Guide to the effective development of intergenerational dialogue free from adult-centred practices

PROLOGUE

Thinking of participation as a process implies recognizing different moments: receiving information, forming one's own opinion either individually or collectively, and being listened to with the attention and respect that someone who exercises their legitimate right to express themselves deserves. All this also requires a counterpart willing to provide information, to make efforts so that that information reaches the other in a user-friendly, intelligible, comprehensible way, to accept that there is a building of opinion on the part of the other, and at the same time, to be willing to listen and value those opinions even when they are different.

Communication between adults and children has historically been unidirectional, where the adult is the one who knows, the bearer of truth, the one who "has the floor" and expects the "minor" to listen attentively and respectfully. This form of communication cannot be considered dialogue, insofar as true dialogue alters the rationale that understands verticality to be the only principle ruling interpersonal relationships.

Dialogue requires two or more individual or collective interlocutors who recognize each other as subjects empowered to understand and propose, capable of respecting each other and sharing certain basic rules that make such dialogue possible. Ultimately, each one of them has something to say and, in turn, is able to listen, understand and respect the other as a person.

In this sense, cross-generational dialogue also requires the recognition of a level of autonomy that will be greater as the child's skills increase in his or her process of development.

This form of relationship seems simple, something which could occur naturally and with the "goodwill" of the parties involved. However, cross-generational communication has always been and continues to be imbued with adult-centrism. Therefore, in order to speak of cross-generational dialogue, we must be willing to deconstruct those adult-centred legacies, legacies that emerge against our will and are repeated at different times and circumstances of the participation process.

This need to review and analyse the attitudes and conditions that enable or restrict cross-generational dialogue is the central focus of this paper that has been produced jointly with the Regional Child Participation Advisory Group (GRAPIA for its acronym in Spanish), based on what these young people have lived through in their passage through different participation experiences. This document is based on the recognition of children and adolescents as bearers of irreplaceable knowledge in terms of their experiences and passage through different programmes and institutional areas, and from which technicians and operators must be willing to learn.

We affirm that this document is itself a product of cross-generational work and is aimed at people who work in institutions and who are interested in organizing and promoting cross-generational dialogue in a mindful way.

The paper provides a series of guidelines and recommendations on how to generate the best conditions to make communication possible and minimize the conscious or

unconscious tendency to reproduce adult-centric attitudes, and at the same time, identifies obstacles that often interfere with the process.

Its publication by the IIN-OAS is part of an institutional policy to promote technical and conceptual productions by children and adolescents themselves and make them available to technicians and operators in the conviction that we all have much to learn from them.

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Víctor Giorgi
Director-General
IIN-OAS
July 2022

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INTRODUCTION

The Regional Child Participation Advisory Group (GRAPIA) is made up of young people aged between 18 and 25 years from different countries of the Americas, such as Mexico, El Salvador, Chile, Peru, Jamaica, and Canada, who, during their childhood and adolescence accumulated a great deal of experience in issues involving child participation, taking part in various networks, advisory councils, and participation groups in their countries of habitual residence. Currently, this group has been working and advising the IIN-OAS on several issues, focusing this year on two aspects: cross-generational dialogue and adult-centrism as the main obstacle to child and adolescent participation.

In this sense, at the IIN-OAS and within the framework of the "Programme for the consolidation of systems for the promotion and comprehensive protection of the rights of children and adolescents", we propose "to promote the cross-sectoral, inter-agency and comprehensive functioning of the territories, including the participation of children and adolescents at different levels of complexity", as stated in our 2020-2023 Action Plan.

With this firm objective in mind, and with the aim of contributing to the strengthening of the participation of children, adolescents, and young people in all spheres of society, this paper, the "Guide for the effective development of cross-generational dialogue without adult-centred practices" is made available. It is the result of work, sharing and reflections based on the participatory experiences of the advisers throughout their lives.

This document compiles a series of elements to be taken into account before, during and after cross-generational dialogue, in order to continue supporting the promotion and generation of child-friendly spaces, processes and tools, which make it possible to rethink current methodologies and practices in cross-generational dialogue.

In short, we are convinced that this document is a useful tool for the general public, and particularly for those who work in the organization of participatory events; as well as for children themselves, so that they themselves can demand the existence of certain conditions and elements that enable the exercise of their rights when participating.

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WORKING PAPER

"Guide to the effective development of intergenerational dialogue free from adult-centred practices"

I.   INTRODUCTION

The Regional Child Participation Advisory Group (GRAPIA) is currently made up of young people aged between 18 and 25 years from different countries of the Americas, who, in their childhood and adolescence, accumulated a great deal of experience in issues involving participation as a right, principle and process, taking part in various networks, advisory councils and participation groups in their countries of habitual residence.

Being a GRAPIA advisor to the Inter-American Children's Institute implies continuing to promote and protect the rights of children and adolescents, no longer as actors, but as participation promoters.

For this reason, and based on our experience in intergenerational dialogue, we see the need to create a guide in order to facilitate the effective development of this type of meeting.

Who is it for? In what areas?

This document is aimed at people who work in institutions (in both government and civil society), and who are interested in organizing and participating mindfully in intergenerational dialogue. In any case, we believe that in different areas, such as in families, schools, society, etc., where there is interaction among adults, children and adolescents, adult-centred practices take place.

II.   OBJECTIVES

To act as a guide for operators or technicians who already work or are beginning to engage in intergenerational work, encouraging participation and equitable communication between children, adolescents and adults in intergenerational dialogue. Helping to rethink how to eliminate adult-centred practices in the intergenerational dialogue in which they participate.

