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**Intergenerational Solidarity:
Strengthening Economic and Social Ties**

Background Paper
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**Intergenerational Solidarity: What does it mean and what are the key issues?
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ABSTRACT

Changes in demographics and opportunities threaten the social compact between generations and can erode intergenerational solidarity. Intergenerational programmes and public policies can protect the vulnerable ties that encourage reciprocity among multiple generations and support intergenerational solidarity. This paper discusses challenges that can create schisms between generations damaging social cohesion. It provides examples of successful interventions that build social capital and respect the unique strengths of each age. Further, practical suggestions are incorporated that can foster solidarity between generations during challenging times.

You aren't just the age you are. You are all the ages you ever have been. Kenneth Koch, poet, professor & playwright

INTRODUCTION—WHAT IS INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY?

Christopher Buckley's satire, *Boomsday*, opens with Gen Xer-s attacking a gated retirement community in protest at the taxes they must pay to support aging Baby Boomers who do nothing but play golf during their long, leisurely retirement years. Encouraged by blogger Cassandra Devine, a new plan is introduced in Congress to address the growing conflict. Adults 65 and older will be given a package of incentives, including tax breaks and free medical care, if they sign an agreement that they will "voluntarily transition" at age 70. In other words, younger generations would foot the bill for five years of retirement if elders promised to commit suicide at the end of the term of the agreement. The book sparked chuckles but also some serious discussion about justice between generations. Fortunately *Boomsday* is just a novel but the continuing rhetoric of the press and policy makers can be even more damaging to the age old compact between generations.

The social compact is based on reciprocity and the belief that society progresses because of the investments past generations have made in carrying knowledge and culture forward. It recognizes that people of all generations—past, present and those to come—are bound together in order to survive and thrive. Humankind is interconnected and interdependent now and throughout time. Intergenerational practices were created in recognition of this compact, the importance of maintaining it, and to honour the strengths and abilities of each generation. The International Consortium of Intergenerational Programmes defines these programmes as "social vehicles that create purposeful and ongoing exchange of resources and learning among older and younger generations." Intergenerational programmes play an important role in contributing to sound public policy by promoting social cohesion, national unity and shared responsibility. When people are engaged in each other's lives, they understand they have a shared interest in their neighbourhoods, villages, and world. Solidarity between generations then includes the giving and receiving of resources throughout the life course. Generations are connected together in their desire for purpose, safety, and security. Discussions about

intergenerational solidarity are often explored from the context of familial rather non-familial relations. This paper will focus on the solidarity between generations when people are connected by global citizenship and not blood.

EXAMPLES OF INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Generations are not competitors for life's satisfactions; they are partners in the search for well-being. Harold L. Sheppard, former professor of gerontology, University of South Florida

Intergenerational solidarity and the policies and practices that support this concept can be found in local and countrywide examples. Yet the media thrives on strife providing USA with images of kids versus canes, greedy geezers and benefits for seniors eating up children's share. All have been taglines or headlines pointing readers to conclude intergenerational conflict is inevitable. The press is less likely to cover stories like one from Mesa Arizona which led with the headline "East Valley retirees invest in schools." This article highlighted a retirement community that repeatedly voted in favour of higher property taxes to support the local schools. The school district worked to develop and maintain a relationship with older residents by inviting them into their schools as tutors and mentors, hosting barbeques before sporting events, and sending students to perform at senior gatherings. The elders in return strongly supported investing in local children even though their biological children and grandchildren lived miles away. Other examples of intergenerational solidarity abound however many members of the press continue to recycle the myth of intergenerational conflict.

Champions

World leaders have a significant role in promoting intergenerational solidarity. These champions can share important messages and demonstrate through their own personal actions the importance of the bonds between generations. Recent events highlight this. First, Queen Elizabeth II called for bridging the generation gap in her Christmas 2006 message. She said that modern life was loosening traditional ties and bonds between generations. She went on to say:

The pressures of modern life sometimes seem to be weakening the links which have traditionally kept us together as families and communities. As children grow up and develop their own sense of confidence and independence in the ever changing technological environment, there is always the danger of a real divide opening up between young and old, based on unfamiliarity, ignorance and misunderstanding.

