

SUMMARY REPORT OF ATD FOURTH WORLD EXPERT WORKSHOP

DIGNITY FOR ALL IN PRACTICE: A WORKSHOP TO UNDERSTAND POVERTY AND WELLBEING THROUGH LIVED EXPERIENCES

**Tuesday 1st February 2022 –
09:00 am to 10.30 am EST
(Virtual format)**

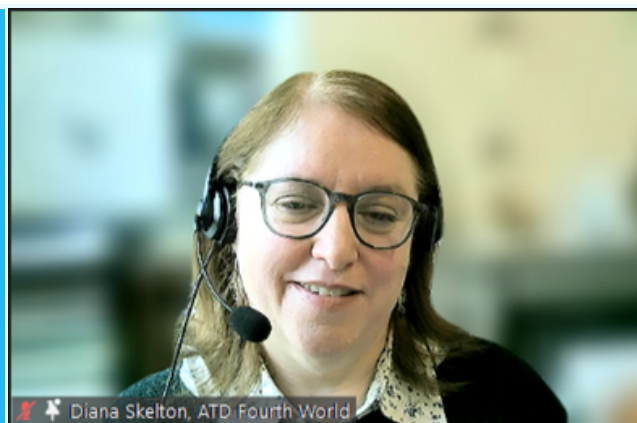
**In preparation of the UN Commission for Social
Development 2022 (CSocD60) on the theme:**

**“Inclusive and resilient recovery from COVID-19 for
sustainable livelihoods, well-being, and dignity for
all: eradicating poverty and hunger in all its forms
and dimensions to achieve the 2030 Agenda.”**

OPENING REMARKS

Moderator, Diana Skelton

National Coordination Team at ATD
Fourth World in the United Kingdom and
former ATD Fourth World representative
to the United Nations



ATD Fourth World Volunteer Corps Member Diana Skelton opened the workshop by starting with lived experiences of poverty, and reminded the participants of the importance of recognizing dignity as an essential concept to understand poverty and well-being.

From this point of view, she welcomed Paragraph 34 of the UN Secretary General's report for the Commission on Social Development, focusing on dignity and affirming that overcoming poverty should be "based on the dignity and respect of the person and their rights", and that "poverty frequently intertwines with discriminatory practices both overt and covert". The report also emphasizes the importance of "meaningful participation of those living in poverty and their representatives in the design, implementation and monitoring of COVID-19 recovery plans". ATD Fourth World hopes that these elements will remain in the Commission's agreed conclusions.

Ms. Skelton further remarked that policy-makers sometimes use the word "dignity" without defining it. However for people in poverty, its meaning is clear. She quoted Ms. Moraene Roberts, an activist living in poverty who passed away in 2020. A neighbour of hers had been required to live in a public housing project where the level of poverty and violence "decided the quality of life" for her and her son. Moraene Roberts reflected: "This person is no longer an agent of her own destiny, let alone a participant in making the decisions that impact on their life. [...] The right to life is compromised by the experience of social exclusion, isolation, deprivation, and disempowerment. [...] It's very important that people in poverty are given opportunities to show the best of themselves, to show what they can do, and to contribute. [...] This gives them a kind of dignity and pride that they wouldn't otherwise have had."

"We hope that today's expert workshop is an opportunity for all of us to engage with these questions of how discrimination impacts dignity; how people who have experienced the denial of their own dignity can participate in developing ways to overcome these injustices; and how legislation can translate into meaningful practice".

Ms. Skelton quoted another activist living in poverty, Ms. Amanda Button, who said: "Poverty gets you down and humiliated to the extent that you feel ashamed or judged. To believe in someone is to give them back their dignity, their self-respect, honour and humanity. It feeds their soul."

Ms. Skelton explained that today's expert workshop was an opportunity for all participants to engage with these questions of how discrimination impacts dignity; how people who have experienced the denial of their own dignity can participate in developing ways to overcome these injustices; and how legislation can translate into meaningful practice.

She then turned to Ms. Wenyan Yang, Chief of the Global Dialogue for Social Development Branch at the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs, for her words of welcome.

Ms. Wenyan Yang

**Chief of the Global Dialogue for
Social Development Branch at the UN
Department for Economic and Social
Affairs**



Ms. Yang started by sharing how honored she was to hear people with the direct experience of poverty who are part of the solution.

She recalled that the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and ATD Fourth World have had a long history of partnership, starting with the commemoration of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty every October at the United Nations. She credited the Fourth World Movement for creating spaces for the voices of those living in poverty to be heard directly at the United Nations.

