

Connecting Unpaid Care Work and Childhood Development for Gains in Women and Children's rights

Women's rights and children's rights directly influence each other, yet there have been few successes at tackling the agendas collaboratively thus limiting the quality of policy and practice in both areas. Integrating unpaid care concerns into early childhood development policies has the potential to positively reinforce both women's and children's rights. Addressing this challenge involves recognising the value of unpaid care work in relation to childcare, redistributing childcare responsibilities from women to men, and recognising that responsibility for children goes beyond the immediate family to the collective community and the state.

Unpaid care and early childhood: the connections

The gap between thinking and programming around these two agendas is most visible in early childhood development (ECD) policies. A recent review of all ECD policies in low and middle income countries found that unpaid care was invisible within most policy statements and measured outcomes. Of 263 policies reviewed, only 40 had explicitly recognised that unpaid care concerns were intrinsically linked to early childhood development. For child rights programming, this is vital because the invisibility of unpaid care work within ECD policies helps explain why some programmes achieve such limited success: programmes which increase the net burden of unpaid care work are unlikely to succeed.

ECD policymaking – from design and implementation to monitoring, evaluation and learning – can be assessed against the Elson Triple R framework to judge whether care is integrated by:

- recognising the value of (mainly women's) unpaid care work and its contribution to the care and socialisation of children;
- redistributing childcare responsibilities from individual women to men, the community and public and private providers of quality care services;

- reducing the drudgery associated with childcare in poverty contexts through provisions that support all aspects of unpaid care work.

For women's rights activists and champions, the integration of unpaid care into ECD policymaking matters because it is likely to set in motion a positive cycle of gains in women's rights reinforcing gains in child rights.

Women's rights and child rights – gaps and challenges

A key challenge for getting unpaid care integrated into ECD policies is that practitioners and champions of women and children's rights have tended to pursue separate agendas through separate programmes and policies. Practitioners and champions of child rights programmes have no connection with those working on women's rights issues. Part of this gap comes from a technocratic approach to the issues confronting children and women, with an artificial separation between the issues confronting women (land and inheritance, family and marriage, domestic violence, bodily integrity, labour market related concerns) and children (education, health and nutrition, cognitive and social development).

This is mirrored by research and policy silos with associated expertise and funding agendas ➔

around these two distinct yet interlinked agendas. These tend to reinforce their separation, and may even mean they compete for resources or policy space. It could be argued that initial differences arose from women's rights and gender equality advocates who were distancing themselves from the instrumental approach of targeting children through working with women. In the fight for gender equality, especially in the workplace, many women activists, academics and professionals also sought to portray themselves as unencumbered by domestic and reproductive responsibilities. Child rights groups, on the other hand, have focused on the child as the centre, with all other aspects being peripheral, including women who were seen as simply conduits that enable children's development. This clash has meant that the inseparable linkages between women and children have been neglected.

Addressing unpaid care concerns is vital to enhance both child rights and women's rights. This is because women carry out most of the childcare responsibilities, with gender norms permeating the division of labour within families and communities. This issue takes on critical importance at this moment in time because of the financial, environmental and social crises which are resulting in additional demands being placed on both the nature and extent of women's participation in the labour market and the levels of care that are required.

With a growing financial pressure on families, more and more women are entering the labour market. There is a balance that 'working mothers' seek to strike between their childcare responsibilities and participation in the labour market. An imbalance towards paid work can cause a care deficit in the home – the main recipients of this care are children, who are the most vulnerable and most negatively affected by lack of adequate care. Care deficits are sometimes filled by other members of the household, mostly elder girls and older women,

restricting in turn their economic, social and political empowerment. A recognition of the twin-sided link between women's rights and child rights is therefore critical to ensure that women's economic empowerment is sustainable and shared across generations, and that the care deficit does not affect children adversely.

On the other hand, ECD programmes rely on women as mothers to ensure children regularly attend pre-school and health centres and provide adequate parenting to the child at home. Unpaid care responsibilities may inhibit women from sending their children to the ECD centres, or from providing adequate care at home, thereby limiting the achievement of the objectives of the ECD centre. At the same time, compulsory ECD centres which require a woman's presence may constrain women's opportunities to access education and work, again limiting the success of the ECD centres. However, focussing on women's rights to the exclusion of child rights is also not enough. It is vital to pay attention to the quality of services being provided as women will not use poor quality childcare services.

Despite these clear connections between women's and child's rights, only 15 per cent (40 out of 263) of ECD policies have been successful in reflecting them. The 40 'successful' policies catered to the unpaid care responsibilities of women and girls through provisions in three aspects:

- 30 policies focussed on redistributing care from families to the state, amongst which seven policies also recognised childcare to be a collective responsibility of communities;
- 16 were concerned with redistributing care from individual women to men by encouraging men to take up active roles as fathers;
- Ten provided support to carers (with two of these ten policies addressing the needs of children as carers of other children).

“A recognition of the twin-sided link between women's rights and child rights is critical to ensure that women's economic empowerment is sustainable and shared across generations.”



A woman tends to her children at a public works site in India.

