

Supporting Children to Return to School

A Chance to Be Somebody



Story written by ATD Fourth World's team in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 2018
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The account we are about to share emerged after several years of involvement by the ATD Fourth World team with families living in extreme poverty on the outskirts of the former Kunduchi quarry, in the Tegeta district of Dar es Salaam. Until its closure, around 1,500¹ people earned their living by breaking stones to make gravel, using small hammers as their only tools. The quarry is now closed and most of the stone breakers have left. A few, however, continue to work along the road, where every day a lorry drops off a load of stones from another quarry, destined to be turned into gravel for the construction industry.

Among them lived Salma and her three children. At the time, the two girls were eleven and nine, and the boy was four. Because of the many difficulties facing the family, the two older children no longer attended primary school. At the start of this narrative, Salma was bringing up her children alone and the family's life and its financial situation were unstable. Salma worked as a stone breaker but had high blood pressure and heart problems that sometimes prevented her from working. She was caught in a vicious circle, and the anguish of not being able to feed her family and send her daughters to school further damaged her health.

The two older daughters and their younger brother are now successfully enrolled in school. This story recounts how the family overcame these obstacles through the determination of the mother and her daughters, as well as through the support of those who stood by them. It is also a tribute to Salma, who fought so hard to give her children a future.

Insurmountable administrative and financial obstacles

Before moving to this area in search of work and accommodation, the family had lived in another district, where the two elder children attended primary school. Salma had done her best to get the necessary school transfer papers for both girls. She returned to see the headteacher repeatedly but only managed to get the documents for one of the girls because the other child's name could not be found in the school register. Eventually, the mother did not have enough money left to cover the transportation costs needed to retrieve the missing file. "I was thinking, how can I let the younger one go to school when the older one has to stay home? I did not want them to think I was prioritising one over the other. So I decided to keep them both at home. The situation was very distressing; I was always thinking about

¹ Benedict F. Malele, 'The contribution of ineffective urban planning practices to disaster and disaster risks accumulation in urban areas: the case of former Kunduchi quarry site in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania', *JAMBÁ: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies*, Vol. 2, No.1 (2009), 28-53 (p.40). <https://www.alnap.org/help-library/the-contribution-of-ineffective-urban-planning-practices-to-disaster-and-disaster-risks>

what would happen to my children tomorrow." Two years went by, with the mother still trying to get them back to school. "Everywhere I went there was always a question of money: at every school, and even when I went to see the local leaders. So I let them stay home."

Meeting ATD Fourth World members

Mr Kasian is a resident of the Kunduchi district and an ATD Fourth World activist. He recalls, "I met Salma through the literacy class run by ATD, where my wife and I had previously studied. When a new class started, I took on the responsibility of finding new pupils who didn't know how to read and write. I used to pass by different houses, telling people about the class and sharing my own story of how I had got over my shame, in order to encourage others to join. That is how I met Salma and convinced her to join the class." "Learning as an adult is not easy," Mr Kasian explains, "and sometimes you feel ashamed. It was difficult for Salma to keep up and she wanted to stop, but I didn't want that to happen. I was living close to her place and I often went to see her. I tried to understand why she did not come to the class. When I realised her children were not going to school, I felt very bad about it. This made me push the ATD volunteers to try to get close to the children's mother..." But Salma felt trapped: "My children were telling me, 'Mama you're going to school. Why not find a school for us as well?' This was very hard for me."

The constant worry about her children's future made it difficult for Salma to follow through with the literacy classes. ATD volunteers regularly attended the course to support the students and present the birth certificate program to them. Salma opened up to Mr Kasian and the ATD volunteers about her worries. She also told them she was interested in getting birth certificates for her children. This request, along with Mr Kasian's repeated urging, prompted the team to visit her.

