The Hidden Dimensions of Poverty (a collaborative research project between ATD Fourth World and the University of Oxford): a discussion between members of the project's International Coordination Team, 19.1.21, facilitated by Fran Bennett[1]

Fran Bennett (F): Welcome everybody, do introduce yourselves and your relationship to the research on the hidden dimensions of poverty.

X – My name is **Xavier Godinot**, I've been a member of ATD Fourth World for many years, I was trained in economics and politics and I've worked in several countries and was happy to be part of this project.

R – I'm **Robert Walker**, I've been associated with this research since the beginning and a member of the international coordination team. I became involved when I was at Oxford, I'm currently based in Beijing.

M – I am **Marianne de Laat**, I've been a member of ATD Fourth World for thirty years now and in the merging of knowledge team for fifteen years, and so I was also a member of the international coordination team of the research, but I'm also from the French national team.

F - Thank you very much. And there are two people who are not with us, unfortunately, who were also members of the international coordination team.

X – Yes, one is Alberto Urgarte; he's a member of ATD Fourth World, he comes from Peru, he was trained as an anthropologist. He had the skill to speak Spanish that we don't have - but unfortunately he doesn't speak English, this is why he can't take part in this interview.

R – The other is Rachel Bray, who was a research fellow within the Department of Social Policy and Intervention at Oxford University during the course of the research. She was heavily involved in the international coordination team, but with a particular focus. She's our raconteur in many ways; she has recorded much of the activity that we have done and the thoughts that we've had over time, as well as being an active member of the team. She's now working in the careers service in Oxford.

F - And she had a background in participatory research, including with children.

Thank you very much, everybody. We wanted to look at three different areas today, and we're talking in particular about the collaboration between ATD Fourth World and Oxford University in this research, using the merging of knowledge, which is a method ATD Fourth World has used for some time. So the first question I was going to ask was about why you decided to work together and what you hoped would come out of this - what added value it would bring. The second area was going to be about what it was like in practice, both within the international coordination team and the liaison with the national teams. And then the outcomes in relation to both what you thought the process resulted in and the findings - what you hope the impact will be more generally.

So to begin with, why did ATD Fourth World and Oxford University decide to work together in this merging of knowledge methodology to look at the hidden dimensions of poverty? Xavier, do you want to go first? Because I think ATD Fourth World initiated the research.

X – We decided to do this project in the wake of some work we had done before. For a few years, between 2011 and 2015, we had been evaluating the Millennium Development Goals with people living in poverty in twelve countries, and we came up with five key

recommendations for the post-2015 agenda. And the main one was: introduce people in poverty as new partners in building knowledge and development. And more precisely, we recommended that the indicators linked to extreme poverty, the $1.25 a day, should be re-examined, and should no longer be considered as a reliable global measure of extreme poverty. So this is the first reason.

The second reason is that for fifteen years I had been the representative of ATD Fourth World to the World Bank, and I had discovered that this institution works mainly in English and gives much more credence to academics than to NGOs. And I felt that if we wanted the voice of people in poverty to be listened to by this institution, which invested in the $1 a day measurement, we had to work with English speaking academics, and to use the merging of knowledge approach that we have been refining for many years. And I got to know Robert Walker in 2012 at an international meeting at UNESCO; then I invited him to take part in several seminars in Brussels, in Pierrelaye, and in New York in June 2013, where he made a very compelling contribution on poverty and shame. And from that moment on, I thought we had to work together. And he contributed to another seminar at the World Bank in April 2014, and there we decided to work together. Our more concrete collaboration started in September 2014 with an application to the John Fell Fund (managed by Oxford University).

F - Thank you very much, Xavier. Robert, do you want to add to that about why Oxford University decided to work with ATD Fourth World?

R – It goes back to the poverty and shame work that Xavier has just mentioned. We were two thirds of the way through a project, which was a six or seven country study, playing with the notion of Amartya Sen, who argued that at the absolute core of poverty lay shame. And following up on a graduate student who said 'I told you about that!', we evolved a piece of research which sought to test it by looking at very diverse countries. Two thirds of the way through that, we decided that we would want to tailor the academic findings in such a way that they would be useful to people from a range of sectors, media, government, international government agencies and international NGOs.

As a consequence of trying to think who on earth you invite to that seminar, I was scouring the internet and, courtesy of google, came across ATD Fourth World. And reading their website, they talked about the sorts of things that our research was finding. In other words, for twenty or thirty years, ATD Fourth World already knew what we were going to find. And so we invited ATD Fourth World to attend; and we had within this seminar the idea of … giving organisations up to £200,000, which we actually did, and said, if you have this sort of money, what would you do with it?

And ATD Fourth World responded to that, they responded to that by linking us in, as Xavier was saying, to the process of thinking forwards from the Millennium Development Goals towards the Sustainable Development Goals. And we also involved Elaine Chase - whose contribution we shouldn't forget - at the early stages of the research. She was a researcher then at Oxford, and is now at University College London. And she attended, I think, the first of our joint meetings with ATD Fourth World, which was very much about the ability for us to play a role in terms of developing the ideas that ATD Fourth World was developing and to understand that process. And so it grew out of that initial commitment really.

