



ALL TOGETHER IN DIGNITY

ASIAN FORUM

ATD Fourth World Regional Team

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From ATD Fourth World Regional Team (Marie Claire Droz, Patricia and Claude Heyberger)

While preparing this newsletter, we have been shaken by the massive damage caused by successive natural disasters in the region (Samoa, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan and other places). We have in mind all those who have lost their loved ones and meagre belongings in the disasters, those who have had to find refuge in relief centres, and those who don't know what they will find when they return home. Such destructive events can also demonstrate the strength of humanity in overcoming adversity. Our friends in Manila told us how the Filipino "Bayanihan" - an inherited sense of solidarity amongst the people - has been prevailing in the efforts implemented to cope with the flooding. However, we worry about how the disasters will affect people in the long term. Are we able to adjust our efforts and programs to the efforts deployed by people in rebuilding and reorganizing their communities?"

*Toward the 20th Anniversary
of the Convention on the
Rights of the Child*

"Childhoods" and Various Approaches to Child Rearing

Ten years ago, 86 children from deprived areas in 24 countries met with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights at the Tabori International Children's Forum in Geneva. The children expressed their thirst for change, stating, "Many families are chased away and have to hide, all alone with no friends. Yet the earth and the sun are for everyone." They asked the UN to recognize the valuable contribution that children can make and "to understand poor children and to learn from them what they already do with their friends to make things better".

Can children be partners for improving the situation of their families and communities?

Childhood is often considered as a time of innocence. Yet, in many parts of the world children contribute to their family's livelihoods and bear other heavy responsibilities including caring for siblings or sick family members. In this sense, depending on the context there are different childhoods. The approach to child-rearing may also vary between different societies, and between segments of the population within the same country. It is important to recognize the qualities of each approach. Children are well placed to know what are the most important aspects to preserve, what needs to be changed and how. We have often been surprised at the valuable contributions children are able to make. They open their hearts if they believe we deeply respect those who matter to them: their parents and other members of their community. They open our eyes to situations we cannot understand at a first glance and spark off new considerations about what must be our top priorities. They challenge the creativity of a society afraid of the future and reluctant to change, as well as new educational concepts.

Many of you who receive this letter are in contact with children who struggle to balance school and work to help their family. You also know adults, teachers and friends who help these children achieve their goals. These experiences can contribute in devising fundamental changes to be undertaken by those who have accepted the responsibility to protect children and provide education to all, without exception.

ATD Fourth World is a member of various international entities (e.g. Thematic Working Group on Education For All led by UNESCO in Bangkok and a regular contributor to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva). In this capacity we invite you to pool your knowledge and experiences so that together we can become innovative and effective stakeholders.

Children smiles worldwide...



On the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children worldwide were invited to paint an imaginary "Friendship train". In this train, every child is welcome, and no one is forgotten along the way. Children from Bangkok have written about what they would do if the friendship train stopped in their neighborhood... (May 2009)"

"Boon..Boon..Chackachak" The friendship train has just arrived in Bangkok Noi station. There are already children from Egypt, France and Mauritius. The children from Thailand are waiting to get on the train. They're all very excited to meet children from other countries. Flame has brought his favorite food, Pla ra, the traditional fermented fish from his hometown in the Province of Nakorn Rachasima. He wants to share it with his new friends. The problem is, it has a very strong smell. It can make some people dizzy. Jun begs him: "Please, Flame, I don't want to eat it and it will stink the whole train." However, Flame still insists on bringing it. "Why not? Nothing's better than raw fermented fish, especially when you dip the hot sticky rice in it. Wow! Wait and see, I'm sure our new friends will love it too!"

To know more about the Tabori Friendship Train:
HYPERLINK <http://www.tabori.org>



The Future of Our children

The author is Mai, a mother who lives in Vietnam. She wrote this poem on the day that she was to receive the key to the house built by a program run by Catalyst Foundation. The mission of Catalyst is to improve the lives of at-risk populations in Vietnam through child trafficking prevention and a community development approach that comprises of the provision of scholarships and vocational training, increasing economic opportunities, and generating a sense of empowerment.

I remember those heartbreaking days,
When even before dawn,
At the same time as their parents,
The little ones had to get up.
Armed with stick, hook or shovel,
They scamper off to the garbage dump,
To grapple for each plastic bag,
Each wrapper.
Foul smell of rotting refuse,
Mixed with the reek of decomposing animals,
Fills your nose with an overwhelming stench.
You stumble forward without hesitation,
For this is what awaits you every day.
The flies are delighted by your presence,
They encircle you by the hundreds,
From morning to dusk.

