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## PolicyBrief

Gender Equality and Poverty Reduction

UNPAID  
CARE WORK

By Anna Fälth and Mark Blackden



## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> UNDP. Human Development Report 2005: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr1995/>.
- <sup>2</sup> For more information on the System of National Accounts and Care Work, See Budlender 2008 and Charmes 2006.
- <sup>3</sup> Convention 156 on 'Workers with Family Responsibilities' (1981) applies to "men and women workers with responsibilities in relation to other members of their immediate family who clearly need their care or support, where such responsibilities restrict their possibilities of preparing for, entering, participating in or advancing in economic activity."
- <sup>4</sup> Water and fuel collection are theoretically included in the System of National Accounts. In practice, however, these services are rarely included.
- <sup>5</sup> Budlender, Debbie, 2008. The Statistical Evidence on Care and Non-Care Work across Six Countries, Gender and Development Programme Paper No. 4.
- <sup>6</sup> Seebens H., 2006. 'The Contribution of Female Non-Farm Income to Poverty Reduction'. Background Paper Prepared for Ellis, Amanda Et Al. 2006. *Gender and Economic Growth in Tanzania: Creating Opportunities for Women*, the World Bank, Directions in Development, Washington, D.C.
- <sup>7</sup> Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, United Nations Population Fund, and the United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2004. *Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis*, Geneva.
- <sup>8</sup> See [http://www.undp.org/poverty/focus\\_gender\\_and\\_poverty.shtml](http://www.undp.org/poverty/focus_gender_and_poverty.shtml)
- <sup>9</sup> The Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress. See further information available at <http://www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/en/index.htm>.
- <sup>10</sup> Professor Diane Elson, Essex University, conceptualized the framework of the three interconnected dimensions of policy towards unpaid care work.
- <sup>11</sup> 'Satellite accounts' reorganize extant data to provide a framework for focusing on a particular field or aspect of economic or social life (e.g., unpaid care work) in order to determine contributions to the national economy. linked among themselves and to central national accounting frameworks, satellite accounts are especially useful for illuminating otherwise hidden aspects of standard economic measures.
- <sup>12</sup> For example, unpaid care workers tend to carry out simultaneous tasks; while watching children, they may engage in activities such as cooking, cleaning or other household chores.
- <sup>13</sup> 'Reducing Rural Poverty through Increased Access to Energy Services: a Review of the Multifunctional Platform Project in Mali'. UNDP (2004). Available at: <http://www.energyandenvironment.undp.org/undp/indexaction.cfm?module=library&action=getfile&documentattachmentid=1088>.
- <sup>14</sup> CEDAW: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>.
- <sup>15</sup> UNDP, 2008. Research Report 'Impact of Employment Guarantee Programmes on Gender Equality and Pro-Poor Economic Development

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## I. Introduction

This Policy Brief provides insight into the importance of addressing issues of gender equality and unpaid care work in national development policies and strategies. It targets UNDP country offices and their national counterparts (e.g., national, regional and local governments and parliaments, academia, media, civil society and the private sector). This Policy Brief can be used to stimulate discussions at the country level with a view towards developing locally-adapted gender equality and unpaid care work initiatives, and, as an advocacy tool with a view towards increasing awareness of gender equality and unpaid care work from the local to the international levels.

Because unpaid care work is unevenly distributed between women and men, it is important to understand its magnitude, dynamics and impact. The 1995 Human Development Report noted that women accounted for more than half of the total burden of work—work time spent either in market-based economic activities, in the subsistence sector, or in unpaid household or community activities—53 percent in developing countries and 51 percent in developed countries.<sup>1</sup> However, women's paid market activities represented only one-third of this work, compared to three-fourths of men's work. Because

