



Learning case

CARE BLOCKS BOGOTA¹

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Graphics: ICLD

Learning objectives

This learning case sets out in the city of Bogota, Colombia. With more than 8 million inhabitants, the city experiences many challenges such as high levels of poverty, informal work, and inequality. It is a city of high contrast. In the north, there are commercial districts and middle- and high-class residential areas, while in the west and south of the city, industry predominates, and poverty is more spread. On the other hand, the city has a large administration that provides services such as access to health care, education, and recreation in each of its 20 districts. The case is based on a real policy led by Bogota's Secretariat for Women's Affairs in 2020. The case is based on interviews conducted in 2022 and 2023 with leading staff at this office.

After the learning objectives, the case description provides a rich illustration of the conditions that led to the development of the Care Blocks policy. Readers are invited to reflect on the case and draft their ideas about creating a care policy for Bogota. Here you are expected to put yourself in the shoes of the civil servants of the women's office. Read the case and bring your notes and ideas to the discussion of the case.

After the case discussion, the facilitator will share the "case ending" and a toolbox on key takeaways to implement a care policy in other cities.

Objectives:

- Create a local government policy to reduce, redistribute and recognize the burden due to unpaid care work that falls mainly on the shoulders of women and consider how including men in this work might impact equity.
- Identify how to put into practice an intersectionality approach in gender, class, ethnicity, disabilities, etc. in the implementation of local policies related to unpaid care work.
- Analyze the role of inter-institutional coordination and citizen participation in creating gender policies.

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Case description

It is 5 a.m. and Graciela opens her eyes. She quickly gets out of bed to take a bath. The night before, she left some soaked lentils on the table to prepare for her husband before he leaves for work. She prepares lunch and runs to wake up her four children of 12, 8, 6 and 2 years. She takes them to the bathroom and makes sure they don't forget their school bags. Graciela rushes back into the kitchen to prepare breakfast as her husband is already seated at the dining room table ready to go to work on the construction site. After everyone has eaten, Graciela hastily completes the cleanup so that she can leave. She gathers her belongings and leaves. Two hours of commuting await her until she can reach her job at an apartment in the north of Bogota, Colombia, where she works as a domestic worker. It is already seven in the morning. She will arrive at a dog, a 4-year-old child, and an untidy home. At four o'clock, she leaves her employer's residence and goes home. On her way, Graciela thinks about what she will do for dinner and what her kids will have for homework. She hopes her older kids have all returned safely after school.

Graciela is one of the thousands of women in Bogota who dedicate their time to care work. According to official figures, nine out of ten women are involved in domestic and caregiving jobs in the city, and for 30% of them, like Graciela, this work serves as their primary source of income (Medina, 2022). The well-being of individuals, households, and society at large depends on unpaid care and domestic work; historically, however, due to gender roles and stereotypes, women have been primarily responsible for carrying out these duties. Women's ability to participate fully in the workforce, politics, and society is constrained by the unequal distribution of care work. This situation has been exacerbated in the Colombian context due to the COVID-19 pandemic, because of the increased burden of care due to the closure of schools and day-care centers, mostly assumed by women.

Of the 1.2 million women who spend the majority of their time providing unpaid care, 90% have limited resources, 70% have not completed secondary school, and 20% have been diagnosed with chronic illnesses (Center for Sustainable Development, 2022). But “time poverty” is perhaps the greatest barrier to breaking the cycle. Thirty-three percent of female caregivers do not have any free time outside their care work duties, greatly limiting their ability to develop personally and professionally. Women's critical contribution to the well-being of their families, and of society in general, has mostly been invisible, unrecognized, and unshared with other able-bodied members of their families. If such care workers were paid, it would represent 13 percent of Bogota's GDP and 20 percent of Colombia's GDP (DANE, 2022).

The Mayor's Office of Bogota faces this challenge: how can it take care of caregivers, like Graciela? How can it start making the city's recognition, distribution, and reduction of care work more equitable to allow both men and women to live better lives?



The issue of unpaid care was far from becoming a major city policy in a city like Bogota, where more than 8 million residents were frequently shaken by insecurity, a lack of formal employment opportunities, ineffective transportation services, and a high poverty rate affecting the most vulnerable populations. In addition, women had to manage a culture still dominated by unequal gender social norms, where taking care of others was seen as a woman's responsibility, and where doing so was seen as requiring special skills only possessed by women. It was especially difficult to break this “time poverty” cycle as

women often take care of their beloved ones, their children, or the elderly and many feel ashamed to say out loud that they were tired.

