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# Campaign and Conference : How do we want to raise our children?

**Grant Report for the Bernard van Leer Foundation  
December 2006  
NET-2005-085**

*"Motherhood is not just something private,  
but it is something that is public."*

*(Prof. Iveta Radičová, Panelist, Former Minister of Family and Social Affairs, Slovakia)*





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## I. Summary



The campaign "How do we want to raise our children?"<sup>1</sup> is the first international campaign conducted by the Mother Centers International Network (**mine**)<sup>2</sup> It was the first time Mother Centers and Mother Center initiatives from around the world had the opportunity to share their concerns as well as their solutions and as such it marked the birth of a global mothers movement.

The idea for the campaign came from the Union of Slovak Mother Centers and the campaign and conference was conducted in cooperation between **mine** and the Union of Slovak Mother Centers. The response was overwhelming: Over 75 Mother Centers, Mother Center initiatives and similar grassroots groups from 24 countries<sup>3</sup> joined the campaign, representing more than 350 000 families worldwide. 166 group reports were received throughout the campaign and posted on the websites of **mine** and the Slovak Union of Mother Centers.



The campaign was structured through a series of questionnaires<sup>4</sup> administered to all participating groups between January and September 2006 and an international conference in Bratislava end of November 2006. More than 30 000 women, men and children participated in the local dialogs organised by the participating groups around the questions of the seven campaign questionnaires. The 3 day conference<sup>5</sup> was opened by Mrs. Silvia Gasparovicova, First Lady of Slovakia, and gave opportunity for face to face debate and exchange to over 180 participants from 20 countries. It also included partnership dialogs between experts from the fields of pediatrics, pedagogic and psychology as well as local authorities with the representatives of Mother Centers and grassroots women's groups.

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<sup>1</sup> The campaign and conference was supported by the following companies, programs and foundations: Bernard van Leer Foundation, Ford Foundation (via GROOTS International), Cordaid, European Social Fund, Initiative Equal, Slovak Ministry of Transportation, Post and Telecommunication, Slovak Telecom, Veneta, and Slovenska Sporitelna.

<sup>2</sup> For background information on mine see Annex 1

<sup>3</sup> Groups from the following 24 countries participated in the campaign: Argentina, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Czech Republic, Ethiopia, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Hungary, Italy, Jamaica, Kenya, Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Uganda, USA and Zimbabwe

<sup>4</sup> See questionnaires in Annex 2

<sup>5</sup> Conference Program in Annex 3

Outcomes included a conference folder containing summary reports of the participating groups as well as a summary report of the content results of the campaign dialogs and a Platform of Action<sup>6</sup> signed by 77 representatives from 16 countries and handed to the Slovak Parliament. Letters of Support for Mother Centers were signed by Slovak local authorities, including the acting mayor of the municipality of Bratislava,. There was extensive media coverage of the campaign and conference in the Slovak media, but also in some of the participating countries, for instance the Dutch newspaper "Gelderlander" carried an article on the participation of the Dutch Mother Centers in the Bratislava conference. The process and results of the campaign were extensively reported on by the newsletters, e-networks and websites of the participating groups and organisations.

The conference also resulted in concrete follow up projects on local or bilateral level. In Russia the conference stimulated the creation of a "Three Generation Center". In Trinidad a national campaign "How do we want to raise our children" has been invoked through the conference. German and Dutch Mother Centers are supporting the construction of a Mother Center in the slums on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, Argentina, with a "stone by stone" donation campaign. In Poland the first Mother Center has been founded thanks to the conference. Mother Center exchange visits are being planned between Mother Centers in Germany, Netherlands and Turkey, including Turkish migrants participating in the Dutch and German Mother Centers.

*"I find it easy to connect and exchange because we have communicated our view on how to raise our children and we have so many views in common"*  
(Participant from Bosnia)



<sup>6</sup> Platform of Action see Annex 4

## II. Rationale and Objectives of the Campaign

In contemporary societies the issue of how to raise children is no longer self evident, does not go without saying. Traditional kin networks are dissolving and many young parents find themselves struggling alone with issues of how to bridge traditional and modern values, how to keep up with their children, what to pass on to their children, how to balance negative influences of media and public life, and how to participate in and influence public childcare and education in kindergartens and schools.

Mother Centers compile a wide range of knowledge and practical experience linked to motherhood and parenthood, child-care and child upbringing. The objective of the campaign: "How do we want to raise our children" is to make this knowledge and practical experience visible and operational both to the families involved in the Mother Centers as well as to childcare professionals and the public at large. For the Mother Center movement this implies a significant move of advocacy and awareness building of the position of Mother Centers in society as unique providers of early childhood education and upbringing as well as family support agents in a system of social prevention and public welfare. In the process a better understanding is developed of what is needed to support mothers and families in their daily and daunting task of bringing up the next generation.

*"The three generation model has broken down but now the Mother Centers fill the gap. Mother Centers are like a big family for the mother and the child"*  
(Participant from Italy)



Mother Centers are carriers of contemporary parenthood, which combines traditionally verified experience with the new demands of modern life. Within the educational system the voice and experience of parents and of practical parenthood is all too often absent. Mother Centers create a favorable atmosphere for peer learning. They establish a bottom up process of peer exchange and peer support, which can be framed as "university of modern parenting " a place where contemporary ideas and trends in child upbringing can be transferred to and accepted by parents, a place where theory and practice of early childhood education can meet and intertwine.

*"From the campaign we have learned that families need more acknowledgment in society. Families should be looked upon more highly. Child rearing work should be revalorized. Our children are our future, support their families!"*  
(Presentation of Italian Mother Centers)

The campaign "How do we want to raise our children?" is created as a format to listen to the voices of parents and harvest the knowledge and experience generated in the every day experience of parenting, and to reflect and define contemporary child-rearing through the eyes of parents and through peer exchange and peer learning.

The campaign process is designed to support parents in their parenting skills by sharpening their vision, as well as to raise and help define issues for collective and international advocacy for family and child friendly societies. Especially the international conference and its face to face exchanges can contribute to a dialog, mutual understanding and peace building across cultural, ethnic and religious divides.

### III. Campaign Steps and Methodology

Coordination and monitoring of the international campaign “How do we want to raise our children” was the responsibility of **mine** and involved the following steps:<sup>7</sup>

#### **Call for Participation**

A call for participation was sent out through the international and national Mother Center networks in November 2005, which met with a very active response. In the first two months 17 countries had joined the campaign and several more followed later on. The feedback showed that women (and men) around the world greatly welcome the opportunity to exchange and reflect on their core values, experiences and issues when raising children.



*“The biggest strength of the Mother Centers is that it has created an accelerated movement of women who are committed to raising the future generation”*  
(Slovak Participant)

#### **Local Dialogs**

The campaign started locally by local Mother Centers and groups initiating debates in their centers on the issues addressed in the campaign questionnaires.

Mother Centers provide an optimal environment for the gaining and exchange of experience concerning parents and children. Although discussions on parenting are a regular part of the daily life in Mother Centers, the structured dialogs of the campaign provided a more focused and concentrated approach, which was greatly appreciated by the participating parents. The resulting reports reflect the issues parents are struggling with as well as the goals and values they are striving for in raising their children. They draw out the knowledge and competencies developed in every day life with children and give a picture of “contemporary parenthood” as it is shaped and formed by everyday challenges and how parents deal and cope with them throughout different cultural, ethnic and social backgrounds.

*“Parents and child development professionals need to work together as equal partners. Both the educators and the parents are experts and hold a piece of the knowledge that needs to come together. Professionals can bring in general or specialised knowledge but it is the parents who know their individual children the best.”* (Panelist Dr. Jana Nosková, Paediatrician, Slovakia)

#### **Dialog Themes**

The debates and dialogs in the campaign “How do we want to raise our children?” were structured by a series of 7 questionnaires which were issued to participating groups between December 2005 and August 2006.




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<sup>7</sup> The international campaign was coordinated by Monika Jaeckel, founder of mine and the Mother Center concept.

*"In the Mother Centers children find new toys and they also learn how to share them."*  
(Presentation of Slovak Mother Centers)

The first questionnaire addressed the **parenting goals** of parents with questions like: What is important to you as a parent? What are challenges in being a parent? What are the values you want to transmit to your child/children? How satisfied are you with your parenting experience so far? What are areas you want to improve? What would you define as a "positive outcome" of your parenting?

The second questionnaire focused on the role of Mother Centers as unique environment for raising children with questions like: What can children experience in Mother Centers that they don't experience at home? What kind of relationships have your children built up to other adults and other children in the Center? In what way has participating in Mother Centers effected your identity as a mother? What makes Mother Centers in your eyes a different place for children and mothers than other preschool arrangements for children like playgroups, baby-groups etc.?

*"We are often asked in Mother Centers, where are the fathers? I can give an answer right here and now. They are at home, taking care of our children, so that we can participate in this conference!"*  
(Participant from Bulgaria)

The third questionnaire was directed at the **involvement of fathers** and asked questions like: What role do fathers play in the family and in the Mother Center? What are their main concerns in regard to raising children? What activities do they find attractive in the Mother Center and how has participating in the Mother Centers effected their parenting and participation in family tasks?

The fourth questionnaire examined the question: **what qualifies for parenting?** And included questions like: What capacities and qualities does one need to raise children? How have you developed your knowledge and expertise in raising children? What has been the role of professionals in qualifying you for child-raising and what has been the role of other mothers/parents and of the Mother Center?

The fifth questionnaire looked at practical parenthood and **parental recipes** in challenging situations like if a child is fastidious about food, does not want to fall asleep alone, cries without an obvious reason, bites and is aggressive towards other children and adults, or throws itself on the floor in public. Questions were also included about strategies parents use for instance to develop the creativity and imagination of children, to teach them values, to respect borders, to learn to respect the environment or to prevent possible sexual abuse.

The sixth questionnaire investigated the experiences of parents with **kindergartens and schools** with questions like: Do you perceive an impact of group experiences in kindergarten/school on your child's personality? Do you think that you can or will be able to influence the educational process (methods, content etc) in kindergarten/school? What are issues you would like to get into a discussion about with kindergarten and school teachers?



*Research shows that when a child has problems, the best outcomes come from working with other parties, either parents or teachers, not necessarily the child itself."*  
(Panelist Dr. Daniela Cechova, Psychologist, Slovakia)

The seventh questionnaire finally addressed the **enabling and disabling conditions for raising children** with questions like What would you identify as the main support you need from society in order to raise your children according to your goals and intentions?

How should your town city or village look like to be a good place to raise children? What challenges do you face as parents when entering public life with your children?

How do you experience the influence of the media and modern technologies on your children? Or: What would you define as the main barriers put into your way in your task of raising your children?

The reports of the debates along these seven themes give a language to the process of "collective parenting" developed in the every day life of Mother Centers. They give a voice to the perspectives of parents on child-rearing and society and define issues where parents want more influence in shaping the environment for their children.

*"There is so much connecting us. We are moving out of isolation, we are strengthening our self esteem, we are moving into development and creating employment, we are building new partnerships. Because of this international movement, we feel stronger."  
(Participant from Argentina)*

## Campaign Guidelines

Guidelines for participating groups were issued at various stages of the campaign. In the beginning the basic objectives, campaign process and time line was outlined. Guidelines were developed and sent out to participating groups to explain the various ways groups could participate in the campaign, as Mother Centers or as other groups, and to support groups in how to conduct the local dialogs and how to facilitate group debates.