As Xavier's explained how I was sucked into it, it wasn't really through an interest in the merging of knowledge, I was sucked into it through this possibility of … with the help of an international NGO helping to create impact for our work on poverty and shame.

One of the other things that ATD Fourth World helped in was to get a redrafting of the ILO Recommendation 202 on a social protection floor, so working with ATD Fourth World, connecting us up to the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, we

managed to get a change in that piece of international law (or guidance). So our strength and I guess our faith … our faith in each other … I'm not quite sure how we got from there and shame to multi-dimensional poverty, other than the fact I had been working on it for some time, but I don't quite remember the birth of the idea. I remember the document that we wrote and I remember promoting it within the World Bank, I don't quite know where the spark came from.

X – I think the spark came from a meeting with the number 2 at the World Bank, and you attended the meeting, Robert, and a young student doing an internship at ATD in New York attended the meeting as well. And I think we decided after the meeting to try and work together and you said, maybe I could get some money from a fund from Oxford University, and then you applied to the John Fell Fund, and then, as you remember, we wrote the first paper and of course the research designed for the World Bank. So that's when the World Bank appeared.

F - Thank you. Marianne, you're somebody in this conversation who has had a lot to do with the merging of knowledge methodology. Do you think that a team which brings together at least two of the elements that this approach usually includes, which is academics and people who work with people in poverty, is important in terms of the process? You didn't have people in poverty in your team, and I think that's quite interesting; so I just wanted to ask how you saw this international coordination team in relation to the merging of knowledge.

M – (laughs) Yes, with the merging of knowledge approach we find ourselves in a kind of area of radical epistemologies. And these are epistemologies which have as their objective, their goal, the construction of new knowledge, but also the fight against inequalities, that is the fight against epistemic injustice – the fact that some people are excluded from the production of knowledge … This has been the case for a long time for women or for minorities or excluded people, such as people living in poverty. And to allow these people to participate in producing knowledge, I think we need to work together, academics and NGOs that bring those people together and enable them to deliver … to develop them, their knowledge, and their own framework of interpretation. So for me, the academics have to ensure that the research is done in a scientific way. For example, they have to ensure that the NGOs do not confuse research with advocacy. And there was maybe a little example in the very beginning of the research: Xavier proposed that we affirm certain convictions of Father Joseph, which Robert obviously refused! Reminding us that we were in a process of research and not political advocacy. And I think he was right, it was his role to remind us of this. But I think our (ATD Fourth World's) strength was that we could gather people living in poverty together - and we went a long way with them before they participated in the research, because it's not possible to take just people on the street and say 'come and participate with us in this research'.

F - Thank you so much, Marianne. I want to get on later to how it all worked. But I want to talk first about whether you anticipated any difficulties, and what added value you thought it would bring to be working together.

R – I want to go back rather than answer your last question, to reflect on the previous question, which was why we haven't got people in poverty on the international coordination team. And to note that we didn't have people in poverty at the first planning event either, which was the first attempt (funded by the John Fell Fund) which brought together the countries that were initially going to be involved, and they were represented by ATD Fourth World volunteers from each of those countries. So, if you like, we have the practitioner component of the tripartite approach to the merging of knowledge, which is how ATD Fourth World has seen it.

But right from the very beginning I wanted to expand this tripartite conception. I thought it was very French. I thought giving priority to intellectuals over real people was something that a Brit wouldn't do. And so I wanted to expand it to include people from the general public who are ultimately responsible, living within a democracy, for policies that get put in place. And I was also very keen that we brought in policy makers themselves. So we have five links to the merging of knowledge rather than three. And at various stages during the research we tried to implement that, but in practice … We sort of did it to a greater extent I think in the UK, where we certainly had members of the public, although we found it much more difficult to recruit policymakers.

F - Thank you so much, Robert. I think that brings me on to something I was going to ask later, but I will ask it now because you've brought it up. As you know, I was actually at that initial meeting, and I've been involved in some ways throughout, although not as centrally as any of you. But when you raised that, Robert, I thought that I've got both hats. I've got an ATD Fourth World hat from many, many years ago onwards and also an Oxford University hat for about half that time. So I could see it from both sides. But it does seem to me that what you raised there, and actually what Marianne said, is the difference between whether you are doing a policy making type of research or a knowledge gathering type of research. You wanted to involve the general public, Robert, because eventually they are ultimately responsible in a democracy for policies; and you wanted to involve policymakers. Marianne talked about this as a radical epistemology, which is about a form of understanding of the world. Now, it seems to me you could see this differently. Is its primary purpose to contribute towards policymaking, or is it a way of gathering knowledge about and enhancing our understanding of poverty?

X – Well, I think the focus of the project was to build knowledge on poverty. And of course, in a second step was to use it as a tool for advocacy. But the main goal was to build knowledge on poverty with people living in poverty, academics and practitioners. And we didn't try to come up with policy recommendations at all, because we just didn't have time.

