

Proposed generic policy actions to integrate UCDW and intersectionality into the national and sectoral gender mainstreaming guidelines: based on the findings of implementation research

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1 INTRODUCTION

Achieving gender equality and inclusive development requires recognizing and addressing the diverse and intersecting barriers that women and marginalized groups face. One of the most persistent yet under-acknowledged challenges is the burden of Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW) – the essential, non-remunerated tasks that sustain households and communities, such as childcare, eldercare, cooking, cleaning, and collecting water and firewood, and community services. These tasks disproportionately fall on women and girls, severely limiting their access to education, health care, economic opportunities, and public participation (Elson and Seth 2019).

In tandem, the principle of intersectionality offers a necessary analytical lens for understanding how overlapping factors such as gender, age, disability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geographic location combine to shape experiences of inequality. Without an intersectional approach, interventions risk overlooking the compounded disadvantages faced by individuals at the margins – such as rural women with disabilities or female-headed households with high caregiving burdens (IANWGE 2025).

This document, based on the findings of the implementation research, identifies key thematic and policy points to revise or integrate into Ethiopia's National Gender Mainstreaming Guideline where unpaid care and domestic work and intersectionality can be meaningfully considered and incorporated. These proposed recommendations are designed to strengthen the policy and programmatic framework for gender equality, contributing the idea that no one is left behind. Embedding these elements into national strategies – across sectors such as education, health, monitoring and evaluation, and project design – Ethiopia can better move closer to fulfilling its commitments for gender equality and women's empowerment under national policies, development plans and international frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Beijing Platform for Action. Policy efforts towards recognizing and investments to reducing, and redistributing unpaid care work, alongside intersectional policy design, is not only a matter of justice but also is a prerequisite for sustainable development and inclusive social transformation.

These proposed policy actions for addressing UCDW and intersectionality gaps are derived from a research project titled "Implementation Research on Gender Mainstreaming Policy from UCDW and Intersectionality Perspectives in selected Government Sectors", initiated by the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA) in collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA). The research activity aimed to investigate the policy and practice of UCDW and intersectionality in Ethiopia's gender mainstreaming efforts by taking the case of five pro-poor government ministries, i.e. the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (Owner of the National GM Guideline), Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labor and Skills, and Ministry of Water and Energy, having sectoral guidelines. The purpose is this proposed policy action is to integrate UCDW and intersectionality into the national and sectoral gender mainstreaming guidelines, contributing to the national agenda of gender equality and women's empowerment.

2 MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH

The research was conducted in 2024/2025, and – as hitherto stated – conducted through desk review and interviews with the selected pilot ministries mentioned above. The findings of the research show that all five ministries recognize the far-reaching impact of UCDW on women's economic empowerment and social inclusion. Besides, there are efforts of implementation to address the impact of unpaid work on women, such as the impact on girls' education and mother's health. Besides, Ministries and other sectoral offices have and are increasingly establishing day care centers for working mothers. However, their documents do not treat UCDW as an independent policy theme. This also means that it has not translated into targeted interventions and budgeted frameworks. This omission limits the potential for transformative policies that could elevate care work from the margins to the center of gender mainstreaming activities.

Intersectionality – another concern of the original study – is occasionally referenced in the gender mainstreaming manuals of those sampled ministries. However, it is not systematically embedded into ministries' strategies. For example, there is a lack of disaggregated data and tailored approaches for marginalized groups that hampers inclusive policy design.

Looking at implementation and structural matters, the research indicated that there are several positive initiatives that have been undertaken: the establishment of gender units, the creation of daycare centers, and improvements in rural education and health services. However, these efforts affected by fragmentation within and across stakeholders (lack of coordination), the women departments' limited influence in the decision making of the ministries concerned, inadequate funding, limited manpower, and misalignment with broader UCDW and intersectionality goals. In some cases, women-focused activities are implemented more symbolically than strategically. For example, several research participants repeatedly observed that high-level officials tend to engage with women's issues more as symbolic gestures of inclusion than as genuine commitments to transformative change. Particularly when it comes to recognizing and addressing the burden of Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW), the issue remains poorly understood—let alone implemented—as a distinct thematic area within policy and programming.

