



## An Issue Brief

### UNPAID CARE AND POST-2015

#### Introduction

The disproportionate burden of unpaid care work that women and girls shoulder is a direct cause of the persistence of gender inequality and the denial of women's and girls' rights. It is difficult to see how substantial change can be achieved in any related area without tackling this fundamental barrier to progress.

Unpaid care work includes domestic work such as cooking and food preparation, cleaning, washing clothes, water and fuel collection, and keeping safe living environments. It also includes directly caring for people including children, older people, people who are ill or have disabilities, as well as for able-bodied adults. Without this daily care, life would not be sustained and reproduced, and the labour force would be unable to function. Yet, despite this, it is mostly unremunerated and unrecognized and often uncouned.

The solution does not lie, as is sometimes assumed, in 'wages for housework'. The changes needed are more profound. They require recognition of the vast amount of unpaid care work undertaken and its central role in society; then a reduction in the time and drudgery required to provide high quality care, and finally a redistribution of responsibility for this care from households to the state, through the provision of public services, and from women and girls to men and boys.

For decades this unequal burden has remained largely ignored. But there are signs that this is starting to change, not least with the important proposal that a target on unpaid care be included in the Post 2015 framework.

#### Context Analysis: A hidden burden with extensive impact

##### *Women's disproportionate burden*

The issue of unpaid care is a truly universal one. In every country in the world women spend substantially longer than men both on household domestic work and on care for children, the elderly and the sick.<sup>1</sup> Lack of adequate quality public services (partly as a result of privatization and government spending cuts) further ensures that care work becomes the responsibility of households rather than the state. Women living in poverty, particularly those in rural areas unable to afford labor saving technology and with limited access to public services, face additional burdens.<sup>2</sup> For those women who have to collect water and fuel, the time taken is particularly high.<sup>3</sup> This disparity further exacerbates ethnic and racial inequalities.<sup>4</sup>

### *Impact on the rights of women and girls*

Women's and girls' unequal share of unpaid care work lies behind many of the manifestations of inequality and abuses of women's rights apparent today, and can be seen as one of the underlying causes of persistent gender inequality. This injustice is justified by entrenched gender stereotypes, the gendered division of labor and the paradigm of men providers-women caregivers which shapes unpaid care work as well as paid employment.<sup>5</sup>

The negative impact starts with education – where girls are far more likely than boys to miss school because of domestic duties. Fetching water is an especially time consuming chore done more often by girls than boys, contributing to unequal school completion rates.<sup>6</sup> Girls are particularly likely to take over domestic work when their mothers enter paid employment, so contributing to the intergenerational poverty that comes from lack of education.<sup>7</sup>

Those providing care may also find their own health adversely affected, both because of the time burden's they bear and inability to attend health facilities themselves.<sup>8</sup> In some cases the physical hardship that come with doing care work is relentless, even after having just given birth some women are expected to undertake care work for their households. Women can also be left isolated and exposed to sexual violence.

Unpaid care work leaves less time for paid employment and also restricts the time women can work unpaid in family businesses or in small holder production. The need for flexible working hours to engage in unpaid care work also relegates women to less secure, less well paid jobs. This has an impact not only on income, but also on women's control over household resources and decision making, and on their ability to leave abusive relationships. It further impacts on savings, pensions and access to other social protection schemes, leaving women who have spent a life time on unremunerated care work with no access to income in their old age.

Women's voice in politics and public affairs is constrained both in a practical sense (with time constraints particularly around child-care) and because they are seen as second class citizens whose place is in the private space of the home while men dominate the public sphere of politics.

### *Impact on the provision of care, the environment, paid care workers and the economy*

The under-resourcing of unpaid care work also has wide-spread knock- on effects. The inferior standing assigned to those who provide care is intrinsically linked to a lack of status accorded to care work in most societies, resulting in a lack of resources invested in its provision. In turn, the lack of investment and social provision reduces the quality of care women are able to provide, despite their hard work, with particularly damaging impacts for children in the poorest households. It also leads to the rights violations of those who require care such as children, the elderly or people who are living with disabilities or are ill.

The undervaluing of care work leads to low wages and insecure employment for the, largely female, paid providers of care. For example, lack of childcare has been shown to push mothers from formal into informal employment in Botswana, Guatemala, Mexico and Vietnam.<sup>9</sup> Migrant women are also affected, leaving their own families in order to care for others for limited wages while their daughters or mothers take over the families' domestic work.

