

Gender Justice and Empowerment: Evaluating Women's Unpaid Care Work in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria has policies and strategies in place to promote gender equality, participation and empowerment. Nevertheless, women's socio-economic remains significantly low. Reasons for all of these are rooted in three major challenges: socio-cultural barriers, gender stereotypes, and illiteracy among the populace. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to evaluate women unpaid domestic work reflecting on the interplay of gender, culture and stereotypes. Unfortunately, unpaid domestic care work is generally perceived to be less valuable than paid work, it is ignored, under-estimated and not considered to be "work"; even by the women and men who engage in and benefit directly from these activities. The paper showcases how gender responsive approaches in division of labour can be utilized for women domestic unpaid work to be recognised and its economic value estimated.

Key Words: Women, Domestic, Unpaid work, Gender Justice, Gender Stereotypes, care work.

Introduction

Every day, majority of women across the globe spend their time (and often very long hours), cooking, cleaning, fetching water, firewood, and caring for children. They are saddled with the task of day-to-day management of household and domestic chores which contribute to sustaining people. Despite being foundational to all societies, unpaid domestic work is neither recognized as work nor valued (UNWomen, 2018). It is more bothersome that, these works are not captured in data or discussed in national debates, and usually not considered when designing and implementing economic and social policies (ActionAid, 2014). For example, in developing economies, women spend more time on domestic unpaid work, on average, women perform at least two and a half times more unpaid household and care work than men (ActionAid Nigeria 2012). This is based on the expectation that, domestic unpaid work is women's responsibility that usually starts at early age, through the process of socialization. In this instance, it has been argued that, gender stereotypes influence the kind of work women do in the household in almost all cultures in Africa societies. A study conducted by UNWomen (2018) of 33 countries, shows that, girls aged 7-14 do more housework than boys of the same age and perform other tasks, including care of younger siblings. Inappropriately, this practice goes for women generally and they are not been compensated for it.

In part, this is because it is invisible in national statistics and less valued, as local and national authorities generally fails to design social and economic policies that can reduce women's primary responsibility for unpaid care work. Women's responsibility for care leads to the violation of their basic human rights to an education which is crucial to empowerment, socio-economic, political participation, decent work and leisure. Also, the unequal distribution of unpaid care work between women and men represents an infringement of women's rights (United Nations, 2013), and as well a strain on their economic empowerment. Therefore, the view expressed in this paper is that, the insensitivity towards unpaid job that is largely accepted as women's responsibility may contribute to persistent gender inequalities and gender injustice in Africa and indeed Nigeria, and perpetually leaving a large percentage of women at a disadvantaged position.

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Contextual clarifications

Gender Justice

Gender simply put, is the roles that a society apportions to its women and men, girls and boys, that often times define their behaviours and relationships and, this has been found to be more favourable to the male members of the society, therefore creating inequality between them. On the other hand, gender justice according to Goetz (2007), entails ending inequality between women and men that are produced and reproduced in the family, the community, the market and the state. It also requires that mainstream institutions, from justice to socio-economic policy making are accountable for tracking the injustice and discrimination that keep women poor and excluded. The cardinal argument here is that, equality and equity are central to achieving gender justice. While equality gives credence to equal opportunity, equity is about fairness in the distribution of the opportunities between women and men. It is when both are put into consideration without bias, then gender justice can be said to be done.

Women

A woman is a female human being. The term '*woman*' is usually reserved for an adult, with the term girl being the usual term for a female child or adolescent (Wikipedia). In Nigeria, out of a total population of over 180 million people, women made up to 49.34% (NPC: 2016). Other countries in Africa as well had high population of women with Niger having 49.9%, Rwanda 51.0%, Senegal 50.9%, Sierra Leone 50.5%, South Africa 50.9 %, Sudan 50.0% and Togo 50.2% (World Bank: 2016). The above figure projected that women formed a reasonable population of Nigeria and Africa at large. Women are the most potent force for the development of any nation and their contribution is majorly felt in five areas of: mother producer, home manager, community organizer, socio-cultural and political activist (Damilola, 2010). Despite the qualities found in women, African socio-cultural values have put them at a disadvantaged position. Often times, they are seen as weaker partners, and as well, treated so.

