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Aid for social protection program  
Foundation Vietnam



GENDER EQUALITY DEPARTMENT  
MINISTRY OF SOCIAL INVALIDS AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

**act:onaid**



**HOW MUCH DOES IT COST  
WOMEN FOR MEN TO BE  
THE FAMILY'S BACKBONE?**

**POLICY BRIEF**

**2**





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## List of abbreviations

<b>AAV</b>	ActionAid Vietnam
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GSO</b>	General Statistics Office
<b>ISDS</b>	Institute for Social Development Studies
<b>MOET</b>	Ministry of Education and Training
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>UCW</b>	Unpaid Care Work
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organization
<b>UNIFEM</b>	United Nations Development Fund for Women
<b>VND</b>	Vietnamese Dong



# 1. Introduction

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Unpaid care work (UCW) refers to “all unpaid services provided within a household for its members, including care of persons, housework, and voluntary community work”.<sup>1</sup> Throughout history, in many societies, household chores such as cooking, washing, taking care of children, elders and other family members and many other forms of “un-named work”, have been considered women’s work. In ActionAid’s view, women contribute to social work and production work as well as reproductive work.<sup>2</sup> Usually, only (part of) production work is paid and recognized in the labor codes and calculation of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for economies across the world. Social work and reproductive work by women are generally invisible and taken for granted as unpaid care work. In many countries in the world women do not receive time off for maternity leave, as their reproductive work

is unrecognized. Many women combine unpaid care work with unpaid production work to gain family income.

Unpaid care work is receiving increasing attention in high level policy discussions and has been prioritized under Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Vietnam’s National Action Plan for the Implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda commits the country to ensure equality in family care, recognize unpaid care and domestic work, and improve public services to reduce unpaid care work (Decision No 622/QĐ-TTg).<sup>3</sup> Vietnam’s National Strategy on Gender Equality for the 2011-2020 period aims to curtail women’s time of involvement in household duties by two times by 2015 and 1.5 times by 2020 as compared to men’s.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Elson, D. (2000). *Progress of the World’s Women 2000*. New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

<sup>2</sup> *Social work involves participating in social activities to maintain the family’s relationships and status in society. This includes attending weddings, funerals, community festivals or activities, religious and cultural rituals, visiting relatives, taking care of children and elders, attending parent-teacher meetings, and other activities. Production work involves any activities that earn income or food for the family, reproductive work includes bearing a child, taking of children, helping them to learn as well as rearing them.*

<sup>3</sup> *National Action Plan for the Implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (Decision No 622/QĐ-TTg): <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Thuong-mai/Quyết-dinh-622-QĐ-TTg-2017-Ke-hoach-hanh-dong-quoc-gia-thuc-hien-Chuong-trinh-nghi-su-2030-348831.aspx>*

However, implementation of these ambitious goals will be challenging and will require understanding of the complex factors that drive and perpetuate the lack of recognition and unequal allocation of unpaid care work.

In this context, ActionAid Vietnam, with support from Irish Aid, Ireland Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, has been undertaking a multi-year research project to better understand patterns of unpaid care work in Vietnam and the perspectives of different stakeholders on issues of unpaid care and household responsibilities. The research uses time diary tools, as well as participatory discussion-based research methods to build a detailed picture. It is being undertaken in three phases, with each phase drawing out lessons and recommendations relating to each of the ‘three Rs’ of unpaid care work:

- **Recognition** that

- (i) unpaid care work is work and plays an important role in the socio-economic development of the

family, society and country;

- (ii) unpaid care work is not work by women and for women only; a lot of this can be shared by men and other family members;

- (iii) unpaid care work can be reduced and redistributed with support from the government and other members of families and communities.

- **Reduction** of unpaid care work can be done through

- (i) recognizing that the unpaid care work is important to society’s development and that women are shouldering the loads invisibly;

- (ii) governments and stakeholders providing public services to lessen the burden so that women can have time to rest, study and build their strengths for further development opportunities;

- (iii) men and other family members shouldering their parts in delivering unpaid care work; unpaid care work can also be reduced by introducing

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<sup>4</sup> National Strategy on Gender Equality for the period 2011 to 2020 (Decision 2351/QĐ-TTg): <http://www.chinhphu.vn/portal/page/portal/English/strategies/strategiesdetails?categoryId=30&articleId=10050924>



different types of machines (washing machines, dishwashers, robot vacuum cleaners, etc.), however, this does not tackle the root cause of the unpaid care work burden on women's shoulders; and

- **Redistribution** of unpaid care work can be done between household members, between the duty bearers and rights holders, between the state and the citizens. This is the most important action to challenge the inequality between men and women and address patriarchy, and therefore the aspect that needs to be advanced at all levels for meaningful empowerment.

This research aims to contribute to a better understanding of the volume and types of unpaid care work that different women and men undertake in Vietnam, as well as the underlying causes that contribute to the current patterns of care. Women's disproportionate burden for unpaid care work is bound up in the patriarchal values that place the

responsibility for care squarely on a woman's shoulders. Reducing this burden is possible through many routes, including providing public services and investing in initiatives to address social norms. Failure to address inequality of care represents a failure to recognize women's needs in resource management, policy development and implementation.

This policy brief provides a summary of key policy issues arising from this research and follows on from the first policy brief in this series, "Unpaid Care Work - Make a House become a Home", published September 2016.<sup>5</sup> It highlights differences in results between this research and the previous research, and presents a more detailed analysis of the patterns of care across different ethnicities, geographic areas and age groups.

