



CARE MATTERS

Taking action on unpaid care and domestic work in ASEAN

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Unpaid care and domestic work (UCDW) is one of the most persistent and systemic barriers to achieving gender equality and women's economic empowerment. Hence, it is important for the ASEAN and its member-states to regulate and oversee policy legislation and investments in programs and services that address issues related to UCDW and to create an enabling environment where it is recognized, reduced, redistributed, and represented as provided for by key international conventions and frameworks. A regional policy framework for such should enable investments in national care systems, improve social protection systems, shift negative social norms that perpetuate unequal care responsibilities, ensure the participation of carers in decision-making processes, improve database on UCDW, and transform labor and business laws, policies, and incentives.

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email asia@oxfam.org.

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Cover photo: Randy helps his wife Maria Socorro with the family laundry outside their home in Guiuan, Eastern Samar, Philippines. Photo by Auralie

1 INTRODUCTION

Women's economic empowerment (WEE) is vital to achieving gender equality and sustainable economic growth in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region. To realize WEE in ASEAN, women must not only have opportunities to take up decent paid work in various sectors of the economy but also control over their time. They must be able to manage heavy and time-consuming responsibilities, along with other enabling conditions such as access to decent work, recognition of rights, and decision-making power.

Ensuring that economic progress is gender inclusive and women are empowered in the economy remains a big challenge in ASEAN. Across ASEAN countries, female labor participation rate is reported to be persistently low with the narrowest gender labor force participation gap in Lao PDR (3%) and the widest gap in Indonesia (33%).¹ The gender inequality in labor force participation is mainly due to inadequate and unequal access by women to economic opportunities in the region.² In the Philippines, for instance, it is reported that women participate in paid work much less than men — only 45% to 50% of women are in the labor force compared to at least 75% of men. This is largely because unpaid care and domestic (UCDW) work at home is mostly borne by women, oftentimes forcing them to stop or reduce their paid work.³

Heavy and unequal UCDW is one of the systemic barriers to women's engagement in the labor force, as this affects their productivity and can severely limit their opportunities to generate income. Globally, women perform 76.2% of the total amount of UCDW, which is 3.2 times more time than men. Across countries in Asia and the Pacific, women provide the majority of UCDW at around 4.1 times more unpaid care work than men.⁴ In some countries, women end up spending 11 times more time than men on unpaid care tasks, which are mainly invisible and unremunerated work.⁵ For example, in Cambodia, married women aged 18–64, on average, spent 3.5 hours per day more on UCDW than men. Moreover, girls and women have a greater total work burden (which includes all types of work such as agricultural, market, and household work) than men, regardless of marital status, age, and rural or urban location.⁶

In the context of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the heavy and unequal UCDW mainly provided by women has increased as lockdown measures and school closures require children and the elderly to stay at home. Women and girls are likely designated to spend more time caring for and providing educational support to children. Older people are at greater risk

¹ Projected Gender Impact of the ASEAN Economic Community: Summary, ASEAN, 2016

² Ibid

³ Lim, Joseph Anthony (2020), Towards a better normal A Study on Inequalities and the Lack of Human Development in the Philippines, Oxfam

⁴ Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work, ILO, 2018

⁵ UN Women and ADB (2018) Gender Equality and the Sustainable Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific: Baseline and pathways for transformative change by 2030.

⁶ Based on a time use survey conducted in 2004, which is the most recent time use survey available for Cambodia. ADB, Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment in Cambodia, p. 19.

of falling severely ill if infected by COVID-19, and in Asia — where elderly often live with their children — women will shoulder the responsibility of caring for them. Oxfam in Asia and UN Women’s joint policy paper highlighted this impact in the wake of school shutdown in 188 countries, affecting 1.5 billion students and over 63 million primary school teachers.⁷

If accounted for in monetary terms, UCDW contributes at least US\$ 10.8 trillion a year to the global economy.⁸ While the importance of UCDW cannot be overemphasized in maintaining the wellbeing of society, it should also be recognized as a public good that is essential to the economy. Governments’ failure to recognize or invest in UCDW worsens inequalities — particularly exacerbating the gender inequalities faced by women not only in the economy but also in the social, political, and cultural spheres.

In ASEAN, women contribute substantially in the economy through large amount of unpaid care work, but they remain unseen and unaccounted for in the national income.⁹ Addressing UCDW is clearly an area where ASEAN and its member-states have an important role and responsibility to regulate and oversee policy legislation and investments in programs and services that address UCDW and to create an enabling environment where UCDW is recognized, reduced, redistributed, and represented (4Rs framework).

⁷ UNESCO (2020) Take data a Survey: COVID 19 and Early Childhood Education Workforce, cited in Mercado, Lan, et. Al. “Women’s Unpaid and Underpaid Work in the Times of COVID-19,” Oxfam in Asia, May 31, 2020. <https://asia.oxfam.org/latest/blogs/womens-unpaid-and-underpaid-work-times-covid-19>

⁸ Based on Oxfam’s calculation; see P. Espinoza Revollo (2020). Time to Care: Methodology note. Oxfam. <https://dx.doi.org/10.21201/2020.5419>

⁹ ASEAN (2016), Projected Gender Impact of the ASEAN Economic Community. This study also pointed out that the limited data on women’s care work.

2 UNDERSTANDING UCDW AND THE 4Rs FRAMEWORK

Care work is essential and crucial to maintaining societies and economies. It sustains and support a healthy society, as well as ensures the safety and mental wellbeing of individuals, households, and communities. It involves a wide range of physical activities that require time, effort, and resources. It encompasses both paid care work and UCDW.

