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Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA. P. O. Box 3243 Telephone 115517 700 Fax :
115517844
www.afica-union.org

CONCEPT NOTE

EXPERT CONSULTATION ON THE FAMILY IN AFRICA
Addis Ababa, 22-23 November 2012

Convened as part of the preparations for the
Twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family,
2014

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I. BACKGROUND

1. The international community proclaimed 1994 as the International Year of the Family (IYF), recognizing numerous contributions made by families to development efforts worldwide. The objectives of the year and its follow up process, including the observances of its tenth and twentieth anniversaries continue to guide national efforts to benefit families. The upcoming twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014 offers an opportunity to refocus on the role of families in development and to take stock of challenges faced by families and recommend a way forward.¹

2. The African Union Plan of Action on the Family in Africa, adopted in 2004 to mark the tenth anniversary of the IYF, was developed to guide AU Member States in developing national structures, policies and programmes in response to challenges facing African families. Such challenges include: inadequate social security mechanisms, high unemployment rate, gender inequality, rural to urban migration, displacement, family disintegration and negative consequences of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

3. To deal effectively with these challenges, the Plan of Action notes the importance of an integrated approach that places the family at the centre of a comprehensive development agenda and advocates for “promotion, formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies to ensure the protection of and support to the African family so as to enable it play its vital role more effectively in the development of Africa.”

4. Priority areas that required urgent attention in the Plan include: poverty alleviation, attainment of higher education, health issues, including reproductive health and focusing on major causes of morbidity and mortality (HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis) as well as strengthening of family relationships and a host of environmental sustainability issues relating to families including water and sanitation, nutrition and food security as well as adequate shelter and land ownership. The Plan of Action further notes that there is a need to identify existing best practices in the provision of social welfare that benefits African families. Notably, the Plan of Action also acknowledges the gender-based discrimination and other challenges persistent in African families.

5. The recent Mid-term review of the African Union Plan of Action on the Family notes several challenges to the implementation of the Plan including low internalization of relevant international and regional instruments; lack of

¹ Report of the Secretary-General on the Preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2014 (A/67/61-E/2012/3), 11 November 2011.

human, financial and infrastructure resources to implement laws, policies and programmes as well as lack of public awareness of family issues

6. As strengthening of African families is one of the priority strategies in the implementation of the Social Policy Framework for Africa (SPF), the Expert Consultation on the Family in Africa will be convened on the eve of the 3rd AU Conference of Ministers of Social Development (CAMSD3). The main output of the Consultation, which will be the African Common Position for the 20th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family, will be considered by the CAMSD3, which will offer an opportunity to raise awareness of the challenges faced by African families; review the socio-economic and demographic trends affecting families; share good practices in family policy development and present a way forward on how to improve the situation of families in Africa.

7. The African Common Position for IYF + 20 will be in line with the overall objectives of the upcoming anniversary. The Common Position is a key opportunity for Ministers in charge of Social Development of AU Member States to re-commit their efforts towards a better implementation and evaluation of the AU Plan of Action on the Family.

II. The IYF+20 process

8. Despite the lack of an international instrument guiding the work on family issues, family-oriented policies and programmes are gradually gaining ground on the development agenda. The United Nations General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council through the Commission for Social Development encouraged Governments to continue to make every possible effort to integrate a family perspective into national policy making and recommended that different stakeholders play a supportive role in promoting the objectives of the International Year of the Family and contribute to developing strategies and programmes aimed at strengthening national capacities.

9. The recent resolutions of the Economic and Social Council on the "Preparations for and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family" noted the importance of designing, implementing and monitoring family-oriented policies, especially in the areas of poverty eradication, full employment and decent work, work-family balance, social integration and intergenerational solidarity. The Member States were further encouraged to continue their efforts to develop appropriate policies to address family poverty, social exclusion and work-family balance and share good practices in those areas (ECOSOC Resolution 2011/29 of 2911).

10. The most recent resolution of the Commission for Social Development invited relevant stakeholders to support the preparations for regional meetings in observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. (E/CN.5/2012/3 to be adopted by ECOSOC in July 2012). Similarly, the relevant stakeholders were invited to continue providing information on their activities in support of the objectives of, and preparations for, the

twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and share good practices and data on family policy development to be included in relevant reports of the Secretary-General. In the light of socio-economic trends affecting Africa, the three areas of focus for the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of Africa: poverty reduction, work-family balance and intergenerational relations have gained a special importance in Africa.

