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Preparations for and observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present substantive report is submitted in response to General Assembly resolution 58/15 of 3 December 2003. It should be read in conjunction with the report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.5/2004/3) submitted to the Commission for Social Development at its forty-second session, which provided an overview of activities undertaken at all levels in observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

The present report provides additional information and analysis of the situation of families worldwide, as well as approaches undertaken, primarily at the national level, in family policy and in support of families. This information may be of interest to Governments and other actors as they consider family policies and programmes in the future.

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* A/59/150.

Contents

I. Introduction

1.   In its resolution 54/124 of 17 December 1999, the General Assembly reaffirmed the importance of the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. The objectives have been, inter alia, to (a) strengthen the capacity of national institutions to formulate, implement and monitor policies in respect of families; (b) stimulate efforts to respond to problems affecting, and affected by, the situation of families; (c) undertake analytical reviews at all levels and assessments of the situation and needs of families; (d) strengthen the effectiveness of efforts at all levels to execute specific programmes concerning families; and (e) improve collaboration among national and international non-governmental organizations in support of families.

2.   One plenary meeting of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, in 2004, will be devoted to the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, as decided by the General Assembly in its resolution 57/164 of 18 December 2002. The meeting will build upon the events held on 15 May 2004 on the occasion of the International Day of Families.

3.   The General Assembly, in its resolution 58/15 of 3 December 2003, had requested the Secretary-General to submit an interim report to the Commission for Social Development at its forty-second session and a substantive report to the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session on the implementation of that resolution and on the preparations for and the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family at all levels. In response to the request of the Assembly, the Secretary-General submitted a report to the Commission for Social Development (E/CN.5/2004/3) that contained information regarding actions and activities undertaken at all levels. The present substantive report provides additional information and analysis of the situation of families worldwide, as well as a consideration of approaches undertaken, primarily at the national level, in family policy and in support of families. This report is derived primarily from experience gained in the preparation of the tenth anniversary. Views and suggestions were also provided by a consultative meeting on mainstreaming the family issue, organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs at United Nations Headquarters from 10 to 12 December 2003. The report synthesizes the information received, indicating general priority issues and approaches for the consideration of the Assembly for the period following the tenth anniversary of the Year. After briefly considering the changing circumstances of families, the report focuses on national-level actions on behalf of families. It considers approaches to family policy, suggests the need for regular national surveys of the situation of families, and proposes actions for national coordination of family policies and programmes, as well as other national actions (legal reforms, legislation and other measures, public awareness, research, service provision and support to non-governmental organizations). After a review of the activities of the United Nations Programme on the Family, the report suggests areas for future action. This report should be read in conjunction with the aforementioned report of the Secretary-General submitted to the Commission for Social Development.

II. The changing circumstances of families

4.   The family has a continuing and crucial role in social and human development as well as in provision of care and support to individuals. Strong family bonds have always been part of most societies, and families in most places continue to make important contributions to social and economic well-being. Indeed, families have major, albeit often untapped potential to contribute to national development and to the achievement of major objectives of every society and of the United Nations, including the eradication of poverty and the creation of just, stable and secure societies. Yet, the contribution of families in achieving these objectives, including the goals established in the major conferences and summits of the past decade and in the United Nations Millennium Declaration (see General Assembly resolution 55/2), has generally been overlooked.

5.   Part of the reason for this may be that families themselves are experiencing tremendous change. During the 10 years following the observance of the International Year of the Family, social and economic forces have continued to have a significant impact on countries, communities and families. One of the activities of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs undertaken to mark the observance of the tenth anniversary was the publication of the study entitled *Major Trends Affecting Families*. The study considered the situation of families from a regional perspective, and focused, in particular, on a number of issues that have, and are expected to continue to have, major impacts on families in the years ahead: (a) changes in family structure; (b) migration; (c) demographic ageing and retirement; (d) the HIV/AIDS pandemic; and (e) globalization. It revealed that each of these issues is affecting families to a greater or lesser extent in virtually every country of the world. With increasing social and economic change, globalization and pressures from HIV/AIDS, migration and urbanization, families have faced increasing pressures and family structures have experienced changes. The tendency has been to have smaller families with fewer children, with a weakening of extended family relationships based on mutual obligation and shared responsibility. These changes have sometimes led to social problems as families have become less able — or willing — to provide for the needs of all their members. Many Governments attach great importance to strengthening families, focusing, among other things, on supporting family self-sufficiency, promoting a nurturing and caring environment within the family and preventing domestic violence.

