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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:**

**priority theme: promoting empowerment of people in
achieving poverty eradication, social integration
and full employment and decent work for all**

Statement submitted by the International Federation for Family Development, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.



Statement

Family impact report as a tool to implement the family perspective

The long-standing efforts of the United Nations to protect human rights have empowerment at their core and have been enriched during the past years with the goal of empowering the world's women and empowering the next generation through work focused on youth. We feel that adding families to the agenda would be another step forward, provided that it includes the removal of all barriers to the active participation of families in society, especially in decisions on investments in health, housing and education. Too often, the time, effort and money families invest in their children finds no social or economic incentive by the society benefiting from them because there are no political instruments to implement it.

Such a step would, in turn, also help women and children since they are part of the family. We need to realize the extent to which the breakdown of the family has contributed to the feminization of poverty and the fact that family structure matters in the long-term fight against poverty, in particular the poverty of children. If we are serious about reducing poverty, valuable short-term solutions, like food banks and shelters, must partner with long-term solutions, which include examining family structure and eradicating the breakdown of the family.

For this reason, we welcome the most recent resolutions of the General Assembly, in which Governments are encouraged to continue to make every possible effort to realize the objectives of the International Year of the Family and its follow-up processes and to integrate a family perspective into national policymaking. In order to put this into practice, we suggest that the family impact report be implemented as a tool for assessing the impact of a given policy or programme on the situation of the family. The declaration of civil society on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, sponsored by more than 200 non-governmental organizations worldwide, notes the opportunity the Year provides to revisit family-oriented policies as part of overall development efforts, supporting its objective to aim at responding to challenges faced by families and continuing to guide national efforts that benefit families worldwide and to integrate a family perspective by introducing a family impact report or assessment as a standing and compulsory part of policymaking.

That is why we think that all the contributions made by the Policy Institute for Family Impact Seminars (familyimpactseminars.org) should be considered, more specifically the six principles established for such reports, as set out below.

1. Family support and responsibilities

Policies and programmes should aim to support and supplement family functioning and provide substitute services only as a last resort. Therefore, they should neither provide incentives for other persons to take over family functioning when doing so may not be necessary, nor set unrealistic expectations for families to assume financial and/or caregiving responsibilities for dependent, seriously ill or disabled family members. They should also enforce the obligations of absent parents to provide financial support for their children.

2. Family membership and stability

Whenever possible, policies and programmes should encourage and reinforce marital, parental and family commitment and stability, especially when children are involved. Intervention in family membership and living arrangements is usually justified only to protect family members from serious harm or at the request of the family itself. Moreover, they should allocate resources to help to keep the marriage or family together when this is the appropriate goal, and recognize that major changes in family relationships, such as divorce or adoption, are processes that extend over time and require continuing support and attention. Appropriate criteria to justify removal of a child or adult from the family should also be defined.

3. Family involvement and interdependence

Policies and programmes must recognize the interdependence of family relationships, the strength and persistence of family ties and obligations, and the wealth of resources that families can mobilize to help their members. They should also recognize the reciprocal influence of family needs on individual needs, and the influence of individual needs on family needs, as well as the complexity and responsibilities involved in caring for family members with special needs, such as the physically or mentally challenged, or chronically ill. Other aspects would include involving immediate and extended family members in working towards a solution; acknowledging the power and persistence of family ties, even when they are problematic or destructive; building on informal social support networks (such as community/neighbourhood organizations or religious communities) that are essential to families; respecting family decisions about the division of labour; addressing issues of power inequity in families; ensuring perspectives of all family members being represented; assessing and balancing the competing needs, rights and interests of various family members; and protecting the rights and safety of families while respecting the rights of parents and the integrity of the family.

4. Family partnership and empowerment

Policies and programmes must encourage individuals and their close family members to collaborate as partners with programme professionals in the delivery of services to an individual. In addition, parent and family representatives are an essential resource in policy and programme development, implementation and evaluation. In that sense, they should provide full information and a range of choices to families. They should also respect family autonomy and allow families to make their own decisions. It is also important to analyse the principles upon which family autonomy is breached and program staff are allowed to intervene and make decisions; whether professionals are encouraged to work in collaboration with the families of their clients, patients or students; whether the family's need to coordinate the multiple services required is taken into account; whether the policies and programmes integrate well with other programmes and services that the families use or make services easily accessible to families in terms of location, operating hours and easy-to-use application and intake forms. The policies and programmes should also prevent participating families from being devalued, stigmatized or subjected to humiliating circumstances, and should involve parents and family representatives in policy and programme development, implementation, and evaluation.

