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# RECOGNISE, REDISTRIBUTE, REDUCE THE WOMEN'S UNPAID CARE BURDEN

Women and the work they do for nothing

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## CONTENTS

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<b>WHAT IS UNPAID CARE WORK?</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>PROGRAM APPROACH</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>LESSONS LEARNED</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>MAIN CHALLENGES</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>PERSPECTIVES FOR FUTURE PROJECTS</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>STORIES OF CHANGE OF THE PILOT PROJECT</b>	<b>8</b>

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## WHAT IS UNPAID CARE WORK?

Unpaid care work refers to the work done in the home and in communities from preparing food, collecting firewood and water to taking care of children, the ill and the elderly. Women and girls living in poverty sometimes have to forego their basic human rights to an education, healthcare, decent work and leisure time in order to balance all these many activities. This perpetuates gender inequality, reinforces inequitable gender norms and keeps women and girls in poverty.

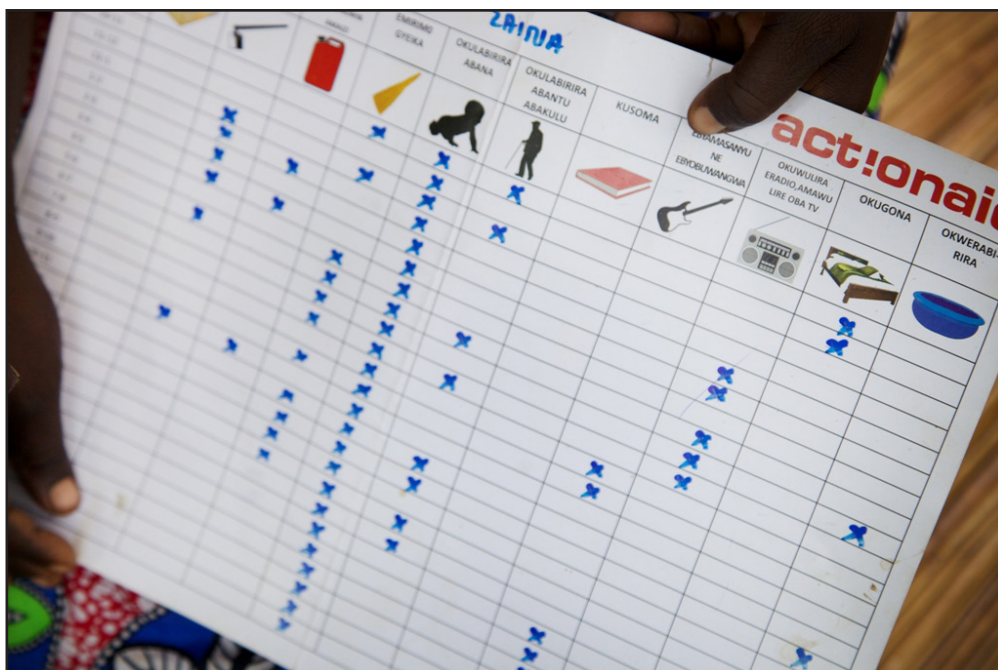
ActionAid International Women's Rights team piloted the women's Unpaid Care Work Program in collaboration with ActionAid Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria and Nepal. This program is one of the ActionAid International's contributions to the National Development Strategies of implementing countries. The program was officially launched in March 2011 in Nairobi, Kenya

### The aim of the Unpaid Care Work program

To make visible women's unpaid care work and its importance to the functioning of any society; so that it is valued by women, their communities and governments.

