



ALL TOGETHER IN DIGNITY

ASIAN FORUM

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From ATD Fourth World Regional Team (Romy Hoffmann-Tran, Quyen Tran, Patricia and Claude Heyberger)

“Due to their lack of schooling, the poor are not comfortable when they are face to face with “educated” people because they think that they lack knowledge. They fear that they might be laughed at or scorned because of what they say. That is why it is important for people who are uneducated or those lacking in education to join talks and discussions that concern the community, society and organizations so that their knowledge increases and can be useful in their lives.”

**October 17, World Day for the
Eradication of Poverty**
www.overcomingpoverty.org

These words come from Mr. Waldo, an active participant in the Family Forum organized by ATD Fourth World in Manila. Mr. Waldo lives with his family under a bridge and sells newspapers, cigarettes and other goods along a highway for a living. Together with other adults from poor communities, with ATD core workers and supporters, Mr. Waldo participated in June and July in the evaluation planning process to review the programs and activities of ATD Fourth World in Manila.

Other participants, who do not have the experience of living in extreme poverty, commit their time, skills, and relationships to support the activities in the communities, and to create awareness and solidarity in their living and professional environments. They too expressed how much they need to increase their knowledge, in particular by knowledge that people living in poverty can bring. They recognized that sharing of knowledge between people whose lives are so different can not be improvised. Just meeting around a table does not automatically give all participants the confidence to speak up. These planning meetings were possible due to years of action and regular contact, getting to know and learning from each other.

In this letter, we share with you testimonies written by Anne and Violie, who are both living in the Philippines. The two articles give a glimpse of moments of peace and learning together when there is no split between "those who know" and "those who need to learn."

On the occasion of October 17, 2011 (24th World Day for the Eradication of Poverty), we are all invited to renew our will to look at each other with confidence, to learn from each other regardless of our educational backgrounds. Whenever possible, let us express publicly our commitment to do our part in eradicating extreme poverty, side by side: those who endure it in their own life together with all those who find it intolerable. Let us pledge for action where the experience and knowledge of all parties concerned are taken into account and the contribution of each of them is welcomed and valued.

Masayang (Happy) Festival of Learning 2011

Anne-Sylvie Laurent, a Swiss core-worker of ATD Fourth World, has been working with poor communities in Manila for three years. Every summer, during the school vacation, the Festival of Learning takes place in three different poor communities. The activities are prepared and carried out by adults and youth from these communities together with volunteers from other segments of society. Anne-Sylvie shares some impressions of this year's event.

“Learning means understanding who one is and what one experiences, in order to share it with others. It means having experiences which are not humiliating, experiences of which one can be proud. It means being able to take part in what others do. All children, all young people want to learn, want to know how to work, to express themselves, want to carry the hope of their people.”

These sentences by Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World are not ambitions; neither can we pretend achieving all of what they entail. But they are here to guide us in our actions and therefore apply for the Festival of Learning as well. In Manila, with different members of ATD Fourth World and other volunteers, we spent some weeks preparing, meeting, visiting, crafting and finally living the Festival of Learning with the members of three communities.

Would I have to keep one image, one memory in mind of the Festival of Learning this year, I would keep this one: a police officer reading with a child. Most often, for these children, the encounters with the police are not positive. They can be chased away from the streets, the shops,

because somehow their presence is disturbing for the rest of the society. Certain police officers do not do this with great pleasure either.



So giving each of them an opportunity to meet differently, through “experiences which are not humiliating, but of which one can be proud” is essential: on a Saturday, four police officers, wearing their uniform,

sat on the mats and read with the children. Then in their workshop, they did storytelling, explained their role in the community, the correct use of the whistle and weapon, the meaning of their badges. And when it started to rain, most of the children in the group did not go home, but continued drawing the police logo, while being protected by the mats the officers were holding...

Among other persons who came were a flight attendant, a nurse, a grooming specialist, a doctor, a group of students fond of poetry, theatre, dance. Other times

were filled with music, a computer workshop, storytelling, games and arts and crafts. All these persons came with the same desire to get to know children, youth, and adults from another reality and to experience something positive with them.

