Gender and Economic Policy Discussion Forum

'Placing Women's Unpaid Work in Development Policy'

FORUM XVII | 10 AUGUST 2015 BRIEFING NOTE 17

HIGHLIGHTS / KEY POINTS

- Unpaid work can be defined as inclusive of activities both within and outside the production boundary
- Unpaid care work forms an important part of a woman's life because it occupies a large amount of their time, thereby restricting participation in civil, economic, political and social activities
- Childcare, which is a part of unpaid care work, needs to be addressed as it engages with overlapping human rights of women, girls and children
- Addressing women's unpaid work requires increasing women's control over labour, sexuality, mobility and resources

The Gender and Economic Policy (GEP) Discussion Forum on 'Placing Women's Unpaid Work in Development Policy' held on 10th August 2015 discussed the disproportionate unpaid work burden that women face and the need to recognize it as 'work'; both in measurement and policymaking. It examines the relation of unpaid work to childcare & livelihoods and what can be done to engage with unpaid work in a better manner. The speakers at the forum were Dr. Deepta Chopra (Institute of Development Studies, Sussex- IDS), Sudeshna Sengupta (Mobile Crèches), Dr. Neetha N. (Centre for Women's Development Studies-CWDS) and Sejal Dand (ANANDI). The discussion was chaired and moderated by Dr. Devaki Jain (Founder and former director, ISST).

Introduction

Dr. Devaki Jain stressed that we need to make a change in the language we use to tackle the issue of unpaid work as vocabulary itself can be a source of oppression. Many a times, scholars pick up vocabulary from Eurocentric intellectuals/spaces and use it in developing countries which distorts our facts and analysis. The term 'unpaid work' suggests that there is a need to monetize it or include it in the national income. However, she suggested that 'unrecognized work' is a more appropriate description in the Indian context. It is important to make these changes in nomenclature as the issue of unpaid work is different for different countries. For example, wealthy Latin American countries have good support systems for women but this is not the same case with poor countries.

In poor countries, good services are available only if one can pay for them, but the condition of the working classes does not allow them to do so. Vocabulary is important even in the identification of unpaid work as a lot of women have been left out due to the way gainful activities have been defined. Hence, there is a requirement to push the boundary of what is understood as gainful/economic activity.

Dr. Neetha N. defined unpaid work as inclusive of activities both within and outside the production boundary. There is an easy flow between unpaid economic work and unpaid social reproduction work, making it difficult to separate the two. In India, women carry out a disproportionate share of all unpaid work, both in rural and urban areas because of the social norms governing division of roles and responsibilities. However, it is important to make a distinction between the types of unpaid work done in rural or urban settings as both are very different. This unpaid work is invisible and unaccounted for in our national statistics.

Unpaid Care Work

Dr. Chopra emphasized how women carry out majority of care tasks and this is not paid care work (like paid health workers/nurses), making care an important subset of the larger category of unpaid work. Care has widespread, long-term and positive impact on wellbeing and development; it is essential for markets to function. Care is done out of love but is distinct from leisure or consumption and should not be reduced to something that women do naturally and without effort, negating the time and energy that goes into doing care. Unpaid care work forms an important part of a woman's life because it occupies a large amount of their time, thereby restricting participation in civil, economic, political and social activities. The skewed distribution of care work done by women simultaneously with paid work results in lack of leisure time which reduces women and girls' well-being. It also results in drudgery which has adverse health outcomes.

Unpaid care work also affects women's economic well-being as women are forced to take up jobs in the informal sector which allow them to balance their work and their care responsibilities – but these jobs are irregular, low paid and precarious. Secondly, unpaid care makes economic empowerment through paid work individualised i.e. paid work can benefit one woman but might put the burden on other females in the family, especially younger girls and older women, who are called upon to provide care. Thirdly, when women engage in paid work, the reduction of care can lead to adverse outcomes for care recipients.

