

A Trapeze Act: Women Balancing Paid Work and Unpaid Care Work in Nepal

National report for Women's Economic Empowerment Policy and Programming



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Glossary

<i>thaagal</i>	fodder
<i>Dasain</i>	A major Hindu festival in Nepal which falls in September/October
<i>Tihar</i>	A major Hindu festival in Nepal which usually follows Dashain and falls around October / November
<i>yarsagumba</i>	A medicinal herb

Abbreviations

DAFACOS	Dadeldhura Farmers' Co-operative Society
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EDP	Enterprise Development Programme
ILO	International Labour Organization
KEP	Karnali Employment Programme
KEPTA	Karnali Employment Programme Technical Assistance
MoFALD	Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development
MoLD	Ministry of Local Development
NLSS	Nepal Living Standards Survey
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PWP	public work programme
RCA	Rapid Care Analysis
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VDC	Village Development Committee
WEE	women's economic empowerment

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Introduction

Nepal's economy is primarily governed by subsistence-based agriculture, which forms 33.7 per cent of the total gross domestic product (ILO 2014). The overall labour force participation rate for men in the country is 80.9 per cent, whereas it is 79.4 per cent for women – the latter being the highest rate in South Asia (Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal 2011). Women are predominantly involved in self-employment activities (76.7 per cent), with a higher percentage of women (67.7 per cent) self-employed in agriculture compared to men (53.6 per cent); the total percentage of women involved in wage work is 8.5 per cent, whereas it is 23.7 per cent for men (*ibid.*).

The share of women involved in non-agricultural wage work has increased from 19.9 per cent in 2009 to 44.8 per cent in 2011.¹ The high overall labour force participation rate for women in Nepal is, on the one hand, indicative of the high concentration of women in agriculture, and on the other, it points to the definition of economic activity that was taken into account during the measurement. In the *Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS) 2010/11*, the collection of goods for own consumption, such as collection of fodder/firewood and fetching of water, is included under 'extended economic activity'. This category is counted when calculating the overall labour force participation rate, unlike other countries in South Asia (ILO 2014). The high labour force

participation rate also reflects women's increased interaction with the market, breaking out of traditional labour roles because of factors such as Maoist conflict and male out-migration (Shtrii Shakti and USAID 2010).

Despite high rates of labour force participation, there are distinct gender gaps in wage rates in the informal sector. The average daily wage rate for women is Rs 189, whereas for men it is Rs 286 (Central Bureau of Statistics, Government of Nepal 2011). Moreover, the majority of women who are involved in wage employment are confined to low-skilled and low-paid work in the informal sector (Lokshin and Glinskaya 2009).

There has been very little engagement on the issue of women's unpaid care work in Nepal by communities and the state. One of the earliest attempts to engage with the issue was made in 1979 as part of the *Status of Women in Nepal* report (Acharya and Bennett 1983), which showed that women in rural Nepal spent 10.81 hours daily on unpaid care work, including subsistence farming and animal care (around three hours more than men). A recent effort to study women's unpaid care work in Nepal was attempted by ActionAid in 2013 (Budlender and Moussie 2013), which found that women on average spent 268 minutes per day on housework (which includes cooking, cleaning, washing, shopping) in comparison to 56 minutes per day spent by men.



KEY MESSAGES

Women are primarily responsible for all unpaid care work including household work inside and outside the house.

Childcare is more of a shared responsibility within the family, with higher numbers of husbands and other men in the household participating in childcare.

Men's participation in unpaid care work is determined by a complex interplay of gender norms on the allocation of roles and responsibilities, work-related migration, and the structure of the household.

The acuity of women's care work burdens is exacerbated by the lack of availability of and access to public resources and services, high levels of male migration, the structure of the family, and gender norms on women's work.

Women's 'choice' of, and participation in paid work is largely influenced by the nature of employment opportunities available in the area, their care work burdens and the familial support available for unpaid care work, and gender norms on mobility and sexuality.

The absence of regular and decent employment opportunities forces women to work in flexible, multiple and precarious working conditions leading to insignificant financial gains and increased physical and mental depletion.

Women's double burden has a spillover effect on girl children and older women in their families, leading to a deficit of care and the depletion of the mental and physical wellbeing of these substitute carers.

Availability and accessibility of public resources and services, such as quality roads, electricity, irrigation, transport, water, and fuel, are prerequisites to reducing the drudgery of women's unpaid work.

The focus of WEE programmes should not only be on increasing women's participation in paid work but also on analysing how these economic opportunities can lead to empowering outcomes without adding to women's unpaid work burdens.

WEE programmes should incorporate a care-responsive lens by paying attention to decent working conditions, including: equal pay, provision of toilets and childcare facilities at worksites, the locations of the worksites, and the nature of the employment.

The research

The ‘Balancing paid work and unpaid care work – Nepal’ research study aims to create knowledge about how women’s economic empowerment (WEE) policy and programming can generate a ‘double boon’, i.e. paid work that empowers women and provides more support for their unpaid care work responsibilities, such that the gains of WEE are optimised, shared and sustained across generations. In Nepal, we looked at two WEE programmes: (1) a state programme, the Karnali Employment Programme (KEP); and (2) a non-state programme, Oxfam Nepal’s Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) with the Pavitra Vegetable and Seed Cooperative. The two sites of study for the KEP programme were Chandannath municipality and Depalgaon Village Development Committee (VDC) of Jumla district in the Karnali Zone, which is located in northwestern Nepal. The two sites

for the EDP were Mehelkuna and Maintada VDCs, located in Surkhet district in the Bheri Zone of mid-western Nepal.

The research adopted a mixed-methods approach, with primary data consisting of quantitative and qualitative data. In each site, a survey was conducted with 50 women who were in paid work and who had one or more children under six years old, out of which 30 were programme (both state and non-state) participants and 20 were non-participants. Out of these 50 women, eight (five participants and three non-participants) were purposively selected for household case studies. Interviews were also conducted with key programme staff and community leaders. In addition to these interviews, 17 participatory tools were conducted with men, women, girls and boys in each site.

Women’s economic empowerment (WEE) programmes

Karnali Employment Programme

The Karnali Employment Programme (KEP) was launched by the Government of Nepal in 2006 under the then Ministry of Local Development (MoLD) (now known as the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development – MoFALD), with the slogan of ‘*ek ghar ek rojgar*’ (‘one household, one job’) (Vaidya 2010). The programme aims to provide at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment per fiscal year to households living in extreme poverty and with no other source of income in five districts of Karnali zone. A further objective is to create local public assets that will contribute to enhancing local livelihoods in the longer term. The employment projects mostly include public works programmes (PUWPs) such as for roads, drinking water projects, irrigation canals and micro-hydropower projects, among others. KEP also encourages women’s participation by targeting female-headed households and by making provisions for equal wages. The programme is currently being implemented in all five districts of Karnali zone, namely Dolpa, Humla, Kalikot, Jumla and Mugu, and has also been extended to an additional adjoining district of Bajura. See Ghosh, Singh and Chigateri (2017b) for a more detailed discussion of the programme.

Oxfam: Enterprise Development Programme

Oxfam launched the Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) in Nepal in 2011. As a livelihoods programme, it aims to develop capabilities and markets for small rural enterprises, with a specific focus on women. The programme targets those agricultural sub-sectors that create opportunities for women at various levels, including at the levels of production, access to the market, and leadership and management decisions (Interview with EDP senior staff, Kathmandu, June 2016). Currently, the programme is being implemented through three enterprises in Nepal: The Small Farmer Food Industries rice mill in Nawalparasi, Pavitra Jankalyan Agriculture Cooperative (also known as Pavitra Vegetable and Seed Cooperative) for vegetable and seed production in Surkhet, and the Dadeldhura Farmers’ Co-operative Society (DAFACOS) for selling seeds and vegetables in Dadeldhura. See Ghosh, Singh and Chigateri (2017a) for a more detailed discussion of the programme.