R - We included in our original design reaching the point where we were going to measure. So that goes back to Fran's question. And I think her distinction is entirely false. I say that the five sectors is a better summary of the kinds of knowledge, the kinds of perspective which would give us a greater understanding of the nature of poverty. It seems to me, as our research ultimately demonstrated, that much poverty is relational, and relations have at least two dimensions, two ends to that relationship, of which public and policy are part. So it was as radical! Where it perhaps differed was the extent to which it prioritised one perspective.

I think my view initially was that we should balance those perspectives and through some form of balancing we would have a better understanding of the nature of poverty. Having begun to teach sociology in Beijing, I now realise that most of that was just wrong anyway - in that poverty is not a reality, it's a concept. It's clearly a socially constructed concept; but the notion of getting it right is somewhat farcical.

F - Marianne, I'd like to know what you think about the question as well.

M – (laughs) I think … Robert is right, that we could have taken into account also the general public and policymakers because they have something, a view, to bring, and it would have been more complete. But at the same time, one of our purposes was also to show that people living in poverty have knowledge to bring, and this was one of our priorities. And the more you make it complex and give everyone the floor, the less you can - I think - show that, yes, people living in poverty can bring something essential to the knowledge - and it was already very complex! So to add two other groups - and complex groups … because we tried something with policymakers for example in France, but it was very complex to have them all

the way with us (they can come a half day, but not ten days, or twenty days, or … whatever). So yes, to me it was a question of complexity also.

F - Thank you, that's really helpful. And I was going to ask what added value you thought it would bring to have ATD Fourth World and Oxford University working together, and also whether you anticipated any difficulties? One added value that I can see, for example, from a cynical perspective, would be that it adds to ATD Fourth World's reputation to have a famous academic institution associated with its research. Is that right, Xavier?

X – Yes, for sure. When you want to work with big institutions like the OECD or the World Bank, if you are not associated with a big university such as Oxford, you don't have much power, you don't have much weight. As I said at the beginning, I discovered that the World Bank doesn't give much credence to NGOs. It gives much more credence to academics. So if you are not working with academics, you won't be listened to, it's very simple.

F - And did you anticipate any difficulties in doing that?

X – Of course it's never easy when we come from different backgrounds and different forms of training. I had the chance of being trained as a researcher, because I was trained as an academic, and so I tried to keep people together all along the project. It was not always easy because it was a very challenging project for each of us, it was very challenging all along the road. And this is a lesson we can draw from these experiments. When you go on such a journey, you need to change personally - you are compelled to change - if you want to be able to work with the others because you need to take on board their concerns. And of course you need to keep your own concerns as well, and you need constantly to make compromises but without losing what's important for you. And something that was very important was of course that we wanted to have the contribution of people living in poverty; and we wanted to have something that could be considered as scientific. So for me these two things were very important - working with people in poverty and doing some scientific work. And this was, in my view, what could give some weight to our project.

F - Thank you. Robert, did you know what it was going to be like to work with ATD?

R - No, I had no idea really. And the reason why we were involved, or got involved, was … I think three reasons really, four maybe. One was the consistency of perspective of ATD Fourth World in the content of their poverty and shame work. So it was clear that we were talking about the same thing in the same sort of way, and that was really fundamentally important. Secondly, one couldn't help but be impressed by the organisation, the integrity of the organisation. I have to confess that seven tenths, eight tenths of it I disagreed with, but there's nevertheless a clear commitment to doing the right thing, and that was an important component. Thirdly was about people themselves. They may have strong views and we may all be fairly inflexible, but ultimately we swap our roles and come together, and that was evident right at the beginning. And then there was a pragmatic consideration. ATD Fourth World has fingerprints on the ground; it understands the nature of poverty in a range of different cultures. It was clear that we wanted to exploit that; we were wanting to have a big impact on the way that the globe thinks about poverty, and therefore we needed it to be international, and ATD Fourth World had the framework that enabled that to be possible. And it also had, you know, its credibility within particularly the United Nations I guess, and of course, as you heard, Xavier was making connections too with the World Bank, so we had feet in both of those international organisations.

And so those were four reasons why I felt that coming together with ATD Fourth World was going to be good. Did I understand the nature of the relationships and encounters that we were going to have over the next years? No! No way! Do I regret it? No. No way. I have really close friends as a result of that project. And in a way I agree partly with Xavier about

the whole process being transformative, I think it is … I think I do think in a different way than I did when I began the process. But I think the compromise is costly. I think coming together makes it very, very difficult to hold on to the foundations of our different perspectives.

And so I think the merging of knowledge is a tool which has great strengths in bringing people together in terms of making people think, in terms of transformation. In terms of the way it evolved within ATD Fourth World, I think it was in a sense, you know, about reaching understandings and reaching decisions; but that's not necessarily research. And what we were trying to do - and this is the experiment from our (academics') point of view - was to see to what extent the merging of knowledge could be a strong research method. And thereby is a tension, and it's a tension which we resolved through compromise, and we came to the end, and we have knowledge which we all have faith in. But whether it's good research is an open question! Whether it's influential research … I'm convinced it is.

