Why the United Nations International Year of the Family?

Voice of the Family in Africa (VOFA)

International Federation for Family Development (IFFD), Strathmore University Law School

Africa Preparatory Conference 2014

"Confronting family poverty and social exclusion; ensuring work-family balance; advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity in Africa"

Nairobi, 23-24 January 2014

Renata Kaczmarska
Focal Point on the Family, DPSD/DESA

Why focusing on families?

- ☐ Families make a critical contribution to society (economic, reproductive, productive, social integration, social cohesion…).

- ☐ Many socio-economic trends (rapid ageing in some regions, increased female labour participation, child poverty, lower fertility, high mobility, intergenerational disconnect) make it clear that policies in support of resilient & strong families are important for overall success of development efforts and a well-being of society at large.

- ☐ Such trends also justify a more family-oriented focus of policy-making, long recognized by the international community.

United Nations frameworks & the family

- Human rights framework

- 1990s framework
United Nations conferences & summits

- 2000 framework
Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

- International Year of the Family & its follow up framework
IYF + 20
GA & ECOSOC resolutions

Post 2015 Development Agenda

International human rights instruments & the family

☐ Universal Declaration of Human Rights:
"The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the state"

☐ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 10
"The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize that:

1. *The widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to the family, which is the natural and fundamental group unit of society, particularly for its establishment and while it is responsible for the care and education of dependent children. Marriage must be entered into with the free consent of the intending spouses.*
2. *Special protection should be accorded to mothers during a reasonable period before and after childbirth. During such period working mothers should be accorded paid leave or leave with adequate social security benefits.*
3. *Special measures of protection and assistance should be taken on behalf of all children and young persons without any discrimination for reasons of parentage or other conditions. Children and young persons should be protected from economic and social exploitation. Their employment in work harmful to their morals or health or dangerous to life or likely to hamper their normal development should be punishable by law. States should also set age limits below which the paid employment of child labour should be prohibited and punishable by law."*

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Article 11

- □ *1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an <u>adequate standard of living for himself and his family,</u> including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent.*

Human rights instruments: UN conventions

- ☐ Human rights law upholds the right of people to marry and form a family, and the right of children to a family. As the family may be vulnerable to economic pressures, HR law seeks to support the family by stipulating State obligations towards the family: keeping families together, reunify them in case of separation.

- ☐ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: relevant on discrimination and unequal treatment of women and their status in the family, setting provisions for equal rights and responsibilities within a family; enabling parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities (GA/RES/34/180, annex)

- ☐ Convention on the Rights of the Child: family is the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members & particularly children should be afforded protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community. Parents have the most important role in the bringing up of children and are encouraged to deal with rights issues with their children 'in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child' (A/RES/44/25, annex)

- ☐ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: persons with disabilities and their family members should receive the necessary protection and assistance to enable families to contribute towards the full and equal enjoyment of the rights of persons with disabilities (A/RES/61/106, annex).

International Labour Organisation Conventions

☐ Convention on Workers with Family Responsibilities: absence of effective measures for reconciling work and family responsibilities compromise development. The Convention calls upon States to create national policies enabling workers with families to engage in employment without risking discrimination and take measures to develop or promote community services, public or private, such as childcare and family services and facilities, thus enabling parents to engage in employment.

☐ The Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families requires State Parties to take appropriate measures to ensure the protection of the unity of the family of migrant workers and facilitate their reunification.

Family authority vs human rights of its members

- ☐ There are families enforcing harmful traditional practices against women, perpetrate violence against women and children (female genital mutilation, early & forced marriage are especially troubling).

- ☐ Some members of families, such as older persons or persons with disabilities may be especially vulnerable to neglect & abuse within their families.

- ☐ Thus family authority is limited by the human rights of its individual members.

1990s framework:
International Conferences and Family:
World Summit for Social Development, 1995

- ☐ The family is the basic unit of society and as such should be strengthened. It is entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support.

- ☐ Family has supporting, educating and nurturing roles & contributes to social integration and social cohesion.