Paid care work involves physical activities or services that are provided directly or indirectly by wage workers or self-employed workers on a range of direct care-related activities. This typically includes medical practitioners such as doctors, nurses, midwives, and other health professionals; early education, primary, and secondary teachers; therapists; nannies or child minders; and personal care workers and domestic workers, including migrant domestic workers.¹⁰ Care occupations — such as those provided by domestic workers, caregivers, and childminders — are predominantly taken up by women.

The nature of the work that they provide are often viewed as extension of women's care roles and closely associated with what are perceived to be women's "natural" abilities and predispositions that they are assumed to be low-skilled, thus justifying the low rates of pay and generally regarded as "low status" jobs.¹¹ While care workers close the circle between unpaid care and paid work (which are underpaid and undervalued), this briefing paper will limit its focus on UCDW.

UCDW, meanwhile, consists of activities related to the direct or indirect provision of care services that contribute to the wellbeing of the family, community, economy, and society at large. It is a term used similarly to reproductive work or household chores that are often unremunerated. Direct care of persons is considered a key component of UCDW, involving hands-on or face-to-face activities with people within the immediate households or in the communities. Domestic work refers to the indirect provision of care, which includes activities related to the maintenance of households to ensure the wellbeing of family members and/or of the community.

¹⁰ Esquivel, Valeria, Care in Households and Communities: Background Paper on Conceptual Issues, Oxfam Research Report, October 2013

¹¹ UNRISD (2016) cited in the ILO report, Care Work and Care Jobs

Box 1. Types of UCDW

UCDW¹²: Providing services for family and community outside of markets/productive work

Direct care of people	Domestic/household work
Childcare	Cooking
Elderly care	Cleaning
Care of ill or disable people	Washing, mending, ironing clothes
Care of community members (e.g., sick neighbors, volunteer work)	Fetching water
	Collecting firewood

UCDW is unpaid because it arises out of social or contractual obligations, such as marriage, family relations, kinship, and other social relationships or being part of a community network. It is care because the activities provided ensure the wellbeing of people in the context of these social relationships. It is considered work because UCDW includes activities that have costs in terms of time and energy.¹³

UCDW AS A KEY DRIVER TO GENDER EQUALITY

UCDW is considered one of the systemic barriers to achieving gender equality and WEE. While care is a social good and essential for sustaining the social wellbeing of society and the functioning of the economy, it becomes problematic to women as they bear the heavy and disproportionate responsibility of providing care. There is a growing evidence that UCDW limits women’s choices and decision-making power, results in time poverty, affects women’s health and wellbeing, restricts their access to economic opportunities, and perpetuates their low status in society.

Not all women are affected by the disproportionate responsibility for UCDW. Women and girls living in poverty are the most vulnerable because they spend significantly more time on UCDW than those from wealthier families. They are less able to afford to hire domestic help or to acquire time- and labor-saving equipment such as fuel-efficient stoves, washing facilities, and cleaning equipment, and they are more likely to live without access to piped water, electricity, and other basic infrastructure and services. In rural areas and the poorest urban slums, where access to basic services is limited, women must travel long distances to collect fuel and water.

According to Oxfam’s research, women from the poorest households in low-income communities in Uganda, Zimbabwe, India, the Philippines, and Kenya spend an average of 40 minutes more each day, or over a year longer during their lifetimes, on such care work activities than women in better-off households. The same goes for children: girls from the poorest households spend an average of seven hours a week more on care work than girls in less poor households. This makes it even harder for girls from the poorest families to spend time on education; they

¹² Also see the examples of UCDW in Annex 1

¹³ Esquivel (2013)

devote five hours less each week to education than those from less poor households.¹⁴

THE 4Rs AS A TRANSFORMATIVE SOLUTION TO UCDW

For the effective and transformative solution to address UCDW, the policy agenda over the past decades has been informed by the 4Rs framework.¹⁵ The 4Rs consists of principles that consider the multiple dimensions and specific actions that diverse stakeholders must do to address women's heavy and unequal care responsibilities.

Box 2. The 4Rs framework

Recognize

Recognize unpaid and poorly paid care work, which is done primarily by women and girls, as a type of work or production that has real value. It involves making visible the contribution of UCDW to society and the economy, including through government policies, budget allocation, and the collection of quantitative and qualitative data to inform policy responses.

Reduce

Reduce the total number of hours spent on unpaid care tasks through better access to affordable and quality time-saving devices and care-supporting infrastructure. Reduction efforts include reducing the drudgery of time- and labor-intensive UCDW tasks to free up women's and girls' time to participate in education and in social, political, and economic life.

Redistribute

Redistribute unpaid care work more fairly within the household and simultaneously shift the responsibility of unpaid care work to the state and the private sector. This include efforts in ensuring that the responsibility for UCDW is shared more equitably between women and men, as well as between government, the private sector, communities, and households.

Represent

Represent the most marginalized caregivers and ensure that they have a voice in the design and delivery of policies, services, and systems that affect their lives. It also refers to the meaningful inclusion of unpaid carers in decision making about national, community, and household budgets, planning, policy, and decision-making processes, ensuring that UCDW is considered in infrastructure and services at all levels.