5. Family diversity

Families come in many forms and configurations, and policies and programmes must take into account their varying effects on different types of families. Policies and programmes must acknowledge and value the diversity of family life and must not discriminate against or penalize families solely on the basis of structure, roles, cultural values or life stage. The policies or programmes should acknowledge intergenerational relationships and responsibilities among family members; provide good justification for targeting only certain family types (for example, only employed parents or single parents); avoid discrimination against other types of families or penalize them; and identify and respect the different values, attitudes and behaviour of families from various racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and geographic backgrounds that are relevant to programme effectiveness.

6. Support for vulnerable families

Families in greatest economic and social need, as well as those determined to be most vulnerable to breaking down, should be included in Government policies and programmes. Policies or programmes should identify and publicly support services for families in the most extreme economic or social need. In addition, they should give support to families most vulnerable to breaking down and those that have the fewest resources, and they should target efforts and resources towards preventing family problems before they become serious crises or chronic situations.

Other requirements

The Policy Institute for Family Impact Seminars gives some other general comments that we consider interesting to keep in mind when designing how to define a family impact report. There can be a preliminary process conducted at an early stage when a policy or programme is being designed or launched; an interim stage when a policy or programme is being implemented; and a later stage when the policy or programme is being evaluated or reauthorized.

It is also important to determine which family types might be affected. Policies or programmes may have different effects on diverse family types. Family impact analysis should consider various aspects of diversity such as family structure (for example, birth family, adoptive family, stepfamily, family of origin, extended family), family life stage (for example, families with young children or elderly dependants, ageing families), locale (for example, rural, suburban or urban), heritage (for example, specific cultural, racial, ethnic or religious backgrounds), presence of special needs (for example, cognitive, emotional and physical needs), and socioeconomic diversity (for example, income, education, number of wage earners).

In order to conduct a family impact analysis, expertise is generally needed on families, family impact analysis and the specifics of the policy or programme. The analysis can consist of conducting an in-depth empirical study or computer simulation. Typically, a more qualitative process of drawing from existing evidence is needed in order to estimate likely consequences. Conducting the analysis may involve such tasks as collecting new data, interviewing informants, reviewing relevant research and consulting with experts.

In any case, a family impact analysis seldom results in overwhelming support for or opposition to a programme or policy. Instead, the analysis identifies several ways in which a policy supports or does not support families. After completing the analysis, policy implications can be drawn regarding the likely effects of the policy and its implementation on specific types of families and particular family functions. These implications raise issues that policymakers and practitioners may wish to take into account in their decision-making and sometimes reveal conflicts between competing principles or varying impacts for different family types. These value judgements are typically made by policymakers on behalf of their constituents or by programme administrators on behalf of their boards and the families they serve. After the analysis is done, a plan should be made for disseminating the results to those policymakers or professionals who are in a position to apply them to policy and practice. The results may generate interest in and the momentum for developing policies and practices that are more responsive to and supportive of family well-being.

Family impact analysis is often difficult to conduct if family data are unavailable. Therefore, it is sometimes necessary for data to be collected before a family impact analysis can be completed. When possible, data on cost effectiveness and political feasibility should also be collected and taken into account in the analysis.

The family impact analysis is meant to be non-partisan. The intent is not to end up supporting or opposing a policy, programme, agency or organization. Instead, the goal is to raise several, often competing, considerations that policymakers and professionals may want to weigh and factor into policy and programme design, deliberations and decisions. Also, in analysing the data and presenting the results, it is important to keep in mind that family impact analysis has the potential to build broad, non-partisan consensus. To do so, the analysis must involve a high-quality, rigorous examination of the issue that clearly and fairly presents ways in which families are and are not supported. Instead of making recommendations, the analysis should include implications for those responsible for making programme and policy decisions.

The purpose of the family impact analysis is not to plan for the sake of planning, but rather to plan for the sake of acting. In moving from analysis to action, it is essential to develop steps for discussing and disseminating the results and, when possible, for assessing the implementation and impact of any actions taken.