Regarding monitoring and evaluation, needless to mention, effective tracking mechanisms are essential for measuring progress and impact. Unfortunately, data systems remain insufficient across ministries. Although gender-disaggregated data exists, it is rarely intersected with other social indicators such as geography, disability or unpaid care. The result is a limited capacity to evaluate the burdens of care work and understand its implications on different population groups.

In summary, despite some changes and achievements to be acknowledged, systemic challenges remain in place as far as the issue of UCDW is seen as a theme and approach for gender mainstreaming. UCDW is acknowledged but lacks dedicated policies for recognition, reduction, and redistribution. Social norms continue to frame caregiving as a female responsibility. Gender is often treated in binary terms, with little room for intersecting vulnerabilities. Ministries depend heavily on donor support and lack the internal capacity for sustained implementation.

3 PROPOSED POLICY ACTION FOR REVISION

To move beyond the current fragmented and often unfocused approach toward transformative change, the following policy actions are proposed, assuming that the national gender mainstreaming guideline is under revision or will soon be updated. While the proposed changes touch on various aspects of the manual, they primarily focus on strengthening its treatment of Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW) and embedding intersectionality as a core analytical and operational principle.

3.1. PREAMBLE AND GENERAL POINTS

- A) Since the national guideline itself was formulated 20 years ago, it needs to take into consideration the national political, socioeconomic, legal, and global factors and developments, which require explicitly integrate UCDW and intersectionality. Also, the current situation of women and girls in Ethiopia, where there is crisis, including conflict, flood, and drought, followed by displacement, has to be considered.
- B) The guideline mentions the impacts of the “household burdens and workloads”; it has to explicitly state UCDW as a hindrance to gender equality and women’s empowerment.
- C) Explicitly show the impacts of UCDW on time poverty, hindering women and girls from better education, high-value and paid work, leisure time, access to basic services, finance, political participation, decision-making positions, and the policy actions addressing them.
- D) Since women are not the same, and each section has its own needs and priorities, the revision or formulation needs to be tuned by an intersectionality lens, considering the legal and cultural aspects.
- E) There seems to be confusion: the Gender Mainstreaming manual is a guideline, a reference document, a strategy, a policy, or a manual, or a mix of policy and guide. This needs to be clear and consistent.
- F) Sustain, the mandate of all government structures and partners (NGOs/CSOs) use for adaptation to their policies and guidelines as appropriate.
- G) Maintain the engagement of CSOs/ NGOs and the private sector in the processes of the revision and formulation of the guideline.
- H) As a policy action, the Ethiopian Time Use Survey (ETUS), 2013, and the Ethiopian Employment and Unemployment Survey (EEUS, 2022) need to be periodically carried out to measure and value the contributions of UCDW in the national economy/GDP.
- I) The MoWSA is mandated to ensure the implementation of the national Gender Mainstreaming Guideline, and sectoral ministries are responsible for reporting and being accountable for the implementation of the national and respective sectoral GM Guidelines. It was not possible of getting evidence to prove or disprove this during the research, and this has to be strengthened and has its own follow-up and monitoring mechanisms. There seems to be no clear coordination and monitoring mechanism, receiving and reviewing reports, and holding accountable the sector ministries for implementing the commitments in the guidelines.
- J) Under the M&E and strategic section, there is a need to set in place an approach for male engagement, integration of gender roles, including sharing the burdens of UCDW by boys and girls in the school curriculum, health service providers’ trainings, to bring societal attitudes and social norms changes.
- K) Networking and partnership are also vital in mainstreaming gender in general, UCDW, and

intersectionality in particular, in the programs of all stakeholders. Hence, these needs require creating or strengthening existing consultative and dialogue platforms with stakeholders.

