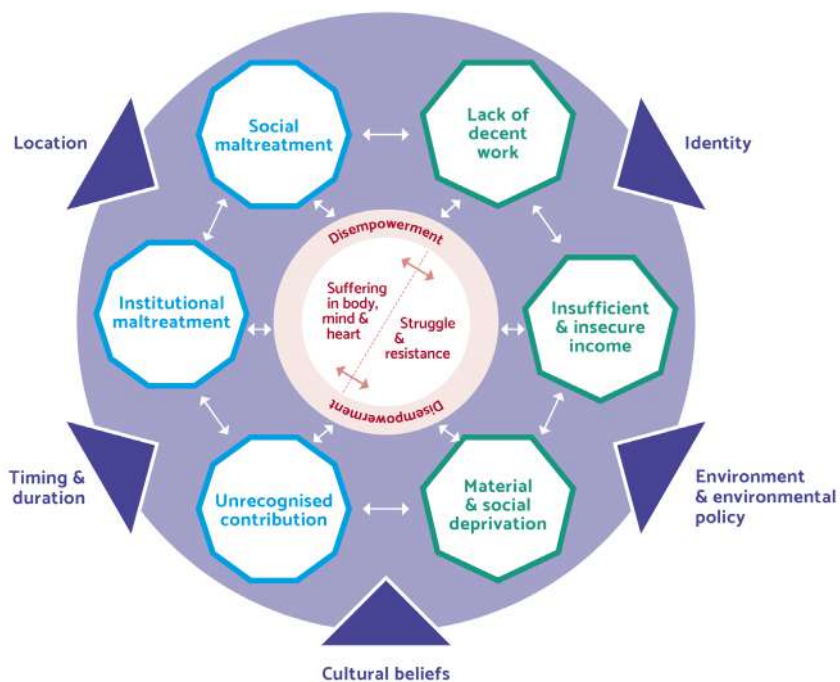


# The hidden dimensions of poverty

International participatory research led by  
ATD Fourth World and the University of Oxford



*ATD Fourth World - Oxford University  
diagram on the dimensions of poverty, January 2019*



# The hidden dimensions of poverty

---

International  
participatory research



To cite this publication: BRAY R., DE LAAT M., GODINOT X.,  
UGARTE A., WALKER R. (2019) *The Hidden Dimensions of Poverty*,  
Montreuil, Fourth World Publications

Editors of this report: Rachel BRAY and Robert WALKER, Oxford  
University; Marianne DE LAAT, Xavier GODINOT and Alberto  
UGARTE, ATD Fourth World

This document is the result of a collective process of contribution  
and critique from co-researchers in national teams from  
Bangladesh, Bolivia, France, Tanzania, the United Kingdom and  
the United States, whose names can be found in Annexe 4.

Responsibility for the final version lies with the International  
Coordination Team as per the above citation.

Layout and cover design: Cécile WINTREBERT

This report is also available on the International Movement ATD  
Fourth World website: [www.atd-fourthworld.org](http://www.atd-fourthworld.org)

© International Movement ATD Fourth World:  
All Together for Dignity

Printed in Saint Ouen L'Aumône

October 2019

ISBN: 979-10-91178-76-1

Price: 10 €



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Executive summary</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>1. Core experience</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Disempowerment .....	15
Suffering in body, mind and heart .....	16
Struggle and resistance .....	17
<b>2. Relational dynamics</b> .....	<b>19</b>
Institutional maltreatment .....	20
Social maltreatment .....	21
Unrecognised contributions .....	22
<b>3. Privations</b> .....	<b>24</b>
Lack of decent work .....	25
Insufficient and insecure income .....	26
Material and social deprivation .....	27
<b>Modifying factors</b> .....	<b>29</b>
Identity .....	30
Timing and duration .....	31
Location .....	32
Environment and environmental policy .....	33
Cultural beliefs .....	34
<b>Poverty in childhood &amp; poverty in old age</b> .....	<b>35</b>
<b>Conclusions and recommendations</b> .....	<b>40</b>
<b>Annexes</b> .....	<b>43</b>
1. Methodology / process .....	44
2. The Merging of Knowledge process .....	46
3. The process used for researching poverty in childhood and old age .....	47
4. Members of the National Research Teams .....	48
5. International coordination team .....	49
6. Academic advisory panel .....	50
7. Partners .....	51





# **Executive** **Summary**

**“Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere”** – the overarching goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – reflects a growing consensus on the need to consider other dimensions, beyond monetary ones, when thinking about poverty.

To improve the global understanding of multidimensional poverty, the International Movement ATD Fourth World, together with researchers from Oxford University, launched in 2016 an international research project in six countries (Bangladesh, Bolivia, France, Tanzania, the United Kingdom and the United States) to identify the key dimensions of poverty and their relationships.

The project is based on a *Merging of Knowledge* methodology, in which practitioners, academics, and people facing poverty are co-researchers. In this methodology, the different types of knowledge resulting from action, academic research, and life experiences are built first in an independent way through meetings with peer groups, then merged to enrich one another, resulting in new insights about the reality of poverty. This process has led to the identification of nine key poverty dimensions that, despite differences in the daily lives of people in poverty across countries, are surprisingly similar<sup>1</sup>.

Six of these dimensions were previously hidden or rarely considered in policy discussions. Existing alongside the more familiar **privations** relating to *lack of decent work, insufficient and insecure income and material and social deprivation*, three dimensions are **relational**. These draw attention to the way that people who are not confronting poverty affect the lives of those who are: *social maltreatment; institutional maltreatment and unrecognised contributions*.

The three dimensions that constitute the **core** experience of poverty place the anguish and agency of people at the centre of the conceptualisation of poverty: *suffering in body, mind and heart, disempowerment, and struggle and resistance*. These dimensions remind us why poverty must be eradicated. They also drive home that everyone, living in poverty or not, is dehumanised by the continued existence of poverty.

All nine dimensions of poverty are closely interdependent and typically, in varying degrees, experienced together, cumulatively rather than each independently, in isolation. While every dimension is evident in all countries and most contexts, each varies in form and degree according to: *location, urban, peri-urban, rural; timing and duration*, short spells differing from long spells, poverty experienced in childhood or in old age varying from that experienced in working age – our tentative findings suggest strong similarities between these two ends of the age spectrum owing to dependency and power relations; *cultural beliefs*, concerning for example, whether poverty is generally thought to be caused by structural factors or by personal failings; *identity* with discrimination on grounds such as ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation

adding to that associated with poverty; and *environment and environmental policy*, from climate change, soil degradation, pollution and associated policies, to urban deprivation and inadequate public infrastructure.

Exploratory research among children and older people reveals similar dimensions to those listed above. Children, though, experience two additional dimensions: absence of care and protection; and sacrifice for the family accompanied by social maltreatment and suffering. For both groups, interactions between dimensions seem to be intensified by identity, cultural norms with respect to childhood and old age, and by the duration of poverty.

The findings also demonstrate that true participation of people living in poverty with others is both possible in international research and moreover generates new insights.

1. The reports of each National Research Team enabled the international coordination team to draft this international synthesis titled 'The hidden dimensions of poverty'. The synthesis was then validated by the NRTs before completion.



# **Introduction**

This report presents findings from research that has sought to refine the understanding and measurement of poverty by engaging with people directly experiencing poverty, practitioners and academics. The longer-term goal is that the research should contribute to more sensitive policy design at national and international level and thereby to the eradication of poverty.

It is widely recognised that poverty is multidimensional. However, hitherto these dimensions have not been well specified, certain dimensions have gone unrecognised, and the ways in which the dimensions interact to shape the experience of poverty has not been properly understood.

**The research has involved teams in Bangladesh, Bolivia, France, Tanzania, the United Kingdom and the United States. People with direct experience of poverty, academics and practitioners, worked together as equals.** The research process – termed *Merging of Knowledge* (see Annex 1) – has made possible a transformation in thinking at individual, community and national levels through the generation and sharing of knowledge.

**Reaching out to listen to literally hundreds of people who are experiencing poverty** has made it possible to combine their knowledge with that of academics and practitioners through a process of multiple discussions in which the knowledge held by each group has been collectively challenged and evaluated. The result of each national process is a set of dimensions defining poverty in that country, as required to meet Sustainable Development Goal 1.2.

Comparing the six country-level sets of dimensions through face-to-face discussions involving representatives of the national research teams, it became apparent that many dimensions were local manifestations of the same underlying attributes of poverty. Therefore, we conclude that **the complexity of poverty is best described in terms of three inter-related sets of dimensions** as portrayed in Figure 1 and explained on subsequent pages.