### The objectives of the program

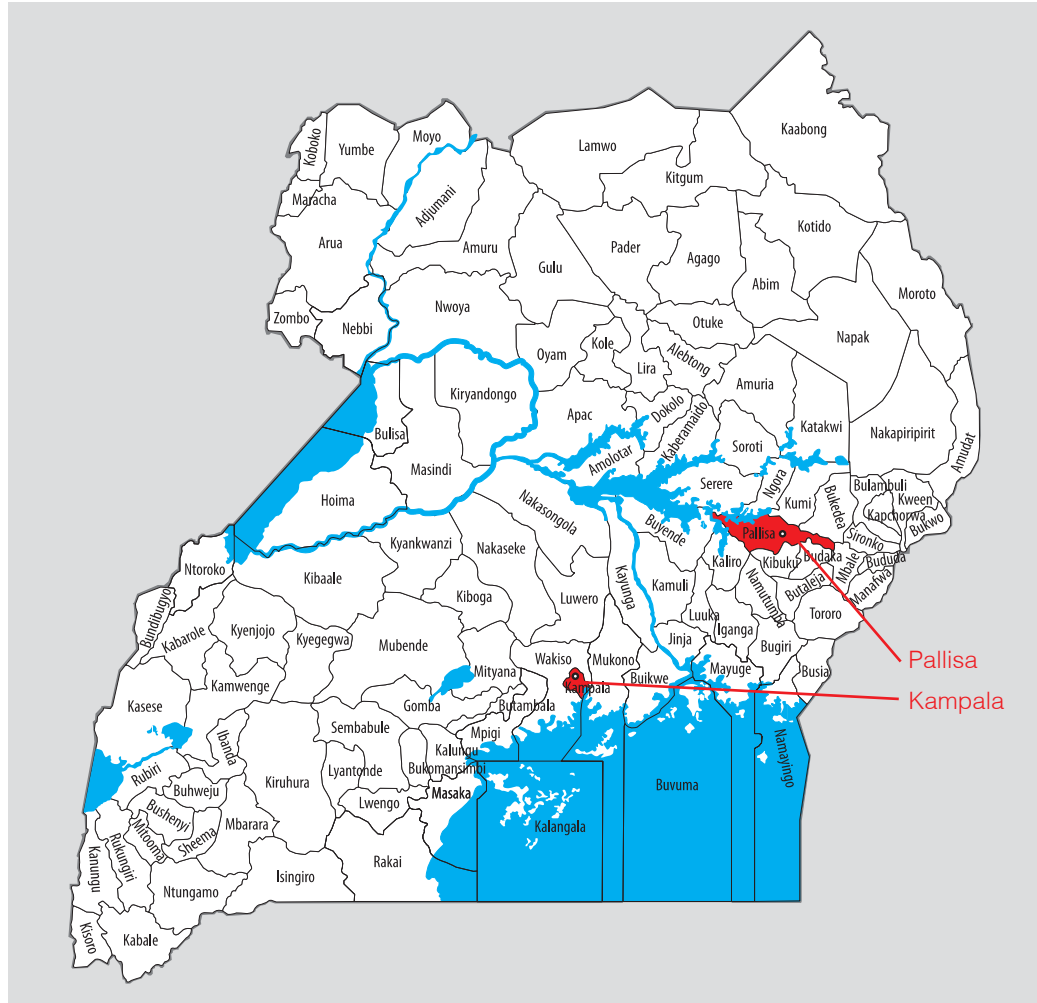
- To challenge the existing traditional development model that places little value on care work and front a more equitable division of labour and equal sharing of these responsibilities in the household between women and men, boys and girls.
- To propose an alternative gender responsive development model that recognizes and supports men, women, business, civil society organizations and the state actors to provide care in a way that does not unduly burden marginalized groups, especially women and girls.
- To advocate for formulation or review of mainstream economic policies that reduce the burden of women's care work.



**Women fill out diaries to track their unpaid care work**

## PROGRAM APPROACH

### Geographical coverage



The project was implemented using the REFLECT<sup>1</sup> approach in four sites, two rural in Buseeta, Pallisa and two urban, Kampala city suburbs Wandegeya and Bwaise. This was to establish the contextual difference between how rural and urban women and men spend their time in relation to care work activities.

The participants in Pallisa REFLECT groups were typical rural and entirely dependent on subsistence agriculture for their livelihoods. In Kampala city, the majority of REFLECT members are engaged in petty informal trade, casual employment, typical house wives and few employed on full time formal jobs. Access to water in Kampala depends on the affordability and ability to pay up to UGShillings 200 per jerry can for tap water and free springs are interspaced in geographical distance and therefore not available to many. In Pallisa district water is scarce and sources seasonal. Boreholes are only available in distant places and hardly produce water in the dry season thus making access to water quite problematic in this site. Although electricity seems available for REFLECT members in Kampala, the cost limits access to and utilization for some in these suburbs while the Pallisa REFLECT groups don't have access to electricity at all.

