

# Gender and Unpaid Care Work



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This guidance sheet is one of a series written to support SDC staff in ensuring that gender is taken into account transversally in different thematic domains - in this case, unpaid care work. The unequal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men, within society and state more generally is fundamentally a human rights issue. This guidance sheet outlines key issues regarding unpaid care work, and how these can be integrated into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of cooperation strategies and project interventions.

## Key issues:

### A. Recognising unpaid care work:

Worldwide, unpaid care is unequally distributed between women and men, restricting women's time and mobility and resulting in the feminisation of unpaid care work. While unpaid (non-care) work such as subsistence agriculture is included in GDP accounts, unpaid care work, in contrast, has remained largely invisible in economic calculations, statistics, policy and political discourse.

### B. Reducing unpaid care work:

Through technological or infrastructural improvements, time invested in unpaid care work, including the drudgery of heavy and repetitive tasks may be reduced. Thus freeing up time for other endeavours, whether paid work, community engagement or leisure.

### C. Redistributing unpaid care work:

The unequal distribution of unpaid care work is rooted in persistent gender roles and stereotypes about 'women's work' and 'men's work'. Achieving shared responsibility for unpaid care work requires awareness raising and changes in gender roles for both women and men.

## Key questions

- How can projects and programmes proactively respond to unequal distribution of unpaid care work between women and men, and between the family, the government and the private sector?
- How would the envisaged project implementation modalities affect/be affected by women's unpaid care responsibilities?
- How can the project ensure that it "does no harm" with its time investment requirements from women and men?

# 1 What is unpaid care work?

Unpaid care work refers to work that contributes to meeting the basic physical and emotional needs of individuals, families and communities. It includes caring for children, elderly people and people who have fallen ill, as well as housework, preparing and cooking food, collecting firewood, fuel and water. Unpaid care work is central to human and social wellbeing. Care work is often unpaid, being performed without any explicit monetary reward for one's own family or community. These reproductive work is the basis for all other so called productive work. Though, care work can also be paid, being carried out by nurses, domestic workers, nannies, or carer in homes for older people.

Generally, **care is perceived as being women's work, whether it is paid or unpaid**: Worldwide, about 75% of the world's unpaid care work is carried out by women<sup>1</sup>. The unequal distribution of unpaid care work in a society is rooted in persistent gender roles and stereotypes, resulting a **distinction between "male breadwinners" and "female caregivers"**. It restricts women's time and mobility as well as their equal participation in so-

cial, economic and political life. Gendered norms shape also national policies on how care work is recognised and valued, and how the responsibilities between families, governments and the private sector are distributed. For example, the availability of quality and affordable child care services is critical for women's access to paid work and the balance between work and family life as well as their access to social security and pension.

While unpaid (non-care) work such as subsistence agriculture is included in calculations of gross domestic product (GDP) and systems of national accounts, **unpaid care work, in contrast, has remained largely invisible** in economic calculations, statistics, policy and political discourse.

Furthermore, paid care work is mostly carried out by women. With increased female labour force participation and household incomes, the demand for paid care work has augmented. There are more than 67 million domestic workers worldwide and 80% out of all domestic workers are women<sup>2</sup>. This growing demand along **the global care chain** attracts women to fill the gap by

migrating from rural to urban areas within countries and migrating from lower income to higher income countries. In addition, the demographic development in high income countries leads to growing care needs in elderly care. Hence, this economic sector can become a critical source of income and lead to the economic empowerment of women. However, income and compensation is often low, because paid care work is generally socially and economically not highly valued. In addition, care and domestic work usually takes place in isolated and private households and puts in particular women in vulnerable position. It can also increase the odds of human trafficking, and women find themselves often excluded of access to legal, health and psychosocial services.

Therefore, addressing the unequal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men within society and government more generally is not only fundamentally a human rights issue, but has also transformative potential tackling deeply rooted gender roles and stereotypes.

# 2 Unpaid care work in international rights framework

The centrality of unpaid care to sustainable development and gender equality is **recognised in the Agenda 2030** (2015) (as target 5.4): "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."

Unpaid care work is also addressed in the **Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Wom-**

**en (CEDAW)**, for example in point 8 of the General Recommendation 23 (1997): "Relieving women of some of the burdens of domestic work would allow them to engage more fully in the life of their communities. Women's economic dependence on men often prevents them from making important political decisions and from participating actively in public life. Their double burden of work and their economic dependence, coupled with the long or inflexible hours of both public and political work, prevent women from being more active."

