

**Contribution to theWorld Family Summit+3  
Warsaw – 29 November 2007**

Plenary session X : Forging global partnership for development

**How to forge global partnership with the poorest families?  
Some guidelines from the grass-root work of the International  
Movement ATD Fourth World**

Mister President, dear friends,

I want to thank the World Family Organization for giving, for the 4<sup>th</sup> time in 4 years, the floor to ATD Fourth World.

And I thank all Polish partners for their work and welcome.

Some of the participants may know something about the ATD Fourth World Movement. Briefly I can say that we run around 100 projects in 30 Countries worldwide. These projects are mainly run by volunteers. We try to run them in partnership with families facing severe and persistent poverty.

What is also important to say today, here, in Warsaw, is that we learned to run these projects the way we do it, from a man who had Polish roots, Father Jozef Wrzesinski.

As I personally understand this man, who died 20 years ago, I'm not afraid to say that, from my point of view, he creates a revolution in the way to approach the poverty and democracy issues, the same way Mikolaj Kopernik created a revolution in the way to look at universe, the same way Maria Sodowska-Curie create the revolution of nuclear science or Janusz Korczak changed fundamentally the way to live and work with children.

This man is for instance the initiator of what is now the UN International Day for The Eradication of Poverty (see [www.oct17.org](http://www.oct17.org)) and I'm proud here to say that this year Poland mobilized its citizens on a very large scale for 17 October thanks to the commitment of its Ombudsman, Dr Janusz Kochanowski.

On this day for instance, the city of Kielce, one big city of Poland who faces high poverty rates, decided to support Jozef Wrzesinski Appeal and

inaugurated a commemorative stone. Wrzesinski Appeal invites us to come together and to make the fight against poverty a top agenda human rights issue.

I'm not going to tell more about this man but when we address poverty and exclusion issues, I see it as difficult not to mention him, here, in Poland. This was a short introduction about what is ATD Fourth World.

\*\*\*\*

The question I want to address now is the challenge to create supportive partnership with families who experience long term exclusion and severe poverty, on local level in order to make partnership with the poorest possible on global level.

I will just give you some key messages. I invite you to go back to some reports or books we published in the past years.<sup>1</sup>

Before I start I just want to stress the fact that the families I'm speaking about are usually named with very negative terms. The families we try to reach, welcome and learn from in our projects are often named with terms like dysfunctional families, multi-crisis families, harmful or pathological families. Of course we challenge these terminologies. They are received as humiliation by the people concerned and are counterproductive.

Now I come back to the key messages.

My first message is are a few questions :

**Do we really know the life and the hopes of the family we want to introduce in some local partnership?**

**Do we know how they experience the help we provide ?**

**Do we know their true expectation ?**

ATD Fourth world invited them to tell in their words what POVERTY IS :

They told us : "POVERTY IS

*Having all the same dreams for the future that everyone else has, but no way on earth to make them come true.*

*Having people think I was in care because I was a bad kid, or had a bad mother.*

---

<sup>1</sup> " How poverty separates parents and children : a challenge to human rights" (2004)  
" Valuing children, valuing parents " (2003) " Smiles worldwide " (2007) see [www.atd-fourthworld.org](http://www.atd-fourthworld.org)

*Seeing foster-parents get so much money to buy my children the things I could never afford to buy them.*

*Having to be better with my kids than everyone else, because someone is watching me.*

*Dreading every Christmas and birthday because of the disappointment in the children's eyes.*

*Keeping secrets, telling lies, and putting on a front.*

*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 kid's go to or what kind of jobs we get.*

*Having social workers think that taking me to McDonalds is a treat because I don't know any better.*

*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.*

*Having not one person to talk to who isn't paid to listen.*

*Wanting to be able to do better, but never being able to.*

*Seeing the way it should be, on the television and so on, and thinking it must be something wrong with me that my life's not like that.*

*Waiting for the day the children are old enough to leave care and find me.*

*Being told that I have nothing to offer my own child, and believing it.*

*Everyone thinking that they have the right to have an opinion about me, just because I ask for a bit of help.*

*According to families who live in persistent and often intergenerational poverty in Great Britain , Exerpts from a workshop based on the cartoon, "love Is.." which took place at Frimhurst Centre, Surrey.*

These sentence make us aware that the parents and children in very poor families have very specific experience.

We have to work to understand this experience if we want to create genuine local partnership. We have to work to understand the hopes and way to cope of the poorest in order to evaluate with them the efficiency of our programs. We have to feel what it means living in extreme poverty to be able to reach the people concerned and be able to include them as genuine stakeholders.

\*\*\*\*\*

My second message comes from our daily grass-root work.

To create local partnership we have to be ready to create a supportive local network of citizens, of families of different backgrounds, of local organizations. These partners have really to be committed to these families and become their allies whatever the reactions of the general environment that might judge very negatively these families.

