

**Invisible Work, Invisible Workers:**  
*The Sub-Economies of UnPaid Work and Paid Work*

**Action Research on Redefining, Recognizing, Reducing and Redistributing Women's Unpaid  
Work**

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### **A Conclusion in Continuum**

#### **6.1: Introduction**

This evidence-based action research integrates the macro and micro via the meso at all levels via both a vast secondary data base and primary analysis undertaken at the level of the household, with an analytically conscious comprehension of all inherent variations, contradictions and differentials. Consequently, this study has been perceived primarily as a process integrating research, advocacy and action, located deliberately in the context of subsistence based livelihoods which are not only highly gendered, but are intrinsically interconnected to especially resource ownership and control patterns, both individual and common.

This ‘conclusion’ therefore is not a typical summary of results that lists out a series of recommendations; rather, it focuses on unraveling and visibilising the fundamentals of the gendered continuum between the Unpaid and Paid Work Sub-Economies that have emerged from the analysis of both secondary and primary data in the concrete economic and extra-economic reality of women and men, and the nature of their labour and livelihoods perceived through macro, meso and micro interconnects that often operate in a dialectical and also exploitative and oppressive manner.

We begin by locating the concept of women’s work within the overall macroeconomic scenario, followed by the critique of identified policies and schemes via both secondary and primary information based evidence. The analysis then focusses on the feminization of the gendered continuum, issues of sustainability and sustenance, linkages between paid and unpaid economies. The culmination of the entire study are the conceptual and methodological learnings.

#### **6.2: Macroeconomic Context of Women’s Work**

The definition of Unpaid Work, which incorporates Unpaid Care Work, extends beyond the domestic domain to unrecognised and hence unquantified work. It represents a continuum of work across various thresholds, and, in the ultimate sense, reinforces the patriarchal interlinks between State, Market, Community, and Family particularly in nations that are in the process of attaining

development. This process of development is often and increasingly characterised by multiple polarities both economic and extra-economic, these several forms of contradistinctions operating across gender, class, social groups, communities, regions, sectors and sub-sectors. Integrated with the morphology of production and reproduction are the opposite yet apposite interconnects between various structures including the formal and informal, the organised and the unorganised, the rural and the urban. Central to understanding the issues of the connects and disconnects between paid, underpaid, unpaid and care work is the location in the system of production, reproduction and ownership of resources, and hence of the analysis of the gendered continuum as well as concatenation. The gendered continuum between paid, underpaid, unpaid and care work in a developing and increasingly differentiated society must, of necessity, be examined in relation to the fact that the primary motive force of entering the domain of production – whether recognised in all its forms or not – is subsistence and survival, located within a sustainable economy and livelihood framework.

The concepts of production and also of work that is central to this understanding therefore incorporate exchange-value as well as use-value, including the intermeshing of the two that lie at the cusp, so to say. This is so especially for women who work at the threshold which characterises the space between the private and the public domain. Women's work therefore has to be perceived at three levels – that within the walls of the home, that outside the walls of the home, and the shadow work which lies on the doorstep (*dehleez*) between that which has an exchange-value and that which has a use-value. This conceptual approach critically and additionally underlies the gendered continuum between all the four categories of work and hence forms the fulcrum of the interconnects between recognising, reducing and redistributing unpaid work, containing within itself the redefinition of work. Fundamental to this continuum is that the economy of a country, particularly one that is developing, rests on both paid and unpaid work, with two simultaneously functioning interdependent sub-economies – the Paid Work Economy and the Unpaid Work Economy.

The very nature of women's work has undergone significant modifications in recent times, particularly since the reshaping of the macroeconomic fundamentals of the economy. The past few years have witnessed rather dramatic changes in the nature of vulnerabilities characterising the livelihoods and the labour of poorer women and also men. These transformations are closely connected to the several decisive and defining processes that have come to characterise the neo-liberal phase.

One, the withdrawal of the State from the public sphere especially that pertaining to where the majority of Indians and especially women live and labour.

Two, the macroeconomic context of declining investment in public provisioning of basic essential rights as well as welfare goods and services that have a direct impact on labour and labour power, especially the unpaid and paid work of women.

Three, the resultant creation of institutional and macroeconomic structures and policies, including privatisation of public goods, which in fact violate civic and civil rights including the right to work, to safe water, clean energy, care, sanitation, etc.

Four, that of visibilisation and de-visibilisation of women's work in the context of their perceived decline in contributing to the nation's economy.

