

Social Reproduction in the Global Crisis

Diane Elson, University of Essex
UNRISD Conference on Social and Political
Dimensions of the Global Crisis
12-13 November 2009

Social Reproduction

Social= non-market, state, family, community

A variety of reproductions:

- Reproduction of the whole society
- Reproduction of social relations
- Reproduction of material conditions
- Reproduction of people as *human* beings
- Reproduction of capital

Social reproduction is contested, contradictory and may be unsustainable

Economic crisis as a rupture in social reproduction

Banking crisis: social reproduction of capitalist money put in jeopardy:
danger of large scale bank failures

Economic crisis: social reproduction of capitalist production put in jeopardy: danger of large scale bankruptcies

Livelihoods crisis: social reproduction of human beings put in jeopardy:
danger of depletion of human capacities and increase in preventable mortality

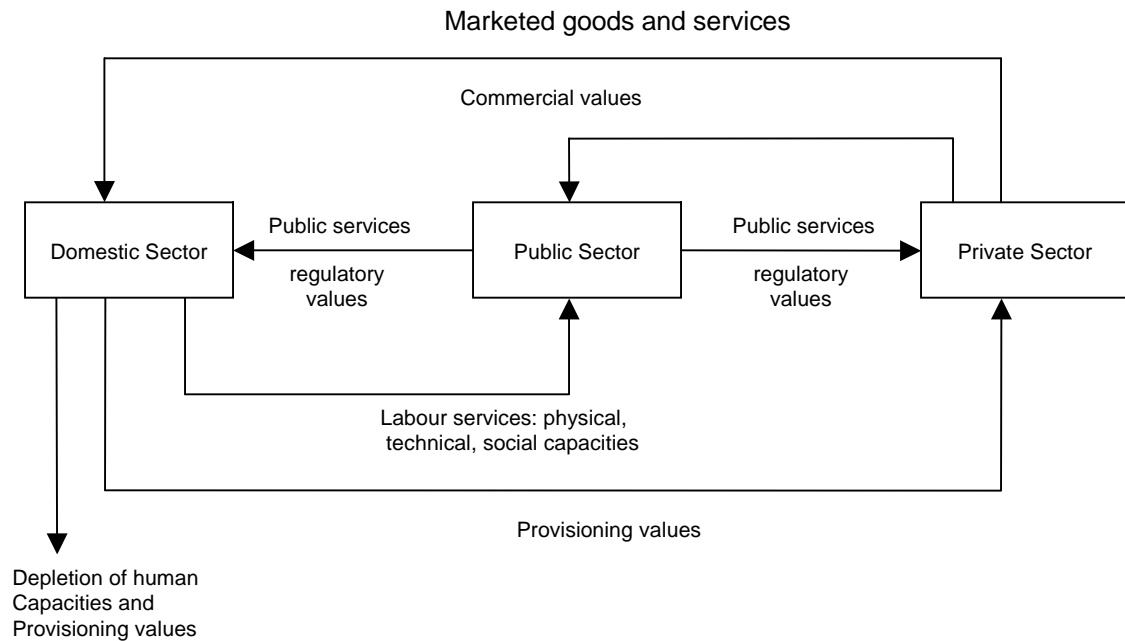
Swift action by states to safeguard capitalist money and large scale capitalist firms

Slow action by states to safeguard human beings

But perhaps households and communities can provide their own safeguards: 'coping strategies' ?

Social Reproduction: A Visual Aid

Source : Elson 1998



The role of unpaid domestic work in social reproduction

Transforming earnings into consumption

-we don't eat money, we eat meals

Producing for household consumption

- e.g. fuel, water, food (included in SNA but unpaid)

- e.g. care (not included in SNA, but included in production boundary, and thus part of Extended SNA))

