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Recognising the Importance of Unpaid Care and Domestic Work for Policies on Rural Women's Empowerment in Nigeria

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PREFACE

This Policy Brief is part of the outputs of the on-going research of the Centre for Population and Environmental Development (CPED) on the research project titled "Gender Inequality and Rural Women's Health in Post-covid-19 Nigeria: Working with Policymakers and actors to promote inclusive and sustainable rural women's health in Nigeria" funded by the International Development and Research Centre (IDRC) under its Women Rise Initiative Programme.

This Policy Brief focuses on the need for policymakers in Nigeria to recognise the importance of unpaid care and domestic work in the country based on the findings of the on-going project on 'Gender Inequality and Rural Women's Health in post-Covid-19 Nigeria'.

The project team, CPED and the University of Windsor are particularly grateful to IDRC and its partners for the funding of the Women Rise Initiative Programme to which CPED and the University of Windsor are beneficiaries. This has enabled CPED and the University of Windsor to carry out the study and the publication of this policy brief. We appreciate and acknowledge the contributions of other Team Members to the execution of the project.

Introduction

Feminists have long proposed that the rights to give and receive care should be recognized as human rights. More recently, interest in unpaid care and domestic work and its implications for women's human rights has also been growing in the literature on development. Therefore, the failure of any country such as Nigeria to adequately provide, fund, support and regulate care contradicts its human rights obligations, by creating and exacerbating inequalities and threatening women's rights enjoyment. Women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work is a key driver of gender inequality in Nigeria, especially in the rural areas where the lack of adequate social services puts the burden of unpaid care and domestic work on women and girls. Be it direct personal care provided to children, the elderly, people with disabilities or illness, indirect care involving domestic work, or supervisory care provided along with other care tasks, women do the lion's share of caring in the rural communities of Nigeria. Care work is vital to the functioning of society. Yet these tasks are undervalued because they are taken for granted as the responsibility of women and girls.

Care services reduce the time constraints faced by rural women in Nigeria who perform the bulk of unpaid care and domestic work on a day-to-day basis. The availability of care services can help redress rural women's socio-economic disadvantage in Nigeria by enhancing their ability to engage in various income generating activities. In doing so, they can enable rural women's enjoyment of a range of rights, including the rights to various income generating activities, education, health and

participation in governance. Reaching conclusions about Nigeria's economic status and development without including the productivity of rural women who do not get paid for their work in their households and communities at large is misleading and doesn't truly reflect the economic well-being of the country.

Due to the limited understanding of the broader impacts of unpaid care on growth and development in Nigeria, the issue is generally ignored in policy formulation. Recognizing the centrality of unpaid care work to the welfare of Nigerians requires concerted efforts to make unpaid care and domestic work visible in policy formulation that will entail the integration of time budget and consumption surveys into national statistical systems, the promotion of the systematic use of gender-responsive budget initiatives, assessing the development costs of spending time on unpaid care work and raising the awareness among other key stakeholders and building the capacity of policymakers. It is against this background that this policy brief focuses on the need for policymakers in Nigeria to recognise the importance of unpaid care and domestic work in the country based on the findings of the on-going project on 'Gender Inequality and Rural Women's Health in post-Covid-19 Nigeria' funded by the Women Rise Initiative of the IDRC, Canada.

Perspectives on patterns of women's unpaid care and domestic work in rural Delta and Edo States of Nigeria

Overall time use by men and women

One of the indicators used to examine the overall workload by males and females in the study areas of Delta and Edo States is the time available for rest after a day's work. Overall, males in both Delta and Edo States had more hours of sleep in the previous night than females. This reflects the pattern of the time for sleeping available to the respondents to the disadvantage of the females. Females being under considerable stress working in unpaid care and domestic duties combined with their normal economic activities are having less time to sleep or rest. Our research validates the need to recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work in the rural communities, and exposes the cultural barriers to achieving this. Majority of the male respondents believe that care-related responsibilities lie squarely with women, hence their reluctance to provide support in the home. The consequence of this unequal distribution of care work in the household is that it has created enormous disadvantages for women. This situation is denying women opportunities for decent work, leisure and rest while subjecting some women to emotional and psychological distress. Most female respondents and some male respondents in the study areas support the idea that men should be involved in unpaid activities in the home front. They agreed with the fact that the unpaid work women

do are enormous and more stressful. Some emphasized that such unpaid works should include works such as sweeping the compound, helping to pound yam, breaking of firewood and even helping them to weed the farm or garden so that the women can have time to rest in order to enjoy a great deal of health.

