

A Tapani Vision of a World Fit for Children

เพื่อน

ami



International Movement ATD Fourth World
www.atd-fourthworld.org
www.tapani.org
atdint@atd-quartmonde.org

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This document is an updated and edited version of the contribution of the International Movement ATD Fourth World to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children (May 2002). Following the Special Session, ATD Fourth World has continued this work by exploring ways in which these commitments can be fulfilled.

The statements by the children were gathered during a campaign carried out by the Taporí Movement in 1999 on the theme "My Heart is in this Stone," as well as from presentations made by delegations of children to international conferences. The context for their statements, as well as the policy implications, draws on the experiences of the Movement in forty countries as documented in the records stored in the International Joseph Wresinski Centre near Paris, France. They also draw upon the results of two studies carried out by the International Movement ATD Fourth World and published in 2004: "How Poverty Separates Parents and Children: A challenge to human rights" and "Valuing Children, Valuing Parents: Focus on family in the fight against child poverty in Europe." We have changed the names of children and parents living in extreme poverty in order to protect their privacy.

Coordinators: Marie-Christine Jounot, Vicki Soanes

Authors: Benoit Cathala, Marie-Christine Jounot, Helene Kehl, Marleny Monroy, Beatrice Noyer, Huguette Redegeld, Diana Skelton, Vicki Soanes, Karen Stornelli, Anne-Marie Toussaint, Chantal Thiébaud, Thierry Viard, Maria Victoire

Editors: Moya Amateau, Olesya Samoylova, Quyen Tran and Naomi Zuk with the support of Angela Evosevic, Jason French, H el ene Rozet and Maria Sandvik

Cover illustration: Jacques Monnard

Photos: ATD Fourth World

Layout : Philippe Larminie

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FOREWORD

The Declaration and Plan of Action adopted by the Member States of the United Nations at the Special Session on Children in May 2002 on the theme “A World Fit for Children”, together with the Millennium Development Goals and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, have helped keep attention focused on the rights of children around the world in the 21st century. This report, reflecting the voices, views, and experiences of children from some of the poorest families and backgrounds, is a valuable contribution to the review of progress made since the 2002 Declaration of the UN General Assembly. It also draws immediate and sharp attention to many of the challenges that still face the world in assuring the rights of children everywhere.

“A Tapori Vision of a World Fit for Children” illustrates strongly why we cannot be satisfied with – even while we greatly welcome – demonstrable progress at the global and national levels. This important report from the International Movement ATD Fourth World makes a major contribution to the consideration of progress towards a World Fit for Children by reminding us that “all children count” – and that the design and effectiveness of measures to reach the most vulnerable and marginalised children are essential to our efforts to promote genuine progress.

The work of ATD Fourth World and the voices of children conveyed through this publication serve to remind us of the centrality to “inclusive development” of understanding why and how so many children remain marginalised and excluded, even in wealthier societies – living the consequences of inadequate protection and facing tall obstacles in obtaining the basic services that most children are able to rely on.

Whether as a result of poverty, discrimination, disability, family breakdown, social conflict, exploitation or violence – to name only some of the central and often inter-related causes – it is incumbent on policy-makers and those who design and cooperate in the development of social and economic policies and programmes to seek out and hear the voices of the poorest children and to make specific provisions to ensure that these policies and programmes also work for them. As revealed in a joint UNICEF/ATD study carried out in the 1990s, entitled “Reaching the Poorest”, unless care is taken to ensure that anti-poverty programmes also reach the poorest of the poor, the gap between them and the rest of the population may simply broaden.

Birth registration – and breaking down the barriers that may prevent children from obtaining formal registration and identity documents, affecting their access to services such as health care and basic education – is a good example, highlighted by this report, of a necessary, positive, affordable and catalytic measure for children’s rights. The report urges that birth registration must be free, easily accessible and universal.

Since 2002, many governments have stepped up their efforts in this and other affordable and critical areas for the poorest children – such as strengthening child protection measures, tackling micronutrient deficiencies and the scourges of HIV and malaria, while promoting practices such as exclusive breastfeeding and basic education. Successes are evident – but much more remains to be done.

Non-governmental organisations and community groups are often in a very good position to advise decision-takers and policy-makers, based on their close familiarity with the conditions of the poorest children and families – and to help their voices to be heard as part of the genuine consultation process which is necessary for well-grounded, rights-based development. They can also help to take that next step in rights-based development, which is to create the conditions necessary for the meaningful participation of all concerned, including the poorest children and families, in the implementation and evaluation of social and economic policies.

UNICEF commends the efforts of ATD Fourth World, both in the field and through publications such as this, to bring renewed attention and evidence to bear on how grassroots experience can be used to ensure that children from families living in extreme poverty can benefit from development and protection initiatives. UNICEF has also focused on these concerns, for example through the *"State of the World's Children Report, 2006"*, which discussed the plight of children who remain "excluded and invisible", and how partners can work practically together to include them.

The World Fit for Children Plan of Action recognized that *"Chronic poverty remains the single biggest obstacle to meeting the needs, protecting and promoting the rights of children. It must be tackled on all fronts"* This report, containing the voices and views of children themselves, provides a wealth of ideas and perspectives on how this can be done.

Richard Morgan
Deputy Director, Policy and Planning
UNICEF

The views expressed in this Foreword do not necessarily reflect the policies or the views of UNICEF or the United Nations.

INTRODUCTION



In this document, the International Movement ATD Fourth World examines the ten principles in "A World Fit for Children"¹ through the eyes and experiences of children from the Tapori Movement.² These principles outline the commitment of the international community to ensure that all children have access to their rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.³ To effectively reach all children, the voices of the poorest and most excluded children must be heard. This document relates the stories and opinions of children in extreme poverty and people who are important to them. With other children from diverse backgrounds, they see and experience the injustice of extreme poverty and continued violations of their rights. Often they do not dare to react and keep their feelings in their hearts, but sometimes, they manage to express themselves with a disarming freshness and inventiveness. They express a rebellion against injustice by how they live and by their choice of friendships.

Children's stories vary from country to country, continent to continent, according to their cultural, environmental and financial situation. There is, however, a common thread in that these children are denied their rights as guaranteed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children living in extreme poverty and their families are particularly well placed to understand the meaning of community building, of working together against social exclusion and helping to eliminate the suffering of others.

¹ The outcome document of the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Children in 2002.

² A profile of this worldwide network can be found on page 70.

³ The Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international treaty that recognizes the human rights of children. The standards in the Convention were negotiated by governments, non-governmental organizations, human rights advocates, lawyers, health specialists, social workers, educators, child development experts and religious leaders from all over the world. It was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989.

Who can better understand the true value of these things than those denied them? However, their poverty often prevents them from making a valuable contribution to this process. The realization of children's rights implicitly requires the realization of the rights of those around them.

In this document, the International Movement ATD Fourth World and the Taporí Movement share some of the knowledge gathered from children as well as from NGOs, individuals and small groups that work with disadvantaged populations. Although this document will not profile all of these grassroots projects, they remain the source of our relationships with these children and their families. ATD Fourth World has developed these relationships over time, whether in their homes or shelters, in their schools or at the garbage dumps where they scavenge to survive. Some work to support their families, others do not. Some are unable to go to school because their families do not have the means to send them. Some experience failure at school, others attain success. Some have been separated from their families and may have no shelter at all, while others grow up in a stable environment. The story of each child is unique and evolving.

ATD Fourth World builds long-term relationships with families living in poverty, sometimes over generations, based not on dependence but on interdependence. All projects are rooted in the priority given to reaching the children and families in the most insecure circumstances to better understand and learn from them. This understanding makes it possible to progress towards the goal of enabling all families to live in dignity.

The solidarity and friendship found amongst children can be illustrated with the story of **Taurai**, who showed how despite his desperate situation, he thought of others. Taurai, a child from **Africa**, approximately ten years old, lives in a home for children who live or work in the streets. Taurai has never been to school. Arriving at the home for the first time, he hadn't eaten anything for days. He was served some sadza, a staple food, but left his plate half full. One of the staff was surprised and said to him, "I know you are very hungry. Why don't you eat all the food?" Taurai answered,

*I want to take it to a friend who is also hungry.
May I please have a plastic bag to put it in?*

As international bodies, governments and civil society increase their efforts to enable the participation of children in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, how can Taurai be a part of this? Even if he does not at present have the opportunity to sit and discuss these issues with others, it must be recognized that in his daily life he makes sacrifices to protect other children. Due to their unique experiences, children like Taurai have an important role to play.

This document outlines proposals for positive change inspired by the experiences of the children of the Taporí movement. Some proposals describe grassroots initiatives, such as access to education, healthcare and culture. Others are more general, but all are based on years of experience of listening to people living in extreme poverty and to those who work with them. The aim is to contribute to the fulfillment of the goals outlined in "A World Fit for Children" in such a way as to include the poorest children in the process.

The message is overwhelming and urgent. Children want to live with their families and be accorded in real terms their rights as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is through listening to children that those with the power to effect change can ensure that children's rights be respected.

When the world finally discovers that we children are all the same, whatever our country or our race, maybe then all adults will want for every child on the face of the earth what they want for their own children. That's when the world will really change.

- A delegation of Tapori children addressing the United Nations Economic and Social Council's High-Level Segment, 1999.

PUT CHILDREN FIRST⁴

In all actions related to children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

This first principle in “A World Fit for Children” is drawn from Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child which states, “In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.” This article acknowledges the special place childhood has in the life span of an individual and its importance in building a strong foundation for adult life. Any decisions taken must be first considered in terms of their potential impact on children. In order to be effective, this means taking into account the various groups of children, including minorities, the disabled, and the poor, since the same actions can have very diverse impact on different population groups.

The best interests of the poorest children are often overlooked

Often, the poorest children are the first to suffer the impact of decisions that are made without meaningful consideration of their situation.

Many governments, local authorities, NGOs, courts and social services attempt to consider the impact of their decisions on children, but often fail to get meaningful input, particularly from the poorest children and their families. To fulfill this commitment to put all children first, including the poorest, these children and their families must be genuinely considered and consulted throughout the decision-making process.

The first step in achieving genuine consultation is to acknowledge that the world of the poor is, in many ways, hidden and unknown to the majority of the community. How many of us see a person living in extreme poverty and can truly imagine how they live? People living in extreme poverty have vastly different life experiences than most of the community. So do their children, whose experiences of childhood are often extremely different from those of their peers.

In **Africa**, the poorest within a poor community found their suffering exacerbated rather than improved after a well-meaning development project went ahead without their consultation.

⁴ The ten statements around which this document is based are taken from the outcome document of the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children, “A World Fit for Children”.

This is illustrated in the document “Partnerships with People Living in Persistent Poverty, the Missing Partners in Sustainable Development”⁵:

ATD Fourth World has been present in an old fish market where many youths lived in the market and supported the market vendors. Recently, the local government planned to build a new and modern structure that would house the different vendors and services of the area. It was at this old market that many of the young adolescents living on the street could earn a bit of money doing odd jobs, such as cleaning produce, helping the vendors, collecting fire wood, and so on – jobs that may provide only enough money for a small meal or a piece of fruit. But with the plans for the new market – one in which booths and vendors would be organized according to service, and which would permit only some of the original vendors to be present in the market – many of these poor street adolescents, as well as other very poor market workers, were to become unemployed. [...] The repercussions of the diminished market have yet to be seen fully, but it is certain that a number of poor vendors and market workers who earned their meager livelihoods in the old market are now without jobs.

The best interests of the poorest children are often not the primary, but the last consideration

Children continue to suffer when their families are unable to secure permanent housing. **Naiema**, a child from **North America**, has lived in shelters since her family was forced to leave their apartment because of sewage drainage problems that were never fixed. She has lived in several shelters, and her schooling has suffered as a consequence. Naiema missed several months of school because she believed the principal of her old school “doesn’t like shelter kids.” In addition, the school that she transferred to was behind her previous one and she had to repeat course work. Naiema asserts that “kids have a right to a good education. I’m not getting that.”

Despite the best efforts of the shelter workers, the pressures of many families living in such close proximity frequently breeds conflict. Naiema feels that “at the shelter, it’s like being in a jail. I’m not free.” She is often drawn into conflicts with the other young people in the shelter and feels that because of this, she brings problems back to her family.

All of these difficulties combine to make Naiema and other children in similar situations feel that their rights are not upheld. Their education suffers due to having to change schools to fit with the location of the shelter; they stand out as different amongst their peers, are often the victims of taunting, and are often drawn into conflicts. Perhaps most seriously of all, they are unable to feel free. Naiema longs for a place to call her own. After hearing of children in Asia who live in graveyards, she said:

People here don’t live in a graveyard. But some people are on the street with no place to go. Or me, I’m in a shelter, not in my own home. People here in North America are not well stable. I would compare it to living in a graveyard. You have to sign in and out and there are rules like for your curfew. It’s your own apartment but you still can’t call it yours. I want something to be mine.

In the authorities’ failure to find Naiema’s family appropriate accommodation, Naiema’s interests have not been put first.

⁵ This document was submitted by the International Movement ATD Fourth World to the World Forum on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, August 2002, p. 7.

Children often suffer the most serious consequences when they and their family are discriminated against

A holistic approach to human rights is fundamental to ensuring that no one member of the community suffers because of the denial of rights to another. In order to ensure the rights of a child, the other members of his or her family must be considered.

In **Western Europe**, in 1998, the tragic loss of a child brought into stark relief the potentially devastating consequences to children when the right of a family to adequate living conditions as enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is denied. Putting children first means investing in their families.

ATD Fourth World had known a particular family for over ten years. A settled Yéniche⁶ family, they lived in a tent, forced to move from village to village, and were constantly at risk of being evicted. In 1990, wanting to find a permanent home, the family found a house with a short-term lease. However, it was in the path of a proposed motorway and was subsequently demolished. In February 1997, the family was re-housed in some workmen's huts on the edge of the motorway construction site and was offered no other solution.

Some residents of the region, shocked by how the family was treated, tried to help the family. Members of the Fourth World Human Rights Committee intervened many times in the hope that the family might obtain decent lodgings, but with no success. Nothing changed, even after a press conference was organized in December 1997.

No council would accept responsibility for this family. Each time a possibility of land or a house was found in the area, the council used it for something else. An unused railway station was suggested but was subsequently destroyed despite the lack of a demolition permit.

On Easter Monday, April 13, 1998, the two-and-a-half-year-old son of this family drowned in a hole full of water created by the construction work. The police noted that this hole, close to a dwelling, was unprotected. The family feels that his death was a direct and dramatic result of their exclusion and the young parents bear the burden of this knowledge. The danger had been recognized a long time before the tragedy occurred. However, children and their families are still condemned to live in inhumane conditions, and their human rights are denied.

⁶ The Yéniches are a group of travelers who have been settled in Western Europe for many years.

Conclusions

Children living in extreme poverty are often not considered in the development and implementation of policies and projects.

- Children live within the context of their families. All decisions that affect their families also affect children. To that end, in order to make the best interests of a child a primary consideration, the needs of families must also be addressed.
- On an international level, the document “A World Fit for Children” emphasizes that “the family is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened.”⁷ The well-being of each member of the family should be considered interdependent. The rights of one member of the family cannot be protected effectively without the same protection for the rights of all family members.
- The poorest members of society are often not considered in the development of policies, as though their poverty justifies the violation of their rights.

