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THE FUTURE OF WORK IN THE CARIBBEAN WHAT DO WE KNOW? WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW?

ILO – SALISES RESEARCH CONSULTATION

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Panel 1: Future of work and demographic patterns. Given the trend of an ageing population and heavy out migration in the Caribbean, what could be the likely impacts on labour supply and economic equilibria? How will the care economy evolve and what role will it play? What kind of information and analysis is needed for sound evidence based policy-making in the coming years? How would different sectors be affected? Will the care economy become a relevant contributor to job creation? What other sectors could play a role?

Presentation

As outlined by the ILO brief, this Panel aims at Exploring the Caribbean findings and insights, including knowledge gaps related to the Future of work and demographic patterns. I have concentrated in my presentation primarily on Care work. I present **three** main points, the first is a Conceptual/Perceptual space that work now occupies, the second two points relate specifically to some of the questions raised in the ILO Research brief for this panel.

- 1. Point one Conceptual/Perceptual: The Future of work requires serious provocative debate and acceptance of housework and care work as Work - this is a discussion that has spanned centuries.**

In a 2006 Indiana School of Law study titled “The Organization of Care Work in Italy: Gender and Migrant Labor in the New Economy”, researcher Dawn Lyon stresses that the shift to migrant carers creates new racial and class based divisions between Italian (or other European) women and the women who serve as migrant carers.

These migrant workers are primarily drawn from Latin America, Eastern European or African nations. “Stereotypes based on the characteristics of migrant women (for example, their acceptance of low wages and willingness to work without protest) are used to devalue their care labour as “real”work”. Lyon proposes that “The gendered and racial implications of this new paradigm of care should be carefully considered as the trend toward migrant caregiving in richer countries continues”. While Caribbean societies by no means fit into this category of ‘richer’ countries, the dynamics of internal regional migration makes for a parallel situation¹.

In 1999 I was involved in the writing of a National Gender Policy for Equality and Equity for the Cayman Islands. In the Cayman Census of 1999, the Household sector was the largest employer of migrant females providing work for 2,370 females. Black, Jamaican women of a lower socio economic background constituted the majority of these household helpers. They sought domestic work in the Cayman Islands because of its proximity to Jamaica, the high value of the Cayman dollar and in hopes of ‘living-in’ so as to save on living expenses. The working population of Cayman depended on these workers to look after their children, households and to care for the elderly. In the consultations and expert meetings with public stakeholder groups and immigration authorities, there was great resistance to providing work permits for these women or for allowing them to bring their children. The policy promoted the view that domestic helpers were important to the stability and function of Caymanian homes. As care givers they ensured environmental hygiene, family nutrition and supervision of children, the elderly and the sick in the household setting. Given this perspective, the policy writers had no choice but to advocate that the practical and strategic interests of these women as holders of work permits should be addressed.

In 2015, with support of colleagues from gender and the social work department at UWI, a research and advocacy project titled *Work-life balance and Aging* was initiated. Funded by the Research Development Impact Fund of the University of the West Indies, this project attempts to bridge the nexus between work life balance and aging. Work life balance refers to finding the right fit between paid work -time and the time people can make for personal commitments or goals. As the demographics show, our populations are living longer so there is greater need to provide economic support, protection from abuse, companionship time, along with health and domestic care for the elderly. In 2015, according to statistical analysis by Godfrey St Bernard for Trinidad and Tobago, those between the ages of 25 to 64 years comprised 57% of the total population, with those over 65 years comprising 9.4% of the total population. By 2030, due to declines in fertility, the population under 15 years or age will have declined with those over 65 years old comprising 15.7% of the total population, and a concomitant reduction in those 25 to 64, the primary working age population to 54.7%.

