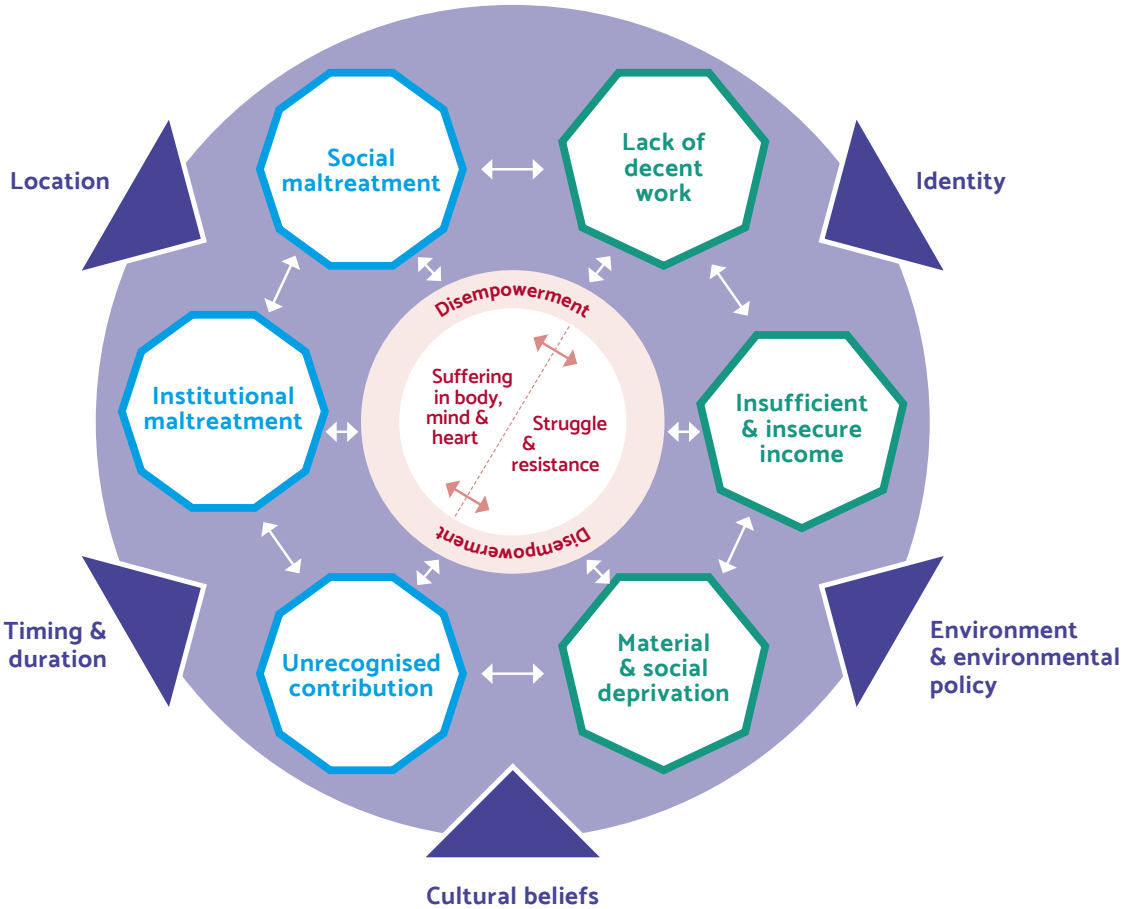
The hidden dimensions of poverty

International participatory research



ATD FOURTH WORLD

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

The hidden dimensions of poverty

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Introduction

This report presents findings from research that has sought to refine the understanding and measurement of poverty by engaging with people directly experiencing poverty, practitioners and academics. The longer-term goal is that the research should contribute to more sensitive policy design at national and international level and thereby to the eradication of poverty.

It is widely recognised that poverty is multidimensional. However, hitherto these dimensions have not been well specified, certain dimensions have gone unrecognised, and the ways in which the dimensions interact to shape the experience of poverty has not been properly understood.

The research has involved teams in Bangladesh, Bolivia, France, Tanzania, the United Kingdom and the USA. People with direct experience of poverty, academics and practitioners, worked together as equals. The research process – termed *Merging of Knowledge®* (see Annex 1) – has made possible a transformation in thinking at individual, community and national levels through the generation and sharing of knowledge.

Reaching out to listen to literally hundreds of people experiencing poverty, their knowledge has been combined with that of academics and practitioners through a process of multiple discussions in which the knowledge held by each group has been collectively challenged and evaluated. The result of each national process is a set of dimensions able to define poverty in that country, as required to meet Sustainable Development Goal 1.2.

Comparing the six country-level sets of dimensions through face-to-face discussions involving representatives of the national teams, it became apparent that many dimensions were local manifestations of the same underlying attributes of poverty. Therefore, we conclude that **the complexity of poverty is best described in terms of three inter-related sets of dimensions** as portrayed in Figure 1 and explained on subsequent pages.

Core experience
Disempowerment
Suffering in body, mind and heart
Struggle and resistance

Relational dynamics
Institutional maltreatment
Social maltreatment
Unrecognised contributions

Privations
Lack of decent work
Insufficient and insecure income
Material and social deprivation

The nine dimensions, and hence the experience of poverty, are further understood to be modified by five factor : identity; timing and duration; location; environment and environmental policy; and cultural beliefs.

The three dimensions that define the core experience of poverty are deliberately located at the centre of the diagram (***Figure 1***) and discussed first. They draw attention to what people expressed very strongly in the six countries : the suffering resulting from disempowerment caused by privation and maltreatment and the way people respond to it through struggle and resistance. The core dimensions also emphasise that poverty is dynamic and that people in poverty are typically proactive not passive.

The relational dimensions of poverty have similarly received little attention from policymakers and academics, unlike the privations discussed later in the report. And, yet, there was a very close agreement between people experiencing poverty, practitioners and academics about how relational dimensions shape poverty. There was a similar agreement about the importance of the interactions between dimensions, as is evident in many of the quotations cited below.

