



# **GENDER AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES: The vicious circle of unrecognized and unpaid care work, poverty and lack of access to essential services for women**

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**GENDER AND GEOPOLITICS OBSERVATORY**

*This article aims to summarize a consolidation report<sup>1</sup> published by Action Against Hunger – France (AAH) - highlighting the links between women’s poverty, women’s unrecognized and unpaid care work (U&UCW) and their lack of access to essential services, and how these impact nutrition security and malnutrition: “[Documenting the links between gender and Economic inequalities](#)”.*

**F**irst and foremost, one needs to note that in all situations observed by AAH, U&UCW is primarily a women’s responsibility and amounts to a part-time or full-time income generating activity, when looking at the time and energy spent by women. The tremendous amount of U&UCW is often carried out in addition to low-income generating activities.

“A Burkinabè woman or girl can have active days starting from 4 am until 11 pm. She will be responsible for the care of children, housework, and will also be devoted to the husband”<sup>2</sup>.

Consequently, women are left with too little time and energy to perform proper hygiene and nutrition care practices, preventing and curing malnutrition, while at the same time not having the time, energy and opportunity to develop higher income generating activities.

After exposing this situation, the report’s main finding pertains to the vicious circle of women’s poverty, lack of access to affordable essential services and increased U&UCW.

Indeed, for women, lack of financial means, in contexts where essential services such as water and health care lack of quality, geographical and financial accessibility and cultural

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1. The consolidation report gathers (mainly) qualitative information from 29 AAH publications, including 10 Link NCAs, 1 meta-analysis of Link NCAs, 13 gender analysis and 4 policy frameworks and/or positioning papers. These documents cover 15 countries in 7 different regions between 2012 and 2021.

2. Action Contre la Faim, *Analyse de genre Burkina Faso*, Burkina Faso, 2020, p. 11.

acceptability, further increases their U&UCW, deepens their poverty and hinders the fight against malnutrition.

Because of lack of access to services that could relieve women from their workload, women have to perform tasks that are much more tedious than they should be.

In that respect, women's workload was identified as a barrier to access health services due to direct and opportunity costs incurred when seeking medical care. On account of long distances and potentially long waiting time, women must be prepared to set aside their workload for the day to take a family member to the clinic. This typically means missing one day of income generating activities, as well as ensuring care is provided for the remaining family members at home.

Similarly, in most countries where AAH operates, fetching water is primarily a women's task<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, when water is not accessible for poor households (usually because of a fee charged) the immediate consequence is an increase in women's U&UCW in terms of time and efforts invested in fetching water, sometimes having to perform the task 2 to 5 times a day, taking 15 minutes to 1 hour and a half of their busy schedule each time<sup>4</sup>.

"Our incomes are low and we often cannot afford the travel costs which triple or quintuple during the rainy season or during emergency night trips".

"It is difficult for us to access the necessary care services because the health center is at a 4 hours walking distance, or 2 hours by motorbike"<sup>5</sup>.

Women are therefore trapped in a vicious circle where lack of services increases their U&UCW, and where their amount of U&UCW reduces their access to services.

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3. In the framework of this report, only one gender analysis found that "Water collection, management and storage appears to be a shared responsibility of women and men, involving also girls and boys. There are no main differences among the groups". Clara Ituero Herrero, Action Against Hunger's International Gender Unit, *Gender analysis report: The Philippines*, The Philippines, 2019, p. 14.

4. Action Against Hunger's office in Zimbabwe, *Link Nutrition Causal Analysis, Chivi District, Masvingo Province*, Zimbabwe, february 2012, p. 37, 59.

5. Focus group respondent. Lenka Blanarova, Grace Heymsfield, Action Against Hunger's office in Haiti . *Link Nutrition Causal Analysis*, Arrondissement d'Anse d'Hainault, Département de Grand'Anse, Haïti, February–September 2019, p. 27-28.

Finally, the report concludes that social protection floors<sup>6</sup>, including access to health and basic income security (BIS), can be transformative to women's economic status and challenge gender boundaries, by fostering the recognition, reduction and redistribution of care work.

BIS for women have the primary effect of recognizing the value of care work, while increasing women's wealth. BIS also has an impact on redistribution and reduction of care work by enabling household to make long term domestic work alleviating investments, while having a strong impact on access to education known as a very important tool in fighting the economic and gender inequalities women face.

"I renovated my house, my kids no longer live in the cold, and the tin roof is now waterproof. (...) Before the cash distribution we used to collect water on our back or on our head, but now we are able to store water in our house"<sup>7</sup>.

Finally available, accessible, acceptable and quality health services also participate to the reduction and redistribution of care work, between women and health institutions, by having affordable care provided by health professionals and reduced indirect costs. ■

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6. Social protection floors are defined by the International Labor Organization's Social Protection Floors Recommendation n°202. They are identified as a set of non-contributory guarantees, including access to essential health care and basic income security for children (providing access to nutrition, education, care and any other necessary goods and services), persons in active age (in particular in cases of sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability) and older persons.  
[https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/fr/f?p=1000:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID,P12100\\_LANG\\_CODE:3065524,en:NO](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/fr/f?p=1000:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID,P12100_LANG_CODE:3065524,en:NO)

7. Kamila Wasilikowska, Somalia Cash Consortium, Action Contre la Faim, Adeso, Danish Refugee Council, Save The Children, *Gender Impact Analysis, Unconditional Cash Transfers in South Central Somalia*. Somalia, 2012, p. 22.

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*The Gender and Geopolitics Observatory aims at promoting inter- and multidisciplinary research on the ways gender can be used to understand geopolitics, act more efficiently against inequalities and violence, and promote the empowerment of women. The Observatory aims both at giving advocacy arguments to decision-makers and being a negotiation and decision-making helping tool, for the public and private sectors, on a wide range of international issues.*

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