

**Revaluation of 'Work' from a Gender Perspective**

Chandrama Goswami,  
Associate Professor,  
Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University,  
Patgaon, Rani,  
Guwahati 781017

**Abstract:**

Work usually means gainful employment for pay or profit. This definition of work excludes subsistence production such as collection of basic necessities like water, firewood and fuel, domestic work and care of the family. This means that the so called 'reproductive' sector is left to the women where their activities go unrecognized. Efforts have been going on for acknowledging women's work to raise women to economic, social and political parity with men. Women themselves have come forward to fight for their rights through trade unions and through their own organization by pressing for a revaluation of their paid work and for valuation in cash for their unpaid work. No one can deny the importance of unpaid work- it lowers the cost of reproduction of the labour force. Of course there are difficulties in the statistical system of identifying, enumerating and quantifying the work performed by women. Many of the activities associated with household maintenance, provisioning and reproduction, are not subject to explicit market relations. There is always a tendency to ignore the actual productive contribution of these activities. Similarly, social norms, values and perceptions also operate to make most of women's work invisible. These invisibilities get directly transferred to data inadequacies, making officially generated data in most countries very rough and imprecise indicators of the actual productive contribution of women. We need to do away with all these difficulties and reevaluate the concept of 'work' to make women's work accountable.

**Keywords:** Unpaid Work, Care, Work Participation Rate, Gross Domestic Product

**Introduction:**

Economic institutions, indicators and definitions of work for many thousands of years have been created and formulated largely by middle and upper class men, an aspect of their control of their societies. Their control of semantics and of economic institutions has become and remains one of the chief ways by which the status of women, and, indeed, of other groups of people, has been undermined and the power of elites maintained (Lewenhak, 1992).

It is indeed ironical that some of the activities required to maintain human life are classed as work and are acknowledged to have a value; whereas some other activities which are very essential for human survival are not regarded as having any economic value and are therefore ignored.

This brings up the interesting discussion on the definition of work. Work has been defined as gainful employment for pay or profit in 1956 by the United Nations National Accounts System. In other words, work means working for a wage or salary, and in the case of self-employment, selling a good or service for money. For example, if a person worked on a family farm, it would be defined as work if the produce

was sold for a profit. This definition of work excluded subsistence production such as the collection of basic necessities like water, firewood and fuel, domestic work and care of the family. This means, there is a value system which determine what value work contributed to a nation.

This definition of work suffered from various drawbacks. Many of the activities in Third World developing/underdeveloped countries did not have a price as it did not enter the market. In 1966, the definition of work was expanded to include the production of economic goods and services that could have been sold, even if they were not sold (for example, animal tending or food processing). Here, the concept of work included production of those commodities/services if there was a market for the goods and services.

The definition of work was further expanded in 1993 to include all activities that meet the family's basic needs for goods and services that could have been produced in a monetized economy (like gathering fuel and water). This definition excludes production of all personal and domestic services from own final consumption within households except for paid domestic services and owner occupied housing (because it was believed that production of such services is a self-contained activity with limited repercussion on the rest of the economy; vast majority of household, domestic and personal services are not produced for the market and there are typically no prices that can be satisfactorily used to value such services; and if personal and domestic services by members of households for own final consumption are included, all persons engaged in such activity would become self-employed, making unemployment virtually impossible by definition). The UN also excluded unpaid care services as it was thought that unpaid care services have 'limited repercussions' on the economy. According to the UN, including unpaid care work in the definition will negate the whole system, as these services do not change and do not impact the status of the economy. The UN however recommended satellite accounts to capture time use (of unpaid care work). However, non marketed activities within the household are generally not recorded properly, thus diminishing the contribution of men, women and children to the economy. This is most true in case of women.

Two frequently used concepts in economic analysis to measure work/activity are GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and GNP (Gross National Product). GDP is defined by the World Bank as "all goods produced and services rendered by residents and non residents of a country". GNP does not include income gained from economic activity and property held by foreigners and non residents in a country. The problem comes in the use of the word 'all' in the definition of GDP. The word 'all' in the above given definition of GDP is misleading because in case of work, it includes only those economic activities which brings a cash return. This leaves out the value of a vast amount of subsistence work and local small-scale production of goods, as well as the everyday self-maintenance required of each person without which there would not be any able bodied labour to employ. As women are heavily involved in these kinds and conditions of work and in the maintenance of not only themselves but also other members of the family, women's economic contribution is the single largest item which is not counted in national economic indicators.