Working together to find a solution

Hamisi and Hemed were the two members of the ATD Volunteer Corps who went to see Salma. They discovered her in the compound of an Indian warehouse where she was allowed to live with her children in exchange for guarding it at night. Salma showed them the vegetables she grew there. She picked some corn cobs and prepared a meal for them. The volunteers realised that this was not the right moment for questions about the children not being in school.

Their second visit was to deliver the forms for the children's birth certificates. As Salma was filling them in, she expressed her hope of sending the children back to school but said that she did not know where to begin. Hamisi and Hemed listened. They avoided making promises to her but back at the ATD Centre they reported the situation to the team. The decision they made together was to visit the family regularly in order "to get to know them better".

Hamisi and Hemed continued to visit the family every other week for several months. Sometimes, when they went to the quarry to meet some of the other parents to fill in papers or make appointments for the birth certificates, they would also meet Salma. She was breaking stones during the day with her two girls, who were either helping her or watching over their younger brother. Time and again, the volunteers discussed with Salma how to get her daughters back to school. They presented her with two options: they could assist in finding the transfer files or she could enrol her daughters in a school with a Memkwa class.² Having decided on the Memkwa option, Salma began to look for a school that ran this program. She visited two schools nearby, but was unsuccessful. To add insult to injury, she received some critical remarks for accepting assistance from an NGO. "I was so disappointed. I remember I got lost on the way home and I was crying all the way. I said to my children: 'Forget about school'... And I went to explain to Hamisi how I had gone to different schools but hadn't managed to get a place for my kids."

Meanwhile, the ATD team discussed the possibility of supporting Salma's efforts to find a school for her children. They decided to accompany her on her school visits and assist with the expenses for tuition, notebooks, and uniforms. The mother was very relieved.

Two days later, Hamisi and Rachel, another member of the team, went with the family to a primary school with a Memkwa programme that was within walking distance. After registering the children, the headteacher asked them to see the teacher of the Memkwa course. However, the first encounter with the Memkwa teacher did not go well. The teacher scolded the mother for being able to dress nicely but not caring enough to send her children to school. "Why have you kept them at home all this time? And now you expect people to help you." Salma felt deeply humiliated.

² MEMKWA is the Swahili acronym for Complementary Basic Education in Tanzania (COBET), a community-based programme initiated by the government in 1999 to provide formal education system opportunity to overaged children or children above school age. Primary school education is condensed into a three-year program, at the end of which pupils can join secondary mainstream school. cf. <https://academicjournals.org/journal/ERR/article-full-text-pdf/9B5158363946>

Reachel replied that this was not the way to speak to the mother, least of all in front of her children. Hamisi said it was better they leave. On the way back, it took them a long time and many kind words of reassurance to calm Salma down. But they still wondered if together they could go through with the registration process while Salma felt so rejected and humiliated.

The following day, Hamisi went on his own to tell the headteacher what had happened. The headteacher listened and was sympathetic and concerned. She asked Hamisi to come back with the mother the next day to finish the registration, so that the children could start school.

Two days later, Salma, accompanied by Hamisi, went to meet the headteacher, Ms Pelagia Mdimi. Hamisi recalls that moment: "The headteacher was really calm, very good... Salma had the time to speak to her and to explain what had happened. This time she had no difficulty in speaking for herself, so I just stayed quiet."

Ms Mdimi then wrote a note and sent Hamisi and the mother with it to the Memkwa teacher. After reading it, the Memkwa teacher said that the children could come to class the next day. Hamisi recalls, "Salma did not say much to the teacher, but when we left to say goodbye to the principal, she was really, really happy."

The difficult readjustment to school

On the following Monday, Hamisi went to Salma's place at 7h00 in the morning "just to be there to help prepare the children for school". Together they passed by the headteacher's office, and she offered the children notebooks and pens. Then the two girls entered class again for the first time in nearly two years.

The assistant teacher of the Memkwa class recalls: "[...] when Roda and Asha joined, they were different from other pupils, because of their life in the street. Even their behaviour was not the same. My responsibility was to make sure they got what other pupils were getting out of the class and to attain success. I gave them more time and help because I knew that they were affected by the situation they were going through."

