

LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD

FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



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- LETTER N° 105 -

THOSE TAKING ACTION ARE CALLING FOR US TO JOIN THEM

Recently, in Port-au-Prince, Mary-Love enrolled in a primary school. A 16 year-old, Mary-Love has hardly ever attended school; she has spent her childhood courageously helping her mother to support their family, which has been severely affected by deprivation and gang violence in her area. At the enrolment centre, Mary-Love had to defend herself; her motivations were called into question! This young, tenacious girl reminded me of Nathalie, a 17-year-old mother living in France whose daughter was admitted to hospital. Nathalie stayed at the hospital with her daughter. The nurses commented: 'She's a bit young to be a mother of two children. We've let social services know. But she is a very good mother to her daughter. She really looks out for her and the father visits every afternoon with their baby'. The father of her two children is 19. He completed his education at a special school for those with learning difficulties. Though he doesn't really know how to read or write, not well enough to fill out the forms in the hospital. Nathalie, who did well at school, takes care of it all. Her partner is proud of her. She also looked after her younger siblings up until they were placed in foster homes. She would have happily continued to look after them, but she was told she was too young.

Where do they find – all these women, full of courage and drive despite a poverty-stricken childhood and

adolescence, despite a precarious adult life that started too soon, despite a tough future on the horizon – the will to even dare to take on such responsibilities in spite of the looks that are cast upon them from the outset?

In this Letter to Friends Around the World, several articles highlight the contributions of women who are taking action as they experience and encounter great challenges, who are taking initiatives and bringing about changes in their society and environment. They are joined by other adults, children and young people who also share with us their inventive and courageous contributions, as well as the work and activities they are undertaking.

Dare we let ourselves be moved by all these people who are doing everything they can so that their family, the people around them, can overcome the poverty that surrounds them? In these children, young people and adults, lies a great deal of the intelligence and feeling needed to shape the future. If they are left alone, their efforts will not bring about the profound changes expected of them. **They are calling for us to join them, for us to follow in their footsteps so that our actions strengthen theirs, and so that the world can finally change!**

Isabelle Pypaert Perrin

Director General of the International Movement ATD Fourth World

WORDS FROM THE TEAM

Despite the COVID-19 crisis, many people and associations have remained determined to stay connected and continue their activities. In this letter **you will learn about** Mati in Bangladesh, the Beitouna cooperative in Lebanon, the young people of 'A Nous l'Avenir' (The Future is Ours) coalition in the DRC, and the 'Association Sources et horizons' (Sources and Horizons Association) in Tunisia.

On page 4 you will find several testimonials shared by participants of the Forum on Overcoming Extreme

Poverty that helped formulate this year's October 17 theme: **BUILDING FORWARD TOGETHER: ENDING PERSISTENT POVERTY, RESPECTING ALL PEOPLE AND OUR PLANET.** This International Day is for the people and groups of the Forum to **unite** and renew their **commitment**. In order to be able to choose a theme and uphold its deeper meaning, it is important to listen to these people who are already taking action for a poverty-free world.

"THE COOPERATIVE PRESERVES OUR DIGNITY."

Beitouna, a not-for-profit organisation founded by the residents of Nabaa, Beirut, celebrates the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, organising a street library, meetings with parents and a cooperative.

The cooperative was launched in 2006, at a time when large numbers of refugees were arriving in Lebanon from southern Libya. Several Lebanese families who had relocated to the area got together to consider how best they could help **each other**, rather than simply relying on aid, or limiting their involvement to its distribution; to find ways to participate. Out of this came Beitouna, which buys products in bulk and resells them at 30% less than the market price. A cooperative of families, each of which pays a small subscription, it is managed by four local women, all volunteers, who make the purchases, and clean and display the produce. In discussion with the members, they decide what to buy, and when to open.

"Prices shot up after the October Revolution in 2019 and we could no longer afford to buy, so we had to close the cooperative down" explains Maya, one of the members. But with the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, the women saw the need to take action again.

They got involved with a Beirut recycling initiative set up by **artist Hayat Nazer** who is active on Instagram,

whereby empty bottles can be exchanged for food vouchers. By collecting 200 bottles they qualified for four vouchers, enough to fund a small initial stock, which was boosted by financial contributions from a few Beitouna supporters.

To **start** the cooperative did not **have many** members, as plenty of food parcels had arrived after the explosion which rocked Beirut in August 2020 and at the start of lockdown. But very soon families found it necessary to turn to the cooperative, which offers a more sustainable solution, even if they could not afford the subscription because of the crisis. In the supermarkets basic essentials have become more and more expensive.

When prices go up, the cooperative loses money. Without price control, wholesalers increase their prices whenever they want.

Since the cooperative reopened, 35 families have signed up. The plan is to increase that number, and to open

three days a week, because there is a growing need in the face of increasing problems.

