



## “Addressing unpaid care in the post-2015 agenda”

### *Synthesis of the Wikigender online discussion*

20-24 October 2014

Unpaid care work is central to our well-being and quality of life, yet remains the invisible and undervalued hand behind the economy. The responsibility for unpaid care work typically falls on women: on average they spend between two to ten times more on unpaid care work than men. The unequal share of unpaid care work curbs women’s economic empowerment as they have less opportunities to undertake further education; engage in skills building and networking; and have the same quality of jobs as men. In light of the 20<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the Beijing Platform for Action in 2015, policymakers, practitioners and civil society are seizing the momentum to discuss unpaid care work issues both at the national and international levels. At the OECD Development Centre, the policy brief “Unpaid Care work: The Missing Link Explaining Gender Gaps in Labour Outcomes” also focuses on the issue by examining the unequal distribution of caring responsibilities between men and women and its implications for gender gaps in labour outcomes.

To contribute to this global dialogue, Wikigender organised an online discussion on “Addressing unpaid care in the post-2015 agenda” from 20 to 24 October 2014. Four discussants led the discussion: **Alison Aggarwal** (Australian Human Rights Commission); **Deepta Chopra** and **Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed** (Institute of Development Studies, IDS); and **Valeria Esquivel** (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, UNRISD).

**Questions included:** what are the challenges for addressing unpaid care work and how can we better collect data on unpaid care work to strengthen advocacy efforts?; what actions should governments, donors, UN bodies and civil society take to reduce and redistribute unpaid care work?; what are examples of successful initiatives, campaigns or programmes that involve men in unpaid care work and which approaches are the most effective in changing attitudes and practices? 84 comments were shared during the discussion. Four key messages emerged:

- **Unpaid care is a universal issue:** it affects women across the globe, regardless of their levels of education and income or the level of development of their countries.
- **Measuring unpaid care work:** tools and research to measure unpaid care are critical to help implement public policies that improve the lives of women.
- **Recognising unpaid care work at the national policy level:** states have a role to encourage a more equal distribution of unpaid care work at the family level.
- **Strategies to address unpaid care work at the community level** are needed to promote effective change in attitudes towards unpaid care work.

The synthesis report provides a summary analysis of the four key messages outlined above.

### Unpaid care is a universal issue

The universality of unpaid care work was recognised as it is an important area of concern in terms of policy and social norms in both developed and developing countries. It was highlighted that while women carry the burden of unpaid care work, its value is not always recognised. Many participants agreed that it is important to reduce the “drudgery” of

#### What is unpaid care?

Unpaid care work refers to all unpaid services provided within a household for its members, including care of persons, housework and voluntary community work.<sup>1</sup> These activities are considered work, because theoretically one could pay a third person to perform them.

care – i.e. the difficult conditions under which women work as carers, either due to a lack of infrastructure or public services. Participants recognised that unpaid care work reduces women’s well-being and health, as well as their opportunities to engage in paid activities or leisure time, and that the state has an important role to play in this regard.

It was also noted during the discussion that unpaid care work not only includes caring for children. Elderly care was raised as an important issue to consider in a context of an ageing population, especially for the post-2015 agenda. With an increasing demand for elderly care, higher investments in caring responsibilities from governments are required. In Mexico, a recent survey found that over a quarter of women engaged in elderly care had either cut back or withdrawn from work. This puts them in a vulnerable economic situation, disrupts workforce productivity and potentially limits their chances for promotion in the future.

### Measuring unpaid care work

Participants raised the challenge of measuring the value of unpaid care work and shared new initiatives of measuring unpaid care work.

Time use surveys are the standard instrument to measure the time spent by individuals and by the household on paid as well as unpaid activities. Yet the discussion raised the issue of how their design could be improved. Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed and Valeria Esquivel pointed out that time-use surveys need to be context-specific to ensure that the multiple circumstances behind women's unpaid care work are recognised and can be effectively used to inform public policy. Data comparability across countries was also noted as critical: initiatives such as the OECD Family Database, which collects time use surveys for its member countries, is a tool through which users can measure the amplitude of the inequality in unpaid care work inside the household, as well as the differences between countries.

Estimations of the monetary value of unpaid care work highlight its weight in national economies. For example, Alison Aggarwal shared the estimation that the cost of unpaid care work for people with disabilities would cost \$40.9 billion per annum in 2010 in Australia if it was carried out by in-home paid care providers: this would represent 1.32 billion hours per year.

Well-being is another lens through which to value unpaid care work. A few initiatives were shared, such as the “Social Wealth Economic Indicators” (SWEIs), which were developed in 2014 to highlight

the economic and social value of care work, especially in regards to child care and education. This work argues that measures like the GDP should be replaced by SWEIs, which give more attention to the importance of unpaid care work for economic and social progress. “Counting Women’s Work” is another research initiative to measure the value of unpaid care, including domestic work, so that it can be valued in relation to paid work. The project, which is part of the National Transfer Accounts (NTA) project, helps to generate a comprehensive picture of the gendered economy in the market and in the home, by examining interactions between the market and the household. In addition, the project will enable to model different scenarios if current trends of increasing women’s labour force participation continue, while women’s unpaid housework and care responsibilities stay the same or unpaid care work is redistributed to men, the state, or the private sector.

