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ATD Fourth world comments to the Doha political declaration

“Time is running out. Recession, inflation, unemployment must not be alibis, pretexts for postponing the fate of the most disadvantaged until tomorrow. This would amount to placing the full weight of the crisis on them once again, to giving priority to the least disadvantaged, taking away from the poorest families the little that, perhaps, they had obtained. This would amount to giving them less work, housing, education and, to reduce even more their weak possibilities of asserting their dignity.”¹

A Human Rights approach to fighting extreme poverty

ATD Fourth World welcomes the acknowledgement in the Doha Political Declaration of the importance of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights including the right to be respected, protected and promoted without distinction or discrimination can not be understated (para 11). Extreme poverty is not a personal failure but a systemic one and we welcome the call to action to address the underlying and structural causes of poverty, inequality and insecurity in accordance with human rights obligations of states (para 2). We welcome the commitment to leave no one behind and reach the furthest behind first, and to place people at the center of development (para 7). Human rights must remain the primary concern of governments and the commitment to “leave no one behind” must guide and define all our actions to end poverty in all its forms and dimensions.

I. Multidimensional approach to poverty

ATD Fourth World supports the commitments made in the political declaration to: “adopt a holistic approach towards the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme and multidimensional poverty” (para 29); and “developing and implementing adequate Multidimensional Poverty Measurements” (para 29,i).

This approach allows for more accurate measurement of poverty as a social phenomenon and is an essential basis for any policy strategy aiming at the eradication of poverty.

While multidimensional poverty measurements currently in use do go beyond available income to take into account multiple material, social and educational deprivations², these approaches

¹ Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World, Brussels on May 15, 1982

² This is the case of the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) for instance.

overlook [Hidden Dimensions of Poverty](#)³, most notably the relational experiences, such as social and institutional maltreatment, being subjected to socioeconomic discrimination and lack of recognition of one's contribution to society. People living in poverty are negatively perceived and treated badly by other individuals and informal groups. They can be subjected to maltreatment by national and international institutions, who through their actions or inaction, or failure to respond appropriately and respectfully to the needs and circumstances of people in poverty, and thereby to ignore, humiliate and harm them. The multiple deprivations combined with the hidden relational dimensions constitute a core experience of poverty - the struggle and resistance to survive, the disempowerment and the suffering of the body, mind, and heart. To end poverty in all its forms and dimensions, we call on the governments to expand the definition and understanding of poverty as outlined in the [Hidden Dimensions of Poverty](#) report and implement antipoverty strategies in line with the [Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights](#).

II. Informed and meaningful participation

We welcome the commitment to “promoting social integration by fostering “full and equal participation for all” (para 4), “enable full, equal and meaningful participation” of people in vulnerable situations, as well as “integrating their needs and perspectives into social and economic policy frameworks” (para 4.b). However, the political declaration as it stands lacks a sufficiently precise definition of what meaningful participation would entail and fails to establish the most crucial steps that must be taken to achieve such participation.

Successful policies are evidence-based. For this reason, the experiential knowledge of those with lived experiences of poverty must be sought and valued as a foundational aspect of public policy design, and not as a mere supplement. It is imperative that people in situations of poverty must be included in the design, implementation and evaluation of any legislation or decisions that may impact them.

Informed and meaningful participation of people in situations of exclusion counters discrimination and helps redress the imbalances of power, which make it harder for people in situations of poverty to have their voices heard.

Therefore, we strongly urge governments to develop and adopt practical steps and guidelines to ensure meaningful participation and integrate them in their public policy making. In this regard, we strongly recommend the widespread application of instruments such as the [Inclusive and Deliberative Elaboration & Evaluation of Policies \(IDEEP\)](#)⁴, a complementary tool which provides

³ As identified in the “Hidden dimensions of poverty” collaborative research by ATD Fourth World and Oxford University.

⁴ Tool for the Inclusive and Deliberative Elaboration & Evaluation of Policies, which results from a collaboration between ATD Fourth World and the UN Special Rapporteur for extreme poverty and human rights.

a step-by-step toolkit for ensuring effective participation - providing a reliable, qualitative and deliberative approach allowing to capture and harness the lived experience of persons in poverty. The IDEEP tool, in particular, delivers truly participative design, implementation and evaluation of public policies, through its analysis of how multiple “hidden” dimensions of poverty can improve policymaking and enhance participation in decision-making processes.

III. Guaranteeing the right to a legal identity

Sadly, the political declaration fails to address ensuring one’s fundamental right to a legal identity. This untenable situation affects an estimated 850 million people⁵, including more than 200 million children under 5 years old⁶, and has serious legal and social consequences for people in situations of poverty, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Guaranteeing the right to legal identity corresponds to SDG 16.9, with a specific focus on ensuring birth registration.

Non-access to legal identity severely impedes the ability of people to enjoy their fundamental rights. The lack of birth certificates and other documents can restrict or even prevent access to work, health, education, and participation in political life which often worsens poverty and contributes to its persistence across generations.

The failure of the political declaration to guarantee the fundamental right to legal identity must be strenuously rectified by public authorities in order to ensure the accessibility and robustness of their national work, health, education or democratic systems to everyone. Upholding this right is a necessary prerequisite to the enjoyment of many fundamental rights. We demand action and call on everyone concerned to achieve universal birth registration by 2030 and for all governments of the world to guarantee that every human being in their territories has the right to a legal identity.

⁵ <https://sdg16now.org/report/target16-9/>

⁶ <https://data.unicef.org/resources/the-right-start-in-life-2024-update/>