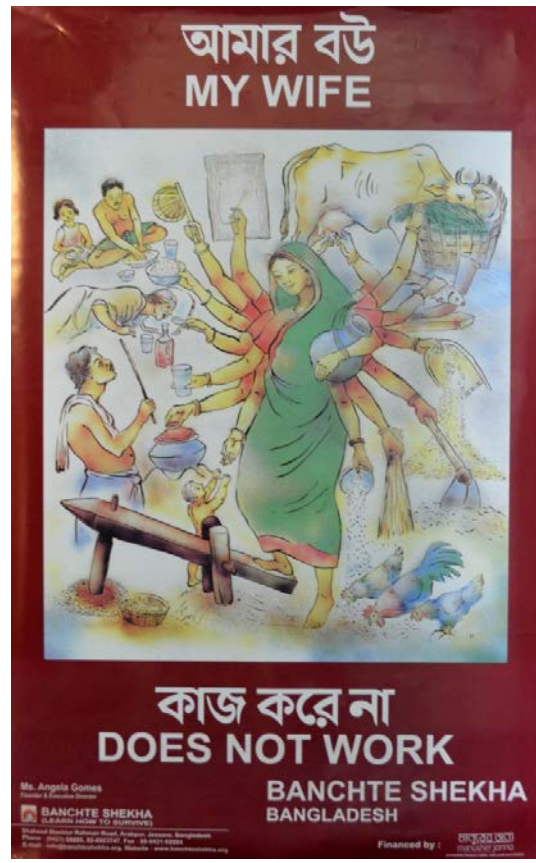


Review of Literature on Unpaid Care Work Bangladesh



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List of Abbreviations

BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BDI	BRAC Development Institute
BGMEA	Bangladesh Garments Manufacturing Employers Association
BMP	Bangladesh Mahila Parishad
BNWLA	Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association
CEDAW	Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CGST	Centre for Gender and Social Transformation
CiC-BD	Citizens Initiatives on CEDAW Bangladesh
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
GQAL	Gender Quality Action Learning
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
ILO	International Labour Organization
LFS	Labour Force Survey
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MOLE	Ministry of Labour and Employment
MOWCA	Ministry of Women and Children
MTBF	Medium Term Budget Framework
NGO	Non Government Organization
NSAPR II	National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction II
PEDP II	Primary Education Development Programme II
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
REOPA	Rural Employment Opportunities for Public Assets
SFYP	Sixth Five Year Plan
SMERU	SMERU Research Institute, Jakarta
SNA	System of National Accounts
SSNP	Social Safety Net Projects
UNRISD	United National Research Institute for Social Development
VDG	Vulnerable Group Development
VDGUP	Vulnerable Group Development Ultra Poor
VGf	Vulnerable Group Feeding

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Executive Summary

This review examines selected policies and plans of the Government of Bangladesh and available research in Bangladesh in response to the need to address 'unpaid care work' at the policy level. Its purpose is to look at whether and the extent to which 'unpaid care work' is addressed in existing national laws, government policies and research in Bangladesh. The review was undertaken as part of a collaborative project on 'Gender, Power and Sexuality' involving IDS (UK), SMERU (Indonesia) and CGST (Bangladesh) that aims to ensure inclusion of unpaid care work into national and global policy agenda.

The findings from the review reveal that 'unpaid care work' has primarily featured in a limited way and mostly as background noise both at the research and policy level in Bangladesh. The search for pathways to women's empowerment in Bangladesh has focused on women's participation in paid work and there is a reflection of it in both policies and research. In this regard, 'unpaid care work' has mainly featured as a constraint to women's participation in paid work. Although barely addressed directly in policies or in research, some very recent changes indicate the creation of space in policies for the emergence and recognition of 'unpaid care work'.

The findings from the review revealed the following about existing policy and state programs : a) in policy documents women's unpaid care work is mentioned in explaining gender roles in Bangladesh but specific policy prescriptions for reduction and redistribution of care work are few; b) existing Labor Acts focus on women in formal sector employment and their child care needs but ignore other care needs or needs of women in informal sector employment; c) only one or two policies on education and safety net specifically prescribe policy and programmatic support for women's reproductive work; d) the emphasis on unpaid care work has decreased over time in various government plans and policy documents related to women; e) some spaces may be opening up at policy levels for including unpaid care (e.g. National Action Plan for Women) and consultative processes are important to keep the focus on unpaid care. The review also highlights the following about existing research on unpaid care. First, researchers have largely focused on counting women's contribution to GDP through including unpaid care in GDP calculations. Second, they have also conducted time use studies to calculate the burden of unpaid care but have rarely discussed redistribution of the care burden. Third, how unpaid care work can be integrated in different policy areas and sectors requires a careful identification of the nature of 'care needs' in those specific sectors such as education, safety net, labor, water management etc.

1. Introduction

“How society addresses the issue of care has significant implications for the achievement of gender equality, by either broadening the capabilities and choices of women and men, or confining women to traditional roles associated with femininity and motherhood.” (Razavi , 2007, pp 379)

1.1 Purpose of this review

Economies have relied on a seemingly endless supply of care work provided overwhelmingly by women to sustain families, societies and the labour force, without giving it any social or economic value. The focus on ‘unpaid care work’ in recent years has come about largely due to the critique by feminist scholars of the structural and neo-liberal trends that prioritize and value market-oriented production of goods and services (Razavi 2007) and dismisses care work, performed overwhelmingly by women, which sustains and reproduces society and essentially provides the basis for market functioning and economic growth. This narrow, androcentric and instrumentalist conception of how the economy operates adopted by most governments, donors, multilateral organizations thus only consider paid, visible forms of women’s economic activities and fail to address the “interconnected interests and trade-offs of women as producers, employees and carers, and more generally *do not recognize the value to society of activities which fall outside the market*” (Eyben and Fontana 2011, pg 3). The growth perspective thus promotes only those dimensions of gender equality that are instrumental to achieving other development goals (Kabeer and Natali 2013) and dominates the advocacy for women’s economic empowerment only as a contributing factor to economic growth (Eyben 2013a).

Not only does this perspective fail to recognize women’s contribution to the economy through ‘unpaid care work’, it neglects the implications of ‘unpaid care work’ on women’s empowerment and in achieving gender equality. Women and girls across *all* societies undertake the bulk of ‘unpaid care work’ more than men and despite substantive increase in female labour force participation (Esplen 2009, Kabeer 2007). This socially ascribed responsibility undermines women and girls’ rights and opportunities and limits their capabilities and choices. ‘Unpaid care work’ being time consuming, arduous and unvalued, in fact reinforces gender inequalities especially among the poor who cannot afford paid care workers, by impinging upon girls’ education, restricting opportunities for paid work, putting women in greater risk of gender based violence and limiting women’s political participation (Esplen 2009). Aside from the argument for gender equality on intrinsic grounds, there is substantive evidence that gender equality, particularly in education and employment, contributes to economic growth, although the reverse is not necessarily true (Kabeer and Natali 2013). Nevertheless, ‘unpaid care work’ stays off the policy table and development agenda.

Over the past decades however, economic, social and demographic changes have been taking place all over the world as in Bangladesh, by which while the demand for care is increasing, its supply is diminishing (Esplen 2009; Razavi 2007). Increase in women’s participation in the labour force, ageing populations, greater investments in girls’ education, etc is squeezing the time that used to be spent by women in ‘unpaid care work’. These have heightened the urgency with which ‘unpaid care work’ needs to be addressed in policy. While there have been advances in theory and policy advocacy

relating to care in rich countries, they are not always relevant to low-income countries. And even while there is a growing literature on care in low and middle income countries, they are largely neglected in their development policy debates and programming (Eyben 2012) “because its recognition as a central policy issue would require a major re-think about how our economy works and what we value” (Eyben 2013b pg 2).

It is in response to the need to address ‘unpaid care work’ at the policy level that this review intends to take stock of the existing policies and available literature in Bangladesh and look at whether and the extent to which ‘unpaid care work’ is addressed in existing national laws, government policies and research in Bangladesh. The review has been undertaken as part of a collaborative project on ‘Gender, Power and Sexuality’ involving IDS (UK), SMERU (Indonesia) and CGST (Bangladesh) that aims to ensure inclusion of unpaid care work into national and global policy agenda.

The findings from the review reveal that ‘unpaid care work’ has primarily featured in a limited way and mostly as background noise both at the research and policy level in Bangladesh. The search for pathways to women’s empowerment in Bangladesh has focused on women’s participation in paid work and there is a reflection of it in both policies and research. In this regard, ‘unpaid care work’ has mainly featured as a constraint to women’s participation in paid work. Although barely addressed directly in policies or in research, some very recent changes indicate the creation of space in policies for the emergence and recognition of ‘unpaid care work’.

1.2 Scope of the review

The overall review will attempt to contribute to an understanding of the imperative to focus on women’s unpaid care work in policy and in research at this point in time.

The first part of the review focuses on policies and plans of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) that can be expected to recognize the issue of ‘unpaid care work’ as part of its development agenda seeking to reduce gender disparities in key sectors and address women’s rights. It looks at whether and to what extent they refer to unpaid care work, and irrespective of whether they specifically mention ‘unpaid care work’, if they refer to any measures or initiatives that can be seen to redistribute or reduce it. It further attempts to draw out different points in time where the issue gained recognition or receded from policy focus.

The second part of the review examines available research related to women’s unpaid care work. It attempts to show the kind of research within which unpaid care work emerges, whether it is addressed implicitly or explicitly, how the issue is treated (sidelined, having only a negative connotation or recognizing it as a positive contribution) and whether they provide any indications for reduction or redistribution of unpaid care work.

1.3 Structure of the Review

Section 2 of the review focuses on the Bangladeshi context and the rationale of the review. Section 2.1 describes the backdrop within which ‘unpaid care work’ in Bangladesh is being examined which

includes the perception of unpaid care work and its implications for Bangladeshi women. Section 2.2 discusses the developmental and legal changes and achievements in relation to women. Section 2.3 discusses the imperative to address the issue of 'unpaid care' and the rationale for the review. Section 2.4 describes the conceptualization of 'unpaid care work' used in this review. Section 2.5 briefly describes the methodology used. Section 3 illustrates the findings from the policy review and Section 4, findings from the review of available research. Section 5 highlights findings from Section 3 and 4 and attempts to indicate what is required to facilitate its visibility in the policy arena.

2. Background and Rationale

2.1 Normative underpinning of unpaid care work and its implications for women in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh 'care work' is perceived to be synonymous with women's work, whether paid¹ or unpaid. It is taken for granted that a woman's primary role is a caregiver. Her skill is seen as a 'natural' part of her 'womanhood' – the rationale being that she does not need to go out of her way to learn these skills - and integral to her performance as a sister, daughter, wife, daughter-in-law or mother in accordance with societal expectations and patriarchal norms. This conflation between her identity as a woman and a caregiver renders little, if any, value to the work she performs as 'work', and as such goes largely unnoticed at the household and societal level, both by men and women, who are socialized from an early age into norms of rigid sexual division of labour.

The discourse of 'gender equality' promoted by the government has focused on enhancing women's access to health, education, markets, paid labour, justice (particularly with regard to violence against women) and political participation. Expansion of livelihood options for girls and women (job opportunities, work in health sector, garment factory work, internal and international migration for work) for women's empowerment has been a key focal point. However, taking up such opportunities and increase in participation has an unseen cost in terms of unpaid care work. The implications of the norm of women as caregivers on women's choices are evident from the everyday lives of women across classes to a greater or lesser extent.

The disproportionate responsibility women bear in providing care and the time consuming nature of care work limits what women can choose to do, whether it is to participate more fully in civil, social and political life, or engage in full-time paid work. It hampers their own well-being as others' well-being is always prioritized (which is what is expected of Bangladeshi women) and their own leisure time is limited. It puts enormous pressures on women, especially on poorer women who often combine low paid work, or piece-meal work to ensure food security with care provision; in some instances it reinforces low self-esteem and subservience to men in a context where unpaid care work is not valued and serves to keep women financially dependent on men. In Bangladesh husbands are seen as primary breadwinners and marriage the ultimate source of security (financial, physical and emotional) for women. This dependency (although changing) urges women to protect

¹ Although this review deals with unpaid care work, women in paid care work desperately require policy attention as well. It is work that is unrecognized under the Labour Law, where abuse and violence towards care workers is acceptable and rampant and where women on account of being women, poor and providing undervalued care work inside a home environment are more vulnerable than in most other forms of work.

their marriage at any cost, which includes the cost of violence towards them. This issue is particularly pertinent for Bangladesh given that unpaid care work is more difficult in the context of poverty where public service provision of basic amenities is poor, and where women have to rely on their own labour to undertake unpaid care work, unable to afford to pay for care work or technological innovations to reduce care work (Budlender and Moussie 2013).