1 REFLECT is a diverse and innovative approach to adult learning and social change, used by over 350 organisations in 60 countries.

### Time Diaries

A spreadsheet or photo diary is a tool for capturing the actual work. It shows the work activities on the horizontal axis and on the vertical axis the time spent on each activity is plotted. It has pictorial representations (pictures and symbols) of activities women and men do on in Ugandan families. Hard copies of the time grid diary were printed and used in the sessions with participants to collect individual data. The female participants engaged in a regular exercise of filling the diaries since November 2011, and by July 2012 the participation rate had risen to over 70% women as compared to 30% men. A total of 15 sessions with 140 women and 2 sessions with 40 men were conducted guided by a lead researcher in both Kampala and Pallisa and the data were analysed.



SAWA	EMIRIMO EGISASULWA	OKULIMA EMERE	OKUTYABA ENKWI NOKUNONYA AMAIZI	EMIRIMO GYEIKA	OKULABIRIRA ABANA	OKULABIRIRA ABANTU ABAKULU	KUSOMA	EBYIMASANYU NE EBYOBULWANGWA	OKUWULIRA ERADIO,AMAWU LIRE OBA TV	OKUGONA	OKWERABI- RIRA
SYMBOL											
10-11											
11-12											
12-1											
1-2											
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**A diary in local language. From left to right the activities are: income generation, agriculture, fetching water, cleaning the house, child care, caring for other family members, reading and studies, music and entertainment, listening to the radio, sleep, personal hygiene.**

### REFLECT sessions

In both Bwaise and Pallisa, an average of 95% of the 140 women regularly attend the REFLECT meetings, conducted twice a month, with the biggest percentage (80%) of members married. In order to improve the literacy (numeracy, reading and writing) skills of participants especially women, community facilitators were trained in participatory tools for adult learning, community analysis of poverty issues and development of action plans which they implement using locally available resources. In their regular REFLECT Circle meetings, participants used the time diaries as reference resources for their discussions. Participants discuss their burden of care and how their typical day's activities affect their wellbeing as women.

## LESSONS LEARNED

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Both men and women participants who filled the time diaries now appreciate the workload and burden of care women shoulder which initially they themselves did not appreciate. The men who were involved in the REFLECT circles show a significant attitude change towards their wives and the work that they do.

These men could act as role models and mentors since they recognized that women do a lot of work, and as a result there has been attitude change at household level, women have gained greater appreciation by their husbands. The men have gone out of their comfort zones to support their wives; for instance, they help fetch water for the family, or they have started bathing their children, and one man looked after his own wife in the hospital rather than asking her mother-in-law to do it. However, the men feel uncomfortable doing dishes and cooking.

Some women are saying that domestic violence is reducing in Bwaise because there is less tension between women and men. There has been an attempt to redistribute the work amongst family members; some of the women share the responsibilities between the children – especially giving care tasks to boy children as well, and not just girls.

Women's literacy skills have improved and they can read the words underneath the signs used in the time diary. Some women can now write their names and dates. To someone who had never touched a pen this is a big achievement for the women. On numeracy skills, participants are learning to count the number of times they have done a certain activity and write down that figure on their time diary. This has improved women's self esteem and now some women are able to speak in public, for instance stand in front of their group's members and share their views.

The women learnt how to manage their time well and save some time to engage in income generating activities. In Kampala, the women used this time to learn some basic entrepreneurial skills such as growing mushrooms, beading, savings and credit. Now they can afford to buy a jerry can of water with their own money especially when their husband is not there. In Pallisa a woman was able to use additional time to sell tomatoes and earn a little bit of additional income to buy soap for the family.

But also, when men support women, women will have time to rest, take care of their health, they will be happier and it will improve their intimate relationship

## MAIN CHALLENGES

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There was some inconsistency in attending meetings due to the many chores that women have to do. Some came late for the REFLECT circles discussions and did not fill out the time diaries. The program also registered newcomers to the REFLECT circle meetings and this meant that the facilitators had to start all over again to explain what the program is about and help them to fill out the time diaries. Therefore some participants filled 6 time diaries, some filled 8 and others filled only 4 time diaries. Hence analysis of the data leaves gaps.



