

**Care Economy, Gender and Inclusive Growth in Post-Reform China: How Does
Unpaid Care Work Affect Women's Opportunities and Gender Equality?**

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This Abstract is Preliminary, Due to Family Needs of Dr. Dong. Please understand that this summary will be changed in late March. (Panel Organizer)

The issue of 'care' and the 'care economy' has recently emerged as a subject of extensive academic and policy debate. The term 'care' refers to the daily work of producing and maintaining human resources, and care work includes the daily activities needed to keep people well-nourished, clothed and healthy, as well as the face-to-face activities associated with the care of infants, children, the sick, and the elderly (Razavi 2007). The time and effort involved in the daily work of caring for oneself and others are essential for the capabilities and well-being of individuals as well as the functioning of society and the economy (Carneiro and Heckman 2003; Folbre and Nelson 2000).

The term 'care economy' refers to the system that determines how care is delivered, financed and regulated in a society. Care can be purchased from the market and provided through the family and community or through civil society arrangements; however, the State can influence how care needs are defined and how the needs are met through regulations, taxes and subsidies or through direct delivery of care services or inaction (UNRISD 2010).

In most countries, care work is predominately undertaken by women at home on an unpaid basis. However, unpaid care work remains unrecognized and undervalued. Indeed, the issue of care largely remains off the policy agendas in most developing countries, where care provision is commonly perceived as a natural duty of women and a private matter of families (Beneria, 2003).

China provides a unique context to study the dynamics of care and the care economy. The Chinese economy has undergone dramatic economic and social transformations since the onset of economic reform in the late 1970s. China's economic

reform and opening up to the international market have engendered rapid income growth and a large expansion of productive employment opportunities. While both women and men have gained considerably from this rapid growth in absolute terms, the extent to which women can benefit equally to men from new economic opportunities depends on how the issue of care is addressed. This is partly because associated with the remarkable rise in income and employment is the structural change that has transformed the country from an agrarian economy to an increasingly industrialized and urbanized economy. The process of industrialization and urbanization typically separates the workplace from the home, making it more difficult for women to combine paid work with caregiving responsibilities. Rural-to-urban labor migration is another major feature of China's economic structural change. While labor migration is an important means to escape poverty for rural households, the flow of migration has left behind a large population of young children and elderly people, intensifying the pressure on family care providers, mostly mothers and grandmothers, in the rural sector. Moreover, rapid income growth, compounded by the one-child policy, has resulted in a substantial fertility decline and accelerated the population aging process, and these demographic trends have particular implications for care needs and provision.

This paper examines the transformation of the care economy in post-reform China and its implications for women's opportunities and gender equality. The paper addresses five critical but understudied questions: How does the reform process reshape the institutional arrangements of care for children and the elderly? How does the changing care economy influence women's choices between paid work and unpaid care responsibilities as mothers and grandmothers? What are the implications of women's work-family conflicts for the well-being of women and their families? How does the tension on the care economy affect people from socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, such as ethnic minorities, rural residents, migrant women, and disabled elderly people? To what extent does the design of social security policy influence the incentives and supply of care provision? Answers to these questions will broaden the scope of our understanding of the centrality of care for gender equality and inclusive growth in developing countries.