

United Nations Expert Group Meeting on  
“Assessing family policies:  
Confronting family poverty and social exclusion  
& ensuring work-family balance”  
1-3 June 2011  
United Nations, New York

**Work-Family Balance and Family Poverty in Asia:  
An Overview of Policy Contexts, Consequences and Challenges**

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## **I. Introduction**

Family and work take primordial roles in Asian societies. To build a family is a filial duty not only to continue a lineage and to assure the care of parents in their old age but also to uphold the family's honor and prestige. Work is a means to meet familial needs. It is usually the men who perform the role of the breadwinner while the women take care of the children, the elderly and the household. However, demographic trends like the declining fertility rates, ageing population, and increased participation of women in the labor force seem to be changing the social landscape in Asia. There are fewer children but greater number of elderly people to care for, and more women who work outside the home. Single-income families have great risk of poverty than dual-income families, yet even greater risk is faced by women and children in case of family dissolution.

This paper will discuss the family and social policy that address family poverty and work-family balance issues in Asia. It will provide an overview of the socio-cultural contexts of policy, examine policy outcomes and challenges, and give recommendations. The region of "Asia" will refer to the nations comprising East Asia, South Asia and Southeast Asia. The term "family" as contemplated in the 1948 UN Declaration of Rights (Article 16) will be used.

## **II. Family and Work: The Socio-Cultural Contexts**

Asian societies, although very diverse, share a common tradition of upholding the family as the basic unit of society. Hindu values stress family harmony and unity, and the responsibility to uphold family honor (Chekki, 1996; Suppal et al., 1996). Islam, in particular its Sunni or traditionalist faction, focuses on the customs and views of the majority of the community and consensus of the family (Ali, 2001). Confucian societies uphold the values of family solidarity and subordination of individual interests to group harmony (Reischauer, 2004).

In this regard, Asian societies traditionally have a strong culture of intergenerational support. Filial piety presupposes that children are indebted to their parents and are obliged to reciprocate them. Children, especially the eldest son (and his wife), are expected to have a sense of gratitude towards their parents and the obligation to provide care for them in their old age. As a consequence, the ideal living arrangement is the extended households consisting of three generations.

The existence of other adult parental figures in the home could ease the burden of child care. In the tradition of strong family solidarity and mutual dependence, parents who live with their married children are counted upon to take care of the grandchildren. Likewise, aunts and other relatives provide care-giving support (Kurrien & Vo, 2004). The help from extended family members buffer the effects of absentee parents who may have to work outside the home. A case in point is China where an estimated 22 million youngsters are left behind in the rural areas with grandparents or other relatives when their parents migrated in search of work (Chao, 2007). An extended family support system has also been found crucial to a child's cognitive and social development even in the midst of poverty in India (Naug, 2000).

Work is also very important in Asia. Hinduism and Buddhism both uphold that anyone could break the chain of rebirths by performing one's duties and responsibilities earnestly (Gupta et al., 2002). The Islamic work ethic views work as an obligatory activity and a virtue needed by a person for self and social life (Ali, 2001). The Catholic faith, practiced in the Philippines and

Timor-Leste, upholds the importance of a strong family life and meaningful work in service of the individual person, his family and society. Confucianism values hard work, self-discipline, strong performance orientation, perseverance and thrift (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). However, work taken to the extreme of putting in long hours, often merely to make ends meet, is most pronounced in Asia. Among the countries where people are working excessively long hours, Korea ranked second to overall leader Peru, with 49.5 per cent of people working more than 48 hours per week. Thailand ranks third, with 46.7 per cent of workers, followed by Pakistan with 44.4 per cent (Lee et al., 2007). The cases of *karo-jisatsu*, i.e. suicide by overwork in Japan reflect tremendous hard work and company loyalty to the point of self-destruction (Kawanishi, 2008).

The sense of family oftentimes extend to the workplace. Within a paternalistic management style, both managers and workers consider themselves as “one big happy family” where there is harmony and caring for one another. Social welfare is provided by the company through policies like for example, rice subsidies or other income in kind or a supervisory style that shows understanding of workers’ family circumstances. Workers return the favor in a spirit of gratitude manifested in desirable behaviors like hard work, initiative, friendliness, etc. For instance, the Thai worker can be highly motivated for the boss who cares and has a *jai dee* (good heart), reflective of the importance of good interpersonal relationships and workplace harmony (Kamoche, 2000).

