



Creating schism within souls

Multidimensionality of Poverty: Bangladesh Perspectives



বাংলাদেশ

“If people can fulfill the basic needs in their life then they can be happy even in a defective social state.”

- Roksana,

People with direct experience in poverty (Bangladesh)

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Introduction



Poverty refers to forms of economic, social, and psychological deprivation among people arising from a lack of ownership and control of or access to resources for the attainment of a required minimum level of living. Poverty is not only a matter of material deprivation but also one of immaterial deprivation such as afflictions, oppression. For a long time, poverty was measured unidimensionally (only in terms of material deprivation) around the world where income or expenditure were considered as the main parameter. Now, the measurement of unidimensional poverty is viewed as an overly narrow definition which overlooks the social, physical, psychological, cultural and political aspects. Consequently, different aspects of poverty have been explored, such as the social exclusion and deprivation approach, the human rights approach, the participatory poverty approach etc. A broader approach to poverty analysis was also suggested by the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) offered by the UNDP and the University of Oxford in 2010 wherein there are 10 indicators grouped under three dimensions.

The United Nations has agreed that all countries should aim to reduce all forms of poverty by 2030. In general, most developing countries measure income poverty which is

\$1.90 per day. But poverty is not just about money; it is everything else. This study tries to reach a consensus about what poverty in all its forms really means. The intention is to make recommendations to policymakers about how poverty should be properly measured and policies monitored to ensure that poverty rates fall rather than rise. The United Nations recommends that children and young people be consulted as well as adults. The 2012– 2014 evaluation of the Millennium Development Goals showed that anything done for populations in poverty without their involvement works against them. Many anti-poverty policies are carried out using specific indicators, but without consulting the populations who are meant to benefit. Therefore, we need to tackle the problem at its root by working directly with these populations.

ATD Fourth World and the University of Oxford have launched a participatory research project initially entitled “dimensions of poverty and how to measure them” to develop new measures of poverty and to establish their relative importance and to explore the ways in which the various dimensions are related. In this research, the Merging of Knowledge (MoK) method was used to identify the dimensions of poverty.

Methodology

How Was This Research Conducted in Bangladesh?

The uniqueness of this research is that it used a new participatory approach, known as “Merging of Knowledge (MoK)” and introduced by ATD Fourth World. Merging of Knowledge is a technique which facilitates the dialogue between people facing extreme poverty, social exclusion and policy makers, business leaders, social workers, teachers or researchers. The goal is to overcome the communication and understanding difficulties due to differences in speaking and thinking, in life experience and perspective, so that constructive discussions can occur. Merging of Knowledge bridges gaps between people from different backgrounds by creating an environment of mutual respect and patience. This approach can be implemented with limited financial resources as long as very rigorous financial ethics are respected. To identify the national “dimensions of poverty” in Bangladesh, three modules were completed with adults participants from both rural and urban areas, in order to capture a wide picture of poverty. They are presented below as Module-1, Module-2 and Module-3. A Module-4 has been run with four (4) peer groups of children and two (2) groups of practitioners working with children. The same MoK approach was used but adjusted to the age of the participants. Outcomes of Module-4 are presented on page 15.

Module-1:

The main objective of Module-1 was to form the National Research Team (NRT) in Bangladesh. Therefore, Executive Director of MATI arranged several meetings with academics from different universities, NGO activists and people with direct experience of poverty. Subsequently, the NRT of Bangladesh ended up being composed of fifteen (15) members including five (5) people with direct experience of poverty, six (6) development activists/practitioners, two (2) Professors from Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU), one coordinator (MATI Executive Director) and one research assistant. In this module, a 3-day MoK training session has been organized, sought to demonstrate to participants how the MoK approach can work with people from very different backgrounds. In addition, NRT members practiced all the steps of the methodology as described below. By defining their own set of dimensions of poverty, they prepared themselves to facilitate the work with the outreach peer groups.

Module-2:

For Module-2, the Bangladesh NRT focused on participants from rural areas. It took NRT members several meetings, contacts with other NGOs and field visits to set up five (5) outreach peer groups of people with direct experience of poverty from different rural areas of Bangladesh. These groups included day laborers, landless people, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, tiger widows. In addition, two (2) academic groups were formed from representatives of different





academic institutions involved in rural areas and two (2) practitioner groups from different development organizations or NGOs working with disadvantaged populations in rural areas.

