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CHILD, FAMILY, AND STATE: Family Policy, Social Protection Policy and the Well-Being of Children^{1*}

Children are the largest age group in the world's population and the most vulnerable group economically, socially, and physically. Given the extensive demographic and social changes in recent years, there is a search for new policy strategies for protecting children and promoting child and family well-being. Even when there is economic growth and political commitment to children, and as essential as these are, more is needed. In particular, knowledge regarding which policy strategies are most effective is essential, if the goal is to do better by children and their families.

Family policy a holistic approach to evaluating social policies affecting children and their families usually regardless of income, is one such strategy. Social protection, government actions that protect individuals, especially the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, against defined social risks, is a second such strategy. Together they constitute two different yet related and complementary approaches to designing social policies. How they differ, what they constitute, what their outcomes are and what values they maximize have been the focus of much of my work. I would argue that both approaches are needed.

FAMILY POLICY

The term "family policy" was used first in European social policy discussions to describe what government does to and for children and their families. The term was used, in particular, to describe those public policies — such as laws, regulations, administrative policies that are designed to affect the situation of families with children or individuals in their family roles - and those that have clear, though possibly unintended, consequences for such families. Characteristic of family policy internationally is first, concern for all children and their families, not just poor families or families with problems, although these and other family types may receive special attention; and second, an acknowledgment that doing better by children requires help for parents and the family unit as well.

The increased attention to family policy during the last 40 years derives from the developments that either threaten this role of the family or are believed to do so.

¹ * Presented at the conference on "Empowerment of the Family in the Modern World: Challenges & Promises Ahead", January 27-28, 2010, Doha-Qatar, these comments draw on the conclusions of Sheila B. Kamerman, Shelley Phipps, and Asher Ben-Arieh, Eds. From Child Welfare to Child Well-Being, New York: Springer, 2010; and earlier, on a presentation at an Expert Meeting on "Family Policy in a Changing World: Promoting Social Protection and Intergenerational Solidarity" in April, 2009, under the sponsorship of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development.

As I have noted elsewhere, family policies may be explicit or implicit. Explicit family policy includes those policies and programs deliberately designed to achieve specific objectives regarding children, individuals in their family roles or the family unit as a whole. (This does not necessarily mean general agreement as to the objective, but only that the actions are directed toward the family; various actors may have different goals in mind.) Nor does it require agreement on the definition of “family”. Indeed, greater progress can often be made by not getting caught up in issues of definition — and instead, acknowledging that there are many different definitions and they vary across countries and cultures. Explicit family policies may include population policies (pro-or anti-natalist), income security policies designed to assure families with children a certain standard of living (cash or tax benefits), employment-related benefits for working parents, maternal and child health policies, child care policies, leave policies, and so forth. Implicit family policy includes actions taken in other policy domains, for non-family related reasons, which have important consequences for children and their families as well. For example, policies regarding immigration -- or HIV/AIDS — may have major consequences for children and their families, yet not directly target them.

Family policy is a sub-category of social policy and as such, can be viewed as a policy field or domain, a policy instrument, or as a criterion by which all social policies can be assessed as to their consequences for family and child well-being.

The family policy field includes those laws that are clearly directed at families, such as family law; child or family allowances; social assistance benefits contingent on the presence of children; maternity and parenting benefits; tax benefits for dependants; and child care or early childhood care and education services.

Family policy can also be an instrument to achieve other objectives in other social policy domains. For example, to achieve labor market objectives, to encourage parents to bear more ~ or fewer ~ children and thus achieve a country’s population goals..

Family policy as ‘perspective’ assumes that sensitivity to effects and consequences for families informs the public debate about all social policies. Family policy instruments include cash and tax benefits; services; laws,; and regulations.. The major policy instruments are ~ and here I highlight eight-:

- Income transfers including child and family allowances, social insurance, social assistance, and tax policies, among others;
- Policies assuring time for parenting, including paid and job protected leaves from employment following childbirth or adoption, and during children’s illnesses or school transitions;
- Early childhood care and education policies (ECEC), both services and various forms of cash and tax subsidies to extend access to ECEC services;
- The laws of inheritance, adoption, guardianship, child protection, foster care, marriage, separation, divorce, custody, and child support;
- Family planning and related contraceptive services
- Personal social service programs;
- Housing allowances and policies;
- Maternal or family and child health services.

