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SLH Learning Paper

# Out of sight, out of mind? Making unpaid WASH work visible

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## Front cover image:

*Caption text:* Bishnu Biswa (38) and her husband Sabinay Shankar (41), wash clothes with soap and water. Sabinay is a tea garden worker at Barnesbeg Tea Estate. They live in Kalkidhura village, Darjeeling district, West Bengal, India. November 2021. *Credit:* WaterAid, Ranita Roy

All figures and tables are original (authors' own).

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## 1. Introduction

Women and girls represent half the world's population, yet according to UN Women (2018) and the Human Development Report's (2022), there is almost nowhere in the world where girls and boys, women and men are equal. WaterAid (2023) recognises that 'imbalances in power and opportunities based on gender are often reflected in WASH systems (institutions, policies, processes) and can be reinforced by WASH actors too'. Charmes (2019) find there is 'no country where women and men perform an equal share of unpaid care work'. Time spent on care work has increased worldwide, a result of COVID-19 and the unfolding climate crisis.

Meeting the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 requires ensuring the 'availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all' (washdata.org). However, there is evidence that WASH services and systems, particularly where they are weak or non-existent, are subsidised and supported by women and girls' unpaid labour (ActionAid and WaterAid 2020). Within families, women are generally the ones responsible for tasks that benefit all members of the household. At the community and institutional level, the WASH system benefits from the work of millions of (mainly female) community health volunteers / workers (CHVs/CHWs) to achieve programme objectives and sustain services and behaviours in the long term. Progress towards gender equality is essential to realising the human rights to water and sanitation.

To date, global WASH efforts have increasingly addressed gender equality through SDG 5, however there has been limited focus specifically on contributing towards Target 5.4, which aims "to recognize and value unpaid

care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate" (<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>). WASH actors appear ambivalent in terms of addressing stereotypes of who does the WASH-related unpaid care and domestic work (UCDW) and facilitating a review of who is primarily responsible for looking after WASH in people's home (Cavill et al. 2022; Cavill et al. 2018). The WASH sector has also lacked the political will and partnerships to redistribute WASH-related UCDW. This lack of engagement on UCDW – perhaps because the WASH system depends on women's invisible work in the household and community to function – appears at odds with the WASH sector's own professed commitment to tackling gender inequalities and women's empowerment in and through WASH. However, good practice can be found in the care sector (which the WASH sector can draw on), where men and masculinities are now very much part of the discussion, aimed to advance the interests of women (Cavill et al. 2022; Cavill et al. 2018). For instance, MenCare has a target of accelerating men's uptake of 50 per cent of the unpaid care work by 2030 (<https://men-care.org/>). Alongside efforts to 'degender' UCDW, there are efforts to 'decolonise' caring masculinities in ways that 'displace whiteness' (Nayak 2023).

The objective of this paper is to galvanise action driven by WASH actors to build on these efforts, and show that achieving SDG 6 and 5.4 will require WASH actors to play their part in shifting perceptions about gender roles and norms around how couples and families divide their work.

## 2. UCDW within the WASH sector

### 2.1 What counts as work

Society relies on families and homes being looked after – yet the time and energy spent on doing so is taken for granted and undervalued by households, governments and businesses. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines UCDW in terms of: ‘(1) domestic services for own use within the household, (2) caregiving services to household members, and (3) community services and help to other households’. In 2013, UCDW was formally recognised as a form of work at the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (although the System of National Accounts already considered water fetching as an

economic activity). International Classification of Activities for Time Use Statistics (ICATUS 2016) define UCDW activities to include ‘food preparation, dishwashing, cleaning and upkeep of the dwelling, laundry, installation, servicing and repair of personal and household goods, childcare, and care of the sick, elderly or disabled household and family members’, among others (ICATUS 2016). In ICATUS, each Major Division of activities listed in the classification gives examples of the types of activities, which plausibly includes aspects of WASH as indicated in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Examples of WASH care activities under ICATUS major divisions**