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<sup>5</sup> ActionAid Vietnam (2016). *Unpaid Care Work - Make a House become a Home*. [http://actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/ucw\\_policy\\_brief\\_en.pdf](http://actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/ucw_policy_brief_en.pdf)

## Key Messages

- Women spent **40 minutes less time every day** on unpaid care work, after participating in the first phase of the time diary study and awareness-raising sessions.
- Despite this improvement, women still spent an average of 274 minutes (4.5 hours) on unpaid care work each day. This represents 32 hours per week, or 207 working days per year that women contribute, but this contribution is unrecognized.
- Every day, on average women spent **105 minutes more than men on unpaid care work** (274 minutes compared to men's 169 minutes).
- Out of all the unpaid work done by women, 177 minutes (three hours) per day is unpaid work that is counted in GDP (such as helping with a family farm).<sup>6</sup> Young women under 29 make the largest contribution to unpaid GDP work of all ages or genders – 98 minutes more than men of the same age.
- Women over 60 spent more than five hours per day on unpaid care work – more than any other age group – and spent more time on childcare than almost all working-age women.
- Women in Northern Mountainous areas spent **nearly two hours (107 minutes) every day** collecting fuel and water – compared to three minutes for women in central cities – most likely because of their more limited access to infrastructure and services.
- Women with higher education spent 104 more minutes on paid work than women with primary education or lower. But higher education did not reduce women's time on unpaid care work.
- There is a significant unmet need for kindergarten services for children under 24 months, to reduce the burden of unpaid care work.
- If women were remunerated at minimum wage<sup>7</sup> for their unpaid care work, their contribution would **represent 996 trillion VND per year – or 30 times the amount that local and national governments in Vietnam spent on kindergarten education in 2013.**<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Unpaid work counted in GDP includes: subsistence agriculture, livestock farming, recycling, or volunteer work.

<sup>7</sup> Web Portal of the Ministry of Finance. Some policies that come to effect since 01/01/2017: <https://goo.gl/bLmfjK>

<sup>8</sup> Unpaid work counted in GDP includes: subsistence agriculture, livestock farming, recycling, or volunteer work.

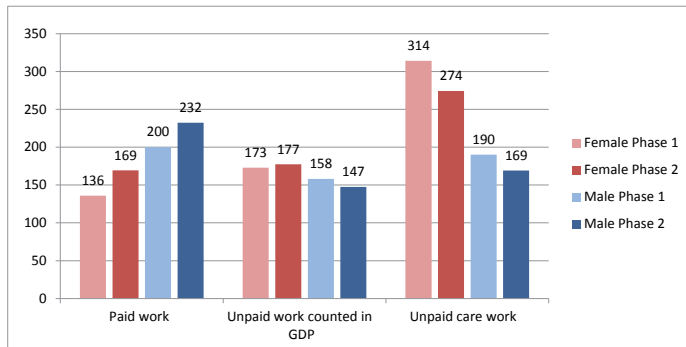
### Box 1: Key terms defined

**Paid work** includes work done for a wage or salary, in a family small business, producing or selling products, collecting rubbish or petty trading.

**Unpaid work (calculated in GDP)** includes subsistence agriculture, livestock farming, recycling, or volunteer work.

**Unpaid Care Work** includes collecting fuel and water, housework (preparing food, cleaning, washing, grocery shopping), care of children, care of adults (including elderly, sick or with a disability), and social or cultural activities (such as meeting with people in the village, attending ceremonies, prayer).

Figure 1 - Overview of time-use diary



Source: ActionAid Vietnam’s unpaid care work time diary surveys – April to July 2016

**Self-Care** includes learning, education and entertainment (doing homework, watching television, reading, entertainment, etc.), sleep, and other self-care (eating, dressing, or washing).

*For a more comprehensive definition of these terms and how they were used in the research, see: ActionAid Vietnam (2016). Unpaid Care Work - Make a House become a Home. [http://actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/ucw\\_policy\\_brief\\_-\\_en.pdf](http://actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/ucw_policy_brief_-_en.pdf)*

## 2. Methodology

This policy brief draws on the results of the second phase of a time use study that was conducted between April and July 2016. The second phase follows the same methodology as the first phase (conducted from January to April 2016). The study is being undertaken in nine provinces: Ho Chi Minh City, Dak Nong, Lam Dong, Ha Noi, Ha Giang, Cao Bang, Tra Vinh, Quang Ninh, and Vinh Long.

Over the course of the study, six data surveys have been collected and analyzed in two phases. The researchers compiled information from the time use diaries of 784 women and men who participated in both phases. To complement the statistics from the time use diaries, the researchers also collected qualitative information through focus group discussions with those who filled in time diaries as well as representatives from local authorities and communities. The participants have also participated in awareness-raising sessions to build community members' understanding of unpaid care work at household level. District meetings were also conducted after each phase of research as part of validating the results. This primary data has been

supplemented with secondary research to better understand trends and context.

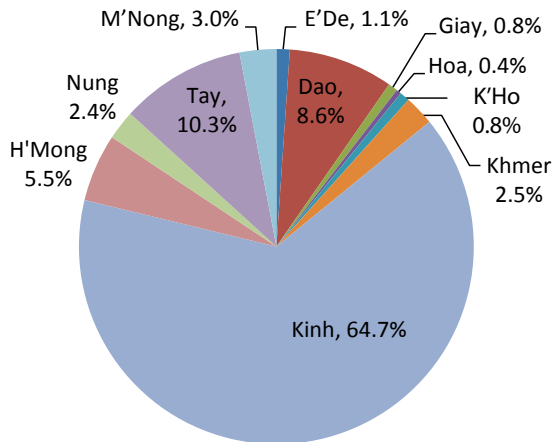
The methodology for this research differs from that used in similar studies of unpaid care work in Vietnam and elsewhere in several key respects. Firstly, the research has been conducted by the participants themselves and monitored and overseen by trained members of the local community, rather than outside observers. The research is also multi-year, rather than one-off, which allows for monitoring of changes in participants' views and behavior over time. Finally, the research includes a strong training and awareness raising component, as well as community-led discussions in which men and women can discuss issues around unpaid care work and its magnitude. They explore the underlying social norms and beliefs that contribute to inequality and plan actions together. These components are designed to ensure that the research does not just record the existing situation, but also empowers communities to take action to change the situation for the better.

