

# Unpacking Perceptions about Unpaid Care Work in Workplaces and Families in Uganda

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Who contributes more to family welfare (earning money to meet family needs)? What options do women have? When we put these questions to both men and women in Uganda, the results were astonishing.

About 62% of women respondents indicated that the husband or other man in the household contributed more to welfare while the wife or other woman in the household contributed about 31%. Almost 70% of male respondents named themselves or another man in the household to have contributed more to welfare compared to a wife or other woman—at less than 25%.

This implies that unpaid care work is not recognized as a contribution even though women take care of the sick, look for food, prepare children for school, and fetch water and firewood – all of which cannot be monetized. Contribution to well-being is majorly seen in monetary value. Anything non-monetary is seen as less important.

Failure to recognise the value of unpaid care work remains one of the biggest challenges in developing countries. It is perceived as work done mostly by women and girls. Efforts to reduce or redistribute it are sneered at and less attention is paid to the impact this has on women's health while plunging them further into poverty.

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Research led by Makerere University School of Women and Gender and consortium partners Economic Policy Research Center and CARE International Uganda; From promises to action: Shifting gender norms and public perceptions about unpaid care work in workplaces and families in Uganda, seeks to recognise, redistribute, reduce, and represent the unpaid care work burden women bear.

Our baseline findings show the burden is still huge – with women spending more than six hours daily doing care work compared to men's three hours. Men spend much of their time – seven hours per day – doing paid work. Our findings rhyme with those of other organizations, including the Kenya Women Economic Empowerment Community of Practice (a project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and convened by the International Center for Research on Women - ICRW) an indication of slow progress in reducing the unpaid care work burden borne by women. The landscape across the region is not different. In Rwanda, a recent survey found rural women spend on average seven hours per day doing unpaid care work while men spend just 2 hours only. In Kenya, the 2021 time use survey showed that women spent approximately 7 times more time on unpaid care work and about 5 times on unpaid domestic work than their male counterparts, with urban women spending more time compared to rural women. Lack of basic social services infrastructure exacerbates the burden. For instance, in peri-urban areas where there was ease of access to water facilities and clean energy cooking stoves, women spent less time on unpaid care work. In rural areas where such services are often amiss, women continue to trek for hours to find water and gather firewood. This is an invitation for better planning and budgeting by policymakers. National budgets are yet to meet the unpaid care gap service needs as areas that would otherwise reduce the burden of care work on women are still starved of resources.

While infrastructure is necessary, the recognition, reduction, and redistribution of unpaid care work burden calls for a discussion on social norms that have inculcated and assigned gender roles. Men that help their wives with care responsibilities still face severe sanctions, including mocking and isolation from peers. Some are whispered to be bewitched. Negative social norms that increase the care burden need to be done away with, and progressive ones encouraged.

Addressing this will take time and a lot of conviction. It needs a clear demonstration that doing away with archaic norms is beneficial to both individuals and their communities. This will involve engaging powerful gatekeepers – religious and cultural leaders, and village elders. Encouraging men to assist their wives in domestic work during prayers and worship days for Muslims and Christians could make a difference.

There is already a willingness to change, and benefits are already visible in some areas where we have carried out interventions and awareness campaigns. Some respondents have revealed that after men helped their wives in sharing care work, the couple's sex lives improved.

Also, households became more open about money issues and budgeting. This has the potential to reduce domestic violence.

Concerted effort is needed to ensure that local governments and national governments budgeting takes into consideration interventions that reduce care work burden on women. Donor agencies and community project implementors can provide things such as water tanks or subsidize the cost of acquiring energy-saving stoves to reduce the time a woman spends walking several kilometers to fetch water and firewood.

Recognition of the value of unpaid care work for both genders will involve engagements and training. Women need to be released from unpaid care work to engage in productive economic work. Unpaid care work needs to be recognized by governments and other institutions as pivotal to the wellbeing of families evident in their plans and budgets.

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