



October 17

United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty 2016

Concept Note

Theme – “Moving from humiliation and exclusion to participation: Ending poverty in all its forms”

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal to “end poverty in all its forms everywhere” explicitly recognizes that poverty results not from the lack of just one thing but from many different interrelated factors that affect the lives of people living in poverty. This means we must go beyond seeing poverty merely as the lack of income or what is necessary for material well-being – such as food, housing, land, and other assets – in order to fully understand poverty in its multi-dimensions.

The theme this year – selected in consultation with activists, civil society and non-governmental organizations – highlights how important it is to recognize and address the humiliation and exclusion endured by many people living in poverty.

Humiliation is pervasive among the homeless and people living in poverty; it is a negative experience that is interpersonal in nature. While shame is the result of a personal judgment of failure, humiliation tends to involve the belief by the individual that he or she does not deserve the treatment he or she is getting. Humiliation is linked to the “feeling” or condition of being lessened in dignity or pride and/or being the weaker or less important party in an unequal power relationship. When people living in poverty perceive that they are being treated in a derogatory or demeaning

manner, this results in feelings of lowered self-worth or self-esteem or a loss of pride.

Often humiliating episodes or experiences contain elements of both verbal and physical actions. Frequently, “looks” directed at people living in poverty are perceived by them as being judgmental, and creating feelings of humiliation. Persons who live in poverty are also exposed to ridicule. They feel humiliated by being placed in the situation of having to ‘beg’ for help or having to endure with rude, demeaning, condescending or judgemental behaviour on the part of social assistance office staff.

Humiliation can lead to absolute deprivation because often persons who feel humiliated are ashamed to appear in public and, therefore, are socially excluded when they are not able to participate in the life of the community. Such social isolation and exclusion can lead to other deprivations and limit other freedoms. For example, being isolated may exclude a person from job opportunities, which can in turn lead to deprivations in being able to purchase food. When people living in poverty feel discriminated against or fear abusive treatment within the health system, they may avoid seeking the medical care they need, leading to deprivations in health.



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“The worst thing about living in extreme poverty is the contempt, that they treat you like you are worthless, that they look at you with disgust and fear and that they even treat you like an enemy. We and our children experience this every day, and it hurts us, humiliates us and makes us live in fear and shame.”

Edilberta Béjar, an activist from Peru

When people talk about their experiences with living in poverty they reveal these important psychological aspects of poverty. People living in poverty are acutely aware of their lack of voice, power, and independence, which subject them to exploitation, discrimination and social exclusion. Their poverty makes them vulnerable to indignity, rudeness, humiliation, and inhumane treatment by people who work in the institutions and organizations from whom they seek help. People living in poverty also suffer the pain brought about their inability to fully participate in community life and which leads to a breakdown of social relations.

Therefore, in order to fully understand poverty in all its dimensions, policy makers must focus attention on key non-material aspects of poverty—such as shame, humiliation and social exclusion— that affect people’s lives and their human dignity. Improved data, including better indicators, are needed because being able to measure and understand poverty in a multidimensional way enriches our understanding of poverty and enables more responsive and effective strategies and policies to overcome poverty in all its forms.

Effective and meaningful participation is not only the right of every individual and group to take part in public affairs, but it also promotes social inclusion and ensures that policies to combat poverty in all its forms are sustainable and respect the true needs and human dignity of people in poverty.



On 17 October each year, we come together to demonstrate the strong bonds of solidarity between people living in poverty and people from all walks of life, and our commitment to work together to overcome extreme poverty and abuse of human rights through our individual and shared commitments and action. An important commitment is to honour the human dignity of people living in poverty and to fight to end the discrimination, humiliation and social exclusion they suffer.

Celebrated since 1987 as the World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty and recognized by the United Nations in 1992 ^[1], the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty promotes dialogue and understanding between people living in poverty and their communities, and society at large. “It represents an opportunity to acknowledge the efforts and struggles of people living in poverty, a chance for them to make their concerns heard and a moment to recognize that poor people are in the forefront in the fight against poverty.” (United Nations, Report of the Secretary General, A/61/308, para. 58)

More information about the commemorations organized on 17 October in New York and worldwide can be viewed at: the [UNDESA website](http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2008/10/081017_01.html) and at [overcomingpoverty.org](http://www.overcomingpoverty.org).

¹ <http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=A/RES/47/196>

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Note: The views in this document do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations or its Member States.