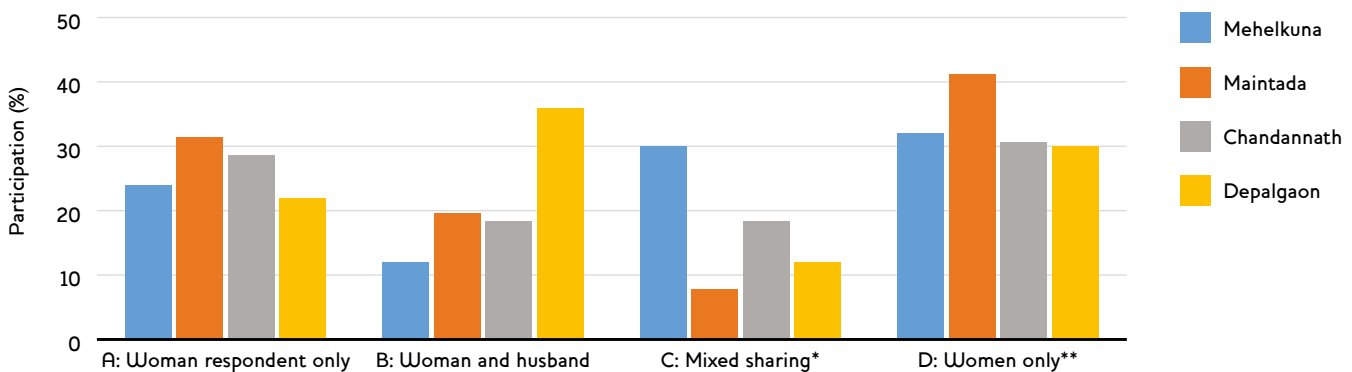
Social organisation of care

Who does what?

The study found that it was largely women who performed unpaid care work. When we disaggregate the components of unpaid care work, we find that both household chores inside the house (such as cooking, cleaning, washing clothes) and household chores outside the house (collection of fuel and water) were predominantly performed by women. As Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate, in over half of households, women carried out household work both inside and outside the house either by themselves or with other women in the household. While women were supported in household work inside the house by male family members (including husbands), very rarely did a man perform these tasks by himself.

Household structure also influenced men's participation, as we see in Depalgaon which shows a high number of husbands participating together with their wives (36 per cent). This is because a large number of women respondents (66 per cent) in Depalgaon were from nuclear households, i.e. the household was composed of the woman, her husband, and children. In the case of water and firewood collection, as Figure 2 depicts, this was performed predominantly by women, with the support of other women in the household (whether girls or other women). This was especially true for the task of fetching firewood, which is normatively exclusive to married women.

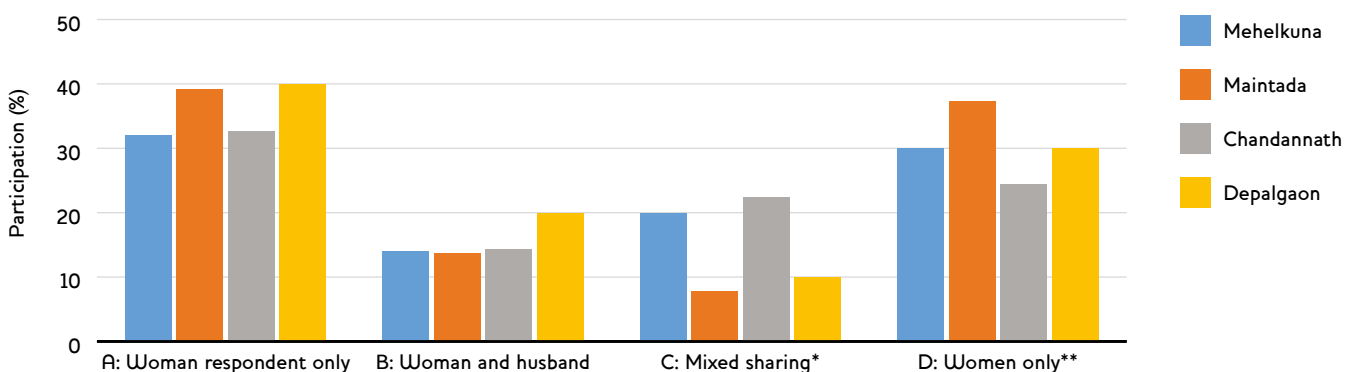
Figure 1: Person(s) responsible for household work inside the house



Notes: * Both female and male household members carry out a specific task, irrespective of age; ** Irrespective of age, i.e. the task could be carried out by a daughter aged six or above, or another (older) woman in the household.

Source: Authors' own, based on the project's quantitative data.

Figure 2: Person(s) responsible for water and fuel collection



Notes: * Both female and male household members carry out a specific task, irrespective of age; ** Irrespective of age, i.e. the task could be carried out by a daughter aged six or above, or another (older) woman in the household.

Source: Authors' own, based on the project's quantitative data.

With regards to childcare, the picture is more variegated; as Figure 3 shows, childcare was more often shared between women and other members of the house, including the husband. In very few households the woman respondent did carry out this task alone. However, conversely, men did not perform childcare all by themselves, invariably relying on the support of female family members.

From our qualitative data and participatory tools, the picture that emerges is that while men did participate in childcare and household work, their contribution to these tasks was usually limited, with men helping only sparingly with unpaid care work (mostly cooking), and usually when women were ill, away, or menstruating.² Jayalal BK from Chandannath (May 2016) explains, 'I look after the children when my wife goes to collect firewood or grass; I also cook when my wife is menstruating as she is not allowed to enter the kitchen.' One of the gendered constraints to sharing care work that men pointed to was that they themselves were preoccupied with paid work as primary earners, because of which they could not spend much time at home. Besides paid work, attending meetings at the ward and Village Development Committee (VDC) levels also restricted their time available to help at home (Care Body Map exercise, men only, Mehelkuna, January 2016).

Girl children were more involved with care work as 'girls are expected to take on the same

