



ISEJ EXPLAINER SERIES

The Work That Makes All Other Work Possible

Unpaid care and domestic work, and why it is a justice issue

Every economy runs on work that no one pays for: cooking, cleaning, fetching water and firewood, raising children, nursing the sick and the elderly. In Zimbabwe this unpaid care and domestic work (UCDW) falls overwhelmingly on women and girls assigned by gender norms, enforced by culture, and treated as invisible precisely because it is unpaid. Sustainable Development Goal 5.4 commits states to recognise and value this work through public services, infrastructure and shared responsibility within households.

The three Rs: recognise, reduce, redistribute

- **Recognise** care as work in statistics, budgets and law so it can be counted and valued.
- **Reduce** the burden through infrastructure and services: water, energy, childcare, affordable palliative and home-based care, and a functioning health system that does not outsource its gaps to women.
- **Redistribute** care from women to men within households, and from families to the state and market including by engaging the cultural and religious leaders who are custodians of the norms that assign care to women.

Where ISEJ stands

ISEJ treats unpaid care as one of its core thematic pillars and studies where care intersects with new pressures including how climate shocks lengthen the care day. Care is not a private family matter; it is the hidden subsidy on which the whole economy rests. Law and policy that cannot see it cannot fix it.

About ISEJ

The Institute for Sustainable Empowerment and Justice (ISEJ) is a Zimbabwe-registered Private Voluntary Organisation working at the intersection of law, public policy, gender equality, climate justice, public health and narrative change. ISEJ translates complex legal and policy frameworks into knowledge communities can use because access to the law should not depend on access to a lawyer.

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