

Common Interests Common Action

May 2002



An Intergenerational Dialogue on Overcoming Poverty



Call to Action ►

We are community leaders from ten different countries. We are youth and adults, female and male. We have come together out of a deep concern about the persistent poverty that we see in our communities and around the world. To this meeting of generations, we have each brought our experience, our perspectives, our hopes, and our desire to learn from one another. Through drama, play, music, research, and discussion, we have found a way to communicate across cultures and ages. We have developed insights that we will carry with us when we return to our communities. We have glimpsed new possibilities for building stronger families, communities, and nations through partnerships between youth and adults. We issue this Call to Action to draw attention to the ways that the lives and the fates of youth and adults in poverty are interconnected, to invite others to join our reflection, and to urge more effective and informed action to overcome poverty.

Common Interests, Common Action

An Intergenerational Dialogue on Overcoming Poverty

From September 12-18, 2001, a selected group of adult and youth leaders from around the world gathered at the Edith Macy Conference Center in Briarcliff Manor, New York. They came together to deepen their understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty, particularly poverty that entraps generation after generation. Drawing on experiences in their own communities, they identified actions that can break the endless cycle of poverty. Over the course of their five days together, their dialogue and interaction generated visions and ideas for ending poverty. In sharing these ideas, they call on governments, civil society, and the business community to act with wisdom and determination to overcome the intergenerational cycle of poverty.



Intergenerational Dialogue participants

Preamble

The Problem of Poverty

Lacking basic education, skills, and resources, poor people face a constant struggle for life's essentials: food, shelter, clothing, and health care. Having little or no say in the decisions that shape their lives, the fortunes of the world's 1.2 billion poor people are often decided by forces and influences far beyond their control. Desperate circumstances that leave individuals without security or a sense of hope lead to risky or dangerous practices, including drug and alcohol abuse, violence, and prostitution. Often relationships deteriorate and families unravel in the struggle for survival.

Poverty exacts different costs from men and women, young and old, rural and urban—on individuals and societies as a whole. The nations of the world have pledged by the year 2015 to reduce by half the number of people living on less than one dollar a day. To reach this goal, more must be understood about how poverty affects these different groups of individuals and, in turn, the societies in which they live.

Intergenerational Poverty: A Vicious Cycle

A life of poverty is the inheritance of many millions of young women and men around the world. Girls and boys growing up in poverty too often become impoverished adults who, as mothers and fathers, are unable—despite their deepest hopes and dreams—to build a better future for their children. Passed down from one generation to the next, this kind of poverty is a vicious trap, nearly impossible to escape on one's own.

Every available resource must be enlisted to stop this cycle. Women and youth represent a vast source of creativity, energy, and knowledge that has been overlooked and excluded from poverty reduction strategies. Governments, civil society, international organizations, and businesses can break the intergenerational cycle of poverty by

investing in women and youth—especially girls—affirming their rights, and accepting and valuing the resources that they have to offer. Women, men, and youth must come together to find lasting solutions.

We have identified four key areas that we believe must be addressed in order to break the vicious cycle of intergenerational poverty. The first is lack of equal opportunities for girls in education and women and youth in employment; the second is the need to build intergenerational alliances within families and communities; the third is inadequate sexual and reproductive health and rights options for women and youth; and the fourth is the need for a stronger role of civil society and for good governance.



Equal Opportunities in Education and Employment

Education

Limited opportunities for women and girls relative to men and boys contribute to intergenerational poverty. Girls are often kept out or drop out of school. When women's roles are limited primarily to those of wife and mother, parents don't believe that school is necessary to prepare girls for adulthood. Girls often must leave school when families need them to care for younger children or other family members; this is especially true where families are affected by HIV/AIDS. Such girls are often isolated, with few opportunities for social interaction. Girls who become pregnant typically are expected to leave school. Many parents arrange marriages for young adolescent girls. All of these factors leave girls and women with less education and fewer skills than boys and men.