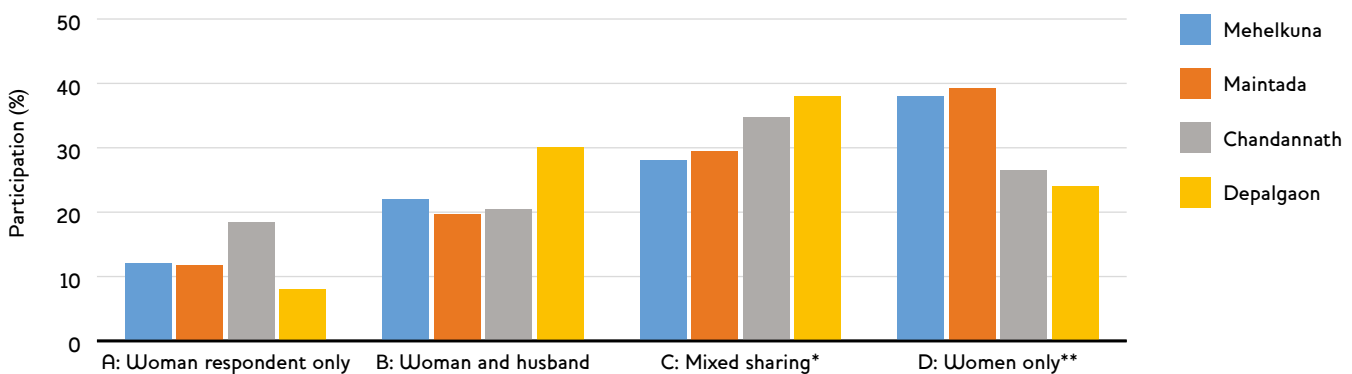
roles when they are married' (Activity Mapping exercise, mixed children, Chandannath, March 2016). The order and age of the children also dictated the nature and amount of work that they did (Care Body Map exercise, girls only, Depalgaon, March 2016). Older girls who were around 10–11 years old performed small household chores such as fetching water and cooking, eventually also helping their mothers with more difficult tasks such as cutting grass for fodder, especially on weekly days off and after school hours (Activity Mapping exercise, mixed children, Depalgaon, March 2016). In Mehelkuna and Maintada, girls began to go to the flour mills from the age of ten on their weekly days off (Sarita Kunwar, Maintada, February 2016; Care Body Map exercise, girls only, Mehelkuna, January 2016).

Boys too performed care work tasks such as fetching water, although they were more involved in household work if there were no elder daughters and/or when their mothers were unwell. For example, Kamla Giri, who is often unwell and whose daughter is married shares,

Both my sons help me. I carry the manure [to throw on the land to fertilise it] and they do it too. They go to school in the afternoon. After returning from school one of the sons helps to carry and the other makes food.

Chandannath, May 2016

Figure 3: Person(s) responsible for childcare



Notes: * Both female and male household members carry out a specific task, irrespective of age; ** Irrespective of age, i.e. the task could be carried out by a daughter aged six or above, or another (older) woman in the household.

Source: Authors' own, based on the project's quantitative data.

Structure of the family

Across the four sites, the social organisation of care and the intensity of the unpaid care work that women performed were also dependent on the structure of the family and the care dependency ratio.³ High levels of male migration for work (particularly in Mehelkuna and Maintada, especially among *dalit* men) affected the composition and structure of the households, leading to large numbers of 'female-headed' households (Acharya and Bennett 1981; Budlender and Moussie 2013). However, in many cases in both Mehelkuna and Maintada, the households were also 'quasi-extended' – while women mostly lived in

'nuclear families', in the majority of cases their in-laws would live in a separate household with a separate kitchen right next door or close by, thereby helping each other on a daily basis. This is partly a customary arrangement, wherein the older parents either stay away or with their youngest son and his family. One of the practical reasons shared by the women for this arrangement was that separate kitchens helped to better manage one's own finances (often remittances resulting from male migration outside the country), thereby reducing stress on both families.

Lifecycle pattern

The care dependency ratio, particularly in a context of acute poverty, also had an impact on the intensity of the care work performed by women. Particularly for women in nuclear families whose husbands had migrated, a high care dependency ratio (having three or more children below the age of six) exacerbated their burden and physical depletion as these

women had to do most of the care work and household work on their own. Women from such households were found fetching firewood and working on their farms or breaking stones until childbirth and just a few days postpartum due to lack of support from within the family and/or due to the necessity to earn due to acute poverty.

Women's participation in paid work

Women's participation in paid work was another factor that determined the social organisation of care. We found instances of older women taking care of children when women went to paid work:

Sometimes, I make food; bring water so that it is easier for my daughter-in-law. Her son is still young and needs to be fed by his mother so I do her work outside the house too. It's difficult with the baby so I'm helping out so that it's easier for her, I consider her to be like my daughter.

Sushila Dangi, Maintada, February 2016

Lack of public services

Access and proximity to public services such as water taps, electricity, roads, mills, etc., affected both how unpaid care work was organised in the household, and the intensity and drudgery of the care tasks performed. For instance, in Mehelkuna and Maintada, the lack of public resources and services (such as flour mills, electricity and water taps) resulted in an increased transfer of the care work burden onto girl children and/or older women (Care Body Map exercise, girls only, Mehelkuna, January 2016; see also Acharya and Bennet 1981; Budlender and Moussie 2013). Moreover,

women found tasks such as fetching firewood and water, and cutting grass most burdensome due to the arduous nature of the work and the time involved.

It takes the whole day to fetch firewood and we are very tired when we come back.

**Care Work Matrix, women only,
Mehelkuna, January 2016.**

Gender norms

Gendered norms also influenced the social organisation of care (Ferrant, Pesando and Nowacka 2014). In the study, we found that certain unpaid care tasks such as fetching firewood (all four sites), carrying woven baskets for carting fodder, manure, water, etc. (specifically in Chandannath and Depalgaon), and certain types of unpaid work such as planting paddy and tilling the land were tasks that only married women could do.

These gender norms further aggravated women's care work burdens as they dissuaded others in the family from helping them (Gyanu Giri, Chandannath, May 2016; Nirmal Oli, Mehelkuna, February 2016; Activity Mapping exercise, mixed children, Chandannath, March 2016). Community sanctions and prevailing social norms regarding gender roles also hindered men's participation in unpaid care work. Gyanu Giri, who is 25 years old and works on her family farm in order to financially support her husband's undergraduate education, shares:

If my husband helps me with my work by washing the dishes even my mother-in-law teases him for doing so. Also, the other people look down upon me for the same... The people who want to help hesitate to do so due to the fear of being ridiculed by the village.

Chandannath, May 2016

These gender norms were reflected in answers to whether respondents thought men or women performed certain tasks better.

In Table 1, we find that activities such as taking care of a sick child and doing household tasks are normatively perceived as a woman's natural responsibility across all of the sites; and therefore women are considered as being better at these activities. In Depalgaon, 94% of respondents considered women were better at household tasks - explained by respondents largely belonging to nuclear households with no additional help.

Activities such as household repairs are normatively considered to be 'male tasks'. In the case of agriculture, we see that women predominantly perceive themselves to be better at this activity. This is because cultural norms in rural Nepal entail looking after the land as a woman's responsibility (planting, tilling, weeding, harvesting, etc.) even though the land is usually in the name of the male members of the family. In Chandannath, however, we see a smaller number of women (16 per cent) holding the same opinion; this is because most of our respondents held no or insufficient land or worked mostly as agricultural and non-agricultural daily wage labourers.

Across the four sites, men are perceived to be better at doing paid work outside of the

Table 1: Perceptions held by women on which gender performs certain tasks the best

Activity	Women are better (%)				Men are better (%)			
	Mehelkuna	Maintada	Chandannath	Depalgaon	Mehelkuna	Maintada	Chandannath	Depalgaon
Care of a sick child	44.0	55.0	76.0	94.0	8.1	0.0	0.0	2.2
Household repairs	0.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	51.0	19.0	9.8	38.0
Household tasks	95.0	93.0	92.0	94.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.7
Animal care	2.4	17.0	12.0	12.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Agriculture	46.0	39.0	16.0	38.0	19.0	23.0	12.0	16.0
Paid work outside house	2.4	2.2	8.2	6.1	78.0	84.0	95.0	89.0
Household decisions	27.0	11.0	2.0	2.0	30.0	23.0	22.0	16.0
Observation	41	46	49	49	37	43	41	45

Source: Authors' own, based on the project's quantitative data.

home; this includes migration for work which is not allowed for women due to normative restrictions on female mobility. Women shared that men do not trust their wives if they go out to work, and in some cases question their chastity and morality. There is a marginal difference in women's perceptions of self working outside the homes between Mehelkuna and Maintada sites in Surkhet and Chandannath and Depalgaon in Jumla. This difference is due to two reasons: (i) a large number of men migrate for work from Mehelkuna and Maintada, and the women respondents from these sites mainly worked on their land as vegetable seed growers; and (ii) due to acute poverty and insufficient landholdings in Chandannath and Depalgaon, women sometimes had to work outside their homes as wage labourers but within close proximity of their homes.