The interactions are shown schematically in Figure 1 as is the influence of the five modifiers. While everything is potentially related and everybody's experience of poverty unique, the nine dimensions and five moderators are clearly part of the shared experience of people in poverty.

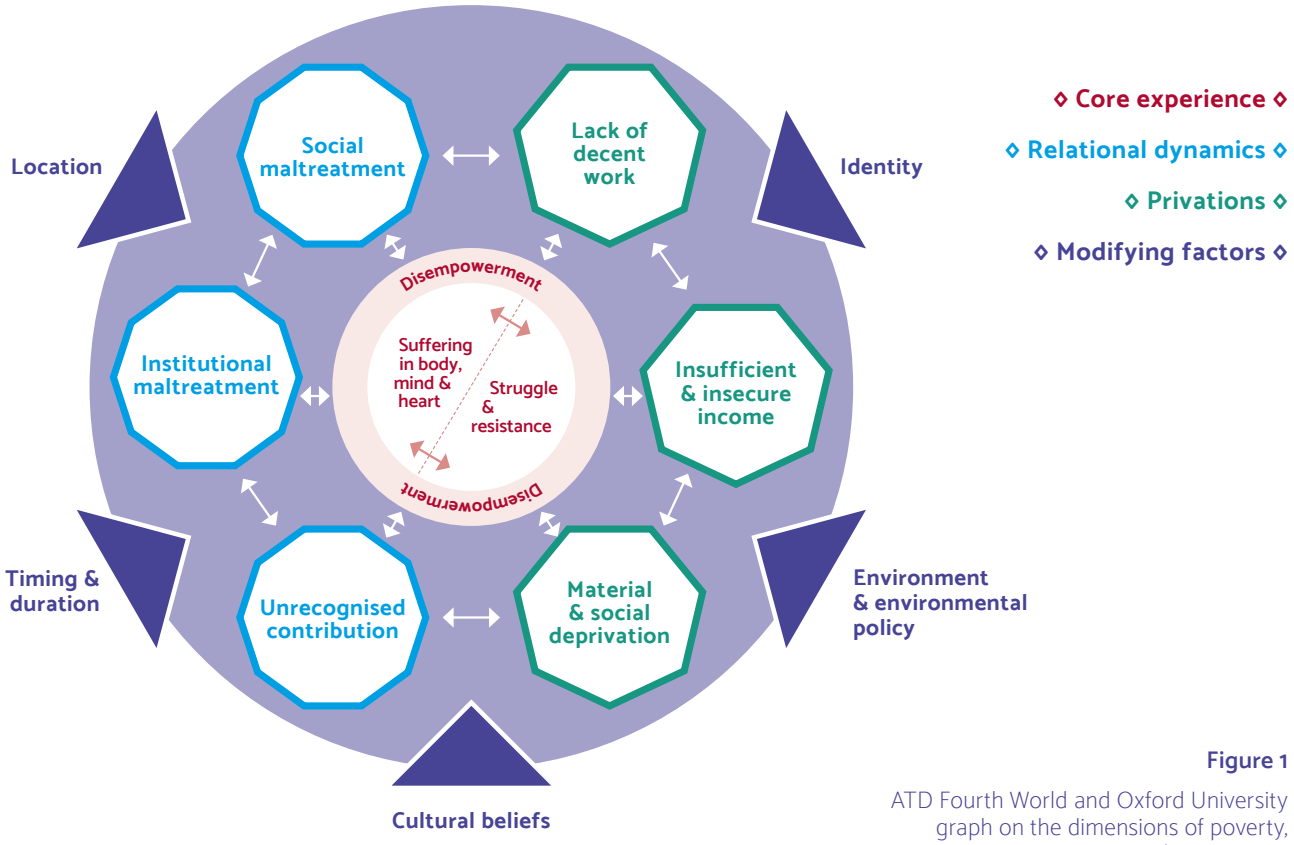


Figure 1

ATD Fourth World and Oxford University graph on the dimensions of poverty, January 2019

1. Core experience

These dimensions are very salient to people living in poverty, yet little understood across society. They are not adequately captured in current multi-dimensional poverty indices. Disempowerment is a prevalent experience that both stands alone, and closely affects people's suffering and their struggle to survive and resist.

Disempowerment

Definition

Disempowerment is lack of control and dependency on others resulting from severely constrained choices.

Description

Poverty is experienced as lack of control. Options and choices are limited and constrained by life circumstances and the actions of institutions. People experiencing poverty have little margin for error in the choices that they make because the consequences of wrong decisions are so severe. Moreover, while people in poverty are often accused of making bad choices, the reality is that they frequently face unthinkable choices between unpalatable options. Often, they have no say in decisions taken for them by people in authority over them. Poverty may mean compliance and forced dependence on others resulting in a loss of dignity and dehumanisation. Lack of control with limited choice increases risk and can undermine the chance of getting out of poverty while creating feelings of insecurity and fear.

"Rich people can buy everything, they use their power to take everything a poor person deserves. They can access everything society has to offer."

Person in poverty, Bangladesh

"Dependence has different forms and different levels. It is most extreme when my need is critical and my survival lies in the hands of others. I have no choice, I must depend on others or on an institution, I endure".

Co-written report of Merging of Knowledge® session, France

"Poverty feels like a tangled web that you can never escape".

Person in poverty, UK

"Poor people are powerless in society. They cannot raise their voice because they know nobody listens to them. Rich people control everything".

Practitioner, Bangladesh

"We are controlled by the greed of a few".

Activist[1], USA

"Poverty creates a situation where you expect that blows may come from anywhere at any time from any source and you must be permanently braced against them".

Opinion-formers and decision-makers, UK

"Any form of poverty generates dependence on institutional systems and can lead to a form of submission. If you don't submit, you get out of the loop and it gets very complicated".