**Unpaid care work is a critical—yet largely unseen—dimension of human well-being that provides essential domestic services within households, for other households and to community members. 'Unpaid' means that the person doing the activity does not receive a wage and that the work, because it falls outside the production boundary in the System of National Accounts, is not counted in GDP calculations.<sup>2</sup> 'Care' means that the activity serves people and their well-being, and includes both personal care and care-related activities, such as cooking, cleaning and washing clothes. 'Work' means that the activity entails expenditures of time and energy. Unpaid care work is also referred to as 'reproductive' or 'domestic' work in order to distinguish it from market-based work. The International Labour Organization uses the term 'workers with family responsibilities'.<sup>3</sup>**

**The International Classification of Activities for Time-Use Surveys distinguishes between three subcategories of unpaid care work: household maintenance<sup>4</sup>; care of persons in one's own household; and services and help to households in the community.<sup>5</sup>**

women's unpaid care work often remains unrecognized and undervalued, men receive a larger share of income and recognition for their economic contributions. In addition, time spent by women and girls on domestic chores limits

their opportunities to participate in the labour force or to engage in economic activity, and entails missed opportunities to attend school.

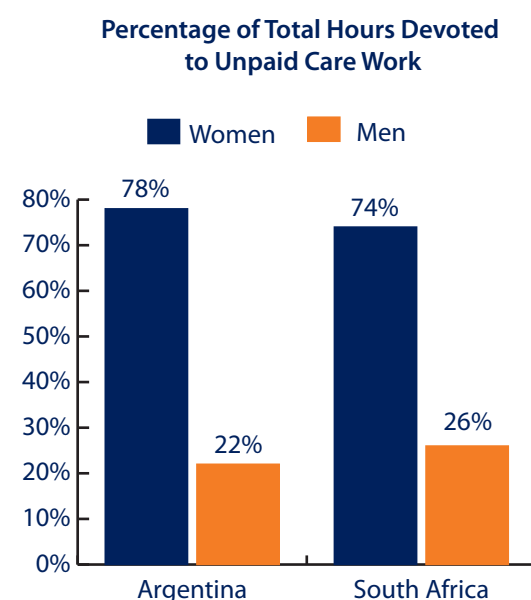
Time-use data offers a detailed portrait of how women and men spend their time, what activities they engage in and for how long they engage in them. Such data can powerfully illustrate unevenly distributed burden of work, such as unpaid care work. For example, in Argentina and South Africa, women spent about 25 and 33 percent more total work time than men did. As Figure 1 shows, of the total time spent on unpaid care work in these countries, women carried out 78 and 74 percent of it, whereas men spent only 22 and 26 percent, respectively. Such time-use data provides powerful information for developing national policies, strategies and public services that address the actual needs of women and men in the country.

#### **PRACTICE POINTER 1: REDUCING UNPAID CARE WORK IN ORDER TO INCREASE MARKET-BASED ACTIVITIES**

**A regional study in Tanzania noted the negative relationship between the probability of starting an off-farm business and the time devoted to chores such as water and fuel collection. A one-hour reduction for every 10 hours per week spent on these tasks increased, by 7 percent, the probability that women would engage in off-farm business activities.<sup>6</sup>**

In the absence of basic infrastructure and technology, the time and energy expenditure on unpaid care tasks is staggering. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has exacerbated women's caregiving burdens. It is estimated that globally, women provide between 70 and 90 percent of the care to people living with HIV/AIDS. The UNAIDS, UNFPA and UNIFEM 2004 report 'Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis' described how "caring for an AIDS patient can increase the workload of a family caretaker by one third. This is a burden in any family but particularly onerous for the poor, who already spend much of their day earning a subsistence living. A rural woman interviewed in Southern Africa estimated that it took 24 buckets of water a day, fetched by hand, to care for a family member who was

**Figure 1: Percent of total hours devoted to work and unpaid care work**



Source: Based on survey data presented in Budlender, 2008. *The Statistical Evidence on Care and Non-Care Work Across Six Countries*, UNRISD, Gender and Development Paper No. 4. Geneva.

dying of AIDS—water to wash the clothes, the sheets and the patient after regular bouts of diarrhoea.”<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, in the current economic and financial crisis, poor women are taking on more unpaid care work—work that otherwise would have been undertaken by the public or private sector. When cuts occur in government-provided services (e.g., child care centres), paid work previously carried out by women to provide these services is shifted to unpaid care work carried out by women in the household.