Recommendations

- Misconceptions about how the poorest live and the difficulties they face can compromise the effectiveness of social, economic and cultural policies: many people living in extreme poverty are not only failing to benefit from social policies and poverty eradication programs, but are in fact still largely invisible to wider society. These are the very poorest members of our society, the socially excluded, and people whose living conditions, efforts and expectations should, but do not, shape social, economic or cultural policies. International Movement ATD Fourth World, with many others, continues to be concerned by this.
- In order to consider the effects of projects and policy on children, the implications for families must be taken into account, especially for the poorest families. Children and their families must be partners in the decision-making process. Consultation must be comprehensive and long-term, ensuring the inclusion of those who are the most difficult to consult. NGOs who have already built up long-term, trusting relationships with the poorest can be instrumental in this process. Using existing structures has the advantage of reducing the time necessary to consult for projects and policy, and it has the added value of channeling funds into established projects.
- Each time a decision is made or a law is passed that has implications for the community, particularly for children, the effects on the poorest children must be a fundamental concern.

⁷ “A World Fit for Children” para. 15.

- Training programs should be established for all people who are involved in the lives of the poorest, including police, teachers, social workers, lawyers and others. They should be aware of the particular needs of the poorest sector of society and how their actions affect that group. This training should have a particular focus on learning from the experiences and opinions of people in extreme poverty. This could be facilitated by NGOs as suggested in the second recommendation.

ERADICATE POVERTY: INVEST IN CHILDREN

We reaffirm our vow to break the cycle of poverty within a single generation, united in the conviction that investments in children and the realization of their rights are among the most effective ways to eradicate poverty. Immediate action must be taken to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

ATD Fourth World applauds the determination of the governments endorsing “A World Fit for Children” to “break the intergenerational cycle of malnutrition and poor health by providing a safe and healthy start in life for all children; providing access to effective, equitable, sustained and sustainable primary healthcare systems in all communities; ensuring access to information and referral services; providing adequate water and sanitation services; and promoting a healthy lifestyle among children and adolescents.”⁸ This recognition of poverty as a complex and intergenerational issue with numerous contributing factors is positive. However, ATD Fourth World is concerned that it fails to address *all* the issues crucial to helping children living in extreme poverty break the cycle.

Many projects fail to reach the poorest

Programs developed to reach the poor often do so to the exclusion and even the detriment of those most in need. Many projects aimed at whole communities benefit the more dynamic, easily reached majority. This is illustrated in the previous chapter by the example of the fish market in Africa. The development and formalization of the market seriously disadvantaged the most vulnerable young people who were supporting themselves through their work in the informal sector. Not only did the development project fail to assist them, but it further disadvantaged them through the elimination of their work. As High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Louise Arbour, said in 2007, “progress towards the MDG targets can easily be achieved at the expense of, rather than in the name of, the poorest and hardest to reach.”⁹

In rural **Central America**, a project¹⁰ developed through long-term consultation with the poorest members of a community resulted in a successful reduction of the infant mortality rate. Members of the International Movement ATD Fourth World Volunteer Corps¹¹ worked with poor families to design the project with the aim of overcoming the many obstacles faced by the poorest families to obtain health care. By listening to the often tragic experiences of these families, volunteers realized that obstacles included distance, often having to physically carry the sick family member; traveling time and the

⁸ “A World Fit for Children” para. 36.

⁹ <http://www.unhcr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/7381B4B4470FFC0AC1257312007306F4?opendocument>

¹⁰ As described in the contribution by International Movement ATD Fourth World to an NGO Consultation in preparation for the High-Level Segment of ECOSOC: “Promoting an integrated approach to rural development in developing countries for poverty eradication and sustainable development;” April 16, 2003, New York.

¹¹ Members of the ATD Fourth World Volunteer Corps work in close co-operation with people living in poverty in various projects around the world. They choose to live simply, often in poor neighborhoods, in solidarity with the poor.

subsequent effects on family income; childcare for their other children; shame associated with their physical condition; and appearance and fear of being judged by medical professionals.

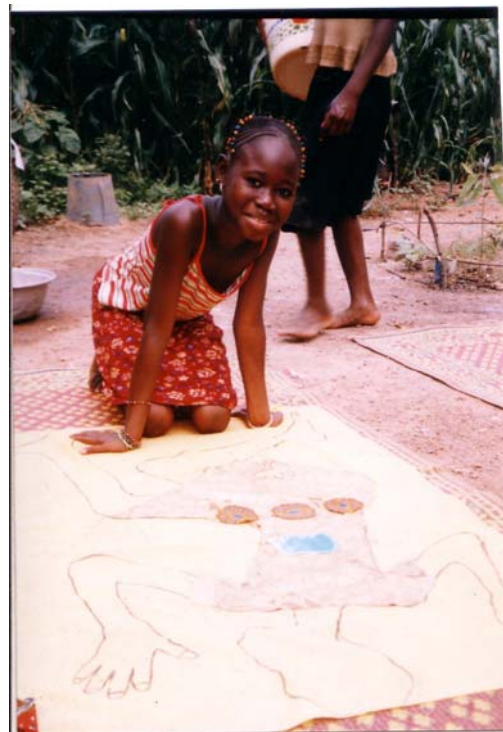
The families and volunteers felt that a project limited to fighting malnutrition through the distribution of meals would merely highlight a painful part of their lives, create tension in the community and be a source of shame. Instead they aimed to develop a project which focused on the parents' hopes for their children's futures. A pre-school was opened, providing creative stimulation to fight the lethargy of the malnourished children, distributing meals and snacks, and demonstrating nutritious recipes using local and accessible produce. The project also focused on the parents through health workshops where they could exchange ideas and information.

Over three years, the mortality rate of children under five dropped from 140 in every 1000 to 83 in every 1000. The success of the project was due to, amongst other factors, its inclusive nature and emphasis on consultation and partnership.

"A World Fit for Children" is a promise made by the international community. Children and families, especially those living in the harshest circumstances, have seen many promises broken. Expectations can lead to disappointment and to even greater despair and disillusionment in the future.

For *this* promise to children to be different, it must be made with full cognizance of past promises made and broken. This one must be kept.

Self-esteem and self-confidence are important tools to empower children and their families



Many projects overlook the fundamental importance of recognizing and respecting the dignity of families living in extreme poverty.

Many parents tell of the premature responsibility their children must shoulder. These parents often work irregularly or at the most physically demanding work for little gain. Some have never been able to find their place in mainstream employment. Many are young parents or parents with many children, but perhaps most importantly, they are parents who love their children and dearly hope that their sons and daughters might one day have a better future.

When a parent cannot find work, it is a humiliation for the family. In many societies people living in extreme poverty fall victim to a stereotype that unemployed people don't want to work. The truth is that the majority of people living in poverty want to be able to support their families but for many reasons are unable to access long-term employment. Though their poverty is perpetuated in part by systemic shortcomings and societal perceptions, they may be branded as the sole source of their problems and treated with condescension and even contempt. This treatment increases their humiliation, creating further disadvantage and contributing to their continued poverty. This shame transfers to their children and can have a devastating effect on their future.

A mother from the **Caribbean** explains that her children realize this stereotype is unfair and defend their father's worth.

In the home, even if the father does not work, the children have respect for him because they know that he knows how to work. They do not say that he is less worthy.

Children are hurt when others assume that their parents don't love them. **Romel** from **South America** spoke at the International Children's Forum¹²:

There are parents who drink because they are sad and disappointed. They have no money to support their family. They go far to earn money and to find food for their children. And sometimes they don't come back because they have found nothing to give their children. Then other people accuse them of being alcoholics and thieves, mad people who don't love their children. But what they don't know is that these parents love their children from the bottom of their hearts.

¹² The Taporí International Children's Forum, "Taporí - Friendship Triumphs Over Poverty". Some 85 child delegates from around the world took part in the Forum in November 1999 on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The children prepared for the Forum, with the help of adults in their communities. They met in Geneva with Mrs. Mary Robinson, the then United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and presented her with the Children's Appeal, which can be found at the end of this document.

Keeping families together is important to the eradication of extreme poverty

In the preamble to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is stated that

[T]he family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community.

A child from **Africa** named **Alain** wrote to a Tapori group expressing the importance of his family:

My name is Alain, and I am eight years old. We are four: Aurora, Sarah, Samuel, and myself, plus Da Linda, who already passed away. Mama and Papa leave home at 6:30 A.M. and come back at 6 P.M. everyday. At home, I play a part by fetching water, cleaning chairs, and washing little Samuel's clothes when he wets his bed. When little Samuel cries, I calm him down by singing with my friends. Papa gives me good advice. He likes chili. So, I plant chili in our small garden. I love Mama, because she teaches me not to blame, and to take care of the house. Our house is made of wood boards.

Alain describes not only the psychological and emotional benefits of being with his family, but his strong sense of his own importance to his family. In spite of his poverty, or perhaps because of it, Alain has a strong sense of worth connected to his being an essential part of a wider entity. He has gained value and self-esteem through working together with his family to ensure its survival and welfare. This self-esteem will be an important positive factor in his struggle to pull himself out of poverty.

➤ **Placement of children into care can deprive children of the conditions necessary for healthy growth and development**¹³

Undoubtedly, families in extreme poverty suffer from difficult living conditions, but they suffer even more when poverty breaks up the family.

In some countries, well-meaning social workers, often acting within guidelines laid down by government and the judiciary, place children into more affluent and stable families with the goal of giving them a better education or a more stable home life. In the United Kingdom, research shows that the educational attainment for children in the care of child protection services is far below that of their peers.

"Just eight per cent of young people in year 11 who had spent at least one year in care gained five or more GCSEs graded A*-C, compared with 50 per cent of all young people"¹⁴

¹³ Since terminology varies widely from country to country, for simplicity, "the placement of children into care", or "in care", unless stated otherwise, is intended to cover children in the care of foster families, institutions and local or national authorities. Similarly, "child protection services" refers to all official bodies concerned with the protection of children (such as Social Services in the UK).

¹⁴ "A Better Education for Children in Care", Social Exclusion Unit Report, September 2003. <http://www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/publications/reports/html/CinCmainfinal/index.html>

This in effect negates any perceived educational benefit of placing a child into care. The report goes on to say that:

"At least some of this poor achievement is explained by other disadvantages. Children in care are more likely to be from groups that tend to do less well in education... They are also much more likely to have statements of special educational need - 27 per cent have statements compared to 3 per cent of all children. However, **even taking account of these factors, children in care as a group do significantly worse than their peers.**"¹⁵

The experiences of **Linda** from **Western Europe** illustrate the difficulties that families in extreme poverty often face in order to stay together:

Linda has four children. Whilst pregnant with her last child she hit a time of crisis. Linda had high blood pressure, the Child Support Agency was paying her irregularly, she had just moved house and her youngest child David was being bullied. On top of all this, her father died. "I could not cope. Who could cope with that situation?" Out shopping with the children, David persistently demanded something that Linda could not afford. She snapped at him. Angry and upset, he ran into the road, shouting that he was going to kill himself.

Later on, a social worker came around and Linda poured out her heart to her, telling her of her own experiences of being in care and how she doubted her parenting abilities - asking for some help. Linda was shocked when she was informed that there was to be a case conference to decide if David needed to be on the "at risk" register. She was devastated by the investigation and the fact that social services put together a file with details of her childhood and her time in care. She said that the whole process made her feel as if she had committed a crime and could lose her children, including her newborn son. It put her under enormous stress. Linda came to ATD Fourth World to get advice and some help to deal with the upcoming conference, needing to know what to expect and how to express herself. A statement was written to be included in the conference notes. It explained how ATD Fourth World had come to know Linda, how she had managed before this crisis and what support ATD Fourth World were willing to offer her. A family support worker from ATD Fourth World went with her on the day.

At the case conference, twelve professionals - several of whom were strangers to Linda - sat around a table giving their views on Linda and David. They expressed concerns about "emotional abuse" and discussed Linda's care history, to which each of them had access. Being prepared and having someone alongside her gave her confidence to present her views herself. When Linda was told that if she agreed to the registration of her son on the "at risk" register, she would get a lot more help, she refused.

In the end, Social Services decided not to put David on the register. Linda said, "I felt I had won in a little way, but I was wrecked. What I wanted was some encouragement and support but what I got was a child protection investigation and it was the last thing I needed."

¹⁵ See footnote 14. Bold type added by author.

Children are sometimes placed in care against the wishes of their parents, primarily because their families are perceived as not having the emotional, financial or intellectual means to raise them. Just because they are struggling due to their poverty and social exclusion, it does not mean they do not love their children. Instead of children being placed into care, funds previously allocated to the child protection system could be used to help them raise their children themselves. An adequate support structure may enable them to stay together, thus avoiding the unnecessary and damaging separation of children from their families.

The Belgian Ministry of Justice was “worried by the fact that children from disadvantaged groups seem to be particularly at risk of being subject to an order of placement.”¹⁶ As stated by the French Naves-Cathala report on provisional care and placing of children (2000), it is in the interest of the child to reaffirm the primary importance of the parents in the upbringing of their children.

Often, the trust between parents and child protection services is fragile. In the worst cases, dialogue becomes tense, doubts accumulate and relations worsen over time. This may sometimes result in all ties being forcibly severed between non-abusive parents and their children, even though this relationship is crucial to a child’s well being.

Children who have been reunited with their families after a period in care testify to the suffering these separations cause. Many children who have been separated from their family talk about its importance as a place of learning, essential for their growth and development.

Eric, from **Western Europe**, explains:

The most important thing for me is to have a mother and a father. Mothers hug you and comfort you when you're sad. Fathers try to talk to you. A foster family, even if they are nice, cannot replace your mother and father. I was separated from my mom, and it was hard. When she would come to see me in the children's home, we would have a lot of fun together, but in the evening it was hard to leave my mother, and I would see her cry.

When you go through that, it hurts. You feel ashamed. Some people said that we were separated because I was getting in trouble all the time. This was said also to other children who are in foster care. We have to do everything possible so that children can live with their parents. We love our parents.

There are many reasons why children are placed into care, whether voluntarily or against the wishes of the parents. Placing a child into care outside the family must be considered as a temporary arrangement in all but the most extreme cases and viewed as a tool to support the child and his or her family. Parents should be empowered to take an active role in the decisions that affect their children. This implies that the family-child relationship will be maintained in a spirit of partnership and dialogue between the authorities, parents and child. Article 9 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child insists that it is important to “respect the right of the child who is separated from one or

¹⁶ “En dialogue, six ans après le Rapport général sur la pauvreté”, Service de lutte contre la pauvreté, la précarité et l'exclusion sociale, Centre for Equal Opportunites and Opposition to Racism, Belgium, June 2001, p. 99.

both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis." This is essential for the successful return and integration of the child to his or her family and for his or her healthy growth and development.

➤ ***Children entrusted to the care of others in the hope of a better future are more susceptible to exploitation and child labor***

Despite the desire to raise and care for their children, parents living in extreme poverty sometimes make the painful choice to entrust their children to others, whether extended family, benefactors or institutions. They do so in the hope that their children's lives will be improved and that they will be able to access their rights.

This shows huge resilience and courage by the family in the face of impossible choices.

In accordance with traditional practice, many families in **Africa** entrust their children to the care of others to learn a trade. This co-operative tradition is now at risk because of the danger posed by those seeking to profit from these families. Instead of the promised training, many children end up being trafficked or forced to work in slave-like conditions. This ends the hopes of these families for a better life for their children and undermines traditional values and the sense of solidarity in these communities.

Alexander's mother, from the **Indian Ocean**, chose to entrust her son to a convent in the hope that he would learn and "become someone." Alexander's little sister was forcibly separated from the family because they had been evicted and were forced to live on the streets.

Since then, the family has never lost the hope that one day they will have the means to live together again. Alexander says:

If we are unlucky and if my little sister has to stay in an institution, then in a few years, when I'm big, I will start working and I will rent a house. They will give my little sister back to us, and we will be able to live all together.