Also resistance from both women and men appeared. Some have asked “What about our culture? How is a man going to be seen doing these things?” Even some women are not comfortable with the change; hence do not want the men to do the domestic work. This is still an area of contention and resistance. It will take time and sensitization to convince both men and women the value of sharing the roles.

## PERSPECTIVES FOR FUTURE PROJECTS

Public service delivery resources should be increased by:

Access to quality primary health care services by reducing the distance women have to walk to and from the health care centres. The distance should be of a radius of 5 kilometers (per parish)

Well resourced health care centres with adequate qualified staff, equipment and relevant drug stocks that reduce the time women spend in accessing treatment, particularly in countries heavily affected by the HIV & AIDS pandemic where the demand for care services drastically increases.

Access to clean and safe water sources within the nearest distance to relieve women of the time spent walking long distances looking for water for the households and investing in solar and wind driven water pumps

Access to improved time saving technologies such as energy saving stoves, biogas, ox driven weeders and harvesters, threshers, water proof zipped tarpaulins for drying their harvests that reduces the time spent by women on these activities.

Recognizing the value of the care work and the tax that would accrue from the work that women are doing by calculating how much the women would have earned if they were spending their time engaged in formal or informal employment hence their contribution to national GDP.

Through Enforcement of stringent labour standards that protect women from working longer hours while still earning low wages because this increases women’s workloads as they are still expected to provide the care in the household.

## STORIES OF CHANGE OF THE PILOT PROJECT

Zaina Mwogeza (36) lives in Butesa village in Eastern Uganda and is married to Igongo. She explains how her typical day looked like before joining the unpaid Care Work Programme:



**Zaina Mwogeza almost did not have any time for her own life.**

“I used to get up before 6am and by 8am I would feed the children and then go to the garden. Sometimes my husband would help in the garden, but not for long hours. I was working in the garden all morning, only breaking for fetching water once or twice, at 10 or 11. When I came home at noon, my husband could command me to get the bath water ready for him. After, I had to collect the basin and soap from the bath room after his shower. I would be preparing some food,

then clean the compound, take care of the animals and the children all afternoon. From around 4pm, I would go and fetch water one more time, the third time in a day, then go to the garden to dig up some food for supper, and continue with the rest of the chores. At six I prepare the supper, bathe the children, bring back animals and ensure everything in the home is in its right place before dark. I would be working without time to rest until I went to bed.”

This has changed since both Zaina and Igongo are members of the local REFLECT circle group in which participants have discussed the burden of care, benefited from the adult literacy training, savings/credit schemes and are helping each other in their gardens. So far, the Unpaid Care Work project has had a great impact on Zaina’s life.

### Changing the cultural belief: No longer the man’s slave”



**Maimuna and Habibu’s lives were turned upside down – for the better.**

“There has been a great improvement in my life, I feel so liberated, and within a year! Today he fetches water for his bath himself, collects firewood and brings it home. He goes to the borehole with the jerry cans on his bike, and if I am doing some cooking, like peeling sweet potatoes, he just comes and helps me,” says Maimuna (52) and a beneficiary of the unpaid care work programme in Katiryo village.

Since she got married 30 years ago, Maimuna felt oppressed and overworked; she lived with the feeling that she was working herself to death. Just like so many women in Uganda she is responsible for all the domestic work, the hard struggle to put food on the plate for her family, bringing up the children



and serving her husband, Habibu. She says: "He would just say 'prepare my bath now. It did not matter if I was doing something else or if we were in the middle of a meal. I had to get up, fetch the basin and towel and prepare for him. After the bath he just left everything for me to clean up. I did not dare to raise my voice or do anything but submit out of fear of being kicked or caned".

Maimuna does not even remember if she ever imagined that life could be different, but something has happened after the couple joined the REFLECT circle meetings that discuss Unpaid Care Work. In their circle, members discussed the negative implications of the rural women's enormous work load and bride price which makes women completely submissive to their husbands.

