



UNITED NATIONS



Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean  
Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean

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Expert group meeting on  
unpaid work and gender in the Caribbean  
8 August 2013  
Kingstown, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

LIMITED  
LC/CAR/L.422  
21 October 2013  
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

## **REPORT OF THE EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON UNPAID WORK AND GENDER IN THE CARIBBEAN**

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## **A. DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. There is a need for more advocacy and public awareness programmes to increase knowledge of the value of women's unpaid work and its contribution to national development. There is also need for capacity building to expand technical skills to undertake time-use surveys and to promote more evidence based policymaking in respect of this issue.
2. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) should support member States' efforts to conduct national time-use surveys since these could assist in effectively addressing major socioeconomic issues related to gender equality, such as social security gaps, income gaps and care policies.

## **B. ATTENDANCE AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK**

### **1. Place and date**

3. The expert group meeting on unpaid work and gender in the Caribbean was convened by the ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean on 8 August 2013 in Kingstown, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

### **2. Attendance**

4. The meeting brought together senior officials from the offices responsible for women's advancement and policies designed to ensure gender equity in countries of the wider Caribbean, including some of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC) member States. The following CDCC member countries were represented: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. Associate member countries were represented by Montserrat and Turks and Caicos Islands. The following organizations and agencies also participated: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Organization of American States, Red Thread Guyana, Planned Parenthood Association, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines National Council of Women, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines National Labour Congress, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Save the Children Fund, Soroptimist International, United Nations entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and the Young Women Christian Association.

### **3. Agenda**

1. Opening of the meeting
2. Objectives and organization of the meeting (adoption of the agenda)
3. The measurement of unpaid work through time-use studies
4. Undertaking a time use study amongst grassroots women from Red Thread- Guyana
5. Quantifying women's unpaid work: The Latin American experience
6. Importance of time-use studies in national development policies
7. Conclusion and recommendations
8. Closing remarks

## C. SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

### 1. Opening of meeting

5. The Director of ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean welcomed the participants to the expert group meeting on unpaid work and gender in the Caribbean and thanked the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for hosting the meeting.

6. She stated that the importance of fully recognizing the economic contributions of all forms of productive work, both paid and unpaid, has been identified as a critical precondition for achieving gender equality. Without the measurement of all productive work, the work performed by women is significantly underestimated. Furthermore, the economic value of this work is not recognized and as a result it is not reflected in the system of national accounts.

7. She acknowledged the fact that the Caribbean subregion faces several challenges in developing the necessary policies to accelerate the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment at the country level. She also noted that no country within the subregion had yet undertaken a full scale national time-use survey. There was therefore a severe lack of time use statistics.

8. She suggested that it was time for authorities in the Caribbean to begin the regular conduct of time-use surveys in order to understand how unpaid work contributes to the national economies. This might also result in more inclusive development and gender equity. Use of time-use statistics could also assist in effectively addressing social security gaps, income gaps and care policies. Time use statistics and studies can also be used to measure the contribution of women to gross domestic product (GDP), to provide the information necessary to promote gender sensitive policy, and to change the perception of women's work and their role in the society and their contribution to national production.

9. The Minister of National Mobilization, Social Development, Family, Gender Affairs, Persons with Disability and Youth of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines noted that there are still many countries where gender inequality persists and women and girls continue to face discrimination in accessing education and job opportunities. He advocated change in social and economic policies to address these inequities. He suggested that access to and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) could help to change the thinking behind gender related issues and thus to empower citizens.

10. The Honourable Minister informed the meeting that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines had made significant strides in reducing levels of gender inequality. He acknowledged continuing challenges in cases where society tends to dictate career choice by sex, but even in this respect there has been progress. He noted that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines had already taken several initiatives to address any remaining gender inequity in the ICT sector and to empower women and girls. Such initiatives include "one laptop per child" and "Girls in ICT Day". For the past two years, some 500 girls at the secondary school level in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines have been exposed to on the job training programmes in both public and private sector organisations in order to encourage their pursuit of careers in ICTs. The Honourable Minister reported the success of this initiative, and congratulated the Telecommunications Department for a job well done.

11. He concluded by encouraging the participants of the meeting to continue to empower all citizens to use information and communication technologies. He exhorted participants to embrace the technology as a tool to facilitate change.