F - Thank you Robert. Can I bring that back to Marianne? Because what we are doing here is discussing the nature of the merging of knowledge as a process, as a tool, as Robert calls it. And one thing that I've wondered is whether it's closer to deliberation? I mean you could call it deliberative trialogue, rather than deliberative dialogue, if you think of the three different groups that were originally involved. So is it deliberation rather than research? What do you think, Marianne?

M – Good question! (laughs). I'm not sure that if you take ten researchers and ask them what is good research, they will respond with the same thing. So, you know that there are different schools in research! So I think with the merging of knowledge, we are very close to participatory research, very participative research and I think that's not the school where Robert was, or is! But therefore it was also important for me that there were two academics in our team. Because no one academic alone can have the truth.

R – Divide and rule!?

M – No! But it was the same for Xavier and me, it's very important to have at least two people coming from NGOs, and two from an academic world, because then you see that there are different schools of thought. Yes, what is good research?! (laughs). I still think that the merging of knowledge can be a tool for good research.

F - What would you say, going back to my question about deliberation and research? What would you say was the difference? One school of thought might say: in deliberative dialogue it's about opinions in the end, it's about views, and you introduce things which you want people to respond to, or at least that's one way of doing deliberative dialogue, deliberative thinking. So is that the difference - that you just ask people to discuss between themselves, rather than you providing the external stimulus?

X – I think we didn't just put together different opinions. If you come back to the notion of what Amartya Sen said about objectivity and transpositional objectivity … When you are working with people in poverty, you are building towards positional objectivity. You take different points of view from people living in poverty and when they work together you get the collaborative point of view, which is close to objectivity on, you know, their living circumstances. So you are working on objectivity. And then when you put together the collective positions of people in poverty, academics and practitioners, you come up with transpositional objectivity. So these words of Amartya Sen I think are well suited to the merging of knowledge. But it's not just deliberation about opinions, it's much more solid than just opinions. Because there has been the collective work.

F – Robert's wanting to come in on that, I think.

R – Well, only for what is almost an ontological question - about what knowledge is, and whether we can meaningfully distinguish between opinion and knowledge and fact. Now I agree with Xavier's notion of people coming together and getting a position. He presented it in terms of people in poverty, and again that's a priority, I think, for ATD … which is to give voice to that particular perspective, which is one which is very largely ignored. But as I saw the process - as I wanted to see the process - it was bringing together those different perspectives, not only to embrace the diversity amongst people in poverty, but to bring together a diversity from all perspectives, insofar as one can define them like that, to get a rounded three-dimensional understanding, if you like - or five-dimensional, even - of the phenomenon, which is the experience of poverty. And I think what we were trying to do was to get people to talk about their experience. Now their experience is as close to fact as they get; but it's clearly moderated through opinion, or it's moderated through words and reflection, which takes you clearly away from whatever it is that is direct experience. So in that sense, I think I'm connected really with Marianne, it's not just 'I think this', it's 'I understand this because …'

And I think that the processes we were getting through was trying to track those explanations for why they understand the world in the way that it is, and to refine that understanding by challenge: 'is that all?' 'is that really what you think?' So it's not deliberative in that sense. There is a connection with deliberative; you say we bring in ideas or facts into a deliberative process - but those are the facts which are coming from the various groups with their different perspectives, so each group is experiencing their own facts, plus the facts of those people that they have been talking to.

F - Thank you Robert. Marianne, did you want to come back on that, having heard what they said?

M – Yes, I think it's refining knowledge together, but coming from different perspectives, and challenging each other; explaining why you think what you think, then making others think about what you said. So it's not merging of learning, knowledge with each one defending what he's thinking and saying, but it's inviting everyone to question their own vision in the light of what the other is bringing to the discussion - and so construct together a common understanding.

F - So we sometimes talk about co-construction of knowledge; is that the right kind of frame?

M – Yes.

F - I think we should get on to something more concrete! (laughs) We're in the forests of ontology and epistemology here. And I think our readers will probably want to know a bit more about what actually happened.

R – We talked for long periods of time about ontology and epistemology, that's what happened!

F - I can imagine! So I was going on to what the process of working together was like. And that was partly within the international coordination team - you may think we've said enough about that - but also between the international coordination team and the national teams in six countries; and I wanted to hear particularly from Marianne about the meeting that was important to sorting out how you structured the findings. Let's start there. So how did the process of working on the research work out for you?

M – Maybe first, before talking about the international process, I could say something about the national level. The research teams in the different countries were composed of people who had experienced poverty, practitioners, and academic researchers. And so, for each

sub-group of these teams to build their knowledge, they organised peer groups for each of these different sources of knowledge. And then after that they merged their knowledge … but that was not always easy in the national teams, and this was for different reasons. In some countries, it was difficult to find academic researchers in post who were willing to participate in the adventure; or in other countries, cultural habits make it difficult to feel equal between men and women for example, or between academics and people who have experienced poverty, or between young and old people. So it was difficult to exchange on an equal basis. Or sometimes practitioners took too much … space. So there were in the different countries a lot of challenges - and so, as an international coordination team, we tried to look with every country at how to do things in the best way.