For the couple, the programme was a great help and one year down the road, the lives of the couple have changed completely. "Women are also human beings, like men. We did not know that, and the women were abused. But we have now learnt new insights, thus we must help the woman in our home" says Habibu.

Maimuna narrates: "Before, I had to carry his hoe to the garden and back home from the garden if he had been working there with me. That's how it was because he was the one who paid the dowry". Habibu adds: "dowry fortifies the idea that the woman is only an asset in the man's home. A very hard working asset!!! Unpaid care work has a high price on the women. It causes exhaustion, lack of sleep, too many daily tasks and too little time to rest hence bad family life."

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## Women and men have started to work hand in hand

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"I was overworked", Naigaga Hadijja answers the question of how her life was before with a short, terse statement. She would wake up at 6 o'clock in the morning and go straight to the garden where she would dig. In the afternoon she'd come back to her house, only to fetch water, look for firewood, start preparing the food and taking care of her five children. Throughout the day her son of two and a half year would be on her back even while carrying the hoe, firewood or the big jerry can of water on her head. Her husband would help in the garden, but after a few hours in the *shamba* he would take off to the nearest trading centre to spend the

rest of the day playing cards, only to return at night, demanding food. Hadijja would crash in her bed at around eleven o'clock, completely

exhausted amidst her husband's physical desires and demands. "I didn't even have time to bathe, I did the work which would have been done by my husband" Hadijja says.

Now her husband, Wabwire, has changed, takes full responsibility and does his part. The change happened because of the Unpaid Care Work project in the REFLECT circle in Butesa, which Hadijja is a member of. Last year the group started to focus on discussing the work women are doing in their homes, and realized that they are having excessive workload, the work is unpaid, and is not appreciated. When



**Naigaga Hadijja was completely overworked.**

Hadijja returned from the meetings she shared with her husband the ideas discussed at the circle and little by little he began to understand.

“Now he is a member of the group and he allows me to join other activities of the community group. We filled in diaries, so he could understand how overworked I was, that we are all humans and we have to share the work. The man can also make the bed, or take care of the children, even wash the linen.”

Hadijja is now managing her time well and since her husband supports her with some activities, she now has a small business, making pancakes

and selling them in the trading centre in the free time. Also, the relationship between husband and wife has improved. Now, the husband works more in the garden, carries the firewood while she carries water jerry cans. “Now we are working hand in hand,” Hadijja says.

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## Now, life is OK

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When Tolofisa talks you get the impression of a strong woman. But even a strong woman can break down when she has to abide by unfair cultural rules, practices and pressure. “Life was not OK”, she says. Tolofisa was reportedly doing everything in her family, *everything*. All domestic work fell on her, and she was also doing all the work on the family land while her husband was doing nothing. When Tolofisa harvested the cash crops, the husband went to the market and sold the produce. He would keep the money; maybe even use it for drinking. Tolofisa did not get anything out of her efforts, and she and the children remained hungry

This has changed since her husband started attending unpaid care work meetings.

“I started to go the meetings in the REFLECT circle, learning how unfair it was that the woman has to do everything”, says Tolofisa, “After some time my husband got curious, he began asking ‘what are you doing there?’ Then he went to see for himself and learned that we should share the house work.”

After some time, life is OK for Tolofisa. Her husband now helps her in the house and does his part with the agricultural work. But also, the two are now taking joint decisions. Together they decide what their money should be spent on and

how their savings are to be spent. And Tolofisa is now in charge of the money.

Tolofisa thinks life changed because the village meetings focused on the women’s many duties and responsibilities, but also their unleashed potential, their abilities. To her there was an important moment when her husband realised that resting made her healthier. This has made them share the work. Actually they are often working side by side now and their relationship has improved. “The most important thing that happened is that we are doing things together now”, she says.



**Tolofisa and her husband are now taking joint decisions on financial issues.**

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## I have become an example in my Village.

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“From a laughing stock at my village I have become a living example that many people look up to”. These are words of courage by Leah Chede, a 50 year old mother of 7 children, 2 boys and 5 girls. Leah and her husband live in Buseta 1 Village in Palisa district. “Given my age and the fact that I am a mother, people in the neighborhood always wondered why I and my husband always fought even when I work so hard for my family to have food on the table and a good life. This caused a lot of disrespect for us among the community members”.