Five, the altered equation between capital and labour as well as the forms of surplus extraction, with appropriation extending beyond individually 'owned' property to that which is 'collectively owned' and accessed.

The benefits to these colluding structures at all three levels of macro, meso and micro are many and myriad, and operate through several interlinked ways and methods –

- By depending on women's underpaid work and unpaid work to fill gaps in public expenditure and 'genderless' macroeconomic policies
- By subordination of women within the productive and also reproductive process via their non-empowerment in the sphere of production
- By limiting the definition of production to that which is visible, recognisable and hence quantifiable
- By neglecting to recognise the existence of unpaid work and hence the need to reduce and redistribute it
- By upholding a particular form of family which ensures cheap reproduction of labour power with women as a reserve army
- By extending the oppression of women via supporting a form of household in which they provide unpaid services
- By taking advantage of gender norms that put responsibility for both unpaid work and also unpaid care work on women
- By remaining silent in the face of increase in gender violence in the economy as well as the society.

### **6.3: Policies: Evidence-based Critique, Evaluation and Articulation**

The detailed evaluation of the 4 laws, 4 policies and 10 schemes that has been carried out reveals the almost total negation of the recognition of the Unpaid Work Sub-Economies, perceiving women primarily as reproductive rather than economic agents. Before critiquing each policy individually, it must be stated that the lack of gendered disaggregated information permeates all layers across both time and space, at both national and regional levels. There appears to be little concern regarding quantitative information especially in relation to gendered benefits. In spite of MIS, reporting by especially state departments is not only low on accuracy but also considerably lagged, with no perceptible effort to monitor data and to rectify lapses. Timely and accurate data is indispensable for monitoring, utilization and reach of funds as well as benefits.

#### *Energy:*

There appears to be a dramatic boost in budget allocations in 2016-17; however, the gross budgetary outlay for 2017-18 is only Rs. 15 crores. Furthermore, women specific allocation as percentage of total MNRE budget has fallen from 27.85 percent in 2014-15 to a pathetic 2.47 today. State level analysis shows that while Maharashtra outlays have increased, the total is a mere Rs. 171 crores. In Telangana, not even 10 percent of the Rs. 241 crores has been utilized; no data exists for Uttarakhand. The original two thirds of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas budget allocated to PAHAL have been halved. The PMUY and the DBTK are miniscule schemes that account for respectively no more than 1.5 per cent and 0.5 per cent of the budget today.

#### *Water:*

Allocations for Swachh Bharat Abhiyan have exceeded that for NRDWP, reflecting a clear shift in State priorities and an increasing and worrying disconnect between water and sanitation. Maharashtra outlay is now one third of what it was three years ago, with Uttarakhand also reflecting a decrease. Both states also appear to have a common problem of utilization of central funds.

#### *Care:*

The implementation of the Maternity Benefit Act appears to have been an utter failure throughout the country, with only 35,035 women benefitting a total of Rs. 60.63 crores as of 2014. Regional implementation is virtually non-existent: Maharashtra Rs. 28 crores to 2078 women, Telangana Rs. 3 crores to 604 women, and Uttarakhand Rs. 0.02 crores to 2 women. The Central allocation of Rs. 2700 crores to IGMSY in the 2017-18 budget was found insufficient for the estimated 53 lakhs

beneficiaries and hence eligibility has been restricted to one child. What this implies for the future child sex ratio is an issue of deep concern. No funds have been released so far to states under the MBP. Maharashtra has slashed its budget estimate within the last one year alone from Rs. 30.09 crores to Rs. 5.39 crores. The BE of Telangana was increased to Rs 30.19 crores in 2015-16, following a not too little AE of Rs. 13.58 cr in the previous year; there is no data after that. Uttarakhand data varies between an expenditure of Rs. 5 crores in 2014-15 and the utilization of Rs. 3 crores a year later.

Allocations to ICDS, one of the most renowned schemes that has a direct impact on women's work both paid and unpaid, has been increased in the current budget after a three-year period of decline. Even so it has dropped as a proportion of the total MCWD budget from 88 percent in 2014-15 to 80 percent today. While the number of operational AWC's increased by about 3000, the number of children in PSE have fallen by 5 percent. All three states show a sharp fall: Maharashtra to 42 percent of BE, Telangana to less than one crore; Central funds to Uttarakhand have been halved.

