

Intergenerational Approach to Development: Harnessing the Demographic Dividend

1 Context

While the space for youth engagement has grown, the space for adolescent engagement is much less flourishing, with 10-19 years falling somewhere in the middle, sometimes considered as children (and technically they are while under 18 years) and sometimes considered as youth (15-19 years fall into the U.N. definition of youth of 15-24 years). **At the crossroads between childhood and adulthood, adolescents typically face many challenges and uncertainties in their lives.** The period of adolescence is also characterized by rapid physical, cognitive and social changes, including sexual and reproductive maturation. While quest of independence leads them to gradually build the capacity to assume adult behaviours, they still need handholding & support from parents that prepares them for roles involving new responsibilities requiring new knowledge and skills. It **also poses new challenges to health and development owing to their relative vulnerability and pressure from society, including peers, to adopt risky health behaviour.** These challenges include developing an individual identity and dealing with one's sexuality. **Young women are particularly constrained and face a myriad of challenges from gender based violence to stifling social norms and biased thoughts** that prevent them from owning property, working and even making decisions about their own lives.

All relevant measures must therefore be pursued as a package and not in isolation to ensure inclusivity. It is within this context that the voices of the youth and particularly young women need to be heard and their views incorporated in policy priorities. Harnessing the demographic dividend will require investments leading to improved employment opportunities, health including sexual and reproductive health and family planning, education and skills development. **Intergenerational dialogue with community at large, government and key influencers is one of the ways envisaged for improved understanding of adolescent issues, in order to achieve understanding and solidarity.**

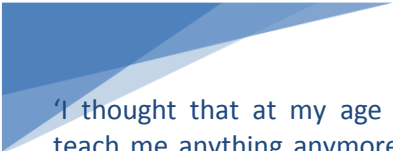
2 Bridging the generation gap through intergenerational dialogue

Far back in the 1920s or so, the families in India lived by certain unwritten rules. Women (& girls) spoke back very rarely to their husbands or fathers, youngsters too, rarely answered back. But as time proceeded ahead (around 1950s-60s), more and more youngsters got exposure to new medias of entertainment and many, after shifting to bigger/ developed cities, changed their attitude, conduct and also the manner of communication with elder members of the family/ society. As per a survey conducted by International Institute for Population Sciences and Population Council and endorsed by the Union health ministry (2010; covering nearly 51,000 married and unmarried young males and females from six states -- Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu), only 7 per cent boys and 4 per cent girls (aged 15-24) discussed "growing up" issues with their father. Only 6 per cent boys confided and "discussed life" with mothers and 77 per cent girls spoke more freely to their mothers, mostly about issues relating to menstruation. Moreover, the commonest areas of discussion between kids and parents were non-sensitive topics like school performance etc. the touchy topics, in contrast, such as reproduction etc., were rarely discussed with either parent (only 2% of young men and 6% of young women did so).

Adolescents have an evolving capacity to understand, anticipate and decide what is best for them and contribute to their own protection under the guidance of positive role models and in supportive ecosystem comprising of peers, focused laws, policies, strategies and programmes. They are not young, passive children, but **"agents" of change, individuals capable of innovation, strong advocacy and leadership when provided the opportunity.** Adolescents and youth are the architects of their futures as well as the future of the society.

Intergenerational Dialogue (IGD)- a participatory method that goes beyond Information Education Communication (IEC) campaigns and aims for concrete changes in behaviour. The method is built around a moderated, respect-based dialogue process across gender and generations and is specifically designed to empower stakeholders to change their behaviour by strengthening their ability to take action. These skills are subsequently put to the test using binding, dialogue-driven pledges which the different generations undertake to make realistic efforts to change.