**Core experience**  
*Disempowerment*  
*Suffering in body, mind and heart*  
*Struggle and resistance*

**Relational dynamics**  
*Institutional maltreatment*  
*Social maltreatment*  
*Unrecognised contributions*

**Privations**  
*Lack of decent work*  
*Insufficient and insecure income*  
*Material and social deprivation*

**The nine dimensions, and hence the experience of poverty, are further understood to be modified by five factors: identity; timing and duration; location; environment and environmental policy; and cultural beliefs.**

The three dimensions that define the core experience of poverty are deliberately located at the centre of the diagram (Figure 1) and discussed first. They draw attention to what people expressed very strongly in all six countries: the suffering resulting from disempowerment caused by privation and maltreatment and the way people respond to it through struggle and resistance. The core dimensions also emphasise that poverty is dynamic and that people in poverty are typically proactive not passive.

The relational dimensions of poverty have similarly received little attention from policymakers and academics, unlike the privations discussed later in the report. And, yet, there was a very close agreement between people experiencing poverty, practitioners and academics about how relational dimensions shape poverty. There was a similar agreement about the importance of the interactions between dimensions, as is evident in many of the quotations cited below.

The interactions are shown schematically in Figure 1 as is the influence of the five modifiers. While everybody's experience of poverty is unique, everything is potentially related and the nine dimensions and five moderators are clearly part of the shared experience of people in poverty.

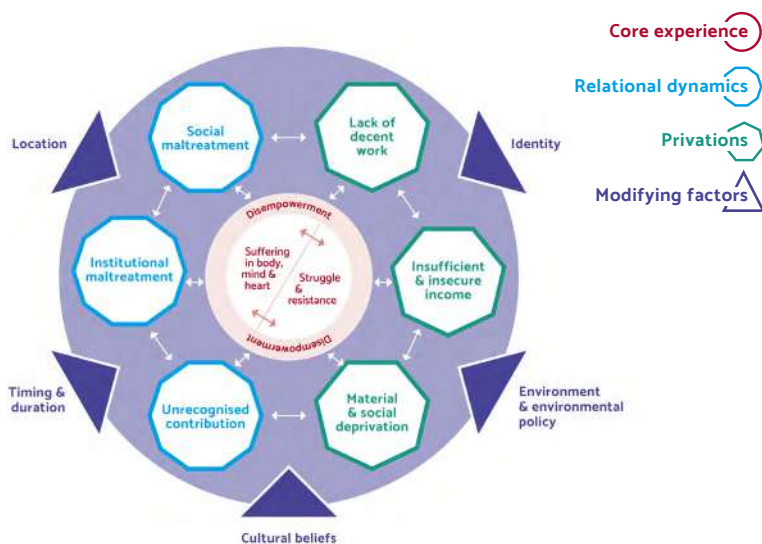


Figure 1

ATD Fourth World - Oxford University diagram on the dimensions of poverty, Jan 2019

# 1. Core experience

**These dimensions are very salient to people living in poverty, yet little understood across society. They are not adequately captured in current multi-dimensional poverty indices. Disempowerment is a prevalent experience that both stands alone and closely affects people's suffering and their struggle to survive and resist.**



# Disempowerment

## Definition

**Disempowerment is a lack of control and dependency on others resulting from severely constrained choices.**

## Description

Poverty is experienced as lack of control. Options and choices are limited and constrained by life circumstances and the actions of institutions. People experiencing poverty have little margin for error in the choices that they make because the consequences of wrong decisions are so severe. Moreover, while people in poverty are often accused of making bad choices, the reality is that they frequently face unthinkable choices between unpalatable options. Often, they have no say in decisions taken for them by people in authority over them. Poverty may mean compliance and forced dependence on others resulting in dehumanisation and a loss of dignity. Lack of control with limited choice increases risk and can undermine the chance of getting out of poverty while creating feelings of insecurity and fear.

*“Rich people can buy everything, they use their power to take everything a poor person deserves. They can access everything society has to offer.”*

Person in poverty, Bangladesh

*“Dependence has different forms and different levels. It is most extreme when my need is critical and my survival lies in the hands of others. I have no choice; I must depend on others or on an institution, I suffer”.*

Co-written report of Merging of Knowledge session, France

*“Poverty feels like a tangled web that you can never escape”.*

Person in poverty, UK

*“Poor people are powerless in society. They cannot raise their voice because they know nobody listens to them. Rich people control everything”.*

Practitioner, Bangladesh

*“We are controlled by the greed of a few”.*

Activist<sup>2</sup>, US

*“Poverty creates a situation where you expect that blows may come from anywhere at any time from any source and you must be permanently braced against them”.*

Opinion-formers<sup>3</sup> and decision-makers, UK

*“Any form of poverty generates dependence on institutional systems and can lead to a form of submission. If you don’t submit, you get out of the loop and it gets very complicated”.*

Practitioners, France

2. During their first long-distance Skype meeting in January 2017, the US National Research Team decided to use the term ‘activist’ for people with direct experience of poverty. Their aim was to avoid labelling people negatively, given that practitioners and academics are known by their professions. We have complied with this decision throughout this document.

3. Opinion-formers are politicians, researchers and journalists who influence or ‘form’ public opinion.

*“We don’t have stable work, so we don’t have the money needed for freedom of choice. Our kids want to study and we tell them ‘We don’t have money’. They get upset and ask us: ‘Why did you promise me I could study and now you say there’s no money?’ As if we’re happy to cut our children’s wings”.*

Person in poverty, Bolivia

*“We talked a lot about how people in power want to erase and discard people who live in persistent poverty”.*

Practitioner, US

*“Rich people take advantage of people in poverty. There is economic exploitation. Small farmers are forced to sell their own products at the prices set by rich city people. Most of the time the rich also manipulate measurements to take advantage of people living in poverty”.*

Peer group of people in poverty, Tanzania

---

## Suffering in body, mind and heart

### Definition

**Living in poverty means experiencing intense physical, mental and emotional suffering accompanied by a sense of powerlessness to do anything about it.**

### Description

Lives are shortened because physical and mental health are undermined through low-quality housing, inadequate diet and the daily demands of survival. Many people in poverty cannot practice preventive care because they have no access to healthy food, or they live in polluted areas. Both malnutrition and obesity can be prevalent. A lack of health care, including dentistry and eye care, can increase health problems. Poor health caused by multiple privations leaves people physically and emotionally scarred.

The suffering includes negative thoughts and emotions that never end and can be overwhelming: constant fear of what could happen, of losing very scarce resources or assets, of what others will say on being ‘found out’ as poor; stress and anxiety caused by the difficulty of coping with uncertainty; shame related to living conditions and the need to ask for help and assistance, guilt about being without key resources or unable to give to others; unbearable pain in being separated from children; despair and discouragement when no end to poverty is in sight. These can provoke levels of frustration, anger, depression and hopelessness that lead to self-neglect or even death by suicide. Self-medication with drugs or alcohol is used as a temporary relief from this suffering. When people internalise daily experiences of injustice and dehumanisation, this undermines their self-esteem.

Parents suffer, children suffer and they also suffer for each other.

These sufferings reinforce each other, making life more intolerable. The intensity of suffering can lead to avoiding contact with others for fear of being judged or shamed. This contributes to social isolation.

*“Poverty means being part of a system that leaves you waiting indefinitely in a state of fear and uncertainty. Poverty kills dreams and cages the dreamers”.*

People in poverty, UK

*“We learn to suffer in silence’. This can lead to anxiety and/or serious health conditions and, for some, internal rage”.*

US Activist, US research team report

*“Stress is more common, because you don’t know how to feed the children. There’s more depression, more despair”.*

Academic, Bolivia

*“I asked my school pupils to run around the football pitch to stimulate their bodies. Suddenly, I saw that six out of seven pupils had collapsed. At first, we thought they were sick. Then we discovered it was because of hunger. Children in poor families become weak because they go to bed without eating and have no breakfast before school”.*

Practitioner, Tanzania

*“There are days when I can’t think any more. It seems that the brain is taking shelter; it no longer works because there is too much misfortune, too much grief. It looks like the brain is taking care of itself. It happens to me sometimes and when it happens, I say I’m empty”.*

Person in poverty, France

*“You can’t get to sleep, you’re thinking ‘what can I do?’. What am I going to feed my children? You feel really bad; it hurts here inside”.*

Person in poverty, Bolivia

*“The physical and mental problems related to poverty leave a person fragile and vulnerable. When people say their age, we are often surprised because their appearance suggested that they were older”.*

Practitioner, France

*“When people are ill, we hear their complaints, cries, screaming, moaning at home. But we cannot send them to hospital. We have to see and hear, yet we cannot do anything”.*

Person in poverty, Bangladesh

*“Poverty is a burden on the shoulder: it is complicated to assume and bear all the difficulties, the reproaches of society and of those around you”.*

Practitioner, France

---

## Struggle and Resistance

### Definition

**There is an ongoing struggle to survive, which includes resisting and counteracting the effects of the many forms of suffering brought by privations, abuse, and lack of recognition.**

## Description

Struggling and resisting are intimately linked in people's efforts to survive, achieve inner balance and to enable themselves, and particularly their children, to have a better life. The struggle takes different forms, many of which remain invisible to the rest of society.