RGNCS seems to be in a state of virtual collapse: its share of the MWCD budget has been consistently below one percent; fall in number of functioning creches by more than one fourth; decline in beneficiaries from 6 lakhs to 1.6 lakhs. This model based on partnership with NGO's and the private sector does not appear to be working well at all. The state level scenario is equally alarming. The allocation in Maharashtra today is just about a crore distributed to about 5000 persons. Uttarakhand has sanctioned Rs. 73 lakhs benefitting 2600 persons, with Telangana reporting 4152 beneficiaries.

It is only in MGNREGA that women are recognised as individual farmers. Using this specific programme, ASVSS in Solapur conducted a series of campaigns and street plays to make MGNREGS work more flexible, and also to focus on asset creation more appropriate to women. ARPAN in Pithoragarh is also focusing on MGNREGS and has held a series of meetings to strengthen women's collectives and to demand a full 100 days' work.

Most schemes and programmes have several eligibility conditions, all of which contravene the very principle of benefits as rights and entitlements, thereby further excluding the majority of the already excluded. Narrow and 'specified' definitions of beneficiaries go against the democratic concept of universalization: illustrations of this are many – omission of rural women; one live-birth; visits to

medical centers; counseling; identification through the ubiquitous card culture, etc. All these protocols put the onus on women when often material, financial, administrative and staff shortages prevent the fulfillment of conditions.

The success of a scheme and the reach of its benefits, no matter how limited and limiting they may be, are determined by availability, applicability, accessibility and affordability. The less than optimal utilisation levels of anganwadi centres in all the four regions surveyed is explained by several factors: distance; timings that do not take account of the fact that especially poorer women are also workers and that the childcare support that they require extends beyond the standard 3 to 4 hours, and, of course, the fact that the unpaid work burden is never taken into account. Other problems do exist: poor infrastructure; erratic electricity; no drinking water and toilet facilities; ineffective teacher training; irregular monitoring and supervision; low levels of community engagement; lack of ownership. An additional concern is that of Anganwadi workers and also ASHA workers and their helpers being perceived as volunteers, and also overburdening them with the numerous tasks they are expected to perform. This gender stereotyping appears to have become even more widespread through the job titles used in schemes, extending to two new categories of ‘women volunteers’ we discovered during fieldwork – *Pashu Sakhi* in Solapur (woman-friend of animals) and *Bhojan Mata* in Pithoragarh (food mother).

The facility of crèches under the BOCW Act is applicable to establishments that employ only ten workers; yet 50 women workers are required for this provision in order to get the benefit. Also, the maternity benefit under this law provides for only monetary compensation. There is no clarification relating to the formula or to the eligibility criteria, nor are there any terms and conditions determining payment. The women beneficiaries do not get leave and nor is there any guarantee of employment on return. No medical expenses are given and neither are nursing breaks, while there is no clause relating to avoidance of hazardous jobs.

New concerns voiced by the majority of respondents in all four areas of research, both urban and rural, relate to digitisation, to mobile banking, to the linking of Aadhar cards with benefits, to registration of construction workers. There are several realities especially in the context of marginalised groups that have been overlooked.

One, the high levels of illiteracy that exist, particularly for women. These proportions exceed 87 percent of female respondents in Hyderabad, 79 percent in Thane, 52 percent in Solapur and 38 percent in Pithoragarh. When asked what their biggest problem was in relation to schemes and DBT, women identified 'digitisation'. SMS messages are sent on mobiles and illiteracy does not permit them to access the information; nor can they talk directly to anyone on the phone because of recorded messages; call centres keep them on hold for long; network connectivity is extremely poor; erratic electricity means that charging cell phones is not always possible; and, of course, that their unpaid work often takes them into far-flung fields where there is no signal.

Two, the emergence of the ubiquitous 'card culture' and the linking of Aadhar cards to avail of most benefits, including that of registration of Construction Workers under BOCWA. The Hyderabad Regional Office of ActionAid Association and the ground partner SALAH in Thane have begun a campaign for overcoming this challenge, and consequently registration drives specifically for women construction workers were conducted, increasing the number by over a hundred and from 11 registered workers to over 200 respectively. As a result, in Hyderabad 98 workers were facilitated in getting bank accounts opened, while 10 women got maternity and marriage benefits. In Thane about 100 workers were supported in getting registered under the medical insurance scheme of Janshree Bima Yojana. Three, the central issue of migration and the fact that portability of rights does not exist. This has deprived hundreds of migrant children from availing of basic benefits including food, midday meals, immunization, schooling. Also, with Aadhar cards often dependent on 'proof of address', migrants are unable to get ration cards or evidence of their stay particularly in so-called unauthorised slums.

