

Partnerships with People Living in Persistent Poverty, the Missing Partners in Sustainable Development

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A communal laundry facility in Bolivia.

International Movement ATD Fourth World
107, av. du Général Leclerc
95480 Pierrelaye, FRANCE
atdint@atd-quartmonde.org

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Authors: Naomi Zuk, Xavier Godinot, Diana Skelton, Thierry Viard, Nicolaas Tweehuijsen

*"Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty human rights are violated.
To come together to ensure that these rights be respected is our solemn duty."*

-- Fr. Joseph Wresinski (1917-1988), founder of ATD Fourth World

The International Movement ATD Fourth World is a non-governmental organization that engages individuals and institutions in support of the efforts of the very poor to free themselves from extreme poverty. It was founded in 1957 by Fr. Wresinski, whose family had lived in deep poverty. Today, ATD Fourth World's Volunteer Corps runs projects in 24 countries in Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas,* and has correspondents in more than 100 countries through the "Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World," which is a network for sharing experiences about fighting poverty.

ATD Fourth World is not affiliated with any political party or religion. The ideal that unites its members is that of ensuring that every person's human dignity is respected in equal measure. ATD Fourth World's financial resources come mostly from private sources and partly from public funding, both governmental and intergovernmental. ATD Fourth World's greatest resource is the time and creativity donated by its members.

International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. Observed every year on the 17th of October, and officially recognised by the United Nations General Assembly in 1992, this day had first been observed in 1987 by ATD Fourth World. Many NGOs organize observances of this day to invite the public at large to hear the voice of people living in poverty and encourage all people to renew their efforts to end poverty and to defend human rights.

For more information, please see: www.atd-quartmonde.org

* In Africa and Indian Ocean	Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Mauritius, Senegal, Tanzania
In Latin America, Caribbean	Bolivia, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Peru
In North America	Canada, United States of America
In Asia	Philippines, Thailand
In Europe	Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom

Introduction

This past March, at the International Conference on Financing for Development that took place in Monterrey, Mexico—where the primary goals of many world leaders were to address issues of globalization, poverty alleviation and sustainable development—a three-meter-high wall was built to separate the influential conference participants from a large shantytown that lies on the opposite side of a dried-up river facing the conference center. Ironically, it was at this conference that James D. Wolfensohn, president of the World Bank Group, spoke of an imaginary wall that separates the rich from the poor, claiming that “there is no wall. There are not two worlds there is only one. Here at Monterrey we must rid ourselves of that wall once and for all.”¹

And it was at this same Monterrey conference that there was a call, similar to the calls of Agenda 21 and the Millenium Summit, to build partnerships that will help to recognize the right for all people to take control of their lives and to empower them to make positive changes for themselves, their families, their communities, and, in the end, the world. Yet the imaginary wall that was spoken about is real.

The International Movement ATD Fourth World supports the spirit of Agenda 21, the Millenium Declaration, and other international outcomes and conferences that focus on efforts to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development. ATD Fourth World also wishes the Johannesburg Summit to be, in the words of Mr. Halifa Drammeh, Head of the UNEP Delegation, a “summit of implementation... partnership ...[and] equity.... The 1992 Rio Summit was dedicated to environment and development. The missing link was equity.”²

What is crucial to the success of this summit and the goal of sustainable development is the actual breaking down of the wall of misunderstanding, fear and contempt that has been erected between the very poor and the rest of society. This breaking down of the wall is supported by the international arena, as was stated at the latest Preparatory Committee meeting in Bali:

*An open, participatory approach to decision making [was] stated as critical to furthering the goals of sustainable development. [...] Ministers agreed that participation of major groups and stakeholders from the early stages of the process of creating partnership was required in order for initiatives to be transparent and fully participatory.*³

In the experience of ATD Fourth World, it is essential that the participation of stakeholders, from the earliest stages and throughout the implementation process, include people living in extreme poverty. They have a great deal at stake because they have the least access to protection of their health, from environmental degradation, and from whatever means they have of earning a living.

But how do we break down these walls to include among the architects of sustainable development these people who are usually the most excluded from dialogue, even within their own communities? The process is clear, but not necessarily easy. It begins by building a relationship with these people and with those who live and work in solidarity with them.

- Part 1 of this paper, “Introducing the ‘Missing Partner’ to the Sustainable Development Approach,” will address the identity of people living in persistent poverty, and why they are crucial partners in ensuring human and environmental welfare for all.
- Part 2, “People Who Live in Extreme Poverty Can Contribute to Sustainable Development,” in reviewing a development project in East Africa that did not include the knowledge of extremely

¹ James D. Wolfenson, remarks to the Plenary Meeting, Financing for Development (Monterrey, Mexico: March 21, 2002).

² Halifa Drammeh, “The World Summit on Sustainable Development: Key Challenges and Choices,” Statement of the UN Environment Programme at the Southern NGO Summit on Sustainable Development (Algiers: March 16-17, 2002).

³ A/CONF.199/PC/CRP.3, Chairman’s Summary of the High-Level Segment, Fourth Session of the Preparatory Committee for the WSSD (Bali, Indonesia: 27 May-7 June 2002), paragraphs 13 and 17.

poor people, will highlight the necessity for establishing partnerships with the poorest in sustainable development projects and the guiding principles for building such partnerships.

- Finally, Part 3, "Conditions and Guidelines for Building Partnerships With the Poorest," will draw lessons from projects: in West Africa that helped urban youth return to support their families in rural communities; in Central America where women used micro-credit to purchase land; in North America where residents of a rural area who have suffered from exploitative development share their knowledge with people from other countries; and in South America that increased a rural community's access to clean running water.

Part 1: Introducing the "Missing Partner" to the Sustainable Development Approach

The World Summit for Sustainable Development is an important opportunity: to reinvigorate the pursuit of sustainable development at different levels and to respond to new challenges that have occurred since 1992. The Rio Declaration, the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Millennium Development goals provide a clear basis for future action. The inescapable link between the three pillars of sustainable development, namely social, economic and environmental, should be underscored. Hopefully, this summit will be the summit of implementation, as there is an urgent need to address the gap between pledges and implementation. It should be the summit of partnership as well, since local, regional and global partnership between and among governments, organizations and all stakeholders are needed to make implementation possible. But how are these different goals to be made compatible? What principles will guide the international community and the different stakeholders in the decision-making process?

