After world leaders adopted the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the United Nations Development Programme will support governments around the world in tackling the 17 new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs aim to end poverty, hunger and inequality, take action on climate change and the environment, improve access to health and education, build strong institutions and partnerships, and more.

During decades, the UN has proven to be the main empowering institution to protect Human Rights, improve the world’s women role and foster the next generation through the work on youth. Within the SDGs, a family approach is a step forward to the long-standing efforts of the UN intended to remove all barriers and ensure the active participation of families in society, especially including decisions on investments in health, housing and education.

“As basic and essential building blocks of societies, families have a crucial role in social development. They bear the primary responsibility for the education and socialization of children as well as instilling values of citizenship and belonging in the society. Families provide material and non-material care and support to its members, from children to older persons or those suffering their

“I call on governments, businesses, institutions and other partners to recognize that caregiving is an essential part of family life. Everyone needs care from family members at some point in their lives—and all should be able to provide that care when the need arises.

Promoting supportive family environments and positive parenting through policies and laws can help families raise healthy, happy children who can grow into valued, productive adults.

Leaving no one behind means leaving no family behind.

On this International Day of Families, let us resolve to advance sustainable development by creating a supportive environment where all family members of all ages can realize their potential to contribute to our world.”

From the United Nations Secretary-General’s Message for the International Day of Families 2016.

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existing from illness, sheltering them from hardship to the maximum possible extent. 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. “[1] Henceforward, to most effectively reach the SDGs and ensure that no one is left behind, we are arguing that we will have to do a better job in leaving no family behind.

Promoting Cohesive Families

IFFD has been working persistently in this family approach and has recently organized its 19th International Family Congress in Mexico City on October, 2015. The Congress hosted 1,836 delegates from 43 countries. In the final Declaration, the delegates emphasized that families have a crucial role in social development and confirmed their commitment to helping families worldwide and to contributing to universal peace and respect of human rights through Family Enrichment Courses and other programmes. [2]

In the final Declaration it’s also appreciated the work fulfilled worldwide since the article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The article set a starting point for any consideration of family-related issues. Where, the mere language and symbolism of family “has the potential to proffer the middle ground from which compromise and consensus can emerge on even the most polarizing and divisive issues.” [3] Therefore, a family impact approach has built consensus in various resolutions and decisions on this matter by the United Nations General Assembly and other international bodies.

The mentioned Declaration was finally stated in February 2016 at the 54th Commission for Social Development and fully explained in a side-event themed precisely “Leaving no family behind” at the UN Headquarters. The IFFD delegates welcomed the recognition within the SDGs, especially 1 to 5, that the very design, development, implementation and monitoring of family-oriented policies and programmes are essential for the success of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. “Family can contribute to eradicating poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empowering women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases”. [4]

Various suggestions included on the Declaration help to achieve SDG1 and SDG2 when considering the family as a unit in which the well-being of their individual members is promoted while a breakdown can be both a root cause and an effect of poverty. A range of family-oriented policies play a vital role tackling with the intergenerational transmission of poverty, which also includes children’s health, development in nutrition and families’ financial resources and behaviours.

A family approach also helps to ensure healthy lives and promoting well-being at all ages (SDG3) when the family facilitates intergenerational solidarity. Therefore, appropriate policies should be directed to promote equitable access to resources that strengthen family ties, such as family enrichment courses, positive parenting classes or mentoring programmes, and encourage volunteering of older persons in schools and offering community service requirements for high-school students, requiring young people to help older persons with their daily activities.

Again, on the SDG4 family approach is reinforced by mentioning “cohesive families” for the first time ever. Cohesive families are said to provide “a nurturing environment to children and youth, for the full realization of their rights and capabilities”. [5] They also are a meeting point for generations offering “inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels for all people, irrespective of sex, age, race, ethnicity, and including persons with disabilities, all migrants, indigenous peoples, especially those in vulnerable situations”. [6]

Furthermore, addressing cohesive families promotes gender equality and empowerment of women by recognizing the value of unpaid care, domestic work and economic dimension of their activity (SDG5). It is in such environment where girls and boys are treated equally and parents share care and household responsibilities. Policymakers may find in cohesive families a potential way to contribute to the achievement of several sustainable development goals and targets.

Evidence-Based Family Perspective

All the efforts made to protect human rights on women and young people could be enriched by adding the family as a political priority. A family approach would represent a logical step forward to ensure no one is left behind, especially women and young people who are naturally part of the family and proven to be the most vulnerable. This family empowerment would promote policies at the national, regional and international levels by removing social, political, legal and economic barriers to their active participation in society. Such a step forward would enable families to assert greater control over their resources and life choices and by providing instruments to recognize the time, effort and money that committed families invest in their children.

Due to policymakers may encounter difficulties valuing families and people, the IFFD is promoting the project “Making Families a Cornerstone in Policymaking: A Global Guide for Policymakers on Family Impact”. In this project the family impact lens pays attention to relationships between people and the fact that “family policies are most effective when targeting the family unit and its dynamic as a whole, rather than focusing on the needs of individual family members”. [7] Yet this conceptual distinction is often overlooked in policy discourse and decision-making. According to the Secretary General of the United
Nations, policies too often ignore the family unit and continue to target individuals. [8]

The value of elevating families in policymaking is supported by a solid body of research evidence that endorses families as a fundamental component of a strong and vital society. Families are a cornerstone for generating the productive workers a sound economy demands and for rearing the caring, committed citizens a strong society requires. For example, researchers have documented the valuable contribution families make in promoting their members’ academic success, economic productivity, emotional well-being, and social competence among other outcomes of interest. [9] In addition, professionals who educate, administer, or deliver services to families espouse the desirability and viability of family-focused approaches for more effectively and efficiently achieving program goals. [10]

Furthermore, dialogue and partnerships between social policy makers and relevant stakeholders, including families, family associations, the business sector, trade unions and employers should be enhanced to develop and improve family-friendly policies and practices in the workplace. This should include both housework and care, because in reality, both are a form of care, housework having important implications for the well-being of all members of the family.