What does it mean ? This means :

1. Creating a positive approach of all members of the family, and an atmosphere of dignity of everyone, without forgetting the role of fathers. We tend to focus on mother and it is good, but it shall not prevent us taking into account how men feel humiliated and useless in situation of extreme poverty and exclusion.
2. Supporting parents to keep the main positive role in front of their children and families and not to take the “good” role ourselves.
3. Organizing events/projects that create moments of “Family happiness” reinforcing positive links between family members. For instance holidays for families<sup>2</sup>. These events are the fundamental to build other preventative or supportive work.
4. Supporting the grow of a collective identity of the families that gives recognition and strength.
5. Transform the local environment into a supportive environment.

Regarding this last point I want to stress the fact that this is a very big challenge because it is focused on the personal changes of the strongest stakeholders. We all know how much we are full of prejudices. But also, institutional help or legislation can be stress factors instead of supportive factors.

I would like to give two recent examples from our work on the field.

- In Luxembourg, we know a mother who is seen regularly by 6 social workers or assistants. The mother told us that after the regular 3-hour visits of one worker who observes her parenting abilities, she systematically vomits due to the stress endured.

---

<sup>2</sup> So many organization worldwide focus on holidays for children in poverty. But challenge ahead of us is yet to support the development of positive “family break” opportunities when daily life is so stressful.

- In Poland, we know a couple who hide from the authorities in order to stay as a family unit and be supportive parents for their children. The father is coming back from a life of homelessness, alcohol dependency and divorce. With the mother of their two children they are condemned to re-create a family in the shadow, to hide themselves but if doing in the light of society, they would lose the very low support they get and it would mean becoming even poorer and more fragile.

We have to be aware that creating local partnership with the poorest will mean triggering changes in institutional support, inappropriate legislation, and first and foremost in our-selves.

\*\*\*\*\*

Now I would like to quote briefly 3 examples of projects who try to create this kind of supportive local networks.

**1** - The first one is probably well-known for some of you and it is not an ATD Fourth World project. I want to speak about the “Family Group Conference” practice and the similar restorative practices. The Family Group Conference approach is currently being adopted and evaluated in many European countries, notably Ireland, the Netherlands, the UK<sup>3</sup> and the Scandinavian countries. Family Group Conferences are a way of empowering families who are going through a difficult time or a crisis so that, as far as possible, they can make decisions on how to resolve the situation and avoid children being taken into state care.

The way to do it is to try to value the a supportive local network and to find alternative solutions within this network. An independent coordinator prepares a meeting, named “conference”, by identifying and gathering together the family network and all existing potential support (neighbors, friends...) The aim is to trigger commitments and facilitate exchanges with the family’s wider social network (family, friends etc) to find alternative solutions which are less drastic and more suitable to the child’s and parents real needs.

**2** -The second example comes from Belgium. Since the adoption of the General Report on Poverty in 1994, Belgium has grounded its commitment to fight poverty by stimulating and monitoring dialogue between different parties. One of this monitored dialogues is the Agora project: Agora is a monthly meeting on issues around child placement and child/family support interventions in French-speaking part of Belgium. It is attended by representatives from the child support services and activist members of two organizations that work in a participative way to express the views of people living in poverty. I can’t explain here in details this project but we can learn a

---

<sup>3</sup> Visit for instance [http://www.frg.org.uk/fgc\\_model.html](http://www.frg.org.uk/fgc_model.html)

lot from it, regarding the conditions which made a constructive dialogue possible and how this partnership is beneficial for the different stakeholders involved.

3 -The last example is one project we currently run in Poland and worldwide and which is called Tapor. It's two main challenges is to listen to children and to prepare with them, more supportive and connected generations of citizens. This is the spirit of the Tapor Movement where children are encouraged to discuss questions about their daily lives and their immediate surroundings.

- how to make sure that all children can form friendships?
- whether there are children living near them who are not included in local activities?
- which children are easy to make fun of?

These children meetings and discussion open up possibilities for living together, now and in the future.

Children who are given the opportunity to interact with other children from different backgrounds are less likely to act in a discriminatory way, both as children and as adults. Tapor projects demonstrate that children from all walks of life have an innate sense of justice and empathy for others, unless they have lost their concern through abuse or very difficult lives. By both soliciting and expressing their ideas and experiences about ways to create friendship, the dynamics of Tapor nurtures the children's sense of pride and responsibility.

I will conclude this presentation with this sentence written by Tapor children:

*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 in communities without friendship. Without friendship, there is no life.*

*From the Children's Appeal - ATD Fourth World International  
Children's Forum - Geneva, 20 November 1999*

Creating communities with friendship for the weakest and most excluded, this is what these Tapor children expect from us.

Creating positive local support networks, this is what enables participation of parents facing poverty to larger global commitments for development<sup>4</sup>.

Thank you very much.

---

Pierre Klein – [pfklein@atd-fourthworld.org](mailto:pfklein@atd-fourthworld.org) - [www.atd.org.pl](http://www.atd.org.pl)

---

<sup>4</sup> See one current exemple of involvement of parents facing poverty in UN debates : <http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/Dignity-in-the-Face-of-Extreme.html>