



**Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-third Session**

**INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL
ON THE PRIORITY THEME**

*Social protection systems, access to public
services and sustainable infrastructure for
gender equality and the empowerment of women
and girls:*

Harnessing synergies and securing financing

Background document:

**Financing social protection, public services and
sustainable infrastructure for gender equality
and the empowerment of women and girls**

by

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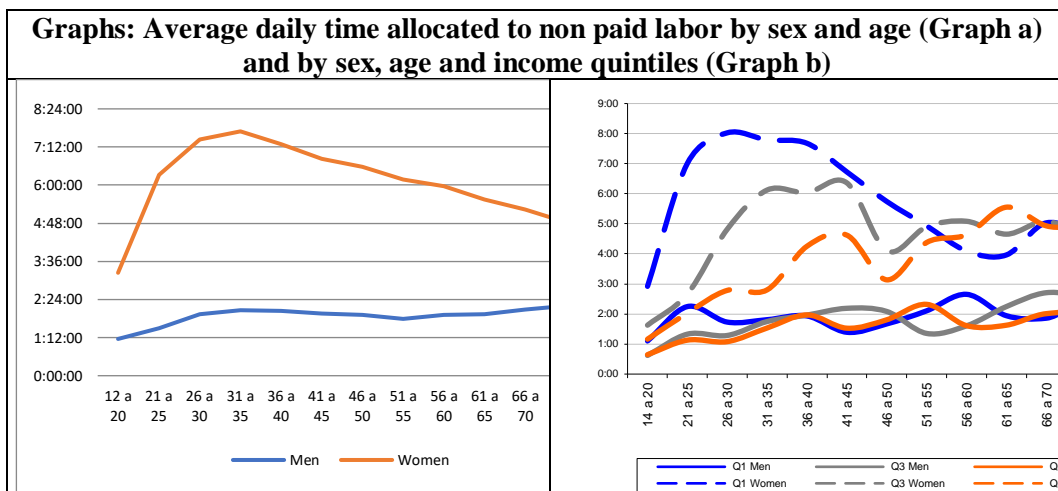
Friday, 15 March 2019

3:00 pm – 6:00 pm

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

Introduction

Use of time by men and women in the region show a precise combination of socioeconomic inequality, gender inequality and life-course patterns of care and unpaid work. The following figure shows the average time allocated to unpaid work by sex, income quintiles and age for a group of countries 10 year ago.



Source: UNWomen, 2017 based on ECLAC microdata from Use of time surveys. Latin American examples

This of course has its counterpart in women's lower labor force participation rates. While women provide a large part of the labor that produces valuable goods and services in the households, they receive no pay for that, and in turn have limited time and face discrimination when attempting to secure gainful employment. As shown in the second graph unpaid work is not only determined by gender. Among women it is also determined by class. Because of lower and later fertility and because they can find substitutes in the market for their unpaid labor, women of higher income brackets will still work more unpaid hours than men, but will do so at far lower rates than women who are poor or in the first income quintile. Social protection, social services and infrastructure are three areas that are neither gender nor class neutral. In many cases they are stacked against women and the poor, and thus especially against poor women.

The eligibility criteria to access social protection –be it pensions, unemployment, job related accident or health insurance is -in most countries in the region- based on the assumption that formal paid work produces value, while unpaid care and home based work does not. The argument in its simplest form is transparent. Men work for wages and contribute part of those wages to social security, thus they are entitled to certain forms of insurance that protect them from exogenous and idiosyncratic shocks. Women do not work for wages –or do so less and more intermittently- and thus they do not contribute from those wages to the social security system –or do so less and in a more interrupted fashion- and thus are not entitled to the forms of insurance men access or are only entitled to such insurance through the insurance males access (Arza, 2018).

Why do most education systems provide a 4 to 5 hour daily coverage? If a full work day for an average worker trying to make ends meet requires an 8 hour work schedule, who will take care of a seven year old child when they are not at school?. We know from ample evidence that this task will most likely be placed in the shoulders and time of the women

in the household. Education services are not meant to balance the productive/reproductive demands of adults because it is assumed that one of the adults that contributed to bringing a new life into society will do it. Why is it that there is such a blind spot in our service and social protection systems for families with children aged 0 to 3? The answer is again the same.