Unpaid domestic/care work

Unpaid care work is a critical and yet unseen dimension of human well-being that provides essential domestic services within household, for other households and community members (UNDP, 2009). According to the International Labour Conference of Labour Statisticians Resolution concerning statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization (2013), unpaid work, including unpaid care work, is included in the definition of "own-use production work" and is therefore considered a form of work. Unpaid work is work that produces goods and services for household consumption, which includes collecting firewood and fuel, fetching water, cooking, cleaning and also providing care for children, the elderly and other dependents.

Faith and Blackden (2009) defined unpaid care work in these various ways, to them unpaid means; 'the person doing the activity does not receive a wage for the work, because it falls outside the production boundary in the system of the national accounts, and not counted for in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) calculations'. 'Care' according to them means; 'the activity serves people and their well-being, and it includes both personal care, and care related activities like cooking, cleaning and washing cloths'. While, 'carework' is seen as 'the activities that entails expenditures of time and energy'. The unpaid care work is also referred to as 'productive' or 'domestic' work in order to distinguish it from market work. Similarly, Elson (2000) observed that, unpaid care work involves time and energy in supporting human well-being, arising out of social or contractual obligations, including marriage and parenting as well as less formal societal relationships. Elson submitted that such kinds of unpaid care work includes: (i) direct care of people, such as child care or care of dependent adults; (ii) housework – such as cooking, cleaning or collecting water or firewood; and (iii) unpaid community work undertaken for friends, neighbours or more distant family members, and work undertaken out of a sense of responsibility for the community, such as volunteer work. He opined that provision of care within households and communities is shaped by power relations and social norms in the society.

Accordingly, Esquivel (2013), is of the view that the amount and pattern of care work within a household depends on the availability of time and labour-saving technology; the availability and cost of substitutes to undertake housework; the economies of scale derived from different family arrangements; the role of income in individuals' bargaining in or out of housework; and social norms. In whatever circumstances, women play the central role, and such roles should not be ignored, bearing in mind that, their contributions to informal economy and, their unpaid labour adds to stabilize the economy of African countries (Dayil, 2018).

Furthermore, unpaid domestic care work according to the United Nations System of National Accounts (1993), divided unpaid care work into two types - ***Productive activities for household subsistence*** such as crop cultivation, animal husbandry, collection of basic necessities like water, fuel and raw materials and, ***Reproductive activities for household maintenance that includes;***

Cleaning, washing, cooking, shopping, providing care for infants and children, older relatives or disabled/ill family members, and all volunteer work for community services. Also, the International Classification of Activities for Time Use Survey differentiated between three categories of unpaid care work. They are; household maintenance, care of persons in one's own household, and services and help to household in the community (Time Use Survey, 2000)

Overall, what constituted unpaid care work in this context of analysis is rest with three important areas: providing for household activities, activities rendered to family members, and the community at large. Unpaid family care is provided for the vulnerable and dependants. Such activities include; a mother feeding her baby or a child cooking for elderly parents, that is, caring for dependants or vulnerable persons. Care is not only carried out for the young and elderly or the disabled. The same care can be carried out for more independent members of the family – husbands/wives and adult children. Lastly, unpaid care may be carried out for people outside the family – friends when they are ill, elderly or disabled, neighbours, community members among others. It can also be provided by not-for-profit organizations (churches, mosques, philanthropists and NGOs). As important as these responsibilities are, recognizing them as vital roles to socio-economic development and women empowerment remains a daunting challenge particularly in Africa and indeed Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the concept of Marxist feminist perspective. The theory is a sub-type of feminist theory, which focuses on the dismantling of capitalism as a way to liberate women, the paradigm states that private property, which gives rise to economic inequality, dependence, political confusion, and ultimately unhealthy social relationships between men and women, is the root of women's oppression in the current social context (Mann, 2012). Feminism's foundation is laid by Engels (1986), in his analysis of gender oppression in the origins of the family private property and the state. He claims that women's subordination is not as a result of her biological disposition but of social relations and that the institution of family as it exists is a complex system in which men command women's services. According to this perspective, the individual is heavily influenced by the structure of society. This theory sees contemporary gender inequality as determined ultimately by the capitalist mode of production. Gender oppression is compared to class oppression and the relationship between man and woman in the society is similar to the relationship between proletariat and bourgeoisie. Hence, women's relegation is seen as a form of class oppression. (Makama, 2013).

