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## Contextualising unpaid care work and women empowerment

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### Abstract

The present paper contextualizes the importance of unpaid care work for women empowerment and sustainable economic development. Based on the survey of literature, the paper highlighted the impact of excessive and disproportionate unpaid care work on women and economic rational of recognising and counting the work. The economic rationale for including unpaid care work in national accounts and converting the unpaid care work is brought forth by many studies for all the countries in general but the gains for India could be much larger than other countries due to its present low status on various indicators of unpaid care work and gender inequalities. The paper highlighted various government and non-governmental initiative in this direction and concluded that addressing the issues related with 'unpaid care work' must be addressed for realizing the cherished goal of women empowerment and gender equalities.

**Keywords:** Unpaid Care Work, Women Empowerment, Gender Inequality

### 1. Introduction

The 2030 Agenda spelling out the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has unequivocally highlighted the need to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" under SDG5. Inclusion of 'Unpaid Care Work and Domestic Work' as a target (target 5.4) in the approved agenda is defining moment in the recognition and valuation of unpaid work. The target states: "Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate." Razavi (2016, 31) [46] observed that the inclusion of gender inequalities in the division of 'unpaid care and domestic work in the 2030 Agenda was a more contentious and hard-won target but she criticised the language used in the target 5.4 which used word shared responsibilities instead of redistribution and is further watered down with the proviso, 'as nationally appropriate'.

Disproportionate burden of unpaid care work is one among many manifestations of the gender inequalities and is one of the causes for persistence of gender inequalities. Most of the unpaid care works like cooking, cleaning, washing clothes and kitchenware, water collection, fuel management, pet care, taking care of sick and elderly are mostly done by women and girls in the family and communities. While many women themselves derive pleasure and satisfaction from the care work, but when care responsibilities bore heavy burden on women, it become unequal and invisible, and results into time poverty, poor health and well-being, limited mobility and perpetuation of women's unequal status in society (Maestre and Thorpe 2016; Esquivel 2013) [37, 22]. This may prove a big roadblock in women path to empowerment by undermining the rights of carers, limiting opportunities, capabilities and choices and often restricting them to low-skilled, irregular or informal employment (Chopra 2015; Carmona 2013; Razavi 2007) [47, 16, 15]. McKinsey Global Institute in a report has identified unpaid care work as one of the four important areas where progress would substantially reduce gender inequalities, other three being education level, financial and digital inclusion, and legal protection (Woetzel 2015, 10) [57, 58].

In Progress of the World's Women report Elson (2000, 24) [20] defines unpaid care work' as 'unpaid' because person doing the activity does not receive a wage for it. The term 'care' stresses that the services provided nurture other people and the word "work" indicates that

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these activities are costly in time and energy and are undertaken as obligations (contractual or social). Though this unpaid work enables and energises active and paid labour force to work (Chopra and Sweetman 2014)<sup>[17]</sup>, its contribution largely go unnoticed at all the levels of the society. In developing countries like India, girls are often forced to abandon their education to assist in the family care work. Though women and girls have been able to break the stereotypes of bread earner (for men) but stereotypes that define care giving as typically female seem to be much harder to dislodge. Being uncounted and unaccounted the care work goes invisible, unrecognized and undervalued and adversely affects health and wellbeing of women/girls, limits their opportunities outside family and undermines their capabilities and skills for paid work. Feminist and gender analysts have been recently calling for a thorough analysis of unpaid care work on women's time, health, their opportunities, underlying assumptions of stereotyping roles and persistence of gender inequalities. Elson (2000, 21)<sup>[20]</sup> underlined this by observing that women have challenged conventional views and proposed new visions of economic life in which women's activities count, in several senses: *counted in statistics, accounted for in representations of how economies work and taken into account in policy making*. The proper accounting and assessment of the unpaid care work can improve women's standing within the family and can be a catalyst for reducing gender inequalities. The problem of unpaid care work and its disproportionate burden on women has been recognised by United Nations and other international agencies (UN, 2013; UN Women 2000 & 2016)<sup>[59]</sup> and considerable literature has emerged on the subject (Hirway 2005 & 2015; Ferrant, Pesando & Nowacka 2014; Elson 2008; Budlender 2008; Razavi 2007)<sup>[29, 30, 24, 21, 47, 14, 1]</sup>. Recognising the policy issues involved in unpaid care work and their macroeconomic significance UNWomen (2016, 229)<sup>[59]</sup> highlighted that the macroeconomic contributions of social policy and unpaid care is required to be explicitly recognized and integrated into macroeconomic measurement and concepts, policy formulation and the assessment of outcomes with regard to gender equality and the realization of human rights. Despite devotion of considerable time, efforts and energies by women on unpaid care activities, their work is not reflected in a country's national income and as a result of this, the work is not even considered a 'work' even by the persons engaged in these activities. Though women of all class, creed, ethnicity, race and religions are engaged in providing care work in different roles but women in developing and poor countries are disproportionately affected by this work. It even violates their rights and opportunities to education, decent work and leisure. It is paradoxical that being highly productive and indispensable for well-being of individuals, their families and societies the unpaid care work is considered not contributing in economic sense and herein lies its consequences for gender inequalities and gender relations. This paper provides a comprehensive literature survey on the unpaid care work economy and its impact and implications on gender inequalities and gender relations. Elson (2008)<sup>[21]</sup> conceptualized the framework for integration of the three interconnected dimensions into policy towards unpaid carework: (i) Recognition; (ii) Reduction; and (iii) Redistribution. Recognition means making unpaid work visible and duly acknowledged. UNDP Policy document (UNDP, 2009)<sup>[23]</sup> highlighted important