Other notable older adults are weighing in as well. In July 2007, Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu announced the formation of The Elders. This group of world leaders has vowed to use their years of wisdom and high profiles to address serious world issues that current elected officials seem to be struggling to solve. Mandela said "I know The Elders will support courage where there is fear, foster agreement where there is conflict and inspire hope where there is despair." As distinguished elder statesmen, this group could have sat on their collective laurels and enjoyed their remaining years at leisure. Instead they are working to mend the world and leave it in a better state for generations to come.

Young people can also be key champions for intergenerational solidarity. In 1997, Hans Reimer founded the 2030 Centre with the goal of strengthening social insurance programmes, such as social security, for younger workers. As a member of Generation X, Reimer found himself speaking out against efforts to erode the social compact and on behalf of a program normally associated with elder advocates. Matthew Albert founded the Sudanese Australian Integrated Learning Program or SAIL when he was 19 years old. Its purpose is to assist Sudanese refugees learn English and build the literacy skills need to assimilate into Australian life. The organization is run by people under the age of 30 while most of its volunteers are elders.

Another example of youth leadership can be found at ManaTEEN, founded by Laura Lockwood in 1994 when she was 12 years old. Bored, she tried to volunteer with a senior meal delivery program in Florida but was told she was too young. She went on to recruit other young people and develop volunteer programmes, many of which are elder serving. ManaTEEN is now the largest locally based teen volunteer initiative in the USAA boasting thousands of teen who volunteer more that 1.7 million hours of service each year. Pet Awareness for Seniors (PAWS), Home Safety Inspections for Seniors, Adopt a Grandparent, and Nosey Neighbours are all programmes that engage young people, ages 8 to 21, in the lives of elders demonstrating solidarity between generations.

At the level of local government, leadership can make a difference when intentionally seeking to connect generations. The city of Falcon Heights, Minnesota recently began to take steps towards becoming a community for all ages when Mayor Sue Gehrz committed to making intergenerational interaction a high priority. The mayor gathered a diverse group of eighty-seven people from the ages of 12 to 88 to participate in a dialogue in response to the tragedy of 11 September. The group, representing all faiths, ethnicities and nationalities, developed 126 action steps to improve safety in the community and prepare for future acts of terrorism and naturally occurring disasters like tornadoes and hurricanes. The city created the “Intergenerational Commission on Homeland Security.” This group laid the foundation for the “Neighbourhood Commission” now one of four permanent Commissions or advisory groups that help to guide city government in Falcon Heights. Every effort is made to incorporate the voices and concerns of all generations into policy decisions that are made by the mayor. This is done in part by creating formal structures within city government that facilitate communication and decision-making by all generations. Intergenerational participation is encouraged in all Falcon Heights' activities and programmes as well as in private events held in public spaces. Specifically, the city requires that: intergenerational interaction is a public policy goal of the City Council; policy proposals must incorporate the ideas and concerns of multiple generations; there is intergenerational participation on city advisory boards; and use of city facilities is free to intergenerational groups.

Issues That Unite Generations

Social policy reflects the value societies place on generations most likely to be marginalized. Intergenerational intersections can be found in many policy areas and provide venues to connect generations and support the mutual web of support between

them. While areas of intergenerational convergence include, among others, access to health care, education, employment, dependent care needs, housing, poverty, immigration, and the environment, three issues that unite the generations will be highlighted in this section.

