



17 March 2014 – Heavy and unequal care responsibilities between men and women remain a norm that is taken for granted. They stand as major barriers to gender equality, taking up women’s time and denying their [equal enjoyment](#) of the rights to education, decent work, health and participation in government, among others.

“Women’s economic empowerment is a mirage if we don’t also take into account the unpaid work they are doing in the home”, says the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, [Magdalena Sepúlveda](#). “In most countries, women – especially those living in poverty - work longer hours than men when unpaid work is taken into account, yet they receive lower earnings and less recognition.”

Unpaid care work such as cooking, cleaning and caring for children and the elderly entrenches women’s poverty and social exclusion when it is not socially recognized and shared.

“Care should be a social and collective responsibility for men and women and supported by the State, rather than falling entirely on women’s shoulders”, Sepúlveda stresses.

Undoubtedly, care is a positive and irreplaceable social good and providing care can bring great fulfilment and satisfaction. Unpaid care work is at the foundation of our societies, and it is crucial for economic growth and social development. However, it has been largely overlooked or taken for granted by society and policy makers.

“For the sake of human rights and equitable, sustainable development, we cannot afford to ignore unpaid care work, and the UN post-2015 development agenda must include such commitment”, says Sepúlveda.

“I call on policy makers to stop looking away from the women in the kitchen, by the bedside, and at the water well, and instead celebrate them by taking concrete steps to recognize, reduce and redistribute the burdens of unpaid care work. This is a necessary condition to achieve [gender equality](#) ,

[sustainable development](#)

and full enjoyment of women’s rights.”