Creativity is used to meet basic needs in imaginative ways, a process through which new skills are learnt. The courage shown by people living in poverty is a source of energy often rooted in their hope and desire to give a better life to their children. They call upon strong inner willpower to focus on opportunities for better things for themselves and those close to them. Compassion motivates ongoing care for family members.

*“Sometimes I feel sad, I don't know where my next meal is going to come from. But when I think about my children, I gain energy and strength to find food for them. I hope that when they grow up, they will get out of this poverty”.*

Person in poverty, Tanzania

*“When I have old clothes, I make new ones out of them. When we have nearly nothing to eat, I make cakes with what I have. I grow my own vegetables. We make do”.*

Person in poverty, France

*“Rich people don't help each other but people in poverty do willingly when they know someone's needs”.*

Person in poverty, Bangladesh

*“If the state takes your child away because of poverty, what is left behind is immense suffering. The action is recognised, but not the suffering, nor what we do to continue, to overcome and to work together. These are two sides of the same coin”.*

Person in poverty, UK

People living in poverty tend to share the little they have with others, possibly reducing their scarce resources and keeping them in poverty. However, this habit creates the feeling of a shared struggle and solidarity, helping to prevent despair or suicidal thoughts. Examples include sharing food, lending each other clothes or household utensils, planning a social gathering together and doing collective work such as small group farming or street cleaning.

*“Living in poverty is engaging in an obstacle course with fewer resources than the others. The impact is everywhere, in all dimensions. It is a daily struggle, a battle with enormous obstacles, it is life lived from day to day”.*

Practitioners peer group, France

*“People in poverty who have people who depend on them (children) have to fight like crazy with all the odds against them. You fight, or you give up, and I think people only give up in extreme cases”.*

Academic, Bolivia

*“People living in poverty want to ensure that the ways communities resist together are included in the bigger picture. By omitting them, interventions could be imposed on communities that disrupt the ways of being that actually are very helpful among people”.*

Academic, US

# 2. Relational Dynamics

**These dimensions are rooted in everyday relationships between individuals, social groups of all kinds and institutions. They show that poverty is shaped by how different groups in society perceive and treat each other. They are new in the sense that they do not feature in existing multi-dimensional indices of poverty.**

# Institutional maltreatment

## Definition

**Institutional maltreatment is the failure of national and international institutions, through their actions or inaction, to respond appropriately and respectfully to the needs and circumstances of people in poverty, and thereby to ignore, humiliate and harm them.**

## Description

Formal institutions, public and private, shape the negative experience of poverty through public discourse and the design and implementation of policy and services; and also, through their neglect of, and failure to listen to people living in poverty. While some institutions are mandated to tackle poverty and improve people's lives, they frequently fail to do so. Sometimes this means living with the consequences of persistent corruption, government failure to enforce existing policy and law, and unfair distribution of resources and services. It also means having no access to justice and no voice in decisions made by government or in civil society.

In framing policies, institutions tend to reflect, amplify and shape discriminatory attitudes rather than to challenge them. Likewise, the design and implementation of policies can serve to exclude people in poverty, fail to meet their basic needs, and stigmatise them. Often people in poverty find their dealings with institutions to be characterised by judgement, domination, obligation and control that stifle voices and result in the denial of rights, disempowering them.

When people try to move out of poverty, they do not find the support they hope for from institutions designed to enable or empower them.

*“Due to lack of good governance there is a lack of employment and money. Most of us have to pay a bribe to get a job. But even this is not a guarantee to get the job”.*

Practitioner, Bangladesh

*“Some social workers are very quick to break up families. Those who want to keep families together get over-ruled by managers. It is about the department and not the workers”.*

Practitioner, UK

*“Out of sight, out of mind: that's government thinking. Resources are just enough to set people up to fail. The human-to-human aspect of services is missing”.*

Practitioner US

*“Leaders in our village have created many taxes which affect us badly. Anything you offer for sale in a market has to be taxed whether you have sold it or not. During local auction day, if you take a goat to sell in order to get money to help your family, you must pay a tax. If you cannot sell the goat, then on your way back with your unsold goat you have to pay another tax”.*

Peer group of men in poverty, Tanzania

*“The system is not designed to enable you to evolve out of it. It keeps us in a constant phase of being below. This system puts you in a situation and blames you for this situation. It is sometimes like you have to steal your way out of poverty”.*

Activist, US

*“A person in poverty might even have a school to go to, but the question is: what quality of teaching are you going to get? The problem goes beyond families in poverty being unable to access schools. Government and wider society don’t give them opportunities. They fail to offer quality services or show a sincere desire to help them escape from poverty”.*

Academic, Bolivia

*“People no longer dare to go to the town hall because they are not well-received, they no longer want to go there to process administrative formalities”.*

Practitioners, France

---

## Social maltreatment

### Definition

**Social maltreatment describes the way that people in poverty are negatively perceived and treated badly by other individuals and informal groups.**

### Description

The public’s behaviour towards people in poverty is characterized by prejudicial negative judgements, stigma and blame. People living in poverty are often ignored or excluded, while the phenomenon of “othering” (saying or thinking “We’re not like those people”) is commonplace. Sometimes the behaviour is conscious and intentional, other times it is not. Sometimes it results from a lack of understanding of poverty.

Social maltreatment goes unchallenged because people in poverty are not recognised for what they bring to society. Relatedly, it creates a setting for institutional maltreatment that, in turn, results in differential access to resources and in the denial of rights. Social maltreatment is more acute for people who are additionally subject to prejudice on other grounds such as disability, gender, sexual orientation or ethnicity. It can also be exacerbated by certain cultural traditions and beliefs.

*“Poverty is being treated like cattle, you have no dignity and no identity”.*

Person in poverty, UK

*“We shouldn’t be asking ‘What’s wrong with you?’ but ‘What happened to you?’”*

Practitioner, US

*“There is discrimination because we haven’t got any money; we’re not well dressed; we haven’t studied; we’re not professionals; we don’t speak properly”.*

Person in poverty, Bolivia

*“Being a victim of prejudice means first being considered as poor, but not as a human being. It means being labelled as ‘poor’. There is a duality: on one side, people living in poverty are invisible, on the other side they are visible because they are stigmatised”.*

Academic peer group, France

*“If a woman from a family in poverty must work late and gets home after dark, there is malicious gossip about her. But if the woman belongs to a rich family then it’s not a problem. The neighbours will not speak badly about her”.*

Person in poverty, Bangladesh

*“An elderly woman in poverty testified how she is excluded from almost all social events such as weddings in her neighborhood. Her neighbors know that she is unable to contribute financially, so they do not invite her”.*

Woman in poverty, Tanzania

*“Here, in the US, who you are is defined by what you have. When you have not much, you are not much. And then, you are not treated like you belong”.*

Activist, US

*“We discriminate against them out of ignorance. We don’t know anything about their lives. We haven’t experienced their reality”.*

Practitioner, Bolivia

---

## Unrecognised contributions

### Definition

**The knowledge and skills of people living in poverty are rarely seen, acknowledged or valued. Often, individually and collectively, people experiencing poverty are wrongly presumed to be incompetent.**

### Description

People survive through resourcefulness. They find different ways to create goods or services beyond what is expected. Against the odds, they fulfil many important roles, often supporting others and making significant economic and social contributions. However, society ignores such contributions or treats them with indifference, to the point where people in poverty may themselves underestimate their knowledge and skills.