Employment Opportunities

While income-generating opportunities are improving for some women in some countries, we see that most women do not have regular paid employment, but work on their own doing piece work at home, tending small shops, selling goods on the street, or doing agricultural work. In many countries, women's work outside the home is forbidden or looked down upon because of strong cultural beliefs that a woman's proper role is limited to the home. Furthermore, steady employment is difficult for women who live in countries or cultures that forbid them to own or inherit land or property.

To Ensure Equal Opportunities for Women and Youth in Education and Employment:

- ▶ We call on governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community groups to create strong partnerships **to eliminate policies and programs that discriminate against women and youth** and establish, instead, policies and programs that ensure equal opportunities in education, vocational training, and employment for all. Through these partnerships, greater attention must be paid to understanding and addressing how the roles and expectations of men and women affect their access to education and employment opportunities.
- ▶ We call on governments to **provide tax credits, rebates, or other incentives** to businesses and organizations that provide employment for youth. We call on governments to create employment opportunities for women and to serve as an example of non-discrimination by employing women at all levels. Decent, productive employment leads to healthier, better educated, safer, and more secure families and communities.
- ▶ We call on governments to pass and enforce legislation giving women and girls **property ownership rights** equal to those enjoyed by men and boys.
- ▶ We call on corporations and NGOs to mobilize resources and simplify procedures and regulations to **improve the access of women and youth to microcredit**. Further, we call on them to implement programs for entrepreneurship development and business development services.
- ▶ We call on governments to commit greater resources to provide **free, quality, gender-sensitive education** in schools for girls and boys. We call for better training for teachers, improved school facilities, flexible schedules, and the development of curriculum that includes practical, applicable life skills.

Those women who are employed are concentrated in a relatively small number of jobs, which tend to be low-paying with little opportunity for

advancement and may be located in unsafe or unhealthy working conditions. Such positions include secretaries, teachers, maids or domestic workers, and industrial factory workers.

In many countries, youth—both young men and young women—cannot find decent and

productive jobs after they finish school. Often their schooling has failed to equip them with marketable skills. Young men, generally expected by society to be the family provider, may be unequipped to earn an adequate income to fulfill this role. The lack of employment and income earning opportunities, particularly in rural areas, means that many people are unable to support themselves or their families and are forced to migrate elsewhere, compromising the integrity of the family. The patterns of migration vary from one country or region to another and include both young and adult men and women.

Equal opportunities in education and employment will enable women and youth to control more resources, which typically translates into a greater say in decision-making. This is an important step in putting an end to the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

In many countries, women's work outside the home is forbidden or looked down upon because of strong cultural beliefs that a woman's proper role is limited to the home.

Building Intergenerational Alliances Within Families and Communities

Cultural expectations about the proper roles for men and women, adults and youth are introduced, taught, and reinforced within the family. We see that often these roles restrict choices and place heavy burdens on men, women, and youth. As a result, these role expectations are contributing to the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

Role Expectations

In most countries, women are fully responsible for the care of the household and family members, whether or not they work outside the home. To cope with the demands of these responsibilities, women typically rely on their daughters, which means girls begin to work long hours at an early age while their brothers are allowed to enjoy more

leisure time. Women are caught between the competing demands of the household, struggling continuously to juggle their domestic

Using theater to identify consequences of intergenerational poverty, dialogue participants portray a situation where a mother, overwhelmed with domestic responsibilities, must turn down her son's request for help with school work.



To Strengthen Family Life and Build Intergenerational Alliances

We call on governments, grassroots groups, NGOs, unions, religious bodies, and informal networks to work together to establish local community resource and training centers to provide a **comprehensive range of family support services**.

- ▶ These centers should provide a gathering point for training and information-sharing on a range of issues most critical to breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Services should include sex education, including education about pregnancy prevention; support to keep young people in school and training for those who have left school; and awareness-raising on the rights of women and youth, ways to end or transform harmful cultural practices, and alternatives to domestic violence. All activities should promote greater gender equality and shared decision-making.
- ▶ Community resource centers should involve youth and adults in creating a curriculum that teaches basic life skills such as communication, developing self-esteem, responsibility, decision-making, and problem-solving. These centers can help create or strengthen networks for mutual care, support, exchange, interaction, and reflection.

responsibilities within the household and their income-generating activities in order to nurture and care for their families.

