UN Workshop on

Technology and Families

6-10 October 1998
Dublin, Ireland

Report

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Introduction

1. The United Nations Workshop on Technology and Families was held in Dublin, Ireland from 6 to 10 October 1998. The Meeting was organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, Division for Social Policy and Development, in close cooperation with the Government of Ireland, Department of Social Community and Family Affairs, and in association with Quest Campus. 1/ The Meeting was opened by the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs of Ireland. In his opening statement, the Minister noted, *inter alia,* that "there can be no doubting the immense challenges and opportunities that all development of global communications and technological advancement present in all areas of our lives: not least in how we can develop programmes to ensure the widest possible participation in the Information Society. The new technologies create the potential for massive changes in how we do business and how we live our lives. However, the kind of future society we live in is substantially determined by the choices that we, as citizens and as a society, make now. The future well-being of people, families and their communities is central to those choices. It is their vision of the kind of society they would like to have that technological development must serve".

2. The basic objective of the Workshop was to assist Governments in investigating the impact of rapid technological change and diffusion on the family and on the roles and interactions of its different members and in formulating appropriate guidelines, specific measures and recommendations for action. The specific objectives of the Workshop

were (a) to provide a forum for participants to exchange knowledge and experience on the role of technology and its impact on families; and (b) to address the nature, forms and extent of technological change and its impact on families, specifically in the areas of education, communication and information; work and employment; and health and basic social services.

3. Across the world, forces of change, many driven by technology which is increasingly science-based, are reaching into all aspects of the life of people and into their institutions, among them the family. The effect is to alter, often dramatically, how people live, how they earn their living, what their prospects are – for better or for worse – and how they relate to each other in and through their social institutions. Technology impacts the institution of the family through various channels, among them the education system, the mass media, the world of work and social services, in particular those relating to health and social well-being.

4. The impact of technology on many facets of life is much scrutinized, in particular its economic and military dimensions. The impact of technology on education, on employment, on health and on individual well-being is much researched. However, the impact of technology on the fabric of the family, on its viability and on the interaction among its members has so far received less attention, especially in an international context.

The present Workshop has concerned itself largely with the following:

- *First*, how technological change affects the family unit in the performance of its central and irreducible functions in any society, traditional, modern and post-modern alike, namely to be the primary or principal socializer of children; and to provide the needed stability and reference point in life to adults;

- *Second*, how change driven by technology affects relationships among family members: husband and wife, mother and father, parents and children, the various siblings, other members of the family, close and more distant; how expectations change within the family – who expects what from whom; how the ability of each to meet these expectations is or can be changed by technology;

- *Third*, and conversely, how technology can come to the help of the family in its efforts to adapt to change in order to continue to play its central role; how new burdens falling on specific members can be eased by technology itself; and what new opportunities for strengthening the family unit present themselves.

6. The findings of the Workshop will be made available to the 38th session of the Commission for Social Development as a contribution to the follow-up to the International Year of the Family (1994) and to the review in the year 2000 of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, 2/

7. The following agenda was adopted:

a. Opening of the Workshop.

b. Adoption of the agenda.

c. Presentation of the background paper and discussion on the impact of technology on families in four specific areas:

- Social change,technology and families;
- Education, communication and information technology and families;
- Employment, technology and families;
- Health, basic social services,technology and families.
- Discussion on guidelines and recommendations.
- Adoption of the report and closing of the Workshop.

8. The Workshop established drafting groups to discuss the impact of the technological revolution on families in three specific areas: education, communication and information technology; employment and work; and health and basic social services.

9. A background paper entitled "The Technological Revolution: Opportunities and Challenges for the Family" was prepared in advance of the session by a team of consultants (Messrs. Michael Cooley, Marcel Fabri and John Balaba, who also participated in the Workshop). The paper provided the starting point for the discussions. The background paper is available at a United Nations Headquarters Website 3/.

