Sixteen Years after Beijing: What Are the New Policy Agendas for Time-Use Data Collection?

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SIXTEEN YEARS AFTER BEIJING: WHAT ARE THE NEW POLICY AGENDAS FOR TIME-USE DATA COLLECTION?

Valeria Esquivel

ABSTRACT

This study takes stock of how advocacy for time-use surveys (TUS) has been framed since the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, which urged countries to regularly conduct TUS in order to quantify unpaid care work, and how conducive the call for action has been for the effective use of this data to inform gender-sensitive policy. Findings suggest that obstacles to progress in using time-use data to inform policy include: an overemphasis on accounting for women’s unpaid work within the framework of the United Nations System of National Accounts; a neglect of a clear distributive justice agenda tied to measuring and valuing unpaid work; and inadequate design of some TUS. However, there are now signs of emerging new analytical frameworks and agendas that link time-use data collection more directly to policy. These agendas are likely to be more fruitful in promoting the use of time-use data in policymaking.

KEYWORDS

National income accounting, social policy, survey research, time budget surveys

JEL Codes: C8, J22

INTRODUCTION

Prior to 1995, time-use surveys (TUS) had been collected for a number of years and for a variety of purposes in some developed countries; however, time-use data collection gained momentum after the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Women’s Conference. The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) – the agreement reached by governments at that conference – appealed to countries to “recognize and make visible the full extent of the work of women and all their contributions to the national economy, including their contribution in the unremunerated and domestic sectors”
by “conduct[ing] regular time-use studies to measure, in quantitative terms, unremunerated work” (UN Fourth World Conference on Women 1995: Strategic objectives A.4 and H.3). Since then, further TUS have been conducted systematically in a number of developed countries, and have been initiated in many developing countries.¹

Nevertheless, the Report of the UN Secretary-General to the 54th Session of the Commission for the Status of Women (CSW), held in 2010, claims that “[l]ack of timely, reliable and comparable sex-disaggregated data on women’s paid and unpaid contribution to the economy is a major obstacle to evidence-based gender-sensitive policymaking” (CSW 2010b: 44.213). However, even where time-use data exist, they are not much used in evidence-based, gender-sensitive policymaking – a fact that poses a major challenge to feminist scholars and development agencies trying to convince governments and statistical offices to collect such data on a regular basis (Gabriel Bonnet Brunnich and Danielle Simone Vacarr 2005; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] 2008).

This study discusses some reasons for the gap between the availability of time-use data and their lack of influence in informing gender-sensitive policymaking and makes some suggestions for ways to bridge it. One likely reason for this gap is an overemphasis on accounting for women’s unpaid work within the framework of the United Nations System of National Accounts, which has resulted in an almost exclusive focus on the production of very aggregate and crude time-use estimates. Other likely reasons involve a neglect of a distributive justice agenda tied to measuring and valuing unpaid care work, which has diminished the possibility of defining a clear set of agreed-upon, gender-sensitive policies. And yet another set of reasons involve the inadequate design of some time-use studies, which might explain why policymakers have not put time-use data to immediate use.

These reasons do not explain why progress in time-use data collection has been itself relatively slow, particularly in developing countries. Nor do they tackle broad political opposition to any gender equality agendas, which contributes to explaining – and may as well be the main reason for – the slow progress in time-use data collection and its low policy impact when these data exist. Yet, this study argues that since the 1995 BPfA conceptual frameworks, political agendas and time-use data collection methods have evolved in ways that make it possible to put time-use data to use in gender-sensitive policymaking. Bridging the gap between time-use data collection and gender-sensitive policy would offer a more concrete position from which to forge coalitions to effectively advocate and create demand for new TUS and for further rounds of existing TUS. This step is essential for progress toward recognizing, reducing, and redistributing unpaid work in ways that contribute to gender equality and social development.
LOOKING BACK: ADVOCACY FOR THE COLLECTION OF
TIME-USE DATA AT THE TIME OF THE FOURTH UN WORLD
WOMEN’S CONFERENCE, BEIJING, 1995

An examination of the text of the BPfA shows a close relationship between
the collection of time-use data and its use to produce aggregate estimations
of unpaid work, which, through the imputation of monetary values, would
contribute to building household-sector satellite accounts. This connection
between time-use data and estimates of unpaid work reflects what Lourdes
Benería has called “the accounting for women’s work project” (2003: 131),
wherein the main aim of time-use data collection is feeding the calculation
of national accounts and ultimately influencing the measurement of
aggregate output. A strong emphasis on recognition and visibility were major
objectives for this accounting endeavor – elements that are related to the
political agenda behind the call for time-use data collection. Both aspects
profoundly shaped advocacy for time-use studies at the time, and are still
strongly present in the discourse of feminist national accountants and UN
gender agencies.

