

SHORTCHANGED:

MAKE WORK PAID, EQUAL & VALUED FOR WOMEN

The global economy is not working for women. Gender inequality affects the jobs women have access to, the money they earn, and the way society values their work. Women who find employment are too often rewarded, not with independence and empowerment, but with poverty wages, unequal pay and insecure jobs. Even in the poorest communities, where poverty wages are a reality for men and women alike, women perform a disproportionate share of the crucial, yet unpaid and undervalued, work of caring for children, the sick and the aging.

Addressing the unequal economics of women's work is essential to closing the gap in earnings and opportunities between women and men, and between rich and poor. With a feminist Prime Minister and a government committed to inclusive growth, Canada is well placed to take immediate steps to make women's work paid, equal and valued here at home, and stand up for women's rights worldwide.



1 INTRODUCTION

To support her aging parents Htet Htet Moe migrated from a small village in Megui state in Burma to neighbouring Thailand. She found work in a factory filleting fish, and now her hands are cut and bruised, her skin damaged by chemicals. Htet Htet is afraid to say a thing because her employer has taken her identity documents. Although she is in the country legally, she does not go out for fear of harassment by police. Htet Htet earns the official minimum wage (about \$11a day¹) but it barely covers her living expenses and she had to pay at least \$1300 to the agent that recruited her. In all likelihood she will return to Burma at the end of her two-year visa thin, unhealthy and exhausted, bringing with her only enough savings for a breather before being forced into another low-wage, deadend job. The dreams she contemplated during her short stint in university will likely never become a reality.²

Htet Htet's experience is sadly typical of the work women do around the world. She is exploited because she is poor, a migrant and, above all, because she is a woman. Gender inequality affects the jobs women have access to, the money they earn, and the way society values their work. Inequality at work is experienced most deeply by women living in poverty, but it affects women from all walks of life and is reflected across the many facets of their lives.

In the global economy, men are over-represented at the top of the income ladder; they enjoy access to better jobs and higher wages. Women, meanwhile, make up the vast majority of the lowest-paid workers, many in jobs that offer minimal security or physical safety. Women also shoulder the majority of unpaid care work – washing their children's clothes, caring for aging parents or collecting water and firewood to cook for their families. Even in the poorest communities, where poverty wages are a reality for men and women alike, women perform a disproportionate share of the crucial, yet unpaid and undervalued, work of caring for children, the sick and the aging.

Women living in poverty are subsidizing the global economy with labour that is either free or cheap, a fact that helps explain why economic growth does not necessarily reduce inequality or even provide hope of escaping poverty. Addressing the unequal economics of women's work is essential to closing the gap in earnings and opportunities between women and men, and between rich and poor.

Women across the world now enjoy higher levels of education and increased access to the workforce, yet their efforts to build a better life continue to be hampered by the unequal distribution of unpaid work, the gender barriers to many fields of work, the undervaluing of jobs held predominantly by women, and the often unspoken social norms that offer men higher wages and rates of promotion from the moment they enter the workforce.³

In developing countries, the combined impact of these factors, along with lower levels of education, often traps women in precarious jobs without formal protections. For example, in Mali over 89 percent of women are in informal employment, compared to 74 percent of men.⁴

In Canada, the pay equity gap is a reality for women across all sectors, and it is compounded by other forms of discrimination. For Aboriginal women, for example, the gap actually increases the more educated they are. All Aboriginal women employed full-time earn 26 percent less than non-Aboriginal men, but Aboriginal women with a university degree earn 33 percent less.⁵

Gender inequality does not happen by accident. It is rooted in long establish norms, attitudes and beliefs, and it can be exacerbated by laws, policies and government spending. Government action can, however, act to reduce inequality between men and women at work. Government has a fundamental responsibility to do so, especially when markets and the private sector fail to.

In a global economy that appears to constrict policy options, many governments have taken the low road, enacting measures that are gender-blind or that further widen the gap between women and men, between rich and poor. Other governments have taken the high road, making policy and financing decisions to ensure that men and women are paid equally, to create economic opportunities for women and to reduce women's burden of unpaid care.

Canada is well positioned to take the high road. It can take immediate steps to make women's work paid, equal and valued here at home, and to stand up for women's rights worldwide. With a feminist Prime Minister and a government committed to inclusive growth, what other road is there to take?