Often, although families have attempted to find a solution to ensure their children's future by placing them with family members or in an orphanage or institution, many children end up living on the streets because of the difficulties of their situations.

This testimony, given by **Mr. Baptiste** from the **Caribbean**, tells of his childhood and illustrates the often easy progression from the protection of a family to the uncertainty of the streets:

In my family, there were six children, of whom I was the oldest. None of us had ever gone to school. One day, my uncle, who worked in a hospital, came to see my father and said to him "Give me your little boy, and I will put him in school." My father told him "No problem, you can take him." I spent five years with him, and he woke me up at 5am to do housework, and then go to the fields. I never went to school, so I ran away. I walked around 15 km, and ended up at a roundabout, where I helped a worker load a bus, and then I got on also. He said nothing to me, as I had helped with his work. He gave me food on the roof of the bus. I arrived at a place when he said to me "Boy, you have arrived at the capital. You can get off." I didn't know where to go. Then, I saw several children coming to meet me. One of them said, "What happened with you?" I said to him, "I have lost my home". They said they were going to put me on the bus so I

could go home. They hit me with sticks. After that they said to me, "Good, you can be part of our gang, stay with us."

The time on the streets has marked me. To live on the streets means stealing, taking drugs, and so many unspeakable things. For the family, it is an insult, a shame.

I wanted so many things, to develop, to progress, I decided to do something and then I was discouraged. I often think that it would have been better if I had stayed with my uncle, even if he mistreated me. I would have become a farmer without doubt, but I would have been happier in the end.

➤ Investing in children living in extreme poverty means investing in their families

Guaranteeing rights for children depends on guaranteeing rights for their parents. ATD Fourth World has learned from poor children that when their families don't receive support, the children themselves must help support their families.

Children's actions, however surprising, reveal what is important to them. Such is the case for **John** from **Africa**. His mother often had trouble finding work since her last employer moved away. The neighbors offer to feed the children sometimes, but John refuses to accept their help. He prefers to stay with his mother, not wanting to leave her alone with nothing to eat. He chooses not to eat even though his mother worries about his health. John very much wants to find work to help his mother. When he does find small jobs in the evenings after school and on days off from school, he gives the little he earns to his mother.

Children want to help their families to leave poverty behind. **Angelica**, from **Southeast Asia**, wrote:

To be able to work is important for all families to survive and fight poverty. I wish that, some day, I will be able to help my family. I want to finish my studies to fulfill this.

In order to invest in John's health and in Angelica's education, and indeed, in their very childhood, it is necessary to invest in their parents, their grandparents, their brothers and sisters. The well-being of each member of the family is interdependent.

This point is emphasized by the experience of a doctor who works with very poor families in the **Caribbean** region:

Financiers funded a project to promote the health of mothers and children. But one must also take care of tuberculosis, malaria and other illnesses. Because we work with families, and the individual is part of that. You cannot say that you have a project just for the mothers and children – what do you do with the fathers?

Children want to keep hoping. They ask that we strengthen our efforts to sustain their parents so that they can take care of themselves and their children, offer them better living conditions and ensure their development and rights. In spite of everything, parents long to raise their children themselves and keep fighting to exercise this right.

Conclusions

Children should be considered within the context of their families as well as individuals. They must be recognized as integral parts of their families and their communities, needing the support of those close to them. Except in exceptional circumstances, they should be given the necessary support to thrive within or in close link to the family environment. To that end, parents must be fully empowered so they can fulfill their roles and responsibilities.

- In certain countries, particularly developing ones, many parents entrust their children into the care of others. These parents believe that they are giving their children their best chance of a better life. But all too often, the children are exploited, or are so unhappy that they run away and end up on the streets.
- The protection enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child depends essentially on ensuring that parents have the means to protect their children and their rights. The well-being of each member of the family is interdependent. In order to invest in the education, development and future of children living in extreme poverty, there must also be investment in their caretakers and their wider environment.
- Many factors, often exacerbated by poverty, contribute to the placing of a child into care. Pressures on social workers include a need to be seen to be ensuring the safety of a child, fear of mistakes, lack of funding and heavy case-loads, perceived neglect as well as other sociological, cultural, economic, environmental and political issues. This often leads to children being placed in care without a real understanding of the situation of the families, creating mistrust within the family, as well as mistrust among other families in the community. People living in poverty are often reluctant to seek support before they reach crisis point through fear of losing their children. A common assumption is that children are placed into care because they are being abused or mistreated by uncaring parents. However, in the vast majority of cases, parents do love their children, but the realities of living in poverty mean that they do not have the wherewithal necessary to care for them adequately.
- Placement of children in care should be considered temporary, and families should be supported to prepare for their children's return. Where this is not deemed possible, adoption is considered a viable alternative. This carries with it the danger of serious and permanent violations to the rights of the child and threatens the status of the family as having the "primary responsibility for the protection, upbringing and development of children."¹⁷
- Projects developed through consultation and partnerships with the poorest members of the community are more effective and have the added value of raising the self-esteem of individuals and reinforcing a sense of community.

¹⁷ "A World Fit for Children" para. 15.

Recommendations

- “The primary responsibility for the protection, upbringing and development of children rests with the family. All institutions of society should respect children’s rights and secure their well-being and render appropriate assistance to parents, families, legal guardians and other caregivers so that children can grow and develop in a safe and stable environment and in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding, bearing in mind that in different cultural, social and political systems, various forms of the family exist.”¹⁸ ATD Fourth World asserts that this should be of even greater consideration in the case of families living in extreme poverty.
- Authorities should recognize that extreme poverty is the cause of many families’ difficulties and for the most part beyond their immediate control. Not enough is done to support the family unit before their situation reaches crisis point. All possible assistance should be offered to families (by social services and educational establishments) to enable them to ensure that their children can fully access their rights. Holistic solutions must be reached with the full consultation and participation of the family.
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that “States parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child.”¹⁹ The unique problems encountered by families living in extreme poverty should be recognized as a contributing factor in the separation of children from their families. Appropriate steps must be taken to address the poverty of the family before crisis point is reached.
- “A World Fit for Children” promises to “protect children from adoption and foster care practices that are illegal, exploitative or that are not in their best interest.”²⁰ In this spirit, social workers, judges, lawyers, police and other professionals whose actions have a potential impact on the lives of people living in poverty should be aware of the realities of these families’ lives. Judgments of behavior, environment and dress are easily filtered through the perspectives of different upbringings. These professionals should be cognizant of the different values and world view of people who were brought up in a poor environment. To that end, extensive training must be instituted with major input from people living in poverty themselves in order to sensitize professionals to the needs of those living in extreme poverty.

¹⁸ “A World Fit for Children” para. 15.

¹⁹ Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 9, Para. 1.

²⁰ “A World Fit for Children” para. 44. (12).

CREATIVE SOLUTIONS: Training of Social Workers by People in Poverty

In London, UK, ATD Fourth World has helped create a steering group to develop a model for involving families in the training of social workers. It is made up of people living in poverty with experience of social services interventions, as well as university professionals and practicing social workers. The project is in partnership with the Royal Holloway, University of London. Through lectures, trainee social workers will be able to listen to first-hand experiences of the poorest families and be challenged in their beliefs. This sensitization of social workers to the special needs of many of their clients will help them form stronger, more understanding relations and consequently be more effective in their support of the poorest families. They will be better equipped to understand how it is harder for people living in extreme poverty to meet criteria set by Social Services and to access the justice system in order to fight to keep their children.

- A crisis-driven approach to child protection leads to a greater proportion of children in care coming from families living in poverty. There should be more research conducted and subsequently more training given to health and social services professionals on the effects of extreme poverty and its impact on the rights of children and their families. The involvement of families living in extreme poverty should be an integral part of this research and training.
- Professionals and public authorities must ensure that no child falls through the cracks of the system. The most vulnerable children must be monitored to ensure there are no violations of their rights. Empowerment of the community to take responsibility for all of its children can be an effective tool in ensuring all children are cared for.
- In developing countries, the root causes that place parents in the situation where they feel they must give up their children must be recognized and addressed. Governments and NGOs should raise awareness through campaigns that warn of the risks of entrusting children to others, especially strangers, who promise that the children will receive education or training in another state or country. Too frequently this can result in the child being exploited.
- Projects should be built in partnership with those it intends to benefit and should be flexible enough to adapt to the changing needs of a population.

CREATIVE SOLUTIONS: The Courtyard of a Hundred Trades, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

Many children from rural families leave for the city hoping for a better life but end up on the streets, living hand to mouth. These children become estranged from their families and often find it difficult to renew contact for a variety of reasons including the shame of having failed or a strained relationship with their families.

ATD Fourth World, through its project "The Courtyard of a Hundred Trades," gives children living on the street the chance to learn a practical skill, such as carpentry or metal work, while at the same time helping them re-establish a relationship with their families. The project started off as a simple activity offering skills training to children living on the street in the city, but in time, many of the children began to ask for help to find work so that they could return home in the knowledge that their families could be proud of them. They asked for support in contacting their families and ATD Fourth World volunteers joined them when they traveled home. Supporting these children and young people during this initial step is crucial. The conditions necessary for a successful return of a child to his or her village can involve many factors such as how the child can contribute to village life, the resolution of existing conflict between child and family, and the reintegration of the child into the more structured environment of the village.

LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND

Each girl and boy is born free and equal in dignity and rights; therefore all forms of discrimination affecting children must end.

In the preamble to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the plight of children living in extreme poverty is highlighted through the recognition that “in all countries in the world there are children living in exceptionally difficult conditions, and that such children need special consideration...” This special consideration of the most excluded and disadvantaged children should be proactive, ensuring that truly no child is left behind.

Discrimination comes in many forms and on many levels and can have devastating effects on the lives of its victims. For children, whose lives are just beginning and whose environment and experiences have a strong influence on their lives into adulthood, the prevention of discrimination is imperative. Discrimination often leads to and can exacerbate social exclusion. Joseph Wresinski²¹ explained: “Children in deep poverty are lonely, deprived of ties with the surrounding world ... deprived of the possibilities to ask and receive explanations, deprived of security.”

Living in poverty leaves children more vulnerable to discrimination

Many Governments have agreed to

[A]dopt special measures to eliminate discrimination against children on the basis of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status, and ensure their equal access to education, health and basic social services.²²

Children living in extreme poverty often experience discrimination in many areas of their lives: whether in the classroom, on the playground or in their community. The reasons for this are numerous. Children living in poverty may find it difficult to reap the full benefit of education because their families cannot afford the extra costs such as school trips, clean clothes and school books. Day-to-day life, its multiple hazards, the absence of means, and the negative image that society reflects back to them break the confidence of people living in poverty.

A child living in poverty can feel uneasy at school and lose his or her desire to learn, a process that can ultimately lead to the child dropping out of the education system altogether. Discrimination suffered as a child can greatly impact the rest of that child's life, affect his or her educational attainment, future employment prospects and the child's relations with others. The result is a perpetuation of the poverty cycle from parent to child.

Extreme forms of discrimination are often experienced by children who live on the street. There are many examples worldwide of such children who are mistreated or even killed.

²¹ The founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World (1917-1988)

²² “A World Fit for Children” para. 44 (3).

Many end up in prison, like **Paul**, a young person who lives on the streets of an **African** city.

With a number of friends I was sleeping behind an enclosure on a piece of ground in the city center. I had been chased away from somewhere else and thought I could sleep there without too many problems. But all of a sudden the police came and I found myself in prison. They accused us all of vagrancy.

Those who have been in prison for a long time sometimes attack those who have just arrived. When I was taken to court and put in prison, the stronger inmates took from me the small amount of money that I had. I couldn't defend myself against them.

Today we are seen as vagabonds and vagrants, and we risk being thrown into prison at any time, but we were born in this country and we want to earn a living legally. We wash cars, clean fish, even crush stones to make gravel. But many of us never went to school, so we don't know the rights that would protect us.²³

Environments can foster social inclusion



➤ **Social planning should promote diversity**

Bringing together poor communities in the same area can exacerbate the social exclusion of the poorest families, affecting interaction between poor children and their peers from other social backgrounds. Many families who live in extreme poverty are forced to live on the outskirts of society, both physically and in terms of their acceptance in the wider community. Social planning often results in low-cost housing being situated on the outskirts of a community, separated from more affluent housing.

Two young girls from **Western Europe** explain how they benefit from interacting with children from different backgrounds:

²³ "Three Years of Learning in Tanzania", International Movement ATD Fourth World, p. 11.

We all are very different in our group. There are younger and older children, some succeed at school, and others don't. Some live in beautiful houses and others in apartment buildings. There are children who are sometimes a little wild and difficult to get on with, but little by little we learn how to get to know them and discover that some have many worries at home or school. By doing things together, by speaking to each other, we become friends. Even if we still argue sometimes, we know to make peace. But it is necessary to take time to know and respect others. When a child is violent, it's because he is unhappy and it does not help to reject him.

Sometimes there is the impression that extreme poverty is impossible to destroy, that we cannot do it on our own. With the group, we have more courage to reach out to others. For example, we did not like seeing young Travelers²⁴ begging in the streets of the city and we thought about how to become their friends; we had the idea to invite them to come to play the accordion in our concert. The children had told us that they would like to go to school, but they were driven off the land where they were because they were going to build there. To say goodbye to them, we gave to each of them a bag and some school materials.

Promoting a cross-section of society in schools can reduce prejudice against people from different backgrounds. The educational performance of children from poor families suffers if they are unable to work alongside a variety of students.

In accordance with the statement in "A World Fit for Children", facilities to "promote physical, mental and emotional health among children, including adolescents, through play, sports, recreation, artistic and cultural expression"²⁵ should include the establishment and maintenance of recreational facilities for children from all sectors of society. Children who are given the opportunity to interact with others from different backgrounds will be less likely to act in a discriminatory way.

➤ **Youth groups help to foster mutual understanding**

The Tapori Movement encourages friendship amongst children from various backgrounds. The worst thing about persistent poverty is social exclusion or, as a Tapori child said, "*to have no friends, to be left out.*" Children from secure families rarely learn about poverty, while children from families living in poverty often have only their immediate (and difficult) environment from which to learn. However, children from all walks of life have an innate sense of justice and empathy for others. By presenting the issue of poverty in a non-threatening and non-judgmental way, Tapori provides a much-needed forum in which children can share their questions, insights and hopes for a better world. Tapori nurtures pride, responsibility and friendship in children, something that can be an inspiration to us all.

The Tapori network was developed by children, some from very poor backgrounds, with the support of ATD Fourth World. Its members are children from around the world whose motto is "*We want all children to have the same chances*". This exemplifies the goal to leave not a single child behind, to not accept that any child be excluded or suffer discrimination.

²⁴ Known to some as Gypsies, most of these families prefer to be known as Travelers, or Roma peoples.

²⁵ "A World Fit for Children" Para. 37, (19).

Vanessa, a nine-year-old member of Taporí in **North America** said:

Even if they live in poverty, Taporis do things for people who are poorer than themselves. They make friends with others who are left out. I like to go and play with someone who is all alone. It's true, you're a little bit scared, but you have to do it. You have to start by being a friend.

Clara and **Rita**, two children from a small village in **Western Europe**, were invited to the Taporí International Children's Forum. Clara's family is well-respected and liked in the village. Her family is very concerned about the welfare of other people.

Rita lives in a trailer. Her family has asked to be re-located to more secure housing, but their request has gone unheard for years. At school, Clara became friends with Rita.