We also found that women from villages located further uphill from the main highway were only able to work as wage labourers in and around their villages, as going further away from their homes was frowned upon. Further, the women would be chastised for shirking their primary domestic responsibilities if they were away for long hours.

Men are also perceived to be better decision makers across all of the sites due to the patriarchal concept of the male member as

the 'head of the family'. Both women and men perceived that men were better at decision-making because they interacted more with the outside world. In Maintada, men shared that they were responsible for attending all official meetings at the ward and VDC levels; this also impinged on their time spent at home, due to which they were unable to help at home (Care Body Map exercise, men only, January 2016). In Mehelkuna, we found that a higher number of women (27 per cent) considered themselves to be better decision makers than in the other sites, although almost an equal number of women perceived men to be the main decision makers at home. This marginal increase could be because the women respondents were working as vegetable and seed producers and had some level of authority to make decisions. At the same time, it is also possible that most of the men from Mehelkuna have migrated for work and therefore women are left to make most of the routine decisions at home – although for bigger decisions they have to consult their husbands even if they are living abroad (Care Wallet exercise, mixed adults, Mehelkuna, January 2016).

Social relations were perceived as a female domain as women are considered to be better at organising occasions, festivals, and associated rituals. In most households, it is often the older women who are considered to be better at managing social relations.

Paid work conditions and experiences

Availability of paid work

Women's employment in rural areas of Nepal is largely concentrated on subsistence-based economic activities such as agriculture and livestock rearing. In our four research sites, women's paid work mostly included self-employment activities, either self-initiated or supported by national or local non-governmental organisations. In Mehelkuna and Maintada, women who belonged to landowning households (including *dalit* homes with small landholdings) were involved in fresh vegetable and seed production, either on their own or through the support of the Pavitra Vegetable and Seed Cooperative, whereas women from most *dalit* households were engaged in multiple small-scale activities such as agricultural labour/sharecropping, livestock rearing, running retail shops, tailoring, and alcohol-making.

In Chandannath and Depalgaon, the majority of the women from *dalit* households were involved in agricultural and non-agricultural labour such as breaking stones, selling firewood and carrying sand, whereas women from other castes were involved in vegetable and apple farming, and the collection of herbs. Besides these activities, women in these research sites also took up wage work under the KEP whenever it was available.

Women involved in wage work in Chandannath and Depalgaon continued to suffer from lack of regular income and low payment in the absence of decent livelihoods incentives or programmes in the area that could support women. Kamla Giri, a KEP worker from Chandannath says, 'if there is no work available then I carry a basket of firewood [to sell it] and buy salt' (May 2016). The guarantee of income

from KEP work was valued by most women from low-income households. However, the short span of employment (35 days) was not enough to make any sustainable economic changes in the lives of the women and their families.

Men across the four sites were also involved in a range of low-paying work in their areas, or they worked as labour migrants. In Mehelkuna and Maintada, the majority of the men had migrated to Gulf countries, Malaysia, or India for work. Those who stayed behind were involved in agriculture or informal sectors such as in transportation or as electricians.

The majority of the men in Chandannath and Depalgaon were involved in masonry and carpentry work. A few men in Chandannath also migrated to other parts of the country or to India to work as daily wage labourers, whereas some were involved in rearing cattle in the higher regions in Jumla or running small shops in the vicinity.

In the case of Depalgaon, some of the households were also involved in collecting a medicinal herb called *yarsagumba* during the off-farm season. None of the children under 18 years old were reported to be involved in any paid work.

During the qualitative interviews, some children shared that they helped their mothers with paid work whenever their mothers were sick; however, instances of children actively participating in paid work were not reported, except for being involved in farming, especially during peak agricultural seasons.



Conditions of paid work

In Mehelkuna and Maintada, women who were Enterprise Development Programme (EDP)-member farmers had better market linkages than women who produced and sold vegetables on their own. This was because the Pavitra Vegetable and Seed Cooperative enabled forward linkages by negotiating and agreeing the amount and rates for seeds with traders beforehand, thereby ensuring a market and guaranteed income for the farmers. On the other hand, women farmers who were not EDP members sold their produce locally where the price and saleability of the produce were contingent upon the vagaries of the market. The Cooperative also enabled backward linkages through the provision of short-term loans to the women farmers in order to facilitate the seed production process. Further, the provision of seed-sorting and harvesting machines by the Cooperative has made the women's work more time- and cost-effective: 'With the seed-sorting machines, we can complete a month's work in two days' time' (EDP women farmers, Maintada). However, in Mehelkuna and Maintada, women who were involved in large-scale vegetable and seed production were able to earn a better income than those who did not have access to productive assets like land and who were involved in wage work. Sharmila Oli, who is a

vegetable seed producer shares, 'I earn enough money to buy my children's clothes and pay their school fee' (Mehelkuna, February 2016).

Particularly in Chandannath and Depalgaon, the majority of women's paid work consisted of extremely arduous agricultural and non-agricultural wage work such as breaking stones or carrying manure and sand, which they did due to acute poverty and food insecurity. Breaking stones with no safety equipment posed the risk of injuring their hands and eyes, whereas carrying heavy loads led to chronic health issues such as back pain and uterine prolapse. Women who were involved in the KEP also experienced similar drudgery as they were often required to carry stones or sacks of mud/cement. Kamla Giri, a KEP worker from Chandannath shares, 'when I go to carry the stones, I fear being injured by it. I'm scared that the stones would crush me. While carrying the sand, my back gets wet with the water seeping out of the basket' (May 2016). While KEP had provided safety gear in 2015 for KEP workers in Chandannath and Depalgaon such as shoes and helmets, this was discontinued in 2016, and in the majority of the working areas of KEP, women as well as men worked without any safety gear and equipment.

Gender norms

Mobility-related gender norms were, to some extent, responsible for determining women's paid work opportunities. In Mehelkuna and Maintada, these mobility restrictions were not visibly present as women went to the market regularly to sell vegetables and seeds. Yet, the idea of women regularly working away from home or migrating for work like men was inconceivable, even for women themselves: 'We cannot work hard like them, earn like them and compete outside the house, we are just limited to our houses' (Durga BK, Maintada). Moreover, male out-migration seems to have increased restrictions on women's mobility and participation in paid work, because of the norms associated with women's chastity and sexuality.

Men migrate for work to other places/ countries with the trust in their wives and their wives want to support in earning a living. But the men tend to suspect their wives and fear that they are involved in wrongdoings in their absence. This mentality affects women's ability to work and explore.

Gita BK, Mehelkuna.

In Chandannath and Depalgaon, while it was expected that women would work in and around the village, the family members and women themselves had no other option but to work even if the paid work was located a long distance away, such as in the case of the KEP. Therefore, gender norms on women's mobility restrictions became flexible in the context of dire economic need:

It is actually not good, to go to the bazaar [and not return home] till night. One may break their leg, break their hand. And someone may say something bad to them, which is not good. It is good to stay at one's house. It would be better to do some work that pays you a monthly salary. Since our earning is not enough, we have to go to the bazaar and stay late. We have [many] problems that's why we have to work till late.