2 MAKE WORK PAID

Women's access to the workforce has surged in recent decades, and with it the promise of greater independence and empowerment. Eighty-two percent of Canadian women hold paid jobs and women now make up close to half the total workforce. Globally, women's employment is also significant, ranging from 26 percent in the Middle East and North Africa to 64 percent in East Asia and the Pacific. However, women who find employment are too often rewarded, not with independence and empowerment, but with poverty wages and insecure jobs.

The High Road: Towards Tea for Two (dollars)

Maria works picking tea on Mount Mulanje, home to Malawi's 128-year-old tea industry which employs more than 50,000 workers in the rainy season. Her wage puts her below the World Bank's extreme poverty line of US\$1.25 per day. The plantation does provide Maria with housing and a long-term contract, things the majority of tea workers lack. But her cash wage is not enough to feed her two children, both of whom are malnourished. According to a recent living wage estimate, Maria would need to earn around twice her existing wage just to meet her family's basic needs.⁸

As a first step, in January 2014 the Malawian government raised the minimum wage by approximately 24 percent. While still below the US\$2 a day poverty line, tea pickers have seen increases in their average earnings since 2012. At the same time, a coalition led by Ethical Tea Partnership and Oxfam is advocating for sustainable and decent work practices and standards, including credible living wage benchmarks. The coalition works closely with Malawian industry, the Ministry of Labour, tea buyers and retailers, wage experts, unions, certifiers and NGOs to improve worker representation in the wage-setting process.

The Low Road: Stitching for Poverty Wages

In the unregulated global economy, many companies build their business models on making things cheaply and quickly. Low wages and unsafe working conditions are rife. The result is not only extreme inequality but loss of life. When the Rana Plaza factory in Bangladesh collapsed in April 2013, 1,134 people were killed and another 2,500 injured. Most garment workers in Bangladesh and around the world are women, and they pay a dear price when companies seek to maximize profits by avoiding safety practices.

While garment work is often better paid than informal jobs or farming, it offers no guaranteed route out of poverty. Many firms insist on poverty wages and some researchers claim women's willingness to accept lower wages is a key factor in increasing profitability. The Asia Floor Wage Alliance estimates that the minimum wage in Bangladesh – which women workers in the lowest levels of the garment industry are paid – represents just 19 percent of what the Alliance calculates to be a living wage in the country. The country of the power of the part of the country.

Between 2001 and 2011, wages for garment workers in most of the world's fifteen leading apparel-exporting countries fell in real terms.¹² Real wages only increased in countries where governments have taken active measures to encourage industry to share the rewards of its growth with workers.¹³

WOMEN ARE PAID LESS THAN MEN

Women are paid less than men almost everywhere in the world and in almost every job category. In Canada, this is true in 469 of the 500 occupations monitored by Statistics Canada. Women usually make up a larger proportion of those working part-time, not out of choice, but because family care responsibilities fall to them. In Canada, women are three times as likely as men to work part-time. In low- and middle-income countries, the wage gap is more extreme. In Pakistan for example, women's mean nominal monthly earnings are 37 percent less than men's. In Pakistan for example, women's

WOMEN DO NOT EARN A LIVING WAGE

While poverty is often associated with joblessness, the majority of the world's poor actually have jobs, but they do not pay a living wage, blocking their exit from poverty, regardless of how hard they work. Women working as waste pickers in Minas Gerais, Brazil earn only \$6 a day¹⁶, while in Thailand women working 13-hour days sewing shoes in their homes earn about \$150 a month.¹⁷

A living wage is an income sufficient to pay for the basic necessities of life, to live with dignity and to participate in society. In Canada, a living wage would be more than the minimum wage, and would take into account both the cost of living in a specific community and the existence other supports, such as government benefits for children.¹⁸



Asamaâ is 31 years old and works with her mother in her embroidery business in their home in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. A lot of low paid work that women do looks like work that women have traditionally done in the household for free: caring, cleaning and cooking for others.

WOMEN END UP IN PRECARIOUS JOBS

Women selling *chicharrones* at highway bus stops in Mexico and those in Bangladesh stitching garments for multinational corporations in their homes are part of what economists call the informal sector, where 40 percent of all workers labour, according to the International Trade Union Confederation.¹⁹ The proportion of women is even higher, up to 75 percent by some estimates.²⁰ In India and in Indonesia, the informal sector accounts for nine of every ten women working outside agriculture.²¹

Many of these women work as street-vendors, home-based workers, waste-pickers and domestic workers. Though many home-based workers are linked to the global economy through subcontracting chains, few are protected by labour laws, regulatory systems or minimum wage rules. Should they become ill or injured, or if they lose their jobs, there is often no social safety net. Such economic insecurity opens the door to exploitation.

