

Report to IGS and DSA on the workshop on women's domestic and care work and the launch of a book "Women are here to serve Men".

23rd May 2019 at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford University.

(Agenda attached at the end)

Introduction

The purpose of the workshop was to share some recent research undertaken by both academics and NGOs into the issues surrounding women's care work and how this shapes their relationship to paid work and economic survival or empowerment. Two presentations focused on the Middle East, the region often seen as homogenous, and dominated by strong traditions and social norms that are said to explain women's low participation in the workforce and their confinement to the private sphere. National and international reports focus consistently on the need to change norms, attitudes and behaviour in order to promote women's participation and economic empowerment. The third presentation looked at Oxfam's work on these issues in three countries.

A fourth presentation from India could not be included because of rules around presenting pre-PhD work unfortunately, especially because Bornali from Delhi has explored the issues in two contrasting villages, one matriarchal and largely Christian and the other patriarchal and Hindu. While the women in the matriarchal village had a much higher involvement in paid work (74%) compared to 36% in the patriarchal village she found that the hours spent on domestic and care work did not fall and men did not take on any more of this domestic work. Her research showed that women's mobility and ability to work outside the home and engage in public life did not release them from unpaid and domestic care work, so women then experience very long and heavy working days.

The canvas is huge and the variations and specifics of how women experience their different work roles and responsibilities and navigate between them are myriad. The panel was only able to touch on some issues but the three papers showed the diversity of methodologies for researching women's work, the widely different contexts that shape women's possibilities, and the complex inter-relation of structural and cultural factors and each woman's positionality in the society and family at play. The three presentations and their diversity raised some interesting questions for people.

Nikki van der Gaag (ex Oxfam and now with Promundo) chaired the meeting.

'Women are here to serve': the challenge of care work for women's position

The research for this book on the MENA region, launched at the meeting, was undertaken by CDRTA in Beirut in Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan. It was secondary research only. The literature on women's domestic and care work is quite sparse, this not being a major focus of concern for many although the low rates of female participation – the lowest in the world- in paid work are. Simple assumptions

are often made that women in the Middle East are all subject to oppressive social norms within the household and community and these are the main cause preventing them from joining the workforce. The low rates of participation persist even though education rates for women rise in several countries and the correlation between formal education and entering paid work is weak, in contrast to other regions of the world.

There are many international reports and scales coming from UN and World Bank but often their data are drawn from very limited sources and the same data are repeated again and again year after year, with very limited associated analysis. The best more up to date sources of research data come from ILO and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. But these all rely on government statistics, which are infrequent in outdated in some countries.

The quality of the data are variable and Morocco is the only country to have carried out time use surveys (two), an essential method for understanding women's work across paid and unpaid work. Concepts and definitions vary, as does the analysis of the data. Qualitative research exists but is usually small-scale and focused on specific groups. The database is shaky but a few strands emerge strongly. The data suggests that women do 6-8 times as much work in the home as men and the region has the heaviest domestic care burden for women and the highest gender gap for paid work. Some of the qualitative research shows small changes in trends and shifting concepts of what is appropriate for women and men to do, with women's attitudes changing faster than those of the men. Men are more willing now to send girls to school but they are still reluctant to see their wives work outside the home and see women's primary role as being a good wife and an honorable woman. While women largely share this perspective on the importance of their domestic roles many express great interest in securing paid work outside the home.

There are of course major differences women depending on their own personal characteristics, such as age, marital status, wealth of household, whether they are rural or urban based, what sect or religion they belong to, and the attitudes of their families. There are wide variations in women's experiences of both unpaid and paid work in reality, depending on who they are and their position in society.

Multiple external and structural factors shape women's opportunities to enter paid work- political, legal, religious, constitutional and policy related. In Egypt for example, the Nasser regime committed to employ all women graduates in the public sector post their degrees, which led to high rates of female employment and a strong cohort of women with good work experience. In Morocco the Constitution has enshrined women's rights as human rights and civil not religious law governs these rights. There are fewer discriminatory personal status and family laws there than in Lebanon, where women's lives are largely bounded and controlled by these laws, which differ according to which of the 18 sects they belong to. These laws govern inheritance, women's position in the household, ownership of children, citizenship, and the appropriate gender roles for women and men, with men as the breadwinner and women as the support. In Jordan few laws have been passed to promote

women's rights or prevent discrimination against them and there are high levels of unemployed graduate women there.