MAJOR DIVISION	EXAMPLES PROVIDED IN ICATUS	WASH EXAMPLES
1	N/A	N/A
2	Production of goods for own final use <i>including supplying water and fuel for own household or for own final use.</i>	Supplying water for own household use.
3	Unpaid domestic services for household and family members <i>including food and meals management and preparation, cleaning and maintaining of own dwelling and surroundings, household management for own final use.</i>	Latrine/ bathroom building, cleaning, maintenance; washing clothes; water for cooking food; cleaning hands.
4	Unpaid caregiving services for household and family members: <i>including childcare and instruction, care for dependent adults, help to non-dependent adult household and family members.</i>	Support to older and younger people, as well as people with disabilities and other household members to wash themselves/use latrine/manage their menstrual health and hygiene.
5	Unpaid volunteer, trainee and other unpaid work <i>including unpaid direct volunteering for other households, unpaid community- and organization-based volunteering, unpaid trainee work and related activities.</i>	Community Health Workers (CHWs) undertaking post-ODF follow up; volunteer WASH committees, Natural Leaders, CLTS facilitators.

Source: Author own

The debate continues in academic literature on whether WASH is part of UCDW. Chopra and Zambelli (2017) recommend further conceptual clarification of how WASH activities are part of UCDW, together with acceptance of this amongst the feminist economists who are involved in measuring UCDW. This would enable WASH-specific data to be collected. However, progress is being made nonetheless, with international NGOs such as Oxfam designing programmes and advocacy on the basis that WASH is part of the UCDW in its [Making Care Count: An Overview of the Women’s Economic Empowerment and Care Initiative](#).

## 2.2 Who does the unpaid domestic and care-related WASH work

Studies including Kotiswaran (2022) have documented the unequal and gendered distribution of such unpaid work. Charmes (2019) found that ‘on average women spend 3.2 times more time than men on unpaid care work’. In practice, international NGOs (such as ActionAid and Oxfam) working on UCDW include WASH in the working definition, but lack of data makes it difficult to make WASH-specific statements. National data is routinely collected in the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) on who collects drinking water, when the source is not on the premises. However, MICS do not collect (gender disaggregated) data on time spent on all the other aspects of UCDW (defined above) such as time spent washing clothes and cleaning the home as well as building, cleaning, and repairing toilets or handwashing facilities,

or promoting good behaviours in the home or community.

The *Drawers of Water* studies (White et al. 1972 and 2002) and MICS reports indicate that for the majority of households (across all wealth quintiles) an adult female usually collects the drinking water. Adult men rarely collect water. Table 2 below shows that men are more likely to collect water in locations with lower levels of gender inequality. The table also reveals that whilst upward trends in the number of men collecting the households drinking water might be sustained (such as in Bangladesh or Lao), they can also reverse (Gambia, Malawi, Vietnam and Zimbabwe).

**Table 2: Percentage of adult men (age 15+ years) who usually collect the household’s drinking water, according to a sample of countries selected to show high, medium and low Gender Inequality Index score (2021)**

	Gender inequality index 2021	MIC 3	MIC 4	MIC 5	MIC 6
<i>Examples of countries with high levels of gender inequality</i>					
Bangladesh	0.530	2006: <b>4.7%</b>		2012/3: <b>5.4%</b>	2019: <b>6.8%</b>
Gambia	0.611	2005/6: <b>14.8%</b>	2010: <b>7.7%</b>		2018: <b>5.4%</b>
<i>Examples of countries with medium levels of gender inequality</i>					
Lao	0.478	2006: <b>8.3%</b>	2011: <b>17.4%</b>		2017: <b>19.8%</b>
Malawi	0.554	2006: <b>5.8%</b>		2013/4: <b>5.7%</b>	2019/0: <b>4.3%</b>
<i>Examples of countries with lower levels of gender inequality</i>					
Vietnam	0.296	2006: <b>30.5%</b>	2010: <b>30.2%</b>	2013/4: <b>31.1%</b>	2020/1: <b>23.6%</b>
Zimbabwe	0.532	2009: <b>11.0%</b>		2014: <b>15.3%</b>	2019: <b>14.3%</b>

Source: Author own, developed from data from Gender Inequality Index (GII) <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>; Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) <https://mics.unicef.org/surveys> - no data available on this indicator for these countries in MIC 1, 2 or 7

