



# The role of families in the future we want

*Promoting the empowerment of families in the Sustainable Development Goals*

**An IFFD Briefing at the United Nations Headquarters**

## **Opening Speech by Marina Robben**

IFFD World President

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the 2015 IFFD Briefing. The past months have been a very important time for our Federation, as we have been able to keep delivering our Family Enrichment courses across the five continents as the international community becomes increasingly aware of the importance of having solid and sustainable families. We are, once again, delighted and amazed by the incredible dedication of our volunteers. The increase in child-rearing know-how and committed love is reflected in the renewed optimism felt by people attending the courses.

But we have also been very active in the preparations and celebrations for the 20th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family, working closely with the United Nations to organize different events and being part of other initiatives, as the Declaration of the Civil Society or the website [family-2014-dot-org](http://family-2014-dot-org), now replaced and enriched under the domain [family-perspective-dot-org](http://family-perspective-dot-org). As the Secretary General has said in his report about this observance, “the Federation actively promoted the objectives of the anniversary, mobilizing support for its declaration and organizing a number of awareness-raising events throughout the year. It also carried out several communications projects to promote a family perspective among governments and international organizations, including a website listing events organized worldwide in observance of the twentieth anniversary and issuing research papers focusing on topics relating to the themes of the anniversary.”

For this IFFD Briefing to be celebrated during the 53rd Session of the Commission for Social Development in 2015, we want to focus on the definition of the Sustainable Development Goals, as the final deadline for its definition is approaching. We have decided to focus three of the proposed Goals to reaffirm or suggest the need for families to be mentioned some of their Targets, keeping in mind the priority theme for the Commission on Social Development - “Rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world”.

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I would like to address now proposed Goal 3 – “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages” – to show that only families can bring the right environment for it. As the UN General Assembly resolution 68/136 recalls, “the family has the primary responsibility for the nurturing and protection of children and children, for the full and harmonious development of their personality, should grow up in a family environment and in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.”

Interest in well-being issues has tended to focus during the past years on the welfare of children rather than on the well-being of families. But growing policy interest in children’s welfare has led to efforts to improve the ways that well-being is measured more holistically, within the family as a unit. There is also a growing recognition of intergenerational dialogue and solidarity. They mostly relate to reciprocal care, support and exchange of material and non-material resources between family members, typically younger and older generations.

Despite social changes and economic crisis, evidence shows that family bonds remain strong and family members assist one another through financial support and care. In both developed and developing countries, older people, especially the younger-old, are more likely to provide financial support to younger family members than they are to receive it, even though there may be a perception that younger generations are faced with the burden of taking care of the older ones. But what are the tools to measure the effectiveness of government policies in promoting the totality of family well-being?

Reducing the risk of a negative impact on child outcomes means also understanding the mechanisms involved in the process of family breakdown and how they impact on child outcomes. The evidence shows that high levels of parental conflict, the quality of parenting and of parent-child relationships, poor maternal mental health and financial hardship interact in complex ways before, during and after parental separation, and impact on child outcomes. The multiple transitions that children can experience following parental separation are also a significant explanatory factor. It is clear from the evidence that how the family functions, rather than family type, is more relevant to understanding the impacts associated with family breakdown.

Changes and transitions of different sorts feature in all children’s lives. Helping children to manage changes and transitions through, for example, improving their coping skills and resilience, is likely to benefit all children, some of whom may have experienced, or will in the future experience, parental separation.

If families are able to successfully carry out their basic functions then they might be said to contribute to positive individual and social outcomes. Viewing family well-being as the ability of families to fulfill their basic functions then requires that those basic functions are identified and agreed. Unfortunately there is no definitive list of core functions, although there is some agreement on what a list might include. There is also debate over the extent to which some of the traditional functions of the family are now no longer the sole preserve of the family. The development of a conceptual framework will need to be guided both by research evidence.

Having conceptualized family well-being, it will be necessary to identify relevant domains of interest and select indicators that measure key components and dimensions of the model. As with the development of the conceptual framework, this stage will be challenging. The complex nature of family well-being will make the development and selection of appropriate and meaningful indicators that measure the concept in question difficult. Pragmatic decisions will be required. Key considerations include the multifaceted nature of family well-being, reflecting the range of functions families have; measurement of the factors that promote or detract from optimal family functioning; utility of using both a subjective and objective sense; the need to capture the collective well-being of individual family members and that part of family well-being that concerns the well-being of the entity itself over and above the well-being of individual family members; the need to monitor family well-being over time; and how to manage data limitations, such as the limited number of data sources that look at families rather than households or individuals.

Well-being is a vast and complex family outcome. As a result, programs need to carefully plan and implement their approach to address the many different strengths and needs of the families they serve. The first step would be to learn about the overall strengths and challenges of families in a program. Once a program has assessed family, community, and program assets and needs, individualized support targeted information can be offered and resources, and trainings develop community partnerships implemented.

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Let me finish by saying that speakers for this event have been carefully selected from persons working in Civil Society Organizations and dealing very closely with those Targets. FEPEM is the French Federation of Household Employers, dealing with professional consideration of care and domestic work. The Women's Platform of the Journalists and Writers Foundation of Turkey works to establish dialogue about gender equality and families around the Islamic world and elsewhere. The mission of Generations United is to improve the lives of children, youth, and older adults through intergenerational collaboration, public policies and programs for the enduring benefit of all. The International Federation for Family Development has been working for more than 35 years through its Family Enrichment Centers in 65 countries to promote and support different kinds of initiatives which aim to bolster and strengthen the family. Finally, the Focal Point on the Family (Division for Social Policy and Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN Secretariat) will also contribute to this event with her inputs about the role of the family in Development. As the main responsible for the preparation and celebrations of the 20th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family, she is one of the most authorized persons to talk about it.

Thanks very much for your presence here today. I think we can consider it as another way to show the importance of the family around the world, and of it the importance of including in the new Sustainable Goals, because, as the Secretary General has said in some of his Reports, "the very achievement of development goals depends on how well families are empowered to contribute to the achievement of those goals."