¹⁴ Oxfam (2018). Infrastructure and Equipment for Unpaid Care Work: Household Survey Findings from the Philippines, Uganda and Zimbabwe- 2017 Household Care Survey Report. These calculations are based on data from the household care survey administered in low-income communities in Uganda, Zimbabwe and the Philippines in 2017 and in Kenya, as well as the India household care survey administered in 2018, which included questions around particular government schemes

¹⁵ The 4Rs framework builds on Diane Elson's 3Rs framework. Oxfam, Action Aid, and the Institute of Development Studies have added a fourth R (represent). A fifth R (i.e., reward), which was forwarded by the ILO to promote more decent work for caregivers, is still being debated among feminist economists and activists. Also see in Oxfam (2015). Time to Care: Unpaid and underpaid care work and global inequality crisis.

3 INSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS ON UCDW

UCDW AS A HUMAN RIGHTS AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS ISSUE

Over the last decade, the issue of care has been enshrined in key international conventions and frameworks. Key development initiatives, such as the 2012 Brasilia Consensus and the 2013 Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, have been significant in framing UCDW as an issue beyond the household — to the collective responsibility of other stakeholders including the state, private sector, communities, and civil society.¹⁶

The intersecting issues of poverty, unpaid care, and human rights were highlighted in the Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, where evidence was presented on how “heavy and unequal care responsibilities are a major barrier to gender equality and to women’s equal enjoyment of human rights.” The report further pointed that “the failure of States to adequately provide, fund, support, and regulate care contradicts their human rights obligations by creating and exacerbating inequalities. A number of recommendations were made as to how States could recognize, value, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work and the need to adjust policies and improve women’s access to services and infrastructure.”¹⁷

Within the UN, the recommendations forwarded in the UN Special Rapporteur report had signalled the shift to tackle the issue of women’s UCDW — not only as an individual problem but also to position care as a social and collective responsibility. UN Women came out with the recommendation to strengthen the capacities of national statistics offices to collect, analyze, and disseminate gender-sensitive statistics on women’s UCDW in order to increase the recognition of this work and to contribute to gender-sensitive policymaking. Since then, UCDW became a priority advocacy of UN Women that it hopes to address in future global development frameworks.¹⁸

Women’s rights international frameworks, such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), highlighted the interconnection of equality, non-discrimination, and UCDW to the economic contribution of unpaid care work to national economies.

¹⁶ The Brasilia Consensus had included care as one of the outcomes of the 11th Regional Conference on Women in Latin America, where it established “care as a right, which requires strong policy measures to effectively achieve it and the co-responsibility of the society as a whole, the state, and the private sector.”

¹⁷ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/10/special-rapporteur-positions-unpaid-care-work-as-major-human-rights-issue>.

¹⁸ Ibid

Meanwhile, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action emphasized UCDW as a constraint for the realization of women’s rights. It recommended countries to recognize and make visible the full extent of the work of women and all their contributions to the national economy. One of its strategic objectives is to promote the harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men, so that women can maximize their opportunities.¹⁹

Box 3. International frameworks relevant to UCDW	
Convention	Provisions relevant to UCDW
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW – 1979)	Establishes the framework for substantive equality between men and women. Among other things, the framework includes the responsibility of both parents to bring up children and the requirement of states to provide social services that enable parents to combine family with work and public life.
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR – 1981)	Guarantees women the right to work on an equal basis with men (Article 6) and equal rights at work (Article 7).
Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)	Establishes the right to care for vulnerable groups and their caregivers, such as children and persons with disabilities. Stipulates the responsibility of both parents for care of children, as well as that of governments to provide support for disabled persons and their families and caregivers.
ILO Convention No. 156 (1983) on workers with family responsibilities	Aims to ensure equal opportunities to women and men workers who have dependants and commits, including through states developing or promoting public or private community services such as child-care and family services and facilities (Article 5b).
ILO Convention No. 183 (2000) on maternity protection	Aims to ensure proper protection, maternity leave and benefits to women workers.
ILO Resolution I (2013) concerning statistics of work, employment, and labor underutilization	Defines ‘work’ as “any activity performed by persons of any sex and age to produce goods or to provide services for use by others or for own use”. This means key unpaid care activities such as fetching water; cleaning, decorating, and maintaining one’s own dwelling or premises; childcare and instruction, transporting and caring for elderly, dependent or other household members—are classified as a form of <i>own-use production work</i> .

¹⁹ UN Women. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, September 1995, Action #156, p. 66

UCDW AS A DEVELOPMENT ISSUE

Over the past decade, UCDW has gained prominence as a development, public policy, and inclusive business issue, with its growing attention and increased visibility within the UN, multilateral bodies, donors, international development organizations, and the private sector. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on gender equality marks an unprecedented advancement and visibility of the care agenda as a central dimension of sustainable development and achieving women’s empowerment. UCDW is included as a specific SDG target and indicator, signalling the importance of addressing it in order to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Box 4: SDG 5 and its target		
SDG Goal	Target	Indicators
Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls	5.4 Recognize and value UCDW 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	5.4.1 Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work by sex, age, and location Proposed indicators 4.1 Percentage of eligible population covered by national social protection programs 4.2 Average number of hours spent on paid and unpaid work combined (total work burden) by sex

Source: <https://indicators.report/targets/5-4/>

Leaving no one behind is a fundamental commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. It is a commitment shared by the ASEAN and its member-states to advance the SDGs in their national development plans. Drawing from the Oxfam Briefing Paper on UCDW for Sustainable Development in Africa, the interlinkages of SDG Target 5.4 are vital for the achievement of several individual SDGs, as well as for the overall SDGs.²⁰ How SDG 5.4 cuts across other SDGs is shown below, and this could serve as a relevant guidance for ASEAN and its member-states to address UCDW as a stand-alone (SDG 5) and crosscutting issue.

SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Gender inequality is central to poverty. The vulnerability of women and girls living in poverty are further exacerbated with the disproportionate responsibility of UCDW across their lifetime. There is a growing evidence that points to the direct relationship between ending poverty and reducing

²⁰ Unlocking Sustainable Development in Africa by addressing Unpaid Care and Domestic Work, Oxfam Policy Brief, February 2020

and redistributing women's and girls' heavy and unequal responsibility for UCDW. When time poverty is reduced, there will be more time for women to take up employment and earn income from productive roles in the economy,²¹ as well as time for women to rest and recuperate.

SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages

Many households depend heavily on women as health caregivers, and where health sector funding is inadequate and the quality of care is low, it is women who fill the gaps. Poor quality health facilities and costly services often discourage patients from seeking professional care, especially in rural areas; instead, many opt for free healthcare provided at home by women.²²

SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Women and girls' disproportionate responsibility for UCDW underpins and reinforces every aspect of gender inequality. Heavy and unequal care and gendered social norms prevent women from engaging in political decision making and leadership roles or from taking part in collective action to promote their rights, including the right to sexual and reproductive health, decent and dignified work, access to social protection, and a life free from violence.²³

SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Data from around the world show that water-related time poverty translates into lost income for women and lost schooling for girls. Fetching and carrying heavy loads of water (and firewood) also have negative effects on women's physical and mental health.²⁴ In the Household Care Survey that Oxfam carried out in the Philippines, Zimbabwe, and Uganda, women reported significantly lower total hours of care work due to improved water source than in households without. This finding implies that providing access to an improved water source could potentially reduce women's average unpaid care workload by 1 to 4 hours a day in the districts in three countries where the survey was conducted.

SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all

Across high- and low-income economies, there is a negative relationship between the relative amount of time women spent on UCDW and economic participation. Research suggests that gender equality in the paid labor market may be one of the most important factors in reducing poverty in developing countries. Yet women's care responsibilities undermine their ability to find and stay in decent paid work. The various demands of earning an income and care for babies or children place pressure on women to work less hours in formal paid work or choose to

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

work informally. This explains the predominance of women in the informal economy resulting in less earning capacity, lower ability to save or contribute to social security, and less access to decent work. This situation only leaves women (and their children) in more vulnerable situations, at risk of falling further into the poverty trap.

Public investment in the care economy can create good quality jobs for women, reduce gender inequality, and support economic growth. Research in seven OECD countries showed that if just 2% of GDP was invested in the care industry (particularly in social and childcare), employment would rise by an estimated 2.4% – 6.1%. The majority of the jobs created would likely be taken up by women, reducing gender gaps in employment, and the policies would boost overall employment and economic growth.

SDG 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation

Gender-sensitive infrastructure is essential to inclusive and sustainable industrialization.²⁵ Investing in care infrastructure—such as water systems, electricity, fuel-efficient stoves, and other time- and labor-saving equipment and technology—has proven to be effective in reducing women’s time on UCDW. Oxfam’s findings from a 2015 Household Care Survey implemented in selected districts of five countries (i.e., Colombia, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Uganda, and Zimbabwe) found that compared with women in households with no electricity, women in households with electricity spent fewer hours on all care activities. There is also robust evidence in multiple countries about the impact of access to electricity and time- and labor-saving equipment on the time women spend on UCDW.

SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Income inequality continues to rise in many parts of the world, even as the poorest 40% of the population in most countries experiences income growth.²⁶ Oxfam’s report highlighted the scale of the gap between the rich and the poor, where the world’s richest 1% has more than twice as much wealth as 6.9 billion people. It is likewise notable that men own 50% more wealth than women. Economic inequality is also built on gender inequality where women and girls living in poverty and from marginalized groups are at the bottom of the economy. Majority of them are poorly paid and/or employed in precarious work while doing the bulk of unpaid and undervalued care and domestic work.²⁷

²⁵ Corina Rodriguez Enriquez, Care systems and SDGs: reclaiming policies for life sustainability, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), 2018

²⁶ United Nations (2015) Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

²⁷ Oxfam (2020) Time to Care: Unpaid and underpaid care work and the global inequality crisis

4 PUBLIC SECTOR INITIATIVES ON UCDW

There is a growing recognition of UCDW as a key policy concern and increasing evidence of public sector intervention in policy legislation and programs that recognize, reduce, redistribute, and ensure representation of UCDW issues. For instance, the EBRD and ICRW policy brief highlights the important role of the State in lifting the burden of UCDW and in creating an enabling environment for women, particularly in ensuring women's participation in labor markets. Public sector investment can take actions in improving care services, defining entitlements to care, and providing subsidies to secure universal access to quality care services, among others.²⁸

Within ASEAN, there are a number of existing policy initiatives and programs by some of its member-states that respond to issues related to UCDW, but data is limited and requires further research and policy analysis on how ASEAN governments can tackle UCDW.

Box 5: Policies related to UCDW in Vietnam

Vietnam Gender Equality Law (2006) stipulates that sharing housework is the responsibility of both women and men; and the husband and wife use their leave time to take care of their sick children according to law.

The Law of Marriage and Family (2014) stipulates that “settlement of property relations to ensure the rights and legitimate interests of women and children; housework and other tasks related to maintaining family's life are considered as labour income”.

Vietnam's National Strategy on Gender Equality 2011–2020 includes a target to “reduce women's time involvement in housework by half by 2015 and by one and a half times by 2020 as compared to men's”.

It is noted that, according to the strategy and laws, the distribution and reduction of housework is under the strategy's objective “gender equality in family”. However, the absence to date of sound, nationally representative time use data, analytical research, and specific strategies for addressing the issue poses challenges to progress on this target²⁹.