A reinforcing dynamic which further leads to a decrease in women's economic well-being is the discrimination women face in the labour market (like low wages, irregular and insecure work, unsafe jobs). This leads to women being largely concentrated in sectors like agriculture (in rural areas) and in services like education or domestic work (in urban areas). All these sectors offer flexibility and allow women to take care of their paid and unpaid care responsibilities simultaneously. These are forced choices that women are making when they enter the labour market. Research also shows that women are more likely to work at home or close to home in preference to jobs which require travel costs and time, even when more secure or better paid as undertaking paid work close to home allows women to take care of their care responsibilities.

In addition, a correlation has been noted between women's stages of life and their entry into the labour force i.e. an increase in women's household responsibilities, following marriage or childbearing, leads to either withdrawal from the labour market, finding more flexible, part- time jobs or entering into self-employment that offers more flexible timings. This is seen in the following table which looks at labour force participation amongst women of two different age groups in respect to their marital status[1]:

Table 1: Labour Force Participation of Women

Marital Status	15-24 years			25-34 years		
	1999-00	2011-12	Diff	1999-00	2011-12	Diff
Never Married[2]	25.5	17.5	-8	54.2	56.3	2.1
Currently married[3]	34.0	23.7	-10.3	42.5	33.0	-9.5
Widow	59.7	44.2	-15.5	71.4	77.4	6
Divorced/Separated	60.6	59.5	-1.1	71.4	66.6	-4.8
Total	29.9	20.0	-9.9	43.7	34.9	-8.8

Source: NSS Employment and Unemployment Survey, Unit level data - 68th Round

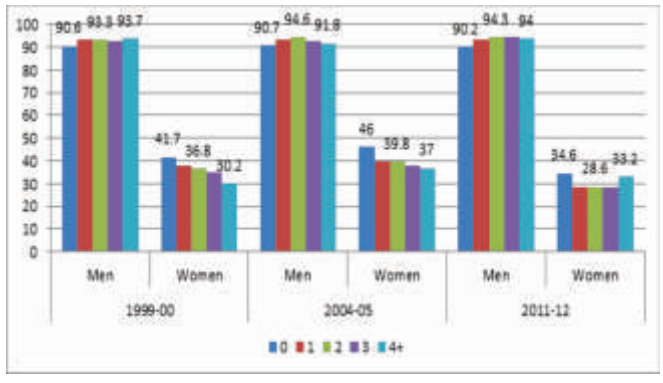
For the category of 15-24 years, the decline in participation has been higher and a decline is uniform amongst all sub-categories (marital statuses). In the same age group, there is a decline in participation rate amongst both never married and currently married. The generally accepted argument for this group is that this is the age when women go for education hence there is some amount of decline. For the age group of 25-34 years, there is a sharp decline in labour force participation rates amongst currently married as compared to the never married category in that age group. In the same category, never married show an increase in labour force participation. Interestingly, in the currently married subcategory, there is a decline in labour force participation in both age groups.

Childcare

Ms. Sudeshna Sengupta spoke specifically about childcare amongst the various other responsibilities that fall under the 'care' umbrella. Childcare can be defined as the "presence or consistent availability of an informed caregiver who is responsive to needs in a predictable manner[4]". There is a relationship which is very unique in care work as here, the worker and the work cannot be disassociated; caring binds the caregiver and the care receiver together. Childcare is located within the domain of social reproduction and takes care of the entire regeneration of past, present and future workers (elderly, present workers and children) so that they can contribute to the production process.

The graph below shows the labour force participation rates of men and women with children below three years of age in the household[5]. Even though we cannot relate individual children to men and women (as we do not necessarily know their relationship) but some data on number of children in a household is available through NSSO. From the graph, one can deduce that when there are children of less than three years in the household, women's participation rate in the labour force does decline. On the other hand, it is interesting to look at men as their participation rate goes up when there are children under three years of age in the household. This might be because of the demand that families put on men to take up additional work when there are children, in order to take care of the households' financial needs. Men are expected to earn and women to care. Hence, it is imperative to talk about childcare facilities as there is a definite relationship between labour force participation of women and presence of young children in a household.

