

HOLY SEE SIDE EVENT
THE HUMAN DIGNITY OF WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY:
CAREGIVING WITHIN THE FAMILY
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Systemic Conditions, Principles and Practices (Legal, Economic and Social) That
Promote Family Caregiving and Dignity of Women

Thank you Archbishop Migliore, Sr. Margaret John Kelly and my fellow distinguished panelists for allowing me to share some thoughts with you and this august body of attendees. Thank you for coming today.

Women as caregivers in the family and women as wage-earners outside of the home need not present an intractable dichotomy for policy makers. Family caregivers can and should be compensated – whether through wages, health care benefits, education credits, or some combination of these. Women workers outside the home can and should receive flexible working conditions that consider the demands on them to provide child and elder-care for their families. Many women in both developed and developing nations act as both caregiver and primary wage-earner and the challenges of this dual role need to be recognized in the form of governmental regulatory policies, law and law enforcement, economic structural analysis and international social contract.

ALL DESERVE DIGNITY. Dignity of women is not a privilege; it is a fundamental human right that requires top down intervention and bottom-up mediation. At the grassroots level, community support of women and preservation of women’s dignity serves to empower women through political engagement and increased access to needed economic resources. Community-based initiatives become particularly important in developing nations where and when national governments are less vigilant in making laws and regulations that address women’s issues, and/or in enforcing laws and regulations that support the needs of women.

Ultimately, to award dignity, women must be empowered, defined in the literature as a “process by which people acquire real power and command real resources within their locality” (Boyd, 1989), or as “giving women the right to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change through the ability to gain control over crucial material and non-material resources” (Moser, 1991, p. 168). Both definitions relate empowerment to the coincident notion of “human dignity” understood as self-respect, self-esteem and autonomy (Osirim, 2001). Empowerment affords women the confidence that they have access to the tools needed to make decisions capable of solving their own problems. When tradition militates against such empowerment, institutional support and the true participation of women in the state are required to positively and effectively intervene.

Grassroots efforts provide the impetus for change but are impotent unless meaningfully linked to the established political institutions at the national level. Doing so ensures legitimacy, status and sustainability. So for example, when constituting grassroots democratic councils or committees, these bodies must extend representation of their interests to wider-held seats on national committees or state ministries.

Let's consider the elements that combine to effect female empowerment and that contribute to preserving the dignity of women care-givers in contemporary society (World Economic Forum Report, 2005 "Measuring the Global Gender Gap"), as well as the actions needed to achieve transformative change, acknowledging that while the ends are universal, the means to these ends derive from models that differ between developed and developing nations (see attached figures).

<u>DESIRED ENDS</u>	<u>SUBORDINATE MEANS TO ENDS</u>
<u>Political Participation/Legal Representation:</u> Involve women in decision-making that affects their lives, and make the process transparent.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Fortify "Rule of Law" ➤ Promote national legal frameworks to strengthen families ➤ Create National Laws/Funding for aging women & abandoned children ➤ Legislate bans on trafficking of women and children ➤ Propel Democratic Political Processes ➤ Support female candidates; Establish National-level Ministries of Women Development ➤ Insist on transparency – engage the media in a positive way
<u>Economic Participation and Opportunity:</u> Distributive justice calls for equal distribution of benefits and burdens. Lack of access to economic resources slows advancement of women in society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Support Microfinance programs that focus on women ➤ Recognize and measure caregiving work in the informal economy ➤ Incent men to assume a larger care-giving role ➤ Encourage private sector (MNC) funding of women development initiatives in response to globalization's feminization of poverty
<u>Education of Women:</u> Improve literacy which helps lift women out of poverty, and focus funding on women's development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Install/fund formal and informal education programs; focus on literacy ➤ Awards/scholarships for young women in the sciences ➤ Train community change agents ➤ Model best practices
<u>Equal Access to Health Care:</u> Especially maternal health, and alleviation of HIV/AIDS infection of women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Advocate for Maternal Health Benefits ➤ Education programs around HIV/AIDS ➤ Ensure safe drinking water and clean environment
<u>Provision of Humane Working Conditions:</u> Safe working environment, equal pay for equal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sponsor legislation that removes discrimination in the workplace