So there were challenges, and we didn't resolve them all, but we dealt with it. And the same challenges arose during the international meetings, with some added complexity, because we spoke five different languages: English, Spanish, French, Swahili and Bengali. And we also came from different - very different - cultures, with a big difference between countries of the South and countries of the North, but also between, for example, the individualistic approach of the United States (yes, you can! yes you can!) and the more human rights approach of France, for example.

So all those things were in play when we came together. And it was a real challenge to realise an exchange where everyone could contribute and bring their knowledge, in a way that everyone at the end could also recognise themselves in the results. So we had to invent a way of doing things … And so, for the meeting in 2018 where we came up with the final dimensions, international dimensions, we thought of a plan of how to do this, with different steps and how to achieve this. So do you want me to explain a little bit more how we did it?

F - I think that would be great, Marianne.

M – So first we started with two days working together, the international coordination team with one delegate from each country. And we worked in two groups: Southern countries together - so Bangladesh, Bolivia and Tanzania - with three people from the international coordination team; and another group, the Northern countries - United States, France, United Kingdom - with two people from the international team.

X – Maybe it's useful to say that at this stage we had 71 dimensions of poverty coming from the six countries.

M – Yes! That's true!

X – 71 dimensions. So this is why we invented, with some support from Marianne, this way of working, not to be completely drawn under by the dimensions.

M – Yes. And so in those two groups, the Southern group and the Northern group, the three knowledges - knowledge areas - were represented; there was always a person with experience of poverty, a practitioner and an academic. And those little groups, they were five or six people, and they had a view of the results coming from the three countries concerned; so they sought to understand the results from each country, looked for convergences and divergences, and then they built a list of common dimensions. So at the end of those two days, we had two lists, I think of nine or ten dimensions, one less for the South or one less for the North. And then we had a five-day meeting in Villarceaux, with five delegates from each country, and also the five members of the international coordination team. And for the first two days we continued to work in two groups, North and South. The first thing we did, we asked the countries to present one of their most important findings. And we did it with …

X – Human sculpture?

M – Yes, yes. So each country presented one important finding - the most important in their view - to the two other countries. That was a start … we started the exchange with that. And then those who worked together in the first two days presented their outcomes, their eight or nine or ten dimensions they found were common to the Northern or to the Southern countries. Then, after this presentation, in their countries they met together – so, France together, Bolivia together - and they asked themselves: do we find ourselves in this list? Is this list also true for our countries? First in country groups, and then in peer groups. So for the Northern countries, people living in poverty coming from the US, from the UK and from France met together. The academics coming from those three countries met together to see: what do we think about this list? and what we propose to change after we talk together, after we heard the different countries react. So … then came some proposals to change the list. So at the end, we had a list which the three Southern countries agreed on and one from the Northern countries.

And then the last step was the Southern countries proposed their lists to the Northern and the Northern their list to the Southern. How did we do it? One group started with one dimension and said: we found this dimension; and then we asked the Northern countries, for example, to find a dimension that was very close to it. And so we went on to see: can we come together or not, and what are the dimensions that are alone or … So a whole day we took the time to do this. So that was very conceptual, we are at the level of concepts … But then we thought: it's important to go back to life, and in peer groups people met and looked at each dimension, each common dimension we found for the six countries, and said: is this true for us? and can we give examples of this in our country? So we came back through experience, through life. So I can say in the countries we started from experience, we came to concepts, we merged the concepts and then we went back to life, to validate or not our findings.

F - That's really helpful, Marianne. Can you just say a little bit about the modifiers?

R – Well, they're a bit of a compromise. In one sense, they coped with environmental factors, which emerged strongly in one of our countries but which were strongly opposed by others. And the idea of moderation I think came right back on the first day in one of the groups; there was the concept of things applied across dimensions. And so the moderating factors, influences, came that way. Quite how we got from one to five … I'm not sure I can remember. Marianne, you have a wonderful memory!

M – I think the modifiers came from the Northern countries.

X – Yes, from the US.

M – The US had already got 'aggravating factors', they called them. And then we put it in, we shared it with the others; and then environment came along too. Bangladesh thought it was a real dimension and others thought it was an aggravating factor. And finally we said, also some factors can not only aggravate but … alleviate?

R – Alleviate or ameliorate.

M – Yes, and so we called them modifiers and not aggravating factors. But in the beginning it came from the US.

X – Yes, and there was a modifier that came from Tanzania, they came up with a dimension that was harmful beliefs. And the other countries couldn't recognise themselves in these harmful beliefs. But we took the idea as an international coordination team and we spoke about it and we said, well, if we change the name and if we say cultural beliefs, this applies not only to Tanzania – with, you know, all these predominant beliefs … witchcraft etc., but it

applies as well to the US - as we say, you know, we believe the reality that everyone can succeed, the American dream etc.; this is a belief that can be harmful to people living in poverty, because you will think that they are, you know, not intelligent, or they are not, you know, pulling to get out of poverty. So the idea of harmful beliefs became cultural beliefs … Harmful beliefs applied only to Tanzania; but cultural beliefs applied to all countries.