This undervaluing also has a bearing on the environment, where women are invisible to policy makers who don't recognize their role as land users. Environmental degradation stretches to the limit women's role as natural resource managers, and further increases their time burdens for example in fetching wood.<sup>10</sup>

It has been estimated that, if calculated in monetary terms, the care services that are provided for free would amount to between fifteen and 50 per cent of GDP.<sup>11</sup> Failure to recognize and acknowledge this substantial contribution that unpaid care work makes to society and the economy (whether deliberately or through ignorance) has led to poor policy making, with sometimes disastrous consequences that are particularly apparent under austerity measures. Decades of neo-liberal macro-economic policies, particularly those designed to reduce the role of the public sector, have depended on and increased the disproportionate burden of women's unpaid care work.<sup>12</sup> There is a deliberate move from state and employer provided care services to the apparently 'free' provision within the household, specifically by women and girls. Women's time is seen as infinitely elastic; it is assumed they will make up the shortfall of cuts in health or education services by nursing the sick or caring for children, or to offset the impact of privatization by walking further to collect water. The impact is felt not only on the time and health of the women but on their families and society as a whole.<sup>13</sup>

### *Unpaid care on the international agenda*

Twenty years ago the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action acknowledged the need to count, value and redistribute unpaid care work, and ensure that it is not an obstacle to women's rights and opportunities.<sup>14</sup> Under international human rights law there are also several legally binding obligations that compel states to address the unequal distribution of unpaid care work.<sup>15</sup> Yet little has changed over the last two decades.

Then in 2010, the High-level Plenary Meeting on the MDGs recognized women's unpaid work, including care work, and the need to invest in infrastructure and labor-saving technologies.<sup>16</sup> In 2013 the UN Special Reporter on extreme poverty and human rights produced her report on poverty and unpaid care.<sup>17</sup> In the summer of 2014 the Open Working Group on the sustainable development goals included a target on unpaid care under its proposed gender goal.<sup>18</sup> This was a significant step in raising the issue on the international political agenda.

### **Policy Directions – Recognize, Redistribute and Reduce**

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Policy responses have been framed around the three pronged approach of recognize, reduce and redistribute. These include recognition of the extent and importance of unpaid care work, a reduction in the time taken and drudgery in providing this care (not a reduction in the amount of care provided) and a redistribution of responsibility for providing care from women to men and from individuals to the state.<sup>19</sup> It is essential these initiatives have as their goal increased and better quality care provision and more choice for careers.

#### *Recognition in all public policy*

Despite its volume, unpaid care work remains largely unacknowledged in the way that we measure work. Recognizing and counting the contribution of this labor would lead to more realistic and equitable policy making. (In 2013 the 19<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Labor Statisticians adopted a resolution to expand the definition of work to include unpaid care work.<sup>20</sup>) Some advances have already been made, for example in Latin America, on including care work within policy and legislative frameworks.<sup>21</sup> While some time-use surveys have already started to demonstrate its extent, much more is needed to develop statistics that could measure this kind of work in order to inform policy-making.<sup>22</sup>

Unpaid care work makes a substantial contribution to all economies, yet its impact is largely ignored by most economists and policy makers, who appear to take its provision for granted. More fundamentally, some argue, the support of unpaid care work is essential to maintaining current economic systems, absorbing and therefore hiding the negative impacts of liberalization of public services, de-regulation of labor and the exploitation of natural resources.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Increased provision by the state*

Governments should have a duty to ensure that high quality, affordable care for the sick and dying, and ensure that child and elder care, is available to all. This requires macro-economic policies consistent with meeting the obligation: sufficient progressive taxation to mobilize the necessary domestic resources combined with a commitment to fully funded, high quality, public services. In some cases there will be a mixture of state provision and state subsidies, alongside regulation of privately and community provided services. Some families may make the choice to do some of this care themselves, but this should be a real choice, with sufficient public provision to ensure access to all. Provision of these services benefits both the potential career by reducing their time burden, and the recipient who is able to access the high quality care needed.

#### *Changing social norms on who does care work, and on its value*

Some work is already underway challenging the assumptions that care work should be done by women and girls, and that they are the natural caretakers. In Zimbabwe 'Africare' has attempted to break down some of the taboos around men caring for those with HIV/AIDS including work with traditional leaders.<sup>24</sup> This work presents a real challenge given the pervasive nature of such norms across most societies, which in many ways underpins the core of patriarchy, but there are some examples of success. These have partly occurred where changes in legislation have made it easier for

both parents to share child-care, as in Iceland.<sup>25</sup> This work will also reinforce attempts to increase the value and understanding of care work in society.