- ☐ Social & economic policies designed to meet the needs of families are encouraged as are promotion of mutual respect, tolerance and cooperation within the family and promoting equal partnership between women and men in the family. (Programme of Action of the WSSD, paras. 80-81)

1990s framework:
International Conferences and Family

☐   International Conference on Population and Development, 1994: family relevant policy recommendations on housing, work, health, social security and education, including parenting. Families in vulnerable situations are in need of particular assistance (single-parent, headed by women, refugee and displaced families, those where family members are affected by HIV/AIDS, substance dependence, child abuse and domestic violence, families living in poverty, affected by war, natural disasters, etc.) Support for multigenerational families is noted in the context of care.

☐   More principles are contained in Plans of Action of major UN conferences (e.g. on women, children)

Family, youth and older persons

- World Programme of Action for Youth + Supplement: globalization and development have resulted in cutting of young people from their families, unemployment is a factor in preventing family establishment. Intergenerational aspect is key.

- Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002: families are important to promote reciprocity, intergenerational solidarity and interdependence; ensuring conditions enabling families to provide care and protection to persons as they age through family-friendly and gender-sensitive policies aimed at reconciling work and care-giving responsibilities is emphasized.

Actions to support family functions

☐ Encouraging social & economic policies that are designed to meet the needs of families and their individual members, especially the most disadvantaged and vulnerable members, with particular attention to the care of children.

☐ Ensuring opportunities for family members to understand and meet their social responsibilities.

☐ Promoting mutual respect, tolerance and cooperation within the family and within society.

☐ Promoting equal partnership between women and men in the family.

(Programme of Action of the WSSD, para. 81)

2000 framework:
Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

☐ The millennium development goals comprise eight international development goals which were set by the United Nations: eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender and equality and empowering women, reducing child mortality rate, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability, and developing a global partnership for development.

☐ Apart from 'family planning', the family/families are not mentioned in the MDGs or the Millennium Declaration itself.

☐ There is an agreement that the post-2015 Development Agenda should be much wider and possibly include guidelines on how to achieve certain goals (sustainability, inequality, youth).

MDGs & the family
Relevant areas

- ☐ Poverty reduction

- ☐ Education of children

- ☐ Gender equality & women empowerment

- ☐ Reduction in child and maternal mortality

The Millennium Development Goals, especially those relating to poverty, education and maternal mortality reduction are difficult to achieve unless the strategies to achieve them focus on the family.

**Family-based interventions:
poverty reduction**

☐ Target families as beneficiaries and empower them to make good decisions for the benefit of the family unit (conditional cash transfers dependent on parents taking responsibility for children's health and education are working).

☐ Support small enterprises including family businesses.

☐ Invest in work-family balance so that parents can find gainful employment and be able to care for their families as well.

☐ Invest in maternal prenatal nutrition, breastfeeding programmes, complementary nutrition for young children in schools.

Family-based interventions:
universal primary education

☐ Invest in childcare.

☐ Eradicate child labour.

Children are sometimes pulled out of school to care for younger siblings in the absence of affordable and quality childcare.

Invest in quality childcare should be linked to primary education targets.

Focus on child labour eradication through legislation and expanding employment opportunities for families with young children.

Family-based interventions:
gender equality

- ☐ Educate boys and girls.

- ☐ Target men, community leaders in interventions (e.g. prevention of domestic violence, abuse of older women, etc.).

- ☐ Promote men's involvement in family life – pointing to benefits for families and men themselves.

Family-based interventions: child mortality

☐ Invest in post-natal care, better nutrition.

☐ Invest in mother's education.

☐ Conduct immunization campaigns targeting extended families, including grandparents who may be primary care providers in many families.

International Year of the Family & its follow-up

The International Year of the Family was observed under a theme: *Family Resources and Responsibilities in a Changing World* & a motto *Building the Smallest Democracy at the Heart of Society.*

The International Year of the Family, 1994 set off actions benefiting families at national, regional and international levels.

Starting in 1994, International Days of Families have been observed to raise awareness on family-related issues.