III. National actions

6.   The major focus for the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family is placed at the local, national and regional levels. In preparation for the observance of the tenth anniversary, many Governments have taken a number of measures that have long-term implications for family policies and programmes. Provided below is a synthesis of the experiences of a number of Governments, as well as a consideration of approaches and good practices in family policies and programmes that may provide input into national deliberations and planning for the future.

A. Approaches to family policy

7.   In the 10 years since the observance of the International Year of the Family, a great deal of attention has been given to family policies in many countries. Governments continue to recognize the family as the primary means for people to live together and to provide mutual nurturing and support. At the same time, family situations continue to change and diversify, and social disparities exist, especially in terms of structures, functions, living arrangements and living conditions. This is true within countries and between countries. Consequently, there has been a reluctance to define an international family policy, even as many countries have found it necessary to review their own policies in an effort to keep abreast of changing family lifestyles, needs and expectations. The issue of family policy remains firmly the responsibility of national and subnational Governments.

8.   While seeking to strengthen families, Governments also recognize the need to promote and strengthen policies to ensure that individual family members enjoy the rights to protection that are often enshrined in national constitutions and in international conventions, so as to foster their well-being and dignity. Thus, there is a need to balance individual rights and family responsibilities. In national and international policy discourse, the notion of "strengthening the family" has sometimes led to confusion because it has often been assumed that this strengthening would come at the expense of individuals within the family. The focus of policy, however, should be to strengthen not a particular family structure, but the functioning of families, so that they can provide for their members. It is important to recognize that family remains the context in which most individuals live and the context that they themselves seek to promote. The family, even while its individual members may not live together, enjoys a sense of identity, responsibility and affiliation which is vital for social cohesion.

9.   "Family policy", or policies intended to support the functioning of families, may be based on certain assumptions about the type of family that is prevalent in a country. Sometimes, policies assume a nuclear family structure, and fail to recognize the important responsibilities inherent in extended family networks and the important support they provide. Most policies once assumed the existence of a male "breadwinner" and a female "housewife" with clearly defined and distinct roles. As a result, in the past, programmes designed to provide financial assistance to families were often targeted at men, and programmes to provide support in caregiving were directed towards women. Over the years, gender-defined roles have blurred, although policies and programmes have not always kept pace. It is therefore essential that efforts be made to ensure that policies are tailored to the explicit needs of families and to the requirements of special population groups, and that they recognize and respond, in particular, to different family contexts, changing needs throughout the life course, and specific local and regional features of family life. Family policies should be reviewed periodically in order to adapt them as necessary to changes in family situations and to overall conditions in society.

10.   The understanding of what constitutes family policy can be different in different countries. In general, however, it can be stated that family policies encompass overall policy measures to assist families in meeting their needs and specific measures that seek to correct dysfunctions where they exist, in order to devise, develop and implement solutions to family problems. The goals of both types of measures are to promote the well-being of the individual, family stability

and a well-balanced social system. Given the diversity of family structures and relationships, family policies should not focus on one type of family alone. Instead, they should take into account all types of family, including single-parent, compound, extended and recomposed families, and make provision for the different needs and particular circumstances of each.

11. Policies may aim to shield individuals and families from difficulty in times of temporary crisis, in order to maintain the cohesion of families during these periods and to assist families in preserving their resources. Family predicaments are not just the result of unforeseen and temporary incidents, however, nor are they solely linked to potential hazards. Family policies should therefore take into consideration the social vulnerability that differentiates certain families for what could be a lengthy period of time. In this sense, family policy is part of social policy.

