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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: rethinking and strengthening social development
in the contemporary world

Statement submitted by Service and Research Institute on Family and Children, a non-governmental organization in 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Overview of the issue as it relates to the work of SERFAC:

Our contemporary world is bewildered at the severity of the global crisis, manifest in increasing dehumanizing poverty, growing injustice and economic disparity, rampant corruption, continual wars in many parts of the globe, trafficking of women and children, cross border terrorism, global networks of drug cartels and weapons of mass destruction. All of which can be summed up as a breakdown of all human safety nets and democratic systems, increasing cultural confusion, unprecedented violence and collapse of civilization.

In the contemporary, complex and complicated socio-political-economic-cultural global scenario, the possibility of rethinking and strengthening development efforts are paralyzed. Unless there are imminent and concerted efforts to address the global crisis, problems involving human life will continue. This demand which calls for demystifying the term “development” with determined articulation to identify, name and take collective ownership for the global crisis which is confronting the existence of humanity itself needs immediate attention.

In this context “development” cannot be equated to or achieved in the way some development professionals conceive it in economic terms. Development must have at its core the wellbeing of humans in all their social contexts and circumstances.

Therefore the call for strengthening social development lies not in mere rethinking but in astute and fresh thinking which is effective, long term and promotes long lasting change i.e. by restoring family life which nurtures men and women, financiers and politicians who are attuned to the common good, realizing that families continue to be responsible for proper utilization of resources, raising of children by providing the emotional, financial and material support for their growth and development.

Family is the primary source of integration, preserving social and human values and transmitting culture by educating, training, motivating and investing in its future and which constitute a vital resource for development. In many parts of the world families are units of production, creating employment and income. As consumption units they have a direct bearing on sustainability and therefore strengthening development in contemporary society lies in the reality of investing greater appreciation of the role of the family in sustainable development.

This fresh thinking and new vision of development calls for investment in “family-centred” practises which is an original and innovative way of working with children, women and families who are at risk or embroiled in contemporary crisis. This approach is based on a radical set of principles, values and beliefs, which recognize the critical role of the family as the common vehicle in poverty alleviation. Family therefore must be a unit of attention where the focus is placed on a strengths — based culturally responsive, educationally enlightened approaches which utilize family strengths and build on the family’s resources, while employing an empowerment paradigm built on collaborative partnerships with families.

Families reflect the fabric of larger society, and strengthening them is essential to the world’s future. Empowering the family can be a crucial enabling process for present and future generations.

In this context SERFAC's focus is developing pro-family thinking and family-centric action which is a strengths-based approach in social and human development in contemporary society.

Specific examples of accomplishments and remaining challenges:

Service and Research Institute have worked in the area of family development for the last thirty years. SERFAC is convinced of the reality that family breakdown with its multiple causes, manifestations, dimensions and consequences has led to the weakening of family relationships. These weakened relationships are like wounds making individuals and families vulnerable to precipitating factors which erupt at any time, leading to violence in society with its consequences of the breakdown of all social safety nets and social safety floors.

SERFAC works to stem such breakdown through its innovative and original "Family-Centred" approach which leads to family sustainability and consequently social stability, peace and development.

An example:

Using a skills training approach for women SERFAC carries out training in needlecraft for six months. This training includes learning the skills and is combined with lessons on marriage and family: such as pre-marriage guidance, parental relationship, parenting, child care and protection, nutrition, health, education, budgeting, environment, addictions, gender equality and equity along with social skills, literacy and language. Such an approach will transform the lives of women, who understand what family life is and work towards improving their own families. This approach enables family development and family sustainability.

While the entry points to several other projects are different, the process involved draws on the strengths of the family for recovery, development and sustainability. This is the transformation process which eventually becomes cyclic and inter-generational transmission is facilitated.

A way forward:

SERFAC's way forward has been to understand the community by understanding families individually and working out approaches accordingly. We expect that such an approach is essential for bringing about family stability, security for children and the wellbeing of society. We believe society especially our youth, need the warmth of human love and affection. This absence or deprivation accentuates during the time of adolescence and youth. While searching for an identity from their families and community, that today's society might be unable to fulfil, they discover their identity with peers, violence and addictions. They are easily lured and identify with such groups and eventually join them.

Specific recommendation:

SERFAC's request for the United Nations is to develop a Charter of Family Rights and endeavour to promote it among all nation states, using its expertise and facilitate its implementation.

Conclusion:

The minimizing of all factors which weaken family relationships and simultaneously understanding the reality of what is "human development and family sustainability" is of utmost importance. One can hope such an approach will lead to strengthening and sustaining social development in our contemporary world.