It initiates a joint process of communication and change that participants carry forward together. Across generations and gender, people are encouraged to talk, listen to and learn from each other. The Intergenerational Dialogues are moderated by trained facilitators wherein opening up to another person's point of view helps people put their own opinions into context. **IGD has evolved as a space for dialogue that is necessary to develop transformative strategies and perspectives on maximizing the development potentials of young people.** It acts as a platform for the voices of adolescents to be heard by decision-makers at the highest level and, in the long run, promotes an attitude where challenges are seen as opportunities, instead of focusing on the negative consequences that might appear.



'I thought that at my age no one could teach me anything anymore. But this has transformed me. In fact, I don't really know what I should do. I have so many things I need to think about and I thank you.'

EL HADJ FODÉ, AGED 75, AFTER PARTICIPATING IN AN INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE AT LABÉ, GUINEA.

The intergenerational dialogue approach leads to:

- Areas of priority, action plan, including clear commitments, agreed upon by key leaders and community influencers Enhanced interaction and communication between adolescents and decision-makers including the opportunity to share and discuss key messages and concerns
- Communication opportunities offered, linkages strengthened and gaps reduced between generations
- Adolescents encouraged to analyze matters of local policy and participate in the decision processes with a creative attitude.
- Common diagnosis and solutions to the problems of the communities. This approach can also guide creation and promotion of public policies, and lead to behaviour change, to a great extent.
- Spaces created for reflection, listening and exchange of ideas between adolescents, parents, community, key influencers, Government bodies/ officials, and other stakeholders on issues that concern the adolescents.
- Creation of methodologies that recognize the differences between languages of older and younger people and help create proper approaches that can take advantages of the inputs given by all generations.
- Provision of tools to help families create a real sense of solidarity and develop a link among children, youngster, elder and society.
- Evolution of schools as a channel for integration and dialogue among generations.

3 Empowering adolescents through IGD: efforts made so far

The "intergenerational approach" is not new. Decades of work involving community and youth development have highlighted the responsibility adults have toward improving young people's lives and, also underlined the responsibility of young people to contribute to their own and the community's development. Evidence shows that young people and adults can build relationships in which they work with and learn from each other. The intergenerational (IG) approach goes a step further, however, to involve families, communities and other support systems to create healthy young people, strong families and responsible communities (Lane 1996). The IGD approach has the potential

to bring adults and adolescents together to plan better and to support efforts to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, promote girls' education, stop child marriages and improve child protection.

The experience of working together creates two important influences in the life of youth: adults, and the wider social context. While support from people in one's environment, from infancy on, has broad positive impacts on later's functioning, relationships with both adults and peers are the sources of the emotional support, guidance and instrumental help critical for young people (Gambone et al. 2002). Along with a caring and supportive environment, opportunities for meaningful involvement in decision-making processes and events such as community activities are the most important factors that seem to contribute to resilient children.

Young women and men flourish when they are surrounded by adults, families and community that values them, respects their rights and recognizes their contributions. Interactions between young people and adults take place in a variety of settings—in home, in schools and in the wider community. Parents, other kin, peers and teachers have the most direct influences on adolescent development, and community/ religious leaders may have a more direct influence on parents, though less on adolescents. Whether and how young people meet their basic needs and apply the competencies they develop depends on these influences in their lives (Zeldin et al. 2000). **Programs using the IGD approach should target several, if not all, influential adults in the lives of adolescents.** The existing literature highlights important gaps with respect to the IGD approach in programs. Although the number of such programs is increasing, those seeking to incorporate an IGD approach, lack a concrete framework or model for guiding the program implementation (Glen and Herbert 2002). Since the program strategies have been more "ad hoc" and project-specific, the potential benefits have not been fully leveraged. As a result, the impact of youth-adult partnerships on young people and adults has not been monitored or systematically evaluated. The most striking gap has been the absence of a clear and agreed upon conditions needed for successful implementation of IGD approach. It is still unclear as to what it means, how best to integrate it in programs, how is it different or should build upon current strategies and what should be the evaluation approaches.

