

# ***INTERGENERATIONAL DEPENDENCY***

## ***FOCUS ON YOUTH***

Prepared by

Girma Mulugetta  
Associate Social Affairs Officer  
Intergenerational Issues Section

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## **BACKGROUND**

1. *According to the United Nations Report on the World Social Situation (2001), the term generation refers to specific groups of people with a major characteristic in common. A generation of persons can relate to all the people born at a certain time, who pass through life experiencing changes at the same time, or refer to all persons at a particular stage of their lives at different times. As per the analysis in the publication, populations who have children at a young age and live long could have many generations, say five or six, which co-exist, whereas populations who would have children late and die young could have few coexisting generations. Generational identities tend to be consolidated through long years spent together in age-based institutions: schools when young, workplaces when adult, rest and retirement places when older. It is therefore advantageous to understand the concept of generations in order to understand the issues of intergenerational dependency.*

2. *Any study or research on intergenerational dependency is inevitably tied to a study or work on families. Aging for example, has an effect both on the role of families in the lives of the elderly and on the role of the elderly in the lives of their families. Families can be a source of emotional support, nursing care, financial assistance, and household assistance for their older members. In turn and as a reciprocity older family members may serve as a family's cultural or religious link, as providers of childcare or as sources of emotional and financial support.*

3. *It is natural that parents expect their grown up children to support them in their old age in exchange for a variety of services they themselves had rendered their children during the children's formative periods. Societal values rooted in their respective ethnic cultures provided an ideological reinforcement for these reciprocal relations. Earlier life course experiences, to their ethnic and cultural traditions and to the historical context affecting their lives all play significant role in determining the nature of such generational support. Again the practice differs from society to society depending on the socio-economic and historical experiences of the respective countries.*

4. *In the developed world, the family surrendered many of the functions previously concentrated within it to other social institutions. Whether or not the shift in responsibility is adequate to render the required economic support is dependent on the development of societies. But generally speaking, the welfare states have relieved children from the obligation of supporting their parents in old age. In such societies the traditional form of assistance and support to the aged has decreased tremendously. It is therefore this interplay of obligations and roles that make the issue of intergenerational relations a complex one.*

5. *As indicated above the changing demographics of younger families is increasing the possibility that younger family members will turn to older members for support. It is also assumed that trends in mortality, fertility, marriages and divorce all influence the structure of families and, in turn, the structure of families has an impact on their function. These processes continue to operate throughout the lives of family members, youth being part of the family, and continue to touch individuals through their effect on the lives of children and grand children.*

6. *As the title of this research indicates, youth is the focus of this study on intergenerational dependency. This is because youth is a changing stage of life that has always required special attention, and this stage of life currently requires more attention because it has grown to occupy a larger portion of the lifespan and has come to raise more expectations with regard to a successful outcome and successful passage into adult working life. In 1995 the General Assembly of the United Nations gave particular importance to the causes of youth by endorsing a resolution entitled: "World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond", with ten priority areas listed as concern to youth and a set of action oriented recommendations to implement them.*

7. *The issue of intergenerational dependency is a recent emerging issue unforeseen when the World Programme of action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond was declared in 1995. The ten priority areas listed in the programme of action namely: education, employment, hunger and poverty, health, environment, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, leisure-time activities, girls and young women and participation of youth excluded unintentionally the issue of intergenerational dependency. But the Programme of Action didn't exclude the possibility of new priorities which might be identified in the future. Thus the complexity and diversity of the subject will definitely generate new research and policy formulation.*

8. *Accordingly, the then United Nations Youth Unit took the initiative to give this new emerging priority area to youth importance by undertaking a study that was presented to the Expert Group Meeting on Global Priorities for Youth, held in Helsinki, Finland from 6-10 October 2002.*

9. *In the report it was indicated that policies be it governmental or community level should address the needs of all persons as the issue cuts across on all age groups. The youth as part and parcel of the family has a key role to play in intergenerational issues. This research is therefore an extension of the study already undertaken with some additional insights and is an effort toward fostering a new look at the issue of intergenerational dependency.*

