

Feature

Development

Family : Fundamental Building Blocks of Society



International Year of the Family

UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali stressed at the 28 November-2 December World NGO forum in Valletta, Malta, to launch the Year. The International Year of the Family should help in the promotion of human rights, especially the rights of the child, individual freedoms and gender equality, both in the family context and in society at large. It is important to reinforce the family's inherent internal strengths to enable its members to realize their full potential.

It is of the utmost importance that parents — with the assistance of social support systems — be enabled to meet their responsibilities in their work and to their families. Maternity leave, child care and care for the elderly and infirm are some of the approaches that can help facilitate this. It is imperative that parents be assured that they will not be penalized in terms of job security or promotions for meeting their familiar obligations.

The Year's objectives are:

- To increase awareness of family issues among Governments and the private sector;
- To strengthen national institutions in their efforts to develop, carry out and monitor family policies;
- To stimulate efforts to address family-related problems;
- To enhance the effectiveness of local, regional and national family programmes;
- To improve cooperation among national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and
- To build upon ongoing activities benefiting women, children, youth and ageing and disabled persons.

Governments, voluntary organizations and the private sector are expected to promote new awareness of problems — and solutions — to the multiple crises of families. They will undertake specific activities and observances at the local, regional and national levels, assisted by the United Nations and its system of organizations.

Preparations undertaken

As many Governments and organizations have begun preparations and initiated observances, national coordinating bodies have been established in over 100 countries, national programmes of action are being developed in over 90 nations, and 94 Governments have designated national focal points on the IYF. Several countries have already identified priorities, started national programmes and begun information campaigns.

The General Assembly has invited NGOs to exert all possible efforts to prepare for and observe the Year and to cooperate with the United Nations to achieve the Year's goals. Many NGOs are fully involved.

WORLDVIEW International Foundation commonly known as Worldview is an international developing country based non-governmental organization committed to sustainable development utilizing communication as a key approach. The global policy of Worldview is "to effectively employ all forms of communication methods in support of human development towards sustainability, and for meeting basic needs of the underprivileged in the development process."

It set about with its developmental endeavor in the year 1979 with the trust that a process of development communication and the participation of the mass people are the prerequisites of successful development. It has, in its 14 years of project work, demonstrated how the communication approach through participatory methods can relieve the worst and most intractable problems of the poor, where 'top-down' development initiatives have repeatedly failed. This participatory approach through communication followed by Worldview and its 52 partner countries with over 300 professional members who work mostly in developing nations, should be seen as an alternative to 'input-based' projects. Participation is in itself already an explicit development objective.

Worldview has mobilized rural communities in development initiatives through non-formal communication techniques as well as through the use of mass media such as television and radio. It has also trained development workers in multi-media skills, enhancing the responsiveness of development agencies and programmes to local needs and resources and building up indigenous capacity for the long-term sustainability of development projects in nutrition, health, AIDS awareness, food security, the environment, economic empowerment and narcotic drugs crop.

The organization operates through a global network of its nine media centers in developing countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Worldview enjoys consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC).

in the Year's preparations, just as they were a major impetus in its proclamation. Several NGOs are bringing the Year's message to community organizations, the general public and families themselves, using their wide network of contacts and channels of communication. Others are organizing special meetings on the Year.

A major NGO initiative, the World NGO Forum on Launching the International Year of the Family (Valletta, Malta, 28 November-2 December), marked the beginning of the observance of the Year. It was

alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina

The family is a universal phenomenon, and the concept of the family is perhaps the most basic one in social life.

But families manifest themselves in widely different forms and functions. Perceptions of the role of the family vary among societies and cultures. There is no single view of the family, nor can there be a universally applicable definition. Indeed, one of the major attributes of the family is its diversity.

The industrial revolution

spawned great changes in family structure. Industrialization and urbanization led to the breakup of the large feudal estates and prompted a sharp change in life and working styles. Many people, especially unmarried youths, left the farms and went to the cities to work in the factories. This process led to the dissolution of many extended families.

