



15th International Forum of NGOs in Official Partnership with Unesco
Transforming Mentalities

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The title of the forum, "Changing mentalities" for a better world, with less discrimination and inequality, is particularly relevant to MMM.

If we really want to change the world, we have to ask ourselves the question of future generations, of transmission: because it's our children who will shape tomorrow's world, with what we pass on to them having made them what they will be.

How do we, today's society, enable them to develop? In terms of health, physical and emotional security, neuro-cognitive development?

On this International Day of Education, it's worth remembering that parents are children's first educators. Fathers, who are mentioned on this panel, and more often than not around the world, mothers. As Banki Moon said in 2009

"We face multiple challenges in our changing world, but one factor remains constant: the timeless importance of mothers and their invaluable contribution to raising the next generation. By rewarding their efforts and enhancing their living conditions, we can secure a better future for all."

Changing mentalities by working for and with mothers means developing a more inclusive, care-centered economy.

This approach already exists today, thanks to the daily work mothers do for their children and families. Throughout the world, women - and mainly mothers - perform more than 76% of care work (16 billion hours a day). If this unpaid family work were valued on the basis of an hourly minimum wage, it would represent 9% of global GDP.

In our GDP-centric economic system, this unpaid work is unmeasured, unrecognized and invisible. It gives no rights and is a source of inequality and discrimination against mothers.

When mothers are discriminated against, poor and unrecognized, children suffer too.

So we need to **change mentalities by recognizing the importance of the role of mothers.**

Because mothers play a central and indispensable role in the functioning of society and the economy. Their contributions go beyond traditional caring responsibilities and encompass various aspects of human well-being, common good and social cohesion, including child-rearing. For those who find all this sentimental blather, let me quote Christine Lagarde, not known for being particularly sentimental. I quote her:

"I think that actually giving birth gives you a sense of prosperity, heritage, transmission, that is quite special. I know it's going to be controversial but I think maternity is central to making sure that our children inherit something that is sustainable, that they can live in, live with and transmit to other generations".

Changing mentalities by working for and with mothers.

From an institutional and systemic point of view, things are changing.

For example, in 2023, the Human Rights Council adopted the first-ever resolution on care, entitled "Centrality of care and support from a human rights perspective".

And it reminds us that parents hold the primary responsibility for children's upbringing, and that states must provide them with the appropriate support.

There are many grassroots initiatives to support mothers and children. These actions help to change mentalities by changing perceptions of mothers and mothers' perceptions of themselves.

More individual and local, these actions are crucial and represent good practices to reproduce.

Here are a few examples from MMM network member associations working in the field with and for mothers:

- ViAllaite in Cameroon advises and raises awareness of mothers on breastfeeding, since feeding a child between the ages of 0 and 2 plays a major role in his or her growth and development. ViAllaite educates mothers about breastfeeding, while respecting their culture and beliefs. Their advice strengthens the mother-child bond and benefits both mother and child.

- AJAD in Ivory Coast and Kisany in the DRC have set up training centers for women and girls, mothers-to-be, where they learn a trade that enables them to work and become self-sufficient. Their aim is to empower women and promote their dignity. This has an impact on the whole community, including children.

- MAHM is campaigning in England for mothers to be able to choose to stay at home and devote their time to their children. For them, the biggest challenge is to change perceptions. Today, they advocate for a fair taxation policy, to make child benefit fair and to advocate for an

economic level playing field so parents have a real choice. And actually for the money to follow the child.

- Ahddane in Morocco works with young single mothers who have had their children out of wedlock. These mothers and children are therefore considered social outcasts. AHDDANE offers them emotional support, legal advice, training, childcare services and living spaces for mothers and children. This is about women's rights in general, and the rights of single mothers and their children in particular.

- Mothers Matter Center in Canada has developed a home visiting program. They say that when they work with a mother, the home environment changes, the situation improves and transforms things for the whole family.

So let's change mentalities by working for and with mothers.

Initiatives like these need to be supported, amplified and reproduced on a larger scale.

I'd like to end by quoting an extract from a book by Jean Birnbaum (director of Le Monde des livres), whose title "Seuls les enfants changent le monde" (Only children change the world) sums up what's at stake at our forum. He says:

"Every political promise is addressed to children, every genuine commitment requires confronting the challenges of transmission. From a spiritual, metaphysical and human point of view, we can't invent a new world without newborn babies."