## **INTERGENERATIONAL ISSUES**

10. *In order to understand the issue better it is important to take note of three interrelated phenomena concerning families and the elderly in contemporary society. The first and most familiar is the demographic revolution characterized by declines in mortality and fertility and a rise in divorce in general. This may not hold true for all societies alike but it has to be understood that the trend differs from society to society.*

11. *According to Linda Burton, in her book, "Families and Aging", she stated that:*

*" Individuals are now more likely to grow older in four or even five generation families, spend an unprecedented number of years in family roles such as grand-parenthood, and be part of a more complex and varied web of inter-generational family ties" <sup>1</sup>*

12. *The second phenomenon affecting the group is the dramatic increase in cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity with the advent of globalization and the information technology. This emerging and diversifying of family life was coupled with demographic transition translate into complex, mosaic of family structures, processes, roles and relationship for the social group as a whole.*

13. *Finally, the social and economic condition of societies have influential effects. Individuals in the social group adapt different strategies to survive when there is an economic set back in a country at different times. This research should therefore be seen with the above perspectives and phenomena in mind.*

14. *According to Raeann R. Hamon, in her research work on "Filial Responsibility", defines filial responsibility as a sense of personal obligation for the well being of aging parents. It is salient intergenerational issue for later families of today. She further elaborates the issue as follows:*

*" These attitudes of duty or willingness to protect and care for elderly parents are frequently expressed in assistance with household tasks and shopping, provision of emotional support, maintenance of personal contact, or shared living arrangements. Filial responsibility also includes a preventive dimension that promotes self-sufficiency and independence among aged parents, enabling them to make decisions and perform tasks which they are capable of doing for themselves" <sup>2</sup>*

15. *Filial responsibility should also be seen in terms of societal values and youth development should be seen in that context as well. This is to say, the development of individual young people considered both as persons and as members of their various societies, but particularly as members of their own families. The development of a young person as an independent adult, capable of making and taking a place in society, requires a set of values of the sort that are found in statements such as the following:*

*“ The aim is to promote the development of young people in achieving their full physical, intellectual, social and spiritual potentials, as individuals, as responsible citizens, and as members of their local, national and international communities”<sup>3</sup>*

16. *Youth therefore need the help of their families until they grow and sustain themselves. The parents when they become older need the help of their children for their economic well being and other social protection. This holds true especially in developing countries with an extended family members and with no social protection system in place.*

17. *According to the World Programme of action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, the crisis of youth unemployment deprives young people of the opportunity to secure independent housing or the accommodations necessary for the establishment of families and participation in the life of society. Unemployment when young has the potential to strongly damage future employment prospects for life. Long term unemployment is also a major cause of poverty. Poverty again has many manifestations homelessness and inadequate housing being one of them leading the vulnerable to depend on the better offs family members for their livelihood especially in developing countries. Recent United Nations study shows us that youth make up more than 40 % of the world's unemployed. The situation may eventually lead to unwanted developments like becoming a burden to the family and to society. Currently there are 66 million youth unemployed worldwide.*

18. *Hunger and Poverty is another area that has a direct bearing on the issue of intergenerational dependency. Again according to the Programme of Action hunger remain among the most serious and intractable threats to humanity, often preventing youth from taking part in society. This kind of situation will create an environment where youth remain dependent on family members until situations improve for them to live an independent life.*

19. *The intergenerational transmission of poverty (ITP) is a process by which poor parents transmit poverty to their children. A report by Inter-American Development Bank in Latin America indicated that mother's education is critical because it acts by increasing productivity in the market place and hence inducing higher labor force participation. A small change in mother's education help break the intergenerational transmission of poverty.*

## **SELECTED COUNTRY EXPERIENCES**

20. *The issue of intergenerational dependency is best illustrated by a case study undertaken in the Caribbean. The impact of unions on residential arrangements and the extent of intergenerational support of one another is vividly explained in this research. According to the study it illustrates responsibility for siblings and reallocation of responsibility. The case study stated such relationship and the nature of the dependency as follows:*