A resolution on the International Year noted "The General Assembly appeals to Member States as well as to other participants in the observance of the Year to highlight 1994 as a special occasion to benefit families of the world in their quest for a better life for all, based on the principle of subsidiarity, which seeks solutions to problems at the lowest level of the societal structure". (GA/RES/47/237, 1993)

International Year of the Family
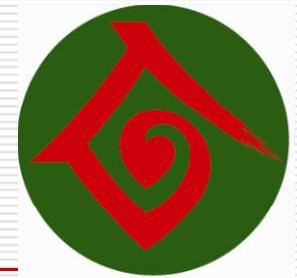## & its follow up process, 1994, 2004, 2014

☐ The observance of the Year gave impetus to consider family issues at an international forum.

☐ Research on family-related topic has been conducted.

☐ Based on the research, Reports of the Secretary-General on a variety of subjects of concern to families have been issued and considered by the General Assembly & the Commission for Social Development (a subsidiary body of ECOSOC).

☐ General Assembly and Economic and Social Council adopted resolutions on the family and offered recommendations to Member States, civil society and other stakeholders.

Objectives of the International Year of the Family & its follow-up process
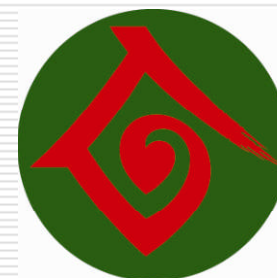
- ☐ Raise awareness on challenges faced by families.

- ☐ Strengthen national institutions to develop, implement and monitor family-centered policies.

- ☐ Improve the collaboration among national and international civil society organizations in support of family-oriented activities.

- ☐ Build upon the results of major events of concern to the family and its individual members.

- ☐ Review challenges and recommend solutions.

- ☐ Support families in their functions.

- ☐ Share good practices.

International Year of the Family + 20

- ☐ *Confronting family poverty and social exclusion*

- ☐ *Ensuring work-family balance*

- ☐ *Advancing social integration & intergenerational solidarity within families and communities*

2014 – TWENTIETH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE
INTERNATIONAL
YEAR OF THE FAMILY

The themes...

☐ The themes reflect the mandate of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 1995 (eradication of poverty; expansion of productive employment – now decent work agenda; social integration).

☐ The three areas still require attention & urgent action to benefit the well-being of families and society.

☐ There are major demographic and socio-economic trends impacting these issues.

☐ They are relevant in all regions.

Confronting family poverty & social exclusion

☐ Poverty eradication is a primary concern of the United Nations on its Millennium Development Goals Agenda.

☐ Poverty eradication should focus on families to succeed (we have examples of successful efforts of cash transfer programmes, child benefits, etc.).

☐ Fighting social exclusion, manifested by discrimination, prejudice, inequality, lack of access to resources and lack of voice is contributing to poverty eradication.

Poverty & social exclusion

- Poverty and social exclusion are still prevalent.

- In many countries, including OECD countries, child poverty has not diminished despite numerous efforts and even is on the rise in some countries.

- Despite positive legislation, social exclusion of groups & individuals continues (ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, older persons).

- Global progress has been uneven.

Ensuring Work-Family Balance

☐ Families, especially those with small children or caring for older persons have increasing difficulties in reconciling work and family responsibilities due to such trends as:

- Higher number of women enter labour force.

- There is less availability of the next of kin to care for vulnerable family members.

- Work responsibilities are more demanding.

- Competition for jobs is on the rise.

Advancing social integration and intergenerational solidarity within families and communities

☐   Trends impacting intergenerational relations:

- Extended families are shrinking & may not live in close proximity (in search for jobs, due to migration, as a personal choice).

- Families are more diverse.

- Young people delay marriage & child-bearing & depend on their families longer.

- Populations are rapidly ageing.

- Burden of care is disproportionately placed on women.

2013 General Assembly
Economic and Social Council resolutions

- ☐ The family has the primary responsibility for the nurturing and protection of children and parents share responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child.

- ☐ We need inter-agency and regional cooperation on family issues to generate greater awareness.

