

# Organizing Discourses around Family before and after the International Year of the Family

## —Basic Research for International Comparison—

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### 1. Introduction

This study aims to describe transformations in the levels of interest in family and the forms/functions of family during the period that marked the establishment of the International Year of the Family (IYF) in 1989—a symbolic event that reflected increased international interest in the family.

The International Year of the Family, 1994, was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly, in its resolution 44/82 of 9 December 1989. The theme of the Year is “Family: resources and responsibilities in a changing world.” The objectives of the Year were to increase awareness of family issues; strengthen national institutions' work on policies; stimulate efforts to respond to problems affecting the situation of families; enhance the effectiveness of local, regional and national efforts to carry out specific programs concerning families; improve the collaboration among national and international non-governmental organizations. Principles underlining the IYF Proclamation describe that the family constitutes the basic unit of society and therefore warrants special attention. Hence, IYF insisted the widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to families so that they may fully assume their responsibilities within the community, pursuant to the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights, the Declaration on Social Progress and Development; and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

As there are few detailed materials written in Japanese about IYF and even less research on the IYF, the current research situation in this field is unknown. In the context in which policies are debated on the premise that “the family constitutes the basic unit of society” across countries, the present study is based on the following questions: 1) Why did the family become an “issue of international concern” during this time? 2) What was the aim of the IYF? In Japan, there was less interest in the IYF than in the International Women’s Year; the IYF was misunderstood as “an orientation towards the patriarchal three-generation family”, 3) If the IYF occurred in response to

issues surrounding the family during this period, what changes in “the state of the family” gave rise to this event?

## **2. Methodology**

The bibliographic survey was adopted as the method of research. The research method applied in this study follows trends in the discourse by presenting hypotheses pertaining to the state of the family, an issue of concern at the time. It also organizes family-studies discourses and conducts a document analysis of the United Nations (UN) resolutions and meeting records prior to 1989, the year the IYF was established.

Family studies were revolutionized by feminism in 1970-80's. We schematically characterize family studies in 1970 to beginning of 90's with four themes, a) the recession of the characteristics of the modern family such as the increase in divorce and cohabitation, increased concern about same-sex partnerships, the appearance of diversity between families and unconventional relationships, b) the questioning of patriarchal gender division of labor, unequal power relations within family, c) individualization of family structures; living an individual life free from family, and d) discontinuity of intimacy and family life (Giddens 2006 ).

Specifically, based on the organization of discourses in family studies, we hypothesize that the establishment of the IYF was based on the following factors: 1) a heightened interest in power relations within the family and the gendered division of labor, and 2) transformations in the forms of family, individualization, closeness between members, functions of the family, same-sex partnerships, and the need to respond to such transformations.

## **3. Analysis**

The major findings are as below:

### **(1) Concern about basic human rights and social development was the starting point of IYF.**

IYF originated from the principle of human-rights protection, first promoted by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenants on Human Rights (adopted in 1966) and Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women(adopted in 1967) in the UN resolution, “World Social Development” (adopted in 1978), based on the Declaration on Social Progress and Development (adopted in 1969), which subsequently led to the UN resolution “Implementation of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development” (adopted in 1979) .

Universal Declaration of Human Rights indicated that equal status for men and women of full age and their free and full consent to marriage. Article 16 stated that the family as a basic unit of society.

*Article 16*

*The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.*

*Article 25*

*(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, and housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.*

“Declaration on Social Progress and Development” (A/RES/2542(XXIV) stated that the family as a basic unit of society. Therefore, the family should be strengthened by the appropriate policies within the framework of national demographic policies and as part of the welfare medical services.

*Article 4*

*The family as a basic unit of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members, particularly children and youth, should be assisted and protected so that it may fully assume its responsibilities within the community. Parents have the exclusive right to determine freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children.*

*Article 22*

- (a) The development and coordination of policies and measures designed to strengthen the essential functions of the family as a basic unit of society;*
- (b) The formulation and establishment, as needed, of programmes in the field of population, within the framework of national demographic policies and as part of the welfare medical services, including education, training of personnel and the provision to families of the knowledge and means necessary to enable them to exercise their right to determine freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children;*
- (c) The establishment of appropriate child-care facilities in the interest of children and working parents*

It is possible to say that article 22 which refers to “The development and coordination of policies and measures designed to strengthen the essential functions of the family as a basic unit of society” is the foundation of the IYF.

“Declaration on Social Progress and Development” (A/RES/2542(XXIV) paved the way for an international approach to the family with the later adopted UN resolution “World Social Development”(A/RES/33/48) (1978) and UN Economic and Social Council

resolution “Implementation of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development” (E/RES/1979/15) (1979).

