

Doha International Conference “Empowering Families: A Pathway to Development”

Doha
16-17 April, 2014



OFAP was invited to participate in the Doha International Conference organized by the Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) on the 16-17 April, 2014 as part of the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family 2014. The theme of this conference was “Empowering Families: A Pathway to Development”. Mr. Nuno Jorge, as the president, represented OFAP in the conference, by invitation of the Qatar’s DIFI.

During the two days, the conference touched upon the significance and the vitality of the families of healthy societies. Gains and losses of the family institution in the process of modernization across different regions was examined using multiple lenses, the identification of further actions, including the incorporation of effective family policies into national development strategies and the use of research related to family issue.



The main topics in the conference are: Poverty eradication, full employment and social integration.

The primary objective of the conference is to refocus on the role of families in overall development and provide United Nations' member states and other stakeholders with concrete recommendations and good practices particularly in the areas of family poverty and social exclusion to ensuring work-family balance and promote intergenerational solidarity.

Objectives:

- Integrate a comprehensive family approach in policies and strategies
- Promote the collection and utilization of data on family issues
- Share good practices and relevant findings
- Improve and strengthen collaboration between researchers, policy-makers, and other stakeholders

The opening session convey of welcome address by Ms. Noor Al Malki Al Jehani, the Chairperson of the Conference Planning Committee, Executive Director of DIFI and the opening statement of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, the Chairperson of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development.

The conference starts with Plenary Session on Families Matter. In this session, the point that why the family should be a priority for policy-makers and the social and economic implications, when for whatever reasons, families fail was discussed. Investing in family policies and mainstreaming a family perspective in policy-making creates the conditions for families to perform their functions, which



support society and a nation's economic competitiveness. Yet despite their contribution to society and overall development, families are rarely considered when policies are made.

Next was the panel discussion on family and poverty. Families in a range of circumstances may have insufficient means to meet basic needs, and this often sharply reduces their children's opportunities to succeed in education and employment, thereby breaking cycles of intergenerational poverty. This session considered why it is important to use the family as the unit of

analysis when designing efforts to alleviate poverty, and we also looked at policies and good practices for confronting family poverty.

The second panel discussion focused on family and work balance. Work-family balance policies aim to support working parents in being productive individuals while ensuring the physical and emotional well-being of their children. Nearly all countries have implemented some policies aiming to support reconciliation of work and family life but their types, coverage, and effectiveness vary. This session discussed how to design effective policies to support family-work balance and looked at policies and good practices.

The third panel discussion was about family and intergenerational ties. As the most basic social institution, the family is the natural and essential social structure in which intergenerational solidarity is created and reinforced. During the past decades, there have been significant changes in demographic behavior that affect intergenerational relations. In light of these changes, intergenerational bonds among family members may be even more important today than in the past. The session explored how intergenerational solidarity could be strengthened through public policies and actions and considered policies and good practices.

The fourth panel discussion was families in special circumstances. Families who are refugees, living in war zones, fleeing natural disasters, or coping with large-scale death due to diseases such as HIV/AIDS are living in extreme circumstances that can put intolerable burdens on them and make it impossible for them to perform their essential functions. Given the long-term impacts of this on adults' well-being and their ability to contribute to society and also to children's outcomes, this session talked about the required action by national governments and international community to support families in these circumstances.



Family policies

The Doha International Family Institute partnered in the 2014 World Family Map Project. The project produces an annual World Family Map that provides numerous family indicators; determines how family strengths are related to important social, economic, and health outcomes; and explores various factors that strengthen or undermine family life. The open program launched the 2014 report during the conference, which examined how family structure and poverty affects children's health outcomes in dozens of countries in the developed and developing world.

The Family Impact Seminars are a series of presentations, briefing reports and discussion sessions for communicating high-quality, objective research to policy-makers. Operating in 25 states in the United States, the seminars encourage policy-makers to view policies through the lens of family impact, and provide nonpartisan opportunities for policy-makers to engage in open dialogue for fostering relationships and finding common ground. During the conference, we highlighted the best practices for using research to build better public policy for families.

The Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) framework have inspired development efforts, helped set global and national priorities, and galvanized unprecedented action to meet the needs of the world's poorest. However, the Millennium Declaration did not mention the family, although the majority of the Millennium Development targets are difficult to attain unless the strategies to achieve them focus on the family. This might be due to the fact that the family is often viewed as a recipient, rather than a contributor to development. Since the 20th anniversary of the IYF is coming at the eve of the target year (2015) of the MDG, we discussed the need to stress the role of the family as a contributor to sustainable development in the ongoing efforts to achieve the current and future United Nations development goals.

Gender equality is a human right and a cornerstone for development. The treatment of women in the family and society must uphold the principle of gender equality. In the conference, we also discussed how to advance women's equality in the family and society without overly focusing on the rights of one of the sexes over the other and will explore the need for a relational perspective to issues of gender which emphasizes the importance of gender equality for building strong societies and health families.

Men have been traditionally seen as economic providers for the family and their other contributions to the family were ignored. Many family policies unintentionally presume men to be absent from the family and / or believe that they do not fulfill their expected family responsibilities. Thereby, men were excluded from policy considerations. However, during the conference, we considered the contribution of men to the family and the impact of absence of males and particularly fathers for family well-being, whether this is involuntary or voluntary.



Closing Session

In order for governments to understand and design policies to meet the need of families, updated cross sectorial national statistics and data on the situation of families and children are essential. Reliable studies are also required to determine the scale of the problems families face, and trusted analyses should be available of the underlying drivers. We discussed the available statistics and data and families of how they can improve to inform policy design and implementation.

Countries need to define and strengthen national mechanisms that address family policies and mainstream a family perspective in public policies. They also need to adopt a comprehensive range of “family policies” which all explicitly aim to support family functions. We looked at those institutions, their roles and challenges they face and discussed the design and implementation of family policies and how it could be enhanced.

The last panel discussion focused on the role of civil society organizations in family policy making through promotion, implementation and monitoring of family policies and programs. Civil society plays an important role in defining the family agenda at the national and international levels. Non-governmental organizations provide essential ‘connective tissue’ between the families whose benefit is being sought by policies and the national (and local) governments who have directed their implementation.