

## RESEARCH SUMMARY

# UNPAID CARE WORK

## OXFAM IN TIMOR-LESTE RAPID CARE ANALYSIS



Natalia washes the dishes at her home in Decusse. Francisco Ismenio Pereira/Oxfam

Worldwide, unpaid care work is undertaken by women, men, and children, influencing the wellbeing and economic participation of carers in their communities. Unpaid care work refers to the provision of services for family and community members outside of the market and can be defined as domestic work or the direct care of persons. Domestic activities include but are not limited to cooking, cleaning and collecting firewood; and direct care relates to activities such as childcare and the care of elderly members. Globally, more than 75% of all unpaid care tasks are undertaken by women, who additionally occupy 66% of paid care jobs.<sup>1</sup> Unpaid care work can impact a woman's economic opportunities in many ways, as care activities typically adhere to traditional gendered roles, and minimise the time that women spend on paid work.

This Rapid Care Analysis (RCA) was conducted to better understand patterns and perceptions of unpaid care work in Timor-Leste. The RCA is an approach designed for Oxfam International to explore relationships of care, identify work activities performed by men and women and their estimated work hours, identify gender roles and patterns,

and identify options for reducing or redistributing care work. The various RCA tools are designed to be participatory, increasing visibility and improving community members' understanding of unpaid care work patterns, so that care work is recognised and redistributed, and the women, women with disabilities and children of a community will be fairly represented in the economy and in society. Case study sites were selected to provide an understanding of women's and men's working lives from a range of locations around the country: Likisa Municipality, Covalima Municipality and the special enclave of Oecusse (RAEOA).

### Key results from this RCA are as follows:

- o The prevalence of subsistence or mixed-economy farming households in Timor-Leste make it difficult to apply the RCA toolkit, as the realities of people's lives means there is a blurring between different categories or types of work. This also makes it difficult for community members to recognise the significant work women do when working in the fields as well as taking on unpaid care work. As such, the RCA is useful in bringing this to the surface, but needs to be nuanced to better fit the Timorese context.
- o Caring responsibilities are shared between women, men, older and younger family members, but there

<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organisation, "Care Work and Care Jobs For the Future of Decent Work." ILO, 2018. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_633135.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_633135.pdf).



Natalia, Norberto and their family in Oecusse. Francisco Ismenio Pereira/Oxfam

is also a clear gendering of care work, with females often caring for many more people than males do.

- o Women and men undertaking unpaid (care and non-care) work all work hard, with women responsible for more unpaid care work, and men doing more work in the fields.
- o Recognising the prevalence of unpaid work across both sexes, women are significantly more time poor than men, because of their work in the fields as well as doing unpaid care work.
- o While communities continue to operate with a gendered division of labour, there is also flexibility within households in how work is distributed, and female and male community members expressed a clear desire to change gender work patterns. Compared to women who operate under strong social norms of what makes a 'good woman', social norms for men relating to unpaid care work are minimal, with men emphasising their care work as an expression of love. Unlike many other cultures, Timorese men do not appear to suffer damage to their perceived masculinity if they undertake 'women's work'. These are clear local strengths to be built on.

### Recommendations, including using the RCA toolkit in the Timor-Leste context, are as follows:

- o The set of exercises are clearly useful in making women's care responsibilities more visible, with many women participants in particular noting their surprise at how many people they care for, and how many hours they invest in unpaid care work. However, these should be contextualised to better reflect subsistence and mixed-economy households. Discussions should also be framed by recognising the unpaid work that is performed by both women and men.
- o The prevalence of unpaid work generally in farming households can make it difficult to recognise the extra work faced by women, compared to their male counterparts. Participatory activities that allow participants to discover this for themselves are potentially very powerful, tapping into husbands' love for their families to encourage redistribution of care responsibilities.
- o The relative freedom of men from social norms relating to unpaid care work, and men's emphasis on voluntarily performing care work as an expression of love, are clear local strengths to be built on. Awareness-raising activities related to unpaid care work could emphasise these points, encouraging men and boys to demonstrate love via unpaid care work.
- o The many hours of domestic labour performed by women cannot be separated from other important infrastructural and community development needs in the community. Lack of clean, accessible water supply, and marketplace access problems are common throughout the country, and significantly increase the time women spend doing unpaid labour. Oxfam could bring this understanding into other aspects of its influencing work with development partners and government, to deepen gender mainstreaming across its influencing work.



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