Practitioners, France

[1] During their first long-distance Skype meeting in January 2017, the US National Research Team decided to use the term 'activist' for people with direct experience of poverty. Their aim was to avoid labelling people negatively, given that practitioners and academics are known by their professions. We have complied with this decision throughout this document.

"We don't have stable work, so we don't have the money needed for freedom of choice. Our kids want to study and we tell them "we don't have money". They get upset and ask u : "Why did you promise me I could study and now you say there's no money?" As if we're happy to cut our children's wings".

Person in poverty, Bolivia

"We talked a lot about how people in power want to erase and discard people living in poverty on a daily basis".

Practitioner, USA

"Rich people take advantage of poor people. There is economic exploitation. Small farmers are forced to sell their own products at the prices set by rich people coming from the city. Most of the time they also manipulate the measurements in order to take advantage of people living in poverty".

Peer group of people in poverty, Tanzania

Suffering in body, mind and heart

Definition

Living in poverty means experiencing intense physical, mental and emotional suffering accompanied by a sense of powerlessness to do anything about it.

Description

Lives are shortened by undermining physical and mental health through low-quality housing, inadequate diet and the daily demands of survival. Many people in poverty cannot practice preventive care because they have no access to healthy food, or they live in polluted areas. Both malnutrition and obesity can be prevalent. A lack of health care, including dentistry and eye care, can increase health problems. Poor health caused by multiple privations leaves people physically and emotionally scarred.

The suffering includes negative thoughts and emotions that never go and can be overwhelming: constant fear of what could happen, of losing very scarce resources or assets, of what others will say on being 'found out' as poor; stress and anxiety caused by the difficulty of coping with uncertainty; shame related to living conditions and the need to ask for help and assistance, guilt about being without key resources or unable to give to others; unbearable pain in being separated from children; despair and discouragement when no end to poverty is in sight. These can provoke levels of frustration, anger, depression and hopelessness that lead to self-neglect or even suicide. Self-medicating with drugs or alcohol is used as a temporary relief from this suffering. When people internalise daily experiences of injustice and dehumanisation, this undermines their self-esteem.

Parents suffer, children suffer and they also suffer for each other. These sufferings re-enforce each other, making life more intolerable. The intensity of suffering can lead to avoiding contact with others for fear of being judged or shamed, so contributing to social isolation.

"Poverty means being part of a system that leaves you waiting indefinitely in a state of fear and uncertainty. Poverty kills dreams and cages the dreamers".

People in poverty, UK

"We learn to suffer in silence. This can lead to anxiety and/or serious health conditions and, for some, internal rage".

Activist, USA

"Stress is more common, because you don't know how to feed the children. There's more depression, more despair".

Academic, Bolivia

I asked my school pupils to run around the football pitch to stimulate their bodies. Suddenly, I saw that six out of seven pupils had collapsed. At first, we thought they were sick. Then we discovered it was because of hunger. Children in poor families become weak because they go to bed without eating and have no breakfast before school".

Practitioner, Tanzania

"There are days when I can't think any more. It seems that the brain is taking shelter, it no longer works because there is too much misfortune, too much grief. It looks like the brain is taking care of itself. It happens to me sometimes and when it happens, I say I'm empty".

Person in poverty, France

"You can't get to sleep, you're thinking 'what can I do?'. What am I going to feed my children? You feel really bad, it hurts here inside".

Person in poverty, Bolivia

"The physical and mental problems related to poverty leave a person fragile and vulnerable. When people say their age, we are often surprised because their appearance suggested that they were older".

Practitioner, France

"When people are ill, we hear their complaints, cries, screaming, moaning at home, but cannot send them to hospital. We have to see and hear, yet we cannot do anything".

Person in poverty, Bangladesh

"Poverty is a burden on the shoulder : it is complicated to assume and bear all the difficulties, the reproaches of society and of those around you".

Practitioner, France

Struggle and resistance

Definition

There is an ongoing struggle to survive, which includes resisting and counteracting the effects of the many forms of suffering brought by privations, abuse, and lack of recognition.

Description

Struggling and resisting are intimately linked in people's efforts to survive, achieve inner balance and to enable themselves, and particularly their children, to have a better life. The struggle takes different forms, many of which remain invisible to the rest of society.

Creativity is used to meet basic needs in imaginative ways, a process through which new skills are learnt. The courage shown by people living in poverty is a source of energy often rooted in their hope and desire to give a better life to their children. They call upon strong inner willpower to focus on opportunities for better things for themselves and those close to them. Compassion motivates ongoing care for family members.

People living in poverty tend to share the little they have with others, possibly reducing their scarce resources and keeping them in poverty. However, this habit creates the feeling of a shared struggle and solidarity, helping to prevent despair or suicidal thoughts. Examples include sharing food, lending each other clothes or household utensils, planning a social gathering together and doing collective work such as small group farming or street cleaning.

"Sometimes I feel sad, I don't know where my next meal is going to come from, but when I think about my children, I gain energy, strength to find food for them. I hope that when they grow up, they will get out of this poverty".

Person in poverty, Tanzania

"When I have old clothes, I make new ones out of them. When we have nearly nothing to eat, I make cakes with what I have. I grow my own vegetables. We make do".

Person in poverty, France

"Rich people don't help each other but poor people do willingly when they know someone's needs".

Person in poverty, Bangladesh

"If the state takes your child away because of poverty, what is left behind is immense suffering. The action is recognised, but not the suffering, nor what we do to continue, to overcome and to work together. These are two sides of the same coin".

Person in poverty, UK

"Living in poverty is engaging in an obstacle course with fewer resources than the others. The impact is everywhere, in all dimensions. It is a daily struggle, a battle with enormous obstacles, it is life lived from day to day".

Practitioners peer group, France

"People in poverty who have people who depend on them (children) have to fight like crazy with all the odds against them... You fight, or you give up, and I think people only give up in extreme cases".

