



*United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty 2021*

**Theme: “Building Forward Together: Ending Persistent Poverty,  
Respecting all People and our Planet”**

## Concept Note

The COVID-19 pandemic that gripped the world during the past year has resulted in over 3.7 million deaths and is reversing decades of progress in the fight against poverty and extreme poverty. According to the World Bank report on “Projected poverty impacts of COVID-19, “between 71 to 100 million people are being pushed into poverty as a result of the crisis, with the majority of the new extreme poor being found in South Asian and Sub-Saharan countries where poverty rates are already high”. In 2021, this number is expected to rise to between 143 and 163 million. These ‘new poor’ will join the ranks of the 1.3 billion people already living in multidimensional and persistent poverty who saw their pre-existing deprivations aggravated during the global pandemic. As a matter of fact, the impact of COVID-19 has been the hardest on the people who - for generations - have lacked equal access to public goods and services, quality healthcare systems and strong social protection, making it harder to cope with any shocks. In addition, the measures imposed to limit the spread of the pandemic often further pushed them into poverty – the informal economy which enables many people in poverty to survive was virtually shut down in many countries.

*« Last week I hurt my leg, but I couldn't have an x-ray because I couldn't afford the COVID-19 test .» Activist from Bolivia.*

The growing inequalities and violations of human rights are more evident during the pandemic. Deeply entrenched structures of discrimination and stigmatisation against people living in poverty exclude their voices and deprive them of dignity. As illustrated by the UN Guiding Principles on

Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, people living in extreme poverty are indeed disproportionately affected by many human rights violations.

The experience of the past year has highlighted once again that people living in extreme poverty are the ones most exposed, least resourced and suffer the most from the double sentence of the climate emergency and the pandemic. People living in poverty are in the frontline of the impact of climate change with severe droughts bringing hunger and intense floods wiping away crop fields, leading to loss of livelihoods and deepening poverty. They work largely in the informal sector and often live in low-quality, unsafe housing in unhealthy environments next to dumping sites or in unsafe areas along mountain edges or swamps. When an environmental disaster strikes, their homes and lives are the first to be destroyed. Climate refugees are on the increase and people living in poverty are victims of environmental destruction, often forgotten by the state.

*“In our country many families have lost their homes and nobody seems to notice it.” Activist from the DRC*

Moreover, people experiencing poverty are often excluded from a sustainable lifestyle simply because of their lack of access to financial and physical resources. And yet they also risk being blamed for this.

*«The most disadvantaged cannot access the premium to buy an electric car. And at the end of the day, we will be called the polluters. » Activist from France.*



Over the past year, governments have been so totally absorbed in responding to the human tragedy caused by the pandemic, that making peace with the planet through climate action is now at risk of being overlooked. The combination of climate emergency and pandemic resulted in worsening the situation of people living in persistent poverty and added several hundred million people to this dire situation. Poverty eradication strategies, climate action and post COVID-19 recovery efforts must equally reach the communities who have been pushed furthest behind and actively engage them in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies that directly affect their lives.

We are at a crossroad. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to pause and reflect on our current economic and social policies to end poverty and build an inclusive world at peace with nature. There is a unique opportunity to dare to think and act differently.

As we embark on the post-COVID recovery and getting back on track with the Sustainable Development Goals, many are talking of “building back better,” but the message from the worldwide consultation with the Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty, a global network of people and organisations working to overcome poverty, conducted by the International Committee for October 17 made it clear that people living in extreme poverty do not want a return to the past nor to build back to what it was before. They do not want a return to the endemic structural disadvantages and inequalities. Instead, people living in poverty propose to build forward.

Building forward means transforming our relationship with nature, dismantling structures of discrimination that disadvantage people in poverty and building on the moral and legal framework of human rights that places human dignity at the heart of policy and action. Building forward means not only that no one is left behind but that people living in poverty are actively encouraged and

supported to be in the front, engaging in informed and meaningful participation in decision making processes that directly affect their lives. In building forward, we need to let ourselves be enriched by the wealth of wisdom, energy and resourcefulness that people living in poverty can contribute to our communities, our societies and ultimately to our planet.

In building forward, let us work together in solidarity with the most vulnerable and the furthest behind and let us remain determined in our goal to end persistent poverty, respecting all people and our planet.

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*Celebrated since 1987 as the World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty and recognised by the United Nations in 1992, 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 recognise 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 initiatives, events and activities to mark October 17 around the world can be found at: UNDESA website, and [overcomingpoverty.org](http://www.overcomingpoverty.org).*

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