Hamisi, together with either Reachel or Hemed, followed the children's schooling closely through visits to their home, to make sure they were doing well, and as a way of encouraging their mother. From time to time he went to the school alone, in order to

understand what kinds of challenges the children were facing and whether the headteacher or the Memkwa teacher needed to discuss anything.

For her part, Salma made significant efforts to support her children's schooling: "I was working very hard to keep some money to support my children and tried to be close to the teachers to explain my situation. Sometimes I didn't eat well to save money for school [expenses]."

Because they had been absent from school for a long time, it was difficult for Rhoda and Asha to adapt to the routine, the system, and the rules of the school. Not long after admitting the two girls to the school, the headteacher found herself confronted with a new dilemma: "One day the girls arrived half an hour late when the class had already begun. The institution doesn't allow children to come late, so the teacher did not allow them to enter the classroom."

Roda explained why they went to the beach instead of going straight home. "The headteacher was very angry with us that day. She said she wanted to meet our parents to discuss the reason we arrived late. There was a whole group of us. Instead of going back home and asking our parents to meet the headteacher at the school, we went to the beach to spend the day there, thinking that maybe the next day the headteacher would have forgotten. But she never forgets."

Ms Mdimi recalled, "In the evening, just when I was in a meeting with the school committee, a police car arrived with the two girls and a few other pupils from another school. One of the police officers said, 'We were patrolling the beach and we found these kids playing there during school hours.' Ah! It did not make a good impression. The committee members were very angry, saying: 'These pupils are not good, they are a bad example to others. Going to the beach during school hours is a bad thing.' At first they decided to suspend the girls for several weeks. I didn't have anything to say because the committee has the power to decide. So I sent the children home."

After further discussion, however, the committee informed the headteacher that they would write a letter to Hamisi and Salma informing them that the school committee had decided to expel the girls from the school. Ms Mdimi then suggested that it might be preferable not to chase them away but to suspend them instead. The committee seemed ready to settle for a one-month suspension. But the headteacher was still not happy with that: "I was

thinking: how can I help these girls come back to school earlier? Because one month is a very long time for the girls to stay at home."

One month can indeed mean a long delay in a child's education. All this happened not long before the end of the year when passing the examinations would allow the children to move on to standard four in mainstream class. Even a one-month suspension was sufficient to make them lose a whole year.

Salma went to the school repeatedly and tried in vain to ask the headteacher to reconsider and allow her daughters to return, but Ms Mdimi said it was not possible. Humiliated and distraught, she went to ask her friends from ATD Fourth World to accompany her there again. The following day she went back to the school with Hamisi. She was afraid to enter the headteacher's office, but Hamisi went in. Ms Mdimi remembers, "He greeted me and said, 'Teacher, we are so sorry, please help us and let the kids come back to school.' He told me all about Salma and the many efforts she had made so that the kids could attend school; about the financial support from ATD and then about how it all went wrong."

The headteacher felt she should not be the only one to hear what the mother and Hamisi had recounted. So she invited the chairman of the school committee and the police officer to a meeting. Additionally, she wrote a letter to the school committee, expressing her apologies for the girls and requesting their permission to let them come back to school.

The school committee came together to make a decision; Salma came with Hamisi. He had warned her beforehand that it would be best not to say anything even if they said hurtful things, unless it was something really difficult and important. In that case, she should speak up. Hamisi very politely asked the committee to accept the kids back in class. The chairman said the girls would not change because they were used to staying in the street and their behaviour was bad. "If you mix them with the other pupils," he said, "they would surely influence them in a bad way." So Hamisi and Salma tried to apologise again.