The total sample size is 784 people – with 2,202 responses obtained over three batches (59% female and 41% male).

All participants in phase two participated in phase one, so the two sets of results are comparable – although 41 individuals dropped out of the study in phase two and were disqualified.

As with the previous research, 11 ethnic groups participated in this research, with the highest proportion belonging to the Kinh group (65%), followed by Tay (10%), Dao (9%) and H'Mong (6%). Since over 50% of respondents belonged to the Kinh group, the results may reflect the Kinh culture and practices more than other groups.

Figure 2 - Ethnicity of Respondents



Source: ActionAid Vietnam's unpaid care work time diary surveys – April to July 2016

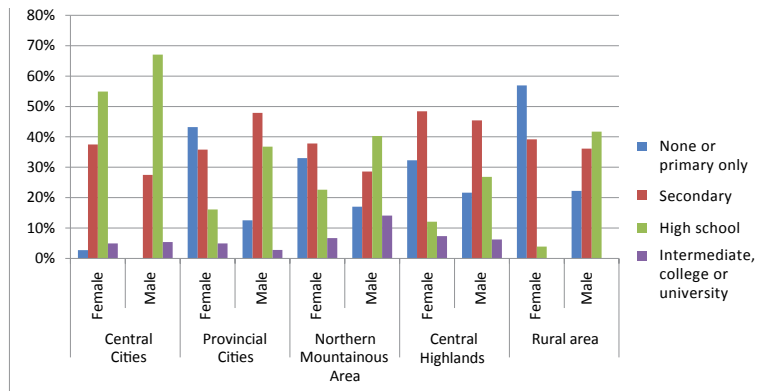


Over 80% of respondents are married, and only 6.3% of women and 13.6% of men are single respectively. This is understandable because the age group over 30 accounts for 80% of the total sample.

Regarding location, because of similarity among regions, the report regroups nine locations into five areas: Central Cities (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City), Provincial Cities (Tra Vinh, Uong Bi), Northern Mountainous Area (Ha Giang, Cao Bang), Central Highlands (Dak Nong, Lam Dong) and Rural Area (Vinh Long). The Kinh group is the majority in all areas except for in Northern Mountainous Area.

In terms of education, more than 92% of both female and male respondents have studied from primary to high school; however, the disparity between men and women remains - the rate of men studying from high school level and higher education is 47.4% while the rate of women is only 27.9%. Figure 3 shows the gap between male and female and between areas. The education rate is highest among respondents in Central cities and lowest among rural areas, and the gap between male and female is biggest in rural areas. Outside the major cities, high-school completion rates are low.

Figure 3 - Education of respondents by area and gender



Source: ActionAid Vietnam's unpaid care work time diary surveys – April to July 2016

## 3. Key Findings

### 3.1. Women's unpaid care burden

The findings from this research reinforce the findings from the previous research: **women at any age, ethnicity, rural or urban location undertake more unpaid care work than men.**

In this research, women committed significantly more time to unpaid care work than men, as well as more time to unpaid GDP work and less time to paid work or rest. Women spent 105 minutes more than men on unpaid care work each day, and 274 minutes (4.5 hours) on unpaid care work in total, which translates to 32 hours per week, over 16 working days per month, or 207 working days per year.<sup>9</sup> This means every year each woman contributes almost seven months of her time to unpaid care work, which is largely unrecognized with little opportunity to share with her husband, partners, sons, or other members of the family or communities.

<sup>9</sup> Based on a working day of 8 hours.

However, there has been a reduction in the care gap between women and men between the previous research (where women spent an average of 124 minutes more than men on unpaid care) and this research (where the average difference was 105 minutes). Awareness-raising activities and discussions facilitated in the community between phase one and two, as well as awareness built through completing and sharing the time diaries, are likely to have contributed to this change. Comments from focus group sessions support this, with several male participants commenting that they were doing more to help their wives with household work following the training they had received.

*When sharing time diary survey with family members, men discovered the problem that they did not involve in housework and did not participate in cultural or social activities.*

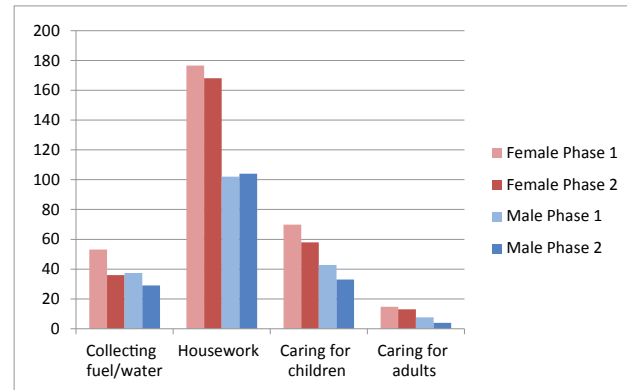
*Notes of focus group discussion, Hanoi*

The reduction of unpaid care work by both women and men could be due to the timing – phase one data was gathered in the first three months of the year, which include the Tet holiday and may involve men and women spending more time at home, while phase two was collected in the middle of the year. It could also be because of improved efficiency – some focus group comments suggested the time diary exercise made men and women think about how much time they spend on unpaid care work and how to reduce it. It is significant that men increased time on housework even as they decreased time on childcare – this could suggest that while men are willing to do more work in the house, childcare remains a woman’s responsibility.

In this research, both men and women dedicated more time to paid work than in the previous research – an average of around 30 more minutes each. Alarming, the gap between women and men’s time spent on unpaid GDP work rose during the period – widening from 15 minutes to 30 between the two phases of research. This requires further investigation in the next stage of research, to ascertain whether time women save on unpaid care work merely goes into other unpaid work for the household.