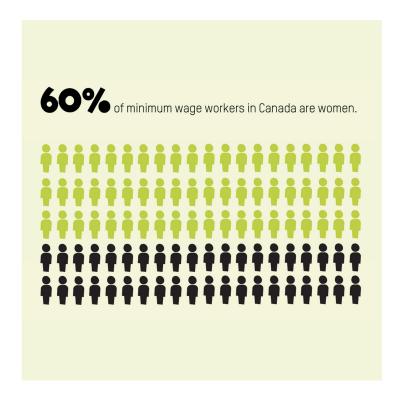
Informal work is often the only option available to poor women, because of lower-levels of education or discriminatory social norms. The Muslim women who make up the majority of home-based garment workers in the city of Ahmedabad, India, for example, told researchers they worked from home because of social constraints against women going out.²²

Regulating private sector labour practices can help ensure that normal business operations reduce inequality rather than intensify it, even in the informal economy. After a decade of campaigning by advocacy groups, Thailand enacted the Homeworkers Protection Act that mandated fair wages, including equal pay for equal work, while obliging employers to provide a contract and meet

occupational health and safety standards. The law also gives workers access to the courts in labour disputes and provides women with a venue for bringing concerns to employers.²³

MORE THAN A MINIMUM

While a minimum wage is legislated in most jurisdictions, it does not exist everywhere, and it offers no guarantee of income above the poverty line. As in informal work, women are overrepresented among minimum-wage workers. In Canada, nearly 60 percent of minimum-wage workers are women.²⁴ In no jurisdiction of Canada is the minimum wage currently sufficient to meet the basic necessities of a single person, let alone an entire family.²⁵ Setting the minimum wage to reflect the cost of living is a step governments can take to lift workers out of poverty. Mandating a living wage would lay a foundation for a more human economy.



TAKE THE HIGH ROAD

Canada must ensure women's work is fairly paid by:

- ✓ Enacting legislation for a federal minimum wage of \$15/hour and begin moving towards living wages for all workers;
- ✓ Holding Canadian companies operating internationally accountable for meeting robust labour standards and practices; and
- ✓ Providing support to developing countries to regulate labour practices in both the public and private sectors.

3 MAKE WORK EQUAL

Nowhere in the world do women have access to the same kinds of jobs, the same degree of job security and the same wages as men. Women are employed at tasks that are frequently less valued and lower paid. And in those areas where women do have access to the same jobs as men, they are not paid equally for the same work. By one estimate, women's income globally would increase by up to 76 percent if the employment and wage gap between men and women were closed – a gap estimated at a colossal \$17 trillion (US).²⁶

As noted above, women tend to work in informal, low-paid, part-time, precarious and unprotected jobs. For example 85.5 percent of women versus 70.5 percent of men in sub-Saharan Africa work in what the International Labour Organization defines as vulnerable employment, i.e. self-employment or work by contributing family workers.²⁷ Not even in rich countries do women have access to the same kinds of jobs or wages as men. The gender wage gap of 31.5 percent in Ontario means a woman would have to work fourteen additional years to achieve the lifetime earnings a man has by age 65.²⁸

The High Road: Equal Opportunities in Sweden

The Swedish Equal Opportunities Act of 1991 explicitly seeks to address gender equality at work regarding employment opportunities, working conditions and access to training.²⁹ The Act addresses pay disparities between men and women doing the same job, as well as those existing between predominantly female or male jobs that have equal value.

It stipulates that all organizations with ten employees or more must formulate and implement an annual pay equity plan with three elements: 1) a list of proactive measures to promote equality; 2) an overview of pay disparities between men and women, outlining the measures to be taken to correct the pay gaps observed; and 3) in subsequent years, a report detailing the successes achieved in implementing the previous year's plan. Two administrative bodies — an ombudsman and a commission — oversee compliance and advise on the development of pay equity action plans. The commission can impose penalties if employers fail to comply.