A scan of recent MICS (Samoa 2021; Bangladesh 2019; Zimbabwe 2019; Lesotho 2019; Georgia 2018; Gambia 2018; Mongolia 2018; Sierra Leone 2018) report that male adults are more likely to collect water in the households in the higher wealth quintiles as well as household heads with secondary or higher educated. In some instances, men in urban areas report being more likely to collect water in some settings (Malawi 2021; Sindh, Pakistan 2020; Lesotho 2019; Zimbabwe 2019). Assuming men do not ‘inflate’ their participation in UCDW, and

that women are also supportive of this change, this indicates nascent changes in gender roles and norms. The literature shows that men might also have access to transport (i.e. donkey cart or wheelbarrows) to collect water from longer distances (Assefa et al. 2021), and at certain times (i.e. during a climate related emergency) (Megaw et al. 2020), in response to water quality hazards (Sultana 2009) or to prevent the abuse of power by those responsible for managing water supplies (ANEW 2020).

Children often engage in WASH work: MICS show that girls predominate in collecting water and other household chores, although boys are also involved in some settings, especially when younger or when the security risks for girls and women are high (WHO/UNICEF 2023). Plan International (2018) found that ‘girls aged 5-9 spend 30% more time on work around the home than boys the same age. Girls aged 10-14 can spend as much as 50% of their time on UCDW’. Conversely, when boys reach puberty their involvement in water collection often reduces.

Gender inequality around unpaid work responsibilities persists into older age, with one study finding that older women (over the age of 60) do more than double the amount of UCDW than older men (reported in Horstead

and Bluestone 2018), often to enable younger relatives to do paid work. Older women report feeling ashamed if they could not fulfil their gendered WASH roles and responsibilities (Jones 2013). They may limit the water consumption or use of water for bathing and washing clothes (or have that limited for them by family members), because they do not/cannot take adequate responsibility for water collection. The impact of the inequality in UCDW has an even greater impact on women with disabilities, women in sexual and gender minorities and on women who are carers for older people, and children. The issue is not care itself, but that women are regarded as the ‘natural’ caregivers of the family with the assumption that this labour should fall on women, leading to their ‘physical and emotional depletion’ (Chopra and Zambelli 2017).

## 2.3 Gender data gap on sanitation and hygiene related UCDW

Surveys tell us that women perform around 75 per cent of UCDW, however there is currently a gender data gap on sanitation and hygiene UCDW. Caruso et al. (2021) find less national-level data available on time spent on building, cleaning, maintaining and repairing sanitation and hygiene facilities or time spent caring for the dependents (supporting their toileting or hygiene needs or caring for people with WASH-related illnesses or people with disabilities) as

well as time spent volunteering in WASH-related activities. Instead, they find that sanitation and hygiene work is typically measured at the sub-national or project level. Improvements in monitoring are needed if we are to quantify both the unequal and heavy share of the WASH-related UCDW done by women and girls and calculate the public (economic, financial and welfare) costs.

## 2.4 WASH-related UCDW beyond the household

The time spent on community WASH activities is similarly unquantified or factored into lifecycle costing and so taken for granted. WASH committees (similar to women’s time on political participation) typically have quotas for female members, often in decision making roles such as President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer, creating an obligation for women. Mommen et al (2017) report improved functionality of the water systems is more likely if women hold roles of chair or treasurer in water committees and may be associated with more regular meetings and revenue collection. Guidance on setting up village WASH or sanitation committees rarely specify the time requirement of the roles and responsibilities, or make suggestions to reduce the subsequent burden on women (e.g. UNICEF 2014). Although the committee may only meet monthly, membership can be a time-consuming

task requiring daily monitoring of WASH facilities and their usage by the community, collecting user fees for water systems, repairing facilities, ensuring all households have a toilet, use it and keep it clean, promoting hygiene practices, monitoring, liaising with other committee members, organising meetings, selecting and training new committee members and so forth.

