Women worldwide are primary caregivers for children and the elderly, a key role that ensures the health of families and communities and that builds every nation’s labor force. However, much of women’s work driving the care economy is invisible in official statistics. Methods used to measure economic activity do not include women’s unpaid work, resulting in policies that overlook how unpaid work limits women’s engagement in the market economy and contributes to gender inequality. The goal of the Counting Women’s Work (CWW) project is to understand women’s paid and unpaid contributions to national economies and economic growth by analyzing how women and men spend their time in the marketplace and at home.

Unlike most other analyses of economic activity, CWW analysis estimates production, consumption, and transfers of goods and services for the household economy, including unpaid care work such as childcare and household chores. By measuring both men and women’s paid and unpaid work, CWW analysis is uniquely positioned to increase awareness of women’s contribution to their countries’ economies. These analyses can also inform policy and program decisions related to economic growth and gender inequality.

Why Does Counting Women’s Work Matter?

CWW analysis quantifies differences between women and men with respect to market work and wages; time dedicated to providing household services and care for children, elders, or other dependents; and total time spent working.

Results from these analyses provide evidence that can inform more effective policies to overcome women’s obstacles to paid work. In addition, CWW analyses help make the case for extending social welfare benefits (such as sick leave, retirement, and childcare) to men and women who perform unpaid care work.

With CWW analysis, it is possible, for example, to project the impact of reducing the hours girls spend in care work on girls’ completion of secondary school. Such analysis could be particularly useful in some African countries. Despite efforts made to increase gender equality in education, girls are still not as likely as boys to complete primary or secondary school in some countries. One of the primary reasons is that girls are burdened with unpaid care work, starting around the age they would be entering secondary school. Reducing the amount of time women and girls spend doing unpaid care work could leave girls more time to attend school or pursue higher education, increasing women’s income-earning potential (see figure, page 2).

By better understanding gender inequalities in unpaid work, we can build policies that recognize the economic role of unpaid care work and promote more equally shared responsibilities between men and women within the home. Policymakers can benefit by using results of CWW analyses to better quantify potential impacts of economic development programs and to assess gender impacts. Consideration of both paid and unpaid contributions to the economy expands policy perspectives on how to accelerate economic growth. Beneficial programs may include providing free childcare, or childcare within or nearby workplaces, or even mobile childcare facilities. For countries with slower population growth, decreasing unpaid care demands could affect women’s labor force participation rates and encourage economic growth.
VIETNAMESE DISPARITIES IN TIME ALLOCATIONS

- Women in Vietnam spend less time on education than men.
- Women in Vietnam spend less time in the marketplace and more time providing household services and care at home than men.
- Women in Vietnam spend less time on leisure and self-care than men.

COLOMBIAN WOMEN’S SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

- At age 20, women with the lowest educational level devote three times as many hours per day to unpaid household services than more educated women.
- For women, higher education is associated with lower fertility rates and higher labor force participation rates in the market economy, leading to higher wages and increased contributions to pension systems.

INCOME DIFFERENCES IN SENEGAL

- Between ages 20 and 50, women spend approximately half the time men do in paid work, earning less per hour for the work they perform.
- Even if women and men were to be paid market wages for their unpaid work, women’s earnings would average less per hour worked than men’s earnings.
- Women and men’s consumption and income levels are lower in rural areas than in urban areas.

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Figure from Counting Women’s Work.

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References


