



Picture: Women harvesting finger millet in Lundazi, Zambia

Empowering Women by Reducing their Time Burdens

Women's Empowerment

Enabling Mothers to Provide Better Care for Infants and Young Children

The most efficacious interventions to alleviate child under-nutrition are well-known and support for scaling up these has risen in recent years. Yet, progress in reducing under-nutrition has been slow. Stunting, micronutrient deficiencies and wasting remain major challenges globally, with short- and long-term implications for children's well-being, including cognitive development, school performance and, ultimately, lifetime earnings. Infants and young children (IYC) require others in the household to care for them, and in many contexts this role is primarily the mother's. Therefore, empowering and enabling mothers to engage in appropriate nutrition behaviors (for example reducing women's time burdens) is essential to achieving positive nutrition and health outcomes for IYC.

In some communities in rural Zambia as many as 50% of children under the age of 5 years have stunted growth, and an equal number are affected by anemia; this could be a result of mothers having heavy workloads, which inhibit their ability to utilize health and nutrition programs, and to provision adequate and appropriate nutrition for their IYC.

Following the scale up of the One Health for Babies and Livestock Project and substantial increase in Baby WASH knowledge in the Eastern province of Zambia, CARE and Cornell followed up on this project with the **Women's Time Use Study**. In an effort to better understand how women's time burdens may influence their engagement with nutrition programs and uptake of behaviors promoted through these programs, our goal was to develop a valid women's time use and time stress survey that could be administered rapidly. We achieved this through:

- Focus group discussions,
- Cognitive interviews,
- In-depth interviews, and
- Household observation.

To obtain a balanced gendered perspective on women's time use and workloads, focus group discussions were conducted with women and men, separately. Overall, a total of 20 men and 70 women were included in the study. Additionally, 8 women who had participated in the One Health for Babies and Livestock Project were included in this project.

“What makes a woman rest is night.”

Findings from all components of this study highlight a tremendous burden on the time of women in Eastern Province. Specifically, women have primary responsibility for childcare and household chores such as fetching firewood and water, cooking, cleaning etc. In addition, a significant portion of women’s time is allocated towards gardening and farming, which contribute to the subsistence of the household. Consequently, women have heavy time burdens, rarely have time for leisure activities, and have minimal time for rest.



Woman breastfeeding child while gardening

Although women reported spending the 2nd largest proportion of their time on child care activities, it was evident from observational data that the quality of care provided to young children was compromised, consequent to the heavy time burden that women have. On average, a majority (75%) of the observed time spent on child care activities was as a secondary activity. This finding is further highlighted in the image above, which shows a mother breastfeeding her young child as she continues to work in her garden. It was also common for breastfeeding episodes to be very brief, serving the purpose of consoling rather than providing nutrition.

Gendered expectations around women’s work

“...but our tradition says the woman should do the housework.”

From the focus group discussions, both with women and men, the gendered divisions of household and community activities were very apparent and emerged as deeply entrenched within social norms. While the men acknowledged that women had a heavier burden on their time relative to the men, and expressed mild feelings of guilt, they also highlighted that it would be socially unacceptable for them to assist with chores designated for women. Further it appeared that labor-saving devices, such

as bicycles, were more accessible to men when they did assist with fetching water or firewood.

What’s in a woman’s workload?

Based on the cultural insider perspective of women’s time use, obtained from the focus group discussions, we developed the **Women’s Time Use Survey**. This context-specific survey includes a **Time Allocation** module, which assesses the absolute quantity of time spent on a list of activities over the previous week, and a **Perceived Time Scarcity** module, which assesses the quality of time use through 6 Likert-type questions. Reliability and content validity of the survey items were ensured through cognitive testing, and the final Women’s Time Use Survey was pre-tested with 24 women. This survey instrument will be used for in-depth analysis of time use and workloads of women participating in the Nutrition at the Centre (N@C) Program in Zambia, which will propel efforts to reduce women’s time burdens and positively transform the design and implementation of N@C and future programs in Zambia. The survey will also be adapted for use in other N@C implementing countries.

Utility of the Women’s Time Use Survey

Measuring women’s time use and time burdens has the potential to contribute to solutions for tackling the unequal burden of unpaid care work. Information collected from this survey can be used to:

1. **Recognize** the burden on women’s time. That is, considering women’s time burdens in the design, implementation and evaluation of program components and outcomes.
2. **Reduce** women’s workloads. This can be achieved by promoting and advocating for improved access to labor-saving technologies and practices. There are many technologies and practices that could potentially reduce women’s workloads, e.g. rainwater harvesters, conservation agriculture, draught animals. However, these need to be made more accessible and acceptable for women.
3. **Redistribute** “women’s work” so that it is share among different people equally. The survey can be used to identify specific areas and/or activities where men and boys can be engaged to support women in their households, by taking on a larger share of what is normally considered “women’s work”.