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Intergenerational Dialogue as a Way to Diagnose and Prevent Violence

According to the last report on youth and development published by the World Bank, there are 1.3 billion young people now living in the developing world, and it is considered -the largest-ever youth group in the history. However, there is not a consensus in regard to Latin America' youth population. Nevertheless, the last research performed by the World Bank (WB)[1], the Iberoamerican Youth Organisation (OIJ), and the Economic Commission for Latin America and Caribbean[2] (ECLAC), have expressed a concern regarding to the dimension of the young population of the continent: Latin America and the Caribbean have an estimatre of 140 to 180 million of young people.

An important percentage of this population lives under the line of poverty and exclusion. According to the OIJ and ECLAC's report, around 58 million of young people live on poverty, and among those, around 21.2 million live under extreme poverty. This situation is reflected on the increased rates of violence on several capital cities. The reality of this, for instance, is represented by the vastly known as *favelas* in Brazil, the *maras* in El Salvador, or the hired *assassins* in Colombia. Those are the top of the iceberg that have shown not only lack of access to basic services but also, lack of control from the government. As a result, gangs with a close connection with other type of criminal activities have taken control over the regular activities of the communities.

In Latin America, as it happens in other continents, there is a paradox as regards the youth situation. Even though the rates of illiteracy have decreased during the past years and the new generations have had more access to public education, there is a continuous lack of job and educational opportunities to stimulate personal development. This situation may increase the risk for young people to use illegal means which puts away the possibility to stop the vicious cycle of poverty and violence.

On the other hand, the intercultural dialogue has been considered on several meetings as one way to promote the sharing of experiences between older and younger. Also intercultural dialogue is a tool to improve living conditions of the people under unfavorable conditions. Indeed the dialogue across generations can be used as a way to decrease the level of violence by using the knowledge and experience of previous generations to create awareness and to promote long term solutions for the risks faced by the community.

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[1] *WDR 2007: Development and the Next Generation. www.worldbank.org.*

[2] *La juventud en Iberoamérica: Tendencias y urgencias. http://www.eclac.org/publicaciones/xml/6/20266/CEPAL_OIJ.pdf*

DIALOGUE ACROSS GENERATIONS IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES: A case study in Colombia.

Colombia has a high rate of violence and according to different studies; youngsters are the biggest population at risk to become involved to this bloodshed, either because they are hired as assassins or because they are victims within the cycle of violence. The pilot project implemented in Bogota (Colombia) to prevent the recruitment of children and youngster by the illegal armed groups have shown that the dialogue across generations is a key tool to prevent violence, in addition, dialogue may contribute to make society stronger, to promote social integration, and to foster youth participation to achieve social development.

To the pilot project implemented the participation of the representatives of the whole community on the diagnostic of the current situation of violence on the territories where they live is the way to start a common commitment from all the members of the communities to improve the particular situation. It is important to get involved all generations in order to make a common diagnosis of the situation. Young and old people have the knowledge to understand the local risks that can affect them. Young people face every day the aggression coming from their social environment and therefore, they can certainly,, on perspective identify the most important causes of the hostility. On the other hand, older people can not only to bring their knowledge and experience on what has been done in the past to avoid this violent behavior, but also to promote common social values within their community.

With the specific aim to generate common strategies against violence, all actors were convened to present ideas about what they considered as the best way to stop the incorporation of children to illegal groups and therefore their participation on the cycle of violence and poverty. As a result, all of them presented possible solutions that were the beginning of public policies to be applied by the government.

For both scenarios, the one to work on the diagnosis, and the one to create common solutions with all members of the community, there was the need to create specific methodologies that could bring them together or have separate workshops. The challenge was always to be able to linkage the perspectives and ways to read realities that came from both old and young people of the community

As the result of this dialogue between generations the following risks were identified, not only as a threat for the young people but also for the whole community:

1. Presence of organized crime groups connected with illegal armed groups. Although, there is no certainty about the presence of illegal armed groups, it is well known their links with the "local" crime groups.

2. Domestic abuse. There are high rates of family violence (child abuse and sexual abuse), child prostitution (soon as at the age of 7 and 8 y), broken homes, and lack of parental control over their children. Families are the first scenario where children and youngsters have the opportunity to understand the meaning of being "part of something", but also to get the knowledge from the experience of the elder people. In this case, and due to the high rates of domestic abuse, there is a gap on this process that affects in the long term perspective the linkage of the young people with the community needs.

