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**Outcomes of
the 15th ASEAN GO-NGO Forum on Social
Welfare and Development**

**The Sixteenth ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and
Development (16th SOMSWD)**

**22 September 2020
(via teleconference)**



15th ASEAN GO-NGO Forum on Social Welfare and Development

“Strengthening Family Resilience and Solidarity: Braving the Adversity and Adapting to the New Normal”

21 September 2020

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The 15th ASEAN GO-NGO Forum on Social Welfare and Development was held on 21 September 2020 through video conference. Guided by the theme, *“Strengthening Family Resilience and Solidarity: Braving the Adversity and Adapting to the New Normal”*, the virtual forum provided a platform to discuss the experiences of families in the ASEAN region on coping with and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ways by which governments and various stakeholders are promoting the resilience and solidarity of ASEAN families. The forum was attended by SOMSWD Focal Points from all ASEAN Member States together with their non-government organisation counterparts and the ASEAN Secretariat, as well as representatives from regional and international organisations.
2. The forum highlighted the fundamental role of the family as the vital unit in ensuring overall health, safety and well-being of individuals as well as maintaining the social fabric during the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Families are faced with unique challenges given the heightened stress brought about by the pandemic. These challenges include, among others, loss of income and livelihoods, disruption on family dynamics and relationships, new way of experiencing learning and education in case of children and limited access to health care and social services.
3. These adverse effects have limited the capacities of families to meet the needs of its members including continued learning for children, access to essential care for older persons and persons with disabilities as well as food security, nutrition and overall well-being for all. During these trying times, family-friendly and family-focused policies have become indispensable to sustain the quality of life of each family member. Such tailored policies and programmes carry the potentials to make families survive and thrive during and beyond the pandemic.
4. The forum successfully provided the opportunity for governments, non-government organisations and the private sector to share experiences, information, reflections and insights on the following: 1) impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on families; 2) building family resilience and coping strategies; and 3) the roles of stakeholders in providing needed support and in promoting family resilience. Against this backdrop, the following recommendations are being forwarded:

- a. **Recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted disproportionately the families and their members and that the roles of families are crucial for our region to respond to and recover from this crisis.** The pandemic has led to the family's loss of income and livelihoods, further resulting to multiple insecurities – putting families to more risks, causing limited access to health and other social services, disrupting learning of children – and increasing the detriments faced by vulnerable groups such as older persons and persons with disabilities. The pandemic has likewise altered work-life pattern and learning opportunities for children and youth and added multiple burden and stress to family members, among others, affecting family-life and overall well-being. These challenges, however, also provide opportunities to rethink and reimagine the roles of families in scaling-up home learning, providing alternative care, improving family harmony and integration, which will deepen family ties and boost their strength and resilience.
- b. **Reinforce the timely provision and expanded coverage of social protection for families.** The immediate provision of comprehensive and targeted social assistance to families and other vulnerable members of the family proved effective in supporting families in times of crises and uncertainties. These include unconditional cash transfers to support families, adopting integrated approaches to address the needs of individuals through the family as the locus of support. These policies and programmes are considered as investments on social protection that cascade social welfare benefits both in cash and in kind to individual members of the family during the pandemic.
- c. **Strengthen capacity and resilience of families to adapt to the new normal.** Families are experiencing the new normal amidst the multi-faceted economic and psychosocial stresses due to COVID-19. But as a strong pillar in our society, multiple coping strategies can enhance capacities of families to bounce-back from the pandemic. For the purpose of targeted and impactful interventions, the road to recovery demands the appreciation of different types and situations of families – single-parent families, extended families, families living with sick and frail members and families living with children and youth with special needs among others. Changing the ways of working, learning and caring for one another necessitated innovation and continuous dialogues, to give cognizance to the roles of families in contributing to the response and recovery initiatives. Also, such interventions need to be context specific to foster resonance with diverse realities of the families. This would require a multi-disciplinary and total family approach that is age and gender responsive, taking to account gender relations and intersectionalities within the family and their role as a pivotal foundation of ASEAN Community building process.
- d. **Harness partnerships with various stakeholders towards building the resilience and solidarity of families.** A multi-level, multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder outlook is crucial not only in mobilising much needed resources but more importantly in fostering a sense of community and collaboration. These include the promotion of engaged and sustained conversations on strengthening families that are evidenced-informed, as well of forging synergy with associations

of youth, women, older persons, and persons with disabilities, private sector, donors and development partners and research institutes among others.
