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CanWaCH GEWG Complex Issues Brief #2

The Care Economy //

What is a complex issue?

Complex issues have multiple and interconnected parts for which a quick fix is not possible. Instead, complex problem solving requires innovation, and multiple, sometimes competing, perspectives that considers the impact of the solution on the surrounding environment and individuals.

The Care Economy

The care economy refers to a “sector of economic activities which is defined by both paid and unpaid labour that relates to the provision of social and material care.”² In particular, the care economy is comprised of two sectors: productive labour (which is remunerated and counted), including work in sectors like health care, education and agriculture, as well as reproductive labour (often considered women’s work and is not remunerated/counted), including work that keeps a family going for example; caring for children, the elderly, and the disabled as well as domestic/household chores like food preparation, hygiene etc.

Why is the “Care Economy” a complex issue? / Pourquoi c’est un enjeu complexe?

Women and girls are responsible for a disproportionate share of care work (both within the formal and informal sector) around the world. Globally, they contribute more than 70 percent of total caregiving hours and perform more than 75 percent of unpaid care work.³ This inordinate amount of unpaid care work often reduces the time girls can attend school and limits women's ability to enter the workforce and earn a paid income, which perpetuates and widens gender inequities worldwide. As such, unequal distribution of care work is among the root causes of women’s economic and social disempowerment.

¹ While this discussion took place in late 2021 this briefing note, resources and recommendations have been updated to reflect the current context (including relevant political announcements and discussions) up to June 2023. As a living document, the resources will be updated and edited on an on-going basis.

² <https://opencanada.org/why-canadians-should-care-about-global-care-economy/>

³ <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/The%20Care%20Economy%20-%20MHI%20Policy%20Brief%20Apr%202022.pdf>



What makes the care economy a complex issue is its multitude of gendered power dynamics, barriers, and contextual considerations, all of which impact advocacy, policy or programming work. In other words, there is no one straightforward approach to create systemic change and improve women's economic growth and empowerment. In particular, factors such as women's fragile gains in terms of access to and control over resources and decision making capabilities. The feminization of the care sector and associated low wages or exploitative working conditions, entrenched social norms (which limit or stigmatise men who take on caregiving roles), and ongoing gendered socialisation and stereotyping impede the critical growth needed in this area. **Unpaid Care Work is complex because it is both a cause & consequence of unequal gender relations.**

Further complicating the issue are the lasting impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic. In the past three years, women around the world lost more than 64 million jobs, resulting in more than \$800 billion in lost income in one year.⁴ In addition, the pandemic led to an increase in authoritarian thinking, particularly in low and middle income countries, which has cemented gender stereotypes and biases in communities around the world, further setting back growth that would support the needs of caregivers, care workers, and women.

Discussion and Recommendations for Practitioners

1. Background - How Do We Conceptualize the Care Economy?

In 2019 the International Labour Organization (ILO) released a [Report on Care Work](#) that describes the care economy as consisting of two overlapping activities:

- Direct personal and relational care – like feeding a baby, nursing an ill partner, etc.
- Indirect care activities – like cooking, cleaning, etc.

While care work is performed by both males and females, women and girls predominantly perform the unpaid care work – particularly indirect care activities like cooking, cleaning, etc. Paid care workers comprise a wide range of personal service workers, such as nurses, teachers, doctors, and domestic workers; but while this sector is compensated, it is typically underpaid and undervalued as a key component to the overall economy

The ILO estimates that 16.4 billion hours are spent daily in unpaid care work, which is equivalent to two billion people working eight hours a day. The value of this labour amounts to 9 % of global GDP, equivalent to US\$11 trillion. The economic impact of the care economy is one of many reasons why it is paramount to recognize and value unpaid care work and promote policies and shared responsibilities around it.

