

National Capacity-building Workshop

Aligning Kenyan's Draft National Policy on Family Promotion and Protection with SDGs

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On behalf of Ms. Daniela Bas, Director of the Division for Inclusive Social Development at UNDESA in New York, I am pleased to extend greetings to you at the start of this Capacity-building Workshop on National Family Promotion and Protection Policy. We are grateful to the Government of Kenya represented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of State Department of Social Protection, Strathmore University and Strathmore Business School for hosting this meeting.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Each of us belongs to a family, and each of us has his or her own very personal understanding of what a family is. There is no single definition of a family and I prefer to think about what a family does rather than what a family is: the caring, support and nurturing at economic, social and emotional levels that families provide for their members. A family enjoys a sense of identity, responsibility and affiliation, even when its individual members may not be residing together under one roof. As individuals we need to receive this support, and we need to provide it to other members of our family.

Family networks have been a pillar of most societies for centuries. Family in the traditional sense, was never described as “nuclear” or “extended”. It was simply family. Adults provided care to children who in turn provided care to them in their old age. This reciprocal system ensured that the needs of all individuals were catered for within the family network. Nobody would starve when other family members had plenty. No children would live alone even if their parents and grandparents had died. While of course in a

continent as large and diverse as Africa there are variations to this scenario, I think by and large this was the traditional situation most people knew.

Over the years, families in Africa and around the world have faced a great deal of pressure and experienced numerous changes. Mainly because of economic factors, family members – often males, but also increasingly females – have migrated to places of employment, leaving their wives, their husbands, their children and parents at home.

Economic development and increased urbanization have also resulted in smaller families, as marriages and childbearing are delayed, levels of education improve, access to family planning service increases and more women work outside the home.

Through all of these changes, families have proved highly resilient, able to blend traditional and modern values and practices in order to ensure the survival and development of their members. And yet there can be little question that families will need additional support – from communities, from civil society, perhaps even from the private sector, and most of all, from Governments, if they are to continue to perform all their functions well benefiting society at large. It is for this reason that many countries are increasingly interested in considering how all their policies affect and influence families – both positively and negatively – and some are developing and implementing national family policies.

National family policies should not just be remedial, designed to help families in need. They should also seek to promote and channel the strengths and capacities of families for community and national development. A few years ago, the United Nations observed the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. That occasion led to greater awareness of what families contribute to economic development and social progress. This “family perspective” has become an important factor for development, and it is increasingly reflected in national development plans and in programmes of economic and technical cooperation.

The formulation of family policies must take place within the framework of overall socio-economic development strategies, SDGs and 2030 Development Agenda but, more than this, those development strategies must also take into consideration the very vital role played by families. Here, we have to keep in mind that families are not just beneficiaries of development but active agents of development. As actions taken are family level impact

the course of development, it is very important for policy makers to undertake a diagnosis of the role and needs of families as they elaborate national developmental policies, national family policies and specific programmes.

A successful family policy or programme, whether at the local, national or international level, will require both integration of a family perspective and advocacy on family issues. The United Nations will continue to fulfil this function at the international level and will promote it at the national level as well. This is the commitment of the Division for Inclusive Social Development has made and will keep in the years to come.

We look forward to fruitful discussions during the next four days leading us to the improved national family policy in Kenya for the benefit of all its current and future families.

Thank you.