*“ Enid is now 51. She and her husband have been married for 25 years, but has not lived with her for several years. Although he is still living in another village in Antigua, he does not provide regular support to Enid and their only child, a 24 years old daughter. About ten years ago, Enid’s elderly aunt, her mother’s sister, moved in. At the same time Enid’s husband’s brother’s daughter, then 8 years old joined the household. Enid works part-time cleaning in a store and also sells cold drinks from her house. When she is out of the household working, her aunt has been able to mind both the small business and the children over the years. Her daughter was able to find her first job in a small shop about a year ago, at which time Enid’s 15 year old sister’s son moved in. Although that sister is unable to provide any assistance in supporting her child, their brother, a skilled professional working in Canada sends money regularly to supplement their household’s income. Enid has thus raised her husband’s brother’s daughter for many years, her mother’s sister, and more recently, her sister’s son as well as her only child”<sup>4</sup>*

21. *In Brazil, the government of Brasilia initiated a project called “Bolsa Escola” which provides income support for very poor families whose school age children attend public schools. Another program the “ Poupanaca Escola” seeks to reduce repetition and drop-out by providing a financial incentive to parents and children to complete secondary education. The financial contribution provided by the government is made conditional on passing the grades. According to the case study the programme so far is working well and this is one way of helping families to overcome the over dependence of one family member over the other. The primary aim of the project is to make family members self sufficient economically in the long-run through education and assistance during the take off stages.*

22. *Different governments have also taken different policy initiatives to address the problem: According to the Report on the World Social Situation, the Government of Armenia adopted legislation to protect the children; Singapore established an inter-ministerial committee on ageing; Cuba implemented a plan of action for the disabled and Australia introduced a comprehensive and integrated approach to family and Bolivia constituted an indigenous people’s council to consult with indigenous groups.*

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

23. *According to the World Programme of Action for Youth to address the issue of youth unemployment it was recommended to create voluntary services involving youth. Youth camps, community service projects, environmental protection and intergenerational cooperation programmes should be established. The Report on the World Social Situation also recommended the need to expand employment opportunities as a necessary condition to enable the poor to help themselves out of poverty.*

24. *The concept of poverty developed in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development is broad and encompasses income, lack of access to education, health care and other amenities, and exclusion from participation in the life of the community. The Programme of Action therefore recommended that efforts should be focused on the elimination of hunger and malnutrition, as well as the provision of social security, education, employment and livelihood, as well as health care services. These are thought necessary in order for youth to be self sufficient and independent economically.*

25. *Sharing the cost of pensions is another step and an important expression of social solidarity. Through such scheme individuals sustain themselves and will not be a burden on the family and on the society at large.*

*“ The sharing of costs of protection between employers and workers and the wider community and the funding by the workers of today of the pensions for the older retired generations are important expressions of social solidarity and solidarity between the generations”<sup>5</sup>*

26. *Limiting the size of one’s family is another solution to the problem of over-dependence. A large family member has implications for the burden of parental responsibilities and for the level and distribution of family support for, and investment in, the young. Parental time and resources are also more constrained, limiting resources available for investments in each family member and reducing parent’s ability to assist their young in taking advantage of new opportunities. These family resource constraints have negative implications for the young in terms of health and educational attainment and increase their current and future obligations to their families \**

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*For further details see “ The Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty: Some Causes and policy implications”, An IADB Discussion Paper, 14 March 1999*

27. *It is critical to educate all age groups about prospects and plans and involve them in all stages of development schemes so as create a shared vision about the future of our world. By providing youth the proper framework and assistance in understanding local, regional, national and global issues and trends, their natural enthusiasm, intelligence and energy will bring forward the best in them.*

28. *At a macro level “ Social policies must ...move beyond a reliance on “traditional” family care models... and towards government policies that support family members in supporting each other in connecting the worlds of work and family.....addressing community care issues for all ages rather than child care , care for older persons, and care for persons with disabilities”. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging also supported this kind of approach as “... a life-course approach to policy-making-be it employment, health or education, which recognizes that policies should be designed to benefit all age groups because aging is a life long process that begins at birth” \**