Well-intentioned efforts to include women more within WASH interventions like CLTS lead to women being encouraged to take on roles as Community Champions and Natural Leaders by other community members or implementing agencies, but there are time-related consequences to consider, and their ability to sustain these roles without incentives or payment needs addressing. The roles involve training on CLTS concepts, sanitation,

handwashing, health outcomes, latrine construction, and participatory techniques,<sup>1</sup> facilitating two- to three-hour sessions to trigger a community-wide commitment to stop open defecation, followed by sustained work to encourage households to build their own latrines and set up hand-washing stations, and adopt improved WASH practices as well as track progress in their village and eventually

achieve (and celebrate) ODF status. Collectively, community members contribute the most time to CLTS: for four CLTS interventions in Ghana and Ethiopia, Crocker et al. (2017) found each hour the implementing NGO spent on CLTS led to community members contributing 5.9–7.5 hours in Ghana, and 27–28 hours in Ethiopia, noting that this obligation doesn't fall equally on all community members.<sup>2</sup>



Caption: Female health volunteer conducting hygiene session at District Hospital Khalanga, Jajarkot, Nepal, May 2017. Credit: WaterAid, Mani Karmacharya

Around the world, CHVs/CHWs (often female,<sup>3</sup> see Table 3) are tasked with delivering a variety of WASH behaviour change interventions. Volunteers work under the supervision of a Community Health Extension Worker to provide health education or services, participate in meetings and give trainings, conduct community mapping and mobilisation. In addition, they spend time recordkeeping, reporting, managing supplies, receiving supervision and training, travel between work activities, building relationships in the community and so forth. Along with their formal household visits and informal interactions with community members, CHVs/CHWs continue work from home and are often 'on call' round the clock. Evidence suggests the more active

the volunteer and more frequent the household visits the more likely behaviour change will be sustained. Rawal et al. (2022) found that 'FCHVs [Family Child Health Volunteers] thought that these services were manageable, however, the situation may become difficult when FCHVs need to deal more with their own household works'. Of the data available, Table 3 indicates the significant time commitment required, which reduces their ability to do other paid work. The table also shows variation in how CHVs/CHWs are incentivised or remunerated, for example through incentives, allowances to cover expenses, fixed salary or stipend.

1 For Plan Ghana, this comprises an initial 4-day session, three 1-day review meetings and a 4-day refresher training over the following year.

2 The difference is explained in the paper in terms of Plan staff in Ethiopia spending far more time on training local actors whereas Plan spent more time on facilitation within villages in Ghana.

3 Recognising there are female-specific CHV/CHW programmes e.g. Nepal [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(19\)30207-7/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)30207-7/fulltext) or Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), in India.



**Table 3: Community Health Volunteers (CHV) time commitment**

Country	Name	Role	Payment	National number	Training	Hours per day	Days per week	H/H to reach	Reference
Bangladesh	Shasthya Shebikas	Female NGO volunteers, recruited by BRAC	Receive performance-based incentives, and some income via selling medical products	//	18-day (3-4 weeks) + monthly refresher training	3.6	6	10-30 per day or 250-300 per month	Reichenbach and Shimul (2011) <i>Exemplars in public health</i>
Ethiopia	Health Development Army (HDA)	Female volunteer community health workers	Unpaid	3,000,000	Around 60 hours	//	1-3	The same 5-6 each week	Health Extension and Primary Health Service Directorate (2016)
India	Accredited social health activists (ASHAs)	Female village-level voluntary health workers recruited by local government	Receive performance-based incentives and/ or a fixed salary, varying between states	1,000,000	Induction 23 days spread over of 12 months + refresher	2-3	4	1 ASHA per 1,000 people	Government of India ASHA Guidelines Janani, et al. 2021
Kenya	Community health volunteers (CHVs)	Male and female volunteers	Receive monthly incentives	86,000	3 months (324 classroom hours and 160 hours of practical experience)	2.4	3	18 per week and 72 per month	Hulland et al. 2015; Nijrani and Hussein, 2020; Aseyo, et al. 2017
Nepal	Female community health volunteers (FCHV)	Female volunteers in community-based primary health care system	Annual allowance of Rs 10,000 for uniforms; Rs 12,000 for transport expenses; Rs 400 for attending meetings	51,000	18 days + refresher training every five years	3.1 (1.7 in 2007)	3	1 FCHV per 500 people	Panday et al. 2014; USAID, 2007
Uganda	Village health team (VHT)	Male and female, although the majority are female	Monthly stipend from Shs10,000 (GBP 2) per member	> 179,000	5 days	4	2	1 per 240 people	Perry (ed) 2021
Zimbabwe	Village health worker (VHW)	Male and female, although the majority are female	Quarterly allowance of USD 42 (often funded by development partners)	>15,000	5 months	4	2-3	1 per 100	Perry (ed) 2021