All that's your routine,
When you hear the sharp cry of the person
who was sitting on the dump awaiting the truck:

"It's coming!"
You dash forward out of breath,
to help your parents with all your might
to retrieve some junk,
cast away as worthless trash,
yet that helps you feed your family,
secure your portion of rice and fish for the day.
The mosquitoes befriend you,
like hungry tigers they sting you relentlessly.

You pondered: "Will this go on forever
Until we are old? Will we never go to school,
never play like the children of the rich?"

NGO Catalyst, [HYPERLINK "http://www.catalystfoundation"](http://www.catalystfoundation)

*How fortunate they are
to be able to study, to know how to read and to write.
They look down on us, they keep their distance
Because we smell of garbage."*

But today, things are not the same anymore.
You are so happy.
You go to school. It's free of charge.
And you receive a scholarship.
Your joy knows no bounds.

Now, you trust that someone is watching over you from
above,
that there are angels and people of good will
who have made your dreams come true.
You have got wings now to soar,
to reach the land of your dreams.

*"I'd like to be a fish!
I want to eat the baby mosquitos so that we'll not get sick."*



Everything seems a lot more positive to me

Nui is a new member of ATD Fourth World team in Bangkok.

At first sight, the families I met in the slum areas really seemed lacking in harmony, a spirit of brotherhood, and motivation to make the community centre a place for everyone. I found out to my surprise that they were aware of it, but didn't feel concerned enough to change it. This worried me as I felt it meant the children would grow up without the sense of belonging to the community.

After a few weeks, my outlook has changed. One day, I went with a core-team member to see 'Nit', a girl whose mom was not able to take care of her and was sent to a home for girls. Thanks to our visit, Nit was excited to get in touch with people in her community and talked to them on our phone. They seemed to reciprocate her feeling.

We later went back to Nit's community and met with those who had spoken on the phone to her. Everybody said they missed her. At the end of the day, it seemed that all the bad memories that stemmed from Nit's time in the community had been forgiven and forgotten.

When Nit was living in the slum, she was particularly looked down upon by other members of the community. It now seems that people have learnt something from her forgiving heart. For me personally, this experience made everything seem a lot more positive to me. It has energized me and given me the confidence and motivation to explore the real feelings of the people.



Knowledge out of social practice

In March and July 2009, six young volunteers of ATD Fourth World in Asia and eight students from the Department of Sociology and Social Development of Lao University attended two one-week Exchange-Training Programs. These programs were organized by Donkoi Children Development Center¹ in Vientiane and ATD Fourth World in Thailand. As these young people had already been actively participating in programs with disadvantaged populations (eg., children from rural communities and urban slums, disabled children), they had a lot of experience to share.

Each session offered them the opportunity to learn about each other's programs and discover other initiatives from Laos and Thailand through visits and participating in activities.

Learning together from each other's culture and experience and discovering the knowledge that comes out of social practice were the main objectives of this exchange. In the context of the 20th Anniversary of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, the participants also reflected on how to join children and help them voice their life experience, concerns and ideas.

All participants of the program are grateful for the kind welcome and collaborative work of:

- the Provincial Library² and the children's book publisher 'Big Brother Mouse'³ in Luang Prabang (Laos), and
- the Sahathai Foundation⁴ in Bangkok and the Moo Ban Deck Center⁵ in Kantchanaburi (Thailand).

Some reactions and insights from the participants:

- "I have seen many beautiful sites, big buildings and rich people in Bangkok, but also people without anything: Is it the same city?"

-Srisavath-

- "Economic growth and development bring a lot of social problems."

- Nui-

- "Actually, we are all conscious that it is a chance to attend this session. I was impressed by the welcoming and the cooperation of every-body at the places we visited."

-Mai-

Taking part in a Boat Library session in Luang Prabang



- "Meeting families in the communities and joining ATD activities are very important moments because it gives valuable experiences."

- Ming-

- "We have received a lot of friendship from each other. Our group was joyful, easy going, because everybody was willing to share friendship with the others. We have a common life spirit. We expect our friendship to go on, and that we'll be able to keep in touch in the future. We dream others will get this opportunity to meet in the future like we did."

-Somphet-Vienphet-
-Anne-

Visiting families in Bangkok



Asian Forum letter is part of the "Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World"⁶ and aims to promote, share and exchange ideas and knowledge stemming from the long-term commitment of people involved in fighting extreme poverty in Asia.

- *We welcome you to share your insights and experiences with us so that we may enrich this letter, with the aim of reaching a better understanding of people living in extreme poverty and of their efforts to overcome it.*

¹ DCDC After School Program

² <http://www.culturalprofiles.net/laos/Units/551.html>

³ <http://www.bigbrothermouse.com/>

⁴ <http://www.sahathai.org/>

⁵ <http://www.fcc.or.th/mbd/>

⁶ <http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/-Permanent-Forum-on-Extreme-Poverty-.html>