Module-3

About 18.9 percent of the Bangladesh population in urban areas lives below the poverty line. Therefore the NRT members worked also with urban people to find out about their experience and perception of poverty for Module 3. Nine (9) peer groups were selected by the NRT after visits in various urban communities, meetings and assessments. Among these nine (9) groups, five (5) groups were composed of people with direct experience of poverty, including day laborers, women with disabilities, city migrants, ethnic minorities and stateless people, all living in urban areas. Furthermore, two (2) academic groups were formed from representatives of different institutions and two (2) practitioner groups were also formed from representatives of different development organizations and NGOs, all working with urban disadvantaged populations.

Merging of Knowledge (MoK) Procedure

Through a substantial investment of time, this approach allowed a co-leadership of the research by people with an experience of poverty, practitioners and academics.

A three-step process was used to identify characteristics and dimensions of poverty in each module. First, knowledge about poverty was generated in each of the independent outreach peer group described above. A total number of 254 people took part in peer groups across the country, with a slight majority of women (58.6%). Each peer group met at least for one day and a half -and most often two days or more- using a range of methods sought to allow the collective identification of characteristics of poverty, and then to group them into sets of dimensions.

Secondly, outcomes of Module-2 and Module-3 were analyzed by the NRT members. NRT members with experience of poverty merged the sets of community people peer groups in one set. Academic members of NRT merged the dimensions of academic peer groups and the practitioners of the NRT merged the dimensions of the practitioners peer groups. The merged sets were the reference for their deliberations toward a Merging of Knowledge event.

Thirdly, the Merging of Knowledge 3-day event organized at the end of Module-2 as well as Module-3 brought together representatives of each outreach peer group. They discussed the NRTs synthesis until defining a single list of dimensions and characteristics of poverty. They also identified some pending questions. The result of this process was not only a final set of dimensions but also new and enriched insights about the reality of poverty in Bangladesh.

Multidimensionality of Poverty: Bangladesh Perspectives





Unmet Basic Needs

Inability to provide / manage sufficient food, clothing, housing, education and health care for self and family members/dependents due to limited resources or insufficient income.

Article 15 of the Constitution of Bangladesh requires the State to ensure people's access to basic necessities including food, clothing, shelter, education and medical care as one of the fundamental principles of State policy. After independence, remarkable progress has been achieved in the case of food production; however, about 40 million people - one quarter of the population - still remain food insecure and about 11 million suffer from acute hunger.

“Poor women cannot eat nutritious food when they are pregnant, which is why they sometimes give birth to a disable child”

The poor, especially those who live in slums, are among the groups who are the most poorly served by the education system in Bangladesh. They lack wealth, power and social connections and are probably under-counted in national surveys and are often ignored in policy and programs. Poor access to quality health services and high costs threaten Bangladesh's momentum towards universal health coverage.

“Poor people's children don't have the opportunity to have computer training /education. If they had this opportunity, they could earn money in the future and their future would be bright”

A serious shortage and an unequal distribution of qualified health personnel are major stumbling blocks: only 25% of health workers serve rural areas, but this is where 70% of the population lives. Poor people cannot wear clean and new/fresh clothing and most of them wear old clothing.

Characteristics:

Lack of food, accommodation and security; depression because of being unable to meet their needs; lacking good food, they eat rotten food; lack of nutritious food; lack of pure water; lack of space in their houses; inadequate medical care, disease more serious because of mismanagement of treatment; mother mortality high; less opportunities for education; discrimination in education, etc.





Insufficient Money

This dimension refers to the situation when people do not have sufficient money to purchase / meet the basic needs, or their income level is very low to fulfill their family's basic needs.

Sufficient money is a pre-condition for survival. Without sufficient money, people cannot cover basic needs, which leads to chronic illness, as well as a struggle with chronic food insecurity, hunger and malnutrition. This situation makes them feel helpless, hinders them from sending their children to school and ensures that children are forced to work to support their families.

“Often quarreling in the family when the husband has less income and cannot fulfill the basic needs of the family.”

People are bound to go into debt when they do not have sufficient money to survive which makes them more dependent on others and creates a vicious cycle of poverty if they do not have any other sources of income. Although per capita income is increasing year by year in Bangladesh, income inequality is also increasing, which makes a poor person's life more difficult. Due to inflation, real income is not increasing and the purchasing power of the poor is going down.