With the support of Clara's mother, friendship grew between the two girls and with others from a Taporí group. Rita explains how some in the wider community treat her family:

Some people make fun of us... They see us as dirty, even though we are not dirty. They see that we live in a trailer. Fortunately, the teacher defended us, and so did Clara. We are often called names; we would prefer that people speak nicely to us. One boy has made peace with us. He says hello to us, and he plays with us.

Rita did not go to the Taporí Forum. Her family, concerned about the uncertainty of their home and lives, and knowing that other children had victimized their daughter in the past, did not dare let her travel. Due to her family's difficulties, Rita lost out on this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and Clara and the other children at the Forum lost out on the presence and contribution of Rita. All too often, poor families miss out on important opportunities, taken for granted by others, in a society that stigmatizes and victimizes its poorest members.

➤ ***Creating meeting places for people from all backgrounds***

To build community spirit and foster friendship, inhabitants need somewhere to gather and interact. This can be an invaluable tool for bringing communities together, resulting in greater social inclusion and an enhanced sense of community. These are likely to be lacking in the poorest neighborhoods, where increased crime, dilapidated buildings and lack of security discourage people from venturing out. Members of these communities would benefit the most from such things as youth groups and community centers. Local authorities should give priority to opening and supporting such centers in the most deprived neighborhoods, using local networks to ensure the inclusion of the poorest members of the community.

In a poor community in **Central America**, the situation of the inhabitants changed radically when the parents were able to work towards a common goal, that of bringing books and cultural activities to their children. ATD Fourth World invited a couple to help start a project. **Juan** and **Maria Guadalupe** opened their one-room house for activities with local children. This home-run project was frequently attended by 20 to 30 children, aged between several months to 14 years old. They crowded into the cabin, reading books and taking part in activities. Maria Guadalupe was devoted to helping both her own children and those of her neighbors. This run-down cabin became the heart of the

community and an important resource for the development of the local children. Three days before Christmas, to liven things up, parents and children decorated the house with strings of lights, paper chains and drawings. On Christmas Day, the family invited neighbors and their children to come and share a big cake. Even the children the family did not know well were invited.

Juan and Maria Guadalupe showed a commitment to helping their community develop through the creation of an environment for the children and their families where the everyday stresses of living in poverty could be forgotten.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child: An effective tool for promoting good citizenship amongst children

All too often, children are not aware of their rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Not only would the teaching of the significance of the Convention in schools empower children to assert their rights, it would open their eyes to the predicament of other children around the world who have difficulty accessing their rights, helping to break down the ignorance which fosters discrimination.

In 2001, 81 students from a school in France prepared a research project on the topic of "education on the rights of the child and human rights". Some of them had read an appeal in a children's newspaper inviting them to contribute, through a contest, to the preparation of the World Summit in New York in 2002. Their work won the contest. Several of these children are in Taporí groups.

Their teacher, a member of ATD Fourth World, said:

Children are sensitive to injustice and are motivated to fight against it without making moral judgments. Many who work on these topics become more respectful to others, more concerned that everyone succeeds. This is contagious. These young people are forces of change in their schools.

Teachers are able to raise their students' awareness of their community and the issue of extreme poverty. Through activities related to human rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children become more aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Teachers should recognize the importance of creating a positive school environment so that children can practice respect and inclusion in their interactions with their peers.

Giving all children access to art, culture, creativity and spirituality is important for their growth and development

As discussed previously, the promotion of "mental and emotional health ... through... artistic and cultural expression" is essential to ensure a child grows into a well-rounded adult. The Constitution of UNESCO states that "... The wide diffusion of culture and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man." For children living in poverty, the overwhelming everyday struggle for basic survival too often precludes their involvement in the cultural and spiritual life of their community. Efforts to enable people living in extreme poverty to access their culture remain meager. The international community is generally willing to help with people's

physical survival: to obtain food, shelter, clothing and even job training. However important these things are, it is also important that society is concerned with ensuring that the poor have access to all dimensions of human existence.

As the mother of a Tapori child told us,

There are no human rights; there are no rights of the child, as long as children do not receive the means to express themselves, to develop their thinking, their intelligence and to have access to the most accomplished forms of culture, education and spirituality.

They also deserve access to their own family history and the history of their community. When this history is one of persistent poverty, it can too easily be a source of shame. Having the means to put it into context and to share it with others can instead make it a source of pride for the child. In **New Zealand**, many educators recognize that Maori children, who are over-represented in poverty statistics, learn better when their culture is respected and taken into account. For example a Maori *Kohanga Reo*, or “language nest”²⁶ provides an environment of mutual respect that boosts self-esteem and pride in themselves, their families and their culture, which often leads to higher educational attainment.

In the **Caribbean**, an ATD Fourth World Street Library helps children by putting them in touch with their culture through song and dance. **Mackendi** tells how he felt able to participate in a street library:

I met ATD Fourth World when I was small, perhaps when I was eight years old. Now I am 16 years old. When I went the first time, nobody invited me. I went because I heard the singing “Come along, come along, come quickly.”

The Haitians are people who love singing, and who love to dance. And when the children hear that, they need to know what’s going on That’s how I first went. For me it was a great pleasure to stay and hear stories that I had never heard before, and songs that I didn’t know ...

I keep going to the Street Libraries because I enjoy them. I have come to know more and more stories and I want to always continue to learn the most beautiful stories.

In the final declaration of the joint UNICEF and ATD Fourth World seminar “Reaching the Poorest” held in Mauritius in April 2000, it was stated that in order to fight poverty and help children, one must “recognize the values that they carry and to respect them.”

²⁶ Maori language preschools incorporating a culturally specific pedagogy.

Conclusions

Children raised in extreme poverty suffer the worst forms of discrimination; they are unable to fully access their rights as enshrined in the Convention of the Rights of the Child. They are left behind in many spheres of their life, including education, personal development and access to culture.

- In spite of seemingly valid reasons behind actions, such as a teacher disallowing a child from going on a school trip because of lack of money, correct clothing or equipment, children are often unable to participate fully in the life of the community (in this case a school) because of his or her poverty.
- "A World Fit for Children" recognizes that not only is it necessary to provide children with the essentials for good physical health and development, but also the means for good emotional and psychological health. To that end, children from poor families must be treated with respect and given access to all spheres of human existence.
- Leaving no child behind means investing in the community as a whole. A community that develops taking into account the needs of its poorest members will develop to the benefit of all.

Recommendations

- Discrimination against people living in poverty needs to be addressed. In all spheres of life, such as education, work, health and community, conditions that encourage the inclusion and respect of the poorest members of the community should be promoted. Only then will the poorest truly become a part of society. As noted in the Draft Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights,²⁷ "Discrimination against the poor based on their image, their dress, their physical appearance or any other grounds related to their situation of extreme poverty constitutes a human rights violation."
- Local and/or national government can promote and fund community centers where children living in extreme poverty are able to interact with others free from the stress of their everyday lives. These centers should run programs that promote a sense of community and aim to enrich children's lives. Special emphasis should be placed on making these programs and centers accessible for the poorest members of the community.

²⁷ Draft guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights: the rights of the poor annexed to Sub-Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights resolution 2006/9 of 24 August 2006.

CREATIVE SOLUTIONS: Access to art for poor families

The internationally renowned Argentinean pianist Miguel Angel Estrella has a long-standing relationship with ATD Fourth World and has performed many times for Fourth World families through his foundation Musique Esperance. Mr Estrella performed two mini-concerts in April 2003 in disadvantaged neighborhoods in Quebec, Canada. By performing in these neighborhoods, he was able to give poor families a chance to experience music in a way they were unable to before, as respected and equal citizens in their community.

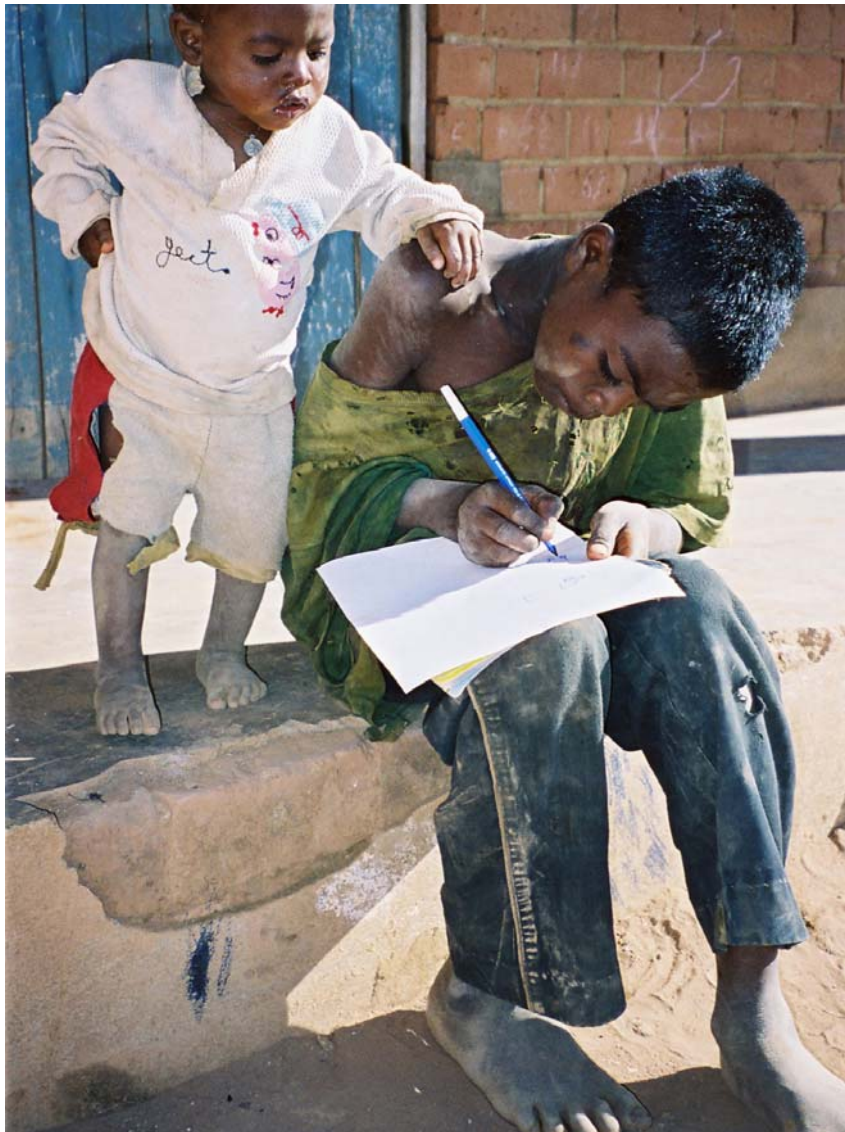


Photo: François Philiponeau

Care for Every Child

Children must get the best possible start in life. Their survival, protection, growth and development in good health and with proper nutrition are the essential foundations of human development. We will make concerted efforts to fight infectious diseases, tackle major causes of malnutrition and nurture children in a safe environment that enables them to be physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally secure, socially competent and able to learn.

Combat HIV/AIDS

Children and their families must be protected from the devastating impact of human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS).

Illness and malnutrition are heavy burdens

Governments endorsing "A World Fit for Children" recognize the fact that

[D]ue to poverty and lack of access to basic social services, more than 10 million children under 5 years of age, nearly half of them in their neo-natal period, die every year of preventable diseases and malnutrition... 150 million children under 5 years of age are malnourished...²⁸

A friend of ATD Fourth World told of a boy in the **Caribbean** who died:

Last year a child died from hunger. They hid the fact that he was hungry, they said that he had worms. Each morning he went to school without eating. He ate nothing until 10.30am, when he was given something to eat at school. And he didn't eat at all until the next day. One morning he fell on the way to school. They called the doctor but he died on the way to hospital.

Poor health among people and families living in extreme poverty is far too commonplace. It is most often the result of substandard living conditions characterized by the lack of nourishing food, clean and accessible water, decrepit housing located in overcrowded communities and polluted and vermin- or insect-infested areas. Some endure forced homelessness or frequent moves due to social exclusion, evictions, and the need to flee war and conflict. Persistent suffering from these precarious conditions manifests itself in ailments and health disorders such as chronic asthma and coughs, meningitis, stress and anxiety symptoms, alcohol or drug dependency, obesity or malnutrition, dental disease

²⁸ "A World Fit for Children" para. 35.

and infected sores and lesions. People living in extreme poverty are more vulnerable to injuries arising from road accidents because of sub-standard infrastructure and transport. They are generally less informed about health matters than their less-poor neighbors due to inadequate education.

Many diseases, such as malaria and tuberculosis, thrive in poor communities and continue to kill large numbers of children and adults in developing countries as well as in increasing numbers in deprived areas of industrialized countries.

People living in extreme poverty often do not have access even to basic medical care. In many countries, medicines and consultation costs are far beyond the means of the poorest. This restricted access to healthcare forces them to resort to medical practices that can be of sub-standard quality and not suited to their needs. Families are sometimes forced to go into debt merely to attempt to preserve the life of a family member.

The necessity for poor children to work at a young age to fulfill a need within their family can take a toll on the child's educational development. The same applies to the child's physical development. Undertaking such responsibilities can deprive the child of the chance to exercise, play and participate in other activities important for good social and physical development. They may also be required to perform tasks that strain their growing muscles and damage their backs and bodies prematurely.

➤ ***The importance of strengthening parents' capacity to better care for their children***

Parents living in poverty struggle on a daily basis against ill-health, but are often intimidated by the health care services available to them.

In a poor area in the **Indian Ocean**, **Ando** lives with his parents and his five brothers and sisters. They live in a wooden house built on a clay floor. His mother is mentally ill, and accompanies her husband to work as a street-vendor, leaving the children to stay at home to look after themselves.

One day, at a Tapori Street Library, it was noticed that Ando had become significantly thinner. At one point he had to leave the Street Library as he was finding it difficult to breathe. Those running the Street Library found him in tears and asked Ando's parents if he needed to seek medical treatment. Ando's parents agreed to take him several kilometers on foot to the nearest hospital. Once there, they had to struggle in order to have him admitted and seen by a doctor. Ando was finally given a bed. Because only women were normally allowed to stay with the patients, his father and eldest brother were belittled by those in the hospital. Nevertheless, they took turns to be at his bedside every day.

Many factors may influence a parent's decision to take their children to hospital: cost, perceived seriousness of an illness, availability and affordability of childcare for the other children in the family, the distance to hospital and transport costs or availability. For very poor families, the decision to seek hospital care for a child is often a difficult one, sometimes entailing sacrifices in other spheres of their lives, such as losing a significant portion of their income.

“A World Fit for Children” promises to “improve the nutrition of mothers and children, including adolescents, through household food security, access to basic social services and adequate caring practices.”²⁹ This entails the examination of issues preventing parents from accessing healthcare.

In **Madagascar**, a link between ATD Fourth World and a pediatric nurse developed into an initiative to improve the relationship and understanding between medical professionals and the poorest families. The aim was to enable parents to be more effective in protecting the health of their children.

Misunderstandings between the two groups had, in the past, led to mistrust and fear, with the medical professionals believing the parents didn't care about their children, and the parents in turn feeling uncomfortable and out of control in the hospital environment. Over a series of meetings between the professionals and the families, a relationship of friendship and trust developed, enabling the parents to feel comfortable in seeking medical help when they needed it, and, crucially, being able to identify in a timely manner when that help was essential.

This dialogue between health professionals and the poorest parents was a long process of building trust and understanding, leading to the successful reduction of child mortality in the community.