She further stressed that learning from experiences is crucial and policy-making must be based on evidence. Ms. Yang saw this workshop as an opportunity to listen to the challenges and good practices from the people directly concerned.

Ms. Yang concluded that it is essential to root the highest level of policy-making in the lived experience of people in poverty.

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KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS FROM ATD FOURTH WORLD ACTIVISTS

ATD Fourth World activists living in poverty from Burkina Faso, Ireland and the United States of America were invited to share some of their experiences facing discrimination in their respective countries and the solutions they were promoting to eradicate poverty and end all forms of discriminations. The realities they shared depicted the need for structural change and revealed their determination to be involved in fighting for their rights and dignity to be respected, should they have the opportunity to participate in the decisions that affect them.

Note: You can find the full texts of the three interventions in the appendix



Elise Kabré from Burkina Faso

"It's true that we live in poverty, but we want to be considered as fully human, because we also have ideas to share in building our society."

"All too often people's skills are not recognised and even ignored – this is prejudice and discrimination. It results in people in poverty feeling they are treated like lesser human beings."



Andrew Kelly from Ireland

"We feel that we are being respected when we bring something to the table, when you respect and value our ideas, when there is transparency and honesty, and we learn something while we are at the table." -Stacy



Stacy White, Kim Tyre, Patrick Lubin and Marie-Claire Foss from the United States.

After the keynotes, the participants to the workshop (Permanent Missions, United Nations agencies and NGOs) were split into three breakout rooms, based on their preferences. A summary of each breakout follows.

DISCUSSION GROUP LED BY THE ATD FOURTH WORLD TEAM IN BURKINA FASO

THEME: DIGNITY, LEGAL REGISTRATION AND RECOGNITION, DISCRIMINATION AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY.



Once in separate discussion groups, activists with the direct experience of poverty living in Burkina Faso shared stories of discriminations they faced in various settings: in hospitals, in their children's schools, when facing identity checks... Not having identification documents was found to be a major obstacle to accessing basic services, respect and dignity. And even when they had the documents, the activists provided examples of not receiving the same treatment as other patients in hospitals, and being poorly received by their children's teachers because of their obvious poverty.

Because civil registration is not systematic in Burkina Faso, some children do not have birth certificates. Activists therefore called for birth certificates to be granted systematically within the maternity ward, at no cost. They also explained that access to maternity wards should be free of charge to ensure that every family can benefit from proper care. In addition to the financial obstacle in obtaining papers, there is also a geographical obstacle: birth certificate can only be obtained in the parents' birthplace. Travel expenses and loss of income during that time make the process particularly complicated and costly. Decentralization could simplify the process.

The importance of accessing identification papers at no cost was showcased by the fact that having papers is a condition in order to access other rights related to health, education, social protection, employment etc.

Children living in the streets also suffer from these socio-economic discriminations. As an activist in Ouagadougou, shared: "Without a birth certificate, it is as if you're not alive". In the words of another activist: "Without an identity, you are limited".

In the dialogue that followed, Member States' representatives underlined the disconnect between texts that are discussed at the United Nations and the reality of what people in poverty go through. They recognized the necessity of getting direct insights from people who face these discriminations.

It was suggested that, through their bilateral relations, other Member States could encourage Burkina Faso to promote free administrative procedures (civil registration, birth certificates, obtaining ID documents) and free access to health care.

