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THEME: PROMOTING THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES

DRAFT AFRICAN COMMON POSITION ON THE FAMILY
for the International Year of the Family + 20

Revision of 27 November 2012

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite variations and changes in its structure and composition, the centrality and indispensability of the family in Africa is unquestionable[i]. For generations this institution has been a source of strength for its members, providing them with a sophisticated social security system, as well as support and guidance mechanisms especially in times of need and crisis such as during unemployment, sickness, bereavement, and old age[ii]. The family has also been a key source of childcare, child socialisation and reciprocal care-giving relations between younger and older family members[iii]. Indeed, it has been argued that traditionally Africa's development has been a result of the strength of the family: large families were a source of labour and an indication of prosperity; extended families ensured that poor families were generally supported by the rich; and unity within the family ensured its survival in cases of internal conflicts, crises and adversity[iv].

Over the years, however, Africa has witnessed a number of socio-economic and demographic changes that have stretched and, in some cases, exhausted the support mechanisms that were traditionally offered by the family[v]. These changes include decreasing fertility; increased number of older persons; increased unemployment and underemployment especially among young people; increased migration; changing nuptiality patterns; increased proportion of female-headed households; and high levels of HIV and AIDS. In addition, the impact of conflicts, disasters and the displacement and disruption caused by them and their impact on families has been very high. Among the notable consequences of these changes are challenges such as high levels of family poverty; increasing work-family conflict; intergenerational disjuncture; and overall family disintegration—all taking place against the backdrop of inadequate social security mechanisms.

In order to deal effectively with these challenges, it is important to ensure effective implementation of the key tenets of international and regional commitments that African Governments have adopted and/or ratified in recognition of the family's critical role in the continent's political, cultural and socio-economic development. Of particular importance and relevance are the activities outlined in the *Plan of Action on the Family in Africa* which was adopted by the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government in July 2004 to mark the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. With a focus on nine priority areas, the Plan of Action on the Family is meant to serve as an advocacy instrument for strengthening family units, addressing their needs, improving their general welfare and enhancing the life chances of family members. It also aims at guiding and strengthening Member States' capacities in developing appropriate national structures, policies, programmes and capacities for addressing key priorities relating to family issues and challenges in Africa.

Despite the apparent continental commitment to the improvement of family welfare, the 2010 mid-term review of the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa noted that while "there are promising signs of increases in allocation towards key sectors such as poverty alleviation, social services and sustainable development", on the whole many African countries "are still lagging behind and fail to implement an effective protection and support to the African family". The review attributed this to, among other things, low internalization of relevant international and regional instruments;

lack of human, financial and infrastructural resources to implement laws, policies and programmes, as well as lack of public awareness of family issues.

In view of the foregoing, Member States need to prioritise the implementation of the priority areas of the Plan of Action on the Family. In addition recognise the three priority policy issues as agreed in resolutions on "Preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family" by United Nations Member States to continue their efforts to develop appropriate policies to address family poverty, work-family balance and family cohesion, and share good practices in those areas.

Poverty

Overall poverty has led to the inability of households and families to attain a minimum and socially accepted standard of living measured in terms of basic consumption needs or income required to satisfy those needs.[vi] To this end, poor families in Africa are subject to various problems that include hunger and malnutrition; ill health; increased mortality; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; substance abuse; homelessness, inadequate and poor housing; overall social exclusion; income insecurity; and unemployment.

In general, the burden of poverty in Africa is most severe among female-headed households, largely due to the multiple forms of discrimination that they face in education, healthcare, employment and control of assets; migrant families; and households affected by HIV and AIDS. Within families, poverty is relatively higher among children and youth; older persons; and people living with disabilities.

Furthermore, given that males in the region have higher formal employment rates than females and that the majority of employed females work in the informal sector[vii], the predominance of contributory social security in the region has the potential to aggravate aspects of gender inequality as it essentially means that in the event of family break-up, or the death of the husband, the affected women are often not entitled to present or future unemployment or pension benefits[viii]. It has also been noted that despite the high rate of inter-country labour migration in Africa, the principle of territoriality – which requires that benefits be paid in the host country – is widespread throughout the region[ix]. This is not only a major obstacle to the maintenance of social security rights; it also increases the vulnerability of many migrant workers and their families.

Taking cognisance of the persisting poverty on the continent, and against the background of growing evidence of the effectiveness of social protection measures in alleviating poverty in low-income countries throughout the world, a growing number of African governments are designing and developing national social protection strategies, often in the context of more comprehensive versions of poverty reduction strategy papers aimed at achieving economic growth, poverty reduction and sustainable development[x].