Great flexibility was given to the groups to adapt the campaign to their local conditions. Participation could involve a handful of women and informal meetings over a cup of coffee as well as a more formal study group or a program involving several hundred participants. Questionnaires could be discussed in the group or taken home and filled out individually. Participating groups could decide to discuss all the questions in the questionnaire or select the most ones most relevant to their situation. Group sessions could be organised per questionnaire, or several meetings could be conducted to work through each set of questions.



At a later stage guidelines were administered to the groups on how to submit their reports and how to prepare their presentations for the international conference.

*"Parenthood is like a road into the unknown which still we should follow."  
(Participant from Slovakia)*

The general experience was that the questionnaires stimulated lively debates and that groups spent a lot of time on each question going into the depth of the matter. The whole process developed therefore at a slower pace than originally anticipated.



## Campaign Reports

Each participating group was asked to send in reports of every group meeting and dialog they had conducted. In some cases this was only possible in their local language, so translation needed to be organised. A forum for publication of the reports and exchange of experiences during the campaign was put up

*"We do not have made a Mother Center yet, but we used the campaign questionnaires as a tool for organizing and starting discussions. Mother Centers would be a great contribution to spreading a culture of peace. The situation in Burundi is very unstable, people have been violated and hurt by armed groups. Hygienic conditions are very bad and we try to help them with just the most basic necessities for survival. Our intention is to support them to have their own Mother Center as a base for security and survival. Now when the women go to the market to sell things they lock up their kids at home and they are in constant fear that the kids are raped in their absence. It would be wonderful if there is a place where the children are safe and can learn something and where the women can find support and trust. "*  
(Presentation of Mother Center Initiative, Burundi)

on the websites of **mine** and the Slovak Union of Mother Centers. Here the groups had the opportunity to read how other groups in other cities and countries were responding to the questions asked in the campaign.

Intermediate campaign reports, summing up the experiences of the debates and explaining the next stage of the campaign were sent out at three intervals throughout the campaign.

Early on in the campaign it could be seen that the parenting issues and situations parents were dealing with were very different in Europe and Northern America than for instance in Africa. Nevertheless also some common themes began to emerge.



*"The attention paid to children is an indicator for the civilisation and progress of society"*  
(Slovak Participant)

### **Analysis of results**

Systematic analysis of the results of the local debates began towards the end of the campaign as preparation for the international conference in Bratislava, where groups were to meet in person to exchange and debate their experiences and results.

As initiator of the campaign the Slovak Mother Center movement contributed a majority of participating groups. Therefore the results were analyzed and documented in two steps. One report concentrated on the results of the local debates of the Slovak Mother Centers, the second report concentrated on the local debates of the international groups participating in the campaign. An in length version, analyzing the reports and debates questionnaire by questionnaire as well as a summary report containing the main results was prepared. At the conference the summary versions were presented of both the Slovak as well as the international report.

*"I have participated in many conferences but I have never been anywhere that combines both such spirit and an inspiring and connecting atmosphere with such rich content, covering the complete spectrum of motherhood"*  
(Participant from Trinidad Tobago)

### **International Conference in Bratislava**

The international conference "How do we want to raise our children?" end of November 2006 in Bratislava was the highlight of the campaign, bringing together participants from 20 countries. The focus of the conference was on showing the diversity as well as extracting common values and common issues of parenting throughout social and cultural settings as diverse as the conditions for parents and children in countries like Argentina, Bosnia, Kenya, Germany, Jamaica, Turkey, Burundi and the Czech and Slovak Republics.

Participating groups received a set guidelines on how to prepare reports before the conference as well as for their presentations

during the conference. Each group was asked to send in two reports in advance: one report containing the basic information about the group and their work and one report summing up the results of their local dialogs. These reports were compiled in a conference folder that was handed out to participants during the conference. At the conference itself groups were asked to get together by country and compile short national presentations focusing on key issues, key messages, lessons learned and recommendations generated by the campaign. Questions they were asked to address included: What are the main concerns of parents in your community? How is your group addressing these main concerns? What have been the main effects of the How do we want to raise our Children campaign for your group(s)? What have been challenges and what are the main successes?

The outcome of the conference developed arguments for the importance of Mother Centers in the process of child rearing and education as well as for ways to bring about positive changes in society for children's upbringing and parenting tasks.



*"Everybody knows what a kindergarten is. Our goal is that everybody also knows what a Mother Center is."  
(Participant from the Czech Republic)*

## **Fundraising**

Fundraising for the campaign and conference was mainly conducted by mine and the Union of Slovak Mother Centers. Several participating groups raised their own funds locally for the participation of their delegation in the Bratislava conference. Funds were mainly acquired for the organization and expenses of the international conference. The main bulk of the campaign was conducted through voluntary work of members of mine and the Union of Slovak Mother Centers as well as of the local participating groups.

*"Mother Centers are a unique prevention tool against social pathology."  
(Panelist from Slovakia)*

*"If male politicians do not want to listen to the views of mothers, invite their mothers, wives, and daughters to the conversation  
(Panelist from Slovakia)*





*"Don't worry, be active!"*

*(Slogan from the Association of Czech Mother Centers)*

*"Mother Centers are often ahead of their time".  
(Mother Center presentation, Germany)*

*"The most powerful parent education is sharing"  
(Participant from Trinidad)*



## **Next Steps**

Next steps involve a thorough documentation of the campaign and conference on several levels. The following documentation products are planned:

- Compendium of groups participating in the campaign, describing their background, organization and activities
- Publication of the results of the local dialogs on the seven thematic questionnaires
- Publication of grassroots advocacy issues including the "Platform of Action"
- Video of the Bratislava conference
- Two newsletters with pictures, quotes and interviews of campaign participants

The Union of Slovak Mother Centers has signed contracts with several local newspapers and radio programs to generate a general debate among their readers and listeners on the themes and questions of the campaign. The debates will be published in the local media.

## **Continuation of the Campaign**

The "How do we want to raise our children" campaign is designed in two stages of which the first stage, the local dialogs among the participants of Mother Centers and similar grassroots groups, has been conducted. Many groups are planning to continue the dialogs in their local settings, by adding new questions as well as by widening the scope of participation of interested parents.

The body of knowledge developed through the first stage of the campaign forms a rich basis for a second stage of the campaign, for debates and negotiations with other stakeholders in society: kindergarten and school teachers, urban planners, local authorities, representatives of the retail industry, representatives of medical professions, religious institutions, universities and the media. These debates take on a broader perspective: The question "How do we want to raise our children?" develops into public reflections on "What kind of environment is needed to raise our children as we want?" Funding for the second stage of the campaign still needs to be secured.



*"The first teacher of compassion towards me was my mother, my mother took fullest care of me and I survived from my mother's milk. This old body still feels the impact of that care and affection today. Some forget this and that is a mistake."  
(The Dalai Lama)*

## IV Issues Discussed

The campaign and conference raised many issues on raising children and on public policies in support of parenting from the perspective of the everyday care-givers.

The overall goals of the campaign and conference was to provide parents with a voice and harvest their hands-on knowledge on issues concerning their children and their role as parents, to identify what values and visions connect mothers world wide and to define common advocacy issues and necessary policies as well as actions and campaigns that could be undertaken as an international network: What role can parents play in making the world a better place for children?

The conference consolidated the themes of the questions addressed throughout the campaign into overall advocacy issues, which were discussed in working groups as well as into themes for debate with other stakeholders in society, which were addressed in panel debates with pediatricians and psychologists, as well as with representatives of municipal and regional government and administration.

The working groups of the conference discussed the values and visions parents are holding for the upbringing of their children, what challenges they face as parents and what changes they are striving for. They also looked at the role of Mother Centers as public spaces of informal learning and peer support for parents as well as locations for the concerns of parents to be voiced channeled into society:

- What are the visions and goals of raising children in contemporary society in different countries and contexts from the viewpoint of parents?
- What does it mean that parents world-wide have issues, visions and values in common? What does it say about the state of our world and the role parents can play in society?
- How can Mother Centers support parents to express and act on their concerns, goals and visions?
- In what way are Mother Centers “Universities of Parenthood”?
- How do they strengthen the parenting skills of participating mothers and fathers?
- What are enabling and supporting conditions for Mother Centers to be places of informal learning?
- What services and support do Mother Centers offer parents and what makes them different from other family services?
- What role do Mother Centers play in strengthening the social cohesion in the communities?

*"I am going to mix a (non-alcoholic) cocktail of all the solutions I hear here and take it home."  
(Participant from Argentina)*

*"In my Mother Center the mothers come together to raise our children, and here we do the same across borders and continents."  
(Participant from Italy)*

*"Mother Centers are a new concept for our country, I think it will work very well. The groups in the rural areas would be able to find space to make a Mother Center and there is definitely a need for it; the women who do not have jobs do barely come out of the house now. I think my work in health and education will be easier too, when there are Mother Centers."  
(Participant from Guatemala)*



*"During communist times the state had the responsibility of raising the children. That has changed now, but the institutions have not changed yet. After the uniformity of the communist times, meeting with such diversity is a value in itself. Such meetings show new perspectives for your own place." (Participant from Poland)*

- In what way can Mother Centers be recognised as an important element in the system of public welfare?
- What are the issues Mother Centers have been addressing in public debates and in their advocacy activities?
- What roles do Mother Centers play in the municipality and in relation to local governance?
- How can the voices of parents gain more influence in society?
- What are ways to strengthen an international mothers movement?
- What are ways of acknowledging and increasing the scale of proactive solutions to family and community issues Mother Centers and grassroots women's groups are developing on the ground?



*"Family life expertise is not validated in our educational system. Child rearing is regarded as something that only highly professional people can deal with. This needs to be demystified." (Participant from Turkey)*

The panel sessions were conducted as partnership building debates between grassroots representatives and public stakeholders with the intention of defining the expertise and knowledge both of parents as well as of professionals, how they can compliment each other and what is needed on both sides to create equitable partnerships as well as with the intention of making visible the contributions of Mother Centers to parent education and family policy and what recognition, resources and public support are necessary to establish them as equal stakeholders and partners in shaping society.

The panels discussed the questions:

- How can productive partnerships be built between parents and professionals to implement the values and visions (and overcome the challenges and barriers) parents have in raising their children?
- How can partnerships between Mother Centers and mainstream actors be established to raise the visibility and influence of Mother Centers in society?



