



Converging
PROFESSIONAL WISDOM
FOR Family Well-Being

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Message from Mrs. Patricia CHU, Chairperson, CIFA



During the quarter, the pandemic of Covid-19 has continued to affect all parts of the world, with alarming increases in the number of newly reported cases and deaths. Many of the activities have to be either cancelled or rescheduled. With social distancing and lockdowns, people have to adjust to new ways of life, adopt innovative technologies to continue schooling online, work at home, conduct business and meetings etc. Life goes on though filled with uncertainties and stresses, putting test on the resilience of individuals, families, communities and countries, and revealing success or failure to cope with adversities, which in turn affect the well-being of families.

Despite the uncertainties and worries, CIFA has managed to survive, coping with the challenges with positive spirit, flexibility, sense of commitment, perseverance and comradeship, making it possible to move forward with activities on different fronts in these difficult times. I can strongly witness the high team spirit in the active deliberations among Council members during the latest Council meeting and Annual General Meeting held on 12 June.

In this issue, I am pleased to report on exciting activities of the United Nations in respect of the Observance of the International Day of Families (IDF) on 15 May and the Preparation for the 30th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family (IYF +30). Upon the invitation by Mrs. Renata Kaczmarek of the Focal Point on the Family, CIFA has been involved in these two important activities, benefitting from the sharing of knowledge and experience, while at the same time contributing ideas from the Asian region.

With increasing number of divorces in Hong Kong affecting the well-being of children involved in these families, the Law Reform Commission has recommended to adopt a new "joint parental responsibility model" into the Family Law. Efforts have been made to gradually develop a Parental Responsibility Model through the initiative of providing 5 Specialized Co-parenting Support Centres. The paper by Moses Mui of the Hong Kong Council of Social Services (HKCSS) shares the view that to cultivate the development of the model, further efforts have to be made in C(capacity building), A(Advocacy), S(Service Interfacing) and E (Education).

The CIFA Council has been watching the development of the Covid-19 pandemic, and has endorsed the recommendation of the Organising Committee of the 6th CIFA Regional Symposium on contingency plans. A decision will be made in mid August as to whether the Symposium will take place as originally planned in November 2020 or rescheduled to 2021. Watch out for the update in the Symposium website! Another exciting development is that a bid to organise the 7th CIFA Regional Symposium in 2022 has been jointly submitted by the National University of Singapore and the Ministry of Social and Family Development. The Council has accepted the bid, and follow up discussions will be made to work out further details in due course.

Covid-19 has posed both challenges and created opportunities for us. With the collaborative effort of all, I am sure that we can survive this crisis with hope, renewed energy and commitment, taking a big step forward to **A Better Tomorrow!**

News on activities in the United Nations

I would like to share some exciting news from the United Nations in respect of the Observance of the International Day of Families (IDF) 2020 and the Preparations for the 30th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family (IYF+30) in which CIFA has been involved.

Observance of the International Day of Families (IDF) on 15 May, 2020



Upon the invitation by Mrs. Renata Kaczmarek of the Focal Point on the Family, Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD) Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) of the United Nations, I have represented CIFA to attend the webinar on “Families in Development: Copenhagen & Beijing +25” in Observance of the IDF on 15 May 2020 from 10:30 AM – 11:30AM (NY Time). It was also an occasion to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of Copenhagen Declaration of the World Summit For Social Development and Beijing Declaration & Platform for Action, in the midst of Covid-19 when the whole world is facing the most challenging global health and social crisis. It is felt that the pandemic brings into sharp focus the importance of investing in social policies protecting the most vulnerable individuals and families, as well as providing a real opportunity for all to rethink and transform our economies and societal function to foster greater equality for all.

Against this background, DISD has invited a number of prominent speakers, including researchers and policy advisors, academia from tertiary institutes and representatives from international organisations in the civil society, to share their analysis of the current situation and thoughts for coping with the Covid-19 pandemic in the context of the family and gender equality. The session was opened by Ms. Daniela Bas and moderated by Mrs. Kaczmarek, our acquaintances in the United Nations developed over the past few years.

For details of the session, please access:

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/family/international-day-of-families/2020-2.html>

I would like to highlight the paper presented by Rosario Esteinou on Family-oriented Policies and Priorities in Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) (2016-2019), showing the analysis of 127 VNRs submitted by UN Member States, indicating that families may be key to ensure progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, with close to 90% of countries making specific



reference to families. Governments consider family policies especially useful for the implementation of the SDG1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 11 and 16.