Most Asian societies clearly delineate the roles of men and women. Conventional interpretations of Confucian teachings view women as subordinate to men. Women in Japan and Korea countries work up to marriage or childbearing. They drop out of the labor force to care for children only to return again to work largely as part-timers when the children are older and become independent. Korean women with university education tend to permanently drop out of the labor market (Kang & Rowley, 2005). Likewise, women in Singapore and Taiwan do not re-enter the labor force once they leave it. In contrast, a strong relationship between women’s higher education and labor market participation was found in Southeast Asian countries of Thailand and the Philippines (Cameron, Dowling, & Worswick, 2001). However, in general, the number of women in paid work vary greatly in Asia with the female labor force participation rate going as low as 32 per cent in Pakistan and as high as 74 per cent in China.

It is not only education that improves a woman’s standing in society. Within her husband’s family, her status could remain marginal until she bears children (Dhruvarajan, 1990). Children occupy a special place in Asian societies, although there is a much greater preference for sons rather than daughters (Gupta, 2003). Only men perform certain traditional rites in China’s patrilineal society, and only a son can carry on the family line. Sons traditionally are considered greater economic asset than daughters who are usually lost to their natal household at marriage. Sons are expected to maintain financial and social ties to families throughout their lives. In bilineal societies like the Philippines, people expect both sons and daughters to help their parents in their old age (De Vos, 1985). However, beyond their economic value as old-age security, children are regarded as family assets that need quality care and education in their early years as well as lifelong support.

Finally, the availability of family workers to render childcare and household services is characteristic of many Asian households. It enables women to pursue a career with varying level of involvement in domestic affairs. Hiring domestic help has lessened work-family conflicts to women managers, for example, in Hong Kong (Ng & Chakrabarty, 2005; Luk & Shaffer, 2005)

and Indonesia (Utomo, 2004) . At the same time, paid work of women in other homes—in and out of their countries— has helped their families to cope with poverty. Asian countries like the Philippines, Indonesia, Burma, Sri Lanka and India are the major sources of paid domestic workers (Hugo, 2006).

### **III. Family Policy in Asia: Consequences and Challenges**

This section will review the existing literature on the various forms of policy responses in Asia as regards family poverty and work-family conflicts, describe the immediate contexts that shaped them and examine their strengths and weaknesses in achieving their objectives.

#### **a. Family Poverty: Back to Basics**

Poverty in Asia basically refers to the lack of physiological needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and medical care. It is distinguished in many ways, for example, by household consumption pattern like the extremely poor, the moderately poor or the vulnerable poor (Bauer et al., 2008), or by severity like the decrepit poor, the very poor and the marginal poor in India (Vijayanand, 2001). In China, the situation of poverty against the backdrop of globalization has given rise to the new urban poor composed of unemployed or laid-off persons, poor workers and retirees from failing or bankrupt enterprises, and poor rural migrants, as distinct from the traditional urban poor of the “Three Nos” households—no relatives, no working capacity and no income source (Liu & Wu, 2006).

Is poverty a form of social exclusion? According to ADB and WB estimates, 1.8 billion people or 54 per cent of the Asia and the Pacific region population are poor. Thus, the poor comprise the majority in Asia, but they can be excluded from economic growth, social development programs, governance intervention and many other factors. It is possibly more applicable in Asia to say that social exclusion contributes to poverty. Families can be marginalized and trapped in poverty with the lack of employment opportunities, poor housing, lack of access to reliable electricity and safe water supply (Xiaoyun & Remenyi, 2008).