This long and difficult conversation lasted for two and a half hours. Everybody seemed against letting the children return to school. Even the headteacher, who was still quite new in her post, deplored the involvement of the police, which she felt had brought shame on her school. When finally given a chance to speak, Hamisi did not play down the seriousness of the children's behaviour. He said, "What the children did was wrong. I agree you should punish them. But telling them to stay home, not to come to school anymore, is a bad decision. I feel it's like putting down our nation. Because every day we say that children

are the future of the nation. What will the future of our country be like if we expel these children? I'm not speaking just about them, but all the other children as well. If they miss the chance to go to school, they miss the chance to be somebody, to have a good impact on our community, like a teacher, a policewoman, or a local leader. If they have the chance to study, our country will be a safer place in the future for everybody and most certainly for them." -

Ms Mdimi described what happened next. "The chairman asked Salma and Hamisi to leave the room while they deliberated. Finally, the committee decided to let the two children return to school as it was the first time we had had a problem with them. But they also gave strict instructions to the mother, as well as the teachers, to make sure the children would not repeat this type of behaviour such as going to the beach during school hours."

The school committee finally came around. The headteacher believed that this was due to the presence of the ATD volunteer. "Hamisi was part of the story. He made a powerful challenge, and when people saw someone coming from 'town', meaning from beyond their own district, to support Salma and her cause, they noticed the effort and were impressed."

She added, "I took time to talk to the chairman of the school committee: 'Let us give these pupils another chance and see if they change. If they do it again, then we will expel them.' It was difficult for him to agree. I told him, 'I will personally make sure they are kept in line and become good pupils'. The chairman asked, 'Is it possible?' I said, 'Yes, I will do my best'. One month later, the chairman came again and asked about the children, whether they had changed. He met them and saw that they were good now. Talking with them, he realised the change and how they had progressed."

A success where everyone benefits

According to the headteacher, it was not only the children who had changed for the better. "In the beginning, the Memkwa teacher was unhappy with the children. But I tried to advise her to take time with these pupils, to connect with them, to believe they will change. Afterwards she told me, 'You are a good teacher because it happened as you said. Now they are doing well.' This teacher learned something from her pupils."

To stay in contact, the headteacher, the Memkwa teacher, and Salma exchanged phone numbers. At regular intervals, Hamisi accompanied Salma to school to monitor the learning progress of her two daughters. Eventually, she took the initiative of going by herself. In Salma's words: "I made friends with the teachers so as to have a connection with them, so as

not to fear them, and to speak well with them [...]. One day I noticed that the children were not marked as present in their exercise books, so I went to tell the teachers: 'I have come a long way with my children, because I want to support them. If they come home without their book marked, I cannot be sure that they came to school.' The teachers congratulated me and said, 'If we had some more mothers like you, we would have better success'." So Salma earned recognition at the school. The teachers welcomed her respectfully, and she made sure to telephone the teacher if one of the children had to miss school for any reason.

After this experience, Salma became more confident when speaking with people in positions of authority. She went by herself and registered her youngest son for nursery school and primary school. Every two weeks she goes to the school to find out how her children are doing in class. When there is a school meeting, Salma is there. She never misses a meeting and tries to speak to the other participants. The two elder girls were in Memkwa class for about six months before they passed the exams to enter the mainstream school (Standard Four.) According to their mother, they love school and were finishing grade seven in 2018 when this story was written. Today they are halfway through secondary school.

Over the years, Salma became close friends with the ATD Fourth World team. She seems a changed person now and is often smiling. "When I saw my children back in school," she explains, "this success changed me a lot. Now I'm not stressed about whether they will pass their exams and how it will be for them to continue to secondary school. I leave that to God himself, he knows what he will do. What changed for me personally is that now I am in good health. I know I still have a lot of difficulties in my life, but God will help me and I still have the energy to work."