In the months leading up to the Johannesburg Summit, it is clear that there has been a greater push for establishing partnerships in an effort to encourage the implementation of sustainable development. Yet, the partnerships proposed in most of the calls for implementation make reference to collaborations between member states, international bodies, and civil society organizations – all viable and important partnerships. But what is missing, and what is in fact of the utmost importance in building partnerships for implementation, is the creation of meaningful, lasting and effective partnerships with very poor individuals at the community level.

We strongly support the UN Secretary General in his statement that "the human rights approach has both relevance and appeal as it sets universally agreed values at the top of the development agenda."⁴ The Council of Europe, whose 43 member states now cover practically the whole of geographical Europe, endorses such a participatory approach to development and further calls for a more human rights-based strategy:

*The human rights approach means that we get our priorities right from the outset; it makes it clear that human well-being for all is our primary objective, rather than economic growth for its own sake. [...] In some of our member States in Central and Eastern Europe, the economic transition has involved the impoverishment of substantial sectors of the population. This seems to be a classical case of concentrating on economic policy to the neglect of social policy. [...] We have learnt that the pursuit of economic growth without concern for its environmental consequences will be unsustainable in the long run. We now need to learn that a society without concern for economic and social justice will also turn out to be unsustainable.*⁵

Economic and social justice demands that the poorest be included in the development process, and that extreme poverty be eradicated.

⁴ Quoted in the statement by John Murray, Head of the Social Policy Department, Council of Europe, "Priority Theme: Integration of Social and Economic Policy," to the UN Commission for Social Development (New York, NY: February 2002).

⁵ Ibid.

- What is “extreme poverty” and who are the poorest?

Poverty has been an overarching theme in preparing the Johannesburg summit. The terms “absolute poverty,” “acute poverty,” and “deep poverty” are all used in the international community. Yet these terms often refer only to an absolute, economic definition of poverty. A clear understanding of the worst forms of poverty requires a more detailed definition.

Extreme poverty is a reality that still exists in rich and poor countries, and which has universal characteristics that must be addressed and taken into consideration in all sustainable development initiatives. Although the following example comes from Tanzania, it clearly demonstrates the condition of social, and often physical, isolation that is distinctive of extreme poverty globally. It also shows the multiple and interdependent challenges that face the most excluded.

A member of the Fourth World Volunteer Corps in Tanzania, who regularly meets with poor youths who live on the streets of Dar-es-Salaam, was on his way to work one day when he discovered a group of families whose existence was unknown by the neighboring communities and institutions. They lived in beached ships that were later to be sold as scrap. Only at low tide was it possible to reach these people. Through repeated visits, the volunteer was introduced to other people squatting in these shipwrecked remains. Many children living there had been dismissed from overcrowded drop-in centers for children living in the street. Some of the adults survived by selling diesel oil stolen from a nearby refinery. One of the men had three bouts of typhus and malaria fever over a period of one month. He described his efforts to find a regular job:

I had worked a whole day for just one meal as compensation. I was even lured into working for free, expecting to be hired longer if I worked well. ... Other people pretend that we are content with staying there, but what do they really know? Do they know that we dream of living in a real house?

In more economically developed countries, people living in extreme poverty have usually known poverty since birth. Their family legacy is one of poverty, illiteracy, exclusion and crisis. Many have spent part or all of their childhood in foster care. Many have children in care or have spent years fighting to keep their children with them. In Great Britain, for instance, children may even be adopted against the will of their parents if the latter are considered incapable of providing proper parenting, which is often deemed the case when they struggle to cope with the consequences of living in persistent poverty. In cases such as these, poverty is not just about living on less than a certain sum of money per day. Extreme poverty is much deeper and touches all aspects of life, as many poor families in Great Britain testified in a recent Policy Forum⁶ in London:

*Poverty is ... having no education, no skills, no job, and no value.
Sleeping in a bed that used to be someone else's,
Wearing cast-off clothes, and being expected to be grateful.
Having no choice of where we live, what school the kids go to or what kind of jobs we get.
Needing help, but being too scared of being judged an unfit mother to ask for it.
Telling my whole life story over and over again, just to get what I am entitled to.
Being treated like nothing, less than nothing, and accepting it.
Walking everywhere all the time, in all weather, all the time.
Waiting for the day the children are old enough to leave care and find me.
Wondering what I ever did to deserve this life.*

⁶ Policy Forums, run monthly by ATD Fourth World in the United Kingdom, bring together people with first-hand experience of poverty and invited speakers or participants from other non-profit organizations. These forums cover a variety of topics affecting the lives of people living in poverty. They provide a context for dialogue with policy makers and other professionals.



Participants in a Policy Forum in the United Kingdom.

Whether in Tanzania or Great Britain, above all else, people living in extreme poverty talk about having no choice in so many aspects of their lives. To them, extreme poverty means a lack of freedom, a lack of means to assume one's responsibilities, and enduring the resulting contempt.

Extreme poverty is multi-dimensional, as is sustainable development. It is characterized by an accumulation and interdependence of multiple insecurities, which are often intensified by, and in turn serve to further deteriorate, people's living

conditions. The many insecurities of life include: hunger and malnutrition, the lack of income or sufficient resources to guarantee a sustainable livelihood, homelessness or lack of adequate housing, exposure to unsafe environments, and high rates of morbidity and mortality due to otherwise curable illnesses.

Various definitions have been advanced in order to better target and thus better reach the populations for which policies are set up. The following definition, adopted by several national authorities and the international community, offers a clear understanding of the cycle of poverty and of the ways to overcome extreme poverty:

The lack of basic security means the absence of one or more of the factors that enable individuals and families to assume basic responsibilities and to enjoy fundamental rights. Such a situation may vary in extent; its consequences can vary in gravity and may to a greater or lesser extent be irreversible. The lack of basic security leads to chronic poverty when it simultaneously affects several aspects of life, when it is prolonged and when it severely compromises people's chances of regaining their rights and of reassuming their responsibilities in the foreseeable future.⁷

One main aspect of extreme poverty must be emphasized: when people, families or communities are in such a situation that "their chances of reassuming their responsibilities in the foreseeable future are severely compromised," they are often blamed for their lack of participation. They are thus blamed for their dire living conditions and often suspected of being complacent. Such misperceptions of people living in extreme poverty lead to their further marginalization, as they are viewed as not respecting the social standards of mainstream society. As the different insecurities they face intensify and accumulate, exclusion and contempt of the poorest become worse, thus reinforcing the wall between them and the rest of society. Consequently, people living in extreme poverty are excluded from participation in the decision-making processes, and more generally, in civil, social and cultural life.

Through years of work with very poor families and individuals around the world, the International Movement ATD Fourth World has learned that building partnerships with people living in extreme poverty is fundamental in the creation and implementation of all programs and policies. But not any kind of partnership will do.