Furthermore, in the **Convention on the Workers with Family Responsibilities (No.156, Art. 3)** (1983) unpaid care work is also stated. It sets out an integrated policy framework "...to enable persons with family responsibilities who are engaged or wish to engage in employment to exercise their right to do so without being subject to discrimination and, to the extent possible, without conflict between their employment and family responsibilities."

1 <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/chapter4/chapter4.htm>

2 [http://www.ilo.org/global/docs/WCMS\\_209773/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/docs/WCMS_209773/lang--en/index.htm)

### 3 Why analyse and address unpaid care work in development projects and programme interventions?

The feminisation of caring responsibilities and the disproportionate time women spend on unpaid care work, as compared to men, **contributes to and reinforces gender-based inequalities**. Unpaid care work is a critical factor understanding structural constraints to women's empowerment. It has direct implications on women's ability to invest time in other economic, social and political activities, from paid employment to education, community engagement and leisure. It hampers women's ability to build up assets, agency, skills and voice and, thus, women's empowerment.

Many international development projects and programme rely heavily on **unpaid care work to support community activities**. Do development projects and programmes that engage community volunteers or labour contributions thereby add to women's workload and/or cause a redistribution of unpaid care work to other

women or girls in the household? Do they exclude the particularly poor and weak – widows and handicapped – who cannot contribute labour and are thus sometimes excluded from benefits?

Furthermore, an overwhelming unpaid care work burden may make it impossible for women to participate in opportunities that may be available, for example, in the context of projects supporting women's economic empowerment. Even if the incentives to participate in such activities may be high, a lack of "free" time to invest may pose a constraint to fully benefitting from such kinds of initiatives. An analysis can highlight the **time constraints affecting women's participation** and the unpaid care work **contribution that underpins the economy and market systems**.

The point is not that these kinds of activities should be stopped, as they may indeed

be valued as opportunities to gather, build solidarity, share and learn. However, an unpaid care work analysis can highlight these **"hidden costs" of development initiatives** and point to steps to take to respond in a way that contributes to women's empowerment.

Challenging relationships and assumptions is not only about how development projects and programme are designed, and the assumption that communities (and women in particular) will have time to invest in them. It is also about **tackling our own personal biases and reflecting on roles and distributions** within our own households and communities. Critical self-reflection is important to highlight unspoken and culturally-informed assumptions we may hold about the roles of women and men in care work in different societies.



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# 4 Analysing unpaid care work

There are two useful frameworks in analysing care work:

## 4.1. The care diamond

The “care diamond” illustrated in figure 1 is a useful way to analyse the distribution of care work among different institutions (Razavi, 2007). Even in contexts where families or households play the primary role in providing care, other institutions such as governments, community organisations

and the private sector also play a role in the provision of care.

## 4.2. The Triple R framework

A way to address and incorporate unpaid care work into development projects and programmes is to categorise according along the **Tripled R framework**, as follows. Note that these are not sequential but rather **mutually reinforcing**.



Figure 1: Care diamond



**Recognition** of unpaid care work means that this work is “seen” and acknowledged/valued by women and men, and by communities, governments and private sector actors. It means that it is recognised as “work”, and as something that is of value both socially and economically. It also means recognising unpaid care work as a collective responsibility among women and men, and between citizens and governments and private sector actors. Recognition starts from a very simple accounting of how women and men spend their time (time use surveys) to the inclusion of such data and analysis in national statistics and social security systems at different levels (including development interventions).



**Reduction** of unpaid care work means that the time spent on unpaid care work is reduced for individual women and for society more generally. It also means reducing the drudgery of heavy and repetitive work, which can have serious physical and mental health consequences. This frees up time and energy for other activities. For example, unpaid care work would be reduced by having a clean water source closer to the house or through labour saving technologies such as washing machines, fuel efficient stoves, use of renewable energy for household tasks, electric grinding mill etc. The reduction of unpaid care work is often addressed through technological improvements and infrastructural development.



**Redistribution** of unpaid care work means that the responsibilities for unpaid care work are more fairly shared between women and men within families, among different people in communities and between families, government and private institutions. The key to redistribution is changing gender roles and stereotypes. One example of this is where male household members take on a greater share of housework and childcare, or where governments take on the responsibility to provide accessible, affordable and quality public services in the care sector, such as childcare, health services, elderly care homes, and primary education.