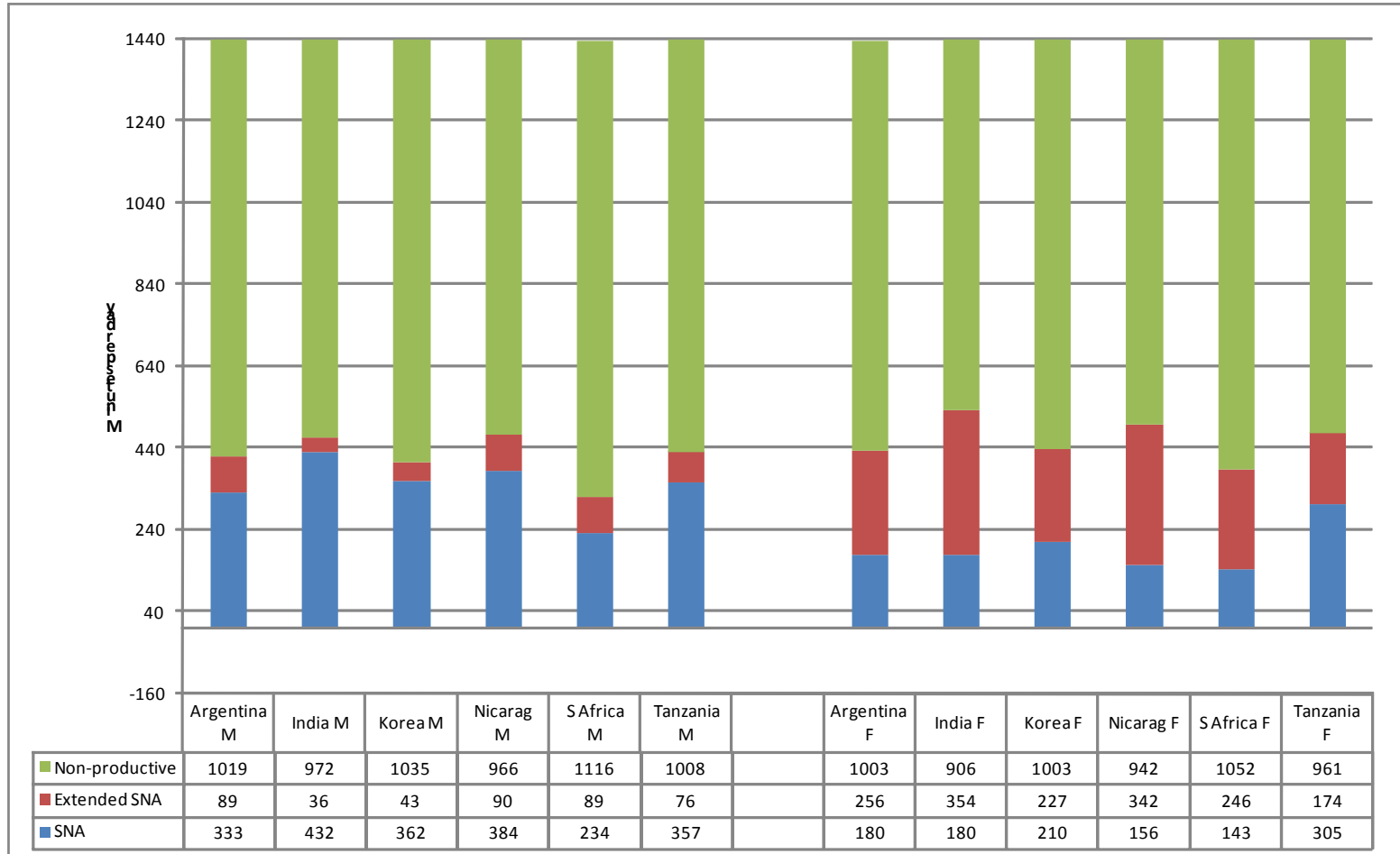
Enabling people to feel like human beings in a system that treats them like commodities

Gender: much more of this work is done by women than by men (see next slide); care and cooking is seen as 'women's work'

Tensions and contradictions: love and obligation, neglect and abuse, violence, family breakdown