Academic, Bolivia

"People living in poverty want to ensure that the ways communities resist together are included in the bigger picture. By omitting them, interventions could be imposed on communities that disrupt the ways of being that actually are very helpful among people".

Academic, USA

2. Relational Dynamics

These dimensions are rooted in everyday relationships between individuals, social groups of all kinds and institutions. They show that poverty is shaped by how different groups in society perceive and treat each other. They are new in the sense that they do not feature in existing multi-dimensional indices of poverty.

Institutional maltreatment

Definition

Institutional maltreatment is the failure of national and international institutions, through their actions or inaction, to respond appropriately and respectfully to the needs and circumstances of people in poverty, and thereby to ignore, humiliate and in other ways harm them.

Description

Formal institutions, public and private, shape the negative experience of poverty through public discourse and the design and implementation of policy and services; and also, through their neglect of, and failure to listen to, people living in poverty. While some institutions are mandated to tackle poverty and improve people's lives, they frequently fail to do so. Sometimes this means living with the consequences of government failure to enforce existing policy and law, of unfair distribution of resources and services, and of persistent corruption. It also means having no access to justice and no voice in decisions made by government or within civil society.

In framing policies, institutions tend to reflect, amplify and shape discriminatory attitudes rather than to challenge them. Likewise, the design and implementation of policies can serve to exclude people in poverty, fail to meet their basic needs, and stigmatise them. Often people in poverty find their dealings with institutions to be characterised by judgement, domination, obligation and control that stifle voices and result in the denial of rights, leaving them disempowered. When people try to move out of poverty, they do not find the support they expect from institutions designed to enable or empower them.

"Due to lack of good governance there is a lack of employment and money. Most of us have to pay a bribe to get a job. But even this is not a guarantee to get the job".

Practitioner, Bangladesh

"Some social workers are very quick to break up families. Those who want to keep families together get over-ruled by managers. It is about the Department and not the workers".

Practitioner, UK

"Out of sight, out of mind government thinking. Resources are just enough to set people up to fail. The human to human aspect of services is missing".

Practitioner USA

"Leaders in our village have created many taxes which affect us badly. Anything you take for sale in a market has to be taxed whether you have sold it or not. During local auction day, if you take a goat to sell in order to get money to help your family, you must pay a tax. If you cannot sell the goat, then on your way back with your unsold goat you have to pay another tax".

Peer group of men in poverty, Tanzania

"A poor person might even have a school to go to, but the question is : what quality of teaching are you going to get? The problem goes beyond poor families being unable to access schools. Government and wider society don't give them opportunities. They fail to offer quality services or show a sincere desire to help them escape from poverty".

Academic, Bolivia

"The welfare system is not designed to enable you to evolve out of it. It keeps us in a constant phase of being below. This system puts you in a situation and blames you for this situation. It is sometimes like you have to steal your way out of poverty".

Activist, US

"People no longer dare to go to the town hall because they are not well-received, they no longer want to go there to do their administrative formalities".

Practitioners, France

Social maltreatment

Definition

Social maltreatment describes the way that people in poverty are negatively perceived and treated badly by other individuals and informal groups.

Description

The public's behaviour towards people in poverty is characterized by prejudicial negative judgements, stigma and blame. People living in poverty are often ignored or excluded, while the phenomenon of 'othering' (saying or thinking 'We're not like those people') is commonplace. Sometimes the behaviour is conscious and intentional, other times it is not. Sometimes it results from a lack of understanding of poverty.

Social maltreatment goes unchallenged because people in poverty are not recognised for what they bring to society. Relatedly, it creates a setting for institutional maltreatment that, in turn, results in differential access to resources and in the denial of rights. Social maltreatment is more acute for people who are additionally subject to prejudice on other grounds such as disability, gender, sexual orientation or ethnicity. It can also be exacerbated by certain cultural traditions and beliefs.

"Poverty is being treated like cattle, you have no dignity and no identity".

Person in poverty, UK

"We shouldn't be asking like 'what's wrong with you?' but like 'what happened to you?' "

Practitioner, USA

"Discrimination because we haven't got any money, we're not well dressed, we haven't studied, we're not professionals, we don't speak properly".

Person in poverty, Bolivia

"Being victim of prejudice, first considered as poor, but not as a human being. Having the label of poor. There is a duality : on the one side, people living in poverty are invisible, on the other side they are visible because they are stigmatised".

Academic peer group, France

"If a woman from a poor family doing a government job is late for work, there are very bad comments. But if the woman belongs to a rich family then it's not a problem. The neighbours will not speak badly about her".

Person in poverty, Bangladesh

"An old woman in poverty testified how she is excluded from almost all social events such as marriage ceremonies in her neighbourhood. Her neighbours know that she is unable to contribute financially, so they do not invite her".

Woman in poverty, Tanzania

"Here, in the US, who you are is defined by what you have. When you have not much, you are not much. And then, you are not treated like you belong".

Activist, USA

"We discriminate against them out of ignorance, we don't know anything about their lives, we haven't experienced their reality".

Practitioner, Bolivia

Unrecognised contributions

Definition

The knowledge and skills of people living in poverty are rarely seen, acknowledged or valued. Individually and collectively, people experiencing poverty are often wrongly presumed to be incompetent.

Description

People survive through resourcefulness, finding different ways to create goods or services beyond what is expected. Against the odds, they fulfill many important roles, often supporting others and making significant economic and social contributions. However, society ignores such contributions or treats them with indifference, to the point where they may themselves underestimate their knowledge and skills.

"Poverty is like being fished by the big net of society and then discarded for not being fit for purpose".

Practitioner, UK

"The capabilities learned from experience by people living in poverty are not valued or considered marketable. In the economic sphere, people in poverty are used as, and considered to be, disposable items, which creates uncertainty and instability in the lives of the working poor".

Resarch team report, USA

"We're very skilled in finding ways to earn money, we know how to knit, we know how to do so many things, recycle, but nobody values these skills. Nobody really says 'They make an effort.' It's made invisible".

