



An audience with Robert Walker



School
of Social Work
and Social Policy



To mark the World Food Day, 16 October, and the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, 17 October.

**The Innovation Academy TCD, 3 Foster Place, Dublin 2
Friday 16 October 2015 - 12.30pm – 2.30pm.**

**From shame
to dignity**

#RolesWePlay

**CIVIL
SOCIETY
ALLIANCE**

**our world
our dignity
our future**



The Shame of Poverty

Undermining the dignity of the poor is a tendency that "*resides deep in the pores of our culture*", observes Robert Walker, professor of social policy at Oxford University.

Exploring Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen's contention that **shame exists wherever poverty is found**, Robert Walker led a **major international study** on the connection between shame and poverty. Blending insights from many disciplines with original research in societies as diverse as Norway and Uganda, Britain and India, China, South Korea and Pakistan, he reveals that the negative consequences of poverty extend beyond material hardship.

People in poverty typically feel deeply ashamed at being unable to fulfil their personal aspirations or to live up to societal expectations due to their lack of resources. Such shame not only hurts, adding to the negative experience of poverty, but undermines confidence and individual agency, can lead to depression and even suicide, and may well contribute to the perpetuation of poverty.

Research carried out in disparate countries across the globe indicates that the incidence and degree of material deprivation varies markedly in different settings but

nevertheless, the aspirations of people living in poverty are very similar. They long to be good parents, good partners, and good citizens, to have a good life and to shape a better future for their children.



What struck Robert Walker, even in the mid-1970s, was the effort that mothers, in particular, made to try to **protect their children from feeling shame** – to the extent that they would skip meals to buy clothes and toys for them. "Children as young as seven and eight soon learn strategies to persuade parents to buy them what they think they need," he says.



"[There] is the possibility that the repeated use of the language of dependency unfairly stigmatises ordinary benefit recipients and undermines self-esteem."

Poverty-related shame is structural. People in poverty are repeatedly exposed to shaming by the attitudes and behaviour of the people they meet, by the tenor of public debate that labels them as lazy, and through their dealings with public agencies. Public policies that stigmatise people in poverty are, because they erode individual agency, likely to be less effective than ones promoting dignity.

This way psychology teaches that shame is often **felt internally** but is **imposed from outside**. This imposition is built on two false premises: First poverty would be the result of personal failings and behavioural deficiencies. Secondly shaming would lead to positive changes in behaviour.

Evidence is clear, however, that according to Walker, ***"global poverty is largely a structural phenomenon caused by factors beyond individual control relating to the working of the economy, the mix of factors of production and outcome of primary and secondary resource allocations"***.

Besides, Walker claims that *"shame erodes social capital, saps self-esteem, and diminishes personal efficacy"*. This in turn raises the possibility that it serves also to **perpetuate poverty** by reducing the individual's chances to develop personal skills and self-help activities.

*“The worst thing about living in extreme poverty is the contempt ... experienced ... every day; it hurts us, humiliates us and makes us live in fear and **shame**”, ATD’s Friend from Peru.*



“They are not ‘the other’ ”

That’s why Walker believes that we need to develop a language recognising that the vast majority of people who are poor are little different from anyone else, apart from the obvious lack of money. ***“They are not ‘the other’.*** ***They are simply people whose lives have gone haywire.*** *Maybe that’s a consequence of a deprived background or illness or accident. But they are citizens, like us,”* he says.

Treating people, therefore, **with respect and dignity** “is the antithesis and antidote to the destructive power of shame and stigma and needs to be integrated into the substances and delivery of policy”.



Robert Walker

Robert Walker is currently **Head of Department of Social Policy of Oxford University**. He joined the Department as Professor of Social Policy in April 2006 when he also became a Fellow of what is now Green Templeton College. He is a Research Affiliate of the National Poverty Centre, University of Michigan and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. He was a Member of the statutory UK Social Security Advisory Committee for 10 years until 2012 and chaired the Academic Advisory Committee during the design and launch of the ESRC UK Household Longitudinal Study. He is currently a member of the Expert Advisory Group for the evaluation of Universal Credit.

