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DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**CENTRING CARE IN INDIA'S
ECONOMIC POLICY**

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CENTRING CARE IN INDIA'S ECONOMIC POLICY

Context

- In recent years, the importance of care work has gained recognition globally, yet it remains underappreciated and undervalued in many economic policies.
 - In India, the need to center care in economic policy is crucial for achieving gender equality, improving social welfare, and fostering sustainable development.

About the Care Economy (Purple Economy)

- It encompasses all the activities related to **caregiving, both paid and unpaid**.
 - Paid Care Work:** Includes nurses, domestic workers, teachers.
 - Unpaid Care Work:** Cooking, cleaning, caregiving, often undervalued.
- The **World Economic Forum's report** on the 'Future of Care Economy' highlights **three perspectives**:
 - As an engine for increasing economic productivity.
 - As investors and employers (business perspective).
 - Focusing on gender equality and disability inclusion (human rights perspective).
- Care Diamond Model:** Involves State, markets, households, and communities in care provision.

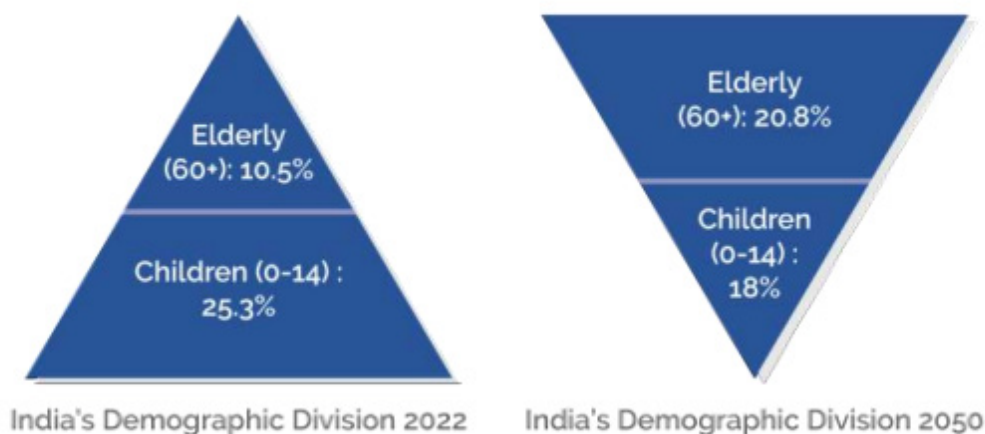
Invisible Contribution of Care Work

- Globally, **unpaid care work** is disproportionately **carried out by women**.
- In India, women spend **nearly 312 minutes per day** on unpaid domestic and care work, compared to **52 minutes by men** (Time Use Survey, 2019).
- It restricts women's economic participation and contributes to India's declining female labor force participation rate, which was **only 24% in 2022** (World Bank).

Need for a Care Economy in India

- Changing Demographics:** A recent **study from the United Nations Population Fund** finds that as of 2022, about 25% of India's population is between the ages of 0-14 years, and 10.5% is above 60 years, i.e. about **360 million children and 147 million elderly persons** require care.
 - Over the next few decades, not only will the population grow, but there will also be a **demographic transition**.
 - By 2050**, the proportion of **elderly persons is expected to increase to 20.8%** of the population, i.e. about 347 million persons.
 - Moreover, even as the proportion of **children reduces marginally to 18%**, the number of children will still be close to 300 million.

Inverted care pyramid in India



Source: UNFPA Our World's Data, Census, MPIA, and SIP

- **Ageing Population:** As **life expectancy increases and birth rates decline**, the proportion of elderly individuals in our society is rising. This demographic shift necessitates more attention to elderly care.
- **Gender Inequality:** Women's active participation in the economy is crucial for reducing gender inequality. However, India faces a **low female labour force participation rate (FLFPR)**.
 - ♦ According to the **Economic Survey 2023-24**, India's FLFPR was 37% (2022-23), significantly **below the world average of 47.8%**. One key reason behind this disparity is the disproportionate burden of care that women bear within families.
- **Multiple Care Burden:** Women in India shoulder multiple care responsibilities, ranging from childcare to looking after other household members—such as the elderly, sick, and disabled.
 - ♦ Additionally, they perform substantial unpaid domestic work. In fact, **women aged 15-64 years spend about three times more time** daily on unpaid domestic work than men.
 - ♦ It often prevents women from participating fully in the workforce.
- **Childcare as a Focus:** To increase women's participation in the labour force, attention is now turning toward childcare.
 - ♦ Some State governments have been working on building support services through the existing **Anganwadi network**.
 - ♦ In the **2024-25 Budget**, there was a **3% increase in the Ministry of Women and Child Development's budget** for the integrated child care and nutrition program (**Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0 scheme**).
- **Beyond Childcare:** While childcare is crucial, we must recognize that women are primary caregivers across the entire life course of household members. Therefore, their care responsibilities need to shift elsewhere.

