

YOUNG PEOPLE AND INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS?

GRET and its partners are exploring new dimensions of youth integration via the JADE programme, funded by Agence française de développement. This programme aims to design and test innovative, relevant ways of supporting young people in their overall integration. This means focusing not just on economic and professional integration, but also on social, civic, environmental and climatic integration.*

In this context, GRET and its partners are conducting strategic reflection, drawing on their experiences in the field and on the progress made by research in these areas. A summary of this progress is presented in factsheets drawn up to create a common base of knowledge and reflection on youth and overall integration. In this regard, we should underline the limits of the exercise, which remains dependent on the progress of research on these subjects. In this factsheet, GRET examines the role of young people in intergenerational relationships and the inclusion of these issues in development projects.

** Jeunesses Actrices du Monde de DEmain (Young People as Stakeholders in the Future)*

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“Our future will depend on the way in which the family and society can respond to the needs of these expanding new generations.”

(UNFPA, 1998)
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In 1998, the United Nations Fund for the Population (UNFPA) warned about the need to prepare for the arrival of new generations in light of the staggering pace of societal transformations during the second half of the 20th century. The advent of capitalist societies and the postcolonial era changed social relationships and contributed to the diversification of young people's experiences. In societies where the age group is the dominant social marker, demographic transition — which first took place in Europe during the 18th century, in the countries of the northern hemisphere during the 19th century, and in the countries of the southern hemisphere during the second half of the 20th century — profoundly

affected the trajectories of young people¹. These new generations of young people were no longer capable of replicating the social order of the past, which had determined the “timespan of youth”.

Images, stereotypes and representations of young people heighten the construction of a view generally conveyed by older generations, referring to “the youth of today”, described as “careless” or “irresponsible”, compared to the “previous generations”, who are often evoked with praise and nostalgia. This view points to a **collective notion** of a **generation** where each person interprets their youth as representative of their entire generation. It also maintains a **feeling of division**, or opposition, between “young people” and other generations.

While taking account of the fact that young people’s experiences are always singular, this briefing note characterises challenges faced by young people with regard to intergenerational relationships. The idea is to look beyond the binary view that considers intergenerational relationships in terms of confrontation or indifference between “young people” and their “elders”, so as to better understand the role these young people play in processes and mechanisms of solidarity and differentiation between generations. Having recalled the key concepts, the note describes the condition and place of young people in regard to intergenerational relationships. Lastly, possible courses of action are presented in order to better integrate these issues when including young people in development projects.

WHAT ARE “INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS”?

In their terminology, intergenerational relationships refer primarily to the concept of generation. But they also allude to the concepts of age, age group or life cycle. These concepts need to be specified in order to better understand the issues they entail.

GENERATION

The notion of **generation** refers to the fact of belonging to a specific historic and social period or era, in which **similar challenges are encountered** and a **common vision** of the world is inherited in a **given**

1. Under the JADE* Programme agreement, GRET defines youth as a phase of transition between childhood and adulthood, during which the role of adult is learned through a process of socialisation within a family and community group. During this phase, young people have more or less difficulty acquiring the attributes and resources that give them a role, a place and skills that are more or less valued in their social environment. The plurality of young people is due to their range of cultural and social diversity, in specific historic, sociological, economic, legal or institutional contexts. For more information, log onto the JADE Programme Agreement web page on GRET’s website (<https://gret.org/en/projet/young-people-as-stakeholders-in-the-future/>).

time and space. It is a concept that is social rather than biological, as it exists solely in relation to time and to other generations. A generation is therefore identified based on visible signs of belonging (age, attire, language, etc.) and collective representations (cultural references, impact of historic periods, value systems, etc.), and can be recognised by its concordance with specific social and historic phenomena.

Although this concept is used in social science to analyse social organisation, social heterogeneity within a single generation must also be taken into account. For example, a political and social event will never be individually experienced in the same way, it will depend on the degree of exposure to and investment in this event.

GENERATION, AGE AND LIFE CYCLE

The definition of age brackets differs according to generation. It evolves with **ideological and intergenerational power relationships specific to each era**, shaping the overall conception of the life cycle and age brackets that will be associated with it. Stages in the life cycle such as the transition from childhood to youth and then from youth to adulthood are historically structured based on relationships of domination between ages, but also on the evolution of a social and economic context and of associated value systems. This means that for each era and context, and for each social group, it is possible to distinguish between specific ways of perceiving and valuing age brackets. The processes of young people’s socialisation, progressing from one phase to the other, are therefore variable, and rooted in an era and a social group. Generation and age bracket, which are two overlapping concepts, are therefore two **social and historic constructs**.

INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Intergenerational relationships designate **relationships between generations**, each generation having its own distinct history, ethics, conceptions and world representations. In social science, intergenerational relationships were first regarded as a “social problem” faced by societies, which needed to be addressed by the latter. The concept of “intergenerational dialogue”, which emerged as a means to overcome the difficulties posed by the “intergenerational problem”, was sometimes adopted by institutional actors.

When discussing intergenerational relationships, it is necessary to take account of:

- **the singularity of each individual’s trajectory**, which is structured by the forms of social organisation he/she participates in. As these forms of social organisation are governed by the place, attributes and functions assigned to the different age brackets, they determine a social definition of age and life cycle thresholds and groups. It should be noted that the flow of existence is punctuated by intermittent phases referred to as stable periods and periods of transition;



MARTISSANT NEIGHBOURHOOD IN PORT-AU-PRINCE, HAITI

- **historic circumstances** in which young people's social relationships and life cycle stages take root. The concept of generation is associated with historic periods, which lead to the future development of individuals and the orientations of their existence;
- **the influence of relationships that develop between generations** on the flow of the life cycle, relationships which lead to processes of transmission, struggle or competition, sharing and alliances. These relationships also lead to value systems, and moral and ethical obligations.

As is the case with belonging to an age group, inter-generational relationships also take place within other types of social relationships, such as gender relationships, parental relationships and class relationships.

THE ROLE AND CONDITION OF YOUNG PEOPLE THROUGH THE PRISM OF INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Positioning young people in their intergenerational relationship makes it possible to better understand the conditions in which they evolve. We will see that young people's socialisation trajectories differ according to the societies and social spaces in which intergenerational relationships take place. Lastly, we will see which type of interaction these relationships generate, and the place of young people.

SOCIALISATION TRAJECTORIES OF "NEW GENERATIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE"

Traditional societies vs Modern societies

In **societies that are largely governed by a traditional system**², the period of youth is punctuated by rites of passage from childhood to youth, and from youth to adulthood. These rites are transmitted from one generation to another within an institutionalised framework. They determine the social destiny of young people who inherit models from previous generations.

In these societies, where the period of youth is short, young people are subjected to strong social control, outlining their rights and responsibilities, and their spaces of freedom. Social order is sometimes characterised by significant hierarchisation of society, and by the reproduction of unequal intergenerational relationships. For example, in some African and Asian lineage-based societies³, social structures are dominated by older people, who have almost exclusive access to privileges, resources and responsibilities.

2. The analysis proposed draws on the following definition of tradition: the set of values, symbols, ideas and constraints determining adhesion to a social and cultural order justified by reference to the past, which ensures the defence of this order from forces of radical contestation and change (GÉRAUD Marie-Odile, LESERVOISIER Olivier, POTTIER Richard, 2016, "Sociétés traditionnelles", *Les notions clés de l'ethnologie*, Armand Colin, p. 376).

3. A society based on descent.

In **so-called modern societies**, the importance of traditions has diminished. Transmission mechanisms and young people's social trajectories are blurred, due to a longer period of youth. Intergenerational relationships are evolving: intergenerational confrontation is more concerned with questioning differentiated access to social structures based on age, than with confrontation between different worlds according to generation. Demographic transition led to "prefigurative societies"⁴, in which older generations are no longer the only model. Young people, who are now capable of questioning the authority of older people, live in societies characterised more by change than by the reproduction of a social organisation. Consequently, young people's experiences are multiple and take place within social trajectories that are more fluid and uncertain. When the period of youth becomes longer due to delayed and difficult access to adulthood, the quest for a social position becomes a major challenge for young people.

How do young people position themselves in intergenerational relationships?

Although, historically, the family is the main base of intergenerational relationships, school, work, public forums, screens and the media are now additional spaces of socialisation making it possible to characterise intergenerational dynamics. By complexifying young people's trajectories, this diversification of social spaces is transforming intergenerational relationships, which alternate between **relationships of solidarity among generations** and **relationships of power, or even tension**, generated more or less explicitly by young people.

> *Young people: intergenerational solidarity actors*

In traditional societies, mutual support between generations is a social duty for young people as soon as they acquire social and economic autonomy enabling them to look after their elders. These solidarity mechanisms are developed mutually over time, from one generation to the next, particularly in the family sphere. However, it is necessary to move beyond the binary vision opposing, on the one hand, the family unit as the only space in which intergenerational solidarity is built in developing countries, and on the other hand, State control over the implementation of redistribution systems in developed countries.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, solidarity extends to community level, with young people from better-off families financially contributing to look after older people from more precarious families. In France, numerous youth associations initiate solidarity actions aimed at creating connections between generations and deconstructing social depictions of old age. Innovative schemes such as the "Senior citizen solidarity civic service"⁵ and the "intergenerational solidarity cohabitation initiative"⁶ demonstrate a renewal of schemes rolled out in the public and private sectors, promoting mutual support between generations.