The following two sections show the importance of addressing the 3 R’s of unpaid care work (Recognition; Reduction and Redistribution<sup>1</sup>) both at the national level and at the community level.

### Recognising unpaid care work at the national policy level

Participants identified the state’s major role in transforming gender stereotypes, notably by implementing public policies and promoting recognition and valorisation of unpaid care work.

The state can play an important role in the design and enforcement of fair legislation to support a more equal distribution of responsibilities between men and women. Alison Aggarwal shared that at the national-level, father-friendly leave policies in the UK and Nordic countries have strengthened opportunities and incentives for men to share domestic responsibilities.



The state can also have a significant impact on reducing the “drudgery” of unpaid care work by providing and maintaining infrastructure such as access to clean water and sewer systems. Efficient public services – such as childcare facilities, universal social security or easy access to water – can help to redistribute unpaid care work from the individual to the state, which expands women’s choices. In terms of public policies, another point of action identified is supportive taxation. For example, a tax credit for caretakers within the family allows for the financial empowerment of women who do not have another source of income.

Several participants mentioned that it is important to elevate the status of unpaid care regardless of the gender of the caretaker. This gives more visibility to the work performed by those engaged in providing unpaid care, rather than focusing specifically on care work as a women’s burden. Deeptha Chopra stressed the importance of advocacy and working closely with the state to ensure that unpaid care work becomes visible. In that regard, she shared information on a project by IDS in partnership with ActionAid country offices, through which the political economy conditions under which policy actors recognise or ignore the significance of unpaid care are explored. She also mentioned that unpaid care can be given more visibility on policy agendas in the context of issues such as an ageing population, the HIV/AIDs challenge or the Ebola crisis.

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<sup>1</sup> Elson, Diane. 2008 "The Three R's of Unpaid Work: Recognition, Reduction and Redistribution, *Presented at the Expert Group Meeting on Unpaid Work, Economic Development and Human Well-Being, United Nations Development Programme*

Participants agreed that while the inclusion of unpaid care work as a target under goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a welcome and unprecedented step to recognise the value of unpaid care work, further advocacy is needed to ensure a strong target remains on the agenda. In particular, it was noted that the adaptation and implementation of an unpaid care target and indicator required particular attention. In this respect, participants discussed at length the importance of the redistributive language in the SDGs. In addition, Deepta Chopra emphasised that the current target addresses the reduction of “drudgery” effectively in terms of provision of infrastructure – but that it needs to be undertaken with the needs of women and girls in mind, rather than as contributing primarily to labour market outcomes.

### Strategies to address unpaid care work at the community level

Participants exchanged strategies, policies and measures that work to reduce the burden of unpaid care work for women.

Participants underlined the importance of changing attitudes and norms to recognise and reduce unpaid care work. Some successful initiatives were shared in that regard. For example, the MenCare Global Fatherhood Campaign (MenCare) advocates for equitable sharing of caregiving work between men and women and for non-violent fatherhood practices. Using audio-visual strategies is another way to increase the policy visibility of unpaid care work. For example, Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed shared that the SMERU Research Institute in Indonesia has used participatory photography: women were given pocket cameras so they could capture the household activities they believed were unpaid care work. She also mentioned a six-day photo exhibition called “Images of Caring Men” (Bhinno Rupe Purush) organised at the Dhaka Art Centre, which showed ordinary men from Bangladesh cooking, cleaning and taking care of children. Such initiatives help to increase the recognition of unpaid care work and contribute to changing attitudes at an individual level.



Alison Aggarwal stressed that community education focused on established stereotypes of parenting and caring is central to social and cultural change, and shared a number of initiatives to address this issue: in Australia, unpaid carers organise several events during ‘Carers Week’ to help raise public awareness on this issue.

She also highlighted the importance of challenging social norms in the workplace in order to redistribute unpaid care work more equally between women and men. Changing mind-sets at the organisational level is one strategy; another one is for companies to provide flexible arrangements to support women and men with caring responsibilities. For example, Australia’s major telecommunications provider, Telstra, has introduced the “All Roles Flex” initiative. This measure was aimed at legitimising unpaid care work and increasing the acceptability of flexible work within the organisation. Breaking the perception that senior positions mean no flexibility is critical to successful change in the workplace, for example by illustrating ‘success stories’ of senior role models who engage in flexible work without being penalised in their careers.

## Conclusion

When addressing unpaid care work, there is the central issue of choice (or lack of choice) for women. This online discussion highlighted the need to work at the community level to initiate attitudinal change as well as at national level for systemic change. Committed governments, more comparable data, as well as measuring tools are central in strengthening the unpaid care framework in the post-2015 agenda. More importantly, participants reached a consensus on the pertinence of the 3 R's "Recognition, Reduction and Redistribution"; there was a strong agreement that tackling social norms is an important strategy to achieve the 3 R's.