12. The articulation of social and family-oriented policies and programmes remains a complex matter. Besides policies designed specifically to support families, all countries have a range of social policies, many focused on the needs of individuals, that also have an impact on the families in which those individuals live. Most existing social policies and programmes focus on individuals, often simultaneously, with few adjustments made in design and implementation to account for the diversity of family structures, internal dynamics and local cultures. Programmes and measures in areas such as employment, housing, education, health and transport should be evaluated not only in terms of how they affect individuals, but also on the basis of their likely contribution to resolving family difficulties or whether they promote family stability, ensure a family's ability to adapt or respond effectively to its environment, or reduce disparities in the benefits provided to families in terms of insurance, taxation, services, education or training.

13. There is growing awareness that a more comprehensive approach should be taken, and technical and political criteria applied to harmonize actions on behalf of the family. It is therefore important for Governments to develop an integrated family policy that effectively and visibly complements existing sectoral policies and attempts to meet the needs of individuals while recognizing that they are also members of families. There may be times when the policies of different social sectors overlap or, worse, conflict. The family dimension should be taken into account in all aspects of policy, and efforts made to ensure that sectoral policies complement those that deal directly with the family and its specific needs. It is important to establish an integrated family policy that overcomes the difficulties of coordinating different social administrations and departments.

14. In addition to social policies, there are policies affecting families that are developed and implemented by a range of governmental and non-governmental institutions, many of which are not social institutions. They may be economic, fiscal, environmental or infrastructure policies. The effects of these policies on families may be unintentional, or they may be invisible to the institutions responsible for implementing them. These policies may be considered to be "indirect family policies". In order to strengthen the functioning of families, Governments should examine the impact on families of both direct and indirect policies, and evaluate all aspects of their effect on families. This will help to ensure that increased consideration is given to supporting families when policy objectives are determined and when the results of policies are evaluated.

15. Responsibility for developing family policy and considering the impact of other policies on families remains with national Governments, but Governments will likely wish to work closely with civil society, the private sector and all other concerned actors in developing and implementing family policy frameworks. Local authorities and groups should take part in drafting and evaluating the family policy, in implementing the policy measures and in adapting them to regional and local requirements. Such an approach would enable all concerned to respond more adequately to evolving family needs and circumstances.

B. Surveying the situation of families

16.   In order to improve their understanding of the situation of families in their countries, a number of Governments have undertaken national family surveys. The information obtained has helped them to understand the diversity of family structures and the variety of conditions in which families function. The goal is to obtain information necessary to improve policy and the effectiveness of programmes to support families. Some objectives of the survey might be: (a) to systematically organize existing information on families; (b) to describe the legal framework relating to the family at the national level; (c) to describe the framework of public policy on the family at the national level; (d) to generate information that will allow for better decision-making, taking families into account; (e) to provide baseline information that will enable the Government to identify changes over time; (f) to express the Government's commitment to integrating a family perspective in policies and programmes; (g) to direct actions to help families stay together and prevent family disintegration; and (h) to provide input to research on family issues.

17.   When undertaking family surveys, Governments may wish to consider a number of factors. Surveys should aim to identify the different types of family living arrangements, or family types, that exist in the country. They should seek to obtain a broad view of family issues, how families respond or cope with their situations, whether they are informed of governmental family policies and programmes, whether they utilize the governmental and non-governmental programmes that are available, and whether they are satisfied with the services they receive.

18.   A survey on family conditions would provide a comprehensive view of the current situation of families, whether that situation has improved or deteriorated as a result of internal or external pressures, and how families have responded or adapted to these trends. Among the additional issues that may be of interest in a survey are: (a) how families themselves perceive or define the concept of "family"; (b) how different generations perceive family life, and how much time and effort they invest in it; (c) how families balance productive work and family responsibilities; (d) how family responsibilities are divided among family members, and particularly between men and women; (e) how much time parents spend in caring for, teaching and nurturing their children; (f) the impact of the media on family life; (g) what support, if any, is obtained from other (extended) family members; and (h) what social or community services are relied upon. There are, of course, other issues and questions that Governments will consider on the basis of their own national cultures and traditions.