Person in poverty, Bolivia

"We have wealth as human beings in what we bring to others. This encourages us to join associations, unions or political parties towards a better future".

People living in poverty, France

"People living in poverty have indigenous knowledge and skills; some are good blacksmiths, ceramic artists, etc. Their skills could contribute to poverty reduction but because they are not recognized and promoted, they remain unused".

Elders in poverty, Tanzania

"A farmer cultivates paddy and others crops for our country. If he didn't, then rich people would not get food easily. The hard work of farmers is a very important contribution for our country, yet we never give much respect to the farmer for his work".

Practitioner, Bangladesh

"The asylum system grossly limits the ways in which you can contribute to society, you have no right to work".

Opinion-formers and decision-makers, UK

"Women play important roles in domestic affairs and family chores including farming, feeding children and other subsistence economic activities. Yet their roles as main producers of household wealth and income are not recognized or valued".

Academic, Tanzania

3. Privations

These dimensions all refer to a lack of resources; monetary, material, cultural and social. They are recognised in policy discourse and feature in some existing multi-dimensional indices of poverty.

Lack of decent work

Definition

Lack of decent work refers to the prevalent experience of being denied access to work which is fairly paid, safe, secure, regulated and dignified.

Description

Often people start working when they are very young, and from this moment they experience exploitation, bad treatment and humiliation. Dignified employment is often scarce, forcing people to accept bad jobs that endanger their health, have no (or very little) positive impact on life trajectories and which can add to their insecurity. Few such jobs are regulated or unionised, leaving people vulnerable to various forms of exploitation including sexual abuse, or being fired without warning and payment.

Pay is rarely fair in relation to market rates or hours worked and may be offered in kind rather than as cash. Some workers are paid nothing at all, through breach of contract or as indentured labourers. People frequently struggle to get any time off and need to take on multiple jobs to make ends meet. Many are forced to travel long distances to work or to migrate in search of employment, necessitating living apart from their families.

Work available in the global South includes stone breaking, domestic work in other people's homes, casual manual labour, rickshaw-pulling, smallholder farming, street vending, shoe-shining or scavenging etc. In countries in the global North, short-term or casual, zero-hour contracts are common, most available jobs do not provide a living wage and access to formal employment requires qualifications and documentation. Broader relational, organisational or entrepreneurial skills gained through daily life in poverty are not recognised.

"As women selling food at fish market, we have a hard time keeping our male customers. Some demand sex. When you refuse, you end up losing them".

Woman in poverty, Tanzania

"We have no choice, we have to do the work that others don't want to do. Our children are not able to continue their studies because we don't have enough money".

Person in poverty, France

"Small-scale farmers are exploited by middle-men and have no say in setting prices for their crops".

Practitioner, Bangladesh

"You work at whatever you can find, because you owe it to your children. You look for work, but you can't find any".

Person in poverty, Bolivia

"A woman working in a quarry as a stone breaker said "We are overworked but underpaid. Most women who work in the quarry usually wake up at 5 am and work from 6 am to 4 pm. At the end of the day, they are paid Tsh 2000 – 5000 (around $ 0,85 – 2,10)"

Woman in poverty, Tanzania

"Problems with immigration status restrict us to "jobs at the bottom of society".

Activist, USA

"A lot of people who we're around don't have a regular job, they get casual labour and that leads them into poverty".

Practitioner, Bolivia

"People in work on low incomes have to rely on foodbanks".

Person in poverty, UK

Insufficient and insecure income

Definition

This dimension refers to having too little income to be able to meet basic needs and social obligations, to keep harmony within the family and to enjoy good living conditions.

Description

Without sufficient money, people may go into debt to cover basic needs, thereby becoming more dependent on others and at risk of exploitation and greater economic insecurity. Sometimes, adult incomes are so low that their children are forced to work to support the family. This work can put children in physical danger and at risk of abuse.

"Poverty is worrying about money all the time".

Person living in poverty, UK

"Without money you can't do anything, there is no life".

Person in poverty, Bolivia

"When we had no money we had to search in the forest for food. Sometimes we ate leaves and roots, without knowing if they were safe for our health".

Person in poverty, Tanzania

"If people have no work to do and cannot earn money then they cannot change their situation/condition".

Academic, Bangladesh

"I don't know what my next meal is going to be or where it's going to come from".

Activist, USA

"Not being able to pay the rent and charges".

Person living in poverty, France

"The only accessible housing is in dirty, unsafe and flood-prone setting".

Academic, Tanzania

"Parents forcing their young daughters to marry early to receive the dowry; having to wear old, broken and worn clothes; cannot repair the house; no toilet; lack of clothing; cannot even buy soap; no electricity, no kerosene, no lamp to study; cannot go to school; child labour; empty stomach obliges to steal food; pain for not being able to afford food, treatment; insolvency, high interest credits; dependency; feeling helpless; begging, prostitution".

Characteristics of the 'Lack of money' dimension, Bangladesh

Material and social deprivation

Definition

Material and social deprivation refers to a lack of access to goods and services necessary to live a decent life, participating fully in society.

Description

The necessary resources include: sufficient nutritious food; adequate clothing; affordable, quality housing with good sanitation, clean water and reliable energy supply providing security and privacy; non-discriminatory education in well-equipped schools; affordable, accessible and effective health and dental care; serviceable public transport; and non-hazardous environments. Lack of access to these resources means individuals, families, and communities being unable to meet daily needs, to live with dignity, or to have sufficient quality time for family or personal growth; and children being denied the possibility to grow and develop normally.

"Not having a place of your own. When you're hosted by someone, you have a sword of Damocles on your head".

Person in poverty, France

"Having no clothes to keep warm in winter. Bad smell from clothes that cannot be dried outside, in dilapidated hut, badly ventilated. We always feel hungry. We always have dirty feet because we have no shoes".

