



Raising awareness of extreme poverty through knowledge accumulation and dissemination

ATD Fourth World has long believed that in order to free our societies from extreme poverty and exclusion, a continual effort is necessary to think together with people living in extreme poverty what is needed for each human being to live in equal dignity. Their knowledge of poverty is an often untapped resource needed to create a world founded on the respect of fundamental rights.

The challenge is to merge different forms of knowledge: to recognize and take into account the knowledge gained in resisting poverty and placing it on an equal footing with other forms of knowledge accumulated to successfully address, not just extreme poverty, but all the major issues in society, ranging from the economic to the environmental. ATD Fourth

World's role is to ensure that the knowledge that is gained from the experience of those who fight daily against poverty and exclusion, and of those who join them, is taken as seriously as other forms of knowledge.

"The best informed experts on poverty are the poor."

Joseph Wresinski, Founder of ATD Fourth World.

Conserving and promoting the history of the fight against extreme poverty – The opening of the Joseph Wresinski International Centre

The inauguration of the Joseph Wresinski International Centre (JWIC) in Baillet-en-France (near Paris) in February 2007 represented ATD Fourth World's commitment to conserving its history and that of its members, bringing under one roof written, photographic

and audio-visual archives, including the writings and wider work of its founder, Joseph Wresinski. The Centre also aims to be a showplace and a resource to enrich and enhance research on extreme poverty, as well as the work of ATD Fourth World and that of its partners.

It is also hoped that the Centre can be a resource for the wider society. Firstly, by enabling people living in extreme poverty to be aware of their collective identity and common history in order that they can take strength from this realization, enter into dialogue with the rest of society

and pass on this pride in their resilience against poverty to their children. Secondly, the Centre will actively promote the

philosophy and approach of Joseph Wrésinski in order for society to understand better the fight against extreme poverty.

Illustrated below is some of the work carried out by the Centre since its inception in 2007.

Developing action-research projects and joint-training initiatives – The Research and Training Institute

The Research and Training Institute is an integral part of the JWIC. Its mission is two-fold:

→ To assist the International Movement ATD Fourth World in the formulation and development

Po University, Paris and the Association Française de Science Politique a conference entitled: *“Exclusion, a Challenge to Democracy: How relevant is Joseph Wresinski’s Thinking?”* More than 300

As part of the preparation for the Paris conference a regional conference on human rights, violence and knowledge, and its link with extreme poverty, was held in Port-au-Prince, Haïti, in February 2008. It was run in



of its strategy, its message and analyses through continual interaction with the latest trends in research.

→ To support the building of knowledge, research and training in all areas affecting the lives of the poorest, taking into account their personal knowledge and experiences as well as the contributions made by practitioners and academics.

In December 2008, ATD Fourth World organised with the Sciences

academics, grass roots workers, and people living in extreme poverty took part in the conference. Its inspiration originated in Haiti during a time of extreme violence in which both academics and grass roots workers were interested in assessing the extent to which Joseph Wresinski’s approach could be a useful resource at that time of turmoil, as well as for the future. The conference enabled a genuine encounter between the university world and the Fourth World, a true merging of knowledge.

partnership with the “Fondation Connaissance et Liberté” (FOKAL) and the Alliance Française. A regional conference was also held in partnership with ATD Fourth World Netherlands in Amersfoort in November 2007 on the theme of “Dialogue with the Fourth World on Poverty and Human Rights.”

The Institute also runs an **Annual Seminar, “Campus”**, bringing together members of the International Movement ATD Fourth World and others to

present studies and research which fuse academic knowledge with knowledge gained from action and knowledge born of life experience. It gathers academics and people at the grassroots level, including people experiencing poverty, so that they can share their research and questions. Between 2006 and 2009, nearly 400 people from five continents took part in Campus. The conference themes included: “How can we fight extreme poverty?”, the mix of participants from the grassroots

Over the course of 2007-2009, the Institute facilitated a series of **cross-disciplinary workshops** with people living in poverty and relevant practitioners and academics from Belgium, France and Switzerland. Participants reviewed the conditions that allow people living in extreme poverty to engage with others in their effort to overcome social exclusion and poverty. These workshops were a follow-up to the Fourth World-University project and Fourth World-Partnership project, both of

recipient have failed. It looks at an approach which encourages the meeting and confrontation between professional and scientific knowledge and the knowledge of people living in long-term poverty.