In addition, unpaid care work intensifies recessions. What may be considered a safety net in one household—making clothes or meals at home, for example—reduces incomes of other households that would have sold the clothes or meals in the market. In these cases, there is a need for measures that maintain the purchasing power of low-income women. These additional factors give added urgency to addressing unpaid care work as a critical dimension of development.

### III. Conclusion

Because unpaid care work is essential for family survival and affects all dimensions of development, it is important for policy makers and development practitioners to maintain a sharp focus on the subject. It is important to focus on why unpaid care work matters for development (recognition), what development interventions can be prioritized to lessen overall unpaid care work

burdens (reduction), and how the burdens of unpaid care work can be more equitably shared between men and women and among public and private sector actors (redistribution). Placing unpaid care work at the core of poverty reduction efforts and synergistically working across all three dimensions will make a substantial difference to human welfare.

### IV. Selected Web Resources

UNDP Gender Team: [http://www.undp.org/poverty/focus\\_gender\\_and\\_poverty.shtml](http://www.undp.org/poverty/focus_gender_and_poverty.shtml)

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development: <http://www.unrisd.org>

Division for the Advancement of Women: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/53sess.htm>

United Nations Statistics Division: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sconcerns/tuse/>

Levy Economics Institute of Bard College: [http://www.levy.org/undp-levy-conference/program\\_documents.asp](http://www.levy.org/undp-levy-conference/program_documents.asp), <http://www.levy.org/vdoc.aspx?docid=1081>

Institute for Development Studies: [http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports\\_gend\\_CEP.html](http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports_gend_CEP.html)

### V. Suggested Reading

Antonella Picchio (2006). Editor. *Unpaid Work and the Economy: A gender analysis of the standards of living*. Routledge Frontiers of Political Economy, New York.

Budlender, Debbie and Ann Lisbet Brathaug, 2002. *Calculating the Value of Unpaid Labour: A Discussion Document*. Statistics South Africa, Pretoria.

Budlender, Debbie, 2007. *A Critical Review of Selected Time Use Surveys*. Programme on Gender and Development, Paper No. 2. UNRISD, Geneva.

Budlender, Debbie, 2008. *The Statistical Evidence on Care and Non-Care Work across Six Countries*, Gender and Development Programme Paper No. 4.

Elson D., 2000. *Progress of the World's Women 2000: UNIFEM Biennial Report*. United Nations Development Fund for Women, New York.

Elson D., 2002. *International Financial Architecture: A view from the kitchen*. <http://www.eclac.org/mujer/curso/elson1.pdf>

Esquivel, Valeria, 2008. *Political and Social Economy of Care: Research Report 2 on Argentina*. UNRISD, Geneva.

Hein C. (2005). *Reconciling work and family responsibilities: Practical ideas from global experience*. (International Labour Organization, Geneva).

Hein C. and N. Cassirer. *Workplace partnerships for childcare solutions* (forthcoming), (International Labour Organization, Geneva).



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#### PRACTICE POINTER 4: ORGANIZING HOME-BASED CARE GIVERS

In many countries, women are bridging gaps to fill unmet care needs in their communities by taking on roles and responsibilities that are normally within the purview of state and public institutions. To assist women caregivers and to ensure that their unpaid care work is recognized and accounted for, UNDP and the Huairou Commission, with funding from the UNDP/Japan Women in Development Fund, collaborated to launch the six country initiative, *Compensations for Contributions: Creating an Enabling Policy Framework for Home-based Care*. The initiative is building caregivers' capacities by serving as a platform for local and international peer exchange, and is facilitating negotiations for more support for women caregivers' work. For example, caregivers in Uganda have participated in the Ministry of Health's budgetary planning meetings, and in Kenya caregivers have participated in district and national-level meetings in order to ensure that their needs are integrated into planning processes. As a result of this initiative, women home-based caregivers in all six countries have begun organizing themselves, have delineated their transportation, food and medicine needs, and have identified the support needed from clinics and the government.