Other key factors, often poorly researched, that affect women's gender roles and access to paid work include the size and vibrancy of the labour market. Given that many jobs in the region are informal and public sector jobs have been cut, opportunities are severely curtailed. At times of high unemployment and economic downturn men have preference in the labour market. Work for women, especially in the informal sector, remains underpaid, poorly regulated, lacking in social security and protection. There is a significant gender wage gap and no laws protecting women from violence at work, so the motivation to get into work can be dampened and opportunities are few. In addition, many women lack the specific skills needed to find 'decent work' as training is focused on men in many sectors.

At home the cuts in services, due to austerity, mean that women's domestic work is more onerous and time consuming. There is no financial support or benefits for women's work in the home, even for child and elderly care, plus a lack of electricity, water, and good transport all adversely affect women's time use. In addition they have to try and make up for cuts in education and pre-school services, garbage collection, and poor health and other basic services. Women report long hours of work in the home and tiredness and lack of leisure and even sleep time.

Domestic violence is prevalent but rarely discussed in relation to women's unpaid care work or their chances of working outside the home. Women's lives are often seen in silos by external agencies, so projects on violence are unrelated to projects on job creation, which are in turn unrelated to women's care work. Many businesses and men expect women to stop work on marriage and women's care responsibilities rise greatly at that time and their relative lack of mobility in the public sphere seriously limits their options. Many incidents of violence are related to women leaving the house, women's 'failure' to be obedient and support their menfolk, and disputes over who controls any income if they do work for pay.

A few of the key issues arising from the research include:

- the huge variations between women's experiences and life chances depending on both personal factors and the many discriminatory laws, policies and practices around women's rights within the home and at work
- the lack of women's rights in the constitution (in three countries) and the abstentions from many international conventions on women signed in MENA countries mean women's rights are not legally protected or promoted
- the almost total lack of investment in supporting women with child or elderly care, lack of pensions and benefits, and very limited investment in new technologies to ease their time burdens at home
- the consequences of women's heavy domestic workloads are rarely linked to the growing poverty in the region poverty it is accepted that the family, especially women, not the state, bear the burden for the reproduction of labour

- the poor economies and weak labour markets limit women's opportunities for paid work in both the formal and informal sectors, yet many women are expected to maintain their households if the men are away or have died and need to contribute to keep poorer families afloat, whatever the gender norms prescribe

One striking finding was that every report written carries multiple recommendations, almost none of which have been implemented. The most popular activities to address women's need for income and empowerment focus on small loans and skills to promote their involvement in low-paid income generating activities, which rarely take into account the financial and time burdens on the women given their heavy domestic and care responsibilities. Addressing social norms and encouraging men to help women in the home and giving women confidence to demand their rights is also a key approach used – one the author of the book finds deeply problematic.

Copies of the book were distributed. Soft copies are available on request from Tina Wallace, email at the end of this report.

Yara Tarabulsi, an MPhil student in Oxford, presented work on 'Precarity and futurity among Syrian refugee women in Lebanon'.

Yara located these women clearly within the highly discriminatory context for women in Lebanon as outlined above, but highlighted the additional and specific challenges faced by refugee women. These included their illegal status, which renders their positions at work always precarious and illicit, making them more vulnerable to exploitation in the informal sector where they have to find work. These are families, and often women headed households, who have lost their family networks, which would have supported them in Syria. Many were from middle class families where they would not have had to look for paid work at home, now finding themselves at the bottom of the heap in the labour market, without adequate protection, housing or support. In addition, as gender and family roles are changing due to migration, some feel responsible for caring for the wider family in distress back home and so need to find work not only for their immediate family but also for parents left behind. They have to navigate between the need to care for their households and children, often as single parents, and their new obligations to their immediate and also wider family across the border. The available rations are limited and not universal and women have an urgent need to earn an income for survival – however small.

The jobs they find are precarious, poorly paid, less than local people, and subject to the threat of police scrutiny. Their lives are insecure yet they try to maintain their roles within the domestic sphere especially around child care and elderly care (often from a distance) while working long hours in highly insecure and low paid work.

