**Transforming the Care Economy for Gender Equal Economy**

**With Reference to India[[1]](#footnote-1)**

India is a highly gender unequal country. Gender inequalities are observed in all spheres of life - economic, political, social and cultural. The Indian government has implemented several policies and programmes over the years for welfare, development and then empowerment of women. However the country still has high gender inequalities – except in some few isolated micro cases.

The main reason for this is that the policies so far have not addressed the patriarchy upfront. The power relations between men and women and the subordinate status of women still remain the same as ever. At the root of the patriarchy is the highly unequal distribution of paid and unpaid work between women and men in the economy. Women are predominant in unpaid work, which is invisible and viewed as inferior kind of work; while men are predominantly in paid work, which is visible in data (in national income accounts) and which is supposed to be a higher category of work. The established model of our households is man-bread winner and woman-home keeper. Our social norms, traditions and customs largely emanates from this.

It is important to address this patriarchy upfront for gender equality, and it is therefore necessary to articulate what exactly we mean by gender equality and to explore pathways to achieving this.

“Care” in any economy contributes in multiple ways to the macro-economy. However the way the care economy is organized in a developing economy like ours, it denies women equal opportunities in life and deprives them of their basic human rights. When women take up work in the labour market, which is very common particularly in the bottom 20-30 % households, it results in severe time stress and time poverty for women, and result in multiple macroeconomic losses, such as, sub-optimal use of the labour force in the economy, care deficiency in the economy and reveals the partial and truncated nature of the conventional macro-economy.

It is critical to transform the care economy in a manner that the economy becomes a completely gender equal economy. As regards the pathways, the author suggests the 3R strategy – recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid work. The 3 R strategy is expected to contribute to gender equality in multiple ways.

Will the 3 R strategy lead towards gender equal economy and society? Will it take the economy towards (1) defeminising care economy – care is equally shared by men and women in the household as well as in the economy, (2) gender equality in the labour market, i.e. equal opportunities to men and women in the labour market; and expansion of employment in the economy for women and women both, along with removal of gender stereotyping in the long run, (3) removing care deficiency in the economy by providing quality care to all, and (4) decent work conditions for care givers in the labour market?

1. Indira Hirway, CFDA, Ahmedabad [↑](#footnote-ref-1)