

Introduction

The “Italian Association Amici di Raoul Follereau” (AIFO) is an international non-governmental development organisation supporting leprosy control, primary health care and community-based rehabilitation programmes in different countries of Africa, Asia and South America since 1961.

AIFO’s mission is:

“AIFO has chosen to focus its activities in supporting leprosy affected persons and persons with disabilities through integrated development projects in a spirit of partnership, with particular attention towards the poorest and vulnerable groups of persons.

At the same time AIFO promotes activities of development education in Europe, for a better understanding of poverty and its causes, under-development and equal North-South relationships”

Through the projects supported by it, AIFO aims to reach the poorest population groups in developing countries, for promoting sustainable development. However our experience and independent evaluations carried out in projects supported by AIFO over the past years show that it is not easy to reach the poorest and most marginalised population groups, especially for development activities. Though such groups may benefit from charitable and social welfare activities.

For understanding the reasons of this difference between aims and reality, in October 2001 AIFO decided to organise an international workshop for project-managers from developing countries. The aim of this workshop was to discuss and understand the different levels of poverty and the difficulties for reaching the poorest and most vulnerable population groups through development activities.

A total of 64 participants from 16 countries participated in this workshop, which was held in Bologna (Italy) from 26 to 31 October 2001. The general format of the workshop included a daily keynote presentation by an external resource person on the general theme of the day, followed by two smaller presentations about personal experiences on that same theme by two participants. The presentations were followed by group discussions followed by plenary sessions. At the end of the workshop, a final document was prepared, which was approved by all the participants.

The **first part** of this book presents the main presentations and a summary of main discussions during this international workshop. It is very difficult to capture the dynamics of passionate discussions and debates in written documents and it is impossible to show the essence of solidarity, participation and friendships, which characterised this workshop with persons speaking in English, French, Italian and Portuguese. Our sincere thanks to all the participants and external resource persons for their passionate participation in this workshop.

The **second part** of this book presents the report of a pilot project, carried out jointly by the Disability and Rehabilitation team of World Health Organisation (WHO/DAR) and AIFO for promotion of **community-based rehabilitation in urban and suburban slums** and low-income communities. This project has been a significant effort in reaching the marginalised groups of disabled persons, especially disabled children in urban settings and links very well with the theme of this book. This project showed that community-based development strategies are possible and needed even among the most marginalised groups, living in urban slums and low-income areas.

Finally in the **third and last part** of this book, some other articles on the same theme of “Poverty, Health and Development”, written by contributors from different parts of the world have also been added, including some papers presented during recent national conferences of AIFO.

Many of these contributions come from persons involved in **People’s Health Movement (PHM)**, an international movement of voluntary organisations and health activists from different parts of the world, fighting for “Health For All” as a Human Right and asking for equity and justice for all people of the world. AIFO is deeply committed to PHM.

Given the different origins of the articles included in this book, the styles of writing are very heterogeneous, ranging from personal experiences to proper academic papers. Hopefully, this will result in a stimulating and provocative mixture. Often, these discussions about poverty and strategies for promoting participatory development lead to discussions about some aspects of globalisation, showing the links between micro-level activities and macro-level policies.

We do hope that the book will be useful to all those persons and organisations involved in supporting the poorest and marginalised population groups in their efforts for justice, equity and a dignified life and in understanding the difficulties in these endeavours.

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