

Proceedings Report

Civil Society Meeting on Parenting

22 October 2018

Doha, Qatar

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Overview

On 22 October 2018, the Doha International Family Institute (DIFI), in partnership with the International Federation for Family Development (IFFD), convened a meeting of select civil society organizations to discuss and finalize the Civil Society Statement. The Civil Society Statement was developed, in collaboration with select organizations, within the framework of the international conference on “Parenting, Child Wellbeing and Development” organized by DIFI (in partnership with UNICEF) on 23-24 October 2018.

The Civil Society Meeting aimed to discuss and finalize the Civil Society Statement. The first session shared the experiences of the civil society organizations on parenting, and exchanged methods of promoting parenting support at the national and regional levels. This session answered the following questions: what should civil society organizations do to promote parental support at the national, regional and international levels? What is the role of civil society in promoting parenting support at the national and regional levels? What are the challenges faced by civil society in promoting parental support? The final session introduced the civil society statement on parenting, and discussed ways to promote and disseminate it.

Session 1:

Sharing of Experiences and Exchange on Promoting Parenting Support at the National and Regional Levels

In this session, the meeting moderator, Ms. Al Malki, Executive Director of the Doha International Family Institute (DIFI), led the civil society organizations in a discussion on their shared experiences, and in promoting parenting support at the national and regional levels.

The introductory remarks made by Ms. Al Malki highlighted that parenting in the Arab region is generally taken for granted. Parenting needs to be analyzed and discussed on both the national and regional levels. Therefore, a civil society statement on parenting needs to be introduced. Ms. Sullivan, Co-founder and President of Parents Forum, added that in order to maximize on the effectiveness of the statement, consistent terms must be used. Ms. Sullivan specifically noted the importance of using the term “parenting education” to highlight the *process* more than the *individual*, and that it is intended for parents and others involved in caring for children. She further highlighted that “parent support,” which includes parent peer support (and which may take the form of parental leave and parent peer support), is distinct from parenting education. Further, Ms. Breemer, Chief Executive Officer of Ngala, added that parenting is a social rather than an individual issue when the narrative of the child is used. In order to boost the potential of children, parents must be supported by governments as well as by civil society organizations. Mr. Sanchez, Secretary General of European Large Families Confederation agreed, and added that society’s outlook should be changed: instead of basing it on individuals, a family perspective in policymaking needs to be introduced. Two major research topics should be promoted: the importance of siblings within the family and to parenting, and how companies that implement family friendly policies affect family life and productivity.

Moreover, the discussion highlighted the major challenges faced by civil society organizations in promoting parenting support. Dr. Socias, Director of Communication of International Federation for Family Development (IFFD), asserted that the act of parenting itself is facing many new challenges. Namely, there are new dimensions of poverty that currently affect parenting: they are not merely economic, but also include time and affection deficits. These new dimensions also influence the role (if any) that the state should play in regards to the family, whether this involves using a reactive or a preventive approach. The second major challenge pointed out by Dr. Oumlil, Professor of Pediatrics and President of Association National Al HIDN, includes the effect(s) of TV and computer screens on the parenting of children. Dr. Oumlil cautioned against the effects of screens (and their influence on parenting) on the disintegration of the family unit, and noted that there is a need to merge efforts from different disciplines, including health, to tackle this problem. Third, Mr. Al Saadi, Executive Director of Protection and Social Rehabilitation Center (AMAN), underscored the effect of the lack of communication between parents and their children nowadays in the Gulf region. Ms. Al Malki agreed, and attributed this to the influx of wealth, and related sense of entitlement felt among children. In turn, this phenomenon deepens children's dependence on the state. Lastly, Mr. Rutter, Founder of Fathers in Africa, stressed the important role of fathers in early childhood development. Overall, the roles of fathers need to be emphasized not merely as providers, but also as child raisers.

