



FAMILY MATTERS



Circular No. 22

Follow up of the International Year of the Family

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FAMILY UNIT

The Follow up to the International Year of the Family is the responsibility of the Family Unit, Division for Social Policy and Development within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The follow-up activities to the International Year of the Family are in accordance with intergovernmental mandates e.g. General Assembly resolutions 50/142 of 21 December 1995 and 52/81 of 12 December 1997 respectively. [The Family Unit welcomes ongoing information and data on family-related policies and programmes from concerned actors and focal points].

A Current Review of IYF Follow up

The International Year of the Family (1994) was the result of the concern and interest demonstrated by the international community to address family issues within the context of development. The Year has helped to bring the subject of the family into thinking about development and into the international dialogue on that issue.

However, IYF follow up, unlike the follow-up of other recently observed international years or similar events, has been hampered by a number of special factors. First, there is a lack of consensus on terminology and basic definitions. Second, the Year did not result in a global instrument setting standards and incorporating a plan of action. Consequently, the process of 'follow up' is more complex in the family area than in others.

To meet the challenge, the Secretariat has made concerted efforts to move the discourse from a focus on definitions and prescriptive and value judgments to an emphasis on an increased understanding of the social, economic and cultural processes that affect the institution of the family in the performance of its central and irreducible

functions in any society. For this reason, the Secretariat will continue to concentrate on: (a) promoting international development cooperation in the area of families; (b) promoting the objectives of IYF within the context of the 5-year reviews of the World Summit for Social Development; and (c) as part of its work on policy analysis, monitor, analyze and evaluate global, social and economic trends that impact on families and identify new and emerging family issues requiring attention by the global community.

The main responsibilities of the Secretariat continue to be: (a) substantive servicing of interGovernmental bodies of the United Nations; (b) assisting Governments in the development, implementation and evaluation of appropriate family-related policies, programmes and initiatives within the context of the IYF framework; (c) facilitating and promoting international cooperation in the field of family research; (d) strengthening links between the United Nations and civil society; and (e) providing technical assistance through the UN Trust Fund on Family Activities. The current activities under these headings are summarized below.

Substantive servicing of Inter-Governmental bodies, in particular the Commission for Social Development, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly is a core responsibility

The family focus has been integrated into the multi-year work programme of the Commission for Social Development, which has been entrusted with the primary responsibility for implementing the outcome of the Social Summit. In this connection, the report of the Secretary General on the follow up to the Social Summit, which will be submitted to the thirty-eighth session of the Commission, will include an analysis of family-related issues, as relevant. Also, the report of the UN workshop on Technology and Families, held in Dublin from 6-10 October 1998 will be submitted to the same session. The Technology and Family activity

should be seen as a proposed concrete initiative for consideration by the Commission to implement the overarching goal of strengthening social integration.

The Secretariat (Division for Social Policy and Development) supported during 1996-1999 the worldwide observance of the International Day of Families (15 May) by preparing background information on the family for use by Governments, the UN system, including the regional commissions, and UN Information Centre's and NGOs. An annual message of the Secretary General was prepared for wide distribution. The International Day of Families during the above mentioned years was observed in many countries. A notable recent event was the celebration of the Day at UNHQ in May 1999 with the First Lady of Venezuela as guest speaker.

During 1998-1999, the Secretariat initiated and promoted a number of action-oriented research and case studies on family issues. In cooperation with the International Federation of Training and Development Organization, A Survey of National Family Policies (Argentina, Egypt, India and the Netherlands) was conducted on an important issue confronting family policy makers - the balance between work and family responsibilities and the need to advance family-friendly policies in the workplace; Selected Country Profiles on Family Policies and Programmes is underway describing a survey of national actions on family related issues in Austria, Cameroon, Jamaica and the Republic of Korea.

The UN Workshop on Technology and Families, held in Dublin, Ireland from 6-10 October 1998, organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in cooperation with the Government of Ireland, and in association with Quest Campus, provided a forum to address the nature, forms and extent of technological change and its impact on families.

The Secretariat has strengthened the consultative process with non-Governmental organizations at all levels, research and academic institutions and foundations through dialogue, meetings and through financial support provided by the UN Trust Fund on Family Activities. The nature of these consultations has ranged from information exchange, organization of

meetings, funding requests, research, promotion of IYF objectives, etc.

The first United Nations Consultative Meeting of Regional and International NGOs on the Family organized by the Secretariat was held on 9 February 1998 in New York, in conjunction with the 36th session of the Commission for Social Development, held from 10-20 February 1998. It was attended by 6 international family Non-Governmental organizations. The aim was to discuss areas of collaboration between the Secretariat and the Non-Governmental sector.

The New York NGO Committee on the Family, the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family, the Bratislava Institute for Family Studies, the Asia-Pacific Forum on Families, and the International Federation for Training and Development Organization provide a valuable link between the UN and civil society organizations on family issues. The Secretariat has also facilitated networking and an exchange of information with civil society through the Internet and a bi-monthly circular letter.

Core activities and objectives of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations include increasing awareness about issues that affect families. Projects funded by the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities contributed to such actions.

The United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities provides financial assistance for activities specific to families and projects of direct benefit to them, with a special focus on least developed and developing countries, as well as countries with economies in transition. Pursuant to the guidance received from the General Assembly for use of the resources of the Fund, priority in the allocation of grants is given to catalytic and innovative activities related to families and to reinforce family-related concerns in mainstream development. The areas are: (a) building national capabilities in least developed and developing countries, and countries with economies in transition; (b) assessments and evaluations of strategies, policies and programmes; and (c) awareness building and related communications support measures in the context of national development.

Since 1996 to the present the UN Trust Fund on Family Activities has received nearly 100 requests for assistance. It has provided nearly \$251,653 in grants to catalytic and

innovative projects in the field of the family. The projects supported by the UN Trust Fund for Family Activities have been at all levels and included policy support actions through research, meetings and community-based activities.

The demand for assistance from the Fund is high but contributions to it have been declining. Only one Member State contributed to the Fund in 1998. Even so, the Fund has succeeded in supporting a diverse range of activities through various co-financing arrangements, its direct contribution averaging \$20,000 per project.

Future activities will be directed to encourage reflection on the type of strategies that would meet various family needs worldwide. This should facilitate inter alia the integration of a family component in national development strategies and plans. In this regard, the Secretariat has initiated discussions with the University of Delaware [USA] on convening an Expert Group Meeting on the Development of a Framework on Family Policies to be held in May 2000.

Moreover, the Secretariat intends to organize in the year 2001 an Interregional Expert Group Meeting on the Identification of Indicators Relating to the Situation of Families.. This would help Governments to gather and investigate data about trends in family formulation, structure and dissolution. Research will also be undertaken on employment and family-supportive environments in selected countries (2000) and on the impact of education, information and communication technology on families as a follow up to the UN Workshop on Technology (2001). These studies will provide a basis for the elaboration of policies and programmes, including systematic and integrated approaches to the design, implementation and evaluation of policies for families.

The Secretariat will continue to encourage research and discussion of a range of family issues with a focus on areas of agreement and policy relevance. In this regard, it is establishing an inter-university network on family-policy development. Global comparative studies on selected issues in family-sensitive policy design will also be conducted to improve accessibility of global information on the IYF objectives and strategy at all levels. A Directory of

Focal Points on the Family will be prepared periodically.

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