2.2 Developmental context of Bangladesh in relation to women

Poverty reduction foregrounds the development strategy of the Bangladesh government and provides the lens through which policies addressing gender equality and women's empowerment issues are formulated. The overwhelming focus of policies and research on women's work has therefore been around paid work.

The mainstream development narrative in Bangladesh follows a particular trend largely concerned with poverty alleviation and human development outcomes, given its emergence as a war-torn and impoverished nation merely forty years ago. The UN Human Development Report of 2011 ranks Bangladesh at 146 out of 187 countries. Between 1980 and 2011, Bangladesh's Human Development Index (HDI) value increased from 0.303 to 0.500, an increase of 65.0 per cent or average annual increase of about 1.6 per cent.

Attempts by successive regimes (both military and civilian) to "woo the international donor community have led to a steady mainstreaming of gender equality and women's rights issues within the public policy discourse" (Kabeer et al 2013, pp 63). As such, Bangladesh has witnessed enormous strides in gender equality in some key social development indicators. Although Bangladesh ranks 112 out of 146 in the Gender Inequality Index 2011, the gains of Bangladeshi women have come at a rapid pace having started from a lower starting point than some of the other South Asian countries, and despite the modest pace of overall poverty reduction (Nazneen, Hossain and Sultan 2011). Successive governments have pushed policies and increased expenditures that have resulted in halving total fertility rates, reducing maternal mortality, infant and child mortality, closing the gender gap in child mortality, closing the gender gap in primary and secondary education, where girls enrollment now outnumber boys (Nazneen, Hossain and Sultan 2011 and Kabeer et al. 2013). Traditional bias towards son preference is also changing with more women expressing indifference towards sex of child than preference for sons (Kabeer et al. 2013; Huq, Kabeer and Mahmud 2012).

There has been a sustained increase in women's labour force participation from 4% in 1974, 8% in 1984, 23.9% in 1999-2000 to 31.5% in 2009-2010 (36% in 2010 according to the latest BBS 2012 statistics), although labour force surveys continue to under report women's economic activities (Mahmud and Tasneem 2011). There has also been an expansion of economic opportunities for women as a result of their access to microcredit, export-oriented manufacturing, agricultural wage labour and expanded health and education activities at the community level led by government and NGOs (Kabeer et al 2013). Various social protection policies and safety net measures promoting women's work, providing pension to the elderly, widowed and the disabled, addressing food security of the poorest have also been taken up by the government. Over 2% of GDP is spent on these social safety net programmes yearly. Despite these interventions, 70 % of poor people do not receive any

safety net support, mainly due to problems in identifying poor beneficiaries and programme administration (World Bank Press Release June 26, 2013).

Bangladesh has also seen a host of laws addressing child marriage, dowry, prevention of violence against women and children, sexual harassment and most recently the Domestic Violence Bill (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010, which for the first time legally deals with violence perpetrated inside the home, previously considered 'private' and therefore outside the ambit of law. Efforts have been made for encouraging greater political participation of women with one-third seats reserved in local and national government.

Another notable phenomenon is female international migration. It is slowly increasing and is estimated at 2-4% of total migration from Bangladesh (Islam 2013). One of the reasons for low figures is the ban on female migration (except on white collar professionals) at various stages between 1988 and 2001 (Islam 2013; Kumari and Shamim 2010). Out of 236,194 female international migrants between 1991 to April 2013, about two percent were skilled workers and the rest were domestic workers (The New Age June 21, 2013). In 2006, the government established the Overseas Employment Policy to ensure the welfare of Bangladeshi workers abroad and the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas employment has recently taken up the initiative to facilitate training, registration and international migration of women as domestic workers, with measures to ensure their safety (New Age March 20, 2013). This indicates that there is now some recognition of "paid care work" at least in the context of migration. However their contribution in terms of remittance is not taken into account as part of the national income.

2.3 Rationale for focus on unpaid care work in Bangladesh and this review

If seen through the lens of 'unpaid care work', some of the gains mentioned above appear to have serious implications for 'unpaid care work'. Conversely, the gains are also constrained by 'unpaid care work'. Together these provide the rationale of why it is imperative to focus on 'unpaid care work' in Bangladesh.

Demographic changes constitute an important reason. Fertility rate has reduced tremendously from 6.0 in 1971 to 2.3 currently (Kabeer et. al 2013). Household size has also shown a steady decline from 5.26 in 1995-95, to 5.18 in 2000, to 4.85 in 2005 (BBS 2010) to 4.44 in 2012 (BBS 2013). This may be an indication not only of lowering fertility rates but also of the increasing nuclearization of families from the more traditional norm of joint families. At the same time, average life expectancy has gradually increased from 50.23 years in 1965, 55.24 in 1980, 59.47 in 1990, 64.73 in 2000 to 70.06 in 2013, (Index Mundi) except for the years 1971-1972 when it dropped sharply to 39 years during and after the liberation war. Moreover life expectancy is slightly higher for women (71.98 years) than men (68.21). There has therefore been a gradual increase in the female population over 60 years, which was 0.035% of the total population in 2010 compared to 0.028% of the total population in 2000 (CiC-BD 2010). This means that there are fewer people in the household who can provide care for a growing proportion of elderly population. It further indicates that the growing elderly population will have a greater proportion of elderly women than men. Although both elderly men and women are vulnerable to lack of care, women may be more vulnerable particularly if they

do not own any assets and because of greater difficulties in accessing old age allowances and safety nets. These need to be flagged as major policy concerns.

The second set of contributory reasons is around women's work. Women's participation in the labour force has undoubtedly increased, but why and what kind of work are they engaging in and its implications in terms of their rights as workers are questions that need to be addressed.

Women mostly work in the informal sector, which more often than not provides poor remuneration, and no social security or rights. Unpaid household work/ or care work is one of the main factors why women need to work flexible hours. Consequently, it is this lack of flexibility in formal sector work that drives women away from the formal sector and towards the informal economy.

The Bangladesh Decent Work Country Profile (Mondal 2012, draft) notes that although female labour force participation rate (LFPR) has increased over the years, a higher proportion of female workers are engaged in informal employment than male workers (92.3% compared to 85.5%). Female LFPR increased from 84.9% in 1999-2000 to 92.3% in 2010. Moreover, according to the report, most workers who are engaged in informal employment are unpaid family workers or self-employed (i.e. own-account workers). In 2010, 56.2% women were estimated to be contributing/ unpaid family workers compared to 7% men and including own account workers they constitute 81.36% of those in employment. Excessive hours of work (more than 48 hours per week as stipulated by ILO) have increased for both men and women. The report states that own-account workers, unpaid family workers and casual employees, represent a sizeable and increasing share of employed persons working excessive time and are mostly engaged in poorly remunerated jobs, which combined have negative implications for the allocation of work, family, and personal time. "Occupational segregation by gender persists and is determined by both employers' and workers' preferences and stereotypes, workers' competencies, and societal perceptions regarding male and female workers" (ibid, pp 50). The report noted the further tendency to set lower wages in sectors in which women predominate. Domestic workers in particular were noted to be underpaid, overworked, unprotected and socially stigmatized.

Women will continue to be trapped in informal employment if there is no recognition, reduction or redistribution of unpaid care work. This can only add to their drudgery without adequate remuneration, security or rights, and they will remain excluded from the rights and benefits that accrue to workers (mostly male) in the formal sector, being outside the purview of the Labour Law (Mondal 2012, draft).

Female migration also has implications for 'unpaid care work' and although the percentage of female international migrants is small (as mentioned earlier), there is a rapidly increasing number of internal female migrants, particularly for garment factory work and domestic work. A study on families left behind by international migrants in Bangladesh and India (Kumari and Shamim 2010) revealed interesting contrast between male migrant and female migrant families in terms of negative impact on family members. While family members of male migrants mainly complained of loneliness and divorce, female migrant family members further reported remarriage and extra marital affairs of male members, family feuds and a general breakdown of family life on the one hand, and absence of proper child care and negative effect on children's schooling on the other,

indicating 'care crisis' in these households. A higher proportion of both male and female migrant families were found to be from relatively smaller families. A similar finding was made by a study on females migrating internally for garment work (Naved et.al 2001), which suggests a change in the trend of migration from larger families found in earlier studies. The decisive factor is rather the absence of an older brother. Female garment workers were also found to be migrating at younger ages (80% below 20 years and more than half under 14 years) and most while unmarried (75% were unmarried at the time of migration). Unlike previous tendency mainly to migrate with parents, migration with only siblings and distant or non-relative were found to account for 54% of the respondents compared to 22% who came with parents. The absence of these young women undoubtedly has some impact on the care of parents/ elders and particularly of younger siblings whom older sisters are mainly responsible for.

Finally, the ways in which families strategize to absorb shocks and crises brought on by increasing food prices also has implications for 'unpaid care work'. While it is thought that people are absorbing these shocks with resilience, the repercussions of it can be found in the costs of such resilience, in terms of increased time and effort to feed and take care of families, negative effects on family, social and gender relationships, mental stress and quality of life. Recently a research was conducted on the rapid and cumulative "slow burn" effect of food price rises on everyday life (Hossain, King and Kelbert 2013) in ten developing countries including Bangladesh. This research found that more women are struggling to stretch their budgets to meet the needs of their family and trying to contribute to the household income found that, as they are unable to meet food requirements at current prices. This struggle has led women in rural Bangladesh (and Pakistan) to look for paid work outside their homes despite strong social norms against mobility. Women were therefore found to be working harder and for longer hours on both income earning and caregiving and reported to be 'exhausted' in trying to reconcile paid work with domestic responsibilities (ibid pg 52). This in turn has led to increased dependence for care work on 'substitute care givers', i.e., older family members, mainly grandparents, and on older daughters affecting their schoolwork. Men's inability to fend sufficiently for their families has led to spousal conflicts. Moreover, increased levels of stress and conflict between members of the household have come to the fore given that usual care givers have less time to care for family members and older family members and children are overburdened with responsibility of care work.

The authors concluded that while social protection policies and managing food price volatility are crucial issues, social protection systems have to be more "care-sensitive" and take into account women's unpaid care work and its value to society and the nation. Furthermore, there has to be a measurement and assessment of the impact of unpaid care work on development.

Pre-occupation with enhancing women's mobility, access to health, education, markets, paid work, justice, political participation in Bangladesh means it is likely that 'unpaid care work' has been placed at the sidelines, if it has been considered an issue at all, although 'unpaid care work' is crucial in influencing the extent to which such opportunities can be accessed and is itself impacted upon by expansion of such opportunities as well as demographic changes. Valuing 'unpaid care work' for its central importance to societal and human well-being (Eyben 2013) or as a contribution to the economy, and not simply a burden, is a perspective that has not been brought to the table. The absence of such a perspective may not impel the kind of policy or research which questions the

policy implications for 'unpaid care work'. Moreover, if governments do not measure women's unpaid care work then they cannot assess its contribution and impact on the different segments of society and on the economy as a whole (Budlender and Moussie 2013). Neither can it adopt informed policies that recognize the importance of care work, redistribute care work between men and women and between state and household, or reduce the element of drudgery in care work (according to the framework proposed in Elson 2010).

Given the lack of any systematic review from the perspective of 'unpaid care work' it is unclear whether any discourse around "unpaid care work" at all exists whether in policy or in research and if so, how it is perceived there are existing policies or research in Bangladesh which recognize and address this issue. It is this gap that this review seeks to address although within its own limitations.

2.4 Conceptualizing Unpaid Care Work

This review uses the definition of 'unpaid care work' as elaborated in UNWomen's *Progress of the World's Women 2000*, UNIFEM's biennial report in which:

"The term 'unpaid' differentiates this care from paid care provided by employees of the public and NGO (non government organizations) sector and employees and self-employed persons in the private sector.

The word 'care' indicates that the services provided nurture to other people.