Thus BPfA Strategic Objective H.3, point (f) calls for:

(i) Improving data collection on the unremunerated work which is
    already included in the United Nations System of National
    Accounts, such as in agriculture, particularly subsistence
    agriculture, and other types of non-market production activities;
(ii) Improving measurements that at present underestimate women’s
    unemployment and underemployment in the labour market;
(iii) Developing methods [...] for assessing the value, in quantitative
    terms, of unremunerated work that is outside national accounts,
    such as caring for dependents and preparing food, for possible
    reflection in satellite or other official accounts that may be produced
    separately from but are consistent with core national accounts, with a
    view to recognizing the economic contribution of women and
    making visible the unequal distribution of remunerated and
    unremunerated work between women and men. (UN Fourth
    World Conference on Women 1995: Strategic objective H.3, point
    [f]; emphasis added)

BPfA Strategic Objective H.3, point (g) advocates the development of
“an international classification of activities for time-use statistics that is
sensitive to the differences between women and men in remunerated and
unremunerated work” and suggests national governments should (subject
to national constraints): “Conduct regular time-use studies to measure,
in quantitative terms, unremunerated work, including recording those
activities that are performed simultaneously with remunerated or other
unremunerated activities’” (UN Fourth World Conference on Women 1995).

**Accounting for women’s work, but missing the link to policy**

The accounting project challenged the notion of “work” associated only with production for market exchanges (Benería 2003; Solita Collas-Monsod 2010). Such a restricted notion left outside “the economy” all forms of unremunerated work: the subsistence sector, and housework and care work that takes place in households and communities. Existing evidence in 1995 and subsequent TUS to date have shown the striking gender differences in the distribution of this *unpaid care work*, which is overwhelmingly done by women (UNDP 1995; Benería 2003; Debbie Budlender 2008). As Diane Elson has summarized, the accounting project aimed for all women’s work to be “counted in statistics, accounted for in representations of how economies work, and taken into account when policy is made” (2000: 21–2).

Since 1995, and following advances in time-use data collection, some developed countries, such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, Finland, and Spain (Madrid and Basque Country), have been able to produce Household Sector Satellite Accounts (Dennis Trewin 2000; Statistics New Zealand 2001; Sue Holloway, Sandra Short, and Sarah Tamplin 2002; Eustat 2004; María Ángeles Durán 2006; Johanna Varjonen and Kristiina Aalto 2006). In developing countries, there have been some exercises in unpaid work valuation that have not become fully fledged satellite accounts because of insufficient information on household inputs other than unpaid work. This is the case for South Africa, Mexico, Argentina (Buenos Aires), Nicaragua, Tanzania, India, and Korea (Debbie Budlender and Ann Lisbet Brathaug 2002; Budlender 2008; Barbara Fraumeni 2010; María Eugenia Gómez Luna 2010). But there is no evidence of household-sector satellite accounts, or the more limited valuation exercises, being much used for policy purposes, even though some feminists have tended to assume that measuring and valuing women’s unpaid work would more or less automatically have an impact on macroeconomic policy:

The lack of recognition of unpaid work in the national accounts has a negative impact on gender equality at the macroeconomic level due to the importance of these accounts as instruments for policymaking. In fact, the national accounts quantify all areas defined as part of the domestic economy. Accordingly, the current economic situation and trends are analyzed, the economic dynamics are interpreted, forecasts are made on the potential effects of economic or policy changes, and decisions are taken on the allocation of resources. (Elsa Gómez Gómez 2010: 10)
But producing household-sector satellite accounts does not by itself change macroeconomic policy. For the household sector to be incorporated in macroeconomic modeling and eventually in macroeconomic decision making, a theoretical framework is required that had yet to be fully developed sixteen years ago. Since then, both mainstream and heterodox macroeconomists have engaged in conceptual work to incorporate gender as an analytical category in macroeconomic modeling (Diane Elson 2004). Macroeconomic models more amenable to incorporating women’s and men’s unpaid work are those that conceptualize “the world in terms of two sectors or systems, one of which comprises the traditional macroeconomic variables and one which comprises the unpaid reproductive economy” (Caren Grown, Diane Elson, and Nilüfer Çağatay 2000: 1148). Most of these models use a form of household production function that converts unpaid working times into outputs, so these stylizations do not typically require fully fledged household-sector satellite accounts, which are more demanding in terms of time-use data. In most cases, crude monetary aggregates of unpaid work would suffice, inasmuch as they are nationwide (or sufficiently representative), and can be disaggregated by gender and between rural and urban areas. The use of detailed Social Accounting Matrixes has helped refine these analyses (Rania Antonopoulos 2008). The fact that the social accounting models require enormous amounts of information besides time-use data to be calibrated and used to inform public policy might explain why they are not more widely used.

Calculations of the aggregate monetary value of unpaid work, and its comparison to other aggregates like Gross Domestic Product (GDP), are more useful in showing its structural role in supporting the paid economy (Antonella Picchio 2003); and in informing long-term development policy (Rania Antonopoulos and Indira Hirway 2010). Indeed, satellite accounts are more likely to have relevance for policy in the long run when they make it possible to track relative changes in the size and composition of market production and households’ production (Varjonen and Aalto 2006). But to be so, they need to be available at regular intervals, not as one-off calculations.