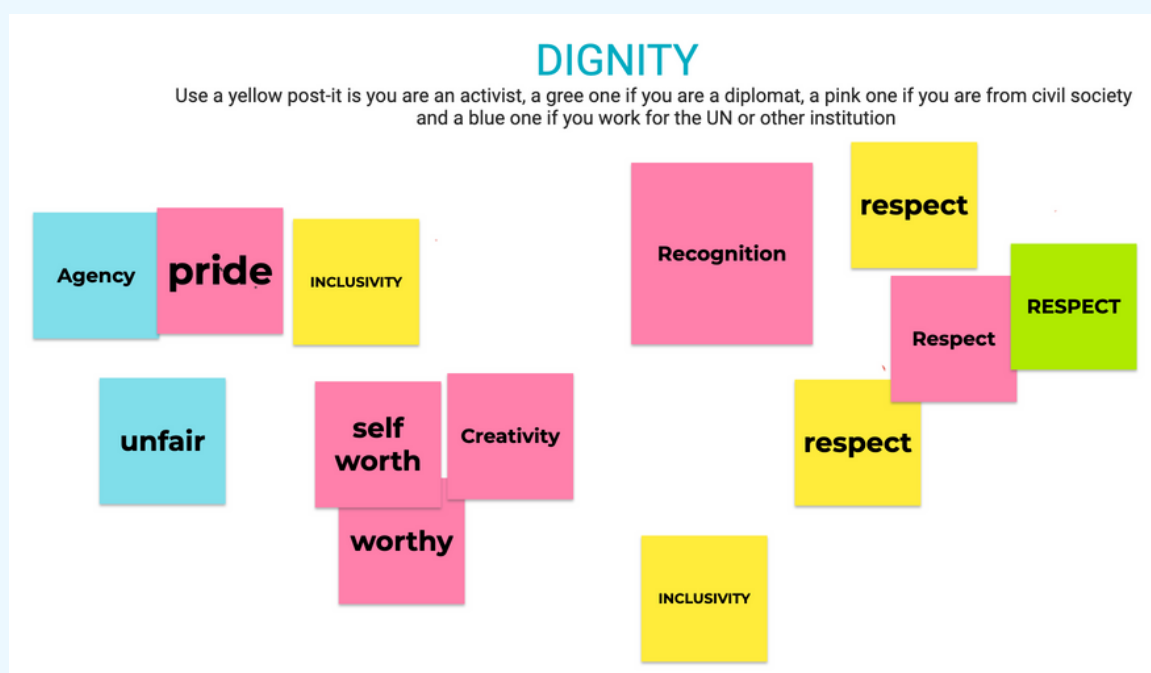
Participants agreed that there is a need to find ways to improve access to birth certificates. It is also necessary to fight all the discriminations that the birth certificate alone cannot solve: legislative texts are important but also actions to fight against discriminations at the relational, interpersonal level.

DISCUSSION GROUP LED BY THE ATD FOURTH WORLD TEAM IN NEW YORK CITY

EXERCISE BASED ON THE 'MERGING OF KNOWLEDGE' METHODOLOGY TO ADDRESS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIGNITY AND PARTICIPATION.



The facilitators of this discussion group led an exercise adapted from the Merging of Knowledge methodology developed by the ATD Fourth World Movement. It involved the use of an online whiteboard, accessible by many users at once. Participants were asked to reflect on the term “Dignity” and to then share a word they relate to it. Using a single word is a way of **levelling the playing field**—it is a tool that allows people from different backgrounds to realize that the same terms used within a conversation have very diverse meanings.



It is an important part of this exercise to take the time to understand what each participant means by the word they choose. The image above shows all the words that participants came up with.

Participants were then invited to group words together that they felt were inspired by a similar idea of dignity. This resulted in three clusters: one with the word “respect,” a second one with “recognition,” “creativity,” and “worthy,” and a third one with “agency,” “unfair,” and “pride”.

Through the conversation that ensued it was clear that the words shared had different connotations depending on the background of the individuals in the group. This exercise clearly showed that **words carry different meanings for different people and can impact effective communication** between those writing policy, doing advocacy work and those impacted by the decisions often made without their input.

After discussing dignity, participants of the New York breakout session repeated the exercise using the word “participation.” See the image of the whiteboard below.



Two very interesting conversations that happened at different points of the workshop were over disagreements over the meanings of the words “agency” and “conditions.”

For the participants, “agency” means the ability to take action. Some activists saw “agency” as having to do with the government or the UN, i.e. a governmental body that one has to go through to access certain resources, which is often linked to negative lived experiences. In the discussion around “conditions,” some participants saw the word’s use as in “creating the conditions for participation.” Some activists in the room expressed that for them, “conditions” recalls a kind of excuse not to allow some parties to sit at the table. They described the anxiety that others will create the “conditions,” which represents another way in which the rights of marginalized people may be chipped away.

In the spirit of the conversation, the group was then encouraged by one of the activists in the room to ensure that takeaways from the workshop inform policy and decision making, “so that we are not still discussing the eradication of poverty and hunger in two or three generations to come.”

DISCUSSION GROUP LED BY THE #ADDTHE10TH ALLIANCE PRESENTATION OF THE WORK DONE IN IRELAND TO RECOGNIZE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISCRIMINATION IN NATIONAL LEGISLATION.



This discussion group explored discrimination from different perspectives: the lived experience of prejudice and discrimination and the efforts to **introduce discrimination on grounds of socio-economic background into Irish legislation.**

An activist who had suffered the early loss of his mother described the impact of poverty on his opportunities for employment. When he got married and had a family, he experienced prejudice and discrimination: his new born was almost placed into foster care. The cycle of poverty is perpetuated when people are not listened to and when they cannot participate in decisions that impact their lives. Then, he explained how he got involved with ATD Fourth World and other NGOs to fight discrimination.