10. The Workshop was attended by experts from the following countries: Belgium, Chile, Estonia, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Malaysia, Nigeria, Singapore, Slovakia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

11. The following were represented by observers: International Labour Office, Irish Government (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, Department of Health and Children, Department of the Taoiseach, Department of Education and Science, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Department of Foreign Affairs), Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Technology Innovative Associates, and Quest Campus.

12. The report of the Workshop was adopted at the plenary meeting on 10 October 1998.

Social change, technology and families

13. Technological developments and diffusion have contributed immensely to the improvement of living standards of millions of people in many parts of the world. Reducing poverty, improving health, widening opportunities and choices and providing access to quality of life-enhancing products have been among the significant beneficial effects.

14. From a family perspective, there have been gains in terms of enhanced educational opportunities for children, an enhanced status for women, greater security for the family as a basic unit of society and more time for pursuits other than those stemming from the

basic need to earn a living.

15. The negative effects are equally well known. These include the stress of having to accommodate to changes in the living and working environment, displacement and dislocation, including in the workplace, challenges to established or traditional values and erosion of the reference points that give meaning to life.

16. From a public policy perspective, a discussion of the link between technological change and its impact on the family must take into account certain basic characteristics of modern, science-based technology:

Technology does not respect borders, blurring sovereignty and identities, and has the capacity to erode values and undermine lifestyles nurtured for generations;

Technology is not neutral. It is rooted in, and the outcome of, the societies and cultures within which it was developed. When transferred, brings with it its own value systems;

Industrialized countries are predominant in the development and diffusion of modern technology. Its products tend to reflect, and are more oriented to, the cultures, needs and lifestyles of families of industrialized societies rather than those of developing societies;

An important and relatively new phenomenon is the gap between scientific discovery and technological application. What used to take several decades now occurs almost instantaneously. This has the dual effect of speeding up access to innovation and new products for the ordinary family while requiring quicker and continuous accommodation to new circumstances -- for example, to the changing demands of the workplace;

The gap between the potential and reality of technology -- that is to say, between what technology is delivering and what it could deliver – is vast and growing;

Technological change affects individual members of families differently, and the nature of this differential impact will itself vary from region to region.

17. While various external forces drive technological development, in particular commercial considerations, technology also has an inner momentum and rationale and, to an important extent, has acquired its own dynamic, particularly through its intimate association with science. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the direction that particular technological developments ultimately take is the result of human decisions, private and public. In deciding what to support and what to discourage, public policy needs to take into account, as one factor, the likely impact on the basic institution of society – the family – and to seek out those developments that, _inter alia_, may be judged to have a positive effect on the family and equitable outcomes for its different members. In framing policy, the use of family impact assessments or statements deserves

consideration. At a minimum, such assessments should seek to create greater awareness through the dissemination of information and should act as a buffer against policies whose effect is to put at a disadvantage, vis-à-vis society, those who give priority to the discharge of their family responsibilities.

18. A key question is that of control over technology. Families and civil society should be proactive in this regard. This has several dimensions. First, families need to be assisted in controlling, to the extent possible, their exposure to unwanted intrusion, for example, via the mass media and new information technology devices. Second, families should be empowered to make use of newly available options for accessing information and technology that improve their lives, create economic opportunities and facilitate social interaction within the family and with the wider community. Third, public policy needs to promote and provide incentives to the development of technologies in areas most useful to the well-being of families, whether in relation to employment, health, education or the integration or reintegration of older or disabled members, with special attention being given to particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged families or those in situations of special stress.

19. Support for the development and commercial dissemination of home health care kits at one end of the technological spectrum, and a greater use of remote diagnostic systems at the other end, to complement primary and community-based health care, are just two specific examples. Possibilities exist for people living alone, particularly older persons with disabilities, to keep in touch with family and community through the available new communications systems; this is yet another specific area where greater support could bring substantial social benefits.

20. An important area of concern to Governments in both developed and developing countries must be to keep education policy under review in the context of employment needs so as to minimize the mismatch between the output of the education system and the demands of technology-driven production. This is a particularly major problem which is not exclusively a problem of the developing countries, but one that also affects the most industrialized countries. Better access to information technology and support in the family for technology-focused schooling can help avoid skill shortages among youth.