Relating the assumption of the above theory to the study of Gender justice and empowerment: Evaluating women's domestic unpaid work in Nigeria, the Justice System has failed to recognise women unpaid domestic work as having, as neither values, nor contribution towards nation building and Gross Domestic Product. Rather, women are seen as domestic keepers and the most disadvantaged group because the scheme of affairs is controlled by men. Aside, women unpaid work are assumed to be the natural responsibility of women and consequently the Justice system may not consider such duties to be contributing to economic development of the country as well as empowering women. In this regard, we may not wish away socio-cultural factors, influencing such ignorance, wherein women are naturally seen as care givers, with no amount of income attached to it. From Nigeria experience, some men kept their wives as "house wife" (taking care of home only) without recourse to cost implication of such responsibility. In this case, we can infer that women are the most exploited group in Africa and of course in Nigeria.

Unpaid Domestic Care Work Generating Gender inequality in Africa

Unpaid domestic care work is one of the features of gender inequality that are common to Africa society. For example, in Ghana, the research carried out by Ghana Time-Use Survey (2009), indicated that women spend much time on unpaid household jobs. They spend 2 hours and 35 minutes while men spend on 40 minutes. In subsistence activities, which includes subsistence agriculture as well as fetching water and collecting wood for cooking, women have the highest participant rates of 47% while men is 38%. Nearly one-third of women (29 per cent) were involved in work for households providing services for income, as against one-fifth of men (19 per cent) in the same category of activities.

In South Africa, The South African Time Use Survey (TUS, 2000), was conducted on 8,564 households and 14,553 respondents (Budlender, 2006; Budlender et al., 2001). One of the focuses of the TUS was on unpaid care work and the survey therefore provides a number of findings on care provision in South Africa. Findings showed that, on average women spend a larger proportion of their day (23%) on productive activities than men (19 %), although they are likely to be paid for less of this time. Women do eight times as much care work as men, on average, and most of this is undertaken in respondents' own homes.

The TUS also revealed that, women account for over three-quarters of the volume of unpaid care work. Males do a fairly consistently low amount of unpaid care work, while there is high variability in the amount of this work that women undertake.

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD,2012) also analysed data on working hours (paid and unpaid) from six countries and found that women do noticeably more work than men in all cases. On average, women do between 174 per cent (South Africa) and 194 per cent (India) of the work done by men. In addition, Oxfam's 2015 Household Care Survey captures these 'secondary activities' of care, finding that adult women have an average of 11.5 hours per day of total care responsibility, almost double the 5.9 hours of care work as a primary activity, and almost 8 hours a day more on average than men in the same households ((Rost et al. 2015).

Likewise, in Sub-Saharan Africa, 71 per cent of the burden of collecting water for households falls on women and girls (Millennium Development Goals Report, 2012), who in total spend 40 billion hours a year collecting water, equivalent to a year's worth of labour by the entire workforce in France United Nations Development Programme (UNDP,Resource Guide on Gender and climate change ,2009,p.32) Resource Guide on Gender and Climate Change, 2009). In reality and majority of cases, care work cannot be done when adult women do less care work because of other responsibilities, the work is usually transferred or the quality of the care provided falls. In some cases, the work may be transferred to paid care workers or to men, but most often responsibility shifts to other women such as daughters or grandmothers. In this case, adolescent girls are particularly affected and may have to drop out of school to help with care work, perpetuating a cycle of inequality.