There are also other initiatives by development organizations that seek to improve policies related to UCDW.

Box 6. Policy-change initiatives in addressing UCDW in the Philippines

The issue of recognizing, valuing, and redistributing UCDW is not just a household concern. The government plays a large role in ensuring access to social protection policies, public infrastructure, and equipment that can lessen time spent on UCDW. In the Philippines, Oxfam and its development partners are working closely with local governments and national governments to strengthen local legislations and to improve government services related to

²⁸ EBRD & ICRW, Research Brief on Maximizing Growth: Public Sector Investment in Care Benefits the Economy

²⁹ Discussion Paper on Unpaid Care and Domestic Work: Issues and Suggestions in Vietnam, UN Women and DFAT, 2016

UCDW. Some of these ongoing collaborations include:

- Enactment of local ordinances on UCDW in 8 municipalities in Eastern Samar, Cotabato, and Maguindanao; increased recognition of UCDW by increasing the professional fees of day-care workers in the Municipality of Salcedo in Eastern Samar
- Memorandum of agreement with the Philippine Commission on Women for more active collaboration in addressing UCDW
- The Department of the Interior and Local Government is interested to build the capacities of regional Gender and Development focal persons on UCDW and to amend the Seal of Good Local Governance indicators to incorporate UCDW.
- Partnership with the Philippine Commission on Women and UN Women in conducting a National Household Care Survey to determine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on UCDW. The Commission on Population and Development has agreed to integrate UCDW in the agency’s pre-marriage counselling training modules/manual.
- The Department of Social Welfare and Development is interested in integrating UCDW into the Family Development Session modules of the 4Ps (i.e., national government’s social protection program) grantees.
- Partnership with the Bureau of Corrections-Leyte Regional Prison for the integration of UCDW modules in the Pre-release/Reintegration Program for Persons Deprived of Liberty

Some concrete policy and programme examples across different countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean that highlight specific government interventions found to have positive impacts on UCDW for women and girls living in poverty in low- and middle-income countries are featured below.³⁰ The care policies are framed within a broad range of social, economic, and developmental issues involving different stakeholders.

INTERVENTIONS TO RECOGNIZE UCDW

Collection of policy-relevant data on UCDW and use of time data to inform policymaking and budgeting decisions

Countries	Government Intervention
Cambodia and Colombia	Time use data were used to define childcare policies. ³¹
Mexico	Household satellite account measuring unpaid care work and its economic value since 2011 informed public policy related to gender equality, care services, household expenditure, and consumption. ³²
Albania	Time use data informed a key indicator on time spent on

³⁰ Parvez, Anam. Oxfam Preliminary desk review: Rapid review of types of government interventions found to have positive impact on UCDW for women and girls living in low- and middle-income countries, 2019.

³¹ Data2x. Invisible No More? A Methodology and Policy Review of How Time Use Surveys Measure Unpaid Work

³² UNECE (2017), Guide on Valuing Unpaid Household Service Work, United Nations, Geneva.

	unpaid care work in the National Strategy and Action Plan for Gender Equality (2016–2020). ³³
Uruguay	Time use measurements in national household survey (2011, 2013) influencing the 2015 National Care Policy. ³⁴

While time use survey generates relevant information for policymaking, the effectiveness of using the data was aided by (1) an enabling environment where international and national feminist advocacy provided impetus for measuring unpaid care work; (2) the quality of data and effectiveness in communicating data results; and (3) political will, motivation for, and the nature of policy change.

However, while there is a growing evidence of the influence of time use data on national level policymaking, particularly in the Latin America and Caribbean region, there remains limited evidence of how these policies led to the reduction of UCDW.³⁵

Incorporation of UCDW commitments into relevant government laws, policies, strategies, and programs

Countries	Government Intervention
Uruguay	The National Care System produced a set of integrated policies in 2015 that aim to build a consistent care system around care provision for children under three years old, care services for elderly people and people with disabilities, and professionalization of paid care work. ³⁶
Costa Rica	The Early Childhood Development and Care Network is an early childhood care policy established in 2014 for girls and boys younger than age 7, with the aim of universalizing integral early childhood care and development services and freeing up women’s and men’s time. This strong gender perspective is reflected in the Costa Rican Beijing+20 report. ³⁷
Rwanda	The Beijing+20 national report for Rwanda promotes the harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men in a range of projects and programs. One explicit aim is to reduce women’s UCDW. ³⁸
Ethiopia	The government’s public works program pays male and female workers equal daily wages but allows women to work 50% less hours than men work in recognition of women’s greater unpaid care responsibilities. ³⁹

³³ Data2x. Invisible No More? A Methodology and Policy Review of How Time Use Surveys Measure Unpaid Work

³⁴ United Nations Foundation – Data2X. Uruguay’s national care policy: A virtuous cycle in data, advocacy and policy

³⁵ Parvez (2019)

³⁶ Esquivel (2017) The rights-based approach to care policies: Latin American experience

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Esquivel and Kaufmann (2017) Innovations in Care New Concepts, New Actors, New Policies

³⁹ Chan, Man-Kwun (2018) Unpaid Care: Why and How to Invest. Policy briefing for national governments. Oxfam

India	The 2016 Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Act are two social protection policies that aimed to reduce the drudgery associated with UCDW in India. ⁴⁰
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These various initiatives were accomplished through the establishment and strengthening of national gender machineries, such as stand-alone ministries of gender and women’s affairs and gender directorates under various ministries. Political will in achieving gender equality and developing enabling policies is important to ensure government’s commitment to address UCDW. While these initiatives offer some evidence on how these policies have led to reduce UCDW for women, these are not substantiated with rigorous evaluations. This maybe because most of these policies have only been formulated in the last five years and would need time to mature.⁴¹

