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Section One
establishing a framework for families

The Asian region is simultaneously confronting two major challenges: an economic crisis which is undermining the human development gains made over the past decade, and realization of the commitments made to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the targets of the Children's Summit. Within these contexts, it is particularly critical that all governments recognize both the **severe stress the crisis is putting on families in their capacity to protect and care for children** and, at the same time, **the importance and capacity of these families as potential partners**.

To meet these challenges, each country needs to develop and implement a **pro-family policy framework**. While each country will necessarily evolve such a framework in the context of its own specific culture, socio-political and economic conditions and its place in the wider regional and global community, all will need to reflect three basic principles:

1. A national commitment to protect and support the family as the primary social institution responsible for ensuring the rights of children.

A country's responsibility to its children will best be met through exercising its responsibility to their families. This requires (i) providing a secure and stable environment supportive of all families; and (ii) monitoring the impacts of policies and programmes to ensure protection and support for those particular families who are failing. The pro-family framework will ensure to each family "*...the widest possible protection and assistance .... particularly for its establishment and while it is responsible for the care and education of dependent children* (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). It will

> *...recognize the participation of families in attaining the fundamental human development aims of reducing poverty and providing the basic services for health, nutrition, education, shelter and employment opportunities to as many as possible; (b) formulate "family sensitive policies" and help improve national capacities to monitor the implementation of these; and (c) encourage governmental, non-governmental and national and international organizations and agencies to assess how their decisions and actions affect families.* (1998 ESCAP 225th session)

2. A recognition that all families are not the same. Policy analyses and their application need to be conceived on a holistic, interactive basis, broadly-based and responsive to the realities of what families are.

Families look and behave differently in different socio-cultural, economic and geographic contexts. State action needs to be flexible enough to reinforce those families which are able to protect and care for their children, and to intervene for those who are not -- in ways appropriate to the particular structures, traditions and values of each. All interventions should aim to develop the capacities of families and to avoid creating dependencies. They should allow for the full participation of families, taking into account their particular assets as well as their deficits.

Crisis-interventions, where necessary, need to be well-targeted and short-term.

3. Confirmation that all families, regardless of form and capacity, are critical institutions of the society, with rights to social, economic and political environments which allow them to exercise their responsibility of protecting the rights of their members, especially those of children and women.

Family structures are changing, due to conditions both in their environment and in themselves. Their core function, however, remains the same: to be the first place of protection and development for children and those who care for them. It is important to understand and reinforce families in terms of this core function, irrespective of their particular forms, and to provide this support in ways which are consistent with the variable life-cycle needs and capacities of each member.

In realizing a pro-family policy framework, four elements are required:

(a) An accurate and comprehensive **knowledge base** of the actual and evolving situations of families in different conditions and confronting varying levels and types of vulnerability.

(b) A **strategy** built on the specific foundations of a *family-friendly environment* -- economic stability, through sound economic policy and transparent and accountable resource management; social inclusion, through equality of resource distribution, open and facilitated access to decision-making, and effective monitoring of policy impact; and eliminating the poverty cycle, through a broad range of social, educational, health, economic and legal support systems which engage the active participation of those who are being excluded, especially women and children.

(c) Comprehensive and integrative **action plans**, promoted collaboratively by all levels of government and civil society, to enable and sustain stable, secure and healthy families and to remove all obstacles to their continued development.

(d) Effective **implementation** of the action plans, involving all levels of government and civil society (including families), serious and sustained attention to strengthening implementing capacities, and monitoring, evaluating and adjusting for impacts.

The following sections of the paper discuss primarily (a) through (c); (d) remains the responsibility of each State.

Section Two
The Knowledge base: why it is necessary to focus on families

A. Families, not governments, are the first line of protection and care for children; the natural and most holistic basis for realizing the CRC: for understanding the problems currently confronting children, and for taking action to address them problems in sustainable ways. But families are changing, and in the process may be becoming less capable.

Families respond, adapt and evolve as they interact with their changing environments, their own changing attitudes and capacities, and the life-cycles of their members. The fact that they so often succeed, even in adverse conditions, is a major reason why most children have continued to be secure and protected, even during crises.

It is in the family where individuals are supported at all points in the life-cycle; where children first, and often most enduringly, learn to assess, incorporate and adapt values, knowledge and beliefs in constructive ways; and where the most basic values, norms and attitudes of the society are passed on inter-generationally, through modelling of healthy behaviour, positive feedback and constructive discipline and affective communication. The more the society itself becomes uncertain and diffuse in what is considered appropriate (e.g. the more globalized it becomes, or the more undone by crises) the more important it is that the capacity of the family to serve as social guide, interpreter and mediator for their children be strong.

It is these capacities of the family which make it society's best base for realizing a multiplier effect for the CRC: enabling in-depth influence of and for both present children and future adults. Government interventions to promote and strengthen goals such as human rights, gender equity, healthy life-styles and sound economic behaviour are most effective and lasting when successful at the family level.

No other institution in society can provide the same reproductive and nurturing role as a functioning family, or in such a responsive, interactive way. The support provided through governments, service agencies and even communities are important and necessary; they provide the enabling environment. They will never be equivalent substitutes for the family, however, because the same interpersonal bonds are not there.

Traditional family structures are changing, from extended through nuclear and, for many, to single-parent and fragmented. Change can be positive, where it is with a pace and consistency which allow for accommodation and adaptation of values, expectations, skills and role relationships. It can be developmental where it serves the needs and purposes of the families concerned. Structural changes seem now, however, to be occurring too rapidly and erratically, less a decision of the families concerned than a consequence of pressures on and within them. Coupled with an apparent decline in the overall value accorded the family -- and the attitudes of mutual care, responsibility and security it traditionally represents -- some analysts are raising the spectre of there eventually being "no families at all" in some areas. In the sense of cohesive and

sustained social units able to function effectively as a place of refuge for the survival, protection and development of children, *there is concern that the family is being lost as a social resource.*

Social values and mores are also changing across the region, in most cases a natural and positive cause and consequence of human development in any society. What is important now in the Asian context is the apparent trauma they are creating for some families, raising serious concerns about how effectively they are being managed by those families -- and thus whether they are serving to protect children; maintain strong, capable and caring citizens; and promote integrated, mutually responsible societies.

Somehow families are having to come to terms with all of this. They must find their own ways of accommodating to the changes in the nature and amount of care, security and resource support they can provide and expect; learn how to be families in a world in which change is rapid, but facilitated opportunities for life- and family-skills learning, few. They are accommodations which may be being made less successfully, if the rising number of children in need of special protection is any indication. It is a critical juncture for governments, and the society in general, to take note.

B. It is recognized that growing numbers of Asian families have been and are failing, unable to provide their members -- especially their children -- with adequate health, nutrition, shelter, physical and emotional care and personal development.

Unfortunately, families are under a broadening range of stress, diminishing their capacity to act as caregivers, protectors and learning centres for their children. There are growing signs of families having less time together to listen and counsel, less knowledge to share, less confidence in what kind of guidance should be given and how. The new economic order is requiring citizens to be creative, assertive and flexible problem-solvers. Many parents, however, continue to feel most comfortable with approaches to childrearing in which they give the answers and directions, while children listen and obey.

Across the spectrum, families have been doing less well over the period of the crisis, with the result that children are being increasingly denied their rights of protection and care. These are families being put at risk, and their children increasingly vulnerable to harm, as a consequence of both external factors (political, social and economic) and correlated factors within themselves (domestic violence, drug and alcohol addiction, child abuse and neglect).

It is from these families that the growing number of children in need of protection are coming. The root causes of children's vulnerability are most often found there: children too much alone, without consistently available and knowledgeable parents -- who away working, have abandoned them to drugs, poverty or AIDS, or have given up because they lack the information, skills or emotional capacity to cope.

Throughout the region, including countries not the worst hit by the crisis, low agricultural production, inequitable distribution systems and environmental degradation, complemented by

the "draw" of the modern sector, are leading to increased urbanization of the rural poor. These are individuals and families with very few human or financial resources to use in adapting to the expenses and stresses of this new environment. Marginalized families, street children and poor female-headed households are becoming a growing urban phenomenon -- their problems exacerbated by their relegation to slums and subject to the traumas of crime, drugs and eviction.

C. It is reasonable to assume that the crisis is making the condition of families worse, creating significantly more poor families across the region and initiating a downward cycle, exacerbated by corollary increases in family stress, conflict and breakdown, which may be difficult to stop.

There are signs in many countries of more domestic violence, street and working children, split-family migration, abandonment; lowered nutritional status in areas of increased food costs, unemployment and decreased agricultural production; cut-backs in family expenditures for non-immediately urgent human resource items such as education and preventative health care; more trafficking of children for prostitution within and across borders; and increases in exclusion, dysfunctional competition for resources and community conflict.

