


**Structural change is needed to tackle unpaid care work, which keeps women and girls in poverty by preventing them from going to school or earning an income.**



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In July 1969, Apollo 11 made history by landing humans on the moon, showcasing humankind's capacity for extraordinary achievements. I must admit, it is astonishing to me that even forty-five years after man first walked on the moon, achieving gender equality in the near future still remains seen as an elusive and unrealistic goal.

Ladies and Gentlemen, My name is Ella Fitzgerald. I am a student at Saint Aloysius College, Carrigtwohill in County Cork. I stand before you today to discuss how unpaid care work shackles the potential of countless women and girls across the globe. The imbalance of unpaid work between men and women not only perpetuates gender inequalities but also confines countless women and girls to the clutches of poverty.

From my earliest memories at the age of four, when Mrs. Banks in Mary Poppins sparked my fascination with women's suffrage, my commitment to women's rights has remained steadfast.

I've been fortunate to enjoy various educational privileges and actively participate in my local sports community. If my mother or I had carried the daily burden of hours of unpaid care work, these opportunities wouldn't have been possible. While extremely grateful for these opportunities, I am keenly aware that many girls and women lack such advantages.

According to the International Labour Organization, women globally perform over 76% of total hours of unpaid care work. The staggering impact of unpaid work on women worldwide is undeniable. While evidence is more prevalent in high-income countries, the global implications suggest a widespread challenge that requires immediate attention.

Unpaid care work not only hinders women's personal and professional development but also exacerbates gender inequalities. As well as this, the implications of this unequal burden are far-reaching, impacting women's access to education, limiting their career choices, and perpetuating economic disparities, especially in low-income countries, where women in rural areas spend up to 14 hours a day doing unpaid care work.

Furthermore, the unequal distribution of unpaid care work leads to it taking a toll on women's mental health and overall quality of life. Considering the number of detrimental impacts that unpaid care work can have on women not only in their daily lives but also long term, it is imperative that this changes soon.

As women who have been fortunate enough to escape the confines of this cycle, we bear a responsibility to advocate for change. We must amplify our voices against a status quo that deprives countless women of opportunities. It is crucial to recognize that this is not just an issue of personal choice; it is a systemic problem rooted in societal expectations and structures.

It is unacceptable that women, irrespective of geographical location, are deprived of opportunities due to the weight of unpaid care work. African author and feminist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie once said, "Culture does not make people. People make culture. If it is true that the full humanity of women is not our culture, then we can and must make it our culture." We must actively support equal opportunities for women worldwide and take on the responsibility of protecting those who are unable to fight for themselves. There are no valid excuses to avoid standing up against unfair practices rooted in outdated ideas.

Reshaping our culture requires advocating for policies that support affordable childcare, parental leave, and other measures that ease the burden of unpaid care work on women. By doing so, we can pave the way for not only better lives for women but also a more equitable and just future for generations to come.

In conclusion, we cannot and will not accept the unjust status quo. Let us be architects of a cultural shift that uplifts women socioeconomically, fostering a world where opportunities are not determined by gender. The time for change is now, and our collective efforts can pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable future.

Now let me ask you a question, will you wait? Or, will you take action now?

Thank you.

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