Despite the progress made in recent years in tackling poverty through the provision of social protection programmes in support of the family by Governments and partners, these initiatives have not been without comment. The African Union has

highlighted the danger in *The Plan of Action on the Family in Africa*,[1] where it is noted that "At the dawn of the third millennium, Africa must rethink its development strategies. Africa must improve the quality of life of all families and their individual members through the strengthening of family-centred policies and programmes as part of an integrated and comprehensive approach to sustainable development. In this context, the African family must be treated as the most important beneficiary and active participant in Africa's development process."

Work-family balance

According to the International Labour Organisation, female labour force participation in Africa increased from 69.8 per cent in 2001 to 70.3 per cent in 2011. While positive, these labour market trends do not indicate that the welfare of African women is necessarily improving. Like their counterparts in many parts of the world, the women continue to be primarily responsible for the general management of their households and for the care of family and household members, particularly minor children, older persons and the infirm. Although having multiple roles (in this case being a worker and caregiver) can provide several resources, such as better financial status, greater social integration and improved social support that can be used to promote personal growth and better functioning in other life domains, there is a wide strand of literature which has consistently shown that it can also lead to high levels of work-family conflict[xi] where there is an inter-role conflict relating to the pressures from work and family functioning. Work-family conflict has also been associated with negative impacts in the quality of relations between spouses, and increased risk of family dysfunction.

Family responsibilities and their conflict with work demands have been identified as major factors contributing to: women's disadvantage in the labour market; the prevention of the attainment of equal opportunity and treatment for men and women in employment Creating public and private sector policies that support men and women with care responsibilities to reconcile work and family obligations will not only strengthen families but also contribute towards stronger economies. Furthermore by limiting women's involvement in other activities, family responsibilities may also constrain women's ability to maximise income generating opportunities and/or career prospects. This is particularly the case for women from low-income families who cannot afford paid solutions such as domestic help or childcare. These women often attempt to solve their work-family concerns by adopting less than satisfactory solutions,

Among other things, increased work-family conflict in Africa can be attributed to rapid rural-urban migration and urbanisation, and the weakened the traditional kinship mode of residential settlement—all of which have diminished the strength of traditional extended family networks[xii]. In addition, the growing economic needs, particularly among the poor, are compelling many adult family members in Africa to engage in income-earning activities[xiii]. Hence, the traditional family support for care roles and domestic tasks, while still frequent, is becoming less available[xiv]. Furthermore, the availability of grandparents to allocate a good part of their time to

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[1] Plan of Action on the Family: Africa's Common Position to the 10th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2004, page 8

helping their adult children in housework and child care may be changing as a new generation of grandmothers—which is better educated, more socialised in the world of work and more active in terms of social life—is now emerging. Therefore, even when families are close by, their capacity to help other family members with care responsibilities is weakening.

Intergenerational solidarity

Intergenerational solidarity—reflected by the provision of reciprocal care, support and exchange of material and non-material resources between younger and older family members—was for generations a key characteristic of families in Africa. This has however been impacted on by the prevailing transformations taking place on the continent. For example, due to HIV and AIDS, many grandparents are increasingly taking up the responsibility of caring for their sick children as well as for the grandchildren who are orphaned or made vulnerable by the pandemic.

Furthermore, due to increased migration discussed above, multi-generational households the traditional extended family, and their associated support mechanisms are no longer the norm in many African countries as families become physically separated and household sizes decrease[xv]. In consequence, kinship obligations are becoming less compelling[xvi].

The upcoming twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014, thus offers Africa an opportunity to refocus on the role of families in development; take stock of challenges faced by families; and recommend a way forward.[2] By the same token, this Common Position paper offers a key opportunity for African Ministers in Charge of Social Development to re-commit their efforts towards a better implementation and evaluation of the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa.

2.   PREAMBLE

WE, MINISTERS IN CHARGE OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN MEMBER STATES OF THE AFRICAN UNION (AU):

RECALLING the rights of the family to protection outlined in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, article 18, paragraph 1 and 2;

ALSO RECALLING the protection and rights of the family as enshrined in article 18 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child;

RECOGNIZING that the family is the basic and most fundamental unit in society that should be strengthened and protected to enhance its role in political, cultural and socio-economic development, and as the custodian of morals and traditional values recognized by the community;

ALSO RECOGNIZING that stable, functional families contribute to smooth functioning of society and to social cohesion and a sense of belonging, the

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[2] Report of the Secretary-General on the Preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014 (A/67/61-E/2012/3), 11 November 2011.

maintenance of a culture of peace and promote dialogue among civilisations and diverse ethnic groups;

RECOGNIZING that the family has the primary responsibility for the nurturing and protection of children and that children, for the full and harmonious development of their personality, should grow up in a family environment and in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding;(A/RES/66/141)

CONCERNED about the prevailing socio-economic and demographic factors that have transformed and negatively impacted the family in Africa as a unit of protection, production, consumption, reproduction, and accumulation;