For short- and medium-term policy, information about the value of unpaid work in particular sectors is likely to be more policy relevant than aggregate household-sector satellite accounts, in particular regarding planning the sectoral distribution of public expenditure. For example, the comparison of the value of the services produced by unpaid work in households and the value of the services produced by the public-sector providers of services like health and education – as has been recently done by Budlender (2008) – can be used to make the case for an increase of the public provision of the latter. It is not clear, however, that valuation of unpaid work in itself is necessary to make the case for provision of public
services. Indeed, Marilyn Waring, one of the pioneers of the accounting project, has recently argued that it is time-use data, rather than monetary valuation of that time, that is critical.

Most of the calls to measure time-use, and indeed my own early work [for example, Marilyn Waring 1988], saw the strategic need for and importance of this work for better policy making. However, “measuring” the size of this economic contribution became tied to estimating or imputing a market value for the work done. [...] I am now categorically of the belief that imputation or estimation is not a necessary step for the most effective use of the time-use data. Imputation has the effect of removing the value of the raw data and converting it to an abstract in which the most important details for strategic policy interventions have been lost. Abstracted imputations for this unpaid work do not help us get any closer to determining what the policy response should be. It may help convince a Minister that there should be a response, because the cost benefit analysis shows, even with trade offs, that an intervention is “worth it.” But it is the cross tabulations of the time-use data, supplemented with other material, which provide the comprehensive foundation for a strategic policy response, and for the monitoring and evaluation of any implementation. (Marilyn Waring 2009: 4)

What exactly are these “strategic policy interventions”? And why were they not present in the BPfA in connection to the call for time-use data to be collected? Part of the answer might be related to the (lack of) an agreed agenda behind that call.

Neglect of links between distributive justice and unpaid work

The BPfA clearly establishes that measuring and valuing unpaid work is related to visibility and recognition objectives. Claims for recognition emerge from the struggles of the “politics of identity,” defined by sexual, gender, ethnic, religious or national boundaries, against cultural injustice (Nancy Fraser 1997). In some circles, recognition (cultural justice) has been understood to supersede the “struggle for redistribution” associated with demands for economic justice. As Nancy Fraser explains, the “recognition dimension corresponds to […] institutional patterns of cultural value,” while the distributive dimension “corresponds to the economic structure of society, hence to the constitution, by property regimes and labour markets, of economically defined categories of actors, or classes, distinguished by their differential endowment of resources” (2000: 117; emphasis added). It is therefore odd that the BPfA put forth such a profoundly economic theme – the measurement and valuation of unpaid work, and its inclusion
in GDP – in the cultural realm and thus deprived it of explicit distributive justice considerations.

The issue of measuring and valuing unpaid work was not an easy one in Beijing. Although the issue had already been present in previous UN conferences, and was in no way new, there was no consensus around the way it should be framed. Among the nongovernmental organizations that supported the initiative were the international Wages for Housework Campaign (WFH), which was the main political force behind demands for measuring and valuing unpaid work in Beijing. Very active in the 1970s in Italy and the UK and debated in the United States (Nicole Cox and Silvia Federici 1975; Lynn Prince Cooke 2010), the WFH agenda connected very clearly the recognition and valuation of unpaid work to its remuneration as a way of gaining women’s autonomy (Mariarosa Dalla Costa 2006). 7

However, the WFH agenda was strongly opposed by the European Union delegation – following the position of Sweden and Denmark – who feared “losing ground for their emancipation policies based on (gender) equality, if the value of the economic contribution of unpaid work was recognized for any reason whatsoever, even if purely on a statistical level” (Antonella Picchio 1995: 2; in Italian in the original). This opposition is unsurprising, given the controversial aspects of the WFH proposal (among them, the likely deepening of the gender division of labor and poor women’s withdrawal from the labor market). Indeed, for the WFH proposal, distributive justice does not take the form of redistribution of unpaid work but of compensation: in exchange for women’s unpaid contributions to production it is money, not work, that gets redistributed.

The issue was settled by leaving aside any reference to wages for housework while accepting the accounting for women’s unpaid work framework. In the process, however, this meant omitting any direct reference to alternative forms of distributive justice in connection to the measurement and valuation of unpaid work. In retrospect, this omission turned out to be counterproductive. By omitting such references, the inclusion of the unpaid work in National Accounts was rendered as abstract as GDP itself (that is, an issue for economists). This is one of the reasons, I suspect, that calls for measuring and valuing unpaid work are repeated in some UN documents and by noneconomist feminists using the language of recognition and visibility but without a clear view of the purpose of the endeavor.

Lack of policy focus in designing TUS

If the purpose of TUS is to produce macro estimations of unpaid work in order to build household-sector satellite accounts, requirements for detailed time-use data are low. These low requirements might have encouraged an overly simplified methodological approach to time-use data
collection, which focused on estimating the time spent by women and men in unpaid work in general, without differentiating different kinds of unpaid work. (This is particularly the case if valuation is done via the application of a “generalist wage.”) Some TUS (particularly those using stylized diaries or tasks lists) have simply asked for the time spent in “domestic work,” paying attention to differentiate it from subsistence production, but not between housework and care tasks. Even in cases when time-use data collected can provide some detail, reports frequently show only very aggregate data devoted to a reduced number of activities, disaggregated by gender.