19.   The aim of a survey is to obtain the views of the relevant stakeholders about the impact of social and economic changes on families and about the priorities

Governments should adopt in developing or revising family policies and programmes in the face of changing family contexts. This type of information will provide both national and local authorities with a basis for policy formulation or revision, and improve strategic planning. As they contribute to the monitoring of family policies, surveys should be conducted periodically, as deemed necessary.

C. National coordination

20. A pivotal lesson emanating from the International Year of the Family is the need for a declaration of political will and commitment, followed by the creation, or reinforcement, of capacities and mechanisms for intersectoral consultation and coordination. Family concerns are cross-cutting and multisectoral: they often cannot be addressed adequately by a single sectoral ministry. It is suggested that a national coordinating body be established, consisting of representatives of public and civil institutions concerned with family matters. This mechanism could evolve from similar bodies that were established to prepare for and celebrate the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, but its responsibilities would go beyond provision of information and raising of awareness of issues to focusing specifically on policy development and implementation. The coordinating mechanism could be a consultative body that plans, develops and implements family policies and programmes; or, rather than develop policy directly, it could oversee the process of policy development.

21. The coordinating mechanism can take different forms according to political and administrative traditions and preferences. It could be either a single body or an organized system of entities under different authorities. The overall objectives of the national coordination mechanism would be to promote family policies and programmes and to achieve a coordinated and integrated approach to incorporating family issues into other policies and programmes in order to derive maximum benefit from available resources. All the ministries or departments that generate policies that directly or indirectly affect families should be represented.

22. Among the functions of a national coordinating mechanism would be: (a) to sensitize public opinion on family-related issues and problems; (b) to undertake periodic reviews and assessments of the situation of families, identifying specific issues and problems; (c) to promote and undertake research; (d) to coordinate, monitor and evaluate family policies and programmes; (e) to recommend changes, amendments or revisions to existing policies and to suggest new policies; (f) to promote complementarity among the policies and programmes of different public and private institutions concerned with family issues; (g) to encourage joint planning, organization and execution of programmes and activities; (h) to mobilize resources from public and private sectors; and (i) to facilitate channels of communication with civil society. In order to undertake these tasks, the mechanism must possess significant influence and high public visibility.

23. Efforts should be made to ensure that the voices of families, as expressed directly or by their representatives, are recognized by governmental and social institutions, and a national coordinating mechanism may serve to ensure this. Family members should have access to a person or an office that can respond to their problems and concerns, and can speak on their behalf on matters of larger social, cultural and political concern. Similarly, service providers may experience practical

problems in organizing and delivering services, and may require assistance in resolving them. It is unlikely that individuals will have direct access to a national mechanism, but the national coordinating mechanism can oversee a system of local ombudsmen or something similar. An ombudsman may be a locally recognized person and the office may be a village- or municipal-level administrative unit.

24.   The views and concerns of families may also be channelled through organizations and associations, and Governments may consider providing support for the development or strengthening of family associations at the local, regional and national levels. Governmental assistance and support for these organizations may take many forms, including the provision of financial support, administrative assistance, organizational back-up and meeting space. Family-related non-governmental organizations may wish to establish their own mechanism of coordination, to improve mutual cooperation and improve the efficiency of their activities. This mechanism would also contribute to, or form part of, a national coordinating mechanism.

25.   A national coordinating mechanism may also serve as a policy think tank to review, monitor, explore and propose policies and legislation of concern to families. It may prepare a systematic description of all governmental actions relating to the family. It may undertake or oversee the type of national survey described earlier.

26.   A coordinating mechanism may act as the primary national body advocating on behalf of the family. While Governments may seek to "mainstream" or integrate a family perspective in various policies implemented by different ministries, they should also recognize the continuing need for family advocacy, and for an office or mechanism that has responsibility for family advocacy. Governments may develop a two-tier strategy combining integration with advocacy. Integration would be carried out in the sectoral ministries and offices, but those responsible for integrating a family perspective in those ministries may require advice and assistance. A national coordination mechanism can provide them with expertise and appropriate technical support on family issues.