Table 2: Labour Force Participation Rates of Men & Women with children below three years of age



Source: NSS Employment and Unemployment Survey, Unit level data – Various rounds (0, 1, 2...refer to the number of children in the household)

Childcare engages with overlapping human rights of women, girls and children and hence becomes a question of social justice and can be located in a larger framework of rights. Secondly, a focus on the holistic development of children under the age of six is non-negotiable as studies prove that before the age of six, 100% language development and 90% of brain

development takes place[6]. Neglect during this critical period can have irreversible consequences and in the absence of an adult care giver a child's development can suffer drastically. This might also affect the individual's potential to fully participate in productive work in later years; making it essential to consider childcare as an important economic agenda as well.

Unpaid Work & Statistics

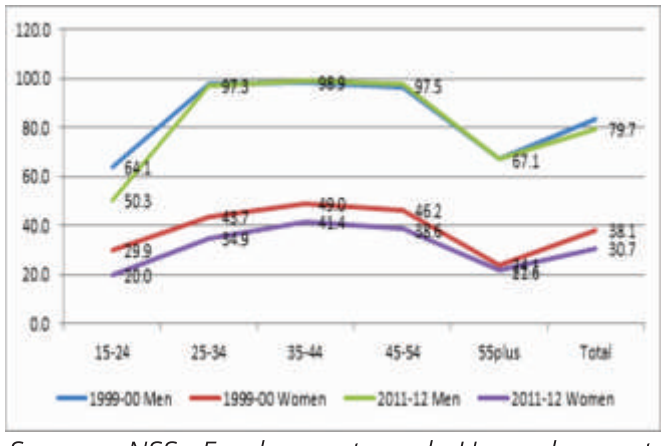
Addressing the issue of language, Dr. Neetha N. remarked that in a capitalist system (where all work is valued in monetary terms), even if we call unpaid work as unrecognized work, the paid part of it will be an important aspect as something which is not paid is not recognised as labour/work. With increased monetization, we have seen an increase in unpaid economic work which is now progressively being included in the ambit of productive work. When it comes to statistics on unpaid social reproduction (care) work, not much is available other than a Time Use Survey of 1998. On the other hand, a lot of data is available for unpaid economic work but a large section of women are still invisible in this segment of work.

In India, the largest collection of data on work that is available is through the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO). Dr. Neetha emphasises that NSSO collects data on three categories of unpaid work: First, those activities which are related to agriculture, kitchen garden, work in household poultry, etc. including collection of agricultural products for household consumption. Second, activities related to processing of primary products produced by households for household consumption. Third, other activities for own consumption resulting in economic benefits to households (which includes collecting fuel, water, maintenance of household premise, etc.)

Activities in category one fall within the economic boundary if a person spends sufficient time doing these activities i.e. if one spends more than 30 days in this activity, he/she is counted as a worker according to the NSSO's definition of a worker. Category two highlights the most important issue with our data system as in our country, a large number of women (and men) do processing work but this is not counted as productive work in our national statistics. According to the international definition of work, if one is doing processing of agricultural products (which are produced by that individual), then it is counted as work. But, when the product is acquired/bought and is then processed, it is not counted as work according to the international definition. On the other hand, in India, neither of these two scenarios is included in the definition of productive work. Even though NSSO collects data for the third category of own consumption, it is not counted as an economic activity (both in India and internationally) Therefore, we need to engage with the data producers to try and push outwards the boundaries of what is called 'production'.

The following table compares the labour force participation rates of men and women of different age groups in two different time periods. The graph shows that the participation rate amongst women is highest for the 35-44 age group. Amongst women, there is a generalized decline in labour force participation however, the highest decline is for the age group 25-34 and this can be attributed to the fact that care burden is highest for this age group.