### *Investment in technology*

With improved technology, the same or better quality care can be delivered in less time, and with less drudgery. This could be achieved through the availability of affordable domestic technology such as grain grinders and fuel efficient stoves, (provision of the latter in the DRC was found to dramatically reduce women's workload.<sup>26</sup>) Or it can be by investing in infrastructure, particularly piped water, energy and roads. Fetching water is particularly time consuming, as evidenced in one South African study.<sup>27</sup>

### *Ensuring that those who undertake care work have choice and voice*

Some women (and men) will continue to choose to care for their families and communities, and they should be supported in doing so. Part of the work on unpaid care must be to ensure that those who care have a greater role in society. This will entail the removal of practical constraints (child care to attend meetings and so on). But more fundamentally it requires recognition that unpaid caregivers are important stakeholders in policy making - from natural resource management through to social protection. Finally it involves a shift in social norms so that women's place is recognized to be in the public as well as private sphere. This last step is difficult, but possible. The Self Employed Women's Association's (SEWA) Women, Work and Water Campaign in Gujarat supported women's participation in local water users' groups. They overcame skepticism and hostility to demonstrate that women could successfully occupy 'public' spaces.<sup>28</sup>

### **Recommendations**

The existence of a target on unpaid care in the Post 2015 framework will in itself make an important contribution to raising the issue up the political agenda. It should therefore be vigorously defended. The current wording of the unpaid care target in Open Working Group Final Outcome Document of 19 July 2014 is useful but could be improved.

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***“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”<sup>29</sup>***

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The final target should include recognition of the following:

1. The state's role in ensuring accessible, quality public services for all, and universal social protection, should be recognized as central to reducing the burden of unpaid care.
2. Investment in infrastructure (especially water) and in labor saving domestic technology should be part of the response.
3. Any target should specifically mention a transfer of responsibility for the provision of care from women and girls to include men and boys.
4. The contribution of unpaid care should be made visible in policy making spaces

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5. Targets on unpaid care should be universal – without a clause around what is nationally appropriate.

Care is one of the issues that can be lost in the silo approach of development goals. Recognition of the vast barrier that unpaid care poses to women and girls' ability to progress under other goals, including education, health and employment should be included throughout the framework.

Looking beyond the Post 2015 framework, ultimately what is needed is a change in social values such that the provision of care is highly valued, and seen as central to the functioning of healthy societies and economies. In such societies the state would have responsibility for raising sufficient revenue and for providing adequate, good quality care accessible for all. There would be sufficient investment in infrastructure and technology to reduce the time- burden and drudgery of the work. Unpaid care work would be shared equally by women and men and those who provide care would be valued, have their voices heard in political fora, and given greater choice and chance to participate fully in all aspects of life.

**This issue brief was prepared by Jessica Woodroffe (Gender and Development Network) for the Post 2015 Women's Coalition**

<sup>1</sup> World Bank, 2012, *Gender Equality and Development*, World Development Report 2012, Ch. 5

<sup>2</sup> Budlender D. 2010. *What do Time Use Studies tell us about Unpaid Care Work?* in Budlender D. (ed), *Time Use Studies and Unpaid Care Work*. London: Routledge.

<sup>3</sup> See Valodia, I. and R. Devey, 2005, '*Gender, Employment and Time Use: Some Issues in South Africa*'. Paper prepared for the Conference on Unpaid Work, Poverty and the Millennium Development Goals, Bureau for Development Policy, UNDP and Levy Economics Institute, October 2005. At [http://www.levyinstitute.org/undp-levy-conference/papers/paper\\_Valodia.pdf](http://www.levyinstitute.org/undp-levy-conference/papers/paper_Valodia.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Sepúlveda Carmona, M., 2013, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights: unpaid care work, poverty and women's human rights*, UN Doc A/68/293

<sup>5</sup> DAWN *Care and Sustainable Economy in the Post 2015 Agenda* Concept Note at <http://www.dawnnet.org/feminist-resources/content/care-and-sustainable-economy-post-2015-agenda>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/wash/index\\_womenandgirls.html](http://www.unicef.org/wash/index_womenandgirls.html) and Sepúlveda Carmona, M., 2013, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights: unpaid care work, poverty and women's human rights*, UN Doc A/68/293

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.younglives.org.uk/> and <http://www.chronicpoverty.org/publications/details/women-exiting-chronic-poverty>.

<sup>8</sup> Sepúlveda Carmona, M., 2013, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights: unpaid care work, poverty and women's human rights*, UN Doc A/68/293

<sup>9</sup> World Bank, 2012, *Gender Equality and Development*, World Development Report 2012, Ch. 5

<sup>10</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), 2010, *Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Employment: differentiated pathways out of poverty*, 31