"The cooperative preserves our dignity, because we are the ones choosing what to buy, and we are the ones paying for it. Being involved gives us a role and boosts our self-esteem."

Maya A., Beitouna, Liban



GETTING YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED, FOR THE WELL-BEING AND DEVELOPMENT OF OUR COUNTRY

A Nous l'Avenir (The Future is Ours) is a coalition of nine organisations for young people aged 15 to 30, set up in 2009 to **share ideas**. The aim is that young people should work together in an atmosphere of trust, free from discrimination on the grounds of race or sex, allowing them to find for themselves solutions to the problems which concern them.

We undertake youth development activities and provide support to young people in various fields of action, so that they can contribute in a peaceful way to the development of their country, in the promotion of democracy and human rights, and in the rejection of all forms of violence.

We have continued to operate throughout this difficult period of COVID-19. Lots of our members have taken to growing vegetables. We have supported them by distributing high quality seeds free of charge, giving priority to the least privileged households.

One of our priorities is to fight against urban squalor. Accordingly, we recently organised a three-day clean-up of

the Ndekezulu public market, one of the oldest markets in the commune of Nzinda, in the town of Kikwit. A Nous l'Avenir is based nearby. In 2014, the market acquired permanent premises, built by Coopération Technique Belge (the Belgian Development Agency, Enabel).

But the buildings had not been used since 2017, the traders preferring to display their produce by the side of the road, 50 metres away, and the market had become a waste ground filled with all sorts of rubbish and filth.

We resolved to remove it all. So over a period of three days, we burnt the rubbish, removed the grime, and cleared away weeds. The work was carried out by a group of 25 young people, including 15 girls. With the market successfully restored to

cleanliness the traders were encouraged to return, and the risk of disease reduced.

We are united in our determination to overcome poverty, however long it takes us.

Cyrille M., coordinator, A Nous l'Avenir



STORIES OF POVERTY TOLD BY CHILDREN

For three years, the organisation MATI took part in ATD Fourth World and Oxford University's international participatory research study on **The Hidden Dimensions of Poverty**. Of the 165 million inhabitants in Bangladesh in 2020, more than 40% were children. According to the latest UNICEF report, 56% of children live below poverty level. Child labourers, children with disabilities and native children are among those who only rarely have access to education. The Bangladeshi National Research Team involved groups of children from different local NGOs in the research process to learn about their experiences and perceptions of poverty. The United Nations also recommends that children and young people be consulted as well as adults.

Four groups of children first defined the dimensions of poverty and their characteristics. Then some of them were invited to write stories based on the dimensions defined.

Gradually, the children gained confidence to express themselves and highlighted the following specific dimensions of poverty:

Environmental pollution and the effect of natural disasters • Poor living conditions • Sacrifice for family members (this

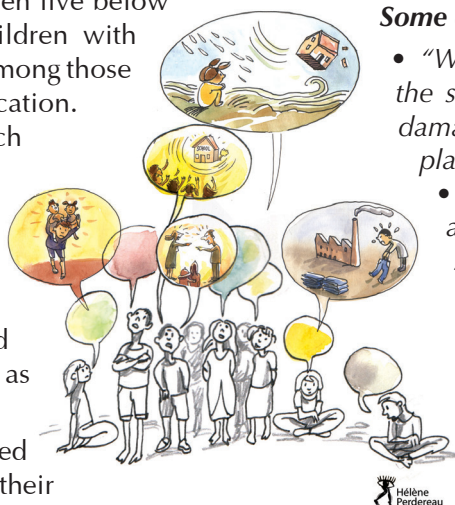
dimension has been identified only by the children in the study) • Unmet basic needs • Lack of awareness and values • Physical and psychological pain • Lack of money • Bad environment in school • Lack of security, always living with fear • Lack of right to citizenship

Some quotes from the children:

- "Where we live, there is rubbish everywhere and the smell of rubbish and cigarettes. Crops are often damaged by heavy rain and flooding, and houses and playgrounds get destroyed in floods and cyclones."
- "I need to work to support my sibling's education and thus I am being asked (all the time) to leave school to go to work to contribute to the family expenses."
- "I work in a trouser factory. Sometimes I feel tired after work. Sometimes I get back late and can't get up in time to go to school."
- "I don't like my parents fighting. It is painful to see them cry. There is mental stress every day."
- "Basic needs will not help to get rid of fear if there is no security in life."

October 17, 2020 was celebrated by sharing **stories of poverty** told by children for this research. A debate was also launched for the participants about the dimensions of poverty highlighted by the children.

Mati, Bangladesh



Hélène Perdureau

"I WANT MY DAUGHTER TO BE LIKE YOU WHEN SHE'S GROWN UP: SOMEONE WHO IS ACTIVE AND EDUCATED."