There are two urgent issues that have emerged from the evidence generated at the field level: though not within the 'scope' of the objectives identified in this research, both have a crucial bearing on the lives and labour of especially the marginalised women. One, that of houselessness which goes beyond the pale of homelessness directly to destitution. This is the reality of a significantly large number of female headed households with their 'illegally' deserted women members. Two, that of deserted parents. We confronted this 'new' phenomenon in the urban slums of Thane; old parents who have been left to fend for themselves after they have either been maimed in accidents at the worksite or have become too old to earn their keep, so to say. These two rather desperate issues are being raised specifically at the request of our 'respondents', in the hope that schemes relating to housing, pension, and social security become more responsive and humane.

However, most of scheme and programme issues have to be perceived in the context of the on-going process of amalgamation of 44 Labour Laws into 4 Labour Codes. The first Labour Code on Wages covers existing laws including Payment of Wages Act; Minimum Wages Act, etc. The second Labour Code on Industrial Relations subsumes the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, Trade Unions Act, 1926, and the Industrial Employment Act, 1946 among others. The third Labour Code on Social Security & Welfare of March 16, 2017 is currently under debate: it subsumes a total of 15 laws including Maternity Benefit Act, Payment of Gratuity Act, Employees Compensation Act, Unorganised Social Security Act, Welfare Funds/Cess.

#### **6.4: Feminisation of Unpaid and Paid Work Activities**

Probably the single most startling of results is the extent of advancement of the process of feminisation of all activities in all sectors and subsectors as well as in constituencies. Feminisation in terms of both numbers and time spent extends over all activities including construction, cultivation, animal husbandry, collection of non-wood forest produce, fishing, collection of fodder, energy, water, household management & maintenance, travel & time for public provisioning, and undisputedly, care. This is not to say that men do much less work, but that, in the main, the number of them involved and as well as their share of the work burden is significantly less in terms of both hours and ranges.

The number of hours women spend and the maximum ranges they put in often go beyond the number of hours that a week contains. The gendered continuum between unpaid and paid work therefore is characterised by not only the multiplicity of women's work but also its simultaneity. For example, grazing and watering of livestock is combined with collection of firewood and cow dung, as well as with cultivation activities. Similarly, personal care is combined with general care of children, as is supervising children while carrying out not only unpaid but also paid activities.

The FAPR is much higher than the MAPR in all regions, the maximum intensity being in the two major activities of agriculture and construction. The GTBR in cultivation for women often extends beyond 55 hours for an average week. In animal husbandry, the difference in GAPR in Solapur is 30.3 percentage points, with Pithoragarh exceeding 50 percentage points. The travel and waiting time expended for fodder collection is about an average of 10 hours in the plains of Solapur, more than doubling to 22.5 hours in the hilly regions.

The construction sector too appears to have embarked on the process of becoming feminized in Thane and Hyderabad, the GAPR differentiation being 18.9 and 7 percentage points respectively. The implication is not that men have voluntarily moved out due to better job opportunities in other sectors via 'pull' factors, but that few alternate job opportunities are open to women, and therefore they are compelled to hang on, so to say, even if for being employed for what we term as 'Half Work'. In this context therefore, the GTBR becomes an important tool, in that the min-max ranges between 4 to 77 hours.

Women however appear to have been kept out of non-agriculture and non-construction earning activities especially in rural areas, the male GAPR being 17.2 percentage points higher in Pithoragarh, even though one third of PRF worked as casual labour with GTBR ranging between 3.5 and 56 hours. On the other hand, a little more than one tenth of PRF in Thane are homebased and domestic workers, both activities being predictably stereotyped.

Predictably, both GAPR and GTBR are much higher for women, although at varying levels in rural and urban areas, the former being almost identical at a little above 47 percentage points. The urban areas are a total contrast, with the tenants in Thane reporting almost 70 percentage points GAPR for women, and a miniscule 6 percentage points for the migrants in Hyderabad. Somewhat similar patterns prevail in most of the other activities and sub-activities. The Female GAPR breaches the 80 percent threshold for household maintenance and management as well as for water, the average being 3 hours/day in all the four regions. To this must be noted the fact that an additional of 5 hours per week are spent by rural women on heating and boiling of water. The gender gap in GAPR for energy is the higher in Solapur at 46.4 and the lowest in Hyderabad.