“My daughter is young enough for marriage, but we cannot arrange her marriage due to a lack of money”

Characteristics:

Cannot arrange marriage for the daughter due to a lack of money; cannot start own business due to a lack of money; cannot meet the needs of the child; unable to use a vehicle due to a lack of money; hope is not met; wants to have domestic animals to make income, but cannot buy them; no electricity, no kerosene, no lamp by which to study; cannot even buy soap; having to wear old, broken and worn clothes; cannot have 3 meals a day; having to ask for food; crisis in the family because a husband died; when ill, no treatment, unable to work, no income; cannot afford the right treatment for a son's illness; cannot get children admitted to a good school; stops education due to a lack of money.



Bad Governance, and Political and Social Instability



Poverty is created due to a lack of proper public resource distribution. Poverty is also created when the government does not respond to the critical needs of society and general problems are not managed effectively and efficiently. In addition, political instability, such as conflicts and widespread competition among various political parties, creates permanent unrest in the country which stimulates poverty. A continuous lack of basic needs or goods and services, such as food, education, shelter, and treatment for some, while others enjoy them as private resources, promotes social instability.

Good governance is a cross-cutting issue and affects every sector of development, especially in a developing country. There are four pillars of good governance which support the building of effective and efficient institutions of government: accountability, transparency, participation and predictability. In Bangladesh, most of these are absent in government institutions. Poor people are excluded from the institutions, which makes them powerless and affects their lives. Public expenditure on health, education and sanitation benefits the non-poor more than the poor due to lack of good governance.

“Poor people never get justice.”

There are many initiatives the government has undertaken to reduce poverty, but most of these programs have not been successful, due to accountability and transparency. Though government policy papers very often emphasize the participation of the poor, such participation remains elusive. The formal structure of account-

ability is notoriously faulty. More importantly, downward accountability towards the beneficiaries is quite flawed, as evidenced by several social service programs, including poverty alleviation programs implemented at the village level. A lack of accountability for using public funds boosts corruption at the local government level. The government does not seem to be very keen about either citizen engagement or participation.

“A lack of good governance is most intolerable, even more than political instability. Good governance can bring peace unless there is political instability.”

Due to this powerlessness and lack of participation, poor people cannot play their roles as citizen. Top-down poverty reduction policies and political interventions during program implementations hinder poverty reduction in Bangladesh. Good governance can act as the means to an end of poverty in Bangladesh. In countries where cultural or ethnic groups feel that there is economic, political and social inequality, it is more likely to occur, causing a vicious cycle that leads to poverty.

Characteristics:

The teaching system at school is not good; increasing crime; a lack of law; the hands of rich people are longer than those of poor people; no value placed on poor people in society; domestic violence; brain drain; child labor; gender discrimination; a lack of women’s protection; superstition; making fun of physical conditions; feudalistic political misuse of power, etc.

III Psychological and Physical State

Physical means the body itself while psychological refers to the mind's functions. Poor people have elevated levels of stress, and stress is linked to depression. Depression causes absenteeism and lower levels of productivity. People who are suffering from extreme stress and depression are less likely to make long-term investments in their health and education. They are more inclined to seek short-term rewards rather than long-term ones because they find it harder to delay gratification. These psychological effects of living in poverty make it more difficult for people to climb out of it.

Poverty has negative impacts on children's health, cognitive development, social, emotional and behavioral development, and educational outcomes. The parents of children living in poverty are more likely to suffer

“I have to suffer a lot of violence, stigma, harassment in society and also in my family because my husband was killed by tiger”

mental health problems, relationship problems, financial problems and substance misuse, which can affect their parenting behaviors, and which can have negative impacts on children's outcomes, too.



“Both parents go outside for work to increase the family income, but there is no one who can take care of their children at home. They always have the feeling of insecurity”

Characteristics:

Feeling loneliness; parental thinking about their children's education; emotional turmoil; frustration; fear; hearing unexpected bad comments due

to physical disabilities; due to extremely congested living conditions, sexual intimacy is missing, which causes bad tempers/inharmonious conditions; feeling bad because unable to meet the needs of the child; negligence of the wife; tension around whether the husband will get sick or not; the husband is thinking of marrying again; cannot do all the work due to being disabled; missing guardian for orphaned children; feeling bad because of staying in others' houses; working as a house maid, but the house owner does not always behave well and often they don't get food; bad feelings about being an orphan; feeling helpless; doubts about how to pay off the installments on a loan. etc

“After marriage, when there is no child, wives are always worried that the husband will marry another woman”



Lack of Entrepreneurship and Employment Opportunities

Entrepreneurship can be a powerful means of poverty reduction for many reasons. First, it provides individuals with the tools to improve their own circumstances, as opposed to relying on aid from foreign governments or NGO's. Second, it gives people the means of achieving a sustainable income. Third, it improves overall economic growth which benefits all the citizens of a country. Creating job opportunities is one of the main responsibilities of the government. In most cases, people want to work but cannot find jobs, which creates poverty. Sometimes, due to lack of good governance and exclusion, poor people are deprived of employment opportunities.