Family Policy as a Global Concept

Today the concept of family policy is a global one. It is used in both developed and developing countries, increasing over time, from a UN expert group in the 1980s, a European Union Ob-

servatory on Family Policies in the 1990s, to a conference in Hong Kong at the end of 2008 on “Strengthening Families” and a UN expert meeting held in Doha, Qatar in 2009 on “Family Policy in a Changing World”. The key criterion is the presence of a child and the willingness (and capacity) for the society to invest in children.

Family Policies have played a significant role in achieving countries’ desired objectives, whether fertility-related, employment-related, facilitating poverty reduction, helping to reconcile work and family life, or linked to enhancing child well being. For families to carry out their traditional roles as well as new ones, they require help and support and sometimes supplementation ~ and that is the role of government and of the various non-governmental organizations.

SOCIAL PROTECTION

Social protection” is a term used interchangeably in the literature with social policy, social welfare and/or social security, but seems increasingly to be used as a generic term that includes the other terms. It is a term that includes those governmental actions or interventions (laws, regulations, funding) that provide individuals and/or families with a defined or minimum standard of living (cash or tax-benefit income and/or goods and services) regardless of the normal market pattern of distribution, often as a matter of legal right. It is designed to protect individuals against defined social risks including loss of income as a consequence of old age, death of a breadwinner, disability, sickness, unemployment, maternity, excessive costs of child rearing. It incorporates statutory as well as non-statutory measures and universal as well as selective or targeted measures. Social protection benefits and services are provided on the basis of non-market criteria such as need, contribution, employment status, age, or citizenship. The concept has emerged as a policy framework for dealing with poverty and vulnerability in developing as well as developed countries. A major issue has to do with the effectiveness of different social protection strategies.

In contrast to the emphasis on children, families with children, and universalism in family policies, social protection policies focus on a wider range of social risks and needs and on the vulnerable, the poor and the disadvantaged. They are not limited to any particular age group or category and they emphasize means-testing as a primary strategy, and targeted policies.

The link between family policies and social protection lies with child-conditioned social protection or social protection policies affecting children. These latter policies include those interventions that are contingent on the presence of children, include attention to “new social risks”, such as trafficking and HIV/AIDS and with, special attention to the poor and needy. Unicef defines child-conditioned social protection as a basic human right, meaning that governments have an obligation to provide both economic and social support to the most vulnerable segments of their population, in particular children. Social protection strategies encompass cash and tax transfers (eg social insurance, social assistance, child-related demogants) and economic support directed at the family or at the individual child, and social services (eg family and community support, child protection, alternative care).

Child poverty is clearly at the forefront of concern in the developing countries, not just income poverty but multi-dimensional deprivation.. Despite variations across countries, following income inadequacies, are the issues of access to health care, to education, adequate nutrition, and safe water.. A Unicef report (UNDP, 2005) stated that “human development and poverty reduction are pre-requisites” to achieving its key goals for child well-being: child survival, poverty and inequality reduction, social inclusion, elimination of hunger, increased access to education

and health care, gender equality and empowerment, maternal health, safe water, and reduced incidence and impact of HIV/AIDS and other diseases. These concerns and problems are shared by the poorest countries, and largely affect the most vulnerable groups within the society.