If time-use data are to be more valuable for informing gender-sensitive policies, more detail is required. Then time-use data can reveal complicated traveling patterns or the long walks due to the complete absence of public transportation and the differences in the use of time that safe water and sanitation bring with them. More detailed time-use data can show the differences that access to childcare facilities make in children’s and parents’ daily routines, and the impact on paid and unpaid work of different family members when a chronically ill, disabled or elderly member of the family is in need of intense care. They can show the role of household technology, family structure, and household and members’ income in the intrahousehold distribution of housework and the effect of very young children on mothers’ and fathers’ care patterns and labor market participation. They can reveal the ways in which poor families compensate with their unpaid work for the absence of a decent income. The list of issues that detailed time-use data could illuminate and provide evidence about is, of course, much longer. Regrettably, it is clear that not all TUS provide detailed enough data to perform some of these analyses, particularly in developing countries. This absence is likely to have made it harder to use time-use data to inform public policy when such data exist.

In order to produce policy-relevant detailed information, time-use data collection methodologies need to be shaped accordingly. Policy objectives should influence activity selection (the classification of activities used for coding in the case of activity diaries, and the list of activities in other survey instruments); sampling design and coverage; and specific background information requested. For example, activity selection might offer respondents high degrees of detail on some dimensions of time use while combining others into generalized categories according to the issues the TUS seeks to illuminate. Furthermore, using information for different population groups to analyze distributive issues requires sufficiently large (and correctly balanced) samples. Information on household structure (kinship relationships and the number and ages of children); the distance to water sources, schools, hospitals, transportation, and shopping facilities; weekly paid working schedules; or school (including kindergarten)
attendance of the households’ children are all required to be used as “controls” if differential patterns of time use are to be identified.

A particular case in point is the methodological treatment of care work, which is qualitatively and quantitatively different from housework and, above all, influenced by different determinants and shaped by policies in different ways than housework. Omitting care of persons or forcing respondents to report care only if it is a primary activity produces biased estimates, given the sometimes passive, “in the background,” and socially undervalued nature of care. Indeed, the main methodological challenge associated with measuring care of persons through TUS is appropriately collecting simultaneous activities, as simultaneity is an important feature of care of persons (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2005). As a result of the lessons learned from previous attempts at time-use data collection based on stylized survey instruments, the newest TUS do differentiate housework from care of persons. Nuanced classification of activities can help capture time spent caring by including a category for “passive” care (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997: 30). And, prompting respondents after they have completed the diaries may help them “remember” low-intensity care (Debbie Budlender, Ntebaleng Chobokoane and Yandiswa Mpetsheni 2001; Valeria Esquivel 2010).

THE WAY FORWARD: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN TIME-USE DATA COLLECTION AND GENDER-SENSITIVE POLICIES

A conceptual shift “from labor to care”

As we have seen, advocacy for TUS has focused on measuring women’s contributions to production. There is a wealth of feminist literature that identifies how women’s unpaid work contributes to production by reproducing the labor force on a daily basis (Lourdes Benería 1979; Picchio 2003). Because unpaid work is overwhelmingly women’s work, these contributions place women in a subordinate economic position that disadvantages them in market production in general, and in the labor market in particular (Benería 1979; Lourdes Benería and Gita Sen 1981). Unpaid work is rendered invisible because it is performed in the private sphere of the household, outside money exchanges. Making it visible in conceptual and statistical terms is in the origin of the BPfa’s “accounting for women’s work” project (Waring 1988; Benería 2003: 131).

However, since 2000, the conceptual focus has shifted “from labor to care” (Susan Himmelweit 2000), with an emphasis on the role of unpaid work in generating well-being rather than on women’s costs of providing it. While reproductive work definitions are task-based – a feature that makes reproductive work particularly amenable to be measured using time-use
surveys – care work was initially defined as “labor undertaken out of affection or sense of responsibility for other people, with no expectation of pecuniary monetary reward” (Nancy Folbre 1995: 75). This definition is both motivational and relational, given the element of affection involved. Care work can therefore be thought of as the material dimension or work component of the caring relationship, a relationship that also has a communicative dimension or motivation component, and a resource dimension or financial component (Maren A. Jochimsen 2003).