In Senegal⁷ and Vietnam⁸, the fact that young people are leaving the family home later — due in particular to a prolonged period of youth — is giving a new balance to previously unequal power relationships. In a context where income levels are decreasing, prolonged intergenerational cohabitation is an alternative to compensate for precarious living conditions, particularly in urban spaces. Young people who cease to financially depend solely on their elders, feel more legitimate in claiming shared authority in households. Improved living conditions of cohabiting generations therefore contribute to reciprocity in the benefits of intergenerational solidarity.

In addition, young people often act as relays in the transmission of culture and history specific to immigrant family dynamics⁹. In this case, the central marker of an identity generated by a background of migration is the intergenerational "we".

> *Questioning of social control by older people: tense relationships expressed by young people*

Young people's strategies to deal with social decline are also vectors of transformation in intergenerational relationships. For example, when traditions weigh heavily, young people can contest power that has been centralised for too long by their elders. In contexts of severe demographic pressure and economic and social degradation, management of land heritage and the definition of matrimonial rules previously governed by older people are also called into question. In Mali and Burkina Faso¹⁰, arrangements around marriage are gradually being dismantled, creating an imbalance in older people's power over young people's life choices.

Older generations are forced to change power relationships because they can no longer maintain an economic and social balance that previously ensured living conditions with which young people could comply. In addition, the development of digital technology has

4. DUBET François, 2018, *Trois jeunesse : la révolte, la galère, l'émeute*, Le bord de l'eau.

5. For more information, log onto (<https://www.sc-solidariteseniens.fr/>).

6. Implemented notably by Réseau Cohabitis, Agence nationale pour l'information sur le logement (ANIL), Association Ensemble 2 générations.

7. Study conducted by DIAGNE and LESSAULT in 2007, featured in *Les relations intergénérationnelles en Afrique - Approche plurielle*, written by ANTOINE Philippe, published in 2007.

8. Thesis by BELANGER Danièle, entitled *Rapport intergénérationnel et rapport hommes-femmes dans la transition démographique au Vietnam, de 1930 à 1990*, presented at the Faculty of Graduate Studies, Université de Montréal.

9. VATZ LAAROUSSI Michèle, 2015, *Les rapports intergénérationnels dans la migration : de la transmission au changement social*, Presses de l'Université du Québec, MUSE Project.

10. SALL Alioune, 2021, *Relations intra et intergénérationnelles en Afrique : apprendre à vivre ensemble*, TraHs n° 11, African Futures Institute.



MEKONG SUSTAINABLE NEWS PROJECT IN LAOS

overturned the former model, in which older people were the only bearers of knowledge. Today, knowledge is also transmitted by young people, as younger generations have grown up using technologies.

Lastly, intergenerational confrontation points to an opposition between “those who possess” and “those who aspire” in the quest for social goods or positions, which takes place within a given social sphere. Conflicts between generations are therefore heightened in spheres where the rules are changing.

IS THE EVOLUTION OF INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS FAVOURABLE TO YOUNG PEOPLE?

Today, it must be noted that young people are faced with an accumulation of **intergenerational inequalities**. These are further compounded by **intra-generational** inequalities.

Intergenerational inequalities are intrinsically linked to the notion of “destiny of cohorts”, theorised by Louis Chauvel¹¹, according to which certain generations pros-

per to the detriment of others. For example, previous generations did not have to suffer the effects of climate change, for which they are considered responsible, nor did they experience difficulties in accessing the labour market. As the current difficulty in accessing “adulthood” contributes to significant delay in accessing a certain social position, age group is also a factor in the increase of intergenerational inequalities. It becomes a marker of differentiation between generations with unequal access to resources and positions.

These **intra-generational inequalities** are also linked to social inequalities caused by unequal distribution of resources between members of a single society, due to its structure and its organisation. For example, young people from the same generation can have unequal access to certain sectors of society due to their social class, their gender, their mobility, etc.

Although it is commonly thought that young people gained greater freedom and autonomy following colonial wars and periods of reconstruction, the inequalities young people experience are still very real. We will discuss a **transformation of** so-called intergenerational **inequalities** that are generating increasingly severe consequences. The latter are mainly socio-economic inequalities, which are worsening between young people and adults due to a prolonged period of youth.