Health Care

In the United States the need to reform health care is reaching a critical stage. While broad changes are needed to ensure people have health care through out their lives, the recent health care policy debate has centred on reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Originally created to ensure low income children have access to health services, the program garnered wide bi-partisan support and a coalition of diverse advocates. In an unusual step AARP, the country's largest organization representing people over the age of 50, publicly supported the growth proposed in SCHIP. In August 2007, House Minority Leader John Boehner sent a harsh letter to AARP accusing them of supporting a Children's Health Insurance Bill at the expense of health care for seniors. In reality the bill made cuts to the Medicare Advantage, a private scheme funded by taxpayers which enriches insurance companies by giving them inflated reimbursements while often failing to deliver on its promises of improved coordination and service. Advocates argue that these funds could be more effectively used to help seniors and children in other ways. At same time America's Health Insurance Plans, a powerful association which represents nearly 1,300 companies that provide health insurance, picked up on the tension and seized the opportunity to launch a campaign which effectively frightened seniors into believing they would lose vital coverage if the changes were enacted. The campaign carefully crafted their message in a way that accused Congress of playing intergenerational politics and robbing seniors to cover children, a claim advocates have shown to be false. Although changes to Medicare Advantage were eventually removed from the bill, it continued to receive strong intergenerational support as a way of extending coverage for low income children. Action on SCHIP demonstrates solidarity between the generations but also brings attention to an important aspect of family demographics. Two and a half million children in the USA are being raised by their grandparents. It is estimated that three quarters of a million of these children are eligible for SCHIP but do not currently have access to the services the program provides.

Access to Education

Education is another area that connects the generations. The Network of Intergenerational Learning in Europe (NIGEL) was founded with the vision that intergenerational learning can contribute to building a stronger social fabric uniting the generations. As a learning partnership, their aim is to develop a strong foundation for intergenerational learning in Europe. An example of this can be found in Cyprus where their Ministry of Education and Culture supports a national programme called 'Interaction of students and Cypriot Senior Citizens' which facilitates older adults returning to primary and secondary schools. At the same time the program encourages students to study the aging process and learn from their older classmates' experiences. Learning about ageism at an early age presents young people with a vulnerability they too could face if they live long enough. In the USAA, state and local education policies have broadened to encourage older adults

to continue their education and keep their minds active through life long learning. The state of Kentucky, for example, allows older adults to enrol in and take classes at no cost at state colleges and universities. Several universities have opened their campuses or nearby locations for the development of senior housing. Older adults are invited to join campus life and take classes for free or low tuition. To preserve limited resources and encourage intergenerational interaction, one school district in Kentucky has also placed senior centers in public schools. The older adults volunteer in the classrooms, sew costumes for school plays, and attend sporting events.

Protecting the Environment

The environmental movement is rooted in intergenerational solidarity. The first Earth Day, held in 1970, was designed to engage people across generations as environmental citizens. Earth Day continues with the aim of broadening the movement, providing education and programmes to foster environmental stewardship. By their very nature, environmental concerns such as climate change are inherently intergenerational issues. The strength of the environmental movement across generations is a testament to the core intergenerational concern of society. When Al Gore expresses concern about global warming and travels the earth to raise awareness; he's doing so for his grandchildren. He is focusing attention on the need to change habits and policies now so that future generations will be able to enjoy a quality life on earth. Former Vice President Gore may just be a distant memory when the ozone layer is depleted. What drives him is what he once called his most important role, that of grandfather. At the United Nations recently, Gore closed his remarks by saying "Our children will ask USA one of two questions. What were you thinking or how did you find the moral courage to rise and solve this problem."

Protecting the environment is attracting global interest as people speculate about climate change and diminished natural resources. Many cultures have understood the importance of protecting the environment for future generations but much of this lesson risks being lost when people fail to take the long view. Japan, which has a history of conservatively using its natural resources, has lately been encouraging conservation. One creative author, Moriko Shinju, published a book to help parents and grandparents who like her were having trouble conveying these values to the youngsters in their lives. Her book, *Mottainai Grandma*, has sold over 400,000 copies. Its purpose is to remind new generations of the Japanese tradition of mottainai or not being wasteful. Environmental awareness and protection are integral to protecting the compact between generations

WHAT ARE THE KEY ISSUES AND THREATS TO INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY?