Table 3: Labour Force Participation of Men and Women of different age groups



Source: NSS Employment and Unemployment Survey, Unit level data – Various rounds

When we put an economic cost to this decrease in workforce participation, the GDP per capita loss has been estimated at around 27%. In addition, it is estimated that 865 million women worldwide have the potential to contribute more fully to their national economies and out of these, 812 million live in the emerging and developing nations[7]. A lot of work has also been done on imputing a value to unpaid care work. But scholars still question if unpaid work (especially care work) which is outside the market sphere ought to be valued in terms of the market wage.

Unpaid Work and Livelihoods

Sejal Dand recollected her experience from Devgadh Baria where 20 years ago, she noticed a phenomenon where very young boys marry much older women; a 10 year old boy marrying an 18 year old woman with the idea to bring in labour into the household. Today, the practice of bringing in women's labour to support agriculture spans across regions, with men from regions which have adverse sex ratios bringing in brides from poorer tribal regions with better sex ratios. Women's unpaid work is directly linked to bodily integrity in cases where young women from vulnerable communities are married, sold and trafficked to do domestic work in urban areas and sex work in labour camps. According to Ms. Dand, addressing women's unpaid work requires increasing women's control over labour, sexuality, mobility and resources.

The continuum of women's paid-unpaid work has a much deeper basis in gender discrimination and stems from gender gaps in control and ownership of resources like land, property and livelihood assets. However, when women farmers come together, one common resounding desire is of recognizing/valuing women's work. Once we recognize women's work, we can find out what else is required to support their livelihood according to the way they envisage it and not according to how market imagines it. Unfortunately, the whole livelihood sector (including state programs) focuses on production outputs and does not address the continuum between women's paid and unpaid work. For instance, in agriculture, there is stress on estimating the per acre increase in yield but no estimation is done of the amount of labour which goes into it. Even the sustainable farming techniques promoted under the Livelihood Mission doesn't count the cost of increased labour/drudgery for women who adopt these practices.

Ms. Dand suggested that there is need to look at the whole livelihood basket: what women and men do and what do they individually bring into the household. In this livelihood basket, it is important to consider the role of public services and entitlements that are needed to reduce women's time poverty and drudgery. In this entire gamut of reimagining the newer form of livelihood options, we need to deliberate about redistributing work between the household, the state and the public. When we talk about the investments made by the state, our imagination about the minimum services that are required to reduce drudgery does not match to what is. For example, the Rajiv Gandhi Water Mission recognizes that we need water for many livelihood purposes including agriculture and that this should be accounted for, but the minimum norm has not changed and is still 40 litres per capita per day (LPCD)[8]. Efforts are being made to engage with the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) which recognises the multidimensionality of poverty and focuses on building institutions for the poor (women) as a primary strategy.

We need a new paradigm to think about women's worth or the intrinsic value of domestic work. In insurance claims (death claims), there is evidence of giving a monetary value to women's domestic roles and work but this value has been really low. For instance, in the Lata Wadhwa case[9], the Supreme Court had set the worth of a homemaker at an annual income of Rs. 36,000 (Rs. 3,000 per month). Similarly, in the Kaptan Singh case, the Supreme Court assessed the worth of another homemaker as Rs. 10,000, making a distinction between a woman who does unpaid work in a higher income family vs. a lower income family[10]. Valuing and monetization of women's domestic work as homemakers is required to ensure that there is a fair compensation of her time, skills and labour. Ms. Dand emphasized that it is necessary to reclaim the dignity of work and establish social justice.

Unpaid Work and Indian Social Policy

In India, care is being provided by four sets of actors who together form the 'care diamond' i.e. the state, market, community/NGOs and family. However, the family takes the most responsibility. Neetha and Palriwala talk about how care rests on the following two assumptions[11]. Firstly, the assumption of gendered familialism where care rests on the gendered network of families and neighbourhood and social security is provided by this informal network. Secondly, it is assumed that women are dependent family members and that there is always a woman family member who is available for care work, thus shifting the burden towards women in the family or within the neighbourhood. The market responds to unpaid care in two ways. First, through domestic workers who are child care providers (they are paid low wages, terms of work are hazy and many

are migrants to the city or from vulnerable groups). Secondly, through private crèches which are high in cost and mainly urban based solutions (with no regulation on norms of quality). The question that arises is how this increasing privatization of care providers affects other providers and the whole economy that revolves around care.

