOME ISOLATION, BREAK THE SILENCE AND FEAR..**

*Before joining the literacy program, my life had a bitter taste. I did not recognize numbers. To wake my children up for school, I relied on the position of the sun. I sold eggs at the market place and asked my husband to count how much I had earned. These difficult situations prompted me to learn how to count, to write, and to read...The teacher tried very hard to lead me and the other members of the group out of the darkness linked to illiteracy.*

*I became another woman. Although I am already forty, I felt like I had been born again. **Fatima, association CODEV, Morocco***



*I think probably one of the most important people who, through my adult life, changed my perspective about speaking out and having self-confidence was definitely Françoise, an ATD Fourth World permanent volunteer working in Ireland. Before that I would hardly speak out (...) I always had my opinions, but I never expressed them. (...) The encouragement and support I received from her, as well as the fact that I was listened to and respected by "educated" people, convinced me that I could turn my life around. **Noleen F., Ireland***

**UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENT DYNAMICS  
AND THE RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY..**

*We are convinced that a person living in extreme poverty is intelligent, courageous, and eager to succeed in life. She needs human warmth to feel like a whole human being again, like someone useful in changing society. Old Raoul was facing an unacceptable loneliness. He feels useful ever since belonging to the group of Families Living in Solidarity. When we say : "Don't leave people behind," we are talking about those crushed by extreme poverty, forgotten by society and yet still alive.*

**Families Living in Solidarity. Democratic Republic of Congo**

**ASSESS AND MITIGATE RISKS TO PERSONS, GROUPS AND THE COMMUNITY...**

*Often I would see the poorest families go to enormous efforts to grow their ties with their neighbors. These efforts were evidence of a desire to see the community survive. It was no easy matter, however, as each day would bring a host of obstacles to be overcome. Outside projects and aid are very often a one-off (...) Our activities should never endanger the community ties or mutual aid. Instead, they should operate alongside them in order to reinforce them. **Elda G., Guatemala***

*After becoming a defender of rights, I often felt mistreated by the public administration. My documents were not the problem. It was the fact that I was living in poverty, a situation common to all women facing administrative formalities, month after month. (...) We need a change on the level of persons and on the level of structures. People ought to do their job in a spirit of service and not of power. (...) I believe that it is possible to build a fair world. **Ana I., Peru***





*Letters from our readers*

**H**ow do we empower people? Our approach consists in breaking down the barriers that exist between rural groups and us (in the city). We all have the same rights and furthermore we share their

concerns. So it's together that we will be able to overcome extreme poverty. **Hassimi S., SEEPAT, Burkina Faso**

**I**n 2017, I have thought of Fr. Joseph in a special way. How his experience of poverty became the motivation for him to ensure that poverty is eradicated from the world. His boldness is a great motivation to myself. **Salome M., Kenya**

« **T**hank you for all the information that you have sent to us over the years. Inequalities persist at every level, but as long as utopia and hope exist, there will be audacity to implement worthwhile actions. » **Ana B., Portugal**

**I** am 82 years old. I try to continue living the same as before by taking part in the life of the poorest in the neighborhood. **Federico C., Colombia**

**W**here should one begin in 2018 to change the way the rest of society looks at the poorest? What strategy should one use to bring the world to respect the dignity of human beings?

We will have to think a lot and deal in realities to be persuasive. It is these same alarming realities that we are experiencing every day alongside underprivileged families. Without love, this struggle will be impossible.

**Denise N., Democratic Republic of Congo**

**L**et's help the most marginalized, underprivileged and vulnerable children fight crushing poverty by empowering them through education. The children I know are extremely poor. Their parents are daily wages earners. They earn a pittance daily. They need to find employment; otherwise they earn nothing and are unable to send their children to school. I have been a school teacher for the last 40 years. I am at the end of my career. Before hanging up my boots, I would have liked to see these children have a better life devoid of poverty and illiteracy.

**Pallithara Anthony Varghese, India**

**Extreme poverty is not inevitable but working to overcome it is a long-term process. Through this "Letter to Friends around the World," we can share what we've learned and encourage each other so that no one is left behind.**

**We are eager to hear from you too! Please do share your thoughts and experiences via the website, by mail or by post.**

As **Abel B.** from **ONUJEU** in **Haiti** wrote to us « Together we build, together we succeed. »



*« I receive the 'Letter to Friends' regularly. Thank you, Lydie, for continuing to take care of it! ».*

*« It is a very strong link between us! When we read the articles, we know that we are not alone. ».*

Back in 1980, the first newsletter I worked on was called 'Letter to Friends in Africa'. In 1987, it became the 'Letter to Friends around the World'.

All along, receiving such feedback went straight to my heart! Working on the page layout, through articles coming from all over the world, I felt the strength of men and women standing tall whatever it takes...I am now retiring but I want you to know that I really enjoyed working with the Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty. Many, many thanks to you all! **Lydie Rouffet**

Our warmest thanks to you, Lydie, and to your husband Dominique who, throughout the years, took care of the printing of the Letter. We did appreciate your skills, availability and friendship! Many best wishes to the two of you! The Forum team.

**The Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty** is part of ATD Fourth World International but those who join it, do maintain their own status and identity.

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