Men are expected to serve as the family's provider and protector. They are regarded as the head of the household and thus the one to make the decisions for the family. Stress, anger, or a sense of failure may result when employment opportunities are not available or where school does not provide adequate skills to allow men to fulfill these expectations.

Families also teach cultural expectations about the proper roles and behavior of youth and adults.

Typically, youth are expected to defer to the decisions and authority of adults, without the right to voice their own opinions or express their own needs.

Impact on Family Life

The tensions that arise from the attempt to live up to—or to resist—these role expectations affect the quality of family life. In many cases this takes the form of domestic violence, alcoholism and substance abuse, depression and other mental health problems. It may also take the form of family break-up, with fathers abandoning their families or young people running away from home. These tensions are even more severe in crisis situations of conflict or illness.

Because family life is critically important to the healthy development of children and youth, it is a promising point of intervention for breaking the intergenerational

cycle of poverty. Community institutions, kinship and social networks, and government policies and programs can help households to be safe and nurturing havens for all family members. These institutions and programs can bring together families and communities to examine and reflect on the consequences of their expectations about proper roles for men and women, girls and boys. They can help youth and adults form partnerships through which they can work together to improve their communities.

The tensions that arise from the attempt to live up to—or to resist—role expectations affect the quality of family life. In many cases this takes the form of domestic violence, alcoholism and substance abuse, depression and other mental health problems.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS is robbing young people in some parts of the world of their parents, their futures, and their very lives. The disease is particularly prevalent among young people, with half of all new infections occurring among 15-24 year-olds. In the hardest hit countries, adolescent girls are at especially grave risk, with rates of infection several times that of adolescent boys.



Theater presentation depicts dialogue participant, left, as a girl who must drop out of school because she is being forced into early marriage.

Information and Access to Services

Young people are sexually active without the information, knowledge, and guidance they need to make informed choices. Women often are constrained in their ability to make choices about childbearing because they do not know about family planning options or they may not have access to family planning and reproductive health services.

Relationships

Unequal power relations between men and women contribute to violence against women and harmful traditional practices, such as early marriage, which jeopardize the health and violate the rights of women and girls. Also, women must often struggle to provide their family's basic needs, in large part because they are unable to choose when to have children, or how many to have. Furthermore, lacking power in relationships with men, they may not be able to negotiate the use of contraception with their partners.

To Promote Health and Protect Rights:

- ▶ We call on governments, NGOs, and international donors to **provide free and easily accessible contraception**. This can be accomplished through a variety of means, including mobile units, vending machines, schools, community centers, and health clinics.
- ▶ We call on governments, NGOs, community-based organizations, and the private sector to provide **information about sexual and reproductive health and rights** using innovative forms of communication, such as folk media, theater, and popular culture. The information must be understandable to all citizens, regardless of their literacy level, age, or sex, and must reach all citizens, regardless of their place of residence.
- ▶ We call on governments to provide **free medication, care, and support, including counseling, to persons living with HIV and AIDS**. We call on governments to endorse the right to health care over intellectual property rights which prevent life-saving medicines from reaching many people who need them.
- ▶ We call on governments to provide an inclusive and compulsory curriculum of **sex education**, including information about gender-based violence.

Beliefs about masculinity and the lack of knowledge about sexuality and reproductive health may lead men and boys into harmful or risky



behavior. When adolescent girls become unwed mothers, they are often scorned by their families and their communities. Without adequate education or skills, both they and their children face a lifetime of poverty.

Young people are sexually active without the information, knowledge, and guidance they need to make informed choices.

Because child rearing is viewed as the responsibility of women, reproductive health and family planning concerns are often considered outside of the role expectations of men and boys. When women become pregnant, efforts to ensure the health of the mother and the baby are not seen as the father's responsibility.

Good Governance and Civil Society

Effective and accountable action by governments committed to the well-being of all is needed to

We call on governments to ensure that representation throughout government—both elected and administrative—reflects the age and sex distribution of the larger society.

break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. In many cases, rather than protecting rights and ensuring equal opportunities, governments are themselves enforcing and perpetuating discrimination against women and youth. Lawmaking bodies lack representation by women, and mechanisms for youth participation are inadequate. There is a

gap in many places whereby important laws have been passed, but are not being implemented. Widespread corruption and bribery undermine the accountability of governments to those they govern. Furthermore, women and youth are rarely represented adequately in formal decision-making structures and processes.

