POLICIES TO ADVANCE SOCIAL INTEGRATION
POVERTY AND EXCLUSION

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This paper discusses the context of poverty and social exclusion focused on the family as the central point of intervention for social integration and deals with issues relating the following questions:

1. How does social exclusion contribute to poverty and unemployment?
2. From the point of view of social integration, what are the pros and cons of pursuing targeted versus universal approaches to poverty eradication and employment promotion?
3. What efforts can be made to ensure that policies designed to promote the eradication of poverty, productive employment and decent work are non-discriminatory and rights-based, that they provide for equality of opportunity, and facilitate the participation of all people in their formulation and outcomes, including disadvantaged and at-risk groups and persons?

BACKGROUND

Poverty is one of the most pervasive causes of social disadvantage. It denies access to essential goods and activities and prevents people from having an acceptable standard of living. When families are excluded, they lack access to their human rights, to basic services and economic resources, and are unable to participate in social, political, cultural, and community activities. Among the causes of social disadvantage are poverty, gender, age, cultural and educational barriers, disadvantageous location, or discrimination because of age, gender, ethnicity, disability or other specific vulnerability (as in the case of refugee populations and those displaced as a result of conflict or natural disaster). Social exclusion can be the outcome for people or communities with a range of problems such as illiteracy, low education, lack of basic work skills, unemployment, low income, poor housing, violence, crime, poor health, disability, and family breakdown. In combination, these problems can result in temporary or permanent cycles of disadvantage across generations, communities and geographic regions. Social exclusion affects both the quality of life of individuals and families and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.

DEFINITIONS
Poverty
"...poverty may be defined as a human condition characterized by sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights" (United Nations Committee on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, 2001)

Absolute poverty:
"a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to services." (UN, 1995

> Exclusion is often perceived as a vicious cycle with three components:
> Unemployment, poverty, and social isolation.[1]

Among the factors which lead to poverty and exclusion in a family are low education and low occupational activity of the parents, a large number of dependents, being displaced, and living in rural areas. Unemployment prevails particularly among the poor and less educated, and/or those with other liabilities (such as disability), increasing the risk of poverty and exclusion for individuals and communities including children and the elderly. Changes in the household structure (single parents and nuclear families) increase the social exclusion of families, especially in those led by single providers (women or men) with limited education, or multiple roles (bringing up children, working at home, as well as holding a job), or changes in the labor market (such as, increased competition and employee requirements, for example higher qualifications, flexibility, intensive work, etc.). Cultural factors, such as the traditional distribution of roles in the family, women having to work double or triple shifts, as well as the lack of basic services like access to health care, education, housing, or safe drinking water, should be considered additional factors in social exclusion.

Social exclusion increases insecurity and produces several forms of deprivation (lack of education, employment, inability to participate in social and political activities, or engage in leisure and cultural activities) that lead to a significant degradation in living standards and increased risk of poverty, stigmatization and social isolation. Living in poverty creates additional difficulties in the search for educational and employment opportunities, and contributes to social exclusion. At the same time, social isolation has an adverse effect on employment, since the individuals are isolated from sources of information and lack the support needed for employment search and job training. Exclusion from the labor market is a consequence of limited education, qualifications and skills, and of discrimination.

The challenge of defeating poverty and increasing social inclusion requires concerted action affecting a range of issues and a cross-sector, human-rights-based approach.

POLICY RESPONSES TO POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

A national strategy for social inclusion based on a positive vision of a society without poverty and exclusion, in which all sectors are included and play their part, should include national and local government, private, voluntary and community sectors, trade unions, local organizations, and the wider public sector. Central and local governments should aim to create through their policies a socially inclusive society ensuring open access to benefits and protection to all members to prevent poverty from developing. Social inclusion approaches should aim to set long term priorities and targets, worked out with community and local institutions, coordinated and integrated by state institutions. Reform of the service system targeted towards excluded and poor families, in addition to greater coordination with the international community, foundations and the private sector, would help create an integrated response.