The Half of the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985), International Year of Disabled Persons (adopted in 1976, effected in 1981) and International Year of the Child (adopted in 1976, effected in 1979) also contain special references to the family. The World Conference of United Nations Decade for Women found that it was essential that household chores and care should be shared by men to facilitate the access of women to gainful employment. In the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons noted that the customs and structure of the family and community had to be taken into account in promoting their ability to respond to the needs of the disabled (United Nations 1986:4).

Although the family has been among the preoccupations of the UN programs stated above, the family was not the object of specific concentrated action (UN DESA CSDHA 1987 b : 11). Family related issues which dealt with by some organization and specialized agencies of the United Nations system were integrated into the action of IYF in order to meet “Declaration on Social Progress and Development” (A/RES/2542(XXIV)) which call for comprehensive social welfare services and the improvement of existing services.

We recognized that IYF, International Women’s year (adopted in 1972, effected in 1975), International Year of Disabled Persons and International Year of the Child have same origin such as Universal Declaration of Human Rights and “Declaration on Social Progress and Development” (A/RES/2542(XXIV)) .

**(2) The delay in social development by oil shocks reconfirmed the importance of the social development and later awoke the argument about the role of the family in the development process.**

The oil crisis in 1973 and in 1979 delayed the promotion of social development. These economic events have set back the fight against mass poverty characterized by inadequate nutrition, poor health, shortened lives, and lack of access to social services. Expectations for a betterment of living standards in the immediate future have been dampened (United Nations Department of International Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), Center for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs (CSDHA) 1982 : 35) .

The resolution entitled “World Social Situation” (A/RES/37/54) was adopted by the General Assembly at its thirty seventh session on 3 December 1982. The Member States were urged to put an effort into the social development, which is about improving the well-being of every individual by betterment of the sanitary system, educational opportunity and promotion of popular participation as a strategy for promoting community-level action and national development.

The resolution entitled “World Social Situation” (A/RES/37/54) in 1982 woke the

argument about the role of the family and the development process. This in turn was realized through the resolution of the Economic and Social Council's Commission for Social Development entitled "Role of the family in the development process" (E/RES/1983/23).

The resolution (E/RES/1983/23) defined the family as a basic unit of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members, particularly children and youth, whom should be assisted and protected so that they may fully assume its responsibilities within the community taking note of chapter II of the 1982 Report on the World Social Situation.

The 1982 Report on the World Social Situation mentioned:

*The growing economic independence of women and the equal rights movement are changing relations within the nuclear family towards more individual autonomy. At the same time, the institution of the family is shaken by the frequency of divorce. Urbanization continues to alter the social fabric of developing regions. Millions of people have, in the past decade, left their hearth and home, sometimes lured by prospects of new opportunities for enrichment and social intercourse, at other times escaping a stifling environment or abject poverty (pp.2)*

This recognized that the institution of the family was undergoing transformations in the process of development and the changes have an impact on the social fabric and the solidarity network.

The resolution (E/RES/1983/23) requested the Secretary-General to enhance awareness among decision makers and the public of the problems and needs of the family, as well as of effective ways of meeting those needs taking into account article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

United Nations Department of International Economic and Social Affairs Center for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs [UN DESA CSDHA] published the four volume report on the family from 1982 to 1987. The first publication in the series was entitled "Models for Providing Comprehensive Services for Family and Child Welfare;" the second was "Role of the Family in the Development Process;" the third was "National Family Policies: their Relationship to the Role of the Family in the Development Process;" and the last was "the Family No. 4: Strengthening the Family: Guidelines for the Design of Relevant Programmes".

The resolution of the Economic and Social Council's Commission for Social Development entitled "the family" (E/RES/1985/29) of 29 May 1985 invited the General Assembly to consider the possibility of including in the provisional agenda of its forty-first session an item entitled "Families in the development process." This was done with a view to consider a request to the Secretary-General to initiate a process of development of global awareness of the issues involved, directed towards

governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and public opinion.

The resolution of the Economic and Social Council's Commission for Social Development entitled "Need to enhance International Co-operation in the Field of the Protection of and Assistance for the Family" (E/RES/1987/42) demands a comment from every country about the possible proclamation of an international year of the family. It was adopted on May 28th in 1987.

**(3) Notable changes in family size (shrinkage), family lifecycles, and the role of the family in the actual data on "The 1982 Report on the World Social Situation" support UN discussions on the role of the family in the development process**

"The 1982 Report on the World Social Situation" was the tenth in a series of reports on this subject dating from 1952. Since the adoption by the General Assembly on 11 December 1969 of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development contained in resolution 2542 (XXIV), the reporting on the implementation of the provisions of this Declaration and the reporting on the world social situation have been linked.