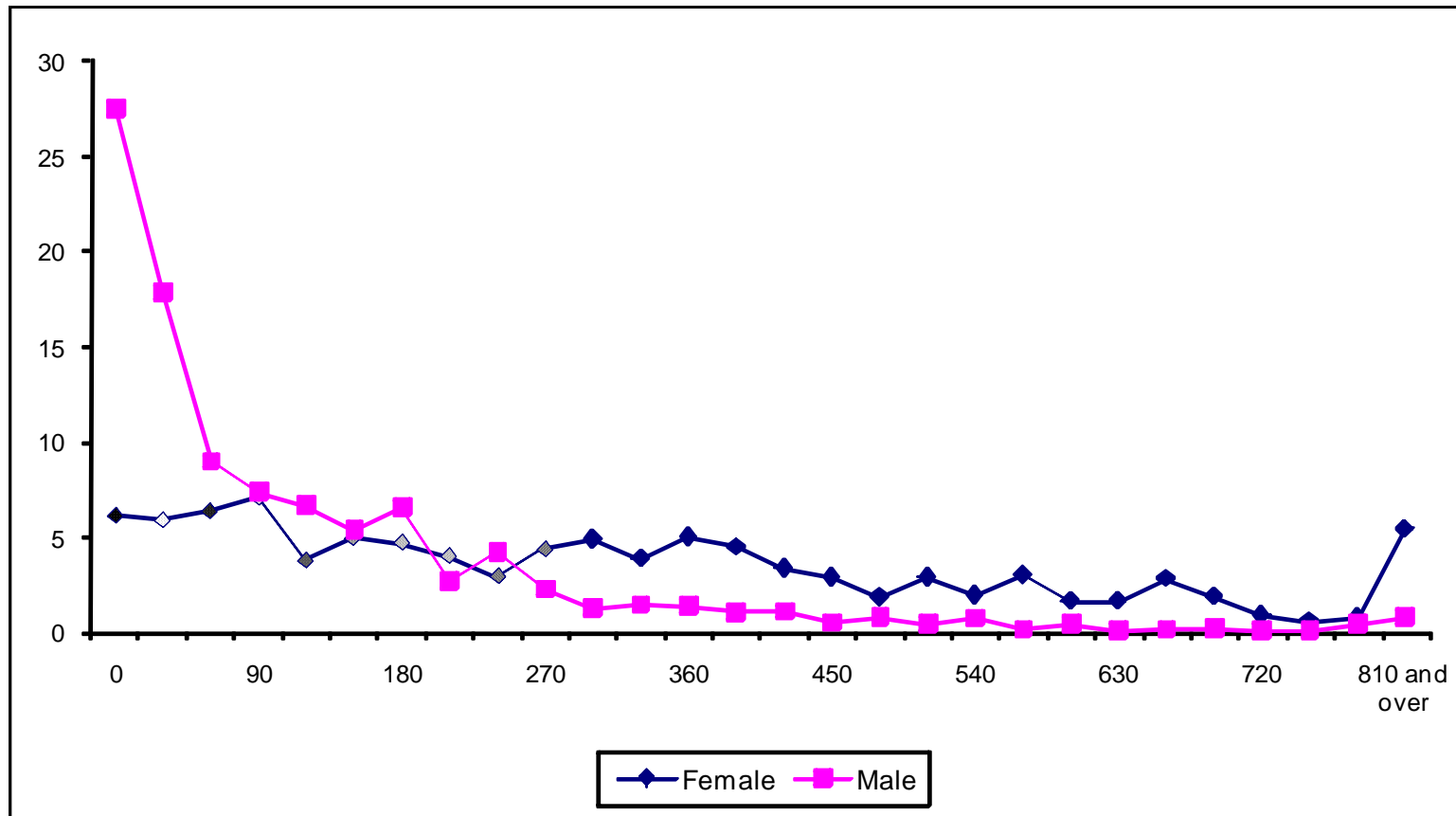
Mean time spent per day on activities by SNA category, country and sex for full sample population