*“Poverty is like being fished by the big net of society and then discarded for not being fit for its purpose”.*

Practitioner, UK



*“The skills that are learned from experience by people living in poverty are not valued or considered marketable. In the economic sphere, people in poverty are considered and treated as disposable, and this creates uncertainty and instability in their lives”.*

Research team report, US

*“A farmer cultivates paddy and others crops for our country. If he didn’t, then rich people would not get food easily. The hard work of farmers is a very important contribution for our country, yet we never give much respect to the farmer for his work”.*

Practitioner, Bangladesh

*“The asylum(-seeker) system grossly limits the ways in which you can contribute to society. You have no right to work”.*

Opinion-formers and decision-makers, UK

*“Women play important roles in domestic affairs and family chores including farming, feeding children and other subsistence economic activities. Yet their roles as main producers of household wealth and income are not recognised or valued”.*

Academic, Tanzania

*“We’re very skilled in finding ways to earn money; we know how to knit; we know how to do so many things, like recycling. But nobody values these skills. Nobody says ‘They make an effort.’ Our skills are made invisible”.*

Person in poverty, Bolivia

*“We have wealth as human beings in what we bring to others. This encourages us to join associations, unions or political parties to work towards a better future”.*

People living in poverty, France

*“People living in poverty have indigenous knowledge and skills; some are good blacksmiths, ceramic artists, etc. Because they are not recognised or marketed, their skills, which could contribute to poverty reduction, remain unused”.*

Elders in poverty, Tanzania

# 3. Privations

**These dimensions refer to a lack of resources; monetary, material, cultural and social. They are recognised in policy discourse and feature in some existing multi-dimensional indices of poverty.**

# Lack of decent work

## Definition

**Lack of decent work refers to the prevalent experience of being denied access to work that is fairly paid, safe, secure, regulated and dignified.**

## Description

People in poverty often start working when they are very young, and from this moment they experience exploitation, bad treatment and humiliation. Dignified employment is often scarce, forcing people to accept bad jobs that endanger their health, have no (or very little) positive impact on life trajectories and can add to their insecurity. Few such jobs are regulated or unionised, leaving people vulnerable to various forms of exploitation including sexual abuse, or being fired without warning and payment.

Pay is rarely fair in relation to market rates or hours worked and may be offered in kind rather than as cash. Some workers are paid nothing at all, through breach of contract or as indentured labourers. People frequently struggle to get any time off and need to take on multiple jobs to make ends meet. Many are forced to travel long distances to work. Others migrate in search of employment, which means living apart from their families.

Work available in the global South includes stone breaking, domestic work in other people's homes, casual manual labour, rickshaw-pulling, smallholder farming, street vending, shoe-shining, scavenging etc. In the global North, short-term or casual, "zero-hour" contracts are common<sup>4</sup>. Most available jobs do not provide a living wage and access to formal employment requires qualifications and documentation. Broader relational, organisational or entrepreneurial skills gained through daily life in poverty are not recognised.

*"As women selling food at the fish market, we have a hard time keeping our male customers. Some demand sex. When you refuse, you end up losing them".*

Woman in poverty, Tanzania

*"We have no choice, we have to do the work that others don't want to do. Our children are not able to continue their studies because we don't have enough money".*

Person in poverty, France

*"Small-scale farmers are exploited by middle-men and have no say in setting prices for their crops".*

Practitioner, Bangladesh

4. In a "zero-hour" contract, the employer is not obliged to provide any minimum working hours, while the employee may sign an agreement to be available for work as and when required.

*“You work at whatever you can find, because you owe it to your children. You look for work, but you can’t find any”.*

Person in poverty, Bolivia

*“A woman working in a quarry as a stone breaker said: “We are overworked but underpaid. Most women who work in the quarry usually wake up at 5 am and work from 6 am to 4 pm. At the end of the day, they are paid Tsh 2000 – 5000 (around \$ 0,85 – 2,10)”.*

Woman in poverty, Tanzania

*“Problems with immigration status restrict us to ‘jobs that lie at the bottom of society”.*

Activist, US

*“A lot of people who we’re around don’t have a regular job. They get casual labour and that leads them into poverty”.*

Practitioner, Bolivia

*“People who work for low incomes have to rely on food banks”.*

Person in poverty, UK

# Insufficient and insecure income

## Definition

**This dimension refers to having too little income to be able to meet basic needs and social obligations, to keep harmony within the family and to enjoy good living conditions.**

## Description

Without sufficient money, people may go into debt to cover basic needs, thereby becoming more dependent on others and at risk of exploitation and greater economic insecurity. Sometimes, adult incomes are so low that their children are forced to work to support the family. This work can put children in physical danger and at risk of abuse.

*“Poverty is worrying about money all the time”.*

Person living in poverty, UK

*“Without money you can’t do anything, there is no life”.*

Person in poverty, Bolivia

*“When we had no money we had to search in the forest for food. Sometimes we ate leaves and roots, without knowing if they were safe for our health”.*

Person in poverty, Tanzania

*“If people have no work to do and cannot earn money then they cannot change their situation/condition”.*

Academic, Bangladesh

*“I don’t know what my next meal is going to be or where it’s going to come from”.*

Activist, US

*“Not being able to pay the rent and utilities”.*

Person living in poverty, France

*“The only affordable housing is in dirty, unsafe, and flood-prone settings”.*

Academic, Tanzania

*“The lack of money at home means: parents forcing their young daughters to marry early to receive the dowry; having to wear old, damaged and worn clothes; you cannot repair your house; no toilet; lack of clothing;*

*you cannot even buy soap; no electricity, no kerosene, no lamp to study; you cannot go to school; child labour; empty stomach obliges to steal food; pain for not being able to afford food and medical treatment; insolvency, high interest credits; dependency; feeling helpless; begging, prostitution”.*

Characteristics of the ‘insufficient income’ dimension, Bangladesh

---

# Material and social deprivation

## Definition

**Material and social deprivation refers to a lack of access to the goods and services necessary to live a decent life, participating fully in society.**

## Description

The necessary resources include: sufficient nutritious food; adequate clothing; affordable, quality housing with good sanitation, clean water, and a reliable energy supply providing security and privacy; non-discriminatory education in well-equipped schools; affordable, accessible and effective health and dental care; serviceable public transport; and non-hazardous environments. Lack of access to these resources means that individuals, families, and communities are unable to meet daily needs, live with dignity, or have sufficient quality time for family or personal growth. It also means children being denied the possibility to grow and develop normally.

*“Poverty means not having a place of your own. When you’re hosted by someone, you have a sword of Damocles hanging over your head”.*

Person in poverty, France

*“Poverty is having no clothes to keep warm in winter. It’s the bad smell from clothes that cannot be dried outside in a dilapidated, badly ventilated hut. We always feel hungry. We always have dirty feet because we have no shoes”.*

Peer group of people in poverty, Bangladesh

*“Poverty is not just about money: there is poverty of education and exclusion from special things”.*

Practitioner, UK

*“Overcrowding is terrible, the whole extended family lives in one room of three square meters. If you sleep in the same room that you cook in, the dampness affects your health”.*

Practitioner, Bolivia

*“Poverty means embarrassment and a feeling of failure at not being able to provide certain things for the kids, like an Xbox, shoes, iPhones etc”.*

Person in poverty, UK

*“Some pupils came to school without tucking their shirts into their shorts. A teacher punished them because he did not know that they did so to avoid the shame of having torn shorts and lacking underwear”.*

Practitioner, Tanzania

*“School environments can create barriers for children living in poverty: parents have to work and can’t come to parents’ evenings. Non-school uniform days can highlight children living in poverty”.*

Practitioner, UK

*“The hardest thing is not having bread to eat every day. If you don’t have food you don’t have the strength to work and you don’t have ideas”.*

Person in poverty, Bolivia

*“You have to choose what is most important to pay for. The home, electricity and water come first; other material things come second”.*

Activist, US

# **Modifying** **factors**

**These five factors were found to intensify or mitigate poverty:**

# Identity

The ways people experiencing poverty are perceived and responded to by others and by wider society are affected by their multiple identities. The same is true of the way they feel about themselves. People in poverty are often stigmatised and discriminated against by others based on stereotypes, prejudice and ignorance. Other groups are treated negatively in a similar way according to gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and migrant/immigrant status. When people in poverty belong, or are assigned, to other negatively perceived groups, the stigma is cumulative.