As in the previous research, women of any marital status spent more time on unpaid care work than men – with the exception of men and women whose spouse was deceased. Interestingly, single women spent least time in paid work (147 minutes – nearly 2.5 hours) while married women spent 170 minutes (nearly three hours). This is contrary to the conventional expectation that married women would focus more on the household and single women on their jobs, and highlights the double burden that women experience when balancing both productive and reproductive roles (while men appear to be able to focus on their productive role).

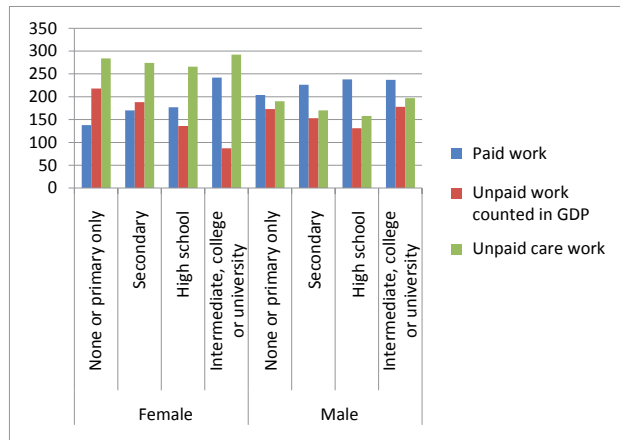
Figure 4 - Breakdown of unpaid care work



Source: Unpaid care work time diary surveys - April to July 2016



Figure 5 - Work by Education and Gender



Source: ActionAid Vietnam's unpaid care work time diary surveys – April to July 2016

### 3.2. Impact of education on unpaid care work

This research confirmed that a higher education level does not necessarily reduce unpaid care work, although women who did not go to school on average did more unpaid care work than women with primary education or higher.<sup>10</sup> However, higher education levels increased women's time spent on paid work and reduced time spent on unpaid GDP work – suggesting that education has a strong beneficial impact on women's work options. For men, higher education resulted in slightly higher rates of unpaid care work and unpaid GDP work but did not seem to have the same impact on paid work that women's education did.

From a policy perspective, these findings highlight that providing women with more opportunities for education is important to open up their choices in paid work. However they also suggest there is need to address the underlying gender norms that keep women with high levels of education and paid jobs responsible for unpaid care work.

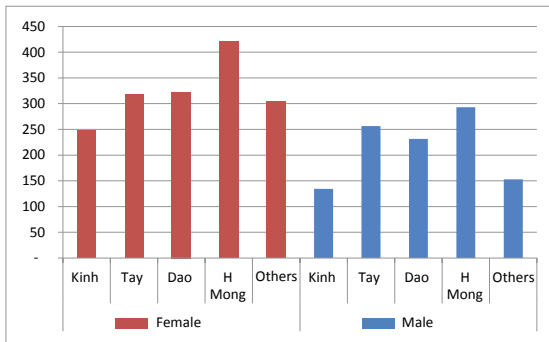
<sup>10</sup> Because of a small sample size of people with no education, the data has been combined with primary education in Figure 5.

### 3.3 Impact of ethnicity and geography on unpaid care work

The results confirm that **the amount of unpaid care work can vary significantly depending on ethnicity.** Specifically, Kinh people spend least time on UCW with 248 minutes (more than 4 hours) and 134 minutes (more than 2 hours) for female and male respectively while H’Mong people spend the biggest time on unpaid care work with 420 (7 hours) and 293 minutes (nearly 5 hours) for female and male respectively. This is consistent with the findings on the impact of geographical location – the vast majority of Hmong, Tay and Dao participants were located in Northern Mountains or Central Highland areas (see analysis below).

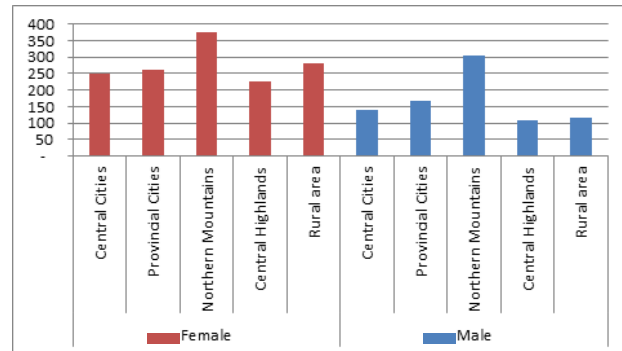
As with the previous research, **geography also played a major role in distribution of unpaid care work.** In regions with developed industrial and economic zones like Central and Provincial Cities (which are also likely to have more support facilities like clinics, kindergartens, schools and water wells located near the house), both women and men spent least time on unpaid care work. The result is consistent with other analysis that both women and men in Northern Mountainous Area spent the highest time on unpaid care work.

Figure 6 - UCW by Ethnicity and Gender



Source: ActionAid Vietnam’s unpaid care work time diary surveys – April to July 2016

Figure 7 - UCW by Area and Gender



Source: ActionAid Vietnam’s unpaid care work time diary surveys – April to July 2016

This may be due to poor access to infrastructure and services in these areas, which require both men and women to spend more time doing tasks that would be automated or provided by the state in other areas (like collecting water). For example, one focus group in Cao Bang noted that the medical station was far for elderly, women and children who have to walk there and that there is not enough clean water in their location.<sup>11</sup>

In Ha Giang, participants commented that schools were within 2 km for most residents, but that other facilities were lacking.<sup>12</sup> Focus groups in the Northern Mountains Region repeatedly commented on the inconvenience of collecting firewood and water.