*"People need to feel that they belong, that if they are not there, they will be missed. Mother Centers seem to be that kind of place for women and children." (Panelist Dr. Daniela Cechova, psychologist, Slovakia)*



## V Results and Lessons Learned

### ***The effect of the campaign –Creating space for parental self reflection and peer learning***

The format of the campaign, creating dialogs between parents through structured questionnaires, generated a peer learning process that went far beyond the informal learning that is part of the every day life of Mother Centers. The campaign complimented the Mother Center strategy of “claiming public space” for parents, with “claiming self-educational space” the parameters of which were defined by parents themselves. Many centers reported that the campaign invoked intense conversations and opened up self reflection and peer learning and sharing on a deep and truthful level. This is exemplified with a quote from a report a Mother Center dialog group in Germany:

*"When we started to address the questions in the questionnaires we were surprised to see to what level they took us. They initiated a process of deep sharing and learning and acknowledgement of truths involved in parenting. It enabled participants to address painful parts of their lives, where they felt overwhelmed, had failed as parents or been incapable of defending their children. It also allowed a sharing of solutions they had found. The atmosphere created was deeply honest and supportive of each other. Simple as well as highly educated parents, people with very little money as well as with a good income, grandparents, single parents, parents whose children had been taken away from them, parents with health or psychological problems shared their stories, concerns and insights and what was important to them in life. There was no pressure to perform or impress. A ribbon of bonding was created that connected all participants, a compassion for each other and each others children, as if we all belong together, are one big family. People shared their worries and listened to each others comments, they also shared the joy their children meant to them, something deep inside was touched and surfaced, creating very intimate moments. Participants shared stories of how they felt discriminated against and not taken serious as parents, how schools or the public administration did not respect and acknowledge them as parents, how they felt that struggling to keep the family together and make ends meet meant that they were too busy functioning all the time and took them away from truly being with their children. We shared our deepest values and wishes. We did not run through the questions, we spent as much time on every*





"We are all on the same page, as I hear the others and I realize world wide we have the same issues."  
(Participant from Jamaica)

question as was needed. Somehow the kind of questions and the way they were put created a certain magic, generated a sphere of sincere self reflection and mutual appreciation and hope, a support for our values, for what is important for each of us as a parent. In these meetings nobody was a failure as a parent, it became visible how everybody was doing the best they could. Participants revealed what was really moving them as parents, how they were following their deepest convictions, how they had overcome challenges, how they were coping and how they were holding on to their dreams. A field of support was created, parents mirrored and confirmed each other, I understand what you did and what your intentions were, how you felt put under pressure or misunderstood, how you stood to your convictions and held your ground or how you feel remorseful and think you should have done better. There was a gentle holding and support, with nobody being a "know it all", "know it better" or giving "expert advice" . Parents often feel very vulnerable and defensive and often so much criticism is packaged as advice. None of that happened, it was very different from many parent education programs, where parents feel put down or confronted with high or unrealistic expectations. And yet there were no taboos, participants were revealing their issues as parents with great sincerity, it was an honest sharing in a trustful and respectful form."

### **Reinventing family and community – the common thread of Mother Centers**



Mother Centers have spread to many countries all over the world. This is not self evident, since it has not happened as part of an official government program or a strategy of an international agency, but on its own, by spontaneous dissemination, through grassroots peer sharing and peer learning. Mother Centers are a global self-help movement. They are being self-created all over the world by women who see the need of community support for the everyday task of raising children.



Throughout the campaign and during the conference participants of Mother Centers representing different historical and social settings around the world had a chance to recognise and define what they have in common:

They are reinventing family and kinship under various contemporary conditions in different parts of the world. They are creating up to date support systems for child-raising in response to current historical conditions and demands. They are paving ways for community parenting and social cohesion, for caring neighbourhoods and humane societies. Mother Centers are an answer to the weakening of social ties, family, kin and neighbourhood networks in many different social, cultural,

geographical and economic circumstances currently on our planet. They recreate community and social cohesion where it has been destroyed by modernisation, by migration, by wars, by totalitarianism and colonialism, by inner city violence, by natural disasters and by the HIV aids epidemic.

*"Mother Centers are pioneers They lay out the basic infrastructure for caring communities."  
(Participant from Germany)*

## **How do we want to raise our children? – Answers from around the world**

The campaign and conference offered participating groups from different parts of the world the opportunity to identify common issues and messages they share as parents. The following summarises some of the conclusions and insights agreed upon during the conference:

*"The subjects of the campaign were close to peoples hearts and minds. That made the participants in the dialogues come closer to one another and get more understanding for each other."  
(Presentation of Dutch Mother Centers)*

- What unites mothers from around the world is the wish for a better world for their children.
- Mothers around the world place great importance on transferring values to their children. They seek to have more influence in shaping the morals and cultural norms of public life.
- Mothers are seeking recognition for the competencies and skills they gain through their daily life and engagement with children.
- Mothers worldwide want more influence on kindergartens and schools. They want to cooperate with kindergarten and school teachers as equal partners.
- Fathers who are involved in the Mother Center movement welcome the chance to participate in discussions on raising children.
- Mother Centers provide a unique and effective learning space for the skills of parenting and raising children and a supportive environment for families not found elsewhere in society.
- Mothers see the need for better social conditions for their task of raising the next generation, specifically in regard to the following issues:
  - The lack of a safe environment for mothers and children. Playgrounds are not clean and safe, urban environments are often dangerous for children, and public infrastructure often excludes mothers and children.
  - Poverty, unemployment, disease and the lack of provision for basic needs.
  - The lack of support in public life for parents values.
  - In Europe many parents feel that public institutions and government agencies are not helpful and that there is much intolerance and social prejudices against parents and children. In Africa many parents express a break



down of values, and a lack of social and public backing for their values in raising children.



*"Our country is multilingual and multicultural. We are going to start a Mother Center and listen to every word you say. There are so few possibilities for us to learn and to travel, this is a very precious experience." (Participant from Guatemala)*

*"The word **mine** means mother in my language. I feel pregnant with the soon to be born Mother Center in my home town of Kisumu. It will be born as soon as I get back home." (Participant from Kenya)*

*"I've seen today presentations I've never seen before. I say this because I could see that it was made from the heart. It wasn't artificial. We are interested in children -they are the center of the universe in the family. It's important to make this the center of the public universe as well. I am fascinated by Mother Centers because they constitute a connection between the private and the public realm." (Mayor of Bratislava)*

- Parents from countries in Europe and North America as well as from South America and Africa agree that environmental issues create serious health hazards for their children. Issues mentioned include pollution, changing climate conditions, contaminated food and water, and poor waste disposal and sanitation.
- New technology is experienced by parents world wide as a mixed package. On the one hand it creates access to information, learning and education, but on the other hand the effects of advertisement and consumerism, of violence, pornography and computer games which children experience through the media are seen as very negative.
- Women around the world express that support from peers, and collective parenting responsibility in the community, "community parenting", is needed to raise children in contemporary societies. This is expressed by parents from countries like Germany or the Slovak Republic as well as from countries like Burundi, Cameroon, Uganda or Jamaica. Grassroots women around the world are taking the initiative to create such communities, through the creation of solidarity and support among parents and neighbors , as well as through projects like Mother Centers and community childcare initiatives. They are creating safe spaces where they can support each other in implementing their visions and values on parenting. They are reintroducing the culture of care into public life. They are creating caring communities. They expect support from government and other stakeholders in society for this work and these initiatives.

### ***Mother centered development – A global Platform of Action***

The campaign and conference presented Mother Centers and women's community initiatives worldwide the occasion to define together what they are striving for and where they can join forces and speak with one voice. This came together in a Platform of Action that was adopted by the plenary of the concluding session of the conference and signed by 77 participants from 16 countries. (See Annex 4). The guiding question was formulated by a participant from the German Mother Centers: "How can Mother Centers move from being successful to being significant, to becoming a major player in public policy making?" The following lists the major advocacy goals and strategies presented and debated in the plenary sessions and partnership panels.

From the perspective of Mother Centers and grassroots women's community groups there are several key dialogs needed with other stakeholders in society to enhance the work they are doing on the ground:

- The majority of skills and knowledge that are applied in society are gained through informal learning. There is a need to acknowledge, resource and certify knowledge building processes developed in informal settings.
- Grassroots groups need to be recognised as experts in their own right and invited as partners to the table. They contribute expertise and knowledge that is often lacking in policy making.
- Funding titles are often too narrowly focused on outcomes instead of process and do not support a holistic approach. Many programs focus on special target groups like youth, women or elderly. What can be learned from the Mother Center movement is the need to resource the process that creates community for all these groups and allows them to design their own solutions and programs.

*"We need to have our own university because there is so much knowledge contained in our community practices, even in our handicrafts. Mother Centers are often started by young women without qualifications. But in our societies it is always about diplomas. In the Mother Center you get a super education The point of a Mother Center University is that it fits the lifestyle of the mothers. And that theory is enriched with practical implementation and experience. We need to find ways of making formal qualifications out of informal knowledge"*  
(Participant from Argentina)

The following policies emerged from the debates as key to the strengthening of the Mother Centers movement world wide:

- Mother Centers in countries where they are being newly established need start up funding.
- In countries where Mother Centers have spread as a self help movement they need to be acknowledged as a basic service and necessary part of public infrastructure, like kindergartens.
- Grassroots groups need to be legitimised to create and monitor their own early childcare programs.
- Mother Centers need to be incorporated into social and family policy programs. There is a need to establish sustainable systems of financing – on the level of state, regional and local budgets (including structural funds and other public budgets).
- Mother Centers need to acquire an active position in decision-making processes – they need to be involved in processes of drafting laws and policy documents, as well as in expert groups, and in the monitoring of existing policies and programs.

*"Women coming together is vital. Physical space is strategic. There should be a Mother Center in every community."*  
(Participant from USA)



*"Children are being taken out of homes by social services in what they call risk families. In the Mother Center the moms will take care of children of another mom who are going through a hard time with drugs or alcohol. Children are between worlds when raised in non-aboriginal homes. Indigenous populations have a "village" model for caring for children. The social service model is hostile to that. It is a racist notion that aboriginal families are not as capable of raising a child."*

*(Participant from Aboriginal Mother Center, Canada)*

- There is a need of formalising the relationships between Mother Centers and decision-making bodies on local, regional as well as national level through contracts of cooperation to ensure constant dialog and grassroots participation in decision making.
- Mother Centers and community parents groups need to be consulted to inform local authorities and institutions like urban planners, educators, police, judges etc. What is really helpful to families and to the community.
- Transparency needs to be created in the budgeting and monitoring of municipal resources in order for public resources to be used in a gender and family equitable way.
- There is a need for respectful research to be conducted on the impact of Mother Centers on children, parents and the community. Such research should be conducted in partnership with academic institutions while maintaining grassroots ownership of the process.
- There is a need for positive media, for stories of successful mediation, cooperation and community building to be spread widely by the media to counteract images of violence.

The following joint projects and international campaigns were discussed and agreed on as desirable by the participants of the conference:

- Continuation of the "How we want to raise our children" campaign
- World wide Mothers March on Mothers Day
- Annual mine networking meeting
- Bilateral exchanges between Mother Centers in different countries



*"Mother Centers are the drops that move the ocean"*  
*(Participant from Slovakia)*

*"Mother Centers are like sun and rain and together they result in growth"*  
*(Participant from Guatemala)*

Participants of the conference were asked to write down any dreams they had of what could be done together. The following list was compiled:

- ✂ A conference in 2 years in Bulgaria
- ✂ A conference in 4 years in Argentina
- ✂ A Caribbean network of Mother Centers and conference by 2010
- ✂ Recognition of Mother Centers as a peace promoting entity by the UN
- ✂ Exchanges visits to Uganda next year
- ✂ AMAHORO (peace) in Burundi
- ✂ NGOs in Trinidad revitalized by "How do we want to raise our children campaign" - 2007-2008
- ✂ A wish to have a Union of Mother Centers in Russia and to welcome Mother Centers from abroad in Russia
- ✂ Full funding for all Mother Centers from the state and the private sector
- ✂ Mothers movement in Poland soon
- ✂ Come to Freiburg
- ✂ To stay in touch and see you next time maybe in Africa
- ✂ Support and accompaniment of our new Mother Center in Guatemala. That there be more Mother Centers in Latin America and that they also make a network and union! Much peace and harmony for everyone in Guatemala.