It is the payment for work that sets cash value on it; the intrinsic value of the work remains the same. This implies, unpaid work should be a factor in the cash economy and should carry an equivalent value. Recognition of this concept will lead to an accurate and fairer assessment of a country's economy. One

of the definitions that is more inclusive goes back to 1934 from Margaret Reid who said that, in principle, any activity that could be performed by someone else, that is not the person who is benefitting from the activity, should be considered productive (work) from an economic perspective (e.g., cooking is work; but eating is not). Almost every job done at home or for a family is also done outside for cash, where employees pay in cash or kind for the work done outside the home. Many empirical studies have proved the point that work done unpaid by a family member is worth as much in terms of cash as equivalent work done by a paid employee. However, as mentioned earlier, in most places, only a minority of women gain anything from the manner in which at present their national economies are defined and calculated.

It is usually difficult to establish cash values of unpaid work done (by either sex) due to lack of information about numbers involved, grades/types of job hours devoted to such work, etc. Thus, a variety of work is done in the home for families which fall under the terms such as 'housework', 'domestic work', and 'family duties'. These works require a wide range of skills and patience, and at times can be very strenuous. However, these works vary across societies and regions. This diversity of economic and social structures across the world frightens competent international agencies from assessing values of these works. As women are mostly associated with these types of work, they are also often called 'women's work'. These are unpaid work done by women for the smooth functioning of the household. These activities keep women out of the so called 'productive' sector of the economy, leaving the 'reproductive' sector to them. Unpaid work also has an opportunity cost as it puts a limit on women to participate in the labour market and reduces the time available to them for self care, human capital investment, socializing with other people, political participation and relaxation.

### **Making unpaid work count:**

Since around the 1920s, people of both sexes have been putting emphasis on the economic value of unpaid work in families. In acknowledgement of work done in World War II, pressure increased for public acknowledgement of all women's work as part of a general movement to raise women to economic, social and political parity with men (Lewenhak, 1992). A number of studies were carried out to study the economic value of unpaid work at that time. Prof Kathryn E Walker of Cornell University presented a motion on 'Economic Discrimination and Household Work' to the Economic Committee of the United States Congress in June 1973 on behalf of the American Home Economics Association. Recognition of the value of work done unpaid in people's homes was strongly supported by Madame Giscard d'Estaing (wife of the then President of France), by the President of the Communist Unions of Sicily, by the New Zealand Select Committee on Women's Rights, by the Indian Status of Women Commission, by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and by many other individuals and organizations. These studies have increased since the mid 1970s. However due to the slow acknowledgement of the value to be given to unpaid work, women themselves came forward to fight for their rights through trade unions and through their own organizations by pressing for a revaluation of their paid work and for valuation in cash for their unpaid work (Lewenhak, 1992).

The United Nations declared 1975 as International Women's Year and this was followed by the United Nations Decade for Women, 1976-85. Other studies during this period also showed the economic value of unpaid work with contribution from the International Labour Organisation. However, the UN's

agenda for the 1985 World Conference to Review and Appraise the Decade for Women claimed that domestic work (i.e., the work required to maintain homes and families) cannot be measured. By 1985, research studies from different countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America pointed out to the importance of unpaid work; though they received little publicity. However, at the World Conference held at Nairobi, Kenya to mark the end of the Women's Decade, the Commission on the Status of Women was forced to accept the document "Forward Looking Strategies", which stated that concrete steps should be taken to quantify the unremunerated contribution of women to agriculture, food production, reproduction and household activities.

The momentum generated by the UN Decade for Women was kept up by women's organizations and other international bodies which succeeded in including 'Unpaid Family Workers' among its main work categories. However, due to the difficulties faced in establishing internationally acceptable bases for assessing the economic value of unpaid work, the document "Forward-Looking Strategies" has not been implemented in practice.