HIV/AIDS has a more devastating effect on those in extreme poverty

It is clear that effective treatment for the HIV/AIDS virus must be found and distributed around the world. Its effects devastate the lives of millions, but this disease has a more profound impact on those whose health is already fragile due to the difficult conditions of extreme poverty. Because of their precarious health and difficulties in accessing medication, the poorest succumb to disease more quickly, prematurely depriving young children of their parents and leaving them more vulnerable. Due to a lack of social capital in the form of friends or relatives, these children are more likely to suffer from a lack of care after their parents have died.

Another consequence of HIV/AIDS for children living in extreme poverty is that, in many cases, education becomes impossible. For example, poor children whose parents have died from AIDS often abandon their schooling as they must assume parental responsibilities for their younger siblings, such as having to find work to support the family. Furthermore, in countries devastated by this disease, schooling is further jeopardized when large numbers of educators are lost to AIDS.

There are many other serious diseases and illnesses that also afflict the lives of very poor people. In order to combat HIV/AIDS and other deadly diseases that plague the lives of the very poor, living conditions and health-care issues must be addressed with urgency.

²⁹ “A World Fit For Children” para. 37, (13).

ATD Fourth World supports the commitment made in “A World Fit for Children” to

Intensify proven, cost-effective actions against diseases and malnutrition that are the major causes of child mortality and morbidity, including reducing by one third deaths due to acute respiratory infections; reducing by one half deaths due to diarrhea among children under the age of five; reducing by one half tuberculosis deaths and prevalence; and reducing the influence of intestinal parasites, cholera, sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS and all forms of hepatitis, and ensure that effective measures are affordable and accessible, particularly in highly marginalized areas or populations.³⁰

Measures need to be implemented to reduce the effects of these diseases on the poorest or their health will continue to suffer disproportionately.

³⁰ “A World Fit for Children” para. 37 (11).

Conclusions

For children to thrive, become healthy adults and reach their potential, they require the essential foundations for human development. This includes good nutrition and a safe environment in which to live. Many factors can prevent children from having proper access to their rights of good health and development.

- Families living in poverty are often forced to live in substandard conditions, in housing which is hazardous to health, in makeshift shelters or on the street. Children, as the most vulnerable, are usually the most affected by these living conditions. The resulting health problems can seriously affect not only their health as children, but also their long-term development. It can lead to serious illnesses and even death. There is also a heightened risk of fire, floods and landslides in substandard and makeshift housing, and children are most often the victims.
- Poor populations are more likely to be affected by disease, both in frequency and severity. The consequences of disease are likely to be exacerbated by conditions such as poor sanitation, lack of access to health services and already fragile health.
- Inadequate nutrition can cause developmental delays and physical vulnerabilities. Access to clean drinking water and protection from disease is the right of every child and is closely linked to safe housing.

Recommendations

- In order for a child to feel secure, and for a family unit to function effectively, it is essential that a family have safe, adequate, long-term housing. A child in secure housing can feel part of society and the community and is more likely to have consistent schooling. All families must be provided with the means to acquire housing that is not hazardous to the health of its inhabitants. In addition, it is important that families not be made to feel vulnerable due to fear of eviction. Families living in extreme poverty must not be left to the vagaries of market forces.
- Children should be protected from the necessity to work, which could hinder their development and cause illness and disease. Most children who are forced to work must do so because of their family's financial insecurity or extreme poverty. Therefore, any action taken to protect children from this should address the needs of the family unit as a whole.
- Children who do not live with their parents must be accorded extra protection by the authorities. These especially vulnerable children must be monitored to ensure that their health and well-being are not being compromised.

- Education is a major key to the promotion of life-long good health. When a child and their parents have an awareness of health issues, they are more likely to take action to protect their health and that of their families. Governments should promote health education using existing structures, for example, NGOs, churches, schools and the media. This needs to be developed in consultation with local communities. Topics should include general health, HIV/AIDS, family planning, nutrition and hygiene.
- Projects such as the one discussed on page 25, which aim to create dialogue between poor families and health professionals, can help to break down the misunderstandings, fear and mistrust between the two groups.

EDUCATE EVERY CHILD

All girls and boys must have access to and complete primary education that is free, compulsory and of good quality as a cornerstone of an inclusive basic education. Gender disparities in primary and secondary education must be eliminated.

Birth registration is a child's first right

The Convention on the Rights of the Child states in Article 7: "The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents."

Since the 1998 edition of "The Progress of Nations," UNICEF has increased its efforts to raise awareness and emphasize the importance of birth registration, essential to ensure access to education. However, enormous challenges remain. Families living in extreme poverty still face obstacles preventing the birth registration of their children. Such difficulties are further compounded when a country is in a state of unrest, when there are few administrative resources, or for those who are refugees, immigrants or members of minority groups.

For many poor children, the lack of a birth certificate is a major obstacle to enrolling in school. In **Southeast Asia**, **Jay**, six years old, dreamed of going to school like his friends. His mother remembered how, when his father went to register him on registration day, Jay cried because he was not allowed to enroll. Jay didn't have a birth certificate. Birth certificates are delivered through the town's hospital or the local government offices, but Jay's situation was complicated because he was born in a different country and his family had moved often. Even if the situation between the two countries had made it possible for Jay's family to return to their country of origin, and even if the family had the resources to make such a journey, they would have had to prove that Jay was actually born on a certain day and in a certain town. It would be impossible for Jay's mother to provide the necessary information. All these obstacles left Jay and his family at an impasse. However, Khru Nute, a woman living nearby, was willing to help. Khru had often supported families in Jay's shantytown by paying for tuition, books and uniforms. She knew the local school headmaster, and, thanks to her efforts, Jay was finally enrolled in school.

All over the world, people living in poverty are frequently forced to move, taking with them only the bare minimum of personal belongings. Amongst other reasons, fires and sudden evictions make it almost impossible for them to protect their official paperwork. It is thus particularly hard for such families to prove their identity and to provide documents when applying for school, employment and health care.

The choice between schooling and survival is an impossible one

Extreme poverty can force families to choose between sending their children to school or their own survival.

In **West Africa**, **Barakissa** and her family are immigrants. To be legal in their country of residence they needed to pay for a residence permit. Since her family couldn't afford this permit, they did not dare go to town, where they could have been arrested and imprisoned. So Barakissa, age eight, was the only member of the family who went to town to sell what her grandmother managed to collect from the garbage dumps. Barakissa lived in the constant fear often experienced by those who are made to feel they should not exist. She asked, "*Do you think they will try to catch me and put me in prison too?*"

In some countries, many children must help with the household chores, including fetching water. When the families' water source is far, and the child must walk for miles, they are often unable to find the energy or time to study. Other factors that cause difficulties in studying include lack of access to electricity (both in developing countries where there may be no access and in developed countries when the families are unable to afford a constant supply) and a lack of quiet, private space in which to do homework.

The worst forms of poverty force many parents to choose between preserving the immediate survival of the family and securing the education that they hope will give their children a better future. Many very poor families cannot even afford the fees demanded by schools because it is more than they are able to earn.

In **South America**, a father from a family known by ATD Fourth World explained the importance of education:

I would like that my children continue their education... the only inheritance that I can leave them, it's education.

However, the annual fees for the school in his district are equivalent to 50 days' wages for an artisan.

Children in many countries, faced with the prospect of missing out on their schooling because of lack of resources, choose to find the money in drastic ways and may become prostitutes, steal, or participate in other illegal activities.

"A World Fit for Children" foresees a world where children are no longer forced to choose between school and the survival of their family. It proposes the promotion of "innovative programmes to provide incentives to low-income families with school-age children to increase the enrollment and attendance of girls and boys and to ensure that they are not obliged to work in a way that interferes with their schooling."³¹

Germaine, from **North America**, made the choice to leave school at the age of 12 so she could replace her mother in caring for her bedridden grandmother who lived with them. This enabled her mother to find work to support the family. Germaine's difficult and courageous decision had to be hidden from relatives, friends, and neighbors so that the family could protect itself from the judgment and punishment of society. For many

³¹ "A World Fit for Children" Para. 40, (12).

years after her grandmother's death, Germaine needed support and encouragement in order to resume her schooling.

Despite the challenges, Germaine continues to go to school in the hope that it will realize her dream to raise her and her family out of poverty.

Raphael, who comes from a country in the **Indian Ocean**, explained:

I believe that I'm able to move forward – but my family has nothing. I often don't go to school because I have no bread to bring and no money to buy it. I have to work to help my family. A teacher sent me home from school one day because I wasn't going regularly. I was so sad. I thought that I'd never be able to go to school again. I want to go to school because, if I pass my exams, I will be able to work and help my family. My family's life will change then... I'm only 11 years old, but I have hope.

Many families do not have the resources to support their children's education. For such families, it is essential that creative solutions enable them to secure a livelihood while supporting their children's access to education.

Humiliation in school affects children's access to education

Children from poor families are faced with humiliation in many aspects of their daily lives. This is doubly true for children who are also members of minority groups.

There are many challenges in obtaining an education for the children of Travelers in **Western Europe**. The children want to go to school, but are often unable to because their families are ostracized and evicted each time they try to settle in a town. Many of the poorest Roma would like to stay in one place, but are forced to move because of discrimination.

Even in cases where disadvantaged children attend school regularly, it can be hard for them to learn because of the humiliation they often endure. **Dominic** and **Kassandra** from **Western Europe** described their experiences at school:

We like to go to school, but sometimes, when it rains, we don't like going. It's far, and we have to take a muddy path to get there. When we get to school, all the children look at us because we get the floor dirty with our muddy boots. The teacher yells at us, saying we're the only ones who come to school like that. The other children have clean shoes because they live in the village where the road is paved. We don't even have water at our house... not even electricity to study in the evenings. Because of all of this, our mother sometimes keeps us home from school.

Dominic lives with his parents, siblings and neighbors in run-down housing. He and the other eight children living with him must walk several kilometers to the village school because the school bus does not stop on the unpaved road. Dominic and Kassandra's parents do not think it is right that their children are humiliated because of the difficulties of their lives. They say:

In winter, [our children] don't like to go to school. They are afraid. However, they have more courage than the other children in the village who live right near the school. Here, the only wealth is the children; without our children, the village school would be closed.

Carlos, from **South America**, helps his family financially by selling candy. He does not always have time to complete his homework. His friend Sonia tells us:

The teacher doesn't want to believe that he works. So she punishes him, and everyone makes fun of him, treats him like he's crazy and nobody likes him. The other kids hit him, and then he gets blamed for the trouble. The teacher calls his mother to complain about him.

Creg is from **North America**. His mother wanted to protect him from violence and recent shootings at school by keeping him at home for safety. In spite of her fear, she saw his dedication to learning and respected his decision when he came to tell her: *"I need to go back to school. I'm willing to die for my education."*

The poorest deserve good-quality education

Not only does every parent want an education for their child, they want good quality education tailored to fit their child's needs. For this to be a reality for the poorest families, educational professionals must meet the special requirements of a child living in extreme poverty.

Teachers need to make curricula relevant to all of their students. To achieve this, they must recognize that the poorest children have particular life experiences that differ from those of their peers. They should also recognize that the poorest parents may not have the time or resources to help their children and may need special support.

Many teachers, despite trying to educate all of their students effectively, face incredible odds. Many classes have too many students for the teacher to be able to give each one the individual time they need. In some countries, primary school classes can have 80 to 100 students. Other difficulties include low wages which force teachers to supplement their income with other employment, negatively affecting their performance in the classroom, and sub-standard buildings that make both learning and teaching difficult.

Initiatives can ensure inclusion of the poorest

In **North America**, ATD Fourth World has been running Street Libraries in a number of very poor communities for nearly 20 years. Although schools in these neighborhoods often have enormous difficulties teaching the poorest children, these same children often thrive in the context of the Street Library where their parents are involved in the learning process. These parents know the conditions that help their children learn. And yet it is

rare that they are able to share this knowledge with their children's teachers. This dialogue is necessary if the children are to succeed. However, teachers in low-income neighborhoods are faced with a difficult task as their schools often have the fewest resources.

In November 2000, ATD Fourth World sponsored a seminar that brought together parents, teachers, academics and community workers. Many of the parents lived in extreme poverty and had been involved with Street Libraries. The seminar, called "Unleashing Hidden Potential," was a culmination of two years' work and has provoked a dialogue concerning the best ways to support children in the learning process despite the obstacles created by poverty.³²

Participants contributed to the seminar by talking about their experiences with the education system. These experiences formed a basis for discussion and a genuine encounter between parents and professionals. It was concluded that some basic tenets were necessary to ensure success for all children. This included the acceptance that all children are capable of learning and all families want their children to learn.

³²A report of this seminar has been published in installments in the Fourth World Journal, available from nationalcenter@4thworldmovement.org. The work from the seminar is available in an interactive CD-Rom, also called *Unleashing Hidden Potential*, which is designed for use by teacher training programs and community centers.

Conclusions

Every child should have access to free and good-quality education without restrictions due to personal circumstances. This education should fully address the child's needs, recognize his or her history and place in the community, and ensure that he or she has an equal chance to fulfill his or her potential.

Many situations prevent children from fully accessing their right to education:

Children are denied access to education due to incomplete paperwork

- Birth registration is the right of every child, and the failure to ensure registration at birth can have an unforeseen and serious impact on a child's other rights. Many unregistered children are consequently denied access to other basic human rights such as the right to an education, and, later in life, the right to participate fully in civil society. In some countries, they may also be at risk of arrest due to the lack of required paperwork.
- Even when parents have registered their children at birth, many poor families have problems maintaining the safety of important documents. This can be due to frequent change of residence, inadequate housing where documents may be easily damaged or lost, general stress and a lack of education that inhibits them from prioritizing the documents' integrity. Consequent attempts to apply for copies may be difficult or impractical because of the distance to the appropriate offices, illiteracy, and costs such as childcare, transport and time off from employment.
- Some poor families, whose problem is particularly notable in Asia, are afraid to register their children for school because the process often requires a photograph to be taken for identity purposes. Some parents are worried that the photograph will be added to catalogues advertising children for slave trafficking. The fear of leaving their child vulnerable to exploitation in this way is a strong deterrent to registering him or her in school.

Education places a heavy financial burden on some families

- In spite of their efforts, many parents are unable to send their children to school because they do not have the means to pay for their schooling. This can be a key motivation for families to entrust their children to another family or institution in the hope that they will be able to have a formal education.
- Even when education is free there are many hidden costs that disadvantage children from poor families. These include field trips, school lunches, extracurricular activities and the cost of uniforms. In addition, the humiliation that a child suffers due to the indirect advertisement of his or her family's financial instability can impact his or her feelings of well being and security in the school community, thus hindering his or her ability to learn.

- Education can suffer when children are forced to interrupt their schooling due to the financial insecurity of their families. A child is often called upon to be a primary caregiver or to take paid employment. Particularly in Asia, Africa and Latin America, many children are required to work outside the home to assist their families financially. Even if the child does not work full time, the extra pressure on the child may have a crucial and negative impact on his or her education.

Humiliation and social exclusion are barriers to children fully enjoying their right to an education.

- Poverty and social exclusion can single out a child as being 'different'. In a time of life where children are establishing their identity and building their self-esteem, bullying and ostracism can be traumatic experiences. Standing out at school, always looking different, having second-hand clothes or being known as a 'poor kid' can also have a negative impact on a child's feeling of belonging and security. In real terms this means that many children living in extreme poverty are unable to fully realize their rights to an effective education.
- It is not only the humiliation of children that can prevent them from accessing formal education, but also that of their parents. For many parents who have been raised in extreme poverty, the predominant memories of their school lives are negative, with humiliation, bullying and lack of educational success all contributing to a fear and mistrust of the educational establishment. The subsequent lack of involvement in their child's schooling can hinder their child's progress. In some cases, parents may keep their children from school for fear of their children having the same negative experiences as them. However, most parents want their children to succeed, in spite of their misgivings.

