DEFINITION

➢ Sociologists have defined the family as **a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood or adoption characterised by a common residence constituting a household interacting and communicating with one another in their respective social roles and maintaining a common culture**.

➢ While there are different types of family structures in different parts of the world, **the family is universally recognized as the fundamental unit of the society**.

➢ The nuclear family usually consists of a father, a mother and children.

THE FAMILY IN AFRICA

➢ However, in Africa, the extended family and kinship systems are very common and more recently there has been an increase in single-parent headed families, child-headed families as well as grand-parent headed families resulting from a number of factors such as wars and conflicts which displace and disperse families; and most recently, the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

➢ In Africa, due to its multiple roles and functions, the centrality, uniqueness and indispensability of the family in society is unquestionable.

➢ Recognition that the family is the basic and most fundamental unit of society, a dynamic unit engaged in an intertwined process of individual and group development, justifies the need to place the African family at the core of society which needs to be strengthened as part of Africa's development process.

➢For generations, the family has been **a source of strength for guidance and support**, thus providing members with a wide circle of relatives on whom they can fall back.

➢In times of crisis, unemployment, sickness, poverty, old age, and bereavement, most people rely on the family as the main source of material, social and emotional support and social security.

➢Therefore, the African family network is the prime mechanism for coping with social, economic and political adversity in the continent.

African Union

➢It is **the principal focus for socialization and education of children** and is **central to the process of human rights education**.

➢In all societies, the family is **the setting for demographic reproduction** and **the seat of the first integration of individuals to social life**.

➢As a result, the family **is at the centre of the dynamics which affect all societies**.

2. THREE DIMENSIONS OF THE FAMILY

➢As the core of the society, the Family can be seen in three dimensions:

1. **firstly**, as a **psycho-biological unit** where members are linked together by blood ties – kinship relationship, personal feelings and emotional bonds of its members;

2. **secondly**, as a **social unit** where members live together in the same household and share tasks and social functions; and

3. **thirdly** as the **basic economic production unit**.

➢It is, therefore, imperative to provide sustained support and encourage cohesion of the family to enable it play its role.

➢In this regard, it is necessary to develop and implement social policies to address the various concerns of families.

➢In Africa, the family is **an equally important institution of society** but it is **undergoing tremendous changes and facing many formidable challenges** thus increasing pressures on the family, including: increasing poverty, civil strives and conflicts; and vulnerability.

➢ Other constraints faced by the African family include: the debt burden, poor governance, high unemployment rate, inadequate social security mechanisms, rural to urban migration, gender inequality, displacement and disintegration of family.

➢ The intensifying impact of HIV/AIDS and other pandemics on the socio-economically productive sector of the population, especially young women, is putting unprecedented strain on the family.

➢ To effectively address these challenges, there is a need for an integrated approach that places the family at the centre of a comprehensive development agenda, aimed at sustaining the its integrity.

➢ It is in this context that, in Decision EX/CL/65 (III), the Heads of State and Government, meeting at Maputo in July 2003, mandated "**the AU Commission, in collaboration with UNICEF and other social partners to elaborate a Plan of Action on the Family in Africa, which will constitute Africa's contribution to the Tenth Anniversary of the IYF**".

➢ The main objective of the Plan of Action is **to advocate for the promotion, formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes to ensure the protection of and support to the African family so as to enable it play its vital role more effectively in the development of Africa**.

THE GOAL

➢ The Goal of the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa is **to improve the quality of life of all families in Africa.**

OBJECTIVES

➢ More specifically, the Plan of Action on the family is aimed at assisting Member States to:

i.   formulate, implement and monitor policies and programmes to ensure protection of and assistance for the family;

ii.   create structures and mechanisms for responding to problems affecting the family;

iii. develop a Management Information System (MIS) on the African family, for data collection, analysis, utilization, dissemination, storage and retrieval at all levels;

OBJECTIVES

iv. develop capacity for the improvement of the standard of living of the family;

v. share experiences and disseminate information on the family;

vi. create a conducive environment for all family members regardless of sex, age, status or disability, with special attention to the rights of women and girls; and

vii. ensure the survival, development, protection and participation of vulnerable groups such as children, youth, women, the elderly, the disabled, the terminally ill and families in difficult circumstances such as, displaced persons and refugees.

➢The Plan of Action focuses on nine priority areas:

1. Poverty Alleviation

2. Rights to social services: education, family health and reproductive health

3. Promoting environmental sustainability: environment, water and sanitation, adequate shelter and land ownership

PRIORITY AREARS

4. Rights, duties and responsibilities

5. Rights of protection of the family

6. Strengthening of family relationships

7. Control of major causes of morbidity and mortality

8. Ensuring peace and security

9. Follow-up, evaluation and monitoring

RECOMMENDATIONS

➢ Requires to be reviewed

➢ Implementation Status

➢ Report submitted to the Specialised Technical Committee on Social Development, Labour and Employment