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**“Family policy in a changing world:
Promoting social protection and intergenerational solidarity”**

**United Nations Expert Group Meeting
Doha, Qatar
14-16 April 2009**

Draft Aide-Memoire

Introduction

The United Nations Programme on the Family in the Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) is organizing, in cooperation with the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development, an Expert Group Meeting on the interrelationship between family policy and the promotion of social protection and intergenerational solidarity, to be held 14-16 April in Doha, Qatar.

The theme of the Meeting is “Family policy in a changing world: promoting social protection and intergenerational solidarity”. Experts dealing with various aspects of social development will be invited from a broad geographical distribution to participate in the meeting in their personal capacities. Experts will be asked to present a paper, participate in group discussions and give their expert opinion and policy recommendations on strengthening family policymaking and integrating a family perspective into the implementation of social protection policies and in the fostering of intergenerational solidarity.

Background

Supporting families, providing social protection and furthering social integration through the strengthening of intergenerational solidarity are all important facets and objectives of social policy and social development. The family, as the basic unit of society, is inextricably linked to the concepts of social protection and intergenerational solidarity. However, while family is often mentioned in the context of social protection and intergenerational solidarity, there is also a need to examine more closely the direct links between these two concepts with family and family-related policies.

The purpose of the Expert Group Meeting is to consider the concept of family policy, analyze how family and family policy are inter-related to social protection and intergenerational issues, and provide policy recommendations to use public policy and, in particular, family policy to support family well-being through strengthened social protection and intergenerational solidarity.

Family policy

One of the objectives of the 1994 International Year of the Family (IYF), reaffirmed by the United Nations General Assembly at the tenth anniversary of the IYF in 2004, is a sustained, long-term effort to strengthen national institutions to formulate, implement and monitor policies in respect of families. In its resolutions 62/129 and 60/133, the General Assembly has also encouraged Governments to continue to make every possible effort to integrate a family perspective into national policymaking. In particular, in resolution 62/129, the General Assembly also recommended that the United Nations contribute to developing strategies and programmes aimed at strengthening national capacities in the area of family and family policy.

Academic definitions of family policy have been marked by differences in their scope, source, target and content. Scholars studying family policy have been unable to come to a consensus agreement on how to define it. Some proposed definitions are very broad and elastic, such as “everything that government does to and for the family”. Many definitions constrain the source of family policy to actions by governmental bodies, disregarding the large number of family-oriented policies that come from employers and civil society organizations. The target of family policy has also often been restricted to families with children, excluding families providing care and economic support to adults, and the content of family policy has often been confined to economic issues, overlooking several other important aspects of family functioning.

One approach to discussing family policy is to make the distinction between explicit policies, which are designed to achieve specific goals regarding families, and implicit policies, which are not specifically or primarily intended to affect families but which have indirect consequences on them. This results in both an explicit definition of family policy, and an implicit definition of a family perspective in policymaking.

Family policy could be defined to involve four main family functions:

- a) family creation (e.g., to marry or divorce, bear or adopt children, provide foster care);
- b) economic support (e.g., to provide for family members’ basic needs);
- c) childrearing (e.g., to socialize the next generation), and
- d) family caregiving (e.g., to provide assistance for the family members who are ill, frail, with disabilities, or to older members in need of assistance or care).

In putting forward this definition, it is also noted that families also provide members with emotional support and transmit cultural and religious values. Scholars supporting this

definition maintain that these intimate functions only matter to social policy on family to the extent that they interfere in some way with the four main functions described above. A question for consideration by the experts in the meeting is to what extent these intimate functions matter for family policy and to what extent they are outside its purview.

For policies that fall outside of the above explicit definition of family policy, a companion, implicit term is *a family perspective in policymaking*. This family perspective in policymaking analyzes the consequences of any policy or programme, regardless of whether it is explicitly aimed at families, for its impact on family well-being, including family stability, family relationships and a family's ability to carry out its responsibilities.

For example, family policy would include issues encompassed under the four family functions, such as child care, child support, divorce, family violence, juvenile crime, long-term care and teenage pregnancy. Tax provisions that create a child-care tax credit or decrease the marriage tax penalty would also be classified as family policy.