Anti-poverty programmes focused on families can take the form of social security benefits in cash or cash equivalents. Indonesia had used cash transfers from October to December 2000 as an anti-poverty scheme but it was discontinued due to the difficulties in program administration (Daly & Fane, 2002). Indonesia’s in-kind benefits include rationed or subsidised amounts of essential goods such as rice, kerosene, nutrition programs and school grants. The provision of benefits in kind rather than in cash have been found to be more effective in accurately targeting the poor (ibid.). The Philippines started a cash transfer program in 2008 involving a monthly grant to the targeted poor of Php 1,400 for a period of five years with conditions of children’s enrolment and attendance in school and mothers’ regular visits to health centers. Nevertheless, the program is beset by criticisms of “perpetuating a mendicant mentality among the poor” (Panti, 2010), costly administration, diversion of funds to graft, and as being a political move to get electoral votes, among others. As a poverty alleviation scheme, it puts a big burden of compliance on the women and children much like the criticisms received by Latin American cash transfer programs (Hall, 2008; Bradsaw & Quiros Viquez, 2008; Barrientos, Gideon, & Molyneux, 2008).

Other anti-poverty programs provide economic aid to the cost of living or childbirth. The Chinese government adopted nationwide in 1999 the Minimum Living Standard Assistance (MLSA) program which aimed to provide basic assistance to urban poor families through set

monthly amounts in yuan. The MLSA has lowered poverty rates but needs improvement in full coverage of eligible families and delivery of entitled benefits (Gao, Garfinkel, & Zhai, 2009). As part of its one-child policy, China provides a child grant for families with one child until he reaches 16 years. To encourage the rise of birth rates, the Japan government provides child allowances for families with children under the age of six, through a 30-70 sharing scheme with the employers. However, the government (national, municipal and prefectural) finances fully the unemployed and self-employed parents' child allowances (Lin & Rantalaaho, 2003). On the other hand, the family-related population policy of Singapore provides child benefits and various types of tax rebates (Singapore Government, 2011). It has been found that child benefits have a small positive impact to fertility rate which negatively correlates with women's earnings (Park, 2005). This means that lost income opportunities of women, net of the child benefits, amount to a cost to having a child in Singapore—a possible disincentive to having more children.

How much are the Asian governments willing to spend on basic social protection package? Basic package consists of “affordable access to basic health care, minimum income support for elderly, disabled and children and employment guarantees and social assistance to unemployed and working poor” (Hagemejer & Behrendt, 2009: 89). Compared with developed economies, countries in Asia spend little in social protection. For example, considering that the bulk of social security spending is invested in pensions, Malaysia devotes 6.5 per cent of GDP to pensions, China 2.7 per cent, and India only 2 per cent (Gerecke & Prasad, 2011). Could they afford more? An ILO study concluded that even low-income countries can afford basic social security if they fulfill some necessary conditions such as the political will to apportion public spending on basic social security, capacity to raise additional revenues, strong public institutions and sustained productivity (Hagemejer & Behrendt, 2009).

Generally considered as more effective and sustainable ways to reduce poverty are those programmes that involve capacity building: the provision of wage employment to the poor through public works programmes in India (Vijayanand, 2001), supplementary employment opportunities among the rural poor during agricultural slack periods, also in India (Gaiha, Imai, & Kaushik, 2001), microcredit services in remote rural areas in Malaysia (Chan & Ghani, 2011), and job creation schemes for unskilled workers in Indonesia (Daly & Fane, 2002). Successful anti-poverty programs from the private sector touch on specific areas that are very valuable for Asian families such as education, housing, health and sanitation. These include Chinese *Qi-fang* online lending community focused on student loans, the Philippine *Gawad Kalinga* which harness volunteerism in building homes for the poor, the Sulabh International which pioneered on sanitary systems freeing many laborers from subhuman practice of scavenging, and the *shokay* apparel company that gives sustainable income to Tibetan herders.

A growing area of concern in family poverty is elderly poverty and the cost of care brought about by the increasing proportion of older people to the total population. In 2005, the elderly people aged 60 years and above in Singapore and Japan make up 12 and 26 per cent, respectively, of the country's total population. Family support for the elder care in the tradition of filial piety is now considered shaky in the light of decreasing number of multi-generational households, increasing rate of female labor force participation, rural to urban migration, etc. Moreover, formal social security programs in the Southeast and East Asian countries have very low coverage of older adults (Chan, 2005). Thus, to help the families bear the costs of elderly care, policy-makers are called to expand social security to a more universal coverage, reinforce

filial piety through values formation, support payments to key caregivers and promote elderly-friendly residence design (Long & Pfau, 2009; Chen, 2009; Suwanrada, 2009).

