This quick guide\(^1\) discusses the concept of unpaid care work as an obstacle to women’s economic empowerment. It suggests how women’s unpaid care work can be recognised, reduced and redistributed;\(^2\) and provides Sida with some practical entry points for supporting this.

**UNPAID CARE WORK AND OTHER UNPAID WORK**

It is commonly understood that households and families (men and women), markets, the state and the non-profit sector all share the responsibility for the prevalence of unpaid care work and other forms of unpaid work. However, in low income countries in particular, girls and women are responsible for a disproportionate amount of unpaid or underpaid care work. Women therefore have less time to engage in paid work, to network, to participate in activities for societal change, or even to rest. This “women’s time poverty” undermines well-being, generates insecurities, fosters financial dependence and limits options for decent work, even to the point of restricting women to low-status, part-time jobs in the informal sector. Girls often look after their younger siblings, ageing or sick relatives, or are sent to collect fuel and water instead of going to school. Mothers, sometimes the sole breadwinners in their families, frequently take jobs in the informal sector where they can bring their infants with them. Often these work environments are unsafe and may have ill-effects on the children’s health and overall development. The burdens of care work on women and girls have increased greatly with HIV/AIDS; globally, up to 90 per cent of home care due to illness is provided by women and girls.\(^3\)

The unpaid care work carried out by women and girls often goes unnoticed and unrecognised in the calculations of a country’s economy. It is not included in labour force surveys or in GDP figures. As a result the realities of women’s and girls’ work burdens are excluded from the data informing policy making.\(^4\)

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1. This quick guide is based on the lectures of Professor Diane Elson and ongoing work in UNDP/BDP, Bridge, OEDC, and the EU. The core actions are developed in UNDP/BDP’s Brief on Gender Equality and Unpaid Care Work, by Anna Fahd and Mark Blackden. Special thanks to Catharina Schmitz, IPM, IDS and Marzia Fontana who provided valuable input to this guide.
2. The model, Recognize, Reduce and Redistribute, relating to unpaid care work, was conceived by Professor Diane Elson.
4. UNRISD Research and Policy Brief 9, Why Care Matters for Social Development.
Some care workers – for example, community health workers, domestic workers, and migrant workers performing household work or care work (of children or the elderly and sick) – are remunerated. However, although they receive wages, they often work in the informal sector, are often underpaid and have no legal or social protection as workers. In many countries paid domestic work is performed primarily by women. One explanation is the long history of care work being unpaid, performed by women within their own households, assumed to involve few skills and therefore considered of low value. The result is low wages and low status once it becomes paid work.

The benefits of reducing women’s unpaid care work

Care in itself is a benefit to society as it contributes to the well-being of both the caregiver and the receiver and fosters close relations between them. Moreover, all care work, paid or unpaid, adds value to the economy and should therefore be included in economic calculations. Even though the gendered division of labour in care work limits such benefits primarily to women, women’s unpaid care work constitutes an important contribution to the economy. It is estimated that if women’s unpaid work were assigned a monetary value it would constitute between 10% and 39% of GDP. Other studies show that reducing the household time burdens on women could increase agricultural labour productivity by 15% and capital productivity by as much as 44% in some countries.

The need to address the issue of unpaid care is becoming increasingly urgent for other reasons. As a result of girls’ increased school enrolment and labour market participation, there is a decreasing willingness and availability of women and girls to do unpaid care work. Simultaneously, the need for care in the world is escalating, not least with the 33.2 million people worldwide who are estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, leaving large numbers of children orphaned and vulnerable.

The 3R strategy addressing unpaid care work: Recognition, Reduction and Redistribution

Professor Diane Elson has suggested a model with three interconnected dimensions that seeks to address and incorporate unpaid care work into the development agenda: Recognition, Reduction, and Redistribution (the 3 Rs). The 3 Rs framework provides a way of finding practical entry points for addressing the unevenly shared unpaid care and unpaid work burden. The aim is to strengthen women as economic actors while acknowledging that an adequate level of care and other social reproduction activities are essential for the well-being of society and the sustainability of human development.

Recognition

Recognition draws attention to the role of care in society and involves making the contribution of carers visible. Recognition involves gathering quantitative and qualitative information on the scope of unpaid work and the distribution of its burden among individuals, communities and other

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6 OECD 2008 “Gender and Sustainable Development: Maximising the Economic, Social and Environmental Role of women” pp.18-19.
7 E. Esplen, Gender and Care, Overview report, Bridge development – gender, January 2009.
b) promote the right to equal remuneration for jobs of equal value for women and men;  
c) ensure transparency in recruitment, promotion and dismissal of women and combat and punish sexual harassment in the workplace;  
d) guarantee women the freedom to choose their occupation, and protect them from exploitation by their employers violating and exploiting their fundamental rights as recognised and guaranteed by conventions, laws and regulations and the Rights in force;  
e) create conditions to promote and support the occupations and economic activities of women, in particular, within the informal sector;  
f) establish a system of protection and social insurance for women working in the informal sector and sensitise them to adhere to it;  
g) introduce a minimum age for work and prohibit the employment of children below that age, and prohibit, combat and punish all forms of exploitation of children, especially the girl-child;  
h) take all appropriate measures to recognise the economic value of the work of women in the home;  
i) guarantee adequate and paid pre- and post-natal maternity leave in both the private and public sectors;  
j) ensure the equal application of taxation laws to women and men;  
k) recognise and enforce the right of married women to the same allowances and entitlements as those granted to married men for their spouses and children;  
l) recognise that both parents bear the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of children and that this is a social function for which the State and the private sector have secondary responsibility;  
m) take effective legislative and administrative measures to prevent the exploitation and abuse of women in advertising and pornography.