M – Yes, I think what is very important here is to understand that we always went back to reality. There are concepts – and then I'll say, is it true for our country too? Why can't we find examples? And that is the way we went forward. Because if not, you say, no, in our country it's not like that, but please think, and think of examples - and then you can move forward.

Yeah. Thank you very much. I'm conscious of the time, and I want to get on to outcomes really. We've talked about the crucial meeting, I think, and I'd quite like to go on to outcomes - maybe partly feeding in what Rachel has been saying about the outcome of the process, in terms of its transformative nature, or what people learned, because she's so thoughtful about these things. But I also want us to have a bit of time at the end to talk about the possible impact going forward.

But first to think about what was learned from the process of the research as a whole, not just the work between an NGO and a university. And … I think we have said some of that already, but do either of you want to talk about that at all?

X – Yes, I remember that Rachel introduced the idea of a multiplier effect … What does she mean? Does she mean that the process was very much participatory for the people who were very involved in it and now when it is finished, we want to replicate it? I think this is what she implies about the multiplier effect, because she saw what happened in the UK, she went to Ireland to see what was happening after the research, and she felt that the people who were involved in the research felt the benefits that they received from the research and they wanted to replicate it with other partners. I think this is what she wants to say with the idea of the multiplier effect.

R – I think that's my understanding of what Rachel says as well. And obviously we're distinguishing here between the process and the outcome. The process of engaging in the research and those who are engaged in the research and, if you like, the report and its consequences, and I think those things are important. I also think this intellectual empathetic idea speaks directly to the participative process.

One is emotionally engaged as well as being intellectually engaged - if you like, a whole person is engaged - and that has consequences for people in that process and wanting to take it forward. In her mind, Rachel wanted to take it forward in relation to thinking, I think, particularly about children, particularly about the elderly. We touched on those two groups in the main research; in the original design we wanted to cover them thoroughly, but the resource constraints - it takes a long time to do the merging of knowledge - meant that we couldn't do that. But again, she's motivated through the process to want to continue it and is reporting on it for others doing the same thing. And that comes out of the process as much as the results.

F - Thank you. Just as a brief parenthesis there … you were going to work with children and old people and working age people and you were going to do urban and rural areas, and - just briefly - was it just resources that meant you didn't really do that, or was it something else? Can you hold that, as I want to come to Marianne.

M – Well, I just want to add that one of the reasons of the process is also that all the partners – participants - have ownership of the results. I think people living in poverty and the

practitioners who were in the research teams know the results, can talk about them, and can defend them; I think this is really a result of the process.

R – I agree.

F - I think that's a very good point. Do you want to say anything about the idea of splitting into groups and areas much more than you actually did in reality, or do you want to leave that?

R – Tanzania effectively did all of it. They were an incredibly motivated team and somehow made it happen. I'm not saying other countries weren't motivated, I'm not quite sure why Tanzania just went ahead in the way that they did, they sort of finished before … And they were very rigorous in terms of what they did. There are lots of ways, aren't there, Marianne, to interpret the merging of knowledge in practice? There's an ideal and there are various steps en route to that ideal, and it may be Tanzania's approach to it meant that they had the capacity to do more. But I think it was helpful, because it did point to commonalities across groups, but also to differences, which I think opens up new questions really. So I think broadly speaking, though I think our research teams would have said, we would have liked to have done it, but how on earth could we?! We worked hours and hours doing what we did.

X – Yes, Tanzania, if I remember well, ran 38 peer groups, which is a huge number. And they did this in rural and urban areas, and with older people and with children. And I want to insist on the efforts made by each national research team to reach out to people living in poverty - not only to them, but also to people living in extreme poverty. And I remember in Bangladesh, for example, they tried to work with the Rohingyas in the South of the country and it took them one day's travel, with buses and boats and so on, just to reach the groups - which is an enormous effort and incredible time devoted to just going to meet people.

M – Yes, I think that each country decided the way they … what was most important for them. Like Xavier said, some said: we have really to reach the poorest, and we will put in a lot of effort to do this. Others said: we would like to make contact with the most people possible, rural, urban, old or younger. I think for us in France, we said: we would like to deepen and to understand better the relations between the dimensions. And we took almost one year in the research group to understand this together. And so we said: we won't do the elderly or children any more, because for us this was important, to understand this very deeply. So each country had this freedom, I would say, to make this choice.

R – That freedom is the challenge, a challenge. If we have a model that the real world is so strong, that it reaches you however you seek to find it, then we can be confident that our results are solid and comparable. If, however, you believe that what we found out is a function of how we go about to find it out, then I think we have a problem, that our work isn't comparable in that traditional scientific way. And you know I think we just have to, broadly speaking, live with that. But it also raises a question of what role do you play as an international coordination team. And we decided early on that, you know …

It's an odd structure, isn't it? Was it bottom up? No, of course it wasn't. Xavier's right at the top of the pyramid that is ATD Fourth World, even though it's a very flat pyramid. So it wasn't bottom up. But we played it as if it was bottom up, because the reality of who's on the ground understanding the problem, it's not us in the international coordination team, it's the national teams and the participants. And so we decided fairly early on that there was no way that we were going to be prescriptive. We were asking our national teams: what are you going to do? if you do that, what are the consequences? and getting people to try to think it through. But essentially our job, I think, was to … I'm not quite sure what our job was; but I think there was a coordination function, both at the beginning - you know, that seminar in Oxford, although not all of the national teams were there, which was about what is our

aspiration, what is it we want to achieve? And I think at the end of the process, in terms of Villarceaux and the other places where we thought collectively, internationally, together, there was a coordination process.