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role of women in society and in the family is needed to achieve full equality of men and women."<sup>14</sup> As called for at the 53<sup>rd</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women, it is important to enable men to participate more fully in family burden sharing. Men are rarely acknowledged for the role they play as caregivers, and are viewed as secondary care providers assisting women. Men who are willing to challenge traditional gender roles by caring for family members are often derided and ridiculed by both other men and by women. It is also important to challenge the gender stereotypes that prevent men from contributing to unpaid care work. A critical task is to ensure that policy supports an enabling environment for men to share care burdens.

**Promote the elimination of gender wage gaps:** Gender wage gaps (women's lower wages compared to men's) directly impact women's opportunity costs for entering into paid employment. The benefits and costs of women versus men going to work are weighed against the benefits and costs of women versus men staying at home undertaking unpaid care work. Because women's opportunity costs are typically lower than men's, households tend to decide that it is more economically practical for the woman to stay home.

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#### PRACTICE POINTER 5: THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENTS IN PROVIDING CHILDCARE FOR WORKING PARENTS

One of the major challenges for economic and social development in Latin America and the Caribbean is lack of childcare for working parents. Since lack of childcare hinders many women from joining the labour market, targeted child care can provide opportunities for these women to join the labour force, help them move out of poverty or avoid falling into it. In 2007, the Government of Mexico responded to this challenge by establishing the Programa de Guarderías e Instancias Infantiles para Apoyar a Madres Trabajadoras (Programme for Infant and Childcare to Assist Women Workers), which targets and studies mothers and single mothers and fathers. Some 72 percent of women beneficiaries did not work due to lack of childcare. As a result of this programme, however, the percentage of unemployed women beneficiaries decreased by almost 40 percent, and incomes of women beneficiaries increased by 35 percent. By June 2009, the programme had assisted 209,760 mothers with child care facilities.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NRAGA), launched by the Government of India in 2005, recognizes the implications that family responsibilities carry vis-à-vis women's ability to freely engage in paid economic activities. The NRAGA includes on-site crèches among other worksite facilities, such as medical aid, drinking water and shade, that local implementing agencies have to set out in order ensure the effective implementation of the employment-generating programme.<sup>15</sup>

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## II. Addressing unpaid care work through three interconnected dimensions

In November 2008, UNDP responded to the urgency of addressing unpaid care work by convening a meeting of experts and holding an e-discussion<sup>8</sup> among UNDP country offices. Meeting participants included experts on time use and unpaid care work from all regions and members of the Sarkozy Commission,<sup>9</sup> including Kemal Derviş, UNDP Administrator. The purposes of the meeting were to review the state of knowledge and policy development on unpaid care work, to identify gaps in these areas, and to determine ways in which UNDP could fill these gaps. The meeting contributed to wider discussions on sharing responsibilities between women and men, which was the topic of the March 2009 53<sup>rd</sup> session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

The key output of the meeting was an agreement on a conceptual framework for guiding UNDP activities in the area of unpaid care work. The framework outlines unpaid care work as three interconnected dimensions: (A) Recognition; (B) Reduction; and (C) Redistribution.<sup>10</sup> Each of these dimensions is addressed below, and core actions by development policy-makers and practitioners are identified.

It is important to keep in mind that a country's range of possible actions depends on a variety of factors, including its level of development and overall capacity, and the availability of financial and human resources and technology. The list of core actions should, therefore, be considered a menu of policy options from which specific initiatives could be developed in line with the particular country context. For example, policy options related to paid maternity and paternity leave may be more relevant to high- and middle-income countries, while options related to integrating unpaid care work perspectives into investments in physical infrastructure may be the more vital to low-income countries. While all three inter-connected dimensions are relevant for all countries, reduction may be the most critical for low-income countries, while the cost implications of redistribution will make it more feasible for middle- and high-income countries.

