

**Protection of the Rights of the Child and
the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
submitted by the Universal Peace Federation**

According to 2030 Agenda 25, for achieving children's well-being we must "strive to provide children and youth with a nurturing environment for the full realization of their rights and capabilities, helping our countries to reap the demographic dividend including through safe schools and cohesive communities and families." In order to implement this goal we need to clarify some key points and partnerships. What are children's most basic needs and rights? What is the most nurturing and cohesive environment for the development of children? Who provides the best protection of children's rights? Safe schools and communities are important, but even more fundamental, especially when communities are unsafe or disadvantaged, is a child's stable family with nurturing, protective and responsible parents. Research from around the world confirms an undeniable correlation between optimum development of children and their family.

Despite a wealth of ratified UN documents (UDHR, CRC, ICCPR, ICD, Social Summit, etc.) recognizing the importance of the family, the partnership barely mentioned in either the MDGs or the 2030 Agenda is that of parents and their children. The partnership most important to a child is that relationship with his parents or caregivers because it is the foundation for the rest of that child's life, both positive and negative. Efforts to recognize the role of parents and support and build their capacities are the most direct and efficient way to improve child well-being. Throughout the world when the family fails to love, protect and provide for children, heavy economic and social costs ripple throughout society, adding a great burden to governments, in addition to the pain and disadvantages the children suffer. Strengthening the family unit and the role of parents can prevent major impediments to healthy maturation of children and ensure that we provide every child the greatest chance to flourish.

There is much evidence that family stability merits attention in eradicating child poverty. In some of the most disadvantaged areas, a family that works together in their garden or family farm makes all the difference in having something to eat. Although there are many valid reasons why parents should not or cannot stay together to care for their children, global research indicates that single parents and their children are at much greater risk for poverty. We see this in developed nations, but in the less developed countries the impact of poverty can be drastic. The Child Trends 2014 World Family Map found that "Children of divorced mothers or those whose unions have dissolved are more likely to be stunted in Central/South America and the Caribbean (12 percent more likely), Africa (18 percent more likely), and Asia (52 percent more likely)." The lack of cooperation and stress of couple instability compromise parents' ability to care for

their children. Children whose parents' relationships are highly conflicted or dissolved, in general, experience not only more poverty but also more emotional stress, poor physical and mental health and a lower level of education.

For achieving the SDGs related to children, education, health care, food and water security and safe environments are key issues for a child's survival and success. Even if the government builds schools, it is the parents who get their children to school and encourage them to study. In the poorest areas, it is the parents who sacrifice and work extra hours to pay for the uniforms and books required for their children's school attendance. In the same way, it is the parents who monitor their children's health, bring them to receive their immunizations and get them medical care, sometimes as a matter of life or death. In terms of nutrition and water, it is well known that many mothers go without for the sake of their children. For refugee or migrant children, who experience disruption and trauma on numerous levels, the presence and care of a family member is their only lifeline of hope and survival. The reality is that governments depend on parents to do what only parents can do best, that is, to love, protect and provide for their children. A stronger partnership between the government and parents or caregivers will have a sustainable impact on the implementation of the SDGs related to children's well-being. Nations that create family-focused laws, policies and programs will be enriching their natural resource of well-functioning families with a greater chance of raising their children to become responsible, productive citizens.

According to the ICESCR, article 10-1, "the widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to the family which is the natural and fundamental group unit of society, particularly for its formation and while it is responsible for the care and education of dependent children." Social policies, educational and service programs that build and implement partnerships with the family are the kinds of protection and assistance that are needed. Summarizing from years of global research on children's well-being, Child Trends' World Family Map 2014 recommended "fostering union stability (assuming parents have low-conflict relationships), extended family support, improving nutrition and parental education, and encouraging parent-child communication, among others." Programs that work with and serve the family unit as a strength have been shown to be effective. Numerous couple education programs such as Stepping Stones or PREP: Preparation and Relationship Education Program have had a significant impact on healthy couple formation, satisfaction and stability and decreasing abuse and conflict. Parent education programs such as STEP: Systematic Training for Effective Parenting, Triple P: Positive Parenting Program and International Federation for Family Development: Family Enrichment have been shown to decrease harsh parenting and stress and increase effective communication and discipline.

What will ensure that children are provided "a nurturing environment for the full realization of their rights and capabilities"? Investing in the natural parent-child partnership is key. Policies, laws and programs that focus on the importance of this relationship will make the difference in sustainability for children's optimal development. Failure to address family dysfunction, build parents' abilities or strengthen the family will lead to ongoing burdens on the government. Providing the protection and assistance that families and parents merit is the investment in children that will yield sustainable and optimal child well-being and flourishing. Let's invest in the family for the sake of children.