

Family Literacy Provides an Effective Response to the U.N. SDGs and Peacebuilding Architecture

Denny Taylor
April 2019

This paper is grounded in: 1) forty years of successful family literacy initiatives undertaken by U.N. Member States, NGOs, and academia; 2) a meta-analysis of these initiatives that has identified connections between the U.N. Peacebuilding Architecture and the global impact of family literacy on peacebuilding and the SDGs. The concept of “family literacy” originates in my 1970s research and is supported by four decades of peer-reviewed family literacy research. The concept is grounded in the recognition that the family is the originating and only organizing principle that all people share, and that all other divisions are secondary.

Today, there are locally defined family literacy projects throughout the world, providing real opportunities for countries to support a global family literacy peace project that could push down the risks confronting humanity.

Based upon forty years of field research and a meta-analysis of family literacy initiatives in U.N. Member States, there are three interlinked evidence-based distinguishing objectives of practice that make **Family Literacy** an effective response to the SDGs/2030 Agenda:

First: Family literacy programs provide access to literacy and academic opportunities for adults and children in vulnerable communities in most U.N. Member States, including economically advanced countries such as the US where there is extreme inequality.

Second: Family literacy programs provide a conduit to respond to the challenges identified by families, and empower them to overcome the problems negatively impacting their lives, including the trauma of war, the impact of HIV and AIDS, and the plight of refugees and displaced families.

Third: Family literacy programs incorporate, in varying configurations, the U.N. SDGs based upon local circumstances and needs, including ending poverty, gender equality, life below the water, life on land, climate change, with peace and justice the overarching principle.

A meta-analysis of family literacy in U.N. Member States based on both qualitative and quantitative research provide significant evidence of how vital family literacy has become to increasing cohesion and reducing fragmentation within and between communities. The unifying factor is that, family literacy projects and initiatives recognize “the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” as stated in the preamble of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, there is little recognition of the positive impacts of family literacy as a viable, unifying approach to addressing local, regional, and global violence experienced every year by one billion children worldwide.

Thus, it makes eminent sense to locate sustaining peace efforts in family settings, working alongside children's caregivers to ameliorate the often-violent circumstances in which they live their everyday lives. Added to the merits of this proposition is the possibility that family literacy is one way that the U.N. can stay ahead of potential conflicts, fulfill some of the constitutive necessities for conflict prevention, and participate with people in local communities in sustaining peace initiatives.

In communities around the world, challenges have been met and vulnerable people are building webs of caring and compassion that intersect and cross over, creating intricate patterns of hope and possibility for future generations in human societies. This is our common project on which we can all agree – the urgent need to live more peacefully. Every effort should be given to sharing this family literacy peace work, with the intent of creating new frameworks for sustaining peace in human societies, whilst becoming more proactive in our responses to the destructive impacts on human societies caused by the ravages of war.

The takeaway is that: 1) family literacy is a social science concept that is now ubiquitous as an organizing principle, a way of framing vital programs for children, their families, and communities throughout the world; and 2) family literacy has evolved into a peaceful way of increasing cohesion and reducing fragmentation by responding to local, regional, and global conflicts that are deleterious to the health and wellbeing, and even the survival of vulnerable families. This combination of proven factors creates many opportunities for locally defined innovative change that could be globally transformative in the spirit of the 2030 SDG Agenda.

It is inspiring testimony to the universal applicability of family literacy that stakeholders, including U.N. Member States, U.N. Officials, NGOs, the private sector and academia, often form partnerships. The beneficiaries are families, especially women and children, displaced families, asylum seekers, refugees, survivors of armed conflict, and families in recovery from weather related catastrophes and other manmade disasters. Often family literacy initiatives are locally defined. In Moldova programs focus on supporting the Roma, in South Africa on knowledge-sharing on HIV and support for family members impacted by AIDS, and in Iraq and Afghanistan on children and adult family members experiencing PTSD.

What is remarkable about the trajectory of family literacy is that it is in keeping with U.N. Peacebuilding Resolution adopted by the U.N. General Assembly on April 27, 2016 (70/262) following a review of the U.N. Peacebuilding Architecture. The remainder of this brief paper will focus on the U.N. response to the resolution in a document, which is dated 12 May 2016, and is specific to Agenda Items 15 & 16 of the Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 27 April 2016.

The critical point here is that the meta-analysis of family literacy initiatives and projects in U.N. Member States underscores the importance that recognition be given to the peace sustaining opportunities that family literacy creates to connect peacebuilding challenges with solutions at the local, regional and global scales.

There is no doubt that family literacy has become a social science concept that is now ubiquitous as an organizing principle – a way of framing vital programs for children, their families, and communities throughout the world.

However, it is worth emphasizing that the meta-analysis of family literacy projects and initiatives in U.N. states have also evolved into peaceful ways of increasing cohesion and reducing fragmentation by responding to many local, regional and global conflicts that are deleterious to the health and wellbeing and even survival of vulnerable families.

This meta-analysis of the family literacy initiatives in U.N. Member States and my 40 years of family literacy research in high poverty urban and rural locations, and in regions of armed conflict and catastrophic events provides solid interlinked scientific evidence of the connections between the 70/262 Review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture and the impact of family literacy on peacebuilding and sustainable development.