Mahesh Dhital, Depalgaon, May 2016

At the same time, there were caste-based differences in the acceptability of certain kinds of paid work for women. For instance, in Mehelkuna and Maintada, women from Brahmin or *chhetri* households did not engage in wage work or activities such as alcohol-brewing as they were not considered 'honourable' work (Activity Mapping exercise, Maintada, January 2016). The norm related to respectability of work was not as rigid in Chandannath and Depalgaon due to extreme poverty. While the majority of the women involved in wage work belonged to *dalit* households, women from non-*dalit* households also did wage work in order to sustain the economic needs of their family.



A woman growing vegetables in Depalgaon, Jumla.
Photographer: Deepta Chopra/IDS.

Seasonality and multiplicity of paid work

Seasonality was a strong element of women's paid work, which meant that they did multiple jobs throughout the year. Women were busy with subsistence agriculture, commercial vegetable/seed production or agricultural labour/sharecropping during agricultural seasons (April – July and September – November), and in the lean agricultural period they took up other kinds of paid work such as keeping livestock (in Mehelkuna and Maintada) and collecting herbs, and non-agricultural wage work including KEP (in Chandannath and Depalgaon). The low-paying nature of

this work also pushed women into multiple jobs. We found many women doing two or three types of paid work simultaneously to earn enough for the daily sustenance of the household (Malati BK, Maintada, February 2016; Radhika BK, Depalgaon, May 2016). However, the employment opportunities available to both women and men were intermittent in nature. As Harka BK says, 'we cannot find jobs regularly here. We work for one month and loiter around for two to three months. If we work for ten days, we are free for the next 20 days' (Depalgaon, May 2016).

Bargaining and collectivisation

With regards to women's bargaining and collectivising capacities, the only positive example was found amongst women EDP members in Mehelkuna and Maintada who were able, to some extent, to negotiate their work conditions: 'We tell them [Cooperative] to bring bigger [harvesting] machine but due to monetary limitation they bring smaller machines' (Sharmila Oli, Mehelkuna, February 2016).

In Chandannath and Depalgaon, lack of regular employment opportunities and the poor economic conditions of the households put women in a weak bargaining position in relation to their employers. However, women

continued working despite low wages and unfavourable working conditions out of the fear that any protest would cost them their livelihoods. Gauri BK shares her anguish, 'What to do! Either we should not take the work. Otherwise, we have to do it whether it is heavy or difficult work. The employers would think that they have paid money so that we should work anyhow' (Depalgaon, May 2016).

There was also no evidence of collectivising efforts among KEP women participants and they seemed unaware of any possibility to bargain with KEP officials for better work conditions.

Childcare provisions at workplaces

During our research we did not find a single instance of paid work that provided childcare facilities at the worksite or in the community. Women reported carrying their children with them to the worksites or making their own arrangements at home, sometimes even leaving the children alone in the house.

Kusum BK's husband is a migrant and therefore she does not have any other carer in the family; she shares, 'there is no one to look after my children. So, I go nearby to break stones. I keep my daughters inside the house, bring the stones and break them at a place close to my

house' (Chandannath, May 2016). Although the KEP implementation guidelines mention the provision of crèches as and when required (MoFALD 2014), none of the KEP worksites had crèche facilities.⁴

Absence of crèches at the KEP worksites is a major hindrance to women's continued participation, as experienced by Januka BK in Chandannath who had to quit the KEP after five days due to the absence of crèches: 'How could I take him [her son]? There was no place to keep him there. My mother-in-law looked after him [at home]. Even then he got sick, so I did not go back'

Imbalance and effects

Care work impacts on paid work

Care work responsibilities, particularly the care of small children, coupled with a lack of support for childcare, affected women's ability to participate in paid work. Mankumari Oli, who is a seed producer with the Pavitra Vegetable and Seed Cooperative in Mehelkuna and who has a high care dependency ratio, says, 'I cannot make more because my child is small, if she was grown up, I would have raised more buffaloes, I would get more fertiliser to use it in the farm to grow more vegetables and seeds' (February 2016). High care dependency ratios exacerbated the lack of options for women, and more so in female-headed nuclear families.

How can I do [any more] paid work; I have no one to look after my daughters. Therefore, I can't buy salt, oil or rice. I just look after my daughters and do the household work as there is no one to help. And, for the personal work or any paid work I might get, I leave my children inside the house and go to work.

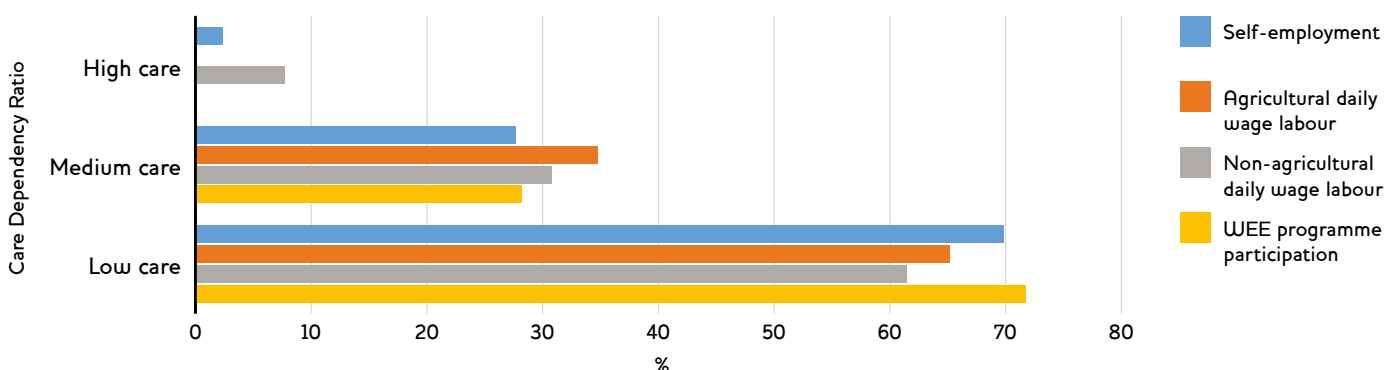
Kusum BK, who has three children below six years of age, Chandannath, May 2016.

As can be seen in Figure 4, which illustrates the relationship between women's care dependency ratio and their participation in the four main categories of paid work, women with high care dependency were unable to participate in WEE programmes because of a lack of enabling measures within the programme (childcare facilities at worksites), the nature and location of work, and a lack of family support that would allow them to participate without worrying for their children.

There were very few women in the study sample (about 5 per cent in Chandannath and Depalgaon) with a high care dependency ratio, and they were found mostly involved in non-agricultural wage labour (breaking stones, carrying sand, etc.) near their homes. Importantly, we also see that women's participation in various forms of paid work increases with a decrease in the number of small children in their care.

However, within the women with medium and low care dependencies, there were some who did not own land and who had no other decent work options; these women had no choice but to work (possibly as primary earners) on either agricultural or non-agricultural daily wage labour with long hours of work.