Group work on the Tanzania narrative

In June 2018 ATD Fourth World held an important international seminar, 'Everyone Can Learn If...!', from which most of the stories in this series originate. Four delegates from

Tanzania attended the seminar, two of whom were protagonists in this story: Hamisi Mpana, the ATD Volunteer Corps member who had accompanied Salma in her efforts to get her children back to school, and Pellagia Mdimi, headteacher of Kunduchi Primary School where the girls were enrolled. Salma had also been invited, but could not leave her children for an entire week. The other delegates from Tanzania were Laurent Ganau, another member of the ATD Volunteer Corps and Aloyce Benjamin Chija, a teacher. All of them had taken part in a participatory research program in their country entitled 'Access to Primary School Education for Children Living in Extreme Poverty'.³

Before and after

The working groups in the seminar set out to distinguish the "before" and "after" stages in the narrative in order to identify specific actions taken by the different stakeholders. In other words, they wanted to identify those actions that introduced change and unblocked complicated situations. There is the initial bleak and desperate situation of a single mother struggling to provide the means for her family to survive. She herself is illiterate and her daughters are out of school since the family moved to seek work and shelter in a new neighbourhood of Dar es Salaam. And then there is the success, two years later, when the children closed the gap of their missed schooling and were well on their way to secondary school.

Key moments and principles of action

Several participants stressed the first steps made by the mother, who was motivated and determined to give her daughters the chance to enrol in school again. She had tried to find a school that would take her children, but failed. When she learned about the primary school with a Memkwa class, she began again, despite her past failures and humiliations, this time accompanied by the volunteers. Several participants argued from personal experience that **for any success to be sustainable, community outreach workers need to follow the parents' own deep concerns and wishes, and respect their rhythm.**

"Why is it always the mothers alone? Where are the men when women are completely on their own with their kids?" remarked a participant from Burkina Faso, after mentioning a

³ This participatory research was carried out with financial support from UNESCO and the French Agency for Development (AFD) from January 2015 to March 2016 in the Kinondoni district in Dar es Salaam. Its aim was to understand the conditions necessary for children living in extreme poverty to be able to start and graduate primary school. <https://www.atd-fourthworld.org/access-primary-school-education-children-living-extreme-poverty-atd-tanzania/>

similar situation of a single-parent family in his own country. "These mothers need to be supported in the education of their children."

Actions that led to turning points

Mr Kasian, the neighbour who himself had learned to read and write through the adult literacy program organised by ATD Fourth World, took on the task of helping to find students for the next course. Thanks to his efforts and insistence, members of the ATD Volunteer Corps were introduced to Salma and her children. Because ATD Fourth World considers participants in their programmes not just as beneficiaries but as partners, time and again this has allowed team members to come into contact with people in situations of extreme poverty — often the most difficult to reach. **Relying on people with poverty experience to "reach out to those whose contribution is still missing"**⁴ is an important element in ATD Fourth World's approach. It was Mr Kasian again who was the first to discover that the two girls were not attending school and he asked members of the ATD Volunteer Corps to go and visit this family.

At this point of the story, many questions in the workgroups arose around the fact that the team members continued to visit the family for nearly six months before accompanying the mother to enrol her daughters in school. **Recognising a dilemma** is important in order to make conscious choices. The participants clearly saw that on the one hand, it was urgent not to lose any more time in schooling the children. On the other hand, it was necessary to fully understand the situation — including the obstacles — in order to know how to proceed and above all, to allow the mother to come up with her own solutions. Other facts confirmed the importance of what the participants called "active patience". The ATD team had reminded Hamisi of the need to first understand the social fabric surrounding the family in order to avoid discouraging or replacing any existing network of solidarity. They had also voluntarily "let the mother describe her own life", — which is a manner of listening without rushing too quickly to conclusions. On the contrary, they came to think that there were many things they did not know. This "active patience" was rephrased by one working group as a principle of action: **"Wait for people to describe the situation in their own terms"**. The difference between doing nothing and exercising active patience lies in the attitude of trust and absence of judgement: not rushing decisions, getting to know the people involved, supporting them in

⁴ Central focus in ATD Fourth World's Strategic Ambitions for 2013 – 2017, from the archives of ATD Fourth World, International Joseph Wresinski Centre.

the path they choose, and respecting their choices. "**Allowing the mother to take the initiative**, as they did when they let her first look for a school that would take her children", said one participant. "It's respecting her dignity", said another.