- ☐ It's important to create a conducive environment to strengthen and support all families.

- ☐ Equality between women and men and respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all family members are essential to family wellbeing and to society at large.

- ☐ Civil society, including research and academic institutions has a pivotal role in advocacy, promotion, research and policymaking in respect of family policy making and capacity-building (A/RES/67/142).

General Assembly and Economic and Social Council resolutions: the importance of family policy

- ☐ Family centred policies and programmes are part of an integrated comprehensive approach development.

- ☐ Family-related provisions of the outcomes of the major UN conferences and summits provide policy guidance on how to strengthen family-centred components of policies and programmes (A/RES/67/142).

General Assembly and Economic and Social Council resolutions: the areas of family policy

- ☐ Poverty reduction: deliver of family-centred benefits (social protection & social transfer programmes) to reduce family poverty and prevent the intergenerational transfer of poverty.

- ☐ Work-family balance: strengthen provision for parental leave, extend flexible working arrangements for employees with family responsibilities, promote gender equality and empowerment of women, enhance paternal involvement and support a wide range of quality childcare arrangements.

- ☐ Provision of social protection, investment in cross-generational facilities, volunteering programmes for youth and older persons, mentoring and job sharing programmes (A/RES/67/142).

Focus of UN activities on families

The UN activities relating to families focus on:

- ☐ Research & report writing on family policy issues mandated by UN resolutions & beyond
- ☐ Convening of expert meetings
- ☐ Promotion and advocacy on the role of families in development
- ☐ Exchange of good practices
- ☐ Cooperation with UN and regional entities, civil society and academics including technical cooperation with Governments at their request

Regional family frameworks:
Plan of Action on the Family in Africa

☐ Plan of Action on the Family in Africa was adopted by African Union in July 2004 to mark the 10th anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

☐ Advocacy instrument for strengthening family units, addressing their needs, improving their welfare and enhancing life chances of its members.

☐ 2010 mid term review indicated some promising signs including higher allocations towards poverty alleviation, social services & sustainable development but overall "African countries are lagging behind and fail to implement an effective protection and support to the African family".

African Common Position in preparation for the 20ᵗʰ anniversary of the International year of the Family, 2014

☐ African Common Position is 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.

☐ Priority policy issues:
- Poverty
- Work-family balance
- Intergenerational solidarity

Recommendations for action

☐ National level:

- Develop and implement comprehensive family-focused socio-economic policies, recognise the diverse, changing needs and the rights of families and their individual members.

- Support the family in its caregiving functions (care subsidies, affordable access to childcare and afterschool services, community care services to care for older persons.

- Improve maternity leave provisions, introduce paternity leave, flexible working arrangements.

- Provide pensions to older persons (in the context of HIV/AIDS and changing family structures).

Post 2015 Development Agenda & Family

Global discussions on post 2015 development agenda are currently under way. Several new elements may be included, such as environmental sustainability, inequality and various aspects of social integration considerations. Important issues impacting development & relating to family:

☐ Gender equality issues (average marriage age of women, child marriage, rates of women literacy, girl child's school enrolment, harmful traditional practices)

☐ Education

☐ Employment

Important general issues:

☐ Human rights & social justice

☐ Equity and equality

☐ Good governance

☐ Public investment in health and education

☐ Priority for women, children & youth

Family policy and post-2015 Development Agenda

- ☐ Over the years, the international community has recognized the importance of family-centred policies and programmes as part of an integrated rather than sectoral approach to development.

- ☐ The international community has agreed that the family is the fundamental unit of society entitled to protection by society and the State.

- ☐ It acknowledged that notwithstanding different family forms and structures, families are fundamental to social development.

- ☐ Focusing on families offers a comprehensive approach to solving of some of the persistent developmental challenges such as intergenerational transfer of poverty and inequality (e.g. families' economic status, stability and parenting quality are vital for children's wellbeing and the very quality of family life is an important contributor to future responsible, just and equal society).