As Mary Daly and Jane Lewis put it, the focus on care work highlights care as a verb and carers as actors but implicitly begs a comparison with other forms of work and labour. Emphasizing care as a particular form of labour also draws attention to the conditions under which it is carried out [...] Our [...] approach leads us to define social care as the activities and relations involved in meeting the physical and emotional requirements of dependent adults and children, and the normative, economic and social frameworks within which these are assigned and carried out. (Mary Daly and Jane Lewis 2000: 285; emphasis added)

Daly and Lewis (2000) emphasize that the care relationship is one in which the receiver depends on the caregiver for her or his subsistence and development. In stressing dependency, however, the care relationship is redefined in a profoundly asymmetric way (Jochimsen 2003). Some conceptualizations evoke a static (and dualistic) notion of dependency, in which dependents are completely deprived of autonomy (Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon 1994). Such a dependency concept might apply to very young children; it is dubious, however, that it applies to dependent adults, such as frail, elderly, or disabled adults (Kate Bedford 2010; Fiona Williams 2010). Moreover, it leaves out the care of everyone else, including healthy adult men. Indeed, the idealization of care as a relationship between an autonomous caregiver and a dependent care receiver might hide the “social pressures on women to provide unpaid care, as well as the risks of self-exploitation and economic insecurity to which unpaid carers are frequently exposed” (Shahra Razavi 2007: 16).

Most of the specialized literature on developed countries understands care work as the “direct” care of persons, excluding most instrumental housework tasks, such as cleaning or cooking, by which people no longer demonstrate relatedness. This conceptual change seems to have accompanied changes in the actual content of what households and families do in developed countries, as “home life is becoming more and more concentrated in sharing meals or telling bedtime stories for which substitutes cannot be purchased” (Nancy Folbre and Julie A. Nelson 2000: 129). Implicit in this last assertion is a demarcation of what care work is, and what it is not, ultimately based on the limits for its commodification.
However, the fact that the degree of actual commodification in housework depends on household technology and income underscores the fact that housework commodification is closely related to income inequality in advanced economies and certainly also to poverty in developing countries (Jean Gardiner 1997). Moreover, it could be argued that differentiating housework from care of persons in this way is a “first world” bias, similar to that Cynthia Wood (1997) posed by regarding the artificial differentiation, in rural contexts, between subsistence production and reproductive labor in the System of National Accounts. In fact, care work, defined as the direct care of persons, does not represent the bulk of unpaid work in developing countries since women and men are more likely to perform housework than care work (Budlender 2008). It is perhaps more appropriate to think of housework as a form of “indirect care” that becomes a “precondition” for care of persons to take place (Nancy Folbre 2006; Razavi 2007).

A possible synthesis of the conceptual evolution from unpaid reproductive work to unpaid care work (both direct and indirect) is the shift from “seeing the household as a site of work, although it undoubtedly still is, to seeing it as a site of care, which undoubtedly always was” (Himmelweit 2000: xviii). Analyses that understand unpaid work solely as a requirement from market production tend to omit the fact that this work sustains emotional and caring relationships within families, and treating it as an undifferentiated concept would produce very crude and aggregate measures of it. Analyses that focus on the emotional and motivational content of care often, on the other hand, disregard its material and financial dimensions, which are closely linked to gender and income inequalities. Conceptually, and also in terms of methods, both types of analysis provide unique insights and need to be integrated.

From “recognition” to “reduction” and “redistribution”

There are signs that feminist understandings of unpaid work have evolved from treating it as invisible but valuable for production – and therefore to be measured and possibly compensated – to treating it as essential to the well-being of those who benefit from it, even if costly for those who provide it, leading to claims for its reduction and redistribution (see, for instance, Benería [2003]; Diane Elson [2008]).

The costs of providing unpaid work services are either foregone leisure or overwork. Leisure is a dimension of well-being and gender inequality in its own right, as Fraser (1997) clearly states. Overwork (both paid and unpaid) is an easy measure of the limited possibilities an individual has to not work, particularly in the case of relatively poor households that cannot buy substitutes for their unpaid work. In developing countries, these households might use lower-productivity technologies than nonpoor
households, thus further increasing their unpaid working time (Indira Hirway 2010a). Also, engaging in simultaneous activities provides households with more unpaid work at the cost of higher work intensity for those who provide it (Maria Sagrario Floro 1995). In all these cases, strategic policy interventions should attempt to reduce unpaid work (Elson 2008; Antonopoulos and Hirway 2010).

The ways these costs are shared between women and men, within households and between households and the society at large, bears strong gender (and class) implications. The unequal gender distribution of these costs explain the limited opportunities and long hours of total work that women face when they enter the labor market. Moreover, the fact that poor households (and women in them) perform more unpaid work than nonpoor households underscores the close relationship between income inequalities and unpaid work. Strategic policy interventions should therefore lead to the redistribution of unpaid work within and beyond households (Elson 2008; Antonopoulos and Hirway 2010).