The economic crisis did not begin these problems, but must surely be exacerbating them. It is logical to assume that family stability will suffer, and its decisions become more short-term and narrow, as incomes become insufficient to meet basic survival needs. As families face heightened uncertainty and poverty, both real and perceived risks will grow; their margins for action, and their options for the future, diminish. These families are likely to be less willing to forego present concrete needs in favour of future often unguaranteed ones. The risk is especially high as women are laid off, since it is their wages which make up most of household expenditures on food, shelter, education and health. Preliminary data already suggest increasing incidents of children being taken out of school and sent to work. Most of the WSC targets are aimed at prevention; they may not in such circumstances be considered compelling.

D. Progress made on the targets so far will be lost without the knowledgeable, committed and capable participation of families, especially those which are hardest hit and likely to be, in any case, the hardest to reach.

Realization of Year 2000 targets is a task largely in the hands of families to facilitate or impede. It is in families that decisions are being made, and will ultimately be sustained, to agree to the priorities, spend the resources, take the time and expend the energy to ensure a safe and nurturing living environment, good nutrition and sanitation, access to immunization, safe motherhood and education. And it is in families that *decisions are being taken not to do these things*, usually for their own good reasons. Especially in marginalized and poor communities, where families are under immediate pressures from the crisis and are not being reached by the shrinking scope and quality of government services, their priorities may well be elsewhere.

It is unrealistic to expect families on their own will realize goals such as the CRC, especially in times of serious crisis or rapid transition. Society assumes certain functions of its

families -- principally to ensure the development of productive, healthy and law-abiding citizens -- but families do not exist in isolation. They are not likely to be able to perform these functions independently of the environment which the State and the wider society provide. *Growing family vulnerability is an especially critical early warning sign and consequence of overall national vulnerability*, just as street and working children are a key sign of failing families. Unfortunately, families like children have good absorptive capacities; they are inherently inclined to survive. When at last they do break down, it is often too late to restore them.

Supportive communities are a necessary condition of progress toward the CRC and WSC targets, but they are not sufficient. In the present crisis, they are in fact able to respond in increasingly more limited ways to the growing complexity of children in need of sustained and responsive care, despite pressures on them to do more by governments unable or unwilling to act. But communities are essentially made up of families, and it is families -- largely on their own -- which are having to be there for children, to see to their development and care.

And in the current situation of limited infrastructure, physical insecurity and weak community support networks, the family is becoming even more critical as perhaps the only, and most consistent, source of stability and protection for children. The ultimate success (and potential failure) of the CRC/WSC goals will necessarily reflect the steadiness of the wider society. It will also reflect the ability of communities and governments to form effective partnerships with the family. The CRC is, finally, a shared responsibility.

E. Families can be assisted to do better, enabling their children also to do better. They have the right to expect their governments, committed through the CRC to ensure the protection of all children, to provide this assistance. The crisis may prove precisely the catalyst to mobilize governments and societies to take action.

One of the most tragic consequences of the crisis may be its pushing families already at risk to yet deeper levels of vulnerability and actual harm, levels from which they may never recover. In effect, it may institutionalize family vulnerability, creating a poverty cycle impossible to break and rendering the goals of the CRC unreachable for large numbers of children.

It is on these very grounds, however, that the crisis may prove an important window of opportunity and a catalyst for action on both WSC targets and the CRC. By making the dangers for families, and thus for the society as a whole, more obviously compelling, it has made old realities less avoidable. Most of these current problems have been facing families for the past decade, but they are cumulative and cyclic, each built on the one before in progressively more serious and hard-to-recover ways. The crisis is speeding up the cycle and worsening its effects. If good and stable citizens, happy, caring and productive people, are to be developed, the family is the necessary starting point. If supportive families are then to do this, government and civil society action is urgently required.

Section Three
issues and strategies for reaching the family

A. In the ideal, *all healthy families perform the same basic function.* By what they do and do not do for children and their primary caregivers, families are the first and most important determinants of a child's survival, protection, development and participation. In the real world, of course, *no two families function in the same way, nor are they formed in the same way.* A family is a social arrangement of individuals who are, in turn, interactive and adaptive members of their wider society and culture. Any one family will be different in what it looks like, what it values, what it is capable of doing and what it needs, depending on context and its own history.

In order to sustain and strengthen families, governments in partnership with civil society need to (i) ensure the broad-spectrum social and economic policies of an *enabling environment supportive of the fundamentals common to all families*, most of whom will do well in consequence; and (ii) at the same time, provide the *specifically-targeted safety-net interventions which will account for the inevitable differences* among families, those characteristics which make some families less successful than others.

To achieve these requirements, *families themselves, as they exist in specific settings and conditions, need to be involved directly and at all stages of the assessment, analysis and action cycle.* So, too, the knowledge and experience of those community-based institutions which interact regularly and immediately with families need to be incorporated in that cycle: schools, health centres, government agencies, NGOs, informal social support networks.

B. Strategies and actions in support of families will be necessarily of two types: *preventative and curative.*

Preventative measures are clearly better, aimed at ensuring the kind of broad social and economic conditions which will allow families to survive and develop with dignity and effectiveness for all their members. They imply providing (i) a strong economy with consistent and equitable distribution systems; (ii) sensitive, socially constructive legal and regulatory systems which encourage family cohesion and internal resiliency; (iii) regular and comprehensive monitoring of the changes and stresses in specific types of family situations and coordinated intervention to stabilize those who are at risk; and (iv) ready access to social, educational and health services of good quality.

Curative interventions, on the other hand, are less easy to achieve successfully. They will always be necessary, but will never be sufficient. They imply (i) support to families in regaining their capacity to be responsible, while not replacing that responsibility; (ii) appropriate, accessible and responsive remedial arrangements to protect and revive broken families and abused members, especially children; and (iii) appropriate control and punishment for offenses against the vulnerable (children, women, the elderly) in ways which prevent further such action and, wherever possible, rebuild relationships.

C. Actions in support of families need to be at three levels: *(i) national*, through strong, clear and consistent expressions of committed public policy; (ii) *meso*, through effective social institutions able to translate national policy in terms of local needs and to articulate those needs in policy terms; and (iii) *local*, through mechanisms and processes enabling the open expression of families' concerns, especially those most at risk, and their participation in all matters of relevance to them.

In each level, action needs to be *horizontal*, to ensure effective coordination and collaboration among sectors and interest groups; and it needs to be *vertical*, to reinforce and promote synergy in the use of resources. Without both forms of integration, it is unlikely that any substantial or lasting development in the status of families will be realized.

D. Obviously, there is no real break between preventative and curative, or between national, meso and local. In each case, however, the balance must be such as to ensure both the *permanent conditions which will protect all families, and at the same time the short-term, targeted and remedial "scaffolding" which will enable those at risk to build and recover their capacity.* It means, for example, a nation of good schools with competent, interactive teachers combined with proactive and creative outreach for those non-attenders who are culturally reluctant and/or without the necessary resources.

E. Finally, actions for families will not often require extensive new structures or resource-intense inputs. Rather, reflecting the fact that families represent a significant "missed opportunity" for new policy and programme partnership, they will need to stress building from, adding to and expanding what is already in place. They will need both to *create a pro-family framework* (i.e. taking the family as such as the point of departure, the bottom line against which all analyses and actions are undertaken and assessed); and to *incorporate into all sectors a family-sensitive dimension* (i.e. maintaining the logic and requirements of the sector as the point of reference, but applying to them the criterion of "best interests of the family").

Broadly, these imply (i) *family-based data collection and situation analysis* at both national and local levels on the status, stresses and assets of families, especially those in at-risk communities; (ii) *converting this information into well-focused and reiterated national policy* (including mass media campaigns) which will raise awareness about the value of, and threats to, families; (iii) *revision of sector policies and programmes* to include explicit reference to the family as target and partner; and (iv) *training of social service providers* on the importance and multiple roles of the family, the symptoms which might denote family breakdown, the dynamics of interpersonal relationships in families, and when or how these might need particular support.

1. Overarching all else, commitment and action must be given to creating an enabling political, social and economic environment for the protection and support of families, and the children for whom they are responsible.

1.1a Situation: Pro-family Policies

Peace, social inclusion, economic stability and good governance are the necessary conditions for eliminating the most egregious risks and offenses against children within their families. An enabling environment is one which supports families in meeting their basic needs, in developing the capacities of their members and in maintaining a sense of optimism in the future. It is the *requisite framework of a preventative pro-family policy.* .