In particular, I would like to highlight the observation made by the author, in which she has put forward following messages for all to ponder: -

- Family oriented policies and priorities are still absent in most national plans and sustainable development strategies in which the family lens approach is lacking
- Several Member States address families as beneficiaries but the potential of families as agents of development remains underutilized
- The integrative nature of the 2030 Agenda demands multisectoral and comprehensive actions and the recognition of spill-over effects between SDGs
- Data collection and the development of statistical indicators are lagging

The full paper can be found at

https://www.un.org/development/desa/family/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2020/05/VNR-PAPER.FINAL_.08.05.pdf

I find the presentations and discussions to be very informative and provided an opportunity for insightful sharing with a lot of food for thought, especially on the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on families and actions to be taken. It is encouraging to note that the deliberations of the session has generated a lot of interest in the international community, with over 3400 views on Facebook (as at 9 June 2020).

Preparations for the 30th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family (IYF+30)



The Focal Point on the Family is in the process of making preparation for the 30th Anniversary of the IYF in 2024, seeking views on ways and means to observe IYF +30 which may include proposals of topics to be addressed and events to be organised. In response to this request, the CIFA Council has put forward the following proposals:

- At the global level - to organise a Global Summit on the Family by the UN and to produce a commemorative publication to be coordinated by the Focal Point on the Family, with input from various parts of the world at local, regional and international levels.
- In the Asian Region - CIFA to organise an Asian Family Summit to echo the global efforts on advancing family well-being, in collaboration with various stakeholders and representatives from various parts of Asia. CIFA to coordinate activities in the region such as cross-country study, training of professionals and joint project in the spirit of From 3A to 4A (Alliance) and CIFA to produce a commemorative publication to update development and achievements of CIFA since the 20th Anniversary of IYF in 2014.

As for the topics, the Council strongly feel that emphasis should take into account the impact of Covid-19 on families, the challenges and opportunities brought about by this unprecedented pandemic, and the lessons that we have learnt in coping with this world-wide crisis which has long lasting effects on the human race. These include:-

- Economic recovery and eradication of poverty
- Family Well-Being in terms of physical, mental and social well-being & Work-Life Balance
- The Family & Development in ICT
- Building of sustainable cities and communities for all

The Focal Point on the Family has organised Expert Group Meetings on the topic of Families in Development: Focus on Modalities for IYF+30 Parenting Education and the Impact of Covid-19 on 16-18 June to address issues on:

- Appropriate ways and means for the preparations and observance of the 30th Anniversary of the International Year of the Family (IYF) and beyond (2020-2024)
- Parenting education in the context of Sustainable Development Goal 16 and beyond
- The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on families and parenting

Concerning the appropriate ways and means to observe the 30th anniversary of the International Year of the Family (IYF+30), DISD proposes to focus on the major trends identified by the United Nations Secretariat, including the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and their impact on families. The major trends are:

- New technologies
- Climate change
- Urbanization & international migration
- Demographic change

Specific areas of research on family-oriented policies to effectively tackle those trends will be discussed. Further, a follow-up to the family-oriented policies for the achievement of selected SDGs will be reviewed.

For details of EGM, please refer to

<http://www.un.org/development/desa/family/meetings-events/impact-of-covid-19.html>

I have only managed to join the one on 16th and find the presentations and discussions most interesting and stimulating. It has provided a lot of information as well as thoughts on the subject for all of us to reflect upon and take appropriate actions at different levels in policy formulation, service development and practice, in an integrated and innovative manner to address the complicated issues facing families. CIFA will take into account these in our efforts to develop plans to celebrate IYF +30 in Asia, and to further demonstrate the concerted effort of CIFA as a regional platform with the mission of “Converging Professional Wisdom For Family Well-Being”.

Use of Parental Responsibility Model in Helping Divorced Families

Moses Mui

**Chief Officer (Family and Community Service)
Hong Kong Council of Social Service**

Impact of Divorce on Children

Families in Hong Kong are no exception in facing many challenges like many other developed cities. Growing trend of family breakdown would be the most prominent challenge among all. The divorce rate of Hong Kong has grown drastically in the past three decades. In 1986 there were 9.8 divorces per hundred marriages registered in the year; by 2016, that figure had risen to 34.4, which means for every 10 couples getting married on one hand, another 3 couples divorced on the other hand.

According to the study conducted by the University of Hong Kong in 2014, it is estimated that the proportion of children affected by divorce has risen from 4% in 2001 to 7% in 2011. And the divorced households are found to face higher financial pressure than the general households. Further, the study shows that the impact of divorce on the emotional health of affected adults and children, as well as academic motivation of children are generally negative.

Under the liberal atmosphere, divorce is regarded as socially acceptable nowadays. Very often, a divorce is simply a mutual and peaceful choice made between two adults. However, if children are involved, the society cannot just look away. If the breakdown of a couple relationship is stressful for the adults, it can be traumatizing and even permanently damaging for a growing child. In many cases, children whose parents are getting or have become divorced would suffer from feelings of guilt or abandonment. Worse still, for those cases with high conflicts, triangulation of children in the parental conflicts would be another serious issue. For instance, it is not uncommon to see the child is asked to take side when the parents argue. Or else, the child is asked about things private to another parent. Inevitably all these factors would be leading to adverse impact on the child's development. Hence, it is of paramount importance to adopt a child-focused perspective in policy formulation and service development to safeguard the well-being of children from divorced families.