Time use in recognised productive activities and unpaid care and domestic work.

The examination of the amount of time devoted to what can be called recognised productive activities by men and women in the surveyed areas of Delta and Edo States show some variations between male and female respondents. The findings indicate that despite the involvement of women in unpaid care and domestic work they still spend more hours working in primary production activities compared with their male counterparts. Mainly after agriculture activities, women stay at home and at the same time they work on preparing food, preparing children to go to school, washing clothes as well as preparing the harvests. The findings show that a higher proportion of the female respondents spend longer hours working in unpaid care and domestic work compared with their male counterparts. The large amounts of time spent by women and girls on unpaid care work also means that their participation in civil, economic and social spheres and in public life is limited. The willingness of the male respondents to participate in the future delivery of unpaid care and domestic work in their household was also explored. The findings show that about half of the

male respondents in Delta and Edo States reported that they would like to participate in the provision of unpaid care and domestic work in their households which is a good sign that things can change in future with appropriate advocacy activities in these localities.

Some aspects of the life history of the male respondents with respect to their experiences as young people or teenagers in their households with respect to whether males did carry out some unpaid care and domestic work show that a large proportion of the male respondents in both Delta and Edo States reported that males/boys never or hardly ever carried out the different unpaid care and domestic work. This observation is confirmed by the findings that most of the male respondents reported that they were never taught how to carry out various unpaid and domestic work such as preparing meals, cleaning the house or compound, washing cloths and taking care of their siblings and aged parents. Overall, the findings show that men/boys have traditionally played insignificant roles in the provision of unpaid care and domestic work in the study areas.

There is general agreement among the male and female respondents in the study areas of Delta and Edo States that the burden of unpaid care and domestic work is too much for women and girls to bear. However, in most of the rural communities in Delta and Edo states as in many parts of Nigeria women do not feel comfortable seeing their spouses or male children getting involved in the delivery of unpaid care and domestic work because they believe that it is against

the prevailing norms. It is this context that male respondents were asked to indicate if their spouses would allow them to take part in the delivery of unpaid care and domestic work in their households. It was found that the vast majority of the male respondents reported that their spouses/partners would like them to participate more in their household unpaid care and domestic work. Within the contest of the findings that both male and female respondents believe that boys should actively participate in the delivery of unpaid care and domestic work, the survey sought to know from the respondents the type of unpaid care and domestic work which they suggest boys should trained to do. It was found that most of the male and female respondents in Delta and Edo States suggested that boys should be encouraged or trained to participate in water collection, washing, ironing and mending clothes and cleaning the house/compound. These responses indicate further that there is a growing recognition that men/boys must be brought up to help in the delivery of unpaid care and domestic work. This obviously opens the way for men and boys to participate in the delivery of unpaid and domestic work in the study areas. Some of the respondents acknowledge they have fuel efficient stoves which they use in cooking that helps to reduce the time spent fetching firewood. Others reported they have an electrical blender but no electricity to operate them. Yet, others said they have kerosine stove, but it is very expensive to maintain. Also, gas cookers, and washing machines, which help to reduce the time spent on household-

related tasks, are only available in a few households.

Females who carry out most of the burden of unpaid care and domestic work were interrogated with regard to what they would do with their extra time if they were assisted by men/boys to carry out various unpaid care and domestic work. The findings show that a significant proportion of the female respondents (39.9 percent in Edo State and 35.3 percent in Delta State) reported that they would use the time in carrying out more income generating work so as to earn additional income. However, a higher proportion of the female respondents (44 percent in Edo State and 45.8 percent in Delta State) indicated that they would use the time to have more rest and carry out personal care such as visiting health care facilities for medical care which they cannot do because of too much unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities. Generally, the male respondents believe that they are making most of the contributions to their household welfare because they disregard the unpaid care and domestic work in which women spend most of the time. Women themselves underestimate the unpaid care and domestic work which they carry out because such activities are not valued in monetary terms. The gendered division of labour in the household is also reinforcing these values into the next generation and preparing boys and girls to enter a world in which care work continues to be unequally distributed. If this scenario persists, Nigeria will not be able to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5) relating to gender equality and empowerment of women and girls by 2030.