⁷ UN General Assembly Resolution 53/146 and UN Human Rights Commission Resolution 1996/23 adopting the *Final Report on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty*, submitted by the Special Rapporteur, Leandro Despouy (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1996/13). Since 1996, UN work on the issue of human rights and extreme poverty has continued with the nomination of an independent expert, Anne-Marie Lizin.

Part 2: People Who Live in Extreme Poverty Can Contribute to Sustainable Development

Individuals, families and communities living in extreme poverty fight everyday for their dignity and survival. While trying to make ends meet, they make unstinting efforts to help preserve family links and guarantee the future of their children. Their acts of resilience and courage too often go unnoticed – like those of mothers who resort to begging to gather the amount due for school fees and school supplies, putting into practice their aspiration for a better future for their children, “so that they will not undergo what we have experienced ourselves,” as they often say. People living in persistent poverty must be “the driving force of the coalition for poverty eradication [because] they have the strongest motivation and the greatest stake in the outcome.”⁸

To better understand *why* it is essential that the very poor must be the motor of development, we will look at a development project in East Africa that neglected to include the poorest in the design stage, thus jeopardizing a number of poor vendors and market workers.

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, with financial support from the government of an industrialized country, 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 fish, helping the fish sellers, 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 vendors and workers were never consulted in the planning phase of the new market, and it was only after construction started that the government announced that vendors could give input. One such vendor, Salehe, a well respected man who sells wood to fish fryers, and who knew his colleagues well, was asked to decide which vendors would be invited to relocate to the new market, and which vendors would be eliminated. Salehe, who works closely with ATD Fourth World, was disheartened when he learned of the controversial and delicate responsibility he was asked to assume on behalf of the market developers.

Knowing that only some of the original number of vendors would be allowed to work within the new market structure, Salehe needed to exercise diplomacy and creativity in trying to keep the greatest number of wood vendors employed. He tried negotiating with competitors so that they would collaborate or share booths, and he created a “waiting list” of vendors to be considered for booths, should a new space become available at a later time. But the displacement and exclusion of some of the original market vendors was inevitable, despite all of Salehe’s and others’ efforts.

The repercussions of the diminished fish market has 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. Entering the new market now requires an identity card. Furthermore, the communal fabric of the fish market has been torn as vendors from each trade were pitted against each other to be admitted to the new market.

Although Salehe was not among the poorest people in this fish market, he spent time getting to know these people. Frequently, he would sleep in the market to protect his wood from thieves, and he got to know the people who had no other place to sleep. The people in the worst situations of poverty had no voice in this development process. Salehe tried to share some of what he had learned from

⁸ UNDP Human Poverty Report 1998, *Overcoming Human Poverty*, p. 11.

them to keep as many people employed as possible. If the grassroots knowledge that Salehe and the workers poorer than he had served the development process in an earlier stage, the project might have benefited all the people who worked there.

This difficulty to create a dialogue with people living in poverty is reflected in the 2002 report about Benin, written by the independent expert, Anne-Marie Lizin. Commenting on the evolution of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers,⁹ Ms. Lizin wrote:

*Decentralised consultations have been very broad and aimed at all professional groups, women's action groups, agricultural workers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Very few people living in poverty, especially in rural areas, are able to get involved with such consultations and obviously, the illiterate portion of the population have no chance at all. It is, however, precisely these people who need to be at the centre of development. Through the meetings that the expert attended, she has concluded that the consultation process – although still effective and broad thanks to the efforts of the World Bank – has not involved people living in extreme poverty.*¹⁰

Creating dialogue and partnerships with the poorest in achieving sustainable development is necessary for the following three reasons, which will be further elaborated below. First, very poor stakeholders possess a knowledge that is crucial to the efficacy of sustainable development programs. Secondly, such partnerships/dialogues offer an opportunity to encourage mutual understanding and dispel misconceptions between different stakeholders – misconceptions that may lead to opposing goals and initiatives. Finally, in bringing the voices of very poor individuals, families and communities to the decision-making table, the poorest themselves are empowered and encouraged to aid in the sustainable development effort.

- *Tapping into the experience & knowledge of the poorest*

People living in extreme poverty have the most in-depth knowledge of extreme poverty and development issues, because they experience it day by day. Children and adults who must walk kilometers every day to find only muddy water know exactly where clean water is lacking. People who miss out on schooling and grow up illiterate know better than anyone just how important it is to educate every child. A parent whose child is malnourished knows just how high the price is when local agriculture is not self-sufficient.

The unrelenting hardships of people living in extreme poverty, and the continual efforts they must make to overcome them, are what make them “the true experts on poverty,”¹¹ as the World Bank recently acknowledged in *Voices of the Poor*, long after some NGOs had highlighted this. These people have seen development projects come and go. As demonstrated in the fish market example in East Africa, the very poor have seen how such projects consistently benefit certain members of a community and not others. They know exactly which people are likely to be left out, and how some people's situations may worsen when a development project has been thought out only with community leaders, and not with any of the people living on society's margins. Their knowledge must be voiced and taken into account as an indispensable component in designing development strategies.

They are often considered ignorant and even incapable of thinking, since they have had no opportunity to gain means of expression through education. In fact, very few people listen to the poorest. “Instead, we impose outside interpretations on them that prevent them from reflecting on

⁹ Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers are designed by the IMF and the World Bank, and by the governments of the countries in which they are to be implemented. They are supposed to include a wide consultation of civil society. More information can be found at www.worldbank.org.

¹⁰ Anne-Marie Lizin, “Human Rights and Extreme Poverty,” pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 2000/12 E/CN.4/2002/55 (March 2002).

¹¹ The World Bank Group, *Poverty Trends and Voices of the Poor* (September 29, 1999), p. 25.

their own lives,” said Joseph Wresinski, the late founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World.¹²

- *Breaking the discord between multiple stakeholders*

In the example of the East African fish market, it is clear that the objectives of the market developers, the vendors, and the young people who assist the vendors were in contention. Concerned with modernizing and updating the fish market, the market developers did not take into account the multiple interests of the diverse and hardworking group of vendors and even poorer people who worked in the market. Had the vendors and workers been included in the design stage of the new market, perhaps a larger, more inclusive structure could have been developed that would accommodate the original number of vendors and workers, thus retaining jobs for all.