2. Targeting Programming for the Care Economy

In order to advance **SDG 5 - Gender Equality**, particularly, [Target 5.4](#) which seeks to recognize and value unpaid



care and domestic work, it is important to develop programming that centers women's roles within the care economy. We recommend focusing on the following contextualised programme elements:

Intersectional Gender Analysis should include the following:

1. **Access:** A person's ability to use the necessary resources to be a fully active and productive participant (socially, economically and politically) in society, including access to resources, income, services, employment, information and benefits.
2. **Knowledge, beliefs and perception:** The types of knowledge that men and women possess; the beliefs that shape gender identities and behavior; and the different perceptions that guide people's understanding of their lives, depending on their gender identity.
3. **Practices and participation:** How behaviors and actions in life vary by gender roles and responsibilities; gender stereotypes can bind women and girls and, due to cultural expectations, inherently link them to be responsible for the majority of unpaid care work.
4. **Time and space:** How gender plays a role in the availability and allocation of time and who makes decisions about these allocations. These decisions include: the division of both productive and reproductive labor; the identification of how time is spent during the day (and week, month, season, or year,); who contributes to specific aspects of family welfare, community governance, and social/support network.
5. **Legal rights and status:** How people are regarded and treated by customary legal codes, formal legal codes and judicial systems.
6. **Power and decision making:** The ability to decide, influence, control and enforce personal and governmental power. It refers to one's capacity to make decisions freely and to exercise power over one's body, within an individual's household, community, municipality, and state.⁵

Data collection is critical to build evidence for indicators that are gender responsive / aware within larger policy or monitoring frameworks. A few examples of indicators that do this are ones that track % of eligible population covered by national security programs or average number of hours spent on paid and unpaid work combined (total work burden), by sex.

Program development on Care Economy should encompass the 5Rs:

- **Recognize** the value of unpaid care work
- **Reduce** drudgery and hours spent on unpaid care work
- **Redistribute** responsibility for care work more equitably both within and outside the household
- **Represent** unpaid and paid care workers and ensure they have a voice
- **Respond** to the rights and needs of unpaid and paid care workers

The 5Rs provide a good starting point for addressing care work challenges and can be implemented at various levels of a program. For example, the 5 Rs can be incorporated into different communication mediums and different levels of programming in order to recognize care work, reduce hours spent in unpaid care work, and redistribute power.

Feedback and engagement, there is a critical need to gather participant feedback in Care Economy projects and to ensure the feedback is actioned. A key group we must engage with is men and boys to challenge gender stereotypes, and promote gender equitable attitudes.

⁵ <https://www.marketlinks.org/sites/default/files/media/file/2020-10/The%20Six%20Domains%20of%20Gender%20Analysis.pdf>



3. Recognizing the Care Economy Varies by Context

Addressing the care economy can vary significantly depending on the context, and it is important to acknowledge how cultural differences can play a role in the approach to this work.

For example, when collaborating with governments on citizen-centered reforms, policy and advocacy, a GBA+ approach might be used to ensure that all reform leaders integrate gender equality considerations, including unpaid care responsibilities. Key stakeholders should be included in collaborations to ensure multiple perspectives are heard.

At a household level, social and behaviour change can be programmed in, there are many approaches to working with couples, for example a “[Gender Model Family](#)” or [GALS](#). These tools help households to analyze the gender division of labour and develop household action plans for more equitable sharing of household chores and child and elder care tasks between women and men.

These examples demonstrate how the approach to transforming inequities in the care economy varies by context and level (household, systems, etc.) where programming is focused. Different levels will require different approaches and the context/culture of where the programming is situated will also have an effect on which approach is best suited.

4. Highlights from the Care Economy in Canada and Around the World

1. Domestically, Canada has made an unprecedented investment toward building a nation-wide early learning and child care system in Canada.
 - a. Access to affordable and high-quality child care is foundational to women's employment and skills development. There will be inadequate workforce recovery without rigorous, long-term support in this area. This investment will ensure that women are able to participate fully in the workforce and alleviate their unpaid care responsibilities.⁶
 - b. This investment also ensures early childhood educators are appropriately paid and supported as essential workers. Many women work high-risk frontline jobs in feminized sectors with little pay or perform the bulk of unpaid care work at home, bumping them out of the workforce altogether. All of this has contributed to inequities and gaps in the workforce and this announcement is a step in the right direction for creating adequate, sustainable funding for women in working in this sector.
2. During the Generation Equality Forum in Paris earlier this year, the Government of Canada dedicated \$100 million dollars towards the global care economy. Recently, in January 2023, the Government of Canada announced \$36 million in funds for programs that address the needs of paid care workers, with a focus on redistributing unpaid care work, representing care workers' and responding to their rights and needs.
 - a. Because the care economy is highly female-dominated, both on the supply and demand sides, expansion of this sector could accelerate women's social and economic participation. An active care economy will not only create jobs for women (and men), but women's increased employment can also lead to further demand for care and household services. Moreover, studies show that increasing women's earnings can not only raise women's social status and contribute to economic growth, but also strengthen their household decision-making and thus reduce gender inequality within the household.