Peer group of people in poverty, Bangladesh

"Poverty is not just about money: there is poverty of education and exclusion from special things".

Practitioner, UK

"Overcrowding is terrible, the whole extended family lives in one room of 3 x 3. If you live in the same place that you cook in, the humidity affects your health".

Practitioner, Bolivia

"Embarrassment and feeling of failure, of not being able to provide certain things for the kids, like xbox, shoes, iphones etc".

Person in poverty, UK

"Some pupils came to school without tucking their shirts into their shorts and a teacher punished them. He did not know that they did so to avoid shame by hiding their torn shorts and lack of underwear".

Practitioner, Tanzania

"School environment can create barriers for children living in poverty : Parents have to work and can't come to parent's evenings. Non-school uniform days can highlight children living in poverty".

Practitioner, UK

"The hardest thing is not having bread to eat every day. If you don't have food you don't have the strength to work and you don't have ideas".

Person in poverty, Bolivia

"You have to choose what is most important to pay for. The home, electric, water, comes first and other material things come second".

Activist, USA

Modifying factors

These five factors were found to intensify or mitigate poverty :

Identity

The ways people experiencing poverty are perceived and responded to by others and by wider society are affected by their multiple identities. The same is true of the way they feel about themselves. People in poverty are often stigmatised and discriminated against by others based on stereotypes, prejudice and ignorance. Other groups are treated negatively in a similar way according to race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and migrant/immigrant status. When people in poverty belong, or are assigned, to other negatively perceived groups, the stigma is cumulative.

"Poverty in France is a lack of trust between colours. If we go to a company, they will take white French and not black Comorians. It's rare to give confidence to black people".

Migrants peer group France

"Throughout American history, society has always favored patriarchy and leaned towards white supremacist dominance".

Report of the US national research team, 2018

"In boarding schools English was taught, you were not allowed to speak your own language under fear of punishment. No one was allowed to speak Navajo. The indigenous language is lost so there is a disconnect in our lives".

Navajo activist, USA

" When they come from the countryside, they can't speak Spanish, they speak Aymara, but when they don't have identity papers, they're not received".

Person in poverty, Bolivia

"Having no equality of men and women; prioritizing son; lack of women's protection and security; no importance of women's opinion; gender discrimination; sexual harassment" are characteristics of gender issues linked to lack of good govenance".

Bangladesh, Merging of Knowlege® event, August 2018

"Oppression of women" is a dimension of poverty in rural Tanzania and "violence against women" an important characteristic of poverty in urban Tanzania. "Increased violence against women which often results in divorce, women and girls subjected to harmful culture and traditions depriving women of their rights to customary land and property ownership and girls not attending school. Early marriages and forced marriages for daughters. Women have no freedom of choice, are not able to contribute ideas and have a low level of decision-making".

Tanzania research team report, September 2018

"Poverty is intersectional; discrimination, sexism, racism, homophobia".

Peer group of opinion formers/decision makers, UK

Timing and Duration

The point in the life course when poverty is experienced affects its intensity, impact and opportunity to move out of poverty. When experienced over a long period, poverty entails a cumulation of pressures and demands with more severe impacts on all dimensions, particularly privations. Repeated spells of poverty exacerbate suffering through failed hopes and aspirations.

"My Mum and Dad were both in poverty, that's why they couldn't put us in school, they had nothing. I'm following the same path as my Mum. You have money for an instant, you're poor all your life".

Person in poverty, Bolivia

"We talked about the vicious circle. When you are born into a poor family, you are more likely to be poor and remain poor. Because the system makes it harder to get out of it, makes the situation worse. This is the idea of social determinism".

Academic peer group, France

"We have talked about the poverty in which some people find themselves following a life accident, for example losing a job. It is 'a descent into hell', they start from the top and fall to the bottom. It is difficult because they can compare with their previous life. For others, they are born into poverty because their families were already living in poverty. They have only known poverty and nothing else. They have nothing to compare with".

People in poverty peer group, France

"I don't know what to do for my children. I am very worried about the future. When I see them coming here in Boko to break stones for the whole day with me I wonder what will be their future. When I think about this, I cannot sleep during the night".

Person in poverty, Tanzania

"You think if I can just make it to the end of the week everything will be OK".

Activist, USA

"Political red tape; the time that you yourself can control and the time that's out of your hands. You may apply for a different type of subsidy but how long it takes for you to receive it is out of your control even though it may be something that you need".

Academic, USA

Location

The precise experience of poverty is sensitive to location: varying by country; between rural and urban areas; and more and less deprived neighbourhoods. Disadvantaged areas, both rural and urban, shape the lives of people experiencing poverty. They are often distinguished by inadequate infrastructure, isolation, a dearth of services, and lack of public transportation. Frequently, there are few employment opportunities or a relative abundance of low quality and precarious jobs paying inadequate wages. Such services as are present, are often of inferior quality with under-funded and failing schools, inadequate health facilities and an absence of shops selling healthy and affordable food. Due to high population densities and inadequate housing with deficient sanitation, there can be the threat of outbreaks of contagious disease. Residents may also be stigmatised by the bad reputation of their neighbourhood.

"In reality, health facilities are very, very far from our homes. For our village, it is now becoming normal to see pregnant women losing their babies at birth because when it is time to give birth, they do not have the means to travel to the hospital".

Woman in poverty, Tanzania

"I think that violence and poverty is exacerbated because you're more exposed... (The poorest families) suffer more, much more, have more risks, because they live in unsafe neighbourhoods".

Academic, Bolivia

"They put you in a crappy place, don't give enough services and 'hopefully' you die in this crappy place because that's all you deserved".

Activist, USA

"When I made the administrative procedures, since I came from the shelter, I was already seen as a poor person. The way they look at me, I already felt poor compared to others. Even in the high school where we were put, even there, through the eyes of our friends, we already felt poor. The building where I live is recognized as the building for the poor".