*“Poverty in France is a lack of trust between colours. If we go to a company, they will take white French and not black Comorians. It’s rare to trust black people”.*

Migrants peer group France

*“Throughout American history, society has always favored patriarchy and leaned towards white supremacist dominance”.*

US research team report, 2018

*“In boarding schools English was taught. You were not allowed to speak your own language under fear of punishment. No one was allowed to speak Navajo.’ The indigenous language is lost so there is a disconnect in our lives. There is a need to relearn the language so we can reconnect with ourselves”.*

Activist peer group report, US

*“ When people come from the countryside, they can’t speak Spanish, they speak Aymara, but when they don’t have identity papers, they’re not received”.*

Person in poverty, Bolivia

*“Characteristics of gender issues linked to lack of good governance include: no equality of men and women; sons are prioritized; women lack protection and security; no importance is accorded to women’s opinion; there is gender discrimination and sexual harassment”.*

Bangladesh, Merging of Knowledge event, August 2018

*“Oppression of women” is a dimension of poverty in rural Tanzania and “violence against women” an important characteristic of poverty in urban Tanzania. “Increased violence against women often results in divorce. Women and girls are subjected to harmful cultural traditions depriving women of their rights to customary land and property ownership and preventing girls from attending school. There are early marriages and forced marriages for daughters. Women have no freedom of choice, are not able to contribute ideas and have a low level of decision-making”.*

Tanzania research team report, September 2018

*“Poverty is intersectional; discrimination, sexism, racism, homophobia”.*

Peer group of opinion formers/decision makers, UK



# Timing and Duration

The point in the life course when poverty is experienced affects its intensity and impact as well as the opportunity to move out of poverty. When experienced over a long period, poverty entails an accumulation of pressures and demands with more severe impacts on all dimensions, particularly privations. Repeated spells of poverty exacerbate suffering through failed hopes and aspirations.

*“My mum and dad were both in poverty; that’s why they couldn’t put us in school; they had nothing. I’m following the same path as my mum. You have money for an instant; you’re poor all your life”.*

Person in poverty, Bolivia

*“We talked about the vicious circle. When you are born into a poor family, you are more likely to be poor and remain poor. Because the system makes it harder to get out of it, makes the situation worse. This is the idea of social determinism”.*

Academic peer group, France

*“We have talked about the poverty in which some people find themselves following a life accident, for example losing a job. It is “a descent into hell”. They start from the top and fall to the bottom. It is difficult because they can compare with their previous life. For others, they are born into poverty because their families were already living in poverty. They have only known poverty and nothing else. They have nothing to compare with”.*

Peer group of people in poverty, France

*“I don’t know what to do for my children. I am very worried about the future. When I see them coming here in Boko to break stones for the whole day with me, I wonder what will be their future. When I think about this, I cannot sleep during the night”.*

Person in poverty, Tanzania

*“You think, ‘If I can just make it to the end of the week everything will be OK’”.*

Activist, US

*“Administrative red tape means that you can control yourself only some of your time, other time is out of your hands. You may apply for a different type of subsidy but how long it takes for you to receive it is out of your control even though it may be something that you need”.*

Academic, US

# Location

The precise experience of poverty is sensitive to location: varying by country; between rural and urban areas; and more and less deprived neighbourhoods. Disadvantaged areas, both rural and urban, shape the lives of people experiencing poverty. They are often distinguished by inadequate infrastructure, isolation, a dearth of services, and lack of public transportation. Frequently, there are few employment opportunities or a relative abundance of low quality and precarious jobs paying inadequate wages. Such services as are present are often of inferior quality with underfunded and failing schools, inadequate health facilities and an absence of shops selling healthy and affordable food. Due to high population density, inadequate housing and deficient sanitation, outbreaks of contagious disease can occur. Residents may also be stigmatised by the bad reputation of their neighbourhood.

*“In reality, health facilities are very, very far from our homes. For our village, it is now becoming normal to see pregnant women losing their babies at birth because when it is time to give birth, they do not have the means to travel to the hospital”.*

Woman in poverty, Tanzania

*“I think that violence and poverty is exacerbated because you're more exposed. (The families in worst poverty) suffer more, much more, and are more at risk, because they live in unsafe neighbourhoods”.*

Academic, Bolivia

*“They put you in a crappy place, don't give enough services, and 'hopefully' you die in this crappy place because that's all you deserved”.*

Activist, US

*“When I followed the administrative procedures, since I came from the shelter, I was already seen as a 'poor person'. The way they look at me, I already feel poor compared to others. Even in the high school where we are sheltered, even there, through the eyes of our friends, we already felt poor. The building where I live is recognized as 'the building for the poor’”.*

Person in poverty, France

*“Poverty means disconnection from adequate resources in a remote rural area. Because of the rural geographic distances, doctors are hours away by car. There is a lack of jobs, education and growth opportunities. It's hard to get a doctor who wants to stay in this area”.*

Practitioner peer group, US

# Environment and environmental policy

The experience of poverty is also influenced by the nature and degree of environmental degradation and various forms of pollution. Examples include extreme weather events such as floods and droughts, deforestation, air and water pollution,

increased use of pesticides and plastics, reduced habitat for biodiversity, and exhaustion of land. People in poverty are more exposed to the negative consequences of these phenomena and have no means to protect their families, livestock and other assets or to move out of harm's way. Climate and environmental policies are often shaped without reference to their impact on people in poverty.

*“Climate change has to do with people in poverty not being able to deal with the changes. Its immediate effects will have bigger repercussions on them (ex: Hurricane Sandy)”.*

Activist peer group, US

*“‘Environmental degradation’ and ‘negative impact of climate change’ are dimensions of poverty in rural and urban Bangladesh with the following characteristics: famine, air pollution, sound pollution, cooking smoke, playing in a dirty environment, water logging, salinity, natural disaster, cyclones, man-made disaster, river erosion, lack of proper land use, lack of arable and animal pasture land, decreasing resources, deforestation, use of pesticides and plastic, effect of climate change on agriculture, environmental disasters due to competitive development, lack of habitat for biodiversity, ecological imbalance etc”.*

Bangladesh research team report, August 2018

*“In rural Tanzania, lack of water is a dimension of poverty since ‘ordinary people, including people living in poverty, consider the absence of clean water to be an indicator of abject poverty, without which life cannot be sustained’. Some attributes of this dimensions are: ‘community conflicts caused by scarcity of water; outbreaks of water-borne and contagious diseases such as cholera due to unsafe water; inaccessibility of water sources due to long distances, requiring time spent especially for women, depriving them of time to engage in other productive activities; inability to maintain bodily cleanliness”.*

Tanzania research team report, September 2018

*“Environmental issues in our area affect health because of; water quality; black/brown lung disease from coal mines and coal dust; underground mining that injects well water with chemicals; high cancer rates and thyroid issues; high drug use rates. People self-medicate with drugs and alcohol. Doctors are hours away by car and give out too many prescriptions for opioids. Preventive health care is very low in the list of government priorities”.*

Practitioner peer group, US

*“There are diseases caused by the bad water resources. They contaminate food and increase illness rates. Economically, disease affects livestock and production in the northern highlands”.*

University student, Bolivia

# Cultural beliefs

Cultural beliefs not only affect how poverty is defined and understood, they can shape the way that people in poverty are treated. They can in and of themselves be a cause of poverty. Countries differ in the extent to which the general public attributes the causes of poverty to structural factors or to individual failings. This helps determine the balance in policy between financial and social support, between selectivity with welfare benefits based on financial need and universal or categorical provisions that foster solidarity and social cohesion. It also determines whether people in poverty are blamed, punished, pitied, despised or respected. Culture creates financial expectations, for example, the need for gifts, dowries, parties, ceremonies and expenditures on witchcraft, which put pressure on family budgets and excludes those who cannot afford to participate. It defines who is expected to engage in paid work and who should do unpaid labour; who should receive assistance and who should be denied it, for what reasons and in what circumstances.

*“People gossip nastily. If your husband was killed by a tiger, they pretend that you are the reason behind that; you bring bad luck; you are a witch. I have to suffer a lot of violence and stigmatisation. I am harassed in the family and in the community, because my husband was killed by a tiger”.*

Person in poverty, Bangladesh

*“Involved in superstitious beliefs e.g. being attached to traditional witchcraft in the hope of becoming rich, bewitching others, ‘making their lucky stars vanish’, resorting to fortune-tellers; and earning money through ‘magic ways’”.*

Tanzania research team report

*“America takes pride in describing itself as a land of opportunities where anyone, regardless of their socioeconomic status, can pull themselves up by their bootstraps and achieve upward mobility. People are judged by the extent to which they have achieved the American Dream based on their material possessions and the ability to provide a better life for their children. These cultural assumptions foster a sense of failure and inadequacy for the more than 40 million Americans who live in poverty and are striving to better their families’ lives without seeing results, most often for reasons out of their control”.*

US research team report, 2019

**Poverty in**  
**childhood**

**&**

**Poverty**  
**in old age**

# Poverty in childhood

Research was undertaken in Bangladesh and Tanzania<sup>5</sup> to find out whether poverty is experienced and defined differently in childhood, as compared to working age. The findings are exploratory because work was done with children in only two of the six countries, both in the global South. Fewer people participated than in the working-age study, and the process to merge understandings of poverty from children, practitioners and academics was not as thorough (see Annex 2).

