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WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT... INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE



"The best way to talk is to talk normal. Just in normal words. But the most important thing is when you're talking to each other you also can listen to each other. When youth and adults talk with each other you often see they just don't listen. And that's the most important part of talking, listening."
girl, 17, The Netherlands

OVERVIEW

In January 2003, *Voices of Youth*, in collaboration with the International Center for Research on Women, launched a mini-module on Intergenerational Dialogue (IGD).

Since its launch, young people from 28 countries in five regions and the USA, Canada and Europe have offered their reflections on, and suggestions for, effective IGD.

In general, young people on *Voices of Youth* feel that IGD is an effective means of solving problems and dealing with complex issues. Participants see open communication between young people and adults as the key to awareness building, partnership and effectuating substantive and sustainable change.

Young people, however, stated that IGD can only be effective if undertaken with patience and understanding, and when all parties respect, listen and trust one another.

Participants identified a number of potential obstacles to effective IGD, including:

- ✗ parents' reluctance to listen to their children
- ✗ uneasiness among youth to speak openly
- ✗ fear of repercussions after the discussions

During the discussion, participants put forth the following suggestions for effective IGD:

- ✗ listen, be open and speak respectfully
- ✗ involve impartial institutions such as schools and community organizations
- ✗ focus discussions on issues pertinent to both youth and adults
- ✗ use the Internet for anonymous dialogue

Following is a brief summary.

A GOOD WAY TO SOLVE PROBLEMS



" dialogue I believe is the best means. talking and exchanging ideas I believe is the best way to resolve problems affecting the world today. the old and the young make up the world, as such, if these two groups exchange ideas it would be of vital help to the world."

girl, 19, Cameroon

Young people on *Voices of Youth* unanimously agreed that talking openly about difficult issues and exchanging thoughts and feelings is the most effective means of addressing and dealing with issues in both the family and the community.

Participants saw dialogue as an "essential tool for survival" (girl, 19, The Philippines); a means of making the world a better and more supportive place for both themselves and for adults.



"I think that intergenerational dialogue is key for resolving the problems of our world. If every parent took the time to listen to their child and answer the questions that preoccupy him, and didn't react violently to the smallest reflection of the child...the world would be a much more pleasant place."

boy, 19, Niger

AWARENESS & LIFESKILLS

Young people also saw intergenerational dialogue as a tool for building awareness and lifeskills among children and adolescents.

Good communication enables parents and caregivers to teach young people "values and culture", and to "transmit lessons beneficial to their long term personal development" (girl, 20, Cameroon).

Participants also discussed awareness building for adults, seeing dialogue as the key "for adults to develop a sense of understanding of where the youth is coming from." (girl, 21, USA)

LISTENING: THE KEY

Young people listed a number of attributes they saw as critical to effective dialogue between young people and adults, the foremost of which was listening.

Respect was also identified as a key and critical component. Young people asked adults to:



"speak with them like responsible people and not like little children for them to become responsible, because now they are treated like unknowns."
girl, 11, Morocco

Participants also talked extensively about trust. Young people consistently reminded their peers that you cannot express yourself freely if you do not trust the person with whom you are communicating. They spoke of the need to build relationships and friendships, to get to know one another and to share their thoughts and stories.

Young people suggested that youth and adults spend time together, take an interest in each other's lives and open up and express themselves.



"Another great way to talk to youths is to build real relationships with young people...Once a relationship is established, than adults have to learn to respect youths by listening to the youth's voice, opinion and stories. Hence, rather than just thinking of youths as "just another young person", the relationship can then blossom into a real friendship. In short, if youths open up, I think that adults should also by sharing their stories— its' only fair."
girl, 21, USA

RELUCTANCE & UNEASE

Participants spoke of children and adults fearing each others' reactions as a major obstacle to open dialogue



" [If] a child said to his/her parent/s 'it is wrong to abused me' the parent/s will get angry and hit the child even more."
girl, 15, Jamaica

With this concern in mind, a number of postings identified the Internet as an ideal forum for intergenerational dialogue as it afforded a certain degree of anonymity:



"It's ideal on the Internet because we can avoid feeling judged by others...that gives us a certain freedom. We could also...meet with people in person to talk, but the unease that comes from

seeing one another face to face can be really strong and prevents us from saying what we wanted to say."

girl, >21, France

POWER

Participants also devoted significant attention to the power dynamic between themselves and adults.

On various occasions discussants spoke of needing to have the "power to participate". They also talked of adults needing "to learn to diminish some of their power. As adults, they have been privileged with power in a way that young people can't. Therefore, if adults are willing to balance some of that power with the youths, than young people will be more open to discussing issues that affect their lives." (girl, 21, USA)

THE SCHOOL & THE COMMUNITY

Many young people feel the school and community based institutions should play a central role in fostering IGD. They suggested that these institutions could provide a safe and neutral space for youth and adults to come together.



"I think that the schools of the community should organise a meeting for both parents, teachers and children, where everyone would freely say his/her opinion. This would solve peacefully many problems of the generation gap and would also contribute to the prosperity of the community."
girl, 16, Greece

Young people called on their teachers, community leaders and law enforcement agents to listen and protect them, and to offer an open and non-judgemental ear.

CONCLUSION

Young people on *Voices of Youth* see intergenerational dialogue as a critical "tool for survival" and key to collaboration, understanding and creating a world supportive for children and adults.

They call on themselves and adults to extend the respect, patience and tolerance IGD requires "because only when children and adults can co-exist in harmony, will life become really beautiful." (girl, 16, Greece)

VOICES OF YOUTH

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