D.   Other national actions

1.   Legal reforms

27.   During the past 10 years, encouraged by resolutions and recommendations of the General Assembly, a number of countries have reviewed their constitutions and legal systems regarding issues relating to families, children, adolescents and youth, older persons and persons with disabilities. In accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Assembly resolution 44/25, annex), for example, some countries have developed new codes on childhood and adolescence. These codes generally recognize the family as the natural and primary environment in which children grow and develop, and assign to the State the primary responsibility for designing and implementing policies, plans and programmes to help families meet their responsibilities. In accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Assembly resolution 34/180, annex), Governments have undertaken reviews of family codes from a gender perspective and made substantial revisions in order to protect the rights of girls and women. Governments that have ratified international conventions should ensure that legal codes conform with international standards.

2. Legislation and other measures

28. Significant progress has also been made in the sphere of legislation to improve the living conditions and strengthen the social security and stability of families, particularly families with children. Many countries have enacted or considered new laws that directly benefit families. The laws and bills show that there is special interest in strengthening parent-child relations, dealing with conjugal and family disputes, helping people balance work and family responsibilities, protecting mothers and promoting measures related to the health and well-being of family members.

29. As a result of the International Year of the Family and its follow-up, both central and local Governments have established policies, programmes or services that target families as beneficiaries, either directly or indirectly. A main objective is to allocate adequate financial benefits to families to help them meet more readily the expenses associated with caring for family members. Reviews and revisions of taxation policies have helped families in this regard.

30. To ensure that policies and programmes are actually implemented, some Governments have elaborated programme implementation guidelines, which provide useful information and assistance to those authorities responsible for implementation. This helps to ensure that policies do not simply remain on paper but are implemented through appropriate programmes.

31. There is now an awareness of the need for action by public and private agencies to disseminate information, expand coverage and coordinate initiatives to address the problems and needs of people within the context of their families. This awareness will lead to continuing legislative action in the years ahead.

3. Public awareness

32. One of the major objectives of the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family has been to revitalize public attention directed towards the family and to renew support for family policies and programmes. This revitalized attention and renewed support should be maintained and extended through an ongoing public awareness campaign and efforts to turn awareness into action.

33. To maintain awareness, a communications strategy may be developed and implemented within the framework of the national family policy and programmes. The strategy adopted would reflect national priorities. It should inform the public about the legislation, policies and programmes that exist to benefit families and inform families about how to access the services and benefits that are available to them. As with any strategy, an information strategy would be implemented over a number of years. Information may need to be provided repeatedly over time in order to be received and understood by a wide range of individuals, families and groups.

34. Within the communications strategy, programmes can be designed to disseminate information through the mass media in order to increase awareness of relevant issues. Documents, publications, articles, brochures, posters and any other form of printed information can reach a large audience and provide valuable information on the issues related to family policy. Alternatives to printed materials should also be developed in order to reach people who may be illiterate. New

technologies, including both information and communication technologies, offer expanded possibilities for increasing public awareness. Entertainment media can provide an excellent means for reaching people and should not be overlooked in the communications strategy.

35. Existing institutions, including schools and health clinics, stores, recreation facilities or any other venues where people congregate, provide an additional means for reaching people, and effective utilization of such institutions should be considered in the communications strategy.

36. The strategy should seek to reach all family members, and special messages may need to be developed to reach particular age groups. Information and awareness-raising campaigns and activities to inform children and young people about family issues and family policies may be organized through childcare centres and in schools. Information should be presented in ways that are relevant and responsive to children and youth. These activities can draw on resource persons specialized in the areas of education, law, psychology, sociology and health. They should also emphasize participation of children and youth as active contributors who can spread information and reach out to their communities, and not simply as passive recipients.

37. Meetings could be organized among governmental authorities, families and family or other associations at the local level in order to encourage interaction between governmental and non-governmental entities, to allow authorities to provide information and offer guidance, and to create opportunities for them to hear the concerns of local populations.