work, flexible benefits, and alleviation of occupational segregation by sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Promote the advocacy role of unions ➤ Foster networking opportunities for women especially in local communities
<u>Elimination of Violence Against Women:</u> Providing a safe and secure environment for women and their families (Note: violence against women is the least punished crime in the world)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Enact laws that punish abuse of women and children ➤ Support peaceful resolution of conflict in war-torn areas where women and children are particularly at risk
<u>GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS</u>	
Encourage and participate in Cross-sector alliances, harmonizing goals of various players	
Recognize and combat the stigma of tradition	
Leverage faith-based initiatives – profound and powerful impact on positively changing behaviors & attitudes	
Insist on funding of related research and compilation of data to ensure transparency and accountability	

Desired Ends (details):

1. Political Participation: Representation of women in the political process is a path to both dignity and empowerment. Women need to be involved in decision-making that affects how resources are allocated in society at all levels of the political process, and that creates the laws & regs capable of affording them improved lives/opportunities
2. Economic Participation and Opportunity: Equal distribution of economic benefits to women and men remains a goal rather than a reality. Lack of access to economic benefits retards women’s advancement in society and limits their impact and influence resulting in a cycle of poverty. Access to resources awards property and power to women that result in more equal status in families.
3. Education of women: Educated women have a far better chance of lifting themselves out of poverty than non-educated women. Formal and informal education contribute to improved literacy rates, and research shows a positive and significant correlation between illiteracy and poverty.
4. Equal access to health care, especially maternal and women’s health – HIV/AIDS remains a larger stigma for women than for men in contemporary society, often further blocking women’s access to needed health care in affected communities.
5. Humane work conditions, removal of barriers to jobs occupied exclusively by men (alleviate occupational segregation by sex) and equal pay for equal work.
6. Elimination of violence against women, which contributes to their degradation and acts to remove their power. Note that violence against women is the least punished crime in the world

MEANS TO ENDS:

1. Fortify rule of law, particularly making and enforcing laws, policies and regulations around issues that affect women – sexual abuse of children, inequality in pay or treatment at work, access to education, reimbursement for family care-giving services, and family and parental leave. Strong rule of law is associated with high rankings for countries on TI’s corruption index, and with a general perception of a robust ethical environment.

Legal change often works to affect changes in mindsets and cultural attitudes/practices, such as child marriage. Promote national legal frameworks to strengthen families through tougher enforced laws on gender violence and attach appropriate punishments. Create national laws and associated funding for aging women and abandoned children who do not have access to adequate care from their families or communities. Legislate bans on trafficking of women and children and on media that serve to dehumanize women in society.