Other issues that are not addressed specifically at families would nevertheless benefit from an analysis of family perspectives on these issues and an examination of the ways families are affected by – or contribute to – these problems, and to what extent families need to be involved in solutions. For example, a general tax reform law that raises or lowers taxes on all citizens would not be considered a specific family policy, even though many of the individuals affected happen to live in families. However, such a general tax reform would benefit from a family perspective that specifically analyzes the potential impact of such a reform on families.

Other general social policies, such as improving access to affordable health care and housing, implementing anti-poverty measures, combating substance abuse, and reducing unemployment, would also not be considered family policy, as they are not aimed specifically at families. However, since all of these areas have implications for families, conducting an analysis of these policies from a family perspective would be worthwhile and even necessary to fully understand the impact, whether intended or unintended, of the implementation of these policies on families.

Social protection, family policy and a family perspective

Social protection plays a crucial role in social development. In its 39th session in February 2001, the United Nations Commission for Social Development addressed the priority theme "Enhancing social protection and reducing vulnerability in a globalizing world". An objective of the expert group meeting is to build upon the accumulated knowledge of social protection in order to examine social protection specifically in the context of family policy and integrating a family perspective into social protection systems and policymaking.

Social protection may be seen as an explicit approach to attenuate, reduce, mitigate or cope with vulnerability and risk of individuals and, by implication, families. As a starting

point, it can be broadly understood as a set of public and private policies and programmes undertaken by societies in response to various contingencies to offset the absence of, or substantial reduction of income from, work; provide assistance for families with children; and provide people with health care, housing and other social services.

In the context of the above discussion on family policy, there are direct family policy aspects, where social protection policies are designed specifically for families. And there are also other social protection policies that are not specifically designed for families but will nonetheless affect families. In the interest of family well-being, it would be beneficial to analyse these policies from a family perspective.

Social protection may be seen in the context of two main subcategories: social assistance, which encompasses public actions that are designed to transfer resources to groups deemed eligible due to deprivation; and social insurance, financed by contributions and based upon the insurance principle, where individuals, families or households protect themselves against risk by pooling resources with a larger number of similarly exposed people.

In general, social protection embodies a society's responses to levels of either risk or deprivation that are deemed unacceptable. Therefore, underpinning a social protection system is a social consensus, either implicit or explicit, and based on values of civility, fraternity and social solidarity, concerning what are acceptable levels of risk and deprivation, and ensuring access to livelihood, employment and income; health and education services; nutrition; and shelter. Social protection deals with both the absolute deprivation and vulnerabilities of those living in poverty, as well as the need for security in the face of shocks and lifecycle events, such as ageing, of those not living in poverty.

The ultimate purpose of social protection is to increase capabilities and opportunities and thereby promote human development. One of its principal aims is to provide at least minimum standards of well-being to people and families in dire circumstances, enabling them to live with dignity. The family dimension here is quite evident. In general, social protection should be seen not only as a residual policy of assuring the welfare of the poorest, but also as a foundation at a societal level of promoting social justice and cohesion, developing human capabilities and promoting economic dynamism and creativity.

In the context of developing countries, a large majority of the population is engaged in various forms of rural or urban self-employment, and is therefore outside any formal system of social protection. Extending formal and public social protection to these groups in a meaningful way is a very large challenge. In such contexts, the majority of effective support that individuals receive comes not from public sources but from the family and institutions of kinship, and from community and civil society, especially religious organizations.

There is also often a sense of skepticism concerning the will or capacity of public policy to deliver to those living in the worst conditions of poverty. In addition, women may be

caught in the paradoxical situation that while they have worked hard to care for and protect their families all their lives, but the patriarchal nature of many societies does not give them equal treatment when they need help from either informal institutions or formal systems.

Intergenerational solidarity and the family

The promotion of social integration is one of the major pillars of the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995. Member States of the United Nations committed themselves to, *inter alia*, strengthening institutions that enhance social integration, recognizing in this context the central role of the family and providing it with an environment that assures its protection and support. Important aspects of social integration are social inclusion, social cohesion and intergenerational solidarity, which are often interconnected.