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[1]http://www.undp.hr/upload/file/20Exclusion.pdf

National policies should take into account initiatives already developed for strengthening social inclusion. Past problems and unsuccessful experiences dealing with them can teach us how to improve and redirect our efforts. National policies should address the structural causes of poverty and exclusion, engaging local communities in the creation of opportunities for all members of society, and the development of a cross-sector approach.

Even if national policy is directed at providing universal access to basic services, the universal approach will not reach all groups and their social, economic, cultural and environmental problems. In order to satisfy the specific needs of excluded populations in disadvantaged situations, an adequate response should also take into account their particular characteristics, such as single parenthood, disabling conditions, displaced status, membership in native groups, advanced age, the status of children etc.

PROMOTING A DIFFERENTIATED APPROACH

Policies addressing excluded populations, should be part of the general national policies but should be adapted for specific populations, with the goal of respecting individual and collective rights and needs, improving availability and quality of public services such as health care, education, housing, political participation, cultural and recreational opportunities, in accordance with the age of the population (child, youth, adult and senior), ethnic group, disabled status, or status as a displaced or other at-risk population. Policies for eradicating poverty among families should focus on measures supporting the employment and education of men and women, allowing for the successful integration of employment with family and community life.

Policies for counteracting poverty and exclusion should adopt an integrated approach focusing on the <u>individual family</u>, and concentrating on social services, social protection, and social transfers, taking into account the specific needs of the family, but targeting the rights and duties of each member of the family. Social services should be well targeted, well defined and periodically assessed. Formal monitoring of the family's progress over time, and the possible redirection of support services in accordance with the results of periodic assessment, should be discussed with the family.
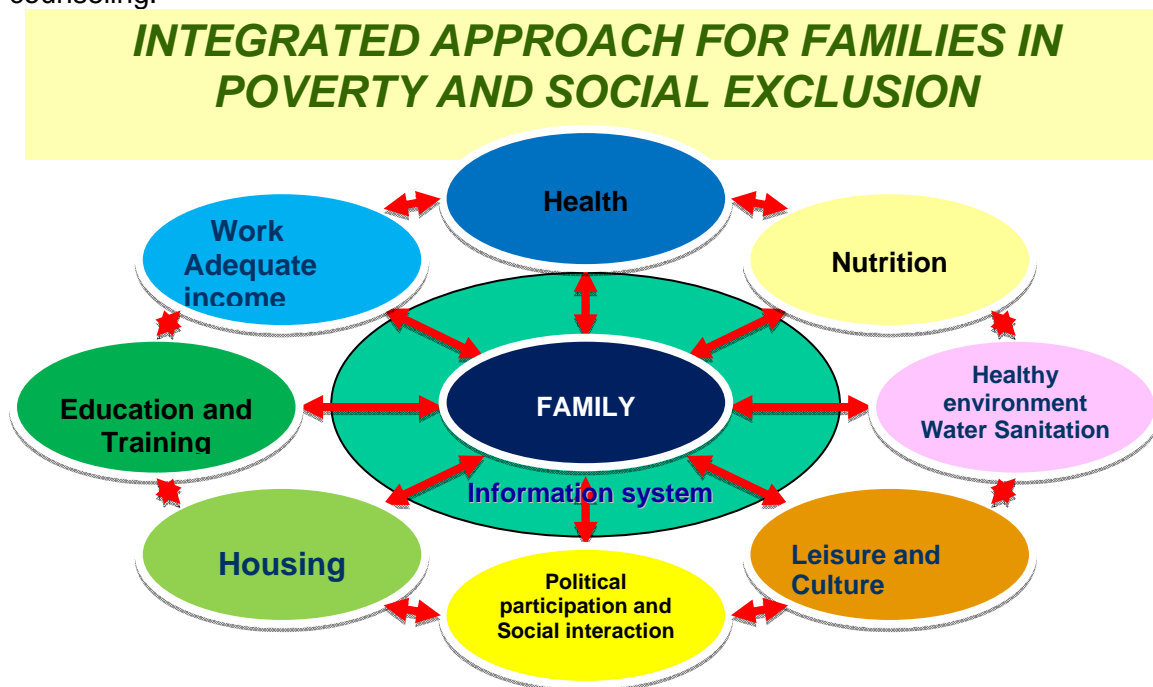
Measures to promote social inclusion must be woven into the mainstream public sector programs. National policies (for all populations) should be revised and redirected, taking an inclusive approach with excluded and poor populations, focusing on improving the way government at all levels responds to social exclusion, assessing the impact of national and local policies, programs and projects. These policies, programs and projects, inserted and framed in the overall national policies, should be constructed and adapted with the participation of local authorities and the community in a differentiated approach in accordance with the burdens faced by the population, taking into account age, gender, ethnic group, disability, displaced or refugee status.   Emphasis should be focused on integrating measures which will allow people to be educated and have a decent job, addressing barriers to education, training and employment, and developing unique ways of assisting re-entry into the labor market. This emphasis should also focus on maximizing support in the poorest areas; providing a safe working environment;