2. Support Microfinance programs that focus on women – the loan is not an end in itself – by working together, families, and communities discover themselves, their creativity and learn about the value of saving. They act in mutual trust and respect and reclaim the dignity of the person. Access to resources gives women the freedom to combine care-giving with dignified labor. Women can engage in self-actualizing work and caregiving simultaneously.
3. Propose community- based policy initiatives that recognize and measure caregiving work primarily residing in the informal economy and immune from the benefits that accrue to work in the formal economy.
4. Push for Education of women and young girls. Even non-formal education (and adult education, particularly functional literacy training programs) can contribute significantly to the empowerment of women and in lifting them from poverty. Consider Awards/Scholarships for young women in the sciences to keep women competitive in the modern labor market. Sponsor the education, training and mobility of women capable of acting as change agents in their communities, giving them access to and knowledge of best practices and successful models of women development programs, with incentives to apply those programs in their local communities.
5. Propel democratic political processes and support female candidates. Establish national-level Ministries or Departments of Women Development that link closely with grassroots community initiatives, and create and enforce quotas for female participation, with transparency and accountability around results.
6. Insist on transparency – break the conspiracy of silence around domestic abuse, eg., so-called “honor killings” in the occupied Palestinian territory. Engage the media in a positive way....
7. Advocate for maternal health benefits – having a child is one of the biggest health risks for women worldwide, especially in less developed countries, where women are 300 times more likely to die in childbirth than in developed countries according to a UNICEF report released in January of this year. Pay particular attention to battling HIV/AIDS, raising awareness about resistant diseases and how improvement in local water and soil conditions can contribute positively to sustained health.
8. Support peaceful resolution of conflicts in war-torn areas, eg, Gaza strip, where women and children civilians are particularly at risk or Northern Sri Lanka where efforts to remove civilians from warfare has left behind hundreds of women and children civilians including many pregnant women.
9. Encourage and participate in Cross-sector alliances – effective support of caregiving role of women in the family requires the cooperative efforts of government, law, civil society, business and community. Goals need to be aligned, measures harmonized and processes coordinated so as not to work at cross-purposes.

10. Insist on funding of research at the national and international levels that investigates women development programs worldwide. Encourage private sector funding of women empowerment initiatives by multinational corporations commensurate with the profits reaped by these corporations in societies most affected by female poverty and disenfranchisement.
11. Promote the advocacy role of unions or other organizing groups that make rules for care-giving and women's working conditions. The ILO for example, is in the process of drafting a new legally-binding convention on domestic/household workers' rights and with the help of Caritas International, is collecting data to both inform decision-making and highlight best practices. In the workplace, resources for organizing effective workplace actions benefiting women are needed, particularly with respect to policies addressing conflicts for working women with domestic responsibilities. Solidarity among women from different countries is extremely important. Organizing activities for women foster networking, improve management experience, and are meaningful expressions of solidarity for them.
12. Recognize and combat the stigma of tradition. International efforts that seek to enforce global accountability and to improve the lives of women in cultures laden with legitimized traditional norms favoring the role of men in those societies or otherwise reinforcing societal inequities are critical.
13. Do not discount the important role of faith-based initiatives in society which can have a profound and powerful impact on changing behaviors and attitudes in the direction of preserving the dignity of women care-givers in the family. To the extent religious beliefs and attitudes can be leveraged to effect change in otherwise insurmountable and legitimized traditional practices that discount the value of women in society, they should be counted upon to do so. Turn to faith as a healing mechanism, a call for peace, and a foundation upon which family norms are developed and cherished.

While all these ends and means are laudable, Challenges remain:

