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.”

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.

**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.

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.

**AUTHOR(S)**

Dominic Richardson; Zlata Bruckauf; Emilia Toczydlowska; Yekaterina Chzhen

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

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