In designing and implementing sustainable development policies and projects, work must be done from the beginning with the very poorest and with those who have lived among them and can help give voice to their experience and knowledge. This is the only way to ensure that there is a mutual understanding of the needs and demands of all stakeholders. Without a partnership with the poorest, development policies and programs are at risk of not only failing to provide the proper goods and services needed by the poor, but they may actually worsen the conditions of exclusion and poverty for those they are intended to serve.

- *Empowerment as a tool to build sustainability*

In several of the World Bank’s self assessments, it is shown that structural adjustment did not last because poor countries did not want to "own" this process that they had neither chosen, nor conceived. The situation is similar at a micro level when we look at small sustainable development projects that uproot the survival of the very poor. When they have no part in the planning, and do not benefit from the outcome, the projects become inherently less sustainable as people, even whose lives previously had some stability, begin to fall more deeply into poverty, thus worsening the overall situation of the community and the country.

As was highlighted at the 1995 World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen, progress towards sustainable development and the eradication of poverty can be realized only with the collaboration of the poorest themselves:

*People living in poverty and vulnerable groups must be empowered through organizations and participation in all aspects of political, economic and social life, in particular planning and implementation of policies that affect them, thus enabling them to become genuine partners in development.*¹³

Until all of our fellow citizens are empowered, the world is deprived of their contribution. But it is not easy to “empower” people whose families have been mired in deep poverty for generations. The more destitute people are, the less chance they have to exercise their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Giving every person a voice is the essence of democracy. However, it is only a first step. In part 3, we will look at the other conditions necessary for enabling even the very poorest people to join in a partnership.

- *What kind of partnership with the poorest?*

It may be easy to call for partnerships between all stakeholders, and more specifically, partnerships with the very poorest, but, as Ms. Lizin noted, truly engaging the poorest in partnerships is another thing. Perhaps part of the reason for this mismatch is due to the fact that partnerships are rarely specified. If we talk of building partnerships with the poorest for sustainable development, what, specifically, does that mean?

¹² Joseph Wresinski, lecture at the Sorbonne University, (Paris, 1983).

¹³ World Summit for Social Development, Programme of Action, (Copenhagen, 1995), paragraph 25.

There are three key characteristics that must be met to develop partnerships with the very poor. First, the voice of the poorest must be brought to the decision-making table for all policies and programs that may directly or indirectly affect their lives in the immediate present and in the future. Ideally, the poorest themselves should voice their opinions alongside governments, NGOs and other stakeholders, but, as will be demonstrated in section 3, there are many barriers that prevent the poorest from doing so most of the time. In such cases, intermediaries who have strong relationships with the poorest, such as local NGOs and other stakeholders, should be relied on to seek the contribution of very poor people, in addition to advocating for them. These intermediaries should be included at all steps of sustainable development programming.

Secondly, the timing of such collaborations should commence at the beginning of the design stage of any development policy or program. Too often, the very poor, and/or NGOs representing the poor, are consulted too little or too late, as was demonstrated in the East African fish market example. Development programs must include such stakeholders in program design and in every stage of implementation to ensure its sustainability.

Yet giving a voice to the poorest is not enough to constitute a “successful partnership” with them. If a program or policy is truly effective in establishing partnerships with the very poor, it will be evident in the following two ways. First, the positive outcome of the policy or program at hand will reach all, and not just those individuals or communities that are easiest to reach. At the end of the day, everyone should come out ahead. Secondly, all those involved in development programs, whether directly or not, should also gain in freedom, pride and responsibility. These two indicators should be the guidelines for measuring whether we are indeed establishing the necessary partnerships with the poorest.

Part 3: Conditions and Guidelines for Building Partnerships With the Poorest

Partnerships of any kind require the time and investment of all actors. Building partnerships such as those called for in this document require perhaps even more investment. Governments, civil society organizations, businesses and other international bodies that are involved in sustainable development programs must consider and carefully develop ways in order to create and effectively realize such partnerships with people living in extreme poverty. But what are the nuts and bolts of building such partnerships? The following examples, which come from different ATD Fourth World teams around the world, will illuminate a few of the unique and essential components for successful partnerships and sustainable development projects.

A. Burkina Faso: Supporting rural, agricultural families¹⁴

Globally, more and more rural families are becoming fragmented, with children leaving for the city. Over the past ten years, ATD Fourth World in Burkina Faso has invested time and effort into addressing this issue by supporting efforts made by these families to find a place for their children within the rural economy.

Alfred was a child living in the capital city, Ouagadougou, with his uncle. His uncle told him to work hard in school. If Alfred had to repeat a grade, his uncle threatened that he would be sent back to the village where his mother lives. In fact, Alfred missed his mother, whom he had not seen in many years. So he stopped paying attention in school, and failed his classes. His uncle did send him back to the village, where Alfred was happy to see his mother. But she could not afford to send him to school. With no prospect of schooling, Alfred left home and returned to the city as a beggar, sleeping under tables.

¹⁴ Cf., ATD Fourth World-Burkina Faso, Annual Report 2001, “Su-toogo soaba” (The Partner of Courage). (Not available in English).

This program began in Ouagadougou where many children, like Alfred, live in the streets and fend for themselves. These children have said: “We don’t like living in the street. But how can we return home without work?” “When you remember how your parents cared for you before, it’s sad to think that in the street, no one can help you. When you think about that, how can you grow up? You can worry yourself to death.”¹⁵

Around the world, there are many cities where children are living in the streets.¹⁶ Obviously, their situation is difficult in the extreme, both for them, and for their community. Development that is sustainable must include building a future with these children, enabling them to learn a trade and to go beyond the small tasks they do every day, thus instilling a sense of pride that they are contributing more to the economic life of their families and their country. Reuniting these children with their parents, and in so doing strengthening the rural communities they come from, has become ATD Fourth World’s goal in this country.

Initially in the program, members of the Fourth World Volunteer Corps were cautious not to question the children too much about their families for fear of pushing them to invent stories they might not be proud of later. Over a period of several years, however, many of these children took the initiative in asking Volunteer Corps members for help in contacting members of their families. As the project evolved, these requests from the children called for Volunteers to make personal visits to their families in the countryside and to develop partnership with them as well.¹⁷

As the program evolved and partnership was established with the parents, ATD Fourth World became more involved in rural communities to find a way and a place for children to reenter their communities. This required a greater understanding of the parents’ situation and of the constraints on families in rural communities.