Source: Author own

There are increasing calls to move away from reliance on such volunteerism for instance by conferring ASHAs with decent employment rights, a living wage, safe working conditions,

and institutional support (Asthana and Mayra 2022) or professionalising HDA leaders so that they will become Health Extension Workers.

## 2.5 Unpaid care work is subsidising economies and health systems

UCDW benefits economies, as it fills gaps and subsidises efforts where there is inadequate investment in public infrastructure and social services (UN Secretary General 2017). Women's economic contribution to the WASH sector, is both within paid (which is often underpaid) and unpaid work. Women and girls' unpaid contribution is often through contribution to home-based health care of family members, teaching of healthy habits and maintaining a clean living environment — which largely goes unrecognised, unaccounted for and is poorly defined (Langer et al. 2015). The global *Valuing the Invaluable* analysis of 32 countries found the 'financial value of women's contributions

in the health system in 2010 was estimated as 2.35 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP) for unpaid work and 2.47 per cent of GDP for paid work—the equivalent of US\$3.052 trillion' (Langer et al. 2015). In essence, UCDW is the 'transfer of resources (labour) by women to others in the economy' (UN Women 2015).

The disproportionate UCDW burdens that women shoulder throughout their lives, together with other gender inequalities and norms, has a significant impact on their physical and mental health, experiences of violence, discrimination and abuse, financial security, and their social status, as shown in Box 1 below.

### Box 1: The costs of unpaid domestic and care work

**UCDW contributes to unequal access to paid work including in the WASH sector:** Globally, 60.7 per cent of employed adults have family responsibilities or live with people who depend on their care (ILO 2018, quoted in Oxfam 2019) and in Africa, 85 per cent of employed women say they have care responsibilities (ibid). 80 per cent of employees with care responsibilities report that they are less productive as a result, and 33 per cent report that caregiving prevents them from doing their best work at all times (Fuller and Raman 2019 quoted in Oxfam 2019). The time involved in doing WASH related UCDW means women have less time to do paid work. For instance, one study in China found that installing flush toilets increased work time in cleaning the toilet, for women more than men (Wang and Shen 2022). Ironically, this UCDW can also mean women make up less of paid roles in the formal WASH sector: utility-level data suggests only 1 in 5 utility employees are female, with women making up only 20 per cent of engineers and women are rarely represented in executive-level positions — only 9 per cent of CEOs are women (<https://wbwaterdata.org/breakingbarriers/en/tool/>). The lack of work-life balance and family-friendly practices can also reduce women's ability to advance in their careers.

**Unequal access to WASH:** Access to WASH reflects existing inequalities in all societies, or else can further embed these inequalities (Cavill et al. 2022; Cavill et al. 2018). Despite their role as WASH providers and managers in households, gender norms can limit women's access to WASH services together with their ability to participate in WASH decision-making processes. Family structures determine how WASH-related assets, power and labour are allocated. Thus, women

may be benefitting less from their WASH-related work than others in the households for instance by restricting water intake or use of water for self-care, whilst weak WASH systems are being held up by women's labour. Where services are weak/don't exist women make up *more* WASH roles (such as CHVs/CHWs) through their free/low paid labour – so it's a double injustice. Although men contribute UCDW to the WASH sector, it is proportionally less than women.