4 Intergenerational approach to development: critical components

- **Recognition of the interdependence of adolescent and adult lives.** The IGD approach recognizes the interdependence between young people and adults and the important roles each plays in the lives of the other. While adults play key roles of providers, caretakers and counselors for young people, many adolescents also play critical roles in the lives of adults - helping with household care or working to supplement the family income etc. (Marphatia 2001).
- **Common understanding and respect for each generation's unique experiences through open dialogue.** Each generation must recognize the opportunities, constraints and unique experiences of the other. Dialogue can be an effective tool for clarification, affirmation of experiences and perspectives, leading to a common understanding. Creative communication strategies viz. drama, social media have been found to be effective in addressing barriers across age, gender and cultural.
- **Equal stake to both generations as owners as well as participants of the process.** After establishing a common understanding and dialogue, young people and adults should be engaged at equal levels, throughout the different phases, to fully capture the needs, concerns and constraints of each. Ownership and participation determines the sustainability of practices adopted.
- **Recognition that younger and older adolescents have different needs and that different adults play supportive roles at different stages in adolescents' lives.** To increase effectiveness, the interventions should be tailored to different developmental stages (pre-and early adolescence) and target groups (such as parents, teachers, community leaders etc.)

- **Sensitization and training are important for both generations.** Both adults and adolescents require sensitization and training to understand each others perspective and to increase the likelihood of working together - productively and respectfully.

E.g. For Girls' education: IGD strategies will actively engage a range of key adults (parents, community leaders and teachers) who together determine girls' access, retention and success in schools. Many of the adults who participate also gain from girls' education projects (in terms of increasing their own functional literacy and numeracy).

For Child protection: Parents, families, or other primary caregivers need to create a healthy, stable and protected environment where adolescents in previously harmful situations can flourish. The field of child protection recognizes the roles adults play in either creating destructive situations for children or in providing support to vulnerable children to lead healthy, happy and protected lives.

5 IGD: Impacting different areas and at different levels

- **Greater impact. Mass media** campaigns have been found to be useful for wider awareness, aren't very effective for behaviour change as the window for community engagement is limited to the extent of period and access of the campaign. IGD on the other hand, follows a behavioural approach and works on a wider aim – developing people's capacities.
- **Capacity development.** IGD develops people's communication and self-reflection skills. Participants gain valuable insights into the viewpoints, needs and desires of the other generation. They learn to bring about changes and also to contribute to changes around. *Behavioural and social change become possible only when knowledge and capacity development come together.* E.g. a woman who has been told about the detrimental effects of child marriage and who has been empowered to engage in constructive dialogue with her husband may be able to prevent her daughter from getting married at young age, whilst fear of reprisal might force another woman to succumb to tradition even against her better judgement.
- **Empowerment.** IGD empowers people, both at an individual and at a collective level, through a combination of dialogue workshops and public discussion with community members/ influencers. The dialogue empowers adolescents and women in particular to become 'Agents of Change' and to stand up for their rights.
- **Bottom-up instead of top down.** Participants in an IGD pro-actively shape their own development under professional guidance. In contrast to conventional IEC approaches, it does not regard stakeholders simply as being at the receiving end of messages.
- **Sustainability.** IGD is based on the understanding that development can only take place if the stakeholders are in the driving seat and in control of their own development. By promoting stakeholder ownership of development processes, a basis for sustainable change is established.
- **Transferability.** IGD approach is effective for various issues in a range of cultural and geographical contexts.

6 Best practices

Children sports bonanza can be used to bring together girls, boys and community together; with special themes viz. menstrual hygiene/child marriage etc. Prior to the sports events boys in different groups with girls can be given opportunities to discuss Reproductive Health (RH) issues affecting them including menstrual hygiene and child marriage with deliberation.

Intergenerational and public dialogue and debate: Provide opportunities for communities to discuss and debate the topic and increase awareness and understanding, through questioning and listening with the support of a trained facilitator (WHO, 2008; GIZ, 2011a). This dialogue and debate allows individuals to discuss their values, norms and traditions and any changes they feel should be made (WHO, 2008; GIZ, 2011a).