If we look at how India has responded to the question of childcare, in 1931 the Royal Commission of Labour in India recommended crèches for factories which employed at least 250 women. Later, it empowered the provinces to provide crèches even if the women workforce is less than 250[12]. In the post-independence period, nine labour laws have entitled women workers with crèches. The Mines Act (1952) elaborates on the standard and quality of crèches: it talks about structures, ventilation, provision of staff, medical arrangement, diet of children, etc. However, the conception of crèches in these labour laws does not focus on the needs of the children and has led to the setting up of institutions which focus on custodial care rather than holistic development of the child[13]. Similarly, MGNREGA shows intent of providing childcare (crèches) but it lacks in implementation and monitoring. Even though the program collects a lot of data, no information on crèches is available (such as the number of crèches opened, expenditure on crèches, etc.)[14].

Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) is the biggest flagship program of the government which caters to children under the age of six. In the year 2012, the restructured ICDS document spoke about converting 5% of anganwadi centers into anganwadi centers cum crèches. However, since 2012, not one crèche has been rolled out. Out of these 5%, 83% (almost 70,000) are to be located in urban and metropolitan areas and 17% crèches (about 10,000) will be located in the villages where 60% of our population resides. This undermines what is categorized as work, reiterates the notion that women in villages 'do not work' and assumes the existence of an informal network in the villages which is expected to take care of childcare requirements. The Rajiv Gandhi crèche scheme also needs to be supplemented and at present covers just five lakh children in a country which has 16 crore children. Similarly, there are 60 lakh ASHA and anganwadi workers in the country but they do not receive fair/minimum wages as they are not considered as workers and are seen as 'volunteers'. No training is provided to these workers because of the preconceived notion that caring 'comes naturally to women'[15]. Maternity entitlements do not exist for all the working women in India except for a 4% who are in the organized/ formal sector inspite of the Maternity Benefit Act and universal maternity benefits under the National Food Security Act. Child care is also seen as a woman's responsibility as no notion of paternal leaves exists in India[16] .

If we look at the international commitments on childcare (ILO, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), each of them highlight that childcare is the state's responsibility and talk about enabling a family but they do not mention childcare as a woman worker's entitlement. However, Sustainable Development Goals have provided us with a window of opportunity as its section 5.4 talks about state's investment in provision and redistribution within the family. In addition, the maturity and strong voice that women rights movement has acquired along with the coming together of child rights and women rights groups in the early 1990's (especially on the issue of childcare) gives us hope and a way forward[17].

Key Recommendations

Accounting for unpaid care work in the broader conception of economic growth as it has various positive effects. First, it has the potential to optimise women's economic participation, by enabling them to work without deepening their time poverty, or worrying about the amount and quality of care their families are receiving. Second, it enables the sharing of the gains of women's economic empowerment across all females in the family, so that younger girls and older women are not left to carry the burden and be disempowered as a result. Third, it allows the gains of women's economic empowerment to be sustained across generations, by ensuring that the quality of childcare improves rather than deteriorates as a result of women's paid work[18].

Re-imagining womenís economic empowerment: which is not simply about labour force participation but also about the choice to work or not in the first place, a choice of a sector or the type of job, choice of location of work, working hours and the conditions of paid work[19]. When we look at paid work, some scholars highlight how

women are concentrated in self-employment and a large number of these self-employed women are unpaid family helpers[20]. Self-employment is not only a result of social restriction on women but also due to the restrictions posed by care burden which limits them to the work available in the household[21]. There is a need to move from a 'double burden (where women have to do both paid and unpaid work) to a 'double boon' (presence of decent paid work that empowers women while providing more support for their unpaid care responsibilities) and this requires a more holistic conception of social policy which is gender sensitive rather than gender/care blind[22].