Source: Budlender 2008



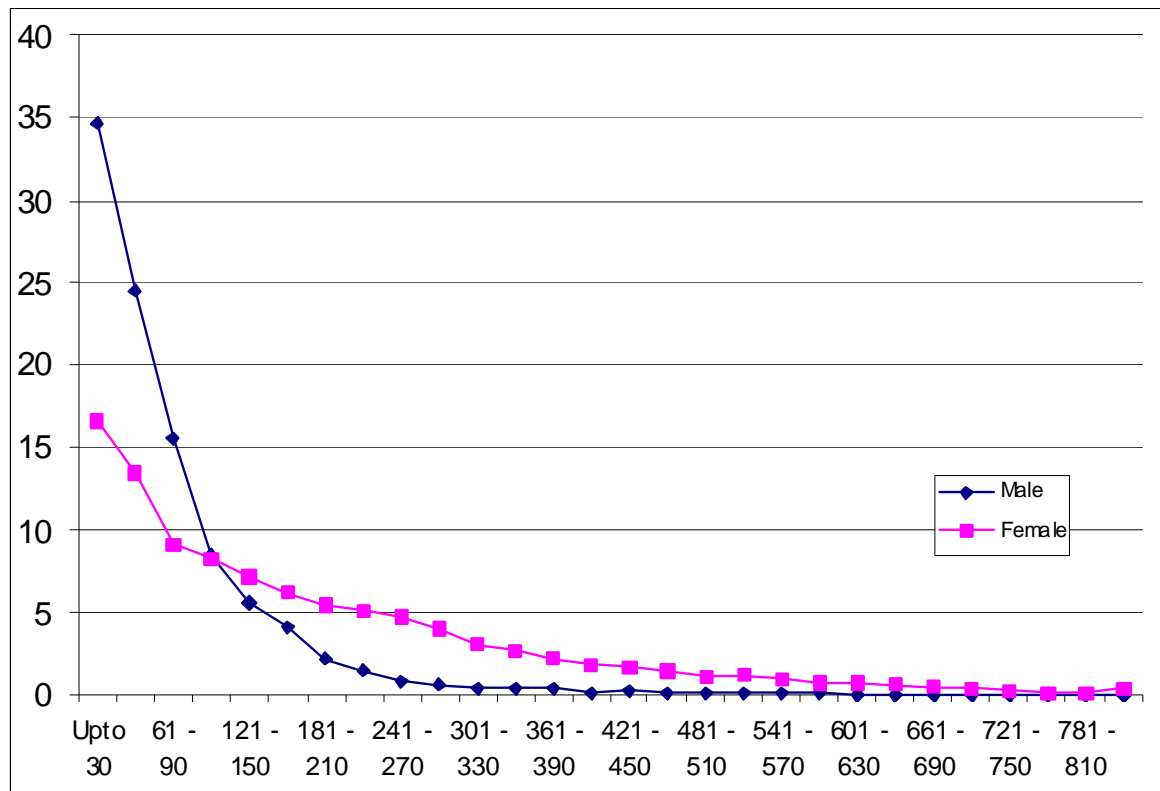
Distribution of time spent on unpaid care work in Argentina

source: Budlender 2008



Distribution of time spent on unpaid care work : India

source : Budlender 2008



The role of unpaid domestic work in times of crisis

- *An invisible safety net*, the basis for 'coping strategies' of low income households?

Experience of previous crises suggests an increase in unpaid domestic work (ie increase in extended SNA and unpaid SNA, while paid SNA falls)

Example: in Argentine 2001/2 crisis 60 % of households made more use of home food production (Fiszbein et al 2003)

But time for care may be squeezed.

- *An intensifier of gender inequality?*

Experience of previous crises suggests more of the increase is supplied by women and girls than men and boys ; and that women also increase their time spent in informal paid SNA work, as do children. Non-productive time for women and children is likely to fall, while for men it rises, as they become un- and under-employed.(Holmes et al 2009; Knowles et al 1999)

- *An intensifier of economic downturns?* Keynesian theory suggest it is.
- *All of the above?*
- No timely national statistical data: forced still to reply on case studies

Unpaid domestic work as a coping strategy?

Evidence 2009 WIEGO study

Conducted with partners in 10 cities, Durban (South Africa), Blantyre (Malawi), Nakuru (Kenya), Lima (Peru), Bangkok (Thailand), Malang (Indonesia), Kasur (Pakistan), Pune (India), Bogata(Columbia), Santiago (Chile)

Interviewed 164 informal workers (79% of them women) in three occupations: Waste pickers, Home-based workers ,Street vendors

“I try to economize by spending money only on necessary things. I take leftover cloth and make clothes for myself now.” Home-based woman garment worker, Bangkok.

Another home-based worker reported no longer buying prepared meals for her family, but cooking meals herself.