For us, the success of an activity is not achieved through usual teaching, but through respecting and loving. Then only teaching in the form of true sharing happens, from and for both sides.

Postal identity card, a reflection...

Violie Villarez is a volunteer in a grassroots project in Navotas, Manila. She helps with recording, transcribing and translating for a study group that takes part in the worldwide action-research of ATD Fourth World focused on "Violence faced by people living in extreme poverty: understanding their role as actors for peace." The following is an excerpt of her personal account of that experience.

I was the first Filipina volunteer here in the C3 Road Bridge community with the Sisters of the Good News. We started to work with the children then later with some mothers of the children. It was my first time to really do some volunteer work with the poorest of the poor here in Manila. At first, the dirt, the smell and seeing the grave situation of these people living under the bridge was disturbing, but being face to face with the hardship of the poorest families here, made me reflect on life. Sr. Anne asked me if I could help with the study group project and I immediately said yes. I already knew the mothers here and it was a great joy to meet them again and feel their warm welcome.

With the approach of an international seminar in England where our study group was invited to send a delegation, I helped some women prepare the papers to apply for their passport. To my dismay, I discovered how even getting a simple legal document like a birth certificate for them was hindered by insurmountable obstacles depriving them of having an identity. None of the delegates made it to the seminar in the end. When one mother got her postal ID she said she was already grateful to the Sisters, that now she existed, she was part of this society, she was known and able to find work, too.

Hearing her say, that she exists now, in my heart I cried silently and asked myself: Who am I? What am I doing here in this community? Am I here just for the sake of

volunteering until I get a regular work? Is my role here just to listen, record and translate or is there a call for me here also? Yes, I am not experiencing the everyday demolition of their houses. Yet, me too, I have lost somehow the security of my own status at this time of my personal journey. What does that mean to me? Hearing of their hunger, their being tired of the daily demolitions, I also realize what a comfortable life I have. I have my home, my family who supports my volunteering here. I cannot complain about the little discomfort I too am experiencing when others suffer a lot more pain and struggle in their everyday life.



Hearing their stories each time the study group met, I learnt to understand them and be more compassionate to them. Listening again to the recording of their sharing, I am aware that I am entering their "sacred ground", that they trust me to listen, encode their words and translate them into English. I have to be careful not to miss the heart of what they share because that is the voice they want to be heard.

I am blessed to listen to their voices, and each time, it seems like I am in a retreat. For what they say echoes my own inner struggle with the uncertainties of my future. Why worry so much? Why do I have so little faith in what is God's will for me? If they are able to entrust all to God's providence, they remind me to have the same faith. Ah, they don't know that I am the one who is having a great lesson in life here.



NEW! → The Story of Fon

"Would you like some flowers? Each garland only costs 10 baht!" – The little girl with the tray attached by a string around her neck makes her way from table to table in all the restaurants along the street. A child like so many everywhere in South East Asia. We usually see them at work. But how do they live? What are their outlook on life and their dreams?

This is a true story written in 2010 with a young Thai girl named Fon and her parents. Tapori, the worldwide children's network of ATD Fourth World, has included this story in its series "Children of Courage". It has been edited in Thai. Thanks to the voluntary contribution of friends, it has been translated into English, French, Chinese and Filipino, and illustrated with many drawings to share Fon's story worldwide.

In order to allow children from all backgrounds to connect with children living in precarious conditions, to encourage their understanding and openness, and to stir their capacity of responsiveness, this Tapori mini-book comes with an activity page inviting children to join the international booklet making campaign "About me". The "Children of Courage series" can be given to individual children, but is very effective when used in children's groups in schools or associations.

To receive a free e-copy of this Tapori mini-book (1086 KB), please write to region.asia@atd-fourthworld.com, specifying in which language you would like to receive it. Any initiative on your part to translate this mini-book into another Asian language is most welcome.