And, you know, I don't want to underplay Marianne's role in terms of that. Yes, we're an international team, but we have brought separate skills, and Marianne's expertise in handling all the complexity that she earlier described in terms of culture, in terms of status, in terms of giving people time and finding ways to think, Marianne's contribution was inestimable in that sense. But there was a coordination function there. And also in terms of holding together the ideas, and thinking how they relate and feeding them back, and taking that feedback, that was also, I think, part of a coordination function at the end that the international team played. And I would want to underline Rachel's contribution to that process as well.

X – Yes, there was a constant tension between the autonomy we wanted to give to the national research teams and the guidelines that we wanted to propose to the teams. Because if we gave complete autonomy to each team, there would be nothing in common. And if we imposed guidelines, there would be no autonomy. So we had to juggle with autonomy and guidelines, and this was a constant challenge for all teams, and we had to adapt to every team.

F - Thank you very much. I want to finish off by talking about the impact - or the possible impact - of the research findings and what is done with them, because I think that's important. And I want to start off with something that I think Xavier and Robert wrote, but I think Robert initially said, which was that this research has not been commissioned by an institutional institution or a government, and therefore we will have to market it to the policy community, because it isn't owned initially by the policymakers themselves, if you like; they haven't initiated the process. In fact - Robert didn't say this, but I'm saying it - it's a challenge to the way in which the international institutions in particular perhaps have measured poverty, and possibly thought about poverty, in the past. So is this being marketed - how successfully can it be marketed, if you like - to the policy community which did not initiate this to begin with?

X – Yes, I want to reply to this question and to put another question to Robert! First of all, we set up at the very beginning of the research an international advisory board. With different people coming from the World Bank, from the OECD, from big universities, from the Agence Francaise de Developpement (AFD). So the big organisations were on the advisory board. And this was really important because at the end of the process, the representative of the OECD agreed to give a welcome at the final meeting at the OECD in Paris. And so it gave the label of, you know, the OECD to the final meeting. So it's recognised that it was important; the secretary general, Angel Gurria, said it was wonderful etc. So in a way we got the results recognised at least by the OECD and we are trying to do the same with the World Bank and with other bodies. Now I heard Robert saying in one of the discussions that we came up with a new paradigm. But you said it, Robert, you never wrote it, so I would like to ask you Robert, do you think that our outcomes build a new paradigm on poverty? What would you say about this?

R – Part of that, a little bit … I'll come back to a particular question. I think it's probably wrong to think about the policy making process as an us and a them - us and the big agencies, as if we're in opposition. Clearly each international body has its own concerns and its own pressures and politics, with a small 'c' … small 'p's and big 'P's are dominant. But I think that, broadly speaking, anybody working in those organisations is committed to doing something about poverty. And so … there is a sense in which the door isn't locked, but we have to push it open. I think involving the advisory group - it was difficult to keep them involved because it takes a lot of time to do research, people move on, policies move on, we hoped it would be more engaged than it could be - but we had doors that were ajar that we

could push. I think the response that we got from the OECD was wonderful! It was members of the organisation who could see the relevance of what we were doing to their concerns. Now, we know that the policy making process is incredibly complex long-term, personality driven and politics constrained. But we had a reception from the OECD which was incredibly positive.

The challenge is to keep up the momentum - and Covid doesn't help. We had a similar sort of door opening in the World Bank and the IMF and they held that door open for us until Covid burst upon us. Now Covid will change the world, is changing the world. Whether we can maintain that interest is a challenge that we have and where we need the power of ATD Fourth World in cooperation with, say, the OECD, and indeed the other NGOs around the world to push this forward.

One of the problems that we have, I think, is that multi-dimensional poverty is thought to have been spoken for. The UNDP has a multi-dimensional poverty index; it is considered you know state of the art in terms of its underlying methodology; it's constrained massively by data availability; but I think we have a problem, because it is now deeply embedded in the international structures. It has the simplicity that attracts policymakers and it has the crudity that makes it not that useful. And I think we have therefore to think about whether the somewhat greater complexity of our own does indeed open up a new paradigm - which is a very pompous word for what we've achieved. And I think to an extent that we have embedded within our concept of poverty individual agency; that we've added a real understanding of the relational nature of poverty, the extent to which individuals and society are connected; and that we as society contribute directly to the experience of poverty - that in broad terms we make it a lot worse on a day to day basis. But we have within there the very notion of positive elements of poverty as well, which is something which is nowhere really on the agenda or in discourse. And so I think it is possible to think about ways of seeing it as a new paradigm.