11. JEHANNIN Guillaume, 2013, “Choc des âges ou friction générationnelle : le rapport entre générations dans une société vieillissante”, *Gérontologie et Société*, Vol. 36 (n° 145), p. 37-54.

SCENARIOS FOR LIVING TOGETHER IN AFRICA

In 2021, professor Alioune Sall, executive director of the African Futures Institute, began working on examining the future of young people and older people living together, in light of intergenerational relationships in Africa¹². This forward-looking work highlights trends in the form of scenarios.

> **The first scenario**, referred to as “trend-based”, is consistent with recent demographic trends in Africa. The proportion of young people is still growing in African countries, and young people already account for the majority of the population on the continent¹³. Yet, older generations still hold an economically, socially, culturally and politically hegemonic position. In this scenario, the demographic

reality obliges societies to review their social organisation, in particular to give new balance to the exercise of power and authority between the older and younger generations. Some functions are naturally assigned to older people and others to young people, based on their knowledge and skills. This first scenario is favourable to young people, as they would be more involved in the construction of a new social model in which their skills would be more valued and used for the common good.

> **In the second scenario**, older people’s power is overturned by young people in a more or less violent manner. Rejection of the traditional authority figure with regard to older people in the family sphere would extend to private sector organisations and State institutions. Intergenerational solidarity mechanisms would decrease, or even disappear. In a context of crisis or social decline, young people can develop

a form of defiance vis à vis older people as they sometimes consider them to be responsible for the crisis they are living in.

> **The last scenario** sorts through value systems inherited from previous generations. The idea is to evaluate traditional practices applied up to now, in order to identify the most relevant and those that promote progress, justice, and individual and collective freedom. This scenario is based on intergenerational co-construction. The objective is to improve the future of living together based on a benchmark of values inherited from the past.

Although this analysis cannot be generalised for all contexts, it provides a useful resource to understand contemporary realities and the manner in which the future of generations, in particular the younger generation, will be influenced by the evolution of intergenerational relationships.

HOW CAN INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS FAVOUR INCLUSION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS?

Having highlighted certain contextual issues, this note will now introduce **levers of action** for better inclusion of young people in intergenerational dynamics. These levers are inspired by actions taken by local and international organisations in the solidarity sector, and by other territorial stakeholders.

Favouring intergenerational dialogue. Given the reconfiguration of values between generations, dialogue is a means to better understand **individual trajectories**, in order to include them in the construction of a **collective future**. This approach makes it possible to deconstruct perceptions and views that one generation can have of the other.

In some contexts, where social dialogue is tense due to significant hierarchisation, informal discussion forums can be crucial to define a set of common issues, to generate intergenerational debate. In Mali, as part of the IMYETA project¹⁴, GRET and its partners implemented mobile training units that travelled into rural communities to train the young people living there and raise their awareness. During cinema-debate sessions

that were open to communities, several generations discussed key subjects and common challenges, overcoming superficial oppositions thanks to facilitators, and mutually identifying solutions.

Other European associations invite people to rethink the urban space so that intergenerational meetings can be created more informally. The implementation by various associations of initiatives such as the Multi-service intergenerational centre¹⁵ and the Café des âges¹⁶ are revising the traditional vision of places intended solely for young people, such as Youth Centres. These urban projects must nevertheless be designed in close collaboration with local authorities in order for the latter to address intergenerational issues in their territories.

12. SALL Alioune, 2021, *Relations intra et intergénérationnelles en Afrique : apprendre à vivre ensemble*, TraHs n° 11, African Futures Institute.

13. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, at the 2019 African Economic Conference.

14. “IMYETA Project – Improving rural Malian Youth Employability through Tutorial Apprenticeship” (online), GRET.

15. Initiative led by the MAMI association. For more information, log onto: <https://www.mami83.fr>

16. Initiative led by Fédération des centres sociaux et socio-culturels de France (FCSF). For more information, log onto: <https://www.centres-sociaux.fr/files/2010/03/Caf%C3%A9-des-ages-M%C3%A0J-20-09.pdf>

Training professionals and raising their awareness on intergenerational relationships. Greater comprehension of power relationships based on age makes it possible to **adapt approaches, practices and methods** that can replicate or even worsen the latter. Research conducted on honour-based violence¹⁷ (HBV)¹⁸, notably in South-East Asian countries, pointed to a lack of training for social workers working with young women. It highlighted a need for awareness-raising among professionals, but also among young women, who are sometimes unaware of the mechanisms of violence to which they are subjected. This research recommends training staff in contact with young people, to equip them with greater knowledge on intergenerational relationships and the challenges they pose. The implementation of awareness-raising and/or training programmes aims to improve the quality of services provided to young people.