Article 18: Protection of the Family  
3. No child shall be deprived of maintenance by reference to the parent's marital status.

Article 20: Parental Responsibilities  
Art. 20. 2. States Parties to the present Charter shall in accordance with their means and national conditions take all appropriate measures;  
(a) to assist parents and other persons responsible for the child and in case of need provide material assistance to the child;  
(b) to assist parents and other persons responsible for the child in the performance of child-rearing and ensure the development of institutions responsible for providing care of children; and/or) to ensure that the children of working parents are provided with care services and facilities.

The Maputo Declaration on Malaria, HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and other Related Infectious Diseases.  
Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development. Relevant articles:  
Part 2 – constitutional and legal rights, articles 4 to 11  
Part 3 – Governance, articles 12-13  
Part 4 – Education and Training, article 14  
Part 5 – Productive Resources and Employment, articles 15 to 19  
Part 7 – Health and HIV/AIDS, articles 24-27  
Part 8 – Peace Building and Conflict Resolution, article 28 (mentions UN Resolution 1325)  
Part 9 – Media Information and Communication, articles 29 to 31

African Youth Charter, 2006  
Preamble:  
BEARING IN MIND the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights relating to the Rights of Women in Africa (2003) and the progress achieved in eliminating gender discrimination, but ever cognisant of the obstacles that still prevent girls and women from fully participating in African society.

Article 23: Girls and Young Women  
States Parties acknowledge the need to eliminate discrimination against girls and young women according to obligations stipulated in various international, regional and national human rights conventions and instruments designed to protect and promote women’s rights. In this regard, they shall:  
[a) Introduce legislative measures that eliminate all forms of discrimination against girls and young women and ensure their human rights and fundamental freedoms;  

Institutions. This should inform and be used by policy makers, the donor community and civil society organisations in designing projects and programmes. Recognition therefore provides a basis for monitoring and measuring the effects of planned governmental policies, donor support and civil society initiatives that strive to end the prevalence of women as unpaid caregivers and unpaid workers. Recognition also involves making public the results of previous initiatives to tackle problems such as discrimination and other barriers to women’s entry into wage employment. The media’s role in this regard is clearly very important.

Sida can support the recognition of unpaid care and unpaid work by:  
• Supporting national statistics bureaus in developing statistics that measure changes in unpaid care work over time, such as time-use surveys (TUS) disaggregated by sex, age and socio-economic characteristics. Such surveys can constitute the starting point for assigning monetary value to unpaid care work and is a good basis for dialogue on the issue of unpaid care. Sida has supported such surveys in Armenia. Other relevant statistics or indicators which can be used to describe the problem and monitor changes are:  
- The number of girls dropping out of school because of burdens in the household;  
- Food and water provision for all household members (especially important when care of the sick is involved);  
- Access to key economic and social services such as care provision for children, the elderly and the sick, and health facilities.  
• Advocating for inclusion of indicators on reduction of unpaid care work such as time-use surveys in PRS indicators. Changes in time use can be used as an impact indicator of a number of interventions such as infrastructure investments in water and energy, efforts to bring about attitude change, and expansion of health care services.  
• Supporting efforts to calculate or estimate the value of the total unpaid care work relative to conventional GDP as a basis of dialogue on care work.  
• Evaluating the potential benefits of investments to reduce unpaid care work by carrying out pilot investments and performing cost-benefit analysis of such investments. Such analysis can provide more in-depth knowledge and incentives for future, larger-scale investments as well as a basis for dialogue. Examples include: cost-benefit analysis of child care provision or provision of meals in schools, investments that make time-consuming chores more effective (cereal mills, water pumps) or investments with synergies that have special advantages on time savings or efficiency (community refrigerators – enabling cooking to be done for days in a row and goods to be sold in the market can be stored).  
• Promoting the systematic use of Gender Responsive Budgeting as a method to analyse the unpaid care burden and care needs, identify policy responses and ensure that there is a budget line for implementing such policies.  
• Making unpaid care work and unpaid work generally a dialogue issue in relevant donor groups and bringing in an expert to build the capacity of such groups.  
• Holding the partner government accountable for international commitments made and for better enforcement of international conventions and agreements relevant to unpaid work and unpaid care work.
Sida can advocate for ratification of conventions and assist in identifying contradictory national legislation.