### A. RECOGNITION

A complete understanding of total household labour effort requires unpaid care work to be taken into account—many of the core contributions to human development and welfare occur in the invisible realm of unpaid care work. Activities essential for nutrition, education and overall well-being of family members include cooking, cleaning, collecting water and fuel, and caring for children, the elderly and the sick—a society cannot be productive without an educated, healthy and well-adjusted populace. Recognizing the centrality of unpaid care work to human welfare requires concerted efforts to make such work visible through use of time allocation surveys, satellite accounts,<sup>11</sup> and improved measurement tools. If unpaid care work is not visible to policy makers and planners, it will not be the subject of policy attention or investment—what is not seen is not invested in or prioritized.

#### Core Actions:

**Measure time use:** Promote the use of time-budget surveys, embed time-use modules within household consumption surveys, and facilitate the integration of time-budget and consumption surveys into national statistical systems. Systematically using satellite accounts will provide greater visibility to unpaid care work. Other actions include evaluating methodological limitations of time-use surveys (e.g., capturing the multitasking aspect of unpaid care work<sup>12</sup>) and how these may be addressed, and identifying and replicating good practice examples of time-use data collection and policy-focused analyses.

**Capture unpaid care work in gender-responsive budget initiatives:** An effective method for recognizing unpaid care work is to promote the systematic use of gender-responsive budget initiatives that incorporate a gender analysis of household time budgets. This will inform national planning and budgeting and will promote setting gender-responsive budget priorities that reflect the importance of unpaid care work for human welfare.

**Understand country circumstances:** Undertake country-level studies to understand the nature, characteristics, and trends in unpaid care work and widely disseminate findings (see Practice Pointer 2). Critical to finding relevant responses to national and global crises (e.g., the HIV/AIDS pandemic, or the food, fuel, and economic and financial crises) is an understanding of how the crises effect the actors undertaking unpaid care work, how they respond to changes in government-provided services, and households' short-term coping strategies.

**Value unpaid care work:** Carry out cost-benefit analyses of infrastructure and other investments by assessing the development costs of spending time on unpaid care work and the time savings made by such investments. It is important to highlight opportunity costs inherent to performing unpaid care work. The value of unpaid care work can be estimated through either the 'generalist approach' (using average salaries) or the 'domestic worker approach' (using salaries of paid domestic workers). Addressing cross-sectoral synergies could help costing and prioritizing investments aimed at reducing the time burdens of unpaid care work.

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#### PRACTICE POINTER 2: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF UNPAID CARE WORK AT THE COUNTRY LEVEL

**In order to inform policy making, it is critical to understand how unpaid care work impacts women and girls' participation in society. Country-level studies should include information on unpaid care burdens at the household and community levels, disaggregated by sex and age. Other essential metrics include changes in time spent:**

- **In school (number of girls dropping out of school due to increased care burdens in the household);**
  - **On agricultural or other economic tasks (implications for household food security and nutrition status); and**
  - **In accessing key economic and social services, including health facilities (with implications for the overall health status of the family).**
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**Raise awareness and build capacity:** Ensuring greater attention to unpaid care work in the public and private spheres requires using time-use data and other relevant information in awareness-raising campaigns and capacity-building initiatives of key development partners, including government officials, United Nations staff and representatives of civil society organizations, employers, workers, trade unions and household and community members (men in particular). In addition, the media can play a prominent role in communicating such information to the general public.

**Assist caregivers:** Establishing public policy interventions—including caregivers' allowance, paid and unpaid parental leave, social security and pension credits and tax allowances—will provide caregivers with a source of income. Particularly in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, it is important to strengthen support to caregivers, home-based caregivers in particular (see Practice Pointer 4).