Voluntary organizations and citizens associations have helped mobilize communities to raise a common voice that has led to more responsive governments. These organizations reflect the needs and concerns of local communities and often achieve their goals and broaden their representation by working in coalition with other like-minded organizations. However, these organizations are not always strong enough to demand accountability from government. Sometimes the organizations themselves operate in a discriminatory and non-participatory fashion.

We see that almost nowhere are women and youth represented adequately in decision-making structures and processes. Policies and programs to

overcome the intergenerational cycle of poverty cannot succeed without the experience and perspective of women and youth.

To Foster Effective and Accountable Government Policies and Programs:

- ▶ We call on governments, international organizations, and local NGOs—especially those working with children and youth—to **formulate poverty policies and programs with a clear understanding of the relevance and impact of the roles each culture and society assigns men and women, boys and girls** (that is, a *gender perspective*). This should include promoting greater understanding and awareness among government, international organization, and NGO officials of the relevance and impact of gender roles. Recognition and support should be given to those officials and programs that are already incorporating gender perspectives into their work, and training should be provided to others.
- ▶ We call on governments to **formulate policies on gender and poverty** that bring together and address a full range of sectors, including education, health, employment, and political participation.
- ▶ We call on governments to establish **sex-disaggregated targets for poverty policies and programs**, formulate and use indicators that measure the impact of poverty policies and programs on men and women, girls and boys, and regularly collect and analyze sex-disaggregated data.
- ▶ We call on governments to **ensure that representation throughout government—both elected and administrative—reflects the age and sex distribution of the larger society**. This should be accomplished through the adoption of laws guaranteeing that a percentage of elected positions are occupied by women or by specific age groups. Procedures should be established to ensure that such representation is effective and meaningful. Youth councils should be established to give voice and influence to the opinions and perspectives of young people.
- ▶ We call on international organizations and multilateral development banks to **require more participatory political processes and more diverse representation in government as a condition of grants and loans**. At the same time, we call on governments to ensure that United Nations agencies and other donor organizations do not support or strengthen non-democratic regimes.
- ▶ We call on business associations, labor unions, and other civil society organizations to **mobilize to bring about more participatory government and more diverse representation among government officials**.
- ▶ We call on governments, international organizations, and NGOs to **strengthen civil society** by providing resources for poverty programs designed and run by independent civil society organizations, and helping them to build their management skills and organizational practices.
- ▶ We call on civil society organizations to become more effective by **building alliances** with sympathetic individuals within government and establishing alliances across national boundaries to exchange information about best practices.

More About the Intergenerational Dialogue

Common Interests, Common Action: An Intergenerational Dialogue on Overcoming Poverty is a project of the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). The 20 participants were selected from more than 130 applicants. Each participant is a leader in his or her community. In preparation for the Dialogue, participants conducted research on the nature of work in their communities and how it differed for women, men, and adolescent girls and boys. Following the Dialogue, participants have used the ideas and insights gained from the event in a variety of community projects and advocacy activities. They are sharing insights and lessons from their experiences through an ongoing dialogue via the ICRW website.

The Intergenerational Dialogue Project was made possible through collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund and the generous support of the United Nations Foundation and the Turner Foundation. For more information, please visit www.icrw.org.



Dialogue participants get to know each other through "icebreaker" activities before discussing their perspectives on the intergenerational dimensions of poverty.

Participants in the Intergenerational Dialogue:

Africa

Catherine Njoki Kamau, 22, from Nairobi, Kenya, is a youth advocate for International Planned Parenthood Federation, Family Planning Association of Kenya, and the Kenya Association for the Promotion of Adolescent Health.

Sammy Oinyiaku, 24, from Kajiado, Kenya, started the organization Maasai AIDS Prevention Network (MAPNet) and he is a youth leader in rural areas.