Latest Development in Hong Kong

As recommended by the Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong in 2005¹, it was suggested to introduce the Parental Responsibility Model into Hong Kong's Family Law. Underlying this Model is the principle that the best interest of children should guide all court proceedings concerning children of divorced families. Specifically, it was recommended to introduce a set of new court orders to govern the arrangement of children when their parents divorced. Further, it was recommended to appoint a separate representative for a child in legal proceedings to ensure the children's views could be better expressed.

To implement the recommendations, the Hong Kong Government has prepared the draft Children Proceedings (Parental Responsibility) Bill for public consultation in 2015². Not surprisingly, diverse views from the public were collected in the consultation. Particular concern was placed on whether there would be adequate support measures for divorced families to tie in with the proposed legislative reform. On the other hand, it was commonly raised whether the community is ready for such a paradigm shift in parenting concept given that Hong Kong is a Chinese society with a culture different from that of other western countries. Therefore, the proposed legal reform was suspended.

Specialized Co-Parenting Support Centres

In spite of the suspension of the proposed legislative reform, the genuine need to strengthen support for divorced families has

¹ The Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong published a series of four reports on the law relating to guardianship and custody of children with recommendations on the appropriate changes to the law. The last one of the series was the Report on Child Custody and Access in which the introduction of "parental responsibility model" was recommended. The full report can be accessed in <https://www.hkreform.gov.hk/en/publications/raccess.htm>

² Before the public consultation conducted in 2015, the HKSAR government has conducted a previous public consultation in 2011 ("Child Custody and Access: Whether to Implement the "Joint Parental Responsibility Model" by Legislative Means). Details can be accessed in https://www.lwb.gov.hk/eng/consult_paper/cca.htm

³ Similar practices have been adopted in many overseas countries, such as the Child Support Agency in Australia with the legislative back-up of Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act 1988 and Child Support (Assessment) Act 1989.

been echoed by the Government. Five Specialized Co-parenting Support Centres funded by the Government have been set up since October 2019. The five new centres operated by non-government organizations provide one-stop support services for divorced parents and their children. The new centres also assist parents to carry out their parental responsibilities under the child-focused principles. This is indeed a breakthrough for the family service development in which the specialized service needs of divorced families are recognized with child-focused approach being adopted.

Way Forward

As reflected in previous public consultations, the majority views that the Parental Responsibility Model is an ideal model which should be adopted when the suitable "soil" exists in the society. The "soil", so to speak is about readiness of the society for the paradigm shift on parenting. To create the suitable soil, it requires concerted efforts among different sectors of the society. Among all, there are at least four major areas which should be followed through with cross-sector collaboration.

- 1. Capacity Building** – Effective intervention for divorced families requires various professional support, such as legal support, mediation, co-parenting counselling, parenting coordination and child psychology. To succeed in helping the divorce families, enhanced professional collaboration and more cross-disciplinary dialogues are needed among social workers, legal practitioners, mediators, psychologists and school personnel.
- 2. Advocacy** – Adequate system change at policy level is essential to address the challenges facing divorced families in Hong Kong. For instance, over 40% of divorce cases could not receive maintenance payment on time in 2016. Over 80% of cases chose not to recover the arrears of maintenance under the existing malfunctioning system which requires the "victim" to take up the sole responsibility to recover the delayed alimony. Hence, it is recommended the Government should set up a designated office with statutory authority to facilitate the enforcement of maintenance orders.³
- 3. Service Interfacing** – Collaborative approach has to be adopted for supporting divorced families with children in order to address a wide range of service needs emerged at different stages. The bridging among various service units should be ensured to be run in a smooth and seamless manner, which could make a great difference for the well-being of the service users. Collaboration among service units could be enhanced not only through working out effective protocol, but also genuine communication with the common goal of helping the divorce families and a child-first mindset.
- 4. Education** – The last but not the least, continuous public education on parental responsibility as well as co-parenting should be conducted not only for the divorced couples but also the general public. Only after the public mindset change occurs, it is unrealistic to see the paradigm shift in the society. It is abundantly clear that that legal reform would always follow the social and cultural change.

Update on 6th CIFA Regional Symposium

(25-27 Nov, 2020)

- The CIFA Council has been watching the development of Covid-19, A decision will be made in mid August as to whether the Symposium will be organised as planned or rescheduled to 2021. **Watch out for announcement then!**
- Deadline for abstract submission is extended to 31 July, 2020
Deadline for Early-Bird Registration is extended to 31 August, 2020
- A new sub-theme on **"Family Well-Being, Family Cohesion & Innovative Services under COVID-19 Crisis"** is added
- A new route added for the Agency Visits: World Vision – Youth Ready Equipping Taiwan Indigenous Adolescents through Vocational Empowerment

For more details and update, please visit: <https://cfrc.ntu.edu.tw/cifa/>