Family policy and post-2015 Development Agenda

☐ There is a tendency to focus on women and children and often call it family policy. Prevailing discrimination of women and persistent child poverty may seem to justify this approach. However, focusing on women and children may not be sufficient not only for poverty reduction or work-family balance but for advancing gender equality and children's rights as well.

☐ Head of UN Women recently noted that the campaign for gender equality has been dominated by women and it needs to be broadened to include boys and men.

☐ Similarly, taking into account family dynamics in policy development and service provision if designed and implemented well is bound to result in improved outcomes for all family members.

Family policy and post-2015 Development Agenda

☐ Consequently, at the UN we recommend that States may find it useful to develop a long-term strategy to guide future United Nations action on families, such as an action-oriented review mechanism focusing on specific areas in family policy development.

☐ The two areas bound to gradually grow in importance are work-family balance and intergenerational issues. Recent trends, such as rapidly falling fertility rates in developed countries, family instability, growing divorce rates as well as mounting difficulties in family formation encountered by young people necessitate urgent action especially in the area of work-family balance and sustainable livelihoods. Similarly, changing family structures, urbanization and mobility as well as rapid ageing and challenges of ensuring human rights and dignity for older persons require a serious look at policies supporting healthy and reciprocal intergenerational interactions so that generations are not perceived as competing against one another.

☐ Both issues are not sufficiently addressed at the international forum despite their growing implications for issues such as the future of women's labour participation and ageing. Depending on the support of Member States, a systematic follow up on family policy development in these areas could be pursued and coordinated.

Challenges

☐ Families are often considered private entities not to be regulated by Government policy.

☐ There are disagreements over the definition of the family (culture, politics, ideology) & no agreed plan of action has been established at the international level.

☐ 'Family agenda' is perceived as conservative aiming at promoting 'family values' or traditional family type.

☐ Family policies depend on national priorities and usually change with political changes.

Comprehensive socio-economic policies focusing on families: benefits

From an international perspective we will continue to support the view that there are many benefits to promoting family-oriented policies which will result in having:

☐ Cost effective public policies

☐ Happier & wealthier families

☐ Better child outcomes

☐ Stronger intergenerational bonds….

Conclusions & a way forward

- [ ] Family-centred policies for poverty reduction, work-family balance and intergenerational relations complement one another have a positive effect on individual families, communities and societies at large.

- [ ] They should ensure a variety of opportunities and choices for families in accordance with their needs and values and should be developed in cooperation with families themselves.

- [ ] Family policies are cross-cutting and should aim at empowering families, enlarging their choices and not replacing them or assuming their functions.

- [ ] Family organizations, civil society and other stakeholders should cooperate in family policy design, monitoring and implementation.

- [ ] The impact of other socio-economic policies and family law on families should also be monitored (e.g. tax policy and family stability, custody laws).

Conclusions & a way forward continued

- [ ] It is useful to recognize the role of families in overall development efforts.

- [ ] International Year of the Family + 20 preparations gave us an opportunity to refocus on families, focus on recent trends affecting families and focus on important issues.

- [ ] Development of policies for poverty eradication, work-family balance and intergenerational solidarity should be promoted at all levels and good practices exchanged since it contributes to the well-being of families and society at large.

- [ ] Over the past decades family perspective in development efforts has been gradually gaining ground. The work of integrating a family perspective into overall development efforts as well as research and advocacy on family issues will continue to be promoted at the United Nations for the years to come.
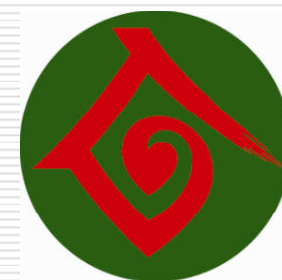
- [ ] We count on your support!

Thank you!

For more information contact:

Renata Kaczmarska, Focal Point on the Family

kaczmarska@un.org

Website:

http://social.un.org/index/Family/InternationalObservances/
TwentiethAnniversaryofIYF2014.aspx

2014 - TWENTIETH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE
INTERNATIONAL
YEAR OF THE FAMILY