



Could investing in families lead to Sustainable Nation Development?

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The family is the basic building block of society, hence has a crucial role in the social and economic development of communities, nations and globally. As basic unit of society, in almost all cases; the family provides the best environment for meeting a child's development needs. In addition to providing care and protection, the family is where children learn how to interact with other people, where they discover their family history, language and customs of their community (MGLSD, Parenting Guide 2018). Studies on families have observed that, families where the mother/ female caregiver and father / male caregiver foster healthy and committed relationships with each other and with their children, children appreciate the importance of building these relationships with others.

Thus, individuals from stable family units are better enabled to contribute to the economic development of society.

Therefore, the role the family plays in society in fulfilling the emotional and physical needs of individuals is instrumental in achieving economic and social development. The United Nations, through its resolution 47/237 on September 20, 1993 proclaimed the year 1994 the *International Year of the Family*. Ever since then, May 15 was dedicated as the annual observance day for the family. Worldwide, over the years, the day has been celebrated under different global and national themes. Uganda has been commemorating this day since 2000.

The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social development is working on policies and guidelines that provide strategies for unlocking the opportunities and potential while working with partners like UNICEF, Plan International, Child Right and

Violence Prevention and SOS Children's Villages. To foster this work, SOS Children's Villages received a capacity training from Centre for Transformative Parenting and Research, a local NGO with specialty in developing and implementing research evidence-based programmes for family strengthening. The training helped the team at SOS to reflect on their own parenting practices and practitioners had the opportunity to challenge their own assumptions and norms that lead to violence against children in their own settings. After the training, SOS Children's Village has been implementing the Parenting for Respectability Programme in five districts in Uganda (Kabarole, Kamwenge, Omoro, Gulu and Wakiso). To ensure that no one is left behind, SOS has also embraced the Men Engage programme to bring all men on ground to strengthen VAC prevention efforts and improve spousal relationships. This is a contribution as spearheaded by the MGLSD, the department of Family and Culture which emphasizes that the family is a vehicle for state formation, social stability, nurturing and parenting responsible and productive future generation for socio-economic transformation.

It highlights the need for a strategic focus and increased investment in the family to promote sustainable and stable relationships

David, an accountant in a reputable company and father of two had this to say;

"If relationships at my family are at stake and we are struggling, I find it hard to concentrate at work. More often my performance at work is affected. However, when my family is happy and we are relating well with my wife and children, automatically my performance at work is good."





David, emphasised that bonding becomes easy if relationships are positive at home

For this reason, investing in the family cannot be underestimated because it plays a fundamental role in achieving sustainable development.

Government of Uganda recognizes the important contribution of the family in achieving the broader National Development Objectives. Uganda's Vision 2040 emphasizes the principle of a high moral and an ethical society whose citizens are strong in religious and spiritual values instilled with the highest ethical standards. The Social Development Plan (SDP) 2015/16 - 2019/20 provides for interventions to address challenges facing the family. The family, as an institution, promotes a sense of identity and safety, instills values and morals for continuity from generation to generation. One key outstanding role of the family is to procreate and nurture the future generation as Herman Gmeiner, the founder of SOS Children's Villages commented,

"From my point of view, nothing in the world is more important than to care and protect a child."

Therefore, when the needs of the families are compromised, the future as well as the nation's development are conceded. No wonder, when the COVID -19 pandemic set in, Governments globally urged the parents who are the key custodians of the family unit to play their parental roles more than before or else the Corona virus would spread like bush fire. Thus the MGLSD through the department of Family and Culture while working partners targeting families, play an important role in national efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (Unicef, 2018). It is for this reason, therefore, the former UN Secretary General in 2010 stated that

"The very achievement of Sustainable development goals depends on how well families are empowered to contribute to the achievement of those goals. Thus, policies and development Programmes focusing on improving the well-being of families are certain to benefit development."

However, there exists a gap in government programmes because many of them fail to target the family as an entity, although programmes have been instrumental in supporting individual family members such as the mothers and the youth. It would be important for government programme working with MGLSD to target the family as a productive unit and also conduct research to provide the nation data on the status of the family to inform family strengthening programming. It is also important for donor funded programs to target families and not individuals

in the family. In addition, Programs on aspects such as women empowerment, child abuse, and violence seem to be responding to challenges in the family but not the root causes, which is the main gap if we are to empower families.

What needs to be done?

- i) There should be Government and Non-Government led programmers that target the family as unit. This is because the family is very key in providing a safety net for its members. Programmes such as Parenting for Respectability (PFR) that target families should be rolled out across the country.



Project Staff of a community-based programme in Fort Portal having a dialogue with a family and guiding them on how to develop a Family Development Plan.

- ii) Government and donor agencies should support NGOs that have family strengthening interventions
- iii) Conduct a country baseline that would provide the status of families to inform Family programming.
- iv) Rejuvenate and promote community systems that regard family issues as societal issues. This can be complimented by supporting community initiatives and structures that support families.
- v) The MGLSD needs to finalize the Family Policy and improve on partnership networks to ensure systematic implementation of the policy

As we commemorate the International Day of the Family, let us be reminded that studies have shown that family functioning and its environments can be the cause and solution to the development of a society. Therefore, practitioners working with families should ensure that the MGLSD understands their goal to enable layering as we target families for nation development.

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