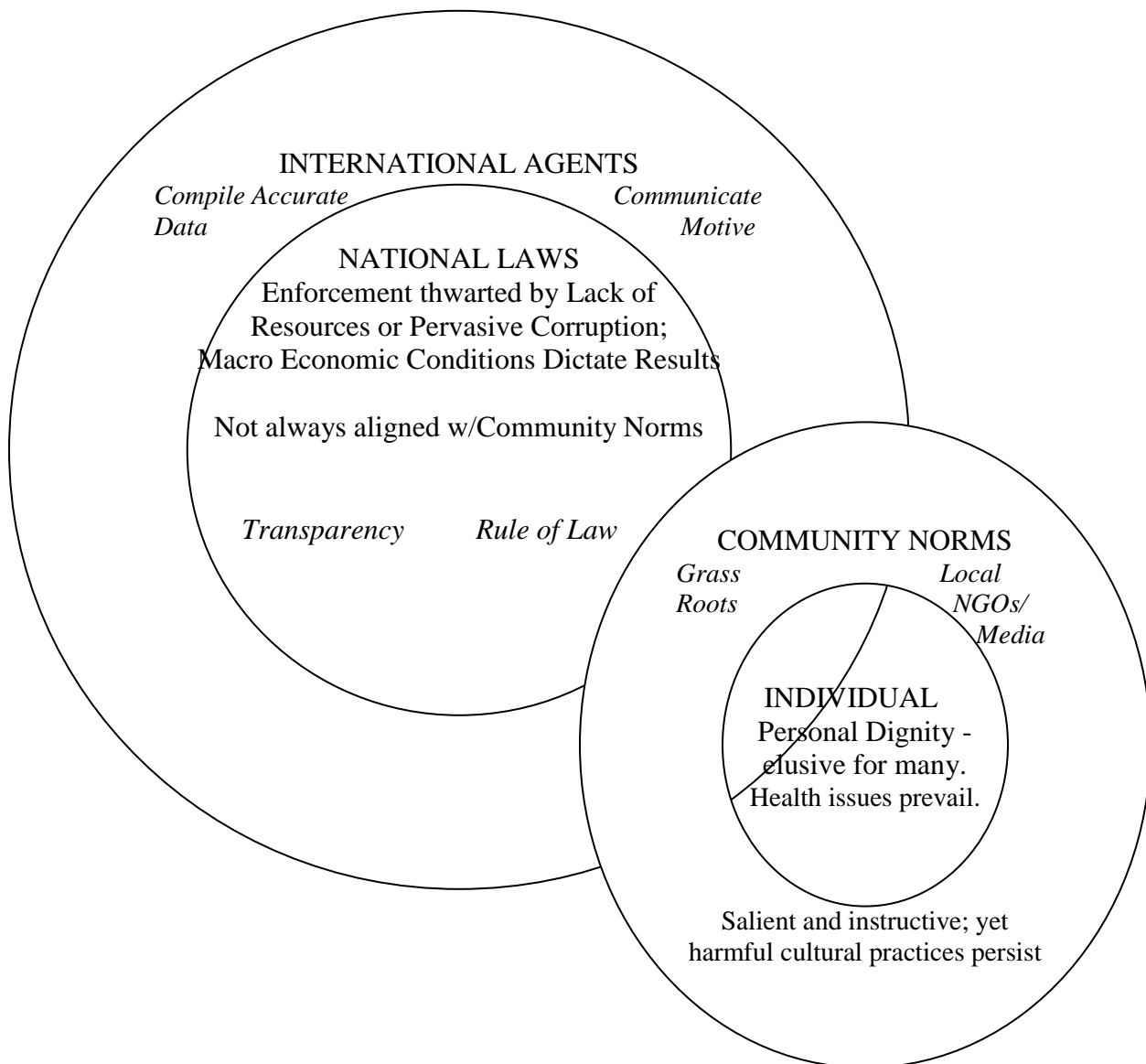
1. State terror, civil strife, and military incursions combine to create a legacy of brutalization and marginalization of women and children, the breakdown of families, an increase in female-headed households, and dislocations in the rural economy that challenge best efforts and retard progress.
2. Unresolved tensions resulting from changes that confront age-old traditions and cultural norms can, in the short term, result in increased violence against women and/or increased caste delineations that discriminate against rural, uneducated women.
3. Indeed, the work of women in the home as caregiver cannot be undervalued or underestimated in terms of what it contributes to a stable society. But in many developing countries, the ability to provide care in the home exclusive of wage-earning work outside the home is a luxury few can afford. Many women in developing countries are single heads of household and must earn money to feed, house and educate their children --- the last of which is key to breaking the cycle of poverty. Women without means are often forced into prostitution or even trafficking of children, contributing to increased incidences of HIV/AIDS, corruption, and economic disenfranchisement, not to mention the moral implications. Economic activities that may be pursued without abandoning one's role in the home, such as weaving, baking and jam making, poultry farms and hatcheries and soya milling, can keep families together and empower women

in local communities. However, in many countries (e.g., Nigeria) women may only pursue entrepreneurial work with the permission of their husbands. How can the rules of patriarchal societies be adjusted to accommodate the burgeoning needs of women?