Person I in poverty, France

"Disconnection from adequate resources in a remote rural area ; because of the rural geographic distances, doctors are hours away by car ; lack of jobs, of education, of growth opportunities. Hard to get a doctor who wants to stay in this area".

Practitioner peer group, USA

Environment and environmental policy

The experience of poverty is also influenced by the nature and degree of environmental degradation and various forms of pollution. Examples include extreme weather events such as floods and droughts, deforestation, air and water pollution, increased use of pesticides and plastics, reduced habitat for biodiversity, and exhaustion of land. People in poverty are more exposed to the negative consequences of these phenomena and have no means to protect their families, livestock and other assets or to move out of harm's way. Climate and environmental policies are often shaped without reference to their impact on people in poverty.

"Climate change affects the future, its effects will fall heaviest on poor people, but we lack voice and power on decisions".

Activist peer group, USA

"'Environmental degradation' and 'negative impact of climate change' are dimensions of poverty in rural and urban Bangladesh with the following characteristics: famine, air pollution, sound pollution, cooking smoke, playing in a dirty environment, water logging, salinity, natural disaster, cyclones, man-made disaster, river erosion, lack of proper land use, lack of arable and animal pasture land, decreasing resources, deforestation, use of pesticides and plastic, effect of climate change on agriculture, environmental disasters due to competitive development, lack of habitat for biodiversity, ecological imbalance etc".

Bangladesh research team report, August 2018

"In rural Tanzania, lack of water is a dimension of poverty since 'ordinary people, including people living in poverty, consider the absence of clean water to be an indicator of abject poverty, without which life cannot be sustained'. Some attributes of this dimensions are: community conflicts caused by scarcity of water, outbreak of water-born and contagious diseases such as cholera, due to unsafe water, inaccessibility of water sources due to long distances and time spent especially for women, hence the lack of time to engage in other productive activities, inability to maintain bodily cleanliness".

Tanzania research team report, September 2018

"Environmental issues in our area affect health; water quality, black/brown lung disease from coal mines and coal dust, underground mining sinking wells affecting water with chemicals, high cancer rates and thyroid issues, high drug use rates. People self-medicating with drugs and alcohol, doctors are hours away by car and give out too many prescriptions for hard drugs. Preventive health care is very low in the list of government priorities".

Practitioner peer group, USA

"There are diseases caused by the bad water resources. They contaminate food and increases illness rates. Economically, it affects livestock and production in the northern highlands".

University student, Bolivia

Cultural beliefs

Cultural beliefs not only affect how poverty is defined and understood, they can shape the way that people in poverty are treated and in themselves be a cause of poverty. Countries differ in the extent to which the general public attributes the causes of poverty to structural factors or to individual failings. This helps to determine the balance in policy between financial and social support, between selectivity with welfare benefits based on financial need and universal or categorical provisions that foster solidarity and social cohesion. It also determines whether people in poverty are blamed, punished, pitied, despised or respected. Culture creates financial expectations, for example, the need for gifts, dowries, parties, ceremonies and expenditures on witchcraft, that put pressure on family budgets and excludes those who cannot afford to participate. It defines who is expected to engage in paid work and who should do unpaid labour; who should receive assistance and who should be denied it, for what reasons and in what circumstances.

"People say bad words, gossips. If your husband was killed by a tiger, they pretend that you are the reason behind that, you bring bad luck, you are a witch... I have to suffer a lot of violence stigma, harassment in the family and in the community, because my husband was killed by a tiger".

Person in poverty, Bangladesh

"Involved in superstitious beliefs e.g. being attached to traditional witchcraft in the hope of becoming rich, bewitching others, 'making their lucky stars vanish', resorting to fortune-tellers; and earning money through 'magic ways".

Tanzania research team report

"For more than 40 million Americans experiencing poverty, the American dream has become a reference that contributes to a personal sense of failure when their realities are measured against it When people experiencing poverty are not able to exit poverty and achieve what is considered a level of success – becoming economically self-sufficient/sustainable as some describe it – middle-class society believes this is due to their own personal failings/ behaviour, lack of morals, or character flaws, as opposed to failing structures, institutions, and an ever decreasing safety-net system".

Report of the US research team, 2018

Annexes

1. Methodology / process

This international research project titled ***'The dimensions of poverty and how to measure them'*** was initiated and coordinated through a partnership between the international movement ATD Fourth World and the University of Oxford.

The research used an approach called the ***Merging of Knowledge and Practice with people living in poverty*®**[1]. Through considerable investment of time and yet limited financial resources because of very rigorous financial ethics, this approach enables co-leadership of the research by people facing poverty, practitioners and academics.

National Research Teams (NRT) were formed in six countries: Bangladesh, Bolivia, France, Tanzania, the United Kingdom and the United States. The six NRTs have nine to fifteen members, comprising four to six people with direct experience of poverty, and two to four academics and practitioners providing services or advocacy for people in poverty, respectively. NRTs were usually facilitated by two coordinators and one research assistant. Highly-experienced ATD Fourth World full-time volunteers accompanied those who had never participated in research before, supporting them in ways that enable their full participation.

A three-step process was used to collect data in each country. First, knowledge about poverty was generated within independent peer group meetings comprising either people with direct experience of poverty, those working as practitioners in communities facing poverty, or academics researching poverty. Each NRT set up between 13 and 38 peer groups of people in poverty, practitioners and academics, in urban and rural areas. 1091 people participated in peer groups across the whole project, with a majority of female persons (60,3%), 665 adults and children in poverty (61,4%), 262 practitioners (23,5%) and 164 academics (15,1%). Each peer group met for at least half a day and most often two days to use a range of methods designed to enable the collective identification of characteristics of poverty, then group these into dimensions.

2 ***The Merging of Knowledge: People in Poverty and Academics Thinking Together,*** 2007, University Press of America.

