

Women, Unpaid care work, and issues on socio-economic security

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Introduction

Household chores as cooking, cleaning, washing, raising children and care for sick person are basic sustenance for an individual. These works add as important aspects to everyday life. However, the chief argument here is who does these work, how is it done, how is it evaluated and its impact that must be properly measured. The family, the market, the society and the state play an important role to balance and maintain it. There is an inter-relationship between the defined institutions depending at large on the state and surroundings. Thus, the state holds accountability to determine the difference of the defined policy within the family and to measure the responsibilities henceforth.

During one of the study in a village, we asked a woman “Sister what do you do?” to which she replied “Nothing”. Nevertheless, during our informal chat we figured her everyday activity lending us the answer to our question. She explained, “I wake early with the crowing of hen around five, broom the house and the yard, fetch water, cook food for animals, make tea, prepare lunch, clean up the utensils, clean the kitchen, wash clothes. Then after prepare afternoon snack, take it to the field and help with field work. After returning home, I prepare more snacks and prepare the dinner, feed and clean up the utensils and the kitchen, which ticks ten at night. Further I work as required and sleep off.”

Although her work list is lengthy that makes her work 12/13 hours per day from morning 5 to 10 at night, yet she feels that it is no work at all. So upon questioning what about all the hours she work, she replies, “The work I do does not get paid, is this work?” This minor discussion clearly illustrates the situation of rural women in Nepal. The activities the respondent mentioned are “Reproductive work” i.e. unpaid care work carried inside the household. While taking care of children, elderly and sick people, fetching products from market, heaving out paddy, grinding flour, collecting firewood are additional work conceded by women (Bhadra et.al, 2010).

Similarly, the urban women are also working prior to the requirement in the household as tutoring children, paying electricity and telephone bills, taking children to school and forth, maintaining house, helping out neighbors to mention. The women who are professionally working are maintaining dual household work i.e. inside the house and outside at their workplace. (Ghimire Niraula, 2070)

The national census carried out in 2001 in Nepal showed that nearly 95 percent of women spend their maximum time in household activities whereas the national census of 2011 depicts 85 percent of the women performing household work (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Although there has been decrement during ten years, majority of women are still occupied in household work.

The work we perform and the time spent on each can be divided prior to the balance and management of our life and work; the three kinds of work henceforth are:

1. Paid work (specially outside the home)
2. Unpaid work/service (specially within the house and sometimes in community)
3. Free time (both inside and outside the house)

However, these three kinds are difficult to be specifically categorized. The inter linkage between the three aspects in the woman's life makes it more complicated and indistinguishable. For example, women are performing unpaid care work as weaving leaves, making sacred cotton threads, feeding the children while watching television which is counted as their free time.

The rise in capitalism has increased the use of consumer items whilst as well education and other opportunities has added economic load to the family; thereby affecting the overall economic system. The transportation facilities have increased the access and availability of market products and expanded the use. Thus, the economy of a family is no more dependent on single person's earning, neither the traditional farming meet up the increasing demands and people are seeking other economic opportunities. The women and children are compelled to involve in direct economy and contribute to the additional economic demands.

The change in global labor market has amplified issues as unemployment, instability, precarious job market, partial job and therefore inclining poverty. The traditional "9 to 5" official time is changing and overlapped the personal time of an individual. This has procured negative impact, while women and children are more vulnerable with the additional household chores in the patriarchal society. They perform unpaid care work as cooking, cleaning, washing utensils, taking care of children and elderly as subscribed as female work. The society and the state have been adversely affected leaving half the population behind in the development procession.

In the developed nation, day child care centers have been opened via grants so as to bring the women in public from their private sphere. Nonetheless, the economic recession 2008/2009 brought a huge jolt to the grant provided to the centers for elderly and children; ultimately added burden to women working in public sphere. The incident then after triggered the discussions and voices were raised strongly on unpaid care work. (Mishra, 2018)

Economic and social security for unpaid care workers

Unpaid care work can be termed as "unsalaried" work as there it offers neither any salary, nor wage or assets of any kind. Generally, it comprises all the work that does not get paid. According to National Accounting System and feminist, all kinds of work that can neither be sold or purchase in the market and not included in national income and GDP are categorized as unpaid care work. The definition is not service-oriented and is based on basic fact whether it is purchasable or not in the market. (Aacharya, 2014a) For example, the care of sick person is not

considered payable if it is inside the household while the same activities is classified as payable in the hospital. Similarly, if family member does household work it is considered as unpaid care work but if the same work is done by others and is paid salary, wage or kind, it becomes a paid work.