The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), adopted at the United Nations Second World Assembly on Ageing (2002), states that solidarity between generations at all levels – in families, communities and nations – is fundamental for the achievement of a society for all ages. Despite geographic mobility and other pressures of contemporary life that can keep people apart, the great majority of people in all cultures maintain close relations with their families throughout their lives. These relationships work in both directions, with older persons often providing significant contributions both financially as well as the education and care of grandchildren and other kin. The MIPAA therefore contains an explicit objective to strengthen solidarity through equity and reciprocity between generations.

The simplest definition of intergenerational solidarity used by scholars in the field is “social cohesion between generations”. The family is a natural and essential social structure where this cohesion is created and reinforced.

Scholars of intergenerational solidarity are often view the interdependence among generations during the life cycle can be analyzed at two levels:

- a) Macro generational cohesion among age groups (cohorts) who identify with specific events or national and global situations; and
- b) Micro generational cohesion among grandparents, parents and grandchildren within families. Relationships among these generations include those among members of nuclear and extended families – aunts, uncles, cousins, siblings, etc.

During the last several decades there have been at least two significant social changes taking place that affect intergenerational relations, involving ageing and family. One area of change is the unprecedented growth in the number and proportion of older persons in most countries around the world, a trend which is expected to continue. The proportion of people age 60 and over is increasing faster than any other age group. Within this group, a group of “oldest old” is also growing.

The global phenomenon of ageing societies raises fundamental questions and issues about the micro experiences of older people and their families, and the macro responses of societies to the needs of these ageing populations. Population ageing is not necessarily a “problem”, but it does mean a changing balance between older and younger people in society and the challenge of establishing new generational relations, of mutual support, social inclusion and social integration.

The increase in life expectancy of older persons also means that a growing number of them who become frail will need more care and support. Caregiving by adult children to their older parents is a major social issue because families in modern societies are still the main source of care and support for older people. However, the inability or unwillingness of societies to continue to meet the needs of older cohorts alters the balance between family and societal systems in terms of responsibility for the care of older persons. Such a situation creates socio-political and policy challenges to social integration and social cohesion.

Family is also an obvious area of large demographic and societal change. Some of the major changes that families around the world face include plummeting birth rates, increased divorce rates, increased labour force participation of women, increased birth rates of unmarried women, an increase in older persons living independently rather than mainly living with their children and in increase in the number of migrant families and families affected by migration. Another change is in family structures from “pyramids”, with a large number of children and young people relative to a smaller number of older persons, to “beanpoles”, with much less children and young people but an increased availability of extended, intergenerational family and kin.

Changes in patterns of family formation and dissolution and the ensuing diversification of families and households lead to more complex and “atypical” family and household structures. The diversity of family formats creates uncertainty in intergenerational relations and expectations and has specific effects on life-course role transitions, such as grandparenthood and retirement. The structural organization of the family is particularly critical for those in middle age, a phase in life when individuals are likely to play multiple roles of parent, worker, breadwinner/co-breadwinner, and caregiver to older parents.

Increased life expectancies imply that some individuals will be members of a three or even four generation family for longer periods of time, while declining fertility rates and delayed parenthood suggest that others will never be members of such multigenerational families. Sociologists have long recognized that forms of social organization affect well-being. The family constitutes the most basic social institution, representing the first group into which one enters at birth, and these ties remain primary over the life course.

In light of these changing demographic structures and changes in family, intergenerational bonds among family members may be even more important today than previously, because individuals live longer and thus can share more years and experiences with older generations.

There is a need to explore if and how intergenerational solidarity could be strengthened through public action. One major question related to this “triangle” of family, intergenerational solidarity and social protection, is what will be the role of society, through its system of social protection and social services provision, in enhancing family relations and solidarity between generations at the family level. Other related questions include the policy implications of the potential for intergenerational family conflict; the impact of generational family ties on the well-being of older persons; the amount of help and support that is actually exchanged between family generations; and the strength of the bonds of expectations and obligations between generations.