"The generation that destroys the environment is usually not the generation that suffers. If they go to the forest, they will be digging their own graves and that of their children and grandchildren." Wangari Maathai, Nobel Peace Prize, 2004

Changes in demographics, family structure, poverty and income, framing of issues, and mobile societies are just a few of the threats to intergenerational solidarity. Developed

countries are home to aging populations with increased life expectancies and decreased fertility rates. Developing countries are home to younger populations and in some cases, such as many African countries, have lost an entire middle generation due to HIV Aids, war, and civil unrest. By the middle of the century, the world's population will be evenly split between young and old. While there are many dynamics to this shift in population, intergenerational solidarity is impacted especially hard in the areas of immigration and increased longevity. Developing countries are losing their educated younger citizens as they seek higher paying positions in developed countries. The Philippines for example has become a great exporter of trained nurses. While needing the workers and services immigrants provide, tension can grow between sub-cultures who are new to each other. Intergenerational approaches can help to bridge these differences. Inspired by a project of the same name in Baltimore, Maryland, Magic Me is an intergenerational arts program in London which engages younger and older people in a variety of projects from poetry to drama, to music. The make up of one of its sites in London's East End reflects the cultural and ethnic differences among the participating generations. The school population is about 70 percent Bangladeshi Muslim young people, whereas the seventy plus generation is about 70 percent white indigenous older people. Participants entered the program with questions like "How do I connect with my neighbours? Are they going to speak my language? Why do they wear those clothes?" The program gave a safe and comfortable place to ask those questions. Soon groups found many similarities. Many lived just down the street from each other for example. Others shared a mutual concern about drug dealing in their neighbourhoods. The program provided a venue and structure for people to find what their commonalities were and take pride in their differences.

Framing Longevity

Older age is being recast. While the 2002 Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing included the goal of moving older persons "from social exclusion to integration and participation," there is a danger that older adult advocacy efforts will threaten intergenerational solidarity. While celebrating longer life expectancy, additional years bring additional responsibility. It is not a time out but a time to contribute to society. Changes in the perception of aging need to cast this new time in life as a time to connect with future generations, increase social capital, and foster reciprocity.

How issues are framed can adversely affect intergenerational solidarity. In the USAA child advocates have recently released reports intended to increase federal supports for children. Unfortunately, the reports have had some negative ramifications. In stating the argument that children's programmes deserve more funding to help the next generation grow up to become healthy, contributing citizens, they have used a frame of "seniors' verses children's" spending. Even a simple change language to "seniors' and children's" spending would have given a different perception. However, rather than tackle the more difficult issue of how federal tax dollars are raised and allocated, they have chosen to focus on another vulnerable population. Worldwide as more attention is given to changing demographics, misguided efforts like this are sure to increase.

Fragmented and silo funding and regulations also infringe on intergenerational solidarity. Government offices charged with elderly affairs and those charged with looking out for

children and families are seldom housed together. Some funding streams in the USA restrict the use of the funds based on age. Regulations are developed independently and without cohesion. Because of this, rules governing services for elders and those governing services for children and youth can be out of harmony. This inhibits intergenerational program development and causes generations to be unnaturally segregated by age.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROTECTING INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY

The web of mutual obligations between generations is essential for a civilized society.
Thomas Jefferson, President, United States of America

Support between generations existed throughout time. Whether grandparents stayed behind to feed and watch babies while parents went to hunt and gather or children returned as adults to work on a family's land, generations cared for each other. However because of shifting demographics, artificial age segregation, and globalization, attention must be paid to bolstering intergenerational solidarity. Significant efforts to find common ground and develop equitable public policy agendas must occur.

Guiding Principles

Guiding principles can be developed that will assist governments at all levels as they draft and review policies. Generations United has suggested the following guiding principles that are designed to help begin the debate.

- We're stronger together. This is not about 'us' and 'them': there is only 'us', and we should think, talk and plan that way.
- Some risks are simply too great for anyone to face alone.
- Society represents a lifetime commitment: we give and receive in different ways at different life stages.
- Public policy should meet the needs of all generations.
- Intergenerational approaches have a positive relationship to economic growth and value creation.
- Resources are more wisely used when they connect the generations rather than separate them.

Intergenerational Public Policy Framework

Generations United encourages others to use an intergenerational framework when reviewing public policy. This lens seeks to determine if the policy incorporates an intergenerational approach to addressing an issue and/or has impact across the generations. This approach provides a better use of resources and uses those resources to connect rather than separate the generations. Intergenerational policies answer yes to these questions:

- Are people of all ages being viewed as a resource?
- Does the policy promote the interdependence of the generations?
- Is the policy sensitive to intergenerational family structures?

- Does the policy encourage intergenerational transfers through shared care or services?
- Does the policy unfairly burden or favour one generation over another?