One facet of this understanding involved the grave questions posed to any society where children live in the streets. In Burkina Faso, when this is discussed in the media, it is often assumed that “parents have given up.” Is this true? The work done by ATD Fourth World and other organizations in Burkina Faso suggests that the parents’ determination is only a tiny facet of a very complex situation. In a series of dialogues involving many parents who had themselves been through these kinds of situations in eight different provinces, several points were raised concerning the reasons for children leaving, and the changing nature of rural life:

- Today, there are fewer constraints than in the past tying children to traditional life in their families’ villages. As the country slowly evolves from a rural to an urban economy, the roles for different members of the family in the village are less clear.
- To some extent, there is more momentum drawing people to the city, to the point where a mother may advise her son to go to the city because she has heard of other children finding work there.
- As families become less extended, there are fewer options in stressful situations. Before, a child who had disobeyed or been troubled by a family dispute might have spent some time living with relatives before coming home. Today, the same child is more likely to run away to the city.

¹⁵ ATD Fourth World-Burkina Faso, Annual Report 2000, “Kamba yaa beog Ba ramba” (Children Are the Parents of Tomorrow), p. 7. (Not available in English.)

¹⁶ The number of children in Africa living on their own because they have lost their parents to the AIDS pandemic is too high and is rising fast. However, the rate of adults and children living with HIV/AIDS in Burkina Faso (6.44% in the end of 1999, according to UNAIDS) is below the average for Sub-Saharan Africa. It was quite rare that the children we worked with in Burkina Faso had no relatives left, and so the impact of AIDS in separating families will not be part of this chapter.

¹⁷ For more information about the beginning stages of this project, see *Reaching the Poorest*, published by Unicef and ATD Fourth World, 1999, (Ref. #E96.XX.USA.1) and *La Cour aux Cent Métiers*, by Michel Aussedat, published by ATD Fourth World, 1996 (not available in English).

Once partnership was established with both the children and their families, ATD Fourth World decided that in addition to supporting some of the children in job training programs, it was very important to support efforts by the children's parents to rebuild a family life in the village with them.

This program has been successful with a number of families; but there are also many barriers to overcome. While many families have been reunited, such reunions are not magical. Success also exists when children return for short periods of time and contribute to their local community on a seasonal basis. For instance, they may return to the village to help with specific farm work, and return to the city when the farming season is over. Despite all the hardships and threats to their health and well-being in living in the streets, once children have tasted the independence of this life—even when they did not succeed at earning money—it can be hard for them to accept the structures of village life again. This is even more the case as village life is itself evolving in response to globalization in ways that can make life less stable for everyone.

Inoussa, for instance, returned to help his family with farming in 2000. After the season was over, he returned to the city. In 2001, when he disappeared from the city, the Fourth World team visited his parents again, where they found him making bricks to repair his parents' home. His father said, "I can find work here for Inoussa." This was a big change, because two years earlier, the same father had said to the Fourth World team, "My son is better off with you in the city." Although his father was now convinced that Inoussa belonged with his family, Inoussa himself still hesitated to remain for good. So the Fourth World team is supporting his father in the purchase of a sheep or a goat that will be completely entrusted to Inoussa's care, so that he will have a specific long-term responsibility. The motivation of an animal to care for has helped other children remain with their families, like Salif who has now remained home for two years, despite some brief trips to the city. In the case of Joseph, it is a specific plot of land, entrusted to him by a relative, that has kept him with his family for three years now. He has helped his family to grow more food, and to begin growing rice and raising pigs for the first time.

B. Guatemala: Women seeking adequate shelter through micro-credit

In 1995, the government of Guatemala City negotiated a peaceful eviction of the many families living in dangerous conditions along the railroad tracks. A government representative asked ATD Fourth World to participate in the negotiations, because of its long history with some of these families. More than 1000 families were transferred to live 14 km. away from the city center. In the months following the peaceful eviction, however, the very poorest among these families, who had too few means to survive in their new surroundings, began returning to live near the railroad tracks. In 1998, the attention given the city in the wake of Hurricane Mitch highlighted the situation of these families, and they were again evicted, and also offered the possibility of buying land to build their own homes. Grants were available from the government to cover more than two thirds of the cost of a 105 square meter lot. The remaining sum of 3500 quetzals¹⁸ was to be paid in monthly installments over two years. Several families who were in contact with ATD Fourth World made this purchase.

In search of funding for the remaining one third of the land purchase, and with the support of a member of the Fourth World Movement, a group of 14 women decided to participate in a micro-credit project with the Institute for Struggle Against Urban Poverty (ISMU). ISMU made six-month loans of 300 to 500 quetzals¹⁹ to each of the women. In addition, ISMU offered the program participants assistance in finding and maintaining steady work and setting personal and family goals. However, given the difficulties of the women's daily life, the loan has been hard to reimburse.

¹⁸ About \$455.⁰⁰

¹⁹ About \$40 to \$60.

After moving in, the families faced many new challenges: finding new schools for their children (for those who were attending); paying off the land loan; participating in community projects; and building relationships with new neighbors, which was a particular challenge for those who had had negative experiences with other neighbors in the past. Yet for most of the women, the main challenge was one that remained from before – the daily struggle to feed their families.

Most of the program participants have worked for many years, yet the income gained from the kind of work they do is insufficient to pay even for their daily dietary needs, let alone paying back a land loan. Many of the families survive by washing laundry for others, selling fruit and vegetables in the marketplace, selling drinks on buses, or running any kind of errand they are asked to. Men often carry goods in the market while others try to find work in clothing factories. Even children feel the need to contribute, selling chewing gum, candy, running errands, or acting out skits to amuse travelers.

For several of the program participants, the monthly payments to the government were too difficult to meet and thus they sold their land to merchants, ending their possibility of secure housing. However, they had been able to succeed in other ways, thanks to the micro-credit loans: by finding ways to earn money, or by paying for health care for their families.

Despite the fact that many of the women were not able to meet the six-month repayment goal, the ISMU agreed to continue supporting these women. Together with ATD Fourth World, the ISMU launched a new, more progressive and flexible project with the program participants, creating a more formal discussion group with the loan recipients, members of ATD Fourth World and representatives of ISMU. Through these discussion groups, the group was able to foster a mutual understanding between the women and the two organizations, as well as to provide a forum for the women to build relationships of support among themselves. Currently, the women, with the help of ISMU and ATD Fourth World, are continuing to help each other find work and adequate health care for their families. Additionally, the women receive support in their financial and administrative negotiations, including a request for the repayment of the land to be spaced out over a longer time-frame.

C. United States: Residents of a rural area teaching others about development²⁰

Vincent and Fanchette Fanelli, members of the Fourth World Volunteer Corps, have been living in a rural Appalachian region of the USA, and have been thinking with its residents since 1995. During this time, they have chosen two projects in which to invest with the families of the region:

- a. supporting the efforts of a local community development organization;
- b. and creating opportunities for residents of Appalachia to share their experience and knowledge with people from other regions and other countries.