21. New communication technologies (for example, satellite technologies) can contribute significantly to overcoming traditional impediments, such as lack of infrastructure, which have prevented many societies from achieving their educational objectives (in particular adult literacy, and universal primary education), and to liberating and informing housewives. Where children have been kept out of school and required to work to supplement the family income, new technology has been able to partly compensate through distance learning and thus help break the vicious circle that keeps families in poverty from generation to generation.

22. While technological change and momentum are irreversible, policy makers in many countries need to pay close attention to the societal consequences of the introduction of new science-based technologies into their societies and the lifestyles of those societies. The embrace of globalization and the advance of technology should not be allowed to undermine, in particular, the stability of families and destroy traditional techniques of production by which large numbers of people (often in family enterprises) obtain their living.

23. Scientific knowledge and methods should also be more directly targeted at the lives and needs of those engaged in traditional modes of living and techniques of production in rural areas and villages. The aim should be to upgrade their quality and competitiveness in the market place without disturbing their moorings and basic features.

24. Scientific research and technological development and diffusion need to be better controlled and managed so that the benefits of technological applications, particularly information technologies touch those that need them most. Far greater resources and a much larger proportion of global research and development expenditure should be devoted to this purpose. A time-bound quantified target can be considered.

25. International organizations, particularly the United Nations, have an opportunity and a responsibility to contribute to the more symmetrical and harmonious development and diffusion of technologies in a manner that does not disrupt the stability and sustainability of families. They can help create the right policy environment and provide multilateral support to ensure that technology touches and reaches those that need it most. Scientific resources and research that address the problems of families in developing societies should increase significantly and should be conducted to the maximum extent possible close to the arena of their application. International organizations can provide the stimulus and support that are needed.

26. Within this broad framework, there are important nuances and differences between and within societies and cultures. More accurate empirical data and analysis are necessary for an informed discourse on the implications of technological change for the future of families. Selected case studies on families in different cultures would be helpful.

27. This present initiative of the United Nations and the Government of Ireland in highlighting family concerns should be pursued and followed up by the non-governmental sector, voluntary organizations and other relevant actors of civil society.

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II. Education, communication and information technology and Families

28. The family remains a primary source of education and learning and should be supported in this role. Its role, next to that of transmitter of language and culture, as one of the primary entry points for the delivery of new technology, should be recognized.

29. To enable families to fulfil their role as active educators, they should be recognized as partners in any education system and the formal educational institutions should be seen as supplementary and supportive. In this connection – and taking into consideration cultural and developmental differences – families should have access to, and be enabled to be full partners in the information society, and in a manner that reflects and enhances their familial roles. Therefore, all efforts should be made for access to adequate

information and communication technology to be secured within the control of the family.

30. The Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development recommended that full educational opportunities, ranging from pre-school to higher education, should be developed. This could be paralleled by adult education and lifelong learning. Such systems should have full access to the latest technological tools such as are provided by information and communication technology.

31. As recognized by the signatories of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, 4/ the issue of education is linked to creating and maintaining an environment of peace and security and avoiding conflict.

32. By recognizing and stressing the necessity for lifelong learning, the promotion and development of information and communications technology may be instrumental in shifting the balance from teaching to facilitating learning. This would focus skills on ways of learning rather than, exclusively, on subject matter or content. From a cultural perspective, it is important to recognize the role of the family in the development of such a "learning habit".

33. To ensure that the educational environment facilitates access by families to basic social services such as health and other child-related services, promoting the availability of and accessibility to information and communication technology is of crucial importance. Information and communication technology should be so shaped as to enhance the development of "heads, hands and minds".

34. The family has traditionally been the main agent of primary socialization. However, in modern society, the media are playing a major role in the socialization of young children. It is therefore important that parents are enabled to manage and control the access of children to information technology.

35. Buildings and other capital resources that form the infrastructure for formal education should not be seen as dedicated to the education only of children. Such resources should be considered part of the resource bank of the community enabling families to learn together.

