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General Debate 3 (a): Actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development at the global, regional and national levels

3 (b): Special theme of the fiftieth session² of the Commission based on the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the key actions for its further implementation

Statement submitted by International Federation for Family Development, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council³

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

¹ [E/CN.9/2017/1](#).

² Changing population age structures and sustainable development.

³ The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Sustainable population development and the value of family time

The International Federation for Family Development currently operates in 66 countries and has been working since 1978 to promote and support different initiatives to help married couples and the family. Our objective is to provide support and efficient aid for parents in their role as educators through the Family Development programmes, tools that allow families to fully develop. We provide experts in training families and promoting and coordinating to more than 200 Family Enrichment Centers all over the world. Through the work of more than 7,000 volunteers in those programmes, we reach around 90,000 persons every year.

Among other things, this experience has shown that the best solution is not to replace families' social functions, either via the state or other institutions, but to support and empower families to carry out these functions in their own right. "Governments cannot afford to fully replace the functions families perform for the benefit of their members and for the good of society. The family is the most powerful, the most humane and, by far, the most economical system known for building competence and character. Still, families do better in a supportive policy environment — one in which, for example, schools actively seek parental engagement; employers recognize that workers are also family members; agencies and organizations are family-centred in their philosophy and operation; and laws support family members' roles as caregivers, parents, partners, and workers. A vital role remains for governments to supplement and complement the private investments families make. Policies and programmes, along with community institutions and societal norms and values, shape the extent to which families can fulfil their functions and develop new capabilities when challenged to do so (Bogensneider, 2012).

The original concept of sustainable development refers to this future. The term was first used by the 'Brundtland Commission', which coined what has become a common definition of "sustainable development": "Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. [A/RES/42/187](#)). Consequently, one can say that sustainable development is not only an economic concept, but it also embraces a profound and fundamental ethical and human dimension. Though numerous theories have been advanced, and practices identified, to explain the causes of the global financial crisis of the past years, it seems obvious that the lack of ethics shown by corporate greed is affecting different aspects of society. As Robert Samuelson declares, "people took shortcuts and thought they would get away with them" (2011), a mistake men and women have made too often in history.

Empowerment of families and their members

"As basic and essential building blocks of societies, families have a crucial role in social development. They bear the primary responsibility for the education and socialization of children as well as instilling values of citizenship and belonging

in the society. Families provide material and non-material care and support to its members, from children to older persons or those suffering from illness, sheltering them from hardship to the maximum possible extent. The very achievement of development goals depends on how well families are empowered to contribute to the achievement of those goals. Thus, policies focusing on improving the well-being of families are certain to benefit development” (Resolution of the General Assembly, [A/RES/66/62](#)).

A recent report of the Secretary-General on this topic states that “family policy development has not kept up with changing norms and expectations or the rising difficulties families experience in fulfilling their numerous functions. As a result, family policies too often continue to target children and/or women individually and ignore the family unit as such. Moreover, policies claiming to focus on vulnerable families often concentrate on a mother and a child, with little attention given to other family members, including the father or the grandparents. Interventions focusing on single-parent families rarely take into account the role of cohabiting and/or non-custodial parents in the lives of children” (Resolution of the General Assembly, [A/RES/70/6](#)).

In other words, the long-standing efforts of the United Nations to protect human rights has empowerment at its core and has been enriched during the past years with the goal of empowering the world’s women and empowering the world’s next generation — its youth. Adding families to the empowerment agenda would be another step forward. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development should remove barriers to the active participation of families in society, especially decisions on investments in health, child poverty, education, population ageing, domestic work and care, youth employment, and domestic violence. It should also recognize the social and economic contributions that families make to society through the time, effort and money families invest in their members — children, youth, the ageing, and those who are unable to care for themselves. Because these contributions often are taken for granted, there are too few incentives or supports to families for the benefits they provide to society and too little discussion of political instruments to empower families. And this step designed to help families would in return also help those who are part of families — women, children, youth, and the ageing.