## Annex 1 Background information on mine

### The **mine** program

*Facilitating a quality leap for the Mother Center Movement*

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- IVd Translating action to policy recommendations
- IVe Stimulating advocacy

#### **V. Mine Campaigns and Projects**

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# I Summary

## Issues/Vision

Some of the major challenges of contemporary societies include an increasingly individualised and aging society as well as increasingly multicultural populations. While family, kin and neighborhood networks are thinning out, the question of social cohesion and social values needs to be re-framed under contemporary conditions. How to live together in social peace and harmony, how to generate social care and responsibility and how to rebuild the social fabric in diverse, conflict-torn and pluralistic societies are issues underlying many of the current concerns around the isolation, alienation and anonymity of communities, the increase of violence, the re-emergence of fundamentalism, the non-engagement of youth and the lack of a pro-active civil society. How to connect with, communicate and understand each other in an increasingly fragmented and polarised society seems to be on everyone's mind, while nobody seems to know how to really do it.

Mother Centers approach these issues by starting with women and children and by organizing on a community level. The **mine** network supports the linking of the Mother Center experiences from local to global as well as from global to local in an effort to bridge grassroots and mainstream cultures in the process of creating social peace, bottom up participation and sustainable communities.

## Background Mother Centers

Mother Centers are self-managed public spaces in the neighborhood, where mothers and their children meet on a daily basis. The atmosphere is informal. You join by having a cup of coffee in the coffee shop or by a visit to the Mother Center second hand store. Childcare is offered on a drop-in basis for all ages throughout the opening hours of the center. Mother Centers are based on participation. Depending on their size and how long they have been operating, Mother Centers reach between 50 and 500 families in the neighborhood. In Mother Centers women are supported to join forces to improve the life of their families and communities, connect with families from different social and cultural backgrounds, claim public space and acknowledgment for their everyday life expertise, fight poverty and social exclusion and participate in local governance. Mother Centers generate support systems in conflict and crisis situations. They create employment and access to the labor market. For children the centers create an expansion of their social and physical space and experience.

To date more than 750 Mother Centers exist worldwide. Mother Centers seem to answer a historic need. They recreate family and neighborhood structures where they have been weakened by modernization, (Western Europe, North America), by socialist regimes (Czech Republic, Bulgaria), by war (Bosnia, Rwanda), by poverty and aids (Kenya) or by migration (Philippines). Mother Centers represent another kind of globalisation, a globalisation from the ground. This has created the need for a global network: **mine**.

## Background mine

The Mother Centers International Network (**mine**) connects and supports the over 800 Mother Centers currently existing in 15 countries. ([www.mine.cc](http://www.mine.cc)). The network stands for a world that places social cohesion and community building at the base of development, re-integrates the culture of care into public life and recognizes the central role of women in peace building and development. The background of the movement and **mine** are described in part II.

Mother Centers are self help initiatives that spring up 'like mushrooms after rain' . That, however, does not happen automatically. Just like mushrooms have almost invisible seeds and networks of roots, self help movements require nurturing and networking. The ideas have to be brought across, and the initiators and grassroots leaders need training and coaching in order to be able to get going and to be a capable partner to donor organizations. The **mine** program is targeted at filling this gap.

## Objectives

The force of the Mother Center movement lies in three distinguishing qualities. They are so simple that they are often taken for granted and remain invisible. The objective of the **mine** program is to bring out and reinforce these qualities, and use them as a development force:

- Mother Centers follow a holistic approach to mobilizing women, they take the female lifestyle (taking care of all simultaneously) as starting point for organizing.
- In (post) war situations motherhood is a neutral and constructive force that has large potential for peace building and reconciliation.
- Women dealing with care giving need a political voice, a 'mothering perspective' needs to be integrated into local, national and global policy making.

These three objectives are described in part III.

## Activities

- Start-up support for Mother Centers
- Peer learning and trainings
- Support of networking and self organization at regional or national level
- Documentation and evaluation, extracting results and translation to policy recommendations
- Stimulating the use of lessons learned for advocacy

These working methods and activities are described in part IV.

# II The mine Story

## IIa. Mother Centers

Mother Centers are local grassroots initiatives that run self-managed public spaces in the neighborhood. They are places where mothers can focus on their needs and interests, exchange knowledge and experiences with peers, receive and generate mutual support in child-rearing tasks, engage in capacity building and further education, and initiate family support services like childcare, eldercare, healthcare, hot meals for children, laundry, janitor of other household services.

Mother Centers are based on participation. The core of any center is a daily drop-in coffee shop with childcare included. Activities involve projects that help lower expenses for families and that support families in their parenting tasks and everyday chores as well as in times of crisis. Most centers have activities like second hand shop, toy library, holistic health services or skills trainings to enter the labor market like language courses, computer and job retraining. Advocacy groups on issues like children's environmental diseases, single parenting or family friendly urban facilities are part of the self-organising that happens in Mother Centers.

Mother Centers are a switchboard of information and exchange, a place where issues and talents can become visible. Everything that happens in the community can be discussed there on a daily basis. Anything that needs immediate attention or response can be attended to collectively. There is openness, fluidity and transparency of decision making. Everyone is welcome in the center, and can participate and be part of it. Things do not happen behind closed doors, or by invitation alone, but 'in public', in the 'public living room'.

Children are a welcome and regular part of Mother Centers, and Mother Centers run many programs for children. They are, however, not the single focus of interest. Activities in the Mother Centers evolve also around the interests and needs of the mothers and are as such also indirectly beneficial to the children. This creates public space that is shared by adults and children and a different kind of childcare than in most programs.

## **Bridging the gap between private and public**

The rapid spreading of the Mother Center movement shows a historic need for community support and a widening of the social space in regard to family and parenting tasks. Mother Centers provide a bridging function between private and public, between the informal and the formal. The neighborhood networks generated by Mother Centers create qualities of 'a village in the city'. Opportunities to spread care-giving tasks for children as well as for the elderly over a larger group arise, thus both providing support to care-givers as well as maintaining the quality of family like care.

Opening up nuclear family structures to local support networks in the neighborhood brings a shift towards more collective responsibility and organisation of reproductive tasks as well as a re-integration of care into public life. Public space in the context of family and neighborhood networks stays personal. At the same time it gives access to public recognition and visibility. Mother Centers as local meeting spaces for families and children in the neighborhood have been called 'public living rooms', as a way to describe this quality. Children experience an introduction and integration into public life in a protected environment. Mother Centers create intermediation and buffer zones for many of the challenges of contemporary society like individualisation, alienation, isolation and clientelisation. They are based on self-management and participation, following the motto that everybody is good at at least one thing which they can contribute to the center and to the community.

### **Benefits:**

Mother Centers:

- \* Offer direct and non bureaucratic assistance in crisis situations and emergencies
- \* Create a safety net for families at risk
- \* Empower women and contribute to gender equality
- \* Increase the domestic involvement and participation of fathers
- \* Support the reintegration of women into further education and the labor market
- \* Support the reconciliation of work and family
- \* Create alternatives to institutional eldercare
- \* Support the social integration of youth
- \* Promote children's and family health
- \* Strengthen tolerance and democratic attitudes in civil society
- \* Revitalise neighborhoods and local culture
- \* Bring together citizens of diverse class and ethnic backgrounds
- \* Create a platform for unused talents and skills to enter society
- \* Bring marginalised and excluded groups into social participation
- \* Develop leadership potential in the community
- \* Create income generating opportunities
- \* Create a rich reservoir for informal learning
- \* Make the knowledge and expertise of everyday life operational for development
- \* Develop institutional literacy among grassroots groups
- \* Generate innovations in professional and institutional programs
- \* Are incubators for new ideas and local problem solving

### **The Mother Centers Success Formula**

The success of the Mother Centers on the ground is based on a set of principles that work together to create basic innovations and social change:

- \* Mother Centers are a grassroots self-help movement. The centers are self managed. Mothers are 'the experts' in the centers. Their everyday life experience is acknowledged as expertise. Professionals have a supportive role and engage in equitable partnerships.
- \* The approach of the centers is resource, not problem oriented. Women are not

approached by asking them to define their problems. Instead they are asked to define what skills and resources they have to contribute to community building and community solutions.

- \* Mother Centers claim physical public space, 'a public room of their own' (slightly adapting the imagery of Virginia Wolfe). They are not harbored in rooms of other organisations for limited periods of time. The women dispose of and self manage the rooms full time.
- \* Work in the Mother Centers is remunerated and it is spread among the participants. Voluntary work is additional, not a substitute for paid work. Usually for every paid hour in the centers an extra hour of voluntary work is generated.
- \* Children are welcome, but the focus is on the interests and needs of the mothers.
- \* Mother Centers function more family like than like institutions. The 'corporate culture' is personal and adapted to family rhythms. It follows women's ways of learning, and women's ways of doing things.
- \* Mother Centers function on the basis of collective leadership and a culture of leadership support. Learning to work together is a major focus. Conflicts are not avoided but part of it.
- \* Mother Centers are melting pots in the community for women of diverse social, cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds. Diversity is celebrated and integration and peace building methods are an integral part of the daily programs.
- \* The expertise of mothers of dealing with care work and the everyday life of communities is entered into advocacy, local governance and policy making.
- \* Mother Centers also claim reflective space. Taking time out for peer learning exchanges as well as for regular seminars to reflect on the daily experiences, the lessons learned, and the way forward are an integral part their functioning.

## **IIb. The mine network – catalyzing, linking, up-scaling**

### **History**

Mother Centers were initiated by a research project that provided the self-reflective space, initial spark and technical support needed to create a grassroots movement. The initial study that resulted in the concept of Mother Centers was designed around the question: What do families themselves consider support for their situation?

Main results showed that parents were looking for recognition and acknowledgement in their taking responsibility for and everyday coping with parenting. They were looking for peer learning and peer support, they wanted to learn from each other. They did not want professionals to 'talk down' to them or put them into the role of pupils. Institutional settings that look like school and require disciplined time schedules proved not to fit family rhythms. They proved to be a high threshold, especially for low income families, whose status often is due to not making it in the education system. Women wanted to have spaces where they could go with their children and not have to organize them away in order to participate in public life. And last but not least family budgets are tight, family women need ways to supplement the family income in ways that are combinable with their family obligations.

Careful listening led to bringing out the authentic voices of families and framing the issues according to their own understanding and self interpretation versus preconceived professional ideas about them. A resource oriented approach helped identify the capacities of families themselves in regard to contributing to the solutions for the issues they were raising. The Mother Center concept resulted out of listening to families and putting together their views and visions into a concept and a model that created enabling conditions for self organisation and self help.