In the Swedish model the responsibility for eliminating discriminatory pay gaps falls to the employer. The International Labour Organization has found that pay equity models that focus on equal outcomes and require employers to carry out a pay equity exercise, like the Swedish one, are more successful than those that focus on equal opportunity, that rely on the voluntary participation of employers, or that subsume equal pay in broader efforts to address gender-related discrimination. ³⁰

The Low Road: Domestic Workers Excluded from Protections

In 2013, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated there to be nearly 53 million domestic workers in the world, representing 7.5 percent of all employed women worldwide.³¹ Domestic workers everywhere are vulnerable to economic exploitation, overwork, rape and other forms of abuse. Most domestic workers are women who care for children, clean homes, cook meals or care for the sick or elderly.

Three out of ten of the world's domestic workers are not covered by labour laws and nearly half are not entitled to weekly rest periods or paid annual leave. Domestic workers in the United Arab Emirates, for example, are explicitly excluded from protections like limits on working hours and overtime pay, and have virtually no legal safeguards to ensure fair, decent and safe conditions.³² In Latin America, only 20 percent of domestic workers have access to formal contracts, compared with 58 percent of the total urban workforce.³³

In 2013, the ILO Convention concerning decent work for domestic workers (ILO Convention 189) came into force. It mandates daily and weekly rest hours, a minimum wage and freedom to choose the place where domestic workers live and spend their leave. It obliges governments to take protective measures against violence and to enforce a minimum age. And it provides domestic workers with the right to a clear statement of employment conditions prior to immigration. Myrtle Witbooi, President of the International Domestic Worker Federation in South Africa, urges decision makers to "treat us as human beings [because] like all other workers we are building the economy. Imagine if on a Monday morning domestic workers around the world decided to stop working."³⁴

WOMEN'S WORK IS CHEAP

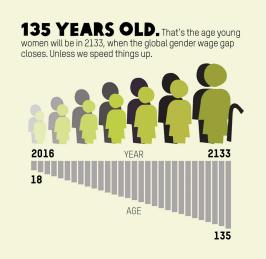
Women and men tend to work in different occupations, and the occupations where women work usually come with lower wages. In Canada truck drivers, 97 percent of whom are male, make a median annual wage of \$45,417 working full-time; early childhood educators, 97 percent of whom are female, make \$25,334.³⁵ In South Africa, 97% of domestic workers are women, while 72% of business owners who employ other people are men³⁶. One explanation for the undervaluing of job sectors that employ women is that much of the work resembles women's traditional household labour: caring, cleaning and cooking for others. Both early childhood educators and truck drivers perform important and challenging tasks, and both men and women deserve fair wages for their efforts.

THE GENDER WAGE GAP IS REAL

The World Bank has calculated that women in most countries earn, on average, just 60 to 75 percent of men's wages.³⁷ There is not a single OECD country where women earn more than men. Even in the country with the smallest pay gap, New Zealand, women still earned 5 percent less than men in 2015.³⁸ According to the International Labour Organization, on current trends it will take 75 years to make the principle of equal pay for equal work a global reality³⁹; the World Economic Forum' estimates it will take 115 years.⁴⁰ In Asia the pay gap ranges from 32.6 percent in India to 21.5 percent in Indonesia and 17.9 percent in Sri Lanka.⁴¹ In Pakistan male agricultural workers earned \$2.97 (US) per day in 2012, barely above the poverty line, while female agricultural workers earned only \$1.68 (US) per day.⁴²

Recent reports from a number of sources confirm that Canadian women are paid less than men, a situation that is both chronic and growing worse. ⁴³ In 2009, women employed full-time earned 74.4 percent of what men did; by 2011, the figure was 72 percent. ⁴⁴ The gender pay gap holds even when factoring in hours worked, education levels and lifestyle. Furthermore, the pay gap affects women of diverse groups differently. Aboriginal women earn 10 percent less than Aboriginal men and 26 percent less than non-Aboriginal men. ⁴⁵ Similar statistics apply to racialized and immigrant women.





GOVERNMENT MUST STEP UP

Governments can help shape the labour market to reduce the pay equity gap. They can legislate equal pay for equal work and set national wage standards that address differences among sectors and ensure minimum wages that provide a living wage. The public service in Canada is a good example: its wage-setting structure, similar to other unionized environments, has helped bring the wage gap below the national average.⁴⁷ University educated women in the public sector have seen their wage gap shrink from 27 percent to 18 percent.⁴⁸

Governments can establish training programs to promote women's participation in non-traditional sectors and create opportunities for women to access full-time jobs that pay a living wage. Access to such programs must be non-discriminatory and additional measures are needed to address the greater pay equity gap for immigrant, racialized and Aboriginal women.