## Findings

Children readily identified experiences of poverty in their lives, some of which were new to practitioners and academics. Most dimensions of poverty in childhood are the same as those defined for working age people. Suffering in body includes: lack of good food (“eating from the rubbish tips, going to bed without a meal”); weight loss; frequent illness and inability to get health care; awareness of which adds to the mental suffering from being harassed, beaten or victimised at school, work and/or home.

*“When I go to school people criticize and make fun of me, saying ‘Look, this one is older than the others but still going to school!’”*

Bangladesh

*“At school the other pupils laugh at us because we are poor. Neighbours see us as worthless and reject us. Teachers accuse us of skipping school when we help our parents at work, and they beat us”.*

Tanzania

Children resist such suffering through inner courage and acts of solidarity with family or friends.

*“When I understand the maths better than my classmates I stay after school to explain it to them”.*

Tanzania

Surprising to some adults is the level of children’s awareness of social and institutional maltreatment affecting them and their families. Children feel neglected by wealthier people and by government, and constrained by low-quality schooling and lack of internet access or opportunities to earn.

*“Rich people living in cities have motors to get water and they make an illegal connection to the government water supply. So when water is being supplied by the government for everyone, the rich people gather lots of water in their tanks and leave people in poverty without enough clean water”.*

Bangladesh

5. Systematic research with children was not conducted in the other four countries due to time and resource constraints.

## Two dimensions are specific to children:

### 1. Absence of care and protection from families and communities

Children understand their parents' need to work yet feel neglected when their everyday needs are not met, and they feel vulnerable to danger or abuse. These experiences are worse for children in foster families or institutions who are not treated well, and who feel they receive less love than their peers.

*"My mother is always busy at the fish market; she does not have time to wash our clothes. I often wear one pair of trousers from Monday to Sunday without showering or changing."*

Tanzania

*"Children are not safe at home on their own, yet there is no other option when both parents are out at work".*

Practitioner, Bangladesh

### 2. Sacrifice for the family accompanied by intense social maltreatment and suffering

Children prioritise their family's needs (e.g. by accepting to leave school or earning independently) while knowing the costs to their reputation and for their future.

*"My parents asked me to stop my studies, saying 'You should work'. I don't like to work but I have to work instead of study".*

Bangladesh

*"Sometimes we steal something to take home for our parents because they need it. We say that a friend gave it to us. We know we will be shamed and excluded if we tell the truth".*

Tanzania

Missing school or falling behind in their studies is painful for children because they feel helpless in the face of low-quality teaching, parental workloads, and discrimination. They also feel angry and frightened about their future because they see a good education as necessary to move out of poverty.

*"I spend the whole day fishing in the lake. There is no time to sit with my parents to discuss the challenges I face when trying to do well at school, or the dangers on the road to school".*

Tanzania

*"I am trying to study hard so I can pass the national examination. I want to be like my teacher and not like my daddy".*

Tanzania

Children bear an extra burden of suffering on behalf of their parents who they love and see are not coping. They experience related disempowerment:

*"This is a picture of my father who works very hard. There is no one who can help my father. I want to help my father but he doesn't agree to this because the work is tough and could harm me".*

Bangladesh

The very close relationships between dimensions (e.g. disempowerment and suffering), accompanied by the cumulative effects of several modifying factors (timing in the life course, gender preferences, cultural beliefs about age-related competence and participation, location), can combine to make poverty in childhood a more miserable experience and more damaging over the long term than if its onset occurs only at working-age.

*“In our country, girls and women are often sexually harassed by boys and men when they go to school, college, market, or when*

*they travel anywhere by bus or train”.*  
Bangladesh

Our study suggests that childhood poverty is experienced in similar ways across settings, with some differences. Children living in the rural areas where we conducted the research lack earning opportunities and reproductive health education, and face more discrimination than their urban peers do if they are orphaned or have a disability. Those living in cities experience despair and suffer in body, mind and heart, both alongside adults and on their behalf, as they witness parental struggles to provide for the family.

---

## Poverty in old age

Research was also conducted in rural and urban areas of Tanzania<sup>6</sup> to find out whether poverty is experienced and defined differently in old age as compared to working age. For the same reasons as for the findings on poverty in childhood, the outcomes on poverty in old age are exploratory.

### Findings

There are strong similarities between the experience of poverty in old age and in working age. Older people have strength from having endured poverty for many years, yet certain dimensions have more impact when they feel closer to the end of their lives, and less able to contribute economically.

### Loneliness and loss of hope

Older people experience the death of their partners, siblings and other peers, and are aware of becoming dependent on others. They fear being abandoned, experience despair and may isolate themselves.

*“I spent all my retirement benefits on medical treatment for my father. After he died I got sick and spent my small reserve, meaning that I am now bankrupt and must rely on support from my sons”.*

*“My life is difficult and lonely. I can no longer work and live on my own. All my family have passed away”.*

6. Systematic research older people was not conducted in the other five countries due to time and resource constraints.



### **Disrespect from the community, discrimination and social isolation**

Older people are treated in ways that make them feel worthless and excluded from local decision-making. Their knowledge of traditional forms of farming, gathering food or building is ignored. Widows are rejected by the families of their late husbands and denied inheritance or access to legal support.

*“People look down on those who live in poverty and assume that we cannot offer anything good to community life”.*

### **Vulnerability to losing money or assets through corruption in the community or family conflict**

When older people are unable to participate in neighbourhood discussions or activities, they are further disempowered and at greater risk.

*“My children put some money together and helped me buy land. After some months I found out that the land was in a forest reserve. My house was pulled down and I now live in a rented room.”*

Older people’s experience of poverty is greatly influenced by location. Dimensions identified in rural areas were: unprofitable farming; violence against women; oppression of widows; weak policy implementation; and resilience. By contrast, older people living in urban areas defined the dimensions of poverty as: loneliness; vulnerability to harmful social behaviours; and survival through hope.

Timing in the life course and duration of poverty, alongside other modifying factors such as disability, gender, and environment, make living in poverty more intolerable in old age. It is much harder to keep hope alive after many years of effort, disappointment and frustration.

**The parallels between poverty experienced in old age and in childhood include feelings of not being worth as much in the household economy or community, of being on the edge of decision-making about resources and of being unable to participate in relationships that provide a basic minimum of care and protection for one’s stage of life. Cultural norms intensify their disempowerment because being seen as a ‘child’ or as ‘old’ puts limits on what younger or older people are allowed to do by their families and communities. Their efforts to help themselves and other people survive, or move out of poverty, frequently go unrecognised and unsupported.**

# Conclusions and recommen- dations

The findings of this international research demonstrate that true participation of people living in poverty with others is both possible in international research and moreover generates new insights.

After creating a trusting environment, providing time to think, prepare and reflect, people in poverty, academics and others working alongside those in poverty shared and questioned each other's understanding; a process termed *Merging of Knowledge*. This process, made possible by a trained facilitation team, allowed some – as members of the national research teams – to engage in all stages of the research from design to dissemination, from “beginning to end”. The result is a deeper understanding of poverty.

This understanding reveals nine dimensions of poverty, six of which were previously hidden or rarely considered in policy discussions. Existing alongside the more familiar **privations** relating to *lack of decent work, insufficient and insecure income and material and social deprivation*, three dimensions are **relational**. These draw attention to the way that people who are not confronting poverty affect the lives of those who are: *social maltreatment; institutional maltreatment and unrecognised contribution*.

The three dimensions that constitute the **core** experience of poverty place the anguish and agency of people at the centre of the conceptualisation of poverty: *suffering in body, mind and heart, disempowerment, and struggle and resistance*. They remind us why poverty must be eradicated and that, while it remains, everyone, living in poverty or not, is dehumanised by its existence.