- I) Revise other policies, programs, plans, and strategies as per the improved gender mainstreaming guideline, as well as budget allocations.
- M) Keep the alignment with all proclamations, including recent ones. These include the Financial Administration (Proclamation No 970, 2016), Federal Civil Servant Proclamation (No 1064/ 2017), Labor Proclamations No 1156/ 2019, and others.

3.2. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

- A) The previous gender affairs section for Gender Mainstreaming has transformed/evolved into a CEO level in the MoWSA, and is named as “Mainstreaming implementation, monitoring, and ensuring accountability, Directorate”. Similarly, the structure in the Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Health (MoH), and Ministry of Water and Energy (MoWE), is called “ Women’s and Social Affairs Mainstreaming Implementation Executive Office” while in the Ministry of Labor and Skills (MoLS) it is “ Women & Social Affairs Inclusion Department’ . The guideline prepared for this change of structure is being revised/updated, which is crucial and timely, considering the findings of the implementation research from UCDW and intersectionality perspectives, and in addressing global developments.
- B) While this is a positive move, it is important that merging all gender issues, social affairs, including all underprivileged sections of society, women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, into one directorate and executive office might compromise the intersectionality aspect.
- C) It is also essential to strengthen the directorate and executive offices with high-level expertise, sufficient budget, and decision-making mandate.
- P) It is also crucial that women are in the driving seat in the gender departments in the target Ministries, in all, for that matter. It seems that most of the gender departments are men-led and dominant. The gender equality and women’s empowerment actions need to start at this level.

3.3. INSTITUTIONAL CHILDCARE INITIATIVES

It is well established that the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA) issued Directive No. 976/2023 on Alternative Childcare and Support, aiming to standardize and expand family- and community-based care services for vulnerable children. In alignment with this initiative, both the repealed Federal Civil Servants Proclamation No. 1064/2017 and the current Federal Civil Servants Proclamation No. 1353/2025 contain provisions that support childcare services—particularly through maternity leave entitlements, affirmative action for female employees, and institutional obligations to promote work–life balance. This is one of the major initiatives to reduce the burdens of women and girls due to childcare being implemented by the GoE and the target Ministries. However, issues of quality service provisions, from training of the service providers, availability of facilities, including the provision of transport services to mothers with their children, and lack of sufficient budget for the centers have been identified as challenges

3.4. ECONOMIC SITUATION

The following can be placed at the end of section 1.5.1. “Moreover, women’s economic contributions are frequently undercounted due to the invisibility of Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW), which disproportionately falls on women. Activities such as caregiving, cooking, cleaning, and collecting water and firewood are vital for household and national economies but remain unrecognized in formal statistics. These time-consuming tasks limit women’s access to income-generating opportunities, education, and public life. Addressing UCDW is therefore essential for achieving economic justice and gender equality.”

3.5. SOCIAL SITUATION: EDUCATION

Under 1.5.2 “Education” section, the following can be placed at the end. “It is true that the burden of unpaid care and domestic work continues to limit girls’ regular school attendance, especially in rural areas where water collection, sibling care, and domestic chores are prioritized over education.”

3.6. SOCIAL SITUATION: HEALTH

Under 1.5.2. “Health” section, the following can be placed at the end. “Caregivers, especially women, often lack access to health services themselves, while bearing the brunt of unpaid care for the sick, elderly, or children. These roles remain undervalued in policy design.”

3.7. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The following can be added at the end of 3.1. “Effective gender mainstreaming must adopt an intersectional lens, recognizing that women and men are not homogenous groups. Overlapping factors such as disability, ethnicity, class, and location influence how individuals experience gender inequality. Likewise, addressing unpaid care and domestic work is vital to unlocking the full economic and social participation of women and marginalized groups.”

3.8. WOMEN’S AFFAIRS BUREAU/ DEPARTMENT

Section 3.3.2.1 can incorporate components that recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work. This may include support for community childcare centers, improved water and energy infrastructure, or flexible program schedules. Design project goals and strategies that explicitly consider intersectional impacts, ensuring inclusion of women and men across social classes, age groups, disabilities, and geographic areas.