In Cambodia, garment factory workers travel into Phnom Penh from the provinces in open trucks on journeys that last up to 2 hours each way. Almost 97% of these workers are women. They earn between \$3 and \$5 per day.

TAKE THE HIGH ROAD

Canada must ensure women's work is equal by:

- ✓ Following through on the federal government's commitment to introduce proactive pay equity legislation, with particular attention to the greater pay equity gap for racialized, Aboriginal and immigrant women.
- ✓ Signing and ratifying ILO Convention 189, the Domestic Workers Convention, and standing up for domestic workers globally by expanding the scope of legislation, policy and programs that allow domestic workers to enjoy the same rights as other categories of workers.

4 MAKE WORK VALUED

People perform unpaid care work in homes and communities around the world, including cleaning, cooking and caring for children, sick family members and aging parents, as well as long hours spent carrying water and firewood. In rich and poor countries alike, the responsibility for such unpaid work falls disproportionately to women. Conservative estimates put the monetary value of unpaid care work at \$10 trillion (US) a year, a sizable chunk of the world's \$74 trillion (US) GDP.

Crises, such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Sub-Saharan Africa, create further burdens of care for women, especially where public services are inadequate. Research in one Tanzanian village found

that, in households including someone with AIDS, 29 percent of household labour was spent on AIDS-related care and the total loss of opportunity for income generation was 43 percent.⁵⁰

The High Road: Quebec Showed the Way

Quebec's subsidized childcare program, which provides affordable care to nearly half of all Quebecois pre-school children, makes a strong case for government investment in the care economy to improve the status of women and poor families. At a cost of \$2.2 billion per year, or roughly 0.7 percent of Quebec's GDP, the program prompted an upsurge in employment among women, especially single mothers, whose poverty rate fell from 36 percent to 22 percent and whose median real after-tax income shot up by 81 percent.

According to one study, by 2008 (twelve years into the program) universal access to low-fee child care allowed nearly 70,000 more mothers to hold jobs than would have been the case if no such program had existed – an increase of 3.8 percent in women's employment.⁵¹ The same study estimates that Quebec's GDP was higher by about 1.7 percent as a result, and that the tax revenues the Quebec and federal governments perceived as a result significantly exceeded the program's cost.

The Low Road: Spain Moves Backward

The austerity measures Spain adopted after the financial crisis of 2008 effectively rolled back gender equality and forced women to return to more traditional roles. In the 2012 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report, Spain's ranking dropped from 12th to 26th among 140 countries, the result of fewer women in decision-making roles in the new government, but also of the gendered impact of austerity policies.⁵²

State support for professional and non-professional caregivers was drastically reduced. In 2011, over 160,000 caregivers were registered in the social security system, 90 percent of them women; by 2012 only 24,000 were still registered. A 23 percent decrease in health spending and a 31 percent reduction in education spending obliged women to take on the essential tasks of caring for children, the elderly and the ill without remuneration. The 2013 budget also reduced spending on gender equality by 24 percent, essentially side-lining gender equality policies.⁵³

WOMEN SPEND MORE TIME CARING FOR OTHERS

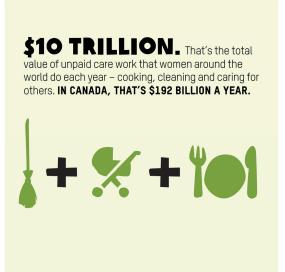
Despite significant progress in attitudes towards gender roles in society, the care economy continues to be sustained by women's unpaid contributions. In many countries, women effectively subsidize the economy every day with an average of two to five more hours of unpaid work than men, a burden that is larger in low-income countries.⁵⁴ In the poorest regions, unpaid work can consume most or all of women's days, limiting the hours they can dedicate to income-generating activities, or obliging them to care for their children while they work. Unpaid care responsibilities also leave women with little time to attend school or gain skills that could help them secure better jobs. In Canada, women undertake 3.9 hours of unpaid care work every day relative to 2.4 hours undertaken daily by men⁵⁵. Canadian women of working age thus subsidize the economy to the tune of approximately \$192 billion per year.⁵⁶