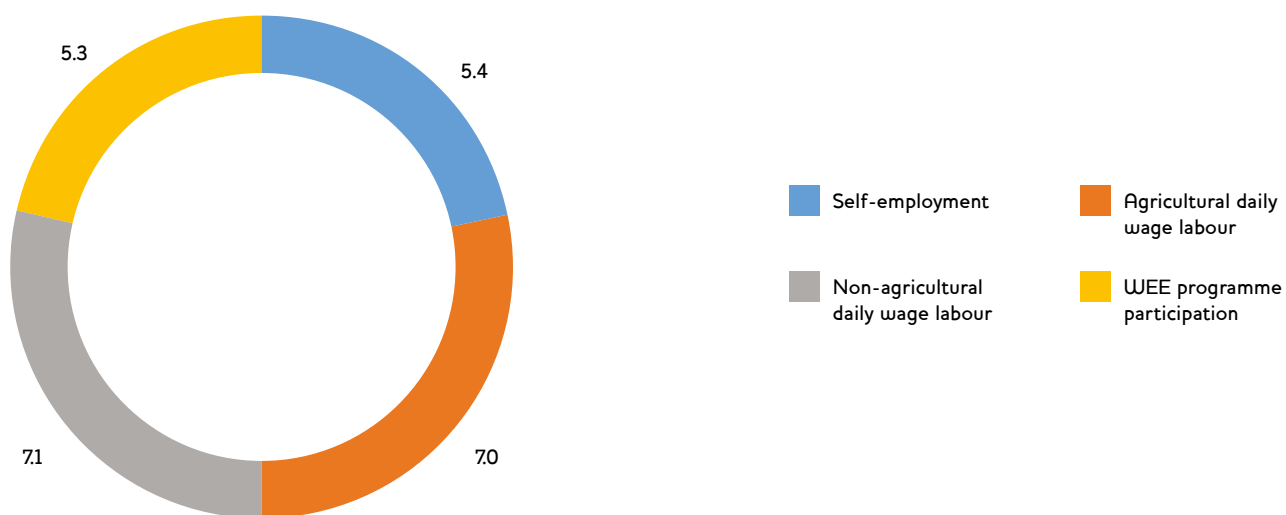
Figure 4: Where women work depending on the number of children < six years of age



Note: The care dependency ratio refers to the number of children < six years of age: high care (three or more children < six years of age); medium care (two children < six years of age); low care (one child < six years of age).

Source: Authors' own, based on the project's quantitative data.

Figure 5: Average number of hours women spent on paid work



Source: Authors' own, based on the project's quantitative data.

Also, one can deduce from Figure 5 that women who were engaged in agricultural and non-agricultural daily wage work also spent more time in paid work than women who were involved in their own agricultural work and other self-employment activities, leading to more acute physical depletion and double burden.

Pregnant and lactating women were discouraged from participating in programmes like the KEP due to the nature of work (Programme Officer, KEP, Depalgaon, March 2016) and due to the lack of care provisions within the programme to support their participation. However, in spite of the discouragement, women such as Menuka Dhital shared that they continued to participate in KEP but while carrying their toddlers on their backs, which both affected their productivity levels and put their children's lives at risk (Depalgaon, May 2016).



Paid work impacts on care work

Women's participation in paid work had an impact on how care work was managed and which care tasks were prioritised and postponed. It also affected the social organisation of care, which resulted in a disproportionate care burden on older women and children in the absence of care provisions by the state and the market.

My daughters sometimes make food and I go to work during the day after cooking in the morning and sending the children to school. After returning in the evening I fetch water and my daughters make food. The older ones who can cook, they do but the younger ones cannot. They also feed the cattle in the afternoon on holidays.

Pramila Rokaya, Chandannath, May 2016.

Across the four sites, female-headed households, particularly those that had no familial support, had to manage their time based on the degree of care and paid work responsibilities, which often led to some work remaining undone. Women reported that they were unable to clean the house and animal sheds, and collect firewood or fodder when they were busy with paid work. Often, women coped with their dual burdens by 'stretching' their day, by waking up earlier in the morning and/or going to rest later at night, what we term as 'time-stretching' in this research. In a typical instance, Kabita BK of Chandannath says,

I wake up at 3am to cook food, feed it to children when it's hot. I leave for the forest at 4am; it takes two hours to collect the firewood. Then I have to be back by 8am to get the children ready for school.



Male migration

Male migration for work had a bearing on the imbalance that women experienced between their paid work and unpaid care work responsibilities, which was only half-heartedly acknowledged by some men: 'it is definitely difficult for her when I am not around, to manage the chores, children and seed production', says Nirmal Oli, 'but my mother is there, she helps out' (Mehelkuna, February 2016). Some women had to reduce their scale of paid work or missed out on paid work opportunities as their care work responsibilities

increased in the absence of men. For example, Durga BK, from a nuclear family, whose husband has migrated for work, told us,

It is [physically difficult to balance], recently they had told me to come for [construction] work but I had some household chores, and there was no one to help and we had to cut the *thaagal* [fodder] so I couldn't go.

Maintada, February 2016

Lack of public resources and services

The intensity of the double burden and the attendant imbalance that women experienced were also intrinsically linked to the availability and quality of, and access/proximity to public resources and services such as roads, water taps, fuel, etc. (Ferrant *et al.* 2014). Women complained of spending almost three to four hours on collecting firewood when the forests opened. Some of the unpaid care tasks such as fetching firewood, fetching water and cutting grass took up a lot of women's time and energy, which in turn reduced their energies to do more paid work. Women who were seed producers especially shared that lack of

irrigation affected their ability to upscale their seed enterprises; Pushpa Khatri of Depalgaon shares,

The source of water is very far away. It is the same for both drinking as well as for irrigation. We have to manually carry the water to our fields for irrigation. It takes a lot of time and effort.

Asha Khatri also recalls, 'I had broken my leg while fetching water and I had to walk all the way to Mehelkuna town with my fractured leg for treatment [as there is no public transport].'

Effects of imbalance on women's wellbeing

Across the research sites, women found unpaid care tasks such as firewood collection, cutting grass, digging, irrigating and fetching water to be particularly onerous and time-consuming. Women complained of back aches, headaches, etc., due to the nature of their care and paid work. In addition, cultural and gendered norms that dictate that firewood can only be fetched by married women (across all sites), and carrying the woven baskets in Chandannath and Depalgaon, further burdened women as these tasks could not be redistributed to anyone else in the family.⁵ Some of the acute fallouts of the heavy physical loads carried by women were the all too common cases of uterine prolapse and frequent miscarriages.

The effects of physically draining unpaid care work were also felt acutely by older women. Gauri BK of Depalgaon explains, 'she [mother-in-law] cannot carry a bucket, and she cannot carry big loads. So, she does light work, like cooking, feeding children, sending them to school, bathing them, combing the girls' hair.' Older women who had become substitute caregivers for children whose mothers were involved in paid work further shared how particularly difficult it became to take care of children due to old age and failing health, especially within a context of low resources and minimal access to health facilities in the area.

Multiplicity of paid work and the arduous nature of this work, such as stone breaking and carrying sand in Chandannath and Depalgaon, contributed to women's physical and mental depletion: 'sometimes my hands, legs and back hurt. And, we have to continuously break stones [for seven to eight days to fill one trolley of stones]. The wind gets into our eyes and it hurts as well' (Kusum BK, Chandannath).

During the peak agricultural season, she [daughter-in-law] has to work both at home and in the farm. Sometimes she goes to work in the farm in the morning and comes back in the afternoon to finish her [care] work... she gets tired; sometimes she gets fever after work or her body aches. She takes herbal medicines and goes to work the next day.

Jayalal BK, Chandannath, May 2016.

During peak agricultural periods such as planting and harvesting, there was a heavy burden of work which led to high levels of physical fatigue and no periods of rest. There was a constant refrain from women about how tired they felt and the emotional effects of constant drudgery and lack of rest (Eyben and Fontana 2011) in the face of necessity.