After the Jasmine Revolution of 14th January 2011 in Tunisia, the government actively encouraged people to create organisations and engage with vulnerable people to help improve their living conditions. And so, in August 2011, with a group of young agronomists, we created the Association Sources et Horizons in the city of Aïn Draham, working to improve the economic and social conditions of its inhabitants.

Aïn Draham is a city in north-west Tunisia, surrounded by beautiful landscapes. The region has a wealth of medicinal and aromatic plants, but it remains poor and faces several challenges such as access to schools.

The city is situated in an arid area of Tunisia, surrounded by very poor, marginalised villages, with land that is left uncultivated due to a lack of means, training and management. We began by listening to families to understand their needs. We met several times with chiefs in the surrounding villages, with people working in agriculture, health and education, and also those who lived there - women, young people and children.

A vegetable garden was opened in 2013 for women and young people so that they could learn how to grow certain

varieties of vegetables in their gardens. We also realised that there was a need to improve learning conditions for children, so we chose to restore a school in one of the villages in the region, repairing the walls, windows and playground. At the same time, we made the decision with

the parents at the school to acquire a small patch of land in order to provide a space where they could grow medicinal and aromatic plants that are now disappearing in the forest. This not only ensures funding for school projects, but also an income for the parents who take part.

Additionally, we have worked to build a dirt road to bring a rural village out of isolation. The inhabitants participate in all of these projects and are paid in turn according to their contribution. I remember there was a dad who refused to join us at first. Insisting a little more each month, we noticed his progressive involvement and change in attitude towards the project. At the end, he said: "I want my daughter to be like you when she's grown up: someone who is active and educated."

Association Sources et Horizons, Tunisia



Hélène Perdureau

TOWARDS OCTOBER 17TH, 2021

At the beginning of the year, we **sent** the consultation launched by the International Committee for October 17 on the choice of the theme for the World Day to Overcoming Extreme Poverty 2021. 125 individual or collective contributions were collected from 40 countries.

Each viewpoint enriched the discussions with partners and the UN.

And the final theme has been chosen:

BUILDING FORWARD TOGETHER: ENDING PERSISTENT POVERTY, RESPECTING ALL PEOPLE AND OUR PLANET.

Here are some brief extracts from the contributions received.

TO CONTINUE THE MOBILISATION FOR THE PLANET

"I am afraid that by focusing on COVID we are forgetting about climate, environmental, political, economic and social issues." **Maria V, Mauritius**

"Madame Marie said: 'Last season, I harvested nothing on our land flooded by the Congo River. [...]' From generation to generation, these families struggle to change their lives, but as long as our societies do not create the conditions for them to get by, their precarious situation remains the same or deteriorates further at the slightest environmental or social catastrophe."

Justin B, Democratic Republic of Congo

"I like very much the fact of insisting on the respect of People and the respect of the Climate. These are notions that in my opinion need to be said again and again, because it is not necessarily self-evident to talk about both sides." **Coraline P., Belgium**

TO CONTINUE THE MOBILISATIONS AGAINST DISCRIMINATION

"Building a desirable future, in the context of the uncertainties we are experiencing, requires tackling chronic poverty by strengthening the power of the first concerned. There is no fatality, things can change. By engaging in this way, we are putting human rights at the heart of the fight for the dignity of all." **National October 17 Committee, France**

"This reminds me of the person who was unfairly arrested and the Atikamekw who died alone and insulted. We must all be put on the same footing, aboriginal people, all cultures, and the planet."

ATD Canada

"To break the circle of poverty, it is necessary to educate girls. Girls stop their education too early and then they become mothers. Sometimes it is difficult for them to manage their household financially, to know how to read, etc. Girls must be encouraged to go further in their studies." **Aminetou S., Mauritania**

TO PROPOSE A DEEP CHANGE OF SOCIETY

"In my community we don't have basic rights, we don't have access to a healthy environment. Sometimes, we have the feeling that the State forgets us." **Julia, Peru**

"Beyond breaking their shame, families have the courage, commitment and determination to come out of silence to say NO to poverty. Therefore, not to give them a place in decision-making at national, regional and international levels on issues such as poverty and climate change, is a disrespect for human dignity." **Christian R., Burundi**

"What are the lessons we are learning from this pandemic to break the cycle of poverty? What are the lessons we can learn from the past to build a future that leaves no one behind?"

ATD, Bulgarie

The Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty is part of ATD Fourth World International. Those who **join, maintain** their **autonomy** and identity.

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Printed by ATD Fourth World.

N° 105, April 2021

Translation provided free of charge
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Drawings by Hélène Perdureau,
long-time friend
of ATD Fourth World.

Page layout by Dominique Layec.