GAPR relating to Care for both urban and rural women is obviously higher. The gender gap is just a little below 49 percent in rural areas, the lowest being in Hyderabad at 20.5 percentage points. The issue here is not only the higher intensity of participation in activities and sub-activities relating to care, but also the GTBR which appears to be lower than "expected". It must be remembered in this context that the centre of our enquiry are the marginalized, who can ill-afford to take off time to look after their children and provide the necessary quality and care particularly in the absence of State support.

The burden of both unpaid and paid work emerges as being at least partly more onerous for female headed households. Their participation in the open labour market is even more determined by the gender-based division of labour and by inequalities. For instance, single women are culturally not permitted to do ploughing; the land is the feminine mother and the plough is the masculine father. They also do not do sowing and carrying of manure to the field, whereas women in general households are not engaged in applying of fertilizer and nursery work.

Additionally, they are often not given either equal wages or even market wages in agriculture and also in construction. Single women have begun accepting what they call 'half-work', meaning that they will accept employment even if for only part of the day or even for a few hours. 'Single-ness' and being out of a designated patriarchal slot is reflected in the nature and extent of work done as well as in the gendered continuum applicable to their reality.

### **6.5: The Stress Burden of Sustainability and Subsistence**

The concept of livelihoods is among the most textured and diverse, particularly if fused with it is, as it must be, sustainability. The most simplistic working definition for livelihoods comprises the capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living even if at the subsistence level. Concomitantly, a livelihood becomes sustainable when it can combine three essential components – the development of the capacity to manage 'stresses' and 'shocks'; when it can at the least maintain its assets; and when it does not degrade the natural resource base. Consequently, sustainable livelihoods, in what we have termed as a primitive definition, amalgamate the following five metaphors.

- Natural capital from which it is possible to derive resource flows and 'useful' services.
- Economic capital in all its manifestations which is essential for the undertaking of livelihood strategies.
- Human capital including capacity of labour-power in both quantitative and qualitative terms.
- Extra-Economic capital which fills in macroeconomic policy gaps and simultaneously subverts exchange-value.
- Relational capital defined generally as network-resources which people seek the help of in the process of pursuing livelihood strategies.

The rather erroneous dichotomy between private property ownership on which women have extremely limited control, and access to common property resources and informal infrastructure on which they are hugely dependent, determines to a large extent the division of women's labour-power as well as labour-time into work patterns and allocations that are separated into paid, unpaid, and care. This rather false separation of women's labour undermines their contribution to the two sub-economies of Paid Work and Unpaid Work. For instance, the restriction and also denial of age-old forest rights due to on-going amendments in forest laws tend to increase a woman's unpaid work burden.

Deriving sustenance and subsistence from common property resources combined with non-ownership rights veils the work women do under communal ownership and community. Non-recognition of women's dependence on informal infrastructure as well as common property resources consequently tends to de-visibility their contribution to the family's well-being and to sustainable livelihoods in all forms and all ways. Disregarding the involvement of women in filling the vacuum created by the ongoing process of increasing unsustainability reinforces patriarchal rigidities and structures at all levels of the State, the market, the community and the household.

We would like to add one of the major manifestations of the extent of stress and sustainability in a woman's life: the lack of sleep. This is probably one of the most problematic impacts of a woman's time and work burden in that she does not have either the time or the peace of mind to sleep, and which affects not only her as a woman and worker, but also emerges as a major obstacle in the fulfilment of her fundamental human rights. There are of course other nuances to the overall impact including mental stress that would require a different kind of research to evaluate. We have used the term 'sleeplessness' as a quantitative indicator to measure the gendered impacts of a worker's burden: the overwhelming majority of women at 80 percent in all areas categorically expressed their desire for sleep. For rural men too sleep is a priority though at 20 percentage points less: after all, they too share the burden of work, paid and unpaid, even though to a lesser degree than women.

## **6.6: Unpaid Work Economy and Paid Work Economy**

India appears to be, as possibly are most developing countries, characterized by two simultaneously functioning sub-economies – the Paid Work Sub-Economy and the Unpaid Work Sub-Economy, the latter subsidizing the former in multiple and myriad ways which are not necessarily measurable and

calculable. The nature of this subsidizing support structure has to be perceived in the context of the prevailing interdependence of macro, meso and micro factors and processes within the framework of the fundamental and on-going changes in the macroeconomic and financial architecture which questions the very concept of a welfare State. An increasingly exclusive and exclusionary market and macroeconomic policies that are occlusive to the existence of unpaid work, combined with the non-fulfillment of the essential needs of especially the marginalised and the limited implementation of schemes at the ground level, have given rise to what we term as Extra-Economic Capital.