INTERVENTIONS TO REDUCE UCDW

Implement policies and programs that increase the access of poor women and girls to affordable and safe water sources

Countries	Government Intervention
Cambodia	The publicly owned Phnom Penh Water Supply Authority has been running the Clean Water for Low-Income Families program for more than ten years as part of the government’s poverty-reduction policy. It has significantly reduced the cost of water for more than 30,000 poor households and has contributed to time savings for the women and children in those households. ⁴²
Nepal	Implemented by the ADB and the Ministry of Women, the Children and Social Welfare of Nepal between 2009 and 2013 included over 3,500 small community infrastructure projects. The introduction of water taps was particularly beneficial for women, reducing the amount of time spent on these tasks by 41 minutes per day on average. This has positive spill-over effects for households—of which 67% reported dedicating the time they saved to income-generating activities. ⁴³

For this type of intervention, women’s representation in the design phase and being involved in decision-making processes is critical for water infrastructure to be designed according to their needs. Other important

⁴⁰ Chopra, Deepta (2013). A Feminist Political Economy Analysis of Public Policies Related to Care: A Thematic Review

⁴¹ Parvez (2019)

⁴² Kingdom of Cambodia (2013): Clean Water for All and Customer Information. Phnom Penh: Phnom Penh Water Supply Authority.

⁴³ Asian Development Bank (2016), Gender Equality Results case Study: Nepal Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women Project, ADB, Manila Philippines.

considerations in ensuring women’s access that will require less time include distance from the households to the water source, connection and affordability of user’s charges, particularly in rural areas.⁴⁴

Implement policies and programs that increase the access of poor women and girls to electricity and time- and labor-saving equipment

Countries	Government Intervention
South Africa	Rural electrification in South Africa has been linked to a decrease in women’s housework and a 9% increase in the female formal labor participation. ⁴⁵
Ghana	Analysis of time use data from Ghana finds that women who have access to electricity in their house dedicate over an hour more to income generating activities with time freed from care work. ⁴⁶

The robust evidence from multiple countries demonstrates the strong impact of access to electricity and time- and labor-saving equipment on reducing the time women spend on UCDW. The affordability of cook stoves and electricity connection charges is a key factor in influencing access of the poorest households, particularly in rural areas. A World Bank study found that women spent 76% less time collecting firewood using LPG in rural Nigeria, while an Oxfam research in India showed that in households with access to the Ujjwala programme (clean cooking fuel programme), women spent an average of an hour more on paid work and 49 minutes less on care work.⁴⁷

Expanding and improving quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) services

Countries	Government Intervention
Mexico	The federal government subsidizes up to 90% of the cost of day-care for children eligible through the Estancias program. Among women benefiting from the program, with the time saved from UCDW, 18% more are now employed, working on average 6 additional hours each week. ⁴⁸
Bolivia	The National Wawa Wasi Program is a social program that provides comprehensive care for early childhood responding to the need for day-care of girls and boys under 47 months of age. A commonly noted impact has been the extra time that women gained by having their children in the Wawa Wasi. This time was put to good use, either by taking animals to the field to graze

⁴⁴ Parvez (2019)

⁴⁵ Dinkelman, Taryn. 2011. "The Effects of Rural Electrification on Employment: New Evidence from South Africa." *American Economic Review*, 101 (7): 3078-3108.

⁴⁶ OECD (2019) Measuring Women’s Economic Empowerment. Time Use Data and Gender Inequality.

⁴⁷ Parvez (2019)

⁴⁸ Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women Policy Brief: Unpaid care and women’s empowerment: Lessons from research and practice

	(frequently stated), cleaning the house, or simply relaxing. ⁴⁹
Costa Rica	The Costa Rican Care Network (Red de Cuido) was launched in 2014. It is a program with a universal ambition, uses a rights-based approach, and aims to guarantee access to childcare services to all children up to 6 years of age, and includes different providers and alternatives. One of the program objectives is to ensure that the provision of childcare services will allow both fathers and mothers to work for pay or engage in education with time freed from care work. ⁵⁰

ECEC services need to be properly financed, regulated, and delivered in ways that enable access by children from disadvantaged families, ensure the quality of services for all, respond to the needs of parents working in both the formal and informal economy, and provide decent working conditions for paid childcare staff and early educators. High childcare fees have been shown to have negative consequences for both women and children. Accommodating parents' long and irregular working hours emerged strongly from multi-country research with women in informal employment in Brazil, Ghana, India, South Africa, and Thailand. While there is substantial evidence stemming from rigorous studies on how ECEC policies have impacted education and learning outcomes for children, only a few studies have found an impact on women's time spent on UCDW—evidence was found in only two countries in Latin America.⁵¹

Increased access to affordable and high-quality health services

Countries	Government Intervention
Pakistan	The Lady Health Workers Programme in Pakistan is a public sector initiative designed to provide reproductive healthcare for women. Apart from the health benefits it provides for women and children, and time-savings for caregivers, it also offers employment opportunities to more than 100,000 women.
Gambia	The public healthcare services have progressed due to an increase in government hospitals and accessible and affordable reproductive health services. With trekking stations and monthly visits to communities to provide reproductive and child healthcare services, they are able to reduce women's time spent to walk to clinics
Rwanda	The introduction of the Universal Community Health Insurance Scheme (Mutuelles de santé) led to a reduction in the financial barriers for women to access healthcare services. It provides healthcare to poor women for an annual minimum contribution. It also improved access by providing health facilities within a one-hour walk for each citizen.