In 2019, the women's movement in Bogota advocated for establishing a District System of Care, which consisted of a set of services, regulations, policies, and technical and institutional actions that sought to recognize, redistribute, and reduce care work, understanding it as a necessary social function for people's daily lives and the operation of society. In 2020, thanks to the leadership of Claudia López, the first female mayor of the city of Bogota, the System became a reality and was led by the Secretariat for Women's Affairs, the body in charge of women's public policy. The District Care System seeks to reduce, recognize, and redistribute care work in the city, involving the district, the national government, the private sector, civil society, communities, families, and households as actors who must work together co-responsibly to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality.



Source: Secretaría Distrital de la Mujer de Bogotá

Discussion questions

You are the director of the District System of Care. You have a small budget, a group of government officials in this Secretariat. The local government has other units that provide services that you could articulate, such as education, health care services, few childcare centres, recreations facilities, some public libraries, among others. Use your imagination and the experience you have from your own local government in answering the following questions:

Consider the following questions:

1. Which activities or services would you include in the System of Care to help female caregivers?
Think here creatively, think about examples from other cities, use the resources the city already has and your imagination,
2. Neither the local nor the national governments in Colombia have given care work a high priority.
How do you persuade important players to support the care work system?
3. What steps would you take as part of the system to change the cultural stereotypes associated with caregiving?
4. Many women in Bogota are unable to leave their homes because they provide care for elderly or disabled people who need assistance. In addition, rural areas make up 75% of Bogota, where women are unable to access services for many reasons such as the lack of infrastructure, an even higher

burden of care, and an increased risk of gender-based violence. *How can the city involve these women in the System of Care?*

5. The budget for the Secretariat for Women's Affairs is limited and its impact depends on the political will of other units that provide services in the city. *How can they persuade other units of the local government to support the creation of a care policy providing articulated services to caregivers?*

Case reflections and potential endings



Source: Secretaría Distrital de la Mujer de Bogotá

The Bogota Secretariat for Women's Affairs made the decision to establish the so-called “care blocks” initiative. This initiative seeks to centralize key services for female caregivers to improve their well-being and to reduce the time women dedicate to unpaid jobs or tasks. A broad variety of services have been put into place within a 20-minute walking distance from care givers divided into training, self-care, resting, and income-generating activities for caregivers, while at the same time, they are released from caregiving responsibilities. Some of the services provided are for instance flexible secondary education for them to finish high school, literacy training, technical training, psychosocial care, legal assistance, and physical activity, etc. Most of the services were already implemented by other units of the local government, however, they were mostly siloed, widespread across the city, and/or centralized in a few areas, which limited their impact.

What does this mean in practice? It means that if you are a female caregiver, you can visit local government office, go to a doctor’s appointment, enroll in a yoga class, and learn how to run your own business while others look after your kids in daycare facilities designed for that. You could also use the public laundries, leave your clothes there and run errands or simply enjoy one hour of doing nothing. In addition to relieving caregivers’ burdens and creating space for rest and self-care, this enables women to move towards other life opportunities where they have economic, political, and social independence.

In addition to face-to-face services, the Secretariat created two “care buses” (one rural and one urban) that travel to rural or peripheral areas of Bogota to offer medical, physiological, and training services, among others, especially focusing on secondary studies, for women who cannot travel to physical facilities located in the urban area. It also developed three house-to-house programs for women and caregivers who cannot leave their homes, because they care for people with mobile disabilities. The latter consists of a professional

from the Secretariat who goes to the caregiver's home in a private car to provide services of training, knowledge certification, and activities related to autonomy and communication tools. Furthermore, the program also involves men who can attend workshops and the Men's Caregiving School, where they learn how to do care work tasks. For instance, one of the interests of men in one of the "care blocks" was to learn how to braid hair in order to do it for their daughters. By involving men, the Bogota Secretariat seeks to promote that caregiving is not "natural" but "learned".

There are currently 17 "care blocks" spread all over Bogota, and the city expects to have 20 by the end of the current mayor's administration (Semana, 2023). Mayor Claudia López has been an active promoter of the measure since its inception. One of the great gains of the policy is the possibility of taking advantage of and articulating services and facilities that were already part of the city, such as schools, parks, and community centres, which has reduced the general investment and set a precedent of effectively using what is already available.