Consequently, to most effectively reach the Sustainable Development Goals, “we will have to do a better job in leaving no family behind” (Sroufe, 2005). In that spirit, we suggest the following aspects to be considered:

1. Child Poverty [Goal 1]. The new promising approach to child poverty is a two-generation approach. Instead of focusing on children and parents individually, a family approach will be used that simultaneously provides high-quality programmes for children and their parents.
2. Population Ageing [Goal 3]. Active ageing allows people to realize their potential for physical, social, and mental well-being throughout the life course so they can continue to contribute to their families; also, it is families that assume responsibility for providing adequate protection, security, and care to aging members when and as they need it.

3. Healthy Lives [Goal 3]. Research shows that a family-centred approach to health care can improve the quality of care and help curb rising costs, whether prevention or chronic care.
4. Quality Education [Goal 4]. When policies and programmes are family-focused, they often are an efficient investment of public resources for promoting youth school success and an effective means for achieving lifelong learning.
5. Unpaid Domestic Work and Care [Goal 5]. Household production constitutes an important aspect of economic activity and ignoring it may lead to incorrect inferences about the significant contributions this unpaid labour provides to national and global economies.
6. Domestic Violence [Goal 5]. Gender equality and gender stereotypes, like many other values and norms, are learned in the family and it is there where it should be first prevented and its effects ameliorated.
7. Youth Unemployment [Goal 8]. Our societies are unable of integrating young people, leading to situations which cause young people to stop looking for a job, to work in unsuitable conditions, and to delay starting a family of their own.

Time poverty and population age structures

For decades, lack of financial resources has been a problem, and it still is in the developing economies. But too often people are plagued by ‘time poverty’ — the idea that there’s not enough time to do all ones needs to do. And time is money. The more money people make, the more valuable their time, the more time they devote to work to earn more. With that logic, work breaks become money-losers. But unpaid work is what it says it is: you don’t get any money for doing it but every society needs it to function. The problem is, people are stressed and burned out, and they often don’t look after those in their family who need help and support. A third dimension of poverty arises that way — poverty of care and affection.

While tackling this kind of poverty and boosting a population sustainable development there is a wide array of approaches. According to some experts, ‘flexicurity’ — a term first coined by Prime Minister of Denmark Rasmussen in the 1990’s, is designed and implemented across four policy components: 1) flexible and reliable contractual arrangements; 2) comprehensive lifelong learning strategies; 3) effective active labour market policies; and 4) modern social security systems providing adequate income support during employment transitions.

Within the United Nations, complementary approaches for time poverty alleviation strategies have been mentioned, such as the “four areas of relevance to the family noted by the General Assembly in resolution [64/133](#): confronting family poverty; promoting intergenerational solidarity; reconciling work and family life; and collecting national and regional data on family well-being” (Report of the Secretary General, [A/66/62](#)).

Also in this regard, our Federation in the World Congress Final Declaration of Mexico City, October 2015 summarized the objectives that we aim to achieve in the following points:

1. Empower families by promoting the integration of a family perspective into policy-making at the national, regional and international levels; by removing social, political, legal and economic barriers to their active participation in society; by enabling them to assert greater control over their resources and life choices, especially including decisions on investments in health, housing and education; and by providing instruments to recognize the time, effort and money that committed families invest in their children.
2. Develop active measures to support the psychological well-being of children and youth with sensitivity to family situations; prevent violence, addictions and juvenile delinquency; and promote school to work transitions and young adults' economic security to facilitate family formation and stability, particularly among those with insecure socio-economic resources.
3. Acknowledge and encourage the responsibility of fathers and the contribution of men to families, develop policies to address the impact of the absence of males on family well-being and promote active fatherhood and the right to family reunification of immigrants.
4. Facilitate intergenerational care and support and promote equitable access to resources that strengthen family ties, such as family enrichment courses, positive parenting classes or mentoring programmes, and encourage volunteering of older persons in schools and offering community service requirements for high-school students, requiring young people to help older persons with their daily activities.

Therefore, work-life balance is the way to counteract the three dimensions of time poverty. The time, effort and money that families invest in their children should receive some form of social and economic return, because these children will eventually become the professionals needed to ensure that society continues to function and, in many cases, that the fiscal system remains balanced.