Extra-Economic Capital incorporates several components that have emerged in order to at least partially cope with the non-attainment of specific essential needs required for at the least a subsistence level of survival. Extra-Economic Capital extends beyond coping and survival strategies, and contains three core elements, each characterised by heavily gendered informality and de-development: the partial filling of the vacuum left by the withdrawal of the State from at least public provisioning; an escape from the market and subversion of market forces; the staying out of the exchange-value conundrum. We illustrate these in the special context of the three identified sectors that impact women's work, paid and unpaid, and the continuum between the two.

Marginalised groups especially women are, more often than not, excluded from formal structures of infrastructural development, and because of the livelihood constraints they face, are compelled to opt out and create their own 'informal infrastructural alternatives'. In Thane water is not only restricted but also limited to 3 days a week. The residents have therefore taken illegal pipe connections from the main water pipes, and the water so accessed has been diverted to common spaces. This form of infrastructural development appears to be in keeping with the on-going massive decrease in all formal structures at varying levels across both time and space: we term this as 'infrastructural informality'. The argument put forward by the women is simple: "the State does not invest the money it takes from us to fulfill our needs, so we are doing it ourselves and creating our own capital".

'Informal Infrastructure' has evolved in Hyderabad too. With no electricity connection on the grounds of being an unauthorised slum, street lights have been tapped to provide at least some light in the homes. The zero-watt bulb is used behind sealed doors and boarded windows, for fear that they may be caught and possibly evicted from the tin hovels they call home. That the impact is the worst on women is obvious, cooking on firewood as most of them do.

The burden of Unpaid Work is made even more onerous because of the lack of gender-sensitive macroeconomic policies; the impact of this is directly on the extent and amount of Paid Work that a woman can do, *ceteres paribus*. Women have been compelled to stay back from work even in a situation of financial desperation in order to fill water; working outside the home in the sphere of recognised production does not reduce her role in maintenance and consumption. These women have now created an alternate mode which cannot of course resolve the issue but helps to at least partially fulfill their multiple roles: going for work on alternate days, and filling water for each other on the days they stay back.

The trade-off between paid and unpaid work is evident at all levels. It is thus strongly suggested that time surveys be carried out before and after the setting up of and investing in public provisioning. This form of gender budgeting, what we have termed as Gender Sensitive Public Provisioning Appraisal, must be applied at all possible layers and points of time including pre and post project phases, and also integrated in monitoring and evaluation systems.

Of urgent requirement is the implementation of energy policies sensitive to women's work is reflected in all four field areas both urban and rural, given that a minimum of 50 percent of households extending up to 80 percent use wood for cooking, heating and lighting. The issue of energy is rather problematic, impacted as it has been in two ways: positively by new schemes, negatively by reduction in and the withdrawal of subsidies especially on kerosene. For one, LPG is not used for all meals all the time, or for heating and boiling water for fear of not getting refills easily. Firewood is used for part of the cooking, as well as for heating and boiling. Second, the permission to purchase kerosene is withdrawn from PDS shops once the consumer has been granted a gas connection. However, the continued dependence on firewood and the rising price of LPG implies that kerosene continues to be required for especially lighting the choolah. In the wake of reduction in subsidies, women are now compelled to use plastic wrappers and waste to light the choolah: the impact of this highly toxic dioxine on the health of the women was already visible in all the regions. Women in Pithoragarh undertake what is called '*alta-palta*', a form of exchange labour historically restricted to cultivation but now extended to energy. For those women who cannot collect firewood due to either over-work or illness, firewood is gathered in the unspoken assurance that the labour-power expended will be returned in a similar form whenever required.

Schemes relating to energy have a huge potential, if properly implemented, to reduce the time burden at least partially. However, the complexities are huge: migration; portability; digitilisation; 'card

culture'; distance; availability; cultural traditions that insist that bread tastes better if baked on firewood. Other specific impediments include the patriarchal practice of women often changing their names after marriage, and thereby becoming non-recognised beneficiaries and non-identifiable bank account holders.

A large proportion of women's time is absorbed by what is called 'care', and yet few macroeconomic policies recognise this. Two areas of immediate and urgent concern are the increase in user fees in hospitals, and the non-availability and non-accessibility of crèches. The non-affordability of public hospitals subsequent to the rise in user fees has led to two immediately apparent results: that of not taking the girl-child or the woman for treatment, and that of turning to quacks. Yet another off-shoot is the increased burden of unpaid work that women now have to bear on the early discharge or even non-admittance of patients, due to rising costs of healthcare.