Surely, one could argue this is not the case when we talk about infrastructure. Is this not a type of public or collective good that benefits everybody equally? Studies on access to energy, urban and rural mobility show nevertheless how such investments tend to favor men and those better off rather than women and those least privileged. Women toll in their households far more than men, walk more than men, use more collective transportation than men. This is also true of the poor when compared to the wealthier segments of society. Yet we invest far more in highways for private cars instead of bike lanes, grant gasoline subsidies instead of subsidies for public collective transport, support business oriented energy expansion infrastructures rather than household (grid to household) oriented energy investment. This type of investment and spending is evidence of both a class and gender biased regressive models of infrastructure development and investment.

In short making social protection, public services and infrastructure investments work for women and girls requires addressing, first of all, the underlying biases that undermine women's empowerment and well-being in the three areas considered and in their inter-linkages. Secondly, it implies a creative process by which the transformative nature of policies in each area is combined so as to maximize improvements in women's empowerment and well-being at the same time that they attack general income based inequalities.

Selected Policy Goals to be achieved in a gradual but consistent manner

Social Protection

Addressing gender gaps and biases in social protection

- Advance towards Universal Family Transfers or universal child grant for families with children gradually suppressing narrow targeting and conditionalities and provide targeted top-up to child grants for single female headed households
- Review, redesign and improve enforcement and guarantees for single female headed household to receive child support from ex-partners.
- Provide social protection rights and schemes that recognize unpaid household work. Extend non-contributory social protection systems or subsidize people in low income and precarious jobs to access contributory systems. Expand state-financed non-contributory benefits (e.g. in old-age, family benefits, parental leaves) and ensure their adequacy, reliability and regular indexation.

Social Services: Education, Care and Health

Gender-responsive public services

- Extend quality collective care services for children aged 0 to 3 years and extend coverage in preprimary schooling at 4 and 5 years of age. Also extend the daily hours of care and school time for children 0 to 12 years old to reach a full average working day.

- Provide universal free of charge modern contraception with an emphasis on long term reversible contraceptive methods.

Infrastructure, basic utilities and mobility

Gender-responsive, sustainable transportation systems

- Invest less in infrastructure that benefits passenger cars (which women and poor people use less), and invest more in gender-responsive public transit (that is also responsive to people with disabilities), walking and cycling infrastructure.
- Tax cars, private use of cars and parking and subsidize public transport to make it more affordable.
- Plan infrastructure investment and develop collective transportation systems looking at women’s mobility needs (work, care centers, education centers, health service, markets) and establish regulations that protect real women in real lives (reserved seats, increasing bus-frequency during off-peak hours, integrated tariffs for combined trips).

Recommendations for gender-sensitive, sustainable energy systems

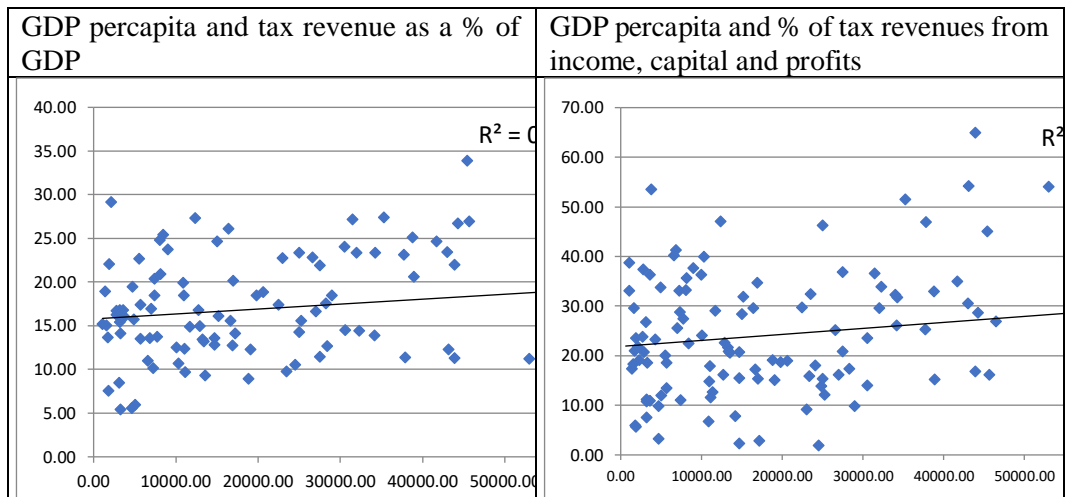
- Make gender-responsive investments in optimal levels of energy access, accounting for women’s multiple roles and their specific livelihood needs (e.g. running water pumps and medium size electrical appliances).
- Subsidize and support connecting the general grid to concrete households
- Prioritize gender-responsive investments in developing and sustaining community energy systems (minigrids) and demand-side management to power households and communities.
- Adapt tariffs mechanisms and regulations to be gender-responsive, including tariffs to more effectively meet the needs of female headed households.
- Improve access to clean cook-stoves

