

Empowering Families: a Pathway to Development

An International Conference to Mark the 20th anniversary Of the International Year of the Family

16-17 April 2013

Doha -Qatar

Concept note

Background

The Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) a member of Qatar Foundation, is organizing a conference on “**empowering families :a pathway to development** ” to be held on the 16th and 17th April 2014 in Doha /Qatar, as part of the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2014.

The conference is taking place in response to several United Nations’ General Assembly and Economic and Social Council resolutions on the follow-up to the International Year of the Family (IYF), 1994.

The member states of the United Nations proclaimed 1994 as the International Year of the Family, recognizing the role and the contributions made by families in the overall development. The objectives of the year and its follow up process and observances seek to stimulate efforts at levels to benefit families. In this regard the upcoming 20th anniversary offers another opportunity to refocus on the role of families in development and take stock of the challenges faced by them and recommend the way forward.

The resolution of the United Nations’ General Assembly A/Res/67/142 as well as the recent ECOSOC resolution on “the preparations and observance of the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the family ” encouraged member States, regional organizations, NGOs and academic institutions to support as appropriate the preparations of regional meeting in observance of the 20th anniversary of the IYF.

Furthermore The United Nations General Assembly and ECOSOC through the Commission on Social Development encouraged governments to make every possible effort to integrate a family perspective into national policy making.

The 2014 Doha conference is nongovernmental gathering and will constitute a global platform for discussion and debate where policymakers, NGOs, experts, academics and other

relevant stakeholders from all around the world will share their views and experiences regarding the centrality of the family and its role in the society. **It will stress on the need to strengthen and empower the family as institution to cope with the challenges in this time of economic crisis and political turmoil. It will also provide an opportunity to highlight the important role of the family as an active agent in overall development.**

During two days, the conference will touch upon the significance and the vitality of the families for healthy societies. In this context, gains and losses of the family institution in the process of modernization across different regions will be 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 issues.

The 2014 Doha conference will be a forward looking gathering that provides guidance and recommendations to institutions at all levels and will seek to influence family policies with evidence based research.

Conference Concept

The family is the basic unit of society and as such it should be protected and nurtured. Yet family is not systematically placed at the center of policy and research. Stable and healthy families are the foundation of strong societies, when family breakdown, the costs are high, societies suffer and the role of government tends to expand.

Although there is a universal recognition of the importance of the family there is no formal consensus on its definition which may impede the effective design and implementation of family policy. It is therefore more productive to focus on family functions and to assess the impact of policies from a family –focused perspective. Policies mostly focused on individuals without taking into account the families in which they are embedded.

In recent decades, we have witnessed demographic, social and economic trends affecting families coinciding with a shift from the extended family to the nuclear family as well as rise of one person household and of cohabitation, increase in family breakdown, falling fertility rates, migration, increase in divorce rates and in the number of older persons which impacts on inter-generational solidarity, housing, social security systems, care giving and health costs.

These trends challenge the ability of families to fulfill their basic functions of production, reproduction, socialization as well as needs of family members regarding health, nutrition, physical and emotional care and personal development. They also undercut social cohesion, and are laying terrible roots for future instability of the society. The current social model and behavioral trends are increasingly losing touch with core values with the children risk being the victims.

As globalization and rapid social change progress, the strength of families and family networks can be instrumental in determining how well individuals and communities adapt to these challenges and to their implications.

Main topics

Poverty eradication, full employment and social integration are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Accordingly the focus of the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family (IYF) is confronting family poverty, promoting full employment and family work balance, advancing social integration through the lens of family perspective.

A-Confronting Family poverty and social exclusion

Poverty is one of the major causes of social disadvantage since it denies access to essential goods, services and opportunities such as education and employment. When families are excluded, they cannot enjoy their basic human rights and participate actively in the social, economic and political life of their communities. Poverty and social exclusion increase insecurity and produce several forms of deprivation.

The success of any poverty alleviation programmes will depend on the extent to which they focus on families while encouraging specific activities for family members and taking into account their different needs and motivations.

To confront family poverty, there is a need for an intervention from all relevant stakeholders in society and for more comprehensive policies to create coherence among different programmes in order to prevent intergenerational transfer of poverty.

B- Full employment: ensuring Work –family balance

Over the last 50 years, women’s participation in paid employment outside the home has been increasing consistently and significantly in almost all countries. Both members of a couple are employed outside the home. The number of single-parent, female headed households has also grown. Despite women’s increased participation in the labour market, their share of family responsibilities has not diminished.

Social policies and services to support family responsibilities and workplace policies to support work-family balance, have not kept pace with the changes in labour markets and families. In absence of adequate policies, the current trends in workplaces and in families lead to considerable conflicts and stress for workers and their families, to which they respond with “individual coping strategies” which, however do not come without a cost.

C- Social integration and Intergenerational solidarity

The promotion of social integration and intergenerational solidarity is critical for families and societies. It will lead to social cohesion and shared responsibility and contribute to developing positive relationships across age groups.

Societies are better off when they promote social integration through inclusive policies that reduce inequalities and poverty and promote sustainable development .While social integration is more viable in societies with strong economy, there are key non economic elements that are part of building cohesive societies.

Ensuring access to decent work and opportunities is a key component of social integration; full employment and decent work provide a pathway out of poverty and create opportunities for marginalized groups including young people, women, elderly and persons with disabilities. Besides being a human right social protection is an investment in the people that yields positive benefits to society.

Other topics:

The conference will also highlight issues of importance to effective family policy design and implementation including the role of national machineries for the family and the involvement of civil society and availability of data and statistics on the family unit. Gender equality and the role of men in the family will also be discussed as important issues to be considered when designing family policies and the conference will attempt to assess to what extent these two issues have been addressed in family policy around the world.

The conference will also consider how family policy development can be promoted within the discussions of the post 2015 development agenda.

The way forward: the policy response

The design, development, implementation and monitoring of family-focused policies as well as the integration of a family perspective in all policies are required to confront family poverty and ensure work-support intergenerational solidarity. In this regard it is important to look at implications of policies aiming at enhancing the well being of a society on families.

The conference will raise many questions related to family polices including, **are the policies in place supporting family functions? Is there a need for more holistic, multidimensional approach? Could social policy be achieved without a family component is part of it?**

There is also a need to see if strengthening the connection between social science research and social policy could lead to better family policy and if the integration of family perspective into social policies is making them more comprehensive and what could be done to establish direct links between researchers and policymakers to help develop a more evidence-based policies?

Objectives of the conference

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; ensuring work-family balance and promoting 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, policymakers and other stakeholders.

Speakers /participants

To achieve these objectives experts will be drawn from Policymakers, researchers, experts and NGOs dealing with various aspects of family policy and good practice from a broad geographical distribution to participate in the conference.

Presentations will center on the following questions:

- Do family matter in policies and what has been achieved so far to strengthen families?
- What are the key challenges and barriers for promoting social, economic empowerment of families?
- What lessons are learned from achievements or lack of progress in the implementations of policies or strategies related to families?
- What policies are further needed to support and strengthen families?