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Platform for a Generational Dialogue on the Future of Latin America: A Window on the Future

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<u>**Politics**</u>

<u>**Thesis**</u>

Young people in Latin America are inventing new ways to participate. They have grown alongside the imagery of democracy and human rights, and their generation is, more than any other, aware of environmental issues and the historical grievances of minorities. These qualities put them in a position to shoulder new political challenges, both in their own countries and worldwide, where pressing issues of multiculturalism, ecology, democracy and rights all vie for attention. But these same qualities are not reflected in access to or participation in politics, and the ability of young people to reshape the political system is at stake, thus fanning –instead of stifling– their interest in public affairs. This is seen in local spaces, in virtual networks, in mobilization around new agendas and in resourceful joint action. Politics is being rethought, not rejected. And young people are spearheading many of these initiatives.

<u>**Questions**</u>

1. What kind of intergenerational dialogue is needed, and with what players, to better bridge the divides between the political system and the aspirations of young people, between politics as usual and the way that young people approach collective needs and aspirations, and between institutionalized political culture and the emerging collective cultures of young people?

2. To what extent are young people more concerned about the political system (power structures in institutions that affect their daily lives) and less concerned about politics (party membership, support for lawmaking, representative voting)? And how, then, to go about reconciling the political system with politics?

3. What actions should political institutions take, and what goals should they set, so that young people trust them more and get involved? In other words, what would legitimize democratic political institutions in the eyes of young people?

4. What spaces need to be opened or are in need of improvement so that young people become political players with a higher profile in public spaces, deliberative bodies and representation mechanisms?

Citizenship

Thesis

Politics and the State have viewed young people in many ways: as a human resource on hold (a stage in the life cycle devoted to preparing for the future, above all by means of education); as a threat to society, a violent, revolutionary or out-of-control generation (from the viewpoint of national security or citizens' safety); as a vulnerable, at-risk group (from the viewpoint of social protection); and, more recently, as subjects of rights and of new identities, and as protagonists of structural change (from the viewpoint of the new politics of youth, justice and culture). In this heterogeneous environment, public institutions, legislation and information systems devoted to youth have emerged, including the Ibero-American Convention on Youth Rights. Much has been accomplished, but progress has been uneven and at times contradictory. It is still not clear where youth institutionality and policies fit in. Intergenerational dialogue should help on this front, focusing on policies that see young people as protagonists, with their own identities, sense of belonging and capacities for the future.

Questions

1. How to change the policy approach to young people, from "a resource on hold" or a "risk group" to "young citizens"? What would this involve, exactly?

2. If belonging to a Nation, as an imagined community, is still valid for different generations, is it worthwhile to foster an intergenerational dialogue to share visions of what Nation –Nation as a work in progress– means? What ideas can they contribute? How to work together to project the concept of Nation into the future? How to tap the new generations to redefine the links between territory and identity, history and the future, and continuity and change?

3. Policies targeting young people as citizens: Do they have a defined profile as to topic, sector of activity, the way they approach young people? Or is this an issue

that cuts across institutions and the way they affect the daily lives of young people? How to keep policies aimed at full citizenship, citizenship rights and a culture of citizenship for young people from being just empty words?

Education

Thesis

Education is the principal avenue to more equal opportunities, to building human capital for vaulting into a more productive society and to forming active citizens who are respectful of rights. So education should also prepare subjects to rise to any challenge, adapt to productive changes throughout their life cycle, engage in active dialogue with decision makers, be able to manage and use strategic information, promote and respect cultural diversity and human rights and protect the environment. The challenges in this sphere are equity in attainment and learning among different groups of young people, relevance in educational contents in order to open more doors to social inclusion and to building more just and sustainable societies and quality reflected in effective learning.

Questions

1. How to redirect spending on education and public efforts so as to narrow educational attainment gaps between groups of young people (who may differ in socio-economic background, ethnic or cultural identity or place of origin) and, at least, achieve universal completion of secondary school, which is seen as key to overcoming the intergenerational transmission of poverty and inequality?

2. What major changes are needed for public education to meet future challenges in productive skills, citizen competencies, environmental sustainability and multicultural coexistence?

3. How to address quality in education and reshape the dynamics of learning so that young people learn what they need?

Employment

Thesis

Young people have higher levels of education, have more connectivity and are more at ease with more flexible organizational structures. All of this should help them access the labour market and lead the transition to new productive paradigms. But these very

same young people suffer higher rates of unemployment and job precariousness than do adults. Access to the labour market for young people is markedly segmented along lines of socio-economic background, gender and educational attainment.

Questions

1. To facilitate access to a young person's first job, should youth labour policies be made more flexible to facilitate initial entry into the world of work, subsidize employers, set quotas for young people, establish better systems for certifying skills and post job opportunities for young people online? Which of these measures should be regarded as more important than others?

2. How to reverse gender inequality and discrimination in an environment in which even among young people women earn less and have more precarious employment conditions than men? What kinds of services are required to strike a better balance between work and family?

3. Might a comprehensive, viable solution consist of promoting youth entrepreneurship, i.e., investing in training, equipment and funding for youth entrepreneurs? Could such an approach be on a broad scale?

4. Might a comprehensive, viable solution consist of moving towards training and skills certification systems outside formal education, as an alternative that would substantially improve job prospects for young people in the productive stages of the life cycle and level the playing field among young people with different levels of educational attainment?

Connectivity and the information society

Thesis

Young people in the region enjoy greater connectivity and are more in tune with new information and communications technologies (ICTs). This makes them the generation with the potential to move towards the information society and bring greater intellectual value added to the productive structure. With longer exposure to educational circuits and greater familiarity with interactive systems for communicating and for retrieving and processing information, young people are set to harness knowledge and communication as the main channels for social integration –both productive and political– in the future.

1. How to work towards more egalitarian access to ICTs among young people from different socio-economic backgrounds, locations and cultures?

2. What policies would enable young people to take advantage of their mastery of ICTs so as to raise their profile in the public discourse, in the representative system and in policymaking, to extend that "virtual public voice" to social sectors of young people that have historically gone unseen and unheard?

3. How to incorporate ICTs into the way young people are taught, both in the formal education system and in other training venues, so that young people (particularly those from a low-income background) can gain better access to useful information and knowledge for the world of work and improve their ICT skills as an asset for participating in the labour market?

4. Is it appropriate to intervene with policies to enhance young people's greater connectivity by promoting social networks and social capital so that ICTs can be used to build capacities for managing resources, capitalizing on networked institutions and boosting entrepreneurship? Or will that happen spontaneously?

Family

Thesis

The family is still at the core of social reproduction in our societies. But family structure and composition, as well as family life, are undergoing vast, swift change. Family arrangements are increasingly diverse (two-parent and single-parent nuclear families, blended families, single-person families, extended families, unformalized families, growing percentage of children born outside formal marriage, and families with same-sex partners). This changes the family economy because it decreases the dependency rate (fewer small children and greater labour participation of women). It changes the composition of families, too. Families are smaller, with a greater proportion of adolescents than young children. In medium- and high-income sectors, children take longer to attain economic independence. Authority relationships within the family are changing, with young people negotiating decisions and declaring early moral independence. All of these changes call for a dialogue between generations as to the future of the family.

Questions

1. How to match these changes with new institutional arrangements and legislation that guarantee equal rights for young people living in different family arrangements?

2. What should the State provide to help young people achieve greater material independence and, when it is time and without gender discrimination, leave their household of origin and form their own household?

3. How to shape education and social communication to halt the intergenerational reproduction of gender stereotypes (rigid functions assigned to women in families and households) and to ensure that the young people of today have more flexible roles in their future living arrangements and share both paid work and the care economy?

Reproductive rights and teenage motherhood

Thesis

Overall fertility in Latin America has declined sharply since the 1970s, driven by socio-economic change (more education and urbanization), cultural change (more reproductive information, secularization, new lifestyles), changing gender roles and greater access to contraceptive methods. But the opposite is true of teenage motherhood, which is not declining. In higher-income socio-economic groups, less than 5% of young women were mothers by age 17. In lower-income groups, the rate ranges from 20% to 35%, depending on the country. In women up to age 19, motherhood is often undesired and poses more risks to reproductive health than for women who are older. It also generates vicious circles of exclusion from one generation to the next because most teenage mothers are poor, have little education and are highly likely to form single-parent households without access to networks for social protection or promotion.

Questions

1. How to approach reproductive rights for teenage women that include timely information, prevention and care so they can fully plan for sexual rights and maternity decisions?

2. To what extent does this require a consensus on the need to resolve entrenched value differences? How are these differences to be addressed?

3. How to effectively disseminate shared responsibility between genders as to full exercise of reproductive rights for young people, not just promoting but legislating on the matter in order to halt the reproduction of sexism and male irresponsibility in this area?

4. What is the role of the schools, family policy and health systems in empowering adolescent women to exercise their reproductive rights?

International migration

Thesis

Many are the reasons that make young people more inclined to migrate than the rest of the population. They are less risk-averse at this time in life; they are forming new households and are more able to make their own decisions. Some are entering university or starting to work and so move from one place to another in order to seek opportunities elsewhere or take advantage of skills that cannot be put to use in their place of origin. For others, migration has a darker side, with young people facing traumatic obstacles that endanger their rights just when they are entering the labour market far from their place of origin. Those at the most risk are young migrants with low levels of education, those who belong to ethnic minorities or are undocumented and those who get sucked into trafficking networks or fall prey to human trafficking.

Questions

1. For young people: What kind of interventions would best make juvenile migration safer and improve the prospects for young migrants? Cooperation agreements between countries of origin and destination, reciprocity agreements, entry facilitation, access to schooling, jobs, and citizens' rights?

2. What can public policy do to encourage migrants to return and to contribute their human capital to national development?

3. Is international migration something to encourage young people to do as one of their training, labour or life experience options? Or should efforts focus on improving opportunities in the country, so that young people will have fewer reasons to migrate?