**Opportunity costs for education and for taking part in civic and political life:** Women in all regions worldwide spend a significantly higher portion of their day on domestic work, according to World's Women (2020) at least three times more unpaid household and care work than men. As water becomes more readily available, it is plausible that time gains mean women may have more time for income generating activities (Fisher et al. 2017). A one-hour reduction in the time spent walking to a water source increases girls' enrolment by 18-19 per cent in Pakistan and 8-9 per cent in Yemen (Koolwal and van de Walle 2010: 11). An extra year of primary school can increase girls' eventual wages by 10 to 20 per cent (UN Women 2012)

**Physical, mental and emotional load:** Carrying water – on the head or back – results in exhaustion, pain and discomfort and musculo-skeletal impacts (Fisher et al. 2017; Overbo et al. 2016). UCDW can also have serious impacts on women's mental health. Water collection can be a significant source of chronic stress for women (Henley 2014). Older women report feelings of depression, isolation, worry, and exhaustion related to WASH (Fisher et al. 2017). Female caregivers of people with disabilities, who are responsible for meeting their WASH needs, often experience poor physical, mental health and wellbeing (Wilbur et al. 2022). Wilbur et al. (2022) report that studies from India (Thapa et al. 2017), Malawi (White et al. 2016) Pakistan (Ansari 2017) and Vanuatu (Wilbur et al. 2021) find that supporting the daily WASH needs of people with disabilities, such as elderly family members can be physically demanding, time-consuming and isolating for caregivers.

**Reduced agency:** Gender influences a person's degree of choice, autonomy and dependence. Often, as Caruso et al. (2022) note 'women do not have capacity to make alternative choices about how she spends her time'; a result of women's limited bargaining power within a household (Agarwal 1997), as well as male under-recognition of UCDW and fears about how women will use their spare time (Suda 1996).

**Increased vulnerability to violence:** Although Sommer et al. (2015) note that access to WASH is not the root cause of gender-based violence, it can exacerbate the levels of violence that women and girls experience. Women are made more vulnerable to harassment or violence when undertaking activities such as water collection or cleaning. This might include harassment (being hissed/ shouted at, or called names), intimidation or threats and physical or sexual assault. Inadequate WASH can exacerbate existing tensions in the home for instance if water to drink or shower is not available (House et al. 2017).

### 3. Programme and policy options and implications

In essence, there is real exploitation of women happening across the WASH system. Strengthening WASH services and systems is an opportunity to further realise gender equality outcomes, if those essential services are developed, delivered and monitored with a central focus on women's and girls' empowerment and gender transformation. More can be done to reduce the costs of unpaid WASH work. The following strategies

are proposed to guide policy action about opportunities, services and resource allocation for UCDW, based on the ILO 5R Framework for Decent Care Work (recognise, reduce, redistribute, reward, with relate substituting for representation<sup>4</sup>):

**Strategy 1: Recognise.** By investing in filling the data gap and collecting data on time spent on UCDW it is possible to recognise and value this work. Several nationally representative tools (time-use surveys, 24-hour diaries, Household Surveys, Living Standard Measurement Study, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and National Panel Surveys) provide information on who collects the water and the time spent (as water collection is counted in productive unpaid work). Improvements are needed on quality and availability of gender data on UCDW on sanitation and hygiene. The ILO only collects data on voluntary aspects of UCDW. Rapid gender analysis such as CARE (2020) provided an insight into the WASH-related impacts of the pandemic. Oxfam's WE CARE programme has created a Household Care Survey Questionnaire, repeated surveys will make it possible to identify whether data has been used and resulted in any changes in the distribution of responsibilities between men and women, adults and children. Alliances such as Data2X<sup>5</sup> are building data on all of women's work, including UCDW, focusing on labour force surveys, multitopic household surveys, and time use surveys. To date, aside from MenCare, there are few examples of the practical experience of working with men on UCDW.

**Strategy 2: Reduce.** Improving access to safely managed water and sanitation can reduce some of the unpaid UCDW associated with WASH. WASH systems invest in time and labour-saving WASH services that meet the criteria of SDG indicators of universal access to safely managed drinking water and sanitation, that are located on premises and available when needed.