The further course of the story confirms that this decision to take the time necessary to get to know each other more deeply — though risky and difficult — was indeed a decisive step toward success. One of Hamisi's co-workers pointed out: " The six months allowed him to create trust. If after the first visit Hamisi had pushed the mother to register the girls in school without knowing her and without creating a mutually trusting relationship, everything could have fallen apart during the challenging times that arose. During those six months, something was built and grew strong and solid: so strong that it stood the test of adversity."

This "something so strong" could be called capacity building — developing self-esteem through having someone you can rely on and someone that you matter to.

However, the groups noted that the volunteers did more than wait and listen. There was the literacy course for the mother, and there was the birth certificate campaign (volunteers would occasionally meet the family at the stone quarry when they went to fill in papers with those workers who wanted to get birth certificates for their family members). There were also monthly home visits to gather news.

It turned out that there was no need for additional pressure from the outside. Seeing their mother attending the literacy course, the children felt very motivated to get back to school and they badgered her about it. That was when the question of school education for the children rose to the top of the urgency scale and the mother's determination to fight for it was strong. **Seizing the moment when it comes** was another principle of action identified by the groups. Having witnessed the failure of Salma's efforts to find a school for her children, Hamisi threw his full support behind her initiative. An important boost for her was the agreement of the ATD team to provide for school expenses, school uniforms, and school supplies. During several moments in the story, it seemed particularly important that the team member accompanying the family was able to step back and receive advice and support from his co-workers. This too was formulated as a principle of action: "**Inform the team and make important decisions together as a team**".

Material obstacles are painful, but not necessarily the most difficult ones to overcome. Important stumbling blocks mentioned were the humiliation that the mother experienced in

the first encounter with the Memkwa teacher and later in the face-to-face meeting with the school committee who wanted to expel her children. Salma's effort to make a good impression by dressing nicely was interpreted by the Memkwa teacher as equivalent to child neglect, implying that she invested her earnings in her clothes, but not in her daughters' schooling. As one participant pointed out: "I learned from the case of the Memkwa teacher that sometimes we make judgements without realising it. I know I have done it too. I have an example in mind, [...] very similar, where I assumed a family was not in a difficult situation because of the way they presented themselves, [...] actually, they were homeless."

The headteacher's interventions to **unblock situations by creating understanding** were also highlighted. Her capacity to listen and take an interest in the plight of a mother with her two school-age kids was even more impressive because she is leading a school of 2,000 pupils. With the Memkwa teacher who thought: "This isn't the kind of family who needs this class" the headteacher was able to create a dialogue and some understanding by explaining the family's situation, and pushing her gently to accept the children into class. Facing the school committee that wanted to expel the children from the school, Ms Mdimi suggested, "There's also another action possible, a shorter suspension." She presented a case that made sense to the school committee and left the door open for the children to continue.

"It can help to **acknowledge that there is a legitimate concern**", one participant pointed out. "Talking about suspension instead of expulsion was a way of saying: 'Yes I agree it's not a good thing for the children's learning if some skip school and give a bad example.'" She acknowledged the board's concern saying: "Yes, we should react, but maybe not as drastically." She showed understanding of the school committee's opinion and also the situation of the family. The Memkwa teacher too had legitimate concerns, wanting to be sure the class was going to serve the children as intended — she and the assistant teacher had ninety pupils.