Treatment and care for sick family members is another significant factor that aggravates family poverty. According to WHO reports, the most common communicable disease in Southeast Asia is diarrhea—affecting 1.27 million individuals annually—followed by lower respiratory infections, malaria, measles and dengue (Gupta & Guin, 2010). Detels (2004) reported that HIV/AIDS has severely affected Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar, although its prevalence does not exceed 2 per cent of the sexually active adult population. (This does not mean that it is not and should not be a significant concern in Asia, but that policy attention and public funding must address the more widespread maladies). In all these diseases, families bear the burden of direct expenses for health care facilities, medicines, laboratory tests and transportation, not to mention the time and effort involved in providing care. Governments are urged to pay urgent attention to improve health infrastructure and information systems, to give sufficient and constant public funding to epidemiological research, and ensure the adequate training and availability of health care professionals.

To conclude this section, the anti-poverty strategies focused on the families that we have reviewed and recommended are basically reiteration of the functions proper to the State and the family. To the State pertains the provision of the adequate human, social and economic environment (access to food and water supply, jobs, education, infrastructure, wealth redistribution, social security spending) needed by families to look after the development and well-being of their family members. There is a challenge for families to foster greater filial piety and strengthen intergenerational support. On the other hand, the governments have to protect and assist the family, respecting always the principles of common good and subsidiarity.

#### **b. Work-Family Balance: The Family in the Spotlight**

Balancing work and family responsibilities has become a relevant topic not only in Europe and North America but also in Asia. Women's increasing labor force participation due to career aspirations, educational achievements and roles as primary or secondary earners for their families have given rise to negative consequences such as work-life conflicts, stress and stress-related sicknesses, overwork, workplace absenteeism, and neglect of children. Demographic changes like the low fertility rates, longer life expectancy, fewer extended households, increasing number of single parents, and growing divorce rates are testing the strength of family values that Asia is known for.

It would be a big step for other countries to recognize the need for national policies to show recognition of, and commitment to, work-family balance. Among the Asian countries, only Japan and the Republic of Korea have ratified the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention No. 156 adopted in 1981. Japan ratified the convention in 1995 when public concern arose over the low fertility levels. Korea ratified it in 2001 at the same time that it was amending its labor standards. Singapore has the most comprehensive program to promote harmony between work and personal/family life. The Singapore Government implemented a wide range of policies and benefits to encourage working parents to have more children. It also supports businesses to introduce work-life programmes in the workplace by providing them with a one-time grant called the Work-Life Works! or WoW! Fund (Singapore Government, 2011).

No country has ratified the Maternity Protection Convention No. 183 adopted in 2000. However, this is not particular of Asia alone, as the Convention has gotten less than 20 per cent

ratification around the world due to preception that the Convention failed “to take into account different national laws and practice” (ILO, 1999). Nevertheless, many countries in Asia have maternity leave with varying lengths like the 52 days in Nepal to around 180 days in Viet Nam. (see Table 1). In Japan, maternity leave benefits are paid for a period of 42 days before and 56 days after confinement with benefit level at 60 per cent of the average daily basic wage (Lin & Rantalaiho, 2003).

Table 1. Maternity Leave Benefits in Selected Asian Countries

	Length of Maternity Leave	% of Wages Paid in Covered Period	Provider of Maternity Coverage
Afghanistan	90 days	100	Employer
Bangladesh	16 weeks	100	Employer
China, People's Republic of	90 days	100	Social Insurance (urban areas, state-owned enterprises regardless of location)
India	12 weeks	100	Social Insurance or employer (for non-covered women)
Indonesia	3 months	100	Employer
Korea, Republic of	90 days	100	Employment Insurance Fund
Malaysia	60 days	100	Employer
Myanmar	12 weeks	67	Social Security
Nepal	52 days	100	Employer
Pakistan	12 weeks	100	Social Insurance
Philippines	60 days	100	Social Security
Sri Lanka	12 weeks	86,100	Employer (86% of wages for workers paid at a time-rate or piece-rate)
Thailand	90 days	100, 50	Employer (45 days at 100%) and Social Insurance (remaining 45 days at 50%)
Viet Nam	4-6 months	100	Social Insurance (duration depends on working conditions, nature of work, disability)