A number of countries in the region have National Plans which specifically aim to secure the human "well-being" and development through access to better health, nutrition and education; protective and secure working conditions; poverty reduction and social equality; and environmental protection. Most also include reference to families and the importance of their being able to care for the elderly, women, children and the disabled; to protect spiritual and cultural values; and to prevent domestic violence, abuse and youth delinquency.

As a result of the crisis, all country Plans are coming under scrutiny, reconsidered in terms of what can still be realized, when and how in light of the various conditionalities required by the IMF, other donors and the market in general. Much of this focus is on what of the various social and health services can and should be maintained. It is not clear where, in the end, the priorities initially put on strengthening families and their surrounding communities will fall.

1.1b Action

It is imperative that the basic commitments and main directions of the initiatives laid down in National Plans do not fall away. The social costs of their doing so would not easily be recovered. Lost families tend to produce lost children, and lead in future years to lost citizens -- even as economies are re-established. Steps need to be taken now, within each ministry and across them, to ensure that core support for the protection of the family as the primary protector of children remains firm.

It is critical that any new or revised policies for families include *specific strategies to assist ministries and local authorities to generate the operational plans and mechanisms needed to implement them.* It is not an easy task to change bureaucratic attitudes and practice, especially given the position taken by many departments that they have no "family" resources, and no room for action beyond the regular work. Countries with long established policies highlighting the centrality of the family (Indonesia's Family Welfare Movement, for example) need to continue to confront the challenge of making the principles of action more than nominal.

Concrete steps need to be taken to *create effective, proactive and collaborative action networks* of agencies, officers and experts able to assist government systems and communities in (i) institutionalizing family-based needs assessments; (ii) developing effective family-support structures through providing information and training for service providers; (iii) co-ordinating service delivery at family level; and (iv) developing family counselling and other outreach opportunities for families, especially those at risk.

Training of local administrators and service providers should include both better, more inclusive, administrative and application procedures, and knowledge on the substance and key conditions of social and child development. Educating informal and official community leaders is also important, about both the need for *integrated child and family development* and the importance of the *linkage between children's rights and their families' responsibilities and capacities* for ensuring them.

New types of support services are needed to enable families to cope and adjust more constructively to sudden or dramatic change. As is beginning to happen in Cambodia and Vietnam, systems of professional "family-sensitive" social workers and para-counsellors need to be developed. Counselling to newly-married couples should be a regular part of the process. The same content should be integrated into all secondary school curriculum.

1.2a Situation: Decentralization

Inadequate targeting of welfare expenditures, and sectorally fragmented programmes aimed at addressing the needs of poor communities and families make it difficult for policies to have impact, and for that impact to be measured. Centralized, vertically-managed social programmes are a problem especially at the level of the family, where it is often not clear how resources and services provided to individual members (through children, women, unemployed workers or youth-based initiatives, for example) are ultimately distributed within the family or contribute to its overall capacity to assess and make decisions on such allocations.

While national plans in many cases try to promote local-level control and the interests of the family through emphasizing integrated and holistic approaches to social programmes, the problem is that most ministries continue **not** to see the family as a social unit. Most continue to operate on a sector and individual-as-target basis.

1.2b Action

Decentralization of policy-making, budget allocation and implementation of programmes is necessary to address these problems. In principal, at least, it allows *integration across sectors* in favour of a human resource development which is holistic and participant-managed. It provides the space for local actors, including families, to determine and act on their own priorities for their own physical, emotional and intellectual good.

Effectively handled, decentralization provides a means of enabling local governments, NGOs and other agents who interact with families to work with them in ways which permit involvement of all family members. It encourages monitoring and evaluation which looks at the impact of interventions on all family members, including on their relations with one another.

There are risks in decentralization, in raising expectations among communities and families that decision-making will become more locally relevant and participatory, and then not being able to follow-through with analyses and action of good technical quality. The risk is

greater where there are no mechanisms for ensuring that priorities set nationally, for the CRC or for Year 2000 targets for example, are effectively pursued. Any decentralization policy needs to be *comprehensive* in scope, and *community-based and iterative* in its needs assessments, planning and evaluation. As suggested above, it needs explicitly to include *strategies for training* bureaucrats, delivery agents and families themselves on participative methods of programme implementation.

Nor does decentralization obviate national-level policy commitments and societal values. *Nationally applied and monitored criteria* are needed for determining where resources should be directed and ensuring their equitable distribution; co-ordinating systems for enabling both local and central level tracking of implementation and evaluate effects are critical. Thailand, for example, is experimenting with a "food basket" basic minimum needs approach to measuring the poverty of families with different age and gender characteristics; to determine where those in poverty are and what the key points of need might be. The intention is regularly to update the measures and make them accessible to village committees for monitoring and intervening with their own families. It is an approach which might be usefully tested elsewhere.

Decentralization also means *sensitizing front-line people in hospitals, schools, police and social service organizations to the need to engage with families*, both in their analyses of what is happening with the specific target individuals or groups to whom they are responsible, and in how they work with them. Teachers, principals and childcare workers, for example, need to be able to identify and address the assets and problems children bring to the school and to their efforts to learn, in terms of the situations of their particular families. Doctors and health care workers need to work within the paradigm of serving the whole family, not just the patient.

In a pro-family framework, the *family itself should serve an integrating function*, helping local agents to reassemble what bureaucracies and sectors have segmented; as a focal point for bringing greater coherence to the separate plans expressed through agricultural and community development, education, nutrition and health, water and sanitation components. Given the still-inherently segmented nature of all government and many donor planning and application processes, the task will not be an easy one. It is, nevertheless, a critical one.

1.3a Situation: New Windows

To some good extent, the crisis is serving to produce new government and civil society mechanisms to deal with the problems it is creating, and causing a refocussing of existing ones. The Thai Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, for example, has created a Centre for Assistance to Laid-off Workers intended to develop procedures for fair termination, schemes for filling the income gap and counselling mechanisms to resolve employer-employee disputes. Its Ministry of Public Health is setting up a "Health Intelligence Unit" in response to the crisis. With a strong research dimension, this is intended as a temporary and flexible mechanism to co-ordinate cross-sector monitoring of the immediate and long-term implications of the crisis, especially on the marginalized groups, and to propose remedial strategies.

1.3b Action

It is fundamental in a pro-family policy that *all available windows for creating interest and capacity* in issues of the family be identified and used. The examples above suggest the kinds of creative and collaborative thinking that will be needed to make meaningful advances on crisis-related problems. It implies serious efforts be made to *co-ordinate and integrate across all ministries and sectors, to ensure a comprehensive and holistic understanding of, and intervention with, families.*

Pro-family policy environments and support systems also require an *integrative, collaborative perspective and the mechanisms to operationalize it.* They require that **all** policy and programme interventions monitor and take into account their impacts on the family, positively and negatively. **All** social sector intervention programmes, especially those at the local level, should be strengthened by incorporating a family dimension. Analyses of **all** social problems, especially those concerning the protection and development of children and adolescents, should include the situation and characteristics of the implicated families and how these might be related causally, or as exacerbating or mitigating factors. From all of this, remedial policies and programmes should be able to take the family into account.

Toward operationalizing this co-ordination goal, consideration should be given to *creation of a specific structure mandated to analyse, formulate and co-ordinate policy with respect to implications for and needs of children and the family.* Concerned especially, but not exclusively with the situation of the most vulnerable families, the mechanism should have the authority to make decisions for the use of family-relevant policy and programme "windows" across all sectors, and from national to local levels.

Family policies executed through specific sectors can be more efficient than multisectoral ones. They need, nevertheless, to *avoid segmented action.* Families, and children, can best be reached holistically. For example, adult literacy programmes can include parent support components and daycare programmes, vocational training for mothers; childcare programmes can include training for older siblings in childrearing practices; parent-to-parent might help fathers and mothers gain confidence in family management skills.

Collaboration with civil society groups is a necessary condition of an effective family-focused environment. This is especially the case in crisis situations, where all resources need to be mobilized, and where non-traditional partnerships become much more possible. Serious efforts will be needed to redirect, reconceptualize and refocus existing human and financial resources; and to develop mechanisms which promote better exchange of information, joint planning and cross-sectors review.

Groups such as Parent-Teacher Associations, for example, exist in some form in most countries of the region. While usually very weak, they nevertheless represent a potentially significant opportunity for much more substantive interaction between families and the school, and as venues for parent training on a range of health, education and social issues relating learning to life. Schools need to become more than simply the places for the children's formal education; agencies like the PTAs could broaden them as community-wide centres of family

learning.