At the same time, non-traditional family types are becoming more and more common, such as cohabitation, same-gender relationships, single-parent families and reorganized families.

The family's role in socializing youth

The basic educational institution — the family — provides the fundamental apprenticeship for life. Under the right conditions, it prepares young people to realize their potential and assume useful roles as adults in society. However, the relationship of today's young

to the family is changing.

Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way — Leo Tolstoy — Anna Karenina

children the exclusive duty of

women, nor earning a living and pursuing a public life the exclusive domain of men. Many wives started working outside the home, just as many husbands started sharing the duties involved in maintaining a household.

The changing family

This transformation of the structure of the family continues today, as families are undergoing rapid changes all over the world. Although such changes differ from region to region, there are some common traits: small nuclear families, the greater longevity of family members, and the transformation of relationships within the family due to changing values.

Other changes are under

way. Formalized marriage is losing its status, and divorce has increased in almost all countries where it is estimated that one third of all families are now single parent families headed by a woman.

Traditional definitions of

family structure tended to be

based on two major types —

the nuclear and the extended

family. But these are undergo-

ing changes, while new family

types are emerging.

Tradition and change

The family is responsible for transmitting social and cul-

ture values. Traditions are

learned and enriched in families and are very much part of the inheritance passed on between generations.

At the same time, the family

is a powerful agent for renewal.

It regenerates and changes

society by challenging ac-

cepted wisdom, expanding

knowledge and scrutinizing

the functioning of existing

institutions. From this per-

spective, families are primary

agents of constructive change

and development.

All members of the family

influence each other in com-

mon ways. The impact of chil-

dren's behaviour on their par-

ents' personalities should not

be forgotten. Children also so-

cialize their parents in many

ways. Parents learn from their

children about child develop-

ment, peer and sibling rela-

tionship, school, fashion and

changes in society. Children

serve as carriers of emerging

trends, through their exposure

to schools, peers and the médi-

um. In particular, immigrant

and refugee parents often

learn their new country's lan-

guage, customs and culture

from their children.

Challenges to the family

The tremendous transfor-

mations occurring in and

around the family, combined

with the early social matura-

tion of youth, their ability to

earn incomes independently of

the family, and the develop-

ment of a youth culture, have

all diminished the influence of

the family in the socialization

process. Schools, peer groups

and television all compete with

the family in the socialization

function.

At the same time, new edu-

cation technologies, particu-

larly the introduction of com-

puter science and computer

aided instruction in schools

and universities, along with

the increasing variety of video

and audio equipment and pro-

grammes, are changing the so-

cialization process during

school years in ways that are

still being explored.

These changes are often so

rapid that parents are not able

to identify with their chil-

dren's educational experience.

Parents then face severe chal-

lenges attempting to play a

supportive role in educating

their children in a changed

and fluid educational environ-

ment.

Another challenge is posed

by single parenthood, which

places a greater burden on the

parent to feed, shelter and ed-

ucate children, as well as pro-

vide emotional support, often

without the assistance of the

other parent or indeed the

State.

The current financial crisis

faced by many countries limits

the extent of their commit-

ment to families and edu-

cation. But even in times of fi-

nancial difficulty, it would be

short-sighted to reduce that

commitment, because educa-

tion is the main way to build

up the future of the child and

society.

The United Nations has

been increasingly concerned

with such issues, and is, for in-

stance, assisting Governments,

particularly in developing

countries, in formulating na-

tional policies which include

measures to support the

socialization function of the

family.

The year 1995 — the fiftieth

anniversary of the United Na-

tions — will see three major

events in the social domain:

the World Summit for Social

Development, the Ninth

Congress on Crime Preven-

tion and the Treatment of Offend-

ers and the Fourth World Con-

ference on Women. That year

will also mark the tenth an-

niversary of the Interna-

tional Youth Year, observed by

the United Nations in 1985. Fol-

lowing the International Year

of the Family in 1994, 1995

will provide the United Na-

tions, in cooperation with the

many organizations dealing

with youth issues, yet another

opportunity for assessing exis-