Further examples

UNDP online forum on Gender and the Economic Crisis

In Ethiopia, some women report reducing purchases of ready prepared food from street vendors and spending more time preparing food at home.

In Chile, some women report dismissing their paid domestic workers and doing unpaid domestic work themselves

In Pretoria, South Africa, some women have formed clubs to buy food in bulk

Holes in the safety net

WIEGO study reports informal workers reducing from 3 meals to 2, from 2 meals to 1, and cutting out milk and meat for children

Oxfam 2009 study tells same story

“We’ve had to reduce our expenses on food, medicine, and other necessities. I often feel dizzy and have stomach pains through feeling hungry.” Cambodian woman worker

- Women also borrowing in informal credit markets at very high rates of interest
- Selling their remaining assets (eg jewelry, sewing machine)

An intensifier of gender inequality?

Potential for adverse impacts

- deterioration in women's health (via malnutrition and stress) but also in men's health (via depression and alcohol and drug abuse)
- increases in violence against women
- increases in 'distress sales' of women's labour , e.g. in sex work
- deterioration in health and education of girls , more so than boys.

Potential for transforming gender relations?

Reports of unemployed men taking on unpaid care work and their wives becoming the main earners in UK, USA and Ireland. NB this may only be temporary.

Any sign of this happening in developing countries?

Or is the outcome un- and under-employment for men, and overwork for women?

Unpaid domestic work as intensifier of economic downturns

Making clothes at home reduces demand for clothing workers

Making meals at home reduces demand for food vendors

What is a safety net for one household reduces the incomes of another household

The paradox of thrift: unpaid domestic work acts like savings and depresses aggregate demand

Modelled by Erturk and Cagatay 1995, who argue that net effect depends on whether depressive effect of more unpaid work is outweighed by a stimulus to investment through more women in labour market

Safeguarding and transforming social reproduction of human beings

- Don't rely on 'coping strategies'- they may be 'desperation measures' that deplete human capacities
- Some households and communities will need cash bail-outs-but need to go beyond cash transfers to build for a more equitable form of social reproduction
- A supportive anti-cyclical macroeconomic policy is essential- public expenditure cuts must be avoided. Fiscal stimulus is possible in developing countries (Vera 2009, Cornia 2009)
- Use the crisis as an opportunity to *recognize, reduce* and *redistribute* unpaid domestic work
- Eg Fiscal stimulus investments in rural water, electricity, transport and health services; and housing and urban infrastructure, will create jobs and reduce unpaid domestic work

References

- Budlender, Debbie, 'The Statistical Evidence on Care and Non-Care Work across Six Countries', Gender and Development Programme paper No 4, UNRISD, December 2008
- Cornia, Giovanni Andrea, presentation at PEGnet Conference, 3-4 September 2009
- Elson, Diane, 'The economic, the political and the domestic: businesses, states and households in the organisation of production', *New Political Economy*, Vol. 3. No. 2, (pp. 189-208), 1998
- Emmett, Bethan, 'Women Workers Pay the Price for the Global Economic Crisis', Oxfam GB, March 2009
- Erturk, K. and Cagatay, N. 'Macroeconomic Consequences of Cyclical and Secular Changes in Feminization: An Experiment in Gendered Macromodeling', *World Development*, 23(11) 1995
- Fiszbein, Ariel, Giovagnoli, Paula and Thurston, Norman, 'Household Behaviour in the Presence of Economic Crisis: Evidence from Argentina, 2002', World Bank Working Paper, Draft, February 2003
- Holmes, Rebecca, Jones, Nicola, and Marsden, Hannah, 'Gender vulnerabilities, food price shocks and social protection responses' ODI Background note, August 2009.
- Horn, Zoe Elena, 'No Cushion to Fall Back On: the Global Economic Crisis and Informal Workers', Synthesis Report. Inclusive Cities Study lead by WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing), August 2009
- Knowles, James, Pernia, Ernesto, and Racelis, Mary, 'Social Consequences of the Financial Crisis in Asia', Economic Staff Paper No 60, Asian Development Bank, November 1999
- Vera, L. 'Reassessing Fiscal Policy: Perspectives from Developing Countries', *Development and Change*, 40(4), 2009.