## **2. Adoption of the agenda**

12. The provisional agenda was adopted.

### **3. The measurement of unpaid work through time-use studies**

13. The Social Affairs Officer of ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean provided an overview of the measurement of unpaid work through time-use surveys and presented a draft background paper on these issues. She stated that traditional statistical methods focus mainly on the formal market economy and if countries are to attain a comprehensive account of the work and employment sector, recognition must be given to those who fall outside of this formal market economy.

14. She noted that time-use surveys are among the most unique methods for collecting data on economic activities in the non-market sector. They are used to collect information to measure the time spent by persons performing a range of activities including paid, domestic, voluntary and leisure. She described unpaid work as being largely invisible, notwithstanding the domestic services provided within the household. She noted that the majority of unpaid domestic work is performed by women in support of their families. It is estimated that women commonly work an hour or more a day than men, when both market and household work are taken into account. This includes the preparation of food, washing and other laundering activities, home maintenance and care of children and sick members of the family. It also includes activities in the agricultural sector, such as the cultivation of food crops, fetching water and fuel and taking care of livestock.

15. She explained that the effort to measure unpaid work was with a view to quantifying it and making it more visible in national accounts. Time-use surveys can also help to determine how family members allocate their time and whether or not they carry out simultaneous activities, as well as identify the gender dimension of the intra-household allocation of time.

16. She described a variety of methods which can be used to conduct time-use surveys. These include interview methods, the self-reporting diary, and the observation method. The Social Affairs Officer emphasized that each method presented its own challenge in terms of the cost implications and more importantly the quality of the data collected. She concluded by encouraging participants to use the opportunities presented in the context of the post-2015 development process to garner the political will and the resources needed to make time-use surveys a regular exercise in the region.

17. The representative of Barbados questioned the methodology for quantification of unpaid work to facilitate its inclusion in the GDP, and sought clarity on the correlation between paid domestic work and unpaid domestic work.

18. A representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines called for more programmes to raise public awareness about the value of unpaid work to promote wider knowledge of its contribution to national development. In this regard more advocacy and capacity building activities were suggested, with a view to raising awareness, to improving the skills to undertake time-use surveys and to analyse data collected for more evidence based policymaking.

### **4. Undertaking a time-use study amongst grassroots women from Red Thread- Guyana**

19. The Community Organizer of Red Thread Women's Development Organization in Guyana made a presentation on the conduct of a time-use study among grassroots women in Guyana intended to document how women spent their time at home. The study provided an opportunity for grassroots women to not only define their work but to make it more visible at the national level.

20. She reported that the diary method was used in the time-use surveys, which was conducted in fifteen communities, on the coast and the interior. Women across different ethnic groups completed their own diaries detailing their daily work by making a note of everything they did from the time they got up in the morning to the time they went to bed at night. The women also recorded how long it took them to do each task. Each woman was asked to record their activities for two days; a weekday and a day on the weekend. This process was used to determine whether the workload on the weekend was different from that of a week day.

21. The Community Organizer stated that the reason for conducting the survey was due to the fact that women's care work was not valued as real work and is referred to as non-productive. She reported that one hundred and one women between 17 and 70 years of age participated in the survey, the majority of whom were housewives; others were self-employed women, domestic workers, teachers, security guards, sales clerks, bartenders, cashiers, hair dressers, sex workers and nurses. About half the women surveyed were single mothers and/or grandmothers and the other half were women with husbands or "live-in child-fathers".

22. Among the challenges encountered by the researchers were the need to gain the confidence of the women, hostility from male partners, racial fears and the need for extra effort to assist those women who were unable to read or write. In addition, the researchers often assisted the women with their housework or with babysitting to build trust with the women and to give them the time needed to complete the diary. The researchers also had to travel long distances to reach the women, sometimes under very dangerous conditions.

23. The findings from the study showed that women have a lot in common across race, particularly the fact that women spent little or no time looking after themselves, that their workload was largely dependent on the size of their families and that there were limited facilities available to assist them with their work. It was also found that women worked very long hours; often as many as twenty to twenty two hours per day and that they regularly multitasked. The Community Organizer reported that the initiative in conducting these time-use surveys was significant for many reasons. Most importantly, it was the first large scale study of the unpaid work performed by women in Guyana involving grassroots women, allowing them to give visibility and value to the work they perform on a daily basis to support their families and contribute to the national economy.