The fights are now history after the Unpaid Care Work project was rolled out in Pallisa and Leah shares her story to inspire women in the same situation she managed to conquer.

“I used to work and get so tired that I would have no energy left to even take a bath!” Leah recalls days when she had to wake as early as 5am, clean the compound and prepare children for school before heading to the garden at 6:30, most of the time by herself.

“A Few times my husband joined me, but he would help me and stay in the garden for approximately one hour, at most two. From the garden I would come back carrying the two hoes, the baby on my back, firewood on my head and food for the day. I then had to be home on time to make breakfast and lunch as well; these had to be on time! Or else I would get beaten.”

To Leah being beaten or fighting with her husband was part of the day’s activities.

Out of the 50 years Leah has lived the last one year has created a difference in her life. When the Unpaid Care Work project was introduced in her village group, she started to reflect upon her life, and she realized there was something wrong.

“When we had our first meeting where we were taught how to fill a time diary then I realized that I did not have time for myself at all. I also realized that I do so much work whose payment has been beatings from my husband. It was not easy but it was time for me to face my husband and tell him the ideas I had learnt from the REFLECT circle. The first time I talked to him, he never responded. Nevertheless, I waited patiently for feedback from my husband. The next time I told him of a meeting I had with my group, he did not object. This time, when I returned I shared with him what I had learnt, writing various alphabetical letters and combining them to make words. He still listened with no response. By this time I was learning to write my name, something that seemed hard and impossible for me since I have never stepped into a classroom. Even when I got no feedback, this did not stop me from sharing with him my learning



**Fighting was a part of daily life for Leah Chede.**

each time I went for the meeting in the group. Then, one evening I asked my husband what he thought of his daughters and the kind of life he wished for them. I was surprised by what I heard, "I want my daughters to study and get respectable husbands," he said.

I then asked him if the way he treated me was the life he wished for our two daughters. It was the first time I was being this bold with my husband and I was ready for a slap as always the case. I went ahead to tell him of the amount of work I did in the home for

which I never got paid money or even a word of appreciation from my family members. Even when I did not get immediate feedback, this bold talk I had with my husband was a turning point in my family; even the neighbors are surprised that they no longer hear fights at my home.

I noted a gradual change in his actions. He became more polite. I started to see another side of my husband that I had never seen before. Of course it took me patience to achieve this behavior of him, and I am still hopeful that much more is yet to change in my home. As I speak my husband started supporting me as I am doing the housework. He redistributed the work equally among the girls and the boys. I feel less burdened because as I cook the children help in fetching water as my husband splits the firewood. After eating I rest as I listen to the radio and if it is a Thursday I prepare to go under the mango tree a few meters from my home for the REFLECT meeting. Many of my neighbors cannot believe that they no longer hear fights in my home and see I and my husband working as a team, this has greatly restored our respect among the people in our community and I see myself and my family as an example for the rest to emulate.

I look and feel much better about myself both as a mother and a wife in my home. I feel a sense of value because my husband respects my opinion now. We sit and plan together; our future plans are to continue digging and accumulate some money from the excess produce to open up a small retail shop to supplement the school fees for our children. This is because we have discovered the secret in educating our children. Our children in the future will be in position to live decent lives and be better and responsible citizens if we give them the formal education as well teach them life values by being exemplary as their parents.

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### **I don't have to ask other people to read my letters anymore**

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**Namusisi was embarrassed because she was not able to read her own letters.**

Namusisi (50) lives in Katanga slums in Kampala. Like many African women, Namusisi never got a chance to go to school and was not able to read nor write. However, Namusisi became member of a REFLECT Circle, and here one of the regular activities at the meetings are teaching the women how to read and write, to help them fit in the modern society.

Namusisi tells how her life has changed:

"I am so happy that now I can write my name and at least read. I used to feel out of place whenever I went for community meetings, as I had to ask friends to write my name on the attendance list. More so, I had to ask them

to read for me my own confidential letters. I used to feel so small after they had known my secrets. Attending

REFLECT meetings has helped me so much, and I am grateful to the Unpaid Care Work project which facilitates us to meet regularly. It has made me to fit in the community.”

