

Unpaid Care Work and Its Impact on Women

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SUMMARY

Women and girls, in general and those living in rural areas tend to spend a disproportionate share of their time in unpaid care work (UCW). This reduces the amount of time available for attending school and studying at home. It also takes away women's time to participate in other economic activities. Last but not least, it compromises women's quality life by robbing their leisure time to rest and by making them to receive health services less frequently than their male counterparts. It calls for policy and programmatic interventions that redistributes and reduces UCW.

This policy brief draws on the findings and recommendations of the study conducted by Professional Association for Development Ethiopia (PADet), Rift Valley Children and Women Development Organization (RCWDO) and ActionAid Ethiopia (AAE) which formed consortium to implement a project entitled "Amplify Efforts for Equal Opportunity and to End Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)". The study aimed studying the magnitude and impact of Unpaid Care Work (UCW) on the lives of women and girls in the case of Ankober and Seba Boru woredas of Amhara and Orimiya regions respectively. EU CSF III backstopped the project with its financial and technical support.

CONTEXT

Women and girls tend to spend a disproportionate share of their time in UCW. Water & firewood collection, meal preparation, cleaning the house, washing/mending clothes, caring for children, caring for elderly people, and farming are the frequent and most difficult household responsibilities which women and girls perform on daily basis.

Although there is no up-to-date national time use data available, the one compiled in 2013 by CSA shows:

- 34% of rural women had to travel between 1-2 hours and 10% above 2 hours to collect firewood for cooking.
- Similarly, most rural household obtain water from wells, or outside public/private taps and the traveling to the nearest water source take substantial time. About 37% travel between one and 2.5 hours, and about 15% travel even longer¹.

Women and girls shouldering the lion share of UCW mainly counts for their lack of education and prevailing social constructs that stereotype roles by gender. For instance, the participants of the FGD in Ankober and Seba Boru identified milking and churning, meal preparation, grinding and pounding, washing house materials and cooking to be works that cannot be performed by men and boys under normal circumstances.

¹ Central Statistical Agency, 2014. The 2013 Ethiopian Time Use Survey

IMPACT ON WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT

Women taking the disproportionate share in UCW means the amount of the time available for attending school and studying is reduced, their time to participate in income generating activities is taken away and their quality compromised since it robs their leisure time and the time to take care of themselves and look after their health. On the other hand, if given the time, women and girls have the aspiration to engage themselves beyond UCW.

Respondents of the survey conducted in Ankober and Seba Boru Woredas shows that of those women who have had the opportunity to spend less time in UCW (because of support they got from male family members and the provision of alternative energy sources for cooking and availing water in nearby village), 41.5% responded to spend on activities that generate income, 39.3% education/training, 30.7% take rest/sleep and take care of themselves, 26.3% work on farm, 37.9% engage in community activities, 33.3% helping neighbors/friends, and 31.6% on religious activities.

However women do most of the care works in the most difficult ways consuming their prime time and energy denying them of opportunities. The survey data from Ankober and Seba Boru Woredas shows 40.9% of the women and girls to have stopped schooling, 45.9% to have failed to taking care of their hygiene and health due to pressure in care works, and 44.7% to have faced health problems due to care for dependent in the households. At national level, the participation of women and girls in education also shows gender disparity. The percentage of females age 6 and older with no education stands 43% and among which primary school is the highest level of schooling attended or completed.²

The impact of UCW on women's education is double jeopardizing. On the one hand, because women lack education, they are forced to shoulder the disproportionate share in UCW. On the other hand, because women are disproportionately taking the responsibility in UCW, they become denied of accessing school and pursuing their education. This is forcing a significant number of women and girls live in poverty cycle having huge contribution to sustaining household poverty and hence delaying development.

WHAT TO DO TO CHANGE



Designing and implementing policy and programmatic interventions that reduce and redistribute UCW are worth considering. These include the following:

Engage with Communities: One cause for the unjustified distribution of care work among family members is the deep rooted social norms in stereotyping roles by gender. Engaging men and boys is one strategy to changing the norm. The other strategy could be increasing engagement with community gate keepers (community leaders, religious leaders and community social structures like 'idir, iqub, debo & others') to changing attitudes on role definition and enhance the participation of men and boys in care works. This is a strategy that needs to be sustained over long period of time until changes in attitudes start reaping. It is also very important to integrate incentive mechanism within the strategy. It is human behavior to respond to encouragement. Hence, giving recognition (eg. by issuing certificate of appreciation and linking the certification with

² CSA, 2019. Ethiopian Min Demographic and Health Survey

services from government offices like reduction in price of fertilizer or other types of incentives) accelerates the change in behavior and reduce the burden of care work on women. It is also very important to integrate violence prevention works within the community engagement since violence is another compounding factor (in addition to UCW) deterring women from effectively participate in opportunities. These interventions include raising awareness on the prevention rights of women and girls from violence as well as including the banning of violence within the by-laws of community social structures.

Strengthen Social Protection: Increasing women's access to livelihood program and linking same with expanded investments in infrastructures and technologies that eases UCW would have tremendous impact in economically empowering women. Women accessing livelihood support does not guarantee their productivity since women spend great portion of their prime time in UCW leaving them with no-to-little time to taking care of their livelihood activities resulting failure in the livelihood support. Hence, the livelihood support of the social protection has to be redesigned at it mandatorily integrate concurrent investments in easing the access to potable water, providing alternative energy sources and the provision of household appliances that ease household chores. Adopting such an approach in social protection grantees effective result in livelihood programs as well as helps women transit to scaling up their businesses.

Expand Education and Training to Women and Girls:

Increasing the level of commitment in expanding education and training to women and girls would sustainable address the problem. But the attempt to expand education and training to women and girls needs to take into account their concerns and capabilities, calling for the adoption of flexible programs as is in the case of expanding non-formal and adult education programs. These programs are open to welcome innovative approaches to expanding education to the most vulnerable. Hence, development partners needs to liaison with the education sector to designing approaches and methodologies that encourage women and girls to pursue their education. It is also highly important to integrate technologies and innovations into these education and trainings programs as it equips women and girls be competitive and marketable.

Expand Economic Opportunities to Women: Among the economic opportunities worth to expand targeting women is women's access to finance and entrepreneurship skills. Revisiting policy as integrates special measures that eases the access to finance by women is key first step to take. Also expanding the access to short term skill trainings to rural women is another approach to integrate into the training and vocational training program of the government. In this respect as well, development partners could liaison with the sector office of the government in designing and sustaining a sustainable program that ensures the access to skill trainings to rural women.

CONCLUSION

UCW is the responsibilities of women forcing women spend their prime time and energy. This is denying women and girls the opportunity to pursue their education and participating in economic activities. This again forces women and girls to live in poverty ultimately contributing to household poverty and hence delaying development. Hence, policy and programmatic interventions that guarantee the reduction and redistribution of UCW are a must to take to promote inclusive development and realize the equal right of women with men.

