

Valuing women's work using *Reflect*

by Rachel Moussié, Women's Rights Advisor – Economic Policy, ActionAid International

Women work all the time. They are the first to wake up when the rest of the family is sleeping and are the last ones to fall asleep at night. Women are traditionally the ones responsible for caring for children, the elderly and the ill. They prepare meals, collect firewood and fetch water to meet their families' needs. These care activities take time and energy even though they are not paid and are done in the home. They add to the many paid activities that women may also be involved in such as petty trading, factory work, or farming.

However, national statistics like GDP (Gross Domestic Product) do not include women's tremendous contribution in caring for their families as part of a country's economic output. Unpaid care work remains invisible even though these activities are critical for human development and social cohesion – they also provide many poor households with basic goods and services they cannot afford to pay for, such as childcare. Unpaid care work may be done out of love for your family, but the lack of public services like water and sanitation,

early childhood education centres, healthcare centres and social protection schemes make unpaid care work difficult. Moreover, around the world unpaid care work is seen as women's work and men are rarely involved in this kind of work.

As a result, women are not able to enjoy many of their human rights. Girls are taken out of school to help with household chores. Women engage in full-time paid work at great physical costs to themselves – not only are their working conditions often dismal, but their workload immense when combined with their activities in the home. Women's sole responsibility for unpaid care work compromises their opportunities to engage in social and political activities such as unions or political groups. Equally important is that women cannot enjoy their right to leisure!

Women's heavy workload and the injustice that results are often discussed in *Reflect* circles. In Nepal, gender workload calendars are used to show the difference between women and men's work. From these visual comparisons, it is evident that women have to do much more work in a day than men, but discussion of the issue does not necessarily lead to a drastic change in women's workload, though some men may be more willing to take up a few unpaid care activities such as collecting water.



James Akema/ActionAid

Leya Cheyde working at her turkey rearing house in Uganda