The word 'work' indicates that these activities are costly in time and energy and are undertaken as obligations (contractual or social)." (Budlender and Moussie 2013)

Unpaid care work therefore involves cooking, cleaning, collecting fuel and water, providing care to children, elderly and the sick. It also includes voluntary community work (Budlender and Moussie 2013). Caring not only involves providing for the material needs of the recipients but also their emotional needs. In other words, it refers to a responsibility and a set of activities "meeting the material and/or developmental, emotional and spiritual needs of one or more other persons with whom one is in a direct personal relationship" (Eyben and Fontana 2011).

2.5 Methodology

This review has selected several government policies and plans that can be expected to recognize the issue of 'unpaid care work' as part of policies/ initiatives seeking to reduce gender disparities in key sectors and address women's rights. These policies and plans manifest the development agenda of the government and include the Five Year Plans, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP), the National Women's Development Policy 2011 and the National Action Plan 2012 for the implementation of the women's policy and are based among other things, the principles of the Constitution of Bangladesh and the Millennium Development Goals, which have all been included in this review. Bangladesh has ratified the Convention of Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and as such, government as well citizens initiatives submissions to the UN CEDAW Committee have also been included in this review. In terms of law, this review specifically

looks at the Bangladesh Labour Act (2006) to examine whether any aspect of it addresses 'unpaid care work'. This review looks at whether and to what extent these policies, plans and law refer to unpaid care work, and irrespective of whether they specifically mention 'unpaid care work', if they refer to any measures or initiatives that can be seen to redistribute or reduce it.

Two sets of policies, namely Early Childhood Development and Social Protection policies have been deliberately excluded from this review as they have been elaborately examined in a thematic review of public policies (Chopra 2013). A thorough examination of these two policies in the context of Bangladesh revealed little in relation to 'unpaid care work'. In terms of Early Childhood Development policies, this review covered the National Education Policy 2000, the Primary Education Development Programme II, the Operational Framework for Pre-Primary Education 2008, the Comprehensive ECCD Policy Framework and the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI). In terms of Social Protection Policies, it covered the Female Secondary School Stipend Programme, Primary Education Stipend Programme, Old Age Allowance Scheme and Assistance Programme for Widowed and Destitute Women, Food for Work Programme, Employment Generation for the Hard-Core Poor, Rural Employment and Road Maintenance Programme, 100 Days Employment Generation Scheme, Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction/ Targeting the Ultra Poor Programme and the Rural Employment Opportunities for Public Assets (REOPA) programme.

The other focus of this review is to look specifically at any literature on 'unpaid care work' in Bangladesh. The literature review does not claim to do an exhaustive review of all available literature, given the numerous cross cutting issues with 'unpaid care work', but select literature that can illustrate the discourse around 'unpaid care work' in Bangladesh.

A Google search on 'unpaid care work', 'domestic work' and 'household work' in Bangladesh, was unproductive barring one or two research work in which it was a focal point, revealing the paucity of research on this issue. The international discourse of "unpaid care work" was therefore used to identify possible arenas where this discourse may arise. Thus, one deliberate focus of the search was to find evidence of any recognition of women's economic contribution through unpaid labour in official statistics in Bangladesh to counter the neo-liberal perspective of economic growth. A Google search only revealed one research undertaken by BRAC Development Institute (BDI) and therefore the review relied largely on the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics Handbook published annually and the only other book (Hamid 1996) to have dealt with the issue as suggested by many. A second focus of the search was on time-use studies driven by the larger global discourse emphasizing time-use surveys as a way of assessing 'unpaid care work'. Third, the parameters of the search were expanded to women's work, empowerment and gender equality which revealed an extensive arena that could not be exhaustively explored. A few studies were selected from these which referred to 'unpaid care work'. A search was also conducted on cross cutting issues with 'unpaid care work' such as migration, activities/ coping strategies of the elderly, children's work, etc. The remainder of the literature covered by this review largely consists of recent studies conducted at the BRAC Development Institute (BDI) that offer some insights into women's unpaid care work. The literature review section therefore deals with mainly three types of literature, limited to very few in number: 1) examination of official statistics to re-calculate women's economic contribution through unpaid labour; 2) time use studies that focus or comment on women's unpaid labour; and 3) studies on perceptions and negotiations around unpaid care work.

3. Findings from policy level documents

In general, the review found no mention of the term ‘unpaid care work’ in the examination of the selected policies, plans and laws. There is some scattered mention of household work and responsibilities and certain measures in a few of the policies that may have implications in the redistribution and reduction of women’s unpaid care work, if the policies are effectively implemented.

However, what also emerged from this review is that what gets to be included in national policies is closely connected to what is being focused upon in the international discourse at that time. Thus, while there was some recognition of women’s household work in some of the early documents (albeit mostly as background), it subsequently disappeared from these documents following the almost exclusive focus on women’s economic empowerment through paid work in the post-Beijing years. Now, with the recent international interest in ‘unpaid care work’, there seems to be a re-emergence of the issue in a focused way as revealed in the very recent National Plan of Action 2012 formulated for the implementation of the National Women’s Development Policy 2011.

The invisibility of ‘unpaid care work’ in policy in Bangladesh, particularly in sectors where it is vital, was also revealed in the thematic review on public policies related to care (Chopra 2013). That review revealed that out of the five policies reviewed under Early Childhood Development in Bangladesh, only one, namely the Primary Education Development Programme II (PEDP II) recognized the care work provided by older siblings to younger ones and set up “baby classes” to address the issue. Out of the nine Social Protection Policies reviewed only the Rural Employment Opportunities for Public Assets (REOPA) programme revealed a provision for maternity leave and consideration of other household and reproductive responsibilities in their programme for promoting women’s participation in project activities. The absence of any discourse around ‘unpaid care work’, particularly in the social protection policies which have obvious direct links to the issue, gives an indication of the extent of exclusion of ‘unpaid care work’ in the policy horizon.

3.1 The Constitution and the Millennium Development Goals

The Constitution of Bangladesh and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) can be seen as the broad canvas within which perspectives on gender equality and specific gender related development goals are formulated.

The Constitution of Bangladesh reflects the government’s stance on women’s rights and provides the basis to push for policies seeking to redress gender inequalities. The fundamental principles of state policy enshrined in the Constitution direct the State to adopt effective measures to secure the participation of women in all spheres of national life (Article 10), including in local government institutions (Article 9), ensure equality of opportunity to all citizens (Article 19(1)), remove all social and economic inequalities between man and woman (Article 19(2)). Further, work is considered a right, a duty and a matter of honour for every citizen who is capable of working (Article 20.1) and it instructs the State to create conditions in which, “...*human labour in every form*, intellectual and physical, shall become a fuller expression of creative endeavour and of the human personality” (Article 20(2); Changemakers 2006, pg 10). The Constitution guarantees *inter alia* equality before

law and equal protection of law (Article 27); non-discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth (Article 28) and mentions specifically that women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life (Article 28(2)), with the provision that “nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens” (Article 28(4); Changemakers 2006, pg 13).

The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) provides a framework of reference for the formulation of specific policies and initiatives targeting women and children. Although care work does not feature in any of the MDGs, there are important links between each of them and unpaid care (Esplen 2009). The linkages noted by Esplen (Esplen 2009, Pg 25-26) are used here to assess Bangladesh’s progress in achieving the MDGs.

MDG 1 (Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger) is linked inextricably with ‘unpaid care work’. Although The Millennium Development Goals Bangladesh Progress Report 2012 (GoB 2013) claims that the targets for reducing poverty gap ratio and proportion of population living below national upper poverty line has been met, about 47 million people live in poverty and 26 million in extreme poverty (The World Bank Press Release June 26, 2013). These extreme, resiliently poor households are substantively less likely to be able to afford two meals a day, more likely to have more children, less likely to have children in primary school and less likely to have a literate person in the household, compared to the national average (Save the Children UK 2005). It is essential for these women therefore to find ways and means of earning an income and invest time and labour in subsistence while providing care for a greater number of children. Care ties them to the home are forced to take on low paid, low status, part-time informal sector work without any leave or health benefits, which have direct financial ramifications. While reducing the proportion of own account and contributing family workers in total employment is one of the targets under this goal, the Decent Work Progress Report (Mondal 2012), states that 25% of employed women are own account workers and 56% are contributing/ unpaid family workers, reflecting at least partially the link with ‘unpaid care work’.

Bangladesh is on track in achieving universal primary education (MDG 2), but it is still lacking in terms of retention in schools. Children from poorer families, especially girls leave school² or juggle between their education and caring for younger siblings or old/ailing family members for which they are responsible along with their mothers. That ‘unpaid care work’ can reinforce gender inequalities (MDG 3: Promote Gender equality and empower women) has already been discussed. In relation to MDG 4 (Reduce child mortality) improved knowledge and care facilities may reduce as much as 40% child deaths; while unpaid care work may impede maternal well-being with women undertaking heavy household chores throughout pregnancy and soon after delivery which relates to MDG 5 (Improve maternal health). Bangladesh has already achieved gender parity in primary and secondary education at the national level and has achieved or is close to achieving the targets for reducing under-five mortality and maternal mortality. Although considerable progress has been made, it is seriously lagging in terms of reaching the target of proportion of women in wage employment in non-agricultural sector (MDG 3), of seats held in parliament by women (MDG 3), of births attended

² Boys are withdrawn from school for paid work (Save the Children UK 2005)

by skilled health personnel (MDG 5) and antenatal care coverage (MDG 5) among others, all of which are related to the issue of women's unpaid care work.

MDG 6 (Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases) is directly linked to 'unpaid care work' as families, mainly women and girls bear the responsibility of caring for ailing family members. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Bangladesh is minimal and it has been successful in treating malaria and TB. Moreover, the government has reintroduced and revitalized 10,723 Community Clinics to improve primary healthcare for women. Although formulated in this manner MDG 6 may seem to have little implication for women's 'unpaid care work' in Bangladesh, in actuality, health crisis is one that people face the most³, and particularly the ill health of the main breadwinner pushes already economically vulnerable people to the brink of survival, with women struggling to provide care work and earn at the same time. Women and girls spend an inordinate amount of time and energy in gathering fuel, fetching water as part of their care responsibilities, particularly where there is scarcity of water and energy sources and a depletion of natural resources which relates care to MDG 7 (Ensure environmental sustainability). Although the 2012 MDG report shows near achievement of the target for improved drinking water sources, it does not show the continuing problem of arsenic in the groundwater and increasing water salinity particularly in the southern belt of Bangladesh which means women and girls are carrying heavy loads of water and traveling over longer distances for safe and drinkable water. These MDG targets therefore need to be revisited.

Thus it would seem that despite advances, 'unpaid care work' is invisibly impeding the achievement of several of the MDG targets and therefore need to be addressed before setting up the targets for the post-2015 MDGs.

3.2 The Bangladesh Labour Act (2006)

The Labour Act (2006) does not recognize paid or unpaid care workers. Large numbers of women and girls, particularly migrant workers (internal and international) are engaged in domestic work. While inadequate measures have been taken up for the protection of international migrants, domestic workers (including half a million children, 75% of whom are girls) in the country are left unrecognized and completely unregulated by the law according to the Ain-O-Shalish Kendra Report of 2012. Child domestic workers are in particular in very vulnerable and often abusive situations. Between 2009 and 2012, 395 cases of violence against child domestic workers have been reported, the nature of which includes rape, murder, acid burn and sexual abuse with physical injury being most common. They have absolutely no rights under the law (ASK 2012).

The Labour Act (2006) in Bangladesh is only applicable to workers in the formal sector. This leaves 78% of the employed labour force working in the informal sector outside the purview of the Act and completely unregulated. In Bangladesh, a large proportion of women (92.3% in 2010, Mondal 2012) work in the informal sector (domestic work, agriculture, tea plantations, construction, etc.). As workers in the informal sector or as unpaid family labour or own account workers, a huge proportion

³ A survey conducted in 2007 on 2400 NGO members found that a substantively higher percentage of respondents faced health crisis than economic, legal or disaster related crisis in past 3 years (Bangladesh Citizenship DRC project)

of women are therefore excluded from the rights and benefits that accrue to workers (who are mostly male) in the formal sector and the stipulations that are supposed to improve the condition of women workers (Mondal 2012, draft). That is they do not benefit from minimum wage, regulated hours of work, paid leave, maternity leave, paid sick leave, pension, etc.