The Mother Centers spread from three model centers, sponsored for 3 years by the German Family Ministry to a nation-wide and later international movement. This happened through the publication of a book that told the stories of the first three centers in a story book format in their own words, through peer exchanges and study visits, many lectures, articles, start-up trainings and countless local negotiations with municipalities and local authorities. Self organisation, the building up of

Mother Center networks, regionally, nationally and internationally as well as linking to other global grassroots women's networks were crucial elements in this process. Financial and human resources limited the spreading of the movement mainly to Europe, including Central and Eastern Europe. Although Mother Centers have also been taken up for instance in the slums of Nairobi or by the aboriginal First Nation population in Vancouver, Canada, these initiatives have remained singular and have not resulted in the spreading of the centers throughout the whole country.

To be successful in different parts of the world, the Mother Center concept needs adjustment to local conditions. Local centers need the support of larger networks. Local authorities often lack experience in partnering with grassroots initiatives. For these reasons **mine** was founded in 2000 as an international network. It is registered in Stuttgart, Germany.

## Functions of networking

The added value and contributions of the Mother Center networks to the local Mother Centers as well as the movement in general are manifold and include:

- \* Organising peer learning workshops to collectively learn from experience
- \* Harvesting the knowledge by asking the right questions
- \* Identifying the innovative elements that make the Mother Centers work
- \* Helping to name, claim, analyse and conceptualise the Mother Center experience
- \* Spreading the word, both in verbal and written form
- \* Linking grassroots perspectives to mainstream debates
- \* Opening doors and contacts for the grassroots groups
- \* Supporting local negotiations and advocacy
- \* Developing support structures for leadership development and conflict resolution.
- \* Creating partnerships to mainstream partners and linking the skills of grassroots women and mainstream actors
- \* Making use of institutional resources and credibility for the support of Mother Centers
- \* Understanding and making visible the global dimensions of the situation of mothers and families
- \* Defining shared concerns of mothers and families as well as strategies for action
- \* Linking the Mother Center movement to like-minded groups and movements
- \* Creating international opportunities for Mother Centers to portray their work and voice their concerns
- \* Supporting innovations and further development in Mother Centers
- \* Enhancing the scope of local Mother Centers through horizontal and vertical linkages.

## Where we stand now

Since winning the Dubai International Award for Best Practices to Improve the Living Environment in 2002<sup>8</sup> **mine** has received many requests for support to start up Mother Centers in countries as diverse as Sudan, Nepal, India, Ethiopia, Albania, Iraq and Burundi. As an organization operating on a voluntary basis, **mine** has not been able to respond adequately to these requests. **mine** can only function if the decision making, programming and planning is carried by the grassroots leaders, but if implementation is not dependent on their non-existent extra time. **mine** has received a grant from Cordaid to develop a strategic plan for organizational development to operate on a more professional basis to realize its objectives, guarantee continuance and make a qualitative leap in global organising and global advocacy. The following program, therefore, demonstrates the potential of **mine**, a potential which still needs to find core support.

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<sup>8</sup> **mine** has been certified as Best Practice by UN Habitat and won the Dubai International Award for Best Practices to Improve the Living Environment in 2002 (see [www.bestpractices.org](http://www.bestpractices.org))

### **III. Objectives of the mine Program**

Before all, the objective is NOT to run the program. We don't do projects, we initiate them, we support self organization and networking. The board members of **mine** have all done this in the past, which is the reason why the movement has grown to its actual size. They did so however more or less in their 'spare time', on the side. Objective is now to bring out the strength of the network, 'the spinning of the gold of the Mother Center movement' in a more organized and professional way, in order to be more efficient and reach further. Stretching the existing (human) resources at the present state of development of the network and its ambitions is not productive any more. Giving start-up support to Mother Centers in Burundi for example simply costs more than doing so in Austria, while at the same time the capacity of the women there to jointly raise the money is lower.

#### **IIIa Mother Centers as organizing force for women**

##### **Holistic Approach**

Mothers world-wide have a similar lifestyle of taking care of very different activities and responsibilities simultaneously. Successful projects for women take these multiple roles into account and allow for the combining of women's activities in all aspects of their lives. The Mother Centers go one step further and approach the diversity of tasks that are characteristic of the lives of mothers as a wealth of expertise and a starting point for organizing.

##### **Public Living Rooms**

A Mother Center, like a home, has all services, leisure, contact and education facilities that families need, combined under one roof. And like a home the door is open at all times. This implies that parents and children can pursue their needs more freely; mothers do not become servants of the schedules and locations of the places where they and their children are required to go. Space is left for own needs in a setting that simultaneously is good for the children.

##### **Lowering the threshold for civic action**

Mother Centers create public space that works by the logic of a private home. This quality is needed in our increasingly specialized society. It is a quality that appeals to women of all walks of life, it is recognizable and familiar regardless of social or economic status. The threshold is so low that women from a very secluded background can participate without fear of having to give up their identity. As such the Mother Centers can function as an organizing and mobilizing force for women also in areas where women and women's perspectives are traditionally excluded from public life, like in Arab countries.

##### **The unspectacular innovation**

The actual innovation of the Mother Center is so unspectacular that it is often overlooked. The strength is in the holistic approach, the combination of multiple aspects, whereas the success is often ascribed to one successful element. This can lead to neglecting the original approach. Reinforcement of the principles and the holistic approach is therefore often needed also after the concept has been successfully adopted. This can be organized through peer learning exchanges and through self-reflection and training seminars. Consulting, coaching and monitoring are important elements of a 'maintenance program' accompanying the development of local Mother Centers.

### **IIIb Mother Centers as first steps in reconstruction and peace-building**

In (post) war situations motherhood is a neutral and constructive force that has large potential for peace building and reconciliation. (Iraq, Burundi, Bosnia)

The effects of war on civil society include personal and collective trauma, poverty, a break down of family, kin and neighborhood networks due to massive dislocation of the population, and a disorientation of social roles and life patterns, that can include gender relations, as well as religious and ethnic traditions. When systems that previously safeguarded social integration and social cohesion break down, people need new spaces to meet, re-orient themselves and reweave the torn social fabric. Communities need a place where they can heal, reassemble and relearn to establish confidence and trust in social contacts. Mother Centers provide such a space. They recreate social networks on a community and neighborhood level.

Healthy neighborhoods are an important element for the reconstruction of war torn societies. Anonymous environments and isolation are key elements leading to violence. The Mother Centers contribute to creating and sustaining strong neighborhoods by providing an open, safe and caring place for individuals and families from all walks of life. The negative spiral of defeat, shame and withdrawal is counteracted in the non-stigmatizing atmosphere of the centers. The Mother Center culture of friendship and practical support helps to regain self-confidence and recognise and reorganise options for rebuilding life and rebuilding community.

Mother Centers recognise the important role women play in this process and offer physical and organisational space for involving women in reconstruction and redevelopment. Reconciliation is a very difficult process. It is often the women who make the first steps, who reconnect on the basis of reorganising everyday life. By providing space for women to come together and create their own solutions the community as a whole benefits.

### **IIIc Raising the political voice of women dealing with care-giving**

Raising the political voice of women dealing with care giving is the third objective in order to integrate a mothering perspective into politics.

Mothers who deal with children on a daily basis learn much about what an environment must look like in order not to destroy the vitality, creativity, autonomy and confidence of children. Because of their daily experience with children they are well aware of the consequences of policies in fields like transport, architecture, urban development and infrastructure on the lives of children.

Mother centers provide spaces for the voice and expertise of those dealing with the concrete aspects of everyday life in families and communities to form and enter into local governance. Their expertise is not based on professionalism, but on practical involvement in care-giving. Making this expertise visible, re-owning it collectively and channeling it into advocacy and decision making, is an important part of the agenda of the Mother Centers movement.

The local centers are involved in many aspects of local governance in their communities, ranging from municipal childcare programs, the design of playgrounds and safety in urban environments, family and youth support programs, poverty in single headed families to environmental health issues, the public transport system, housing and the development of residential areas. In many instances they are instrumental in creating municipal programs that are more flexible and responsive to the needs of families. The Mother Center networks focus on creating new channels of participation for the voice of community women to be included in public decision making.

## IV. Activities

The objectives of the **mine** program are executed through a number of projects in very different settings and countries. They do have several elements in common. All projects are in a very early stage and get coaching till they have enough strength to continue on their own as self-help projects. The set of activities that are at the core of the **mine** approach is described in this chapter.

Underlying the **mine** approach is the objective to enhance the political clout and negotiating powers of grassroots women, to increase their visibility, influence and recognition and to broaden the base of support for their issues and their work. While grassroots practices are local, their learning and growth, as well as their impact needs to be global. As institutions increasingly de-link grassroots knowledge from development, there is a need for a collective and linked response. By documenting and owning their knowledge, by exchanging and linking across cities, countries and regions, by leveraging multiple sites of decision making, grassroots women's movements become global players while staying rooted in the local.

### IVa Start-up support for Mother Centers

Each country where Mother Centers are active represents a place where at some point in time one or more of the **mine** leaders visited and sparked off the interest of local women. This process consists of clearly defined steps that can be up-scaled and duplicated if approached in a systematic way.

The annual **mine** networking and board meeting 2004 in the Mother Center Bos & Lommer in Amsterdam decided that it was time to respond and support the spreading of Mother Centers in countries of the South. At present Lebanon, Nepal, Sudan, Burundi, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Iraq and Albania are some of the countries where groups have voiced interest in the Mother Center approach.

A basic requirement to start up a Mother Center is a group of initiators with a wide network on grassroots level. Interest and support from authorities and influential people is a second element. Mother Center activists need to meet face to face with these groups to tell the story and spark off local interest, followed by a back and forth process of questions and answers to shape the general concept to size and adapt it to the local conditions. What elements of the Mother Center concept are especially relevant to the local setting and circumstances and what elements need to be adapted or reinforced? On the base of this knowledge the initiators get trained by people from **mine**. This could imply that we go there and do it locally, but a regional training seminar involving several countries can work as well.

The initiative phase, as well as the definition and preparation phases are the 'core business' of the **mine** network. During the definition phase the input from the local group increases and they are supported to define their own steps. The **mine** activities in this phase involve translating, adapting and creating materials fit to the local situation, as well as coaching and support for the fundraising activities of the group.

### IVb Peer learning and trainings

The start-up support for new Mother Centers always involves training in the basic concept of Mother Centers. This ideally takes the shape of peer learning since this is the most powerful kind of learning for grassroots groups. Peer learning is a strategy, that consciously formats the natural learning that happens in informal exchanges and informal settings. In everyday life, most people

learn most easily and voluntarily from discussing things with their family, friends or their peers: those who can provide the required information and skills out of their own experience.

Research has shown that 70% of the knowledge people actually use and implement in their lives is generated outside of formal learning structures in informal settings. Learning tends to be more successful, when instructions are given by peers rather than by experts. Peers are more likely to use understandable language and to relate the information given to an experiential level. Peer learning is a very effective learning strategy.

An in-built advantage of peer learning is also, that learning happens in both directions. When articulating your own experience in order to explain it to others, you become more conscious of your own learning as well as of your own knowledge gaps. Peer learning thus both supports the exploration, consolidation and ownership of knowledge gained, as well as stimulating further knowledge quest and knowledge generation. As such it is well suited both for the introduction of new groups to the concept of Mother Centers as well as for the process of regular reflection to reinforce and deepen the understanding of the basic elements of innovation involved (see section IIIa).