Appalachia is a part of the United States where coal and lumber industries have extensively depleted the region of its resources, while bringing little benefit to the inhabitants. Their fate has followed the “boom and bust” cycles of the industries. As the beautiful forests in the region were destroyed, miners also sacrificed their health to the difficult working conditions.

*Here, we understood how an entire region could feel excluded, feel that it had no value for others and feel left behind. [...] Yet a natural resourcefulness, a genuine love for the mountains and strong family ties have created a rich culture, a strong spirituality and sense of values, which we were privileged to discover each day.*²¹

The ancestry of many families in the region is a mixture of European and indigenous Cherokee. Others are African-American. Historically, in addition to the coal-mining and logging industries,

²⁰ Cf., Report of the Fourth World Movement Seminar on Appalachia, compiled by Angela Evosevic (April 2000).

²¹ Vincent Fanelli, “Appalachia: Our Place Is There,” Fourth World Journal (April 2001).

people also worked to build the railroad — labor so harsh that some workers had to take drugs to keep up. All these industries have deeply scarred both the bodies of those who worked for them, and the land that the workers call home. Today, the coal industry is in decline and the official unemployment rate of the region is near three to four times the national average. Some people earn their living by working for wood chip mills or doing odd jobs. Sewing mills that previously provided employment for the majority of women have abandoned the area. These women now seek low-paying employment in the service industry, or as clerks in stores. Some people even pick wild berries or gather medicinal plants for a living. More recently, a new form of employment that has come to the region raises divisive issues:

*Our region is seen as the perfect place to build the prisons which no well-off community would have. The prisons are presented to the community with an official unemployment rate of over 20% as a chance of employment. A poor, rural population becomes the jailer of a largely urban prison population.*²²

Many people still have no access to water and must haul it in large tanks to their homes. In the community where members of the Fourth World Volunteer Corps live, there is no sewage system and waste runs into the river.

a. The local community development organization

As the community explores new employment possibilities for its residents, protecting the environment is a common priority for all. "Digging a garden is important. It's a rhythm of life that people cherish. People are angry when they are considered ignorant because they have a way of life that is more tied to nature around them. Rediscovering nature and the importance of nature for everyone, and especially families trapped in poverty in an urban setting, is something this region has to share with the world."²³

Another common priority has been the need to create employment locally so that young people do not move away from the area. According to Mr. Fanelli, the local community is "witness to the 'bleeding away' of the region's primary resource, its young people."²⁴ With an official unemployment rate three to four times the national average, there is little encouragement for youth to stay in the area. Those who leave for studies do not come back; and those who stay can hope, at best, for low-paying service jobs or the uncertain future of work in the coal mines.

Given these two priorities for developing the region, and also given the hope of local leaders to attract technology industries to the region—industries that do not pose a threat to the environment and that would provide an avenue for young people to stay in the area—the Fourth World Volunteer Corps members proposed to the local community center to provide a computer training course for both the youth and adults of the region. Such a course would provide individuals with a basic foundation in using computers and a step toward possible employment in the technology industry.

ATD Fourth World proposed beginning a free computer class. A community center was interested in hosting it, and the class began in 1996. To date, some 375 people have taken the 8-to-10 week class. "The response, we think, shows that we are contributing to the aspirations of the community."²⁵ Offering both a morning and an evening class allows both employed and unemployed people to enroll. A man who had great difficulties reading and writing said at first that the class was a bad idea. After seeing how the classes went, however, he said that it is better that more people can learn to use a computer and can then get better jobs. A woman who lives in a particularly isolated place learned to use the Internet through the class. She said, "Since I was little, I dreamt of going to Mount Everest. I don't know if I'll ever go, but I heard that through the Internet you could go there with

²² Vincent Fanelli, in the Report of the Fourth World Movement Seminar on Appalachia, p. 39.

²³ Ibid., 2.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

someone who is climbing to the top.”²⁶

The computer course was designed to support people’s search for a way to gain skills that would enable them to earn a living that does not destroy the environment or their own health, and one that does not lead them away from a region they love.

b. Sharing knowledge with people from other regions

For the Fourth World Volunteer Corps members, knowledge of the community they live in has come not just from conversations or meetings, but primarily through shared experiences, such as gardening with very poor families of the region, or repairing a home together. ATD Fourth World has learned that people in Appalachia want to be understood by others and to share their experiences widely. For instance, they feel strongly about protecting the environment they live in, and want to have others learn from what their region has undergone.

Recognizing the residents’ passion for the land and their desire to voice their experiences and feelings about their current situations, ATD Fourth World began a training program in Appalachia for members of its Volunteer Corps who have already been working in poor communities for several years. These training periods, run several times a year for periods ranging from a week to a few months, are an opportunity for a step back in order to learn from another reality. They include projects such as planting or harvesting potatoes, or helping residents who are repairing their homes. In this way, residents of Appalachia have been able to share their love of nature, to mentor visiting Volunteers, and to accompany the renewal of their work in other regions of the world, including Southeast Asia, West Africa, Central America and Europe, as well as in other parts of the United States.

This sharing of information about their experiences and their land with people from other regions can be difficult to begin as “the people [here] have been so mistreated and deceived by the companies that have come in. They look at outsiders with distrust on account of that. [...] But they’ll share half of what they’ve got on their plate with you, however poor they are.”²⁷ Contacts can be much more positive when groups come from elsewhere to repair houses in Appalachia. However, when no effort is made to include young people from the region in these efforts, they are left to feel useless. Even within the region, municipal structures that are trying to develop a tourism to improve the economy do not see the unemployed, local young people as a potential to build the tourism, for instance by preparing hiking trails.

Despite these challenges, the very poor individuals and families of Appalachia continue to value exchanges with people from other places. Although they are apprehensive of “outsiders” who come to exploit the region and then leave, they are eager to welcome and have a real dialogue with those who come to learn, and then to apply what they learn in other parts of the world.

In the end, it is important that people from other regions learn from Appalachia’s residents:

*because many people in the world have been made to feel dependent on other countries. They have the impression that they are being told what is best for them by others. The extent of their country’s dependence on other countries makes it difficult for them to assert their right to self-determination. Very important things can happen in the world if different communities can give strength to each other in saying, ‘We don’t want people coming in to tell us what to do. We want people to work with us.’ Maybe people in Appalachia have more strength to say that.*²⁸

²⁶ Ibid., 47.