⁴⁹ Chopra, Deepta (2013)

⁵⁰ Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women Policy Brief: Unpaid care and women's empowerment: Lessons from research and practice

⁵¹ Parvez (2019)

Some of the key factors determining access particularly in rural areas include distance to healthcare facility, user fees, and insurance fees. Among other challenges, lack of job security and salary payments for health workers, irregular supply of medication and equipment, and poor-quality health services have been noted to improve access to health services. Though there is substantial evidence stemming from rigorous studies on how access to health services policies have impacted health outcomes for women and children, only a few studies looked at the impact of health services on women’s time spent on UCDW—evidence was found in only one country (Gambia).

Adoption of social protection measures that support women and men with substantial UCDW responsibilities

Countries	Government Intervention
South Africa	The Child Support Grant (CSG) provided by the Government of South Africa has allowed women to place children in nurseries/crèches and participate in the labor market, which has led to increasing their income. Over the long-term, having a child who receives the CSG has been linked to increased participation in paid work for women. Female CSG participants are less likely to accept the gendered division of labor and are more involved in community meetings. ⁵²
Uganda	In Uganda, families with elderly people who received the Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (an additional component to take care of the elderly people) reported that elderly people ceased to ‘feel like a burden.’ ⁵³
Egypt	The Ain El-Sira Pilot Conditional Cash Transfer Programme in Egypt provides compensation to mothers and female heads of households for any time spent fulfilling programme conditions, and parents receive more money for keeping girls in school than keeping boys. ⁵⁴

When cash transfer programs are based on a maternalistic model of care, children’s needs supersede women’s needs. These programs, which bind women to households as carers, also do not change patterns of intra-household responsibilities for care or gender relations. Conditionalties attached to the receipt of a cash transfer often place additional time and care-giving demands on women.

While there is ample evidence from rigorous studies on how cash transfer programmes have improved children’s health and welfare and women’s formal labor force participation, only a few studies explicitly considered impacts on women’s time spent on UCDW.⁵⁵

⁵² Chopra, Deepta (2013)

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Parvez (2019)

INTERVENTIONS TO REDISTRIBUTE UCDW

Challenging gender norms around UCDW through government programmes, policies and interventions

Country	Government Intervention
Philippines	The national government's 4Ps program, which provides cash assistance to poor families, includes a Family Development Session that discusses relationships between husbands and wives, women's rights, and home management, among other topics. The program requires fathers and mothers to attend these sessions, and has established a target to achieve a minimum 40% involvement of fathers. ⁵⁶
India	In India, the Gender Equity Movement in Schools program promotes gender equality, including through challenging social norms, with school children aged 12–14. Children who participated in the programme showed increased support for gender-equal practices including greater male involvement in household work. ⁵⁷
Mexico	The government of Mexico City, through La Nueva Cultura Laboral, promotes the role of fathers in raising and caring for their children, in recognition that women's care responsibilities impede their participation in the formal workforce and that fathers' involvement in childcare delivers multiple benefits for children's development. ⁵⁸

From Oxfam's research and work on shifting social norms, there are a number of promising strategies, which include the following:⁵⁹

- Multi-sectoral, multi-level interventions: at the community level, awareness-raising through different methods; and at the national level organized diffusion of key messages through wider public engagement/social marketing and coordinating with policy makers and the private sector to tackle institutional norms.
- Strategies that are based on an understanding of the viral nature of change: leveraging creative channels of communication to reinforce messages that challenge both empirical and normative expectations
- Working with role models and champions to challenge prevailing norms in the communities and begin to build a social movement.
- Using positive elements of existing cultural narratives to cultivate a new norm
- Engaging with policymakers and businesses to shift institutional

⁵⁶ Chan, Man-Kwun (2018)

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Parvez (2019)

norms

- Working with men and boys is key to changing harmful gender norms: not only do men typically hold power over others in their community, but men can also be constrained.

Social norms interventions that promote redistribution of care work between men and women and a reduction in women's time spent on UCDW are in their nascent stages. Evidence in this area is largely anecdotal in nature or resulting from small quantitative studies in specific localities and is focused on the redistribution rather than the reduction aspect.

Increase space for poor women and girls or WROs/cooperatives representing them to participate effectively in care supporting government policies, programme and intervention

Country	Government Intervention
Nepal	The Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women Project was implemented by ADB and the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare of Nepal (2009–2013). It meaningfully engaged women's groups and cooperatives representation in program design, implementation, and decision-making processes. Participating in women's groups and collectives, a reduction in women's UCDW, and increased income all contributed to improving relationships between women and men. ⁶⁰

Compared to other types of government intervention showcased in the above examples, there is generally limited information related to women's representation on care-related issues in policymaking bodies. Evidence of the impact of women's representation in care related policies, programmes and interventions on their time use and UCDW is still an under-researched area.⁶¹

⁶⁰ OECD (2019) Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment. Time Use Data and Gender Inequality

⁶¹ Parvez (2019)

5 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS UCDW IN ASEAN

To ensure ASEAN meets its commitments to achieving gender equality, leaving no one behind, and sustainable and inclusive growth, member-states must:

Invest in national care systems and improve public services and fiscal policy

Governments must invest in cross-governmental national care systems, in addition to investing in and transforming existing public services and infrastructure. National care systems must include the provision of universal access to safe water, sanitation, and domestic energy systems, as well as investments to deliver universal childcare, eldercare, and care for people with disabilities. These should also include access to quality healthcare and education, as well as the provision of universal social protection, such as pensions and child benefits.