Notable changes such as the decline in the size of households, the decline of fertility, encasement of the voluntary dissolution of the family by legally sanctioned divorce or separation, frequency of the one-parent family were shown in the report. The report recognized that families were becoming more fragile and the institution of the family was weakening, more than it is often assumed, amidst capitalism, industrialization, and urbanization, brought about by development and progress, in both developed and developing countries (UN DESA CSDHA1982: 20) .

"The 1982 Report on the World Social Situation" reported that recent world social situation is far from achieving the goal of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development due to the oil crisis. The report concluded that policies should meet family needs in a non-coercive manner (UN. Department of International Economic and Social Affairs 1982 : 35) .

The resolution titled A/RES/37/54 World Social Situation was adopted without vote in 3 Dec. 1982. A/RES/37/54 World social situation requested the Commission on Social Development at its twenty-eighth session to give high priority to the examination and discussion of the 1982 Report on the World Social Situation and to submit its views and observations to the General Assembly at its thirty-eighth session through the Economic and Social Council.

It requested the Secretary-General to transmit the 1982 Report on the World Social Situation to other United Nations bodies concerned with international activities and to the regional commissions for their consideration, and to issue the 1985 report on the World Social Situation, taking into consideration the provisions of the present resolution and including an analysis of the implementation of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development in the light of the goals and objectives of the International

Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade, and taking into account the comments of delegations on this question made during the thirty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

The Economic and Social Council adopted Economic and Social Council resolution " Role of the Family in the Development Process (E/RES/1983/23)" taking note of chapter II of the 1982 Report on the World Social Situation dealing with the family, in which is quoted article 4 of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development. There it is stated that the family as a basic unit of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members, particularly children and youth, should be assisted and protected so that it may fully assume its responsibilities within the community.

The resolution stressed that the relevant organs, organizations and bodies within the United Nations system should give due attention to the role of the family in the development process and requested the Secretary-General to enhance awareness among decision makers and the public of the problems and needs of the family, as well as effective ways of meeting those needs.

#### **(4) Establishment of IYF and discussions leading to it**

In 1987, the resolution titled "(E/RES/1987/42) Need to Enhance International Cooperation in Protection of and Assistance for the Family" was adopted at the forty-second UN General Assembly to invite all States to make their views known concerning the possible proclamation of an international year of the family and to offer their comments and proposals thereon to the Secretary-General. A series of discussions was held at the General Assembly after the above-mentioned resolution had adopted, and in 1989, the forty-fourth General Assembly decided to proclaim 1994 as International Year of the Family without vote (A/RES/44/82).

In the process leading to the adoption of the resolution, there were heated discussions over the value and forms of family. Netherlands, for example, proposed that "family" includes "family and family-like group units of society," taking into account the very diverse culture and people of the world. Some member States strongly opposed to the proposal, arguing that the family-like group units of society represented illicit relationships, undermining moral values.

In addition, there were arguments both for and against the proclamation of the IYF. Governments favoring the IYF considered that the Year would serve to highlight the importance of families; promote a better understanding of their roles, structures and functions; encourage a better appreciation of their concerns, situation and problems; and provide the impetus for policies that would more effectively support, assist and otherwise promote their well-being. A government opposed to the IYF argued that existing mechanisms of international cooperation should be used instead to focus attention on fulfilling the basic needs of the families in developing countries.

**(5) International concerns and activities concerning the family within governmental organization, non-governmental organization served as a tail wind for adoption of IYF.**

“The family No. 4 strengthening the family: Guidelines for the Design of Relevant Programmes” published by UN referred that International concerns and activities concerning the family inspired the IYF (UN DESA CSDHA 1987 b : 11) .

“The family No. 4 strengthening the family: Guidelines for the Design of Relevant Programmes” is the fourth report in series on the family undertaken since 1982 by the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. These studies provide a survey of findings for policy maker and development planner with new perspective on families in development process; modernization, urbanization and industrialization.

The obvious case is the Declaration of the Inter-American Year of the Family by the Organization of American States, OAS. The resolution on the Inter-American Year of the Family proposed by the Inter-American Commission of Women, CIM was adopted on November 10 in 1981. During XIX and XX Assemblies, CIM requested the General Assembly of the OAS to declare 1983 as an Inter-American Year of the Family.

CIM was the first inter-governmental agency established to ensure recognition of women's human rights. It was founded in order to influence the outcome of the Fifth International Conference of American States in Santiago, Chile (1923) from the perspective of the legal status of women and their right to vote (<https://www.oas.org/en/cim/about.asp>). CIM promotes the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of economic, social, political, and cultural development.

