

Generation of Change: Young People and Culture

The seven stories in this report show the challenges facing young people growing up in the first decade of the 21st century. The stories show Grita, Tsehey, Daniel, Kim, Jiigee, Seif, and Leire in their daily lives, each working to enjoy and transform their own cultural surroundings. Culturally sensitive approaches to development help young people to be more effective in changing the harmful elements of culture, while celebrating the positive aspects that enrich their lives.

The cultural experience of young people is a hybrid of many different elements. Because young people are not limited by their parents' experiences and memories, they are generally flexible and dynamic. They have the potential to become agents of change.

The complex streams of culture have intense effects on young people, leading them to challenge gender stereotypes in sport; to become champions of other young people

in their passage to adulthood; to adapt international music to the realities of local life; to bring new communication technologies to one of the most isolated regions on earth; to rise to the top echelons of government; to live in peace in a land at war; to escape child marriage and claim the right to choices in life. By doing all these, and more, young people are changing themselves and their cultures.

Development programmes should support young people such as these to negotiate a place in their society. Young people need the skills to embrace their local culture: to change what hurts them, such as harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation or child marriage; and support what helps, like better information and services for their sexual and reproductive health, and the prevention of violence against women.

Steeped in long tradition, older generations may resist these changes. Programmes

need to open a space for dialogue between generations. Their approach should spring from deep sympathy with the culture, respect for its ways and knowledge of its history, power relations, politics and economics. Culturally sensitive approaches will equip development programmes to help make human rights and gender equality a reality in all societies, and young people their most visible champions.

Endnotes

INTRODUCTION

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