



Oral Statement
Expert Mechanism on the Right to
Development – 6th Session

Thematic study
Inequality and social protection systems in operationalizing the right to development.

We at Make Mothers Matter would like to congratulate the Expert Mechanism for its draft thematic study on *Inequality and social protection systems in operationalizing the right to development*. We welcome this thematic focus, which is crucial to the right to development. We also welcome its reference to *Our Common Agenda*, the Secretary's General landmark roadmap and proposal for a new social contract.

However, the draft study fails to clearly acknowledge a key reality: there cannot be any development without women. Women and girls are not a marginalized group - they represent more than half of humanity.

The fact is that to ensure equality of opportunity for development for women, and their full and effective participation in economic and social development, we must address the inequitable distribution of **unpaid care work**. This issue is at the root of Gender inequalities and a main cause of reduced or even lost opportunities for women and girls¹.

In particular it is time to establish:

1. that the unpaid work of caring for others IS work², essential work that must be recognized and supported for what it is: foundational to our society and our economy
2. that this work is mostly done by women and girls, who are heavily penalized for assuming this responsibility, in particular when they are mothers
3. that unpaid care work should be a collective responsibility, and that it must be more equitably shared between men and women, but also across society – including through the provision of supportive infrastructure and social protection systems³

These necessary steps are in line with the Secretary General's recommendation in *Our Common Agenda* to measure and value what matters for people and the planet - beginning with unpaid care work.

¹ See also the 2013 Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Magdalena Sepulveda, on unpaid care work and women's human rights
<https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2F68%2F293&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False>

² This is in fact acknowledged by a resolution adopted by the 2013 International Conference of Labour Statisticians on Resolution concerning statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization – see https://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/standards-and-guidelines/resolutions-adopted-by-international-conferences-of-labour-statisticians/WCMS_230304/lang--en/index.htm

³ See the series of HLPF that MMM has organized these past few years: <https://makemothersmatter.org/care-is-a-collective-responsibility/>, <https://makemothersmatter.org/unpaid-care-work-is-work-that-our-economic-system-must-recognize-invest-in-and-support/> and <https://makemothersmatter.org/placing-care-education-at-the-heart-of-a-new-economic-system/>

The work of Caring is inherently human and it is at the centre of wellbeing, both human and environmental. In our view, valuing and supporting Care work should be at the heart of policy making to operationalize the right to development.

Disconnecting social protection from formal employment and embracing the principle of universal coverage and social protection floors is a critical first step in this direction, and it is especially important in the current context of economic crisis and the looming threat of austerity. But more needs to be done.

To quote the UN SG: “The pandemic has shown us who is doing the work that really matters: nurses, teachers, care workers. As we recover, we need to remember this. It is time to end the inequities of unpaid care work and create new economic models that work for everyone”⁴.

So here are my (multiple) questions:

- Could the right to development framework help address this issue of the inequitable distribution of unpaid care work?
- To go further along this line, could we recognize Care as a human right, the right to care and the right to be cared for – a new right that supports the right to development?
- How could the right to development framework support the creation of a new economic model that works for everyone and helps us move away from the GDP growth mantra?

⁴ Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General, Town Hall with Young Women from Civil Society Organizations on 31 August 2020