All nine dimensions of poverty are closely interdependent and typically experienced together, cumulatively in varying degrees, rather than each independently in isolation. While every dimension is evident in all countries and most contexts, each varies in form and degree according to: *location*, urban, peri-urban, rural; *timing and duration*, short spells differing from long spells, poverty experienced in childhood or old age varying from that experienced in working age – our tentative findings suggest strong similarities between these two ends of the age spectrum owing to dependency and power relations; *cultural beliefs*, concerning for example, whether poverty is generally thought to be caused by structural factors or by personal failings; *identity* with discrimination on grounds such as ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation adding to that associated with poverty; and *environment and environmental policy*, from climate change, soil degradation, pollution and associated policies, to urban deprivation and inadequate public infrastructure.

Exploratory research among children and older people reveals similar dimensions to those listed above. Children, though, experience two additional dimensions: absence of care and protection; and sacrifice for the family accompanied by social maltreatment and suffering. For both groups, interactions between dimensions seem to be intensified by identity, cultural norms with respect to childhood and old age, and by the duration of poverty.

---

# Recommendations

It seems unlikely that the complex multidimensionality of poverty exposed by this research can be adequately addressed by a single targeted policy response, or even by policies that address individual dimensions. Rather:

1. All policies should main-stream considerations of poverty, taking account of every dimension and the relationships between them.

The research has shown the added value of comprehensive participation involving people with direct experience of poverty and others with pertinent knowledge. It has demonstrated its feasibility even in cross-national settings. It follows that:

2. Knowledge coming from the direct experience of poverty should be recognised and valued.
3. People in poverty should not only be consulted but fully involved in the building of policies from start to finish.

The Sustainable Development Goals require us to end poverty in all its forms and dimensions everywhere. Now that the nine dimensions have been identified and their interdependency demonstrated, it is necessary to draw conclusions in terms of individual and collective behaviour, action programmes and policies. In terms of policies, it is necessary to develop appropriate indicators to set targets, monitor progress, identify success, and to hold governments and civil society to account.

Indicators should be developed for the six newly specified dimensions in a truly participatory manner.

**It is important, though, that indicators remain a means to fight poverty rather than becoming ends in themselves. Our collective sight must remain focused on the difficulties and complexities of everyday human lives that lie behind the simple metrics.**

# **Annexes**

# 1. Methodology / process

This international research project titled "*The dimensions of poverty and how to measure them*", was initiated and coordinated through a partnership between the International Movement ATD Fourth World and the University of Oxford.

The research used an approach called the *Merging of Knowledge and Practice with people living in poverty*<sup>7</sup>. This approach can be used with limited financial resources as long as very rigorous financial ethics are respected. Through considerable investment of time, this approach enables co-leadership of the research by people facing poverty, practitioners and academics.

National Research Teams (NRT) were formed in six countries: Bangladesh, Bolivia, France, Tanzania, the United Kingdom and the United States. The six NRTs had nine to fifteen members, comprising four to six people with direct experience of poverty, and two to four academics and practitioners providing services or advocacy for people in poverty. NRTs were usually facilitated by two coordinators and one research assistant. Highly experienced ATD Fourth World Volunteer Corps members accompanied those who had never participated in research before, supporting them in ways that enable their full participation.

A three-step process was used to collect data in each country. First, knowledge about poverty was generated in independent peer group meetings comprising either people with direct experience of poverty, practitioners employed in communities facing poverty, or academics researching poverty. Each NRT set up between 13 and 38 peer groups of people in poverty, practitioners and academics, in urban and rural areas. A total of 1091 people participated in peer groups across the whole project, with a majority of female persons (60,3%), 665 adults and children in poverty (61,4%), 262 practitioners (23,5%) and 164 academics (15,1%). Each peer group met for at least half a day and most often two days to use a range of methods designed to enable the collective identification of characteristics of poverty, then group these into dimensions.

7. *The Merging of Knowledge: People in Poverty and Academics Thinking Together*, 2007, University Press of America.

See also: [www.4thworldmovement.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Guidelines\\_for\\_the\\_Merging\\_of\\_Knowledge\\_and\\_Practices.pdf](http://www.4thworldmovement.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Guidelines_for_the_Merging_of_Knowledge_and_Practices.pdf)

Secondly, the NRTs followed the *Merging of Knowledge* approach to analyse the outcomes from the peer groups: members of the research team with direct experience of poverty made a synthesis from the reports of peer groups with people living in poverty; the practitioners did the same from reports made by the peer groups of practitioners; and likewise the academics. These three syntheses were the starting point for their deliberations towards *Merging of Knowledge*, resulting in the joint production of a single list of dimensions of poverty and their characteristics and some pending questions.

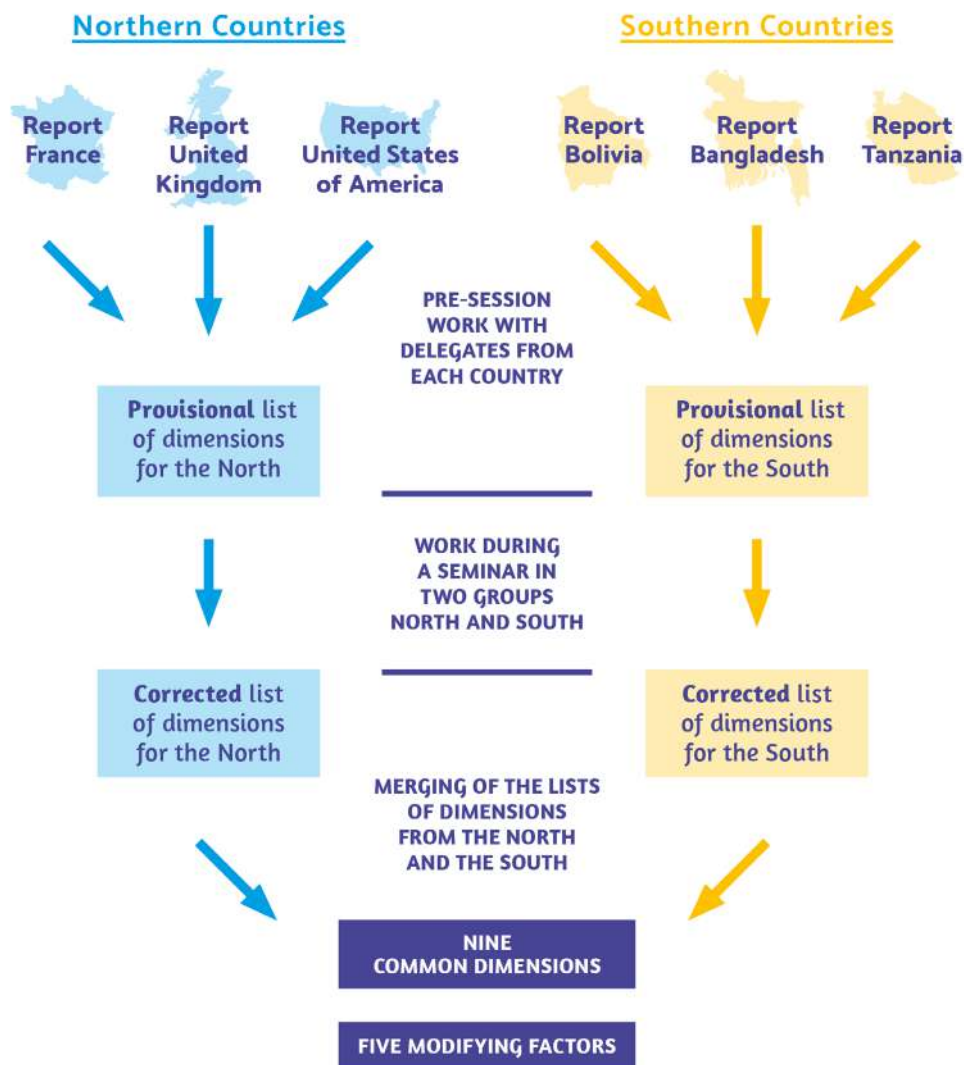
Thirdly, a *Merging of Knowledge* event was organised for two or three days with members of each peer groups to discuss the production of the NRTs. Across the project, 280 people took part in *Merging of Knowledge* events. The NRTs then put forward their analysis taking in account the new data produced in this event. The result of this process was not only a list of dimensions, but also new, enriched insights about the reality of poverty in each country.

In September 2018, 32 delegates from the six NRTs gathered with the international coordination team to work together for one week. The six NRTs had identified a total of about 70 dimensions of poverty. Project participants first worked in two groups, comprising delegates from, respectively, the global North and the global South, to see whether there were common elements in the list of dimensions identified by each national team. The two groups then convened in plenary to compare their lists. They were surprised to find out that, although the daily lives of poor people in the North and in the South are in many ways different, the list of dimensions they had identified were very similar. At the end of a seven-day session, project participants came up with a list of nine dimensions of poverty that are common to all participating countries, two country-specific dimensions and three modifying factors.