Pooling and transferring intergenerational knowledge and skills.¹⁹ Numerous companies have been working on **intergenerational transmission** for several years now. The latter results in the valorisation of generations' skills and knowledge, and the implementation of mechanisms for transmission from one generation to another. This makes it possible to reconfigure knowledge and skills based on intergenerational consensus on the company's strategic objectives. An approach referred to as intergenerational management makes it possible to mobilise all stakeholders and facilitate management of human capital in a forward-thinking manner. The design of tools such as an **"intergenerational skills benchmark"**²⁰ is a practice that can provide inspiration for international solidarity actors working on young people's training and their integration into employment or self-employment.

Strengthening young people's skills and using these skills in territories. Labour markets are deteriorating across the world, necessitating the redesign of skills development so that young people can become professionally integrated more easily. Young people are the first and main victims of transformations in the labour market. It is therefore necessary to highlight the skills that young people can contribute to the labour market as it currently stands.

To do this, it is recommended that:

- soft skills be integrated in training courses for young people;
- new training programmes be geared towards emerging jobs for which older generations are no longer the sole knowledge holders;
- and that traditional skills and knowledge be transmitted to young people so that they can become relays, playing essential roles to address conservation challenges.

Rethink governance practices and mechanisms. The definition of **governance that works for young people** is a powerful lever to improve their participation and their involvement in the territories they live in.

Renewal of governance bodies must be accompanied by a change in institutional logics inspired by traditional practices, from which young people are often excluded. During an inter-association meeting organised in 2015, a consortium of solidarity organisations²¹ called for a review of youth governance based on stakeholders as well as bodies. Coordination of skills and interests of stakeholders within bodies is necessary so that they can be used for collective intergenerational governance. In order to ensure dialogue on intergenerational skills within a governance body, some associations propose prioritising work on a balance of contributions from "experts" and "non-experts", renewal of members based on transparent, collectively balanced criteria, development of information literacy to improve decision-making, and pedagogy for local stakeholders. In addition, also as part of the IMYETA project conducted in Mali, Village Committees for Support of Young Apprentices (VCSYA) were set up. These committees made it possible to integrate young people in the villages selected as members, involving them in decision-making, conflict resolution and sharing of information in their community.

CONCLUSION

On International Youth Day 2022, the UN Secretary-General called for work on an **"intergenerational union"** to construct a fairer world. The choice of intergenerational solidarity as the theme for this day demonstrated the indivisible and interdependent nature of the connection between young people and other generations. Greater consideration of young people can only be achieved if the intergenerational dynamics within which they live and interact are taken into account.

Work on youth must therefore be based on a contextualised study of intergenerational relationships, challenges and effects, rather than concentrating

17. Honour-based violence is any form of psychological, physical, verbal, sexual, economic or spiritual violence that is motivated by the desire to protect or restore the honour or reputation of an individual, a family, or a community. This violence is used to control the social or sexual behaviour of a person, to make them comply with the norms, values and practices related to the traditions or customs of a given group (definition taken from a [publication](https://www.lumiereboreale.qc.ca/bibliotheque?download=321&doc=71) on the Athena legal info website, designed by the Shield of Athena Family Services organisation in collaboration with women law students from McGill University and the University of Montreal. For more information, see the online publication: <https://www.lumiereboreale.qc.ca/bibliotheque?download=321&doc=71>.

18. CSF, 2013; Harper and coll., 2014; Geadah, 2016.

19. All of the skills necessary to effectively manage intergenerational situations in a professional setting.

20. Example of a [benchmark](#) produced as part of the "Gestion des âges" project, conducted by a network of stakeholders in the Val d'Oise region, north of Paris, supported by the European Union.

21. Including the French Red Cross, the French Popular Relief Charity, the Familles rurales association, and APF France Handicap.

solely on an analysis of young people's needs. The intergenerational aspect serves as a pertinent level of analysis and a prism for the design of actions aimed at improving youth inclusion in the short and the long term.

It is now necessary to develop new approaches and mechanisms so that different generations feel fully involved in solutions to the challenges in their territories. To do this, young people's skills must be valorised and boosted, territorial stakeholders must be trained to analyse power relationships in intergenerational dynamics, and to pool skills, practices and discussions among the different generations. In order not to exacerbate dynamics of exclusion or create an intergenerational divide, intergenerational relationships must be systematically analysed in the design of "Youth" actions. This prism of analysis is necessary to coordinate actions aimed at greater inclusion of youth. Lastly, working on intergenerational relationships means acting in favour of young people today and in the future. ■



This note was written by

Syrine KTARI ("Integration and employment" officer at GRET).

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Page 1: Weaving activities (Safire project in Mauritania).