Entrepreneurship has a close connection with the alleviation of poverty. Entrepreneurship is believed to be an important mechanism of economic growth and development. Entrepreneurship increases productivity by bringing new innovations and speeding up structural changes by forcing existing business to reform and increase competition. But the poor people of Bangladesh do not have much opportunity to become entrepreneurs due to a lack of institutional and government support. Capital is necessary to be an entrepreneur, but without collateral a poor person cannot get a loan from a financial institution. For the poor, labour is often the only asset they can use to improve their well-being. Hence the creation of

productive employment opportunities is essential for achieving poverty reduction and sustainable economic and social development. It is crucial to provide decent jobs that both secure income and empowerment for the poor, especially women and younger people. Employment opportunities are not available for the poor who are even being prevented from getting a job in open competition due to corruption, as well as institutional and social maltreatment.

“No opportunity for people to work on their skills. In Bangladesh, there are many people who have already gained skills, but have no chance to use them because there is no opportunity or place, like an industry, a company or institutions where they can work”

Characteristics:

Working in the field as day laborers when not getting any other jobs; low salary jobs; a lack of work /jobs despite being educated; internal migration because of missing job opportunities; no opportunity for people to work on their skills; a lack of skills development; entrepreneurs don't support people; a decrease in the work force; a lack of skilled labor; having no income to start a privately owned business.

Insufficient Transportation, Communication and Technology



This dimension refers to the situation in which insufficient transportation, bad road conditions, a lack of good communication systems and insufficient technological knowledge affect poor people's daily lives negatively.

Public transportation is necessary for the poor people of Bangladesh but transport is controlled by the private sector and government does not have much control over it. Therefore, poor people spend significant amounts of money for their trips to work and the burden of transport expenditures on poor people may be very high. Given the high cost of transport, the time taken by the poor to travel to work varies greatly. Poor people make fewer trips compared to non-poor people and often go on foot.

“Lack of a proper road system for the disabled. A disabled person can't move on the road easily. For them, it's not easy to walk on the road or outside. “I use a wheelchair and with that I can't go on a small road. Big cars do not want to take us”

On the other hand, village-level communication is very bad, which hinders agricultural activities. Sometimes, poor farmers cannot supervise their fields properly, due to bad communication. Consequently, they are not getting the crops they expected. Insufficient new technology also negatively affects poor people. In Bangladesh, poor people mostly depend on agriculture, which is still based on a traditional system. Knowledge on new technology is limited, which impedes the production as well as the income of the poor. In addition, new technology is very expensive for individual poor farmers.

“Due to the lack of technical education, our county is moving towards poverty.”

Characteristics:

Wants to work in any handcraft job or company, which is not possible in the villages; a lack of communication; road conditions are very bad; technological obstacles; a lack of safe roads; traffic jams; increasing transportation costs; the misuse of modern social media and technology.

Natural and Environmental Degradation

Poverty and environmental issues are interlinked. Environmental problems cause severe suffering to the poor, i.e. poverty is influenced by climate change, different natural risks and various forms of pollution. Carbon emissions, the use of chemicals and pesticides, industrial pollution, sea-level rises create floods, droughts, salinity, increase temperatures, reduce habitats for biodiversity and augment the tiredness of the land. Poor people are most affected by these occurrences and poverty also increases through these environmental incidences.

Bangladesh faces a number of environmental problems due to its geographical location and setting, high density of population, poor socio-economic development, inefficient resource management and institutional framework. The diversity of its biological resources are also threatened by human intervention, through the destruction and degradation of the land, as well as as denuded forest and aquatic habitats.

“Because of salinity, all the arable land (in the south of Bangladesh) is losing its ability to growing crops.”

In addition, climate change is creating severe poverty traps. Unless we address the climate change problem now, sustainable poverty reduction will remain a dream. People in poverty



are more exposed to the negative consequences of this phenomenon and have no means to protect their families, livestock and other assets.

“Most of the natural resources are controlled by capitalism. That’s why ordinary people don’t get access to these resources.”

