

## I. UNPAID WORK – SOME BASIC FACTS, APPROACHES AND DISCUSSIONS

### WHAT IS UNPAID WORK?

Unpaid work can be understood to comprise all productive activities outside the official labour market done by individuals for their own households or for others. These activities are productive in the sense that they use scarce resources to satisfy human wants.

Housework, care for children and for sick and old people, do-it-yourself jobs and voluntary community work or work in political or societal organizations, subsistence agriculture, help in family businesses, building the family house, maintenance work, transport services etc have one thing in common: they could, at least in theory, be replaced by market goods and paid services. This so-called 'third person criterion'<sup>1</sup> distinguishes unpaid work from consumption and from time and energy invested in one's own education (Bruyn-Hundt, 1996; p. 26). For the same reason, personal activities like sleeping and leisure activities fall outside the definition of unpaid work. Unpaid work consists of time used as an input (often together with the use of purchased goods and/or consumer durables used as capital equipment) in non-market production processes; unpaid work is part of a particular 'mode of provision' for human needs (Gershuny, 1983 and 1988).

If it is true that unpaid work is work that, in principle, also could be done in the context of an alternative 'mode of provision' by a paid worker, then, by implication the monetary value of unpaid work can be imputed. (The question of the value of unpaid work will be dealt with in Section 3). It is hardly thinkable, however, that all work would be paid, or - what amounts to the same thing - that unpaid work would not exist. Unpaid work is an essential element in the social fabric and an important factor for the quality of life.

Defining what unpaid activities will be taken on board in our discussion in this paper and what will be left out involves some brain-twisting decisions. For instance, using a lawyer's perspective, Raymond Le Guidec has discussed work done in prisons as well as the work-component in vocational training as forms of unpaid work (Le Guidec, 1996). These forms of unpaid work would not pass the economist's third person criterion test: neither the prisoner nor the trainee could hire somebody else to perform that work. In addition, work in prisons is not freely chosen employment.

Furthermore, most literature on unpaid work leaves out compulsory military service. Apparently, only professional soldiers should be viewed as people who 'work' (their salaries are included in the national accounts!) while conscripts are merely objects of a higher strategy. Oddly enough, when the idea of compulsory social service is discussed, nobody would deny that it is work - vital work - that is at stake.

The diversity of activities caught under the heading of 'unpaid work' makes policy discussions of unpaid work very abstract. Most authors using this general label focus on a particular type of unpaid work in a particular context, e.g. women's domestic work or voluntary caring work outside the home. To broaden the concept of work by including unpaid work and consider the policy implications, it is indispensable to discuss what forms of unpaid work are relevant in specific policy discussions.

### HOW MUCH UNPAID WORK IS DONE AND BY WHOM?

The skewed distribution of work, paid and unpaid, between women and men, was made visible in the Human Development Report 1995. (UNDP, 1995, Ch. 4). A sample of 31 countries studied indicated not only that of the total burden of work, women do more than men (53% in developing countries and 51% in industrial countries), but also that of women's

<sup>1</sup> In a recent contribution Cynthia Woods has exposed some problematic implications of this criterion. See also par. 2.2. See also: Himmelweit (1995).

Forward-looking Strategies, adopted at the end-of-decade conference in 1985<sup>16</sup>.

An interesting post-Women's Decade event was the Expert Group Meeting on Social Support Measures, held in Vienna, 14-18 November 1988, in preparation of the 33rd session of CSW (E/CN.6/1989/6 and Addendum). This meeting especially highlighted the interrelationship between sex equality at the workplace and the sharing of domestic and parental responsibilities and emphasized that only combined strategies - aimed at both the sphere of unpaid work and the world of paid employment - would be successful in changing the uneven distribution of unpaid work.

The same double approach to unpaid work as a question of private redistribution and public intervention can be found in the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, September 1995). At the Beijing conference, that two-fold approach in itself did not arouse much debate or controversy, although some diplomatic fine-tuning was necessary to arrive at a wording that reflected the respective roles of governments, NGOs and private citizens<sup>17</sup>. At Beijing, the focus was on the measurement and valuation of unpaid work and its incorporation in national accounts. In the end, a text on that specific aspect could only be adopted as part of a package-deal<sup>18</sup> that embraced a wider framework of recommendations on the role of women in development, improvements in

statistics and gender analysis and making visible and changing the unequal distribution of paid and unpaid work between women and men.