Addressing unpaid care work through the Triple R framework has important implications not only for women’s economic empowerment, but also for women’s **political engagement and women’s representation in leadership and decision-making**, whether in households or cooperatives, companies, local councils or community based organisations: Recognizing, reducing and redistributing the burden of unpaid care work contributes to an understanding of shared responsibility

between women and men, and the family, the state and the private sector and enables women’s representation through individual and collective action. Representation is not only about political representation but also economic empowerment such as having the opportunity to participate in remunerative activities outside of the house and gaining a self-controlled income. Indeed, economic empowerment may be considered a confidence builder and an enabler of political voice.

Understanding better the everyday realities of how women use their time will help to ensure that **development interventions are more appropriately designed**. Particularly for programmes that target women’s economic or political empowerment, unpaid care work will likely be a significant constraint that needs to be taken into account.

## How to carry out an analysis of unpaid care work in development projects and programmes?

A possible way to carry out an analysis of unpaid care work is by involving in a **two-step process**<sup>3</sup> – the first is collecting information from women and men participants on how they use their time. The method for this is a **time diary**, which includes a set of categories, such as work included in GDP calculations, unpaid care work, and other. The second method used is **participatory reflection-action discussion groups**, using the REFLECT method<sup>4</sup>. So rather than merely producing data of interest for researchers and policy-makers, the combined method emphasises a process by which the women and men participants themselves reflect on their own situation and take action individually and collectively. An analysis of the type, amount and distribution of unpaid care work **generates knowledge, evidence and awareness about the everyday realities of women and men's livelihoods and wellbeing**.

Data collected can be used for advocacy and for identifying concrete actions based on the analysis of the key time-consuming tasks. These are best **defined in dialogue** with the participants; they may suggest particular problems or solutions that projects and programmes could either support directly, or help seek other support – such as from the local government.



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## 5 Addressing unpaid care work in development interventions

### 5.1. Integrating unpaid care work in the project cycle management

Reflection on unpaid care work can be integrated at different points in the project cycle management. It is **particularly useful in an identification or inception phase**, to understand how a project or programme that might demand women's time investment would affect women's existing time

use situation. For example, interventions that require or imply a labour investment (i.e. road construction), significant time invested in dialogue and discussion (i.e. local governance, natural resource management), time invested in training (agriculture, skills development) or marketing products

will affect and be affected by the unpaid care work distribution.

An unpaid care work analysis is a useful **diagnostic tool** and can be complemented by more sector-specific analyses. Likewise, sector specific analysis – such as analysis of a

<sup>3</sup> For more on this method, please refer to the Unpaid Care Work: Practical Guidance on Analysis and Intervention (HELVETAS 2017) and the detailed guidance provided in the Action Aid and Oxfam unpaid care analysis listed in the references

<sup>4</sup> REFLECT is an approach to adult learning and social change that builds on the work of Paolo Freire and participatory methodologies. See : <http://www.participatorymethods.org/resource/pr-literacy-and-empowerment-reflect-method>

particular value chain or public service could be adapted to integrate an unpaid care analysis. Such an integrated/mainstreamed approach is important because unpaid care

work, otherwise often invisible, underpins economic activities and compensates for a lack of public (or commercial) services in the care sector. Such analysis may also be

useful in pinpointing possible constraints to women's participation in project activities, such as lack of time and limited mobility due to unpaid care commitments.

## 5.2. Integrating unpaid care work in different sectors (transversal integration)

There are many potential opportunities to shape projects and programmes in different sectors so that unpaid care work is rec-

ognised, drudgery is reduced and that the allocation of caring responsibilities is more equitably distributed. The options range

from "technical fixes" to reduce drudgery to addressing the power dynamics behind issues of redistribution and representation.

### Theme

### Potential unpaid care work considerations and entry points

#### Market systems development



- Projects should consider the "invisible" unpaid care work that underpins particular market systems and integrate this into market systems analysis, as well as the extension of unpaid care work into the sector in different forms.
- Based on their analysis, projects should have to clarify how they could best tackle unpaid care work in the market systems that are being addressed (see the Triple Rs for different options) and which permanent actors have the incentive and capacities to get involved.
- Projects could analyse care as a service sector (with both paid and unpaid elements) and consider how the market for care services could be facilitated to function more effectively, contribute to creating dignified jobs and relieve some unpaid care work responsibilities hindering women from participating in market activities.
- The relationship between unpaid care work and women's economic empowerment should be carefully analysed to understand the current business models/cultures/practices and especially analysing the structural barriers that hinder women being part of the market system or engage in/take a productive role.