The Bangladesh government has introduced several changes in the legal provisions on minimum wage, working time and leave, especially for maternity leave and annual leave. These are only applicable under certain conditions for formal sector workers. This recently revised Act ensures minimum wages (which was not a part of the law earlier) and prohibits discrimination in wages on the basis of sex. It continues to provide maternity benefits to women for up to two children but has increased provision of maternity benefits to 6 months (on 10 January 2011) which was previously 4 months. Criterion for eligibility to receive maternity benefit has been relaxed to include women who have worked for at least six months, which previously included only those who have been working for nine months. Maternity benefits are calculated on the basis of the median wage earned in the last three months preceding her maternity leave. This means that women who earn less and women with more than two children get less benefit and no maternity leave, respectively. Public sector workers however get fully paid six months leave.

Working hours have also been regulated under the revised law in order to provide workers with a better balance between work, family and personal life. However, the Decent Work report (Mondal 2012) states that workers including those in informal employment are increasingly working more hours, especially urban workers who spend an inordinate amount of time in commuting.

Bangladesh has no national social security system and healthcare coverage is low across the labour force. Although the government has invested in social protection, a huge proportion of formal sector workers, the entire informal sector and own account workers are excluded. Informal sector workers are to some extent beneficiaries of the government's various Social Safety Net Projects (Mondal 2012). Public sector workers get an allowance for insolvent persons with permanent disability. To some extent, informal sector workers are receiving employment injury benefits and disability benefit under the newly enacted Bangladesh Labour Welfare Foundation Act 2006. While there is provision for old age pension for public sector workers, only 3.3 above the age of 60 years received it in 2010. The government through the Ministry of Social Welfare however also provides old age allowance under the Social Safety Net Projects (SSNP) in the amount of only Tk.300/- every three months. Various categories of people who receive pension, VGD, or other government grants including domestic workers and vagrants are not eligible for this old age allowance under SSNP.

The revised law however makes it mandatory for every establishment with forty or more employees to have a crèche for children under-six years. Although the various conditions under which it is mandatory provides loopholes for such establishments to avoid providing these facilities, it has positive implications for 'unpaid care work' especially of female garment workers, the largest formal sector employment for women. However given the track record of the garment industry, its actual implementation is debatable.

3.3. The Development Plans: The Sixth Five Year Plan (SFYP) and National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction II (NSARP II)

The overall examination of government policies, plans and reports suggest that while, women's household responsibilities, unpaid labour and even 'sex stereotyping' as an issue is acknowledged, this does not necessarily translate into a discourse on 'unpaid care work'. There have been no focused initiatives to assess contribution of women's unpaid care work to the economy. However, the need for redistribution of household responsibility between the sexes has been mentioned. Connections to unpaid care work may be drawn with the efforts to set up crèches, day care centres, provide paid maternity leave, etc as enabling measures for women to engage in outside paid work while managing unpaid care work. Similarly provision of safety net measures such Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) and Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) cards, widow/ old age / disability pensions may be seen as reducing some of the pressures on care work among the poor.

In Bangladesh, the development plans, for instance the Sixth Five Year Plan (2011-2015) and the National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction II (FY 2009-2011) have integrated strategies for women's development and empowerment which use the constitution, CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action as basis for its policy and legal framework. Both the Sixth Five Year Plan (GoB 2011) and the National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction II (GoB 2009a) share the same vision and goals for Women's Advancement and Rights (GoB 2009a, pg 61-65) which include, elimination of discrimination against women, creating opportunities for education and marketable skills training to enable them to participate and be competitive in all economic activities, promoting an enabling environment at the work place by setting up day care centres for children of working mothers, career women's hostels, etc and taking action to acknowledge women's contribution to social and economic sphere. However, they do not spell out what contributions they intend to acknowledge (which leaves plenty of scope for patriarchal attitudes of policy makers to shape what can be valued as a contribution in which unpaid care work may not arise) and how they intend to go about it. They also share similar strategic objectives that include developing advocacy plans for treating girl and boy child equally and promote equal sharing of household and productive work. The mechanism for the latter is not spelt out in either of the documents although the revised National Education Policy will apparently address it as per the government's sixth and seventh periodic submission to CEDAW Committee. Both plans prioritize women in social protection programmes and intend to give preference to women with disabilities through safety net measures (SFYP) and housing and accessibility to all physical facilities (NSARP II).

"Domestic responsibilities" is specifically mentioned only in the section on Women's Risks and Vulnerabilities in the NSARP II, which addresses the problem of non-attendance or dropping out of school of girls under 12 years and adolescent girls for domestic responsibilities, the indivisibility of work done as part of normal household work or agricultural responsibilities, and the double burden of education and work (including care-giving). Because of the perspective within which "Domestic Responsibility" is seen (as associated risks and vulnerabilities), there is no mention of it with regard to adult women as it is not perceived that her domestic responsibilities are impeding her in anyway.

The NSARP II and the SFYP mentions two strategies that may have implication for policy formulation around unpaid care work. The NSARP II mentions the need to strengthen the capacity of the national statistical system and the ministries in generating and reporting data, especially sex disaggregated

data, in understandable forms and sees it as a challenge for which concerted actions would be needed. It states that dialogues will be undertaken among stakeholders for identifying when and what types of sex disaggregated data should be collected by the statistical system. The availability of sex disaggregated data is one of the bases to mobilize around any policies for 'unpaid care work.' One of the SFYP strategies to integrate gender issues in planning and budgetary processes address gender issues is to build the capacity of relevant government officials on gender responsive budgeting and planning. Gender budgeting could be another avenue to mobilize policymakers around the issue of 'unpaid care work'.

3.4 Gender Related Policies: Reports to CEDAW Committee, the National Women's Development Policy 2011 and The National Action Plan 2012

CEDAW plays an important role in shaping gender related policies in Bangladesh. The National Women's Development Policy 2011 (Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs 2011) in fact takes CEDAW, along with the Constitution of Bangladesh and International Human Rights conventions, as its basis. Following is an examination of the government periodic reports to the CEDAW committee, the National Women's Development Policy and the National Action Plan 2012 to implement the policy with respect to 'unpaid care work'.

Possibly the strongest recognition of women's unpaid care work is addressed in the government's third and fourth periodic report to the CEDAW Committee (GoB 1997), although in the section describing the women's status in Bangladesh and the challenges it poses. In this section, the report stated that though women play a major role in the functioning of the household and the economy, they are generally not seen outside the domestic sphere. More importantly, it acknowledged that national statistics have not been able to account for their contribution in the form of "domestic work" and "unpaid labour in family ventures". It further stated that women work harder and longer hours than men. By their estimation, women's working days range from 14 to 15 hours including child rearing and household management. The report also stated that the definition of women's work makes it invisible in national statistics and referred to the adoption of more inclusive measurement of women's economic activities to better capture their contribution. It mentioned that the recent use of wider definitions of labour force activities and agricultural work has enabled capturing women's expenditure saving work and women's work in agriculture (although still insufficiently as we shall see later). It further suggested that women's role should not be conceived in economic terms only but should be considered in terms of education, training and job opportunities, income, employment, assets, health, and the role they play in the family and in society. These characteristics, it claimed, are crucial in determining the amount of political power and social prestige a woman is accorded and thus the extent to which she can influence decision-making within the home and in the community.

In outlining the government's progress in terms of the different articles in CEDAW, the report makes several important points relevant to unpaid care work:

- In a section under Temporary Special Measures (Section 2.3.6), the report states that although the Labour Law (prior to its revision in 2006) gives women in formal sector employment three months maternity leave, twice in the life of a woman worker, child care

facilities and exemption from night duty, few women enjoy this benefit. It also mentions NGO initiatives to provide day care centres in collaboration with employers and the establishment of schools for child workers removed from garment factories in collaboration with garment manufacturers, the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), the government, ILO, UNICEF and the NGOs (in the wake of the Harkin's Bill).

- In reference to Article 5 (Sex roles and stereotyping) the report states that true advancement toward equality requires fundamental social and cultural change. Social expectations of the roles to be played by women are still very traditional, giving importance to child rearing and household management. Interpersonal relationships between men and women and practices based on ideas of superiority and inferiority of one sex in relation to another and sex-stereotyping need to be addressed. "To this end the recognition of family life as a vital area, maternity as a social function and the need for shared responsibility of men and women in the upbringing of children, needs to be stressed" (Pg 29).
- With reference to Article 11 (Equal Employment and Training Opportunities) the report stated that despite broadening the measures for labour force activities, the Government has not yet been able to reflect women's unpaid household work in the national accounting of gross domestic product.

The alternative report (BMP, BNWLA and Naripokkho 1997) prepared jointly by members of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association and Naripokkho (who are also members of CEDAW Forum dedicated to the promotion and implementation of the Convention) provided a number of recommendations focusing on specific points of CEDAW in relation to GOB's Third and Fourth Periodic Report in 1997. Although the report provided critical observations on different issues such as trafficking, child prostitution, acid violence, equal wage, maternity leave, political participation etc., it did not address women's unpaid care work explicitly or implicitly.

Unfortunately, the recognition of and the nascent discourse on women's 'unpaid care work' in the combined third and fourth periodic report was gradually lost in the successive fifth periodic report and the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports to the CEDAW Committee.

By the time the combined sixth and seventh periodic report was submitted to the CEDAW Committee in 2009, concerns with gender mainstreaming (following the current government's Vision 2021) and sex disaggregated data had gained primacy. This report focused on the policies and strategies for gender mainstreaming through integration into planning and budgeting as put forward by the NSAPR II and reflected in the Medium Term Budget Framework (MTBF). However, the report admitted the need for greater conceptual clarity among the implementers at the various levels. The other major focus was on how the different ministries have been providing MOWCA with sex disaggregated data, and the publication of the Gender Statistics in Bangladesh 2008 by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and the Database on Women and Children Issues published by MOWCA on the basis of secondary data sources. However, a comprehensive sex-disaggregated data base is still in the process of preparation (GoB 2009b, Pg 12).

While gender responsive budgeting and sex disaggregated data (which informs formulation of a gender responsive budget) are important to bring 'unpaid care work' onto the policy table, the combined sixth and seventh alternative report (CiC-BD 2010) submitted to the UNCEDAW Committee by the Citizens' Initiatives on CEDAW-Bangladesh (CiC-BD) argued that there is little awareness of the importance of sex disaggregated data at the policy level.

Secondly, the government's response to the Committee's observation based on its previous report urging the state to "design and implement comprehensive awareness raising programmes to change stereotype attitudes and norms about the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and society" (GoB 2009b, pg 35), illustrated limited understanding about the concepts. The government cited again the various social protection measures as awareness raising initiatives. It also mentioned encouraging women to participate in "non-traditional" professions (as opposed to teaching and nursing) such as civil service, doctors, engineers, advocates as "a significant measure" of the government in addressing sex roles and stereotypes (although it does not mention how). The only initiative that hints at awareness around redistribution of 'unpaid care work' is the National Education Policy that was in the process of finalization.

In response, the CiC-BD report expressed concern over the persistence of patriarchal values and traditional norms which regulate social relations and shape institutional culture. Thus even while women turn to the state to change these relationships through legal and policy reforms, their implementation is not effective in challenging these deeply embedded values (CiC-BD 2010, pg 9). As an example of its entrenched nature the report noted the resistance in viewing women as a main worker in agriculture rather than the stereotypical view of women as supplementary workers, which results in undervaluation of women's work and hinders access to training, capacity building, market linkages, etc currently targeting only men (CiC-BD 2010, pg 46). This resonates with the need to recognize that actors and institutions who formulate policies are themselves guided by patriarchal norms (Nazneen and Mahmud 2012), which may be one of the reasons that 'unpaid care work' has not emerged as policy concern.

Third, the report included various social safety net measures to ensure the "advancement" of women but the coverage seems to be limited: Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) cards to 750,000 distressed and ultrapoor women providing them with food assistance and development package training; Vulnerable Group Development for Ultra Poor (VGDUP) cards to 80,000 women providing them with access to life skills training on income generation, health, nutrition, rights, etc., subsistence allowance, savings creation, asset transfer, etc; 18 day care centres in Dhaka and five divisional towns; Widow Allowance to 0.9 million women in 2008-2009. No numbers were provided for recipients of the old-age pension scheme. The CiC-BD report however noted that older women have not been considered as a policy priority although the CEDAW Committee took the decision to adopt a general resolution at the 42nd session to protect them from multiple forms of discrimination. If prioritized, this would have the potential to reduce the pressure of elderly care that constitutes a major part of 'unpaid care work' in Bangladesh.