Towards policies and programmes on the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities

Based on the findings in this on-going study it is necessary that policy makers and other key stakeholders in Nigeria recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work so that women especially in rural areas of the country can perform household work with relative ease and also have the time to pursue work that is fulfilling and rewarding both financially and otherwise. It is in this context that the policy framework should focus on the need to transform rural women's experiences in the household by recognizing, reducing and redistributing the amount of time spent on care and domestic work.

The recognition of unpaid care and domestic work in public policy

Recognizing the centrality of unpaid care work to human development and welfare, especially in rural areas of Nigeria, requires concerted efforts to promote their importance through use of time allocation surveys, satellite accounts, and improved measurement tools. If unpaid care work is not visible to policy makers and planners, it will not be the subject of policy attention or investment—what is not seen is not invested in or prioritized. This much needed recognition of unpaid care and domestic work in policy and planning in Nigeria should embrace a number of strategies.

First, there is need for national and sub-national governments such as those of Delta

and Edo States to incorporate the use of time-budget surveys, embed time-use modules within household consumption surveys, and facilitate the integration of time-budget and consumption surveys into national statistical systems. Governments should invest in estimating the value, in monetary form, of unpaid care work. This will contribute to influencing policy makers on understanding the level of which unpaid care work should be recognised and the community members will value it and work together. Second, there is need to promote the systematic use of gender-responsive budget initiatives that incorporate a gender analysis of household time budgets. This will inform national planning and budgeting and will promote setting gender-responsive budget priorities that reflect the importance of unpaid care work for human welfare. Third, there is need for key government agencies at the national and state level in Nigeria to carry out cost-benefit analyses of infrastructure and other investments by assessing the development costs of spending time on unpaid care work and the time savings made by such investments.

In the fourth place, there is need for policymakers and non-state actors in Nigeria to pay considerable attention to the raising of awareness so as to ensure greater attention to unpaid care work in the public and private spheres by using time-use data and other relevant information in awareness-raising campaigns and capacity-building initiatives of key development partners, including government officials, and representatives of civil society organizations, employers, workers, trade unions and household and community members. In

addition, the media can play a prominent role in communicating such information to the general public. Finally, governments at the national and state levels in Nigeria should strengthen the teaching curriculum to have children and youth engaged at an early age. In the same instance, there is a need to replace teaching materials that reinforce gender stereotypes with those that promote equitable distribution of care and domestic work among males and females.

Promoting the reduction of unpaid care and domestic work

Policies and programmes are needed on the reduction of time spent by women in unpaid works through the provision of time saving investment and infrastructure such as electricity, pipe borne water among others. Investments in infrastructure and labour-saving technologies that are focused on household-level care tasks (e.g., fuel-saving stoves, mills, wells, piped water or alternative fuels) could be effective in reducing the time women and girls spend on unpaid care work. For example, when electricity was introduced in rural settlements in South Africa, it was discovered that the time women spent on housework decreased leading to increased employment in paid labour by 9 percent. Tracking how such time savings are used would contribute to a better understanding of whether time saved is channelled into paid work/formal employment, social or political activities, or transferred to other sorts of unpaid work.

Governments in Nigeria can then take a cue from the South African example, by

providing social infrastructure that can reduce unpaid care burden on women. Better access to public services, childcare and care for the elderly by the government would reduce the time spent by women in unpaid work. While longer school time for children would reduce the time spent by mothers on unpaid care work. Gender stereotypes which see women as solely unpaid care givers should be discouraged through the implementation of appropriate policies and programmes involving the participation of men. Training initiatives that empower women in household bargaining or encourage men to recognize women's paid or unpaid work have proven effective in redistributing uneven workloads in the few settings where they have been studied. Deliberate efforts towards advocacy, sensitization and awareness in Nigeria society would help to reduce the stereotyping which sees care giving as women's responsibility. Men and other critical stakeholders should be targeted to achieve this aim. Relieving women of some of the burdens of domestic work would allow them to engage more fully in the life of their communities.