### **The importance of unpaid work:**

Unpaid work makes its impact on the market economy indirectly. Unpaid work is generally done at home and lowers the cost of reproduction of the labour force. Wives and mothers are not the only unpaid labour in homes. Male members too do a part of the unpaid work as well as children, though to a lesser extent. However, in most societies, and particularly in developing countries, essential activities which are unpaid (such as cooking, cleaning and other household work, provisioning of basic household needs, child care, care of the sick and the elderly, as well as community-based activities) are usually the responsibility of the women. The distribution of work – paid and unpaid, between women and men, is skewed, as proven in the Human Development Report, 1995 (UNDP, 1995, Chapter 4). A sample of 31 countries studied showed that of the total burden of work, women not only do more than men (53 per cent in developing countries and 51 per cent in industrial countries), but also that of women's total work time – both in developing and in industrial countries – roughly two-thirds is spent in unpaid work and one-third in paid work. For men in industrial countries, these shares are reversed. Men in developing countries spend even less of their total work time in unpaid work: roughly one-fourth.

Since the 1970s, the contribution of unpaid work to the economy has come under focus from different theoretical perspectives. There are actually several motives for studying unpaid work, each one connected to policy issues (Francavilla et al., 2011). First, the motive of measuring the contribution of unpaid work to GDP, which has led to the construction of satellite accounts to be incorporated in the System of National Accounts (Chadeau, 1992; EUROSTAT, 2000, 2003). This methodology tried to find out the GDP of a country if unpaid domestic work are measured, valued and included in national accounts. Second, the motive of its interrelation with labour market work, which is important, especially for women. Women's participation in the labour market needs to be studied in the framework of the theory of allocation of time, thus involving the analysis of its interaction with domestic work (Breen and Cooke, 2005; Bonke et al., 2008) with family child care tasks and fertility choices (Del Boca and Vuri, 2007) and with care of the elderly (Spiess and Schneider, 2003). The aim of measuring and assigning values to unpaid work is to study the gender inequalities arising from the unequal sharing of family care

tasks between women and men. Third, the motive of choosing the optimal mix of public and private resources to meet the demand of family care in a welfare system. In fact, in a cost-benefit analysis, the value of unpaid family care can be taken as a cost not only for the family, but also for the society, when household members performing unpaid work could generate, with the same amount of work, a higher value added in the market. In this case, state intervention with public services or subsidies might be more efficient. With sufficiently detailed data, estimates of the value of specific family-based care activities that could be in part either subsidized or supplied by the State at possibly lower costs for the society may be derived.

By estimating the market or monetary value of the unpaid work, some policy issues can be formulated for improving the welfare of women. It can also ensure the rightful share of women in National Income, and lead to engendering of the budget. It may lead to laying the foundation for gender sensitive policies in support of household/domestic work, care (of children and adults), subsistence farming, etc.

### **Methodology of Evaluating Unpaid Work:**

There are two main approaches of evaluating unpaid work within the household depending on what it measures – (i) output of the unpaid work or (ii) input (i.e., time) required to carry out the work and produce goods for household consumption. In the first approach, which is used in the System of National Accounts, all unpaid activities such as food preparation, washing, cleaning, etc. is classified and broken down into different types of work based on their availability in the market. These activities are then priced at the market rate. This approach is not usually used in studies that evaluate unpaid work of women, mainly because of the detailed information needed on different activities carried out and products produced at the level of households as well as markets. In the second approach, a monetary value is put on the time required to perform unpaid activities. This method provides an indirect and reasonably accurate measure of the value of unpaid work. Data required for this method can be collected by a time-use survey. After the time-use survey of women's activities at home is done, a monetary value is put on these activities by the (i) opportunity cost approach (which is the income/wage foregone by doing unpaid work), or (ii) market rate approach or replacement cost approach (which is the market cost of buying the goods and services that are provided by the unpaid labour within the household).

The opportunity cost approach assumes that the person doing the work at home have a foregone income in the labour market. The market rate/wage approach can be carried out by evaluating unpaid labour at the wage of a 'general' worker (who can do everything from cleaning and cooking to helping children with their homework and nursing the sick and the elderly) and a 'specialist' worker (which treats different activities as distinctly different works, each having their own specialist market wage). All the above approaches have their methodological and empirical problems and shortcomings which bring a certain degree of bias into the estimation of the monetary value of unpaid work. But, despite the shortcomings of the market rate approach, it gives monetary estimates of unpaid work which are less biased than given by the opportunity cost approach. In this study, the market rate approach is used. A distinction is made between general housework and home education support provided by mothers and

care services given by women and trained personals. The study combines the 'general' and 'specialist' approaches to evaluate unpaid domestic work (as has been used in other works, e.g., Budlender, 2008; Esquivel, 2008; Tabatabaei, et al, 2013).