Source: <http://data.un.org>

In practice, compliance of the private sector with regard to maternity leave can be problematic. Whether fully shouldered by the employer or shared by the new mother through income deductions for social security, maternity leave benefits still amount to monetary and compliance costs for the companies. It has been reported that private companies in Japan pay lower maternity benefits than small and medium-sized companies (ibid.). Korea imposes sanctions for not paying entitlements or paying partial benefits, but the penalties are insufficient to ensure implementation (Won & Pascall, 2004). Maternity leave benefits have also given rise to stereotypes of women as expensive labor or as employees who disrupt teamwork due to relatively long absences. Sun (2009) reported pervasive perception among Singaporean career-oriented women of job insecurity related to leave taking. In Thailand, many women workers do not finish their 90-day leave partly because their employers, who pay 100% of their benefits for the first 45 days, ask them to return to work earlier than mandated by law (Kusakabe, 2006). This author’s interviews of women managers and executives in the Philippines revealed that a strategy for promotion was to demonstrate their diligence and dedication by continuing to work from home during maternity leaves.

Paternity leaves are generally shorter. China, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore grant a 3-day paid leave while the Philippines give 7 days paid leave through the social security system. Thailand has a 15-day paternity leave for civil servants while Nepal grants 11 days to male government employees. It is expected of a man to prioritize his work or suffer an income loss and for the woman to take care of their child. Thus, in Japan, many men believe that they are risking job security by taking paternity leave (Mutsumi, 1999). In the Philippines, there is no sanction for non-compliance, and business priorities or work demands take precedence over an individual employee's family needs. In practice, it is sometimes taken as a vacation leave to be used up soon but not necessarily before or during the wife's confinement. Similarly, in Thailand, paternity leave is not taken seriously and it is doubtful if fathers provide family care when they take the leave (Kusakabe, 2006).

The availability of child-care service seem to ease work-family conflicts. However, its effectiveness is highly dependent on the quality of the caretakers, the equipment and facility, sanitation and food. In Thailand, the reported occurrence of accidents and mistreatment of children had discouraged working parents from sending their children to day-care centers (Kusakabe, 2006). In the Philippines, there are very few companies who put up day-care centers for their employees due to the high costs involved and the expectation that families have an extended support system to take care of the children (Caparas et al., 2006). The Korean government provided different kinds of subsidies for private firms with over 300 women workers to establish childcare facilities. But considering that more women are employed in small and medium-sized firms, few women benefited from daycare centers (Won & Pascall, 2004).

Without a reliable and accessible child care service, Asian women would tend to temporarily or permanently give up employment. And when children reach school-age, another kind of childcare is needed wherein mothers heavily spend their time. A clear example is the Japanese *kyoiku mama* ("education mothers") whose personal devotion to their children's trajectory through the educational system explains their withdrawal from the job market (Holloway et al., 2006). For women managers in Hong Kong, it is very important for them to supervise their children's homework as they put a high value on educational achievements (Ng & Chakrabarty, 2005). In general, Chinese parents are typically very involved in their children's education because it is believed to be vital to a child's future success and quality of life (Yang, 2010). Hence, reliance on child care provided within the family is still very strong in Asia.

Considering that the culture of long working hours is the norm within a strong Asian work ethic, flexible work hours seem to be an important work-family balance policy for women in Japan (Kenjoh, 2005) and India (Budhwar et al., 2005). A study showed that flexibility reduced work-family conflicts in Singapore service industry and is strongly correlated to employee commitment (Chow & Keng-Howe, 2006). However, flexibility may not be effective in reducing work-family conflict in China where working long hours is tolerated because it is more difficult to find or keep a job (Spector, 2004). Moreover, a supportive work environment could oblige a Chinese employee to reciprocate by working harder (Luk & Shaffer, 2005),

A factor that will be difficult to put into policy is the culture of support that helps working women to balance their work and family demands. Social support from peers and supervisors can minimize stress and reduce the work-family conflicts. Sun (2009) reported that supportive work supervisors help women in Singapore to think about having more children and strike a better balance at work. In the Philippines, the most popular work-family policy is the permission granted leave the workplace due to family reasons (Caparas et al., 2007). This



implies that within a societal value of close family ties, work supervisors are usually very understanding about family emergencies.