III.   DEFINITION:

We consider that **intergenerational dialogue** is a method that benefits the promotion of participation, which is carried out through the **exchange of information, ideas and feelings between children, adolescents, youth, and adults**. **For it to be effective, it must occur within the parameters of equality, adaptation, flexibility, respect, active listening, empathy, tolerance, and lack of prejudice.**

As for **adult-centred practices**, we understand them to be actions carried out by adults in which the progressive autonomy of children is violated or limited, and where their opinions are not taken into account in the decisions that are relevant to them.

For all of these reasons, it is important that, within the framework of public policies that aim to promote and protect the rights of children and adolescents, and by means of intergenerational dialogue, there should occur: **papers or recommendations to the States or entities in charge, communication through active participation, and awareness-raising on various topics that generate learning opportunities.**[1]

Once the dialogue phase is completed, **it is essential to effectively follow up on the recommendations, agreements generated, or other outcomes obtained through intergenerational dialogue.** It is hoped that all of the stakeholders will receive feedback that will allow them to perceive the achievement of the objectives and commitments raised in each dialogue by the institutions.

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[1] These inputs could be updated and adapted to conditions in each country; they can be of use to review the regulations and policies that promote the protection of the rights of children.

IV. SOME ELEMENTS NECESSARY FOR INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE:

1. **It is suggested that adults and young people be prepared and mindful regarding the promotion and protection of the rights of children and adolescents** with the aim of doing away with prejudices relating to children that invalidate or make invisible their participation. They should join in the dialogue, considering that the voice of children and adolescents has the same importance and weight as the opinions shared by adults.

2. In order to design different working methodologies that adapt to intersectional conditions, it is necessary to create **segments by age ranges** and based on a prior diagnosis of the context, taking into account culture, socio-economic conditions, accessibility, religious beliefs, and the community being addressed.

3. The **topic proposal to be addressed should be creative**, and include the possibility of adapting it, avoiding merely expository and formal talks. We suggest employing user-friendly methodologies and language, in order to foster an environment that facilitates dialogue, where children and adolescents feel safe and motivated to interact.

4. Organizers should **provide sufficient information and outreach prior to the event** to publicize the objective and purpose of the dialogue, assist in the preparation prior to the activities and detail the role of the participants. We suggest working in depth on three elements: representation - representative - representativeness (who represents the group, how do they represent the group and how is the representative selected).

5. If participation requires face-to-face attendance and travelling, we suggest:
   a) Providing preparation and prior information to the child or adolescent. Obtaining the relevant authorizations. Adult chaperones must provide the necessary care, and adults must comply with the appropriate codes of conduct.
   b) Having financial support and the sponsorship of organizations and institutions.
   c) In addition, we recommend providing opportunities for rest and camaraderie, with the aim that children and adolescents should feel safe in a pleasant environment, generating bonds of trust, and favouring the sharing of ideas and knowledge.

6. If the dialogue takes place through **virtual media**:
    a) Before the event, we recommend checking whether participants have the necessary equipment (computer, tablets, mobile phones, headphones, webcam) and reliable access to an internet signal. If children and adolescents do not have access to the technological tools they need, we recommend that the organizing institutions provide them with the necessary means in order to ensure their participation.
    b) Organizers should consider dynamics and times for relaxation.

7. **Once the intergenerational dialogue event has concluded, we suggest carrying out evaluation activities with the various participants** (children, adolescents, youth, and adults), with the purpose of sharing ideas about the experience and finding points for improvement for subsequent events. We also recommend following up on the outcomes obtained during the intergenerational dialogue, always with the participation of children and adolescents, and also to disseminate them as widely as possible in order to reach the general public, encouraging the inclusion of the opinions of more children to be added in future meetings.

V. SOME OBSTACLES THAT MAY ARISE AND HINDER INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE:

1. **A major obstacle in these participation opportunities is adult-centrism**. Among other factors, sometimes adults, because they are older and have more experience, consider that their opinions and ideas are better and more appropriate than those of children and adolescents. If this happens, intergenerational dialogue no longer occurs. It is therefore important that the opinions of all be heard and respected, in order to fulfil the objectives and purposes of these dialogues.

2. **Decorative participation** (when children's opinions have no impact, they lose visibility). It is important that adults' opinions avoid infringing upon the participation of children and adolescents and that adults refrain from seeking to promote causes that do not represent them.

3. **Lack of representativeness** often occurs when adults choose or impose a representative on the collective of children and adolescents, depriving them of the opportunity for democratic choice among peers.

4. **Centralism and lack of coordination among national, departmental, and local levels within the State** lead to the participation projects of children and adolescents being regarded as incidental extras, when they should be a priority, thus causing the lack of follow-up to the proposals or outcomes of intergenerational dialogue.

5. Due to **formality, event duration, large numbers of adults in the venue, different languages and excessive use of technical language**, children and adolescents lose their confidence to act freely. It is essential that the methodologies used in intergenerational dialogue should be user-friendly and seek to generate opportunities to motivate child participation.

6. Finally, efforts should be made to foresee any unexpected events that might arise, due to aspects such as **gaps in access to digital media and connectivity** (internet access, connectivity tools, availability of a quiet spot for internet connections, etc.), since children and adolescents could be affected when participating in virtual intergenerational dialogue events.

"All of these recommendations are variable, may be subject to review and are applicable in child participation events, both face-to-face and virtual."