Further extant literature on unpaid care work in Nigeria has shown that women and girls perform the majority of unpaid care work. A study conducted by the Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire (CWIQ) shows that women spend most of their time doing unpaid care work: one in every two men spends time doing pursuits that earn them an income, one in every two women spends time doing unpaid work (Angel-Urdinola and Wodon 2008). A position that was further reiterated by Rizavi and Sofar (2010) that women contribute more than 60% of the time devoted to housework and care, irrespective of their employment status, income or education levels in Nigeria. The report of the British Council Nigeria (2012) relates this phenomenon to persist patriarchal ideologies which men are seen as bread-winners, and women as homemakers. The implication is that women become primarily responsible for childcare, maintaining homes, washing, cooking, fetching firewood and water for drinking, as well as unpaid work such as helping with planting and harvesting firewood, food crops and cash crops. The report further explains that due to unpaid care work responsibilities, women are also more likely to occupy low-level posts that offer them the flexibility they need to manage their households while working. The Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics (NBS: 2005) revealed that women devoted more of their time to unpaid activity in this order: child care (17.2 %), cooking (10.1%), care of the elderly (9.8%) and recreation (8.3%) in the country.

Notwithstanding this heavy responsibility bestowed on women, the modern capitalist market system looks down on these types of work because they do not produce a market income. Therefore, it may be argued that, this pejorative stance makes women very poor despite their longer hours on domestic work. These unpaid works is also often undercounted and undervalued because it is carried out simultaneously with paid and productive work, or when the carer is also studying, eating, resting or socialising. This responsibility for 'supervision', even when caring activities are intermittent, restricts the carer's mobility and productivity (FMWASD, 2014). In October 2013, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights reported that 'heavy and unequal care responsibilities are a major barrier to gender equality and to women's equal enjoyment of human rights' (Carmona, 2013), which tells the tales of the Nigerian women.

Consequence of Unpaid work

Whichever ways we want to assess unpaid care work, we must bear in mind that 'Care' in itself is a benefit to society as it contributes to the well-being of both the caregiver and the receiver and fosters close relations between them. Moreover, all care work, paid or unpaid, adds value to the economy directly or indirectly and, should therefore be included in economic calculations. Even though the gendered division of labour in care work limits such benefits primarily to women, women's unpaid care work constitutes an important contribution to the Nigerian economy. It is estimated that if women's unpaid work were assigned a monetary value it would constitute between 10% and 39% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (FMWASD, 2014). Other studies equally show that reducing the household time burdens on women could increase agricultural labour productivity by 15% and capital productivity by as much as 44% in some countries. By implication, the inability to recognise the economic value of unpaid work has a far reaching effect on the economic development of the country.

More so, this debar women to favourably compete with men in the labour market, thereby causing women not enjoying equal rights in the sector, mainly because of domestic burden. More so, this becomes complicated or burdensome when women combine paid and unpaid work. Budlender (2001) describe these as double burdens, as women in the workforce having to work a full day are still held accountable for the majority of the domestic unpaid work at home. This may have negative impact on women, because it may give women less time to spend in the workforce, resulting in men dedicating more time to the workforce, and, therefore, likely getting promoted over women. Beyond this, double burden have the tendencies to affect personal wellbeing of women, as this may affect their sleeping and having less time for taking care of themselves. Sen, (1999) and Chambers, (2005) view double burden from productivity perspective. They observed that, double burden can also negatively affect women's job performance in the workforce, encouraging male promotion over female, the action that have the tendencies to portraying women as inefficient and incapable. Obi (2020) reiterates that, the burden of unpaid care and domestic work, remain the face of poverty on Nigerian women. Apart from the above implications, unpaid care work also affects human rights which are considered to be integral aspects of poverty reduction and development.