3.9. BASIC UNDERSTANDING OF GM APPROACH

The paragraph under 3.3.2.5 can incorporate the following. “A comprehensive understanding of gender mainstreaming shall include unpaid care work and intersectionality. Intersectional analysis helps uncover how overlapping disadvantages (e.g., being a rural woman with a disability) intensify care burdens and restrict access to services or opportunities.”

3.10. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Under section 4.1.1., Monitoring and evaluation. The following bullets can be added.

- “Monitoring and evaluation frameworks should incorporate time-use data and care-related indicators.”
- “Disaggregated data should go beyond sex to include age, disability, geographic location, and caregiving status.”

3.11. MONITORING AND EVALUATION CHECKLISTS FOR ORGANIZATION/ POLICY/ PROGRAM/ PROJECT

Section 4.3 can include the following additional bullet points.

- “Average hours spent on unpaid care and domestic work, disaggregated by sex, age, region, disability status, and socioeconomic background.
- Percentage of programs/projects that include interventions addressing unpaid care work (e.g., provision of care services, time-saving technologies).
- Proportion of beneficiaries reporting improved work-life balance due to care-supportive services.”
- Develop gender assessment and monitoring tools with indicators to measure results, identify gaps using different methods (scorecards, gender responsive assessment scale)

3.12. CHECKLIST

Under 4.3.1.3, the “checklist” for “Program and project design” can have the following additional points.

- “Does the program identify and analyze unpaid care and domestic work burdens?
- Are care-related services or labor-saving infrastructure integrated into the intervention?
- Is participation designed to be care-sensitive (e.g., flexible scheduling, childcare at meetings)?”

3.13. INDICATORS

Correspondingly, the following bullets can be added to the indicators list:

- Average hours spent per day on unpaid care work by project beneficiaries, disaggregated by sex, location, and age.
- Number/percentage of interventions that include provisions to reduce care burdens.
- Number of beneficiaries accessing new or improved care support services (e.g., childcare, water services).

3.14. ANNEX (GLOSSARY)

Under Annex 1(Glossary) definitions of terms can be added as below.

Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW): Non-remunerated activities such as caregiving, cooking, cleaning, and fetching water/fuel that are essential for household and societal functioning. Predominantly carried out by women, UCDW limits participation in paid work, education, and political life.

Intersectionality: A framework recognizing that individuals experience multiple, interconnected forms of disadvantage or privilege based on gender, ethnicity, disability, geography, class, and other identity markers.

Time poverty: A condition where individuals, primarily women, have insufficient time for rest, education, or income-generating activities because of the burden of unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities. Time poverty reduces personal well-being and economic opportunities.

Redistribution of care: A strategy within gender equality efforts aimed at balancing the responsibility for unpaid care work among women, men, the state, and the private sector. It includes promoting men's involvement in domestic tasks and expanding access to care services and infrastructure.

Care economy: The sector of an economy that includes both paid and unpaid care work such as child care, elder care, health care, and domestic tasks. Recognizing and investing in the care economy is essential for achieving gender equality and inclusive economic growth.

4 CONCLUSION

The integration of Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW) and intersectionality into Ethiopia's gender mainstreaming efforts is not an optional enhancement – it needs to be considered a foundational requirement for effective and inclusive policy-making in the area of gender mainstreaming. If national framework have to address the root causes of inequalities, it is necessary to acknowledge the diverse realities of women and marginalized groups, and systematically embed care-sensitive and intersectional approaches across sectors. The policy action and integration points provided in this document are believed to serve as practical and strategic entryways for transforming gender norms, redistributing care responsibilities, and ensuring that development outcomes are equitable and sustainable. Moving forward, a deliberate and well-resourced commitment to these dimensions will be essential for translating policy intentions into real change on the ground.

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