

Introduction

Modern development challenges increasingly reveal the inadequacy of policies that treat economic growth, security, and social welfare as separate domains. In many national contexts, the contributions of care work—whether delivered in households or through formal institutions—are systematically undervalued. This neglect not only distorts economic measurements but also weakens public health, social cohesion, and overall security. Development policies that ignore the hidden costs and benefits of care work risk exacerbating inequality and undermining long-term economic resilience. In regions characterized by rapid urbanization and shifting labor dynamics, it is imperative to reconfigure policy frameworks to recognize the interdependence of care, security, and macroeconomy.

The traditional metrics of development, such as gross domestic product (GDP) growth and employment figures, often fail to account for unpaid labor and informal work in care sectors. This oversight results in a narrow conception of national progress that omits critical dimensions of human well-being. Moreover, policies that focus solely on aggregate economic indicators tend to overlook the social vulnerabilities that arise when care is neglected. This issue is particularly acute in settings where gendered responsibilities and informal labor underpin the functioning of households and communities. In effect, the undervaluation of care creates a cascade of challenges—from reduced labor productivity and deteriorating public health to increased social fragmentation and diminished national security.

An integrated approach to development policy is therefore needed—one that synthesizes environmental, economic, and security concerns with a keen sensitivity to everyday social practices. Such a framework emphasizes that care work is a strategic asset that sustains human capital and drives economic productivity. Recognizing the centrality of care would prompt policymakers to reframe success metrics and adopt more holistic development strategies. This essay examines the critical intersections between care, security, and macroeconomy and discusses how integrated policy frameworks can transform development outcomes.

Discussion

At the heart of the issue lies the persistent undervaluation of care work. In many societies, care work—whether in the form of child(ren) nurturing, caring for the elderly, or supporting family members with special needs—is performed predominantly by women and is often unpaid or undercompensated. Such work is essential for maintaining a healthy workforce and ensuring social continuity. Yet, traditional economic models frequently disregard these contributions, leading to a systematic underinvestment in public care services. The result is a vicious cycle in which inadequate support for care undermines public health, reduces labor participation, and ultimately stifles economic growth.

Furthermore, when care work is sidelined in policies' ideations and debates, the broader security of a nation is compromised. National security is not solely defined by military capacity or crime statistics; it also encompasses human security ensuring that citizens can live in environments where their basic needs are met. Inadequate care provisioning can contribute to increased stress, poor health outcomes, and social unrest. These factors, in turn, weaken community resilience and erode public trust in government institutions. An integrated policy approach would reframe security to include these dimensions, ensuring that public investments in care-related infrastructure (such as healthcare, childcare, and eldercare) are seen as critical to maintaining social stability.

The fragmentation of policy-making processes is another key issue. Traditionally, economic policy, security measures, and social welfare programs are developed in silos, with little coordination among the responsible agencies. This separation leads to policies that are inconsistent and often counterproductive. For instance, economic policies that promote industrial growth without considering environmental and social costs can lead to deteriorating working conditions and increased public health expenses. Likewise, security strategies that focus solely on law enforcement may ignore the social determinants of crime, unrests and, recidivism. By integrating these domains, policymakers can design interventions that address the root causes of instability rather than merely treating its symptoms.

Addressing these challenges requires rethinking how national success is measured. Instead of relying exclusively on macroeconomic indicators like GDP or employment rates, a more comprehensive set of metrics is needed—one that includes indicators of public health, social well-being, and access to quality care services. When policies are evaluated based on their ability to improve these dimensions, governments are incentivized to invest in areas that directly enhance human resilience. Such a reorientation of policy metrics would encourage investments in public care infrastructure and promote economic strategies that recognize the full value of care work.

Data collection is a critical component of this integrated approach. Existing statistics often fail to capture the diversity of experiences within populations. For example, aggregate economic data may mask the disproportionate burden of care work on low-income families or the gendered dimensions of unpaid labor. Developing disaggregated data systems that detail the contributions of care work, and its associated social costs, is essential. Improved data collection methods—such as community surveys, participatory mapping, and focus groups—can provide a nuanced understanding of how care work impacts families, public health and economic productivity. These insights are vital for designing targeted interventions that address local needs and promote equitable development.

Innovative policy interventions can further enhance the integration of care into national strategies. Best practices from various regions suggest that public-private partnerships, community-led care initiatives, and participatory budgeting can be effective in redressing care deficits. By investing in programs that support quality healthcare, childcare, and eldercare, governments can reduce the hidden costs associated with poor care provisioning. Moreover, integrating care into economic planning can lead to improved labor productivity and better health outcomes, thereby reinforcing the overall resilience of the state.

In summary, the undervaluation of care work, coupled with fragmented policy-making processes and insufficient data, creates a multi-dimensional challenge that undermines national development. A holistic, integrated approach is essential for addressing these issues and fostering sustainable growth. Such an approach not only promotes economic efficiency but also enhances human security by ensuring that the well-being of all citizens is prioritized. Although these insights have emerged through broad reflections on

various regional experiences, the implications are universally relevant for modern states seeking to achieve inclusive development.

Conclusion

The analysis presented here makes a compelling case for integrating care work into the core of national policy frameworks. Traditional models that overlook the significance of care work ultimately contribute to economic inefficiency, social inequity, and diminished domestic security. By reconfiguring policy to incorporate comprehensive measures of public health, social well-being, and economic productivity, governments can build more resilient and inclusive societies.

For development experts committed to transforming policy paradigms, embracing an integrated approach that values care as a strategic asset is essential. Such a shift requires not only the redesign of policy frameworks and data collection systems but also a commitment to participatory governance that empowers local communities. As we move toward a future where economic growth is measured by more than just aggregate output, the evidence strongly supports the need for policies that are truly people-centered.

In light of these insights, GENDERISE's CASM Program is poised to lead the way by driving integrated policy reforms that place care at the center of national development. By collaborating with governments, researchers, and civil society, the program aims to transform development strategies and create a more equitable and resilient future.

References

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