

**Discussant of paper by Gilbert, N. "A Conceptual Framework for Family-Sensitive Social Protection" at FSSP Consultation Meeting, Doha, Qatar, 20 June 2018**

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Thank you for the invitation to comment on Neil Gilbert's very interesting and thoughtful paper making the case for rethinking social protection for families. The paper posits an alternative conceptual framework for social protection for families. The first part of the paper very usefully discusses two key factors that are associated with changing family trends and social dynamics in different regions of the world including the MENA countries.

In his analysis new demographic trends and changing family structures are observed to a greater and a lesser extent in different regions of the world. These factors, together with increasing women's participation in the labour market has presented many countries with new needs and challenges. In tandem with these processes are significant socio-cultural changes or lags that are occurring in relation to beliefs and practices about the notions of 'family', marriage, cohabitation and divorce and about gender and care policies. Although religious beliefs and practices may be changing among younger people in the MENA countries, these continue to play an important role in shaping notions of family and ultimately FSSP.

Gilbert points out that these significant changes in family structure among others, resulted in a weakening of family ties and stability. The case for FSSP is made around this particular challenge which informs the alternative conceptual framework discussed in the second part of the paper.

The alternative framework makes the important point that the definition of family is contested consisting of different family forms and the growing desire to create more egalitarian family relations and systems. Further, it is acknowledged that legal and socio-cultural systems are influential in shaping how 'family' is defined. What is good about the definition is that it leaves open the definition of family in terms of family types, composition, intergenerational obligations and gender. The definition takes a normative stance on marriage stating that 'family is a group of people linked by marriage ....' which will determine eligibility to social protection. Will this mean that those who are cohabiting and divorced for instance or who are in polygamous marriages will not qualify for social protection? Careful thought will need to be given to the definition of family in the Qatari context adhering to Islamic religious precepts. This is important in understanding who the groups of people are who may be left behind

An open definition could lead to side stepping the real world issues of families in Qatar. The focus of the paper is generic and therefore does not discuss the Qatari context specifically. It would be helpful to ask further questions about (a) how families are changing in Qatar and countries in the region, and (b) what the social challenges are that a family social protection policy will need to address. This could help to clarify the rationale for the policy focus on family strengthening and the overall goal of reinforcing the institution of the family as the foundation of society, instead of addressing social outcomes as outlined for instance in the UN 2030 Agenda.

Qatar is of course a very wealthy country and has a very high Human Development Index according to its latest Human Development Report (2015). The latter report however identifies a range of challenges such as relative poverty, the spatial dimensions of exclusion, the influence of globalisation on families, marriage and fertility in a context of rapid social and economic change that

continues to affect traditional Qatari family life. Qatar has a high migrant population and what are its implications for social protection more generally and for families specifically. Other social issues are raised in the Human Development Report that are pertinent to this discussion such as Qatari's women's rights to transmit their nationality to their children where they have foreign husbands and then there is the question of violence against women. There is some evidence also that there are now more Qatari women than men who are not married suggesting changes in marriage trends as well.

The only point I am trying to make is that family-centred social policies are more usefully discussed in the context of country specific realities, its social goals and outcomes. Perhaps the consultative meeting could give more attention to this aspect as you think about family social protection. Neil Gilbert also raised important questions at the end of his paper about incentives and unintended effects of family social protection policies based on learning from other country experiences.

Contemporary debate on social protection in low and middle income countries for children and families are beginning to converge around the need for both cash transfers for families to meet risks and consumption needs of those who are left behind while also offering other systems strengthening interventions through family support programmes, access to basic services (household level infrastructure support), health, education, child care services, social support, better co-ordination of service access and use among others. Cash transfers at family and household levels are also increasingly targeted at children, persons with disabilities, older persons especially where they are cared for in three generational families. In some countries there is a strong community care and support focus in the design of the programmes. The question of women's empowerment and more equitable gender distribution of care responsibilities as more women are engaged in wage employment is emerging as a critical issue for family centred social protection policies. Gender activists caution against an instrumental approach to social protection where women are viewed as conduits for child well-being leading to the reinforcement of gender inequality in care. How are men and fathers viewed in policy thinking and to what extent will these depart from the male breadwinner model that has dominated earlier northern social policies. And consideration needs to be given to the links between social reproduction and production in relation to family social protection strategies.

I am therefore wondering whether there is scope conceptually to combine the ideas around social protection as it is evolving in many countries in the South with Neil Gilbert's ideas about family strengthening as well as more gender transformative ideas and new social trends. To what extent this is possible in the middle-east countries under discussion is something that needs further interrogation.

These are a few key issues and challenges that came to mind as I read the paper and to think about conceptually and in its application in Qatar and presumably in the MENA countries. I have not addressed the roles of the state, market, family and communities which is another set of institutional questions that will require further thinking.

Based on my experience of engagement in the conceptualisation and design and ongoing evaluation of South Africa's Child Support Grant, now reaching 80% of eligible children, these are a few critical issues to think about. The report cited in the list of sources (Patel et al. 2017) provides some insight into South Africa's approach to supporting families in social reproduction and social care.

*Sources:*

UNDP and Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics (2015). Qatar's Fourth National Human Development Report. Realising Qatar National Vision 2030. The Right to Development. Doha Qatar: MDPS.

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