

## **The Unrecognized Backbone of Society**

"Sometimes, to bring food to the table, that's what I had to do." (UN Women). Women and girls globally echo Uruguayan Soledad Rotella who could not afford to put her eldest children in daycare. Instead, she took care of them without receiving pay for her work. But this problem isn't just economic; it's global. Unpaid work has a drastic gender divide, with 75% of all unpaid labor being carried out by women (UN Women). It falls to us to value unpaid work and make it easier on women to cope with their responsibilities. These are my goals if I led a project to promote gender equality, empower women and girls.

Work can be classified into two broad categories: money-making and unpaid work (The Atlantic). Both are equally necessary for society, but we tend to place a higher emphasis on paid than unpaid labor. When we solely enhance women financially, we are not addressing the disproportionate amount of unpaid women versus men. Unpaid work is also not recognized by orthodox economists who do not factor it into GDP (Gross Domestic Product), citing that caregiving and cooking are choices. However, many women call for attention to the unpaid labor girls do every day, and my project empowers unpaid work in many ways. I would primarily implement this in the Middle East, North America, Asia and Africa, where some of the tightest workers' rights restrictions exist.

My project would increase the number of time use surveys, which indicate how people spend their time, and give visibility into gender working disparities. We do not conduct enough to form effective policies, so improving time-use surveys to be easier to understand is something I hope to accomplish. My project's UN staff would work with local newspapers, radio stations and grassroots organizations to get these surveys out to people. These surveys indicate how much unpaid work women do, and what policies are best to empower women.

I would increase the use of GDI (Gross Domestic Income) to measure economic standards, as it counts unpaid work and tends to be more accurate than GDP in the long run (Vox). GDP has a major role in shaping public and private sector mindsets. Since the unpaid economy is often not factored into GDP, it poses a great disadvantage for countries like Tanzania, where unpaid work is valued at 63% of its GDP (UN Women). My project would push GDI into UN reports with the support of feminist and contemporary economists, setting an example for countries.

Empowering women is my project's goal; to accomplish this, we must address the larger issue in Sustainable Development Target 5.4- the overwhelming gender gap between men and women in unpaid work. Women do almost three times as much unpaid work as men worldwide (OECD). To redistribute this work, my project would engage with the community to educate them of this disproportionate number. We will utilize specials on televisions, radios or in newspapers and working with grassroots organizations or UN partner companies to promote this issue to boys, business magnates and the community overall. I strive to have maximum influence in low-income countries because these nations have the largest gaps between unpaid work across genders. Female empowerment is not about overwhelmingly focusing on women; it is about changing the social norms of the entire community to reflect more progressive values on feminized issues like unpaid work.

Women are subject to unpaid work every day, and it hinders their ability to provide for their family. To empower women and girls, we need to balance responsibilities with financial prosperity. Encouraging governments to enforce and subsidize universal childcare, or at least a derivative of it, greatly empowers mothers and give them time for high-paying jobs. In my UN-backed project, I will activate these initiatives.

Subsidizing the cost of childcare would encourage more mothers to put their children in such programs. In Nairobi, Kenya, 80% of mothers who were given daycare vouchers started sending their kids to daycare facilities, compared to 57% of mothers who were not given these discounts (CNN). If national subsidies on childcare from taxes are implemented, more parents can afford childcare, and use their free time to get a paying job if that is the better option for them. My project figures out the percentage of a nation's GDI affected by unpaid labor, specifically childcare, and what systems work best for families. Then, laws regarding free, subsidized or easier-access childcare would be drawn up, with economic and childcare experts. My project would urge countries to allocate a part of their GDI towards improving daycare facilities, training teachers and educating families about public childcare.

Unpaid childcare, if valued, accounts for 25% of Australia's GDP and women account for 75% of all unpaid work in the country (Price Waterhouse Cooper Research), but Australia does not have universal childcare, despite major consequences for women. The United States has some of the highest childcare costs globally but fails to provide federally-endorsed paid parental leave. These developed countries are my main target for this imperative. Subsidizing childcare costs address larger issues of unpaid work and gender equality. By giving leave benefits to both parents, caregiving and domestic duties would no longer inherently be women's work, as now, the entire family would be expected to facilitate childcare. This is what my project hopes to shed light on using subsidies and enforcement of childcare facilities.

Unpaid work is an issue that stretches far beyond any single nation. As Melinda Gates said, "Unless things change, girls today will spend hundreds of thousands more hours than boys doing unpaid work simply because society assumes it's their responsibility." (The Atlantic). Bridging this inequality starts with recognizing the unpaid work women do, and developing

policies to honor that work socioeconomically. Easing childcare responsibilities by encouraging family-friendly policies is the other crux of my UN-backed project. Money isn't the only indication of success, as the age-old proverbs say. It's the structure behind the stage that keeps the set from falling apart.

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