The General Assembly of OAS approved the resolution on Inter-American Declaration on Family Rights (AG/RES.678 XIII-G/83) on November 18, 1983. OAS stressed the importance of the family as an indispensable framework for an individual's physical, emotional and social development and as a basis for social order citing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations. It stated that changes in the economic, social, technological and cultural aspects of society affect the family, since it is sensitive to such changes in social dynamics. It urged the governments of the member states to recognize and observe such rights (Zanotti 1984 ; AG/RES.553(XI-0/81) Declaration of the Inter-American Year of the Family) .

“The family No. 4 strengthening the family: Guidelines for the Design of Relevant Programmes” mentioned that the Council of Europe has sponsored several activities on the family (UN DESA CSDHA 1987 b : 11).

The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms Strasbourg, agreed to Article 5 (22.XI.1984 ) on Equality between spouses.

*Spouses shall enjoy equality of rights and responsibilities of a private law character between them, and in their relations with their children,*

*as to marriage, during marriage and in the event of its dissolution. This Article shall not prevent States from taking such measures as are necessary in the interests of the children.*

Activities undertaken by non-governmental organizations concerned with families were mentioned too. We found strong interest in family was emerging within inter-governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations and these movement served as a tail wind for adoption of IYF.

#### **(6) Gender relations in families: from the perspective of development**

Declarations of the UN conferences on development and human rights held in 1980's – mid 1990's stipulated that "the family constitutes the basic unit of society." At the same time, they required to protect the human rights of women and girls in the families, promote equal sharing of responsibilities for the family by men and women, encourage both men and women to participate in productive and reproductive activities, ensure full and equal participation of men and women in decision-making in reproductive lives. The IYF shared the recognition. During this period, development agencies were also urged to analyze the inequality of men and women in decision-making and allocation of resources within a family, and address the issues. We see the influence of feminism movement in the declarations and shift in the recognition of gender relations in families in development.

#### **4. Conclusion**

First, to explain how the family became a matter of international concern, we have explored the effect of heightened feminist movements and responses to change, in the form of family, functions, closeness, and individualization, as argued in the family-studies literature. However, our findings indicate that, at the source, there was concern about social development, originating from the principle of human-rights protection, first promoted by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in the UN resolution, "World Social Development" (adopted in 1978), based on the Declaration on Social Progress and Development (adopted in 1969), which subsequently led to the UN resolution "Implementation of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development" (adopted in 1979).

The present study shows that the relationship between the IYF and other international "years," including United Nations Decade for Women, World Assembly on Ageing, the International Year for Disabled Persons, and the International Year of The Child, derived from a common foundation, namely efforts related to the International Covenants on Human Rights and the Declaration on Social Progress and Development; these years are like branches and leaves growing from the same trunk and roots. UN saw diverse approaches to the reality of the family among UN families organization such

as FAO, WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO, Habitat and ILO lose sight of the family as an entity with a global character.

Second, the present study shows that the purpose of the IYF, based on its principles, was “to raise awareness of issues related to the family, which is a source of wellbeing for each family member.” We argue that there was a need to focus on “family” to ensure the comprehensive inclusion of women, disabled persons, senior citizens, and children—whose inclusion into policy had been fragmented—as the beneficiaries of development. This came about following the emergence of a stance that prioritized “economic development accompanied by social development and the integration and participation of youth and women,” underlined by the principle that “the ultimate goal of development is the continuous improvement of the wellbeing of all through participation in every step of development and the fair distribution of profits.” Thus, the purpose of the event was not to promote “an orientation towards the patriarchal three-generation family.”

Third, to explain transformations in the state of the family that led to the establishment of the IYF, the present study shows that UN discussions recognized emerging changes in family size (shrinkage), family lifecycles, and the role of the family amidst capitalism, industrialization, and urbanization, brought about by development and progress, in both developed and developing countries. Specifically, we show that, as developed and developing countries coped with the economic slowdown caused by the two oil crises by reforming the welfare state and implementing liberalization, these changes led to concerns about social development retreat, and particularly the weakening of the function of family in developing countries. This, in turn, led to heightened concerns about family wellbeing, which resulted in the establishment of the IYF.

Fourth, International concerns and activities concerning the family within governmental, non-governmental organization served as a tailwind for adoption of IYF. These movements were with a background of the rise of the feminism movement and the change of the family in the real world.

Finally, the present study offers insights into modern Japan from the perspective of the IYF, which promotes a comprehensive approach toward improving the wellbeing of individuals and families. We have highlighted the adverse effects of the Japanese welfare system, which presumes that the family is the main caretaker, and the fixed gender roles within it, as demonstrated by the double-care issue. This study also explores the design of a social-service system reliant on a family model that dismisses the families of disabled persons; and a vertically-segmented government administration that treats childrearing and senior care as separate matters.

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