addressing issues such as violence, crime and antisocial behavior; building a future for young people, providing integrated help for children, adults and at-risk seniors.

INTEGRATED STATEGY APPROACH, SUPPORTING FAMILY ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Focusing on excluded families in poverty, and providing integrated family support services to them will prove successful if families are actively sought out with the combined assistance of community organizations at the local level, and with state-level support staff permanently assigned to work with families. The state-level staff can perform periodic home visits to compile information about the family situation, identify gaps and vulnerabilities, provide information to the family about accessing available state-level services, connect state-level social services with family members, redirect them to the specific services they need, and follow up with the family providing support and outreach. The state-level staff will follow up with the family for the period deemed necessary, that is, until the family rises above poverty and social exclusion. This investment should be accompanied by governmental planning and design of interventions for the inclusion of such communities, as well as the implementation of service system reforms that take a multidimensional approach to the problems of families in poverty and social exclusion. Policies regarding excluded populations should be subject to cross-sector approaches, within the broader context of the general policies for the population.

Specific services should be available for people with special needs. An integrated network of services should support such families, such as critical intervention centers, social therapy centers etc. Prevention programs should address specific problems of family members with special needs, with services such as psychological crisis counseling.

INTEGRATED APPROACH FOR FAMILIES IN POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

Limited job skills, in combination with limited education, are basic factors increasing the risk of poverty and exclusion in families. Therefore, ameliorating the employment barriers faced by women (and men) who are bringing up children or have other dependents, creating access to formal jobs or decent alternative income sources, providing income support for persons caring for children, facilitating the combination of work with childcare, and increasing the improvement and updating of job and professional skills among the adult members of households, will all help to break the vicious cycle of poverty and social exclusion. Access to employment and decent work should become one of the principal policy instruments of for reducing family poverty.

Improvement of the economic conditions of families and occupational opportunities, especially for women, requires actions which mediate the balance between work and family, such as improving access to child care and low-cost services to support housework, improving access to basic education in job skills or to update job skills, and the provision of a system of benefits to reduce the costs of engaging in work, for which the person has low qualifications, while raising a family. It is also important to include the social and psychosocial effects on health and well being in the workplace environment, taking into account physical health hazards, the social climate, and security issues.

EDUCATION

Education affects social inclusion. Personal achievement, educational accomplishment, and habits of life-long learning, result in easier access to paid work, which in turn influences the socialization, inclusion and empowerment of individuals and their families. Education is affected by poverty and income inequality, gender, ethnic and cultural factors, and by other burdens, determined, among other things, by disability, age, displacement and civil unrest or natural disaster.

Access to quality, subsidized education for children and adults is important to break the cycle of poverty and social exclusion. Preschool education, kindergarten and day care, youth, adult, and senior literacy and education, should take into account geographical differences affecting access to educational facilities in neglected communities, as well as the inclusion, accommodations and support for disabled and ethnic populations. Improvement of school infrastructure and equipment (including computers) and access to institutional childcare, equalizes children's opportunities in the educational system, and also helps women (and men) balance work and family life, as well as re-entry into the labor market. Availability of childcare is a prerequisite for improving the opportunities of women and men in the labor market.