4. While economic and political participation for women is an overriding goal, training women long separated from such participation for active and effective roles remains under-funded and under-realized.
5. Real empowerment is a process, but the state of dignity that women are entitled to as a right is immediate. How do we reconcile the immediate need with an evolutionary process?
6. Can the incorporation of local interests within institutionalized mechanisms of the state also act to suppress critical expressions of discontent or challenges to the status quo?
7. Alliances between and among different sectors and different levels of society is a critical step in improving the condition of women globally. Yet these cross-sector alliances are hard-won. How do we harmonize the conflicting goals of various agencies so that the dialogue at the grassroots level may be adequately translated at the national and international levels to accurately represent local needs and priorities?
8. Finally, NGOs play an important role in valuing the care giver and in empowering women. But a distinction must be made between NGOs established at the national level, and those operating at the grass roots level. A proliferation of national NGOs appeared on the scene in the late 1980s and 90s, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, poor Latin American and Caribbean communities, and parts of Asia in response to increasing pressures from developed countries for these regions to privatize, democratize and open borders to free trade. With this agenda, NGOs were created with the unintended consequence of attending to the needs of the more privileged of society rather than to society's poorest (for example Women in Business or WIB in Zimbabwe in the late 1980s, that provided loans to women's businesses, the bulk of which went to middle and upper-class entrepreneurs.). Not all national NGOs fall into this trap, but the agendas of the state may not be aligned with the agenda of the local community – thus the need for intimate linkages as suggested earlier. Local NGOs, on the other hand, are formed around and understand the indigenous practices of local communities, and tend to thus meet the needs of the poorer and lower-income women in society, giving them decision-making power, allowing them to define their own priorities, letting them engage in networking, and providing them with the means to remain self-sufficient. How do we foster and support local NGO involvement in the lives of women?

Ultimately, sustainable change in women's material and non-material conditions as care-givers will never come about unless collective empowerment enables them to dismantle the root causes that produce the inequitable access to resources between the genders and to hold up the value that their work, whether wage-earning or not, represents for society-at-large.

HUMAN DIGNITY OF WOMEN AS CARE-GIVERS AND FEMALE EMPOWERMENT: DEVELOPING COUNTRY CONTEXT – Dignity of women care-givers in economically distressed areas is elusive, and threatened by persistent and life-threatening health issues; when dignity is attained, it can be buttressed and enforced by Community norms that may not always be in alignment with national laws and regulations, but that are highly relevant for community residents. However, community norms may also reinforce stereotypes and persist in encouraging cultural practices harmful to women. Community *grass roots* initiatives and *local NGOs and media campaigns* can help to reverse local stigma and influence public policy change, particularly when institutionalized links with national institutions are put in place to reinforce actions. National efforts are best focused on improving *transparency* and *rule of law*. International agencies press for transparency and accountability but struggle with accurate *data collection* and can be thwarted by national governmental policies and cultural norms that are uncomfortable with international dictates and *mistrust motives*.



HUMAN DIGNITY OF WOMEN AS CARE-GIVERS AND FEMALE EMPOWERMENT: DEVELOPED COUNTRY CONTEXT – Dignity of Women Caregivers buttressed by national policy and accompanied by *legislative efforts* to afford working women flexible employment conditions to support family care-giving (varies considerably across cultures) and abetted by *female representation* in politics. Community norms are secondary to the needs of the individual, and rely on *advocacy* and the *media* to effect positive change. International pressure for transparency is largely respected, unless national goals are in conflict; redress comes through *consensus-building* and *peer pressure*. However, gaps in care-giving are filled by imported female labor that suffers from low pay, few benefits, and neglect of their own family needs in their home countries. *Dignity is reserved as a right for local women residents*, and is focused on sexual and reproductive rights, equal access to education, and equality in the workplace. It remains a struggle for migrant labor to attain and preserve these rights.