11. The new focus on **poverty** in Africa takes into account the vulnerability of families in Africa, and threats to the human capital of children which has lifelong and intergenerational consequences and has resulted in regional and national commitments to social protection programmes, including labour market policies and programme, social insurance programmes, social assistance, micro and area-based schemes, and child protection.² The adoption of the AU Plan of Action on the Family in Africa was a landmark achievement. Nevertheless, many AU Member States still lag behind and fail to implement the key tenets of the Plan of Action that aim at reducing poverty and social exclusion. Instead, many Member States address poverty through the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers frameworks aimed at achieving overall national growth, poverty reduction and sustainable development. However “given the documented centrality and indispensability of the family in Africa’s sustainable development and poverty reduction efforts, it is imperative for countries in the region to encourage and support the effective multi-sectoral implementation of the key recommendations of the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa as well as to develop and integrate policies and strategies to address families in vulnerable and crisis situations”.³

12. **Work-family balance** issues have also gained ground with the growing number of women entering the labour market, and the diminishing availability of next of kin to care for the young and the old within the extended family systems. While work-family policies certainly compete with a number of other social development goals, including poverty eradication and service provision, there is a need to recognize that mechanisms should be put in place to help workers with caring responsibilities. Urgent action is needed in improving maternity leave provisions, introduction of paternity leave, introduction of flexible working arrangement and affordable childcare services. Moreover, there is a need to study the gaps that exist between the needs for workers and their families and the existing labour legislations and collective labour agreements.⁴

13. In the area of **intergenerational issues**, the weakening of extended family systems necessitates greater focus on intergenerational dynamics

² Zitha Mokomane “Anti-poverty policies focusing on families: regional overview: Africa” Paper prepared for Expert Group Meeting on Assessing Family Policies, United Nations, NY, 1-3 June, 2011.

³ Zitha Mokomane “Good Practices in Anti-Poverty Family-Focused Policies and Programmes in Africa: Examples and Lessons Learnt” Paper prepared for the Expert Group Meeting, UN, NY, 15-17 May 2012.

⁴ Zitha Mokomane “Work-family balance: Overview of policies in developing countries” Paper prepared for an Expert Group Meeting on Assessing Family Policies, United Nations, NY, 1-3 June 2011.

within households. Due to the HIV and AIDS pandemic, in the absence of parents, many grandparents are left to care for their grandchildren as young parents succumb to the epidemic. Effective policies, such as pension provisions and child-oriented social protection policies are indispensable to ensure that grandparents cope with those increased responsibilities. In addition, gender equity issues have gained attention as central to family well-being and intra-family functioning and deserve special consideration.

III. MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE EXPERT CONSULTATION

14. The key focus of the Consultation will be the consideration and development of the African Common Position for the 20th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

IV. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

15. It is anticipated that the Consultation will produce the African Common Position for the 20th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family which will be presented for consideration by the CAMSD3.

V. FORMAT OF THE CONSULTATION

16. The Consultation will take place over two days, 22-23 November 2012, and it will consist of presentations by experts and discussion by participants.

VI. AGENDA AND DOCUMENTATION

17. The Consultation will consider the following agenda items:

- i) Poverty alleviation and access to basic services for African families
- ii) Work-family issues
- iii) Strengthening of African families and intergenerational issues
- iv) Rights, duties and responsibilities
- v) The way forward for strengthening the Family in Africa
- vi) The African Common Position for the 20th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

V. PARTICIPANTS

18. The Consultation will bring together one (1) expert researcher and author on the family from the five (5) AU Regions, the Chairperson and available members of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, professional staff of the Department of Social Affairs, the AU Commission and stakeholder partners from international organizations

(Plan International, Save the Children, African Child Policy Forum) UN agencies (UN DESA, UNICEF) and development partners (GIZ).

VI. ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

19. The Department of Social Affairs, AUC will be responsible for invitations to participants, for the preparation of the Common Position and the Report of the Consultation. Translation and interpretation services, and secretarial support, will be available.

VII. BUDGET AND OTHER RESOURCES

20. Technical support will be provided by partner organizations and GIZ will assist with provisions regarding the venue and meals for the Consultation, as well as air tickets and daily subsistence allowance for invited experts.

VIII. CONTACT PERSONS:

**Dr Johan Strijdom, Head of Division: Social Welfare, Vulnerable Groups,
Drug Control and Crime Prevention,
Department of Social Affairs**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: 00-251-115517844

Tel: 00-251-115-517700 Ext. 2217

E-Mail: STRIJDOMJ@africa-union.org

KesamangL@africa-union.org; ThunduN@africa-union.org.