2. Establish a "watching-brief" at national and local levels, to organize, collect and analyze data on the status and dynamics of families

2.1a Situation: Building a Knowledge Base

It has been clear from the early stages of the current crisis that governments know very little about the status of families, or of the levels and types of threats they are facing. Without such knowledge, purposive action to ensure stable and secure social conditions and a basic safety- net for all families -- particularly the most vulnerable -- has not yet been possible in most cases. There appear to be no systems comprehensively able to assess the need for, and efficacy of, interventions which foster family cohesion and resiliency (e.g. of income support for subsistence families during drought, failed harvests or serious illness; of incentives to families for preventative health care, education and caring for PWAs).

Another issue on which a sound knowledge is critical, but seems so far inadequate, concerns *families and work.* Families, through their different members, perform jobs which contribute to the wider society. Less often recognized, families also undertake jobs of caring for one another which are equally a contribution to that society. Both sets of activities constitute forms of work, and each implies opportunity costs for the other. For the family, deficits on either side can have implications for its level of poverty, for stress, dislocation and health of family members, for its adequacy of parenting and vulnerably of its working children. For the society, an imbalance has implications for creating and maintaining a strong, appropriately skilled and reliable workforce, and for maintaining symmetry between economic growth on the one hand and social cohesion on the other.

2.1b Action

Essential to any enabling, pro-family, environment is the systematic and comprehensive generation, analysis and use of information on their changing situations: their different structures; their assets and stresses as a result of their socio-economic and geographic locations in the society; and their different functions, especially in response to changes in those contexts. It is critical to create, in other words, a national "watching brief" on behalf of the family.

The first element needed for such a "watching brief" is *extended -- qualitative and quantitative -- demographic data*, focusing particularly on identifying families and children at risk and the factors which put them there. Both quantitative and qualitative data are needed, for example, to display the status and changing trends in family membership; the distribution, cultural backgrounds and mobility of families; family resources and their management (ratios among wealth, expenses and savings); levels and quality of health and nutrition; quality and participation by different family members in education; patterns of childrearing, decision-making strategies; and the nature of intra-family messages on issues of children's rights, gender relations and parenting.

Preferably set up as a *permanent data retrieval-analysis-interpretation mechanism*, the aim of the watching brief should be to *track the impacts of all government policies* with respect to the implications for different types of families throughout the society: whether and how policies are providing families with social protection and risk-taking margin; and what effect policies are having on families' abilities to exercise their responsibilities and develop their capacities for giving care to their children. Existing social survey instruments, such as Thailand's annual Basic Minimum Needs protocol or Indonesia's SUSENAS need to be reviewed in terms of their quality and relevance, and the processes they use to collect and display data, with respect to reflecting the character and dynamics of families.

It is essential that such data systems include *participation by families and communities*, to ensure that information is correct and complete from their perspective, and to enable their sustained input into informing, adapting and implementing policies and actions based on that information. Such capacity for self-assessment within families and the institutions which work with them is critical to pro-active management and relevance at the local level.

Prevention rather than correction of family problems must be the priority. This requires simultaneously (i) identifying those families who are vulnerable to harm and breakdown; and (ii) recognizing and acting on those factors which put them at risk. Risk factors vary; they are both direct and indirect, external to the family as well as a function of its own internal make-up. Because of this, it is not always easy to relate any single "factor" to the immediately observed problem; nor does action on any one factor lead to immediate change. Risk factors are complicated by being inter-related and cross-sectoral.

Each set of risk factors, therefore, requires *development of situation-specific and locally-useable indicators and suitably participatory data collection and management systems*. Each of these data systems, in turn, requires *internal and cross-referenced analysis*. And from these, there need to be *systems for communication, sharing and integration*, in order to translate the realities for families "on the ground" into the policies and programmes of effective action. It will be especially critical during the period of adjustment to the crisis, that governments and the civil society pull together to monitor the effective maintenance of those *national policies and proportions of national budgets* which are allocated to social problems and social support relevant to families.

It will also be important in this respect to *establish base lines and monitor trends by combining diverse data sets* to determine the different types of vulnerability families face. Co-ordinated *synthesis research and field-based case studies* will also be important, to enable cross-referenced, comprehensive and "dynamic" explorations of underlying causes of problems; of how families are assessing risks and determining preventative action; and of their capacities and strategies for coping.

Analyses of trends, for example, need to look at how much it costs different family types, in different circumstances, to raise a child, to what level of education and health, in both absolute terms and relative to income. They need to consider issues such as how many families can depend on protective, extended-family arrangements and how many on the State; what

percentage of families rely on multiple wage-earners; and how families divide their time between income generation and caregiving. *These are the types of indicators which operationally define* vulnerability. They are the kinds of cumulative data needed to gauge progress toward the goals of family security and stability to which governments have committed themselves.

In a broad sense, such analyses will be looking at *the nature and effect of coping:* (i) at family survival skills - the attitudes and capacity families have for conflict resolution and negotiating resources; the relevance of their knowledge bases and their ability to find and assess new information; (ii) at family survival strategies - the decisions families are making about educational investments, labour force participation, childrearing, custody and access, inter-generational support, reproductive technologies, time and resource allocation; and (iii) at the family's need for survival action -- what activities the family is undertaking as a result of changing socio-economic conditions, physical conflict or social policies.

Correlations among these factors and trends over time will determine whether conditions of family vulnerability are wide-spread and potentially permanent (requiring significant changes to the overall economic, social or physical environments of many families); or more limited in scope and likely temporary (requiring punctual, well-targeted interventions to enable failing families to re-establish themselves). The aim should be to *identify appropriate and sustainable balances in intervention design*, between arms-length, supportive programmes which will allow families to maintain their self-reliance, and those which ensure that none fall so far below a coping capacity they cannot recover. Principal attention should be given to minority-group families, those who are in unstable situations caused by conflict, migration, environmental degradation and/or extreme poverty.

Finally, careful attention will need to be paid to the *balance being maintained between families' economic survival and their nurturing needs* in the context of a world of work becoming much less secure and much more demanding. It is a balance which governments, social and economic policies and employers need to monitor and facilitate.

Tracking the interactions between families and the workplace will require categorizing and monitoring: (i) of an increasingly diverse range of working arrangements, in formal and informal labour markets, modern sector and agricultural production, wage and non-wage employment; (ii) of where, in what specific types of work and with what costs and benefits different members of the family are earning incomes; (iii) of the stability of those jobs and income levels; (iv) of how responsibilities for income generation are shared within the household; and (v) of how effectively families are (and perceive themselves to be) "harmonizing" the demands of work and responsibilities of family life -- especially with respect to the care, protection and development of children.

3. all governments need specifically, and proactively, to reach those families which have traditionally been "hard-to-reach"

3.1a Situation: Who They Are

Across all issues dealing with Year 2000 targets, realization of the CRC and the

economic crisis -- and conditions of the family in the context of all of these -- the most perplexing and crucial test of policy action and national commitment concerns the *status of the "hard-to-reach"*.

Why families are hard-to-reach is, unfortunately, fairly clear. They are families which represent a crisis in policy, action and public conscience -- the tragic and concrete example of a still-persistent failure to act decisively on *"deeply-rooted poverty and vast discrepancies between the rich and the poor"*. This fact is made obvious through the region's exploited children who are mostly the children of these families: in Burma 70% of households depend on child labour; in Thailand, 70% of child workers provide "a major source of family income"; in Indonesia, 77% of school dropouts report the need for them to support family income (UNICEF-EAPR Annual Reports).

Who are the hard-to-reach families is also clear. They are families who continue to live in conditions of poverty, social marginalization, endemic insecurity and domestic and civil violence; families for whom tradition, limited access to resources and a general sense of hopelessness in the future allow them few alternatives as they try to make choices for their children. They are the families and communities isolated from the benefits of development and subject to the worst implications of its abuses in various forms of economic, social, geographic and/or cultural exclusion.

The urban poor constitute a specific community of hard-to-reach families. Unstable, living a marginal existence in all senses, they are often broken families, poorly nourished and educated, victims of random and organized deviance and criminal behaviour, with little or no capacity either to protect themselves or to make use of public support services. Not all poor urban communities are powerless, of course; even the most impoverished and excluded community will have families with considerable assets in the form of knowledge and skills, of mutual support arrangements, of strategies for making creative use of an objectively very disorganized environment. Nevertheless, these families are very fragile, continuingly subject to the actions of outside systems which typically neither understand nor care about them.

