# The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Family Policy Making

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# Introduction

▶ We had hoped for the best from the Third Millennium, as serious and tireless work preceded it on the international level, in the hope of creating a better world.

▶ However, our meeting today, at a time that witnesses big transformations and an unwitnessed regression.... frenzied mobility prevailing throughout the world,...primarily affecting the developing and less-developed countries... mobility whose results are still unknown, a stage undoubtedly characterized by screening and a fall in advancement of some; Its obvious outcome is a new world based on division and isolation, not on the openness desired through globalization, and the information and communication revolution… new risks are affecting these countries beside the existing risks, such as poverty, unemployment, marginalization, social exclusion, conflicts, civil wars, child labor, children orphaned and their mothers becoming widows.

# Introduction and Recommendation

▶ The time has come for civil society organizations to develop their capabilities, gather their groups together and combine the vision that will govern this stage to avoid present and future risks. Even though risks such as these are obvious geographically, their harmful effects extend beyond their places of origin. These troubles in fact impact at several geographical locations either through asylum seeking, migrations or the resultant countries' attitudes.

▶ Civil Society organizations are still distant from this momentum. So, in this case, is there a possibility of empowering families, or are we in a state of managing crises and disasters, and staying on the alert to defend human acquisitions and homelands, and establishing security and peace?

▶ **This is what I think,** and I hope a recommendation will be issued from this meeting regarding this issue, with a global call directed to the United Nations to defuse strife and agree to a charter that will protect families from the consequences of the current situation, whether its the Middle East, the Arab Maghreb, the African continent or any other country affected by these crises.

# Before speaking about the Role of Civil Society Organizations in Family Policy Making

▶ According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) vision for human development which can be summarized in the development of humans, development for humans and development by humans; any talk of development, empowerment, building welfare, a just society, and other vital issues, will not happen without achieving a part, or all, of the three main elements. This is a clear indication of the individual's full participation in the process of decision making and its implementation.

▶ Broad participation in human development resolutions require devoting a large space to all forms of civil society organizations to reflect public will in an institutional, commanding and effective way, in the processes of justice and social progress, to establish in society the capability to absorb its needs and the changes that may arise, whether positive or negative.

# Civil Society Organizations Classification

▶ The term 'Civil Society Organizations' is a comprehensive term that includes all organizations arising from society members, and extends from the family to the government to accomplish certain benefits and interests.

▶ Hopkins University took the initiative of classifying civil society organizations, according to activity, into eleven groups, with each including sub-groups as follows:

Social Services Group - Development And Population Group - Law, Policy And Defense Group – Professional and Union Organizations – Education and Research Group - Traditional Charitable Organizations Group - Health Group - Environment Group – Culture and Recreation Group - International Activities - Religious Activities.

▶ From here, speaking about the Role and effect of Civil Society Organizations in Family Policy Making requires classification, differentiation and approximation.

# Basic Requirements for Ensuring Effectiveness

▶ **There are basic requirements represented in the following:**

1. Political will that believes in the three dimensions of human development, and seeks to apply and execute them.

2. The structure and composition of these organizations and the availability of fair legislations that will ensure their ability to play an effective role according to parameters of human rights and rights of others.

3. Are there enough of these defense and human right civil society organizations, especially in 'developing and less-developed countries'?

4. The extent of governmental participation in the committee memberships of these organizations and policy making work groups; to what extent are their voices heard?

# To Cause the Desired Effect

The effect of civil society organizations on policies **relates to two important factors:**

▶ The availability of the appropriate climate and rule of law, transparency, accountability, justice, public participation, respect for human rights and a strategic vision.

▶ Effective organizational capabilities of these organizations.

So, would civil society and its organizations stand idle in the presence of autocratic governments that practice social exclusion and have no interest in development or institutional work or public participation?

In fact, the role of civil society organizations intensifies and becomes more complicated in cases of authoritative rules, not less. The law, policy and defense group, and the professional and union organizations play continuous roles and face confrontations to obtain justice for citizens, influence policies, advocate and exert pressure.