Collective online writing and creative workshops provided support, restored hope and enabled people to express themselves. The activist shared he was involved in the making of the report "Does it only happen to me?" which resulted from a wide survey on discrimination on the grounds of poverty. "If you are poor, you have no protection".

An activist from the Irish section of European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) and member of the #AddThe10th alliance recalled the history of the alliance of NGOs: EAPN, including ATD Fourth World and others, has worked since 2014 to collectively bring **discrimination on socio economic grounds in Ireland's equality legislation.** People organized and campaigned creating spaces to discuss equality and rights. The alliance brought to the parliament this new basis for discrimination, citing an article of the constitution. There was considerable resistance but the issue will be brought again to new ministers.

An activist from an NGO for unemployed people said that some figures are striking. Among people seeking work, many are discriminated against precisely because they are unemployed, or because of age. She argued that policy makers need to better understand what and whom they are working for, otherwise policy won't work. **People who have lived poverty should be recognized as experts in poverty and dignity.** She pushes for the inclusion of the concepts of dignity and participation into legislation, stating: "If you are not at the table, you are on the menu".

° [Article](#) with links to the full report: "Does it only happen to me?" and its summary, video, recommendation

° [More about the art workshop](#) on discrimination on socio economic ground.

° # Add the 10th Alliance [article](#) and [submission](#) to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Review of the Equality Acts

APPENDIX - FULL KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS FROM ATD FOURTH WORLD ACTIVISTS

Elise Kabré, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

"Dignity is what makes us human; it's what allows us to live fully and be respected in society. We are born with dignity and must maintain it at all costs, as confirmed by our activist friends in these words: "In our tradition, we say that man is ready to die rather than lose his dignity because if you lose your dignity, you live in shame." Or again, "Dignity is the first intrinsic value of man." It's important because it enables people to live in harmony within a society and to live and build their community together. This was emphasized by two activists, who said: "Dignity is important because it leads people to respect each other"; "It's of great importance because it helps build a just community for all."

Living in a community calls us to follow standards of behaviour that include respecting our neighbours and respecting the rules enacted by the State, one of the most important of which is birth registration. The latter allows a person not only to have their rights respected but also to have their dignity respected because you can fully participate in community life. It's essential to have a legal status in order to be enrolled in school and to be treated with dignity. For example, a child was often made fun of by the other children because he didn't have a birth certificate. Not only was his dignity violated but also his rights, because without the birth certificate, he can't register for final exams, nor receive a diploma. There are obstacles still to be overcome, but we recognize the efforts being made by the Burkina Government to ensure that all children have access to their rights, while reminding parents of their duty to register a child's birth.

Discrimination can even put lives at risk. Here in Burkina Faso, the Movement is in contact with women accused of witchcraft who are driven out of their villages. They participate in our actions to move forward together.

However, respect for a person's dignity goes beyond birth registration. When you live in extreme poverty, even if you have a legal status, it doesn't keep you from being discriminated against and having your dignity trampled on. For example, recently I was in the hospital, unwell, and I needed blood. I had difficulty breathing. Friends of the Movement succeeded in having me transferred into an oxygenated room from the one where, with other patients, we were simply left to ourselves. It's difficult for those who are in poverty to get blood transfusions. First of all, because there isn't enough blood. But those who can afford it get it easily. And then, even if the blood was donated for you, it can end up in someone else's hands.

When you're poor you don't count - even what's intended for you is diverted to people who have more means. An activist was refused her child's school report, but saw that the other parents were receiving theirs. She went home and then returned with someone who spoke in her place, and who was given the bulletin without a problem. It's true that we live in poverty, but we want to be considered as fully human, because we also have ideas to share in building our society."

APPENDIX - FULL KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS FROM ATD FOURTH WORLD ACTIVISTS

Andrew Kelly, Ireland

"I'm Andrew from ATD Ireland Thank you for this opportunity to address this room, full of people who can and do make a difference. I'm here today as a community activist from ATD Ireland because I believe change is possible, I really want a better world and a more just society for my kids without such poverty and open socio-economic discrimination that I have faced my whole life. Only by working together can we break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

Genuine participation and building trustful partnerships based on Dignity is key. For too long we have not had a genuine seat at the tables of power, when I say genuine - I am referring to having our voices, ideas and aspirations heard, listened to and acted upon. But people with direct experience of poverty should be recognised as experts on poverty and should be included in any societal debate, we need to address this - and maybe change the tables to be more accessible! This participation is essential, but it takes time and efforts to build up the confidence to speak out, it has taken me a while.. I can tell you.

What does it mean to live in poverty?