²⁷ Report of the Fourth World Movement Seminar on Appalachia, p. 11.

²⁸ Denis Cretinon, in the Report of the Fourth World Movement Seminar on Appalachia, p. 14.

D. Bolivia: Access to water

In the impoverished neighborhood of Aponto, in the small city of Coroico, Bolivia, ATD Fourth World was a part of a local community-based project to build a free public laundry facility for the poor families of the neighborhood to use. Prior to the construction of this laundry space, the only source of public water was the stream. Access to the stream depended on land ownership, and was thus quite limited for the very poor families. So these landless families, a majority of whom earn their living by washing other people's clothes, were dependent for both their personal water and for the water needed to work on the inconsistent and unpredictable authorizations from the local landowners. Furthermore, the places the women could find water and wash clothes were dirty, with broken shards of metal in the ground. This was dangerous for the children who often accompanied their mothers to work, and for the mothers themselves.

In 1997, after two years of project assessment and fundraising, construction began of "Las Lavanderías" of Coroico (the public laundries of Coroico). The partners included two members of the Fourth World Volunteer Corps, the Bolivian Association of Friends of ATD Fourth World, the town hall and parish of Coroico, and most importantly, the families of Aponto themselves. Funders included: the City Hall of Madrid, Spain; the United Nations' 1% for Development Fund; the town hall of Coroico; and all the people who donated their skills and services locally. The project was to construct a public and free washing facility for the community.

During the planning phase of Las Lavanderías, monthly meetings were held of all the partners to ensure that the needs and desires of the poorest in the community were being addressed. Additionally, these meetings provided a forum for the very poor to express themselves and their hopes and needs, thus beginning to bridge a gap that had existed between them and the rest of the community.



Despite these meetings, there remained many poor families and individuals who were not comfortable attending them. They tended to be the most isolated or excluded in the region. Many felt too ashamed of their living conditions to participate in large meetings. In order to ensure that these people would be able to contribute their input to the project, so that all the citizens of Aponto would be part of it, the architect and the Fourth World Volunteer Corps members took the time and effort to visit the individuals and families that were unable or unwilling to attend the large, public preparation meetings. With the construction plans and the project design in hand, it was possible to learn the wants, needs and hopes of even those who were truly isolated in the community.

This consultation process with the families and individuals of the neighborhood introduced an important new aspect into the design of the project. What they said showed the architect that it would be important for the facility to double as a social gathering site for children, parents and others. Mothers often supervised young children, even while they were busy washing clothes. Therefore, it was crucial that the laundry site be an open and safe environment where children could accompany their parents. The building would also be designed to serve as a social gathering place where children and families could meet in a welcoming environment.

The very construction of the washing facility was also a collective endeavor for all stakeholders. Most of the facility was built by its future users. In June 1999, the end result was a laundry facility with four washing stations, a public toilet, a maintenance/surveillance house, and an open social

pavillion, overlooking the laundry space. A Taporí Kiosk²⁹ in the social pavillion has become a place for reading and art activities for children, which are run once a week, with a particularly festive session once each month.

By building this laundry facility, the poor, landless citizens of Aponto not only gained access to water, and the much needed free and clean laundry facility; they also gained dignity and confidence in their community and themselves. Many of the women who use the facility are pleased to have an accessible site to do their wash and work, and at the same time to be able to socialize with others and to care for their children. Pamela, one such mother, said, “before, parents did not allow their children to go to the laundry areas because these areas were ugly and dangerous. But now, parents say that they can go to play in the laundry.”

As the Lavanderías project demonstrates, partnerships with the poorest do not happen overnight. True partnerships with those living in extreme conditions require major investments: of time, persistence, training, capacity building, resources, follow-up and willingness to learn from the poorest. The project of the Lavanderías was successful for it took into consideration the following conditions.

E. Lessons learned: Conditions for partnerships with the poorest

While the four projects described are all quite different, there are a number of common conditions that enabled and encouraged the participation of the poorest in such development projects.

- Investment of time

The Lavanderías project took several years to develop and execute. The shame and lack of confidence that are characteristic of extreme poverty often serve as roadblocks to participation for many people. It is not enough to open doors to civic participation. Some people will still hesitate. As demonstrated in the Burkina Faso and Guatemala examples as well, time is needed to locate and build relationships with the poorest, to get to know their lives, their interests, their aspirations. Through ATD Fourth World’s long standing relationships with and knowledge of the very poor families in the above mentioned examples, it was able to identify issues of interest to these families and to work with the families to realize ways in which to address such issues. Deep relationships with very poor individuals, families and communities must be established to help encourage them to dare to enter and take part in the sustainable development effort. This way of allotting time, however, is often seen as an obstacle to building partnerships with the poorest, as, all too often, sustainable development programs and initiatives come with strict time guidelines that may not permit the needed time to build relationships with people living in the worst situations. Successful work with the very poor cannot be turned around in a matter of days or even months. If we truly want to include the poor in all our programs, we must be prepared to work with long-term, flexible deadlines.

- Inclusive goals

One of the main goals of the partners in the Lavanderías project was to give every person in Aponto a voice in the design and decision making so that no one would be excluded from its benefits. Very poor families, or individuals who felt too ill at ease to participate in large meetings, were consulted through home visits, and their experiences and thinking affected the decisions made. They were consulted from the very beginning, when the project was still flexible. Similarly the computer classes in Appalachia were designed to be accessible even to people who would never have imagined that they could take such a class.

²⁹ Taporí is a movement of children who want all children to have the same chances. It is part of the International Movement ATD Fourth World.

Partnerships that are restricted only to the groups that are the easiest to reach can become powerful tools of exclusion for the others.

- *Confidence and trust*

Partnerships with the people living in extreme poverty also require building mutual trust and confidence of all actors in the partnership. Toward the beginning of the Lavanderías project, trust was not yet very strong, and the faucets intended for the laundry were stolen. Similarly, with the children and families in Burkina Faso, it took time to develop trust between the children, parents and ATD Fourth World before children could even speak truthfully about their family backgrounds.

People living in extreme poverty need to know that their views and aspirations will be heard by other partners. It takes time for them to build confidence in themselves and in the other actors. At the same time, other partners “need to have confidence in the value of the knowledge that the poorest can bring and in the possibility of their aspirations becoming reality.”³⁰ Through the informal training sessions held in Appalachia, ATD Fourth World has shown its trust in the families living in the region by giving them the responsibility of sharing what they know about their land and their situation with others in hopes that such information will aid other communities and families like themselves.