Click here to access the full thread of comments and key resources shared on unpaid care work:  
[http://wikigender.org/index.php/Online\\_Discussions](http://wikigender.org/index.php/Online_Discussions)



## List of resources shared

### Reports and Studies

#### *Measuring Unpaid Care Work*

Budlender, Debbie (2008), The Statistical Evidence on Care and Non-Care Work across Six Countries [http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/F9FEC4EA774573E7C1257560003A96B2/\\$file/BudlenderREV.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/F9FEC4EA774573E7C1257560003A96B2/$file/BudlenderREV.pdf).

Budlender, Debbie (2010), Time Use Studies and Unpaid Care Work, UNRISD. <http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/search/414BA4D59E6D9AB1C125775B00480FD7?OpenDocument>.

P.Lloyd-Sherlock (2014), "Beyond neglect: long-term care research in low and middle income countries" International Journal of Gerontology 8:66-69.

UNRISD (2012), Gender Patterns and Value of Unpaid Work: Findings from China's First Large-Scale Time Use Survey. <http://www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/document.nsf/%28httpPublications%29/7CE1453DB093FB41C1257A8E004D6A57?OpenDocument>.

#### *Unpaid Care in the Post-2015 Agenda*

Ferrant, Gaëlle (2014), Time use as a transformative indicator for gender equality in the post-2015 agenda. OECD Development Centre. [http://oecd.org/dev/poverty/Time%20use%20\\_final\\_2014.pdf](http://oecd.org/dev/poverty/Time%20use%20_final_2014.pdf).

Gender and Development Network (2014), Unpaid care: A priority for the post-2015 development goals and beyond, <http://www.gadnetwork.org/storage/gadn-responses-and-briefings/GADN%20Unpaid%20Care%20briefing.pdf>.

Institute of Development Studies (2013), IDS In Focus Policy Briefing: Getting Unpaid Care onto Development Agendas, Issue 31. <http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/IFPB31.pdf>.

Women of China (2014), Put the Care Economy in the Post-2015 Development Agenda, <http://www.womenofchina.cn/womenofchina/html1/features/columnists/1410/303-1.htm>.

### General

Folbre, Nancy (2010), Valuing Children: Rethinking the Economics of the Family, Harvard University Press.

Prince M, Brodaty H, Uwakwe R, Acosta D, Ferri CP, Guerra M, et al. (2012), Strain and its correlates among carers of people with dementia in low-income and middle-income countries. A 10/66 Dementia Research Group population-based survey. International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry 27(7):670-682.

Promundo, Journeys of Transformation: Engaging men in Rwanda as allies in women's economic empowerment and partners in caregiving. <http://www.men-care.org/data/Journeys%20of%20Transformation%20%20pg..pdf>.

Swiedel, Joke (1999), Unpaid work and policy making: Towards a broader perspective of work and employment, UN/DESA. <http://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/1999/esa99dp4.pdf>.

The World Bank group Gender and Development, Gender at Work: a companion to the World Development report on Jobs. [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/07/15/000442464\\_20140715121401/Rendered/PDF/892730WP0Box3800report0Feb.02002014.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/07/15/000442464_20140715121401/Rendered/PDF/892730WP0Box3800report0Feb.02002014.pdf).

United Nations (2013), Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. <http://communitylawcentre.org.za/un-special-rapporteur/Report%20of%20UN%20SP%20on%20poverty%20on%20unpaid%20caregivers.pdf>.

UNV (2011), State of the World's Volunteerism Report: Universal Values for Global Well-being. [http://www.unv.org/fileadmin/docdb/pdf/2011/SWVR/English/SWVR2011\\_full.pdf](http://www.unv.org/fileadmin/docdb/pdf/2011/SWVR/English/SWVR2011_full.pdf).

## Campaigns

Carers Week 2014 Australia, <http://careroke.com.au/>.

Carers Week United Kingdom, <http://www.carersweek.org/>.

HelpAge International, A global movement for the rights of older people. <http://www.helpage.org/>.

Manuela Ramos, <http://www.manuela.org.pe/el-uso-del-tiempo-de-las-mujeres/>.

Men Care: A global Fatherhood Campaign, <http://www.men-care.org/>.

The Caring Economy Campaign, <http://caringeconomy.org>.

Unpaid care work in Indonesia photos. <http://interactions.eldis.org/slideshow/unpaid-care-work-indonesia>.

## Tools

Australian Human Rights Commission (2013), Investing in care: recognising and valuing those who care. [https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/UnpaidCaringVolume1\\_2013.pdf](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/UnpaidCaringVolume1_2013.pdf).

Counting Women's Work, <http://www.countingwomenswork.org/>.

ELDIS Interactions, Making unpaid care work more visible in public policy. <http://interactions.eldis.org/unpaid-care-work>.

Kidder, T. and Pionetti, C. (2013), Participatory Methodology: Rapid Care Analysis, <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/participatory-methodology-rapid-care-analysis-302415>.

Social Wealth Economic Indicators: Measuring Social and Economic Success, [www.socialwealth.us](http://www.socialwealth.us)