'Poverty is not being able to smell the flowers because the stress of life gets in the way.'

This simple sentence makes us very aware of many of the issues facing people living in poverty. Poverty is a multidimensional issue, a lot more complex than only financial, we are facing multiple challenges simultaneously. Stigma, Shame, Discrimination are all key everyday parts of poverty. All too often people's skills are not recognised and even their suffering ignored - this is prejudice and discrimination. It results in people in poverty feeling they are treated like lesser human beings, shouldering this shame and stigma has a big effect on mental health. It really hurts to the point where it can give you a mental health disorder and from a young age can lead to bullying and as an adult you feel that the state and the system is working against you.

When you live in poverty and you experience socio-economic discrimination you don't have any real protection, even though in Ireland we have already 9 discrimination grounds in the equality legislation. We are not protected, we constantly fall through the cracks.

In Ireland we have worked on a number of key projects on Socio-economic discrimination, we interviewed over a 100 people and built up a report with many examples of discrimination, recently we had a series of art workshops where people spoke out about the discrimination that concluded in a public exhibition, where we discussed discrimination with the wider public.

But one key collaborative action that I am proud to be part of is the new development of an alliance with many other organisations called the #Addthe10th Alliance. "

APPENDIX - FULL KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS FROM ATD FOURTH WORLD ACTIVISTS

New York's Introduction to their work on dignity and participation

MARIE-CLAIRE: Good morning to you all. It is a pleasure to be here today contributing to this dialogue. We are a group of ATD Fourth World members based in New York. Some of us have direct experience of poverty and identify as activists. The latest report by the United Nations Secretary General to the Commission for Social Development recognized that, "dignity implies, among other things, the participation and empowerment of the most vulnerable in decisions that directly affect their lives." Our group has worked on this theme of participation as a key component of the respect of our dignity. Before going into the breakout room session, we would like to share some key ideas.

KIM: We participate because we know that if we are not in it, we don't win it, if we don't participate, we will be on the menu, we will be the side dish. Also, because if we are quiet, we are going to be walked over, taken advantage of. When we participate, we participate for everyone, for your housing situation, for their housing situation, for all children, we don't participate just for our kids. We need all communities to be able to participate, not just some. We participate because it is crucial, and we get a lot of respect. When someone's life seems to be a mess there is more reason for that person to participate. Participation is healing, people who have gone through so much struggle can support others. Respect is a must be. Everyone deserves respect but we don't get respect unless respect is given. Some people think they don't need to be respectful; they believe they are better than us because they have more money, they think that we are nothing because we live in poverty. We are grappling with the concept of whether dignity will ever be respected. We have to try so hard and put so much effort into the community to be respected, and that takes a toll.

STACY: We feel that we are being respected when we bring something to the table, when you respect and value our ideas, when there is transparency and honesty, and we learn something while we are at the table. Participation must lead to change; it is crucial to change the world and to do it right. We need to pass laws. If participation is crucial, why would you not include us? Are we equal? That is the question. Until you feel we are your equal, you will not include us. Will you not include us until we have climbed out of poverty? Why aren't we included now, am I not equal because I am a lived example of what poverty looks like? Is our dignity recognized? Can we participate? Some of us are living in a community we feel like we don't belong to. We cannot sit and talk because living in poverty people don't want to talk with us. They want to talk at us! They don't feel comfortable and now is the time to get rid of those uncomfortable feelings and talk with us about the things we need to talk about. People have their own set agenda and that's what they are focused on. We also have an agenda. Let's work together to mesh the agendas. So that we can have a common agenda for EVERYONE.

PATRICK: We would like to say something about participation and work. Some people won't respect you and will violate your dignity because you don't work. They think that if you don't work, you don't participate. Working is a kind of participation, but there are other ways to participate. Because you don't work, that doesn't mean that you are not productive or that your time is not valuable, that doesn't mean that you sleep all day. As parents we always participate in a hundred things, and we feel a gap when you don't see that we take care of our kids. Our group of activists was able to develop these ideas using participatory methodology to build and share knowledge. For years we have been part of the Fourth World People's University in New York, because, as we said before, to participate meaningfully you need to belong to a community.

KIM: Another key action for our group has been our preparation of materials to train professionals in the schools of social work at Columbia University, Fordham University, and The New School to share the perspectives of people with a direct experience of poverty, and to create the conditions for true partnerships between social workers and the people they work with.

STACY: Both the workshops we facilitate in these institutions and People's University are places where ATD's Merging of Knowledge methodology is central to our work. Instead of explaining what exactly that is, our workshop is going to show you through an adaptation of an exercise.