On the other hand, Figure 7 shows that the gap on time on unpaid care work between women and men is biggest in Central Cities, followed by Central Highlands Region while the gap is smallest in the Northern Mountainous Area. Some focus group comments suggest that this may be because the high volume of work requires all household members to contribute, however this inequality is interesting to explore further in the third phase of research.

*“In the countryside there is always so much work, so we help each other”*

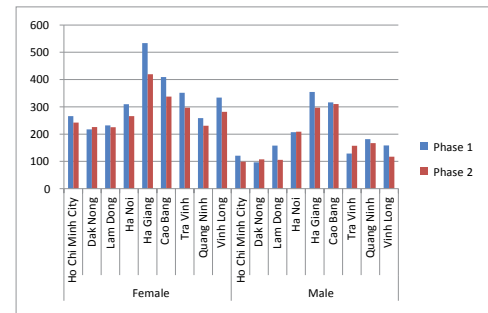
**Focus group discussion, Dong Ha, Quan Ba, Cao Bang**

<sup>11</sup> Focus group discussion, Lung Lua District, June 2016

<sup>12</sup> Focus group discussions, Quan Ba and Dong Ha Districts, June 2016.

Figure 8 shows that there is a significant reduction on time on unpaid care work of both women and men in Ha Giang and Cao Bang (Northern Mountainous Area). In Ha Giang, participants commented that filling in the time diary led to them reducing the time spent on unpaid care work. Participants in this region also commented in several different group discussions on the increased agricultural workload (and increased time in the fields) at the time of the phase two data collection which may have reduced participants’ time for unpaid care work.

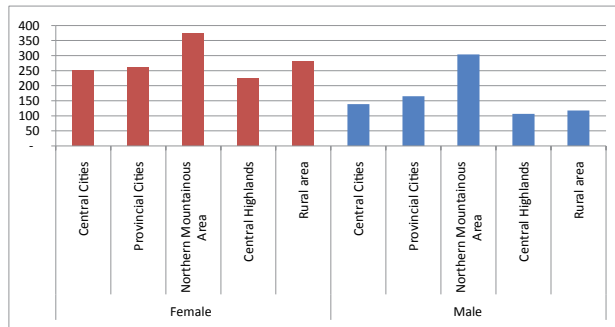
Figure 8 - UCW by location and gender



Source: ActionAid Vietnam’s unpaid care work time diary surveys – April to July 2016

As shown in Figure 9 both women and men in Northern Mountainous Area spent a lot of time on collecting fuel and water (over 90 minutes), and there is a big gap in rural areas when women spent nearly five times more than men did (62 minutes and 13 minutes for women and men respectively). **This suggests that investment on public services such as fuel and water provision facilities could significantly reduce time on unpaid care work, especially of women in Northern Mountainous Area** (see discussion above).

Figure 9 - Collecting fuel and water by Area and Gender

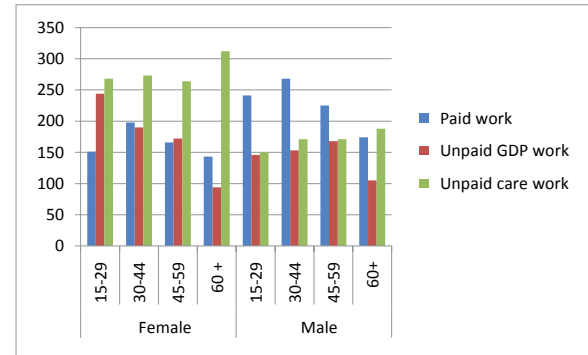


Source: ActionAid Vietnam’s unpaid care work time diary surveys – April to July 2016

### 3.4. Older women bear the greatest unpaid care work burden

The results highlight the important role of older women in providing unpaid care work - particularly childcare.

Figure 10 - Paid and unpaid work by age



Source: ActionAid Vietnam’s unpaid care work time diary surveys – April to July 2016

For both genders, unpaid care work reached its peak from 60 years and above – but women’s time (312 minutes or over five hours per day) greatly outweighed men’s (188 minutes – three hours). This finding is similar to the previous research. Data in Figure 11 (below) also shows that women over 55 with no children spend an average of 94 minutes a day caring for children – this is more than working age women with 0, 1, 2 or 3 children.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Note that another time use study in Vietnam, Counting Women’s Work, found two peaks in women’s unpaid care work – one at 20 years old and one over 60. As the sample and methodology of that study were different, the two results cannot be directly compared, but this also highlights the way that women who are not of working or reproductive age take on household care responsibilities for working-age women. See Dr. Nguyen Thi Lan Huong, Pham Minh Thu, and Pham Ngoc Toan (2017) Counting Women’s Work in Vietnam, Counting Women’s Work Country Report No 3, available at: [http://www.cww-dpru.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image\\_tool/images/74/Country%20Report%2003%20-%20Vietnam.pdf](http://www.cww-dpru.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/74/Country%20Report%2003%20-%20Vietnam.pdf)

This trend may relate to the aging rural population, where young people in the family move to urban areas in search for job opportunities, leaving their small children in the custody of grandparents, thereby increasing the burden of unpaid care work for the elderly in rural areas, especially older women.<sup>14</sup> It may also reflect the lack of availability of free or low cost public kindergartens, which many survey participants commented on, requiring family members to take responsibility for childcare. Regardless of the explanation, this trend highlights the important role that grandparents – particularly grandmothers – play in supporting the economy.