One very poignant example of this vulnerability, and one which the current crisis is likely to make worse, is the growing tragedy of slum evictions in major cities in the region. Whole communities continue to be forcibly removed and (sometimes) deposited with little thought for the survival needs of the families involved. The consequences have been harsh: disintegration of families and destruction of their social support systems, including those supporting and nurturing children; loss of family and community economic bases and joint family income; single-parent migration; increased incidents of child labour and domestic abuse. (Dizon: 20,21)

Family violence, apparently on the rise across the region in families of all income levels, presents another form of hard-to-reach families because so much of its worst excesses are invisible. The abuse lies hidden in the family, perpetrated by those who maintain the power against those who have neither the resources nor often the will to respond. Across the region, too little is being done to prevent, control or punish it, considered by many a "family problem". It is a problem expected to become worse as the stress of the crisis becomes more deeply felt,

especially as men have fewer outlets or supports for dealing with the anger, dependency and hopelessness which come with it.

The numbers and levels of vulnerability of hard-to-reach families of all types can be expected to increase as the impacts of the economic crisis wend their way through more communities and touch more families. They will become worse as new strains are added: as families realize the potential of permanently lost jobs, rising costs of basic food and other staples, returned migrants and their lost remittances, loss of income earners and loved ones through AIDS and drugs. These are the same families, of course, who are already finding themselves without the security of personal support networks or accessible health and education systems -- and, thus, for whom sending their children to work, regardless of the nature of that work, may seem a not unreasonable option.

3.1b Action

Serious, sustained and challenging questions must be asked of all society and government policy systems concerning the situation of hard-to-reach families; serious and durable answers need to be found. Governments, sensitive to the impact of the crisis on the macro economy and on the more articulate and well-off of their citizens, have been less able to hear the families most at risk. The burden of the crisis is falling especially on these, on the minority, indigenous, migrant and refugee families who constitute most of the hard-to-reach. *The strategies being taken by such families to adjust and reallocate their human and financial resources, and where immediate specifically targeted "safety net" interventions can most effectively be applied, are critical questions for which answers have yet to be -- but must be -- found.*

Hard-to-reach families face a multitude of problems in a number of forms. Interventions to protect and strengthen these families need to be equally *many in number and multidimensional in scope.* On the macro scale, these will include options for affirmative action to create jobs, provide targeted "safety-net" subsidies and compel equitable resource access and distribution.

At a more micro level, consideration needs to be given to: (i) whether the children of these families could be kept in school and away from work by waiving tuition, uniform or books costs; (ii) whether social support groups and opportunities for learning through counselling could sustain families' morale and guide their decisions toward the CRC targets rather than away from them; (iii) whether action to create jobs, provide training programmes or establish family welfare support payments could ease the stress on families of returning migrants; and (iv) what pressures could be put on employers to ensure safe and educative environments for working children, and shield low-income mothers from the full brunt of sudden layoff.

For families on the street and in slums, *intervention must directly involve their own action and participation, in defining their own problems and developing and managing their own solutions.* It will be important always to start with assuming and building on existing strengths of these families, regardless of their often "non-traditional"structures. Action must also, of course, start with serious and sustained interventions at the broader policy level, to redress the factors of economic and social marginalization which keep such families at risk.

Policy action to prevent arbitrary and recompensed eviction is urgent. Families must have a reasonable sense of stability and continuity if they are to take action on preventative, future-oriented care of their children. Adequate shelter is, indeed, one of rights of the child, and this necessarily includes a reasonable sense of being "anchored".

For children on the street, action must similarly involve the family, since the underlying causes are most typically there. So, too, should be the most enduring solutions. On-site, tailored and carefully facilitated programmes of support to the family, helping all members to cooperate in addressing the behavioural, attitudinal and economic problems which caused the child to leave in the first place, are key.

All of these actions aimed at hard-to-reach families, both assessments and interventions, *must include the families themselves*, as well as those civil society organizations which work with them. There is room, too, for creativity. For example, for working with the mass media to promote the ideals of the family, the value of human over material resources, ways to handle stress, violence and substance abuse. The message must also be clearly and strongly given that labour and sexual exploitation are crimes. There is little evidence so far that very much action in any of these areas is yet underway.

3.2a Situation: Deviance and Crime

According to research and the experience of those working with children in trouble with the law, the most effective means of preventing criminality and delinquency among the young is through strong, educated and caring families as creators of basic social bonds. (Mauras Perez:42). According to the Beijing Rules for the administration of Juvenile Justice, too, the family is essential "*for the purpose of promoting the well-being of the juvenile, with a view to reducing the need for intervention under the law, and of effectively, fairly and humanely dealing with the juvenile in conflict with the law*".

It is the lack of quality parenting and stable, healthy family environments which to a large degree causes children to be exposed and fall prey to crime, as first and foremost its victims. Youth delinquency and crime are growing social phenomena and while not yet a high profile issue in the region, there is no reason to suspect they will not become so as stresses of the crisis move through the society and problems with drugs, sexual exploitation and unprotected street children proliferate. They are therefore issues requiring *preventative attention.* Experience suggests that the costs of not doing so will be very high: in monetary terms of detection and detention; in social terms of insecure communities; and in physical and emotional terms of the victims who suffer. For the children and youth involved, the price is also high -- a denial of their right to full development and participation, frequently the cause of their being exposed to an environment of crime in the first place (often on the street) and resulting in a loss of both liberty and a future.

The younger children are when they enter such a world, and the less experience they have with a nurturing home environment, the less likely they are to have self-esteem, social skills or

skills-based competencies. The less likely they are, then, to have the resiliency necessary to cope with the stress, assess the risks and take the assertive action needed to protect themselves (Ibid Bk2:4). In consequence, the more likely it is that exposure to such a deviant street environment will result in serious and permanent intellectual, emotional and psychological damage with few real options for realizing a normal life -- including the ability to establish and sustain a normal family relationship of their own.

The younger children are when they are implicated in the detention system, the more likely too they are to be physically and sexually abused, introduced to hard drugs and swayed to the "benefits" of criminal activities. The less likely they are to receive the education and social interaction skills necessary to survive in the non-criminal world.

3.2b Action

It is critical that broad societal and State recognition be given to the link between the lack of a stable and caring family and the cycle of involvement in victimization, deviance and criminal behaviour. Obviously, not all dysfunctional families produce deviant children; many children who enter and adopt a deviant life-style, however, do come from failing families.

Poverty contributes to poor health and nutrition, fewer opportunities to interact with caregivers and increased levels of family stress. Poor health of the mother, coupled with limited access to early preventative health care and nutrition for her children, puts those children's development at risk, and can lead to decreased success at school -- itself a "strong predictor" for later delinquency and victimization. "It is the combination of risk factors children experience, particularly if these are multiple, persistent and not balanced by protective factors, that predispose them to negative outcomes" (Ibid Bk1:9-11). It is, therefore, important that social services, particularly education and health, become more aware and proactive in the attention they pay to children *in the context of their families*, not as isolated students and patients.

Toward redressing this situation, a pro-family framework needs to include *attention to the various dimensions underlying the CRC and Children's Summit targets* as concerns of basic child protection and care: to healthy babies, through antenatal care, nutrition and healthy life-style, father's involvement in protecting and supporting the physical and emotional well-being of the mother, ensuring a safe delivery; to secure parent-child attachments and avoidance of child neglect/abuse, through training in effective and protective parenting, counselling for families under stress, links among community parents and professional support systems, making the child "more visible" in the community; to family cohesion and positive developmental childrearing, through home visits, community support groups and early childhood education (ECCE) activities focusing on non-aggressive disciplinary practices, facilitating children's social learning and constructive links with the wider community; and to positive early school experiences, through teacher-parent communication and facilitating parents' own further learning (Ibid Bk1:9-10) .

4. It is necessary to Broaden the "Sector Lens" to include families: how they may be

affected and how they can be included as reference points and partners

4.1a Situation: Migration

Though not traditionally a sector as such, migration constitutes in fact a multi-sector phenomenon, a socio-economic activity undertaken by families which has implications for their participation in all other sectors and implicates most sector departments. Migration is always a serious, and often a traumatic, concern for families -- whether they move as a unit or only one parent leaves. Families most typically migrate to seek work; less often, but in significant numbers, they also move to avoid actual or threatened conflict and social exclusion. Much of the migration in the region is legitimate (documented): both in-country, workers moving back and forth between urban and rural communities as incomes decrease, prices rise or environments become unlivable; or international, workers leaving to and returning from countries elsewhere in the region -- for much the same reasons.

Much migration is also undocumented, but not necessarily clandestine. Migration of this type presents a particularly difficult situation for families, putting them at risk with little or no access to social resources or legal protection. It also faces receiving governments with a problem, the need to balance between the "realities" of the politics and economics of unplanned and uncontrolled populations, and the requirement that these populations, especially their children, be assured their human rights.