**Strategy 3: Reward and remunerate.** National through to local WASH services rely on labour that is usually expected to be given for free – in the household and the community. WASH and health systems have taken an instrumentalist approach to CHVs/CHWs, viewing this work as an extension of household UCDW, necessary to reach the unreached and supplement the WASH workforce. The campaign for state-provided wages for housework became prominent in the 1970s, with the global women's strike.<sup>6</sup> India in particular has seen a groundswell of progress on rewarding and remunerating UCDW, which might be expected to include aspects of WASH at the household level. Kotiswaran (2021, 2022) reports:

- In 2021, a new political party Makkal Needhi Maiam, made an election promise to pay a salary to housewives in Tamil Nadu, India.

4 In the ILO framework, representation refers to the right to collective bargaining, freedom of association, collaboration with trade unions representing care workers, whilst still recognising the importance of this (with lessons applicable from initiatives to support the rights of sanitation workers) relate looks to broader partnerships and relationships within the WASH system that support improved access to WASH.

5 <https://data2x.org/>

6 <https://globalwomenstrike.net/care-income-now/>

- An unconditional cash transfer *Orunodoi* scheme in Assam recognises women’s unpaid domestic and care work, <https://assam.gov.in/scheme-page/154>
- Indian courts have quantified women’s UCDW to fix a monthly income, multiplied for her reproductive lifespan, in compensation cases under the Indian Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 for loss of services of housewives to the family.

**Strategy 4: Redistribute.** What is considered appropriate behaviour for men and boys, women and girls is changing in many societies around the world. Current generations often demonstrate less support for a traditional division of gender roles within the home. The Gender Social Norms Index (UNDP 2020) reveals ‘only 10.3 per cent of people worldwide have no gender social norms biases, including 11.5 per cent of women and 8.9 per cent of men’. In households where both members of the couple are both have paid work, men’s uptake of UCDW remains low – meaning women combine a paid job along with UCDW. Whilst there are possibilities for ‘caring masculinities’ to ‘rework’ the gender norms and relationships, women may feel protectionist and defensive around UCDW out of concern that men would inevitably seek positions of control. Without addressing wider gender norms, roles and power relations, WASH programmes can place additional burdens on women by reinforcing gender assigned roles (such as water collection, cleaning and care for the WASH needs of others). According to Huggett et al. (2022) WaterAid Timor have supported the redistribution of household work as part of CLTS approaches: women and men reported a change in WASH-related roles and an increased willingness to share household tasks. Men reported a new understanding of the work that women did in the home. By working to change values, mindsets and behaviours on shared responsibility within the household, WASH actors can catalyse the emergence of new gender norms. For instance, by removing outdated gender stereotypes, images and messages in programme approaches and instead use those that show men and boys, women and girls sharing all the household chores. Furthermore, redistribution is also required to other actors – state, market and community.

**Strategy 5: Relate.** UCDW is an interconnected issue that spans all domains of people’s lives, beyond WASH. It will require partnerships at many levels – individuals, families, societies, private sector, and ministries – to address it. WASH actors can play a pivotal role in facilitating these partnerships by supporting initiatives to collect and analyse data, promote dialogue on expectations around UCDW, develop policies, advocate for gender equality in and through WASH and support governments in promoting change in gender norms. Expert groups, such as women’s rights holder organisations, can inform and advise the WASH sector on women’s specific needs, perspectives and interests.

## 4. Recommendations

With the 2030 SDG deadline fast approaching, this paper has explored how WASH actors and policy-makers can fully commit, act and advocate for the 5R framework on women's UCDW work. The core recommendations emerging are set out in Table 4 below:

**Table 4: WASH-related UCDW policy recommendations**

Policy area	Policy recommendation	Policy measure
Care WASH Gender Health Social protection Labour	Recognise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for less debate and more agreement on WASH within UCDW. Adapt UCDW dimensions to more clearly show the links to WASH.</li> <li>Measure WASH activities within UCDW through regular time-use surveys or labour force surveys, with data disaggregated by sex, income, age, location and other relevant factors.</li> <li>Include unpaid time women spend on WASH-related activities in nationally representative data collection tools such as household MICS.</li> <li>Review and measure the impact of UCDW on employees in the WASH sector.</li> </ul>
	Reduce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invest in expanding access to WASH services, infrastructure for more people and places in order to reduce the drudgery and time burden associated with WASH work.</li> <li>Ensure design and delivery of WASH services are led by women, to ensure it most effectively reduces their UCDW.</li> </ul>
	Redistribute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tackling UCDW is a core component of WASH system strengthening improved service delivery.</li> <li>Include measures to address unpaid care in government plans, budgets and systems (such as improved services).</li> <li>Implement family friendly working arrangements for employees to manage their own UCDW responsibilities and enable greater caring roles by men.</li> </ul>
	Reward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Act on the demand of the Global Women's Strike for new care-related policies and practices.</li> <li>Reward CHWs and other unpaid or low paid care workers more within the WASH sector.</li> <li>Value female CHVs and CHWs by ensuring they have decent terms and conditions, a safe work environment as well as advocating to redefine their employment status longer term, in line with the ILO Decent Work Agenda.</li> <li>Make changes in WASH organisations so workplace practices enable workers to more effectively fulfil family care and household/workplace responsibilities.</li> </ul>
	Relate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for government ministries, including health, water and gender, to work together to address UCDW.</li> <li>Secure multi-sectoral gender-responsive policies across WASH, health, gender to address UCDW and invest in adequate WASH-related infrastructure and services.</li> <li>Collaborate with women's rights activists, grassroots and community-level organisations as well as feminist networks who are sources of knowledge and experience that can advance the agenda.</li> </ul>

Source: Adapted from: Maria Arteta (n.d) *Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work*, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---americas/---ro-lima/---sro-port\\_of\\_spain/documents/presentation/wcms\\_702216.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---americas/---ro-lima/---sro-port_of_spain/documents/presentation/wcms_702216.pdf)

## 5. Conclusions

To date, the WASH sector has invested in *reducing* the unpaid work burden associated with access to WASH, principally by building physical infrastructure, increasing access to WASH services as well as changing hygiene-related practices and behaviours. Whilst this has helped improve health and hygiene, saving money, time, and drudgery, WASH actors have done comparatively less to shift the social expectations that UCDW-related WASH work is a woman's responsibility. This paper outlines the ways in which WASH activities are interlinked with women's UCDW. Unless the WASH sector urgently engages with the whole of the 5R framework on UCDW, we will fail to meet our SDG targets, to accelerate progress toward universal WASH coverage and broader

objectives for gender equality and women's empowerment. Better measurement, increased data collection on sanitation and hygiene alongside water, and stronger evidence will help us *recognise* UCDW. As Dhar (2020) notes 'with more data collected and made available, calls for action can be made and decisions taken' that both *remunerate* and *redistribute* unpaid WASH work. In order to play our part effectively, WASH actors must relate and collaborate with a range of partners, including women's rights organisations (IANWGE 2020), and invest in gender-responsive multisectoral programmes to address interrelated issues of gender, WASH and health, to garner wider support for change.

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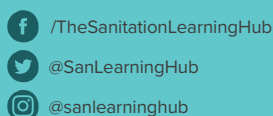
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# Out of sight, out of mind? Making unpaid WASH work visible

Target 5.4 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) involves the recognition and valuing of unpaid care and domestic work (UCDW). Much UCDW is related to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and daily workloads increase when household and community WASH services are weak, in disrepair or non-existent (WaterAid 2022). Unequal gender power relations mean women often do the UCDW that other family members are unwilling to do. This makes WASH efforts an obvious lever for change on UCDW by influencing how policy makers make decisions about responsibility for this work. Yet to date the sector has taken little action to change what happens on WASH in people's homes, leaving gender norms unchallenged or in some cases reinforcing the belief that UCDW is a role for women and girls. This paper adapts the 5Rs framework for decent work (ILO 2018) to explore the kinds of positive changes (recognize, reduce, remunerate, redistribute and relate (with the authors adaption of the latter substituting for representation) that are needed to redress the UCDW balance more fairly between men and women. It outlines the ways in which WASH activities are interlinked with women's UCDW dimensions and it argues that WASH actors and their services and systems must be actively engaged across the whole of this framework in order to fully address UCDW. Actionable recommendations are given to both fulfil our commitments to reach the SDG targets so that women and girls benefit equally from WASH policy and programmes, and to gather the data needed to ensure that our efforts are working.



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