

A cornerstone of social development

Civil society perspectives on parenting education

1 November 2020



Recently and in a more formal way, civil society at large has played a significant role in supporting parents, improving their skill-building capacities, promoting research projects and advocating for the recognition of parenting education at the local and the global level. [2] Although parenting education is a relatively novel term in the international fora, there is substantial evidence that it is a useful and cost-effective tool to improve parent-child relationships, reduce child-problem behaviors and prevent maltreatment. [3] In some cases, they are referred as family-strengthening programmes or comes together as of parenting education as support, [4] but they all include a set of tools and activities oriented to improving how parents approach and execute their role by increasing child-rearing resources including information, knowledge, skills, social support and competencies. [5] It definitely calls governments and other stakeholders for recognition, while reinforcing the mission of the family unit as a cornerstone of child wellbeing and social development. [6]

This paper considers civil society as all stakeholders supporting and assisting families' and caregivers' capacities in regard to child development, including through comprehensive education, training, promoting positive parenting and enabling safe environments. [7] It is critical that perspectives shared by civil society are taken

Parenting education has been an important tool for parents and caregivers in their child rearing efforts.

It might not have always been known with this term, but it is certain that from one generation to another it has been informally transmitted a set of guidelines, comprehensive education and training of parents and caregivers.

The shared priority has been children well-being and risk prevention. [1]

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Extract of the paper presented in the Expert Group Meeting organized by the Division for Inclusive Social Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in June 2020.

Original available at <https://bit.ly/3gHq8uW>

into account to improve policy design, implementation and evaluation. [8] With countries in mind, international institutions have enriched their policy reports and recommendations with valuable civil society perspectives on parenting education programmes. [9] In most cases, such programmes are designed to advise about health and nutritional issues, early stimulations, child rights, gender issues and the importance of community involvement in children's wellbeing. [10] Thus, innovative solutions and evidence-based recommendations can enrich partnerships for the wellbeing of children and prevention of violent behavior. [11]

A rapid transformation has reshaped the role of parents and caregivers. Parenting education is not only mothering or fathering anymore, nor a skill required just by progenitors, but shared and acquired by grandparents and siblings alike. [12] In this paper the structure will follow parenting education landmarks of civil society perspectives and growing legitimacy in global policy making. They all have provided international organizations, governments and policymakers a better assessment of household realities and their variety of challenges.

Perspectives turned into policies

The situation of parents at home has been rapidly evolving and the ability to ensure the wellbeing of children has proved to be increasingly complicated. Parenting models have been transformed along with cultural and social changes. [13] The list of civil society efforts is long and rich. In many cases parents have joined forces for the sake of their children and families.

In 2014, the Declaration of the Civil Society on the Occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family marked a turning point for parenting education and its formal recognition in the international fora. [14] A large number of civil society organizations formally pledge to integrate a family perspective in social policy design [15]. In line with the objectives of the anniversary, their claims included intergenerational solidarity, parenting education programmes; child-care provisions; psychological wellbeing of children and youth; prevention of violence, addictions and juvenile delinquency; school to work transitions and young adults' economic security to facilitate family formation and stability; and the support of older members of families. [16]

Since then, civil society perspectives on parenting education and support have enriched various efforts to improve the role of parents and caregivers regarding child rights, wellbeing and social development. Parenting education programmes have shown to be instrumental at reducing several risk factors increasing the likelihood of violence against children within their families, such as family poverty, parental unemployment and low levels of parental education. Aged and staged approach

in parenting education builds capacity on parents of typical and appropriate behaviours of newborns, toddlers, preschoolers and school-age children, as well as appropriate caregiver responses. [17]

As a result, a myriad of references on parenting education have been included and have gained awareness in UN Agencies research projects, UN Secretary General's reports and national policy frameworks on family, child and development. [18] For instance, in 2015, UNICEF country offices, according to their evidence, indicated that NGOs are as important as the state as providers in many regions of the world, especially in offering parenting education and support. [19] The same year, the Secretary General's report included various parenting education programmes implemented by countries as conducive to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, references that have replicated since on following reports. [20]

Moving into 2016, SOS Children Villages, experts on family-strengthening programmes, parenting skills and family-separation prevention interventions, linked the vulnerability of children to the lack of parenting skills of their parents and caregivers. [21] In 2017, the Kenyan Government, in consultation with several civil society partners, associated family stability with responsible parenting. [22] Also, the European Union launched the largest research study with 'FamiliesAndSocieties', with several references to the role of both parents in upbringing children. [23] Later that year, the Report of the Third Committee on the Rights of the Child included references to parenting education in relation to strategies for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children. [24]

Finally, between 2017 and 2018, Member States adopted by consensus a groundbreaking resolution on the Follow-up to the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family and beyond. The General Assembly left behind a resolution in stagnation for almost a decade [25] and formally "encouraged to invest in family policies and programmes that promote strong intergenerational interactions, such as intergenerational living arrangements and parenting education, in an effort to promote inclusive urbanization, intergenerational solidarity and social cohesion". [26]

Strengthening the content of parenting education

Rapidly, the new agreed language required to be enriched by solid content in order to prosper in the following years. With renewed determination, many civil society agents raised expenditures and commitments to improve and strengthen parenting education programmes and services. [27] Partnerships arouse in every corner of the world to contribute with good practices and evidence-based recommendations.