38. In its resolutions on the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, the General Assembly has repeatedly called for the exchange of experiences and information among Governments. This exchange takes place at the regional level through the regional commissions, and at the international level in the annual sessions of the Commission for Social Development.

4. Research

39. In addition to the family surveys described earlier, there is a need for continuing in-depth research on the family, its functions, relationships and dynamics. This research would support policy adjustments or new policy development, and would form a foundation for the implementation of national action plans for the family. Research can provide additional and relevant local, national and subregional evidence and information to inform policies and programmes. Studies can provide qualitative information to complement statistical and other information. They can also offer families, particularly socially excluded families, an opportunity to articulate their conditions and needs first-hand. Participatory forms of research are an important means to increase popular participation in the design, implementation and evaluation of local family-related programmes and policies.

40. Governments interested in supporting research on family issues might wish to work with interested parties, particularly the academic community and non-governmental organizations, to design a plan to guide family research. The plan could promote integration of the work of universities, study centres and non-governmental organizations, where such integration is desirable and useful. Support for research on family issues can be sought from a variety of sources,

including the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities. The findings of research studies on families may be published or otherwise disseminated to provide useful information and guidance on these matters to policy makers, government authorities, service providers and families.

5. Service provision

41. Social services generally include provision of education and training, medical care, reproductive health services, social welfare services and labour-market services. Many services are designed to meet the specific needs of individual family members without giving due attention to the family context. Social services should treat the family as a fundamental partner in the provision of support for those family members who need care. When problems exist that a family cannot address by itself, the State and the social sectors must intervene, but they should focus their efforts on strengthening the family's own independence and minimizing its dependency on external services. Effective services would help families to retain and strengthen their caregiving functions and strengthen the capacity of families and communities to cope.

42. Many countries provide some kind of financial support to families, generally in the form of direct payments, entitlements to special services or tax benefits. These benefits acknowledge the expense involved in raising a family and the difficulties many families face in reconciling work and family responsibilities. Governments may consider increasing family allowances, taking into account family income and applying principles of fairness; awarding a child benefit to families; and including adopted children among the children who benefit from family allowances.

43. Research has shown that, in the vast majority of cases, caregiving that takes place in all societies is provided through family networks. Usually this caregiving is provided by women and girls, who may have to sacrifice other goals, including education and productive employment, in order to provide care to family members who need it. Recently, new focus has been placed on men as fathers and as partners in caring for families. Programmes that attempt to overcome gender stereotyping and encourage men to take greater responsibility and participate more actively within the family and the community have been initiated. The effect is not only to empower women, but also to enhance the overall quality of life of the family.

44. Governments can acknowledge and encourage the caregiving and nurturing that are provided in families. A first step is to recognize that family caregiving constitutes a substantial contribution to society. A second step is to assist men and women in balancing productive work and family responsibilities. Governments may also reward caregivers through programmes that provide benefits to people caring for family members at home, or offer them some form of small payment or credits to be used for purchases. Governments can also promote community-based efforts to support family caregivers. Some non-governmental and community-based organizations provide back-up support to family caregivers, offering them the information, training, guidance, assistance and respite that help them meet the need for care.

45. This approach to supporting family caregivers recognizes the strengths of local communities, which include solidarity and traditional forms of knowledge in addition to professional skills and information that are useful to family caregivers. Solidarity and mutual support, which are important forms of social capital, are

enhanced through the collaboration of different community members. In this way, family resources can be optimized, burdens can be shared, opportunities can be enhanced, and participation and responsibility of the community and its families can be increased.

46. The development of services to provide comprehensive support to families living in poverty, including, where possible, guaranteed minimum benefits for the poorest families, is particularly important. Such services may help families that are vulnerable to external economic pressures to remain together. It is important for service providers to bear in mind, however, that poor families are not homogeneous and that there are many dimensions to poverty that require nuanced policy responses and tailored programmes, taking into account the special situation of each family member. However, programmes tailored to the needs and situations of particular families, groups, communities or regions should nevertheless be integrated into an overall coherent and coordinated system of public benefits for families.