Nevertheless, the work culture in many companies demands uncompromising focus and total dedication that are displayed by men who are typically the family breadwinner. An alternative for women with difficulties to balance work and family is to shift to informal employment or create their own enterprise where they have more command of their time. However, as noted in the latest ADB/ILO report on *Women in Labour Markets in Asia* (2011), alternative work from home or own-account operations expose women to more work interruption and decreased productivity leading to lower income, less social protection, less access to skills upgrading, and no benefit from an organized bargaining power. The way forward includes giving legal protection and voice to informal workers, enhancing entrepreneurship skills, launching communication campaigns that highlight the great social value of caregiving or building a home/family, and investing in research to inform policy-making.

Men's share in domestic responsibilities decreases the workload of women and improve their work-family balance. The division of domestic labor is well studied in Western societies but the recourse to hired helpers in Asian homes has made the men invisible in house chores. However, they are not dispensable to bring up their children who can learn from a mother as well as a father. The participation of men in parenting can already be a significant relief to mother's burden if not to her homemaker's functions. For instance, Chinese parents are traditionally differentiated in roles as characterized as *yan fu ci mu* or "strict fathers, kind mothers" although Shek (2008) has noted that fathers are more demanding of their adolescent daughters than sons and both parents watch over the chastity of their daughters before marriage. A study noted the complementarity in values inculcated by Indian parents to their adolescent daughters: the mothers emphasized competence and effectiveness, while the fathers stressed a positive orientation towards others (Paten-Amin & Power, 2002). Japanese fathers are being encouraged to be more present in family life since "children deprived of hearing conversations between their fathers and mothers may be missing important cues for developing the social discipline demanded of adults" (Japan Times, 2006). Policies to reduce work hours may help to give men opportunities to give more time to child rearing, but it must be supplemented by parenting skills training and counseling services. There must also be mechanisms to provide disincentives for men (and women) to abandon their children.

It is generally accepted in more developed countries that shared responsibilities at home result to satisfactory work-family balance in dual-earner couples. However, oftentimes it is the division of labor itself that does not come about in the first place. Weismann et al. (2008) concluded that division of housework between gender has been "stubbornly resistant to major change" even in egalitarian Dutch society. Hence, it is less probable to expect it in Asia with strong traditional beliefs about the role of a man and woman within the family. Moreover, that men spend more time at home and share the domestic load may not be what women want especially if the family breadwinner has to bring in more income. An interesting insight is seen in Bharat (1995) who studied over 300 working couples in India and found that both career women and non-career women in the sample ranked highly the husband's role as companion of the wife and gave low priority to his role in sharing domestic tasks. There is a need to update research in this area in order to inform policy-making. Family-focused solutions may involve greater awareness of men helping women at home as well as relationship-building through

marriage courses. To minimize contrary behavior, there must also be disincentives to neglect family duties.

The presence of domestic helpers has acknowledged earlier as a success factor for women in Asia to balance career and family. Generally a resource that can help reduce involvement in housework and/or childcare, domestic helpers can also require more time and energy especially if they are sick or have personal problems (Luk & Shaffer, 2005). But there is little knowledge about their qualitative contributions, limitations and areas for improvement because domestic work is generally undocumented and even excluded from the legislative enactments (ILO and ADB, 2011). It might be a help to ensure greater work-family balance if domestic service can be professionalized. This author's interviews of career women revealed that they could effectively focus in the workplace if the maids have adequate skills training in cooking, nutrition, cleaning, laundry, etc. Formation in work and personal values is also very important most especially when maids are entrusted with child care. A well-managed home can lessen a woman's guilt which can oftentimes led her to quit her job thinking that it was too idealistic to even attempt to combine the two incompatible spheres of work and family (Caparas, 2008).