# Methods the Civil Society Organizations Can Use to Impact Policies

▶ Experience shows that intervention by policy, law and defense groups has been a **successful** method to either exert pressure or to raise issues and awareness (including alliances, collecting facts and information, mobilization, advocacy, raising public opinion, revealing shortcomings, condemning abuses and issuing publications), and by exerting pressure using all available means including radio, satellite stations and different types of art, drama, poetry, songs, etc., and of late, the social media to expose the practices internationally.

▶ Does the role of all organizations intensify, each in its own field, in the presence of bad governance? And if so, why?

▶ From my experience in social work, I have found that policies, measures and procedures are multidimensional economic, political, social, cultural and legislative processes, including the ultimate goal of distributing economic and political powers at society level and achieving empowerment and social justice, thus, impacting on the society.

# Cultural Heritage and the Role of Civil Society Organizations in Impacting Policies

▶ Impacting policies are not linked only to a type of political authority, but also to many other factors that directly effect policies and concepts such as cultural heritage, customs and traditions, and the collective mind with its different components: values, behaviors and daily practices of its individuals.

▶ Some of the easiest tasks of civil society organizations to activate impact, are the ones linked to advocacy, defense work and pressure... while issues such as imbuing human right concepts into the legacies and daily practices, shall remain an important and a complex message for the civil society organizations to incorporate into their initiatives, to effect attitude changing and basic formation of cultural structure. This results in stability based on a reference of embedded values, in addition to outcomes produced by science, modern experiments and cultures.

▶ The contributions of civil society organizations include providing information about the state of population, monitoring problems' phenomenon and abuse, carrying out researches and studies, reviewing laws and procedures, and organizing training courses, enriching the cultural arena with the requirements of growth, progress **and raising awareness.**

# Policy Inclusiveness

▶ It is important to address the complexity of the issues related to family empowerment and policies because it covers three stages: its structure, constitution and functions.

▶ Despite the similarity of the aims and goals of the social pattern, known as 'the family', the structure, constitution, function and the needs thereof are a very complex and multi-faceted process, from which several essentials arise including social upbringing, the individual's cultural, value and social components, and the different categories within the society, particularly the vulnerable and those subject to risks including women and their multitude of issues, children, the disabled or the aged.

▶ The multi-faceted overlap required to fulfill the requirements of the family's social security represents in fact, the majority of legislative and procedural systems starting from family laws or personal status, to human rights, to social protection, to the environment, to social security and ending with the law of customer protection.

# Deserving Factors for Impacting Policies

▶ **<u>In order for civil society organizations to impact on policies, there are important factors that should be taken into consideration as follows:</u>**

- These policies should aim to establish fair demands in relation to justice and human security.

- They should have apparent impact on the economic, social and political situation of the family and its composition.

- They should be based on a true analysis of the real facts and be scientifically considered.

- They should be definite, achievable, and measurable.

- They should receive support from a known number of society members, and be aligned with traditional values and pattern.s

- They should take into consideration the use of effective communication mechanisms with all concerned parties that include those in the grass roots and all their constituents; allies and partners, decision makers and opposition members.

- The information upon which their demands are built, should be accurate, correct and agreed upon by all the parties participating in the implementation of these policies.

# The Role of International Organizations

**The second part of my statement, which I think my colleagues will concentrate on in detail, is the role of international organizations.**

▶ When we talk about civil society organizations, the first thing that comes to mind are the organizations that have direct contact with the masses. However, I digress in this statement to emphasize the importance and the power whenever the range of impact is broadened and linked to include all local, regional and international levels.

Experience has proved the power and effectiveness of the role of international organizations in two important aspects:

▶ **The First Aspect** is the impact on policies. During the past few decades, the United Nations had a big role to play through international covenants and declarations, and the monitoring of changes in policies and human rights directions. The covenants and declarations that proved successful are: the Geneva Convention, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Human Rights Treaty, CEDAW, the Human Security Document, the Development Goals Document and the International Criminal Court.

▶ **The Second Aspect** which is more important, is the role the international organizations play in building the capabilities of local civil society organizations as a key partner in social development and community participation, which is the same role regional organizations can adopt.