Economics defines that production and consumption of goods are different but production of service and the consumption have similar scheme. An example, production of shoe as a goods and its consumption can be distinguished, in contrary the oil massage is an act which does not engage any goods but is a service. Goods once produced can be set aside but service can never shelved. (Aacharya, 2014b)

Reproductive activities impedes important role in continuing the society, yet despite of heading dual roles in agriculture and household activities, the role of women remains unrecognized and unpaid. Women are forced to bore double burden (Ghosh, 2017). In the developing nation, the market offers few economic opportunities to meet their daily requirements and contributions of women and children in the household offer opportunities for the other family members to actively participate in economic rendering activities in public sphere. Women contribute in savings of the family and increase the overall economy (Ghimire, Niraula, 2013). Despite of the illustrations of various researches that the contributions of women and children inside the household and the other unpaid work are huge, it is not considered as “work”. Human Development Index report (United Nation Development Program 1995) mentions that the monetarily evaluation of unpaid work around the world comes to 1600 million US dollar.

Another study of Australia depicted that service oriented activities offer huge role in economy of Australia; the 2009/2010 reportedly showed that while paid work was 411.4 million US dollar, unpaid work was 4650.1 million US dollar that comprised 77 percent of women in paid work (Henig, 2012). This clearly indicates women’s contribution in economy is much high.

The developing nations however neither calculate nor discuss the issue of unpaid work and are aloof in major economic and social agendas. This has led to women and their contribution and their work as invisible, underrated and devalued. Women despite of working 11 hours and more each day are seen saying, “I do not work”.

The state and the society fail to recognize these work and the women in larger group in these sectors are farfetched in the social structure and are hence deprived of opportunities. If these unpaid care works are evaluated on monetary terms in GDP then these hold greater value in market economy. Although the actual GDP will not depict increment, if it is accounted or included in GDP; it will indicate improvement in lifestyle of production in GDP. The economists further imply that the increase might be due to marketing of goods, while the actual lifestyle may remain stagnant (Ghimire, Niraula 2013). Prior to gender evaluation, though there might not be improvement in lifestyle; contribution of women in GDP will be noticeable and the work of women can be articulate into economic terms. This can recognize that women are an important

most of development and share equal contribution in economy. It will acquaint women of their roles in the economy and mark their identity in their share in economic development.

Developing nations has large number of women working in agriculture, animal husbandry, etc; these household economy increases the economy of an individual house that will ultimately increase the national economic development (Aacharya, 2003 translated 2006). The dual activities affect the women physically and mentally. If the work load is divided, women will face less health issues and in turn decrease the health expenditures. Various studies have revealed that household works have bind women from various other educational and skill developing opportunities (Action Aid International, 2013). Service oriented authorities prioritize women less as they assume that women take more leave comparatively as they act in household activities too. This makes women taking leave indebted towards their employee and feel mental pressure struggling with dual work burden.

The issue of unpaid care work is not only an issue of women alone, rather is an issue that requires proper recognition. It should be simultaneously raised as national and political issue by academicians, activists, policy makers, government representatives and concerned stakeholders. A collective stand is thus needed on the issue.

People working in formal and informal sectors receive allowance, insurance allowance, health allowance etc. post service. Where is the social security for women who render their life within household? A wife takes care of their sick husband while the same man gets annoyed upon taking care of wife, a bitter social reality. Women die due to lack of proper health treatment; the women must raise the social security issues and be vocal for themselves. The family, society and state must be accountable to ensure social and economic security to limited women that are involved in unpaid care works. A detailed discussion is to be opted to on account to international agenda to sort out responsibilities and roles of each.

Why is it necessary?

Nepal has signed carious international conventions and treaties, to name few; Convention on elimination of all kinds of Discrimination against Women 1979 (CEDAW), Fourth World Women Conference, China 1995, Millennium Development Goal 2000, Sustainable Development Goals 2016, Universal Development of Human Rights 1948, etc. Fourth World Conference in China 1995 declared that unpaid care work is major reason for gender inequality and a policy has been proposed by the declaration paper for creating gender equality. Similarly, the fifth goal among the seventeenth goals of Sustainable Development Goal 2016 has a provision to introduce indicators to measure household works and report it to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

The directive principles of Constitution of Nepal 2015 emphasize on introducing unpaid care work as economic indicator. Part four of the constitution implies Directive Principle, policies, obligations of the state in sub-part four to identify unpaid work as rearing of children, care for

family and contribution to economy (Nepal Government, 2015). The ninth plan (2002-2007) also mentions about providing appropriate recognition to the economic works done by women and incorporating it in the national accounting system. The state has recently introduced labor law called “Social Security Law”. The law has offered social security to the women working in informal sectors including daily wage and salaried domestic laborers. Despite of national and international declaration, the non-implementation of the same clearly indicates the challenges and problems enforcing and implementing it. Although this will not aid to women involved in unpaid care work, it is certain to raise the issue on national level for economic and social security of women. The national and international agendas shall certainly imply a role to end gender inequality. The vital aspect however is the essence of family members accepting unpaid work as “our work”. Thus the national and international efforts will induce proper policies to implement it.