Additionally, the civil society organizations recognized different approaches that could be used to promote parenting support. First, Ms. Roche-Nagi, Managing Director of Innovation Development Centre, explained that there is a need to use programs that are underpinned by different theories to reach diverse communities. For example, her organization found that evidence based programs are very effective when they are used in conjunction with value systems and religious backgrounds. Dr. Pakula, Treasurer of International Federation for Home Economics, also provided the example of her organization's advocacy for including unpaid home-based work within the GDP of the country. This mechanism is used to educate the public that parents also contribute to the welfare of the country.

Further, Ms. Al Malki questioned the role of the state versus the role of civil society in promoting parenting support. This distinction is specifically important in producing evidence-based programs for parenting. Dr. Al Dosary, Executive Director of the Family Consulting Center (Wefaq), explained: although civil society organizations can suggest developmental programs to the government, they need to be in line with the national strategies. However, he cautioned against the fact that civil society organizations may not have enough experience to implement the agreed upon programs, for example. This presents a challenge to their implementation. Dr. Bechir, President of Arab Center for Parental Education, agreed that the application of these statements and theories is difficult. He argued for the essential role of civil society organizations in Tunisia when the state's role was non-existent.

Alternatively, Ms. Al Barrishi, Director General of Jordan River Foundation, showed that alternatively in Jordan, parental education is not a national priority when juxtaposed with other priorities. She noted that intervention in the public sector only begins when there is a large

dilemma. Instead, she drew attention to the fact that her organization has found that the economic status of women directly contributes to the wellbeing of children, and the elimination of abuse. Thus, they have supported programs that empower women financially. Ms. Al Barrishi suggested the need to focus on educating parents while including and utilizing other sectors to support this objective.

Moreover, Ms. Ogutu, Director of Investing in Children and their Societies, pointed to her organization's experience in supporting parenting education programs using existing social protection services. In effect, they bundle parenting education services with cash transfers. They use universal as opposed to targeted programs to avoid stigmatizing parents that need these services, working from the premise that all parents need help. Overall, Investing in Children and their Societies promotes an integrated approach through homegrown services, coordinating with different sectors and ministries, to target parenting.

Finally, Dr. Al Dosary added that although the role of civil society organizations is important, crises such as the current blockade of Qatar, continues to affect the provision of services to vulnerable families. He pointed to one consequence of the blockade in which 1500 families have been affected negatively. This presents a challenge to the social wellbeing of families, as well as to their access to services.

Session 2:

Introducing the Civil Society Statement on Parenting

In the final session, the meeting moderator, Dr. Socias, led the discussion on the dissemination of the Civil Society Statement on Parenting. The discussion revolved around the ways the civil society organizations could advocate for parent support at the national, regional and international levels, as well as explore opportunities for further collaboration and future advocacy.

The civil society organizations highlighted the need to disseminate the Civil Society Statement strategically in order to attain maximum impact. Dr. Socias proposed creating an independent website to enable other entities (public and private) to join the Statement. He highlighted the need to get as many signatories as possible in order to execute the best plan of action with a strongly supported Statement. He proposed a tentative deadline of July 2019. Dr. Socias recommended to disseminate the Statement in the Annual Report that is submitted to the United Nations General Assembly or to use the European Union as a disseminating platform. Other organizations agreed that it would be beneficial for the civil society organizations to unite and present the Statement at the United Nations. Dr. Socias suggested the Commission for Social Development as a platform. Ms. Al Malki agreed, and noted that the Statement needs to be translated into the official UN languages in order to reach a wider audience worldwide. Ms. Sullivan suggested writing an introductory paragraph to the Statement to urge organizations and other entities to consider signing it. Further, Dr. Vazquez, IFFD Representative to the United Nations, noted the benefit of presenting the Statement within the context of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He also suggested presenting the Statement in relation with one of the themes of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Dr. Kusztra, President of World

Family Organization, added that it would be useful to present the Statement on the 30th anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