47. Simply offering services may not be sufficient, particularly to families who are poor, isolated or vulnerable. Many of these families may not be aware that services exist that can help them, or they may not know how to access those services. They may be reluctant to use services, because they have to pay a fee, or fear stigmatization. They may not have the time or the transport required to reach the site at which the service is provided. In order to ensure that services are available to the families who need them, service providers must reach out, providing appropriate information and support to those families to help them access those services.

48. One approach to ensuring that services reach families who need them is to compile and maintain a directory of information and services, including rights and entitlements, to facilitate families' access to these resources. Such a "family guide" could be compiled to provide families with information about administrative offices and associations offering services to families, as well as about the procedures to be followed to obtain services and the applicable costs.

49. Another approach is to develop incentive mechanisms tied to service provision. For example, families may be encouraged to send children to school if the school offers a meal, or if there is a means of replacing the income those children might otherwise have provided to the family. Access to services can be enhanced through the establishment of one-stop family service and training centres. Such centres provide a number of services under one roof, thus simplifying procedures and reducing the time and effort spent in obtaining services.

50. One area where community support can be particularly important in helping families access services is that encompassing the development of awareness and knowledge. Community-based efforts to combat illiteracy among different age groups, with particular emphasis on women and inhabitants of rural areas, can help the members of those groups access services.

51. Innovative forms of social service provision can benefit more than the individual and the family, and extend to the community as well. In one country, an intersectoral employment programme seeks to greatly improve living conditions for families by helping unemployed workers re-enter the labour market by providing training. At the same time, it supports jobs in productive projects that benefit the community.

52. In addition to social services available to all individuals, such as education and health care, specific family services may also be provided. These services are directed at supporting adoption and child development, improving family welfare, providing counselling and intervening in instances of violence or abuse, and are traditionally provided by social workers and assistants, as well as by teachers and nurses, and any other professionals involved in work relating to the family. They aim to provide families with social and psychological support and to help families settle unresolved problems and cope during periods of stress or adjustment.

53. Domestic violence of any sort, but particularly violence against women and girls, is now generally regarded as a social problem and as a threat to family cohesion, as well as a violation of human dignity. It should therefore be included under the umbrella of social support, in addition to which counselling and support centres for victims of marital violence should be established, along with shelters, where necessary. Parental education programmes, designed to provide new parents with information and parenting skills, have proved successful in some places.

6. Support to non-governmental organizations

54. Many of the services offered to families are provided by non-governmental or community organizations and associations. Governments have recognized the vital contributions to family well-being that are made by family associations and non-governmental organizations, and have increasingly utilized these organizations to channel resources to families and communities. Sometimes, however, these organizations require strengthening to be able to deliver services. Governments may consider providing not only financial resources but also technical support to these non-governmental organizations. One approach that has been shown to be successful is the partnering of government with community organizations. Governments may second personnel from ministries and directorates on a full- or part-time basis to work in organizations to increase their capacities, knowledge and administrative skills.

55. Governments may also encourage the exchange of experiences and expertise among non-governmental organizations by creating opportunities for them to come together in seminars, conferences or round tables. They can encourage joint programming and partnerships to improve efficiency and effectiveness of programmes.

IV. Support from the United Nations Programme on the Family

56. In its resolution 57/164, the General Assembly decided that the major activities for the observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family should be concentrated at the local, national and regional levels and that the United Nations system should assist Governments in these efforts. The United Nations Programme on the Family of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat has undertaken or supported a range of activities to observe the tenth anniversary encompassing:

(a) Launch of the anniversary: on 4 December 2003, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs delivered the statement of the Secretary-General; several non-governmental organizations also organized events on this day;

(b)   Expert Group Meeting on Mainstreaming the Family Issue, 10-12 December 2003: the meeting brought together experts from all world regions to discuss how mainstreaming should put families at the heart of the policy-making process. It also explored how to incorporate a "mainstreaming strategy" within the work programme of the Division for Social Policy and Development. The Meeting provided an opportunity to exchange knowledge on approaches and problems related to the mainstreaming process with respect to family issues, and developed recommendations on strengthening capacities for effective planning and coordination of family-related activities;

