

**Parallel Event - UN Commission on the Status of Women 68
Statement Delivered by Farah Arabe, Founder of itotheN Consulting
Wednesday, March 13, 2024**

-Questions & Final Remarks-

Question 1: In the interviews of the vox pop video we just presented, people have the feeling that gender equality at work and mothers' challenges are not going to change soon (some are talking about two generations!) and that the world is still fixed in an old mindset. How can we change this and bring light on mothers' amount of invisible work among the general public? And do you think policy makers are helping in changing the narratives right now?

Data on invisible care can make it visible. But as any behavioral scientist will tell you, data alone will not change behavior. We need to incorporate behavioral scientists, especially with localized, cultural knowledge, into policy making in support of mothers. The work of organizations like MMM and their grassroots partners who work day-in and day-out directly with mothers, particularly vulnerable mothers is extremely valuable.

Are policy makers helping change the narrative? No. Unfortunately many policy-makers prefer polarizing politics than bringing us together in our common humanity. Usually, support for motherhood and the family align with the political right, and women' choice and economic empowerment with the left. We need non-politicized forces in policy-making that support motherhood and the family, and women's choice and women's economic empowerment. It should not be either one or the other; it is all beneficial to women and therefore to humanity.

Question 2: Some of the people in the interviews talked about the importance of education to fight against cultural biases. What are the common elements and big differences between Global North and Global South in terms of motherhood challenges and consequences on the level of poverty among mothers? Are some countries more progressive than others?

Are some countries more progressive than others? Every country is different due to differences in culture, religions, history, colonialism, etc. Some countries need to incentivize motherhood (such as some Asian countries with a fertility/demographic crisis) and others need to incentivize women's labor force participation. But, in every country parenthood is undervalued, and in every country women do more of the unpaid caring work. Every country has to move in the direction of valuing parenthood more (with social policies that pay mothers to be mothers, for example), and a more equal distribution of care work.

Having said that - one big distinction between the north and south in terms of challenges to motherhood and poverty consequences is the informal economy. In countries where 70% or more of the workforce is informal, labor laws like paid parental leave, will have little impact. How do we provide paid maternity leave to the single mom, small entrepreneur, who sells sandwiches on the street? If you add to that the fact that in developing countries there often is already increased poverty, disease and conflict adding to the adversity against families and the stress of parents and children, then the situation of mothers in the global south is much more dire.

Question 3: What are your recommendations for investing in mothers in your field ?

In addition to all that we have already discussed and mentioned, conceptually, we need to stop viewing rearing children and parenting/care as a burden and income-generation as the north of all development policies. In my opinion, that is a case of a reversal of societal priorities; the tail wagging the dog. The centerpiece of human development should be the centerpiece of policy and development.

More pragmatically, in the practice of international development and policy: All policies and development programs should be assessed on their impact on parenthood and child development. For example, income-generation programs should, at the very least, have a plan or infrastructure of care in place. These should be conducted with the same with the same rigor that we are expected to conduct environmental assessments, for example.

Final remarks:

In chaos theory, there is a concept I love called the butterfly effect: the idea that a small occurrence can influence a much larger complex system. Amid parenting chaos, remember that those small serve-and-return interactions in infancy and childhood, those moments of connection, trust and love, can create a tremendous ripple effect of development and prosperity around the world. Please visit itotheN and connect with me via LinkedIn to stay in touch.