¹ Dawn Lyon, www.repository.law.indiana.edu › JOURNALS › IJGLS › Vol. 13 › Iss. 1 (2006)

One of the primary questions that we have asked in this study is who is providing the care work and how much of this is paid or unpaid labour? Is it that retired persons (those that are still fit for work) are finding themselves increasingly providing unpaid labour to support those who are currently in the labour force? Culturally this is considered the norm, since grandmothers have been taking care of children of absentee parents or mothers for a long time. The WLB and Aging project has confirmed that this is still the practice from surveys, journals and talking circles. But, simultaneously, we have also found that as the supply of informal care workers culled from family or community is decreasing, within the society few want to do care work which is ill organized, considered household drudgery rather than skilled work and generally underpaid and under-regulated. Much of this care work is now available to migrant labourers who are brought in to provide both care work and domestic labour. The problem that Dawn Lyon points of the new gendered and racial hierarchies caused by female migrant labourers in care work, already exists in this society (Trinidad).

Not surprisingly, we found that care work is still perceived as women's responsibility. As the older age groups expand, and as women remain in gainful employment outside of their homes, even with access to care workers, the double burden of work and care for women in the family is increasing rather than decreasing. It is worth reminding us here that the unpaid care work, performed primarily by women, is crucial to the well being of societies and contributes to social development as well as economic growth. "The only Caribbean country to recognize women's unwaged work is the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in 1996"². This achievement was the result of ongoing advocacy by the women's movement in this country, particularly the work of the National Union of Domestic Employees (NUDE), which was in the forefront of advocating for government to count women's unremunerated work.

The idea of re-configuring what work looks like now and the future, how it is measured, recompensed, and distributed in the sexual division of labour has surfaced in different ways recurrently in the past. Aspects that I am raising in respect of housework and child care, calls to mind the "domestic labour debate" which raged in the early second wave feminist movement from the 1970s. One of the concerns then was that women's demands for equal career opportunities placed on them a dual burden as they were still held responsible for care of the family and for housework. Marxist feminist scholars in particular argued that the concept of household workers as non-labourer is misleading. It assumes that such workers have no involvement in the process of production either of goods or services, or surplus value for a society³.

The concept of a "family wage" – which was coined during the industrialization of Western economies after 1750, when the economists and thinkers of the time

² See <https://www.cepal.org/publicaciones/xml/4/28924/l.118.pdf>

³ See Maxine Molyneux, "Beyond the Domestic Labour Debate", https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Maxine_Molyneux2/publication/289969978_Beyond_the_Domestic_Labour_Debate/links/5693be0a08aeab58a9a2a763.pdf

pondered on how to structure family life and gender roles within a competitive labour market is also related and has not yet been resolved. Political economists like Adam Smith and John Malthus wrestled with these issues of family life and the economy and some among them, including the liberal John Stuart Mill, called on women labourers to return home. Returning women to the home is not an option in 2017 to deal with care work and is unlikely to be one in the future. It was never an option nor a reality. Women have always worked and they continue to form a large part of the active working population whether in the homes or outside. The Central Statistical Office has commented on a trend of decreasing male participation and increasing female participation. "From a gender perspective, ...the 2016 data shows that males decreased by 4700 or 1.2% while females increased by 2,700 or 1.0%".

A question to pose here is how much of this increase in women's participation is in the area of care work or in the unpaid informal sector? Given the increasing urbanization of societies and the demands for services of different kinds including cheaply available food and side walk sale of consumer goods, are these old/new growth areas for women? The issue I am raising here for consideration is how much has really changed in regard to a definition of work and how is women's work, once it resides in these informal and unorganized spaces, still not counted and accounted for?

Point 2. Responding to questions for consideration by the Panel: How will the care economy evolve and what role will it play? How would different sectors be affected? Will the care economy become a relevant contributor to job creation? What other sectors could play a role?

Care work spans a large spectrum, from domestic tasks, food preparation and highly skilled health care support for disabled and elderly in homes as well as in institutions such as homes for the aged. As in other specialized areas or work, skills are established through formal training, assessment, certification and references. I think that increasingly this area of work will require institutions that certify and monitor care workers – allowing for the evolution of a more organized form of labour. There is no doubt that an underground economy will co-exist but this approach will offer protections to the buyer as well as seller of the service.

