



Statement on the follow-up to the UN Special Session on Children

In 2002, governments committed to creating a world in which all children have access to their rights. Despite gains made since then, significant gaps remain, and for the very poorest children - in both North and South – who are excluded and even invisible, these gains can often be irrelevant to the realities of their lives. The following points are taken from ‘A Tabori Vision of a World Fit for Children,’ a 2007 report by International Movement ATD Fourth World, which relates the experiences and opinions of children in extreme poverty and those around them. The document highlights the many barriers for very poor children and outlines proposals for positive change toward the realization of their rights. Those with the power to effect change at the local and national level can ensure the rights of all children be respected by listening to and supporting the efforts of children experiencing poverty and of those who stand in solidarity with them.

The best interests of the poorest children are often overlooked

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

Many actors attempt to consider the effect of their decisions on children, but often lack input, particularly from the poorest children and their families. To fulfill the commitment to put all children first, these children and families must be genuinely considered and consulted throughout the decision-making process.

The first step in achieving genuine consultation is acknowledging that the world of the poor is often hidden. Children living in extreme poverty frequently have vastly different life experiences than others.

ATD Fourth World continues to be concerned that the realities, efforts, and expectations of the very poorest members of our society do not shape social, economic, or cultural policies.

Investing in the poorest children means investing in their families

It is common knowledge that when the families of poor children don't receive support, the children must help to support their families, often at the expense of their education. The well-being of each member of the family is interdependent.

Children should be considered within the familial context and as individuals and recognized as integral parts of their communities. Except in extraordinary circumstances, they should be given the necessary support to thrive within or closely linked to the family environment. Parents must be fully empowered so they can fulfill their roles and responsibilities.

The poorest deserve a good quality education

The worst forms of poverty force families to choose between the immediate survival of the family and the education they hope will give their children a better future. Many obstacles exist to access to education for very poor families.

In **South America**, a father explained the importance of education:

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

Educators must be trained on poverty-related issues. They should understand how poverty can affect a child's behavior and educational progress.

Parents must be accorded respect by educators, who should continuously involve them in their children's education. Schools should take into account parents' histories and the barriers to their involvement in their children's schooling. Factors preventing this involvement include illiteracy, negative prior educational experiences, fear of being judged and misunderstood by teachers, and intimidation. It is essential that all the significant people in the child's life be true partners in the educational process.

Participation gives children the confidence to change their lives.

Consulting only the most easily accessible and articulate children results in the further marginalisation of the poorest children. True participation requires a long-term commitment by all parties involved. The poorest families must be sought out and empowered to contribute to this dialogue on a local, national, and international level. The poorest children must be identified and a relationship of understanding developed with them, with their contributions respected.

The consequences of poverty are isolation, shame, and guilt. Children living in poverty are not used to being listened to and taken seriously. The road to self-expression for these children is a difficult one, requiring care, understanding, and innovation.

The poorest as our benchmark

As the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights recently noted, development "can easily be achieved at the expense of, rather than in the name of, the poorest and hardest to reach."¹ For the very poorest children and their families, this real risk of being left behind as we move towards the realization of rights for all has dire consequences. We appeal to governments, the United Nations, and all stakeholders to consider the very poorest members of society in all actions in the fight against poverty. Let us measure our success by the situation of the very poorest and most vulnerable.

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¹ See http://www.wunrn.com/news/2007/07_07/07_09_07/071507_un4.htm