

# 1 Background

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## 1.1 The approach

The guidebook covers an enormous area. It provides a broad sweep, rather than technical details on any of the many areas. It provides the why and what rather than the detailed how-to of investigating unpaid care work. In many other sources, the topics covered in this guidebook are discussed in a very academic or very technical way which excludes many people. The approach used here is to provide the basics in as simple a way as possible, but also to provide references so that interested readers can go further on their own.

We have adopted the broad-brush and non-technical approach because we hope that this guidebook will stimulate groups to take up the issues through advocacy. If advocacy is our main aim, we want as many people as possible involved, and we want as many people as possible to understand enough to make the arguments themselves.

Some of the issues covered in this guidebook involve statistical and economic terms and concepts. The guidebook is written for non-economists and non-statisticians. However, it is the statisticians who produce the figures and the economists who build the economic models which provide the building blocks on which much policy is made. If the non-economists and non-statisticians want to influence the statisticians and economists, and engage them in argument, they need to know the basic terms and concepts.

The guidebook is intended primarily for use in countries covered by UNIFEM's Regional Office for Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean States<sup>1</sup>. It does, however, draw on examples from beyond this region. Some of these examples might be directly applicable to our region. Others will need to be adapted to suit the specific conditions in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> These are: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Advocacy around unpaid care work is particularly important in the twenty-first century, and especially in Southern Africa, as we face the many challenges of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In addition to its many other consequences, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is likely to increase the burden of unpaid care work of the women and girls in the region as they spend even more time than before caring for loved ones who are ill or orphaned. This extra responsibility could reverse some of the gains that women and girls have made in recent decades.

## 1.2 Defining unpaid care work

In this guide, we use the term ‘unpaid care work’ in the same way as was done in *Progress of the World’s Women* (Elson, 2000). In brief, we refer to tasks such as housework, cooking, and caring for children, old people and sick people where the person doing this work is not paid. The term includes work done for the family as well as what is sometimes called ‘volunteer’ work, where individuals assist other households or the community more generally.

Each of the three words making up ‘unpaid care work’ is important:

- The word ‘unpaid’ stresses that the person doing the activity does not receive a wage for it.
- The term ‘care’ stresses that the activity serves people and their well-being.
- The term ‘work’ stresses that the activity has a cost in terms of time and energy. It also stresses that the activity arises out of a social or contractual obligation, such as marriage or less formal social relationships.

Many other terms have been used for what we call ‘unpaid care work’. Elson explains why some of these terms can be ambiguous:

- Domestic labour: Does this refer to what we call unpaid care work or does it refer to the work of paid domestic workers?
- Unpaid labour: Does this refer to what we call unpaid care work or does it refer to the work a woman does without pay in the family business?
- Reproductive work: Does this refer to what we call unpaid care work or does it refer to giving birth and breast-feeding?
- Home work: Does this refer to what we call unpaid care work or does it refer to paid work done in the home on subcontract from an employer?

Elson stresses that the term ‘care’ does not mean that the work is always done willingly, or with love. Whether the work is done willingly depends on the relationship between the caregiver and the receiver and perhaps other people in the family or society. In some cases the care is given unwillingly, because the woman feels forced by psychological, social or even physical pressures. The debate is however, by no means closed.

### 1.3 Roadmap to the guidebook

- Section 1 of the guidebook provides an overview of why the guidebook and defines unpaid care work in the context in which it will be used throughout the guidebook.
- Section 2 looks at the relationship of women’s unremunerated (unpaid) work in Southern Africa to their poverty. We do this because one of the important aims in raising issues of unpaid care work is to address the relative and absolute poverty of women in the region.
- Section 3 looks at the different types of work which women (and others) do. The section examines what types of work are fully counted, partially counted and undercounted in standard statistical and economic systems. It links this to which types of work are unpaid and underpaid.
- Section 4 discusses statistical tools and methodologies for data collection, production and analysis on unpaid care work. It includes a summary of the work that has been done in Africa on this topic to date.
- Section 5 examines measurement of unpaid care work with an economist’s eye. It asks how we measure – or value – this type of work, so that it can be ‘seen’ by economists and considered in economic policy making.
- Section 6 discusses how unpaid care work can be inserted into the national accounts, the standard system for measuring the size and shape of an economy.
- Section 7 concludes by suggesting some of the ways in which the idea of unpaid care work can be used in advocacy. This is the most important part of the guidebook as, unless our interest in unpaid care work leads to changes in the lives of ordinary women and men, it is not worth too much effort.