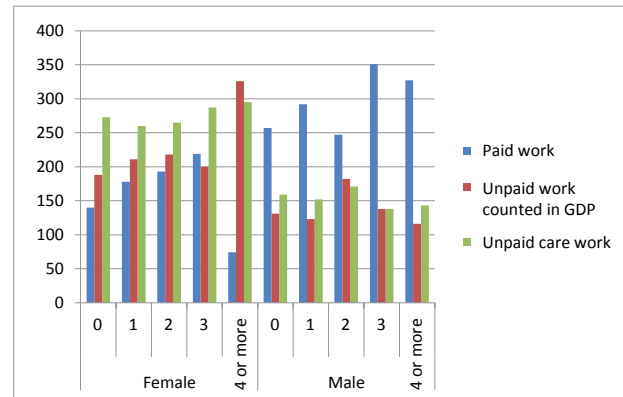
It is also significant to note that young women’s contribution to unpaid GDP work is high – averaging 244 minutes (4 hours) per day – higher than any other group.

### 3.5 Impact of number of children on unpaid care work

In this research, the number of children of respondents had a smaller impact on unpaid care work than in the previous research. Overall, women with four children spent 30 minutes more on unpaid care work compared to

women with two children and showed a sharp decline in paid work.<sup>15</sup> Men’s unpaid care work showed a slight increase with two children (of 19 minutes) and then a decrease with three children (of 33 minutes), while men’s paid work time went up with three and four children. This may reflect the need for additional household income to support a larger family, with the role of income earning falling traditionally to men and care falling to women.

Figure 11 - Paid and unpaid work by number of children



Source: ActionAid Vietnam’s unpaid care work time diary surveys – April to July 2016

<sup>14</sup> Thinh, H. B. (2008). Rural industrialization and changes in the current rural families. 3rd Conference on Vietnamese Studies. (pp. 256-271). Ha Noi: Vietnam National University, Hanoi.  
<sup>15</sup> However, it is important to note the small sample size – only eight women and six men had four or more children and only 12 men had three children. There were also many missing responses on numbers of children (30% of sample did not answer).



## 4. How can we reduce women's unpaid care responsibilities?

Vietnam's National Action Plan for the Implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda commits the country to ensure equality in family care, recognize unpaid care and domestic work, and improve public services to reduce unpaid care work.<sup>16</sup> The Action Plan also sets out a series of activities that will be undertaken at local and national level to achieve this commitment. The data from this research, as well as the comments and suggestions from community members in focus group discussions, also shed light on what initiatives will be effective to implement this commitment.

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<sup>16</sup> *National Action Plan for the Implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (Decision No 622/QĐ-TTg): <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Thuong-mai/Quy-et-dinh-622-QĐ-TTg-2017-Ke-hoach-hanh-dong-quoc-gia-thuc-hien-Chuong-trinh-nghi-su-2030-348831.aspx>*

#### 4.1. Recognition of the value and impact of unpaid care work

Previous research has identified that unpaid care work could potentially account for more than 20% of Vietnam's GDP.<sup>17</sup> The time diary analysis in particular highlights the contribution older women make to the economy by providing childcare for working-age parents. Recognizing the contribution of this work is an important first step to ensuring that economic and social policy supports this vital section of the economy. Greater recognition and codification of unpaid care work from 2020 is included as a priority activity in the National Action Plan to implement the SDGs.

The results support the theory that greater recognition and awareness of unpaid care work may lead to a reduction and even a small redistribution of this work within the household. Both women and men spoke in focus groups about the changes that had occurred in their households as a result of the awareness training and filling in the survey.

*“After many times of filling in the time diary, we found it quite effective because each time we filled in this diary, we thought about how much time we had to work.”*

*Group discussion, Quan Ba District,  
Ha Giang province*

*“Through this training I realized that men and women are equal, so work should also be shared with each other, not one person to do it all.”*

*Female discussion participant, Tra Vinh*

#### 4.2. Addressing underlying gender norms

Despite the above changes, focus group discussions still highlighted the strong prevalence of views that it is women's role to do the housework and care for children and women are better suited to this role.

<sup>17</sup> ActionAid Vietnam (2016). *Unpaid Care Work - Make a House become a Home*. [http://actonaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/ucw\\_policy\\_brief\\_en.pdf](http://actonaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/ucw_policy_brief_en.pdf)



## Box 2: Perceptions about the division of unpaid care work in Families

Views expressed in group discussions justifying the current trend in the division of unpaid care included:

*“According to gender norms in all families, women must keep house”*

*“Men are the family backbones and should do heavy duties, and make all major decisions in the family.”*

*“Men mostly make money, thus the housework and unpaid care work are women’s main duties”*

*“Men are clumsy and cannot cook well and as a result, then women do not allow them to cook anymore”*

*“Women are often money managers; women are financial managers of families. Women know how to be housewives”*

*“Women always take their responsibilities seriously; they worry about their children, housework, husband and children, parents even when they feel tired, they still feel obliged to perform their duties.”*



These views have their origins in the historical role of women within the Vietnamese family unit, which places responsibility for maintenance of the home and the family on women's shoulders and dictates that child-rearing is women's 'innate task'.<sup>18</sup> Women's role in the household is inculcated into girls and boys from a young age, with girls doing more care work than boys and boys' work is focused on handy work and repairs while girls' work focuses on washing, cleaning, cooking and looking after siblings.<sup>19</sup> The role of the mother is central to many Vietnamese myths, legends and stories of nation formation – from the mythical role of the mother Au Co to the brave mothers who fought in successive wars of liberation.<sup>20</sup> While women have long been participating in paid work and public life, underlying social norms about women's caring role are resistant to change. The role of the women as the primary household carer persists.