As disabled children are prone to be socially isolated due to their limited access to general education and inclusive kindergartens, the education system should improve the inclusion of these children in classes, and provide trained personnel to work with them. Increasing nursing services for families with disabled children, particularly in rural areas, should be emphasized

In addition, special attention should be paid to the nullifying effects on the educational achievements of individuals as a result of discrimination by employers on the basis of age, gender, disabled status, ethnic or cultural factors.

HEALTH

The challenge in the health care sector is to reduce inequalities in the social security and health systems, in access to water, sanitation and nutrition, assuring that the various systems are capable of including all of the population with their differing characteristics. Integrated health services should develop measures for the inclusion of at-risk populations, actively seeking difficult-to–reach families, and adapting their services to respond to cultural factors, age, disability status, etc.

Epidemiological surveys, programs for health promotion and prevention of diseases, plans for early diagnosis, corrective treatment and rehabilitation, should reach out to socially excluded families in poverty within their communities. Basic indicators regarding the health of excluded populations of different ages, their own perception of their health, and identification of protective health factors, should be taken into account.

An integrated health care system with primary care, a good referral chain, access to specialized medical care, well-trained professionals and community health promoters, should reach the population without transferring the cost of extending the system to poor families.

Indicators of the quality of health - water and sanitation, nutrition, and the social, cultural and economic status of families and groups - requires cross-sector approaches, because health does not depend solely on the quality of the health care sector.

Particular health care systems for indigenous populations should be developed and implemented in accordance with their world view and should make provisions and training for them accessible in order that they may manage their own system with the support and supervision of the national health system.

HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT, WATER AND SANITATION

Unsafe sanitation and poor hygiene practices are common among families in poverty. They increase health problems such as diarrhea and skin diseases, absenteeism at school and work, and increase costs as a result of deferred care, which in turn impacts negatively on overall income of the family.

Safe and healthy spaces should be provided for poor and excluded families, in their homes, schools, work places, and their communities. Provision of safe water, home water treatment facilities, latrines, sewage systems, and general household sanitation are all essential.

Water and sanitation policies and programs are essential to national poverty reduction plans. By strengthening local government through decentralization strategies, their

capacity to deliver infrastructure projects and to perform community-level water and sanitation projects in both rural and urban communities can be improved.

HOUSING[2]

Housing problems intensify the social exclusion of vulnerable families. Often, acceptable housing cannot be afforded by low-income families unless low rent or low price housing is made available. Families with numerous children or dependents and single-parent households, have to deal with inadequate space, payment of rent and bills, and often move from one accommodation to another, to avoid paying the monthly rent. As a result they must change jobs and schools and disrupt their social interactions within their communities.

Social exclusion and poverty are not confined to any particular form of housing. Such families can be homeowners in social housing developments and in low-income, private rental rooms. Therefore, exclusion due to lack of proper housing should be addressed by providing the means to acquire appropriate accommodation, with services including the development of integrated social inclusion policies on education, health, welfare, transportation, crime prevention, job training and employment.

The principal stress factors in housing are related to ownership, the condition of the dwelling and its surroundings, social relationships, and income. Housing developments for low-income families often result in the concentration of unemployed and welfare recipients, along with general insecurity and violence. Inclusion strategies should also apply to the homeless, in institutional housing, private slum housing, overcrowded housing and private tenant housing

CULTURE AND LEISURE

A family's economic condition translates into conditions for participating in culture and leisure activities. Single-parent households and families with numerous children or dependents often do not have the time or the means to participate in these activities. Families need to learn about public leisure and cultural opportunities and should be directed towards public parks, libraries, free entertainment and environmentally safe activities. The state should provide the infrastructure necessary to promote healthy life styles and the opportunity to participate in cultural activities.