Recommendations

- Free and easily accessible birth registration must be universal. Initiatives must be taken to ensure that no family, however poor, is prevented from obtaining birth registration and the benefits that go with it. This entails the examination of associated costs and other prohibitive factors. Effective solutions must be found to guarantee this right. Government, in consultation with disadvantaged families, has a crucial role to play in finding these solutions.
- All children should have access to free and good-quality education at a school easily accessible from their home. Steps must be taken to ensure that no child is prevented from going to school because of the costs of education. The hidden costs of schooling first need to be recognized and the effects of such costs assessed. Schemes to help broaden access to education should be implemented. These may include financial assistance to pay for uniforms or appropriate clothes and shoes, books, stationery and the waiving of fees for school trips for families who are unable to pay.
- Innovative and flexible initiatives should be implemented to enable children to obtain an education while helping their family secure the necessary financial resources to sustain themselves. Where solutions cannot be found in the short term, action must be taken to help the child continue his or her schooling. Effective solutions may include night classes, flexible schooling hours, financial incentives and other forms of family support.

- Education professionals need to find out the root cause of each child's truancy. This can only be achieved by getting to know the family on a personal level. Effective solutions that take into account the difficult situation of families living in extreme poverty can only be found in partnership with the child, his or her family and others in contact with the family. In all cases, the first priority must be to empower the child to attend school rather than to punish him or her.
- It is important that not only education professionals, but also social workers and those responsible for the well-being of children in the community, work to ensure that all children have access to schooling. Particular attention must be paid to those children in institutions, on the streets, and in foster families, as they are the most at risk of missing out on an education.
- Non-formal cultural and educational activities should be provided to disadvantaged children within their neighborhoods. Parents should be included in the planning, execution and evaluation of each project. This approach gives children a well-needed boost in their education and gives parents the necessary confidence to help their children improve their achievements at school.

CREATIVE SOLUTIONS: Street Libraries

In many countries around the world, ATD Fourth World runs Street Libraries to support children from poor neighborhoods in developing their potential and self-confidence. Many activities are planned around books, arts and crafts, computers and practical skills such as carpentry. Street Libraries give children an opportunity to be free to experiment and to learn in a positive and non-discriminatory environment. Street Library coordinators work to ensure that every child is included and that attention is given to the most excluded children in the community. Activities take place in the children's own neighborhoods, contributing to a greater feeling of security and therefore a greater ability to learn. Over the past 30 years, Street Libraries have enabled thousands of children discover their creativity and learning ability.

- Teachers need to be trained on poverty-related issues. They should understand what it means to live in poverty and how it can affect a child's behavior and educational progress. Training should include a period of practical experience in schools or organizations in deprived neighborhoods to enable teachers to develop a basic understanding of the realities of life for families living in extreme poverty.
- Child-centered learning should be a priority. One size does not fit all in educational terms and educational practices should reflect this. Priority must always go to the child most in need. Class sizes must be tailored to enable this to happen.
- The process of education should continuously involve parents, not simply when problems are encountered. A parent should never have to earn the respect of educators and should automatically be accorded respect. Schools should take into

account the particular history of parents and the barriers that may prevent them from becoming involved in the schooling of their children. For example, illiteracy, negative educational experiences in their youth, a fear of being judged and misunderstood by the teachers and intimidation are all factors that prevent a parent from becoming fully involved in their child's education. For education to be successful, it is essential that all the significant people in the child's life are true partners in the process.

- Many of these proposals will not be possible without extra funding. Schools in the most deprived neighborhoods tend to have the fewest resources when, in fact, a greater level of funding would help ensure parity with schools in more advantaged neighborhoods. This would give teachers and schools the time and resources to create genuine dialogue with parents, facilitating the search for real solutions to the extra challenges that the poorest children face. Education must become a top priority for governments and be funded accordingly.
- If children are expected to fail by those around them, this often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Children must be encouraged and supported in their educational attainment and teachers must be careful not to lower their expectations of poor children because of latent prejudice.
- There should be zero tolerance in relation to bullying. Zero tolerance does not require that pupils be excluded, but requires that the bullying students are given extra support to help them to treat their peers with respect. Friendship between children of different backgrounds can be fostered through special activities that promote understanding and tolerance.



PROTECT CHILDREN FROM HARM AND EXPLOITATION

Children must be protected against any acts of violence, abuse, exploitation and discrimination, as well as all forms of terrorism and hostage taking.

PROTECT CHILDREN FROM WAR

Children must be protected from the horrors of armed conflict. Children under foreign occupation must also be protected, in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law.

The violence affecting children living in poverty throughout the world takes many forms, such as the violence endemic to communities suffering deprivation, frustration and insecurity; the devastating effects of war; and armed conflict and the violence associated with drugs and crime.

Living in poverty exposes people to many forms of violence

Serafino and **Ricardo**, from **Western Europe**, regularly witness violence in their community, which has a profound effect on them. This became clear at the start of the Tabori International Children's Forum in which they participated. Initially, Ricardo and Serafino were aggressive towards the other children. However, by the end of the Forum, after having experienced a protected and friendly environment, these same children expressed the crucial need for a safe environment. They said:

All children need to play, the poor children in the community too. In the residence where we live, parents don't dare let us play outside because of the violence. So sometimes we play in the hallways or in the room, but there is not much space. It's difficult. All children need to play, even if they don't have a lot of things, even if they are poor; they love to play.

Through playing, we can learn the rules of society. We learn that one person can't do anything he wants. He can't hit another person for no reason. Playing together is important for children and adults to learn how to respect each other.

Serafino and Ricardo's story demonstrates the clear link between social environment and violence. Given a safe and friendly setting, children can live with and relate to others without violence and aggression. Their words show us how important a safe environment is to the positive development of children as members of society.

➤ ***Children of poor families face increased danger***

Very poor families are often the most vulnerable to abuses committed against children as they have few resources for protecting their children and ensuring their safety. Fear becomes a daily reality for these families. For example, in countries most affected by the trafficking of children, families with the fewest means are the first targeted.

Doña Teresa, a mother from **Central America**,³³ lives next to a garbage dump, where she makes a living by collecting and selling materials in order to support her family. One day, a woman came and suggested taking Doña Teresa's children "so that they can grow up happily." Doña Teresa, angry and hurt, sent the woman away, as she loves her children and struggles for them to be happy. Months later, her youngest child had his finger bitten off by a rat. Doña Teresa took him to the hospital and visited him each day to care for him. During one of her visits, two of her children were taken from the garbage dump where they live. She searched frantically but never found her children. Out of panic and fear for their own families, neighbors accused her of selling her own children for a pittance.

Similarly, some parents in **Southeast Asia** who are known to ATD Fourth World decided not to register their children in the local school. They feared that the photos required for school registration would be illegally used in child trafficking catalogs. They chose safety over education.

The effects of such violations of their rights and of the unfulfilled hopes of very poor families are immeasurable. The fear experienced by families living in extreme poverty can be all-encompassing, and in some cases, debilitating.

➤ ***Drug-related dangers for the poorest***

Other forms of violence touch children's lives as well. For example, children who witness drug use are often the first to suffer its devastating effects. At the same time, they recognize that the drug dealers and users are also trapped into the choices that they make.

Sandra, from **Western Europe**, explains:

In my city, I know children who live in an area where a lot of drugs are sold. It's a very poor neighborhood, and people go there to take drugs. They do it in front of the children, and the children get scared. The children are also scared of getting stuck by a needle, like the ones you find on the ground.

Now the neighborhood is very dangerous. I think that the drug dealers established themselves in poor communities because poor people can't do anything about it. The neighbors are scared too, and little by little, the drug dealers take over.

I suggest that the drug dealers be made to understand that they are hurting others. Afterwards, we can give them a job so they can support themselves and their families. And for the addicts, I suggest that we give them treatment that will work quickly, and that when a person wants to go

³³ Doña Teresa's story can be found in *The Fourth World Chronicle of Human Rights*, Editions Science et Service, Paris, France, 1991.

through treatment, they be considered as a person and not be maltreated. Then, everyone will have what they need, and the selling and abuse of drugs will stop.

➤ **Street violence and bullying**

Like Serafino, Ricardo and Sandra, many children live in constant fear of violence.

Naiema, from **North America**, speaks of her friend, **Melissa**, who knows what it means to live in fear:

One day, I was walking with Melissa when others pushed her. I told them to stop, explaining that just because she doesn't know how to do her hair nicely doesn't mean she should be pushed around. In Melissa's neighborhood, it's very hard. People shoot each other. Children are afraid to go out or to go to the store. One boy that Melissa knows even killed two people in a single day. A child that lives in a neighborhood like that is always afraid. I'm also afraid when I go to see Melissa. But it's important to go see her. Sometimes we do each other's hair. I want to stop the violence and, most important, ensure that no more guns are sold. Children want to live in peace.

Poverty is exacerbated by war and instability

When war, sickness and violence are present, children are in danger of losing those closest to them. A child from **Eastern Europe** wrote a poem about the search for his missing father:

*I hurried to school. A man was walking in front of me.
I thought, "My father, it's him! It's my father! He walks the same way."
I ran and when I held his hand...
I realized that I was wrong. This man looked at me, surprised...
I said, "Oh! Excuse me!"
I went on my way, with tears running down my cheeks.
Who has invented this right, that I should grow up without a dad?*

Many children caught up in conflict see the suffering of those around them.

Marko, Jelena, Alma, Ilda, Nazira, Alyana, Merlin, Zinaida and **Florentina**, from Eastern Europe said:

All around us, there has been war for the last ten years. A lot of children have lost their fathers. Misfortune and poverty have come into our homes. For us, things are very difficult, but the refugees have even more problems. Many people have found asylum in the homes of cousins or friends; by doing that, friendship triumphs over poverty. But some people still live in tents or in collective houses and even in abandoned factories. Ilda knows people who live in a grocery store that is only ten square meters. A family of twelve lives there. They sleep on concrete. The people around them each help in their own way but they need more than that to get their smile and their dignity back.

The poorest are the least able to recover from the devastating effects of conflict. They lack financial resources as well as the social capital needed to start over, such as a social network on which to depend for support. They are also less likely to be educated, which disadvantages them in the search for employment. These difficulties in building a future for their family result in people living in extreme poverty being disproportionately disadvantaged in the aftermath of war and conflict.

Conclusions

Many poor children face violence in their everyday lives, either on the street or in their schools. The poorest children in any society are the most vulnerable and must be protected accordingly.

- Drug-related violence, guns and shootings, rapes and general street violence too often surround children in poor neighborhoods. They are unable to truly have a childhood. Because of the threat of violence, children in these environments are sometimes not even able to leave their own homes to play and often have to make do with cramped conditions. The result is that children are denied activities many of us take for granted, such as being able to go to school without fear.
- Children from very poor backgrounds are more often the targets of bullying because they frequently stand out as being different. Bullying does not include just physical attacks but also taunting and name-calling. The daily realities of their lives may mean that they do not have access to water for washing or the financial resources for new or tidy clothes. In addition, they may be more psychologically vulnerable to the negative effects of this violence and abuse due to the daily stresses of their lives.
- The effects of war and conflict are magnified by poverty. Many families face an additional struggle to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of war.

Recommendations

- It is the responsibility of schools and educational professionals to ensure that every child has a safe and secure environment in which to learn. Professionals must evaluate the risk of children from poor backgrounds being victims of bullying and take all possible action to prevent it. Schools must teach and encourage respect for and between all students and protect the most vulnerable pupils. Anti-violence initiatives and tolerance education should be a vital part of each school's activities.
- Very poor families are the most vulnerable to potential abuse, especially against their children. Decisive action must be taken to eliminate trafficking in children, not least because the danger and fear of losing children to such practices is higher in the poorest families and can adversely affect their schooling. Poor families must be protected from such risks and safeguards put in place to ensure that by registering their children for school, they are not jeopardizing their child's safety. International agreements to monitor the movement of children must be strengthened.
- Every child has a right to a safe place to play. Councils or community leaders must provide places that are free (in so far as possible) of the violence of their neighborhoods. The responsibility for this should not only fall to communities and NGOs but should have governmental financial support.

- The trade in guns must be addressed. Governments must develop gun trade policies that limit the number of guns in circulation, restrict availability (especially of guns that do not have a practical use apart from violence against people) and strengthen the rules and regulations concerning their safe storage and use.
- Support must be given to families displaced by war, taking into special consideration families who are already vulnerable due to poverty. This special consideration should include an understanding of their lives and limitations. Education and literacy levels, employment prospects, social capital and cultural and religious background must be considered on a family-to-family basis if support is to be successful.

PROTECT THE EARTH FOR CHILDREN

We must safeguard our natural environment, with its diversity of life, its beauty, and its resources, all of which enhance the quality of life, for present and future generations. We will give every assistance to protect children and minimize the impact of natural disasters and environmental degradation on them.



Photo: Dimas Pérez Venegas

People living in extreme poverty are often obliged to live in the least desirable places and are the least protected from natural disasters

People living in extreme poverty are often forced by circumstance to live in the most difficult and dangerous places including areas prone to flooding, pollution, fire, landslides and other natural disasters. Poor farmers are forced to eke out a living on infertile land. They risk their lives and those of their children by living next to dangerous roads, railroad tracks and rivers. They are more at risk of illness due to lack of access to water, overcrowding, bad sanitation and lack of basic services such as rubbish removal, roads, lighting, plumbing and electricity. They might not have the luxury of considering safety when choosing where they live.

Rina, from the Andean region in **South America**, describes:

*I want to tell you a story of **Roberto**, a kid from my class. One morning, he came to school very sad. He said that his house had collapsed due to rain and humidity. I asked him: "Didn't you know it was dangerous to live on a*

mountain side?" "We knew it," he responded, "but nobody helped us to find a more secure house." I thought a lot about it: why did my family get a safe house and Roberto's didn't?

International efforts to preserve the environment and protect people from natural disasters will succeed only if we ensure that families like Roberto's have access to decent housing and resources and that monitoring and warning systems are operational and effective.

Many children live in tents, shacks, slums, overcrowded hostels and refugee camps. They live near the foul smell of dumps, beside depositories of high-risk waste, under the bridges of noisy and polluted highways and next to railroads and airports.

How can children be expected to care about and respect their neighborhood when it deteriorates daily, when nothing works, when there is no provision for water or waste?

Children are expected to thrive on barren land, in dilapidated towns and housing where it is difficult to stay healthy. How can they be expected to preserve the planet without ever having experienced what this means?

Jimmy lives in a house that is too small for his family. He had a chance to spend several days with other families in the countryside during a "family respite stay."³⁴ One evening, when the weather was good, the children wanted to sleep outside in the moonlight. There, in a beautiful setting, watching the limitless sky, Jimmy said quietly: *"I love the stars, and the stars love me."*

Later, he was able to speak for the first time about his little sister who had died. He spoke of her being in heaven, maybe because of what he experienced under the stars. The beauty of nature connected him with his sister he had lost.

Respecting this connection with nature means respecting the potential spirituality of all children, especially those who are usually cut off from the nature's beauty.

It is particularly important to guarantee access to environmental resources for children and families who bear the brunt of violence and extreme poverty, especially those living in urban areas.

People living in extreme poverty are wrongly perceived to bear a disproportionate blame for environmental damage

For many years, children and families living in poverty have been contributing to the protection of the environment in ways commonly ignored: by collecting various products and materials that they recycle, salvage, repair and resell.