To conclude this section, policy-making in work-family balance in Asia is in its incipient stage, basically focused on parental leaves and child care benefits and services. Work flexibility is still very much a company discretion considering the strong Asian work ethic and little job security. Work and family are universal phenomena but there are certain nuances in Asian cultures that policymaking must consider to assure implementation. Lastly, strengthening parenting and marriage and professionalizing domestic service provide a challenge to family policy in Asia. Greater cooperation from government, business and society is needed for more effective implementation.

#### **IV. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The family in Asia needs more than ever the support and security provided by the State, the market and civil society. Resources must be allocated justly to all members of society and hence family poverty must be addressed more vigorously by the State. And when mothers leave the homes to supplement family income to fight poverty, there is more reason for the State to assist the families. There must be a conscious effort from the State to come up with policies to enable the families to adapt to changing circumstances. Failure to do so would make the families more vulnerable to poverty, social exclusion and dissolution – all of which have harmful effects to society.

Assisting the families does not entail substituting it in caring for its children or elderly members, but facilitating its survival, development and long-term stability through the effective and efficient functions of the State in providing basic necessities like food, water and shelter, creating and securing jobs, building capacity through education, etc. These functions must be carried out, always respecting the principle of common good and subsidiarity. National and international policy must take into account the human and cultural values that shape the family. In addition, a realistic view of human behavior must enlighten policy-making so that it includes disincentives for citizens to neglect or abandon their family responsibilities.

It is highly recommended for the UN to:

- Articulate and commit to a vision of the family that is above any ideology, respecting the basic and timeless values about the family and its rights (e.g. in fidelity to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights).
- Harness regional solidarity in tackling family issues by catalyzing an intra-region coordinating council that will help governments to identify issues, trends and challenges in family policy and promote cooperation among neighbors of similar cultures in developing strategies and sharing best practices. Membership must give equal voice to all countries to be able to establish the credibility and legitimacy of family initiatives in the region.
- Create a research center within the UN University, if it has not done so yet, that will provide the necessary research needed to inform policy-making, uncover biases or gaps in policy implementation and measure their impact. The research center is recommended to be subdivided into regional/sub-regional tracks for a more extensive and in-depth systematic study of family issues particular to each region or sub-region.
- Institutionalize a comprehensive set of performance measures with which to evaluate the achievements of Member States in eradicating family poverty and ensuring work-family balance. (Similar to the Balanced Scorecard approach that is popular in the business sector, this comprehensive set of measures needs to be derived from the UN-articulated vision on the family, and includes different stakeholder perspectives such as the families, civil society, business and government). From the onset, it must also be linked to a motivating reward system to ensure compliance.
- Facilitate sustained compliance to existing Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention and Maternity Protection Convention through various types of incentive systems.

It is highly recommended that the UN encourage the Member States in Asia to:

- Articulate and commit to a vision of the family that is above any ideology, respecting the basic and timeless values about the family and its rights (e.g. in fidelity to the Member State's Constitution)
- Foster a clear and open communication in all sectors of society so that specific policy creation and implementation are discussed thoroughly and the difficulties explored and addressed.
- Initiate a regional discussion on cash transfer programs to leverage on the successes and learn from the failures within Asia and in relation to Latin American experience. The same proposal is made of other anti-poverty strategies like social protection packages, capacity building, elderly poverty, healthcare , collaboration with NGOs, etc.
- Explore issues of corporate policy and culture that hinders or promotes work-family balance with the private sector.
- Create an incentive system for the business sector (e.g. tax breaks, improved government services, etc.) in observing paternal leaves, establishing child care services, encouraging flexible work and other work-family balance policies.
- Model the way, through the civil service or government bureaucracy, in work-family balance by implementing work-family balance policies and programs, and linking them to organizational efficiency and productivity
- Uphold the social significance of caregiving and domestic service through communication media strategies, and regular training to to enhance entrepreneurship, boost employability, or expand horizons for the vulnerable family workers.

- Protect the traditional Asian family values through family-focused solutions to work-family conflicts like parenting skills training, marriage courses and counseling services. Install mechanisms to discourage and sanction neglect of family responsibilities.

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