Furthermore, unpaid care work reinforces gender inequality through its impacts on girls' education, women's economic empowerment and women's political participation. In many cultures in Nigeria and Africa at large, children are socialized to believe that the man is the breadwinner, while caring is for women and girls. Women are seen as the nurturers, mothers and homemakers. These socially ascribed roles for providing care undermine women's rights and limit their opportunities, capabilities and choices (Esplen, 2009). There are opportunity costs for girls' education that arise from the heavy burden of household chores too. Many girls drop out of school to assist with domestic activities, income generation activities and/ or care for siblings or the sick. Even where girls attend school, care workloads reduce time available for studying as well as time for play. The burden of providing care is usually greater in families with many dependents, such as young children, elderly members and the sick. Exhaustion and stress can result from the burden of providing everyday care because huge amounts of time and energy are involved in care activities. Impacts can be physical such as headaches, backaches, physical and exhaustion (Zahrah, et al 2013). The discourse on effect of care obligations cannot be completed without looking at the implications on women's access to public sphere, where their participation in political and economic life have been limiting and further perpetuating gender inequality, exclusion and traps women in poverty. Makama (2013) described this dis-appropriateness situation as very difficult and reduces socio-economic empowerment of women. She reiterate the consequence to include low level of educational attainment, poverty, biases against women's employment of certain branches of the economy or types of work and discriminatory salary practices.

In as much as unpaid care work has not found its value in the national policy space of many countries in Africa, including Nigeria. We cannot deny the fact that some efforts have been made in Nigeria, though such efforts have not generated the necessary desires. Faith and Blackden (2009), developed a conceptual framework to guide United Nations Development programme (UNDP) activities in the area of unpaid care work. The framework outlined unpaid care work as three inter-related dimensions of; Recognition, Reduction, and Redistribution. According to Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development in collaboration with Action Aid Nigeria (2014), the recognition aspect of this policy option analyses the centrality of unpaid care work to human welfare and explored certain strategies to achieve this. Such steps encompass time use survey or measurement of time use, understanding the country context, value unpaid care work, raising awareness and building capacity, as well as policy change to assist care givers.

The reduction aspect of this policy dwells on; increase access to key infrastructure, maintain/expand core public service, cash payment to care givers, tax credit or benefits, and public care services. And lastly, the redistribution aspect of the policy is on analyses measures which support equitable sharing of burdens of care not only within households (between men and women), but also between and among key providers of care services – government, the private sector and communities. This aspect therefore anchors on; implementation of policies favourable to sharing of burdens and engaging with men (Faith and Blackden, 2009; Esplen, 2009).

Adopting these strategies in Nigeria first started with ActionAid through its programme on women unpaid care works. This was necessitated arising from its 2009 review of the International Women's Rights team that discovered that women's unpaid care work was a great constraint to gender equality and women's empowerment in Nigeria. The main objectives of ActionAid's Unpaid Care Work Project are to recognize, reduce and redistribute women's unequal burden of unpaid care work. Since the official launch of the project in March 2010 across the three ActionAid pilot countries.

ActionAid Nigeria, has conducted several community and national levels interventions to expand knowledge and respond to women's Unpaid Care Work in the selected communities. However, several policy-related questions on the women's Unpaid Care Work and how to mainstream the issues into broader policy space necessitated the commissioning of a policy mapping in Nigeria. Despite all these efforts, a review of macro-economic policies and policies targeting poverty reduction in Nigeria showed that unpaid care work is yet to be recognized and mainstreamed into plans and policies in Nigeria (Okojie, 2012) Some of this policies are as follows:

- The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS);
- The Seven Point Agenda;
- The Vision 2020 Blueprint;
- The Transformation Agenda;
- The Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment (SURE) Programme;
- The National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS);
- NAPEP's Care of the Poor Conditional Cash Transfer Programme;
- The National Gender Policy (2006);
- The Universal Basic Education Act;
- The National Policy on Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria;
- And the Employment and Tax Laws in Nigeria