actions required in these three dimensions. The invisibility of unpaid care work by women is mainly due to paucity of data and lack of proper codification and enumeration of the work. Core actions for recognising women's unpaid work are: (i) conducting time use survey; (ii) capturing unpaid care work in gender-responsive budget initiatives; (iii) understanding country circumstances (iv) valuing unpaid care work (v) raising awareness and building capacities; and (vi) assisting caregivers. Core actions under reduction strategy dimensions includes (i) improving task productivity (ii) expanding access to key infrastructure (iii) maintaining/expanding core public service and core actions under redistribution strategy dimensions includes (i) policy interventions by implementing policies favourable to burden-sharing (ii) expanding access to health care and ensure high quality care (iii) engaging with men and (iv) promoting the elimination of gender wage gaps.

Woetzel (2015, 29)<sup>[57, 58]</sup> found that in some regions, such as South Asia (including India) and MENA, women are estimated to undertake as much as 80 to 90 percent of unpaid care work. The study found that ... "time spent in unpaid care work has a strong negative correlation with labor-force participation rates, and the unequal sharing of household responsibilities is a significant barrier to enhancing the role of women in the world economy". The women are forced to accept 'occupational downgrading' as they are forced to choose employment below their skill levels due to their dilemma of balancing care responsibilities and paid employment (Hegewisch and Gornick, 2011)<sup>[28]</sup>. Despite increase in women's participation in the paid work in the world, women are still more likely than men to have lower-paid jobs and part-time jobs, to earn less than men do (Morton *et al* 2014)<sup>[41]</sup>. Desilva (2010)<sup>[16]</sup> observed that the burden of childcare responsibilities creates a "motherhood penalty and Bloom *et al* (2009) on a study based on 97 countries panel data found that on average, a birth reduces a woman's labor supply by almost two years during her reproductive years. The empirical evidences suggests that women perform bulk of household work irrespective of their employment status, income, wealth and education levels (Rizavi and Sofer 2010; Kalenkoski and Stratton 2009; Rapoport and Sofer, 2005; Aronsson *et al*, 2001)<sup>[48, 34, 45, 6]</sup>.

## 2. Evidence from Time Use Studies

As the emphasis on recognising and valuing unpaid care work has increased after UN resolutions insisting on improving the visibility of women's unpaid work, many time use studies have been conducted. According to UNDP Human Development Report 2015 between 2000 –2010 at least 87 such surveys were conducted asking individuals to recall their activities during the previous day. The efforts to collect data on unpaid care in India began in 1980s (Bhattacharya 1985; Sen and Sen 1985)<sup>[10, 51]</sup> and a pilot survey in 6 states was carried out in 1998-99. Results of time use study in 6 Indian states reveals that female unpaid work is more than 30 percent of state GDP. In case of Madhya Pradesh, female unpaid work is more than 40 percent of state estimated SGDP. Time use studies analyses the distribution of time in various activities by men and women and can be a powerful tool to understand disproportionate distribution of unpaid care work on women. Budlender (2008)<sup>[14]</sup> based on the findings from analysis of time use data from Argentina, Nicaragua, India, the Republic of Korea, South Africa and Tanzania