Finally, the conversation around women's work (both in the government and the CiC-BD's report) was very much around increasing participation in the labour force, women's unpaid economic activity (taken as distinct from 'unpaid care work', which is assumed not to contribute to the

economy), and women's work in the informal sector (where a large proportion of women are engaged), which is still not accounted for in the national economy or regulated by the Labour Act (2006). However, the CiC-BD report pointed to the need to question the dominant development paradigm which advocates "growth above all else" discounting "inequality, social dispossession and unsustainability" as inimical to the rights of women who provide the cheap labour necessary for this growth (Pg 10). This may be seen as an entry point to bring 'unpaid care work' into the horizon of women's rights activists and policymakers.

It is in the National Women's Development Policy 2011 that we find the scope for bringing in "unpaid care work".

The background section of the report briefly but clearly points to the fact that "there has been no appropriate evaluation of the intellectual and physical labour women invest in household work" (MOWCA 2011, pg 1). The objectives of the policy includes building women as an educated and skilled human resource; ensuring regular attendance of girls in school; providing social safety nets for ultra poor and allowances for widows, elderly, destitute women; recognizing women's contributions through work in the formal and informal sector to socio-economic development; ensuring accurate reflection of their contribution in national statistics; taking into account agricultural and home-based labour of women in calculating national development and economic growth. In a section on supportive services to facilitate the participation of women in the labour force the policy recognizes the need for providing day care centres for children of working mothers, and crèches in the workplace etc as well as homes and improved facilities for elderly and disabled for women and providing special support to families for rearing children with disabilities which have relevance to the reduction of unpaid care work.

However, it is only in the National Action Plan 2012⁴ (which is currently undergoing revision through consultations with the various ministries) for the implementation of the policy that we find a clear articulation of the issue of 'unpaid care work' echoing the current international discourse around it. In the section on women and economic development, it states,

"Although women's economic activity is increasingly being recognized, there is still a huge population of women whose contribution to the economy through work within the household or outside of the market is not recognized. Particularly the work of housewives is not given recognition by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). Apart from this, women do a lot of work in the community for which they receive no remuneration, which is why it is not considered to be economic activity. Although BBS's definition is based on ILO's definition of economic activity, in practice it is the social definition of work which takes only the work of adult men into account. This is why formal economic value of women's contribution to household work remains unrecognized by BBS. However, there is substantial evidence from research that women's unpaid work is making a positive contribution to the economy. For example, if women's contribution was taken into account as men's then our GDP would have doubled. Time spent in labour would amount to 16 hours for

⁴ The national action plan broadly focuses on gender equality, women's empowerment and women's increased participation in all spheres. Some of the specific aims are pertinent to the issue of unpaid care. Such as ensuring women's fundamental and human rights, focusing on the female child and children with disabilities - this includes the plan to formulate an early childhood policy by 2014, changing attitudes towards discrimination between children at the family and societal level, of course, education and adult literacy, etc.

women, which is far greater than for men. The time has now come to accurately define women's economic activity and re-assess both men and women's contribution to the overall economy and society. It is with the representation of their economic contribution in all official statistics that women will be recognized as "economic citizens"⁵ (MOWCA 2013, pg 52).

This plan includes specific actions against the objectives of recognizing women's contributions through work in the formal and informal sector to socio-economic development; ensuring accurate reflection of their contribution in national statistics; and taking into account agricultural and home-based labour of women in calculating national development and economic growth. It also identifies the ministries (Finance, Planning, Bureau of Statistics, MOWCA, Local Government, Information, Commerce, Labour and Employment) responsible for ensuring calculation of sex disaggregated data, providing statistics on the economic contribution through unpaid work of rural and urban women, evaluating and including the monetary valuation of women's agricultural and household work in all national accounts and communicating women's economic contribution through mass media.

The reason why this perspective and articulation in the action plan is uncannily similar to the international discourse and concerns around unpaid care work is because researchers/ activists who are involved in this current research were part of the series of consultations to formulate the action plan and were successful in getting their rationale across. This specific articulation of "unpaid care work" was missing even in the earlier draft of the action plan. What remains to be seen is whether this perspective is retained in the final version after the consultation with the relevant ministries.

4. Findings from research in Bangladesh

There is hardly any research material available on Bangladesh directly and explicitly dealing with 'unpaid care work'. The use of this terminology is not evident. It has variously been called 'household work' or 'domestic work'. 'Unpaid care' is often subsumed under the term 'unpaid labour', where even if a distinction is made between 'unpaid care work' and 'unpaid economic activities', the 'unpaid care work' aspect of it is generally ignored especially when attributing contribution of women's 'unpaid labour' to the economy. This is not surprising given the discussion so far on the mainstream development narrative which also shape the kind of research that is done (and funded) and the kind of questions that are asked.

As outlined in the methodology this literature review consists of research focused on the following three aspects: 1) examination of official statistics to re-calculate women's economic contribution through unpaid labour; 2) time use studies that focus or comment on women's unpaid labour; and 3) studies reflecting on perceptions and negotiations around unpaid care work.

⁵ Author's translation from Bengali.

4.1 Examination of official statistics to re-calculate women's economic contribution through unpaid labour (including unpaid care work)

According to the 2012 Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh (BBS 2011), 6.06 million of the total working age urban female population (11.6 million) and 19.03 million of the total working age rural female population (36.1 million) belong to the household work category. This is in contrast to 239 thousand of the total working age urban male population (11.6 million) and 923 thousand of the total working age rural male population (36.3 million) in the household work category. Household work is seen as a component of those not in the labour force (along with "students" and "others") and in this regard, women engaged in household work (or "housewives") constitute 79.5% of those not a part of the urban female labour force and 82.5% of those not a part of the rural female workforce.

The assumption here is that those doing only household work do not contribute anything to the economy and are therefore not worth including in the labour force. Several problems have been identified by various authors with this type of categorization. One is that official statistics (for various reasons discussed below) subsume under this category women's unpaid labour in the form of economic activities that are unpaid (for example working in the family farm, enterprise), or paid in kind, or those which constitute expenditure saving activities (Mahmud and Tasneem 2011). Second, women themselves do not recognize their work in the household as economic activity (Mahmud and Tasneem 2011). Third, women's work in the household is multiple and fragmented in nature in contrast to men's that is clearly identifiable, uniform and outside the household. As a result, they cannot articulate their primary occupation and end up identifying themselves as "housewives" (Efroymsen et. al 2007) when questioned by enumerators gathering labour statistics. Either way, this results in a gross exaggeration of the proportion of 'housewives' estimated in the labour force survey. The sheer numbers, as shown above, promote the readily acceptable idea (conforming to the prevalent and preferred patriarchal perspective) that more than half of the women in Bangladesh, whether in the urban or rural areas are *merely* 'housewives' implying that they do not do any work of value, socially or economically. This reductive understanding exacerbates the invisibility of 'unpaid care work' in official statistics and in the perception of policymakers, keeping in mind that it is not only the category of 'housewives' who perform 'unpaid care work', but all women, whether they are part of the labour force or not, including those who fall outside the age group of the 'working population', i.e., below 15 years of age.

The most comprehensive work done till date that directly addresses and demonstrates the contribution of 'unpaid care work' to the economy of Bangladesh is Shamim Hamid's essay on "Non-Market Work and the System of National Accounts: The Case of Bangladesh" (Hamid 1996). Her brief account and critique of the System of National Accounts as it is applied in the Bangladesh, the problems with categorization and enumeration of women's work and her findings from a time-use study and the calculations of the GDP using different definitions for estimating national income, makes it worth discussing her essay elaborately.

Hamid states that while women are major producers of non-market goods and services, mainly through "housework", which enable the effective functioning of the conventional economy, it has been ignored by national statistics which only account for market work. Both the UN System of

National Accounts (SNA) applied in Bangladesh and the national labour force statistics estimates national income by taking into account only market work, and thereby fail to capture the total production of the country by excluding non-market production of goods and services by women. The SNA guidelines followed in Bangladesh dates back to 1953 before the inclusion of subsistence production in the revised version of SNA in 1968. The report of the Commission for National Income, which was established to reconcile the two GDP estimates produced annually by the Bangladesh Bureau of statistics and the Planning Commission (BBS 1992 cited in Hamid 1996) however failed to identify this gap or to suggest production boundaries more appropriate for Bangladesh. It further failed to point out the problem with methodology and definitions of BBS which resulted in sex-biased statistics, despite the fact that this was amply illustrated, according to the author, by the sharp increase in female labour force participation rate between 1985/86 and 1989 in the BBS Labour Force report (1992) with the incorporation of paid and unpaid agricultural work, although it continued to exclude housework.

According to Hamid, the exclusion of housewives, the inactive and children from the labour force following the standard ILO classification of labour force, has a significant impact on the under-numeration of the female labour force. During the time she was writing, 95% of the active age (10-64 years) women were subsumed under the heading "housewives not in the labour force". As a result "housewives" who are capable of generating Tk.150 million daily through non-market activities such as fuel/ water collection, home repair/ maintenance, fishing and care of livestock/ poultry, were excluded from the labour force while the unemployed who generate less than Tk.6 million daily from these same activities were taken into account as a legitimate part of labour force (Hamid, 1988, 1989 cited in Hamid 1996). This led to a substantial underestimation of the labour force and consequently the national income. Hamid stated that although these shortcoming were going to be addressed in the (then) proposed Revised System of National Accounts (UN 1990 cited in Hamid 1996), it still retained a degree of arbitrariness in its production boundaries by including, for e.g., public sector services of "Water, Electricity and Gas" but excluding water carrying services provided by individuals in rural and urban areas where the state fails to provide these basic amenities. Moreover the revised system would continue to place no value to services provided by household members, especially women, through activities such as cooking, cleaning and childcare, categorizing them as production mainly to be excluded (Hamid 1996, pg 10).

Hamid argued for the inclusion of both market and non market work in GDP as it would be a better indicator for highlighting women's contribution to national income and the economic significance of non-market work especially to enable policy makers to allocate production resources to producers commensurate with their contribution to the national income, among other things (measuring development, monitoring changes in allocation of labour resources that reflects actual growth, effectively measuring household income and standard of living and formulating welfare and population policies).

The study disaggregated conventional GDP and re-estimated the national income of Bangladesh by evaluating time allocated by household members to housework and subsistence production using a time use budget study of 62 villages (2653 respondents) in Bangladesh. It found highest participation of women is in work relating to home and family care, in collecting water, food, fuel and fodder, in expenditure saving activities which includes repair and maintenance of dwellings, in livestock and

poultry care, in crop processing and in cottage industry. Men were found to perform fewer types of activities in terms of farm and field work, livestock, marketing, collecting house building material and petty trade. The pattern revealed that women's time is heavily fragmented and involves a wide range of activities to which time is allocated in small units whereas men who perform fewer and more homogenous types of work are able to allocate their time in large blocks. The dual burden of women's market⁶ and non-market work was demonstrated by the finding that while men spend 23% of their time on market work and only 2% on non-market work, women spend 23% of their time on non-market work and another 9% on market work. The study also found that women perform 97% of all housework and the time spent on family. Home care increases as the economic condition of the household improves. Housework also increases with the size of the household but appears to be dependent more on the number of old and adult males in the household (those 10 years and above) than on the number of infants (0-4 years) or children (5-9 years). This, according to the author is an indication of the patriarchal system prevalent in rural Bangladesh.