Transforming Communities Through The Power Of Grandmothers¹

Grandmothers across the globe play an important role not only caring for young children but also advising and educating younger women in their communities on all aspects of family well-being. Interestingly, in the developing world, the influence of grandmothers even extends to the men in their communities as well. In India, the tradition of grandma stories has not only provided elderly women with the opportunity to participate in society by giving them a chance to use their life experience, but also promoted intergenerational communication between the elderly and young children, each representing the opposite ends of a generation spectrum. The Beautiful Story-Grandma Program (storymama.kr [in Korean]) is a unique program that the Advanced Center for Korean Studies began in 2009. Through the program, elderly women were given training and sent to child education facilities near their homes to tell three- to five-year-olds stories based on Korean traditions and history. The work of the Grandmother Project and World Vision demonstrated that when grandmothers are acknowledged, included and given access to new information, their commitment and contribution to family and community health and well-being increases. Starting in 2013, World Vision empowered grandmothers in Sierra Leone to be positive agents of change in their community. The grandmother-inclusive approach to social and behaviour change for nutrition built on the culturally-designated role of grandmothers as advisors and caregivers. It strengthened grandmothers' knowledge and self-efficacy to promote positive health practices in the community. Grandmothers were publicly recognized and praised through intergenerational community sessions that highlight the positive roles of grandmothers in the community.

7 Implementation of IGD approach: critical steps

- **Hold community consultations (1).** Prior to each dialogue, consult the community to determine how it perceives relations and communication between the generations and gender, family structures, traditional practices etc. These focus group discussions, held separately according to generation and gender (younger adolescent girls, older adolescent girls, younger adolescent boys, older adolescent boys) will ensure that all parties involved can express themselves freely. The results of the community consultations will provide a qualitative description of the situation at the outset and can also be used as baseline data to monitor the results.
- **Conduct Intergenerational Dialogue sessions.** Organize these sessions as a group activity wherein participants will be selected basis their communication & dialogue skills and from a wide range of participants (religious or traditional leaders, health personnel, teachers, parents, youth, etc.) Encourage the participants to engage in a constructive debate with each other using proven, graduated exercises, to build on the previous work. The workshop may focus on: active listening and dialogue skills; family structures and paths through life in the past, present and future; traditional practices. Depending on the context and the thematic area being discussed, the dialogue sessions can also be designed as public hearings wherein issues can be analysed together by adolescents, decision makers, community people. The analysis may entail all the aspects of the issue viz. what is being done, how is it being done, what still needs to be done and what commitment can be made.
- **Organize Public Meeting (1)- Presenting pledges and requests.** Use these meetings as a platform to allow participants present the results of their dialogue to the community, their traditional and religious leaders, representatives of decentralized institutions and other key stakeholders. The participants will tell everyone in the community what they would like to change and what they will change about their own behaviour. At the same time, they will also express requests to the community and to institutions. The meeting facilitators should help participants formulate their pledges and wishes in a realistic manner.

¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/development-unplugged/transforming-communities-grandmothers_b_15828436.html

- **Do rigorous follow-ups.** After the first public meeting, the participants will start working as ‘agents of change’, help them report back to the facilitators who encourage and support their efforts to put the desired changes into practice. Set up mechanisms to document the processes of change using monitoring forms/ methods/ templates.
- **Reorganize Public meeting (2) to assess changes.** Organize second public meeting after an agreed period to help representatives of both generations, as well as representatives of authorities and institutions, report on the changes that have taken place and what they did to make them happen. The point of reference will be the pledges made at the first public meeting.
- **Conduct community consultations (2) and results assessment.** Shortly after the second public meeting, conduct second community consultation to discuss concrete results of the IGD. These results can be compared with the data from the first community consultation to determine the impact of IGD.

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