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Information Brief

The Intergenerational Approach to Development: Bridging the Generation Gap

Despite considerable interest in intergenerational approaches in programs targeted to adolescents, documentation on what the approach incorporates is scarce. There is even less information on the number, type and success of programs undertaking this approach. Implementing projects that involve youth-adult collaboration has been difficult, largely due to limited understanding of the conditions in which youth-adult interactions are most likely to be successful. Furthermore, the absence of a clear and commonly agreed upon conceptual framework to guide implementation of the IG approach inhibits a proper evaluation of its effectiveness. Realizing the importance of the IG approach for the development of adolescents, in January 2003 the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) commissioned ICRW to assess if and how an intergenerational approach can enhance positive adolescent development and to provide direction for incorporating this approach in programmatic efforts.

The "intergenerational approach"—young people and adults working together to address social problems in developing countries—is not new. Decades of work involving community and youth development have acknowledged the responsibility adults have toward improving young people's lives and, similarly, the responsibility of young people to contribute to their own and the community's development. Evidence from this work shows that young people and adults can build relationships in which they work with and learn from each other. The intergenerational (IG) approach in project work in developing countries has emerged almost organically based on this understanding. It 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 IG approach, when implemented in development projects, has the potential to bring adults and adolescents together in a constructive manner to support efforts to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, promote girls' education and improve child protection.

Methodology
ICRW conducted a literature review to document findings regarding the impact of youth-adult interactions and relationships in fostering healthy youth development, and to examine the extent to which an IG approach is being used in programs. Salient research was reviewed from the fields of communications, youth development, sociology, psychology, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, girls' education and child protection. ICRW also conducted interviews by phone or in person with staff from 25 projects employing the IG approach. Information about the successes, challenges and lessons learned in involving adults and youth and connecting the two groups was collected and analyzed, and 11 projects were profiled as "best cases." The last activity was an "on-line dialogue" between young people and adults who were

interviewed for this project. The goal was to capture their experiences and insights concerning successes, challenges and shortcomings in developing and implementing an IG approach. The dialogue was facilitated using the Voices of Youth (VOY) mechanism at UNICEF.[1] VOY and ICRW facilitated the discussion via a chat room through VOY. Fifteen participants (five youth, 10 adults) from five countries explained how best to create a common understanding and synergy between the two generations to work on HIV/AIDS, girls' education and child protection issues. Findings from both the literature review and the case studies are highlighted in this brief.

Findings on IG

Literature Review

The literature reviewed emphasizes two important influences in the life of youth: adults, and the wider social context of adolescents' lives. One consistent finding is that support from people in one's environment, from infancy on, has broad positive impacts on later functioning. Relationships with both adults and peers are the sources of the emotional support, guidance and instrumental help that are critical to young people's capacity to feel connected to others, navigate daily life situations and engage in productive activities (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 value them by respecting their rights and recognizing their contributions. Interactions between young people and adults take place in a variety of settings—in the home with parents, older siblings and other relatives; in schools with teachers and other staff; and in the wider community with religious and community leaders and health staff. Parents, other kin, peers and teachers have the most direct influences on adolescent development (those with whom interaction generally takes place), while community and religious leaders may have a less direct influence (interaction takes place during a particular activity). Whether and how young people meet their basic needs and apply the competencies they develop depends in large part on these influences in their lives (Zeldin et al. 2000). One

implication from the literature review is that programs using the IG approach should target several, if not all, influential adults in the lives of adolescents.

While the benefits of positive youth-adult relationships are clearly documented, the existing literature highlights important gaps with respect to the IG approach in programs. Programs in which adults and young people collaborate are on the rise. However, those seeking to incorporate an IG approach, lacking a conceptual framework or model on which to guide the program implementation, cannot maximize the potential benefits of this collaboration (Glen and Herbert 2002). While many organizations do involve both generations in programs, the strategies have been more "ad hoc" and project-specific. As a result, the impact of youth-adult partnerships on young people and adults, particularly in developing country settings, has not been monitored or systematically evaluated.

Perhaps the most striking gap in the literature is the absence of a clear and agreed upon set of conditions needed to successfully implement the IG approach. There is still a great deal of confusion as to what it means, how best to implement it in programs, and how it differs from—or builds upon—a number of current strategies that aim to bring the two generations together. Without a conceptual framework, it is not possible to recognize and evaluate the benefits of the IG approach, nor can it be advocated as a programmatic intervention.

Framework for the IG Approach

To provide greater clarity and guidance for implementing the IG approach in programs, ICRW, drawing on the research conducted for this paper, has identified its five critical components:

1. **Recognition of the interdependence of adolescent and adult lives.**
   The IG 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 are also pillars in the lives of adults, for example in helping with sibling and other household care or working to supplement the family income (Marphatia 2001).

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[1] Since 1995, the VOY mechanism has used live chats, web boards, interactive quizzes and more to explore the educational and community-building potential of the internet. VOY aims to facilitate the active and substantive participation of young people on child rights and development-related issues.