*“In modern society, women’s role is no longer confined to the family. The beauty of the modern female is also demonstrated not only by the four virtues of “industry, appearance, speech and behavior” but also by her knowledge, intelligence and social awareness. This , however, does not mean that young girls can afford to neglect their housework.”*

*Quan doi Nhan Dan Newspaper, 8 March 2005<sup>21</sup>*

In particular, mothers and mothers-in-law are considered responsible for household management and are often responsible for training the daughters of the household to undertake unpaid care work. To change distribution of care, it is necessary to challenge the social norms that underpin inequality in the household. This includes eliminating instances where institutions reinforce fixed gender roles, but also

<sup>18</sup> *Institute for Social Development Studies (ISDS) (2015) Social Determinants of Gender Equality in Viet Nam, Hà Nội, ISDS supported by Ford Foundation, Australian Government, Oxfam Novib available at: [http://vietnam.embassy.gov.au/files/hnoi/ISDS\\_Report\\_Binh%20dang%20gioi\\_EN\\_PDF-2.pdf](http://vietnam.embassy.gov.au/files/hnoi/ISDS_Report_Binh%20dang%20gioi_EN_PDF-2.pdf)*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Le Thi Nham Tuyet (ed) (2005) Images of the Vietnamese Woman in the 21st Century, The Gioi Publishers, Hanoi.*

<sup>21</sup> *As cited in Tuyet, ibid.*

supporting women’s own empowerment and choice. Strict gender roles restrict both men and women and change in this area would benefit the entire population.

*“Local governments need more propaganda to influence men’s perceptions of change. Because women sometimes do not dare to speak.”*

**Female group discussion participant, Tra Vinh**

Vietnam’s National Action Plan on the SDGs stipulates that the government will take action to implement a “Dad’s caring hands” intervention to increase men’s participation in sharing domestic work and childcare. Funding and implementation of this initiative may support norm and behavior change, particularly if accompanied by interventions focused on changing beliefs from childhood.

#### **4.3. Improving the availability of public services**

In focus group discussions, several respondents cited the inaccessibility of and unavailability of some basic public services as kindergarten, health care and water which require women to spend their time providing these services.

*“Currently, local public services are not guaranteed, quality is not good. Once disease is detected, the response is not good, and majority of local people go to seek medical attention at the District Medical Centre. Kindergartens and schools should be opened in different new sites. Previously, small sites of kindergartens were there which made it convenient to take the children to schools, but this year those small sites have been disbanded, parents have to take their children quite far for the same services and this does consume their time. The hamlet does not have tap-water and still uses water from the river.”*

**Group discussion, Vung Liem district,  
Vinh Long province**

*“Majority of women thought unpaid care work is women’s work and they had to undertake it without reflection or pressing. However, those women suggest to improve the quality of public services: health and kindergartens so that they could keep their mind on caring for family and children”.*

**Notes of group discussion in Lam Ha district,  
Lam Dong province**

These results are supported by the data that shows that women and men in more remote geographical areas spend more time on unpaid care work, potentially because of the lack of services available in those locations. The data also suggests that providing services in Northern mountainous areas to reduce the amount of time collecting fuel and water would give women in those areas close to two extra hours per day. This is supported by international evidence. In Uganda, having a fuel-efficient stove reduced the gender gap in primary care work by one hour. In South Africa, the time women spent on housework decreased when rural electrification was introduced, boosting labor force participation by 9 percent (Klugman and Melkinova, 2016).<sup>22</sup>

Provision of child care for pre-school aged children has also been found to increase women's participation in the workforce in several countries.<sup>23</sup> While Vietnam has improved access to early childhood care and education in recent years, enrolments for children under three years



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<sup>22</sup> Klugman, J and Melkinova, T. (2016) *Unpaid Work and Care, A Policy Brief. The Secretary General's High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

(when the burden of care is highest) are still low – with a national rate of 22.7 per cent but much lower rates in some regions such as Mekong River Delta (6.8 per cent) and Central Highlands (6.2 per cent).<sup>24</sup> The rate of enrolment of children under two is particularly low, at 14.3 percent in 2013-14.<sup>25</sup> Participants in one focus group discussion also commented on the timing of these services, indicating it would be valuable for kindergarten services to be open sooner, and to have lunch available for young children.<sup>26</sup>

A survey on public kindergartens in Uong Bi City, Quang Ninh province carried out by Uong Bi Women Development Fund with support from ActionAid Vietnam showed that there is no public kindergarten for

children 6-24 months in Uong Bi.<sup>27</sup> According to official statistics from Uong Bi Statistics Office, there are 3,877 children from below 24 months having not attended school or accessed public services. This number is only from local residents having a registered permanent address, and has not taken into account 30,000 migrant workers. The survey also reveals that the burden of taking care of children below two years old falls onto women or grandmother's shoulders and some women have to leave their jobs to take care of their children because of there is no public kindergarten.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Pham Thu Hien (2015) *Background paper: Analysis of Early Childhood Education and Care in Vietnam. Unpublished, cited in UN Women (2016) Discussion Paper – Unpaid Care and Domestic Work: Issues and Suggestions for Viet Nam. Ha Noi: UN Women.*

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) (2014) *Viet Nam Education for All 2015 Review. Ha Noi: UNESCO and MoET*

<sup>26</sup> *Focus Group Discussion, Quan Ba District, Ha Giang Province*

<sup>27</sup> *Minimum wage rates at Ke Toan Tien Ung: <http://ketoanthienung.net/muc-luong-toi-thieu-vung-nam-moi-nhat-hien-nay.htm>*

<sup>28</sup> *Data from GSO: Average Population by Sex and Residence, 2016 ([http://www.gso.gov.vn/default\\_en.aspx?tabid=774](http://www.gso.gov.vn/default_en.aspx?tabid=774)) and World Bank (Population Ages 15-64; 2016): <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.1564.TO.ZS>*



### Box 3: Women's economic subsidy

Our research shows that women spend on average 4.5 hours per day on unpaid care work. If this unpaid contribution was paid at the hourly average minimum wage, women would earn 2.56 million VND per month for their care work, or 30 million VND per year.<sup>27</sup> This amount represents the annual subsidy that women provide to the economy through unpaid care.