Rather than pattern this training only against developed country models, it would be useful to explore what culturally appropriate models can be adopted so that those seeking care work can earn while they are being trained and building experience and so on. Can we perhaps develop systems of on the job training that will allow persons to earn while they work?

Secondly, how might aspects of care work be privatized while allowing for public oversight, e.g. how much of care work might be delegated to private care companies that are regulated by the state. Care work has generally been perceived largely through health care – e.g. nursing, while private care work is seen as the individual or family responsibility. Just like the question raised by Adam Smith et al

in the 18th century, we are still wrestling with the balance between family care and economic productivity, with the additional proviso now that is a priority, that of protection of the rights of informal sector care workers, something long outstanding on the agenda. As an aside, while robots may take the form of some household time saving and monitoring devices, since one of the recurrent issues we encountered was that of loneliness among the aged, and the fact that some tasks cannot be carried out by a robot, it is unlikely, in my view, that robots can replace the human touch required in some aspects of care work.

3. Panel Question: What kind of information and analysis is needed for sound evidence based policy making in the coming years?

In general, public policy is seen as an output from governments, “what public officials, within government, and by extension the citizens they represent, choose to do or not to do about public problems”. However, many policies are linked to the global identification of problem areas. With respect to the issue of Care work as work, some prerequisites that position us on a global map need to be in place. These have surfaced in the critical Policy Review of our WLB and Ageing project:

First, Trinidad and Tobago has not ratified the ILO Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No.156) ... Ratifying countries commit to developing and implementing policy to enable persons with family responsibilities to exercise their right to obtain or engage in employment without being subject to discrimination and, to the extent possible, without conflict between their employment and family responsibilities. One of the recommendations of the policy review carried out by the WLB project notes that “ratification can act as a catalyst for the development of policy around work–life balance” (Gaietry Pargass).

Second, the ILO Convention Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers (Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) which has not been ratified by Trinidad and Tobago sets labour standards for domestic workers. Under this Convention, domestic workers are entitled to the same basic rights as those available to other workers in their country, including weekly days off, limits to hours of work, minimum wage coverage, overtime compensation, social security, and clear information on the terms and conditions of employment. The new standards oblige governments that ratify to protect domestic workers from violence and abuse, to regulate private employment agencies that recruit and employ domestic workers, and to prevent child labour in domestic work. ... Domestic workers are also excluded from the definition of “worker” under the Industrial Relations Act. Achieving their own work-life balance is difficult. The Draft National Policy on Gender and Development crucially speaks to implementation of the Decent Work Agenda to reduce the work-life conflict of low income workers, including domestic workers (Pargass).

The second area under this question is that data needed to generate policies in care work is hard to come by.

An ECLAC Sub-regional Caribbean study carried out in 2014 observed that : “While many countries in other regions, including Latin America have undertaken national time-use surveys, the Caribbean remains the only region yet to carry out a full scale survey. This is deemed to be another one of the major data gap in statistical systems in the Caribbean, where the valuation of unpaid work is statistically invisible. This is a serious omission because it means that unpaid work, particularly unpaid care work, despite its important contribution to economic and social development, is not reflected in the economic statistics used for policy making — namely the national accounts and the official labour market statistics”⁴.

The key question here is how do we get at accurate data and from this point devise metrics for regulating and accounting of the contribution of care work to the economy?

The Work Life Balance and Ageing project encountered this difficulty in attempting to get to data that is for the most part inaccessible through standard survey methods. Instead we have drawn on a methodology that comprises, journaling by individuals, talking circles (focus groups with a difference), and expert or individual interviews along with the standard surveys that access demographic data. The project promotes the use of innovative methodologies to understand both care work and to comprehend aspect of the informal labour market that rarely emerges in formal surveys.

⁴ <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/36619-situation-unpaid-work-and-gender-caribbean-measurement-unpaid-work-through-time>