The research was carried out mainly in the Beka'a valley but also elsewhere in Lebanon, and focused down on the experiences of over 30 women, who expressed their experiences in their own words, using concepts that had meaning for them. The

interviews and observation produced a rich picture of daily life for some Syrian refugees, and was a rare chance to glimpse the challenges and demands these women face seen through their own eyes. Each of them makes decisions and tries to balance as best they can the situation they find themselves in and the conflicting demands on their time and energy between fulfilling their gender roles as good women and wives in the household and meeting their needs to provide the 'affective labour' required to care well for their children, and the need for paid work for survival. Their only options are precarious and exploitative jobs, with low pay and no protection from sexual and other harassment. The long hours mean sometimes they are forced to leave their children unprotected while they work, while other women find complex ways to oversee their children during working hours. They have a deep felt need to find ways to uphold the morality they were brought up with and want to see in their children, but navigating between paid and unpaid care work is demanding and each woman finds her own way of trying to balance them.

While there is some work available in INGOs it is low paid, and refugees are often paid what is called 'a symbolic wage' that does not keep them financially. But these jobs do provide some status, respectability and dignity to the women and they appreciate the skills training and the respect they receive within these organisations. However, the low pay in these jobs in no way contributes to their 'economic empowerment'. Their economic survival is shaped more by the economic and labour market realities, their illegal status, the attitudes of local people towards refugees than the opportunities afforded by INGOs, which more effectively address their need for respect and a safe space to work in.

The presentation focused on case studies of three women and their families and showed so clearly how differently women are able to respond, how their opportunities are constrained by multiple factors, and how much the external world shapes what it is possible for them to do. Their contexts are so changed and gender roles and norms are being changed yet women want to maintain continuity with their pasts to carry into the future. The overwhelming power of the research came from the way women were listened to and allowed to tell their own stories without imposing frameworks and set questions on them. Their stories drove the way the research was analysed and presented. Their diversity as personalities, the diversity of needs and responses came through very clearly, challenging (for some) the way much humanitarian work with women is currently being done.

Thalia Kidder, Oxfam GB, presented the work of their WE Care household care survey: factors and norms influencing unpaid care

This is a complex programme of research and development practice across three countries run by Oxfam, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Philippines, funded by Unilever. Thalia presented the detailed surveys undertaken by Oxfam staff and partners, including time use surveys for people in the communities where the programme work is to be done. These try to describe and understand how time is allocated to care work within the family and the communities, who carries responsibility for what, and how much time women are required to spend on child and domestic care, as

well as what can be done to cut the time and energy needed for this work. The work is framed within a women's rights approach as well as a poverty reduction approach.

The methodology used with communities is simple and designed for staff and partners to use easily without too much intrusion on people's lives, and is designed to help to develop relevant programmes in each community. Beyond the field level the data have been analysed statistically - correlating which factors most affect women's time spent on child care – to identify what kinds of interventions will best enable women to combine their care work with economic work outside the home, which is important for poverty reduction and is also defined as empowering; WE in the title of the programme stands for women's empowerment. The work is designed to recognise and value the skills of care work, to reduce the difficulty and isolation of this work for women, to redistribute care responsibilities across families and communities, and to promote the representation of carers. The methodology and approach is detailed and can be found, along with the key findings, [here](#).

There was a lot to communicate in a short presentation so those interested should look at the many sites in Oxfam presenting this work.

Based on the data analysis the research found that women in Uganda and Zimbabwe spend over ten hours a day on care work, secondary care work and supervision. Children were also very involved. The analysis identified factors that do or do not reduce women's heavy care burdens and found that many common approaches do not in fact alleviate the time women spend on care work or promote their decision making power. For example, access to improved stoves and water pumps made little change, and paid work little more- an hour of paid work only led to 10 minutes (up to 44) of unpaid care work. Issues that did emerge from the analysis as priorities for women trying to balance their paid and unpaid work-life duties included better access to water, electricity, and child-care. Each of these factors was, however, specific to the context in which the research was carried out and some of that diversity inevitably gets lost when data are aggregated.