To date, there are few hard data on what impacts the crisis is having on patterns, stresses and implications of migration with respect to families, either those who travel or those who have stayed behind. In-country migrants appear to be going back from urban centres in reasonably large numbers, but it is not yet clear whether they will want or be able to establish homes there on a permanent basis. Sending families may not be able to reintegrate them, especially since corollary to their return is the stopping of their remittances. There is evidence, still fairly anecdotal, that a potentially significant number of returnees in some countries may be HIV positive or have AIDS, making re-integration yet more tenuous.

4.1b Action

The optimism expressed by some, that the agricultural-cum-rural sector will absorb many of the returning migrants, needs to be moderated. For the most part, these sectors are less robust than anticipated; significant accommodation will require more land being made available, more intensive retraining of workers in agricultural methods and/or more rural-based jobs created. Even with these, it is far from certain that urban migrants will be content or able to make such a dramatic change in lifestyle, or that families and social networks will be strong enough to facilitate their adjustment process. *Family counselling, programmes to assist substance abusers, provision of social services for education and health of newly arriving families* will all be needed to enable and sustain the serious adaptation and learning processes returnees, from local or overseas moves, will be forced to make.

Government and NGO programmes aimed at guiding, training and facilitating employment generation for the returnees are essential. Though several countries have initiated

them, most are still only in the planning or early-testing stage. The Philippines has in place mechanisms and programmes which could well serve to protect and strengthen returnees and their families, if put quickly into action and effectively focussed on those in most need, with serious, coordinated and reasonably sophisticated work training. Its Overseas Workers Welfare Administration intends to provide economic support in the form of family assistance loans and entrepreneurial training, and a social reintegration and counselling programme for women. Both are aimed at helping workers and their families overcome the stress of dislocations and develop organizational and other skills to manage the changes. More such programmes should be considered in other countries.

Particular attention needs to be given to the situation of undocumented migrant families -- irrespective of the dilemma they present to receiving governments and their social services. Recognizing and helping them may be seen as creating untenable precedents and ignoring the legitimacy of formal migration, but not to recognize or help them introduces new stresses into often the most fragile parts of the society (urban slums, isolated indigenous communities, rural poverty) and is fundamentally contrary to basic human rights and the CRC. As new children are born into this condition without rights of citizenship, their potential as effective parents and residents is further put in jeopardy. *It is in these conditions -- of few social or economic support networks and immediate needs for emotional care, knowledge and skills -- that interventions to support the family unit, as the social institution of choice, are most critical.*

More extensive *documentation and analysis is needed on new migration patterns, or on variations of previous ones.* "Floating" populations, for example, is a label applied specifically in China, but to a phenomenon perhaps occurring elsewhere. Little is known about the implications for family members who are left and those who accompany the migrant worker; the push and pull factors causing the decision to move; the legal, regulatory and social support "environments" which impinge on families and reduce their capacity to cope (lack of registration cards leading to limited access to schooling, and State-supported medical care, for example; children without adequate supervision from working parents or left behind in rural areas). Analysis of these dimensions will be necessary to the development of any effective mitigating policy or intervention in support of these families and their children.

4.2a Situation: Education

A family which values education is more likely to send its children to school, despite limited resources. It is also more likely to support the schools and help pay for its teachers. *Unfortunately, the present crisis risks seriously undermining relationships between families and schools.* Data are beginning to show declining attendance and increasing drop-outs, assumed to be a direct result of families with less money to spend on schooling, and of the higher levels and range of such costs. Reduced participation may also be a consequence of families perceiving declining quality, as teacher-student ratios become less favourable, teacher class-time is reduced (where teachers take extra jobs) and fewer curriculum materials are available. There are indications also of more indirect causes of reduced participation -- migrating families not finding schools able to accommodate their children; migrating parents leaving children with caregivers who may not insist on attendance; and private schools closing down.

4.2b Action

Governments and communities need more systematically to *track changes in families' participation in the education system, and the causes of those changes in terms of their own decision-making processes.* Changes in overall expenditure for children's schooling and the differential allocation of schooling opportunities by age, gender and disability; and changes in attitudes towards schooling, about which children should attend, to what grade level and in what areas of study -- these are the kinds of issues which need to be considered in terms of support to UPE targets in the context of the crisis.

Different reasons on the part of the family for not sending children to school, or deciding to withdraw them, imply the need for different intervention strategies -- tuition waivers to students in particularly hard-hit areas or mobilizing school outreach to migrant families, for example. Innovative thinking, focusing specifically on *ways to engage all members of the family in the education experience* -- not simply the narrower aspects of formal school -- will be key to ensuring both the goodwill of families towards keeping children in school and monitoring their progress, and the readiness of parents themselves to learn new life, work and family management knowledge and skills.

Attention also needs to be given to the **provision of childcare-cum-early education services**, and especially to the potential for overcrowding, poor quality and abuse where these are unregulated. The situation of sub-standard provision is likely to become more problematic as the crisis continues, especially for the poor whose options are fewer and knowledge of what to look for is more limited. As more members of a family are forced to work, and as they have to seek further afield to find jobs; as nuclear families and internal migration reduce access to kin networks as an option; as availability of good public provision lessens -- the quality of private agencies, under-regulated at the best of times, can be expected to become less assured. More untrained people, realizing a sellers market, are likely to get into the business. Systems to monitor demand and supply, and action to assure quality and access will become increasingly important.

The crisis provides an important window for *catalyzing action and collaboration among new actors, or with existing actors in new and broader ways*. As suggested earlier, teachers and parent-teachers associations are, across the region, a largely under-utilized resource which need to be reconsidered and kindled. Similarly, the linkages between nonformal and formal education, literacy programmes and job skills training, parent education and early childhood education (ECCE). Indeed, any channel which will involve families in partnership with the school should be options explored in helping to reduce the reluctance of many parents, especially those who are illiterate, marginalized or from minority cultures, to press for their children's education. Mechanisms need to be created or strengthened which will give these families the tools to themselves decide in favour of schooling -- and thus increase the chance of those decisions being maintained.

Strengthening the quality and reach of early childhood care and education (ECCE)

programmes will be a key strategy in contributing to the immediate and longer-term capacity of families. ECCE programmes can be a powerful tool, one with the potential both of enabling the better participation and learning success of children in school, especially children from poor and marginalized families, and of creating critical openings through which to engage parents and other caregivers in family education.

Children do not develop in isolation, but through interactions within networks of relationships, and the most immediately and meaningful these is their family. Well-designed ECCE programmes should be directly consistent with the child's own development patterns and needs: holistic, comprehensive in focus, and concerned with all the core factors of the CRC: survival, protection, development and participation. And they are important in being applicable across all of the social dimensions of the Children's Summit targets, stressing the inter-connections among health, cognitive and psycho-social development, nutrition and interpersonal relations.

To achieve these goals, ECCE programmes need to (i) incorporate multiple dimensions, addressing the full and real problems of the family; (ii) build on family assets; and (iii) involve professionals from across the sectors, as well as community organizations. They must go "behind the family door" in participatory ways to interact with diverse members of the household on a range of issues relevant to the well-being of child.

ECCE programmes are, in principle, applicable to all sector ministries, all of which should share in their costs -- along with the private sector, local communities and families themselves. Families can often contribute significantly to these programmes, through helping to build facilities and provide supplies; through the skills and time they donate; through participation in family-based community savings plans which help pay for them (a good example of the unpaid work families do which needs formally to be recognized). Good ECCE programmes can offset these costs by *serving a preventative function*: the early learning of children leading to their staying longer and more successfully in school (cutting wastage costs) and their parents' acquiring greater knowledge and skills in basic health and nutrition, leading to overall better family well-being.

4.3a Situation: Health

The implications of the crisis on the health status of countries in the region can be expected to be multiple and interactive. *The first and most sensitive indicators of both immediate and long-term effects will be (and are being) found in the family*: in nutritional status of children and pregnant mothers; in infant mortality and low birth weight; in MMR; in hygiene-related illnesses; and in disease incidence and severity related to declining access to medication. Health service quality and access overall is beginning to decline in some countries as cuts are made to budgets and as increased numbers of people require care. Utilization of services is likely also declining as families re-allocate limited resources to other areas.

The crisis may also be having negative health implications for families in countries whose economies are not, because of still very low levels of development, as directly touched.

There is concern, for example, that the former access of Lao border families to Thailand's medical services may be cut off as Thai budgets are reduced and imported medicines curtailed. Already suffering high rates of maternal and child mortality, under-nutrition and disease, these families may be especially at risk without careful monitoring to ensure the adequacy of their care. Similar conditions may prevail in Cambodia.

