



# Confronting family poverty and social exclusion

A PERSPECTIVE FROM  
THE MOST VULNERABLE FAMILIES



# International Movement ATD Fourth World

- We are a civil society organization where people living in poverty and extreme poverty are active members.
- We are in more than 30 countries both in the North and the South and we have been living and working very close to people living in extreme poverty for more than 50 years.
- The experience and knowledge I am going to share has been built with people living in extreme poverty.

# ATD Fourth World and the family

- We don't promote any particular model for the family.
- For many years we have worked very close with families that were seen as dysfunctional families.
- And for many years we have seen how parents fought to keep their family together in spite of all the difficulties.
- We have developed approaches and projects centered on the family.
- We have led research projects to understand the roles of families in the eradication of extreme poverty.

# How Poverty Separates Parents and Children: A Challenge to Human Rights

How Poverty Separates  
Parents and Children:  
A CHALLENGE TO HUMAN RIGHTS



A study by ATD Fourth World

With forewords  
by the United Nations and UNICEF

[www.atd-fourthworld.org](http://www.atd-fourthworld.org)

Through examples in six countries: Guatemala, Haiti, Burkina Faso, the Philippines, the United Kingdom and the United States this study shows:

- the difficulties families living in poverty encounter to live as a family
- all the hidden efforts parents and children do to stay together
- make recommendations for a human-rights based approach to family separation



# How Poverty Separates Parents and Children: A Challenge to Human Rights

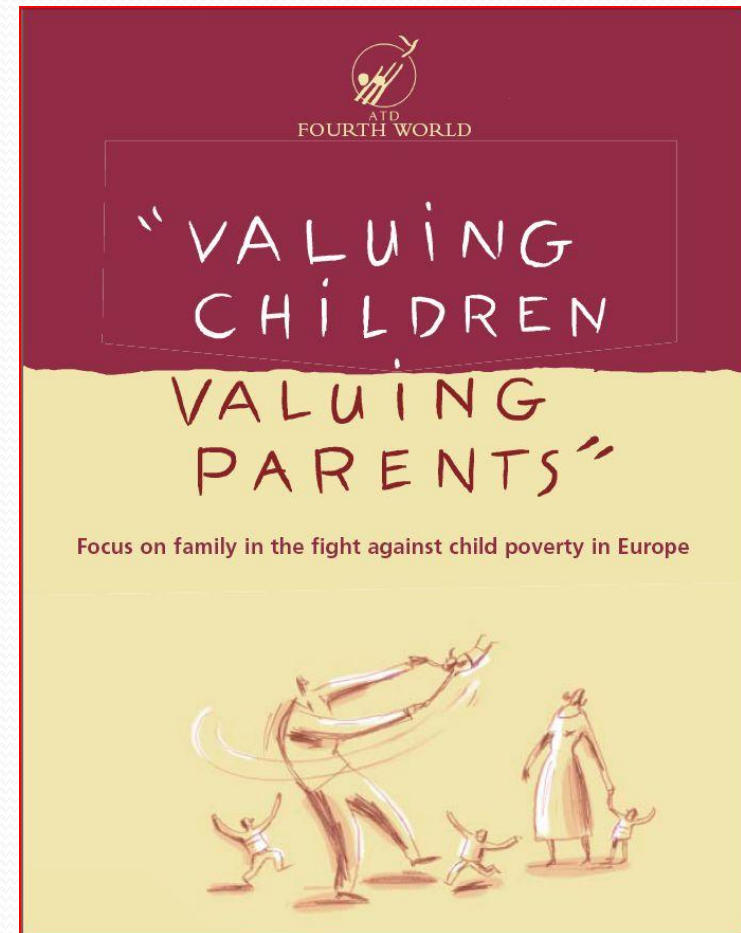
*"Poverty can destroy families . But in times of deep trouble, the family is a source of strength. The poor strive to keep their families together even more than other people, because that's their last hope. No matter how poor you are, as long as you have each other to hold onto, you still have that strength. But once your family is taken away, you just give up. Maybe you don't know where you're going to find your next meal. But as long as there's hope, you have to go out and try again. I see this a lot in poor families - generations stand by one another, no matter what"*

*"Families all over the world remain the most vital force in the battle to eradicate poverty. The irony is that, often, the centrality of family has escaped the attention of policymakers... (They) are only beginning to realize that programmes to eradicate poverty and to provide basic services must recognize and support the ongoing efforts that families already make."*

Johan Schölvinn, former director of the UN Division for Social Policy and Development

# Valuing Children Valuing Parents

- Focus on family in the fight against child poverty in Europe
- This study comes from a reality lived in many developed countries: in the so called 'best interest of the child' many children living in extreme poverty are taken into care



# Valuing Children Valuing Parents

- This study highlights the need to listen to children and parents who face severe and persistent poverty in their daily lives.
- It offers an opportunity to learn from effective practices in 10 countries in Europe.
- It challenges policy-makers, academics, anti-poverty activists, social and community workers to develop partnerships with families to find new ways of supporting them that are effective, human and empowering.