Characteristics:

Deterioration of the environmental situation (climate change); playing in a dirty environment; the lack of a healthy environment; salinity; water logging; cannot increase food production; use of pesticides and plastic; use of extra chemical product; deforestation; environmental disasters due to competitive development; a lack of animal pasture land; river corrosion; cyclones; a lack of habitat for biodiversity; the restriction of natural resource utilization; the effect of climate change on agriculture etc.



Module 4: Children Group

The Bangladesh national research team in consultation with the international research team decided to work with the children group from both Urban and Rural areas of Bangladesh, and this was named Module-4. Bangladesh has a population of 160 million; 60 million or more than 37% of the total population are children (ages 0 – 14). A new report by UNICEF in Bangladesh found that 33 million children under 18 - around 56% of the child population - are currently living below the International Poverty Line. Over half of Bangladesh's children are living in poverty and there is widespread deprivation amongst them in the basic areas of food, sanitation and shelter, with limited

ability to escape their circumstances, according to experts. In Bangladesh, education is free, and it is mandatory for children between 6 and 10 to attend school. However, child labourers, children with disabilities, native children etc. only rarely have access to education. Their right to education is not respected. Therefore, the Bangladeshi national research team decided to work with them to find out their experience and perception of poverty. Four (4) children peer groups from different parts of Bangladesh were selected by the national research team after several visits to the communities, meetings and assessments.

Dimensions findings from children groups

- *Environment pollution and the effect of natural calamities*
- *Bad living conditions*
- *Sacrifice for family members*
- *Unmet Basic Needs*
- *Lack of awareness and values*
- *Physical and Mental Pain*
- *Lack of Money*
- *Bad environment of school*
- *Lack of security, always living with fear*
- *Lack of citizenship's right*



Conclusion and recommendations

The findings of this international research demonstrate that genuine participation of people living in poverty in cooperation with others is possible in international research and generates new insights. A majority of the participants involved in the research in Bangladesh noted that in part because of the Merging of Knowledge methodology, everyone's experience and opinion could be valued and considered in equal measure. Participants also noted that the methodology enabled them to understand new aspects of poverty which had not occurred to them prior to engaging with people from such different backgrounds.

The international research work summarizes several major findings, providing a clear account of the multidimensional nature of poverty in Bangladesh. Further, many of the factors associated with poverty were identified to be closely interdependent. Beyond the more familiar attributes related to housing conditions, work, health, food, financial security, etc., this work highlights a number of less recognized aspects of poverty that were identified by the research groups, many of which are rarely considered in descriptions of poverty or captured in current multi dimensional poverty indices.

One consideration concerns the way people are treated by others, including across wider society, its services and institutions. Another relates to the psychological and physical suffering people living in poverty experience due to permanent tension brought about from their daily struggle to survive and the continued neglect of their efforts to make a better life for themselves.

Research findings on the multiple dimensions of poverty thus offer lessons for formulating policies both in Bangladesh and more generally across developing countries. Research outcomes can also be used to explore ways poverty reduction efforts led by development agencies and government can be made more effective. On the other hand, various economic policies aimed at addressing poverty in all its forms may not ultimately be successful if a multiple dimensions framework is overlooked, leading to questions about their overall effectiveness.

Future work on these newly identified dimensions of poverty in Bangladesh will require government policymakers and regulators to conduct a thorough analysis of the pros and cons associated with the research outcomes. In this connection research outcomes should be shared more widely with different government bodies and institutions. However, it cannot be said that existing policy failures are merely the consequence of inaccurate results or errors in data on global poverty reduction efforts over the decades.

Encouraging the inclusion of people living in poverty and their participation in various policies and programs, including in the design and decision making process has yet to be fully carried out by those working in the development sector.

Without identifying and addressing these concerns, achieving socioeconomic well-being in many developing countries will remain an elusive goal.