Back home, all NRTs refined their findings, complementing them with a written account of the new insights about poverty that had emerged from their research. Their reports enabled the international coordination team to draft this international synthesis titled "*The hidden dimensions of poverty*" which describes nine common dimensions, their interactions and five modifying factors. The synthesis was then validated by the NRTs before completion.

The whole process of *Merging of Knowledge* at the international level is described in the flow chart below.

## 2. The Merging of Knowledge process





### 3. The process used for researching poverty in childhood and old age

**To understand childhood poverty:** In both Bangladesh and Tanzania, there were two kinds of peer groups. One was of children aged 9-16 years living in poverty. The other was of practitioners working with children from families experiencing poverty. They worked separately using age-appropriate techniques to define the dimensions of poverty in childhood. Children participated in a *Merging of Knowledge* process with adult practitioners in Bangladesh. The knowledge of local academics about child poverty, gathered through interviews, was then fed into the final analysis. In Tanzania, the National Research Team compared practitioners' knowledge with that of children, and merged these in the final analysis.

**To understand poverty in old age:** The approach used with working age people was repeated in Tanzania, starting with separate work in three peer groups to define the dimension of poverty in old age. These groups were made up of people aged 60 years and above who live in poverty, working-age practitioners who interact with older people, and academics. For the first time, representatives from peer groups of older people participated in a *Merging of Knowledge* process with working-age practitioners and academics.

1. Lived experience of poverty	Bangladesh: Children	Tanzania: Children	Tanzania: Older people
Age range	10 - 14 years	9 - 16 years	over 60 years
Numbers	22 girls, 13 boys, 35 total	30 girls, 32 boys, 62 total	20 women, 26 men, 46 total
Peer group locations and ethnicity	2 rural (1 with Rohingya refugees) 2 urban (1 Hindu scheduled caste)	3 rural; 5 urban	2 rural; 5 urban
2. Practitioners	7 community workers in NGOs offering support to children	7 teachers and staff of child care institutions	12 teachers, pastors, community development and government workers
3. Academics/Policy or Decision makers	Interviews with 4 individuals (UNICEF, school inspector etc)	0	7 social science lecturers / researchers

---

## 4. Members of the National Research Teams

### Bangladesh

Tahmina AKTER, Shahena AKTER, Rajon BIN, Marjina AKTER, Fakir Azmal HUDA, Rafiqul ISLAM, Samiur Rahman KHAN, Akhtaruzzaman KHAN, Sajia Kadir KHAN, Mridha Shihab MAHMUD, Afsana MIMI, Pijon NONGMIN, Lenen RAHAMAN, Andrea RAHAMAN, Shams UDDIN, Jalal UDDIN, and Claude HEYBERGER as resource person.

### Bolivia

Sophie BOYER, Demetrio NINACHOQUE, Emma POMA, Roxana QUISPE YUJRA, Rocio ROSALES ZAMBRANA, Diego SANCHEZ, Martha TORRICO, Kassandra VILLCA. Thanks to Matt DAVIES, translator.

### France

Abdallah BENDJABALLAH, Chantal CONSOLINI, Marianne DE LAAT, Caroline DESPRES, Marie-Hélène DUFERNEZ, Bafodé DIABY, Jean-Claude DORKEL, Evelyne DUBOIS, Gerardo GIL GARCIA, Elena LASIDA, Marion NAVELET, Pascale NOVELLI.

### Tanzania

Gabriel Chacha SASI, Upendo Spora CHRISTOPHER, Alexie GASENGAYIRE, Elimina John FUNGA, Abdallah JUMA, Frateline KASHAGA, Rehema Jackson MAPUNDA, Asha Athumani MOHAMED, Venance Francis MAGOMBERA, Constantine Saasita MUNEMA, Pélagie MUKAMPAMIRA, Yussufu Hamisi MKUTI, Kasiani Hilali RAMADHANI, Salehe Mussa SEIF, Kitojo WETENGERE and Martin KALISA as resource person.

### United Kingdom

Corrinna BAIN, Rachel Broady, Amanda Button, Sarah Campbell, Susana CASTRO MUSTIENES, Elaine CHASE, Judy CORLYON, Thomas CROFT, Andrea CURRIE, Paul DORNAN, Gwennaëlle HORLAI, Dann KENNINGHAM, Thomas MAYES, Susan McMAHON, Zewdu MENGISTE, Moraene ROBERTS, Lucy WILLIAMS.

### United States of America

Shawn ASHLEY, Maryann BROXTON, Guillaume CHARVON, Donna HAIG FRIEDMAN, Amelia MALLONA, Johny OCEAN, Julia Ann SICK, Kimberly Ann TYRE, Marlon WALLEEN, Yamasheta WILSON.

---

## 5. International coordination team

Rachel BRAY, Robert WALKER, University of Oxford; Marianne DE LAAT, Xavier GODINOT, Alberto UGARTE, International Movement ATD Fourth World.

### Logistics

Asia JANKOWSKA, Léa AMBROISE, Fan WU, Marie REYNAUD.

### Interpreters

Pol AIXAS MARTINEZ, Anne BOISARD, Mathieu CAUSSANEL, Samuel COROYER, Laura DIEZ, Rachel FARMER, Teresa LOPEZ GONZALES, Morrisson MAUD, Emma MAWER, Ricardo SUIN.

---

## 6. Academic Advisory Panel

Roles and institutions when panel formed in September 2015

**Sabina Alkire**, Director of the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, University of Oxford

**Grace Bantebya-Kyomuhendo**, Professor in the School of Women and Gender Studies at the University of Makerere, Kampala

**Francois Bourguignon**, Chair Emeritus, Paris School of Economics, former Chief Economist at the World Bank

**Martine Durand**, Chief Statistician, Director of the OECD Statistics Department

**Gael Giraud**, Chief Economist, French Agency for International Development (A.F.D.)

**Paul Healey**, Head of Profession for Social Development, Department for International Development (DfID)

**Ides Nicaise**, Professor at the University of Leuven, Belgium, coordinator of the European project RE-InVEST

**Francesca Perucci**, Assistant Director, United Nations Statistics DivisionP

**Magdalena Sepulveda**, Former UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Senior Research Fellow at the UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)

**Christopher Winship**, Diker-Tishman Professor of Sociology, Harvard University, US

**Nobuo Yoshida**, Senior Economist, Poverty and Equity Global Practice, World Bank Group, (member of the panel until December 2016)

# 7. Partners







**Extracts of Miguel Angel Gurría's speech, Secretary General of the OCDE, at the OCDE - ATD Fourth World international conference, 10 May 2019, Paris**

*"For too long, discussion about poverty has been characterised by a gulf in how poverty is measured and analysed in poor and rich countries alike. The conventional metrics that are used to measure extreme poverty, based on the \$1.9 per day threshold, tell us that extreme poverty has long been eradicated in most OECD countries. ... This conclusion is at odds with what people with direct experience of poverty report about their lives and it reflects the inadequacy of these metrics. Now, for the first time, the ATD - Oxford University research places a bridge across this gulf in the measurement approaches between rich and poor countries. ... allowing us to see poverty through a single perspective. ... At the OECD we will work hard to develop additional measures that capture the most intangible and pernicious dimensions of poverty such as disempowerment and stigma."*

**Extracts of Jean-Paul Moatti's speech, Member of the United Nations Global Sustainable Development Report Expert Group, at the OECD - ATD Fourth World international conference, 10 May 2019, Paris.**

*"In Nature, one of the two leading scientific journals in the world, an editorial a few weeks ago was entitled: "The best research is when scientists co-elaborate the research with the communities involved." But unfortunately we don't have enough examples of what is now called participatory science or citizen science, such as this study by ATD Fourth World with Oxford University. ... What really struck me in this study is that a number of things you say converge with some of the most groundbreaking advances in global science. For example, with their own tools, the most famous neurobiologists are bringing to the fore the emphasis on emotions that is at the heart of the results of this project... We will propose in the Global Report on Sustainable Development to curb the dynamics of the global scientific community to do more of what is now called "sustainability science". In other words, a science that emerges from the problems encountered by people on the ground to mobilise each other's knowledge, scientific knowledge but also the other forms of knowledge, in particular the one related to the living experiences of the most vulnerable, needed to move forward and find solutions."*