concluded that women tend to spend more time on unpaid care work than men as the mean time for women is more than twice that for men. The gender gap is most discernible in India, where women spend nearly 10 times as much time on extended work included in national income than men. The gender differences were found to be more pronounced in case of India and Tanzania. UNWomen (2016, 44) <sup>[59]</sup> highlighted that in all regions women work more than men: on average they do at least two and a half times more unpaid care and domestic work than men and in case of India this ratio is significantly higher as women work 6.77 times higher on unpaid care and domestic work than men. UNDP's Human Development Report 2015 (UNDP 2016, 107) highlighted that women work for longer hours than men as analysis of time use surveys representing 69 percent of the world's adult population shows that women account for 52 percent of total hours worked whereas men accounts for 48 percent. The distribution of this work into paid and unpaid categories shows that out of this total work 59 percent is paid and 41 percent is unpaid. While men's share is nearly twice that of women—38 percent versus 21 percent in paid work the picture is reversed for unpaid work as women perform three times more than men—31 percent versus 10 percent. The unavailability of time use survey study for many developing countries, leads to undervaluation and invisibility of the work. For example, no proper time use survey is conducted in India since 1998-99. As per briefing note for countries on the 2015 Human Development Report, the data for the year indicated that in case of paid employment women work for 160 minutes per day whereas men work for 360 minutes per day whereas when it comes to unpaid work women work for 297 minutes per day against 31 minutes per day by men. Narasimhan and Pandey (1999, 8) <sup>[42]</sup> highlighted that on the average male spend about 42 hours in SNA activities (activities included in National Accounts) as compared to only about 19 hours by females. But when it comes to extended SNA activities (activities such as household maintenance, care for children, sick and elderly) male spend only about 3.6 hours as compared to 34.6 hours by females. Therefore, female spend 9.61 times more time in extended activities as compared to male. The McKinsey Global Institute study also highlighted that male-female ratio of unpaid care work is 0.102 in case of India which is even less than the South Asian Average of 0.176.

### 3. Evaluating and Integrating unpaid care work in economic and policy sphere

Though the amount of unpaid care work and its gendered distribution has implications not only for individual and household well-being but also for nations and societal well-being yet it has been neglected by all mainstream schools of economics and by various development actors (Budlender, 2010) <sup>[12]</sup>. The available estimates for contribution of unpaid care work range from 20 percent to 60 percent of GDP (Antonopoulos, 2009) <sup>[2]</sup>. In India unpaid care is estimated at 39 percent of GDP and in South Africa it is around 15 percent (Budlender 2010) <sup>[12]</sup>. Ahmad and Koh (2011) <sup>[1]</sup> based on 27 OECD countries data highlighted that the value of household production as a share of GDP varies considerably across countries. It is above 35 percent in Portugal, Australia, Japan, China and New Zealand and below 20 percent in the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Canada,

Norway and United States. UN Women (2016, 12) <sup>[59]</sup> rightly highlighted that:

Indeed, some patterns of economic growth are premised on maintaining gender inequalities in conditions of work and earnings and enforcing unequal patterns of unpaid work that consign women to domestic drudgery. Without a monitoring framework solidly anchored in human rights, it is difficult to know whether claims of empowering women stand up to scrutiny.

The unpaid care work carried out by women and girls is not included in labour force surveys or in GDP figures and as a result women's and girls' work burdens are excluded from the data informing policy making. Once time use survey identifies the activities undertaken and time devoted to these activities, next logical step is the monetary evaluation of the unpaid care work. Opportunity cost approach and replacement cost approaches are normally used for this purpose. The opportunity cost approach evaluate the income/wage foregone as a result of doing the unpaid work and the replacement cost approach measures the market cost of buying the goods and services that are provided by the unpaid labour within the household. This is required for quantification of women and girls contribution in national income and to make their work visible by publishing these statistics. By institutionalising care work and internalizing it into the market system (Jones 2012; Golla *et al.* 2011; Markel 2014; Maestre and Thorpe, 2016) <sup>[33, 27, 38, 37]</sup> we can empower women in recognising true value of their time and efforts. The substitution of non-market work with market-based work would increase GDP significantly as more equitable sharing of such work among men and women and introduction of productivity-enhancing inputs such as infrastructure and automation, could result in utilizing the time saved in paid work. According to estimates applying conservative approximation based on available data on minimum wages, the unpaid care work of women could be valued at \$10 trillion of output per year—an amount that is roughly equivalent to 13 percent of global GDP (Woetzel 2015, 29) <sup>[57, 58]</sup>. Woetzel *et al.* (2015) <sup>[57, 58]</sup> estimates suggest that women contribution in India's GDP is only 17 percent which is significantly lower than the global average of 37 percent, and the lowest among all regions in the world. This is more appalling when we contrast with their higher share of unpaid care work (10 times more than men) such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children and older members of the family. India could gain an addition of \$700 billion of GDP in 2025, upping the country's annual GDP growth by 1.4 percentage points. If that unpaid work is valued in the same way as paid work, it would contribute \$0.3 trillion to India's economic output. The study goes on to the extent of emphasizing that in the future, women's economic empowerment will go hand-in-hand with changes in their role in unpaid care work (20).