Economic Benefits of a Care-Centered Policy

- **Higher Female Workforce Participation:** Expanding care services, such as affordable daycare centers and elderly care facilities, would allow more women to enter the workforce, thereby increasing overall economic productivity.
- **Job Creation:** Investing in the care economy can generate millions of jobs, particularly for women.
 - ♦ The **ILO estimates** that investment in care services could create **11 million new jobs in India by 2030**.
- **Improved Health and Well-being:** A strong care infrastructure ensures better early childhood development, elderly care, and mental well-being, leading to a healthier and more productive population.
- **Reduction in Gender Inequality:** Recognizing and redistributing care work can help bridge the gender gap in wages and economic opportunities.

Challenges in Integrating Care into Economic Policy

- **Financial and Budgetary Constraints:** Public spending on care services, including child care and elderly care, remains low compared to other social sectors.
- **Lack of Data and Policy Recognition:** Economic indicators like GDP do not account for unpaid care work, making it difficult to push for policy changes.
- **Deep-seated Gender Norms:** The cultural expectation that women should be the primary caregivers limits policy efforts to redistribute care responsibilities.
- **Fragmented Healthcare and Social Services:** Lack of coordination among different sectors (e.g., health, welfare, labor) leads to inefficiencies.
 - ♦ Different funding sources and priorities create policy misalignment.
 - ♦ Healthcare and social care often fall under different ministries, leading to jurisdictional conflicts.
- **Technological and Data Sharing Barriers:** Interoperability between healthcare IT systems is a challenge.
 - ♦ Privacy concerns and lack of standardized data policies slow down integration.

Policy Recommendations for a Care-Centric Economy

- **Increase Public Investment in Care Services:** The government should expand public child care, elderly care, and health services to reduce the burden on families, particularly women.
- **Recognize and Measure Unpaid Care Work:** Incorporating the economic value of unpaid care work into national accounts and economic indicators.

- ♦ It can be achieved through time-use surveys and satellite accounts that measure the contribution of care work to the economy.
- **Strengthen Legal Protections for Domestic and Care Workers:** Ensuring fair wages, social security, and labor rights for care workers will improve working conditions in the sector.
- **Promote Shared Responsibilities:** Encouraging equal participation of men in household and care work through public awareness campaigns can help shift gender norms.
- **Integrate Care Economy into Economic Planning:** Future budgets and economic policies must allocate funds specifically for care-related infrastructure and services.
- **Encouraging Shared Responsibility:** Promoting policies and cultural shifts that encourage men to take on a more equitable share of care responsibilities.
 - ♦ It includes implementing paternity leave policies, conducting awareness campaigns, and challenging traditional gender norms.
- **Promoting Gender-Responsive Budgeting:** Allocating resources to address gender disparities in care work through targeted programs and initiatives.
 - ♦ It includes increasing funding for social protection schemes, such as maternity benefits, paid family leave, and pensions for caregivers.

Conclusion

- Centering care in India's economic policy is essential for achieving gender equality, improving social welfare, and fostering sustainable development.
- By recognizing the value of care work and implementing supportive policies, India can create a more inclusive and equitable society.
- As the country continues to grow and develop, it is crucial to ensure that care work is no longer invisible but is acknowledged and valued as a fundamental pillar of the economy.

Source: TH

Mains Practice Question

[Q] Discuss the significance of centering care in India's economic policy and analyze how recognizing unpaid care work can contribute to gender equality, social welfare, and sustainable development. What challenges might arise in implementing such policies, and how can they be addressed?

