Towards a Double Boon: The Case for a Fair Share of Care: Workshop report

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The final workshop of the IDS project ‘Balancing unpaid care work and paid work’, part of the DFID-IDRC-Hewlett Foundation funded Growth and Equal Opportunities for Women (GrOW) programme, was held at IDS on 9th November 2017. The workshop, titled ‘Towards a Double Boon: The Case for a Fair Share of Care’, brought together a range of participants across both academia and practice, including renowned feminists Diane Elson, Ruth Pearson, and Devaki Jain, as well as representatives from DFID, IDRC, Oxfam, and ActionAid. The workshop consisted of a full day of presentations, discussions, and activities, with lively engagement and debate amongst participants on key issues of care, paid work, and women’s empowerment. Project outputs – including national reports, working papers, and programmatic notes - were distributed among the participants, along with previews of multi-media outputs such as the audio slideshow, infographic, and animation. A near-complete draft of the Global Synthesis Report was also circulated among participants prior to the workshop.

The day’s events were kick-started by project lead Deepta Chopra, who provided a brief introduction to the ‘Balancing unpaid care work and paid work’ project and the four countries of the study (India, Nepal, Rwanda, and Tanzania), followed by a discussion on the research approach and mixed-methods design. As Deepta highlighted, “the mixing of methods has been a unique part of the project – a strength – which allowed us to re-evaluate our methods, adapt our tools, as well as triangulate our findings.” Members of the IDS project team then presented key findings on women’s double burden of care work and paid work from across the four countries, followed by a discussion on the low-paying, insecure, and arduous nature of women’s paid work as well as the drudgery of their care work. Speaking to the complexity of women’s double burden, project team member Naomi Hossain pointed out that “women value their paid work because it enables them to spend on their children, but it is exactly their paid work that is undercutting the value of their care work for their children.”

Indeed, one of the key issues highlighted by the project findings and discussion was the nature and extent of women’s physical and emotional depletion, with adverse impacts on women’s health and productivity, the quality of care for their children, and the overall well-being of women and their families.
However, one of the main takeaways from the discussion was that drudgery and the resultant depletion faced by women and their families are not inevitable or a necessary consequence of women’s engagement in paid work. Rather, lack of public services and opportunities for decent work are two most detrimental factors affecting both the social organisation of care and women’s experiences of paid work. These factors were determined as crucial for future research and advocacy, with participants committing to actively share the findings of the research with their professional and personal networks as well as integrate them into their own work on issues of women’s economic empowerment.