Families are key to issues of HIV/AIDS, and can be expected to become even more involved (by choice or default) as the crisis leads to higher incidence and fewer public support systems. And incidence is expected to rise as more children and adults are drawn or forced into the sex industry as other jobs are lost; or as commercial sex becomes a more important outlet for the stresses and frustrations men feel in other parts of their lives. There are likely to be fewer services available for persons with AIDS (PWAs) and this, coupled with the return of working migrants, will put additional strain on families confronted with the decision of whether or how to reintegrate them into perhaps already more poverty-stricken conditions. The risk of HIV/AIDS will be greatest for the hard-to-reach families, those with often few resources of their own and little access to information, counselling or medical care.

4.3b Action

As with education, it will be critical for government at every level to pursue systematic and comprehensive data collection on health issues, to *identify what the family-relevant linkages to health are: how families are being affected by the crisis; what changes are occurring in both health status and health decisions within the family; and how curative and preventative services are being used* -- especially with respect to children and mothers. Where families have been participating in privately-funded or co-funded public coverage, they may now be making decisions to withdraw (as is already happening some countries). It will be important to know both whether this is the case, and what the follow-on implications are in terms of less regular and preventative care; increased need for more extensive and expensive "crisis" care; greater loss in work-time.

Direct and interactive communication with families on all of these issues will be important, not necessarily to make the scenarios less likely, but to make them more amenable to management. The better the reasons for family decisions are understood, the more relevant policy and programme interventions can be and the more effective in making subsequent resource allocations by families, and their use of public services, more constructive.

It will also be important to *evolve a blend of social, health and economic, qualitative and quantitative indicators* into any assessments of family-based health status and decision-making. Understanding how all of these dimensions interact with family attitudes and behaviours concerning health-related issues should help guide and target subsequent interventions with them, as well as enabling piggy-backing of data collection and analysis mechanisms. Coupling this with *action to facilitate use of the information at the community level*, by local governments, NGOs and families themselves, will be important in identifying and taking action on behalf of families at risk with greater speed, specificity and follow-up.

Community-level, family-based support and education activities on HIV/AIDS, though not yet in effect operationally in many places, may ultimately be among the most durable answers to the care of PWAs as governments withdraw. Young people in particular should be able to go home for comfort and support, making families the place where health systems and donors can perhaps most effectively target their palliative funding, and where community groups can find collaboration in their support efforts.

Toward this end, *government action will continue to be critical to better understand the patterns and content of communication within families* concerning issues such as male-female relations, sexual behaviour and drug use in the context of AIDS; also *to know more of the dynamics of social exchange, and of the types of health costs involved for families as AIDS-caregivers*. It is on this basis that much more significant and direct support needs to be given to families in the form of information, tax incentives, health-cost subsidies, counselling.

4.4a Situation: Legal and Social Support Systems

Legal and regulatory environments are rarely neutral for families: they provide either a context which protects and encourages their stability and ability to care for members, or one which undermines these roles. It is far from clear in the region that governments and legal systems are finding a best balance between allowing families to manage themselves in protecting their own best interests, while at the same time protecting those families which are weak or whose members are at risk of abuse.

There is a growing consensus in the region that current legal and judicial processes remain in many ways inadequate to the needs of families. That they are too soft on perpetrators and too hard on victims of child abuse and domestic violence. That lawyers, judges and police, and all who come in contact with dysfunctional families and exploited or abused children, have insufficient knowledge and skills to prevent and recognize these problems as they obtain in families or to deal with them in appropriate and protective ways in terms of that context.

The law is also an issue for families with respect to *entitlements over resources.* In some cases, women are still denied land ownership or right of inheritance. Some cannot keep property after divorce or separation. Systems for ensuring child custody payments are lax. There are also *inconsistencies between official law and traditional practice* where laws may allow women to inherit, but tradition and informal discrimination in things like banking prevent it happening.

Families differ in their structures, assets and needs across economic, socio-cultural and geographic contexts. *National programmes for the creation and spending of national revenue, designed and applied in ways which ensure equity for all families and are tailored to their diversity, appear to be still weak and poorly adapted to the changing crisis context.* The effectiveness and scope of mechanisms such as taxation benefits, family welfare and income support, childcare programmes and maternity (and paternity) leave regulations, remain uncertain. All of these have important potential not only for protecting families, but also for encouraging pro-family behaviour (e.g. tax incentives for keeping children in school, for keeping the elderly, disabled or permanently ill people at home).

4.4b Action

Particularly in this adjustment-to-crisis period, *all laws and regulations need to be reconsidered from the perspective of how they differently affect men, women and children as individuals, and how they affect the cohesion and stability of the family as a unit.* All Constitutions should be reviewed, and advocacy efforts explicitly designed, to ensure that laws and regulations positively affect families -- or at least do them no harm. One such area concerns childcare provision. The fact that increasing numbers of women are in the formal and informal workforce, often without a family or other network to care for their children, suggests the need for national policies concerning childcare services: in some cases, to provide it; in all cases, to ensure a sound and enforced regulatory system of standards of quality.

So, too, it will be important for all countries to *review and revise their legal and taxation systems, and their social welfare policies,* towards ensuring they effectively and equitably support the resiliency, independence and integrity of the family, as it exists in its various forms.

In any legal or judicial regime, there is no one or always clearly best way to apply the "best interest of the child" stipulation of the CRC. Culture, social traditions, economics all play a role. Thus, in all countries, regardless of the level of development of their legal systems, debate and negotiation in determining how to treat the family, parents and children, in cases of divorce and separation, abuse and violence are critical. With few clear answers as to how laws and regulatory systems can best protect the integrity and security of the family, but increasing evidence that they are not doing enough, there is no option but to pursue the search for better ways. All of these are issues which need to be addressed, and especially as human, institutional and financial resources come under greater pressure from the current crisis. It is critical in the context of the family to understand in what areas and how the law affects its cohesion , stability and functions -- particularly as these relate to women and children -- and develop the mechanisms to assist them.

Related to this is the importance of countries developing the principles, framework and mechanisms of a "family law" system. There is need to ensure that the ways in which the law treats marriage breakdown, domestic violence, control over household resources and custody of children do not put women and children further at risk; that it serves to help preserve family stability rather than exacerbating inequity and conflict; and that it ensures that the victims of family abuse have fair and ready access to effective legal protection.

Family law involves a complex of legal, socio-cultural, financial and human rights issues, requiring specifically trained judges, lawyers and police and a well-informed community. Where legal systems are failing to facilitate systematic reporting and sensitive action on family-related conflict, or to coordinate action to protect victims and control perpetrators, *training throughout the system* is needed. Professionals in regular contact with families -- doctors, teachers, social workers, community leaders -- must have clear and readily accessible means of bringing cases of abuse to the attention of police and counsellors. Several initiatives have already begun in the region with respect to family courts, child law and family law and marriage regulations. Action is needed on all of them to *ensure their further development, including public education to promote*

greater demand for their effective application.

It is necessary to examine and act through a *preventative, holistic social development framework, to address the family conditions associated with children becoming victims of crime and falling themselves into patterns of delinquency and/or permanent criminal life-styles.* This requires development of reliable data bases on the incidence of children involved in criminal environments, through choice or force, and taking action to strengthen the kind of child and family-sensitive policing, legal and judicial systems necessary to protect, extricate and recover them. Analyses are needed on the specific conditions which propel children and young people into these environments. On the basis of these, culturally appropriate, comprehensive and integrated legal policies and action can be developed -- in collaboration with communities, sector professionals and families themselves.

5. states must assist families to overcome their isolation and dependency through good quality programmes which support their learning and their ability to connect into the community

5.1a Situation: Learning and Change

Families across the region are finding themselves increasingly on their own and thus, depending on their conditions, more independent, isolated or vulnerable. Inadequately designed public welfare and donor interventions exacerbate this tendency where they limit the family's responsibility for making its own decisions, putting these decisions instead in the hands of sector "experts".

Families need to have the chance to learn their way into their new structures and roles. Countries across the region are variously recognizing declines in the capacities of families to guide, educate and discipline their children in ways which both conform to values and traditions and prepare them for the uncertainties of the changing social and economic world. In too few cases, however, are they providing the mechanisms to help those families learn how to engage effectively with these changes.

5.1b Action

Government services and access to information activities need to *move closer to where families are, both geographically and, especially, through more direct relationships with them as partners in programme interventions.* Interventions with women and children, for example, should make it a priority to *look to the families from which they come*, to ensure that disadvantaged families in particular are being supported in building on their assets and strengthening ownership. The aim should be to create "discretionary margin" for families, providing them resources in ways which allow them to test and adapt innovations to suit their own needs. For example, income generating funds need to have sufficient flexibility that they can be applied by the family in ways they see as relevant, including making changes in their use as conditions warrant.