29. *According to a recent report entitled, “ Supporting Your Adolescent” \*\* it was reported that adolescence is a time for young people to define their place in the family, peer groups, and the larger community. During this stage of their lives, youth struggle with the transition from childhood to adulthood. During childhood, they depended mainly on their parents for economic and emotional support and direction. In adulthood, though, they will be expected to achieve independence and make choices about school, work, and personal relationships that will affect every aspect of their future. It is therefore highly recommended that they get due support during this transition period. Without support and guidance, these young people may fall victim to behaviors that place them, and others, at risk. In many societies these behaviors include dropping out of school, running away from home, joining gangs, and using alcohol or drugs or becoming involved in other law-breaking behaviors. Some youth may become despondent, leading to academic problems, social isolation, or self-destructive behavior.*

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*Taken from a paper ( Intergenerational Relations) presented to the Expert Group Meeting on Global Priorities for Youth held in Helsinki, Finland 6-10 October 2002.*

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*See for details “Supporting Your Adolescent” Tips for Parents, August 1996, published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Family and Youth Services Bureau.*

30. Referring to the recommendations contained in the Political Declarations of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging (2002) we find that two of the resolutions have particular relevance to the issue of Intergenerational Dependency and these are stated as follows:

*“ Article 15: We recognize the important role played by families, volunteers, communities, older persons organizations and other community-based organizations in providing support and financial care to older persons in addition to services provided by Governments.*

*“ Article 16: We recognize the need to strengthen solidarity among generations and intergenerational partnerships, keeping in mind the particular needs of both older and younger ones, and to encourage mutually responsive relationships between generations”<sup>6</sup>*

31. Finally, the UN Report on the World Social Situation (2001) underscored the importance of investing in developing the human capabilities of all citizens, with particular attention to excluded and marginalized groups. It also stressed the importance of formulating policies and programs that encourage youth to exercise their entrepreneurial talents and enter self employment to be self sufficient and independent. Acknowledging the importance of social protection systems and the need to reduce vulnerability the report stated that:

*“ It is important to the well-being and cohesion of society to take measures to protect all its members from the risks they face at different stages in life and to overcome the disadvantages that they confront because of gender-based assumptions or by reason of their membership in a particular race, class or group. When individuals are forced by circumstance to become a burden on their families and communities, the loss to society is obvious. When individuals can not reach their full potential, it is not only they who lose; society loses also. Both individuals and society are strengthened when all people contribute at their maximum potential”<sup>7</sup>*

## NOTES

1. *Linda Burton, Families and Aging, Generations and Aging series, (Baywood Publishing Company, Inc. Amityville, New York), 1992, P. 1*  
  
*(originally published as the Summer 1992 issue of Generations, Journal of the American Society on Aging, Mary Johnson, Editor).*
2. *Taken from, Vision 2010: Families and Aging, by Sharon J. Price and Timothy Brubaker, (National Council on Family Relations, Minneapolis, MN), 1996, P.2.*  
  
*(Raeann R. Hamon, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Family Studies and Gerontology, and Chairperson of the Behavioral Science Department at Messiah College. She teaches marital relationship, aging, family dynamics and theory. Her research interests include Bahamian family life and folklore, and intergenerational relationships in later life such as filial responsibility and aging parents' experience of children's divorce).*
3. *The 5<sup>th</sup> International Youth Forum, Report on Youth and Family, 14 – 21 July 1994, Seoul, Korea, P. 82*
4. *Christine Barrow, Family in the Caribbean, (Ian Randle Publishers), 1996, P.113*
5. *Strengthening Families for Life, Final Report of the Commission on the Family to the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs, July 1998, Dublin, P.311.*
6. *Report of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid, 8-12 April 2002, P. 4.*
7. *Report on the World Social Situation (2001), PP. 210-211*