In 2007, the World Bank published working paper which is made up of a collection of case studies from ATD Fourth World’s work and projects in Madagascar, Tanzania, the USA, Belgium and three Latin American countries. Entitled



and academia allowing everyone to gain a better understanding of extreme poverty and the lives of those who experience it. Campus in 2008 invited participants from the academic world and the grassroots to examine how Joseph Wresinski’s thinking is looked upon by today’s society. In 2009, Campus welcomed a large delegation from the Chinese speaking world, looking particularly at the interaction between poverty, peace and violence.

which had the overall objective of bringing together the knowledge and experience of grassroots activists living in long-term poverty, ATD Fourth World full-time volunteers, academics and practitioners in relevant fields. Linked to this project was the publication in 2008 of “*Le croisement des pouvoirs*” (*The Merging of Power* - Editions de l’Atelier and Editions Quart Monde). The book argues that anti-poverty initiatives based on an unequal balance of power between the giver of aid and

“Participatory Approaches to Attacking Extreme Poverty: Cases Studies Led by the International Movement ATD Fourth World,” the publication emphasised the need to take into account the knowledge of people living in extreme poverty and work in partnership with them in order for programmes and policies targeting them to be successful.

A second World Bank publication, *“Moving Out of Poverty: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives,”* included a chapter which featured two in-depth life-stories or monographs from Burkina Faso and Peru commissioned by the World Bank. The monographs drew attention to the families’ extremely precarious lives, social exclusion and accumulated insecurities. It recommended the need for policies which recognize the efforts of parents, families and communities to move out of extreme poverty. The writing of these monographs was only possible due to the particular approach of ATD Fourth World, encapsulated by the longstanding commitment of its full-time volunteers and their long-term presence with such families.

In November 2008 the book *Eradiquer la misère: Démocratie, Mondialisation et Droits de l’Homme* was published (*Eradicating Extreme Poverty: Democracy, Globalisation and Human Rights* - Presses Universitaires Françaises). The book presents life-stories, or monographs, from countries in four different continents (France, Burkina

Faso, Peru and the Philippines). It argues that the eradication of extreme poverty can only be achieved by seeking a model of development that is more equitable, lasting, and just regardless of economic and

environmental dimensions. The book aims to incite the necessary changes in individual, then collective behaviour toward human beings living in poverty. An English translation is awaiting publication.

A place of solidarity in midst of poverty and violence – example from Haiti

In Haiti, during the riots in 2004, ATD Fourth World teams from around the world sent messages of support and solidarity. Haitian members of ATD Fourth World, living in extreme poverty, told us: *“These messages are very important to us, we know we’re not alone, we have friends around the world who are concerned for us, they give us strength and hope.”*

The violence prevented people from going into the street, from meeting, especially in the poorest neighbourhoods. *“Violence in the country affects everyone, rich or poor. You don’t dare go out anymore or walk in the street. You go to bed, afraid, you don’t know what to do anymore. Between us neighbours, we suffer for one another – the neighbourhood is our*

protection. Rich or poor, everyone has to pitch in together, we have to make peace to end poverty together,” said one mother from Haiti.

In the last few years, despite the insecurity in the country and the difficult conditions in the poorest neighbourhoods, the inhabitants, in link with ATD Fourth World and its members, carried on with their monthly meetings to *“break the silence, trust and hope together.”* Certain people said, *“We have to show our dignity to everybody. With the problem of water in the neighbourhood, people struggle everyday to have water to drink and food to eat. ATD Fourth World has remained for us a place of unity where we can think and meet together again.”*

Understanding how the poorest people contribute to building peace

ATD Fourth World’s work around the world over the last 50 years has enabled us to witness the violence and fear which extreme poverty engenders. In the midst of such chaos, the efforts of people living in chronic poverty to construct peace has also been evident to those living and working alongside the very poorest people. Since 2008, ATD Fourth World, with

support from the UNESCO, has been undertaking research to understand with people living in poverty the link between their daily struggle against extreme poverty and their contribution to peace, and gain recognition of their role as constructors of peace. This has involved creating spaces and the conditions in a safe and confident setting where participants can share

experiences, either from their own lived experience of poverty and violence or from their long-term commitment alongside people who face it daily. The four-year project will make public its findings at the end of the project.