### 4. Programme Interventions to reduce burden of unpaid care work

Based on the literature surveyed, it emerged that government, NGO, international organisations and aid agencies are required to intervene by adopting measures to reduce the excess and unequal burden of unpaid work on women through investment in time-saving infrastructure such as safe water sources within easy reach, clean and affordable domestic fuels, availability of electricity and institutionalised care homes for children, elderly and sick

can free up women's time for paid work. Another strategy could be to convert unpaid care work into paid jobs, including through state-funded or market-driven care services. The interventions if properly targeted and effectively implemented could result in higher GDP to the extent that time saved by women is used for paid work. Beside GDP it would have other positive effects such as more women could be financially independent, and there may be intergenerational benefits for the children of earning mothers (Woetzel 2015, 12) <sup>[57, 58]</sup> as daughters raised by an employed mother spend less time on housework, are better compensated and are more likely to hold supervisory positions than daughters whose mothers stayed home fulltime (McGinn *et al* 2015, 25) <sup>[39]</sup>.

In India some legal and promotional provisions are made to reduce the burden of disproportionate work on women. The simple laws apparently gender neutral in their effect can also help in reducing gender inequities. Balesar and Rani (2011, 50) found that if the minimum wage was extended to all wage earners, the gender pay gap would decline from 16 to 10 per cent for salaried workers and from 26 to 8 per cent for casual workers in case of India. India's Constitution recognises the right to maternity benefits, and in 1961 with the Maternity Benefit Act, these were enshrined into law. Employers are obliged to provide of day care facilities mandatory under various legislations, (Factories Act 1948, Mines Act 1952, Plantation Act, 1951, Inter-State Migrant Workers Act, 1980 and MNREGA 2005) which women employed in organised work can avail. MNREGA includes provisions for onsite crèches and other facilities such as medical aid, drinking water, shades and breaks for lactating mothers (Antonopoulos 2013, 29) <sup>[3]</sup>.

The Early Childhood Care and Education Policy, 2013, mentions capacity building of parents and communities, and the statutory provision of crèches. For the mothers working in unorganised sector 'Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme for the Children of Working Mothers' has been started by Ministry of Women and Child Development for reducing the burden of child care and encourage women to engage themselves in paid jobs. The government of India is running Scheme for 'Working Women Hostel' since 1972-73 by providing grant-in-aid for construction of new/expansion of existing buildings for providing hostel facilities to working women in cities, smaller towns and also in rural areas where employment opportunities for women exist. There various other programmes run by Ministry of Women and Child Development is aimed at reducing the burden of women in unpaid care work and encouraging women to go for paid work/paid employment. The 'Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP) Scheme' administered since 1986-87 imparts skills related to employability and entrepreneurship specifically in the sectors like Agriculture, Horticulture, Food Processing, Handlooms, Tailoring, Stitching, Embroidery, Zari etc, Handicrafts, Computer & IT enable services along with soft skills and skills for the work place such as spoken English, Gems & Jewellery, Travel & Tourism, Hospitality. There are many other related programmes run by the ministry but evidences indicate that their size is too small to mitigate the excess burden on women of care responsibilities (Seema and Narayan, 2016; Jhamb, Mishra, and Sinha 2013; Mishra and Sinha 2012 & 2015) <sup>[50, 32, 40]</sup>.

Parental leave and childcare services are other measures which help in sharing care responsibilities and enable

women to enter and remain in the labour market. In India, the Central Government in 1999 made provisions for paternity leave for a male Central Government employee with less than two surviving children for a period of 15 days to take care of his wife and new born child. The efforts aimed at increasing women wage employment would also help in reducing unpaid care burden on women and girls. As more women enter paid jobs that are more stable and higher paying, they can help to fuel economic growth, while growth brings more urbanization and wage jobs that move women out of unpaid and less productive work.

## 5. Conclusions

The surveyed literature has revealed that unpaid care work by women and girls provides enabling environment to energies and maintain active paid labour force but its contribution in the society, community, household and to those providing them and receiving them is largely go unnoticed and undervalued. Though various empowerment programmes aims to empower women economically, socially and politically but the efforts are likely to underperform if women and girls devote their considerable time and effort for unpaid care activities. The lack of data and proper representation of women's unpaid care work the policy makers are likely to take into account the effects and affects of women unpaid care work. We found that time use survey are missing for most of the developing countries. For example, the last large scale time use survey in India was carried out as late as 1998-99. To make women unpaid care work visible, evaluation and assessment of women work is need to be done and efforts should be made to include the implied values of women work in national income statistics of the nations. The dream of women empowerment cannot be realised by properly integrating women unpaid care work into household decision making, de-engendering stereotypes, policy making and national income accounting.

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