Although many groups have called for a common policy agenda, no one has systematically reviewed the complexities, realistic trade offs, opportunities, and barriers that exist with local and national policies that impact solidarity across generations.

Ministries and Offices

Intergovernmental working groups can be established to monitor threats and opportunities for intergenerational solidarity. Using intergenerational guidelines and principles, generation impact statements can discuss the virtues and potential pitfalls of proposed public policies. This generational analysis should take into consideration the broad scope of social policies that support different generations and view social policies at all levels of government.

Some countries are creating offices and ministries with explicit intergenerational implications although these appear to be fuelled by concern for the welfare of an aging population. For example Croatia has a Ministry of Family Affairs, War Veterans and Intergenerational Solidarity. Family Affairs includes children and youth while the intergenerational solidarity division is focused on safeguarding the rights of the elderly. The government of Singapore created the Taskforce to promote grandparenting and intergenerational bonding in its Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports.

In Wales the Welsh Ministry became the first European nation to address intergenerational practice as a funded policy area linked to a national strategy. The strategy was developed out of a partnership between the children's commission and the older people's division. The effort is a direct response to changing demographics, a perceived distancing and growing distrust between generations, and changes in the family structure. The strategy called for establishing a Welsh Centre for Intergenerational Practice which would hold an annual conference, support and document intergenerational projects, review public policy, and disseminate information.

National Intergenerational Networks

Networks link people with common concerns and interests. They foster greater collaboration and increase social capital. Recent years have seen an increase in the number of national and regional networks concentrating on intergenerational practice. The USA-based Generations United (GU) is most likely the oldest of these efforts having been started in 1986 by leading children, youth and senior advocates concerned about the growing potential for intergenerational conflict. One of the founders, Jack Ossofsky said "We formed Generations United to argue for a caring society." Today GU continues as the only national organization focused on promoting programmes and public policies that connect generations. The organization works to identify emerging issues impacting children, youth and older adults and responds with practical programmes and policies. Currently GU has three areas of concentration: grandparents and other relatives raising children or grandfamilies; intergenerational shared sites; and Seniors4Kids, a civic engagement project that mobilizes older adults as the advocates for quality early childhood education. The organization benefits from a strong, committed board of

national leaders who take their role of protecting intergenerational solidarity very seriously. Key to their success, as one board member stated, is that “we are around the table in good times and bad times, when resources are plentiful and when they are scarce.”

New networks are beginning to thrive. The Spanish Intergenerational Network resulted from the first nationwide conference in 2005, Intergenerational programmes in Spain: analysis of the situation and potential for development. To date they have attracted over 200 members, conducted assessments and training programmes, and developed or translated materials to support program development and evaluation. Recently the network launched a website devoted to intergenerational work in Spain.

The Centre for Intergenerational Practice at the Beth Johnson Foundation supports intergenerational practice across the United Kingdom. The Centre holds a regular conference, is a repository for model programmes and best practices, conducts studies and pilot projects, and assists others in establishing national intergenerational centres. It also houses the International Consortium of Intergenerational Programmes (ICIP) which is the international membership organization promoting intergenerational practice.

The Japan Intergenerational Unity Network was launched during a conference in 2006 and seeks to support budding intergenerational work in that country. Following the 2006 ICIP conference, talks are underway to establish an Australian Intergenerational Network and interest has been expressed in Africa as well. These networks are intent on supporting intergenerational solidarity and can play a key role in keeping ngos, governments and individuals focused on protecting the ties that bind generations.

Shift in Thinking

New parameters must be created that respect the commitment between generations and reflect the compromises that will be needed to sustain longer life. Better social policy can move the discussion from scarce to reasonable resources. For example, the greater Phoenix Arizona area faced difficult decisions and limited tax dollars when planning for future facilities for seniors, teenagers and other community members. Rather than split the available tax dollars and fail to adequately meet the needs of any generation, they decided to begin retrofitting and building new recreation centres so they are now multigenerational centres. The facilities are used from the early dawn hours until well into the night. Elders can walk on an indoor track in the morning that will be used for jogging by people on their way home from work in the evening. Senior meals are served in the same multipurpose room that is used for karate and line dancing at night.