For example, near garbage dumps all around the world, or in the streets, people can be seen making their daily living by collecting iron, tin, leather and other materials. In doing so, they reduce the amount of waste in the world. As industrialized countries

³⁴ For many years, ATD Fourth World has provided families with a welcome break from the strains of their daily lives. It is a time when families, some split apart by poverty (for example, with children in care and adults in hostels), can experience a period of relaxation, joy, discovery, and interaction with others in a similar situation.

adopt more organized and formal recycling practices, the poorest have been losing this source of income and the opportunity to contribute to the recycling effort.

Poor farmers have for years developed ways to cultivate their land in a sustainable way. However, people living in extreme poverty are often the first to be blamed for environmental crises, such as the depletion of forests and energy resources and desertification. The poorest families are often driven away from fertile lands by their richer neighbors or by developers. In order to survive, they are obliged to use materials and resources that should be preserved for the future.

Their liability for environmental damage, which pales in comparison to that of certain industries and countries, tends to result in their economical and geographical marginalization.

As a **group of children** from **Africa** explains:

In our village, as well as in the neighboring ones, we know children who do not have enough to eat because their parents are too poor. When they have no more food, they go to the backwoods looking for timber. They know that cutting wood causes damage to nature, but they don't have a choice. They borrow a cart somewhere, and they drive this cart by a donkey to the nearby town, which is 55 kilometers (34 miles) away. There, they sell the wood for a little bit of money. They return home with millet to give to their family.

As stated by the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development:³⁵ "The 15 per cent of the world's population living in high-income countries account for 56 per cent of the world's total consumption, while the poorest 40 per cent, in low-income countries, account for only 11 per cent of consumption."

³⁵ Action for Sustainable Development, Sustainable Production and Consumption: Fact Sheet

Conclusions

Families living in extreme poverty bear the brunt of the consequences of environmental degradation. Children living in marginalized areas are the most vulnerable to natural disasters, while children living in poor urban areas are unable to have access to and enjoy the natural environment.

- Families living in poverty are almost never free to choose the environment in which they live. They are forced to live in degraded environments and are consequently more vulnerable to illnesses, natural disasters and accidents.
- Children from poor neighborhoods are often the most isolated and lack access to the natural beauty that many of us are able to enjoy. Families living in extreme poverty in industrialized countries are unable to afford family holidays taken for granted by most families. Sometimes children are unable to leave their homes unaccompanied due to their dangerous environment. Often they are trapped in a sea of concrete, covered with graffiti and garbage, with dilapidated buildings and infrastructure surrounding them. Living in these conditions makes it difficult to cultivate a respect for the environment.
- In many developing countries, the poorest families help recycle many materials in order to find a source of income. This can have a positive effect on the environment. This important contribution of the poorest to the future of the planet is seldom recognized.

Recommendations

- Every child and his or her family have the right to live in a safe and healthy environment. Families living in extreme poverty must be provided with safe housing with access to clean water, sanitation and amenities.
- Children should be encouraged and supported to find ways to protect their environment through varied activities such as developing 'green areas', participating in clean-up campaigns and tree planting. Children also need a place to play. This is a special challenge, especially for those in the inner cities, but one that can be accomplished through the funding and support of playgrounds and youth clubs. Children themselves can help to create these places, and in fact often take the initiative themselves.
- Poor children and their families should have the right to a break from the stresses of their everyday lives. In some countries this is a recognized right and resources and projects are in place to this effect, with varied success. Many NGOs and schools organize days out or longer trips where children have a chance to experience a different environment. These projects, as an important service to the community, should receive recognition through governmental support.

CREATIVE SOLUTIONS: Family Outings

Several times a year, groups of families from a community who live under a bridge in Thailand are able to enjoy a family outing to the sea, with the support of ATD Fourth World Volunteers. These are invaluable opportunities for the members of these families, both young and old, to relax, recharge and take a break from the worries and grind of their difficult lives. The children have the opportunity to play in a picturesque environment without any responsibilities and to just enjoy being children. In addition, children are given the opportunity to see something beyond their daily reality, and that there are other ways of living beyond their poor communities. Their horizons are broadened and their feelings of hopelessness reduced.

- The contribution of many poor families to the reclamation and recycling of waste products should be celebrated and encouraged. Often the poorest have a positive impact on the environment and can play an important role in conservation and recycling. This must be nurtured and sustained whilst ensuring poor families are not exploited in the process.
- In poor communities, recycling schemes instituted by local authorities and with the support of local schools, clubs and neighborhood children can have positive benefits. The result can be that neighborhoods become cleaner and safer, there is a positive impact on the environment and it can help children find pride in their community. Schools and other educational institutions have an integral part to play in this process by supporting these initiatives.

LISTEN TO CHILDREN AND ENSURE THEIR PARTICIPATION

Children and adolescents are resourceful citizens capable of helping to build a better future for all. We must respect their right to express themselves and to participate in all matters affecting them, in accordance with their age and maturity.



In the document "A World Fit for Children", it is stated that

Disadvantaged and marginalized children, including adolescents in particular, need special attention and support to access basic services, to build self-esteem and to prepare them to take responsibility for their own lives. We will strive to develop and implement programmes to promote meaningful participation by children, including adolescents, in decision-making processes, including in families and schools and at the local and national level.³⁶

In order to succeed, this requires a long-term commitment by all parties involved with disadvantaged children and their families. The poorest families must be sought out and empowered to be able to contribute to this dialogue on a local, national and international level. Children must be reached in their own environment, the poorest children need to be identified and a relationship of trust and understanding developed with them. Their contributions must be respected and taken seriously.

A serious commitment to invest time and energy in children living in poverty demonstrates that they count. Consequences of poverty include isolation, shame and guilt. Children should be valued for who they are and for how they support their family.

³⁶ "A World Fit for Children" para. 32 (1).

Such children are not used to being listened to and taken seriously. They will not spontaneously express themselves because they don't believe that their opinion counts and are not always able to articulate what they mean or feel. The road to self-expression for these children is a slow and difficult one requiring much care, understanding and innovation.

On November 20, 1999, the International Children's Forum, "Tapori, Friendship Triumphs Over Poverty" took place in Geneva. The children decided to concentrate on the subjects of **family, school, friendship and peace**. The appeal found at the end of this document was drafted and presented to Ms. Mary Robinson, the then United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and was a result of a long process of consultation with the thousands of children who belong to Tapori around the world. The final draft took five days to finalize, with input from all of the delegates present at the Forum. This event was made possible because Tapori children fight against the injustice they see and experience in their lives. Since then, the delegates and their Tapori groups have been responsible for spreading and maintaining the spirit of the Forum in their neighborhoods, schools and families.

Children need the right environment to be able to speak and be heard

➤ *Listening to children takes long-term commitment*

For many children, being able to express their thoughts and opinions is not automatic. It takes time to build trust and friendship with their peers and with adults before they feel comfortable enough to do this. Families, schools, local authorities and other organizations at the local and national level can help to ensure that all children, including the poorest, are listened to. Community-based NGOs are well placed to facilitate consultations as they have already built up trusting relationships with children living in extreme poverty in the communities where they work. Consulting only the most easily accessible and articulate children results in the further exclusion of the poorest children.

Simon, a child from **Western Europe**, has been in link with ATD Fourth World for years, and as a young adult, has gone on to do freelance work with children's charities. Simon grew up in extreme poverty, and through being listened to and taken seriously as a child, has been able to express his opinions on many subjects, particularly around issues concerning children and young people. He first spoke in public at age seven at a commemoration of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on October 17, and has gone on to become a valuable member of society with a unique contribution to make.

Consulting children should not be a token gesture, only asking their opinions on certain days, or at certain events. They should be asked to contribute at every stage of their lives. Ensuring the participation of children is a long process. ATD Fourth World volunteers make a long-term investment to ensure each child is heard, as illustrated by the story of Noudia.

***Noudia** is a child of Eastern European origin who lives in **Western Europe**. She was ten years old when we met her. We wanted her to take part in the projects that we organized with the local children. But for her, it wasn't easy to take part. She wasn't educated, and she didn't have the necessary confidence to join a children's group or to go to school. She was deeply ashamed of herself and of her*

family who survived through begging. The others rejected her. She did not participate in very much, not even in the street library because of the way the other children looked at her.

We felt that a preliminary step was necessary if we wanted Noudia to join the group at the cultural center. We started to visit her at home with a computer. She immediately connected the project with her deep desire to go to school. She wanted always to write with the computer. Her family also took part, including her sisters and her parents.

We created an Internet site with the children of the cultural center. On the first page was a tree with a photograph of each child in the group. Even if Noudia had not yet joined the group, she had her place on the tree and so was present in the minds of the other children. They did not even know her first name to begin with, they just insulted her. Gradually during the meetings, they learned to call her by her first name and got to know her through her personal web page.

Noudia got to know the other children each time we went to her place with the computer and she looked at the site, which grew gradually with the personal pages of each child. But the link with Noudia remained very fragile and she did not feel ready to take part in the group at the cultural center.

One day, Noudia recorded a song in her language. She felt able to do it because she was at home and she felt safe. Her mother did not know that her daughter could sing so marvelously. Her song was added to the song page on the site. At the cultural center, the other children started to listen to her song, and were very impressed by the way Noudia sang. They loved to listen to her. With this song, she existed in a positive way for the others and she was known by something beautiful she could do.

This project gave sufficient confidence to Noudia to enable her to join the group. But it took time - at least a year before she dared to come to the cultural center. And then, strengthened by this experience, she was able to enroll in school. In 1999, we asked Noudia to take part in the International Forum of the Tabori children in Geneva. She was able to participate thanks to the confidence in herself that she had gained through the group at the cultural center. Noudia said during the Forum that for her, the most important human right was to be able to go to school and she spoke of children who, instead of going to school, have to work to help their family to survive.³⁷

Noudia had much to contribute, and through the long-term support of the adults around her, was able to not only find the strength to claim her own rights but to defend the rights of others.

➤ **Encouraging understanding**

After the Tabori Forum, a language teacher of one of the delegates co-organized a summer exchange session for the pupils of her school through the South-East and West Europe Solidarity Association. She included children from refugee families who were housed in a nearby run-down factory, children from a disadvantaged community and children from Western Europe. She recounted the experience:

³⁷ Extract from the evaluation of the Cultural Center, Marseille, ATD Fourth World.

Initially, I didn't disclose to the participants the backgrounds of the children who were invited to the summer school. Out of the fifteen children in my group, four are refugee children, housed in an abandoned factory. Not only did they go red with shame from certain insulting remarks, but they also had problems communicating with the other participants, as they could not speak the same language.

*I observed the reactions of my pupils; I listened to what they said about the atmosphere with their new friends. **Macha, Marija** and **Marko** did their best to help them, using mime, drawings and other means. They were always ready to join them, while other pupils rejected the outsiders and were reluctant to play with them. The whole group got progressively accustomed to the newcomers, and the mocking gradually ended.*

At the end of the summer session, they all enjoyed acting, and they put on a play. It was a real success thanks to the efforts put in at the school over the previous year.

Children from poor families need the opportunity to participate in activities and interact with other children in order to build up their confidence and trust in others, and to feel free to express themselves and articulate their opinions.

➤ ***Existing community-based resources can be used to reach the poorest children***

Grass-roots NGOs, community workers and teachers can help bridge the gap between authorities and the poorest children.

The Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World³⁸ creates an opportunity for grass-roots organizations and individuals who fight against poverty to share their knowledge and experiences. Many of these people and groups have spent years working with poor families and their children and have the necessary skills to reach the poorest community members.

➤ ***Listening to children can empower them***

Opportunities for poor children to express themselves give them confidence that carries over to other parts of their lives.

At the International Children's Forum, **Fannie** and **Arnaud**, two young delegates from the **Caribbean**, stressed the importance for all children to go to school, although they themselves do not attend. Upon their return home, Fannie and Arnaud were once again plunged into the daily hardship that children like them are subject to. They had voiced the urgent need for education for all children, and yet this had yielded no changes for them and no tangible solutions for other children around the world. It was dramatically upsetting for them.

³⁸ The Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World is a network of individuals and associations who work alongside people living in extreme poverty. Linked through a newsletter, they correspond to ensure they not remain isolated in their efforts to fight poverty. Contact: forum.permanent@atd-quartmonde.org

Despite this disappointment, Arnaud and Fannie, with the help of a few adults, continued to communicate their ideas and hopes for education to other children. After the Forum, Arnaud intensified his efforts, attending several Taporí events in his area. He took an active role in the group, encouraging children who had reading difficulties or who were uncomfortable reading in front of others, stating: *"Let her read, she is not a baby. She can read by herself ... Don't be afraid to read, don't be shy, you are not at school here!"*

➤ ***Participation gives children the self-confidence needed to change their lives***

Fannie and Arnaud's efforts did not stop with Taporí. When their town threw a festival for children at the end of the year, Fannie and Arnaud were determined to participate. They were successful in rallying the Taporí group to help prepare the festival. It was a huge and courageous undertaking for the Taporí children, boosting their confidence and giving them a platform for communicating their views to other children. Once shy, the Taporí children were able to speak at the podium just like any of the other children. They related their experiences of meeting children from all over the world through the Taporí network, underlining the importance of such encounters. It was also a time for them to express their aspirations for peace in the district and their desire to learn and be respected.

The strength the children gained through their participation in this festival gave them courage and further meaning to their lives.

Conclusions

Children not only have a right to be heard and to have their ideas taken into account in matters that affect them and their communities, but also to be recognized as resourceful citizens who are capable of making a contribution to society. If it is to be ensured that no child is left behind, the voices of all children must be listened to, and special action must be taken to ensure that children living in extreme poverty are heard.

- In accordance with their age, children have a right to have a say in and be genuinely listened to in relation to what they want in their lives. If children are respected by others and have the chance to express their ideas and hopes for the future, they will grow up with self-respect and dignity. If they are constantly marginalized they are likely to grow into marginalized and socially-excluded adults. Respect for the individual and their personal perspective on life must start as children. They then have more chance to become adults who have control over their lives, thus helping to break the cycle of extreme poverty.

Recommendations

- Children must be given the opportunity to make a real contribution to the fight against poverty. For anti-poverty projects and initiatives to be truly successful, all concerned parties, including the poorest children in the community, must be actively involved in the conception, implementation and evaluation of those projects.
- For the most vulnerable children with the most difficulties or who live in the streets, building trust is a process requiring much time and commitment. For this reason, NGOs, journalists and especially policy-makers must respect and take seriously the contributions that these children make. It is vital to delve below the surface to guard against the risk of misunderstandings or misconceptions. Their stories, experiences and thoughts must be carefully nurtured so that they can express themselves fully and faithfully, and in so doing, contribute to a dialogue in a meaningful way.
- Children often have an insight into their family situations and the needs of their families that others outside the family do not. The powerlessness a child may feel over the often traumatic experience of being taken from his or her family can be mitigated by genuinely listening to the child's wishes. Many children who are placed in care, institutionalized or sent to other families would prefer to stay with their own family. The child's wishes should not only be taken into account, but should be assigned due weight, according to their age and maturity.
- In order to ensure that all children are heard, special effort must be paid to avoid children from poor families falling through the cracks. Birth registration for all must be a priority, and it must be ensured that every citizen and member of the community has full and equal access to participate freely in the form of government practiced by their country. Furthermore, in a secure environment, many people living in poverty can feel free to talk about the reality of their lives, and share their ideas about possible solutions to their suffering. This empowerment is crucial if the poorest families are truly to have an influence on the political decisions made within their society.