Sources:

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United Nations (2001). Chapter XIV “Enhancing Social Protection”, in *Report on the World Social Situation*, New York.

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Objectives and expected outcome

The primary objective of the Meeting is to provide Member States with expert opinion and recommendations regarding family policy and its relation to social protection and intergenerational solidarity.

The expected outcomes of the Meeting are:

- a) 5-10 page paper (single-spaced) prepared and presented by each expert on issues in the annotated agenda and including policy recommendations; and
- b) final outcome report encompassing a summary of discussion and the policy recommendations from the expert group meeting.

Papers by experts will focus on one or more aspects identified in the outline of the themes below and in a forthcoming annotated agenda, explain its relevance, provide quantitative and qualitative evidence, analyze the roles of social institutions, summarize conclusions and provide policy recommendations. In as much as possible, an emphasis will be placed on policy actions, whether at the local, national, regional or international levels.

The final outcome report of the meeting will summarize the discussions held and provide expert recommendations. The document may also include, as an annex, the papers given by the experts.

The final report will be used as an input to the 2009 Report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family (IYF), which will be issued to the 64th session of the United Nations General Assembly in Fall 2009. The final report of the expert group meeting will also be issued as a stand-alone document for distribution to Member States in the Third Committee of the General Assembly, convened in October 2009, and to the 48th session of the United Nations Commission for Social Development in February 2010. It will also be posted on the Programme on the Family website.

Organizational and Administrative Matters

The total number of participants will be approximately 25, including 12 experts participating in their personal capacity. These experts will be identified and invited by the Division for Social Policy and Development. The Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development will also identify up to four experts. Representatives from international organizations, United Nations offices and agencies will also be invited. Participants are expected to arrive on 13 April and stay through the duration of the meeting, through the end of the day on 16 April.

Discussion and brainstorming will be the preferred method of work. No formal conference style presentations are envisioned. The preparatory process, including advance preparation of written inputs by the experts is seen as very important. It is expected that the participants will submit their papers to the UN Secretariat by 31 March 2009. A preliminary list of substantive issues to be explored is given below, and the Secretariat will also provide an annotated Programme of Work.

The working language of the meeting will be English. All submissions should be provided to the Secretariat in English.

Passports, visas and travel arrangements

Participants will be expected to make necessary arrangements to have up-to-date passports. An information note will be sent out to participants to assist with visas and travel arrangements, which will be handled by the Doha International Institute.

The United Nations assumes that experts invited to participate in meetings are in good health, and that they will inform the Organization of illness or disability that could prevent travel to or participation in the meeting.

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Outline of Themes

The main themes to be addressed by the expert group meeting are:

a) Family policy:

- Explicit and implicit family policy: family policy and a family perspective in policymaking;
- Ways and means to integrate a family perspective into policy-making;
- National experiences with family policies and family policy-making;
- Identifying necessary elements for implementing capacity building in the area of family policy and family policymaking.
- Recommendations for family policymaking at the local, national and international levels;

b) Social protection:

- The interrelationship between family policy and social protection;
- Promoting social protection through family, promoting family through social protection;
- Social spending as an investment in society to enhance social protection, social cohesion and family well-being;
- Best practices and national experiences with family policy and social protection;
- Special issues regarding family policy and social protection in the context of developing countries;
- Developing strategies and programmes to strengthen national capacities in the links between family policy and social protection.

c) Intergenerational solidarity:

- What is intergenerational solidarity and how does it relate to families;
- The interrelationship between family policy, social protection and intergenerational solidarity;
- Promoting intergenerational solidarity through family policy, promoting family through policies aimed at enhancing intergenerational solidarity;
- National experiences with family policy and intergenerational solidarity;
- Special issues regarding family policy and intergenerational solidarity in the context of developing countries;

- Developing strategies and programmes to strengthen national capacities in the area of family policy and intergenerational solidarity.

The experts may also be asked to consider the objectives of the International Year of the Family and the upcoming 20th anniversary of the IYF in 2014 in order to give their expert opinion and advice regarding the continued implementation of the objectives and provide expert recommendations for the focus and emphasis of the IYF and the United Nations Programme on the Family.