Although at the beginning it was difficult to convince the different entities that public money should be invested in a pilot program, the care blocks have already borne great fruit: 399,000 caregivers have been involved, 2 care buses, 3 home care programs, and 8,016 women caregivers who have been professionally trained. So far, the program has won several awards such as the "Bloomberg Mayor's Challenge" and the "Wellbeing Cities" - New Cities in 2021, it was also recently recognized by the World Government Summit in Dubai as one of the most innovative policies. The program has strategic allies such as UN Women, the Swedish Embassy, IDB, and UNDP.

According to Natalia Oviedo, advisor to the District Women's Secretariat, the biggest challenge in the implementation of the care blocks has been the integration of different sectors, to make all services work simultaneously. Once every three months the 13 district actors involved in the policy (who provide new and existing services to meet the care needs of women and caregivers) meet to analyze what is working and what is not. Another challenge has been to have systematized information on who is accessing services, as each entity keeps records in a different way. In March 2023, the Bogota Council approved the agreement that institutionalizes the District System of Care, which means it will continue as a permanent program in future administrations (Bogotá, 2023).

Reflective questions

About this case:

- What do you think about the "care blocks"?
- What are the gaps you can see in the policy?
- What role does integration of different units (de-silo) play in the success of this policy, in your opinion?
- Do you anticipate this program would have any unintended negative effects?

Implementing in your own situation:

- Do you think a care policy is needed in your municipality?
- How would you adapt this idea to your locality?
- What lessons apply to your own situation?



Source: ICLD

How should a care system be set up?

Using Bogota's "care blocks" as an illustration.

1. **Understand the problem:** collect information to be able to estimate what is the situation of women/ men in relation to unpaid care. Look for official data and collect yourself through surveys and focus groups with caregivers to understand their needs. You can inquire about things like:
 - a) How many hours of unpaid care work do you do per week? How many hours would you really like to spend?
 - b) If you had to choose one need in relation to your work providing care, what would it be?
 - c) What goals or aspirations do you have for the future?
 - d) How do you wish others in your community would help with caregiving?
2. **Conduct an evaluation of the services your local government offers to women and men in general** (women's health controls, adult education, entrepreneurship training, microcredits, recreation, etc.), as well as services specifically related to care (childcare, elderly care, support for persons with disabilities, schools, recreation, sports, etc). Determine which of these services, in terms of preferences, accessibility, and location, best meets the needs of the caregiver as revealed by the data you collected. Ask care givers about the services they wished to access and the barriers they faced, In Bogota, many women said they could not access education programs because the hours did not suit their needs or simply because they could not leave the people they were caring for.
3. **Hold workshops with representatives from the various institutions** that offer pertinent services in your municipality and ask them what simple adjustments can be made to better cater to the needs of both the people receiving care and the women and men who are providing it.
4. **Determine whether there is an extra budget that could be allocated to particular programs and create those programs.** Examples include the mobile and adaptable daycare and the laundry machine program. Consider caregivers' unique needs. For instance, the house-to-house program in

Bogota was established as a result of the realization that many women providing care were unable to leave their homes, so the city brought the services to them.

5. **Ensure that the services you offer align with educational initiatives that seek to increase public awareness of the need to redistribute caregiving responsibilities.** Determine which societal groups and stakeholders are crucial to the system but still need more education about its significance, and arrange meetings, forums, and other events to educate them.
6. **Include the aspects of local democracy** supporting the organization of care providers so that they can be represented and have a voice in the care policy. Make the policy transparent, share the budget that your unit has, and make the process to access services open to all. Ensure that the needs of vulnerable groups are taken into account.
7. **Write the policy of care. What are some of the main elements such policy can have?** It must be written strictly in accordance with the principles of equality, universality, and solidarity and take into account both the care providers and the care recipients.
8. **Start implementing your policy: here are some tips based on the case of Bogota**
 - a) Prioritize collaborations with academic institutions, businesses, the social and solidarity economy, or civil society organizations.
 - b) Identify funding sources inside your local government, but also community organizations and private businesses.
 - c) Develop a communication strategy to better engage caregivers and increase civil society's support for the policy.
9. **Follow up and evaluate the policy. Here are some tips based on the case of Bogota:**
 - a) Survey the participants before and during the process to determine the policy's strengths and weaknesses.
 - b) Ask the service providers for information on the number and characteristics of participants to ensure you are reaching your target audience and their reaction to the services

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