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*Why should
we care about
UNPAID CARE WORK?*

Debbie Budlender

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UNIFEM is the women's fund at the United Nations. It provides financial and technical assistance to innovative programmes and strategies that promote women's human rights, political participation and economic security. UNIFEM works in partnership with UN organizations, Governments and non governmental organizations (NGOs) and networks to promote gender equality. It links women's issues and concerns to national, regional and global agendas, by fostering collaboration and providing technical expertise on gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment strategies.

UNIFEM was created by a UN General Assembly Resolution in 1976, following a call from women's organizations attending the 1975 UN First World Conference on Women in Mexico City.

UNIFEM's mandate is to:

- Support innovative and experimental activities benefiting women in line with national and regional priorities;
- Serve as a catalyst, with the goal of ensuring the appropriate involvement of women in mainstream development activities, as often as possible at the pre-investment stage.
- Play an innovative and catalytic role in relation to the United Nations overall system of development cooperation.

(GA Resolution 39/125)

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of UNIFEM, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.

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Foreword

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) commissioned the writing of this guidebook on unpaid care work under its Regional Programme to promote African Women's Economic Security and Rights.

The Regional Programme seeks to contribute to the empowerment of African women to realize their economic security and rights in the context of globalization and the feminization of poverty. A major action to be undertaken in order to achieve this is to influence macroeconomic and trade policy making to focus on feminized poverty and African women's access to and control over resources, while ensuring that women's contribution to the national economies through care, domestic and reproductive work are recognized in macroeconomic policy frameworks.

Unpaid care work is a major contributing factor to gender inequality and women's poverty. The assumption that unpaid work is elastic and valueless is a major concern to women. Feminist and gender analysts have consistently called for a thorough analysis of the implications of excluding unpaid work on women's time, opportunities and economic growth and development in general. The development of this guidebook is one step towards realizing that call.

The amount and intensity of unpaid care work in Southern Africa has been exacerbated by the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Mainland Southern Africa is said to be the most affected region in the world. Southern Africa has less than 5% of the world's population and yet has the highest rates of HIV and AIDS infection. The worst affected countries include Swaziland, Botswana, Lesotho, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

At the same time most economies in the region are undergoing a process of restructuring which includes the health sector. This inevitably involves attempts at reducing costs and introduction of service fees, much to the chagrin

of the poor who constitute the majority of the population in all the countries in the region. Indeed this has also led to the transference of the care giving responsibility from Government institutions to women and children.

This guidebook also very importantly makes a connection between unpaid care work and gender responsive budgeting. Gender responsive budgets ensure that the needs and interests of individuals from different social groups are addressed in the Government budget. In particular it ensures that the needs and interests of women and men, girls and boys are included.

By understanding the distribution and nature of household responsibilities it is possible to make budgets sensitive to the needs of various households.

The guidebook is intended to assist in advocacy activities aimed at influencing economic policy makers to acknowledge and account for women's contribution in national and global economies through statistics, national accounts, budgets, and taxation. The purpose of the guidebook and subsequent activities is to make unpaid work visible and to make it accounted for in macro- and micro-level policy making. This will enable policy makers to formulate and implement gender-sensitive policies that will counter the feminization of poverty.

We owe a special thank you to Debbie for her cutting edge work in the area of gender responsive budgeting and her willingness to share her skills and knowledge with a wide variety of individuals and organizations.



Nomcebo Manzini

Regional Programme Director