Learning, exchanging and thus growing as a network can be described as the life force of the Mother Center movement. A new format of peer learning, the Grassroots Women International Academy or GWIA (see [www.GWIA.net](http://www.GWIA.net) ) has been developed by the founder of **mine** and been pioneered in cooperation with the National Association of German Mother Centers to systemize this process. It is foreseen that in the consolidation and growth of **mine**, GWIA will follow suit.<sup>9</sup>

#### **IVc Support of the organization of national or regional networking**

Because national or regional organizing of Mother Centers has happened in most places where more than 50 Centers are active, it appears to be a natural process. It is not. Mother Centers are rather local in their orientation. Most participants highly appreciate a wider networking process but do not start it off by themselves. The funding by the Bernard van Leer Foundation for instance that enabled the Czech and Slovakian networks to professionalize was brokered by **mine**.

Money is not the sole factor determining networking, though at a certain point –as was the case with the Czech and Slovakian networks- continuation of growth at a purely voluntary level is not possible. As important is to facilitate the contacts and give coaching in the actual organizing strategies, in translating lessons learned from local projects to policy recommendations.

Networking is never a goal in itself, but a powerful instrument that is used in many ways by **mine**. Stimulating local networking from the start of new Mother Centers in a country is therefore an important way to consolidate and duplicate the activities of the network.

#### **IVd Translating action to policy recommendations**

Like networking, the documentation, evaluation and transfer of the knowledge gained on the ground into policy recommendations is something Mother Centers engage in but usually do not start up on their own.

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<sup>9</sup> GWIA is stakeholded by the Stichting Nest! that administers the GWIA website and has published the GWIA Handbook. GWIA has won the 2006 Dubai award for the transfer of best practices granted by the UN Habitat Best Practices and Local Leadership Program.

In mainstream knowledge building systems grassroots expertise and know-how most often is lacking. Grassroots groups often are already practicing solutions, where academia and policy makers are debating theories. By excluding grassroots women and ignoring, under-resourcing, distorting or diluting their practices, a wealth of highly needed expertise is wasted. Many academic, institutional and political arrangements manage to overlook and abstract from what is really happening on the ground. This is quite amazing, considering the fact that it is there, that all knowledge needs to be implemented. And it is there where the ultimate answer and test to ideas and theories, the validation if they apply or not, is to be found.

A major obstacle to incorporating grassroots knowledge and know-how into public decision making lies in the fact that they often stay local. Much of grassroots wisdom is held in places so disperse, it is difficult for others to access, thus entering the channels of public decision making very insufficiently. The Mother Center pioneered GWIA methodology stimulates a process where grassroots groups engage in translating their practical knowledge into something that can be used in education and policy. Each of the **mine** projects includes an evaluation and reflection process to reap the lessons learned in a way that guarantees ownership of the groups over the produced knowledge.

## **IVe Stimulating advocacy**

Translating the experiences of the Mother Centers into policy recommendations implies the use of these recommendations for advocacy. This requires strong stimulation from the networks to ensure that conferences and networking events continue beyond the events themselves. Rather than a project oriented management of events, this approach requires a process focused stimulation of the use of the outcomes of Mother Center events and projects for advocacy.

Strong continuous presence of the networks can facilitate such a process as well as a focus on building constructive partnerships with other stakeholders in society. Only by creating a framework for peer learning and networking and by building partnerships across sectors can the momentum be built to make real impact, to turn around top down procedures into bottom up processes, to reallocate resources to reach the grassroots level and to engender decision making.

An important part of advocacy consists of a process of systematic analysis and strategy building in regard to mainstream political processes. Understanding the issues and challenges that are better dealt with in partnerships, defining when partnerships work and what roles partners can play in sustaining and up-scaling grassroots practices, carrying forward lessons learned from each phase to the next, linking the innovative components across issues and sectors as well as re-examining the parameters of social policies constitute elements of programmatic and innovative thinking required to stimulate and underwrite social change.

To this end the **mine** network engages in programmatic activities that “develop the talk to the walk”, that put a language to the new thinking evolving from grassroots practices on the ground.

Fundamentalist movements build on the fact that people are looking for ways to quiet their uneasiness around the falling apart of traditional structures of social cohesion and community. Traditional structures and values answer to a need for safety and community, a social unit you can rely on. Progressive forces tend to support an independence and individualistic model that does not provide answers to the fundamental issues of interdependency of the human race and the planet.

The Mother Center movement is developing an alternative to these two approaches, by creating conditions for a balance between the contemporary values of individualism with socially responsible and reliable networks. Mother Centers put the values of care into a modern context and stimulate social cohesion and mutual responsibility to develop in a community setting, based on choice and diversity, and in a climate of tolerance and respect. Mother Centers develop reliable neighborhood networks that extend beyond family and clan structures to include social units and networks based on common interests and preferences. As such they reclaim family values and incorporate new visions of family and community.

The practice of Mother Centers has the potential of developing a political theory on the issues of care and care work in contemporary societies.

## V. Mine Campaigns and Projects

### **The mine How do we want to raise our children International Campaign**

The idea for this campaign came from the Union of Slovak Mother Centers. In contemporary societies the question of how to raise children is no longer self evident. Traditional kin networks are dissolving and many young parents find themselves struggling with issues of how to bridge traditional and modern values, how to keep up with their children, what to pass on to their children, and how to participate in and influence public childcare and education in kindergartens and schools. This campaign aims to stimulate a dialog process as a bottom up approach to redefining child socialization and child-rearing through parental self reflection, peer exchange and a peer learning process. Discussion groups have been formed in 19 countries on parenting and family policy issues follow a common format with monthly questionnaires.

A first harvest and evaluation of the campaign is undertaken at the International Conference How do we want to raise our Children 17-20 November in Bratislava

This campaign is supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, Cordaid, EQUAL, Slovenska Sportelna, Ministry of Transportation, Posts and Telecommunication, Slovak Telecom, and GROOTS International and is coordinated by Monika Jaeckel.

### **Guinness Record in Pram Pushing**

„Pram Pushing“ is a Europe wide Mother Center action day to call for more family friendly cities. It was created as a publicity by the Union of Slovak Mother Centers who set a first Guinness Record on Mothers Day in 2004 as a way to raise awareness for the needs of parents and children in urban environments. Since then the event has been repeated every year. In 2005 108 prams were pushed in Slovakia. In 2006 **mine** up-scaled the event to an international level involving 18 locations in 7 countries inside its network.

2 120 prams were pushed simultaneously inside one hour on a one mile walk by Mother Center participants from Austria, Bosnia, Czech Republic, Germany, Slovakia, The Netherlands and Tyrol, Italy.

The Stuttgart organiser Mütterforum Baden Württemberg complimented the action with participants pushing prams not containing children but life size posters stating some of the reasons why many prams stay empty in current society: the lack of compatibility of work and family, the isolation of mothers, the poverty risk of single parents, the lack of welcoming structures in public life for children and families.

This campaign is coordinated by Elena Bakosova.

### **Mother Centers Dissemination Study**

Mother Centers originated in Germany in the early eighties and have since spread into 15 countries. Currently there are over 800 Mother Centers world-wide. The spreading of the Mother Center model was not the result of a structured initiative or program, but happened through a process of peer learning and self-organization. What makes the Mother Center dissemination experience especially interesting is the fact that the concept and model has spread to countries with very diverse cultural, socio-economic, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

The Bernard van Leer foundation has commissioned **mine** to undertake a study aiming at tracing the ways and channels through which the dissemination of Mother Centers happen.

### **Mother Centers in Roma Communities**

Spolu International Foundation Netherlands is partnering with **mine** in a pilot project to explore the potential of the Mother Center model as a way to mobilise women in Roma communities and to strengthen the Roma movement in Central and Eastern Europe.

In this project **mine** is training and consulting Mother Center initiatives in Albania, Serbia, Bulgaria and Macedonia.

**mine** trainers in this project are: Andrea Laux, Anja Lasch and Karin Paulsen-Zenke from Germany, Elena Kasiakova and Gabika Dunajcikova from Slovakia and Senada Dzankic from Bosnia.

### **Mother Centered Development**

This project is funded by Cordaid, Netherlands, and has three main objectives that are intertwined:

1. The overall objective is to promote, reinforce and spread the women led local development model of Mother Centers in Europe. This is implemented through developing tools and building capacity for linking and learning on women centred development across borders.
2. The second objective aims at the empowerment of Roma women. This is implemented through trainings and coaching of Mother Center initiatives in Slovakia and Bulgaria.
3. The third objective is to develop a common political action platform between the existing and starting Mother Centers in Europe.

**mine** trainers in this project are: Jana Gregusova, Gabika Dunajcikova and Eva Fiedlerova from Slovakia and Andrea Laux from Germany.

### **Skills Audit for Mother Centers**

**mine** is partnering with LCO Netherlands in developing a skills audit for Dutch Mother Centers (Competenciebalans). This project is specifically aimed at migrant women in the Dutch Mother Center. The skills audit is an instrument to reflect and document skills and competencies gained through informal learning. Following a biographical approach participants compile their personal skills profile and develop further life plans based on their strengths and resources. A Competenciebalans handbook has been put together, which will form the basis for trainings of Mother Centers in The Netherlands.

### **Mother Center Impact**

**mine** is currently partnering with the Union of Slovak Mother Centers and the Union of Czech Mother Centers to develop and conduct studies on the impact of Mother Centers on mothers and children as well as the overall society. The studies are being supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation as well as the Charles University in Prague.

### **Mother Centers in Bosnia**

**mine** partnered with the Mütterforum Baden Württemberg in a project funded by the Robert Bosch Foundation, Germany to spread Mother Centers in Bosnia. 3 Mother Centers were supported for 3 years in getting started. A documentation of the Bosnian experiences is available.

### **Not the chicken, not the Egg, but the Nest!**

From 2003-2005 **mine** conducted a feasibility study, commissioned by the Dutch Ministry for Housing and the Environment, focussing on integrating the social and the physical into city planning and engaging the community as an asset for urban development. In this study the concept of Mother Centers was up-scaled to the level of city planning and the development of whole neighbourhoods and settlements.

For more information see: [www.nest.cc](http://www.nest.cc)

### **Trainings and Exchanges**

Between 2001 and 2006 **mine** has conducted a series of trainings in Bosnia Bulgaria and the Czech Republic in partnership with the Mütterforum Baden Württemberg on the Leadership Support Process and on the basic concept of Mother Centers. These trainings were supported by GROOTS, by the Heidehof Stiftung Stuttgart and by the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

Several exchanges were conducted in the same time period in cooperation with the Slovak, Czech and Baden Württemberg Mother Center networks between Mother Centers in Bosnia, Germany and the Czech and Slovak Republic. These exchanges were sponsored by GROOTS International.

An exchange of Foundations and Funders supporting the Mother Center movement was organized in cooperation with the Mütterforum Baden Württemberg at the Robert Bosch Foundation headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany.

