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## Commission for Social Development

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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:  
Priority Theme: “Fostering social development and social justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication”**

### **Statement submitted by the Doha International Family Institute, non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **The role of policies and programs in supporting and empowering families towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

#### **Introduction**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in September 2015, is an ambitious global framework that aims to address a wide range of social, economic, and environmental challenges. At the heart of this agenda is the idea of leaving no one behind, and this includes empowering and supporting families such that not one member is left behind. Families play a pivotal role in sustainable development, as they are the fundamental unit of society. Their well-being and empowerment are critical for the success of the 2030 Agenda.

**Family Capital: The Fuel that Drives Development:** the concept of “family capital” is defined as “mothers, fathers, and their children engaging in the business of life supported by an extended and intergenerational family network – all working together to create a virtuous web that serves the economic, physical and spiritual well-being of all family members; and ultimately serving communities and nations” (Roycastle, 2016). It is critical to view the family from the ‘giving lens’ and not the ‘receiving’ or ‘consuming lens’, noting that a stable, cohesive family will provide better outcomes for child wellbeing, higher economic achievements, preventative measures towards crime, violence and drug abuse, higher education rates, while also consuming fewer natural resources, making it a development dynamo.

**The Importance of Families in Sustainable Development** revolves around their ability to provide the nurturing environment in which individuals grow, learn, and develop. Strong and stable families are essential for a thriving community and a prosperous nation, such as below examples relating to the sustainable development goals:

1. **Poverty Eradication:** Families are on the front lines in the fight against poverty. Many individuals and households living in poverty are part of families struggling to make ends meet. Effective policies and programs that support and empower families can help break the cycle of poverty and lift these families out of hardship, such as family focused strategies including income support, universal child benefits, cash allowances, as well as policies that aim to prevent familial dissolution.

2. **Quality Education:** Families are the primary educators of children. Quality education starts at home, and families are responsible for instilling values, skills, and knowledge in their children. In a report conducted by DIFI on Adolescent Wellbeing in Qatar (2020), we found that almost 12% of adolescents spent only 6 hours a week with their families. The implications of staying at home during COVID-19 prevalence showed that 48% of participants found a positive relationship between supporting their children with their education and staying at home, as per DIFI’s report on “Surviving a Crisis: the Impact of COVID-19 on Family Cohesion in Qatar”. Specifically, policies and programs that support family education, such as flexible working arrangements, can contribute to achieving SDG 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all.

3. **Gender Equality:** Empowering families involves promoting gender equality within households. Within the family perspective, DIFI has continued to advocate for policies and programs that support and empower women, as critical members of the family and society. This is done within a national and institutional context that promotes gender equality and addresses the challenges faced by women in Qatar, and based on evidence that provides basis for practical policy

recommendations. Policies that challenge and change these norms are critical to achieving SDG 5, which focuses on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

4. **Health and Well-being:** Families are key players in promoting good health and well-being. Access to healthcare, proper nutrition, and sanitation are all influenced by family dynamics and a child's first information on health is retained from the family, specifically, parents. One of the key issues addressed by DIFI is that of fertility in Qatar, to identify the factors that affect the decline in fertility rates, which included personal, economical, structural, contextual, education and health factors. Supportive policies and programs can help families make healthier choices and access essential services, thereby contributing to SDG 3, which addresses health and well-being.

### ***Recommendations***

**In support of the family unit, the Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) takes a 'familyist' standpoint, towards promoting family cohesion.** To support and empower families, a range of policies and programs must be developed and implemented for the entire family unit, fathers, mothers, children and the intergenerational family members as well. These initiatives should be tailored to the unique needs and circumstances of different communities and should be sensitive to cultural, economic, and social factors. Below are some key areas where policies and programs can make a significant impact on family well-being and contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

1. **Family-Sensitive Social Protection Policies (FSSP):** Unlike other analytic frameworks on social protection which focus on designing and assessing the effects of policy measures on particular problems such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, educational achievement, and health, FSSP is concerned with the impact of social policies on the more general institution of the family, which involves spousal and intergenerational interactions over the life course. Therefore, designing and implementing FSSP available for all stages of the family-life cycle (from premarital counseling of parents to programs for adolescents, to intergenerational support for elderly members) is critical in achieving the sustainable development goals. While worth noting that addressing the challenges in implementing family-centric policies and programs requires a concerted effort from governments, civil society, and international organizations.

2. **Work-family Balance Policies (WFB):** Introduce a set of policies to address a full WFB framework including revisiting leave policies, childcare arrangements, and flexible working arrangements. WFB policies are constantly recommended towards ensuring child wellbeing, marital happiness, family cohesion, as well as towards a healthier physical and mental state of each of the family members.

3. **Multi-Sectoral Approach:** Embrace a multi-sectoral approach to development that integrates family-centric policies and programs with broader sustainable development initiatives. Collaboration between various government departments, civil society organizations, and international agencies can help address interconnected issues effectively.

4. **Pre-marital and Parenting Education Programs:** Developing and implementing mandatory premarital and parenting education programs can be key in providing couples with the necessary skills and knowledge towards assuring cohesive, and happy families that in turn will impact many of the development goals.