The major findings from the study are centered around:

1) The contribution and estimation of women's market and non-market work;

- Conventional GDP estimates capture 98% of men's production but only 47% of women's production.
- Women's contribution to national income using conventional estimates is 25% and men's contribution 75%.
- If non-market work (subsistence + housework) is included in national income estimates, women's contribution is 41% and men's 59%.
- Non-market work increases conventional GDP estimates by 29%
- Women's contribution to market work is 25% and to non-market work 97%
- Under the prevalent UNSNA (1953) production boundary definitions 95% of non market production of Bangladesh is excluded
- Under the proposed recommendations of the Revised UNSNA 38% of men's non-market work and only 4% of women's non-market work will be accounted for in GDP estimates

2) Time spent on market and non-market work;

- Of the total time spent on work in rural areas women contribute 53% and men 47% (in the case of children's contribution, boys: 65% to market work and 25% to non-market; girls: 35% to market and 75% to non-market. Elderly contribution show male: 83% market and 19% non-market; elderly female 17% market and 81% non-market)
- Of the total time spent on market work women contribute 25% and men 75%
- Of the total time spent on non-market work women contribute 89% and men 11%

3) Household characteristics of major contributors;

- Women from extreme poor households make the highest contribution in terms of time to market work indicating that poverty is a major incentive for women to enter the labour market
- Women from extended nuclear families contribute the most in terms of time to market work. Since the extended nuclear families comprise lateral generations living together this

⁶ The study defined 'market work' as that comprising agriculture and non-agriculture activities and 'non-market work' as that comprising subsistence activities and housework. 'Work' is thus the sum of market and non-market activities.

indicates that female family support for housework enables women to enter the labour market.

4) Under evaluation of women's work;

- Female to male wage ratios shows that undervaluation of women's skills in all sector of the economy
- Opportunity cost (income that could have been earned in the time spent on non-market work) is 64% of formal wage rate; informal wage rate (wage that would have had to be paid to someone to perform the non-market work that he/she is performing) is 80% of formal wage rate indicating self exploitation of the rural labour force and perceived non-value of non-market work
- Marginal differences in wage rates between women and children indicating that women's skills are valued at par with children
- Men have more leisure time than women

5) Class differentiated data on work

- Women from poor households have more leisure time than women from non-poor household indicating that women from poor household are under- and unemployed in both market and non-market work
- Moderately poor households have the least leisure and are the most diversified in their income sources. This indicates that such households work the hardest and are in a position to make optimal utilization of development programmes
- Extreme poor households spend the most time in gathering and foraging activities
- As economic condition of the household improves men's participation in non-market work decreases while that of women remain static. This indicates that male family labour receives first priority for being replaced by hired help

In 2013, the struggle in Bangladesh is *still* very much around visibilizing women's unpaid labour. The recognition of 'unpaid care work' as something of value to the society and to the economy has to thus first contend with the common perception that dismisses women's 'unpaid labour' as work. According to the time use statistics in Bangladesh Decent Work Profile report, men spend 7.8 hours more on economic activities than women. However, if unpaid household work is added, then it appears that in fact, women work 8.1 hours more than men (Mondal 2012). Thus the recognition of 'unpaid care work' as economic activity has the potential to radically change women's contribution to the economy.

An examination of the official BBS statistics carried out by Mahmud and Tasneem (2011) estimated a female labour force participation rate of 67% compared to the official Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics estimate of 29.8%. The major source of the discrepancy lay in the uneven coverage of women's home-based economic activity and particularly in terms of their unpaid labour contributions. Their paper points to the fact that although women in Bangladesh perform a variety of economic activities ranging from homestead based expenditure saving activities, self employment, seasonal or part time work or work that takes place within the home in the family farm or enterprise, to outside paid work, but much of it remains *socially* unrecognized as work. There are strict perceptions about the division of labour by sex where men are perceived to contribute productive labour while women contribute reproductive and care labour. 'Work' is commonly understood, by men as well as women, as an activity that produces goods and/or services having a

market value, and by extension as generally the activity of adult males. The authors found that the interpretation of 'work' followed by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (at all levels) is closer to the social perception of work, even though the official definition of work or economic activity in Bangladesh supposed to be used by BBS is based on the ILO definition of economic activity that is more inclusive⁷. Moreover BBS enumerators often gather their data from the household head, who has little knowledge about the work women do. The authors believe that this, along with conceptual problems, problems with fielding the survey, enumerator quality and workload lead to, not only the neglect of women's unpaid care work (reproductive and household maintenance activity) but even women's unpaid work in family farm or enterprise, resulting in the designation of a large proportion of women who engage in economic activities as 'housewives' in the labour force.

In the context of Bangladesh where women are generally considered to have a lower social position vis-a-vis men, non-recognition as workers hold grave consequences for women, especially poor women in terms of their own self esteem, value given to them by their family and community and even as citizens of Bangladesh. The authors argue that 'recognition as a worker who contributes to the household and community economies has transformative implications for women's lives. The extent to which work might help to transform the life options available to women – including the extent and terms on which they undertake unpaid care work, depends upon how society and state values this work and accords recognition.'" (Mahmud and Tasneem 2011, pg 6)

4.2 Time use Studies

Time use diaries are an effective tool to measure how different groups of people (men and women, rich and poor, rural and urban) use their time (Budlender and Moussie 2013). In contrast to labour force surveys which focus on the types of work that can categorize the individual as "employed" for inclusion into national accounts, (Budlender 2008) time use surveys record all the activities performed by an individual over a given period of time (day or week), including 'unpaid care work'. Comparisons can then be drawn between time spent on paid, unpaid, non-work and leisure activities that can inform policies.

Time use surveys have been carried out in Bangladesh since the 1970s (Cain 1977, Cain 1991, Cain et. al 1979, Farouk and Ali 1977, Khuda 1980, Khandker 1988, Farouk 1980, Amin 1994). Although all of them have data on time spent by women on 'unpaid care work', it is mostly used to answer questions regarding women's work in terms productive activities, subsistence activities, paid employment and their links with fertility, kinship structures, markets, seasonality, etc. However, what is evident from their work is that women's time is mainly absorbed by 'unpaid care work' for which they are almost exclusively responsible.

Some studies found that time spent on unpaid care work also increases with improved socio-economic status for women, although it declines for men. Studies in rural areas have found that women work longer hours particularly in agricultural households where wealthy landowners are

⁷ ILO definition of economic activity: a person aged 15 years and above, who was either working one or more hours for pay or profit or working without pay in a family farm or enterprise or organization during the reference period (week preceding the interview date) or found not working but had a job or business from which he/she was temporarily absent during the reference period

more likely to hire help for agricultural work rather than for domestic work. In fact women's work burden increases because they have to cook for the hired agricultural workers (Cain et. al 1979, Amin 1997; Amin 2009). On the other hand, Khandker (1988) found that husband's pre-marital wealth and landholdings induce a substitution from work (household work and income generating work) to leisure. He also found that while there is a positive association with women's own wage and labour force participation and a negative association with household work, spouse's wage is negatively associated with women's income generating activities and positively with women's leisure time. This finding would clearly depend on the socio-economic status of the household, with women in poorer households being less able to afford leisure (Ilahi 2000).

Another study (Zaman 1995) found that while women spend most of their time (6-8 hours) on domestic chores (cleaning, meal preparation, fuel collection, childcare, etc.) irrespective of class, there is substantial variation between rich peasant households and small/ landless peasant households during busy and slack season. Women from small and landless families, along with their involvement in field and post-harvesting work also spend more time on domestic chores in busy and slack seasons than women in rich households. The latter spend most time on domestic chores in the intermediate season as they have helping hands in the busy season. Women in middle peasant households spend the same amount of time in domestic chores, across all seasons.

Most have presented difficulties involved in estimating time for different activities as women quite often undertake multiple tasks at a given time (for e.g., minding/ breast feeding child while cooking). This is particularly true of childcare which is generally underreported in the time use studies conducted (Rahman 1986). Children below one year of age remain awake for six hours a day and children between 1-2 years of age remain awake for 10-12 hours a day but most time use studies do not report more than 2 hours spent on child care (Rahman 1986). It is underreported because it is not considered to be work at all by women (Rahman 1986; Zaman 1995) or noted as a joint activity (Ilahi 2000; Amin 2009; Rahman 1986) with other work that takes primacy in reporting and only reported upon careful probing. But since child care is crucial in influencing decisions to enter the labour force, it is an arena that requires further attention.

These time use studies offer sometimes divergent findings as most are small-scale time use studies based on findings of one or a few villages. However, there is regional variation, seasonal variation and variation by socio-economic condition and by age group in the way that women use time that cannot be analysed from these studies. Furthermore, most of the time use surveys are done on the rural population, thus there is large gap in such studies among urban populations. The only study on urban population found by the search indicates certain differences in time use between rural and urban women (Efroymsen et.al 2006) in Bangladesh. This study found that rural women undertake a much wider range of activities than urban women. For urban women especially, helping children with their homework, taking them for private tuition and taking children to school takes up a lot of time, particularly in terms of the latter as mothers often wait at the school till the children are let off to save transport costs.

Most of these studies are outdated given that the time women need to spend on 'unpaid care work' is squeezed by current macro trends of women's increased labour force participation and international migration. Moreover, women's increasing absence in the household is accompanied

with trends of nuclearization of family structures, smaller household sizes and expansion in the proportion of the elderly population that demand women to spend greater time on care work, where such time is already squeezed. These will undoubtedly have an impact on women's time use pattern in the present.

Till very recently, in fact this year (2013), there was a marked dearth of recent large scale time use data that would allow an analysis of the implications for 'unpaid care work', in present day context. In an unprecedented move, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics undertook a time use pilot survey for the very first time in 2012. However, before going into the findings of their draft report, this review will look at the earliest time use studies which are important to understand not only how women use their time, the nature of 'unpaid care work' but also the socio-cultural context that shapes women's work to a large extent.

Any discourse on women's work in Bangladesh is inevitably linked with patriarchy and more often than not, *purdah*. Mead Cain was one of the earliest demographers who worked with time use data in Bangladesh in the 1970s placed patriarchy and *purdah* at the centre of his analysis of the data he collected between 1976-1978 in a single village to write on household and kinship structures, patriarchy and women's work, fertility, son preference, economic activities of children, dependence, mobility and mortality among the elderly, etc. Though critiqued later (see Alam and Matin 1984) and despite his extreme pessimistic view of the unchanging plight of women in the grip of patriarchy and *purdah*, his work is still relevant for understanding the nature of 'unpaid care work' in Bangladesh, revealing patterns of time use similar to later findings by others and raising issues that are still important in analyzing women's 'unpaid care work' particularly in relation to their participation in paid work.

Cain incorporates 'unpaid care work' into what he calls 'home production'⁸ in the context of Bangladesh. Cain (1977) distinguishes between labour "necessary for the maintenance and upkeep of the household, which is directly not productive in the sense of generating income or contributing to the physical capital formation" and labour "necessary for generating income and capital", naming the former as "enabling" in so far as it frees other members of the household to engage directly in activities that are "productive", which is the latter. Women almost exclusively contribute "enabling" labour, which he describes elaborately to indicate the time-consuming nature of such work.

This sexual division of labour is seen as engendered by *purdah* and patriarchy, which is based on "men's control of property, income and women's labour" and works to limit women's work to inside or near the homestead and men's to work outside the home. He emphasized that,

"Purdah is a complex institution that entails much more than restrictions on women's physical mobility and dress. It denies women access to many opportunities and aspects of everyday life and at the same time confers upon them social status as a protected group." (Cain 1977, pg 408)

⁸ These include collecting firewood, housework, shopping, rice processing, food preparation, child care and care of others

The process of socialization towards consolidating sexual division of labour begins at an early age (Cain 1977). Children of both sexes begin work from the age of 6 years, gathering firewood, collecting water, taking care of younger siblings. By the age of 6-7 years, girls are active in sweeping, washing dishes, tending chickens and picking chillies and graduate to rice processing and food preparation by the age of 9-10. Boys on the other hand, start tending cattle, fishing, etc by the age of 8-9 years and start agricultural work by the time they are 11 years old. These engender from a very young age the norms regarding appropriate work roles and responsibilities of males and females.

This division of labour between young boys and girls still hold true, although time invested in these activities have possibly changed due to increased schooling. However, a recent study based on a national survey on adolescents which includes time-use found that while girls and boys are both spending more time in school, girls are more likely to spend less time in studying at home than boys and are significantly more likely to work, mostly in terms of domestic chores, than boys (Amin 2009). Moreover, their workload increases in households where there is presence of a child under 5 years and is reduced where there is the presence of an elderly (65+ years) household member who shares some of the workload. Child time use is “intimately” associated with labour markets for adult and children and where there are such markets, time use for children and adults, particularly mothers and daughters are closely associated (Ilahi 2000, pg 34). Thus while economic incentives may draw women into the labour market, children may be drawn into household work to substitute for their mothers⁹.

