

Human Rights, Social Ecology, and the Family

Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, executive director of UN-HABITAT (The United Nations Human Settlements Programme)—delivered by Dr. Jay Moor, special advisor for strategic planning, UN-HABITAT

It is an honor and pleasure for me to be here today representing the executive director of UN-HABITAT, Mrs. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka. UN-HABITAT, or the United Nations Programme for Human Settlements, is the United Nations agency responsible for promoting the two goals of the Habitat Agenda—adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development—and also for the Millennium Declaration target of significantly improving the lives of one hundred million slum dwellers by the year 2020.

UN-HABITAT's primary link to human rights issues is through its work on adequate shelter for all. At the beginning of the long Habitat II negotiating process that resulted in the Habitat Agenda in 1996, "the human right to housing" became a most controversial phrase, because individual countries interpreted its meaning and assessed its consequences differently. If it were to remain in the final document, it would have to be converted to something more objective. Our strategy, suggested by the secretariat to the Habitat II conference, was to deconstruct the concept to reveal its less controversial constituent parts, most notably access to land, access to credit, women's inheritance of property, and protection from forced evictions. These were issues that could be discussed with more precision and less emotion; in the end, they were recombined into an acceptable package of housing goals that could be progressively achieved over time. You may notice that each of these components is also part of an enabling strategy that became the key theme of the Habitat Agenda.

A similarly acceptable definition of the family was more difficult to negotiate during Habitat II. Ultimately, a normative definition was accepted, but with most controversy left intact. I need not relate to you the nature of the controversy that surrounds any normative position on the family, nuclear or otherwise. It is enough to observe that sincere people of great integrity and social concern come down on all sides.

Our experience with housing rights suggests that a strategy of objective deconstruction might result in agreement, or at least an acceptable logic, regarding some fundamental truths about the family.

A recent discussion between UN-HABITAT staff and a young Catholic priest working in the Kangemi slum of Nairobi explored this proposition, and in the process, revealed its relationship to social ecology. The context of the discussion was the measurement of poverty in slums, one of UN-HABITAT's chief responsibilities within the UN system. The young priest wanted to know whether our poverty mea-

surements could somehow help point to a link between the breakdown of the family and the social ills of slum life.

UN-HABITAT has, for about a decade, collected quantitative urban indicators, including socio-economic, infrastructural, environmental, and governance data at the city level. These data have allowed us to arrive at some conclusions about regional differences among cities and about the link between city development and national human development (a very strong positive link).

As the discussion progressed, it was agreed that one of the main functions of the family, of course in addition to nurturing and protecting the young and providing instant social capital, is the transmission of values and virtues across generations. The priest noted that in many slums of developing countries, the breakdown of the family unit is related to a breakdown in even the most elementary virtues, such as honesty and nonviolence. It was his contention that a central aspect of slum eradication or upgrading needs to be the rebuilding of a sense of virtue and the schooling of the young in this orientation. The foundation for such rebuilding, said the priest, always has been and always will be families with a father and a mother. He felt that the Church's concern for the nuclear family is really a concern for the restoration of a sense of and schooling of virtue in society.

But this process is also a function of other institutions. The priest informed us that Catholic social teaching extends from the issues of "socialization" in community groups to questions of publicly held ideas and values that promote a "culture of life"—the set of ideas, values and symbols that are commonly held and that orient citizens towards a growth in virtue. In this, he admitted, the family is necessary but not sufficient in the process of building a just social order. The values imparted by the educational system, mass media, and the young themselves, as peers, are also of major importance.

In exploring just what values and virtues result in a just social order and a better life for all, and how to measure their contribution to a sustainable urban society, our small group began to speak of ethnicity and how traditional values in some countries are articulated in the context of rural life based on subsistence agriculture or on pastoralism. Our Catholic friend agreed that it will never be possible to restore these value systems completely within a context of urban living; new value systems need to evolve.

The conversation then turned to how there are some specific values and practices that are upheld by traditional

cultures that need to be changed. One example is wife inheritance, which has become a significant transmitter of HIV/AIDS. Another example is tribalism, which needs to develop towards patriotism. Yet another is the need for men to develop new notions of what it means to be head of a household, because the time is passing when wives or teenage children will accept decision making that occurs without consultation and dialogue.

There was also the question of how the evolution of values, as well as their transmission, can provide a fruitful basis for dialogue on feminism. In the breakdown of values witnessed in slums, women do indeed suffer from domestic violence and the obligation to raise children alone. The restoration of traditional values can help men be more responsible in their relationship with women. There is, without doubt, injustice to women within many traditional societies. The values transmitted from generation to generation need to take greater consideration of most of the issues raised by feminists—especially those relating to the equal dignity of women with men, access to resources in support of women's roles, and women's right to participate in all aspects of domestic and public decision making. But the role of women also needs to be understood as part of a continuum of family, community, and culture, where an appropriate identity is supported for men as well as women.

Most of these issues, and many more, are somehow related to the family as a social institution. As such, they beg for greater knowledge on our part as leaders and opinion makers. The statistics and data collected by United Nations' organizations and other official monitoring bodies do little to illuminate human social behavior, let alone human ontology.

At the end of the discussion, the priest proposed that a more qualitative dimension of measurement be employed in the larger process of monitoring and assessing poverty in the UN system as a whole. Immediately the conversation turned to how anthropological methods, action research, social surveys, perception surveys, citizen report cards, and other techniques for gathering, organizing, and analyzing qualitative information would allow governments, local authorities, and civil society organizations to see more clearly what policies would be needed to create sustainable or generationally stable urban societies. If thematically disaggregated information, derived through both quantitative and nonquantitative methods, recombines to support the strengthening of the nuclear family, it will do so with much more force and purpose than we have seen in the past.

Ladies and gentlemen, as participants in this World Family Policy Forum, you have access to some of the best thinkers on these issues. As executive director of an agency of the United Nations charged with helping governments, local authorities, and civil society find workable alternatives to our currently unsustainable lives, I would ask you, your

governments, your universities, and your other institutions to join with UN-HABITAT in a learning venture. In building capacity for good urban governance, we must identify and test appropriate methods for monitoring and evaluating the social component in developing sustainable human settlements. The proper framework for this is undoubtedly social ecology, where our various propositions can be dismantled and examined with scientific rigor, and then brought back together for more effective social policy.