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### Commission on the Status of Women

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace  
for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by Make Mothers Matter, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



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## **Statement**

### **Addressing unpaid care work for women empowerment and sustainable development**

It is now widely recognized that sustainable development and Women's empowerment are intrinsically linked. However, women empowerment, especially mothers' empowerment, cannot happen as long as the issue of unpaid family care work is not seriously addressed; that is as long as this essential work of caring for children and other dependents is not Recognized, Reduced and Redistributed (following the "3 Rs" framework introduced by Professor Diane Elson of Essex University).

Unpaid family care work includes both the production of goods for self-consumption, notably subsistence farming, fetching water and collecting firewood, and the provision of services for self-consumption such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and other dependent persons. According to a 2013 Report of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty, its monetary value is estimated between 10 and over 50 per cent of GDP. But despite its huge value, unpaid care and domestic work is not included in the calculation of GDP and other economic statistics. It therefore remains undervalued in society and largely invisible to policymakers and politicians.

Unpaid care work has the greatest impact on poor women for whom additional time and income can make a big difference. But even in developed countries where a lot has already been achieved, unpaid family care work remains one of the main obstacles towards substantive gender equality. The European Institute for Gender Equality 2015 Gender Equality index Report shows that time is the issue: "This domain [of time] highlights the core of the division between women and men in the European Union: the wide gender gap in activities related to care. Throughout all [European Union] Member States, it is women that perform the bulk of these caring activities, with extremely wide gender gaps between the time spent on caring and educating children and grandchildren, as well as time spent on cooking and housework."

### **Recognition**

Unpaid care work must be recognized as a vital contribution to the economy: without it, our economies would simply not function. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action urged States to "conduct regular time-use studies to measure, in quantitative terms, unremunerated work", which could be used as a basis for its economic valuation as a percentage of GDP or in so-called Satellite Accounts, and make it visible. However, not only relatively few countries have actually implemented this recommendation, especially in developing countries, but also the resulting data has not been used much in gender-sensitive policymaking.

Unpaid care work is "work", a fact that is clearly recognized by the milestone resolution of the 2013 International Conference of Labour Statisticians, where governments have agreed on important changes on how work and employment are defined. As a result, unpaid care and domestic work will statistically be categorized as work, which is a key step towards recognition.

Giving stay-at-home caregivers, especially parents caring for children or other dependent, a worker's status and its related rights, including access to social protection, care credit in pension calculation, access to training, etc., should logically follow this resolution and would also support recognition.

In order to fully acknowledge and support the role of women who are mothers, concrete actions should also be taken to reconcile work and family life. In addition to the recognition aspect, reconciliation policies are essential to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment as they can support women's employment, foster economic independence and alleviate poverty.

### **Reduction**

The development of basic public infrastructure and services, i.e. water and sanitation, electricity or other forms of energy, but also transportation, Information and Communications Technologies, proximity to healthcare and childcare services, are key to reducing unpaid care work, especially such work as fetching water or collecting firewood.

Women's empowerment and sustainable development cannot happen if women continue to spend so much time compensating for the lack of public infrastructure and services: according to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Research in sub-Saharan Africa suggests that women and girls in low-income countries spend 40 billion hours a year collecting water — the equivalent of a year's worth of labour by the entire workforce in France", a huge amount of time that could be better used in income generating activities and education.

Building such infrastructure should have the highest priority in developing countries and women should be involved in all stages of their design and planning in order to best serve their needs.

Civil Society can also play a key role in this respect, as exemplified by the partnership established between UNESCO, the government of Cote d'Ivoire and a newly established network of Non-Governmental Organizations chaired by Aide à la Jeunesse Africaine Défavorisée — a Make Mothers Matter member organization. Following the Non-Governmental Organization Forum organized in July 2014 by the UNESCO Non-Governmental Organization Liaison Committee in Yamassoukro (Cote d'Ivoire), the new partners will jointly work to devise and implement water access policies.

### **Redistribution**

Redistributing unpaid care work is about sharing care responsibilities, first and foremost between men and women, especially fathers and mothers, but also between households and other stakeholders (the State, the private sector or civil society initiatives) that can provide care services.

Redistributing unpaid care work between men and women is probably the most challenging task, as it means changing stereotypes and cultural norms where care and domestic work are considered as sole feminine responsibilities, including by women themselves.

It is worth noting that, involving fathers, and more generally men, in caregiving and domestic work, has a positive impact on the other "Rs": in addition

to creating a virtuous cycle of changing norms and stereotypes, it shows that this work is valuable and deserves Recognition. Involving men could also foster Reduction when committed fathers and husbands are involved in the development of public infrastructure and services, and to innovation in time saving technologies.

However, as noted in the 2015 State of the World's Fathers report, "achieving equality in care and domestic work is not simply an issue of individual men doing more. Employment and livelihood policies; childcare, tax, and benefits systems; and health, education, and social services have not kept up with the changes taking place in families around the world, and this creates substantial barriers to families who try to operate in a more egalitarian approach."

Paternity leave alone will not do the job: it is the whole system that needs to be adapted to this new reality.

### **Make Mothers Matter Recommendations**

- Provide accessible, affordable and high-quality public services and infrastructures, in particular in the most disadvantaged and remote areas, with a focus on addressing the issue of women's "time poverty". Water, electricity, energy, Information and Communications Technologies, transportation, proximity to childcare and healthcare are all necessary to significantly reduce the time spent on unpaid family care work, mostly performed by women, and thus free up time for remunerated activities.
- Make unpaid family care work visible to policymakers and society at large by regularly conducting good quality time use surveys, which inform policymakers with relevant data and allow assessing its monetary value as a percentage of GDP. Include unpaid family care work in alternate economic and social indicators currently under consideration to measure well-being (e.g. Beyond GDP, Genuine Progress Indicator).
- Building on the resolution adopted at the 2013 International Conference of Labour Statisticians, legally recognize unpaid family care work as being a particular category of labour that produces rights (e.g. access to social security, education and training, a voice in the democratic system, etc.).
- In particular, recognize the periods dedicated to unpaid family care work in the calculation of pension rights ("care credits"), as these periods are essential to society well-being and contribute to the economy. This must not be seen as a cost but as an investment in childhood and human capital with a positive impact in other areas: recognition of the social and educational role of parents, prevention of women poverty, prevention of social and health problems linked to burn out and stress, prevention of violence and school drop-out, higher fertility rates, etc.
- Take a lifecycle perspective and Facilitate discontinuous career paths rather than linear ones, allowing men and women to withdraw from work partially or completely to educate and care for their children or dependent relatives, and then re-enter the labour market without being heavily penalized.
- Promote the regulation of quality part-time work and job sharing schemes allowing men and women to adjust their workload to their family responsibilities, and eliminate any type of discrimination against part-time

workers (i.e. mainly mothers) regarding career advancement, pay level, social security, pension rights, etc.

- Address the “motherhood penalty” and the growing inequality and discrimination between parents and non-parents by recognizing and validating the competences and skills acquired and developed while performing unpaid family care work to facilitate labour market re-entry after a career break.
  - Facilitate access to lifelong education in order to ensure that women and men of all ages can acquire and develop the knowledge, capacities, aptitudes and skills needed to fully participate in the paid labour market.
  - Promote and support equal sharing of care responsibilities between men and women, between mothers and fathers (e.g. through paid paternity leaves, parental leaves, awareness raising and education, etc.). Men caring for their children from the beginning will be more likely to continue during the whole childhood, which will benefit children, the mothers and the fathers themselves.
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