36. The scope of education should be wider and include the whole family – parents and children. This is especially important when parents need also to learn new skills required by the technology and can share learning resources. Moreover, as recognized by the signatories of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, the issue of education is linked to creating and maintaining an environment of peace and security and avoiding conflict.

37. The family is more than a primary source of education. Its more significant role is in providing children with important initial sets of values. The first relates to social interaction, where the family provides both examples and a discussion forum in which learning can occur. The second relates to education with respect to its value in sowing the seeds of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning must begin in the home.

38. Law and policies regulating and guiding the educational system should be reviewed on a regular basis at the national level, taking into account new and emerging

technologies. In this way, technology can be used effectively to enhance, rather than inhibit, the educational system, thus introducing students to the realities that they will confront in later life and preparing them for the world of work.

39. In developed countries, the results of formal education can still be very diverse. Some young people emerge functionally illiterate: others progress to the highest level available. However, many highly educated people are underemployed in the workplace owing to the state of demand for their skills. The functionally illiterate may find it impossible in the new technological environment to gain any employment at all. Generally, this gives rise to cynicism with regard to the educational process.

40. It should be recognized that education is not limited to formal education as provided in formal settings. The importance of informal education should be stressed: here the role of the family is crucial. In view of the emerging information society, measures should be taken so that families can acquire and maintain the appropriate skills to become full partners or participants. Learning and earning systems could be introduced into family and other businesses.

41. Care should be taken to ensure that international efforts are made to address the dichotomy between an emerging "elite of information rich" and the mass of "information poor". In shaping policies and programmes, attention should be given to regional differences, social class, age stratification and other cleavages in society.

42. Recognizing the imbalance in the resources that exist in the Member States in respect of providing what has been suggested, international cooperation and support are essential from international organizations, other States, non-governmental organizations and civil society. The sharing of technologies about and for education cooperation programmes (for example, transfer of technology between developed and developing countries) constitutes one dimension.

III. Employment, Technology and Families

43. Technology is having a dramatic effect on the nature, availability and value of employment on a global scale. Technology creates jobs but also destroys them.

44. Technological innovation is taking place at an increasingly rapid pace, providing unexpected opportunities which can greatly enhance family life in some instances and concurrently cause the disintegration of the family in other instances. The speed of change is such that our knowledge of its specific effects on family stability is deficient. This knowledge gap undermines the abilities of policy initiative as well as families to, on the one hand, take effective action to take advantage of the considerable opportunities for families that present themselves and, on the other, deal with the negative effects.

45. The growth of typical work, as a direct outcome of technological innovation and change, is particularly to be noted. This is facilitating the participation of women in employment. There is, as a direct consequence, an emerging recognition of the need to advance family-friendly policies in the workplace. The issue of parental leave encompassing fathers as well as mothers is becoming increasingly important. The trend towards low-skilled, low-income work for women needs, in particular, to be highlighted. This issue also spans the question of equal pay for equal work irrespective of gender.

46. The increasing use of information and communications technology and the advancement of telework, or "telecommuting", in a variety of forms, including home-based activity, present new possibilities for the performance of work in places other than the traditional workplace.

47. Traditional crafts and other home-based employment can benefit considerably from the introduction of modern and appropriate technology, significantly improving family life conditions. (The Meeting noted specific examples in this area.)

48. Teleworking also provides opportunities for more flexible, family-friendly work patterns by lessening the requirement for attendance at a particular place or time. This holds out many advantages for those who want or who need to work away from home. It also holds out significant opportunities to families in rural and remote districts for accessing employment. However, there are issues of health, safety and social security, which must be addressed. The question of the intrusion of the employer in the home, privacy and the potential destabilization of family integrity must be addressed and reappraised regularly.

49. Given the rapidity of change, the importance of continuous learning while in employment is to be particularly highlighted. National Governments, trade unions, labour organizations and employers should endeavor to create structures and incentives to support continuous learning and to inform employees of its benefits to family life.

50. Increasing stress and pressure on the family arising out of employment in an increasingly competitive environment and rapid onset of globalization must be addressed through appropriate support and protection, including regulation.