In conclusion, the outcome of the Beijing Conference implied that the unpaid work of women had to be more recognized and had taken into account in the formulation of socio-economic policies, but it did not spell out how that goal could be accomplished other than by better measurement and statistics.

### UNPAID WORK AS A SOCIAL ISSUE

As can be concluded from the previous section, the Women's Branch of the UN (DAW, CSW, and four World Conferences) have been quite active on unpaid work as a substantial policy issue. The 'social sector' of the UN, especially the Commission for Social Development, has in comparison been lagging behind. Mostly, the question of unpaid work was hidden under the heading of 'the family'. This perspective did not bring any new focus of analysis. Such a novelty had to wait for the preparatory process of the Social Summit<sup>19</sup>. The final outcome of this process was a section in the Programme of Action on 'A broader recognition and understanding of work and employment' (Ch.3E).

The focus originally was the drive to extend the concept of work to include unpaid work, mainly to recognise all sorts of 'social activities' like volunteer work and 'semi-employment' that often replace employment for those 'not that employable' - a typical welfare approach. The background of this outcome was the dialogue between those who advocated full employment for all as a feasible goal, and those who thought that goal neither feasible nor desirable and promoted recognition of all sorts of 'useful activities' as work or employment in a broader sense. The first group clearly won the debate. This can be seen in the rather vague contents of the recommendations concerning these 'useful activities'. When the discussion became influenced by the inputs from women's NGOs and femocrats inside governments, both the recognition of (women's) unpaid

<sup>16</sup>Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, para 121. Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, held in Nairobi, 15 - 28 July 1985. See UN (1995).

<sup>17</sup>See e.g. the Platform for Action, para's 173 g and 179 c. Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 4-15 September 1995). A/CONF/177/20.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Platform for Action, para's 156, 165, 204 b, 206 e, f, g, and 209. Par. 206 f sub (i) acknowledges that the unpaid work done in agriculture, particularly in subsistence agriculture, and other types of non-market production activities are since the 1993 revision included in the SNA. Cf. Vanek (1996), p.124.

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work and the demand for more flexibility in allocating time over paid and unpaid work were also incorporated under this heading. In addition, Commitment 5 of the Copenhagen Declaration paid tribute to the principles of equal partnership and shared responsibilities of women and men and other familiar women's demands. Although much energy of delegations at the Social Summit had to be allocated to the controversy of unpaid work and its measurement in the national accounts<sup>20</sup> - a debate that in fact was a dress rehearsal for the Beijing World Conference on Women that was to take place some months later - the real novelty was this broadening of the very concept of productive work.

The outcome of the Social Summit implied that unpaid work and its relationship with paid employment had to be taken into account into socio-economic policy-making. The Summit, however, did not formulate the agenda for the implementation of such a vision.

### **THE UN AND UNPAID WORK AFTER 1995**

After the Copenhagen Summit and the Beijing Women's Conference, the issue of unpaid work reappeared at the agendas of various inter-governmental gatherings, though the outcomes of these discussions up to now can only be characterized as uneven and fragmentary.

#### **Commission on the Status of Women**

The Commission on the Status of Women in its 40th session (1996) discussed child and dependent care, including sharing of work and family responsibilities. Both the Secretariat's report (E/CN.6/1996/5) and the Agreed Conclusions 1996/3 (E/CN.6/1996/15, p. 14 ff) covered familiar ground, by focusing on increasing the role of men (esp. via education), reforms in labour and social security legislation and the introduction of a family support system.

<sup>20</sup>In contrast to the Beijing Platform for Action, the texts adopted at Copenhagen Summit do not give evidence that delegates were aware of the 1993 changes of the SNA.

At its 41st session (1997) the CSW took up the theme Women in the Economy. The Secretariat's preparatory documentation (E/CN.6/1997/3) and the panel discussion and dialogue held during this session (E/CN.6/1997/9, p. 44) paid only meagre attention to unpaid work. The Agreed Conclusions 1997/3 (ibid., p. 12 ff) only touched upon the issue of measurement and valuation and the sharing of unpaid and paid work between women and men.

#### **Commission for Social Development**

The Commission for Social Development, in charge of the follow-up to the Social Summit, discussed the employment issue as its priority theme at its 35th session (1997).