# But a family approach is not enough

*“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”*

- Respecting and enhancing families is a vital part of improving access to rights and escaping poverty and social exclusion, but as the children say it is not enough. Families live in broader communities and they need the fundamental social bonds within those communities.



# *Extreme poverty and human rights*

*The idea that freedom and universal rights are counterbalanced by responsibilities towards our neighbors, our country, all of humanity and the living world seems to be an ethical principle recognized by most civilizations. But people living in extreme poverty are deprived of the ability to exercise their rights and responsibilities. Since they do not have economic, social and cultural rights, they cannot assume their professional, family and social responsibilities. Without the power to exercise their responsibilities, they are considered as second-class citizens who can be deprived of the economic, social and cultural rights enjoyed by all other citizens. And they can indeed be deprived in this way, since they have no economic, social or cultural assets that would allow them to make use of their freedom and their right to protest.*

People living in extreme poverty show us the interdependence that exists between rights and responsibilities and the close relationship in between the non respect of human rights and social exclusion.

# Access to fundamental rights

- Access to fundamental rights like housing, health care, school for children, training and work for parents can only become real for people living in extreme poverty in the context of a community, of the fundamental bonds within the community.
- The bonds of people living in extreme poverty have been eroded by the hardness of their living conditions

# Proposition

Create the conditions for a genuine dialogue:

- between families living in extreme poverty and schools, social services, health services,
- but also with researchers, decision-makers and grassroots actors in order to create links between academic knowledge, life knowledge of people enduring extreme poverty and the knowledge of grassroots actors so as to design new strategies.

# Participatory research project

## To assess impact of MDGs on people living in extreme poverty

- Analysis will be carried out using the "Merging of knowledge" approach, a concept that enables people living in poverty and other relevant actors to contribute to a process as equals.
- People living in poverty and the group of other actors (researchers and decision-makers) will work separately to develop their own set of findings based on their own knowledge and experience.
- The next stage will involve merging the two knowledge sources, with the two groups presenting their findings of the impact the MDGs have had on the poorest populations in their locality.
- The groups will then work together to develop recommendations on ways in which policies and actions to achieve the MDGs can reach and benefit people living in extreme poverty, within the 2015 deadline, as well as discussion concerning the eventual post-2015 framework.

For a comprehensive overview of the Merging of knowledge approach see:  
<http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/Guidelines-for-the-Merging-of.html>

# *Distinction between poverty and extreme poverty*

The way we define or understand poverty and extreme poverty has a huge impact in the strategies we undertake and those strategies have a huge impact in people's lives.

*“A lack of basic security is the absence of one or more factors that enable individuals and families to assume basic responsibilities and to enjoy fundamental rights. Such a situation may become more extended and lead to more serious and permanent consequences. Chronic poverty results when the lack of basic security simultaneously affects several aspects of people's lives, 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”.*



# A project in a rural area in Rwanda

From a community building perspective:

- Four social workers worked to build links among the most vulnerable and excluded families so that they could break isolation and build friendship and solidarity.
- They helped with the process of reconciliation and allowed these families to be recognized by local authorities as citizens actively committed in fighting against extreme poverty.
- There was also an economical intervention mainly to support the efforts that were already being made both individually and collectively; they created, for example, a credit system to allow families to have access to small livestock, farm equipment and seed.



## Community work



## Community meeting

# A new project

- An approach more focused on measurable results.
- Who could participate:  
People that were still living in poverty but could follow the proposed rhythm and could help the project to succeed.
- Who were excluded:  
The most vulnerable families, old people, people with chronic illnesses or disabilities



# Impact on the population

- This new project may have an impact in helping people out of poverty, but it will also have an impact in the relationships within the community, because the most vulnerable will see how the most dynamic find their way out of poverty, while they are left behind.



# Our approach matters

If we understood extreme poverty as a violation of human rights we would not propose projects that exclude the most vulnerable just because without them we can have more visible and measurable results





# Reaching the most vulnerable

- If the respect of fundamental social bonds, family and community bonds, is a necessary condition for accessing rights, it is not a sufficient condition; there also needs to be opportunities to access housing, employment, education, healthcare services, social protection, etc.
- Very often, even if the resources exist, they are not accessible for people living in extreme poverty.

# Proposition

- Develop strategies that will be effective in reaching all those living in poverty, including those living in extreme poverty:

This implies knowing the living conditions of families in extreme poverty and the obstacles they face, so that additional support can be provided in partnership with them.

For deepening the understanding on this approach see the report of the independent expert on the Draft guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights.