

Success Story: Dominican Republic 2011

Leveraging DPAC for national policy reform



Acknowledgements

This Success Story would not be possible without the invaluable contributions of DPAC organizer Ms. Silvia Mazzarelli. The background information for the Story was gathered through an interview with Ms. Mazzarelli, as well as a review of secondary sources. Ms. Mazzarelli works for International Volunteer Service for Development (VIS) and serves as the National Coordinator for the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) in the Dominican Republic and as the Caribbean representative to the NGO Advisory Council for follow-up to the UN Study on Violence against Children. In her roles, she is well-positioned to identify opportunities for involvement in larger child rights initiatives.

Introduction

The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children (DPAC), celebrated annually on 20 November, is an opportunity for all sectors of society - governments, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and religious communities - to work together to end violence against children. World Day events take many forms, including mobilization and media campaigns, workshops, religious services and vigils, and common action to protect children from violence.

DPAC was launched in 2008 at the Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) in Hiroshima. The initiative unites secular and religious organizations and harnesses their collective power in support of children. In 2011, more than 200,000 people in 72 countries participated in the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children. This Success Stories series tells the inspiring stories of 2011 and 2012 DPAC actions in selected countries and provides resources and recommendations for organizing similar actions. This story highlights actions in the Latin America and Caribbean region.

The 2011 World Day actions in the Dominican Republic demonstrate how the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children can strengthen an existing group of partners and provide them with an ongoing strategic focus for their work together. The DPAC celebration was integrated into a wave of activities focused on the issue of violence against children sweeping across the Dominican Republic and the region. DPAC linked these national and regional policy initiatives to community-level outreach.

Identifying strategic opportunities

In August 2011 when the possible actions for the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children were being considered, preparations were already underway for a large-scale regional event on violence against children, set to take place in Santo Domingo in early December. The First Central American and Caribbean Event for the Monitoring of the Recommendations of the UN Study on

The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children is a powerful instrument to fortify existing initiatives to eliminate violence against children.

– Silvia Mazzarelli, GNRC Coordinator, Dominican Republic

Violence against Children would bring major attention to the issue of violence against children in the Dominican Republic and would involve high-level political figures such as the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children. There was an important opportunity to coordinate outreach to religious communities on the issue of violence against children and feed into the December event.

Tip:

- Look for opportunities to link the World Day actions to relevant ongoing initiatives.

DPAC as a galvanizing force

The GNRC group began meeting in early September to discuss World Day preparations. Although the GNRC group had already been formed in the Dominican Republic, it was not fully functional. The World Day actions served to focus, strengthen and reinforce the group. Initially, a large group of partners came together to brainstorm and share ideas, but as the work continued, a core group of organizations took the lead. The core planning group consisted of: International Volunteer Service for Development (VIS), Muchachos y Muchachas Don Bosco, World Vision, Baha'i, Pastoral Materno Infantil of the Catholic Church, Metropolitan Community Church, and the NGO Coalition for Children in the Dominican Republic.

Recognizing that corporal punishment is a serious issue that is only clearly prohibited in schools (not in homes) in national law in the Dominican Republic, the group identified positive parenting as a focus for their World Day actions. They took note of the ability of religious leaders to touch lives within poor and isolated communities that remain beyond the reach of the government, NGOs and UNICEF. They decided to ask religious leaders to sign a declaration promoting good treatment of



A young participant in the candle lighting ceremony.

children, including through positive parenting, and encourage them to share messages about positive parenting during services. The signing of the declaration was the centerpiece of a celebration which took place on November 17, 2011. The celebration also included a short introduction, an interfaith prayer, and a candle lighting ceremony.

From the beginning, each of the organizing partners contributed to the planning process based on their own capacity and expertise.

Some organizations provided financial support, others contributed staff time and labor, others leveraged their contacts and networks in support of the celebration. By October the group began working on the interfaith prayer and the declaration.

Tips:

- When selecting a theme, take note of children's issues that are receiving national attention.
- Divide the responsibilities according to capacities.

Involving children and reaching communities through the interfaith prayer

The group found that the creation of the interfaith prayer offered an excellent avenue for involving children and young people in the World Day actions. An existing interfaith prayer that was being used in the region by various GNRC groups formed the basis of the prayer. The partners developed a first draft of the prayer by modifying the existing prayer. Each organization then brought the prayer to the children that they work with in order to solicit their inputs and ideas. The planning group incorporated the feedback from the children into the final version of the prayer.

Examples of interfaith prayers

As the Dominican Republic example demonstrates, the development of interfaith prayers for use in World Day activities can be an opportunity for involving children in DPAC preparations. Previous examples of interfaith prayers can be a useful starting point for this process.

- Access the [interfaith prayer](#) that the group adapted for their World Day actions.
- Access the [interfaith prayer](#) created specifically for the 2011 actions in the Dominican Republic.

The interfaith prayer extended the reach of the World Day activities beyond the November 17th ceremony; it was used as a tool for generating nationwide enthusiasm for World Day. The group produced small flyers with the text of the prayer and worked through their networks to distribute the flyers to organizations working with children around the country. They encouraged the use of the prayer throughout the week surrounding the celebration and asked faith based organizations to begin their activities with the prayer. This allowed them to connect to partners in rural communities that could not participate in the celebration. The prayer was also widely shared through faith based radio programs.

Involving religious leaders through the interfaith declaration

The interfaith declaration anchored the celebration within the context of an ongoing regional initiative to end violence against children. At the national level, the declaration served a dual purpose: it guaranteed the meaningful participation of religious leaders in the celebration, and it linked the celebration to the First Central American and Caribbean Event for the Monitoring of the Recommendations of the UN Study on Violence against Children in December.

The first step in the creation of the interfaith declaration was a review of previous interfaith declarations, including the 2006 [Kyoto Declaration on Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security](#). The planning group drafted their own declaration following this review. They aimed to echo the international commitment of the Kyoto declaration at a national level.

Resources for drafting interfaith declarations

- Access [more information](#) about the 2006 Kyoto Declaration and the full text.
- Access the 2011 Dominican Republic [interfaith declaration](#).

The group followed a careful strategy for securing endorsement of the declaration. The organizations in the group divided the responsibilities for outreach to religious leaders according to their connections to particular faith communities. Two to three weeks in advance of the celebration, each leader received a formal letter requesting endorsement of the declaration. In the end, the strategy yielded signatures on the declaration from thirty of the country's religious leaders.

Tips:

- Leverage networks and connections in support of the actions.
- Be sure to follow formal protocol when reaching out to religious leaders.

Celebrating and advocating together

On November 17, 2011, seventy participants, including religious leaders, children and representatives of civil society organizations and faith communities, gathered for an evening celebration of the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children in Santo Domingo. Two young people from World Vision served as the masters of ceremonies. The interfaith prayer preceded the declaration-signing ceremony. As each signature was added, a child lit a candle symbolizing hope for the children of the Dominican Republic.

We are committed to educating parents, guardians, teachers and educators on the use of positive discipline, based on love, respect and dignity.

- Interfaith Declaration on Good Treatment of Children and Adolescents

A few weeks later at the First Central American and Caribbean Event for the monitoring of the Recommendations of the UN Study on Violence against Children on December 1 and 2, the declaration was presented to Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative to the Secretary General on Violence against Children, and Ms. Tilza Ares, General Manager of the National Council for Children and Adolescents in the Dominican Republic.



Marta Santos Pais, Special Representative to the Secretary General on Violence against Children addresses the event.

An overview of follow-up to the UN Study in Latin America and the Caribbean*

The process of follow up to the UN Study on Violence against Children in Latin America and the Caribbean builds upon a strong political commitment of governments of the region, the mobilization of leading child-focused civil society organizations, and the participation of organized networks of children and adolescents. This process has been developed with the SRSG on VAC, UN Member States and UN Agencies, academia, and civil society organizations and regional networks. In 2011 and 2012 three regional meetings for the follow up to the UN Study were organized in Latin America and the Caribbean. The first meeting took place in Asuncion, Paraguay, the second in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic and the third meeting in Kingston, Jamaica in May 2012.

Aligned with the recommendations of the UN Study and the strategic agenda of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children, the three Regional Meetings expressed commitment to:

- The development in each country of a national strategy to prevent and respond to all forms of violence;
- The introduction of legislation to prohibit all forms of violence against children; and
- The consolidation of data and research to inform progress in this area.

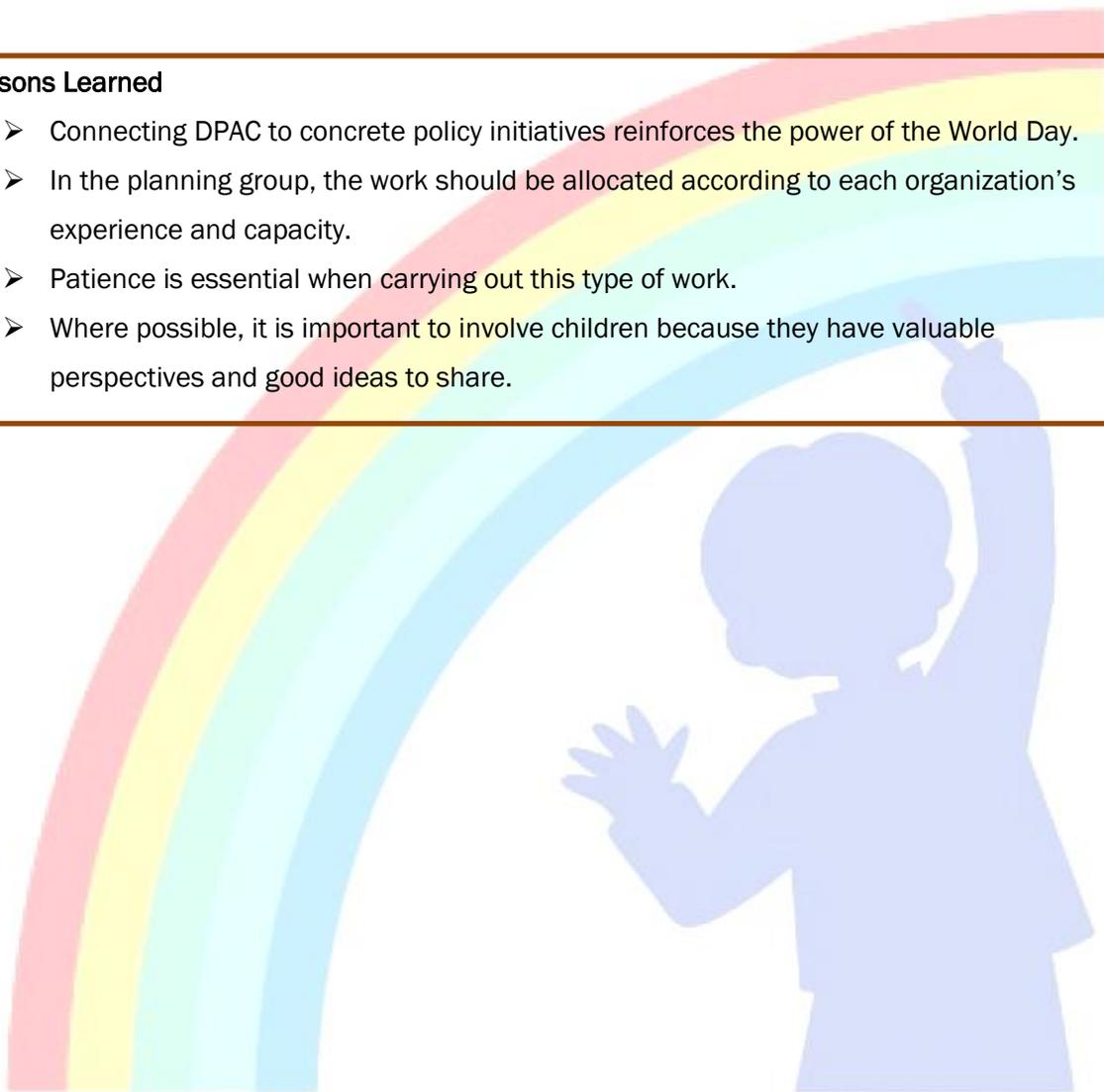
*Source: Office of the SRSG on Violence Against Children, Background for Event on Promising Practices,

<<http://srsg.violenceagainstchildren.org/sites/default/files/event_images/mcaldeira/side_event_19_oct_promising_practices_from_latin_america_and_the_caribbean.pdf>>, accessed October 2012.

The event in Santo Domingo in December 2011 launched a process to develop a national roadmap for follow-up to the UN Study on Violence against Children (see the box above).¹ The involvement of religious leaders in the event through the interfaith declaration set the stage for the inclusion of religious communities in this process. National consultations with various sectors of society are being organized to inform the creation of the roadmap. In 2012, the World Day will be used as a platform to engage the religious sector in these consultations.

Lessons Learned

- Connecting DPAC to concrete policy initiatives reinforces the power of the World Day.
- In the planning group, the work should be allocated according to each organization's experience and capacity.
- Patience is essential when carrying out this type of work.
- Where possible, it is important to involve children because they have valuable perspectives and good ideas to share.



¹ The complete text of the Santo Domingo Declaration, the Children's Declaration and the Regional Roadmap are available in Spanish at <http://redlamyc.info/grupo-de-trabajo-1/60-encuentro-centroamericano-de-seguimiento-.html>.