Examples of successful integration of unpaid care into ECD policies

Community and state run childcare centres

Gardens of Mothers and Children in Albania are low-cost community based centres that serve young children and their families. In addition to providing children with pre-school education and training to mothers, the programme also encourages men to take on active fathering roles through the Boards of Fathers (a place for the men to gather and talk about child health and development, nutrition, play and children's rights). A similar programme is the Chile Crece Contigo (Chile grows with you) programme, which recognises childcare as a shared responsibility of the state, communities and families, and supports fathers in playing an active role in caring for their children.

Encouraging men as fathers

Jordan's ECD policy lists several concrete ways in which fathers can help in childcare, including preparing children's meals and spending time playing with children. In Ukraine, 'Papa-Schools' provide training for fathers to encourage them

to take a greater role in early child development, with an overall objective of changing stereotyped gender roles and helping men to achieve greater co-operation (in the private and professional spheres) with women.

Supporting women's economic participation through strengthening ECD provision

Botswana, Ethiopia and Ghana's early childhood care and education policies respond to poor and disadvantaged women's need for time so that they can engage in other productive activities. Cuba's children's circles were established in 1961 in order to provide institutional care for the sons and daughters of working mothers.

Recognising children as carers

In Bangladesh, under the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP II), primary schools incorporate informal 'baby classes' which enable older siblings to attend school at the same time as caring for their younger siblings. The policy is based on the recognition of care work provided by older siblings which often prevents them from going to school.

“Jordan's ECD policy lists several concrete ways in which fathers can help in childcare, including preparing children's meals and spending time playing with children.”

Policy recommendations

1 Ensure ECD policies take into account concerns of unpaid care.

ECD policies can be made 'care-sensitive' by:

- Recognising that childcare is a responsibility of men. Encouraging men to take on positive roles as fathers and as husbands/brothers to women carers will lead to a redistribution of unpaid care from women to men.
- Recognising that childcare is a responsibility of the larger community. Setting up childcare centres within a community will ensure holistic development of children, and also ensure a change of norms in valuing women and girls rights (to health, education, rest and leisure).
- Recognising that both children and women are citizens of the state – and therefore the state needs to provide good quality care for children and their carers (who may be women, other children and men). This care can be provided in the form of quality services (opening state funded ECD centres, ensuring ECD centre opening times are flexible and suit working parents, and providing staff training), and in terms of financial support (through subsidies for ECD centres and cash transfers for childcare to carers).

2 Ensure good quality childcare facilities that protect the best interest of the child and also provide support to women's economic participation. Two further aspects are also important:

- Monitoring specific provisions related to unpaid care: this will signal a seriousness of intent towards integrating women's rights and child rights.
- Documenting the impact of these provisions: the impact of ECD centres on children is documented, but more needs to be known about the impact they have on the lives of women. Information on the increase of time available to women, the use of that time on other activities (rest, work, social life), and also on quality of childcare (increase in income of women leading to better nutritional outcomes) will be useful to showcase the positive and mutually reinforcing cycle between women's rights and child rights.

3 Bridge the gap between specialists working on women's rights and child rights issues. Recognising that women are mothers, workers and citizens, and are crucial to the holistic development of children, will help to propel the child rights groups to take into consideration women's rights. For the women's rights camp, it is time to reclaim the reproductive sphere and to listen to its constituents who want to balance work and childcare well, and not substitute one for the other. Creating communities of practice, integrating research agendas, and reviews of donor and NGO action to integrate unpaid care into childcare issues will be a critical step towards breaking down the silos between women's rights and child rights.

Further reading

Chopra, D. (2014) 'Towards gender equality with care-sensitive social protection' *IDS Policy Briefing 49*, Brighton: IDS

Chopra, D., Kelbert, A.W. and Iyer, P. (2013) *A Feminist Political Economy Analysis of Public Policies Related to Care: A Thematic Review*, Brighton: IDS

Making unpaid care work more visible in public policy
<http://interactions.eldis.org/unpaid-care-work>

Eyben, R. (2013) 'Getting Unpaid Care onto Development Agendas', *IDS Policy Briefing 31*, Brighton: IDS

Credits

This *IDS Policy Briefing* was written by **Deepta Chopra**, Research Fellow in the Vulnerability and Poverty Reduction Team at IDS, through her work on the 'Making unpaid care visible' stream of the UK Aid-funded programme on 'Influencing Policies to Support the Empowerment of Women and Girls'. It was edited by **Carol Smithyes**.

The opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of IDS or the UK government's official policies.

Readers are encouraged to quote and reproduce material from the *IDS Policy Briefing* series. In return, IDS requests due acknowledgment and quotes to be referenced as above.

AG Output Level 2 ID: 290

© Institute of Development Studies, 2014
ISSN 1479-974X



IDS Policy Briefings are published by the Institute of Development Studies and aim to provide high quality analysis and practical recommendations for policymakers on important development issues.

To subscribe: www.ids.ac.uk/idspolicybriefings

Institute of Development Studies, Brighton BN1 9RE UK
T +44 (0) 1273 606261 F + 44 (0) 1273 621202 E ids@ids.ac.uk W www.ids.ac.uk
twitter.com/IDS_UK #idspolicy facebook.com/idsuk