#### Vocational education and skills development



- While providing child care services during trainings is relatively straightforward, the challenge is finding a more sustainable solution that would allow women to take up employment opportunities following trainings.
- Developing possible strategies, for self-employment as well as for becoming an employee, could be included in VSD curricula.
- Projects could analyse care as a service sector (with both paid and unpaid elements) and consider offering professional skills development, i.e. on child or elder care.
- Projects should consider women's engagement in unpaid care work and develop innovative strategies to impart skills to women in the community.
- Important principles in this sector include equal wages for equal work, safe workplace or training place, provision of temporary incentives for women to encourage their participation, provision of child care centre or child minder, waive training cost for women, mobilising local ambassadors/role models to encourage women in to the field.
- Projects should maintain a roster of skilled women labour and share it widely.

#### Migration



- Projects should analyse the care chain in a migration context – how does labour migration affect the unpaid care work distribution among those who remain behind?
- Projects should analyse how other work (i.e. non care work) is redistributed, particularly in cases whether migration is predominantly practiced by one gender. For example, who takes over tasks that are often performed by only women or men, such as (depending on the context) ploughing, irrigation water management, etc

#### Agriculture and food security



- Projects could consider investing in and supporting labour saving and post-harvest technologies, i.e. food processing technology for grinding grains, or storage systems; introducing technologies such as bio-gas stove with the use of cattle dung, also useful to fertilise fields.
- Projects could consider supporting rural advisory services / agricultural extension workers to adapt their methodologies to take unpaid care work into consideration. This is particularly relevant when male outmigration means that women take over more agricultural responsibilities, in addition to their unpaid domestic and agricultural work. One important topic is child care facilities, as women often take their children with them to the field.

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## Natural resource management



- Different tenure arrangements may affect women's unpaid care duties, for example time required to collect fuelwood for cooking or water for drinking and washing. Projects may be able to contribute to reducing unpaid care work by improving access to natural resources under community or indigenous tenure arrangements. Technical solutions, such as improved stoves, could be considered to reduce the amount of time women spend collecting fuelwood.
- Projects should analyse how community labour contributions, i.e. in forest management, affect women's time use and unpaid care work distribution. Likewise, participation in user groups for managing resources.
- Consider environmental care work – the conservation of water, forests and such. It is important to value and acknowledge women's role in such care and conservation activities.

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## Rural infrastructure



- Projects should analyse how community labour contributions, i.e. in road construction, affect women's time use and unpaid care work distribution. Likewise, participation in user groups for managing infrastructure.
- Projects could consider investing in/supporting infrastructure development specifically aiming to reduce unpaid care work, such as water points, irrigation systems, roads, or electrification and clean energy.

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## Local governance and decentralisation



- In contexts of decentralisation, local governments may be responsible for providing key services and infrastructure that affect unpaid care work, ranging from child care to drinking water. In partnership with local governments, projects could analyse and target improvements in services that are considered particularly important for reducing or redistributing unpaid care work, such as child care services.
- Local governments may also be responsible for regulating services that are provided by other actors, whether private sector or NGOs. Through their regulatory power governments can influence the delivery and the financing schemes of services that affect unpaid care responsibilities or the care service sector itself (including both paid and unpaid elements).
- Unpaid care work is connected to civil status and work force participation. For example, entitlement to public services or social benefits and protection request an official civil status, and are often linked to formal employment. Access to these benefits may be hampered by not being registered as a resident in a particular locality, or having registered one's marriage or the birth of children. Civil registry is thus a potential entry point.
- Projects should consider how the time requirements of participatory processes such as strategic development planning processes relate to unpaid care responsibilities.
- Advocate for social security provisions and also support government to implement it with public funding.
- Projects could support public spending for infrastructure development that reduces women's workload, like community child care centres.