51. Consideration should be given to the conversion of production and services facilities into learning organizations providing continuous learning supports, teamwork and personal skills development, preparation for change and general workforce advancement. The advantages of such a conversion with respect to the reduction of worker stress, international competitiveness, local economies and family life need to be emphasized and appropriate action, support and incentives considered.

52. New technologies provide the opportunity to bring the university classroom into the workplace and to provide learning content and on-line libraries, making possible small-scale learning organizations at a local level. These can be highly beneficial to workers in the family home.

53. Owing to the rapid change in working conditions and, in particular, deformalization of work in the home, provision should be made for the regular review and reappraisal of standards, work regulations and guidelines as set by international conventions and social partners, that is to say, the United Nations, the International Labour Organization and

local regulatory authorities. Similarly, social welfare and protective legislation must be kept under constant review to see that it is responsive to the changing needs of workers and family life situations.

54. Technology can offer remarkable support to enhancing gainful and attractive employment opportunities to family members who are disadvantaged through disability or for other reasons. In some instances, technological aids and devices can remove the effect of a disability. In general, it is important that technology create opportunities for sustainable livelihoods in the context of sustainable family life.

55. The growth of global population requires more intensive effort at all levels to increase employment opportunities through a more directed application of emerging technologies. This would ensure fair access to opportunities for all and would be in the interest of family members and the viability of family structures.

IV. Health, social services, technology and families

56. The basic objective of the follow-up of the International Year of the Family is to strengthen and support families in performing their societal and developmental functions and to build upon their strengths, in particular at the national and local levels. Thus, health and social services should continue to recognize families as social capital and not as passive recipients of services. Technology should be used to support families, and policies, including those in health and social services, should work to minimize the adverse impact of technology. Where technology is used, families must continue to be engaged in the process of delivery and be enabled to make decisions, for example, in (but not limited to) the area of environmental protection.

57. The family-related provisions of the outcomes of the world conferences of the 1990s provide policy guidance on ways to strengthen family-centred components of policies and programmes as part of an integrated comprehensive approach to development. Thus, there is value in introducing **family impact statements** to ensure that policies, which have an impact on the ability of the family and individual family members to carry out their roles and meet their personal/individual needs, are assessed at an early stage so as to preclude the vulnerability of families through such policies. Health and social service delivery systems should also carry family statements.

58. The concept of poverty developed in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development is broad and encompasses income, lack of access to education, health care and other amenities, and exclusion from participation in the life of the community. The Programme of Action emphasizes the need to focus efforts on the elimination of hunger and malnutrition, as well as the provision of social security, education, employment and livelihood, as well as health-care services. It advocated that overall economic and social

policies and programmes should be examined with respect to their impact on family well-being. Family impact statements in some contexts therefore support this commitment.

59. It is also recognized that, in some countries and, in particular, the developing countries and countries with economies in transition, technology can vastly increase the access to health and basic services of communities. Governments, United Nations related agencies and international bodies must continue the process initiated in this Meeting.

60. There is a need to acknowledge and recognize the vast amount of social care provided by family members. This raises two concerns. The first is that there is a need to apply technology more widely and intensively in labour-saving devices so as to reduce physical care where this is possible. The second is to ensure that families are supported in providing personal and, often, intensive care. In most societies, this is provided by women who bear dual care and work responsibilities. Where there is monetary support for social care, there is a need to guard against the creation of disincentives or perverse incentives. In addition, information technologies can empower and help families perform their functions of caring, nurturing and parenting.

61. The potential of technology to devise support systems for people with disabilities so as to increase their quality of life should be further explored. The use of technology in reducing learning disabilities or increasing learning abilities can be more widely explored and resources should be provided. Where inventions or creations are produced in this area, an objective in the development of technology should be to produce such inventions or creations at low cost and to make them available to more people. Older persons with reduced abilities should also benefit from new technologies. Where new technologies are being designed and employed for the delivery of government services, the needs of groups, such as the elderly and those with disabilities, should be incorporated at the design stage.