We don't even get to sit, resting is not possible. When we go to collect firewood in the morning, we carry flatbread with salt. How long can we survive on that? We don't have water to drink. We come back thirsty and tired carrying the basket. Even after coming back we have to arrange many things such as water, the stove, food, the grass and look for the cattle. We have to worry about meeting our daily needs like food. We are able to buy a half a kilogramme of rice if we find some work, otherwise we don't. It is not a happy life.

Kamla Giri, Chandannath, May 2016.

Effects of imbalance on women's time

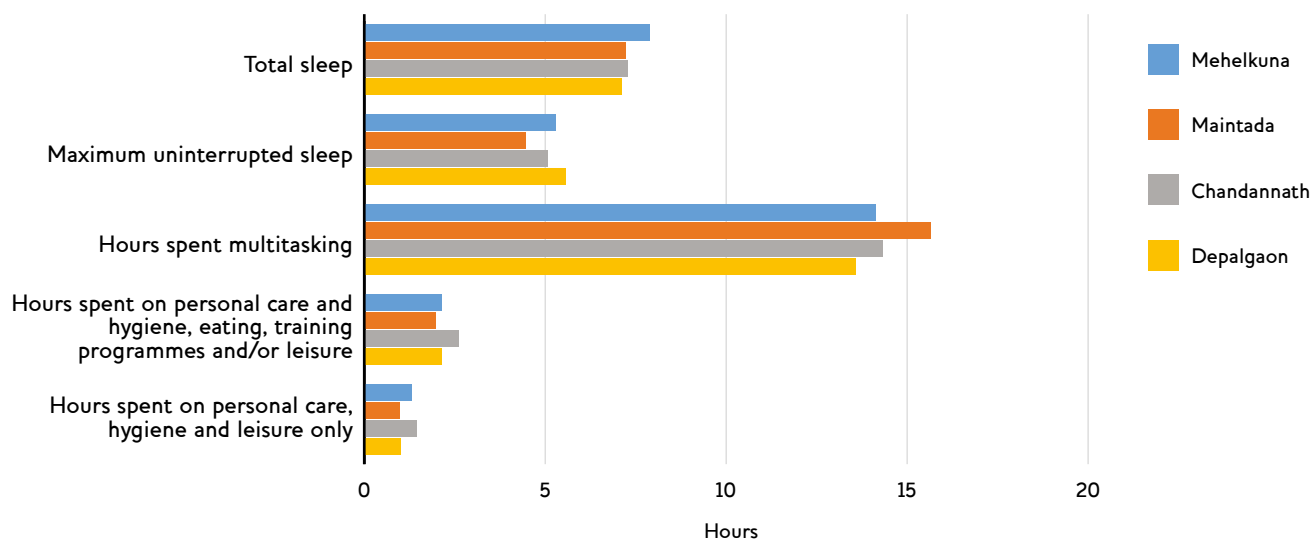
The time available to women for rest and leisure was mostly based on the household structure, care dependency ratio, access to public services, and level of economic stability of the woman's family. In Mehelkuna and Maintada, high levels of migration affected women's time for rest and leisure as they were now responsible for doing most of the paid and unpaid care work.

Furthermore, women with small children found little time to rest; Bhuma BK of Maintada who has two children aged three years and seven months old respectively says, 'I do not get any time to rest in the day as I have to constantly take care of my children along with finishing my other [paid] work. I only rest in the night when I sleep.'

Being rural sites, women's time for rest and leisure was seasonal; the high peak agricultural months of June, July, September and October were considered most draining. Women also shared that they did not get time to rest when they had to collect firewood and cut fodder and during important festivals such as *Dasain* and *Tihar*.⁶

We found that women spent long hours on multitasking (an average of almost 14 hours across all sites) and had very little time for rest and leisure (see Figure 6).⁷ While women spent over seven hours on sleep, it seems that they try to accumulate their sleep time as the total numbers of hours of sleep and the maximum hours of uninterrupted sleep are quite different – almost three hours in Maintada and around one-and-a-half hours in Depalgaon.⁸

Figure 6: Average time women spent on sleep, multitasking, leisure, personal care, and hygiene



Source: Authors' own, based on the project's quantitative data.

Effects of imbalance on children

In most households across the sites, women were usually helped by their daughters in household work such as with cooking, cleaning, cutting grass, fetching water, and sibling care, which affected their daughters' time and physical wellbeing.

Boys helped intermittently with household chores such as fetching water and cutting grass, but they were more involved in unpaid care work in families that had no daughters. Surendra Giri, aged 14, whose parents are unwell and elder sister is married, complains:

I would like to have more time to study but I have to do most of the household tasks [cooking] and take care of my younger sister... I wish my eldest sister was nearby and not married [then] she could have done all the work.

When mothers are involved in intense or multiple paid jobs, it is often the eldest girl child who is responsible for unpaid care work; Sheetal Nepali in Depalgaon had to quit school in order to support her mother with unpaid care because her mother was the primary breadwinner in the family: 'Well, everybody goes to school but I cannot. They roam around but I cannot. That's how I feel... If we could

do something we would not have to suffer like our parents.' Lack of public services such as roads, taps, flour mills, etc., also leads to girl children doing unpaid care work, which aggravates their time poverty and physical depletion. In Mehelkuna, girls complained of the drudgery involved in obtaining flour and cutting grass: 'the mill is further down and it takes two to three hours to do the work... we have to carry heavy loads on our heads which results in headaches and back aches.'

My mother tells me to return early in the evening so that I finish all the work... She tells me to skip playing and return home [and] I get time to study only after I finish all my work [at home]... I don't like to fetch firewood; I hurt myself while chopping firewood.

Deepa Oli, Maintada.

Conclusion

One of the stark conclusions of the study is that women are unable to balance their paid and unpaid care work due to several factors: the lack of availability of decent employment opportunities in rural areas; a lack of quality public resources and services; migration of men, especially in Mehelkuna and Maintada; a lack of assets such as land in the dalit communities; and prevailing gender norms, especially around women's participation in unpaid care work and mobility. All of these contribute towards women's inability to avail benefits from paid jobs. Lifecycle patterns also influence the nature, location and time of, and ability to bargain in, women's paid work. In Mehelkuna and Maintada, high male migration also burdened some women further as they had to take on some of the men's responsibilities such as ploughing.

Overall, it was found that women reported extreme drudgery due to the nature of their unpaid work (fetching firewood, cutting grass, childcare, household chores) and paid work (vegetable and seed production, agricultural and non-agricultural wage labour such as breaking stones, carrying sand, selling firewood, work under KEP, etc.), which were found to be physically exhausting. Time for rest and leisure, as found in all agrarian societies, was limited to agricultural lean seasons. However, women in Chandannath and Depalgaon were found to be engaged in some form of paid work even during the lean seasons, further reducing their time for rest and leisure.

As we conclude, there are some ideas presented here that require more thought and debate surrounding the discourse of unpaid care work and WEE. For example, in the case of the KEP, it is important to question the conditions of paid work which are currently available to women in these areas. The KEP discourages mechanisation in order to provide more man-days to its participants. However, it is important to understand that the kinds of construction work that fall under the programme are difficult and dangerous. As

such, promoting decent work conditions is an absolute must in this case; however, there is a need to question the nature of work available to these women, especially when asking for decent work in order to gain a double boon for women, households and communities. The question then is: would some form of mechanisation help in making work conditions decent and make women's lives easier? This question needs more analysis given that a recent document by the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on WEE points to 'lack of time and labour-saving equipment and devices' amongst women as a restriction to achieving WEE (Klugman and Melnikova 2016).

