



General Studies-1; Topic: Role of women

Addressing unpaid domestic work done by women

Introduction

- Recently various parties in their manifestos promised various forms of payment to homemakers, thus putting the spotlight on the unpaid domestic work done by women.
- This had sparked a debate on the issue of care work and possible solutions to address the disparities therein.

What is Unpaid care work

- Unpaid care work, according to the OECD, refers to **all unpaid services provided within a household for its members, including care of persons, housework and voluntary community work.**
- These activities are considered work because theoretically one could pay a third person to perform them.

Housework and the economy

- Standard measures of **economic activity do not take into account a large portion of this unpaid work**, much of which is done by women and girls.
- McKinsey estimates that **women do 75% of the world's total unpaid care work.**
- In India, women spend 299 minutes a day on unpaid domestic services while men spend 97 minutes, according to the 2019 NSS report.
- This inequality has a **direct correlation with participation in the formal economy.**
- The economic contribution of women is 17% of India's GDP — less than half the global average and therefore, women's economic participation is very poor.

Importance of Women's Unpaid Work

- The Women's unpaid domestic work, is the **'hidden engine' that keeps economies, businesses and societies running** and contributes significantly to individual well-being.

- While this work is foundational for societies, it is mostly invisible, undervalued and unaccounted worldwide.
- The ILO estimates that **if such services were to be valued on the basis of an hourly minimum wage, they would amount to 9 per cent of global GDP.**
- The importance of unpaid care work in addressing gender issues is delineated under the **Sustainable Development Goal 5.**

Concerns / Challenges

- India has slipped 28 places to rank 140th among 156 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2021.
 - Among the drivers of this decline is a **decrease in women's labour force participation rate.**
 - It also estimated that **earned income of women in India is only one-fifth of men's.**
- According to an ILO report, unpaid care work is the main barrier preventing women from getting into and progressing in the labour force.
- A major challenge on the economic front is getting more women into the formal workforce.

Measuring and monetising care work

- The economic indicators like GDP and unemployment rates do not take into account the allocation of labour and time resources by households and their impact on livelihoods and well-being.
- **Measuring unpaid care work is thus key to arriving at more inclusive socio-economic indicators.**
- This helps in formulating policies to address the gender gap.
- The value of unpaid work can be estimated by calculating the amount of time spent on it – and then putting a price on it, or by measuring the labour inputs that go into the activity.
- According to an Oxfam survey, **care work is often not considered 'work' and done 'automatically'**, hence respondents are less likely to report time spent on care.
- It is also difficult to capture the whole spectrum of care work as multitasking is common. For example, women might look after children while cooking or engaging in farm work.
- Variation and seasonality of work is also difficult to capture.
- Another issue is accounting for unpaid work in national accounts.

Wages for housework

- In India, an application by the National Housewives Association seeking recognition as a trade union in 2010 was rejected.
- In 2012, it was said that the government was considering mandating a salary for housework to women from husbands, the aim being to financially empower women. However, the proposal never materialised.
- There are instances of cash transfer schemes for women. but they are positioned as financial support rather than payment for housework.
- Supreme Court has ruled that fixing notional income for a non-earning "homemaker... is a step towards the constitutional vision of social equality and ensuring dignity of life to all individuals".

Way Forward

- The first step in addressing the inequalities in unpaid care work is to **recognise its value.**
- This requires data and more data will make more unpaid care work visible and help frame targeted policies.
- Reducing unpaid care work by **investment in physical infrastructure** like clean water and sanitation, energy and public transport, and in social infrastructure such as care and health services and education.
- **Redistribution** of care work between men and women, and between families.
- Investments in and expansion of care services for children and childhood education, for example generate jobs, of which many could be taken up by women.

- More **equitable childcare and maternity policies** could help reduce the 'motherhood penalty'.
- Policies should address the rising need for care and tackle the huge disparity between women's and men's care responsibilities.

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