#### **Documentations and Publications**

**mine** has been commissioned to document several activities at local level. Publications that are available (see **mine** website [www.mine.cc](http://www.mine.cc)) include:

- "Hot Money" – The Savings and Credit Group in Stuttgart Germany (supported by the German Family Ministry) in German
- "Mothers in the Center – Mother Centers" THE (original) Mother Center book (translated from German by Gabrielle Bryant, Monika Jaeckel and Andrea Laux and supported by GROOTS)
- New Partnerships for a New Millennium – The Intergenerational House Stuttgart West (supported by GROOTS) in English and German
- Local Governance from the Bottom up – Bringing the Habitat Agenda home, supported by the Huairou Commission in English
- Family Policy not for but WITH Families – The Local to Local Dialog Stuttgart (a partnership project with Woman Spirit, St. Louis, USA, supported by the Sister Cities Program Stuttgart) in German

#### **mine newsletter and networking meetings**

The **mine** newsletter comes out once or twice a year. Copies can be downloaded on the mine website. ([www.mine.cc](http://www.mine.cc))

**mine** networking meetings are conducted once a year, each time in a different country. The meeting in 2005 was conducted in Sarajevo, Bosnia, the 2006 meeting in Den Haag, Netherlands.

## Annex 2 questionnaires

### How do we want to raise our children? Campaign

**Preface:** This questionnaire is the first in a series we will be sending out. It is intended as a support in the discussion, reflection and dialogue process of the groups joining the “How do we want to raise our children? campaign. You can structure the debates in your groups as best suits your needs. The questions can be answered by each group member individually, going around in the circle, or as a group discussion. You can of course leave out questions or add questions of your own to the list.

**Documentation** of your group process and discussion is very important. You can do this by recording your debates on tape and transcribing them later, or by assigning a group member to take minutes. We ask you to send reports of each discussion session to: Jaeckel@mine.cc and to Elena@materskecentra.sk

### Questionnaire no 1

#### I. What do you consider good child-raising

- 1) What is important to you in being a parent?
- 2) What are challenges in being a parent?
- 3) What are your goals in raising your child/children?
- 4) How would you describe your child-rearing style?
- 5) What are the values you want to transmit to your child/children?
- 6) Do Mother Centers support you in your parenting goals, if so in what way?
- 7) How have your ideas on parenting developed?  
From where have you gotten guidance or inspiration?
- 8) How secure are you in your ideas about parenting?  
What are areas you are insecure or have doubts about?
- 9) How satisfied are you with your parenting experience so far?  
What are areas you want to improve?
- 10) What do you experience as barriers to raising your child/children like you want?
- 11) What would you define as success in raising your child/children?  
What would you consider as a “positive outcome”?

### Questionnaire No 2

#### II. In what way are Mother Centers a unique environment for raising children

- 1) What can children experience in Mother Centers that they don't experience at home?
- 2) What do your children like and enjoy in the Mother Centers? What do they experience as a challenge?

- 3) What values do children experience in the Mother Center?
- 4) What kind of relationships have your children built up to other adults and other children in the Mother Center?
- 5) In what way has participating in Mother Centers effected your identity as a mother?
- 6) What effect does it have on you that in the Mother Center others witness your parenting style and your relationship to your child/children?
- 7) In what way does participating in Mother Centers effect your relationship to your child/children?
- 8) In what way have you experienced Mother Centers as a support to your situation as a mother and your parenting skills?
- 9) What have you learned about parenting and being a mother by participating in Mother Centers and how did you learn it (for instance through observing other mothers, through reactions of others to your child/children, through talking with other mothers etc)
- 10) What makes Mother Centers in your eyes a different place for children and mothers than other preschool arrangements for children like playgroups, baby groups etc. ?

### **Questionnaire No 3**

#### **How to involve fathers in parenting?**

- 1) What role do fathers play in the family?  
And what role would you like them to play?
- 2) What are the main concerns of fathers in regard to their children?
- 3) What role do fathers play in the Mother Center?  
And what role would you like them to play?
- 4) Has participating/interacting with the Mother Center had an effect on the father-child relationship, on their views on parenting, and on their participation in family tasks? If so, in what way?
- 5) What activities in the Mother Center are most attractive to fathers, are they most easily motivated to join?
- 6) Do fathers find the Mother Centers challenging? If so in what way?
- 7) What activities /programs could be introduced in Mother Centers to attract fathers and to enhance their role as fathers?
- 8) Has participating/interacting with the Mother Centers given fathers more opportunities to meet other parents and to exchange opinions and experiences on parenting?
- 9) What have fathers learned about children, parenting and family issues through contact with the Mother Centers?
- 10) Do fathers experience the Mother Centers as a support for their parenting role? If so in what way, if not why not?

#### **Questionnaire No 4 What qualifies for raising children?**

1. What is it you need to know in order to do a good job in raising children?
2. What capacities and qualities does one need to raise children?
3. What would you describe as your specific expertise in raising children and how have you developed it?
4. What have you learned in the Mother Center about raising children?
5. What have you learned from your child about raising children?
6. If you would have to choose one thing, what would you say is the most important expertise in child-raising?
7. Have you had “wrong” ideas/concepts about child-raising and if so, where did you get them from?
8. Where have you learned the most about raising a child, what have you experienced as your best support for this task?
9. How could you best learn more about raising children?
10. What about child-raising can you learn from books/magazines/courses, what needs to be learned by practical experience?
11. What has been the role of professionals in qualifying you for child-raising and what has been the role of other mothers/parents?

#### **Questionnaire Nr 5 –**

##### **Practical Parenthood Parental recipes**

*Dear parents,*

*The questionnaire which lies in front of you asks about solutions to questions about everyday problems of taking care of your children and their upbringing. The outcome of discussions on these topics will be a summary of world- wide grassroots parental experience and could bring very useful knowledge and thus help to many children and parents.*

*Because of a wide range of possible questions the questionnaire is divided into 3 thematic areas:*

- 1. – eating, excreting and sleeping (the smallest children)*
- 2. – behaviour*
- 3. – personality development*

*In each area there are given some introductory questions for inspiration. Answer only questions you feel you are experienced in. The questionnaire is open to adding further questions.*

*It is up to your decision whether you will have a discussion in your MCs on the suggested topics or you will choose another way to get questions & answers – e.g. to have a special notice-board with questions and answers, or to put it up on your website etc. Share your experience with others, “the book of recipes” will be our joint piece of work.*

*We look forward to all your comments!*

### **1. E&E&S (eating, excreting and sleeping)**

**What do you do if a child:** (please quote age of your child):

- ...“doesn’t need” food
- ...eats much and many times
- ...is fastidious about food
- ...wants to be fed also during the night
- ...is afraid of a chamber pot
- ...urinates in the bed
- ...doesn’t want to fall asleep alone
- ...cries without a visible reason

### **2. Behaviour:**

**What do you do if a child:** (please quote age of your child):

- ...is aggressive towards peers and adults...
- ...bites
- ...has phobias of ...
- ...is hyperactive
- ...feels insecure among peers
- ...is defiant
- ...throws himself/herself on the floor in the public

### **3. Personality development:**

**How do you help a child most effectively:** (please quote age of your child)

- to develop his/her emotional world
- to develop his/her social contacts and relations (in families, with siblings, grand parents, friends, authorities etc.)
- to develop creativity and imagination
- to learn values
- to develop language skills
- to learn to respect the environment
- to learn solidarity, empathy, help others, politeness, sharing with others etc.
- to learn respect and to all kind of people
- to cope with media influence (TV, news etc.)
- to make decisions
- to respect borders
- to be motivated for accurate behaviour

**What are your strategies...**

- to punish (whether to punish or not)
- to choose and buy toys and plays (whether to buy or not military toys, computer games etc.)
- to choose free time activities for children
- to prevent possible sexual abuse

## **Questionnaire Nr 6 – kindergartens & schools**

### Basic information:

Age of your child/children:

Does she/he attend kindergarten? (underline) YES - NO

Do you have a child-minder YES NO (if so please adapt the following questions to your childcare situation)

1. Do you plan or did you put your child in kindergarten and why? At what age?  
If not, why?
2. According to what criteria will you choose or have you chosen a kindergarten/school?
3. Where did you get information about the kindergarten/school and what determined your decision for having chosen a particular kindergarten/school?
4. Will you expect any problems after your child enters the preschool settings? If yes, which ones and why?
5. How do you think that your influence on your child will be changed (or was changed) after his/her entrance to the kindergarten/ school?
6. How do you perceive an impact of group experience in kindergarten/school to your child's personality?
7. Do you think that you can or will be able to influence the educational process (methods, content etc) in kindergarten/school?
8. Are you aware of your rights, duties and possibilities as a parent in relation to kindergarten/school?
9. Do you know any alternative possibilities of pre-school and school education? If yes, which ones? Add your experience, advantages, disadvantages ...
10. What qualities, skills and knowledge should the ideal educator/teacher have?
11. How should an ideal kindergarten/school look like?
12. What would you change in the kindergarten/school that your child attends or will attend?
13. What are issues you would like to get into a discussion about with kindergarten and school teachers?

## **Questionnaire No. 7**

### **Enabling and disabling conditions for raising children**

- 1) What would you identify as the main support you need from society in order to raise your children according to your goals and intentions?
- 2) What would you define as the main barriers put into your way in your task of raising your children?
- 3) What are environmental issues you are confronted with in raising your children?
- 4) Does your environment create health hazards and issues for your children? Please specify.
- 5) How should your town city or village look like to be a good place to raise children?
- 6) What challenges do you face as parents when entering public life with your children?
- 7) How do you experience the influence of the media and modern technologies on your children?
- 8) Do you live in child friendly accommodation? If so, what makes it child friendly, if not, what is lacking?
- 9) Would you call your neighbourhood family friendly? If so why, if not, why not?
- 10) And what about your society? Would you define it as child friendly? If so, why, if not, why not?
- 11) In which areas and in what ways would you like to have more influence as a parent on society?

