

# Key Issues & Challenges Facing Families in the Arab Region

DIFI/UNFPA EGM on Integrating a Family Perspective in the SDGs in the Arab countries: Aspirations and Challenges, Doha, 29 - 30 November 2017

Nader Kabbani, Brookings Doha Center

Can a “family perspective” bring added value for the achievements of SDGs?

*Bottom Line: Families, as a unit, have been suppressed and are barely visible in the SDGs. Yet, families are at the core of the SDGs. This has implications for the design of successful policies and programs that can help countries achieve their targets.*

1. The family as a unit is barely visible in the SDGs. There are 17 goals with 169 targets and 230 indicators. Only 3 family-level targets & 2 family-level indicators.
  - Goal 1: End Poverty. Indicator 1.4.1: Households with access to basic services
  - Goal 2: End Hunger. Target 2.3: Agricultural productivity of small-scale farmers
  - Goal 3: Good Health. Target 3.7: Reproductive health and family planning
  - Goal 5: Gender Equality. Target 5.4: Value unpaid care and domestic work
  - Goal 10: Reduce Inequalities. Indicator 10.1.1: Growth of household incomes
2. Yet, families are at the heart of the SDGs. For example, Goal 1 is ending poverty.
  - Indicators 1.1.1 / 1.2.1: Proportion of population below the international / national poverty line. These are not accurate.
  - Poverty is a household indicator, based on household income or spending. What you have is the proportion of the population living in households or families below the international / national poverty line.
  - Policy solutions: need to focus on why family resources are not enough. Family access to land, jobs, credit. Child health, parental education, etc.

Other targets that are at the family or household level include:

- Goal 1: 1.4.2. Secure tenure rights to land;
- Goal 2: 2.1.2 Prevalence of food insecurity in the population (Experience Scale)
- Goal 3: Health indicators
- Goal 4: Education: person in family with highest educational attainment
- Goal 5: Gender equality: share of income; share of household assets
- Goals 6 & 7: Water & Energy: Proportion of population in HH with access.

### 3. Family Policies & Programs

- The problem with this approach is that you end up with “family policies”.
- ...“often an untapped potential to contribute to the achievement of goals.”
- “The family can *contribute* to ending poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality, reducing child mortality, and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases” rather than being a focus.
- Actually, the family is often at the core of meeting SDGs, but because it is not explicitly reference in the targets and indicators, policies & programs miss them.
- For example, youth unemployment. Indicator 8.6.1: Proportion of youth not in education, employment or training.
- Analysis:
  - Highest unemployment rates in the world (across all Arab countries)
  - Long transitions between school and work
  - Queuing for jobs in the formal public and private sector
  - Skills in demand not obtained in school
  - Little opportunity for work experience
  - Strong gender dimension
    - Better work conditions and less discrimination
    - Family pressures and social acceptability
  - **Family support structures delay take up: missing**

#### Policy Recommendations:

- Initiate research that examines the SDGs through a family lens, restoring its role within the SDGs as well as identifying elements in which the family can play a role.
- As suggested, identify demographic, social, economic and development issues and challenges affecting families in the Arab region and regional family priorities that should be addressed during development planning and the localization of SDGs.
- Support the reintroduction of a crosscutting family dimension to policy and programmatic solutions that support achieving the SDGs within the Arab region.