Cain is important particularly in addressing the life cycle variations in women’s ‘unpaid care work’. Age stratification is used for patriarchal control of older women over young¹⁰. He finds that total work time for daughters in law is greater than for household heads’ wives and almost double that of household heads’ mothers (Cain et.al 1979). However, this advantage of performing least amount of ‘unpaid care work’ is forfeited in the case of widows who are not integrated into their son’s household or are female heads, in which case their total time spent on work is greater than other mothers. In general, elderly women carry out similar activities to their younger counterparts but spend less time on them. Child care is one of their main activities (Cain 1991).

Within this context he found that average hours of work per day over the whole year is nearly the same for males (8.33 hours) and females (8.29 hours). Women allocated 81% of their labour time (6.68 hours) to “home production”, and found that the locus of such activities, with the exception of collecting firewood, was the homestead. Among income earning activities, he notes that handicrafts, hut construction, animal care and crop production also take place within the homestead, and only wage work (mostly at employer’s house in terms of general housework, rice processing, sewing quilts and other food processing) and other income earning work as taking place outside the home. Almost all of men’s home production time is accounted by shopping for consumer goods, as women do not go to the market because of *purdah* and men across classes allocate little time to child care,

⁹ This study refers to a study in India (Skoufias 1993) where it was found that increase in women’s wages reduces time spent by boys and girls in school, but significantly only for girls.

¹⁰ This relationship between mothers in law and daughters in law are however changing with increased education and engagement of daughters in law in paid work (Kabeer 2012 <http://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/naila-kabeer/decline-in-missing-women-in-bangladesh>) and therefore may not lead to the same finding if more recent time use data were to be analysed.

food preparation, firewood collection rice processing and other types of housework. He further notes that male labour does not substitute for female home production labour, regardless of the level of female income earning activity, that is, there is no evidence that men increase their work time in order to ease work loads of women.

Cain specifically focused on childrearing and work and found that it is difficult to assess the extent to which child care represents a constraint to women's market work, independent of the general system of patriarchy. Child care implies little change in labour time of rich women invested in income earning activities as they do not participate in market work that takes them outside the home. However, he did find some evidence that points to increase in total work time of richer women mainly due to increased child care time and other home production time. Among poor women, he found that, those without children spend on average twice as many hours in income earning activities than poor women with young children, that is the trade off between child care time and income earning time is most pronounced among the poor. As with richer women, child care time, other home production time and total work time are greater for poor women with infants than for those without.

However, he came to the conclusion that it does not follow that demands of child bearing and rearing are a major factor affecting women's engagement with market work. He concluded that "the degree of labor market segregation is not simply a neutral accommodation of women's childbearing role. Rather, market segregation is both a consequence and a means for perpetuating the system of patriarchy" (Cain at. Al 1979, pg 428). Cain identified the systemic nature of patriarchy as a major obstacle to finding solutions to problem of women's vulnerability and lack of income earning opportunities and further assumed that policies seeking to increase women's economic autonomy or protect their rights would face resistance from women as well as men if they imply violating norms of *pardah*.

The increasing levels of women's participation in the labour market despite the centrality of "*pardah*" posed in Cain's work as in others (Amin 1994) has led some to believe that *pardah* is weakening although there is a dearth of evidence to support this claim (Mahmud 1997). Rather, an explanation may be found in terms of women making a choice not between *pardah* and income earning, but as a household strategy striving to seek a balance between women's household production responsibilities and the urgent need to earn an income for their family (Mahmud 1997, pg 239). Patriarchal norms manifest in the prescribed gender roles however limits investments in building women's skills that have market value and thereby negatively influence their participation in the labour force. Policies therefore need to address women's increased labour force participation in a way "that is favorable both to women's efficient time allocation and their general well-being" (Mahmud 1997, pg 259).

Turning now to the most recent time use data available, the review looks at the time use pilot survey conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in 2012. Although the draft report (BBS 2013) does not mention what prompted this decision, BBS officials at a meeting with the BDI team mentioned that there were pressures from women's rights groups for some time to do this. Time use surveys are both time intensive and costly. The decision therefore had to be at least partially donor driven. The mandate of the time use survey to draw out productive activities that are not currently

measured in statistics in order to expand the existing coverage of national income and product accounts and reveal the inter-relationships between peoples' paid and unpaid work as well as the capacity of the people to continue providing unpaid labour in the future is clearly articulated in the report. Details of various activities are covered in the survey other than those discussed below and including "providing community services and help to other households" which is included within our definition of 'unpaid care work'. However, no time was spent on this activity according to the survey. The following tables are all adapted from the BBS time use pilot survey draft report.

Nationally, the average number of hours spent by the 15+ year female population is 4.8 hours compared to 1.3 hours spent by men on "providing unpaid domestic services for own final use within the household" and 0.7 hours and 0.1 hours respectively for "providing caregiving services to household members".

Table 1: Average number of hours spent on 'unpaid domestic services' and 'unpaid care giving services' by sex and by national population and employed population

	Male	Female
Unpaid domestic services for own final use ¹¹		
15+ year population (national)	1.3	4.8
15+ year employed population	1.3	2.8
Unpaid care giving services to household members ¹²		
15+ year population (national)	0.1	0.7
15+ year employed population	0.1	0.7

Employed female population of the same age group were found to spend less time on unpaid domestic services (2.8 hours) but the same amount of time for caregiving. Employed women in rural areas were found to spend on average more time in unpaid domestic services (2.8 hours) than those in urban areas (2.2 hours) but same in unpaid care giving services (0.7 hours). That is, time spent on unpaid care giving services remains constant for women whether as part of the national, employed, rural employed or urban employed population.

It is only when employed women are disaggregated by employment status that some differences are seen in average time spent in providing unpaid care to other household members, ranging from 0.5-0.7 hours on average. Pronounced differences are only found in the case of women engaged in non-agricultural daily wage labour (0.3 hours) and women who are employers (0.0 hours) who either have less time to spare for it or can afford to hire paid careworkers. Men consistently spend negligible time on unpaid care to household members (0.0-0.1 hours) except for men who are regular salaried staff who spend 0.3 hours on it.

However, there are wide differences between the average time men and women spend on "unpaid domestic services" among the employed population (see Table 2). The data shows that both men and women who are self employed in agriculture, unpaid family worker and agricultural day

¹¹ This is considered work in relation to the general production boundary (household) but not in relation to SNA production boundary and includes cooking, cleaning, sweeping, etc. (BBS 2013 draft)

¹² It includes all activities in relation to unpaid services for the care of children and adults, as well as sick and disabled members of the household.

labourer spend more time on “unpaid domestic services” than members of their own sex employed in other categories. They most probably represent the poorer sections of the population who cannot afford paid care services and where men do share domestic responsibilities substantively.

Table 2: Average time spent on “unpaid domestic services” by sex and employment status

	Male	Female
Regular salaried staff	0.9	1.6
Employer	0.8	2.2
Self employed (agriculture)	2.0	3.7
Self employed (non-agriculture)	0.9	2.9
Unpaid family worker	1.3	3.3
Irregular paid labour	0.7	1.8
Day labour (agriculture)	1.8	3.0
Day labour (non-agriculture)	0.9	2.2

More variation in time use is found among women in different employment status than men, with women who are regular salaried staff and who are irregularly paid labour spending the least amount of time. While obvious links may be drawn between the small amount of time spent on domestic services with the demands of time on a woman engaged as a regular salaried staff, explanations for women in irregular paid work require deeper analysis.

Table 3: Average time spent by all (employed and not employed) and by employed population in doing paid work, household work, leisure and other work by sex and urbanity

	All (employed and not employed) 15+ year population		15+ year employed population	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Rural				
Paid Work ¹³	5.8	1.5	6.4	5.0
Household Work ¹⁴	1.5	5.6	1.5	3.5
Leisure	1.2	1.1	1.2	0.8
Urban				
Paid Work	6.4	2.0	7.3	6.0
Household Work	1.0	5.0	1.0	2.9
Leisure	1.9	1.9	1.8	1.5

The distribution of average hours spent in paid work, household work and leisure as shown in Table 3 reveal that while rural women among the employed 15+ population spend 3.5 hours more in paid work than the 15+ population, they spend only 2.1 hours less in household work and also have less leisure time. This pattern is the same but more pronounced among urban women. This reveals the

¹³ Paid work includes work in formal sector, work for household in primary production activities, work for household in non-primary production activities, work for household in construction activities and work for household providing service for income. (BBS 2013 draft)

¹⁴ This includes unpaid domestic and caregiving services

increased work burden on women who are employed. Furthermore women who are employed spent more time on work (paid + household) than men. What the table also reveals is that rural men are more likely to share in household work than urban men.

The survey data also reveals that among the 15+ population, time invested in household work peaks for women in the age group of 30-59 years (6.0 hours), with women in 15-29 years age group (5.4 hours) and 60+ years (3.5 hours), investing comparatively less time. The pattern is similar among the female employed population, but with fewer hours spent on household work. Ever married women were found to spend more time (2.4 – 3.5 hours) in unpaid domestic services than unmarried women (1.5 hours), and currently married (0.5 hours) and separated women (0.7 hours) were found to spend comparatively more time on unpaid caregiving services than unmarried, widowed or divorced women (0.2 hours). The survey also revealed some regional variations in average time use in both types of household work with highest time invested in Sylhet and Rangpur (6.0 hours) and least in Rajshahi (4.9). It was however only in Rajshahi that women were found to spend substantively more average time on paid work (2.1 hours).

Finally data on average hours spent in terms of the activities that are covered in the national accounts (SNA) and those spent in extended SNA which include domestic service and unpaid caregiving service are shown below.

Table 4: Average hours worked by 15+ years population and employed population by status of SNA and extended SNA by sex

	Male	Female
15+ year population (national)		
SNA	6.73	2.19
Extended SNA	1.31	4.80
15+ year employed population		
SNA	7.0	5.6
Extended SNA	1.3	2.8

The data shows that if the coverage under SNA is indeed extended, women’s contribution to the economy will increase as will the GDP of Bangladesh.

4.3 Studies reflecting on perceptions and negotiations around unpaid care work

Recently there have been some studies, mostly qualitative, that have looked at perceptions and negotiations around ‘unpaid care work’.

From the studies it is evident that household work or ‘unpaid care work’ is generally perceived as the responsibility of women even while women are engaging more and more in paid work. A study on community health workers, largely women, (Mahmud and Sultan 2011) shows the general perception to be that:

"The women have to manage both the outside and inside work. They may need to keep domestic help for the household work, those who cannot afford this have more work to do. They have to do the household work at night and outside work during the day." (Mahmud and Sultan 2011, pg 13)

However, there also seems to be a perception that men are sharing some of the household responsibilities, or that they should share (Efroymson et.al 2007, Mahmud and Sultan 2011, Mahmud et.al 2012) and that poorer families are more likely to support sharing of household work as there is little option to pay another for care work (Mahmud and Sultan 2011). Men's contribution is mostly in terms of child care that is not considered as demeaning for a man to do than other types of housework, and in sometimes undertaking some of the household activities when their wives are ill. Social perceptions around gender roles can also inhibit men from helping.

"Though it's a natural rule for everyone to help other, but sometimes it becomes difficult to do because of the environment. If I try to help my wife other people will say that I am not a good man". (Husband of a government health worker who does not help; Mahmud and Sultan 2011 pg 13)

Given this perception, 'gender equality' - a notion that is now quite common among the general population- is rendered meaningless. One woman reflecting on the implication of gender equality in terms of domestic division of labour was quoted as saying:

"Nowadays boys and girls have equal rights. But no matter how much right one has, girls always have somewhat less than boys. Suppose ... both husband and wife work. The boy will come back home and rest. But the girl will never be able to come back home and not do anything. She will come and quickly see to what her husband wants to eat, what her children will eat. If she has parents-in-law, then she will prepare their meals and serve them food. She will not be able to come home and rest." (Huq, Kabeer and Mahmud 2013, pg 36)

This double burden is a cause of discontentment for women and a cause for stress in family relations (Mahmud and Sultan 2011). Redistribution of 'unpaid care work' thus emerges as a major issue of concern.

A report (Kabeer et.al 2013) on findings from a women's work survey in Bangladesh pointed to the fact that women working in the informal sector perform a greater number of domestic tasks than women in formal employment or women who are economically in active. While an explanation may be found in the latter's ability to hire paid care workers, it may also be explained by the fact that they reported being able to rely on their older daughters for help, which women in informal employment were least likely to report.