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[2] Housing is an entity that facilitates the fulfillment of a specific functions set for the individual and/or the family. These functions include providing shelter from inclement weather, guaranteeing safety and protection, facilitating rest, allowing for the use of the senses to engage in culture, facilitating the storage, processing and consumption of food, providing the resources for personal and domestic hygiene and sanitation, aiding convalescence of the sick, care of the elderly and disabled, and the development of children, and promoting a balanced family life. The development of housing serves to pull together a social agenda based on the family, an economic agenda based on the means of making a living, a cultural agenda based on traditions and customs, and an environmental agenda in the physical context. http://www.cepis.ops-oms.org/bvsasv/e/iniciativa/rejecutivoingles.pdf

VIOLENCE

 Programs to counteract family violence, (especially violence against women), and assistance in the prevention of violence and mitigating its effects, should be promoted, as well as activities aimed at increasing the level of social sensitivity to the occurrence of family violence, training of service workers in the detection and management of family violence; development of organizational and personnel resources to provide professional assistance to victims of violence in the home; and the enhancement of protection for victims. Other issues to be taken into account are the prevention of and assistance with juvenile crime and alcoholism, drug abuse and nicotine addiction among young people.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION: THE ROLE OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Information systems are essential to provide baseline information about socially excluded families and their progress over time towards social inclusion. A set of indicators should be established and implemented at national and local levels relating to the implementation of specific programs, and to the monitoring of poverty, exclusion and the wellbeing of families, as well as to the amount of funding invested. Data from national statistics, complemented with specific information on families, and from research centers and academic institutions, provide information, for a network of public and private institutions with horizontal and vertical coordination that will enable the collection of relevant data for the monitory of social policy. Data collection on social assistance to families in poverty and exclusion should be enhanced and extended to other national and local information systems, including services and family benefits. This will enable the central government to collect information from different levels of state and local administration and use the information for monitoring and assessment, and to implement specific services as needed. Specific variables should be included in national statistics and information systems (ethnicity, displacement, single parent, disability) allowing for the provision of information and monitoring of the at risk/excluded population,

RESEARCH

In order to build national capacity, a national research system should be developed, that would include and redirect research and policy analyses in anti-poverty and social inclusion policies, strategies, programs and projects. A coordinating point between research and policy should be created, promoting synergies among private and public institutions, universities, foundations and others working towards developing national strategies and action plans for the elimination of poverty and the achievement of social inclusion. This collaboration would also monitor and evaluate the implementation and impact of this research effort. All stakeholders (public, private and community) should be involved in the research process.

Research can influence policy changes for the empowerment of poor communities by designing a better way to provide policy-makers with reliable data, to strengthen the potential for universities to include new academic priorities directed towards a more practical orientation and cost effective solution to the problems of families and communities. Research stakeholders should be able to respond to the education and

training demands of poor and excluded communities, focusing on interdisciplinary training, participatory action research and, practical training for students, by exposing them to real life situations. The views of families and the community should be included in the research process.

ROLE OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND FOUNDATIONS

The advocacy role of international organizations, setting internationally acceptable norms, fostering cooperation, and engaging in technical cooperation activities, could contribute to national welfare policy if their work were shaped by interaction between national and international policies.

The role of international organizations, their promotion of ideas and recommendations on social policy, are important. But these ideas should also be disseminated at the local level.

CONCLUSIONS

In order to tackle poverty and social exclusion at the national level, a centrally led social Inclusion division should be established at the national level to develop coordinated policy, a social inclusion plan, research and assessment capacity; establish indicators, measure progress, and continually improve practices based on evidence with the support of community reference groups. The division would also be responsible for developing a system of regional and central planning entities which would include collaboration among the government, private and the community sector, as well as national and international foundations and communities. Clear targets and strategies to support implementation and monitor the outcomes of the social inclusion plan should be developed, and commitments obtained from relevant government departments to adopt common targets and develop collaborative practices to achieve social services. These must be aligned with the priorities of national policy. The promotion of participatory democracy to improve social justice, equality and universal human rights and likewise to improve participatory policy processes is essential to the inclusion of at risk families and communities. Families should be the focus.