International Day of Families 2013
"Advancing Social Integration and Intergenerational Solidarity"
15 May 2013 (observed 16 May 2013)

Background Note

Social integration & intergenerational solidarity

The World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995) defined the objective of social development in general and social integration in particular as the creation of "a society for all". The very goal of social integration is to bring all social groups, particularly vulnerable groups, and individuals into the political, social, cultural and economic structures of a society so that they can participate in the decision-making process and improve their access to opportunities.

Fostering of social integration goes hand in hand with promoting intergenerational solidarity, often defined as bonding between and among individuals in multigenerational family networks and among different age cohorts in the larger community. In practical terms intergenerational solidarity relates to reciprocal care, support and exchange of material and non-material resources in families, typically younger, and older generations.

Trends impacting intergenerational relations

Several demographic and socio-economic changes such as population ageing, increased mobility and migration, rapid urbanization and break-up of traditional extended family structures pose numerous challenges to social integration and intergenerational solidarity. Such trends present new demands on family members and test the grandparent-parent-youth-child relationships.

Among those demands is the rising cost of caring for older dependants often negatively impacting families' employability, productivity as well as savings ability. Moreover, changing living arrangements have resulted in older persons living alone, in skipped generation households, or in institutionalized settings. On the other hand, with growing unemployment disproportionately affecting youth, young people may need to depend on their parents or grandparents for material support or housing provision longer than before.

Despite these challenges, research indicates that in both developed and developing countries, family bonds remain strong and family members assist one another through financial support and care with many surveys pointing to the fact that older people are more likely to provide support to younger generations. What's more, in many countries, it is grandparents who are often day care providers for young children when their own parents are at work. They may even assume the role of near-custodial grandparents, where grandchildren reside with them while parents migrate in search of jobs. Skipped generations are not uncommon in many regions, where orphaned children, often due to HIV/AIDS, are in permanent care of their grandparents.

Policies and programmes advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity

Policies and programmes promoting social integration and intergenerational solidarity, including family-oriented policies, have been increasingly taking into account the changing roles and demands of all generations. Such policies have a potential to contribute to effective public policy by promoting social cohesion, shared responsibility and understanding between generations. They can be fostered at family, community, society and national levels.

Since the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, some efforts have been made to advance social integration by addressing age, gender-based and other forms of discrimination and improving mechanisms for participation. Mostly, however, social integration efforts have so far focused on special needs of social groups, in particular youth and older persons.

Regarding older persons, one of the goals of the 2002 Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing is to move them "from social exclusion to integration and participation". This concept is the basis for intergenerational programmes fostering solidarity between generations, which have been proved effective in promoting social inclusion and fight discrimination based on age or ability and creating "a society for all ages".

In terms of youth, "intergenerational relations" have been added as a priority area to the World Programme of Youth in 2007. Its proposals for action focus on strengthening families, empowering young people and bolstering intergenerational solidarity.

Intergenerational initiatives mainly aim at increasing cooperation, interaction and exchange between people of different generations. Through such programmes, people of different ages share their talents and resources and support each other in relationships benefiting both the individual and their community. Intergenerational programmes provide a platform for developing positive relationships across age groups and strengthen ties between family and community members.

Family focused policies and programmes promoting social integration and intergenerational solidarity vary across the regions. They may range from initiatives aiming at social inclusion of marginalized groups to specific programmes promoting multigenerational living arrangements, shared intergenerational sites, mentoring programmes at work and volunteering of younger and older people in the community.

Besides their financial impact, social protection schemes play an important role in restoring dignity and conferring recognition to older people. They also tend to support intergenerational solidarity and mutual assistance within families. Tax benefits and policies supporting intergenerational care, such as allowances for grandparents who care for their grandchildren contribute to strengthening family ties as well.

Good practices in promoting intergenerational solidarity and their benefits for participants and larger community

Some good practices promoting social integration and intergenerational solidarity focus on intergenerational housing arrangements, such as encouraging extended family proximity in living through tax credits or home loan incentives while "cash and counseling" programmes allow using cash benefits by family members caring for their relatives.

Educational institutions may also promote intergenerational programmes by encouraging volunteering of older persons in schools and offering community service requirements for high-school students. School-based intergenerational programmes often involve community service, requiring young people to help older persons with their daily activities.

Shared sites intergenerational programmes are uniquely positioned to help generations interact as they provide ongoing services to both children and older persons who attend the programmes in a single facility. Typically, these are

care programmes for the very young and older adults, where both generations can interact.

Another care setting involves older persons as employees or volunteers at children's care programmes. Research indicates that senior employees provide a family-like quality to the programmes and help teachers offer more one-on –one care. Older care workers help children developed social skills and ease the transition from home to school.

Parenting education has a potential to strengthen intergenerational bonds by instilling values of tolerance and respect for older persons among young children and teaching good caregiving skills to parents of young children.

The analysis of many intergenerational programmes indicates that they improve participants' self confidence, self-esteem and perceived health while facilitating greater community integration and involvement. Mentoring programmes have been found to help younger people build very concrete and often highly specialized skills, find work and expand career opportunities.

Intergenerational approaches have a potential to address many broader development priorities, such as building of active communities, encouraging responsible citizenship, as well as addressing inequality and social exclusion. Benefits to the broader community also include the revitalization of public infrastructure through community-based projects.

A way forward

There is a growing recognition that public policies should be framed with intergenerational approach in mind. Policy development must consider the diverse needs in sectors dealing with social security and welfare, pension, health care, social support and employment and labour as well as lifelong learning. Family-friendly policies need to recognize the changing nature and diversity of family structures and forms and obstacles to full engagement such as larger geographical distances preventing families from providing care and support to their dependent members.

Various social policies ranging from education, social protection provision, policies reconciling work and family life, measures eliminating age-related barriers in the workplace as well as investing in community programmes involving people of different ages contribute to improved intergenerational relations at the family, community and society level.

As social integration based on inclusive development requires mechanisms facilitating participation and partnership, Governments should establish mechanisms facilitating the involvement of all other important actors at

the national and local levels. Social inclusion units within governments or task forces for social integration and intergenerational solidarity are needed as well as local government mechanisms for the mobilization of efforts at community levels.

However, the implementation of socially integrative policies is not a sole responsibility of Governments but should be shared by all sectors of society including the private sector and civil society al large. Partnerships between the public and private sectors, civil society in the broadest sense including grassroots movements, trade unions and academic institutions are necessary for social integration efforts to succeed.

It is also important to share knowledge about good practices in social integration and intergenerational initiatives being implemented and advocated by different stakeholders.

The success of social integration and inclusion efforts depends on the effectiveness of public policies and the support from local communities, civil society and families and their active participation in the society as citizens with rights and responsibilities. To move closer to 'a society for all' a broad-based participation and engagement of people in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes should be encouraged at all levels.

For additional information:

Butts, D., L. L.Thang & A. Hatton Yeo (2012) Policies and Programmes Supporting Intergenerational Relations.
http://social.un.org/index/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=VGkxtn3WSyA%3d&tabid=1733

Fact Sheet: Youth and intergenerational partnerships (2010)
http://social.un.org/youthyear/docs/youth-partnerships.pdf

United Nations (2011, 2012). *Report of the Secretary-General Preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014.* New York.

United Nations (2010). *Report of the Secretary-General on the Follow-up to the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.* New York.

United Nations (2008). *Report of the Secretary-General on Promoting social integration.* New York.