Among the most debated of components of care work is that of looking after children. Several intriguing issues have emerged. It appeared rather surprising that a relatively little proportion of the woman's day is devoted to child care. Also interesting was that men do tend to share child caring activities even though for a lesser period of time. An additional aspect is that of the limited benefits to children arising from the provisions of the relevant schemes, including those of non-availability, distance and timings. Yet again an alternate system of informal support has emerged. Women construction workers in Thane leave their children with elderly and often disabled neighbours, dropping the child off along with a lunch box so as not to add to the burden of the 'caretakers' who are as marginalised as them. In Hyderabad, the women left their younger children under the supervision of unemployed youth. As women in Solapur put it, "our children grow up just like that, on the roads and the streets". What this does to the quality of our future workforce is another issue altogether.

There are several major learnings. One, that all women need crèches, as all women are working; whether her work is recognised or not is the problem of policy. Two, that men too share somewhat in child care; hence the inclusion of paternity leave becomes essential in helping redistribute the care burden. Finally, the need to view child care additionally from a class perspective based on issues of subsistence and survival rather than an exclusive gender perspective, thereby isolating and marginalising women yet again.

There are two important myth that are broken. One, that women do not travel beyond their local horizons: this study reveals that more women than men used public transport. A central infrastructural issue thus emerges – that of greater investment in more affordable and better transport and road systems that takes into account gender differentiated needs. Two, that women do not have and do not want technological knowledge. The results of the study show that there is general non-recognition of this fact. In the main, households are perceived as basic production and consumption units, with no recognition that women play important roles including in maintenance and distribution. Consequently, ignored are gender dynamics within households that do not allow women decision-making power, not even over their reproductive rights

### **6.7: Conceptual and Methodological Learnings**

The nature of functioning of the gendered work continuum in developing countries has to be evaluated at several interdependent levels, reflecting as it does the interconnected components of what is the work of a woman especially in a situation of marginalisation; of vulnerability; of patriarchy and the norms and forms that it undertakes; the on-going struggle between capital and labour; the ‘integration’ of the economy both formal and informal under the impact of deeply penetrative global forces; the extension of privatisation: all located in the ongoing process of the increasing abdication by the State from fulfilling its stated objective of a ‘just and equal society’ irrespective of gendered social and economic divides. Identified below are the major methodological and conceptual learnings that also at least partially explain how this research is different and distinctive in capturing the myriad nuances as well as the broadbrush contours of time and labour structures.

#### ***One: Synchronicity of Research Methods and Analytical Tools.***

In keeping with the very concept of a continuum, knowledge collection and analysis too has been constructed as a continuum. Consequently several simultaneous methodological ‘tactics’ have been used: literature critique feeding into desk review of policies; pilot surveys reconfirming as well as refuting assertions; interviews with key informants who pinpointed especially administrative challenges; labeling and listing methodological gaps with the purpose of overcoming statistical ‘obstacles’; field discussions identifying ground level urgencies; policy analysis resulting in identification of gaps. Among the many of the several challenges faced was therefore gathering information relating to the reality of particularly the two selected constituencies of agricultural workers and construction workers. The Household Questionnaire thus had to be designed carefully and meticulously in keeping with the uncharted territory of viewing the linkage of macroeconomic

policies with the Unpaid and Paid Work Sub-Economies in order to unravel the gendered continuum. This challenge was overcome not only by wading through existing literature, but also because of the very nature of this study that is based on integrating academics, advocacy and action. The experience of the ground partners enriched the sensitivity of the analysis in various ways: through responses, reactions, debates, arguments, and consistent and committed connect with the areas and the people they have been working with. Probably the greatest commendation to the designing of the Household Questionnaire came from an enumerator in the Hyderabad Regional Office of ActionAid Association India who confided in us that he remembered his mother every single time that he filled in a questionnaire. In all 4 regions the ground partners organised a series of community meetings to popularise the concepts as well as the research over a period of several months, a process that continues even today to strengthen advocacy and action for the purposes of reducing and redistributing unpaid work. This non-linear and concurrent strategy created for this action research will hopefully contribute significantly to further research methodology.