The research, which was also designed to bring statistical evidence to the international and donor table on women's child and domestic care roles as part of a women's economic empowerment programme, highlighted the scale of women's workloads and the multiplicity of challenges women face, from structural to behavioral. One major conclusion was that there is a need to work across all of these challenges to enable positive change to happen: 'combining interventions on equipment, services and social norms' can result in positive change on the long unequal hours of women's work. In terms of social norms they focused especially on male attitudes to care work and found that while 79% men agree with supporting their wives in the home, many experienced jeering or jeered at other men doing this domestic work.

Discussion

There was a wide-ranging discussion and only a few issues are highlighted here- issues that raise big questions for researchers and practitioners:

- ***The very different methodologies generate different kinds of data.*** There was great appreciation for the ethnography on Syrian refugees and how that presented the women as complex people, diverse and grappling with different challenges in each of their lives. Their lives are not siloed, their 'intersectionality' comes together in each and every body and needs a holistic understanding. Women's experiences are highly differentiated, something that statistics and surveys inevitably tend to iron out, leading to more standardised approaches and understandings of women's needs, rights and challenges.
- ***The challenges of translating women's own perspectives into programmes is real*** and the distance between development and humanitarian programming and what women themselves care about can at times be very significant. How can the complex realities be better matched in larger scale development or humanitarian interventions, and how can agencies find time/space to listen more to women themselves? The methodology presented opened up many questions around these issues, positive and challenging
- ***How much of the problem of long work hours and limited access to paid work for women lies with the social norms and how much is rooted in discriminatory laws,*** weak policies around paid and unpaid women's work, poor labour markets, lack of services for families, lack of women's rights in the Constitution?
- ***Some emphasised issues of patriarchy and legal and structural frameworks that hold this in place, others focused on social norms as key.*** Questions were raised about the ethics and effectiveness of outsiders working to change the social norms of others and were concerned about the top down nature of the approach. Subsequently, some raised concerns about the colonial nature of that approach. Similarly there were different views on the value and need for working with states on laws and policy frames, with some raising concerns about corruption preventing implementation. Again concerns were raised subsequently about this attitude towards states in the MENA region, while others agreed with this approach but felt only work at the local/provincial level was really effective.
- ***The concerns of siloing women's lives and dealing with problems separately*** in different interventions were clear, and the problematic role of children in care work and the lack of health components in the work presented were raised.

Thanks to all who came and those who fed back after the session.

Tina Wallace

tinacwallace@icloud.com

13th June 2019.

The challenges of women's invisible care work: analysis of new research



A participatory workshop jointly convened by International Gender Studies and Development Studies Association

23rd May, 2019

The Old Library, Lady Margaret Hall,
Norham Gardens, Oxford
2 – 5 p.m.

Convener
Dr Tina Wallace

'Women are there to serve men': the challenges of care work and domestic labour for women's position, status and economic contribution in MENA CRTDA, Beirut, 2018. This book on the MENA region will be launched in UK at this workshop:

The workshop is convened by Dr Tina Wallace, Research Associate of IGS at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford and convener of Development Studies Association Gender Policy and Practice study group

Panel speakers include two PhD students working in Lebanon and India, and two practitioners, one from Oxfam. The purpose is to share and explore recent research into women's unpaid care work, how it is understood, defined and measured and how it shapes women's life chances and their opportunities for paid work. Ideas for working with women and communities on these issues will be shared and all are welcome to contribute their own experiences.

Panel Speakers:

Tina Wallace - Research Associate, International Gender Studies at Lady Margaret Hall, study group convener at Development Studies Association, *Launching the book, 'Women are there to serve men'*

Yara Tarabulsi - MPhil Anthropology student, St Anthony's College, Oxford.
Precaarity and futurity among working Syrian refugee women in Lebanon

Thalia Kidder - Women's Economic Empowerment Lead, Oxfam, Oxford
WE-Care household care survey: factors and norms influencing unpaid care

Bornali Borah - Centre for the Study of Regional Development (CSRD)
School of Social sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
Women's Work and Implications for Well-being: A comparative analysis of Patriarchal and Matrilineal cultures in the North Eastern Region of India (A presentation of her research work)

Panels will be followed by working groups to discuss issues and share other research and practice.

Date 23rd May 2019

Place: The Old Library at Lady Margaret Hall, Norham Gardens, Oxford

Time 2-5pm

Tea, coffee and biscuits provided! No charge for the workshop.

All welcome but if you are coming please RSVP to tinawallace@icloud.com. Thanks