- Supporting or commissioning analysis at country level of how care provision and people involved in care work are affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the food, fuel, economic and financial crises, and changes in government-provided services.

- Ensuring that any new labour legislation, labour market or social security programmes and labour force surveys include unpaid care work and domestic workers.

**Redistribution**

Once the nature and consequences of unpaid work are understood, it is important to take measures to reduce and to redistribute it.

The purpose of reducing unpaid work, including unpaid care work (and also of redistributing it – see below) is to free time for women and girls to engage in formal jobs and/or social and political activities. To this end it is crucial to track changes in time use and to make sure that freed-up time is not simply consumed by other kinds of unpaid work or care work. An example from rural China shows that when electricity was introduced to a village, women worked at home at night and longer hours in the fields, rather than reducing their time poverty.

*Sida can contribute to the reduction of women’s unpaid care work and unpaid work by:*

- Contributing to investments in time and labour-saving infrastructure, technologies and/or practices that reduce time-consuming unpaid tasks. Long-term infrastructure investments could be made in mills, wells, piped water, and alternative fuels such as biogas, solar, wind energy. Short-term solutions may include fuel-saving stoves.

- Supporting analysis of the kinds of infrastructure investments that would contribute most effectively to reducing unpaid care work and other unpaid work. Multiplier effects, such as creating jobs for women and men (long-term investments like road-building), or cross-sector synergies where time, manpower or effort spent on more than one chore is reduced (electricity in houses can reduce fuel collection and cooking times). Other examples are school food programmes.

- Supporting country-level research on care-related obstacles to women’s entry into paid labour. Tax laws, working hours, working options and minimum wage legislation may have negative effects (but not always) on women’s access to the labour market. For example, external care arrangements may cost more than a woman would earn if she were formally employed, making paid labour a less likely option.

- Through dialogue, highlighting the consequences of cutbacks in essential government services and infrastructure investments, which are an important means of relieving households of unpaid care burdens, creating employment and raising labour productivity. Especially cutbacks caused by natural disasters, armed conflict, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the economic crisis/recession.

**Redistribution**

In parallel with initiatives designed to reduce unpaid care work and other unpaid work it is necessary to establish a framework for a redistribution of responsibilities, time and resources. The aim is to ensure that the burden of care services and unpaid work tasks are shared more equitably between women and men, government, the private sector, communities and households.
Households and families, markets, the state and civil society are all involved in the design, funding and delivery of care. These institutions interact in different ways in different countries, and although it is important to support context-specific solutions and take budgetary constraints into account the state does have an important role to play. The state decides who has access to quality care and who bears the cost of such provision, and although it may not be able to fund care services it can support care solutions through tax alleviation, by regulating care provision and controlling the basic quality of services. Other measures to facilitate redistribution of care work are policies and laws enabling the reconciliation of work and family obligations, supporting parental leave, ending discriminatory legislation and creating programmes that challenge the tradition of women taking primary responsibility for care work and expand women’s opportunities and choices.

Sida can contribute to the redistribution of women’s unpaid care work and unpaid work by:

- Encouraging the adoption of economic and labour market policies that uphold basic ILO principles on rights to reconciliation of family and work and the human right to decent work: flexible working arrangements, provision of parental leave, provision of affordable child care, social security, pension credits, tax allowances and care services for the elderly.
- Supporting improved access to health care services and promoting the reduction of transportation and user fees. Improving the quality of care, changing the opening hours of health centres (to meet the needs of families) and raising the skills level of public care workers also give families more scope to make use of public care services rather than relying on women and girls to undertake unpaid care work.
- Drawing attention to interesting care arrangements carried out by NGOs, women’s self help groups, labour market associations, communities and others, and supporting research into how these initiatives could be scaled up.
- Supporting analysis of possible disincentives to a more equal sharing of child care responsibilities in laws, regulations and social benefits, for example the fact that parental tax benefits are often paid to the father as the assumed head of household. Such studies could also identify remedies and explore tax and other incentives for a more equal sharing of child care.
- Contributing to a change in the gender norms that allocate the responsibility for care to women and girls, through dialogue and through supporting the work of civil society organisations, such as women’s organisations or men’s groups challenging these norms.
- Supporting male role models and initiatives that enable men to take on more care work, by providing funds or giving such change agents a platform where they can meet with government representatives, donors, the media and others. Examples of such initiatives are “father schools” supported by Sida in Ukraine and Belarus where men who were about to become fathers were given the opportunity and skills to become active and responsible parents.
Women carry firewood, Ribaue, Mocambique.
Photographer: Gunilla Åkesson

SOURCES & FURTHER READING


Emily Esplen, Bridge paper "Gender and Care", UNRISD, January 2009. Found on: http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/CEP_Care_OR.pdf


Anna Fälth and Mark Blackden, UNDP/BDP Brief on Gender Equality and Unpaid Care Work


Various papers on unpaid care on UNRISD’s website: http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BB128/(httpProgrammeAreas-ForResearchHome)/BAC527EAC4F1F9C8025718B003C2B65?OpenDocument