### ***Two: Methodological Approaches and Estimators***

Our assertion that work is fundamentally a continuum implied that the existing methodologies were not sharp enough or deep enough to provide either a correct estimate or capture all the myriad components of all forms of women's work. Methodological challenges emerged at every point and at every level of analysis and evaluation. The defining characteristics of the gendered work continuum are multiplicity, simultaneity, clustering, combining, agglomeration, aggregation, and synchronicity; the work continuum is multidimensional and hence the methods of estimation must necessarily be constructed to capture all the dimensions and dimensionality that constitutes the continuum.

It is in this context that we have formulated new conceptual-based methodological approaches and estimators that go beyond perceiving any form of work including and especially unpaid work as a category that is isolated, disassociated, individual, and therefore to be estimated and measured 'separately'.

- The construction of the ***Time Distribution Method (TDS)*** in order to estimate the unpaid burden and capture the multiplicity and simultaneity of women's work.
- The formulation of the ***Gendered Activity Participation Rate (GAPR)*** which indicates the extent and intensity of involvement of males and females in a given activity – economic as well as extra economic; recognised and unrecognised.

- Creation of the *Gendered Time Burden Range (GTBR)* which estimates the range of hours that women and also men expend at a minimum as well as at a maximum on various activities and sub-activities.
- Formulation of *Gender Sensitive Public Provisioning Appraisal (GSPPA)* approach to unravel the relatively unexplored connection between fiscal policies and women's unpaid work, both that has a shadow value and also that which is termed as 'care'.

### ***Three: Expansion of the Care Diamond***

In another methodological departure, the Care Diamond has been expanded to incorporate the role of caste and community that are increasingly influencing the central issue of women and work. In this context of the interdependence between the two sub-economies of paid and unpaid work is consequently suggested a re-structuring of the Care Diamond. For one, the community is not neutral; it is heavily partisan and increasingly so especially in the context of caste and religion which generally tend to impede support particularly to those who are already marginalised and vulnerable. Two, there is an urgent need to recognise and incorporate the informal support systems that have been created by those who are marginalised in an attempt to fill the vacuum created by gender-blind macroeconomic policies. Three, the need to examine the impact of the role and nature of non-governmental organisations that have been coopted to deliver public goods and public provisioning including via the implementation of schemes and programmes which the State earlier provided directly.

### ***Four: the Fourth R of Redefinition***

Additionally and importantly, our analysis of the functioning of the gendered work continuum has led us to add a fourth R to the 3 R's that had been developed particularly and specifically for unpaid care work – that of Redefinition of the concept of unpaid work itself.

### ***Five: 'Undefinable' and 'Unquantifiable' Unpaid Work***

Here we would like to raise several concerns and challenges relating to the calculation of unpaid work. Four illustrations are provided. One, that when the data shows that no time or less time is taken for, say, preserving meat & milk, it may be either because fresh items are bought every day or it may

be because there is no money to afford meat and fish. Two, the issue of waiting time: the dying dynamics of the construction sector are such that when waiting time is recorded as being less, it could imply either there was no work and therefore there was no need to wait, or that work was found immediately and hence there was no waiting required. Three, the need to include boiling water to unpaid work in the specific context of the nonfulfillment of the guarantee for safe and clean drinking water.

Four, and this is being separately emphasised because it requires urgent and immediate intervention: sexual exploitation which goes beyond being a conditionality for obtaining work. Several questions thus emerge: Is this an economic or allied economic activity? Is it located within the domain of Time? Or should it be added also to the concept of Burden? Is this paid work or unpaid work? This issue is being raised separately precisely because it is becoming rampant, it is being openly embedded within labour contracts, and it is being unquestioningly internalized by women workers and also the men in their families.

Several critical factors emerge: that the Paid Work Sub-Economy especially in the context of the prevailing market systems and structures cannot sustain itself without the support of the UnPaid Work Sub-Economy; that the unpaid and paid work continuum cannot be understood in isolation from macroeconomic policies and strategies; that women are increasingly shouldering the responsibility of not only the proverbial double burden but also the macroeconomic vacuum burden; that the several gender differentials and also similarities that have emerged need to be located in the concrete lived reality of marginalisation and vulnerability; that women participate in and often dominate the three strategies of survival that determine an economy that is still developing – income earning, income augmenting and income saving; that women are increasingly responsible for sustainable subsistence-based livelihoods that go beyond the private property domain; that the multiplicity and simultaneity of women's work restricts in multiple and myriad ways their full participation in the economy and society, and acts as constraints on their struggle for emancipation, equity, empowerment and equality.