⁶ <https://www.ywcatoronto.org/takeaction/additional/gender-responsive-workforce-recovery-plan-https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/campaigns/child-care.html>



RESOURCES

- [Action for Paid Care Workers Initiative](#) (Global Affairs Canada)
- Global Health and Gender Policy Brief - The Global Care Economy
<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/The%20Care%20Economy%20-%20MHI%20Policy%20Brief%20Apr%202022.pdf>
- A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan by YWCA Canada and the Institute for Gender and the Economy:
<https://www.feministrecovery.ca>
- Preventing a Lockdown Generation in Canada by YWCA Canada and YMCA Canada:
<https://www.preventingalockdowngeneration.ca/>
- Beyond Lip Service: Global care economy gets unprecedented boost from Canada by Oxfam Canada and YWCA Canada:
<https://ywcacanada.ca/news/beyond-lip-service-global-care-economy-gets-unprecedented-boost-from-canada/>
- Resetting Normal: Women, Decent Work, and Canada's Fractured Care Economy by The Canadian Women's Foundation, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Ontario Nonprofit Network and Fay Faraday:
<https://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1215&context=reports>
- UN Women's Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice:
<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2021/Feminist-plan-for-sustainability-and-social-justice-en.pdf>
- UN Women's Toolkit on Paid and Unpaid Care Work: From 3Rs to 5Rs
<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/A-toolkit-on-paid-and-unpaid-care-work-en.pdf>
- Feminist Building Blocks of a Just, Sustainable Economy:
<https://socialeurope.eu/the-feminist-building-blocks-of-a-just-sustainable-economy>
- Ontario Nonprofit Network - Building a robust and sustainable care economy
<https://theonnc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ONN-HUMA-brief-on-the-care-economy-March-2022.pdf>
- Qualitative research (four countries) findings of the effects of Male Engagement in Health management and Care Work from our SHOW projects:
https://planccanada.ca/file/planv4_files/reports/Chapeau-FC-Report-BGD-HTI-GHA-NGA-23-OCT2020-EN-WEB.pdf
- Gender Responsive Pedagogy Teacher training: <https://planccanada.ca/reports-and-publications/education>
- Gender Toolkit, Women's Empowerment Manual and Gender Model Family manual developed in Alinea projects in Ethiopia
 - <https://agri-training-et.org/gender-toolkit-documents/>
 - <https://agri-training-et.org/women-empowerment-manual/>
 - [https://www.ssi-km.online/wp-content/uploads/kpdocs/193%20ORO_GMF%20Manual%20For%20%20Irrigation%20Sector%20\(002\).pdf](https://www.ssi-km.online/wp-content/uploads/kpdocs/193%20ORO_GMF%20Manual%20For%20%20Irrigation%20Sector%20(002).pdf)
- 13 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CONSULTATIONS TO INFORM CANADA'S NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO END GBV (Addressing ECONOMIC ABUSE AND INJUSTICE in Canada)
- Sign the Canadian Center for Women Empowerment [Pledge](#) for fighting Economic Abuse and become an advocate for Economic Justice within your social circles and local communities
- Join the national Economic Abuse and Awareness Month - Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment and 22 major Canadian cities from coast to coast have proclaimed November 26th as Economic Abuse Awareness Day. In addition CCFWE joined four continents such as Australia, England, and New Zealand to recognize International Economic Abuse Awareness Day. Join the movement here <https://ccfwe.org/helpusrise2021/>
- [Download and learn more about Economic Abuse - fact sheets](#)



- Join our month of action this November as we engage advocates, financial institutions, partners and the public in starting a national conversation – and [check out our toolkit here](#) and learn more about how you can commemorate this awareness-raising month and take action to help end economic abuse.
- [Policy Recommendations for the Banks, Credit Unions and Financial Institutions on Addressing Economic Abuse in the Context of Gender-Based Violence in Canada](#)
- Relentless Resilience microsite: <https://aurafreedom.org/relentless-resilience/>
- Relentless Resilience reports: <https://aurafreedom.org/publications/>
- [Global Health and Gender Equality Policy Brief by the Wilson Centre:](#)
<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/The%20Care%20Economy%20-%20OMHI%20Policy%20Brief%20Apr%202022.pdf>