Adopt and improve social protection systems

Gender transformative social protection policies have the potential to contribute to the recognition and redistribution of care and domestic work through various life cycle social protection measures, such as cash transfer programs, social security, access to healthcare, pension, maternal protection, maternity and parental leaves, specific provisions for women that work informally or unpaid to ensure income security, unemployment benefits, and labor market policies, among others.

Improving access to publicly funded care services through social protection benefits is another measure that can positively impact women's time-poverty, thus allowing women's increased engagement in social, political, and economic life.

ASEAN governments must increase budgets for universal social protection for all, starting with social protection floors,⁶² and design social protection programming that addresses the needs of women and girls to ensure a more just and sustainable economy. These policies must be designed in consultation with women and people with care responsibilities to avoid, for example, cash transfers going only to male heads of households, and with the explicit intention to reduce care inequalities.

In the context of COVID-19, social protection measures intended to realize basic income security and uphold the right to an adequate standard of living to ensure that all those who have lost their income as a result of COVID-19 including those who are unable to earn their livelihoods because of care giving responsibilities. Governments must

⁶² The Social Protection floors as defined by ILO have to guarantee 2 main provisions for all: Income security throughout the life cycle and Universal Health Coverage (health insurance)

expand their social protection measures to cover unpaid carers and paid care workers, and ensure that all employers are providing childcare support to all those who need it, including those with caregiving responsibilities within the family, supporting families to reconcile paid and unpaid work through paid leave for primary caregivers, reduced or flexible working arrangements, and childcare services.

Shift and challenge negative social norms that perpetuate unequal care responsibilities

Harmful norms and sexist beliefs that see care work as the responsibility of women and girls lead to an unequal gendered distribution of care work and perpetuate economic and gender inequality. As part of their national care systems, governments need to invest resources in challenging these harmful norms and sexist beliefs, including through advertising, public communication, and legislation. This also requires collaboration with multiple stakeholders such as civil society organizations, academe, businesses, and media.

Ensure that carers have influence on decision-making processes

UCDW is a social and economic issue. Governments must facilitate the participation of women and people with care responsibilities in policy-making fora and processes at all levels, as well as invest resources in collecting comprehensive data that can better inform policymaking and evaluate the impact of policies on carers. Increased funding for women's organizations and movements working to enable their participation in decision-making processes is also critical. These measures are important building blocks of national care systems.

Systematically analyze proposed economic policies for their impact on girls and women by improving data collection on UCDW

Governments must improve data in national and accounting systems. They must particularly include data on the distribution of UCDW in order to measure the SDG target (specifically 5.4) and recognize the contribution of UCDW to the economy. Time use measurements through national household surveys and household satellite account measurements are some of the examples of how data is collected and use for policymaking that responds to issues of UCDW.

Value care through transformative labor and business laws, policies, and incentives

Step up regulatory mechanisms for businesses in ASEAN to recognize the value of care work and sustain the wellbeing of workers. Further, governments must ensure that businesses support the redistribution of care through the provision of benefits and services, such as crèches and childcare facilities, and ensure living wages for care providers

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ANNEX

Examples of UCDW	
Domestic Work	Direct Care of Persons
<p><i>Meal preparation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buying food/waiting in line for food distribution Collecting food for immediate consumption by the family Preparing food: grinding, pounding, peeling, chopping Cooking Serving food Waiting for husband to finish food Washing plates Keeping food Warming food Carrying food to family members/day labourers Queuing for food supplies (e.g., humanitarian context) <p><i>Water</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fetching water Cleaning the well Storing and managing water Boiling water for husband to bathe Boiling drinking/cooking water Going to pay water bill (urban) Queuing for daily water supply (e.g., humanitarian context) <p><i>Energy</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collecting firewood Cutting the trees Splitting firewood Lighting the fire Maintaining the fire Buying paraffin Lighting the lamps Cleaning the lamps Charging the solar battery Going to pay electricity bill/buy electricity voucher (urban) <p>Clean space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cleaning the house Sweeping the house Sweeping the compound Mopping Cleaning/polishing/smearing the floor Decorating the house Landscaping Tidying/organising the house or compound Laying or making the bed Going to buy cleaning products (urban) Disposing of garbage Cleaning/emptying sewerage <p><i>Clean clothes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Washing clothes Drying and folding clothes Mending clothes Ironing clothes Buying clothes 	<p><i>Childcare</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking the children to school Taking children to the hospital Treating the children Caring for a sick child Shaving/braiding children's hair Bathing children Feeding children Playing with children Teaching children Emotional support Supervision/being responsible for looking after children Preventing children from playing in dangerous/dirty areas Preparing children for school/bed <p><i>Care of dependent adults</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking care of the ill/injured/disabled/vulnerable Taking people to hospital Taking food to the hospital Helping ill relative in the garden/home Providing emotional support/listening to someone's problems Bathing/feeding ill person <p><i>Care of community members</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carrying things for elderly Looking after elderly/dependent relatives or neighbors Cleaning the communal well/street/toilet Looking after/supervising someone else's children Unpaid work to prepare food in/for schools Unpaid help to cook/prepare for funerals/weddings Settling disputes/counselling Volunteer health worker, home health carer <p>Emotional support/listening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moral support for chronically ill people Emotional support for family members who suffer stress or depression Support for bereaved people

Source: Oxfam (2013/2016), Participatory Methodology: Rapid Care Analysis Toolbox of Exercises



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