Nevertheless, the Nigeria government in many instances commit its self to eliminate discrimination by persons, and adopt the principle of equality in legal system and laws prohibiting discrimination against women as well as establishing tribunals and public institutions to ensure protection of women. Partly, is the Nigeria ratification of (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women(CEDAW) in 1985, however, successive governments have never incorporated its provisions into domestic law in line with the provisions of section 12(1) of the Constitution of Nigeria 1999 as Amended. The implication of this, is that none of the progressive and far reaching rights afforded women under CEDAW can be enforced in our courts (Atim 2016).The National Gender Policy of Nigeria (2006), that is expected to help eliminate all forms of barriers against women, cannot say to have achieved much in the area of unpaid care work and domestic work, which women are susceptible to. We can then argued that, the inability to implement the provisions of gender related policies in Nigeria, has been a hindrance to the achievement of gender justice in the country.

Conclusion

Drawing from the view expressed in this paper, the evidence points to women and young girls doing more unpaid work and this have impact on women's inability to engage in other aspects of public life including political participation. Beyond this, the phenomenon negatively wedged on women and girl child education, as they perform bulk of house work, leaving less time for education; which is an essential element of women's empowerment. While this menace is felt around the world, the impact is more severe in Africa. It is established that the patriarchy nature of Africa societies and indeed Nigeria, is essentially a contributing factor, which in turn, breeds gender inequality and discrimination against women. Put together, these have multiple effects on women well-being and development.

The fault may derived from the States' failures to provide, regulate and fund domestic and care formal services, that can reduce burden on communities, families and especially women. However, the study is of the view that if unpaid care work is measured using time-budget surveys and embedding time-use modules within household surveys, it will realise that, Nigeria is losing so much income to unpaid care work. In this regard, some recommendations and good practices are listed below:

First, there should be reduction of time spent by women in unpaid works through provision of time saving investment and infrastructure like; electricity, pipe borne water among others. 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% (Dinkelman, 2011). Nigeria government can then take a cue from South Africa example, by providing social infrastructure that can reduce burden on women.

Secondly, better access to public services, child care and care for the elderly by the government would reduce the time spent by women in unpaid work (OECD Development Centre, 2014). While longer school time for children, would reduce the time spent by mothers on unpaid care work.

Kenya adopted this strategy and it increases the labour participation of women (Cassirer and Addati, 2007), Nigeria can as well learn from this and provide better access to public services, particularly on child care and care for elderly, while essential amenities such as health care is made available in households.

Thirdly, there should be redistribution for family-friendly working policies. This means maternity leave for mothers should be increased by the government from 16 weeks to 24 weeks as stipulated by International Labour Organization (ILO). Morocco adopted 12-14 weeks maternity leave and it decreases the danger of women leaving their jobs while taking care of their babies. Also, there should be paternal leave for men equally with maternal leave. This would increase the redistribution of unpaid care work for both parents. Nigeria can learn from this practice, bearing in mind that family-friendly working policies increases cooperation and understanding within and between family settings that can be felt in the large society.

Fourthly, gender stereotypes which see women as solely unpaid care givers should be discouraged. In Zimbabwe for example, the “Africare’s Male Empowerment Project” seeks to change behavioural trends and challenge existing gender norms by increasing male involvement in home-based care services given to rural people living with AIDS. Deliberate efforts towards advocacy, sensitization and awareness in Nigeria society would help to reduce the stereotyping which sees the responsible of care giver as women responsibility. Men and other critical stakeholders should be targeted to achieve this aim.

Finally, relevant institutions need to carry out action based research on unpaid care work in order to establish the economic value of such responsibility and how it can positively impact on the economic development of the country. The research should be that it attracts policy makers and other interested parties in the country for the purpose of legislation. Also, such research will raise related policy questions on unpaid care work, while creating more data for strategies that can help to address the problems of unpaid care work in national plans and policies.

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