The call for reduction and redistribution of unpaid work is now imbedded in UN discourse, with the old visibility and valuation discourse, following BPfA formulae, still very much present as well. For instance, this can be seen in the resolution adopted at the 53rd CSW in 2009, which asks member states to:

o. Design, implement and promote family friendly policies and services, including affordable, accessible and quality care services for children and other dependants, parental and other leave schemes and campaigns to sensitize public opinion and other relevant actors on equal sharing of employment and family responsibilities between women and men;

p. Promote greater understanding and recognition that caregiving is a critical societal function and should be equally shared between women and men within the family and households and strengthen dialogue and coordination between all relevant stakeholders;

q. Measure, in quantitative and qualitative terms, unremunerated work that is outside national accounts, in order to better reflect its value in such accounts, and recognize and take necessary measures to incorporate the value and cost of unpaid work within and between households and society at large in policies, strategies, plans and budgets across all relevant sectors. (CSW 2009b: 4–5)

Even with its mention of “policies, strategies, plans and budgets,” point q above is disconnected from the previous long list of recommendations for policy interventions. Moreover, the point does not make clear how the value and cost of unpaid work are to be “incorporated” into the policies, strategies, plans, and budgets. Such a phrasing underscores the idea that
valuing unpaid work has nothing to do with these policies, but rather is a stand-alone policy.

Point 0, in turn, links the unequal sharing of responsibilities within households to gender stereotypes, thus placing it within a cultural justice framework. The emphasis on equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men might, however, result in overlooking family contexts in which it is simply not possible to equally share (because there is no adult to share them with), or in which the care burden is so great that, even equally shared, care needs are not covered (Valeria Esquivel 2008; Bedford 2010). Recognizing that “increased sharing of responsibilities between women and men will not, however, be adequate with respect to addressing the persistent challenges of caregiving in society,” the Report of the UN Secretary-General for the CSW emphasized the role of the state in increased public investment in care services in order “to reduce the care burden on households” (CSW 2009a: 17–8; emphasis added). Such an approach became more evident in the 54th CSW session on women’s economic empowerment, which understood care policies as a means to promoting the equal sharing of responsibilities beyond households to “society as a whole” (in other words, as a means of redistributing care; CSW [2010a: 5, point 14.e]).

A similar evolution can be traced in the agreed conclusions of the 10th and 11th Regional Conferences on Women in Latin America, the Quito Consensus (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC] 2007), and the Brasilia Consensus (ECLAC 2010). While in 2007, the link of visibility and recognition of unpaid work to economic and social policies was stated in very broad terms and still within the BPFA framework, sometimes even stressing its “lack of compensation” (see, for instance, ECLAC [2007: point 12]), the Brasilia Consensus proposed in 2010 a detailed agenda for redistribution of unpaid care work, considering “care as a universal right, which requires strong policy measures to effectively achieve it, and the co-responsibility of the society as a whole, the state, and the private sector” (ECLAC 2010: 2). In Brasilia, member states agreed to:

1.a) *Adopt* all necessary social and economic policy measures in order to achieve the social valuation and recognition of the economic value of unremunerated work performed by women in the domestic and care sphere;
1.b) *Foster* the development and strengthening of care and universal services policies, based on the recognition of care as a right to all persons and the notion of shared delivery by the State, the private sector, the civil society, and the households, as well as between women and men, and to strengthen the dialogue and coordination of all stakeholders;
1.c) *Adopt* measures to establish or extend parental leaves, as well as absence permissions to care for sons and daughters, in order to contribute to the (re)distribution of care tasks between women and men, including paternity leave. (ECLAC 2010: 2)

A further commonality between the CSW agreements and the Latin American regional agreements is that “care” means care for dependants, and thus is sometimes different from unpaid work. Regrettably, this definition reveals the influence of the more restricted developed countries’ conceptualizations and agendas.

**Broadening the policy agenda**

The BPfA is, of course, much more than the articles related to unpaid work. It is a framework for policymaking that both implicitly and explicitly was based on a different model of growth and development than that which has dominated national and international policy-making in recent decades. The Platform for Action called for, and relied upon, a model of economic growth that is egalitarian, inclusive, participatory, people-centred, sustainable in terms of the environment and accountable, and based on a rights-based approach to much public service delivery. (Expert Group Meeting [EGM] 2009: 55, point a)

Within this framework for policy making, the BPfA has implications for the current care agenda and alternate development agendas. Even though these agendas have not yet been sufficiently informed by time-use data analyses (possibly because aggregate time-use data are not conducive to do so), time-use data are salient for policy interventions aimed at reducing and redistributing unpaid care work.

Implicit in the CSW resolutions cited in the previous section (CSW 2009a; 2009b; 2010a) as well as in the Quito Consensus (ECLAC 2007) and Brasilia Consensus (ECLAC 2010), and inspired in the conceptual move “from labor to care,” the care agenda aims at redistributing the costs of care more evenly across different actors, while guaranteeing at the same time that care is provided to those who need it. The recognition that care has important features of a public good whose contribution to economic growth, social development, and social cohesion serves the purpose of justifying policy interventions – such as (labor market) reconciliation policies, the provision of care services, and investment in public infrastructure – that redistribute care on both efficiency and equity grounds (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development [UNRISD] 2010). Within this agenda, time-use data are finally untied from an almost exclusive valuation purpose.
to become an advocacy tool, giving women’s groups a way to articulate their claims (Williams 2010).

