

The Role of Family in Achieving the SDGs for Women, Children and Men at CSW

Lynn Walsh
March 22, 2017



New York, United States—The family is essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, according to speakers at a side event to the 2017 Commission on the Status of Women.

The March 22 program, “The Role of Family in Achieving the SDGs for Women, Children and Men,” was hosted by the Permanent Mission of Kenya, organized by UPF International, and supported by the World Congress of Families, United Families International and Sustainable Families Group.

Understandably, the predominant focus during the annual Commission on the Status on Women is on women’s issues. Yet, when addressing the most daunting problems in the world—such as hunger, poverty and violence against women—it is hard to ignore the importance of the family, fathers, husbands and men in solving these problems.



Acting as the moderator, Taj Hamad, the UPF director of UN relations and a senior advisor to UPF, gave a warm welcome to the participants.

To open the session, Her Excellency Koki Muli Grignon, the deputy permanent representative of Kenya, set the tone by stating that the family is fundamental to society. In the family, she said, every child learns values such as responsibility and respect, and mothers are recognized as essential providers of nurturance and stability for all family members. To ignore the family or let it weaken will only bring instability and deterioration of society, she said. Ambassador Grignon spoke of Kenya’s strong family values and the need to keep them viable and respected.

The next speaker, Mrs. Jane Wambui Kiragu, an advocate at the High Court of Kenya, spoke about the very effective maternal mortality reduction program, “Beyond Zero,” which was initiated in Kenya by the nation’s first lady. Sadly, every year thousands of women die in childbirth from medical complications that can be prevented and treated. The strength of the “Beyond Zero” program comes from educating husbands and other family members to recognize signs of problems in pregnancy or childbirth—such as

hemorrhaging, infection and high blood pressure—and teaching them how to save mothers' lives with some basic knowledge, skills and preparations. Mrs. Kiragu said that the members of one's family are the ones who are best suited to provide this life-saving care, which has brought a dramatic reduction of maternal and infant mortality in Kenya.

Dr. Tim Rarick, a professor of marriage, family and child development at Brigham Young University-Idaho, followed with his talk on "Fatherhood: Key for Women's and Girls' Economic Empowerment." Professor Rarick presented research showing the correlation between fathers' absence from the family with their daughters' increased risk for substance abuse, behavioral, emotional and academic problems, early sexual activity, sexual and physical abuse, adolescent pregnancy and poor relationships with men.

In contrast, daughters with engaged, loving and responsible fathers tend to be self-confident, successful in education, social relations, mental health, marriage and income. Dr. Rarick ended by showing heart-warming photos and relating stories of his loving and happy relationship with his three daughters and his wife.



The next speaker, Robert Roylance, the general manager of the Farm Management Company, gave a presentation on "Eradicating Women's Poverty: Doubling Family Farm Productivity." Mr. Roylance and his wife, Susan Roylance, spent six years in Kenya helping poor families develop productive family farms and marketing systems, bringing the women and their families out of poverty.

With colorful slides he showed the common problem of poor crop growth due to soil depletion. Then he showed photos of the abundant vegetables grown by the families after they applied his methods of soil repletion and composting. He pointed out that women do most of the manual labor in the gardens but that when the fields become more productive, husbands often get more involved in growing and marketing vegetables. The Roylances personally watched these families climb out of poverty together and saw the great joy of parents as they were better able to provide for their children's education, health and brighter future.

The final talk, "Family Bonds Empower," was given by Lynn Walsh, the director of the UPF Office of the Family. Using research graphs she pointed out the higher risk that non-married women have of experiencing violence. In addition, children of unmarried mothers experience more sexual, physical and emotional abuse than those in intact families. Ms. Walsh explained that the decision and commitment to marry change perception and behavior, especially in men, leading to greater personal investment and sacrifice to make the relationship thrive.

Ms. Walsh referred to natural hormonal changes which increase trust and bonding within conjugal relations, childbearing and the parent-child relationship. She stated, "It seems nature not only wants the parents to be deeply attached to their children but also wants the mother and father bonded and committed to each other."

She ended by encouraging the participants to recognize and promote the kind of family that is best suited for optimum human development for all family members, which is necessary for achieving the SDGs.