### **Situation in India:**

It is impossible to understand women's work in India, or anywhere in the world. Women have been a part of the working class since the beginning of society. However, the exclusion of unpaid/unrecognized work occurred with the separation of home and family from the market. This separation was not very marked for thousands of years. The distinction between home and market, home and manufacturing base, home and farm were one as long as people had access to land and raw materials from it. As land ownership became concentrated in fewer hands and population was rising, the number of landless people seeking a livelihood by other means started increasing ((Lewenhak, 1992, pp 18). This change happened more extensively in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in countries where the industrial and agricultural revolutions developed. As men, women and children on a mass scale went outside their homes to work in factories, mines, metal-and-brickworks and as seasonal agricultural labourers, the separation of paid from unpaid labour became more absolute. Mass production in industries required a 'mass' of hands; i.e., higher growth of population which led to an increase in women's activities as mothers. However, this activity was not publicly recognized as having any economic importance at that time.

In India, the Work Participation Rates as described by official surveys do not really indicate the productive contribution of women, because many of their economic activities, whether at home or outside, is not recognized as work (or an economic activity) by other household members and even by the women themselves. A significant part of women's work is not just unpaid; it is also socially unrecognized. This is true of just not just social reproduction, but also other economic activities where women's work is rendered invisible by social perceptions. thus, women's work participation rate is just a proxy indicator of women's overall status in society and of gender empowerment.

There are difficulties in the statistical system of identifying, enumerating and quantifying the work performed by women. Many of the activities associated with household maintenance, provisioning and reproduction, are not subject to explicit market relations. Thus there is a tendency to ignore the actual productive contribution of these activities. Similarly, social norms, values and perceptions also operate to render most of the household based activities "invisible". These invisibilities get directly transferred to data inadequacies, making officially generated data in most countries very rough and imprecise indicators of the actual productive contribution of women.

The major sources of data which looks into women's participation in economic activities are the Census of India and the National Sample Surveys. They have increased their attempt to recognize women's work by asking probing questions that tries to establish women's involvement in economic activity. However, this still includes only participation in work for the household farm or enterprise, and does not include housework, childcare, care of the sick and old, and related activities associated with social reproduction. It also does not include related work necessary for provisioning for the household, whether it is fuel

---

wood collection (in rural areas), or attempts to obtain access to clean water (in urban areas). Thus, there is an urgent need for a reevaluation of the concept of work.

In recent times, evidence on unpaid work by women is captured through time use surveys. These show, not only that women devote time to unpaid work at the cost of leisure and rest, but also that much of the unpaid labour has been increasing over time. There are a number of reasons for this. The Structural Adjustment Policies have led to a reduction of government expenditure reducing access to a range of public goods and services for ordinary women (which affects women adversely as the additional burden falls on them). For example, cuts in health expenditure, not only reduces the women's access to health facilities, but also increases the burden of labour on women as the responsibility for caring for the sick who cannot be hospitalized falls on them. Worsening of urban infrastructure conditions, such as drinking water and sanitation, imply greater time spent in ensuring minimally clean water supply for the household. Inadequate access to fuel for cooking requires more time spent collecting firewood, etc.

Sometimes increase in women's unpaid labour is also because of the attempt to fulfill certain social objectives. An example to this is the formation of Joint Forest Management Committees to conserve and regenerate forest resources through decentralized village-level actions, which set aside areas to be developed as forests, prohibiting any encroachment, including minor fuel wood collection, as women now have to travel much further away from their homes to access even minor amounts of such resources.

This implies there is an urgent need for reevaluation of the concept of 'work'.