For instance, UNICEF Office in the Middle East and North Africa, a long-standing supporter and data provider of parenting-education programmes in the region [28], organized in partnership with the Doha International Family Institute a Conference on Parenting, Child Wellbeing and Development in late 2018. It served to identify a variety of academic views on the benefits of parenting for children and development and share results of 10 country research, attributing the cross-cultural success of parenting interventions to basic principles that are universal across cultures. (e.g., parent-child relationship building through play and positive attention, child behavior changes through social learning). The research study found very few examples of evidence-based parenting interventions that had been replicated in low- and middle-income countries, despite the fact that various other generic parenting interventions have been tested in small-randomized trials and found to be promising in these settings. In this regard, there is room to grow in low-income environments and demonstrate that this method not only works for high and middle class users and conservative audience. [29]

At the same time, the conference served as a platform to present the Civil Society Statement on Parenting. The declaration signed by 9 transnational, regional and local NGOs, highlighted the role of parenting in contributing to sustainable development, while improving quality education and health outcomes. [30] A wide array of perspectives were discussed through representatives of NGOs coming from all continents as of the recognition of fatherhood and the responsibility of fathers at home; more investment in research on families and parenting, program evaluations and impact assessments of parenting policies and programs; adoption policies that enable work-family balance; value of grandparents as caregivers and inter-generational solidarity arrangements; achievement of equality in unpaid care, and shared responsibility in domestic work ; creation of an enabling environment for meaningful contributions of civil society organizations in the design, implementation and monitoring of family policies and programs, removing barriers to the establishment, work and funding of nongovernmental organizations. [31]

Such response from various civil society partners was not unheard and consequently, since 2018, some other UN documents have recognized the value of parenting as a skill building strategy to build up the parents capacity in their child rearing. [32] As an example, the protagonism given to parental care and parenting education in the resolution on the rights of the child and the girl child. [33] Noting, the important contribution of civil society organizations specialized in crisis response, development and more concretely, in family strengthening. [34]

Further actions should have to create an environment of collaboration and share of good practices, at the same time that promotes more evidence-based recommendations.

The way forward

In addition to the institutional recognition of parenting education and the ample response from non-governmental organizations, other institutions have also played a significant role. Early in 2019, the New York Times announced the launch of their new Parenting Section covering issues related to fertility and pregnancy, babies, kids and the life of parents with them. [35]

The richest countries were called to the spotlight with the report on family-friendly policies in the OECD and EU. The study suggested that there is scope for those nations to improve their family policies and collect better data. [36] Later on, UN-Women shared a report examining how the transformations in families impact women's rights. It proposed an innovative and affordable family-friendly package of policies together with the recognition of the role of grandparents and kin at home. [37] In this regard, the authors illustrate that grandmothers often carry out domestic and care work and, when possible, also share their assets and pensions. [38]

Late in 2019, following the 'First-ever Parenting Month' governments and businesses were called to invest more in policies that give parents the time and support they need to raise happy and healthy children under the motto "Early Moments Matter". Further on, UNICEF hosted the Family-Friendly Policies Summit: Redesigning the workplace. This unprecedented initiative fixed the commitment of many public and private actors to procure paid parental leave, breastfeeding breaks, childcare and parenting education for parents around the world. [39]

Most recently, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, a historical celebration of the International Day of the Families brought together substantial contributions [40]. First, the launch of the Families, Family Policy and Sustainable Development Goals Global Report. The report shows how family policies can work to affect the Goals; how the perspectives and support of non-government actors can contribute to it; and how family attributes impact those interventions. The report is designed for policy makers and practitioners as a guide in their daily work.

Second, a report on family-oriented priorities, policies and programmes in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as reported in the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019. The report analyzes 127 VNRs submitted by 114 countries, where almost 90% of the Member States make specific references to family and consider family policies useful for achieving SDG1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 11 and 16.

In the coming years, in addition to sharing good practices of parenting education at home, there is a growing necessity to sustain with evidence, data and literature review the social benefits of programmes aimed at improving the competences of

parents, grandparents, caregivers and kinship care, especially after all the attention brought up to their role in lockdown situations due to the recent pandemic. [41]

The evaluation and redesign of policies depend largely on how civil society perspectives and the implementation of various parenting education policies is followed. For many parents and caregivers, their main contribution may not be something they do, but someone they raise.

Recommendations

1. Promote policies that enable work-family balance like flexible working and leave arrangements, parental leave, affordable, accessible and good quality child-care and initiatives to promote the equal sharing of household responsibilities, including unpaid care work, between men and women;
2. Invest in parenting education programs that address the different range of parenting needs and dimensions; empower parents and caregivers to continue to build on their good practices while enabling them to adopt others that will improve children's health, development, learning and wellbeing and ensure they are protected;
3. Make the wellbeing of parents, children and other caregivers' the explicit objective of parenting

policies and programmes, while investing in universal, positive parenting programs and services that are sensitive to the requirements of individual families and the different needs of mothers, fathers and other caregivers;

4. Recognize responsibility of men to families and encourage their contribution, developing policies to address the absence of males/fathers on family wellbeing, and promote active and present fatherhood;
5. Recognize the valuable contribution of grandparents and other kins to parenting and invest in family policies and programs that promote strong intergenerational interactions, such as intergenerational living arrangements and parenting education in an effort to promote inclusive urbanization, intergenerational solidarity and social cohesion;
6. Promote research on families and parenting, programmes evaluations and impact assessments of parenting policies and programs, so that the role of parents and their contribution to children's wellbeing and social development can be better understood and supported by all stakeholders;
7. Create an enabling participatory space to promote an environment for meaningful contributions of civil society organizations in the design, implementation and monitoring of family policies and programs, removing barriers to the establishment, work and funding of nongovernmental organizations.

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