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## Climate change



- Projects should consider the "invisible" unpaid care work that underpins many community-based resource management and adaptation systems.
- Possible impact of mitigation actions on UCW should be carefully analysed such as afforestation measures or biofuel plantations, on time spent to access fuel wood, fodder or water.
- Consider the use of the observation and resource management capacities of men and women, as part of their unpaid care responsibilities (such as being the repository of climate risk management knowledge base or conservation of biodiversity) in designing meaningful adaptation measures.
- Relationship between women's unpaid care tasks and their ability to participate in decision making platforms (which are often at the national or global level in the climate change domain) should be taken into account while designing processes.
- Analysis of evolution of resource access and control due to climate change and its impact on the load and time of unpaid care work should be part of every step of the PCM cycle.

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## Emergency response & disaster risk reduction



- Women's unpaid care work burden often increases dramatically after natural disasters.
- Responses should take this into account, to ensure that unpaid care work (and its time demands, including access to water and fuel) are recognised in all phases of planning, implementation, response and recovery.
- Furthermore, women who are completely overburdened by trying to manage the domestic tasks and caring for families in new and difficult post-emergency situations may not have the time or capacities to participate effectively in consultations around response and recovery interventions.

### 5.3. Integrating unpaid care work at different levels

Unpaid care work analysis aims to contribute to changes at different levels.

**Individual, household and community level:** First is the level of individual women and men, who are empowered through the process of reflection and discussion to analyse their own particular time use and propose responses to more equitably distribute the shares of unpaid care work. The process aims to both strengthen agency and change

structures within a household and community.

**State and private sector levels:** One of the aims of unpaid care work analysis is to frame care as a societal issue and a “public good” – a situation of unequal and inequitable care work distribution is a challenge for society as a whole, rather than only as a burden for individual women. The unpaid care analysis process thus aims to contribute to changes

also at a more systemic level beyond particular households and communities. States and private sector actors have responsibilities to ensure social protection policies that address women’s disproportionate burden of unpaid care work and the private sector can act responsibly and guarantee decent work conditions as service providers in the care sector.

#### An initiative resulting from a time use and unpaid care work analysis: Samala Community Child Care Centre in Belpata VDC, Dailekh, Nepal

*“I keep my daughter in the “Community Child Care Centre” and go to the fields to harvest paddy without feeling stressed. I am happy that my child is getting good care, and is being taken care of in a safe environment.” – Tulasi BK (24 yrs), mother of a 2 year old.*

Samala Community Child Care Centre in ward 5 of Belpata Village Development Committee has become a model initiative in Dailekh district. The Child Care Centre is operated by the women of Samala Community Awareness Centre, a group of Dalit women. Presently accommodating 15 children of ages ranging from 1 to 5 years the Child Care Centre is a part of the pilot action research by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation that aims to plan and implement different programmatic interventions to recognise, reduce and redistribute women’s engagement in unpaid care work and to improve women’s representation at local level institutions. Although the Child Care Centre is in the early days of its existence, the short term advantages that the mothers of the children have expressed shows that it has become easier for them to go to do paid work (mostly crushing stones, working in others’ farms) and to work in their own farms (subsistence agriculture) without worrying about their children.

**Advocacy and policy dialogue:** Longer term and more systemic responses to unpaid care work, imply changes also at the policy level. A report on unpaid work within OECD countries noted that public policies have a significant impact on the gendered distribution of unpaid work.

Advocacy and policy dialogue agendas will differ between contexts, but important elements may include social security and pension policies, tax systems, public childcare and other care responsibilities and parent leave arrangements. Equally important are awareness-raising campaigns,

aiming to both recognise unpaid care work and also challenge prevailing social norms about “women’s work” and “men’s work”. A good example is MenCare<sup>5</sup> a global fatherhood campaign promoting equitable involvement of men in childcare and domestic work.



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5 www.men-care.org

## 6 Monitoring and Evaluation

- The unpaid care work analysis method is also a very **useful monitoring tool** – it can be used to establish a baseline for time allocation and for monitoring changes over time with regular time diary collection.
- Unpaid care work analysis that takes place only over a short **period of time**, will likely only get to the point of recognition. This is still useful information for the programme design.
- Time use analysis could be done with specific **target groups**, i.e. children and young adults. As gender roles and gender stereotypes are socially ascribed and anchored in tradition, younger generations may be more open to changes. Unpaid care work analysis could therefore be conducted with youth groups and teenagers for awareness raising and self-reflection.
- In the frame of monitoring results achieved towards the objectives of the Federal Dispatch 2017-2020, SDC defined an **Aggregated Reference Indicator** on time saving: Number of hours per day saved on domestic chores due to labour-saving interventions.

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