62. Bearing in mind the commitment in the World Summit for Social Development made in relation to the family, 5/ health and social service systems should be delivered in such a way as to recognize and cater to cultural sensitivities and ethnic diversity within and across national boundaries. In this regard, it is pertinent to note that where technology is imported for use in health and social service delivery, it should be adapted for cultural use.

63. In view of follow-up actions to the International Year of the Family and the strengthening of international cooperation on family issues, it is recognized that, despite the advent of modern technology, there is still a lack of information about its effects on the institution of the family and family life or interactions. Research should continue, and the findings should be made more widely available to Governments, so that they can make informed choices as to how they will operate in the new information age. Research on how health and social service can be delivered more effectively with technology to dispersed and rural communities in developing countries, for example, can go some way towards ensuring that more populations will benefit from the services made possible by technology.

64. In response to calls to Governments to build family-friendly societies, inter alia, by promoting the rights of individual family members, in particular in terms of gender

equality and the protection and development of the child, health and social services should be delivered *in time* and where families are increasing their access in rural and urban areas alike. Access to social services at the workplace should be possible, including access to related information.
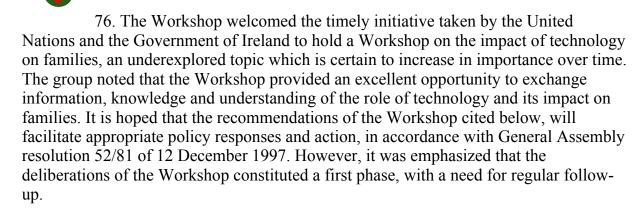
65. There is a need to stress health promotion (in contrast to illnesses) and to make health and social services available throughout the life of the individual and the family. Technology as used in the media can be adapted to communicate information and knowledge to families in a way that was not possible in the past. Such efforts in preventive health care and environmental protection should be made more widespread, taking cognizance of cultural and ethnic sensitivities.

66. Traditional health care and herbal medicine should be preserved. Much of the knowledge about these resides in the family. Technology can be used to further develop and interpret that knowledge and to make it more available in a cost-effective way. Modern or new technologies can make information from indigenous communities in these areas of health and medicine more accessible.

67. Information technology, where it helps to disseminate "good" information and strategies, and helps agencies and various stakeholders to stay connected and work collaboratively is deemed crucial to improving health and social services delivery. From the point of view of both the family and providers of services to the family, it is crucial that immediate and urgent use be made of new forms of two-way communication: family to family, family to providers of services. It is also recognized that the evolution of the Internet has not brought with it the appropriate advantages. This is mainly due to the double-edged nature of the Internet itself. The Internet today can be viewed as a wilderness to be harnessed effectively and universally by the family. An alternative Internet could be developed which is organized and marketed in the interest of promoting a basic services platform to all families worldwide either at a family or a community level. Governments, to provide support to this proposal, must feel confident that the negative sides of the Internet are eliminated or at least controlled. The Meeting calls for both leadership and cooperation at all levels to develop the necessary prototypes and networks which can make this happen without undue delay.

68. It is recognized that the advent of the Internet and similar systems has changed family dynamics, relationships and roles in families. For example, it is known that modern technology has a differential impact on men and women, the young and older people and, in some instances, their positions in the family. In some communities, the elderly feel marginalized and excluded because of the fast pace of technological changes. However, some technologies can be used to increase social interaction and inclusion in the family and community.

69. The ill effects of the Internet, despite its facilitative and efficient qualities in communications, are well known. Some countries can offer lessons by way of their ability to reap the benefits of modern technology while preserving the family's ability to transmit family values. This provides the moral ballast to enable young people to evaluate new information. Social service delivery systems should continue to enable, enhance and support families in doing this.

70. In the area of parenting education and the learning of parenting skills, social service systems can play a role by making these available to families, including information to

families through the Internet or other communication sites. Social service and its network of community agencies can assist families in restoring some of the prestige and authority of parents (and/or mentor figures in the family.)