Considering this in national terms, the volume of this contribution is immense. Based on the working age female population of Vietnam (32.89 million women)<sup>28</sup>, nationally, **women subsidize the economy to the tune of 996 trillion per year.**

This amount is more than 30 times the amount that national and local governments in Vietnam spent on kindergarten and pre-school education in 2013 (30.24 trillion VND).<sup>29</sup>

To take another example, if it the cost of building a school is 100 million VND, women's unpaid care contribution is the cost equivalent of building 9,960,000 schools.

<sup>27</sup> Web Portal of the Ministry of Finance. Some policies that come to effect since 01/01/2017: <https://goo.gl/bLmfkK>

<sup>28</sup> Data from GSO: Average Population by Sex and Residence, 2016 ([http://www.gso.gov.vn/default\\_en.aspx?tabid=774](http://www.gso.gov.vn/default_en.aspx?tabid=774)) and World Bank (Population Ages 15-64; 2016): <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.1564.TO.ZS>

<sup>29</sup> MOET, GSO and UNESCO (2016) Education Financing in Viet Nam 2009-2013, Hanoi, available at: <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/vietnam-nea-report.pdf>

## 5. Recommendations

The recommendations in this report focus on measures to **reduce** unpaid care work, and build on the recommendations in the first report Unpaid Care Work - Make a House Become a Home, that focused on recognition of unpaid care work.

### 1. Address social norms that contribute to unequal burden of care:

- Mass media organizations should ensure they are avoiding stereotypes about gendered division of care work in publications and advertising, and promote positive gender roles for men and women.
- All stakeholders, particularly civil society organizations should avoid reinforcing the view that “housework is women’s work”, and should actively promote equitable distribution of care through their programs and awareness-raising, including working with women and men at household level.
- The Government of Vietnam should take a leading role in raising community awareness around unpaid care work and the roles of women and men, and should ensure that its own programs do not reinforce gender stereotypes that contribute to unfair distribution of care. School curricula should be gender sensitive and should address gender roles and women’s rights issues.



## 2. Invest in public services for reduction of unpaid care work

The Government of Vietnam should prioritize public services that reduce unpaid care work, in particular:

- Investing further in childcare and early childhood education, particularly for children 6-36 months old and in rural and remote areas, so that families are able to send children to a nursery, kindergarten or other childcare, freeing time for paid work and leisure.
- Supporting rural development initiatives (such as electrification and water and sanitation infrastructure) that will reduce the time women currently spend collecting fuel and water and preparing food. Local and national governments should consider allocating funds to services and infrastructure to help reduce the burden of unpaid care work.
- Improving access to quality low-cost health services to reduce the adult and child care burden that currently falls to women.

## 3. Implement existing commitments on recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care work

District, provincial and national levels need to focus more efforts to achieve Objective 5.4, National Action Plan for Implementation of SDGs, and commitment to reduction of unpaid care work. Additional investment in data collection at the national level is needed to monitor the progress of this goal.

**In fact, this report and its process could serve as the baseline data to measure the government's efforts in reducing the unpaid care work to a half load by 2020** as well as the progress that Vietnam makes in delivery of SDGs commitments.

# 6. Conclusion

The results of this research confirm that women undertake the majority of unpaid care work in the household and that inequalities exist irrespective of geographical location, ethnicity, level of education, number of children in a family, age and marital status. This reflects prevailing patriarchal values that place responsibility for household work on women's shoulders, and simultaneously devalue this work and its contribution to the economy. As a result, policy and budget decisions do not prioritize interventions that reduce unpaid care work.

However, these results also suggest that awareness raising and discussion about unpaid care work within households and communities can help to recognize, reduce and redistribute that work. The second phase of the research saw a reduction in the amount of time both women and men spent on unpaid care work, and a small redistribution of unpaid care work, with the gap in women's and men's time reduced.

To reduce the amount of unpaid care work women are required to do, it is necessary to increase the availability and accessibility of public services that can take on some of the unpaid care burden— particularly investing in kindergartens for children under three. It has been highly significant that women are undertaking a herculean workload for men to be the backbone of the families and for society to enjoy the life as it is.

It is hugely important to address the underlying social norms that place the burden of care on women's shoulders by tackling stereotypes about the roles of men and women, and making spaces where men and women can discuss household responsibilities. Existing and new government initiatives to address the care gap need meaningful ongoing funding and long-term planning and engagement.

Most importantly, actions need to start at home. Only then will we see a more equal society, where both men and women have equal opportunities within and outside the home.







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**ActionAid's research signature:**

“People-centered evidence with women and girls at the core, combined with knowledge from in and outside the organization enables power shifts. This brings about changes at local, national and international levels”.

## Introduction of The three ‘Rs’

The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) explicitly recognizes women’s disproportionate responsibility for some aspects of care and the impact this has on their human rights: “The responsibilities that women have to bear and raise children will affect their right to access education, employment and other activities related to their personal development. They also impose inequitable burdens of work on women... Relieving women of some of the burdens of domestic work would allow them to engage more fully in the life of their communities. Women’s economic dependence on men often prevents them from making important political decisions and from participating actively in public life.

ActionAid’s solutions to address women’s disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work can be categorized into three Rs:

**Recognition** of unpaid care work means that the work done by (mainly) women is acknowledged by the women themselves and others. It also means that it is recognized as being “work” and “production”, as well as an important contribution to a country’s socio-economic development. Recognition can include providing compensation, recognizing unpaid care work in pension schemes, or measuring unpaid care work in national statistics.

**Reduction** of unpaid care work means that the burden is reduced for individual women and for the society more generally. This can happen through the service being provided in a different way (for example, government-provided childcare or provided closer to where people live and work so that less time is spent accessing public services such as health care).

**Redistribution** of unpaid care work means that the overall amount of unpaid care work remains the same, but it is more fairly shared among different people. One example of this is where male household members take on a greater share of housework and childcare.

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