Gender-responsive, sustainable water and sanitation systems

- Ensure continuous piped water at the household level and in rural settings, prioritize “multiple use” sources that provide water for drinking, small plots and small herds. Develop financial resources to invest in scaling up gender-responsive, de-centralized water-augmenting technologies that have proven to be effective and efficient (e.g. rainwater harvesting), and in the development of new gender-responsive, scalable water-augmentation technologies.
- Integrate menstrual hygiene management (MHM) as a mandatory feature of all sanitation interventions, and as a feature of public education curriculum in order to break harmful social taboos.

Creating fiscal space for social investments across the three areas

All of these measures cost money. Yet there are three fallacies of the lack of fiscal space for such endeavors that need to be confronted:



Source: World development indicators

- Taxes and especially progressive taxation is not feasible or desirable for economic reasons. There is no evidence that supports this claim. Many OECD countries with long standing high progressive tax burdens do exist and have in many cases exemplary economic performances.
- States cannot spend more than they do, especially in contractionary economic environments, given their fiscal situations. This is also simply not true. Many countries spend well below their potential levels and many have relatively sound fiscal situations. Both some expansionary spending and additional debt can in many cases be justified and positive in inter-temporal terms if such spending improves public and merit goods and increases human capital formation.
- Most state spending is already allocated and cannot be changed. On the contrary, a large part of what the state spends caters to special interests and powerful groups that lobby and exert influence to gain rents from the state while they do not generate social returns commensurable with such spending.

As mentioned in the summary document from the previous expert panel in New York: “Contractionary fiscal policies and market oriented sector reforms constrain the social welfare functions of the state, with dire consequences for social and environmental sustainability. Cutting back deficit financing of public expenditure, lowering the tax burden on private enterprises, and privatizing state enterprises and social services undermines government action. The argument for such policies is that government spending is not only inflationary, but also tends to crowd out private investment. Yet public investment can also encourage private investment, for example, when the public provision of infrastructure, education and health care, makes private investment opportunities more attractive. This is especially true in developing economies, where market imperfections are extensive and where public goods are undersupplied by markets relative to what is socially or economically optimal because their social returns are greater than their private returns. Even if private returns, measured with respect to the growth of future incomes, are not high enough to provide full monetary compensation to households and business for the taxes required for an increase in public investment, such an increase may still be justified. This would be the case if the social returns to investment were sufficiently high to provide other benefits, possibly non-monetary, that households and businesses value”.

Investment in public infrastructure, social services and social protection also raises the productivity of economic activities within households. Household unpaid work and the production of goods and services it generates sustain families. Preparing meals, household maintenance, and fetching water and fuel is possible because of women's unpaid labor. Thus, public investments that raise the productivity of this labor have the potential to contribute to greater gender equality by reducing the time burden of unpaid work and at the same time improving the quality of such products and services.

In order to increase investments in gender enhancing social protection, services and infrastructure governments can:

- Develop methods and tools for gender based evaluation and budgeting making clear the biases and potential benefits of shifting budget allocation both within and between sectors and policy areas.
- Protect strategic areas from cutbacks. These include care services and health and education with a gendered design, public transportation systems, rural investment in energy reach and capacity, network to household energy connection, sanitation and water for segregated urban slums and poor rural areas.
- Expand progressive taxation. Most emerging and developing countries have space for expanding their tax base and making it more progressive. Taxing concentrated assets such as land and property, inheritance, personal rents and corporate rents are tools available today that can be expanded and/or better enforced.
- Redirecting investments based on borrowing: The region borrows from international and domestic lenders and from financial multilateral institutions. Yet much of these projects are geared towards big infrastructure development serving mostly corporations and large enterprises. Increasing investment from borrowing in social infrastructure and in the last connection between broad systems of infrastructure and households (sanitation, drinking water, energy) should take center stage.
- Redirect investment and spending that is neither economically efficient nor environmentally sound, or redistributive and gender responsive.

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