#### References:

1. Benería, Lourdes (2003): "Gender, Development and Globalization: Economics as if People Mattered", Routledge, New York.
2. Beneria, Lourdes and Gita Sen (1981) "Accumulation, Reproduction and "Women's Role in Economic Development": Boserup Revisited", Signs, Vol. 7, No. 2, Development and the Sexual Division of Labor (Winter, 1981), pp.279-298
3. Bonke, J., M. Deding, M. Lausten, and L. S. Stratton. (2008): "Intra-Household Specialization in Housework in the United States and Denmark." Social Science Quarterly 89:1023–1043.
4. Breen, R. and L.P. Cooke, (2005): "The Persistence of the Gendered Division of Domestic Labour." European Sociological Review 21:43.
5. Budlender, D (2008): "The Statistical Evidence on Care and Non-Care Work Across Six Countries", Geneva, UNRISD, Gender and Development Programme Paper No 4
6. Cagatay, Nilüfer, Diane Elson and Caren Grown (1995): "Introduction", World Development, Vol. 23, No. 11, pp. 1827–36.
7. Chadeau, A (1992): "What is households' non-market production worth?" Technical Report 18, OECD Economic Studies, Paris.
8. Del Boca, D. and D. Vuri, (2007): "The mismatch between participation and childcare." Journal of Population Economics 4.
9. Dong, Xiao-Yuan, Xinli An (2012): "Gender Patterns and Value of Unpaid Work: Findings from China's First Large-Scale Time Use Survey", UNRISD Research Paper 2012-6.

10. Elson, D (ed) (1996): "Male bias in the Development Process", Manchester: Manchester University Press, Second Edition.
11. Esquivel, V (2008): "political and Social Economy of Care: Research Report 2 on Argentina", Geneva, UNRISD.
12. EUROSTAT, (2000): "Guidelines on Harmonised European Time Use Survey." Technical report, Eurostat. European Commission, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
13. EUROSTAT.,(2003): "Household Production and Consumption Proposal for a Methodology of Household Satellite Accounts." Technical report, Eurostat. Working Papers and Studies.
14. Folbre, Nancy and Julie Nelson (2000): "For love or money—or both?" Journal of Economic Perspectives, Vol. 14, No. 4, pp. 123–140.
15. Folbre, N (2006): "Measuring Care: Gender, Employment and the Care Economy", Journal of Human Development, Vol. 7, No. 2, July.
16. Francavilla, F, G C Giannelli, G Grotkowska, M W Socha (2011): "Use of Time and Value of Unpaid Family Care Work: A Comparison between Italy and Poland", Discussion Paper Series, IZA DP No 5771.
17. George, Beena, Natasha Choudhury, Ashutosh Tripathy, Phaeba Abraham (2009): "Women's Economic Contribution through their Unpaid Work: The Case of India", Evangelical Social Action Forum and Health Bridge.
18. Ghosh, Jayati (2009): 'Never Done and Poorly Paid: women's Work in Globalising India', Women Unlimited, ISBN-10: 8188965448.
19. Jain, Devaki (1982) "Domestic Work: Its Implication for Enumeration on Women's Work and Employment", in K. Saradmoni, ed., "Women, Work and Society", Calcutta, Indian Statistical Institute, 1985
20. Lewenhak, Sheila (1992): 'The Revaluation of Work', Earthscan Publication Limited, ISBN 1-85383-115-8.
21. Medeiros, Marcelo, Rafael Guerreiro Osorio, Joana Costa (2007): "Gender Inequalities in Allocating Time to Paid and Unpaid Work: Evidence from Bolivia", Working Paper No 34, International Poverty Centre.
22. Medeiros, Marcelo, Rafael Guerreiro Osorio, Joana Costa (2007): "Gender Inequalities in Allocating Time to Paid and Unpaid Work: Evidence from Bolivia", Working Paper No 34, International Poverty Centre.
23. Statistics New Zealand (2001): "Around the Clock: Findings from the New Zealand Time Use Survey", Wellington.
24. Swiebel, Joke (1999): "Unpaid Work and Policy Making – Towards a Broader Perspective of Work and Employment", DESA Discussion Paper No 4, United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
25. Tabatabaei, M Ghazi, N Mehri, M Messkoub (2013): "What is Unpaid Female Labour Worth? Evidence from the Time Use Studies of Iran in 2008 and 2009", Working Paper No 562, International Institute of Social Studies.
26. United Nations, (1996): Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4–15 September 1995, United Nations, New York.