UNPAID CARE WORK DOESN'T GET COUNTED

Unpaid care work is generally excluded from national accounting systems, its economic value ignored. The absence of data limits government's understanding of the ramifications of policy and spending decisions, particularly on women and men's work, and on gender inequality overall. Timeuse surveys, for example, can provide valuable data to inform gender-sensitive policy-making or poverty reduction plans that better value and reward women's contributions. Statistics Canada sets a good example by collecting data on unpaid household activities every five years.⁵⁷

Until fairly recently, developing countries either failed to measure unpaid work or their attempts were small-scale, qualitative or focused on production of goods, such as subsistence agriculture. However, some countries like Nicaragua, India and Tanzania now undertake time-use surveys that provide more reliable and representative data.⁵⁸





PUBLIC SERVICES EASE THE BURDEN

Investing in public services such as child care, healthcare and eldercare can free up women's time to seek employment or improve their job skills. Access to drinking water and electricity – two of the Sustainable Development Goals – can also have a profound impact since in Benin, for example, collecting water and fuel can take up to three months of full-time, unpaid work per year. ⁵⁹ When governments invest in easing the burden of unpaid work, women enter the workforce, families move out of poverty and government revenues increase.

Investing in childcare has a profound impact on gender equality and women's access to employment. For example, Quebec's low-fee childcare program increased women's employment, brought down poverty rates and caused a 1.7 percent rise in GDP, lifting government revenues far more than the program's cost. ⁶⁰ High quality and affordable early childhood education helps women pursue careers and eases family financial stress. The pledge by Canada's federal government to develop a National Framework on Early Learning and Child Care starting in 2016, including an investment of \$500 million

the following year (with \$100 million of it for Indigenous child care on reserves) could help to ease the burden which Canadian women bear.⁶¹

WOMEN'S RIGHTS GROUPS CATALYZE CHANGE

Evidence consistently shows that women's rights organizations and movements are fundamental catalysts for change towards gender equality. They monitor the impact of social and economic policies and build momentum for governments to act. They undertake research, document violations and accompany women whose rights have been violated. They advocate for legislation and policy to enshrine women's rights in law, and they push governments and the private sector on implementation. What's more, they work tirelessly to challenge discriminatory social norms.

Yet women's organizations are chronically underfunded by governments and donors. They receive less than 0.4 percent of global official development assistance. ⁶³ Canada only allocates \$3 million annually to women's organizations out of its \$4.6 billion international assistance budget. ⁶⁴

TAKE THE HIGH ROAD

Canada must ensure that women's work is valued by:

- ✓ Promoting universal, high quality, affordable child care across Canada. The federal government must follow through on the promise to build a National Framework on Early Learning and Child Care in 2016, including significant annual investments increasing to \$2.6 billion by 2019/2020.
- ✓ Supporting women's movements in developing countries that are working to level the playing field for women. The federal government must make women's rights a stand-alone thematic priority for international assistance, allocating 20 percent of that assistance to programs that specifically aim to advance women's rights, gender equality and women's empowerment, and ensuring that at least \$100 million annually flows directly to women's rights organizations.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Canada should ensure that women's work is fairly paid by;

- ✓ Enacting legislation for a federal minimum wage of \$15/hour and begin moving towards living wages for all workers;
- ✓ Holding Canadian companies operating internationally accountable for meeting robust labour standards and practices; and
- ✓ Providing support to developing countries to regulate labour practices in both the public and private sectors.

Canada should ensure women's work is **equal** by:

- √ Following through on the federal government's commitment to introduce proactive pay equity legislation, with particular attention to the greater pay equity gap for racialized, Aboriginal and immigrant women.
- ✓ Signing and ratifying ILO Convention 189, the Domestic Workers Convention, and standing up for domestic workers globally by expanding the scope of legislation, policy and programs that allow domestic workers to enjoy the same rights as other categories of workers.

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- ✓ Promoting universal, high quality, affordable childcare across Canada. The federal government must follow through on its promise to build a National Framework on Early Learning and Child Care in 2016 including significant annual investments increasing to \$2.6 billion by 2019/2020.
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Grace and Mark live in Uganda and have 5 children. Since attending a workshop with Oxfam, Grace and her husband switch their roles in the home.

She can decide to fetch water as he prepares porridge, or he could go to mind the cows while she cooks. The workshop they attended supports women's economic empowerment by addressing excessive and unequal care work.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

MAKING WOMEN COUNT: THE UNEQUAL ECONOMICS OF WOMEN'S WORK

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¹ All figures in Canadian dollars, unless otherwise specified.

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email info@oxfam.ca.

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