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COULD FAMILIES BE THE KEY TO ACHIEVING THE SDGs?

AS WE APPROACH THE DEADLINE FOR THE SDGs, A NEW REPORT HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPORTANCE OF STRONG FAMILY POLICIES IN ORDER TO MEET THESE TARGETS

(18 May 2018) The family is the fundamental social unit of all modern societies. We learn to communicate, to empathise, to compromise within these small, vital social structures. The importance of the family is reflected in national public policies, such as child allowances and paternity leave, which focus on family policies as a way to improve the living standards of future generations. Thus, families, and the national policies that support them, play an important role in national efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Former UN Secretary General in 2010 stated that “the very achievement of development goals depends on how well families are empowered to contribute to the achievement of those goals. Thus, policies focusing on improving the well-being of families are certain to benefit development.”



Djénéba Diarra, her husband Mamadou Doumbia and their daughters Sitan Doumbia, 5, and Assitan Doumbia, 3 months, in Baraouéli village, Ségou Region, Mali.

Given these realities, understanding how families contribute to social progress is key to finding the most effective route to achieving the SDGs. Despite this, global data on families is lacking, prompting the UN Secretary General in 2014 to call on governments and relevant stakeholders to “support data collection and research on family issues and the impact of public

policy on families and invest in family-oriented policy and programme design, implementation and evaluation.”

In response, a team of family policy experts, including Dominic Richardson, UNICEF Innocenti’s Education Officer, have compiled a synthesis Report “*Key Findings on Families, Family Policy and the Sustainable Development Goals*” to analyse how these policies are being used to meet the SDGs. The project calls on policymakers, practitioners and the general public to act.

The report summarises the evidence across six SDGs: poverty; health; education; gender equality; youth unemployment; and ending violence - all of which can be positively impacted by well-designed family-focused policies. By analyzing over 150 quality-assured family policy studies, evaluations and literature reviews, every region of the world is covered, with the sole exception of the Middle East.

PROMISING PRACTICES

Evidence across the six SDGs shows that family-focused interventions are often positively evaluated, with desired effects on family outcomes being achieved to varying degrees in the majority of cases across all goals. However, there is no ‘silver bullet’ in family policy or programme design. Instead, aspects of different policies are shown to be effective when designed for a specific purpose. Additionally, implementation choi-

ces impact results, including where the policies are hosted and who is involved in their application.

EFFICIENCIES IN COMPLEMENTARY GOALS

Spill-over effects of policies from one SDG to another were observed. For example, well-designed family poverty interventions have positive spill-overs into education and health. This indicates opportunities for optimizing effects within and across social progress measures by integrating policy portfolios. Equally, poorly-designed policies can negatively impact the outcomes in other goal areas, highlighting the need to consider the order of interventions. For example, efforts to address employment outcomes for women will be sub-optimal whilst gender inequality in leave entitlements continue to exist.

Effects on >>>	1 NO POVERTY	3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING	4 QUALITY EDUCATION	5 GENDER EQUALITY	8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH	16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS
Policies and programming for						
1 NO POVERTY		e.g. Access to health in multiple countries, and health outcomes				
3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING						
4 QUALITY EDUCATION						
5 GENDER EQUALITY						
8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH						
16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS						

Notes: Poverty and health family interventions also record positive impacts for SDG 2. Poverty has a positive impact on SDGs 10 and 11. The light blue squares denote observed positive spillover effects from one SDG intervention to another.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

The report highlights key messages for each individual goal, as well as cross-goal considerations for policy-

makers and practitioners. Firstly, the review clearly shows the need for more data on the family. National and international organisations can work together to build the evidence base, and in doing so, support evidence-informed family policy, cross-sector integration, and implementation strategies.

Secondly, policymakers and practitioners should recognize that, although global goals are the same, a family policy will not work in the same way in different contexts. This indicates a need for further evidence on the scalability and transfer of family policies. Comparative studies, including this report, can only provide an indication of potentially effective practices rather than a prescription for action.

Finally, evidence shows that family environments can be the cause of and solution to negative social outcomes. Practitioners working with families should be conscious of the important role played by family professionals, early interventions, and family involvement in physical and mental health treatment.



Father Dejan, mother Stefana, son Filip (4 years) spend time together in their home in Belgrade, Serbia.

The study highlights the importance of working for families, and with families, in order to meet the SDGs. Efficiencies in complementary goals show that even single-purpose policies can achieve multiple goals. As an elementary social unit, the progress of families will inevitably influence the progress of the societies in which they are part. Those seeking to meet the SDGs should not underestimate the role of strong families as enabling agents for achieving the SDGs.



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KEY FINDINGS ON FAMILIES, FAMILY POLICY AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: SYNTHESIS REPORT

INNOCENTI RESEARCH REPORT

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT: WWW.SDGSANDFAMILIES.ORG