<sup>11</sup> The calculations vary from 15-63% depending on country and method. See for example: Budlender, D., 2010, 'What Do Time Use Studies Tell us about Unpaid Care Work? Evidence from Seven Countries', in *Time Use Studies and Unpaid Care Work*, ed. Budlender, UNRISD; Hoenig S. A. and Page, A.R.E, 2012, *Counting on Care Work in Australia*, Report prepared by AECgroup Limited for economic Security4women, Australia; Charmes, J. and J. Unni (2004), "Measurement of work", in G. Standing and M. Chen eds., *Reconceptualising Work*, International Labour Organization. Taken from GADN (2014) *Unpaid care* Briefing 6: <http://www.gadnetwork.org/storage/gadn-responses-and-briefings/GADN%20Unpaid%20Care%20briefing.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Elson, D. (1995) (ed.) *Male Bias in the Development Process* (2nd ed.), Manchester: Manchester

<sup>13</sup> See e.g. Elson, D., 2006, *Budgeting for Women's Rights: Monitoring Government Budgets for Compliance with CEDAW*, UNIFEM

<sup>14</sup> Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995. At <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>. See in particular Strategic Objectives A4, F6 and H3.

<sup>15</sup> Sepúlveda Carmona, M., 2013, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights: unpaid care work, poverty and women's human rights*, UN Doc A/68/293



- <sup>16</sup> UNGA 2010: para. 72, (d) (e). Quoted in UN Women In collaboration with ECLAC Expert Group (Oct 2013) *Meeting Structural and policy constraints in achieving the MDGs for women and girls* at <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Food/Expertpaper-UNWOMENMexicoevent.pdf>
- <sup>17</sup> Sepúlveda Carmona, M., 2013, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights: unpaid care work, poverty and women's human rights*, UN Doc A/68/293
- <sup>18</sup> Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals (2014) *Final Outcome Document* At <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>
- <sup>19</sup> Elson D., 2010 *Gender and the Global Economic Crisis in Developing Countries: A Framework for Analysis*. Gender and Development, 18.2
- <sup>20</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Labour Statisticians in 2013 adopted a resolution to expand the definition of work to include unpaid care work or 'own-use production work'. See [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/normativeinstrument/wcms\\_230304.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/normativeinstrument/wcms_230304.pdf)
- <sup>21</sup> DAWN Care and Sustainable Economy in the Post 2015 Agenda Concept Note at <http://www.dawnnet.org/feminist-resources/content/care-and-sustainable-economy-post-2015-agenda>
- <sup>22</sup> See ODI, 2014, *Measuring women's empowerment and social transformation in the post-2015 agenda* at [http://www.oecd.org/dev/poverty/ODI%20-%20post-2015%20social%20norms\\_final.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dev/poverty/ODI%20-%20post-2015%20social%20norms_final.pdf) and [http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/169A34EDDF90D43DC12573240034E24E/\\$file/Budlender-paper.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/169A34EDDF90D43DC12573240034E24E/$file/Budlender-paper.pdf)
- <sup>23</sup> See for example Balakrishnan, R. & Elson, D., *Economic Policy and Human Rights: Holding Governments to Account*, Zed Books (2011) and *The Integration of Gender and Human Rights into the Post-2015 Development Framework* (2013) [http://womens-studies.rutgers.edu/images/stories/Faculty\\_Image/The\\_Integration\\_of\\_Gender\\_and\\_Human\\_Rights\\_into\\_the\\_Post-2015\\_Development\\_Framework.pdf](http://womens-studies.rutgers.edu/images/stories/Faculty_Image/The_Integration_of_Gender_and_Human_Rights_into_the_Post-2015_Development_Framework.pdf) and Antonopoulos (2008) „The Unpaid Care Work – Paid Work Connection [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---integration/documents/publication/wcms\\_119142.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---integration/documents/publication/wcms_119142.pdf)
- <sup>24</sup> Akintola, A., 2008, 'Towards equal sharing of care responsibilities: Learning from Africa', paper prepared for UNDAW Expert Meeting
- <sup>25</sup> IMF, 2013, *Women Work and the Economy: Macroeconomic Gains from Gender Equity*
- <sup>26</sup> Bourque and Kega-Wa-Kega, 2011, *Assessing the impact of fuel-efficient stoves in Minembwe*, Oxfam, Germany
- <sup>27</sup> Valodia, I. and R. Devey, 2005, 'Gender, Employment and Time Use: Some Issues in South Africa'. Paper prepared for the Conference on Unpaid Work, Poverty and the Millennium Development Goals, Bureau for Development Policy, UNDP and Levy Economics Institute, October 2005. At [http://www.levyinstitute.org/undp-levy-conference/papers/paper\\_Valodia.pdf](http://www.levyinstitute.org/undp-levy-conference/papers/paper_Valodia.pdf)
- <sup>28</sup> FAO and Asian Development Bank, 2013, *Gender Equality and Food Security: Women's Empowerment as a Tool Against Hunger*, 56-57
- <sup>29</sup> Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals (2014) *Final Outcome Document* At <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>