International outcomes circle

The hidden dimensions of poverty

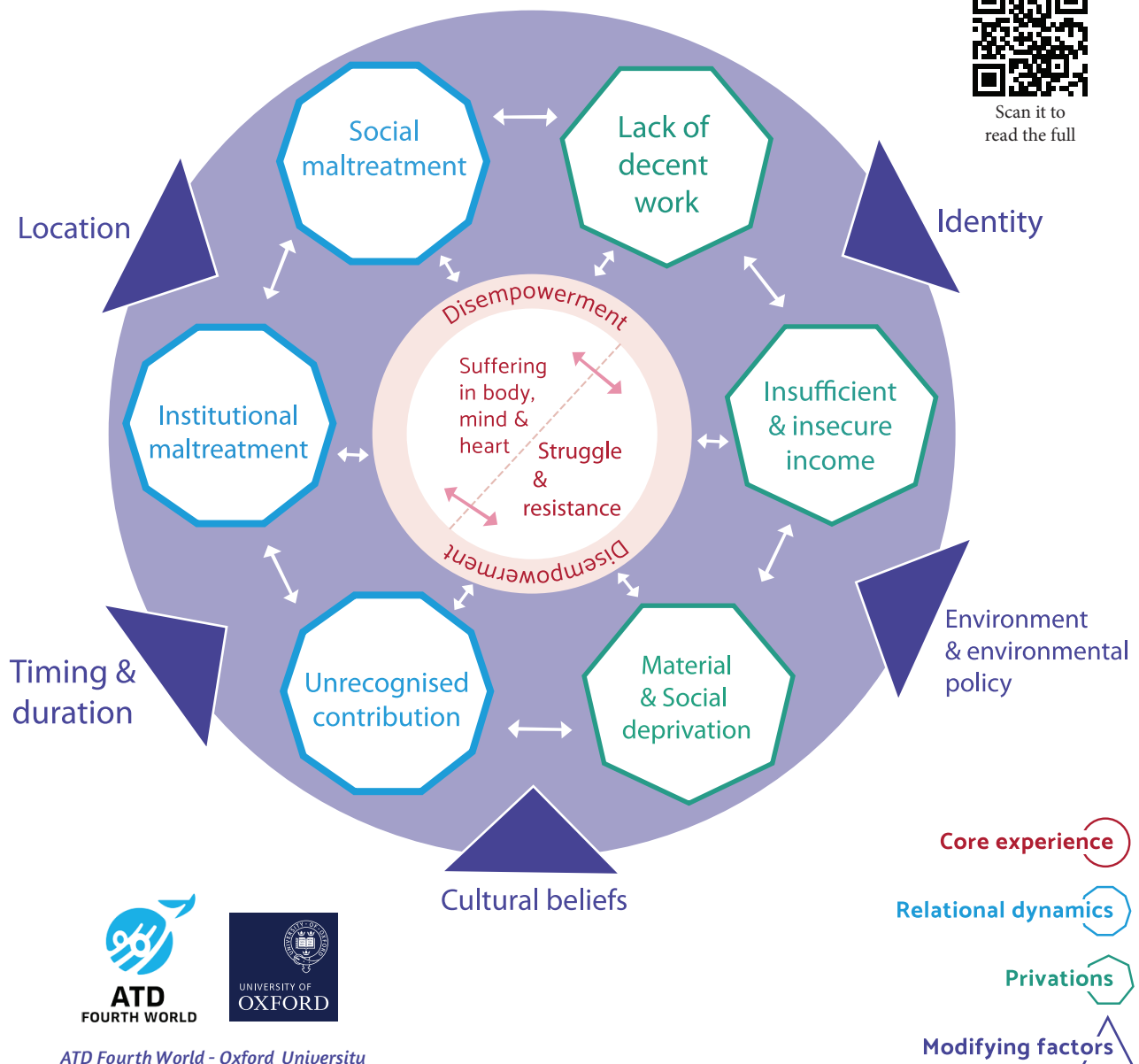
International participatory research led by
ATD Fourth World and the University of Oxford

This is the international merged 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 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 has made possible a transformation in thinking at individual, community and national levels through the generation and sharing of knowledge.



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read the full



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

Mati

Mati is an organization that aims to join all its human forces, energy, and love in the universal fight against poverty and towards a life in dignity for all human beings, regardless of gender, status, color or creed. Mati's general approach is to question development theories that do not take individual people and their personal life stories into account.

The University of Oxford

The University of Oxford is one of the leading universities in the world. It is a collegiate research university in Oxford, England. There is evidence of teaching as early as 1096, making it the oldest university in the English-speaking world and the world's second-oldest university in continuous operation.

AFD (Agence Française de Développement)

The Agence Française de Développement (AFD) funds, supports and accelerates the transitions to a fairer and more sustainable world. Focusing on climate, biodiversity, peace, education, urban development, health and governance, our teams carry out more than 4,000 projects in France's overseas departments and territories and another 115 countries. In this way, we contribute to the commitment of France and French people to support the sustainable development goals.

ATD Fourth World

ATD (All Together in Dignity) Fourth World is a movement of solidarity among and in collaboration with the most excluded families around the world. Founded in 1957 by Joseph Wresinski, ATD Fourth World brings together women and men from all cultures and social classes and is active in 34 countries. It is an international non-governmental organization with no religious or political affiliation