24. The meeting participants congratulated the Community Organizer for the work undertaken by Red Thread. There were enquiries made regarding the national impact of the project. The meeting received further information on the project results, which included its success in the building of relationships across different ethnic groups in Guyana. The Community Organizer also noted that this project had other residual effects, such as increased visibility for the Red Thread at the national level and a significantly increased number of clients seeking assistance from this Organization.

25. The representative from the Bahamas thanked the Community Organizer for her presentation and indicated her intent to invite the Red Thread to conduct a workshop to raise awareness among Bahamians on the benefits of time-use surveys.

## **5. Quantifying women's unpaid work: The Latin American experience**

26. The Associate Social Affairs Officer in the Division of Gender Affairs of ECLAC headquarters delivered a presentation on the Latin American experience in measuring and quantifying unpaid work. She identified gender systems as the relationships established between women and men in a given location, which defines the tasks, attitudes, and different responsibilities for men and women. In many instances these assignments involve inequalities. She defined the concept of work as any human activity

which aims to produce a good, be it material or immaterial, for survival and well-being. She also identified paid and unpaid work as the two types of activity that are relevant for the analysis of production in a given society.

27. She identified the sexual division of labour as a concept that defines the distribution of activities by sex. She explained that an essential indicator used to measure working time from a gender perspective can be defined as “total work time = paid work time + time unpaid domestic work”. She noted that when one adds both work and unpaid work time, the total time allocated to work inside and outside the home is greater for women. She asserted that unpaid work should be measured to show the importance of women’s contribution to society and the economy, with a view to promoting more informed decisions and gender-effective public policies. Statistics on time-use and unpaid work have therefore become an important tool in the measurement of housework as well as unpaid and volunteer work of both men and women. They are also useful for the measurement of paid work in the informal sector, including the household sector.

28. Information was provided on the distribution of total working time (paid and unpaid) performed by men and women in a number of Latin American countries using time series analysis, including the urban/rural differences. The variables which affect time-use were also identified, including factors such as the size of the household, the age distribution of household members and employment status. Study results demonstrated that unpaid work represented as much as 23 per cent of GDP in Nicaragua, 23.7 per cent in Mexico, 26 per cent in Chile and Uruguay and 32 per cent in El Salvador.

29. The Associate Social Affairs Officer provided comprehensive information on the use of time-use data in Latin America to aid in the improvement of a range of national gender equity and social protection initiatives, including policy formulation, satellite accounts, national care systems and modifications in national health funds to integrate uninsured spouses and cohabiting spouses. She indicated that the results emphasised the need for the building of linkages between the users and producers of statistics and for the integration of time-use surveys into official statistics.

## **6. Importance of time-use studies in national development policies**

30. The Social Affairs Officer of ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean gave a presentation on the importance of time-use studies in the pursuit of national development policies in the Caribbean and on the ways in which they can contribute to effectively addressing socioeconomic issues related to gender equity. She reaffirmed that the household economy, that is comprised mainly of unpaid work is a critical part of the total economic system. She therefore underscored the importance of measuring unpaid work to give visibility to women’s contribution to the economy and to promote the empowerment of women and gender equity.

31. She emphasized the need for greater attention to be given to the measurement of unpaid work through time-use surveys. She also noted that there is still the existence of serious data gaps in the statistical systems in the Caribbean. There is also need to further build the capacity of national experts to use the tools developed to collect time-use survey data.

## **7. Conclusions and recommendations**

32. The representatives of Grenada and the Bahamas expressed interest in working with ECLAC on the conduct of national time-use surveys. The representative of the Bahamas indicated that her Government’s Bureau of Women’s Affairs was currently getting ready to launch a national gender policy, that includes policy directives on the importance of measuring unpaid work. She therefore intended to seize the opportunity to have the Bahamas start the process of sensitization to build national awareness



regarding the conduct of time-use surveys. In this context, she indicated that the Bahamas would extend invitations to ECLAC and Red Thread-Guyana to assist with these activities.

33. A representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines expressed interest in using the time-use survey methodology to conduct a small scale survey among school children to measure how they use their time.

## **8. Closing remarks**

34. The Director of ECLAC subregional headquarters for the Caribbean delivered closing remarks and thanked the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for hosting the meeting. The Minister of National Mobilization, Social Development, Family, Gender Affairs, Persons with Disability and Youth of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines expressed appreciation for the participation of the delegation and conveyed his satisfaction at the successful outcome of the meeting.

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