Mahendranath Busgopaul, 50, from Curepipe, Mauritius, is the secretary general of Halley Movement, an NGO working for the welfare of children and families in the Indian Ocean Region. He leads an intergenerational dialogue in the Islands and has worked with youth groups throughout Mauritius.

Richard Mkandawire, 53, from Louis Trichardt, South Africa, is the director for academic programs, research, and outreach at the Centre for Youth Studies at the University of Venda and is a youth policy advocate and researcher in South Africa.

Dinah Kivuti, 63, from Embu, Kenya, is the director of the Kamuthuago Christian Women's Group. She has started many income-generating initiatives, including a catering school for women and girls, and she attended Beijing plus Five.

Asia

Anjali Agarwal, 38, from Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India, is the project director for Better Life Options, a program for girls and young women, with the NGO *Bhartiya Grameen Mahila Sangh* (BGMS).

Kanchan Kumari Jha, 15, from New Delhi, India, is a founding member of the Children's Parliament (*Bal Panchayat*) in her community and has represented the NGO Community Aid and Sponsorship Program (CASP) at various national youth camps.

Xuan Linh Le, 16, from Hanoi, Vietnam, attends Hanoi Amsterdam High School and is active in the Youth Coordination Center International, Asian Youth Network, Youth Workshop Asia, and Save the Children.

Anchalee Phonkling, 40, from Chiang Mai, Thailand, is a gender section supervisor for Intermountain People's Education Culture and Tradition (IMPECT), which seeks to revitalize and apply indigenous and tribal knowledge in all areas of development.

Europe and Australia

Mirjana Arsic,* 19, from Belgrade, Yugoslavia, is the education department coordinator at the Youth of Yugoslav Association against AIDS (Youth for JAZAS).

Franziska Brantner, 22, from Freiburg, Germany, is vice-president of the Youth Caucus of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). She initiated the Youth Parliament in Freiburg and has worked with youth environment management in Germany, France, and Israel.

Georgia Heath, 18, from Salisbury, South Australia, is currently a student at the University of Adelaide and is also the youth governor for the South Australia youth government.

Grace Kyriakos, 29, from Beirut, Lebanon, started out as a youth volunteer coordinator for the National YWCA of Lebanon and is now is program coordinator for the organization. She was also involved in the World Youth Forum of the United Nations, representing World YWCA.

Latin America and the Caribbean

Cristian Acosta, 16, from Montevideo, Uruguay, is part of the organization *Mujer Ahora* (Woman of Today). A high school student, he has initiated many activities, including a sports club with his mother.

Carmen Beramendi, 51, from Montevideo, Uruguay, works with the organization *Mujer Ahora* (Woman of Today) and with young people in grassroots and urban settings. Her interests include gender, information, technology, and domestic violence.

Blas Fernandez, 27, from Buenos Aires, Argentina, works with the *Centro de Estudios de la Mujer* (Center for Women's Studies) and has worked in economic development, education, and social programs in grassroots and urban settings.

Leidy Marcela Gomez,* 19, from Colombia, is the national coordinator for youth at Profamilia, and attended Beijing Plus Five and the UN Special Session on Children PrepCom.

Folade Mutota,* 41, from San Juan, Trinidad and Tobago, is a founding member and Coordinator of Project Affairs at the Women's Institute for Alternative Development (WINAD), a national NGO which prepares young women for leadership roles.

Diego Alejandro Palacio,* 19, from Medellin, Colombia, is a participant in Project Fenix and in the *Red Juvenil*, a youth network, and leader of an educational program for young children. He is also a home-based worker.

Gustavo Albert Rios Cardona,* 26, from Medellin, Colombia, is the facilitator for the *Grupo Fenix Confama* as well as a youth mentor and activist.

*Several participants were prevented from attending the Dialogue because of transportation disruptions resulting from the events of September 11. They otherwise have been active participants in the on-going Dialogue.

International Center for Research on Women

1717 Massachusetts Avenue, NW

Suite 302

Washington, DC 20036, U.S.A.

Tel: (202) 797-0007

Fax: (202) 797-0020

e-mail: info@icrw.org

<http://www.icrw.org>