3. School dropout. There are high rates of school desertion, and there is a lack of following up of the school attendance from the parents. Schools are the scenario where the children and young people increase their levels of exchange with the society and therefore the lack of follow-up on the educational process along with the personal development of capacities can be a potential opportunity for the organized crime groups to gather the attention of the youngsters and get them involved on common objectives. Nevertheless, in many cases teachers could spend more time with youngsters than their own parents. This can be a good opportunity to positively influence them and enroll them in projects related to legal activities.

4. Child work. The high levels of child vulnerability and the lack of opportunities for the old people have created the "need" of the child work. The lack of economic resources leads parents to find non-formal jobs for children and youngsters to support the gross family´s income.

5. Misuse of the leisure time. One of the challenges that are facing the younger generations is how to use the leisure time. In the case of the community that was part of the study, this problem was attributed to deficiencies of the government to provide different opportunities to young people.

6. Lack of social recognition of the role of youth. Social structures of the communities not always recognize the value of the work done by youngsters. This situation can be an obstacle between generations due to the fact that this behavior goes against the efforts done by youth organizations to promote peaceful conflict resolution, and can create the exclusion of the young people of the community.

Taking as starting point all the risks mentioned above, the community moved forward to design possible ways to deal with them. The workshops took into account the knowledge and information that all actors were able to bring to the possible solutions. These are some ways to face the already mentioned risks:

1. To create, through the participation of the older and younger members of the community, common diagnostics and common solutions related to the problematic issue that was identified.

2. To promote participation of young people on the process of building the paths ways to solve problems. In addition, to create methodologies that are appropriate for young people to that allow them to share their experience and knowledge about the problematic issue, but also about the possible and creative solutions.

3. Family values have to be strengthened, either the nuclear or the wider. There is a need to fortify the family roles and networks to prevent risk environments giving the parents specific guides and tools that recognizes de voice of children and youth on the common family path.

4. Schools have to be attentive to the general situation of the students. As part of their commitment with the community, school boards and teachers have to be aware of the risks that can end up with aggressions. Schools should allow some activities that can help to prevent the violence. These activities that can be performed at schools should count with the standpoint of young people and cannot leave out the interest and languages of the targeted audiences.

5. Promote a public recognition of the role that every generation has on the improvement of the quality of life for each member of the community. The role of youth and youth participation should be highlighted because it creates a sense of identity that brings the young people to a place where they can build up their life plan, and also make stronger their identity, and at the same time keep all members contributing to the community development.

The mentioned experience brought up many learned lessons that can become recommendations to public policy when it comes to the intergenerational dialogue.

1. Dialogue across generations plus youth participation is the more effective tool to create common diagnosis and solutions to the problems of the communities. This approach has to be a guide to create and promote public policies, because it can transform the culture.

2. It is a matter of high importance to create methodologies that recognizes the differences between languages of older and younger people. Not with the interest to create a gap among them, but to create proper approaches that can take advantages of the inputs given by all generations in the community.

3. Families have to be in the eye of the public policies either if it has a nuclear composition or a extended one. Those families have to be strengthened with tools that allow them to create a real sense of solidarity and common life projects in order to become a real link among children, youngster, elder and society.

4. The role of young people and youth organizations on the social processes should be highlighted and recognized for the members of the community, but also for the

local authorities in order to avoid the exclusion of this initiatives and projects of the current process of development of each community.

5. Schools are also a good scenario where the dialogue across generations can be developed and therefore cannot be excluded of the integration and dialogue among generations.

This situation of violence cannot be ignored by policy makers in the region. The challenge is to create policies based on the common perspectives of young and old people that are part of the communities. The next step is to promote and implement policies that create opportunities for the young people, taking advantage of the window that is opened by the high levels of education and the lower rate of dependants. In that matter, it is important to focus on those policies that bring basic services to people, and on those that facilitate intergenerational dialogue and youth participation as those are the ones that can give long term sustainability to the common solutions identified and agreed.

Nevertheless, to build a long lasting effect of those policies, it is required to combine the implementation of several policies with a cultural change approach that can include in the core of the society the value of the intergenerational dialogue. That approach shall be focused on the transformation of cultural practices, the encouragement of the legality principle, the respect of the rule of law, and the use of pacific means to claim rights as a save path to achieve prosperity and peace.