# Partnerships between Civil Society & Government Organizations

▶ <u>Within the framework of cooperation and partnerships between government organizations, decision-makers and clients,</u> I point here to examples of partnership between civil society and governments, and how this partnership can be enhanced.

1. The last two decades have witnessed tangible development in growth, from this vision to its planning stages. During the fifties and sixties, emphasis was on strategic planning, be it five-year or ten-year planning, and the experience helped us to produce a vision to determine a clear road map to the future, a direction for the pathway of development, and growth in economic, social and human capital for the coming quarter of a century. This experience witnessed the broad participation of all concerned parties. Civil society organizations were an effective partner in making it happen. These partnerships were crystallized in the experiences of Malaysia, India, South Korea, Dubai and Qatar Vision 2030

**Qatar Vision 2030 is a tangible example of the participation of civil society organizations as an effective member in its realization, throughout a lengthy process that lasted more than two years.**

# Partnerships with Civil Society Organizations

2. In the State of Qatar, the Supreme Council of Family Affairs has an effective role in networking and coordinating between society organizations and partnering with them in their national plans, prepared by the council through its participation in various different committees and working parties. Due to the existence of political will that supports justice and institutional work, the council was successful in influencing and changing many legislative issues covering topics such as family law and litigation. It also formulated all national strategic plans related to women, children and families, in partnership with civil society organizations.

3. The Social Development Center also had a big role to play, as a civil society organization, in impacting on many policies. It participated as an effective member in the steering committee of Qatar Vision 2030, and had representatives in all working parties. It also represented the Center and participated in many national plans (Women Strategic Plan/Children Strategic Plan/Human Rights Committee).

# Qatari Women Rights

▶ One of its most important achievements regarding family legislation is the formation of a committee for the Qatarization of the women's conference recommendations between the family and the labor market held in 1997, with the support of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser. The recommendations were presented to the Cabinet to put in place the appropriate legislative tools for their implementation.

▶ Recommendations that were implemented directly are the rights of the Qatari women who marry non-Qatari citizens, and rights for her children to enjoy Qatari citizens' privileges. Other amendments cover labor laws to give the working woman the right to access maternity leave and have breastfeeding breaks. **After the establishment of the High National Committee for Family Affairs**, the Supreme Council for Family Affairs was established, and then came the formation of administrative courts for the benefit of government employees. There were other demands that the Supreme Council for Family Affairs was instrumental in following up on including **giving female employees housing allow'ances as an entitlement, the right of women to own public housing, or senior employees housing, working part time, setting-up baby care centers at places of work, and giving Qatari female employees the right to keep their salaries after death.**
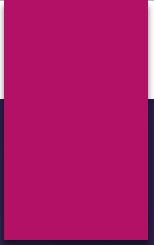
# Conclusion:

▶ I do not want to miss the opportunity here to mention the largest historic campaign in the field of advocacy **and international pressure** that was led by Sir Bob Geldof in his campaign for the reduction of poverty in Africa, urging governments and the private sector to work for justice in Africa; and his famous campaigns Band Aid 1985 and Live Aid 2005.

▶ Undoubtedly, the work of these organizations has faced many obstacles that have  limited its efficacy, including restrictive legislation, funding for their programs, the availability of information and research, and the availability of expertise and technical support.  Therefore, talking about an effective role for civil society organizations will not be practical without the understanding and support of the government for these organizations' role, and understanding of the integrative role between them, caring for individual voluntary efforts, striving for collaborative efforts and organization, networking between domestic work sectors for the exchange of expertise, and managing databases and partnerships in building capabilities.

# Important Issues

▶ **I would like to guide the attendees to develop discussion around the important issues of public work issues**

and I hope to pose these questions to give rise to further discussions about them:

1. To what extent should organizations adhere to a specialized role, particularly social work organizations, without paying attention to the injustices surrounding them where they work, in an effort to observe impartiality and in support of the principle of specialization? And could they undertake work, whether developmental or charitable, that overlaps their work in advocacy, enhancing citizenship and promoting human rights demands? Is that required and enforceable?

2. Many demands have been made by the government recently to offer financial and technical support to the civil society organizations. So, to what extent could this affect their independence?

# Thank you for your kind attention.