

2017 Commission on the Status of Women side event: Family Capital

Lynn Walsh
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New York, United States—A side event to the 2017 Commission on the Status of Women was held under the title “Family Capital: The Engine for Women’s Development.”

Every year the Commission on the Status of Women, an intergovernmental body which is connected to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), convenes in New York to review progress toward gender equality and the empowerment of women in the world. As part of its work, the CSW identifies challenges, creates standards and formulates policies. Researchers, policymakers, advocates and activists gather by the thousands at the United Nations to hold programs on relevant issues.

The theme of the 61st CSW, held from March 13 to 24, 2017, was “Women’s Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work.”

Universal Peace Federation International collaborated with the Sustainable Families Group, United Families International and the World Congress of Families to organize an event titled “Family Capital: The Engine for Women’s Development” on March 21. With the Nigerian Permanent Mission’s generous hosting of this event we were able to meet in the beautiful, sunny meeting hall at the Nigerian Mission, located one block from the UN.

Mr. Akinremi Bolaji, minister of the Second Committee for the Mission of Nigeria, gave the opening remarks, underlining the centrality of the family. “There can be no real progress made with the Sustainable Development Goals without sustainable families,” he said. The minister spoke with clarity and passion about the critical importance of family-oriented policies and practices.

Acting as the moderator of the event, Mariah Fralick, the president of the Sustainable Families Group, explained that each of the speakers was an author who had contributed to the recently published Family Capital and the SDGs: Implementing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This book is available, free of cost, online at www.familycapital17sdgs.org/sdg-book-complete/

The next speaker, Marcia Barlow, MPA, the vice president of international programs for United Families International, gave the framework for the program in her talk, "Family Capital, an Introduction." She described “family capital” as the resources the family unit can bring toward accomplishing important personal and societal goals.

It is necessary to recognize that “the family is not just a ‘taker,’ consumer or receiver of goods and government largesse, but a potential powerhouse that will aid in growth and development,” Ms. Barlow said. With photos of families from all over the world she presented several impressive examples of family-focused practices that helped families bring themselves out of poverty, radically increase their family farming productivity, improve maternal and infant health and survival, and develop economic stability.

Dr. Tim Rarick, a professor of marriage, family and child development at Brigham Young University-Idaho, followed with a dynamic presentation titled "Fatherhood: Key for Women's and Girls' Economic Empowerment." Countering the popular cultural attitude that fathers are unnecessary for mothers and girls, Dr. Rarick referred to his abundant research on the emotional, academic, social and mental benefits that girls gain from being raised by engaged fathers.

“There is a father-factor in our world’s worst social problems,” Dr. Rarick said. “For many of our most intractable social ills affecting children, father absence is to blame.” Ending on a positive and personal note, Dr. Rarick described how fathers teach their daughters how they should be treated by males in all of their future relationships: with respect and cherishing. He concluded with a charming photo of himself and his beaming daughter dressed up for a date together.

Next Mariah Fralick switched from her moderating role to give a presentation on “One Refugee Woman’s Courage for Her Family.” She related the harrowing 20 years of hardship that one refugee mother, Kri Paw, experienced as she led her family from brutality and starvation in Myanmar to eventual freedom and independence in the United States. This moving story made us grasp the depth of a mother’s sacrificial love, courage and perseverance for the sake of her family.

The final presentation, “Family Bonds Empower and Protect Women and Children,” was given by Lynn Walsh, the director of the UPF Office of the Family. Showing several graphs with data on family dynamics and stability, she pointed out that marriage decreases the risk of violence against women as well as physical, sexual and emotional abuse of children.

Marital commitment and biological ties enhance the attachment, personal effort and meaning of the relationship, especially for the husband and father, Ms. Walsh said, leading to stability, responsiveness and consistency in which children, wives and husbands are likely to flourish. A stable family attachment provides the best chance for every family member in each stage of life, from infancy to grandparenting, to develop optimum human capacities to love and serve fellow human beings. Without the family nurturing this human capacity, she said, we will never actually attain sustainable development.

In his closing remarks, Minister Bolaji thanked Sustainable Families Group, World Congress of Families, United Families International and Universal Peace Federation for jointly holding this event. He also challenged us to stand up not only for the family but also for our religious freedom by speaking out for our relationship with God.

The event ended with enthusiastic discussions and networking over refreshments provided by the Sustainable Families Group.