The climax, which was also a turning point in the story, caused a great deal of reaction among the seminar participants. This was when the two girls had been picked up at the beach while truant from school. There was a lot at stake for everybody involved, especially for the children and their mother, but also for the headteacher, still new in her position, who had been deeply embarrassed in front of the school board by the appearance of the police van that brought back the kids. "I felt ashamed", she admitted, "because on the board there are many people with strong personalities and important responsibilities. They could have said that I

am not suitable here because I allow students to go to the beach." So defending this family meant taking a personal risk, which she generously brushed aside saying, "We believe if you decide to do something, don't be put off by the risk. The kids were at risk; they could have drowned when they went swimming on their own." Another participant drew the conclusion: **"Know your own risk, embrace it, and acknowledge the risk others take."**

After the police had turned the children in and the decisive meeting had taken place between the chairman of the school board, the headteacher, the Memkwa teacher, the police officer, Salma and Hamisi, several days went by during which everyone was able to reflect on the situation and prepare their arguments. It was also a time of pre-negotiations. Salma went to see the headteacher to apologise for the children and say that she would like them to go back to school. The headteacher agreed that they should be allowed to return and wrote to the chairman asking the school committee to accept them back. What struck the seminar participants most was that the dialogue between the different stakeholders never ceased. Still, during that decisive meeting everything seemed blocked. Positions were taken and held. One person asked, "If Salma had not been accompanied to that meeting, would she have been able to make her point? Would she have been taken seriously?" Most likely not.

When everyone is caught in a stalemate, what helps to set things in motion again is to **broaden the perspective and put things in context**. This is exactly what Hamisi did when he reframed the problem. He did not plead for compassion for a family living in poverty nor did he tell the school board members what to do. Instead, he asked a question much wider in scope: "What will be the future of our country if we expel these children?" And then he described a scenario of what would happen, doing it in a way that created a close link between the future of these children and everyone in the room: "If they miss the chance to go to school they miss the chance to be somebody important in the future of our community, like a teacher, a policewoman, or a local leader." Meaning: they will not be able to become someone important and useful like you. And then he drew a parallel with a positive outcome for the entire country: "If they have this chance to study, our country will be a safer place in the future for everybody and most certainly for them." By now it had become clear that allowing these two children to study — and all the children in the world — is reasonable, better and safer for everyone.

In the Learning from Success Method, turning points describe moments where the protagonists of the story are standing at the crossroads and decide — from among several

possibilities — the road that will ultimately lead them to success. In this story, the school committee together with the headteacher allowed the two children to return to school, this was the crossroads.

Last but not least, was the success clearly shared between the children, the mother, the neighbour, the members of the Volunteer Corps, the headteacher, the Memkwa teacher, the policeman, and the school committee, including the chairman. All these stakeholders used their position and the opportunities at hand to respond adequately to the challenge. Mutual respect and recognition for the legitimate concerns of each of them led from conflict to cooperation, so that everyone in the end was a winner. The students became better students. The mother was exemplary in overseeing her children's schooling and overcame her shyness to stand up to people in positions of authority. The neighbour continued to care for others in the community. The ATD team allowed themselves be guided by the aspirations and rhythm of the mother, respecting the time needed to create trust and to reduce her fear. The headteacher was more convinced than ever that children from a background of extreme poverty had the right to education. She was also convinced of the value of the time she had invested in talking to the mother, the teachers, and the school committee, seeking to create unity by helping them to understand each other. The Memkwa teacher overcame her fear of children who differ from the others and admitted to having learned something new from her headteacher, the children, and their mother. Finally, the school committee was able to broaden their perspective by listening and considering alternative viewpoints. Consequently and admirably, they moved away from their initial reaction to reach a better decision. The chairman in particular deserves to be mentioned, because he gave credit to the headteacher's point of view without being fully convinced. He was open to giving the children a second chance, at least in order to find out if they deserved it or not. He came back later to meet the children in order to convince himself that the decision had been the correct one, that the children progressed, and became better students.

One participant concluded that all through the story there were moments where someone was looking for solutions through dialogue: "Mr Kasian doesn't know what to do for Salma, so he talks to the volunteers. The volunteers visit her but don't know how to proceed so they speak with their team. They go to the school with the mother, and there is a dialogue established between the mother and the teachers [...]. What I learned as the fundamental principle of action is that we constantly need to foster dialogue on a person-to-person level and within a network."