The BPfA was imbued in a broad and progressive development agenda that comprised macroeconomic, food security, education, health, and employment policies (EGM 2009). From the outset, unpaid care work was identified as a key determinant of women’s incidence and vulnerability to poverty (UN Fourth World Conference on Women 1995: Strategic objective A.4, point [b]). Various analyses of time-use data have demonstrated that women and men living in income-poor households spend more time in unpaid work than in nonpoor households, given that poverty is associated with lack of infrastructure and limited access to care services, frequently leading to overwork (Budlender 2008; Hirway 2010a). Time-use data can show the time-related constraints of the poor in terms of both time stress (overwork) and time allocation, thus informing the provision and allocation of public infrastructure (Elena Bardasi and Quentin Wodon 2010; Hirway 2010a). Time-use data has also been used to evaluate poverty alleviation policies that impose conditions on women (usually, that children attend school and healthcare check-ups) in exchange for cash transfers, indicating that these time costs are nontrivial and in some cases might offset transferred income (Sarah Gammage 2010).

A particularly important goal of the BPfA’s development agenda is the full integration of women in all spheres of public life, including in employment and decision making at all levels, which might be hindered by women’s responsibilities for unpaid work (CSW 2010b). From the point of view of current development agendas, the emphasis is not so much on enhancing women’s “employability” by allowing them to redistribute part of their unpaid care work, but on making full employment and the generation of decent work for all the primary goal of macroeconomic policies (EGM 2009; CSW 2010a). Engendering this aggregate and demand-side perspective requires understanding the particular workings of women’s labor supply and sectoral demand. Moreover, the redistribution of unpaid work towards the “society as a whole” and “full employment for all” (CSW 2010a: 5, point 14.e; 4, point 3) must be linked in order to achieve both objectives (Rania Antonopoulos 2010).

**Improving time-use data collection methods and linking them directly to policy**

The emphasis on aggregation and counting of unpaid work has led to criticism among those who focus on care policies, because important dimensions of caring remain unaccountable and could be missed (see, for example, Joan Tronto [forthcoming]). Some feminist scholars have also expressed their reluctance to accept TUS as a good means to measure care, given the linearity and “modern-clock” bias of activity diaries – which
might conflict with the needs-based logic of care provision – and their narrow focus on the materiality of care (Valerie Bryson 2008). In spite of these valid criticisms, time-use data can provide renewed evidence to support agendas for the redistribution of care, and TUS methods have improved as a result. Indeed, the move from the emphasis on producing aggregate estimations of unpaid work to the production of more detailed time-use information has resulted, in part, from these criticisms.

An open approach is required to engage with development specialists and macroeconomists who are frequently unaware of the extent of “the [care] economy” if not feminist, and even less aware of the potential of time-use data to illuminate sectoral policies and the impact of macroeconomic policies on unpaid work. The value of unpaid care work need not be treated uniquely as a macroeconomic aggregate but may also feed into calculations of the “extended income” at the household level (Nancy Folbre 2009). These calculations have helped to challenge conventional income inequality measures as well as poverty measures (Claire Vickery 1977; Andrew S. Harvey and Arun K. Mukhopadhyay 2007; Cathleen D. Zick, W. Keith Bryant, and Sivithee Srisukhumbowornchai 2008).

Time-use data can also complement other sources of data and support objectives beyond unpaid work measurement – for example, measuring the labor force, informal sector activities, or infrastructure needs (Indira Hirway and Jacques Charmes 2006). TUS could also become a powerful policy-monitoring device to measure whether different policies effectively reduce and redistribute unpaid care work (UNRISD 2010). Using TUS as monitoring devices could also help support their collection on a regular basis. A move of TUS from the sphere of national accountancy offices to social and demographic statistics could help in bringing in several policy-oriented demands and therefore better cater to specific policy evaluation purposes (Margarita Guerrero 2008).

A RENEWED ADVOCACY FOR TIME-USE DATA COLLECTION

The path opened by the BPfA has been a fruitful and crucial one, without which the lessons learnt regarding how to frame advocacy for time-use data collection and unpaid work measurement could not have been learnt. However, it would be a strategic mistake to continue advocating for the measurement of unpaid work in exactly the same terms as the BPfA did sixteen years ago. Aggregate estimations of the monetary value of unpaid work should not be presented as the main or only reason for conducting TUS. On the contrary, a renewed advocacy for time-use data collection should recast time-use data collection not as a precursor to the construction of household-sector satellite accounts, but as an irreplaceable source of information for the design of policies that support the reduction and
redistribution of unpaid care work within a framework that recognizes both caregivers’ contributions to well-being and the costs of caregiving – that is, within an economic justice framework.

Of course, time-use data per se do not indicate what these policy interventions should be – that is, a way to reduce and redistribute unpaid work in specific contexts. But time-use data have already been used to advance the care agenda and the development agenda, providing evidence of the centrality of unpaid work to the production of well-being. Beyond the stylized finding that women everywhere bear the brunt of the costs of this provision, time-use data show that economic and social environment, household structure, income distribution, and social and economic policy all shape the ways in which some women and households more than others, and some countries more than others, distribute unpaid work (Debbie Budlender 2008, 2010). Evidence of gender and class inequalities in the distribution of unpaid work, overwork, and even care deficits – when the most basic care needs are not met – should help feminist advocates and scholars, as well as policymakers, to envision social and macroeconomic policies that would reverse these persistent disparities.