He is keen that high quality research should be used to **inform the political process** and to **improve policy** with the goal of enhancing all our lives. To this end, he undertakes research relevant to the **development of welfare policies** in Britain and other societies, and engages in dialogue with policy makers and anyone else wanting to use or support research to bring about positive change. Particular research interests include poverty, social exclusion, family dynamics and budgeting strategies, children's aspirations and employment instability and progression. Policy concerns embrace social security and social assistance, welfare to work and labour market policies, policy evaluation and policy transfer - that is the process of learning from experiences in other jurisdictions.



He is the author of 19 books, along with *The Shame of Poverty*, published in July 2014.

It is tempting to visualise the yawning gap [between a slum in Uganda], and Green Templeton College, Oxford, where Walker works. To portray him as a well-meaning academic in the proverbial ivory tower, however, would be misleading. He was brought up in Birmingham, the son of a factory worker who educated himself during the Second World War and became a teacher in inner-city schools. "I was brought up with an awareness of the problems that he worked with," says Walker, 61, who armed with a doctorate in social geography took a job in the civil service looking into why so many people were failing to claim the rent allowance (now called housing benefit) they were entitled to. (*Extract from What are the links between shame and poverty?, written by Chris Arnott for The Guardian in August 2010*)

Trinity International Development Initiative

The Trinity International Development Initiative (TIDI) was established, by researchers at Trinity College Dublin (TCD), in 2007, to maximise the university's contribution to understanding and addressing the major global development challenges of our time through research, teaching and outreach activities. By helping to forge links between different teaching and research activities, TIDI aims to ensure that the College's overall approach to international development is distinctive, coherent and integrated. TIDI is now regarded as the hub of international development in TCD.



TIDI's vision is that TCD will be internationally renowned for excellence in development research and education and for the provision of practical solutions to real-world challenges.

Over 100 TCD staff members identify themselves as having a research interest in this area, and there are more than 70 research projects on international development. Over 40 courses with development content are on offer, at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. A wide range of existing research, teaching, and service partnerships has been identified and TIDI is already playing its part in facilitating and supporting such collaborations, most crucially with institutions in the developing world but also national partnerships with Irish institutions working on international development issues. Public events, consultancy, support to policy-makers and service provision are also part of Trinity's engagement with this field.

School of Social Work and Social Policy – TCD

The **School of Social Work and Social Policy** offers professional education and training in **social work and wider human services** (addiction studies, child protection and welfare), courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level, postgraduate training in applied social research, as well as a range of opportunities for postgraduate research students.



School
of Social Work
and Social Policy

In research and teaching, the School seeks to contribute to **building knowledge** about how to respond more effectively to the **social questions** of our day. The range of disciplines and strengths in the School creates rich opportunities for synergies and collaborative 'joined-up' thinking about complex multi-dimensional issues.

The School undertakes **applied research** in fields such as addictions, ageing, child welfare, immigration, intellectual disability and social security. It hosts the National Institute for Intellectual Disability and the Social Policy and Ageing Research Centre.

Robbie Gilligan



Robbie Gilligan is **Professor of Social Work and Social Policy** at Trinity College Dublin. He served as **founding Head of the School of Social Work and Social Policy** from 2005 to 2011. He is also a Research Fellow (2013 - 2016) at SFI - The Danish National Centre for Social Research and Extraordinary Professor at the Optentia Research Programme at North Western University, South Africa. He is currently **Associate Director of the Children's Research Centre** at TCD which he co-founded with Dr Sheila Greene (Dept of Psychology).



All Together in Dignity – ATD Fourth World, based in Dublin since 1999, is an **international human rights organisation** that works through grass-roots **projects in partnership with people living in poverty**. All around the world, it remains focused on constantly reaching out to the most vulnerable families, those who have a long history of poverty and educational disadvantage even in the so-called developed countries.