RECALLING the principles and objectives enshrined in the AU Constitutive Act as well as its Vision and Mission on socio-economic development;

ALSO RECALLING the various international and African Union policy documents and instruments related to strengthening family units, addressing their needs, improving their general welfare, and enhancing the life chances of family members;

FURTHER RECALLING the actionable agenda of the African Common Position on Human and Social Development in Africa and the Plan of Action on the Family;

AWARE of the activities outlined in the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa which notes the importance of an integrated approach that places the family at the centre of a comprehensive development agenda and advocates for "promotion, formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies to ensure the protection of and support to the African family so as to enable it to play its vital role more effectively in the development of Africa.";

RECOGNIZING that the recommended activities in the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa, the Millennium Development Goals, and other social development strategies are mutually reinforcing and should be implemented in conjunction, in order to achieve coherent, family-centred sustainable development and should lead to strong post-2015 sustainable development objectives;

ACKNOWLEDGING that strategies to improve the welfare of families in Africa need to be multi-sectoral, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable families and family members such as female-headed households, child-headed households, migrants families; families and households affected by HIV and AIDS; people with disabilities, children and youth, and older persons;

CONVINCED that civil society and research and academic institutions have a pivotal role in advocacy, promotion, research and policy making in respect of family policy development and capacity-building, (A.C.3/67/L.12)

NOTING the resolutions of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations on the "Preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family" which noted the importance of designing, implementing and monitoring family-oriented policies,

especially in the areas of poverty eradication, full employment and decent work, work-family balance, social integration and intergenerational solidarity.

FURTHER NOTING the resolutions on the "Preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family" which encouraged United Nations Member States to continue their efforts to develop appropriate policies to address family poverty, social exclusion and work-family balance and share good practices in those areas.

HAVE AGREED AS FOLLOWS:

3.   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

i) At national level Member States are urged to:

I.   Ratify, domesticate, harmonise, apply, and monitor international and regional instruments aimed at improving the welfare of families.

II.   Commit to the effective multi-sectoral implementation the key recommendations of the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa.

III.   Implement and monitor the Actionable Agenda of the African Common Position on Human and Social Development in Africa, the Social Policy Framework for Africa and Africa's post-2015 objectives;

IV.   Develop and implement comprehensive family-focused socio-economic policies that recognise the diverse, changing needs of families, and support, strengthen and protect families, particularly in vulnerable and crisis situations.

V.   Promote the participation and role of men, particularly fathers, in strengthening family life and promote positive male role models;

VI.   Encourage civil society initiatives ensuring that they have the freedom to promote the wellbeing of families.

VII.   Implement specific legislation, policies and interventions to strengthen gender equality, the empowerment and participation of women in families;

VIII.   Invest in programmes that prevent family separation and promote family tracing and reunification when applicable, addressing the factors that cause families to separate.

IX.   Promote gender equality within the families - between women and men and girls and boys – and promote and support the role of fathers as care givers.

X.   Promote work-family balance by putting in place context-specific mechanisms and policies to facilitate the balancing of work and family responsibilities. These should include improving maternity leave provisions, introduction of paternity leave, as well as introduction of flexible working arrangements,early

childhood care, support for home care of those with chronic illness and disabilities and increased household access to water and renewable energy;

XI. Promote intergenerational solidarity by ensuring that all interventions aimed at supporting families recognise generational interdependence and promote intergenerational interaction and healthy intra-family relations.

XII. Develop and ensure effective implementation of policies, such as pension provisions to ensure that grandparents cope with their increased caring responsibilities in the context of high HIV and AIDS prevalence and changing family structures.

ii) At continental and regional Levels Member States are urged to:

I. Coordinate and harmonize the implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of international and regional instruments that aim to improve the welfare of families

II. Promote, disseminate, domesticate international guidelines on the alternative care of children.

III. The African Union should build capacity at the continental and regional levels for a better monitoring and evaluation of the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa.

IV. The African Union Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) should investigate opportunities for capacity building through the voluntary and non-governmental sector.

V. Develop multi-sectoral regional collaboration and partnerships to facilitate the sharing of good practices and experiences on family policy options among African countries.

VI. Strengthen the capacity of the African Union Commission to promote, monitor and report on the Plan of Action on the family.

iii) At the international level Member States are urged to:

I. Collaborate with and support Member States, the African Union Commission and the Regional Economic Communities in implementing international family-related policies and commitments.

II. Mobilize adequate resources to supplement local efforts, in line with international commitments, to enhance the welfare of the family in Africa.

III. Call for the African Union to lead an evaluation of international aid and development strategies, in particular looking at less fragmented, issue-specific initiatives and a more family centred approach.

IV.   Encourage the African Union to lead co-ordinated action at the International level to place family at the centre of the post-2015 global development agenda.

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