



FAMILY MATTERS



Circular No. 23

Follow up of the International Year of the Family

December 1999

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, 52/81 of 12 December 1997, and 54/124 of 17 December 1999 respectively. [The Family Unit welcomes ongoing information and data on family-related policies and programmes from concerned actors and focal points].

THE SECRETARIAT

The General Assembly, in its resolution 44/82 OF 8 December 1989, proclaimed 1994 as International Year of the Family. The Year's objectives are to, inter alia, (a) increase awareness of family issues among Governments; (b) strengthen national institutions in formulating, implementing and monitoring policies in respect of families; (c) stimulate efforts to respond to problems affecting, and affected by, the situation of families; and (d) enhance the effectiveness of local, regional and national efforts to carry out specific programmes concerning families. The Assembly called for the widest possible dissemination of the objectives of the Year as well as periodic reporting on activities undertaken to follow up the Year. In its resolution 52/81 of 12 December 1997, the Assembly recognized that the basic objective of the follow-up should be to strengthen and support families in performing their societal and developmental functions and to build upon their strengths, in particular at the national and local level.

A report of the Secretary General (A/54/256) was prepared. It was the third

biennial report on follow-up activities to the Year, prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 50/142 of 21 December 1995 and Assembly decision 53/434 of 9 December 1998 on the organization of work of the Third Committee and biennial programme of work of the Committee for 1999-2000. This report is based primarily on information made available by Governments, the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and research institutions.

SUMMARY OF THE REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

GENERAL

Five years after the International Year of the Family, the discourse and debate at the global level continue to express the concern of Governments for actions that support families as the basic units of society. A common understanding exists that all actions and policies affect and impact on families as well as that specific measures are needed to preclude negative consequences in the attempt to support and strengthen families. To this end, many Governments have so geared national development strategies as to take into account the role of families in society or the effect of those strategies on families. They have recognized the need to build family-friendly societies based on the tenets of social integration contained in the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development.

Family-related activities undertaken by the United Nations system including the regional commissions during the follow-up period were facilitated by the global conferences of the 1990s. Three main activities can be identified: (a) providing technical assistance to Governments at their request; (b) preparing reports and studies on the situation and needs of families; and (c) organizing meetings, seminars and workshops on family-related topics.

Non-governmental organizations at all levels continue to increase public awareness and undertake research on family-related issues. Research activities range from data

collection to more action-oriented investigation to assist Governments in policy formulation by providing concrete recommendations for improving the situation of families. Also, many non-governmental organizations have organized family-related meetings, seminars, workshops and conference at all levels.

Many research and academic institutions have prepared studies and surveys on the situation and needs of families. Subsumed under the topic of research are: (a) assessment of the role of the family in the socialization process and how this role has been affected by social change; (b) review of the various governmental and non-governmental programmes relating to families; (c) assessment of explicit and/or implicit family policies; (d) review of the resources available to family programmes; and (e) a review of the existing policies and legislation affecting the status and situation of families in society.

Notwithstanding the achievements since 1994, there remain a number of problem areas requiring attention at all levels. One such area involves the need to develop common ground and common understanding among constituencies viewing family issues from different perspectives. Another concerns the lack of basic knowledge in many countries on many aspects of the family, with the result that policy often remains based on outdated information or on stereotypes.

In view of the above, the following recommendations for action were proposed:

(a) There is a need to improve the knowledge base through research, data collection and collaboration among Governments and research institutions, nationally, regionally and internationally. To this end, the United Nations system, including the regional commissions, should play a supporting role, including providing technical cooperation as appropriate and as requested by Governments;

(b) Priority should be given to the building up of local capacity in developing countries and in countries with economies in transition and to the training of personnel to formulate, implement, monitor and evaluate appropriate policies and programmes related to families;

(c) Attention needs to be given to the most appropriate way of observing the tenth anniversary of International Year of the Family in 2004 in order to strengthen follow-up, especially at the national and local levels. In this connection, the Commission for Social Development might be invited to undertake in 2004 a comprehensive review of the global situation of families based, *inter alia*, on information made available by the Secretary-General in collaboration with other concerned entities of the United Nations system;

(d) In order to meet the requests from Governments for assistance in formulating and implementing family-related policies and programmes, and to strengthen the family component of development projects when requested, the resources of the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities need to be increased.

ACTIVITIES OF SOME RESEARCH CENTRES ON FAMILY MATTERS

A salient feature of the follow-up to the Year is the concerted development of research activities on families at all levels and the widening scope of international cooperation on family research. Some research centres carry out surveys, studies and investigations to formulate national family policy. These are mostly government institutions operating within a ministry or a department of the country concerned. They have provided valuable input to the policy process at the national level and have promoted international research on the family and related issues. For example, in Malta, a Family Study and Research Commission was created to determine the situation of families and set future policies. The Institute of Child Health in Greece, supervised by the Ministry of Health and Social Services, undertakes research on domestic violence, education, and the study of family relations and family structures, at the global, European and national levels. The Australian Institute of Family Studies continues to serve as the national information resource centre on family-related information.

Other research centres and institutes are non-governmental private institutions that focus on family well-being. For example, the National Women's Education Centre in Japan, in 1995-1999, has undertaken research on parenting, child-rearing, promoting lifelong learning for women and

gender equality. The Austrian Institute for women and gender equality. The Austrian Institute for Family Studies (OIF), in 1995-1998, conducted national surveys on childcare, the efficacy of childcare vouchers, and the impact of telecommuting and home-based work on family relations. The research activities of the Institute of Labour and Social Affairs, Poland, during 1997-1999, focused on the conditions of families during the transition to market-based economies and on the evolution of families and the welfare State in Europe.

The European Observatory on Family Matters prepares regular information on family policies in all member States of the European Commission. The Observatory studies the development of family structures and living arrangements in the individual member States of the Commission, and compares national family policies (for example, taxation of families in different countries). In April 1998, the Austrian Institute for Family Studies was designated as the new coordinator of the European Observatory on Family Matters for a six-year term.

The Secretariat will continue to encourage research and discussions 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 Year objectives and strategy at all levels. A Directory of Focal Points on the Family will be prepared periodically.

UNITED NATIONS TRUST FUND ON FAMILY ACTIVITIES

Core activities and objectives of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat 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 the reinforcement of family-related concerns in mainstream development. The areas involved 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, the United Nations 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 (see table). The projects supported by the United Nations Trust Fund for Family Activities have been at all levels and have 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.

THE NEXT ISSUE OF FAMILY MATTERS

The next issue, the first of the millennium (February 2000), will provide information on: (a) The Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family; (b) The Asia-Pacific Forum on Families; (c) The Vienna NGO Committee on the Family; (d)

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national programmes on the family; and (e) The Home Page on the Internet.

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