Partnership is possible only if each partner is convinced of the importance of sharing what they know and learning from others. If some conditions to partnership seem obvious – listening to the poorest, building their confidence – they are not sufficient. A woman involved in a project in rural France cautioned, “listening is not the same as understanding. For me, we can understand each other only when we can contemplate doing something together.” Listening is not a passive attitude. The ethic of doing and learning together implies a discreet and demanding companionship to support the poorest families in their efforts to live up to their expectations and commitments. It can develop only when each person learns something from the others, and is proud of his or her own efforts and input.

- *Commitment and flexibility*

Clearly, working with people living in extreme poverty is not easy. If we are truly committed to this goal, we must commit time and energy to developing such relationships. We must also be prepared to adapt our projects. In the Bolivian example, the architect epitomizes the kind of commitment required. Mr. Julio Carrasco, the architect responsible for the design and construction of the Lavanderías project, was not convinced that he was reaching the poorest of the Aponto community in the monthly planning sessions. Together with Fourth World Volunteer Corps members, he invested the time and effort to knock on doors and personally meet with individuals and families in search of their input. Mr. Carrasco demonstrated flexibility both by being ready to adapt the design plans, and in his manner of work by visiting the homes of the very poor.

Similarly, in working with very poor families and individuals, program objectives and indicators must serve as adaptable guidelines, and not strict road blocks or contract breakers. The ISMU micro-credit program is a clear example of such flexibility. Although the original indicator of success for the micro-credit program was the timely repayment of the loan, the ISMU recognized that the micro-credit program was successful in other ways for the participants – in aiding the participants in finding work and in obtaining health care. Therefore, despite the fact that the women did not meet the original goals of the program, ISMU decided to continue its financial support and guidance to the women.

³⁰ Alwine de Vos van Steenwijk et al., “Redefining Human Rights-Based Development: The Wresinski Approach to Partnership with the Poorest,” United Nations background paper #ESA/DSPD/BP3 (December 1999), p. 15.

- *Capacity building and training*

While each partner brings experience and reflection to the table, it should also be noted that training is necessary for all partners in development programs. In addition to technical and policy-specific training, partners coming from very poor backgrounds need training in understanding one's rights, being able to express oneself and taking on responsibilities. There must be an emphasis on capacity building of the very poor so that they fully take part in the decision-making and implementation process instead of becoming merely "token partners." In Bolivia, the Fourth World Volunteer Corps members began this training with poor families through the People's Universities they held every month. People's Universities, run by the Fourth World Movement in a number of countries, are regular meetings where people living in extreme poverty have the opportunity to overcome the uncertainty of what to do or say, to confront one another, and to support one another. As different themes are discussed, it is possible for a person to realize that they are not alone in their situation, to gain the confidence needed to meet with others as equals, and to practice expressing one's views in a way that can be understood by others.

For all other partners, it is important to provide on-going training about the conditions of extreme poverty and what can be learned from the very poor. Without this step, the likelihood increases of some people being left out of the project completely because others are not aware enough of their situation to know whether their needs are different from those of other citizens. Again, in the example of the Lavandarias, a committee was established among the local school, hospital, town hall and church of Aponto to address training professionals in this manner. In addition to promoting the use of the laundry facility by such professionals, the committee was asked to meet frequently to discuss what it means to be extremely poor, how to identify and work with the poorest, and how to consistently keep the poorest in mind when developing programs and services.

- *Consensus building*

In Appalachia, ATD Fourth World would never have started computer classes without an agreement from the community center. And in Guatemala, the partnership of ISMU and ATD Fourth World was central to the micro-credit project.

In Bolivia, as was mentioned, the support committee established was also responsible for publicizing the Lavanderías to other individuals and institutions. This role was crucial, as "efforts by the poorest to overcome their condition are not sustainable if they are not noticed and backed by other segments of society."³¹ The town hall of Coroico was a particularly important partner. Although its budget is quite small, and it is rarely able to fund any kind of development project, the mayor took the means to invest money in the success of this project.

- *A spirit of humility and a willingness to learn*

In the Burkina Faso project, the people meeting the children in the city and then traveling to the countryside to meet their parents are themselves residents of the city. They write,

*The more doors are opened to us, the more we realize just how ignorant we city people are of the rural community being shown to us. What influences in the rural world today must parents take into account in educating their children? What communal life exists among villagers today? What do children learn about the traditional knowledge of the villagers? How do village residents cope with the competition, both with city life, and with commerce from neighboring countries, such as the Ivory Coast? We have so much to learn, and our sporadic visits give us only partial answers.*³²

³¹ Ibid.

³²"Kamba yaa beog Ba ramba," p. 35.

Conclusion

At the international conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, the governments present stated : "Achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millenium Declaration, demands a new partnership between developed and developing countries."³³ Building this partnership is an enormous challenge for all those involved. Each country also faces the challenge of building a real partnership with people living in deep poverty within its borders. In fact, extreme poverty and exclusion continue to persist even in the world's wealthiest countries, a situation from which much can be learned.

*Partnership is essential for the development of the population as a whole; yet the poorest people rarely have the chance to experience such an association with others. The participation of the poorest depends largely on the will of political and social leaders to involve them. When leaders make the effort to inform the most disadvantaged people, solicit their views, and show that they are taken into account, then the poorest will be able to exercise full citizenship, be recognized as having rights and responsibilities, and be helped to assume them.*³⁴

Building partnership with the people living in the worst forms of poverty requires many conditions, as detailed throughout this paper. Here we will mention just two:

- a commitment and continuing support from local and national governments, and from international institutions;
- a dialogue among NGOs and individuals who are trying to include the poorest in sustainable development projects, in order to learn from one another's experiences. We are not proposing that the work of these different NGOs be melded together, as each one has a specific contribution to make. However, by networking and joining forces, they can better introduce very poor populations into the design and implementation of sustainable development projects.

Our own contribution to this process will focus on Africa, where NGOs committed alongside the very poor can benefit from more opportunities to support one another. Before the end of the International Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006), the International Movement ATD Fourth World hopes to organize, together with other partners, a small seminar about the concrete conditions required for partnership with the poorest. Calling for this partnership is just a first step. The second step is to be specific about the conditions required for it to succeed, as we have tried to do by sharing in this paper some examples of our work. We know that NGOs and individuals who have invested themselves in building these partnerships have a great deal to share. We invite others to contact us about this seminar.

³³ A/CONF.198/3.

³⁴ Joseph Wresinski, *Chronic Poverty and Lack of Basic Security*, (Landover, Maryland: 1994). (Translated from a 1987 report, "Grande pauvreté et précarité économique et sociale.")