Address gender gaps in resources: as women's access, control and ownership of resources have a direct bearing on their utilisation of the resources and incomes accrued therein[23].

Greater investment in public services and infrastructure: for water, roads and energy to reduce drudgery. Investments and support for care services for children, elderly, infirm and persons with disability which are gendered in nature.

'Universalize maternity entitlements and childcare as a public good for public good[24]': but the costs of universalizing childcare also need to be calculated.

Keeping the overlapping rights of women and children in mind while designing a program as childcare is just not the entitlement of a woman; it is entitlement of a child, a worker and a family[25].

Need to talk about paid work along with unpaid work: as strict division between paid and unpaid work is not possible. Social policies are addressing paid care work but ignoring unpaid care work. Dr. Neetha pointed out that out of the 30% women who are workers, 15% are unpaid economic workers making 85% of women outside any paid form of economic work.

Conclusion

In her summing up, Dr. Devaki Jain remarked that there is a need to do a characterization of female labour in India and map how many women work in the different occupations available (self-employed, home based work, etc.). There is also a need for a discussion on all these descriptive categories of work in a developing country like India. She remarked that the UN Women conferences have had 'care' as their theme twice but there is a need to debate on issues like employment, labour and rights. There is also a need to study the surge of domestic workers in the cities of India, as the sector might have grown in a different way if we had more resources allocated for well managed publicly funded childcare. The link between environment and unpaid work also needs to be established: what happens to women's burden due to the attack on resources like water, fuel and social infrastructure? According to Dr. Jain, asking for unpaid work to be included in the GDP might not be the best approach because the bigger question is of giving women rights. In addition, bringing this unpaid work economy into national accounts might not be helpful as giving a market rate to this work will not reduce the burden of survival for women and the gender stereotyping linked to it.

Endnotes

[1] Neetha P at GEP XVII, 10th August 2015

[2] Meena Swaminathan "Early Years Education: Policy and Practice in Early Education & Care" (2006)

[3] Neetha P at GEP XVII, 10th August 2015

[4] http://www.talkingpage.org/artic012.html

[5] IMF Staff Discussion Note "Women, Work, and the Economy: Macroeconomic Gains From Gender Equity" (September 2013)

[6] http://rural.nic.in/sites/downloads/monitoring/Study%20of%20ARWSP.pdf

[7] http://indiankanoon.org/doc/508534/

[8] http://www.academia.edu/11679119/Unpaid_Work_Un-recognized_Household_Work_and_Women_in_India

[9] Neetha N. and Rajni Palriwala "The Political and Social Economy of Care", UNRISD

[10] Meenakshi Gupta "Labour Welfare and Social Security in Unorganised Sector" (2007)

[11] Sudeshna Sengupta at GEP XVII, 10th August 2015

[12] IDS's review of all social protection and early childhood development policies of low and middle income countries

[13] Sudeshna Sengupta at GEP XVII, 10th August 2015

[14] Sejal Dand at GEP XVII, 10th August 2015

[15] Sudeshna Sengupta at GEP XVII, 10th August 2015

[16] Deepta Chopra at GEP XVII, 10th August 2015

[17] Deepta Chopra at GEP XVII, 10th August 2015

[18] http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—asia/—ro-bangkok/—sro-new_delhi/documents/publication/wcms_146129.pdf

[19] Neetha P. at GEP XVII, 10th August 2015

[20] Deepta Chopra at GEP XVII, 10th August 2015

[21] Sejal Dand at GEP XVII, 10th August 2015

[22] This phrase was coined during the National Workshop on "Women's Unpaid Work", organised by UN Women in April 2015

[23] Sudeshna Sengupta at GEP XVII, 10th August 2015

Speakers at the Forum

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Sudeshna Sengupta, Mobile Creches

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Devaki Jain - Founder and former Director, ISST

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