Another crucial issue that requires more deliberation arises from the voices of women asking for paid work close to home, mainly to be able to balance their unpaid care and paid work responsibilities. This is a difficult issue to address as there is a chance that by recommending such as possibility, we are reinforcing the gender norm of unpaid care work being a woman's primary responsibility. It is thus crucial that while closer locations are essential for fulfilling decent work conditions, at the same time it is also imperative to campaign for redistribution of unpaid work amongst family members, especially men, in order to break the gender norm of women as primary caregivers.

Another point which needs to be understood by policymakers when they design a WEE programme is whether a livelihoods option alone is going to be enough, given that employment opportunities are rare in these areas; is it then time to look beyond livelihood options and towards demanding decent work and more employment opportunities for men and women in the communities. This is especially important as the study found that women across the four sites would rather work on their farms than break stones as it is less physically demanding.

Outbound male migration for work also hinders the possibility of redistributing unpaid

care work between genders, which would help reduce the burden on women. This is a macroeconomic question that the state and the international development organisations working in Nepal need to give more thought to given that Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world.

In the end, moving towards a double boon will not be possible without building an understanding of the care issue at the levels of the household, community, market and the state. Elson's clarion call for 4Rs – recognition, reduction, redistribution and representation – in care work needs to be understood and implemented at all levels for women and households to be able to move towards a double boon. There is an urgent need for advocacy from top to bottom in policymaking, and in programme design and implementation, to take cognisance of how care affects WEE and vice versa and to understand the various socioeconomic factors that prevent women from reaching a double boon. This is not an easy task given the patriarchal mindsets that govern policymakers and programme designers who still consider care work and unpaid work to be primarily a women's responsibility. Programmes and policies need to be inclusive and crosscutting across sectors in order to reach optimal WEE and a double boon.

Recent literature such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report on unpaid care work and UN Women's report for the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on WEE (UN Women 2017) have highlighted the need for recognition of unpaid care work by policymakers as a crucial step towards WEE. Goal 5.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals also identifies the global importance of recognising, reducing and redistributing women's unpaid care work for all countries by 2030 (UN 2017). As such, there is a need for more evidence-building on women's time and participation in care and unpaid work, and their hindrances to participation in decent paid work, especially in Nepal's context. The advocacy on unpaid care work is at a nascent stage in the development sector of Nepal and there should be more dialogue on women's unpaid care burden between academicians, practitioners and policymakers.

Lastly, programmes aimed at women's empowerment need to have a care perspective in both their design and implementation. Grass-roots-level communication and advocacy needs to be encouraged in order to provide decent paid work and redistribute care work within the family, community, market and the state, thus reducing women's double burden and moving towards a double boon.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the state

- Carry out macroeconomic reforms; in particular, increasing the availability of decent work and better income opportunities for women and men in a range of localities, especially closer to home for women with young children.
- Focus on skills training and access to finance and markets.
- Design key national policies and strategies to (a) recognise women's and girls' heavy and unequal unpaid care and household work responsibilities as a key issue that needs to be addressed to achieve development goals, and (b) include concrete commitments to address women's and girls' unpaid care and household work.
- Increase public investment in infrastructure and services that are accessible and affordable for poor women and girls and that reduce the time and energy they spend on unpaid care and household work. Two things are critical: (a) provision of accessible public resources and services such as roads, irrigation canals, water, fuel, electricity, flour mills, health centres and schools; (b) childcare provisions – through scaling up, promoting and improving the quality of some existing community-run Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres; and provision of childcare at workplaces.
- Collect relevant data on unpaid care and household work and incorporate them into relevant national statistics.
- Prioritise the importance of girls' education, addressing the challenge of girls taking on unpaid care work.
- Promote positive attitudes towards women's leadership and concerns, such that unpaid care and household work becomes a legitimate and vital issue for public debate at community, local and national levels.

Recommendations for the community

- Encourage women's participation and decision-making in community institutions and meetings.
- Provide information on and awareness of various community projects, budgets, and incentives to women in the community.
- Actively campaign for changes in gender norms and seek participation of men and families to initiate greater redistribution of unpaid care work.
- Stimulate greater community involvement in envisioning and implementing practices and provisions that reduce the drudgery of women's unpaid work, for instance, collective farming, community childcare centres, flour mills, schools, etc.

Recommendations for non-state programmes

- Design programmes with a substantive focus on care, taking into account diversity and lifecycle patterns of women.
- Build a national campaign targeting communities, academicians, practitioners and policymakers.
- Focus on integrated development through increased coordination with other state and non-state programmes, such that work pressures on women decrease.

Recommendations for families

- Recognise and value women's care, unpaid care work and paid work contributions.
- Promote a greater role for men and boys in the family in undertaking care responsibilities, such that the women and girls in the family are not overburdened.
- Provide women with adequate time for rest and leisure by redistributing care work among all members of the family, irrespective of gender.

Notes

1. Nepal gender profile, 5 May 2015, www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/nepal/document/nepal-gender-profile
2. One common feature across all the sites was the participation of men, particularly in cooking, when women were menstruating because of cultural menstrual taboos connected to ritual purity and pollution in Hinduism which do not allow women to enter the kitchen and touch the hearth (considered a pure place) (Care Body Map exercise, men only, Maintada, January 2016; Activity Mapping exercise, mixed adults, Depalgaon, March 2016; see also Amgain 2012).
3. Care dependency ratio refers to the number of children < six years of age: high care (three or more children < six years of age); medium care (two children < six years of age); low care (one child < six years of age).
4. There were crèche facilities in the four VDCs where pilot and demonstration projects were implemented with the direct support from Karnali Employment Programme Technical Assistance (KEPTA), but only in the year 2015.
5. This applies to carrying manure, firewood, sacks of wheat to the mills, apples and other produce, etc.
6. As per the data collected using the participatory tool 'Care Calendar' with women across the four study sites.
7. The data collected for time were during lean agricultural months when women were relatively less stressed for time.
8. The data were collected during lean agricultural months when women had relatively more rest and sleep time.

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A Trapeze Act: Women Balancing Paid Work and Unpaid Care Work in Nepal

National report for Women's Economic Empowerment Policy and Programming

Balancing unpaid care work and paid work carried out qualitative and quantitative research in India, Nepal, Rwanda, Tanzania across 16 sites. This research explores how women's economic empowerment policies and programmes can take unpaid care work into account, in order to enable economic empowerment to be optimised, shared across families, and sustained across generations. It focusses on the social

organisation of care in low income households, and the role of families, state, private sector and not-for profit sector.

Ultimately, the research aims to identify measures that can lead towards a 'double boon', creating paid work that empowers women and provides core support for their unpaid care work responsibilities.

The Balancing unpaid care work and paid work project explores the successes, challenges and lessons for Women's Economic Empowerment programmes and policies.

Creating and sharing new knowledge on the balance between paid work and unpaid care work

Advocating for decent paid work, providing support for unpaid care work responsibilities and removal of barriers to entry and retention in paid work

Resulting in women's economic empowerment that is optimised, shared across families and sustained across generations



NEPAL

Research was undertaken in 2016 in four sites in the Surkhet and Jumla regions of Nepal

📍 Mehlkuna

📍 Chandannath

📍 Maintada

📍 Depalgaon

PROJECT LEAD:



Institute of Development Studies

RESEARCH PARTNERS:



Institute of Social Studies Trust

UPTAKE PARTNER:



Oxfam Nepal

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