The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development, convened under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), took place in New York City from July 9 to July 19, 2019. As the global platform for reviewing progress on the implementation of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, the HLPF offered Member States the possibility to present their efforts in leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first. In line with the theme of HLPF 2019, “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”, the International Movement ATD Fourth World had the opportunity, as a Non-Governmental Organization with ECOSOC status, to engage in the HLPF and remind Member States and UN agencies of the importance of empowerment and the inclusion of people living in poverty in the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies that directly affect their lives. ATD Fourth World members spoke on panels, took part in high-level meetings, and organized a side event and a training workshop. They made a crucial contribution to the HLPF by expanding on the concepts of empowering people and the conditions necessary for people living in poverty to bring their knowledge and voices to the discussion of eradicating poverty.

Influencing the HLPF: High-level meeting with Ambassador Inga Rhonda King, Monday July 8, 2019

On Monday, July 8, one day prior to the opening of the HLPF, an ATD Fourth World delegation had the chance to meet with Ambassador Inga Rhonda King, President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and Chair of the HLPF. Delegates with direct experience of poverty along with ATD Fourth World Volunteers and Allies spoke with Ambassador King about how participation was central to leaving no one behind, combating injustices, and transforming policies and institutions.

“When you live in poverty, you are not free to make your own decisions. We don’t claim our rights to be respected and we fear being evicted. And because of this fear, we find ourselves unable to do anything, feeling helpless. We are judged, and most people think that our laziness is the cause of our poverty”, said Roxana Petrona Quispe Yujra, an ATD activist from Bolivia, when discussing stigmatization, social maltreatment, and disempowerment.

Ambassador King reacted to the delegation’s messages at a very personal level. Together they discussed how including people living in poverty, both in research and policy-making, allowed for their knowledge and intelligence to help create effective change. This was illustrated in a recent participatory research led by ATD Fourth World and Oxford University on the Hidden Dimensions of Poverty. Ambassador King agreed with the message of including all voices and experiences to leave no one behind and quoted an ATD Fourth World activist at the opening panel of the HLPF the day following this meeting.

Click here to download the official memorandum given to Ambassador King
HLPF Side event: “Unleashing the Transformative Potential of the 2030 Agenda through Participatory Approaches”, Tuesday, July 9, 2019

On the first day of the HLPF, July 9, 2019, ATD Fourth World hosted its own side event in collaboration with the French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development, the Institute for Development Studies, and Oxford University. Entitled “Unleashing the Transformative Potential of the 2030 Agenda through Participatory Approaches,” the side event consisted of five keynote speakers — academics, practitioners, and people with direct experience of poverty — presenting groundbreaking findings and testimonies on how participation in research deeply transformed them individually and collectively. Following these presentations, a breakout session in three small groups enabled members of the audience to come together in small groups to discuss topics such as conditions for empowerment, impact on policy-making, accountability, and monitoring. For more information about the keynote speakers and breakout session, click here to download the report of the side event.

HLPF Training workshop: “Participatory and inclusive tools to build capacities in leaving no one behind”, Thursday, July 11, 2019

As part of the 2019 edition of the SDGs Learning, Training & Practice — a series of capacity building and knowledge workshops held at the HLPF and co-hosted by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DESA/DSDG) and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) — ATD Fourth World and Oxford University were selected to feature in a training workshop focusing on “Participatory and inclusive tools to build capacities in leaving no one behind”. Dr. Rachel Bray from Oxford University presented the Merging of Knowledge methodology used in the Hidden Dimensions of Poverty research, which was co-led by ATD Fourth World and engaged people living in poverty as co-researchers in the process. This presentation was followed by Roxana Petrona Quispe Yujra, an activist with direct experience of poverty, and Sophie Boyer, Volunteer Corps member from ATD Fourth World Bolivia, who explained how the Hidden Dimensions of Poverty research took place in Bolivia and the conditions needed to allow everyone to participate. They also spoke of transformations that the process achieved among activists living in poverty, academics, and practitioners.

For more information about the training workshop, click here to watch the full video recording and see the presentations of all speakers.
Closing the HLPF: Isabelle Pypaert Perrin at the ECOSOC High Level Panel on Friday, July 19, 2019

The ATD Fourth World Director General, Isabelle Pypaert Perrin, spoke at the afternoon session of the ECOSOC High-Level Panel on July 19, 2019, at the United Nations headquarters. This final session, chaired by Ambassador King, the ECOSOC President and Chair of HLPF, focused on future-oriented trends related to active participation in decision making and ensuring inclusiveness and equality. Ms. Perrin expanded on the importance of ensuring that all stakeholders, especially people living in poverty, can participate in designing, implementing, and evaluating policies and in producing knowledge that leads to change. She highlighted inclusive knowledge as a way to guarantee that development leaves no one behind. She noted a question asked of her by Madame Louise, a woman living in poverty: "We are doing a lot of work, we are fighting hard for extreme poverty to disappear. Will our children reap the fruits of our struggle or will they die in the same misery as us?" Madame Louise's question draws attention to a fundamental injustice: people in extreme poverty are making great efforts to reduce their suffering, but no changes are made as long as they stand alone in their efforts. Ms. Perrin also reminded us that it is people in poverty who bear the brunt of the climate crisis and that policies relating to social injustice and climate change should be considered together. She concluded that in order to ensure empowerment for excluded people and effectively eradicate extreme poverty, policies and projects should be rooted in the efforts of people living in poverty themselves.

To watch Ms. Perrin’s remarks, please click here (from 17minutes onwards). To read her statement (in French), click here.

Conclusion

Through its engagement in the HLPF and the participation of an international ATD Fourth World delegation, the International Movement ATD Fourth World brought key messages to the United Nations systems, member states, and civil society organizations, notably:

- Ensuring that vulnerable communities be included in consultation and participatory research at all levels, including in the work of UN agencies such as UNDP and UNICEF, during the programming and monitoring related to the implementation of the SDGs;
- Measuring multidimensional poverty: the $1.90-a-day measure of poverty takes into account only a monetary dimension and not the variations in average income levels between countries. Governments should look at many other dimensions, including disempowerment, shame, exclusion, discrimination, and the absence of political power, and modifying factors such as gender and duration, among others, so poverty “in all its forms” can be eradicated everywhere.

Our advocacy at the HLPF allowed ATD Fourth World to gain stronger recognition from the ECOSOC President and UN agencies such as UNDP, with which new plans for collaboration are being discussed. Our work to bring the voices and experiences of those furthest behind into the work of the United Nations will continue during the SDG Summit taking place in September 2019 at the UN headquarters in New York.