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NOTES

1 For recent inventories, see the Annex in Valeria Esquivel, Debbie Budlender, Nancy Folbre, and Indira Hirway (2008) and Indira Hirway (2010b).

2 Although the subsistence sector is seldom included in practical terms due to lack of data, the UN System of National Accounts has included it as part of the production boundary (that is, included in gross domestic product [GDP] calculations) since 1993.

3 For heterodox contributions, see the special issues of World Development (Nilüfer Çağatay, Diane Elson, and Caren Grown 1995; Caren Grown, Diane Elson, and Nilüfer Çağatay 2000); Colin Danby (2004, 2008); and S. Charusheela (2010).
Examples of these models are that of William Darity, Jr. (1995), which includes a household production function for subsistence production; the Computable General Equilibrium (CGE) model for Bangladesh by Marzia Fontana and Adrian Wood (2000), which includes “reproduction” and “leisure” as separate economic sectors; and that of Ismaël Fofana, John Cockburn, and Bernard Decaluwé (2005), who use microsimulations to test the impact of trade reforms on women’s and men’s participation in paid and unpaid care work.

Debbie Budlender (2004) goes beyond this criticism to explain that time-use data are discursive devices. As she puts it: “Detailed data are, however, not necessary for unpaid labour to be considered in GRB initiatives […] exact data strengthen the case and make it appear more scientific, but are not required for appropriate policy making” (2004: 17).

The Human Development Report 1995 (UNDP 1995) is an example of the conceptual approach already developed at that time, and of the scarce time-use data then available.

In the words of Selma James: “When we say wages for housework we don’t expect that the first pound, dollar or lira that comes to us is going to transform the situation and the society. We have a number of objectives with the perspective of wages for housework. The first […] is for housework to be visible. And that has immediate implications both directly and indirectly; that is, women can say ‘This is what I have been doing’ to their families and to their communities generally. […] This money was women’s by right, this was owed to us. We must have this money as an entitlement” (Global Women’s Strike 2009).

If a “specialist wage” is applied, then the different services provided by unpaid work should be identified.

For example, in 2001, a short module was introduced to the 2001 Living Conditions Survey in Argentina. It had “yes/no” questions to ten tasks, but respondents were asked to report the time devoted to perform them all, making it impossible to distinguish time spent on different tasks.

For references on TUS methods, see UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2005) and Esquivel et al. (2008).

Defined in this way, there is no reason to exclude from care relationships those situations in which the caregiver receives a payment or monetary reward – that is, a situation in which someone different from the caregiver provides resources to sustain the care relationship. Indeed, one important difference between unpaid work and care work is that the newer concept departs from the BPF framework, “more specifically, focusing on the labour process rather than the relationship to the site of production (home versus market) or the production boundary (in the SNA [system of national accounts] or not)” (Folbre 2006: 186). In the latter sense, this new formulation expands unpaid work by including also the study of care work performed in the paid economy – the work of teachers, nurses, doctors, paid domestic workers, and so on

However, Jochimsen argues that it is possible to reclaim “the power of the concept of dependency to capture essential human relations which exist alongside moments of autonomy” (2003: 241).

Children themselves have agency, voice, and rights, even though they cannot act upon these themselves.

These assertions are supported by time-use data. See, for example, Suzanne M. Bianchi, Melissa A. Milkie, Liana C. Sayer, and John P. Robinson (2000); Jonathan Gershuny (2000); and Jonathan Gershuny and Oriel Sullivan (2003).

Some authors maintain that since care is always provided within a care relationship, the nature of care itself changes when it is commodified because the relationship
changes (Susan Himmelweit 1995). The feelings and motivations that accompany care work become nontransferable, and therefore “non-commodifiable” (Kathleen Lynch 2007). Later writings take a somewhat less strict view. For example, Nancy Folbre states that “debates over whether care should or should not be ‘commodified’ often overstate the consequences of whether care work takes place inside or outside the money economy. Most forms of care for dependents – including but not limited to children – require a combination of paid and unpaid work. Substitutability between the two is limited, especially at the extremes. Few families can care for dependents entirely on their own, and few schools or hospitals can operate successfully without cooperation from family members. But most people reach for a balance among the different types of care that help them meet their needs” (2008: 376).

Some literature conceives of housework as a “costly” activity that most people would choose to avoid and demand substitutes for and caring as a “rewarding” activity, therefore not a “cost” (Paula England and Michelle J. Budig 1998). Recently, Robert E. Goodin, James Mahmud Rice, Antti Parpo, and Lina Eriksson (2008) have proposed the criterion of “socially necessary” time to frame choices regarding unpaid work: only beyond the minimum necessary time does the choice to perform an activity emerge. In this way, they do not need to (arbitrarily) differentiate care work from housework: both are necessary up to a certain threshold, and a matter of choice beyond it.

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