International Children's Forum

Tapori: Friendship Triumphs Over Poverty

**on the occasion of the 10th anniversary
of the Convention
on the Rights of the Child**

Geneva, November 20, 1999



Children's Appeal

We are 86 children from 37 delegations and we come from 24 countries. We represent children we know from all over the world with whom we have worked very hard to prepare this gathering. We are thinking especially of those who have not been able to come because of the situation they are living in.

We believe it is very important for all children to be able to gather together and learn from each other. We need to help this happen.

A lot of people say that children are the future. If everyone really believed this, there would be less — and even no more — misery in the world. Today, fighting poverty is the most important thing.

All around us, in certain countries, there has been war these past ten years. Many children lost their fathers. Hardship and poverty have entered our homes. It's very hard for us, and refugees have even more problems. Some children no longer have their parents or their homes.

Some children don't go to school. They are always in the street, and sometimes we see them asking a passerby for money. For those of us who are around this every day, it's very hard to see.

Many among us live in very poor neighborhoods where a lot of drugs are being sold. Some people go there just to buy drugs. They shoot up in front of the children, and this makes children afraid. They are also afraid of getting stuck by needles that have been

left lying around on the ground. Parents are afraid for themselves and for their children; it's becoming dangerous.

Too many children live in poverty. Because of this poverty, they are often lost in life, lost in the world.

For us, the family is the most important thing. Without families, we can't live; we can't grow up. But families can't live in homes or communities without friendship. Without friendship, there is no life.

Many families are chased away and have to hide, all alone with no friends. Yet the earth and the sun are for everyone.

All children should have a house and should live with their family; there should be no more children in the streets. Children living in the streets suffer a great deal.

We have to do everything we can so children can live with their parents.

Sometimes there are fathers who don't have enough money to raise their families. They travel very far to find whatever they can to feed their families. Sometimes they don't come back because they were unable to find anything, and then people accuse them of not loving their children. What these people don't know is that they love their children with all of their hearts.

All parents want to send their children to school, but some are unable to do so because they don't have any money. They are forced to let their children work in order to support the family and to enable the younger ones to go to school. Our parents already do all they can, and we have to help them. We know children like Augustine, who goes with her mother each morning, before going to school, to sell things at the market. She's always late for school. Once school is out, she goes back to work at the market, often without having eaten anything since the morning.

We want to say that the world would be better if all families were happy and helped each other. We want our mothers and fathers to be happy.

"Adults must help us, please!"

We children need to stay strong, hand in hand. We demand respect, the right to peace and to friendship and the right to lead normal lives.

We would like it if our imaginations could fly free like a dove of peace and if our dreams could become reality.

We want all children to be able to come together so that not one child has to endure poverty.

All children should have places to go like our Tabori groups, where we can meet together and do things together, even if our lives are very different. When we take the time to know each other, we can be friends and become stronger.

We believe that all children should have the same chances. One thing that everyone absolutely deserves is to be protected. This is what makes love possible and gives hope and courage to continue.

We believe all children should be able to go to school and learn for free. Knowing how to read and write can make them want to learn a trade. That could help them get their family out of poverty.

For each child to learn, we need to be respected, and we need for no one to make fun of us. Adults need to make it possible for children to respect and help each other. Everyone needs to work on this; children need grown-ups to set the example.

It's important for parents to have jobs to help their children grow up properly and to get a good education.

We want children to be able to help out with certain tasks, but not have to do too much, nor to do work that is more than their strength can manage.

Children need to be able to play, even if they are lacking many things. Children love to play. At school, we can play with a lot of other children. Playing together is important in learning to show respect to other children and adults. We ask that people show how important this is for all the children of the world.

No more violence! We need to do all we can to protect peace in the family and in the world. Most important, no more selling guns! Children want to live in peace. If we have peace, we will have friends.

We would like land mines to turn into shoes. We would like bullets to turn into candy and cannons into tractors.

We don't have solutions, but we want everyone to understand the situation of children who have problems, so that these children will no longer feel lonely, and so that, in the end, we will find a solution to give them a better life. We are asking the United Nations to understand poor children and to learn from them all that they already do with their friends to make things better.

We, as Tabori children, want to be friends with everyone. It's important for all of us to get together for the world to change and to be fairer to people who suffer. If everyone could convince people to believe in Tabori and in the new generation, the world would be a better place.

Adults, please help us make this happen.

CONCLUSION

"It's important for all of us to get together for the world to change and to be fairer to people who suffer. If everyone could convince people to believe in Tapori and in the new generation, the world would be a better place.

Adults, please help us make this happen."

So said the children of Tapori in their appeal on the occasion of the International Children's Forum to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In this document, Tapori children of all backgrounds, united by the conviction that "friendship triumphs over poverty," have told us of their own accomplishments in defending children's rights. Too often, these accomplishments go unnoticed. We need to know what children do, day after day, to protect the lives, health and well being of other children; to respect and defend each child's dignity; and to build peace. They have shared with us, in their own words, the responsibilities that they take on in their family, in school, in clubs and in their community.

Through these children's actions it is clear that, in their eyes, children's rights are interdependent and indivisible. The international community has long recognized this interdependence and indivisibility of rights, but these children go still further. They show what it means to want these rights for all children, without exception. While some of them live in extreme poverty and others are more fortunate, together they defend human rights.

This is what a Tapori delegation expressed to the United Nations Economic and Social Council in Geneva in July 1999:

A lot of people say that children are the future. If everyone really believed this, there would be less — and even no more — poverty in the world. Today, fighting poverty is the most important thing.

THE TAPORI MOVEMENT



The Tapori movement was born in the French shantytown of Noisy le Grand in the 1960s. Father Joseph Wresinski, founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World, brought the plight of the inhabitants to the attention of the wider population. Discovering the manner in which the children of this shantytown lived, other children wrote to Father Joseph Wresinski, wishing to help and offer them their friendship. In response, he created a newsletter, which suggested activities that could help them understand the lives of the poorest. Later, the network took on the name Tapori, after a group of children Father Joseph Wresinski met who were living in a train station in Bombay, India. They had no families to care for them, but by forming a community, they created a strong family substitute and shared their strengths and resources in order to survive. Moved by this example of children organizing themselves and finding innovative solutions to their problems, he realized that children all over the world could do the same, with the specific goal of taking action against extreme poverty.

The Tapori movement is now an international network of children who work together to create awareness of poverty and human rights issues and to engender friendship and solidarity between children living in poverty and children of other backgrounds. Today, more than 10,000 children between the ages of 7 and 13 from over 50 countries are in link with Tapori. Every month the Tapori newsletter shares news of other children who, in Europe, Africa, the Americas and Asia find ways to include the most disadvantaged children in their communities. The letter is published in French, German, English, Spanish and Dutch, with some issues translated into Thai, Tagalog, Chinese, Madagascan, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Esperanto and Polish.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Many isolated children communicate with the Tapori network through the Tapori letter. Others, supported by an adult who facilitates their discussions, meet in small groups to share their experiences. Together, the children find the strength to share their experiences of injustice and are able to denounce them in a climate of trust.

A Director of Primary Teaching in Western Europe said:

Because of Tapori, the children were more tolerant and there were less arguments and aggression in the classroom. The underprivileged children were better accepted, not only by the other children, but also by the teachers. Teachers participated in a training session organized by the province on the subject of social exclusion. Co-operation between children improved. The school is not without conflict, but the climate has improved. The parents say so too. In the school, there are two major events: October 17, International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, and the end of the school year in May. I have changed because of Tapori and I really believe it is because to take care of the poorest children changes the climate of the school. One gives to the children these values for the rest of their life and they will help spread these values to others.

ACTIVITIES

□ *The Tapori Newsletter*

The newsletter has the following objectives:

- To relate the lives, hopes and courage of children living in extreme poverty.
- To serve as a forum for children who work within their communities to build friendship and peace and fight against extreme poverty and exclusion.

Personal letters from Tapori children form the basis of the monthly newsletter. Each child or group who writes to Tapori receives a personal response showing them that they are taken seriously in their desire to change the world around them.

A Teacher from Western Europe wrote:

I use the Tapori newsletter with my class. It is a discussion point and a powerful educational tool. The pupils look forward to it and it is often used as a reference in dealing with the small conflicts that arise between them. For the events of October 17 and November 20³⁹ an exhibition takes place to raise awareness about the subjects raised by the Tapori newsletter. It is a teaching aid that helps the children to be more aware of the world around them.

³⁹ International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and International Day for Children respectively.

□ ***Tapori mini-books***

Tapori mini-books tell the stories of the lives of children living in extreme poverty around the world. Children are able to react to these stories and to learn from the experiences of others. Some books are accompanied by lesson suggestions based on the story.

□ ***The website www.tapori.org***

This site is aimed at children and includes the history of Tapori, news and stories from children around the world and the opportunity to write to Tapori international. It is accessible in ten languages: French, English, Spanish, German, Dutch, Portuguese, Italian, Polish, Swahili and Chinese. The site received 220,000 visits in 2006. More and more children from developing countries such as Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Guinea, communicate with Tapori through the website. Children and young people put a lot of hope into this type of communication and are concerned that modern technologies should benefit the poorest.

□ ***Discussing poverty-related issues***

Some groups of children are supported by an adult, and meet regularly. Together, they relate or read examples of injustice and discuss the issues raised. In these groups, particular attention is given to the most disadvantaged children. All of the children are full participants, and contribute ideas to help the group progress in its understanding and practical action.

Examples of practical action taken:

- Children reacted to press articles in which children or their parents were badly and unfairly portrayed by writing to the journalists concerned.
- Some met with a teacher to make suggestions so that no child would be excluded or left to fail in their class.
- Other children, supported by their teacher, wrote a charter for more equality and respect in their school.
- Others wrote to the mayor of the city to bring to his attention a situation where someone's rights were not respected.
- Some participated in children's town councils in an attempt to ensure that all children were represented and that decisions benefited the entire population.

□ ***Taking part in the campaigns of the International Movement ATD Fourth World***

In preparation for October 17, International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, and on November 20, the International Day of the Rights of the Child, Tapori publishes a teaching aid for adults, used as a tool for raising children's awareness of the issues of extreme poverty and social exclusion. Through the suggested activities, children are encouraged to express what they have learned using various mediums, for example, by holding an exhibition.

A teacher from Western Europe wrote:

The story of Valéria from *My Heart is in this Stone*⁴⁰ was our starting point. We discovered it little by little, discussing it in the class. It was used as a catalyst to speak about the children's rights, the right to be different and the right to be respected. Thus when I suggested the possibility of taking part in an exhibition and of making something that would cause people to look at poverty in a different way, the children immediately accepted. They worked very hard on the project. This activity had an effect on the behavior of the children. Conflicts were resolved more quickly in the spirit of the right to be different. The behavior of the class improved in this same spirit: 'I have the right to be listened to, I have the right to be helped.' Discussions between children were reinforced and improved. It was a beautiful adventure!

Using the teaching aid, each child or group created something, whether a song, a game or a presentation. The results of their work were shared with other Taporí groups. In 2002, the teaching aid suggested that children make bags containing messages of friendship. Some of these bags traveled around locally, gathering new messages as they went, before continuing their journey around the world. In 2007, the teaching aid examines the question of what extreme poverty is, why it is a violation of human rights, and how children can come together to fight it. It also proposes a number of songs from around the world.

□ ***Training and sharing of the experiences of adults***

Regular meetings make it possible to support Taporí group organizers, to enable them to share their experiences and to discuss their questions. The Taporí administration is in contact with the organizers and sends them news from around the world to help them deepen their knowledge of relevant issues.

⁴⁰ See Bibliography

The History of Taporí

1957 – Two years before the adoption of the International Declaration of the Rights of the Child, Joseph Wresinski founded the Fourth World Movement with families living in an emergency housing camp in Noisy-le-Grand near Paris, France. The preamble of the declaration called on humanity to offer its best so that each child can be happy.

1967 – Francine de la Gorce, a member of the Fourth World Volunteer Corps, spoke on television about the courage of the children she lived amongst in the housing camp. Hundreds of children who saw the program wrote letters of friendship to the camp.

1979 – The International Year of the Child was an opportunity for the international community to make new commitments to children. To prepare, the Taporí movement invited children to write their family history, their dreams and their thoughts.

November 20, 1989 – The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children representing Taporí were present. Taporí collected hundreds of testimonies about the rights of the child, and more than 10,000 children around the world embroidered or drew their names on banners to say: “We want all children to have the same chances.”

1996 – For the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, children from around the world began sending to Taporí stones that had symbolic or real meaning and value to them, along with messages explaining these meanings. Child delegates of Taporí met the then Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali on June 25 to share these messages and ask for his support.

November 20, 1999 – For the 10th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, an International Taporí Children’s Forum brought together children from 27 countries at the United Nations in Geneva. The then United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs. Mary Robinson, met at length with the children and listened to the “Children’s Appeal” they had written together.

2002 – A seminar was held in Mauritius for adults involved with Taporí in the Indian Ocean, Tanzania and Haiti.

May 8-10, 2002 - The United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children was held in New York, attended by government leaders, NGOs, children and young people. Two children represented the Taporí movement⁴¹, and were able to express their views and those of the many Taporí children around the world.

June 29-July 6, 2003 - Seminar in La Paz, Bolivia with 100 participants: “Taporí, source of commitment”

November 2003 - Children’s Forum during the European Social Forum in Saint Denis, France

⁴¹ ATD Fourth World and the Taporí Movement were represented by Malal Sow from Senegal and Nick Ruggiero from the U.S.A.

October 17, 2004 - Junior Senate in Paris, France.

January 2005 – International seminar of Taponi facilitators to share experiences and know-how.

June 2006 – Taponi begins the international campaign “Listen to Us and We’ll Change the World!” It publishes the true story of Ono and René, two boys from the Democratic Republic of Congo. More than 3,000 children in over 40 countries participate in the campaign, making their life-sized silhouettes and writing messages about what’s important for themselves and other children around the world.

March 12-April 6, 2007 – Taponi hosts an exhibit of children’s life-sized silhouettes and their messages at the United Nations in Geneva, sponsored by the missions to the UN of France, Peru, the Philippines, Senegal and Switzerland. Taponi children speak in front of the Human Rights Council.

If you would like more information about Taponi, or would like to start your own group, you can contact us via the web-site at www.taponi.org or through:

Joseph Wresinski House
Chemin Galiffe, 5
1201 Geneva, Switzerland
Phone: 022 344 41 15, Fax: 022 344 47 77
E-mail: taponi@bluewin.ch

Fourth World Movement National Center
7600 Willow Hill Drive
Landover, MD 20785, United States
Phone: (301) 336-9489, Fax: (301) 336-0092
E-mail: taponi@4thworldmovement.org

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Titles available: *Manuelito, Jessica, Elifet, Matute, Katia, Pablo, Mamadou and John, Mario, Leah, Brian, Boureima, Deepika, Raphael, Jacinto*. Some are available in French, Thai, German and Dutch.

Fourth World Publications, Landover, Maryland, USA. About 16 pages each.

My Heart Is In This Stone

Noldi Christen, Christine Lesueur

«*Once upon a time, there were five thousand little stones and their stories. Pebbles, painted stones, lumps of coal, volcanic rock, pieces of jade, crystals, gravel from a construction site, even seashells. Their stories are the stories of real children from around the world.*»

Illustrated book in four languages: English, Spanish, French and German

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This album contains 160 photographs and works of art from five continents, illustrating the joy of living as a family despite extreme poverty.

The album contains texts in five languages: English, Spanish, French, German and Dutch.

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For more information about Fourth World Publications, a catalogue is available on request.



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International Movement ATD Fourth World – 107, avenue du Général Leclerc
95480 Pierrelaye - FRANCE