Increased life expectancy also calls for revisiting and rewriting the social compact between generations. Investments in education, which often end when a person reaches adulthood, need to take into consideration life long learning opportunities and age integration in existing educational settings. The workplace will need to adapt to allow older workers to continue to contribute and make entrée for younger workers more accessible. Flexibility and accommodation will promote workforce cooperation and

decrease the likelihood of conflict in the workplace. Investing in human resources through education, re-training, and workplace flexibility can result in higher productivity.

Youth advocates and organizations need to be more involved in the discussion. The UN 2004 Youth Day had the theme, “Youth in an intergenerational society.” The 2003 World Youth Report included a chapter on intergenerational relations. Yet intergenerational practices that support solidarity between generations are for the most part championed by researchers and practitioners in the aging field.

Longer Productivity Verses Leisure

In the middle of the 1900s developers and marketers systematically worked to change the perception of old age and retirement. Along with longer life and better health came the opportunity to pursue leisure and focus on individual interests. While some may choose this lifestyle, longer life should also be viewed as an opportunity for pursuing productivity with purpose. Civic Ventures, a San Francisco-based think tank has begun promoting “en core careers” for older individuals at the intersection of continued income, new meaning, and significant contribution to the greater good. They promote the view that retirement affords a time in life to pursue a career you always wanted but could not whether because of salary, education or benefits. Policies that inhibit an older individuals’ ability to continue to engage in the workforce will need to be revisited and revised so that countries can benefit from increased longevity coupled with productivity.

Voluntary work and civic engagement are other possibilities for continued contributions. Public policy can support these efforts through tax abatements, offering educational scholarships, discounted prescription drugs, and other incentives. Policies should be written to explicitly include opportunities for civic engagement. Most notable is the recent inclusion of language in the Older American’s Act (OAA) designed to encourage inter or multigenerational programming. In the 2006 reauthorization of the OAA, advocates were able to work with policy makers to include language that specifically supports these types of programmes. The OAA authorizes grants to fund opportunities for multigenerational civic engagement. Examples named in the Act include:

- support for grandparents and other older adults who are raising children;
- involving older volunteers in providing support to families who are in need, perhaps because a child is ill or disabled; and
- promoting multigenerational activities.

Family Caregiving and Grandfamilies

Family caregiving touches all generations. In some cases it may include young caring for dependent older family members but in many cases it involves older adults as the givers of care. Many grandparents are being called on to raise a second and in some cases, third family. Whether due to HIV Aids, as seen most widely in Africa, or substance abuse as experienced in many developed countries, these grandfamilies take on the burden at great personal sacrifice. Public policies can support them in their effort to raise children which will result in healthier children and supports for the caregivers as they age and become more frail. Examples of good social policies include the National Family Caregiver Support Program which allows local governments to use funds to provide support groups,

counselling, information, and access to services. Currently the Kinship Caregiver Support Act is being considered in Congress. Among other provisions, it includes subsidized guardianships to provide financial support to grandfamilies. The Lifespan Respite Act recognizes caregiving across the lifespan. However, while they passed the Act, Congress has yet to appropriate funding to implement the program.

CONCLUSAION

Changes in the world can erode an already weakened social compact. One internet social networking site, Facebook, has a group “I don’t wanna be Facebook friends with senior citizens!” that boasts 231 members. Chances are its members did not grow up relating to elders invested in fostering intergenerational solidarity. All generations have a stake and a role to play in dealing with demographic and societal changes to protect the environment and world we live in. This includes redefining and strengthening the cohesion between generations. Interventions at the local, regional and country level are needed to ensure the ongoing commitment between young and old that foster’s the transfer of culture, skills, and experience. Stronger, just communities mean all generations receive supportive services they need and allows each individual to share their skills, talents and interests to enrich society. Intergenerational practice and policies have been shown to work and provide an avenue for protecting societies’ values. These values include caring for the most vulnerable and easily marginalized populations, the young and the old. Adjusting to change will require compromise, investment, and a long view. Generations are meant to relate to each other through connections not conflict. After all, it is about building a world that values and engages all generations in a community, not a competition.

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