

The Bellagio Initiative

Briefing Summary

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Caring for Wellbeing

Rosalind Eyben and Marzia Fontana
Institute of Development Studies, UK

Conventional development thinking emphasises economic growth over human wellbeing and ignores care as a public good that sustains and reproduces society and on which markets depend for their functioning. Our alternative is an economic system that reflects and places a value on equitable relations between women and men. We challenge commonly held assumptions about how the economy works – assumptions that in this time of global crisis risk bringing greater misery and impoverishment for those who can least protect themselves from collapsing markets.

‘Care’ refers to a wide domain of activities that contribute to meeting the material and/or developmental, emotional and spiritual needs of one or more other persons with whom the carer is in a direct personal relationship. Cross-country comparative studies show how prevailing gender norms mean that women undertake the bulk of unpaid care work such as minding and educating children, looking after older family members, caring for the sick, cooking and collecting water and fuel. In developing countries women work longer hours than men, low-income women work longer hours than better-off women, and rural women work longer hours than urban women. The invisibility and undervaluing of care work also has an impact on women’s wages as domestic workers and in jobs such as nursing and care of children and the elderly. Until challenged by feminists, women’s caring role was ‘natural’, and thus not identified as a matter requiring a policy response.

The last 30 years have seen increasing numbers of women entering the market economy. Most have to juggle the demands on their time between their paid activities and unpaid care work. As a result they are frequently employed on a part-time or piecework basis

where wages are lower, employment less secure and collective action or negotiation more difficult. In some countries these changes have coincided with a decline of state provision and everywhere an increased involvement of the market in care. Women who can afford to do so hire poorer women, often underpaid and overworked and in many parts of the world subject to racial discrimination.

Care is a public good that sustains and reproduces society. Yet, despite the evidence most development organisations remain blind to all but the paid, visible forms of women’s economic contribution. Hence development policies and programmes have failed to address the interconnected interests of women as producers, employees and carers with negative effects for individual, family and social wellbeing.

Why care is central to well-being

- Care is the foundation of living well together.
- Care replenishes the human resources needed for sustainable economic development: if unsupported women’s resilience in providing care may not last forever.
- Everyone has the right to receive adequate care and the right not to be exploited when providing care.

Practical steps

Firstly, development organisations and their partners can address three interconnected dimensions, identified by Diane Elson and consisting of *recognising* care – or example through integrating unpaid care into systems of national accounts, *reducing* its drudgery elements through labour-saving technologies and reliable access to water and energy

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supplies, and *redistributing* care more equitably, not only within families but also among and between families and other providers of care services – for example, community-based and non-governmental organisations, the private sector and state agencies.

The most politically challenging matter concerns the maintenance and expansion of core public services to reduce unpaid care work. This is why, secondly, global and local debates are needed for people to re-imagine potentially diverse ways in which their social and political economy could be re-ordered so that care is recognised and properly supported as the foundation for living well together.

Philanthropic foundations could:

- Take the lead in demonstrating the importance they attach to the issue by undertaking a care audit of the programmes they finance;
- Integrate care responsibilities and activities into the design of future development activities;
- Actively challenge the assumptions informing existing economic development models that render care invisible;
- Encourage and support worldwide debates among diverse audiences about how to change our economic models into ones shaped by altruistic and solidarity principles.

The logo for the Bellagio Initiative, featuring the text "Bellagio Initiative" in a white serif font against a dark, abstract background with overlapping circular shapes.

Bellagio Initiative

The Future of
Philanthropy and
Development in the
Pursuit of Human
Wellbeing

Credits
Rosalind Eyben and
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The Bellagio Initiative is a series of global consultations to produce a new framework for philanthropic and international development collaboration in pursuit of human wellbeing in the 21st century. The project is led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), the Resource Alliance and the Rockefeller Foundation.