ATD Dublin is running projects to support the contribution of people struggling daily against poverty, visiting families living in disadvantaged areas, and promoting in particular the **International Day for the Eradication of Poverty in Ireland on 17 October** each year to make sure that the voices of people living in poverty are at the heart of this event. We offer many opportunities to volunteer on a short or long term basis. If you are interested to help us, please visit www.atdireland.ie and contact us: info@atdireland.ie / 01 855 81 91.



2015 European Year for Development

2015 is a special year for development. It is the first ever European Year to deal with the European Union's external action and Europe's role in the world.

The 2013 Eurobarometer gave a surprising insight into how EU citizens see development:

- More than 80 % believe that development aid is important, and 60 % actually think we should be giving more aid;
- Two-thirds believe that tackling poverty in developing countries should be one of the European Union's main priorities.
- At the same time, 50 % say they know nothing about where European Union aid goes.

In 2015 we will do our utmost to **explain to European citizens how EU development aid works**. We will show taxpayers how their money is being put to the best possible use in empowering our fellow human beings around the world who are mired in poverty through no fault of their own to make a living for themselves, their families and their communities.

Also, in a fast-changing world, the lines between the developing and developed worlds have become increasingly blurred. The development landscape has seen the traditional donor-recipient relationship give way to a **world of cooperation, mutual responsibility and mutual interest**.





THE GLOBAL GOALS

For Sustainable Development

On 25th September 2015, world leaders have committed to 17 Global Goals to achieve 3 extraordinary things in the next 15 years. End extreme poverty. Fight inequality & injustice. Fix climate change. The Global Goals for sustainable development could get these things done. In all countries. **For all people.**

The more people who know about the Global Goals for sustainable development, the more successful they'll be. If we all fight for them, our leaders will make them happen. So they need to be famous.

THE GLOBAL GOALS

For Sustainable Development



That's why we need your help to share the Goals. In conversation, on e-mail, in debate, on products, at home, at work, at school – whatever it takes to **#TellEveryone.**

www.globalgoals.org

#GLOBALGOALS

Ready to take part
to the achievement
of the 17 Global Goals?



We, 7 billion citizens,
are waiting for you!

From 12th to 17th October 2015

Support ATD's Social Media Campaign

1. Choose a goal
2. Take the matching arrow
3. Write or draw what you will do to contribute to the implementation of this goal
4. If you are on social media, take a selfie with the arrow or take a picture of your arrow and post it on Twitter or on Facebook with hashtags: #TellEveryone #RolesWePlay



If you are doing this with a group of friends or your activity group take a **GROUP PICTURE** with you and all your arrows and **#RolesWePlay** and send it to the 17 October Committee: **committee@17october.ie** - **www.17october.ie**

Don't hesitate to be catchy and creative, even to create your own arrow!

The Roles We Play, Here and There

A serie of events ahead of #EndPoverty Day

1st October to 17th October

The Roles We Play Exhibition

Free Entrance - Mon-Fri: 7am to 7pm. Sat: 10am to 6pm. Sun: closed.

The chq Building. IFSC, Dublin Docklands, Dublin 1

16th October

An Audience with Pr. Robert Walker, *The Shame of Poverty*

12noon to 2pm

The Innovation Academy. 3 Foster Place, College Green, Dublin 2.

Candle Vigil, marking a connection between World Food Day and UN Day for the Eradication of Poverty

7 pm - Famine Statues, Custom House Quay, Dublin 1.

17th October

Annual Gathering to mark the UN Day for the Eradication of Poverty

11 am - Human Rights and Poverty Stone, Custom House Quay, Dublin 1.

The Roles We Play Workshop

Come and meet some of the participants from the project and join them for a workshop that seeks to open up a constructive discussion around the roles we all play in our communities.

1.30pm - The chq Building. IFSC, Dublin Docklands, Dublin 1.

@RolesWePlayEYD



Therolesweplay

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