The study also found that women working outside the home were also most likely to feel being under constant pressure not only because of the harassment they faced in the public domain but also because of their constant attempt to reconcile their paid work and household responsibilities.

This problem of reconciling paid and unpaid work was explored in another study by BRAC (Afsana et.al 1998) which reflected on whether it's Women's Health and Development Programme (WHDP) overburdened the participating women with a view to reducing their burden.

Women included in WHDP were characteristically poor women who were involved in more than one activity under the programme which included an education forum (MS), health organization (GC), rural development organization (VO) and health workers (SS). Most of the women were seasonal daily labourers (for example digging earth) and also spent time on home-based income generating activities. Their involvement in the programme was without remuneration. The study found that women on average spent 15 hours a day on different type of activities a day. On average women spent less than 2 hours a day on child care but women with small children spent as much as 5 hours on it. On the days of the programme meetings, women had to wake up earlier than usual (which is 5am) and hastily complete their household work. If unable to do so, women would shift their responsibilities to their older daughters or mothers in law which created family tension and conflict. Most women would not attend meetings if it caused inconvenience to the family for example leaving a sick child with them or if it affected their direct income earning work. With their triple burden (unpaid care work, programme activity and paid work), women particularly those belonging to large nuclear families with small children spent an inordinate amount of time on household work and child care, undertook income generating activity, curtailed their free time to perform programme activities and were fatigued and exhausted by the end of the day. They would also have to take their children to the meetings if they were unable to leave them with neighbours. Women belonging to joint families faced less stress as they had support with both child care and household work, which was crucial to their participating in outside activity. Curtailing their “free time” had financial repercussions since it was found that there was no conception of relaxation during “free time”. Rather it was found that women used this time for subsistence production and income generating activities which were essential for maintaining the nutrition level of the household and bring in extra income.

This brings to the fore the question of how much more can be squeezed out of women’s time unless unpaid care work can be reduced or redistributed. Space for negotiations around ‘unpaid care work’ may emerge from the competing value attached to her ‘care work’ and her income, if its importance for the well-being of the household is recognized. However, how it is reorganized may have implications for care recipients like elderly women and the female children who are more likely to fill the void than men unless perceptions around gender roles change.

Studies on women’s work in Bangladesh as elsewhere have focused on the strong association between paid work and empowerment. In fact women’s employment in the formal sector has been found to be most consistently associated with various empowerment indicators (Kabeer et. al 2013). Informal sector work, in which most women are engaged in has also been associated with empowerment but to a lesser extent. Furthermore various studies including the ones cited above (Kabeer et.al 2013; Afsana et. al 1998) have shown that the value families give to women’s work is tied to its paid status as well as social visibility. ‘Unpaid care work’ being neither paid nor visible is generally not valued. Some have suggested that violence towards women at the household level may have to do partly with deemed worthlessness of women’s ‘unpaid care work’ (Efroymsen et.el 2007), however research needs to be done on whether women’s paid work and the consequent ‘care crisis’ may also result in violence towards women.

Women are however quite aware of the crisis of care they themselves may have to face in their old age. With preference for smaller families, tendency for nuclearization of households, migration out

of sons and their families for work, distance from their daughters, greater authority of educated daughters in law who may be reluctant to provide the kind of care that they earlier provided to in laws, women worry about who is going to take care of them when they can no longer fend for themselves (Huq et.al 2013). They feel that unless they can offer money (or the prospect of inheriting money/assets), no sons or daughters in law will take care of them.

However, one study (Kabir et.al 2002) suggested that providing support to the elderly is still strong in Bangladesh and the type of support they receive depends on the gender of the recipient as well as the provider. Propensity to receive support was stronger among the rural elderly compared to their urban counterparts. Spouses are a great source of support. However, elderly men were much more likely to be married (and therefore able to receive support from their wives) than women who were mostly widowed. Most live with their children or in the same compound as their children. The elderly were found to receive material support¹⁵ mainly from sons and practical¹⁶ and emotional support from wives, daughters and daughters in law. A higher proportion of men were among those who do not get material support, which is partly a reflection of their gainful employment and asset ownership and partly the cultural expectation that men have to fend financially for themselves. Women are not expected to do so. Among those who do receive material support, men were most likely to say that they received cash, but women were not. While shelter is considered to be a basic need of elderly women, having cash in hand is not. In terms of emotional support, the study found that the lack of spousal support was not compensated by support from children or others among the urban elderly as much as they were among the rural elderly. These attest to the greater vulnerability of elderly women than men and the even more vulnerable status of elderly women in urban areas.

The study also demonstrated the high level of contribution of the elderly in all types of household tasks. Elderly women in rural areas were found to have a greater contribution in all types of household tasks than their urban counterparts. Elderly men in rural areas had greater contribution in terms of washing and drying clothes, looking after others, looking after the house in the absence of others, etc., than elderly urban men, while the latter contributed more in terms of cooking, cleaning, making beds, etc., than their rural counterparts. Apart from domestic chores, the elderly were found to play an important role in taking grandchildren to school, helping them with their studies, taking other household members to the doctor, paying bills, etc.

The relationship between the elderly and the young is one of mutual support in Bangladesh and it has long been so. Without the support of one group, the other group is bound to suffer. The fact that practical support is mainly provided by women, their increased participation in the labour force will undoubtedly put households into a crisis of care in the absence of alternative arrangements.

There have been some interventions by NGOs aiming towards redistributing 'unpaid care work' at the household level. A recent study on BRAC's "Gender Quality action Learning" programme (Mahmud et.al 2012) shows that such interventions may have uneven but positive effect. In their most "successful" intervention areas, men were found to bring water for cooking, sweep verandahs, tidy rooms and arrange clothes, wash clothes, put up mosquito net, help in cooking (chops fish and

¹⁵ Cash, shelter, clothing, food, medical expenses

¹⁶ Getting up from bed, dressing, undressing, moving outdoors, taking medicine and household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, washing, etc.

vegetables), repair earthen floors, make earthen stoves, light stove, clean out cowshed. Men in these areas also cook especially in times of crisis when their wife is away or ill. Men also take care of their children in terms of bathing and dressing children, taking them to school, taking wife and children to doctor when they are ill. In the “less successful” areas men performed fewer of these tasks and mostly when wives are unable to and never in terms of cooking. These findings were stark contrast to non-intervention areas, where focus group discussions with male and female community members revealed that not only is all household work done by women, women’s work is not valued by men. Participants claimed that men do not do any work even when their wife is ill. They would rather get another woman from outside to do the work instead of doing it themselves. Of the few men who do work under these circumstances are very ill tempered about it. Female participants further stated that not only do men not contribute to household work, they forcibly take whatever money their wives earn through their income generating work.

Finally, the expectation that women are exclusively responsible for ‘unpaid care work’ seems to be held even by Bangladeshi diasporas and is thus an issue that transcends national borders. A report commissioned by OXFAM UK’s Poverty Programme (Robson 2012) explores the relationship between caring, earning and poverty and how it is affected by ethnicity with the aim to increase understanding and evidence of barriers to paid work, tailor services to their needs and to promote economic independence among BAME (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic) women in the north-east of UK. This report found that there were clear gender role expectations in these communities, but whereas African women received support from husbands for childcare, Bangladeshi and Pakistani women bore the entire responsibility of childcare, care of adults and housework. Lack of access to adequate or affordable child care was identified as the main barrier to paid employment, education and training. While African families had networks with ‘foster families’ to support them with childcare, it was found that Bangladeshi women were far more isolated and could only rely on relatives or friends once in a while. It also found that for Bangladeshi and Pakistani women, caring for adults (usually in laws) was their responsibility and for this they received neither support nor recognition despite undergoing considerable strain in doing so. Further there was an expectation that they would provide care for the family without any kind of external support.

5. Conclusion

In Bangladesh, the discourse around women’s empowerment and rights and gender equality has largely been linked to women’s engagement with paid work with good reason. Given that strong patriarchal norms, socially entrenched gender roles and lack of economic opportunities colluded to exclude women from participating in the workforce and confine them to household, women’s economic participation is seen as a conduit to their empowerment. As a result ‘unpaid care work’ has been more or less ignored or seen as an obstacle and not generally perceived to be a contribution to the economy. If it has been addressed at all in policy or in research, the issue of ‘unpaid care work’ has mostly been raised as a background to or in relation to paid work.

The above policy review reveals that women’s paid economic activity is only partially recognized in policy. Perceiving and including even women’s unpaid labour (work in the family enterprise, expenditure saving work, etc) as an economic activity is an ongoing struggle. In terms of care work,

paid care work has received some recognition with regard to international migration but not with regard to domestic labour policy. 'Unpaid care work' is primarily not recognized except in a minimal way mostly in terms of facilities that accommodate women's caregiving responsibilities so that women can engage more fully in paid work. That too though is limited to women employed in the formal sector, excluding the vast majority of women in the informal sector. A few initiatives such as child care facilities, crèches and old age homes have the potential of redistributing 'unpaid care work'. There is however very little, if any understanding of the cross cutting nature of 'unpaid care work' with the issues that are of major concern to the government, for example, the various MDGs. Furthermore, while some policies do reflect the need to change the gendered division of labour within the household, patriarchal attitudes persist among the policymaking actors and institutions themselves.

Research plays a vital role in generating evidence to change the perception and understanding of policymakers regarding 'unpaid care work'. The dearth of research that focuses on 'unpaid care work' evident from the review on research provides a strong case for new research to be conducted on this issue. However, another approach to gathering information about 'unpaid care work' could be to ask questions on the implications on 'unpaid care work' when doing research on migration, health, demography, rights, children's work/ child labour, elderly, social protection and a whole range of other issue which all have cross cutting concerns with unpaid care work. Researchers in diverse fields can then contribute to the discourse of 'unpaid care work' while pursuing matters of their own interest. The trick is to ask the right questions. The authors of the research on food price volatility (Hossain, King and Kelbert 2013a) concerned with social protection policies stated that while the fact that women are increasingly engaging in paid work to deal with the increasing food prices may impel research on implications for women's empowerment and labour force participation,

"It is less likely to raise questions about who does the unpaid care work that keeps families fed, clothed, clean, and generally looked after when they are young, old, or sick, because such activities are still largely invisible to development policy. However, care work draws on time, effort, resources, and relationships, usually of women, and rapid food price rises tend, on average, to increase the level of care work required to achieve the same level of human development and wellbeing". (Hossain, King and Kelbert 2013a pg 9)

It is being able to recognize links with 'unpaid care work' that can impel research to contribute to its discourse and therefore to policy formulation. Therefore there is a need to train ourselves to see through the lens of 'unpaid care work'.

Nevertheless, spaces have opened up in the policies for 'unpaid care work' to be recognized and addressed. The government has not been unresponsive to demands from international quarters for example to produce sex disaggregated data which can provide the fodder needed to bolster the arguments for bringing 'unpaid care work' into the policy arena. Institutions such as the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics have been influenced to conduct a time use survey which can enable the measurement of women's engagement in 'unpaid care work'. Thus international discourses and reports have proved to be effective in creating the scope for the discourse of 'unpaid care work' to emerge locally. Furthermore, the consultative processes with citizen groups, women's rights groups, NGOs, etc. by which the government has undertaken certain policy formulation or action plans for

implementing policies has played an important role as we have seen in the case of The National Action Plan 2012 for women's development.

The efforts till date have been mostly piecemeal ones. But the changing social, economic and demographic context of Bangladesh is going to force our hand to come up with a comprehensive policy on 'unpaid care work'. This will require at the very outset a greater awareness on how 'unpaid care work' cuts across various developmental agendas. It will also require an understanding of child time-use, given that women's unpaid care responsibilities are often substituted by girls' time, which can have lasting negative impact on gender equality and empowerment. Furthermore, there has to be a change in patriarchal attitudes that dominate how women's work is perceived and valued both at the societal as well as the policy level. Finally, taking lessons from the food price volatility research (Hossain, King and Kelbert 2013), any scheme should be tested to see whether it recognizes, reduces or redistributes care work and whether it increases or decreases the drudgery involved in women's unpaid care work. Time use studies should be incorporated into household surveys to assess the importance of unpaid care work. Finally policymakers should identify and support the needs of substitute caregivers.

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