Furthermore, the civil society organizations discussed potential outreach strategies to disseminate the Statement. First, Mr. Wee Min Lee, Chairman of Focus on the Family Malaysia, outlined the need to be strategic in attracting organizations from different regions by adopting a clear vision for the Statement. Dr. Kusztra noted the importance of also engaging the local communities in disseminating this Statement. She asserted the need to include SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) in the Statement. Mr. Sanchez added that Target 5.4 (Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work) should be recognized in the Statement. Moreover, Ms. Al Barrishi questioned which organization(s) would lead this coordination effort to attain the maximum impact of the Statement. Ms. Al Malki explained that this joint effort should be led by DIFI and IFFD. She also emphasized that this effort should not merely involve policy makers, but also other stakeholders, highlighting the “Think Global, Act Local” strategy. Second, Ms. Breemer noted the importance of using consistent messaging in any outreach platform or mechanism. Mr. Rutter added that using media at the community level to attract signatories is an effective mechanism. Overall, the civil society organizations also recognized the need to engage local mayors, public administrations, parliaments, regional governments and municipalities, as well as faith communities and organizations, to disseminate the Statement.

In general, the civil society organizations agreed that this network of organizations must collaborate on projects that create impact. Ms. Al Barrishi explained that this group of organizations would be able to use their influence to attain funds from the international community to continue disseminating the Statement and its associated work. Ms. Al Malki emphasized the need to agree on follow up actions, such as producing a joint report or project that highlights the success stories of civil society organizations’ work. Dr. Socias agreed, and added that this joint project should also include best practices from different regions. Dr. Ben Brik, Director of the Family Policy Department at DIFI, underscored the need to maintain a formal relationship between the civil society organizations in attendance, and to disseminate this Statement using a formal mechanism.

Ms. Al Malki concluded the meeting by stressing the importance of parenting regionally and internationally, and by highlighting the opportunity of using the Conference on “Parenting, Child Wellbeing and Development” on 23-24 October 2018 in Doha, Qatar as a platform to advocate for the issues outlined in the Statement.

Founding Members of the Civil Society Statement:

- **Doha International Family Institute (DIFI)**
Represented by Noor Al Malki, Executive Director
- **International Federation for Family Development (IFFD)**
Represented by Ignacio Socias, Director of Communication, and Alex Vazquez, Representative to the UN
- **International Federation for Home Economics**

- Represented by Christiane Pakula, Treasurer
- **European Large Families Confederation**
Represented by Raul Sanchez, Secretary General
- **Focus on the Family Malaysia**
Represented by Wee Min Lee, Chairman
- **Investing in Children and their Societies**
Represented by Beatrice Ogutu, Director
- **Fathers in Africa**
Represented by Kevin Rutter, Founder
- **Parents Forum**
Represented by Eve Sullivan, Co-Founder and President, and Djamel Bekkai-Pierre, Board Member
- **World Family Organization**
Represented by Deisi Kusztra, President
- **Ngala Parenting with Confidence**
Represented by Fiona Beermier, Chief Executive Officer

Participant Organizations:

- **Arab Center for Parental Education**
Represented by Aouani Bechir, President
- **Jordan River Foundation**
Represented by Enaam Al Barrishi, Director General
- **Child Development Foundation**
Represented by Omer Mukhtar Gindeel, General Manager
- **Innovation Development Centre**
Represented by Kathleen Roche Nagi, Managing Director
- **Arab Network for ECD**
Represented by Ghassan Issa, Director
- **Family Consulting Center (Wefaq)**
Represented by Rashid Al Dosary, Executive Director
- **Protection and Social Rehabilitation Center (AMAN)**
Represented by Mansour Al Saadi, Executive Director
- **Association National Al HIDN**
Represented by Mina Oumlil, President
- **Center for Family Studies and Research in Values and Law**
Represented by Khadeja Mofeed, President and Founder

Group photo

