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IYF+30 Way Forward: The roles of stakeholders: governments, academics, civil society, families and homes

CARE IN THE HOME, CARE OF THE COMMON HOME

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Celebrating the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs International Year of the Family's 30th year is a great privilege. At Home Renaissance Foundation we are soon to celebrate our 20th year championing the value of the home to society.

These anniversaries are significant, but must not obscure the obvious truth that families and homes go back not mere decades but millennia. Within this, but often forgotten, is another truth; families and homes have always had to engage with the challenges presented by life on this planet. It is in the home that the first lessons of care, mutuality and responsibility are learnt and thereby transferred to the care of the earth, our common home. The dynamic therefore is not "what can external agencies do for homes and families?" but "what can they learn from them?"

In this paper I shall outline briefly the vision, purpose and processes of Home Renaissance Foundation as they are relevant to this meeting and our distinctive contribution to this debate on Families and Climate Change. I shall set out the primacy and priority of the home in fostering positive attitudes and behaviours relating to the challenges of climate change and in generating solutions which allow families to be the active agents of response rather than passive recipients of larger policy decisions. Drawing upon the ethics of care, I shall set out the need for recognition of the home as the place to create and nurture the responses necessary for communal and corporate responsibility. In conclusion I shall refer to certain of the policy recommendations and the urgency of their implementation.

In September 2023 Home Renaissance Foundation in partnership with Professor Mohamed Gamal Abdelmonem and Nottingham Trent University

gathered leading academics from across disciplines and the world to bring their expertise and research experience to bear upon Home/Family and Climate Change. The aim was to understand the power of the home to transform societies in the face of climate emergency. The fruit of this gathering, and much subsequent work, was developed into the publication and policy recommendations launched by Professor Abdelmonem and Renata Kaczmarek here in New York yesterday.

There is a rightful focus on the family as the key stakeholder in how this global challenge is addressed. Families are both vital players in actions to mitigate climate change, and are in the frontline of its deleterious effects. At HRF we aim to sharpen the focus to see the home and household in this role. For the family always exists within a context, though it may be fragmented, displaced or estranged the context of home is intrinsic to the life of both individuals and the families and households of which they are a part.

Understanding the home as the foundation and glue of a healthy society is at the heart of our vision. Recognising that the work and care of the home is core to human flourishing and whole-life well-being has been the explicit focus of our research engagement. The areas we have explored range from the challenges and opportunities of the digital age, the crisis of global migration, to the relationship between the home and physical and emotional well-being. Central to all this is the need for policy-makers to also understand, recognise and support the home as the building block of just, compassionate and resilient societies.

Pioneering multidisciplinary study and cooperation are hallmarks of our work and publications. Just as the home is multi-faceted, our approach draws upon diverse fields including philosophy, architecture, social and political science, health, technology and law. The diffuse nature of the home – each home being unique in its particular nexus of place and people and yet having the shared characteristics of all places of shelter and relationship– requires agility in terms of moving between established modes of study and policy. We believe that seeing individuals and the family within this wider context is key to harnessing the skills and strengths created, nurtured and sustained within the home.

The care of the home requires not only specific skills and strengths but attitudes and behaviours. That these translate to the care of our environment and our global –common - home is not a superficial metaphor but a deep reading of the role and significance of home in the face of climate change. The ethics of care helps to articulate and apply the human motivations for these beneficial attitudes and behaviours. Of especial

interest here is respect for resources, their conservation and just distribution, and the building of resilience and social cohesion.

I am indebted to Antonio Argandoña, Emeritus Professor of Economics and Business Ethics, IESE Business School, who has published widely on this area, for the following brief summary of this ethical perspective. All references in this section are citations in his paper, "Ethics of Care, Care in the Home" given at the aforementioned Expert Meeting at Nottingham Trent University in 2023. The ethics of care is a term and series of socio-philosophical insights emerging in the later twentieth century from increased attention to the spheres of life, often those of women and children and most notably the home, underrepresented in previous studies and debate.

Many of the new research questions address areas which had remained unquestioned because they were part of given expectations: that it was within the home children were prepared for the responsibilities of adult life and that these responsibilities included caring for and about the needs of others. This was modelled in the home and lived out in wider relationships. (Of course, this did not happen in every home but the general expectation was that positive social attitudes would be passed on in this way.) More recent studies seek to measure and evaluate the benefits of caring and being cared for. (Danioni 2023, 137) Relationships, responsibility and experience are pivotal rather than tangential in this understanding. "It is an ethics that values interdependences and caring relations that connect persons to one another, rather than privilege independence and individualisation." (Phillips 2029, 1157)

Within the home, therefore, the ethics of care presents itself as a useful instrument for dealing with what we can call the moral dimension of caring for the environment. As "home is the first site where our values and beliefs are moulded," (Payne 2010, 213)) and the home is the earliest site of "place-based environmental education (or not) well before and beyond the classroom." (Brizi 2020, 91)

In the home the well-being of others is experienced early, for good or ill. Consumption of goods and services provided by others is based not on market forces but human need and vulnerability and justice. In the home the youngest and oldest members may not be economically active but are supported and cared for independent of their measurable contribution. Responsibility to others is therefore not an external life choice but the internal mechanism of life within the home.