Governments at the national and sub-national levels in Nigeria should prioritize financing early childhood education and development as a strategy to reduce the burden of unpaid care in rural communities of the country where such facilities are lacking. Federal Government and State Government budgets should allocate finances to construct childcare centres in rural areas that lack these facilities. In addition, government should consider providing financial assistance or subsidies to

already existing childcare facilities that lack the financial wherewithal to meet operational costs, caregivers' salaries and other needs so that these institutions can operate and also attract caregivers/educators. The Ministries of Education should play the oversight role of ensuring that childcare institutions all across the country are properly managed and accountable.

Although various federal and state governments, including the Delta and Edo State government, have made remarkable contributions towards the achievement of sustainable development, there is still more that needs to be done, especially in the contest of rural areas. Basic infrastructure such as healthcare, electricity, water and sanitation, childcare, roads and transportation should be a major priority. In addition, social protection services for the rural poor, the elderly and persons with disabilities should be made available. These services should be brought closer to communities so that the public—and most especially women and girls who often carry the burden of care—can reduce the amount of time spent traveling to seek services. Another way that the government could enhance social protection service provision for rural communities is to initiate a Community Works Program that specifically focuses on training and employing individuals to provide social care services for pre-school children, children and adults living with disabilities and the elderly. Such an initiative could provide temporary relief for the unemployed, particularly women, since many of them lack opportunities for paid work while also catering for persons

that need these services. Finally, there is an urgent need for governments to focus attention on investing in affordable time- and labour-saving technologies for populations in rural areas as a way of addressing unequal distribution of care work. In the case of Delta and Edo States, there is a clear need for investing in these technologies in order to reduce women's care burden in poor households. Fuel-efficient stoves and clean water systems in households will cut down on the drudgery women engage in while walking to forested areas in search of firewood and water.

Promoting the redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work

Redistribution of unpaid care work means that the overall amount of unpaid care work remains the same, but it is more fairly shared among different people and between public and private institutions. The key to redistribution is a consideration of equity. Redistributing unpaid care and domestic work in Nigeria requires policy measures that support equitable burden-sharing, not only within households (between women and men), but also between and among key providers of care services. Such providers include governments, the private sector and communities, offering support through legislation, policies and programmes that facilitate burden-sharing. These providers could be mobilized and supported to share the burden of care work through policy makers' increased attention and action. It is against this background that a number of policy issues must be taken into consideration at the national and sub-

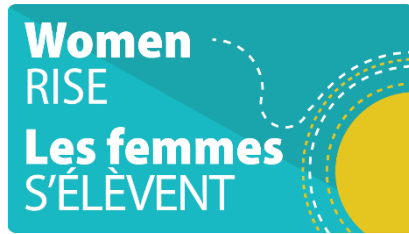
national levels in Nigeria as part of the promotion of women's post-Covid-19 empowerment and health care.

In the first place, there is considerable inequality in access to paid care services, especially in the rural areas of Nigeria. People who are disadvantaged in terms of education income and disability that live in these rural communities are often not in a position to pay for care services. This puts care services delivered through markets beyond the reach of those who need them most. It should be pointed out that care services in the context of the rural communities of Nigeria can only be complementary to the unpaid care that family members provide, rather than being perfect substitutes. Adequate policy responses require measures that will facilitate long-term transformation of attitudes and require institutional arrangements that promote equal sharing of household and family responsibilities and societal change. Shifting cultural norms around family size and composition as well as greater acceptance of institutional care arrangements and paid care providers can allow for a redistribution of care services from households to the state and markets in rural Nigeria.

Secondly, policies to expand access to quality health care in rural communities should focus on removing the barriers to health care services by, for example, expanding health care centres and reducing transportation and user fees. Quality of care—including opening hours (to meet the needs of families) and the skills level of public care workers—also contributes to

families' choices in making use of public care services or compelling women and girls to undertake unpaid care work. For example, if public care services are sub-par, women and girls may be trapped into providing the services themselves. Finally, policies and programmes should be articulated to enable men in rural communities and indeed urban areas in Nigeria to participate more fully in family burden sharing. Men are rarely acknowledged for the role they play as caregivers and are viewed as secondary care providers assisting women. It is also important to challenge the gender stereotypes that prevent men from contributing to unpaid care work. A critical task is to ensure that policies at the national, state and local government levels are designed to support an enabling environment for men to share care burdens.

Project



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