Family-to-family strategies are key, enabling families to share their learning with others, and in turn strengthening their capacities of assessment and communication as well as transferring information. Such exchanges can serve as a means of helping families gain relevant insights on issues such as childrearing, resolving family conflicts or ways to improve nutrition, and how their own initiatives might be better used, within a resource and cultural framework and in ways closer to their own experience. They can also lay the basis for long-term linkages, where the content of the exchange shifts overtime to address other, perhaps community-level issues.

Family resource programmes are a particular form of a family-linkage approach which could be explored for suitability in different contexts. Designed in terms of the needs and resources of the specific families involved, these programmes build on existing knowledge and skills to strengthen the confidence and capacities of parents who have problems. They focus on the entire family, rather than on members as individuals; on preventative, community-based services, rather than crisis interventions; and on building on the assets families already have for assessing and solving their problems, rather than on "filling in deficits". They aim to provide both parents, as well as other family caregivers and children, non-judgemental contexts in which to develop their own programme goals, approaches and specific activities; to share ideas and experiences; to acquire knowledge on child development and childrearing practices; and to get information on the types of social, education and health services are available. Costs of such programmes can be kept low largely through parents and community members volunteering their time and resources, and co-ordinating access to already-available social services, including schools and health centres.

Messages about healthy life-styles, education and childcare in these and all family-oriented interventions need to be *communicated in levels and types of language appropriate to those involved*, giving them the chance to discuss and interpret what the suggested behaviours or attitudes might imply in their own situations. This is especially important for *marginalized and minority group families,* those "hard-to-reach" because they typically in quite different socio-cultural traditions than that of the message sender. They are also families often unable to use social services effectively, lacking confidence in dealing with the bureaucracy, knowledge of what is available and/or skills in articulating their problems.

It is important to note that there can be *risks in broadly-based "community" programmes in terms of trying to realize a family-focus. All families are not of a kind*, even within the same village. They bring to bear different capacities, expectations and needs; they perceive things differently; they are accorded different status by their neighbours. Families also interpret and act on risk differently, and are thus not equally able to make use of local resources, such as co-operatives, health centres, savings plans or participatory approaches. This implies programmes which are fairly labour-intensive, able to be tailored at the point of application.

Families are also inherently integrative. They decide and act on the basis of often very eclectic tasks to be done, problems to be solved and needs to be met, not social "sectors" (except when forced to do by those sectors). While most families are probably not indifferent to members

bringing back new ideas, skills or knowledge from social change programmes, nor can they be expected necessarily to accept those innovations, or to "take them in" in precisely the ways intended. There is, therefore, risk in acting on families simply through their individual members (women, children, heads-of-households). In *isolating the parts from the whole*, by treating them as somehow independent agents, it is possible to *exacerbate any tendencies toward fragmentation* a family might have.

The success of all intervention programmes will be strengthened to the extent they can *effectively blend different sectoral areas to reflect the inherently integrative reality of the family* -- regardless of the programme used as entry. Thus, for example, a health intervention can serve as a means of mobilizing family-based learning and behaviour change in dealing with intra-family conflict. Every policy and programme, especially those attempting to change fundamental values, expectations or behaviours of individual members of a family, need to be considered in terms of whether and how they might also be strengthening or diminishing the cohesion, stability and overall human resource development of that family.

5.2a Situation: Men in Families

In most if not all countries of the region, the *role of men in families* has been undergoing significant change. Coupled with very rapid shifts from rural to urban and into different economic sectors and social settings, *men are also facing perhaps most dramatic change in the way they perceive themselves and are perceived within the family.* In many of the region's cultures, they have moved from a position of undisputed head-of-family to one in which their influence and authority are shared with more assertive, independent and publically-active wives and children. With the crisis, men are now confronting yet more trauma: sudden unemployment, pressures to migrate, uncertain futures, and families at greater risk from ill-health, psychological stress -- new demands with fewer resources to meet them.

These are conditions facing all members of the family, of course, and especially the more vulnerable women and children. The difference for men, in general, is a lack of sympathy for their plight and so a much more *limited provision of psychological and learning resources the need to facilitate their adaptation.* There are increasing concerns now that men's attitudes and behaviours are not keeping pace with their new realities; *increases in domestic violence, substance abuse, abandonment and multiple families suggest growing discontinuity between the what men may expect and what they can do.*

The considerable (and critically important) attention given to developing consensus on, and providing learning opportunities to encourage, a different position for girls and women in terms of their responsibilities, capabilities and rights, has not been matched with respect to boys and men. How to merge the "softer" characteristics now being demanded of them -- to be more caring, protective and responsive -- with those of dominance, self-assertion and control traditionally expected is not always clear, making the accommodation even less easy.

5.2b Action

Towards broadening the lens on the family, towards not isolating the parts from the whole, it is becoming very clear that *more focused analysis and attention must be given to the role of men -- as husbands, fathers and, by extension, people who can influence social action.*

Governments, researchers and the wider society need to work toward a *pro-family policy framework which understands, encourages and guides the inclusion of men as active and responsible agents* at a number of key levels: as spouse and parent, as role model for what fatherhood and male-female relationships mean and, as members of the local community and wider society -- people able to influence the "family-friendliness" of their social, economic and political environments. Focusing on women and children on their own has tended to deconstruct the family as a unit. WID programmes, for example, need more conscientiously to follow-up on participants as they return to their families with new attitudes (of self-confidence), capacities (in decision-making) and tasks (of income generating), specifically to help them accommodate all of these changes within their families -- a setting which, for male members, probably has not changed.

Reconstructing "new" family arrangements in this way is a necessary task, but a formidable one however. *Prevention is key; segregation needs to be avoided in the first instance.* Analysis and action with families needs to ensure not simply attention on its members as individuals, but *on the nature of the relationships among them.* Children generally do better where families are complete and stable, a situation best assured when relations between parents are "based on mutual respect, equal rights and shared responsibilities" (UNICEF/b:13). *It is not for women and children on their own to realize the CRC.*

6. higher public profile within and across countries to the importance of the family is essential -- to confirm their strengths and share lessons learned

6.1a Situation

Many of the problems confronting families in any one country of the region are becoming more generalized to the whole; and more linked. Obvious examples of this include: legal and illegal migration; movements of children for sexual and labour exploitation; dislocation of minority communities across national boundaries; mass media images of ethnic violence and deviant behaviour. All countries in the region are signatories to the CRC, which recognizes families as the first place in ensuring the rights of the child, and ASEAN heads of government agreed to the 1995 Declaration of the 5th Meeting to "*continue to strengthen the family as a foundation for strong caring and cohesive society...and (to) provide safety nets for families to help cushion the impacts*" of change.

To date, NGOs appear to be the major catalysts of media in support of the family, but mainly indirectly -- through programmes on causes, consequences and actions needed to counteract child trafficking, HIV/AIDS and drug-use. While these recognize the critical role of the family, they are putting perhaps insufficient focus on the *positive* role families can have in

preventing these problems and in reintegrating and caring for affected children and adults.

6.1b Action

The value of the family, and its integral importance to the well-being of all societies, warrant a much higher public profile in all countries. Region-wide sharing of experience and collaborative action concerning issues of the family would be not only pragmatically sound as the effects of the economic crisis and restructuring efforts begin to take hold, they are national commitments.

Unfortunately, the *plethora of messages being delivered daily, at all levels, which directly and indirectly undermine the position of the family as a fundamental part of the society* are not being countered by values of mutual responsibility, of human development and security based on interpersonal relationships - the fundamentals of the family. Mass media messages arguing for individualism, the benefits of material progress and financial security, the importance of independent action and thought can, in not put into a broad context of social responsibility, effectively undermine the growth of citizens who are both sound as individuals and socially reliable. The message needs to be put firmly and repeatedly across all mass media, through all government programmes and policy statements and through all IEC programmes that the family is the "core of the society". That while in form and function it will continue to evolve, it must always be protected.

The ultimate impact of any message rests in how effectively their use can be *facilitated directly with families themselves,* in the context of their households, through other more *interactive interventions*. Families must be given the opportunity to engage with and interpret new ideas into their actual life; simply to expose them to the information is not sufficient. As new family types emerge, it will become increasingly important to identify what the necessary conditions of viable family structures are and encourage, support and try to stabilize them.

It is no longer possible to promote the (probably always simplistic) ideal of a "traditional" Asian family. It is, however, critical that governments and societies across the region look to what were and are the *traditional core Asian values of family rights and responsibilities and help to reinforce and adapt these*, as appropriate, through policies, the media and education. Logic would suggest that progress on the CRC and Year 2000 targets will be limited, if not stalled and even lost, unless both direct and high-profile attention is given (i) to convincing families of the importance of participating in them, and (ii) to convincing societies of the importance of the family in this effort.

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