2. **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. Through speaking and listening, both generations can clarify and affirm their experiences and perspectives and work toward a common understanding. Many groups—UNICEF, Advocates for Youth (AFY), ICRW, the International Youth Foundation (IYF)—with experience in youth-adult partnership-building say that creative communication strategies, such as use of drama and the internet, can help dismantle significant barriers across age, gender and cultural differences (Klindera et al. 2002).

3. **Both generations are key stakeholders whose buy-in, ownership and participation are important for the project's success.**
Once a common understanding and dialogue is established, the IG approach then aims to engage young people and adults at equal levels throughout the different phases of a project—from needs assessment to implementation to monitoring and evaluation—in order to fully capture the needs and concerns of each generation, along with the constraints faced in cross-generational work. Ownership and participation can determine whether learning and practices adopted during the project will be sustained by the community thereafter.

4. **Recognition that younger and older adolescents have different needs and that different adults play supportive roles at various stages in adolescents' lives.**
Simply recognizing each generation as a project stakeholder is not sufficient. Programs will be more effective if the interventions are tailored to the different developmental stages (pre-and early adolescence) instead of targeting the whole age segment as a homogeneous group. Similarly,

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Youth and reproductive and sexual health (RSH), Burkina Faso, 1999-2003

Advocates for Youth, based in Washington, DC, and Mwangaza Action, based in Burkina Faso, implemented a project promoting the participation of communities (specifically youth and adults) to improve adolescent reproductive and sexual health (ARSH), including mitigating HIV/AIDS. The objectives were to improve adult and youth knowledge, attitudes and practices related to the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people; to engage community members, especially youth, in developing and implementing interventions; and to build capacity among participating partners to work on ARSH issues through a variety of strategies, including strengthening youth-adult partnerships. The project was implemented in 20 villages, reaching at its maximum 3,000 adults and 3,000 youth per month, and was evaluated by the Pacific Institute for Women's Health.

IG Successes
Pre-intervention phase

1. Tapping into the existing network of Youth Associations in Burkina Faso and assisting them in becoming the main agents for designing and implementing the project.

2. Needs assessment of young people and adults to understand both how each generation perceives young people's needs, and to find out their perceptions of how and which adults can facilitate or hinder improvements in youth reproductive health (RH).

Implementation phase

3. Creation of teams with eight youth and two adult members under the guidance of Youth Associations. These "intergenerational" teams, which were linked with community-based village committees, were responsible for conducting the needs assessment, assisting in project design and overseeing activities at the village level.

4. Utilization of multiple media and tools such as street theater and video presentations to convey sensitive issues to community members across sex and age.

5. Training for both youth and adults to become skilled educators on youth RH information and services.

Evaluation results show an increase in confidence of both youth and adults, as well as improved communication between them. The percentage of youth who felt comfortable discussing issues of sexuality with their parents increased from 36 percent to 55 percent over the course of the project. The peer educators who took part in the project were seen as "mini-doctors" in the villages and were sought out by other youth as well as adults for advice and guidance on sexuality and HIV/AIDS issues.

projects will be more successful if they can determine which adults (such as parents, teachers, community leaders) to target and engage in project implementation.

5. **Sensitization and training are important for both generations.**

   Both adults and youth require sensitization and training to understand the perspective of the other. This increases the likelihood that they will work together productively and respectfully and find strategies to work together. Successful IG approaches promote skills training for both youth and adults in the technical area of the project, for example, HIV/AIDS prevention knowledge.

Program Review

In order to understand how and under what conditions an IG approach is best implemented, we reviewed 11

projects from three different sectors (HIV/AIDS, girls' education and child protection) that explicitly have tried to incorporate this approach. One project from each of these sectors is summarized as a "best case" to give an idea of the key elements of a successful IG approach.

HIV/AIDS

The IG approach adds value to programs seeking to mitigate HIV/AIDS because it can support and strengthen the capacities of individuals, families and communities to prevent HIV infection and ensure protection and care for children, young people and adults infected with and affected by HIV and AIDS. (See box on page 3.)

Girls' education

IG strategies actively engage a range of key adults (parents, community leaders and teachers) who together determine girls' access, retention and success

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ISHRAQ (enlightenment)—Creating safe places for out-of-school girls to learn, grow and play, Egypt, 2001-2004

Save the Children, Population Council, CEDPA and Caritas are partnering to implement a project to improve the life opportunities of out-of-school girls (13-15 years old) in the rural governorate of Minya. Project objectives include improving girls' literacy, recreational opportunities, livelihood skills, health practices and mobility; influencing social norms that inhibit girls' life opportunities; and improving local and national support for policies that are more supportive of girls. In addition to the young girls, the project targets four other groups: adolescent boys (13-17 years old); parents of participating girls; community leaders; and promoters—local young women (18-27 years old) who act as group leaders for the girls' learning sessions.

IG Successes
Pre-intervention phase

1. Stakeholder analysis and needs assessment to not only understand educational needs of girls and parents, but also to identify key stakeholders—parents, brothers, local leaders, teachers and doctors.