How can this be achieved? A proposal includes three very clear recommendations: policies to promote education about freedom and rights; information and advice regarding responsibility and duties; and legislation on both these areas. Sound family policies must be based on adequate research and analysis. Family policy monitoring and evaluation is also indispensable to advance policy development; continue policies that work and discontinue those that have proven ineffective. Support data collection and research on family issues and the impact of public policy on families and invest in family-oriented policies and programme design, implementation and evaluation. [11]

Well-Being Indicators

According to the resolutions from the Commission for Social Development and Commission for Population Development an evidence-based approach is definitive to policy development, monitoring, review and follow up. It will never be a family perspective without measurement tools. That is why we promote the delimitation of evidence-based quantification of family impact according to Global Well-Being Indicators. The scope should be both narrow and broad. Kaleidoscopic examining both (1) family policies intentionally designed to improve family functions (e.g., early childhood care and education, positive parenting, caregiving of the aging, reconciliation of work and family life) and prevent dysfunctions (e.g., child exploitation, domestic violence, family poverty) and (2) any policy that inadvertently influences family functioning and decision-taking will never be a family perspective without measurement tools.}

Families, healthy lives and sustainable future

The central goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development focus on ending poverty, promoting shared economic prosperity, social development and people’s well-being while protecting the environment.

Families remain at the centre of social life ensuring the wellbeing of their members, educating and socializing children and youth and caring for young and old. From a policy perspective, taking families into account in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals has a potential to speed up the achievements of many targets relating to individuals’ well-being.

A number of family policies, such as those supporting the caregiving role of families, work-family balance for parents, empowering families to support their individual members’ health, education and well-being, have been found to contribute to overall development goals.

In particular, family-oriented policies can contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 1 to 5 relating to doing away with poverty and hunger; ensuring healthy lives and promoting of well-being for all ages; ensuring educational opportunities throughout the lifespan and achieving gender equality.

The theme of this year’s observance of the International Day of Families focuses on Sustainable Development Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. Families have a unique role in ensuring health and wellbeing of children. Parents can improve children’s health outcomes by providing emotional support, ensuring preventive and sick healthcare visits, including timely immunizations and proper treatment in times of illness. In turn, a number of policies and programmes, can effectively assist parents in ensuring proper care and thus better health outcomes for their children.

Policies and programmes that increase family financial resources or improve caregiving behaviours also have the potential to positively influence child health and wellbeing, particularly for vulnerable families. For instance, cash or in-kind transfers, such as child allowances, or conditional cash transfers requiring parents to ensure their children’s preventive healthcare and school attendance go a long way in to promoting children’s health and education outcomes.

International Day of Families 2016 Observance, ‘Families, healthy lives and sustainable future’ - Background Note, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
making (e.g., education, gender equality, health care, sustainable economic development, urban growth). In a nutshell, we will promote the concept that families are what to think about and that the family impact lens is how to think in a more holistic way that recognizes the importance of commitment to others, which is first learned and practiced in families. [12]

Evidence-based Global Family Well-Being indicators are projected to be an outcome of a research-based method that critically examines the past, present, or probable future effects of a policy on family relationships, family stability, family members’ ability to carry out their responsibilities, and so forth. [13] Analysis of family impact can help policymakers to better grasp how strong families support societies and how societies can support strong families. The goal is to turn family rhetoric into reality. To use the family impact lens to shift the current rhetoric from merely appreciating families in the abstract to substantively viewing families in more pragmatic, accurate, and effective ways.

Our initial thinking is outlined below on how we plan to encourage the world’s decision makers to view policies through family-colored glasses, that is, developing policies that create the conditions for families to thrive and that consider any policy for its impact on families.

- Develop culturally appropriate principles and indicators that will serve as the core for a family impact checklist that builds on the knowledge and experience of family experts from around the world; we will begin with (but not be limited to) principles such as family responsibility, family stability, family relationships, family diversity, and family engagement.

- Our work will target family policies designed to promote the best interests of families. Also, we will focus on other policies that may not specifically address family interests, yet may have inadvertent consequences for them. For example, we will conduct family impact analysis on three or four 2015 sustainable development goals. We will strive to incorporate these findings into the UN’s capacity building efforts and communicate these findings to the policymakers who are developing implementation plans.

- Pilot test different methods for bringing the family impact lens to policy and practice with our partners in academia and civil society in different countries around the world in those jurisdictions where family policies are made; because policymakers typically seek out information in the context of trusted relationships, pilot tests will focus on jurisdictions where our partners have established trusting relationships with policymakers.

- Produce brief, accessible publications targeted to the issues and decisions policymakers face in their jobs such as why family impact is important, how policymakers can examine family impacts of policy decisions, in what ways the family impact lens has benefited policy decisions around the world, and so forth.

- Develop a toolkit that can be used as a prototype to encourage more widespread adoption of the family impact framework and methods.

- Evaluate whether our efforts are reaching our goals of encouraging policymakers to view issues through the lens of family impact, incorporate family considerations into their jobs, and take steps to build better public policies for families.

- Plan for dissemination through the development of resources, both written and video, that capture how much can be accomplished and what can be learned in the pilot tests and evaluations.

- Build on what is learned to envision what strategies and leadership are needed to promote widespread global adoption of the family impact framework. [14]

If we really want to leave no family behind, we need to define the right well-being indicators to assess the impact needed for implementing a family perspective. From a Universal Human Rights perspective, it is also needed that these indicators should be globally pertinent in the definition but locally appropriate in the application.