In recent years, the provision of cash benefits has become a key social protection strategy in developing countries, not just in the developed countries. One big difference has been the growing stress on linking cash benefits to particular behaviors, specifically, attendance at health clinics and enrollment and attendance at school. . These “conditional” Cash Transfers (CCTs) were launched initially in Latin America but have been copied increasingly in Asia, Africa, and the CEE countries. A debate has emerged regarding whether conditionality is essential or whether non-conditional benefits (as in South Africa, for example) at a decent level would not be as effective. In addition to an adequate benefit, reasonable conditions, and appropriate targeting, the major factors linked to a successful CCT program are an adequate supply of schools and health care centers; a social infrastructure adequate to cope with the administration and delivery of a categorical, cross-sector, means-tested benefit; and an identification of what the conditionality adds to the value of the cash benefit.

Other issues include: how vulnerability is defined apart from low income, the importance of, making the mother the beneficiary of the benefit, which promotes gender equity as well, making “carers” (grandparents, other relatives) eligible to receive the benefits when no parent is in the home, thus helping to support AIDS orphans and child-headed households, CCTs are not a magic bullet but may be an important component in a country’s social protection package

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude: I want to stress 4 points:

1. Protecting children against traditional and new social risks, and promoting child well-being is increasingly a global concern and there is beginning to be a global response but the major developments thus far, are regional. The primary intervention is a government policy involving the use of cash transfers, however, this is not sufficient by itself to solve all the problems. Cash transfers are an essential component of a policy package but neither the full package, nor an alternative to other interventions, nor a panacea. There needs to be a more holistic approach to policies and programs that confront poverty and social exclusion including the reduction of income poverty along with ensuring access to health care, education, food aid and safe water, and social services.
2. The child conditioned social protection literature is dominated by the experiences and use of cash transfers, especially CCTs, and there is a significant gap with regard to the inclusion of social services interventions —protective services and supportive services including ECD/ECEC.
3. A large gap has to do with the lack of systematic data on child well-being including data on the policy responses and where possible, their effects, not just on the problems/risks.
4. And, finally, there is little discussion of children’s rights and their entitlement to social protection.

Family policy, with its particular attention to a holistic policy approach to all children and families with children, and social protection, with its emphasis on protecting against defined social risks for poor, vulnerable, deprived individuals, adults as well as children, are both needed. There is no one model for either family policy or social protection policy, although there are templates for each. The policy regimes vary across regions and countries. Nonetheless there are commonalities and there is lesson learning.

APPENDIX

The most extensive child-oriented data base is Unicef's annual State of the World's Children covering about 190 countries.

See also, Unicef: An Overview of Child Well-Being in Rich Countries. Florence, Italy. Unicef Innocenti Research Center and related background paper by Bradshaw, J., Hoelscher, P. and Richardson, D., covering 21 countries, and The EU Index of Child Well-Being, covering 8 clusters:

- Material Situation
- Child Health
- Education
- Housing and Environment
- Children's Relationships
- Children's Subjective Well-Being
- Risk and Safety
- Civic Participation

The most significant family data base is the OECD Family Data Base, first launched in 2006 and now updated to 2008, covering its current 30 member countries, and including 37 indicators. The structure of the Family Data Base does not include indicators that cover issues related to the position (and care needs) of elderly family members (eg). pensions or health care (a separate policy domain), or long term care of the aged. The indicators, which continue to be increased, are organized under four constructs:

1. The Structure of the Family

- Families and Children
 - Fertility indicators
 - Marital and partnership status
- ### 2. - The Labor Market Position of Families
- Families, Children and Employment status
 - Workplace Hours and Time for Caring
- ### 3. Public Policies for Families and Children
- Tax and Cash Benefits
 - Child related leaves
 - ECEC
- ### 4. Child Outcomes
- Child Health
 - Child poverty
 - Education

The most significant social protection data base is the ESSPROS data base in the 27 country EU provides this classification of benefits in Europe: The benefits included are:

Sickness and health care including maternity

Disability

Old age

Survivors

Families and children

Unemployment

Housing

Social exclusion.

The Family-Children benefits include those that: provide financial support to households for bringing up children, financial assistance to people who support relatives, and provide social services specially designed to assist and protect the family, particularly children. They include cash benefits such as family or child allowances and tax benefits, maternity and parental leave benefits, and benefits in kind such as ECEC, Home helps, and housing benefits.

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