Families and households with well-developed patterns of responsibility and just distribution are equally well-placed to respond to initiatives at neighbourhood, local and national governmental levels. Early awareness and

acceptance of behaviours in reducing water and fuel consumption, recycling and other informed environmentally- friendly choices leads to more active engagement and wider social benefit. These informed attitudes also lead to choices preventing the waste of resources. This is all learnt at the household level and applied across life spheres and has been summarised as follows "The level of motivation (...) makes the difference. By internalising motivation, we become eco-virtuous." (Brizi 2020, 89) It is ,though, a mechanism of transfer which bears fuller examination as a recent study on environmental learning in everyday life concludes, "We encourage individuals to connect, make meaning, and learn about the environment and environmental issues cumulatively across and among all daily-life experiences as they move through and enact various social roles." (Ardoin 2021, 1681) The place where this formative opportunity to connect, make meaning and to learn in daily-life is the home.

Alongside this active participation in choices to mitigate and adapt in the face of climate change, the home is also uniquely placed to build climate resilience. When we keep the true global story in view we see the whole context in which these smaller shifts in behaviours resonate. Across the world families are forced to leave homelands made uninhabitable or uncultivable by the effects of climate change. This frontline is not notional but actual. Here resilience is essential to survival.

In our recent work on the Home and Displaced People, we included migration as a direct consequence of eco-geographical changes. Underpinning the resilience of families is the strength of their relationships and the ways in which they were enabled to recreate home in new contexts. The capacity to rebuild is related to how open and available receiving societies are to understanding their own connectedness to those from further away. The ethics of care can be seen in this context as broadening the definition of who is to be cared for and where responsibility extends. The humanising of more distant connections gives dignity to those seeking new places and ways of finding a home. Human dignity and human resilience are connected as human goods.

Another important aspect to this is the ability to learn from the experience of others; for physical and psychological distance to be bridged between those currently having to make climate-related changes and those for whom these challenges still lie ahead. (Hill 2023) In both cases resilience is built up by our connectedness rather than remoteness from each other.

Since the first International Year of the Family in 1994 the societal shift to a more individualistic perspective has gathered pace. Broadly speaking, in Western cultures the increased stress on individual autonomy, ownership

and rights has correlated with a decreased sense of belonging and responsibility to wider contexts such as neighbourhood, local community or place of worship. It is sometimes expressed as the difference between those who are "somewheres", that is connected to a place and group of people, and those who are "anywheres", that is independent of immediate circumstances. The exponential growth of the internet over these thirty years has had a role in replacing the local with the global, but this is only part of the story.

Public policy in housing developments which isolate rather than connect residents has also had an impact, as has the erosion of public third spaces such as sportsgrounds and libraries. Other social and economic disruptors in the form of relationship breakdown, unemployment, rising housing and energy costs also contribute to a less "rooted" society. Within all this change the home and households have been if not overlooked then certainly taken for granted.

What *is* overlooked is that the ties that bind us must not be taken for granted. All those ties and connections which encourage positive behaviours and attitudes, which I outlined earlier within the ethics of care, are inevitably loosened by policies which do not understand or value them. For this reason it is becoming increasingly clear that the response to the global challenges we face cannot be left at the individual level. The action and cohesion of the community is needed, where each individual can also feel and act upon their full membership of this wider world. The community, which is modelled and sustained by the home when it is given the status and recognition it both offers and needs.

We commend and endorse all the policy recommendations launched yesterday, but in the light of what has been discussed above I would like emphasise the following:

1. Recognise the home and household as the primary place and source of positive response to challenges.

Public institutions and national governments must prioritise families, homes and households as fundamental units and critical agents in learning, education and shared concerns about climate change. They must inform life-long climate choices as a collective social unit rather than the current focus on individual attitudes. (Strand One: The Care for the Planet)

2. Trust homes to respond in ways which will make the most difference in their own context

Governments need to revisit their top-down instructional approach and work within regional/ community "real" boundaries and ecosystems for change rather than the current focus on political messaging and national targets that have limited meaning on the family and community level. (Strand Two: Climate Change and Public Health)

3. Build contexts in which homes can function at their best for the good of all.

Governments need to force a radical approach towards a holistic approach to housing within a relational model of lived neighbourhoods where natural and social interests are integrated and complementary within a meaningful, connected and sustainable living.

The work of Home Renaissance Foundation grew out of the need to support homemakers, and the realisation that it is first of all policymakers who need to understand the value of home. To return to the age-old world of homemaking for one final analogy: when you follow a recipe to feed the family, the quality of what you get out is directly related to the quality of the ingredients and the skills you put in. In the recipe that the UNDESA is considering for Families and Climate Change the same principle applies. Put in the ingredients to allow homes to be at the heart of policy and strong, empowered, resilient and responsible families will come out.

HRF 29th April 2024

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