71. In the use of technology in the Irish social welfare system, for example, there is a progression from what might be called the uniform production systems towards differentiated response systems. The basic technology allows the system to gather, store and make available information on the individual and on the family. Based on this, focus can then be given to individuals and families of specified types so as to provide specialized schemes. Family and individual privacy and the safeguarding of personal data are paramount considerations in these developments. These initiatives may provide models for development in other countries. Caution should be exercised to ensure that the privacy and the integrity of the family are protected at all times. Consideration should be given to individuals who have access to electronic files of themselves and to the possibility of clarifying personal information.

72. The Meeting suggested that certain principles should inform the maintenance of sensitive information held on computer. Such principles would incorporate the following guidance namely: (a) that access to information by third parties should be effected with the informed consent of the subject of that information, (b) that information should be obtained by methods that are fair, open and transparent and (c) that information should be used only for the purpose for which it has been obtained.

73. There is a need to view the family as a resource that has the potential to make decisions in its own interest. It should be supported without undermining its integrity. It should be viewed as a resource to be enabled rather than as a unit to be subject to intervention by an outside agent especially the State, whenever it is deemed to be falling apart or dysfunctional. The family should, preferably, be the primary entry point for delivery of the benefits of technology. Where the establishment of such an entry point is impracticable, the impact of the situation on the family and its relationships should be evaluated.

74. Non-governmental organizations have a history of working alongside families in some areas that the State has steered clear of. These Non-governmental organizations have experience and expertise in supporting families and there is a need to recognize the benefits of working with this part of civil society if families are to be reached more quickly by services. The network of Non-governmental organizations, for example, can play a role in helping to support families and minimize the negative impact of the Internet, for example, on children and young people. They can work with parents and children to enhance family relationships (to empower parents to take control again in the homes and to have their authority recognized) in the face of alternative values and lifestyle conveyed to them via modern communications and the media.

75. The role of Non-governmental organizations as partners and agents of preventive health care and social services delivery will become more important as the State begins to lose more of its control with a growing civil society. Partnerships will then emerge to work towards more family-friendly societies.

V. Next Steps

76. The Workshop welcomed the timely initiative taken by the United Nations and the Government of Ireland to hold a Workshop on the impact of technology on families, an underexplored topic which is certain to increase in importance over time. The group noted that the Workshop provided an excellent opportunity to exchange information, knowledge and understanding of the role of technology and its impact on families. It is hoped that the recommendations of the Workshop cited below, will facilitate appropriate policy responses and action, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 52/81 of 12 December 1997. However, it was emphasized that the deliberations of the Workshop constituted a first phase, with a need for regular follow-up.

77. The Workshop also requested the United Nations, in partnership with Governments and the Non-governmental organizations sector, to promote and conduct qualitative and quantitative research (a) on how technological change affects the family unit in the performance of its central functions; and (b) on how technological change affects relationships among family members, in country-specific settings, by means, for example, of selected country studies as a prerequisite of the development of national action plans.

78. The Workshop called upon Governments to undertake family impact assessments within the broad framework of social policy.

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Notes

1/ Quest Campus is an Irish-based international non-governmental organization dedicated to addressing gaps in the service of higher education systems with respect to practical human needs through leadership and international cooperation involving universities and other relevant institutions and civil organizations on an international level.

2/ *Report of the World Summit for Social Development*; Copenhagen; 6-12 March 1995 (United Nations publication; Sales No. E.96.IV.8); Chap. I; resolution 1; annex II.

3/ url address: http://wwwunhq.un.org/esa/socdev/iyf

4/ *Report of the World Summit for Social Development*; Copemhagen; 6-12 March 1995 (United Nations publication; Sales No. E.96.IV.8); Chap. I; resolution 1; annex 1.

5/ Ibid.; sect. B; entitled "Principles and goals"; para. 26 (h); according to which heads of State and Government would create a framework for action to "recognize the family as the basic unit of society, and acknowledge that it plays a key role in social development and as such should be strengthened, with attention to the rights, capabilities and responsibilities of its members. In different cultural, political and social systems various forms of family exist. It is entitled to receive comprehensive protection and support".

NOTE: **The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers.**

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