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### **Working together has made my family happier.**

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Kamoji Charles is one of the two male members in the REFLECT circle in Katiryo village in Pallisa district. Charles has a one wife and together they have 6 children. He is also a member of he REFLECT.

When Charles grew up, he was made to believe that certain work was meant to be done by the women. It is therefore little wonder that all Charles did to support his wife was cultivating the garden in the morning. After digging he would spend the rest of his day relaxing with friends.

“This has also been the practice with my two sons, Julius (15) and David (13). I have trained them like I was trained by my father and uncles. Even my mother who never allowed me to do certain work, stereotyped to be women’s responsibility,” Charles tells.

It was not until Charles started attending the REFLECT circle meetings that he knew of the Unpaid Care Work concept. Before, he had never taken a minute to think about the work his wife does and attach monetary value to it. When the couple tried to work this out, Charles could not estimate the value. He would never be able to repay her for the sacrifice she made for the family

“My wife who goes to the garden , and since girls go to school, we leave her doing the rest of the house work like fetching water, cooking food, cleaning the house and the compound, washing clothes and utensils, looking for firewood, taking the animals to graze, taking care of our 4 year old son. I let her do all that, not because I do not love her but the society we live in put us in this situation, to the extent that if my mother found me washing the utensils in my wife’s presence she would regard my wife irresponsible!”, Charles says.

Putting the aside the society he lives in and what it dictates, taking part in the Unpaid Care Work project he has come to realize that he has a choice to make, between managing the family the way society pleases or the treat the family members with fairness, dignity, respect and love. Responding to his choice, Charles decided to redistribute the roles of each family member regardless of if they are male or female.

“I had talk to my sons about how we as men must support our wives, mothers and sisters in doing house work so we can spend less time in leisure, and they can equally share the relaxing time with us.”

Right now in Charles’ home everyone is expected to work equally, if his wife is cooking then he takes the animals to graze. As the boys fetch water, the girls pick firewood, rather than before when all the work would be left to the girls and their mother. They all now work as a team to get the work done and rest all together when everything is finished.

My wife is even more creative now, jolly, looking younger”, he says with a laughter and big smile on his face, “this is because after doing the work together we have time to sit and have a discussion on how we would like to raise our children and future plans. I realize that I have been missing out on so many ideas because most of the time she was running up and down to have the home in order. By the time she would be done she would not have the strength to sit and talk about anything constructive. Instead she would rush for the bed dreading the next day that starts at 6am for her and ends at 11pm when our children are all asleep.

“I have shared my learning with fellow men when having a social moment. I have appreciated the results I have got from supporting my wife in doing the house chaos. Keeping in mind the society that my wife and I live in, it is definitely going to take time to have men support women. They do so much work that we never recognize, but it is possible if we begin with the young ones - to change their mind sets like I am doing with my three sons,” Charles says.

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## Marriage CAN be enjoyable

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Najjemba Proscovia is one of the REFLECT circle facilitators in Bwaise slums. After receiving a T.O.T (Traing of Trainers) in REFLECT, she went back and started bringing the ideas of Unpaid Care Work into her own family. She convinced her son and daughter, Nakawooza Mary, to attend a REFLECT circle meeting where they talked about the unpaid care work of women. She made a follow up with her son and talked more about the issue until the son realized that it was really necessary for a woman to get more time off the domestic work and involve herself in income generating work. The son of gave his wife one of the rooms in their house so that she can get income from it.