#### B. REDUCTION

Though the time burdens of some unpaid care work tasks are not as conducive to reduction as others are (e.g., care for children, the elderly, the sick and the disabled), many categories of tasks can be more efficiently undertaken. Examples include water and fuel collection, food preparation (e.g., de-husking grains) and cooking (see Practice Pointer 3). Investments in infrastructure and labour-saving technologies that are focused on household-level care tasks (e.g., fuel-saving stoves, mills, wells, piped water or alternative fuels) could be effective in reducing the time women and girls spend on unpaid care work.

Tracking how such time savings are used would contribute to a better understanding of whether time saved is channelled into paid work/formal employment, social or political activities, or transferred to other sorts of unpaid work. If improving women's labour market participation is to be a key goal of saving time on unpaid care work, attention needs to be paid to the regulatory environment affecting work options or working hours for women, so as to ensure the most effective utilization of time savings.

Prioritizing these investments will have multiplier effects that are essential for achieving the Millennium Develop-

ment Goals (MDGs). This was highlighted as a strategic priority by the MDG Taskforce 3 on Education and Gender Equality of the Millennium Project.

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#### PRACTICE POINTER 3: MULTIFUNCTIONAL PLATFORMS IN MALI

**A multifunctional platform is a 10-horsepower diesel engine with modular components that can supply either motive power for time- and labour-intensive work (e.g., milling or de-husking) or can supply electricity for activities such as lighting, or pumping water. Findings from a study of the impact of the multifunctional platforms in Mali indicated that the platforms reduced the time required for labour-intensive tasks from many hours to mere minutes.<sup>13</sup> The time and labour saved by women was shifted to income-generating activities, which lead to increased rice production. Because young girls were needed less for time-consuming chores in the household, the ratio of girls to boys in schools improved, and the proportion of children reaching grade five increased.**

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#### Core Actions:

**Improve task productivity:** Raise the productivity of unpaid care work by reducing the arduousness and inefficiency of care tasks. In poverty reduction strategies, prioritize the promotion of investments in time and labour-saving technologies that are focused on domestic work.

**Expand access to key infrastructure:** Support improvements to rural water and irrigation systems, domestic energy, and rural transportation infrastructure investments. Such investments will have substantial multiplier effects (e.g., creating jobs for women and men and reducing women's unpaid care work), thus building on cross-sectoral synergies that are critical for achieving the MDGs.

**Maintain/expand core public services:** Expand, or during crisis, avoid, cutbacks to essential government services and infrastructure investments. These services and investments are an important means of relieving households of unpaid care burdens, creating employment and raising labour productivity. The Beijing Platform for Action emphasizes that women take on more unpaid care

work when public services are unavailable. Certain public services are particularly effective in reducing unpaid care work, such as providing children meals in school, or improving public transportation infrastructure.

#### C. REDISTRIBUTION

Redistributing unpaid care work requires policy measures that support equitable burden-sharing, not only within households (between women and men), but also between and among key providers of care services. Such providers include governments, the private sector and communities, offering support through legislation, policies and programmes that facilitate burden-sharing. These providers could be mobilized and supported to share the burden of care work through policy makers' increased attention and action.

#### Core Actions:

**Implement policies favourable to burden-sharing:** Encourage the adoption of legislative and policy measures and programme interventions that are focused on enabling women and men to more effectively balance family and work responsibilities. Such measures include flexible working arrangements, provision of maternal, paternal, and parental leave, and the provision of affordable child and elder care services. Adequate policy responses require measures that will facilitate long-term transformation of attitudes, and require institutional arrangements that promote equal sharing of household and family responsibilities and societal change.

**Expand access to health care and ensure high quality care:** Remove barriers to health care services by, for example, expanding health care centres and reducing transportation and user fees. Quality of care—including opening hours (to meet the needs of families) and the skills level of public care workers—also contributes to families' choices in making use of public care services or compelling women and girls to undertake unpaid care work. For example, if public care services are sub-par, women and girls may be trapped into providing the services themselves.

**Engage with men:** The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women emphasizes that "a change in the traditional role of men as well as the