

Equity and Development: Through a Gender Lens

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Leontief invented a way of looking at economies, in terms the structure of resource use and resource flows, rather than in terms of markets, prices and consumer preferences, that is invaluable for looking at the structural changes that drive development. It is also a way of looking at economies that can be easily adapted to look at non-market resource use and resource flows. This is important not only for analysis of environmental challenges but also for analysis of economies and equity through a gender lens.

A *gender lens* refers to the way that feminist economists look at economies:

- insisting that economies be analysed in ways that take account of the lives of women and girls as well as of men and boys;
- insisting that the unpaid domestic work related to caring for families and communities, done predominantly by women and girls, is just as important as the paid work of producing goods and services in the private and public sectors;
- because it is a key input in reproducing labour power, both on a day to day and an intergenerational basis;
- because the organization of unpaid domestic work is a key factor in determining the distribution of income , wealth and human well being.
- The unequal responsibility for unpaid domestic work persists even as economies undergo major structural changes and output as measured by GDP grows;
- the structure of unpaid domestic work changes with development- less drudgery as some tasks are no longer necessary because of provision of water and energy infrastructure and use of labour- saving technology in households - but more time on inter-personal care as child care intensifies and includes more and more elements of education- and new demands for frail elderly care arise with an ageing population;
- the unequal responsibility for unpaid domestic work constrains the ability of the majority of women to earn a decent income, accumulate assets, and enjoy rest and free time.

This inequality can be revealed by time use surveys. Let me give just two examples, drawn from a paper written for UNRISD by Debbie Budlender, and covering time spent on unpaid care work (a subset of unpaid domestic work).

Argentina, 2005, Buenos Aires, population aged 15-74:

- On average, males spend 89 minutes per day, and females 256 minutes per day
- A little over 25% of males do no unpaid care work
- A little over 5% of females do no unpaid care work
- Many females, but almost no males do more than 450 minutes a day

Males do more paid work, on average about 333 minutes per day, while females on average work 180 minutes a day.

Adding the paid and unpaid work together:

- Males work for 422 minutes a day
- Females 436 minutes a day, a little more than males

India, 1998/90, 6 states, all household members above age 6

- On average, males spend 36 minutes a day, and females 354 minutes a day
- Around 35% of males do no unpaid care work
- A little over 15% of females do no unpaid care work
- Many women, but almost no men do more than 450 minutes a day

Males do more paid work, about 432 minutes a day on average, while females work 180 minutes a day on average.

Adding the paid and unpaid work together:

- Males work for 468 minutes a day
- Females work for 534 hours a day, considerably more than me.

So to look at equity and development means we need to look at equity in time as well as in money, and consider how this is related to the structure of economies and the structures of power.

Of course, there are those who argue the distribution of time spent in unpaid work is not an inequality but merely a difference, and one that does not require any policy attention. It is the result of women's own choices, particularly the choice to have children, and to withdraw from the labour force to take care them. Gary Becker got the Nobel Prize for Economics for, among other things, constructing economic

models that demonstrate this to be a perfectly rational choice in light of women's supposed comparative advantage in rearing children and men's in earning money.

But feminist economists call into question this notion of choice, drawing on a wealth of evidence, including from sociologists and anthropologists, to show how little choice many women have, and how those choices that they do have are shaped by social norms that embody gender inequality. The same is true of men, of course. There are what Nancy Folbre calls 'structures of constraint' that shape the lives of women and men, and result in unequal sharing of child care and care for frail elderly relatives, designating this care as primarily 'women's work' in ways that produce unjust outcomes.

I have argued that public action is needed to address this inequality, presenting this in terms of what I call the three R's of unpaid domestic work.

The first R is for Recognize

Unpaid domestic work is invisible to most conventional economic policy makers. There are no regular yearly statistics on this work. The conventional macro models on how national economies work only consider paid work and the outputs produced by paid work.

This work can be made visible through *time use surveys*, and there has been progress over the last 40 years in producing statistics of time use, including in many developing countries.

But in too many cases, these have been one-off efforts. And even when time use surveys are conducted on a regular basis, as in some of the Nordic countries, they are at 5 year intervals. Useful for looking at longer run structural changes, but not for medium and short run changes.

As everyone who has done Economics 101 knows, the output of unpaid domestic work is not counted as part of the GDP, often illustrated by the story of the man who married his housekeeper and reduced GDP. Methods have been developed to construct *satellite accounts* that place a notional money value on unpaid work and its output. Such accounts show that this is quite substantial in relation to GDP- amounting up to about a third of the value of GDP.

However, even when statistics on unpaid domestic work and satellite accounts are produced, they are not used in design of economic policies.

In my work on structural adjustment policies in the 1980s in developing countries and on austerity policies in Europe since 2010, I have argued that unpaid domestic work is a vital but hidden factor in how economies adjust to severe cutbacks in public expenditure, tending to expand to produce goods and services that substitute for those supplied by the state or available for purchase in the market. But too often it is women doing the extra work, while gender norms constrain men who have lost their jobs from contributing more to unpaid domestic work. The outcome for working class people is all too often: overwork for women and enforced idleness for men.

It might be argued these are just temporary effects in the period of adjustment that will disappear as the economy recovers and gets back to normal. But actually, overwork and enforced idleness have long run impacts: deterioration of mental and physical health, skills, social fabric, and an increase in preventable mortality. Unpaid domestic work is not, I argued, in infinitely elastic supply, able to expand to make good the deficiencies in the public and private sectors.