Whoever might have expected here a further discussion of unpaid work as an element in economic policy-making, would have been very disappointed. Although the agenda contained an explicit reference to 'a broader recognition of work and employment' (Ch.3E of the Copenhagen Plan of Action), the Secretariat's preparatory document (E/CN.5/1997/3), mainly prepared by the ILO<sup>21</sup>, almost ignored this theme, as did the panel discussion held during this session. The EU Presidency criticized this omission in their intervention in the debate and remarked that 'these questions clearly deserve to be further discussed - not only from the angle of conceptual clarity, but also for its practical relevance in the framework of job creation and the fight against long term exclusion from the labour market of the most vulnerable groups'. However, the result was only one paragraph in the resolution that held the Agreed Conclusions (E.CN.5/1997/11, res.35/2, para 24) - a ceremonial compensation that did not involve anything new.

#### **Statistical Commission**

<sup>21</sup>The document leaned heavily on the ILO World Employment Report 1996/97, which almost completely left out unpaid work.

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***and evaluating progress' (E/CN.3/AC.1/1996/R.4, Appendix). The report of the Commission's Task Force on National Accounts (E/CN.3/1997/12) does not mention future activities concerning the measurement and valuation of unpaid work or its incorporation in national accounts or satellite accounts. There is a (rather vague) reference to the start of the process of updating the 1993 System of National Accounts, however (ibid. para 33).***

## IV. POLICIES WITH RESPECT TO UNPAID WORK

For the purpose of social and economic policy-making it may be useful to explore the boundaries between unpaid work on the one hand and commercial and public servicing on the other. How is it decided whether a given human need is fulfilled by unpaid work or by goods and services bought in the market or supplied by the government? The *New Home Economics* (cf. Becker, 1965) would answer that that would depend on taste (i.e. non-economic preferences), relative prices, income levels, opportunity costs of time used for unpaid work etc.

Mainstream economic literature does not mention, however, that behind these well-known factors there is also government intervention which influences availability and profitability of services. The choices people make between unpaid work and goods and services bought in the market or from the community, are also influenced by economic policies regarding infrastructure, the encouragement of economic growth and development, the issuing of business licenses, vocational training, price regulation, taxation, subsidies and the like. Economic policies, so far, have not been studied for their explicit or implicit effects on the boundary between paid and unpaid work. Only the criticism by feminist economists on the gender effects of structural adjustment policies has initiated that type of analysis (cf. par. 4.4.3).

Mostly, the economic policies indicated above are discussed with a view to stimulating aggregate demand, economic growth and employment, or because of the inherent positive effects of such public services as education, health and the like. In addition, specific labour market policies are directly aimed at combating unemployment (e.g. Langmore and Quiggin (1994), Ch.8 and 10 respectively). Only very seldom do such policies also explicitly intend to influence the world of unpaid work; the obvious example being childcare.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup>One could also think of subsidies to NGO's that organize voluntary services, or tax exemptions for allowances received for 'unpaid' work. An interesting example is a recently announced measure of the

In other words, the boundaries of paid and unpaid work are influenced by market forces determining the range of the private service sector and by political and budgetary factors determining the range of the public service sector. The choice between paid and unpaid work and profitability/political feasibility of social servicing are two sides of the same coin. The way public policies are affecting this choice is the focus of this section.

### TWO TYPES OF PUBLIC POLICIES WITH RESPECT TO UNPAID WORK

In the literature there are only scattered remarks on the relevance of public policies for unpaid work. These policies can be divided into two groups:

- *Specific or direct policies* are explicitly aimed at unpaid work. They might be recognizing it or making it more visible; influencing the quantity of unpaid work done in society or changing the distribution of unpaid work among different groups in society.
- *Indirect or 'mainstreamed' policies* are not designed and implemented with a view to affecting unpaid work as a primary policy objective, but they have implicit effects on unpaid work. Sometimes influencing unpaid work is included as an explicit secondary objective of a policy. Mostly, however, mainstream socio-economic policies have implicit effects on unpaid work.

In the following paragraphs of this section these two types of policy-making with respect to

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Netherlands government to subsidize firms that offer 'home services' such as cleaning and maintenance work. The stated policy goals of this measure are not only combating both unemployment and moonlighting, but also supporting the two-career family and the elderly to carry out their domestic drudgery (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 1997).