The developing nation has provision of division of labor among the family members which ultimately lessens the workload of women. The issue of unpaid household must not be limited to women one, it is responsibility of the family, society and the state; further interlinked with the productivity and their rights that will rightly determine their input and make it visible.

How can it be done?

The state determines the level of service; the household work is also linked with tax system of a state. The household work is in turn affected by the tax amount, example- woman can purchase washing machine if provided under cheap price that will decrease their time spent on washing clothes. Similarly, the decrease in tax on child care and elderly care will facilitate the access to maximum service. The state can reduce price of cooking gas, water, animal feeding, hence denouncing the time spent on it and imposing productive work on the same. Other issues that can be discussed to ensure the economic social security for women involved in unpaid care work are as mentioned:

- Figuring the work price valuation of paid and unpaid work women (Ghimire Niraula, 2017)
- Determining the quantity of time spent on unpaid care work through survey (Time use survey method) (Neupane, 2017)
- Gender mainstreaming of the unpaid care work and the policies to implement it
- Following Diana Elson’s theory of three “R” –Recognition, Reduction and Redistribution to entail it in development agenda
- Inventing and promoting of more household related technologies to save time spent in unpaid care work
- Providing necessary training thereby encouraging the fathers to take care of children and imposing paternity leave
- Discussing the unpaid work as political agenda

- Education is an important aspect to shape the social responsibility, thus educational tools must educate that the household activities is responsibility of all. This can be assisted through various pictorial methods showcasing parents cooking together, providing examples of father cleaning while mother are cooking, etc. The subjects in university course as home science, nursing must not be confine as women only subject; it should in turn be encouraged to be studied by both men and women.
- Provision of sharing of capital earn by the paid working member of the family to the unpaid care working member basically women of the family. The state can even introduce provident fund to women who are performing unpaid care work and securing economic social security to them.
- The government must be held accountable towards implementation of policies and strategies of unpaid care work. It can be properly addressed via forming particular committees or at organizational level.

Who will perform?

- **Individual:** An individual must be aware of the valuation of work one does and necessarily informs others of the same. The women herself and the family members must be informed of the evaluation of the work and encourage the unpaid care workers.
- **Non-governmental groups and organization:** Regular programs in rural area that addresses the issue of unpaid care work and properly address the importance of division of household work to both men and women. This can be done through proper division of work, respect and recognize the work, reduction of workload, re-distribution of work must be highly encouraged.
- **Media:** Media as newspaper, television and radio must disseminate information of sharing of household work and relative programs must be produce.
- **Local, Provincial and Central government institutions:** Our country is now federal government; the local, provincial and central government must be liable to introduce appropriate programs and policies to address economic-social security of limited unpaid care working women. Women activists, researchers and related stakeholders must advocate reaching the desired goal. To begin with joint orientation program can be commence for unpaid care working women and paid working person (normally men) for every household.
- **State level:** Nepal has signed various treaties and conventions; the state thus must form necessary policies and ensure its implementation from concerned stakeholders. There must be obligatory provision as sick leave to employees, paternal leave to both the parents and quality family time which has to be guided and monitored by International Labor Law.
- **International level:** Commission on the Status of Women (CWS) monitors and evaluates whether the countries that have signed the International Convention and treaties are accountable towards the provision as recognition of unpaid care work, reduction of

workload and redistribution of the workload. While the activists must be responsible to the reliability and validity of the report.

- **Recognition of household work:** The three “R” recognition, reduction and redistribution of the household work need to be properly implemented through necessary policies.

Conclusion

Apart from afore mentioned three “R” as identified in Census report of Nepal 2001, reindoctrination form men, women and other is also required that will thereafter disseminate information and there will be proper valuation of unpaid care work. Various indigenous groups residing in Nepal have divided their labor work; these good practices must be encouraged and duplicate. Unpaid care work must be extensively discussed, researched and studied on a larger forum of cultural, economic and political aspect. In order to ensure women rights and gender equality in actual terms, the state must analyze the inter linkage between the policies concerning unpaid care work, inequality and discrimination (Sahavagi and others, 2015). Further, appropriate attention is to be given on implementing the policies.

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