Family literacy Initiatives:

- “Encourage coherence, synergies, and complementarities”
- “Recognize that development, peace and security, and human rights, are interlinked and mutually reinforcing”
- Respond to “the high human cost and suffering caused by armed conflicts”
- Recognize the importance “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”
- “Recognize and participate in the struggle to establish a just and lasting peace all over the world”
- “Ensure that the needs of all segments of the population are taken into account”
- “Encompass activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, ... moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development”
- “Stress that civil society can play an important role in efforts to sustain peace”
- “Promote sustained and sustainable economic growth, poverty eradication, social development, sustainable development”
- Support “gender equity and respect for, and protection of, human rights and fundamental freedoms”
- “Recognize also that the scale and nature of the challenge of sustaining peace calls for close strategic and operational partnerships ... (including) civil society organizations, women’s groups, youth organizations”
- “Reaffirm the important role of women in peacebuilding and noting the substantial link between women’s full and meaningful involvement in efforts to prevent, resolve and rebuild from conflict and those efforts’ effectiveness and long-term sustainability, and stressing, in this regard, the importance of women’s equal participation in all efforts for maintenance and promotion of peace and security and the need to increase women’s role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution and peacebuilding”
- “Reaffirm also the important role youth can play in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and as a key aspect of the sustainability, inclusiveness and success of peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts”

Family literacy is used to frame peace enhancing initiatives by most UN Member States, and meets the agreed upon Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly 27 April 2016 and outlined in the 70/262 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture.

Countries including Afghanistan, Nepal, and Sub Saharan Africa offer village based family literacy programs, which seek to develop literacy in the context of community needs such as health, employment and family planning. In some countries family literacy initiatives are designed to reduce gender inequality and family violence, while in other countries family literacy programs focus on the amelioration of psychological and emotional traumas resulting from armed conflict and the support of family members physically disabled by war. For example, family literacy peace enhancing programs have been established to:

- Respond to the needs and concerns about health, employment and family planning (Afghanistan; Albania; Sub Saharan Africa)
- Respond to the psychosocial needs of women (Afghanistan; Egypt)
- Respond to war trauma and PTSD (Afghanistan; Iraq)
- Respond to issues of child labor, family violence, and other life adversities (Afghanistan)
- Establish literacy programs for socially excluded families (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- Establish literacy and peace education classes for families (Iraq)
- Establish literacy programs, especially for women and girls who want to attend schools and literacy classes in order to lead a peaceful and better life (Iraq; Bangladesh)
- Establish programs empowering rural women to develop literacy skills through the writing and documenting of their own poetry as a cultural resource that is valued both locally and nationally (Yemen)
- Establish programs in low-literacy regions, e.g. with families in the deeply-rural, under-resourced mountain valleys of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa)
- Create home based programs to engage with families in literacy activities (South Africa)
- Create literacy centers of care for vulnerable children and mothers (South Africa)
- Combat HIV and AIDS through informational literacy activities (South Africa)
- Establish family and community literacy programs for children isolated and needlessly separated from their families (Armenia)
- Encourage family literacy for boys and girls living in poverty by developing basic literacy and using “communication technology” (Azerbaijan)
- Develop family literacy programs for young children working to contribute to family incomes (Bangladesh)

Highlighted here are the family literacy initiatives in UN Member States. Family literacy has also become conduit for the peaceful relocation of refugees and economic migrants in Canada, the U.S., and many countries in Europe, especially Germany and Sweden. In many economically advantaged countries family literacy programs are available, especially for mothers and children learning new languages and life skills so that they can survive and thrive in the new places that have become their home.

Family literacy is also integral to and in keeping with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. A systematic analysis of the family literacy initiatives undertaken by UN Member States indicates that family literacy is used in most countries in ways that are in keeping with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Most importantly, family literacy initiatives are used to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies. The focus of worldwide family

literacy initiatives on many of the other 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is also both remarkable and profound:

- [GOAL 1: No Poverty](#)
- [GOAL 2: Zero Hunger](#)
- [GOAL 3: Good Health and Well-being](#)
- [GOAL 4: Quality Education](#)
- [GOAL 5: Gender Equality](#)
- [GOAL 6: Clean Water and Sanitation](#)
- [GOAL 7: Affordable and Clean Energy](#)
- [GOAL 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth](#)
- [GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure](#)
- [GOAL 10: Reduced Inequality](#)
- [GOAL 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities](#)
- [GOAL 12: Responsible Consumption and Production](#)
- [GOAL 13: Climate Action](#)
- [GOAL 14: Life Below Water](#)
- [GOAL 15: Life on Land](#)
- [GOAL 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions](#)
- [GOAL 17: Partnerships to achieve the Goal](#)

Most family literacy initiatives in UN Member States are conceptually plural, and are focused on ending poverty and hunger, and on promoting good health and wellbeing. The majority of initiatives have as their mission inclusive quality education, gender equality, climate action, peace and justice, and revitalizing partnerships for the goals. Most include programs especially for girls and women.

Connecting family literacy with peacebuilding and sustainable development will change the ways in which UN Member States and civil society think about the future of humanity. Equally important is the opportunity for the extraordinary trajectory of family projects and initiatives, which provides frameworks for public education that embrace the global effort to reimagine the public school experiences of children, ensures they have a sustainable future, and do not become endlings on a less hospitable planet.