

Opening Remarks by
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Opening Remarks

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

We have been organizing these briefings at CSD since 2009. The main objective of the Doha Briefing is to inform, exchange views and share evidence from our research, expert group meetings and conferences on family related issues with UN member states delegates and representatives of NGOs attending the Commission.

Through these briefings, we also like to highlight current issues facing Arab families and information on family policy development in the Arab world.

In this Briefing, we would like to underscore some key points from our last expert group meeting on “**Integrating a Family Perspective in implementation SDGs in Arab Countries: Aspirations and Challenges**”, which was organized in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund Arab States Regional Office in November 2017 in Doha.

The primary objective of the meeting was to explore the role, added value and feasibility of integrating a family perspective towards the achievement of specific SDGs with an emphasis on the goals supporting the welfare, protection, participation and rights of individuals, encourage the integration of a family perspective in the implementation of the SDGs at the national and regional levels and the inclusion of family priorities in national plans and policies

We hope that the knowledge created through that meeting and its recommendations, would be of use to all relevant stakeholders, especially in the Arab world.

The emphasis on the region level stems the fact the Arab countries are currently facing interlinked series of great political, social and economic transformations which are adversary impacting social, economic and human developments. In fact, the Arab experts in the meeting argued that efforts should be directed to saving what could be saved in many Arab countries and it would be unrealistic to expect to achieve new gains in the current situation.

Arab families are facing unprecedented challenges because of wars, conflicts, political instability, fragility of states, migration, high unemployment rate, inadequate education and health provision and changing family structures and values.

These challenges are adversely affecting the well-being, cohesion and functioning of families and impacting progress in regional sustainable development.

I will summarize now some of key messages of the Briefing and I hope we can discuss them together during this Briefing:

1. **There is a no dispute over the role of families in development** but there are different opinions about the **extent of that role** and whether, **in the context in the SDGs**, this contribution is limited to the first five goals or to more goals than just the first five.

You might recall the famous statement by the UN Secretary General in his report in 2011 on the Follow up to the 10th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family that “the very achievement of development goals depends on how well families are empowered to contribute to realization of those goals.” One expert argued that this statement was mostly viewed as an urgent call to governments to make crucial efforts to **strengthen national institutions** to formulate, implement and monitor policies in respect of families and stimulate actions to respond to problems affecting, and being affected by the situation of the families.

Unfortunately, that call was not headed by many governments, and hence, in many countries, national institutions for family issues either do not exist, or they are placed very low in the structures of governments and therefore, they are unable to influence policy. In addition, they mostly suffer from the lack of adequate human and financial resources.

2. As countries continue to advance in their implementation of the SDGs, there is increasing attention to the role of family policies in the achievement of SDG targets. However, we still need to emphasize the importance of family policies having a clear **relational emphasis connected to conceptions of wellbeing**; they should enable strong and stable family relationship and promote intergenerational relations. The experts stressed the need to address the lack of emphasis and understanding of the parent – child and child – family relations and their influence on the child life choices and outcomes. They highlighted they need to provide or expand the provision of **positive parenting programs**.
3. In efforts to integrate a family perspective during the localization and implementation of SDGs, **a bottom-up approach should be used**. Regrettably, what we are seeing so far, especially in our part of the world, is an insistence on top down development planning with limited stakeholders engagement and more importantly, exclusion of families. Unfortunately, this top down approach is also dominant in civil society organizations working on the ground.
4. The importance of **prioritizing national and local realities** and issues over the mainstreaming of a global agenda. The experts advised that the 2030 Development Agenda must be seen as a broad framework not a prescriptive framework.
5. Also, there was a huge **emphasis on culturally appropriate solutions**. The experts emphasized the need for creating a database of best practices that are regionally and culturally relevant and the importance of accountability in policy-making.
6. A **focus youth issues in development strategies** was of the most important key message made by most experts. Assisting youth in their development is critical to achieving the SDGs and family policies should start to focus more on youth issues. The emphasis on youth is particularly needed in the Arab world.

The Arab Human Development Report of 2016 states that “the current youth generation is the **largest youth cohort this region** has had over the past 50 years, making up 30% of its population of 370”! Arab youth are facing key challenges such as unemployment and exclusion from the formal markets.

In many Arab countries, a significant percentage of young men and women are forced to live a life of “waithood”, unable to earn their living, dependent on their parents for economic support and unable to form families of their own. The impact of Arab youth desperation was felt around the world in January 2011 in the now “infamous” Arab spring. Furthermore, ongoing wars and conflicts have had lasting negative impacts on youth.

Empowering Arab youth could be the **game changer** for the region. In fact, the Arab Human Development Report found that “Arab states can achieve a huge developmental leap and ensure durable stability if they put the empowerment of their youth at the top of their urgent priorities and harness their energy to advance development processes”. As such, empowering youth in their positive development is a critical aspect of the attainment of the SDGs.