I first developed this analysis for the case of developing countries, but in the last five years, I have been applying it to Western Europe.

Yet still the role of unpaid domestic work, and the impact of fiscal policy upon it, is not recognized by policy makers. After being challenged through the courts, the UK government must now produce assessments of the impact of its austerity policies on equality. These assessments (which are in any case of very poor quality) do not consider the impact on unpaid domestic work.

So while some progress has been made in recognizing the existence of unpaid domestic work statistically, there is much more to do in getting economic policy to recognize this work.

The second R is for Reduce

Unpaid domestic work can, and should, be reduced by investment in labour saving technology, some of it investment within households, much of it via public finance. For example investment in:

- rice mills and clean cooking stoves;
- washing-machines, and vacuum cleaners;
- infrastructure, especially clean water, sanitation, and clean energy;
- decent housing;

- and public services, especially care services and health services.

Economic development usually does involve investment in the kind of infrastructure that can eliminate some kinds of work altogether- the drudgery of walking miles to get water and wood, for instance.

- The challenges are to create this infrastructure in ways that are not environmentally destructive;
- that do not displace communities from their land;
- and that provide affordable access for low income women.
- These challenges are especially severe when infrastructure is privatised
- The inequality between women and men in this kind of unpaid work intersect with class and urban/rural inequalities.
- For many urban women, especially women in middle and upper income households, water is on tap, electricity available at the flick of a switch.
- But rural women, especially low income rural women, in low income countries, still have to spend a lot of time and energy collecting water and wood.

Public investment in care services reduces the amount of unpaid work in a different way, not by eliminating the need for services provided, but by transferring production of them to paid workers, either in the public or private sectors. There may be economies of scale, so the total amount of work required may be reduced, but there is a limit to the potential for increasing productivity in care services.

There has been increasing public investment in child care and early education services, not only in high income countries, but also in many middle income countries. But at the same time a lot of this investment does not provide universal free (or low cost) services, staffed by well-paid and well-trained workers. Rather there have been increasing public subsidies to private providers (both for profit and not for profit) many of whom do not pay a living wage and do not provide quality services. Needless to say, the majority of those employed in care services are women.

So the problem is that the reduction in women's unpaid care work is often being achieved by creation of low quality low paid jobs. This is not inevitable, as the cases of Norway and of Chile show.

The reduction of unpaid domestic work through public investment and public provision has been a goal of women's struggles in many parts of the world, and one of the impetuses behind the welfare state.

The third R is for Redistribution

We would not want to eliminate unpaid care work altogether. We want both time free from care, and also time to care for our loved ones. What is required is to redistribute the remaining unpaid domestic and care work so that men and boys do more of it. This can be encouraged by:

- systems of social security that provide tax-funded paid parental leave for fathers as well as mothers, with pay at a high percentage of wages, and a use it or lose it requirement;
- payment of child-related welfare benefits to the main carer, not necessarily the mother;
- equalising hours of paid work at about 30 hours a week for both men and women;
- employers to provide family friendly flexible working arrangements for both men and women;
- employers recognizing that time spent in unpaid care work enhances interpersonal skills;
- high profile men playing a bigger role in care of their children and elderly parents .

These are the kinds of policy now coming on the agenda in some high income and middle income countries, especially in Western Europe and Latin America.

The redistribution of unpaid care work requires men's lives to become more like those of women- whereas the process of development in both developing and developed countries has tended to make women's lives more like those of men- through for instance policy that focuses on trying to raise the female labour force participation rate in paid work, without trying to raise the male participation rate in unpaid domestic work.

Are there reasons for optimism on greater equity in unpaid domestic work?

The issue has moved up international agendas.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty produced a report on Unpaid care work, poverty and women's human rights in 2013 that argued that unpaid work

burdens restrict women's enjoyment of human rights. She referred to the 3R's of unpaid work and argued that care should be seen as collective, not a purely individual responsibility.

There was no recognition of unpaid work in the MDGs- but in the SDGs, Goal 5.4 is:

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.

Melinda Gates has also expressed concern about women's unpaid work and embraced the 3 R's framework – see Bill and Melinda's 2016 Annual Letter.

At the annual meeting of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York next week, many UN agencies and NGOs will be raising the issue of unpaid domestic work.

Of course, this growing attention does not necessarily mean that any effective practical steps will be taken. One barrier is the continuation of cuts to public expenditure in many countries. Another is that many women in key decision making positions in governments and businesses do not feel the urgency of this issue because they themselves do very little unpaid work-instead they hire paid domestic workers. Class inequality and gender inequality are intertwined and both need to be addressed.

In concluding, let me emphasise that by itself female participation in paid work does not automatically 'empower' women and overcome gender inequality. As Ruth Pearson and I argued in the late 70s, when considering the entry of women into export –oriented industries in Asia and Latin America: while earning a wage can promote the decomposition of existing unequal gender relations, it also serves as a basis for recomposition of new forms of gender inequality. A factory job may liberate women to some considerable extent from the patriarchal control of their fathers and husbands, but it also subordinates them to factory managers in a regime of gendered capital accumulation. Women do benefit from earning wages- but owners of capital benefit more. And most women are still left 'holding the baby', continuing to have to take the main responsibility for unpaid domestic and care work.