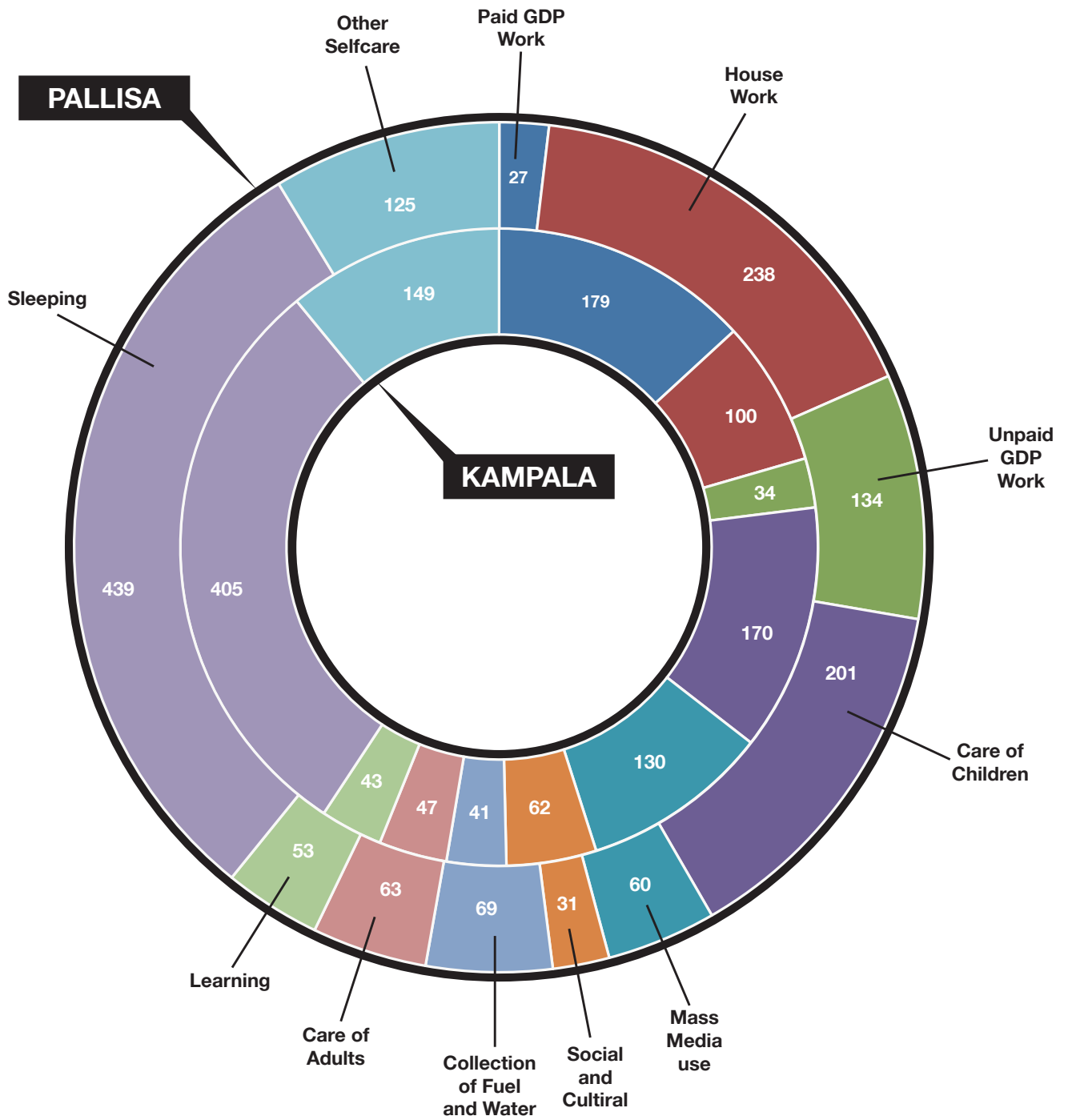
**Najjemba Proscovia persuaded her husband to have her own small business.**

Nakawooza Mary tells:

“I can’t believe my husband has changed to this extent! He used not to allow me to do any income generating work and he was furious about my demand to do something which can bring income to the family. Whenever I told him of doing something, he threatened to divorce me. I thank my mother in law for encouraging both of us (me and my husband) to attend the REFLECT meetings. Indeed these meetings have made my husband to change his attitudes and behaviors towards our family. He even helps me with domestic work like caring for the children and fetching water for the family. We are all happy in our family and we no longer have quarrels. If this program was countrywide, married women would live a happy life and marriage would be enjoyable.

## Comparison of Women Time Diaries for Kampala and Pallisa Districts

### Time Spent (Minutes) in a Day



**ActionAid is an international anti-poverty agency working in over 40 countries, taking sides with poor people to end poverty and injustice together.**

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