## **Annex 3 Conference Program**

### **Mother Center Conference: “How do we want to raise our Children”**



Elizabeth Akpalu of WILDAF-Ghana and Gideon from Canada. Picture by Saskia Repcikova

#### **Program:**

#### ***Friday, November 17<sup>th</sup>: Arrival of Participants***

- |                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| 16.00 – 18.00    | Registration  |
| 17.00            | Meeting of Workshop Facilitators and Panelists in Hotel                                 |
| 18.00 – 21.00 h: | Getting to Know Each Other<br>Informal gathering in the Mother Center Ráčik, Bratislava |

## **Saturday, November 18<sup>th</sup>: Introducing the Theme**

- 7.30 – 9.30                      Registration
- 9.00 – 9.30 h                      Press Conference
- Conference Facilitator: Michaela Galvankova, Slovakia
- 9.30 – 11.00 h:                      Welcomes and Introductory Speeches
- Silvia Gasparovicova, First Lady of Slovak Republic
  - Tatiana Mikusova, Vice mayor of Bratislava town
  - Emilia Krsikova, State Secretary of Ministry of Work, Social Affairs & Family
  - Jolanda de Haan, Bernard van Leer Foundation
- 11.00 – 11.30 h:                      Coffee Break
- 11.30 – 12.30 h:                      Goals and Structure of the Conference  
Eva Fiedlerova, chair of Union of Mother Centres, Slovakia  
Monika Jaeckel, chair of **mine**
- 12.30h                                      Lunch Break
- 14.00 – 15.30 h                      Hearing from Each Other  
Country Reports on Content and Process of the Mother Centers How do we Want to Raise Our Children Campaign
- International Evaluation of Campaign Results, Lucia Lipovska, Slovakia
  - 8 minutes reports in alphabetic order of countries:  
Argentina, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Czech Republic, Germany, Ghana.
- 15.30 – 16.00 h                      Coffee Break
- 16.00 – 18.00 h                      Country Reports continued  
Guatemala, Hungary, Italy, Jamaica, Kenya, Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Uganda, USA.
- 19.30 h                                      International Party with Traditional Slovak Cuisine,  
Primary school Tbiliska street

## Sunday, November 19th: Harvesting Our Work

- 9.00 – 9.30 h          Summarizing of Saturday’s outcomes
- 9.30 – 12.30 h        Workshops (2 parallel Workshops per Theme)
- 1)                      Visions and Values on Parenting: Commonalties and Cultural Differences  
Facilitators: Joan E. Bishop and Barbara King Trinidad, Margaret Jobita, Kenya.
- 2)                      MC as Universities of Parenthood  
Facilitators: Zora Pauliniova, Slovakia, Marieke van Geldermalsen, Netherlands.
- 3)                      Recognizing of the place of MC in the system of Public Welfare  
Facilitators: Sarah Silliman, USA, Dana Marekova, Slovakia.
- 12.30 – 14.00 h        Lunch Break
- 14.00 – 15.30h        Summarising Results of the Workshops and Preparing Creative Reports for the Plenary
- 15.30 – 16.00 h        Coffee Break
- 16.00 – 18.00 h        Reports and Results of the Workshops + Panel Discussion I. with Professionals on the theme:  
**Productive partnerships between parents and professionals – A partnership building dialog**
- Guests: Prof. Kadriye Yardakok, Turkey  
Magda Helman, Poland  
PhDr. Daniela Čechová, Slovakia  
MUDr. Jana Nosková, Slovakia
- Facilitator: Zora Pauliniova, Slovakia
- 18.30                    Dinner
- 19.30                    **Mine** Networking Meeting  
Possibility to visit Bratislava downtown at night





## Annex 4 Platform of Action

### International Mother Center Policy Paper and Platform of Action

#### **I. We are mothers, we are competent, we have joined forces for a better future for ourselves, our families and our children**

We are women from Mother Centers, Mother Center Initiatives and other Grassroots Community Groups. We are from 22 countries. In total at least 45.872 women, men and children participate actively in our groups.

We have come together from November 17-20, 2006 in Bratislava, Slovakia, to discuss the issue: How do we want to raise our children?

We have been engaged in a year long campaign on the local level to discuss the issues of child-raising as they present themselves in our daily lives. We have gathered a wealth of hands-on practical knowledge from the bottom up, which needs to be entered into public debate and decision making.

30 000 women, men and children from over 75 local groups, Mother Centers and Mother Center networks world-wide participated in our campaign. What connects us is our concern for the well-being of our children. We represent parents' voices from Argentina, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Burundi, Canada, Cameroon, Czech Republic, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Hungary, Italy, Jamaica, Kenya, Poland, Russia, Slovak Republic, The Netherlands, Trinidad, Turkey, Uganda and USA. Together we represent more than 348.353 families.

We mothers of all ages from nine to ninety, feel responsibility for our future as well as for the future of our children. We are often facing social isolation, lack of appreciation of our work, marginalisation and poverty. We share common problems, values, aims and we have similar strategies. In all our difference we all derive our values on a personal level from a deep sense of spirituality.

We are dealing with the task of parenting under conditions of isolation, devaluation, poverty, high levels of crime and substance abuse in the community, family violence and the sexual abuse and prostitution of young children. We are struggling to provide basic needs like a safe place to live, uncontaminated food, water, sanitation and clean air. We are taking care of children of all ages, of abandoned children, of AIDS-orphans. We are taking care of the sick and the old. Our centers are public living rooms for all generations.

We deal with our own problems, we are capable of designing feasible solutions and we have the support of each other. We also want to co-operate with and we seek support of other members of society.



**II. Mother Centers are a UN accredited Best Practice to promote healthy families and communities. Mother Centers and their networks need political and financial support.**

Mother Centers are being self-created all over the world by women who see the need of community support for the everyday task of raising children. Who see the need of recreating community and social cohesion where it has been destroyed by modernization, by migration, by wars, by totalitarianism and colonialism, by inner city violence, drugs and alcohol abuse, by natural disasters and by the HIV AIDS epidemic. Mother Centers are an answer to the weakening of social ties, family, kin and neighbourhood networks in the many different social, cultural and historic settings currently on our planet. They reinvent family and kinship under contemporary conditions. They are creating up to date support systems for child-raising in response to current historical conditions and demands. Mother Centers are paving ways for community parenting and social cohesion, for caring neighbourhoods and family friendly municipalities.

Mother Centers are a safe and caring space, where mothers of all ages can be supported and learn from other moms, a place of easy access, a home outside of home, a place to find community and support, a place of recognition and backing for parenting, a place for diversity and equality, a place that brings everything under one roof, implements a holistic and inclusive approach to families and communities and recreates neighbourhoods, a place to contribute talents and create family services, a place to generate civil society, to enter grassroots knowledge and resources into public life and public welfare, a place to share values and to realize dreams and visions.

Mother Centers provide many benefits to society including: quality improvement of family child rearing; promotion of tolerance and democratic skills; integration of socially weak families; support for better gender, family and neighbourhood relations; improvement of health for women and children; integration of migrants, ethnic minorities and Indigenous peoples; development of knowledge skills and knowledge reserves; support of compatibility of work and family; community building that includes youth; reverse of demographic trends; reform of institutions; improvement of the living environment (habitat); creation of humane forms of ageing; promotion of peace and international understanding.

World wide Mother Centers are struggling for sustainability. They cannot survive without access to public rent free space. They cannot survive without political support, and without core funding of the centers and their networks. Existing Mother Centers around the world face daily challenges: lack of public recognition; lack of funding; difficulty maintaining grassroots ownership and burnout. Mother Center initiatives around the world are struggling to access space and funds to get their Mother Centers going.

We have shared our stories and we have defined the support we need.



### **III. We have a mission**

The Mother Center International Network (**mine**), its member networks, supporters and partners stand for a world that values and supports the work of mothers.

We stand for a world that places social cohesion and community at the base of social and economic development. We stand for a world in which the culture of care is reintegrated into public life, we stand for caring community development. As mothers we see the need to invest in a ecological, economical and socially sustainable future.

### **IV. We see the need for the following policies and measures**

We want the wealthy so called “developed” countries to acknowledge and address poverty and racism in their own communities.

#### **We see the need for the following policies**

- ❖ Policies that support welcoming structures for children and families in public life
- ❖ Policies that support access to employment and income generation
- ❖ Policies that support the compatibility and balance of work and family
- ❖ Policies that calculate the value of unpaid care work and translate it into economic terms, revealing the enormous, currently invisible value of care work
- ❖ Policies that support and resource the care work of women
- ❖ Policies that recognize, support, preserve and make visible Indigenous culture and traditions through Indigenous participation and most importantly, the rights of Indigenous parents/families to raise their own child/children
- ❖ Policies that allow women and men to spend quality time with their children
- ❖ Policies that combat poverty of families and single parents
- ❖ Policies that acknowledge the expertise and competencies gained by everyday life and in informal learning settings
- ❖ Policies that legitimize parental organized child care
- ❖ Policies that support kindergartens and schools to cooperate with parents as equal partners
- ❖ Policies that include Mother Centers and other grassroots women’s groups as equal partners in local governance
- ❖ Policies that guarantee secure tenure and shelter for families
- ❖ Policies that secure access to safe water, air and sanitation
- ❖ Policies that secure family friendly services and family friendly urban and rural infrastructure
- ❖ Policies that support a healthy and sustainable natural environment
- ❖ Policies that support the equality of men and women
- ❖ Policies that ensure affordable quality childcare



**We see the need for the following measures**

- ❖ Legitimization of the informal learning that occurs already in the Mother Center setting
- ❖ Support for incorporation of complementary formal learning, resulting in certification of the practice expertise gained in the Mother Centers so that for instance teenage mothers can continue formal education
- ❖ Creation of a Global Fund for exchanges and peer learning between Mother Centers and other Grassroots Women’s Groups world-wide
- ❖ Core Funding for existing Mother Centers and their Networks and creation of a global fund for the setting up of new Mother Centers and their participation in the Mother Centers networks
- ❖ Creation of a Global Fund for grassroots women’s groups to have rent free access to, to own and to self manage their own public spaces
- ❖ International formation and adoption of a Caring Community Index
- ❖ Invest in women and children at the budgetary level by implementing a gender and family perspective in the use of public resources
- ❖ Tax redemption for the work of grassroots community groups
- ❖ Institute international support for two percent of taxes to fund NGOs
- ❖ Funding of impact studies of Mother Centers on children, families and society

**V. We have collectively decided to engage in the following campaigns and actions**

- ❖ Continuation of the How do we want to raise our children campaign
- ❖ Mothers March on Mothers Day
- ❖ We want to work together on the creation of an Indigenous Mother’s Network as part of the International Mother Centers Network

**VI. We seek support and partnerships for these policies, measures and actions from all sectors of society**

**Media**

We are able to offer positive stories and deep insight into various topics.

We challenge the media to publish positive news.

We do not get enough attention from the media, as we do not stand for crime, sex and scandals.

We ask the media to partner with us in making public the positive solutions as well as the stories of community and solidarity being lived every day in our groups and centers.



### **Local Authorities**

We are able to offer positive models of organizing and developing communities.  
We ask local authorities to treat us as equal partners in local governance.  
We are not sufficiently recognized by local authorities and municipal councils.  
We challenge local authorities to design and implement their family policies WITH families rather than FOR them.  
Partnership with local authorities, police, the judicial system and health workers has to begin with listening and proceed to mediation and finally facilitating collaboration.

### **Institutional Actors and Professionals**

We are skilled in raising our children and managing families, as well as organizations, in practical as well as methodological ways.  
We challenge professionals to redefine their role from being the ones teaching and defining expertise to the ones engaging in principled and equitable partnerships with Mother Centers and other grassroots women's groups.  
We are not sufficiently recognized by professionals and institutional actors.  
We ask professionals to partner with us to enhance the visibility, recognition and remuneration of grassroots women's expertise, and to be door openers for grassroots women's experts to engage on an equitable basis with mainstream institutions.

### **Private Sector**

We can offer skills, expertise, endurance and passion to do various jobs.  
We challenge the private sector to adapt corporate culture to the needs of caregivers.  
The work of mothers and caregivers is not sufficiently recognized by the corporate world and the social partners.  
We ask the private sector to support community work and grassroots initiatives in civil society.

Signed on the International Day of Children's Rights 2006, by:

Mother Center International Network for Empowerment (**mine**)




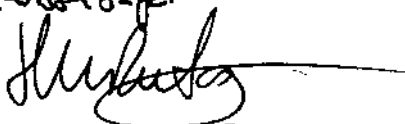



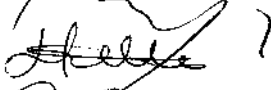



Union of Slovak Mother Centers



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