(c)   A global study on trends affecting families, with chapters covering the situation of families in all world regions, which was published and disseminated. The study examines critical issues affecting all families: demographic changes; changes in family structure; issues related to migration; the HIV/AIDS pandemic; and globalization;

(d)   A study on the impact of HIV/AIDS on families, which is being edited. It will be published and disseminated in late 2004;

(e)   A Policy Workshop on HIV/AIDS and Family Well-being, which was convened from 28 to 30 January 2004 in Windhoek, Namibia. The objectives of the workshop were to explore the effects of HIV/AIDS on the family unit and family networks, including changing generational roles and related social integration issues; identify coping mechanisms at different societal levels to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS on the family; review existing policies and programmes to determine how they respond to the needs of families affected by HIV/AIDS at different stages of impact; develop a policy framework and recommendations for addressing family issues and changing inter-generational roles in HIV/AIDS policies and strategies; and identify further capacity-building needs and knowledge gaps for follow-up activities. The final report and recommendations of the workshop are available on the web site of the United Nations Programme on the Family (www.un.org/esa/socdev/family) and will be published in late 2004;

(f)   A technical publication entitled *Family Indicators*,[1] which was completed and issued in all official languages;

(g)   The International Day of Families (15 May), which was observed at United Nations Headquarters on 13 May 2004 under the theme "The observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family". The Department of Public Information/NGO Section worked with the United Nations Programme on the Family to organize a seminar on the theme. The New York NGO Committee on the Family and the IYF +10 Committee also organized panel discussions;

(h)   The United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities, which provided support for a number of conferences and publications. The Fund contributed to a regional meeting on the family, organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, and to an African regional meeting organized by the Government of Benin. In the context of International Youth Day, it linked young people and families through support for the organization of panel discussions on inter-generational issues at the World Youth Festival held in Barcelona, Spain. The fund also supported the Vienna NGO Committee on the Family in publishing a report entitled *Documenting Contributions of Civil Society Organizations to the Well-being*

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[1] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.IV.4.

of Families, on the establishment of its interactive Internet forum and database of family organizations, and it enabled the publication of a report by the International Movement ATD Fourth World entitled *How Poverty Separates Parents and Children*.

57. These activities provide important information for Governments to utilize in planning and implementing family policies, programmes and activities in the future. They also created opportunities for governmental and non-governmental representatives, experts and all interested actors to exchange experiences and good practices.

V. Suggestions and recommendations

58. This report has provided a substantive review of issues concerning family policy and programmes, based on experiences gained during the preparation and observance of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. This review may provide guidance to Governments as they further develop national policies, programmes and plans of action on the family. In considering further action on the family in follow-up to the tenth anniversary, the General Assembly may wish to consider the following recommendations:

(a) **To integrate family issues in national development policies and programmes, Governments may wish to establish three institutional pillars: first, a national commitment at the highest level of government, preferably in the form of a declaration, or proclamation, by the head of State; second, an effective national coordinating mechanism; and, third, appropriate family support legislation and social services that take into account the country's cultural, environmental, social and economic conditions;**

(b) **Governments should maintain partnership with concerned organizations of civil society (including non-governmental organizations, academia, professional societies and institutions, trade unions, employers' federations, chambers of commerce and industry, the legal and medical professions, and other stakeholders), especially through their participation in national coordination mechanisms;**

(c) **As the United Nations has a catalytic and supportive role in strengthening and enhancing concern for the family at the national, regional and global levels, this role can best be exercised by assisting in integrating family perspectives in the development process and by supporting national action. The General Assembly may wish to encourage the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to provide technical assistance to national coordination mechanisms; support diagnostic studies, research and data collection; exchange expertise and experiences on family issues; disseminate information; support networking at subregional, regional and interregional levels; and encourage policy and programme coordination within the United Nations system, and with other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The United Nations Programme on the Family should highlight advocacy, capacity-building and technical support to Governments, at their request, on the issue of the family.**

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