You know in China, we've interestingly come up with very similar dimensions - different, nuanced differences, but similar. Now, could it be that it's because we follow what ATD Fourth World found? Well, there's always that problem; the methodology was different, but it came up with very similar things. We have that with a much smaller-scale project in Thailand, which is also picking up very similar sorts of things. We're currently working with children; it's different again, but it does have this element of agency, and this element of constraint at a personal one to one level against these notions of abuse in the way that society treats people. And I think that those are really important elements in terms of the experience of poverty. And I think it is experience that we're talking about, it's not measurement. Hopefully we will get to measurement; it's possible to measure, I'm convinced. But it's the experience which I think we have brought.

F - Thank you so much Robert. I want to pick up very much on your last point and introduce a personal view - for the first time I hope - which is that I think this research is very, very useful for policy formulation and policy evaluation; I have more doubts about whether it is possible to use it as a regular, internationally comparative, credible measure, and whether that's actually a good use of the research anyway. So who would like to speak to that challenge for the last few minutes? I think it may be more useful to policy, to thinking about policy, than to thinking about measurement.

X – Yes, I can say a few words about one of the impacts of the research. Well, you know that poverty is often approached in simplistic ways; the $1 a day measurement of the World Bank is really simplistic. And we want to introduce more complexity. And our diagrams introduce more complexity. And I would like big organisations and national statistics offices to have more complexity in their measurement. And now the French national statistics office INSEE has agreed to try and measure institutional maltreatment. And so they built up a

questionnaire which was submitted to us, and so I submitted it to all colleagues at Oxford, in the UK, in Ireland and to the national research team in France, and we came up with comments. And most of those comments were taken on board by INSEE, and that modified the questionnaire that could be used in 2021. So this is one way to introduce more complexity in the measurement of poverty. It will not change the fate of the world; but it's more complexity, it's better than before, still better than before.

M – I would just add they not only took on board one of our dimensions, secondly they recognised us as a partner of interest … because they came back to us and said: what do you think about it?

And we succeed in mobilising people. I think that's also important to say: with research you can mobilise the people who worked with that to think about next steps and so on. So it's not only that they took it on board, I think it's also this, that in France we have succeeded in calling activists, to think with them about it and to formulate some sort of suggestions. So yes, I think it's also a result of the research; we can still go on, even if the research is done for now …

X – Yes, what she's telling us is that you managed to bring the people together one year after the research was finished, which is important to say.

F - Thank you. Robert - last point, I think.

R – I think the process that we're talking about is important - that people are still there, they're still prepared to be engaged. We're talking about adding complexity, which is the last thing that policymakers want to hear. They want simplicity and simple solutions, but the world is complex, and I think it's important … It doesn't worry me that policymakers pick up ones and twos of our dimensions, they add them in and I think that's important, and I do think measurement's important. You know it's one of the tools; it's part of the language of the policy making process and adds a certain credibility. And so the fact that INSEE has come back in that way I think is incredibly important and it will be quite interesting to see which other dimensions we would like to push.

But I agree with you about the notion of the template. These dimensions are dimensions that we could think about in a mainstreaming poverty sort of way - whenever we're implementing policy, let's think about these dimensions, let's think perhaps about how our policy ideas are likely to impact on that. We've done a little bit about that with a piece that we did on universal child grant for UNICEF New York; it wasn't spelt out, but it was implicit. We've thought about it, we promoted it as something to be done here in China, whether again that will get picked up I don't know. But I think it is a very useful structure in that way. And I think it's probably quite good, because I think it can work at many levels in policy. I think it's as relevant for practitioners on the ground like social workers to think about these dimensions as it is for somebody in the Department of Finance to think about it.

We have a proposal connected with the meeting at IMF and the World Bank, which was meant to be held when Covid attacked us, which I would like to see resurrected, which is about thinking about some sort of basis for developing that template, to think about it, to think about the questions that we could add to each of our dimensions. And maybe even think about different tools for different parts of the policy making process. I agree with that.

But, you know, I think all of us would say the process is important in terms of transforming people and institutions. And I think the research output is a different consequence of the research. And some of the things that Rachel has said in terms of, you know, it adding credibility or bringing people who really know what it's like into the decision making arena is powerful in itself. Marianne earlier talked about the notion of ownership, this broad

ownership of the findings … irrespective of their scientific validity, they take on a life of their own - which I don't think is problematic, I think it's an important part of the policy making process. After all, research is one small part of, if you like, information or knowledge that's used in the policymaking process; the more credible we can present it as, then perhaps the more influential it will be.

I would just add Rachel's point - that this is part of a set of participative research approaches, which has its own unique characteristics - and so to think about it as that; you know, we set out to test it as a research method, as well as devise meaningful scientific conclusions. And I wouldn't want to forget that part of the process.

F - You're quite right, Robert. When I initially framed the question about the outcomes in terms of measurement and policy, I also had methodology as part of that, and the reason I had that was because of Rachel's contribution. So I think that's exactly right: research method is one of the outcomes, as well as the contribution to measurement, and as well as the contribution to policy framing and policy evaluation.

Thank you very much to everyone, and to Rachel for sending in her thoughts as well. And thank you to Xavier for organising the discussion.

X - Thank you very much indeed, Fran, for your commitment and the time you devote to us.