3 www.4thworldmovement.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Guidelines_for_the_Merging_of_Knowledge_and_Practices.pdf

Secondly, the NRTs followed the ***Merging of Knowledge®*** approach to analyse the outcomes from the peer group: members of the research team with direct experience of poverty made a synthesis from the reports made by the peer groups with people living in poverty, the practitioners did the same from reports made by the peer groups of practitioners, and likewise the academics. These three syntheses were the starting point for their deliberations towards ***Merging of Knowledge®***, resulting in the joint production of one single list of dimensions of poverty and their characteristics and some pending questions.

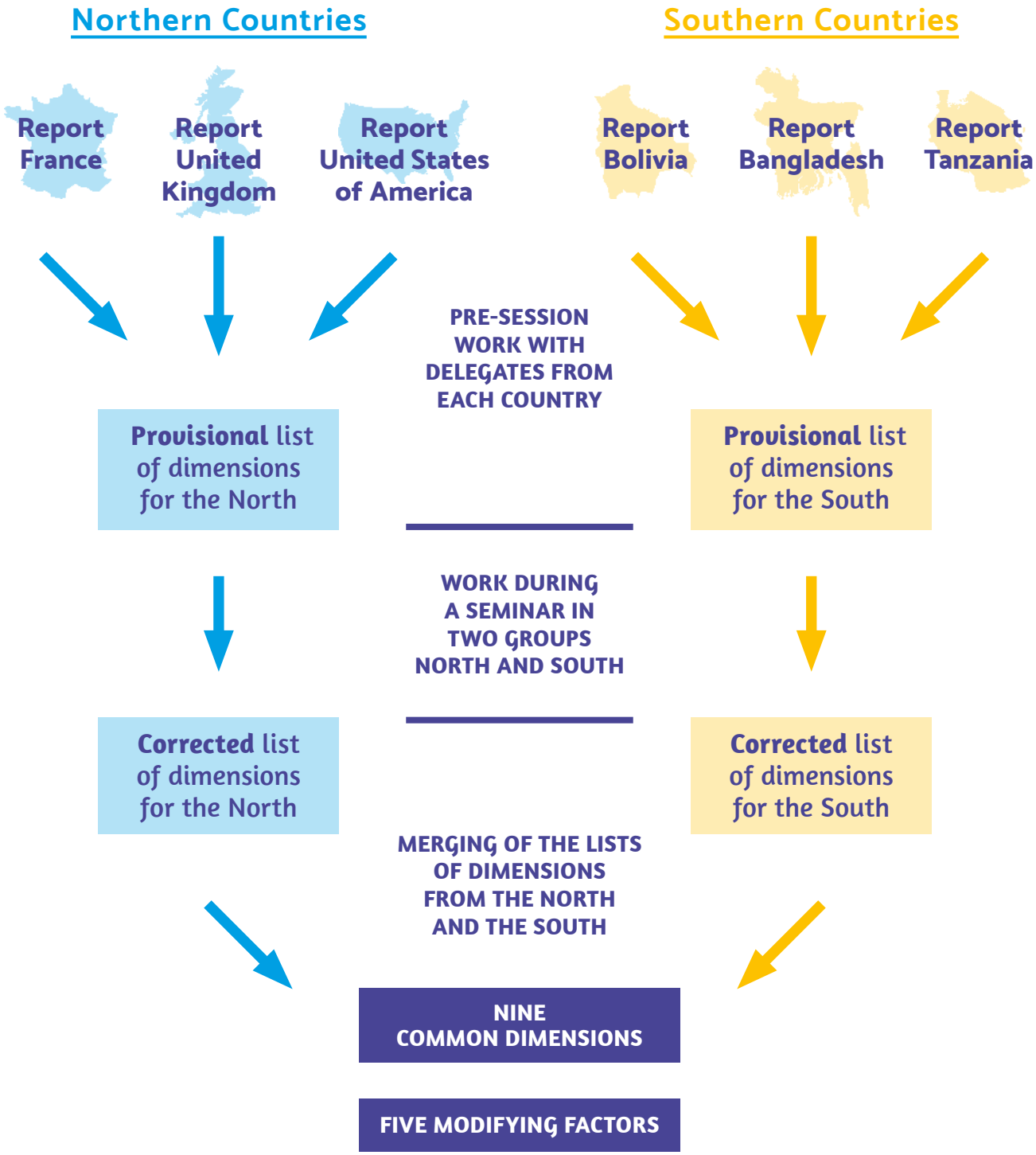
Thirdly, a ***Merging of Knowledge®*** event was organised for two or three days with members of each of the peer groups to discuss the production of the NRTs. Across the project, 280 people took part in ***Merging of Knowledge®*** events. The NRTs then put forward their analysis taking in account the new data produced in this event. The result of this process was not only a list of dimensions, but also new, enriched insights about the reality of poverty in each country.

In September 2018, 32 delegates from the six NRTs gathered with the international coordination team to work together for one week. The six NRTs had identified a total of about 70 dimensions of poverty. Project participants first worked in two groups, comprising delegates from, respectively, the global North and the global South, to see whether there were common elements in the list of dimensions identified by each national team. The two groups then convened in plenary to compare their lists. They were surprised to find out that, although the daily lives of poor people in the North and in the South are in many ways different, the list of dimensions they had identified were very similar. At the end of a seven-day session, project participants came up with a list of nine dimensions of poverty that are common to all participating countries, two country-specific dimensions and three modifying factors.

Back home, all NRTs refined their findings, complementing them with a written account of the new insights about poverty that had emerged from their research. Their reports enabled the international coordination team to draft this international synthesis titled 'The hidden dimensions of poverty' describing nine common dimensions, their interactions and five modifying factors. The synthesis was then validated by the NRTs before completion.

The whole process of ***Merging of Knowledge®*** at international level is described in the graph beside.

2. Process of Merging Knowledge®



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Graphic design and layout : Cécile Wintrebert
Printed in may 2019 by the OCDE
Open type : Catamaran & Amaranth