2. Involvement of young women promoters, adults and adolescents in defining project activities.

Implementation phase

3. Community-wide workshops involving youth and adults to determine the planning and implementation of activities.

4. Strategic involvement of adults who are important in girls' lives, such as religious and women leaders.

5. Establishment of a key role with significant authority for young women (the promoters).

6. Involvement of young women promoters provides the generational link required to help parents and girls communicate better, and to discuss and change gender norms.

7. Inclusion of adolescent males and parents, who control girls' mobility and access to educational opportunities. This gives them a stake in the project and establishes their sense of "ownership," which in turn encourages them to support the project goal of creating an enabling environment for girls to develop and to access life opportunities.

Preliminary results show that the project has successfully created youth and adult committees at the village level who monitor project activities monthly and solve problems as they arise.

in schools. Many of the adults who participate also gain from girls' education projects (in terms of increasing their own functional literacy and numeracy). (See box on page 4.)

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. (See box below.)

Successes and Challenges in Incorporating the Five Components of the IG Approach
The 11 "best case" projects that ICRW analyzed are only partially implementing an IG approach. They recognize the interdependence of youth and adult lives and are promoting an intergenerational dialogue to discuss each generation's unique experiences. They view both generations as key stakeholders whose buy-in, ownership and participation are important for project success, as demonstrated by the inclusion of young people and adults in all phases of the project and the appointment of both generations to serve in leadership, decision-making and implementation roles. They identified the key adults who provided the support adolescents were seeking, be it information on HIV/AIDS, succeeding in school, or something else.

However, implementation of the IG approach fell short in some ways. Some projects are not consistently assessing the information and training needs of adults. Similarly, ensuring that both generations benefit from activities is not always a project goal. None are differentiating between the needs of younger and older adolescents. In addition, projects need to better differentiate between simply involving both generations and building meaningful partnerships, where adults and youth come together to meet a common goal and each values the unique, yet complementary contribution that the other has to offer (Norman 2001; Checkoway n.d.). Another problem is that project staff often lack the appropriate skills to facilitate cross-generational dialogue and activities and to overcome the attitudinal barriers

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Project Fenix, Colombia, 1998-present

Project Fenix, a mentorship project to end youth gang involvement, works to create better lives for young people living in poverty and violence in Medellin. Young people recruited into the program not only work with adults to leave the street gangs, but also benefit from life skills and leadership training to succeed in their new lives free of violence. To date, 100 boys ages 14 to 25 have participated in the project.

IG Successes
Pre-intervention phase

1. Presence of community facilitators with similar histories to young participants creates the foundation for intergenerational bonds.
2. Outreach is conducted by adult mentors and young staff in barrios where young people involved in street gangs reside.

Implementation phase

3. Facilitation of workshops by adult role models—former gang members—aims to achieve personal growth of youth and sustainable peace in neighborhood. This also has the added benefit of demonstrating the value of youth-adult collaboration to the larger community.
4. Creation of social and political consciousness of "giving back" to the community among youth. The cycle of intergenerational giving is continued through the creation of "mascota," where youth groups identify a child they will mentor.
5. Workshops provide youth with tools to understand the context of poverty and violence where they live, and to understand the struggles of their parents in providing a safe and secure home. Parents are involved with youth in separate discussions about these issues.

Project Fenix has led to perceptible declines in street violence among participating youth because of support provided by adult mentors who were former gang members, as well as improved access to life skills and employment training. The project's mentorship model has been replicated in many other cities.

among adults toward youth leadership. Finally, ensuring steadfast participation of both generations throughout the life of the project is proving to be a challenge.

The IG approach is based on process, which is time- and labor-intensive, and results take time to materialize. Because the IG approach is only recently being applied in development projects, clear evidence to support its long-term impact is not yet available. However, preliminary evaluations of the projects show that this approach has great potential in building youth-adult partnerships at the community level. These partnerships have created open channels of communication and dialogue on sensitive issues such as HIV/AIDS, reproductive health and violence. In addition, projects have built the capacity of both young people and adults to implement activities, which has contributed to broader community participation in youth development. Finally, such increased capacity and participation helps communities work together on other issues well after projects have ended. At the same time, greater programmatic and intervention research is needed to determine more specific direct and indirect benefits to young people and adults from this approach.

Recommendations and Next Steps

The following recommendations for program development can help to fill current gaps in research and implementation:

▸ Experts should meet to discuss the proposed IG conceptual framework and how to systematize it in UNICEF and other agency programs worldwide.

▸ User-friendly monitoring and evaluation constructs are needed to measure the effectiveness of youth and adults working together and the impact of such collaboration on project objectives and effectiveness; the specific benefits that adults derive from partnering with young people; and the impact of an IG partnership on selected psychological and social development outcomes for youth and adults.

▸ Training in group dynamics, interpersonal skills and technical knowledge on the issue being addressed in a given project is needed for both young people and adults working together.

▸ Operational research or intervention studies should be undertaken to guide the implementation of the IG approach in programs.

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