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## **Gender, Unpaid Care and Social Protection: Policy Priorities for West and Central Africa**

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\* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

## **1. Introduction**

Mutually reinforcing internal and external factors pose unique challenges to gender equality and women's economic empowerment in West and Central Africa. Constraints specific to the region include discriminatory social institutions, a stalled fertility transition, limited decent job opportunities, fragility / conflict, and constrained fiscal space and institutional capacity. Systemic factors include multiple, overlapping crises, from climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic to the cost of living. This situation calls for innovative, integrated approaches to advance gender equality and climate action while tackling the drudgery of domestic work and women's time poverty. Such approaches ought to target the nexus of climate change, fragility, gender-based violence and gender (in)equality.

## **2. Some key challenges facing West and Central Africa specifically**

Since gender equality was articulated as a development objective in the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals, concerted efforts by the global community have delivered some results in key areas such as maternal mortality, education, political participation, legal protection, and participation in professional and technical jobs (Mahagan et al., 2020). However, progress across gender equality targets have been uneven. Target 5.4 – Value unpaid care and promote shared domestic responsibilities –, for instance, had not received much attention until the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the central role that care plays in the functioning of our economies and societies. Access to care is a crucial factor in human well-being and an essential element for the growth and sustainability of the economy. Although the family is the primary place where care is administered, care constitutes a public good and the implications and benefits that stem from it extend beyond the family sphere and those to whom care is administered (UN-Women, 2022). In the short term, care work supports people daily, ensures the reproduction of workers and their good health and productivity. In the long term, it guarantees the reproduction of future generations of workers. Care work contributes to social sustainability.

This section offers an overview of six key challenges facing West and Central Africa specifically, and which bear implications for the care burden and the situation of women in the region. Those include structural issues as well as emerging challenges of growing significance.

### **Discriminatory social institutions and unpaid care work**

Despite some progress over the recent years, gender inequality in West Africa remains among the highest in the world. Available data show that discriminatory social institutions – formal and informal laws, social norms and practices – still restrict women's rights and empowerment opportunities across 17 West African countries (Bouchama, N., et al., 2018). There is also evidence of persistent differences in time spent on paid and unpaid care work over a period of twenty years,

with women spending a disproportionately higher amount of time on unpaid care work compared to men (Charmes, 2019). Unpaid care work encompasses all activities performed at the household and community level that cater to the physical and emotional needs of humans at different stages of their lifecycle (Esquivel, 2018). They include but are not limited to cooking, cleaning, caring for children, sick, elderly, and disabled persons, fetching water, sourcing energy like firewood, and other forms of unremunerated direct care of family and community members (ILO, 2018).

In urban areas of Senegal for instance, women spend 4.5 times more time than men on unpaid domestic and care work, and twice as much time as men in rural areas (Cissé and Hénovi, 2023). Women's heavy domestic and unpaid care workload constrains their engagement in income generating activities. Evidence from The World Bank's Women, Business, and the Law dataset for instance shows that across all categories, the West African region ranks lower than both the global average and that of sub-Saharan Africa as a whole (Mayra et al., 2020).<sup>1</sup>

### **High fertility rates: West Africa still in the early stage of its fertility transition**

While most regions in sub-Saharan Africa have started to experience fertility decline, in some parts, most notably in West Africa, fertility has remained persistently high. Five of the 17 countries in the region exhibit fertility rates of five or more children per woman (Schoumaker, 2019). Women's limited bargaining power in the household, socio-cultural norms and religion are important determinants of delayed fertility transition (Rodriguez et al., 2022). Stalls in fertility decline, combined with the disproportionate amount of time that women and girls spend on unpaid care work, and the paucity of gender-responsive infrastructure and support provided by the state, severely restrict their opportunity sets, mobility, and economic prospects.

### **Limited decent employment opportunities**

Unpaid care work shapes the ability, duration and types of paid work that can be undertaken (Rania, 2009). Where decent job opportunities are scarce and discriminatory social institutions prevail, women are less likely than men to secure decent jobs. This reinforces existing gender inequalities, including in unpaid domestic and care work.

Although job creation in Africa has been on the rise over the last two decades, most of the jobs relate to self-employment. It generally occurs in agriculture or off-farm activities linked to agriculture with the informal sector representing about 90 per cent of total employment. In Ghana for instance, 92 per cent of employed women are in informal employment (Baah-Boateng and Vanek, 2020). In Benin women represent 63.6 per cent of informal employment, and 52.9 per

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<sup>1</sup> The database captures the extent to which countries have gender discriminatory laws that are likely to hinder women's economic opportunities, including those related to freedom of mobility, equal pay, entrepreneurship, and access to/control over assets.

cent in Cameroon.<sup>2</sup> For Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, the numbers are as high as 94.1 per cent and 96.8 per cent respectively.<sup>3</sup> Across sub-Saharan Africa 74 per cent of women in non-agricultural jobs are in informal employment. That often leaves women without any protection of labour laws, social benefits such as pension, health insurance or paid sick leave. Women routinely work for lower wages and in unsafe conditions, including risk of sexual harassment.<sup>4</sup> In some countries, agriculture and related activities account for over half of the workforce, with an over-representation of women in Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Sierra Leone.

## **Climate change**

The intersections of climate change and care work have until recently been overlooked. Yet, climate change exacerbates existing gender inequalities in domestic work (Fruttero et al., 2023). A vicious circle sets in where “the more women are affected negatively by climate change, the worse the inequalities get, and the worse the inequalities get, the worse the impact becomes” (MacGregor et al., 2022).

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change identifies West Africa as a “climate change hot spot”. That is, where human security is at risk due to projected climate change impacts.<sup>5</sup> For countries such as Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, and Mali where the food economy accounts for over 80 per cent of employment, climate variability represents an existential risk both at the national and the local level (FAO, 2014). Women are among those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change as they overwhelmingly rely on agriculture and off-farm activities linked to agriculture. Women in West Africa contribute 40 per cent of agricultural production, and 80 per cent of agricultural processing (Allen et al., 2018).

Natural resources are a critical input to women’s daily livelihood and household responsibilities and activities across West and Central Africa. Increased pressure on natural resources thus increases the drudgery associated with performing unpaid domestic care work and limits women’s time for paid labour. At the same time, women are often the less equipped with the resources necessary to respond to climate-related shocks (McOmber, 2020). Responsibilities such as maintenance of kitchen gardens, homebuilding, cooking, cleaning, and washing require natural resources like timber and water. Already, women and girls spend a disproportionate amount of time on domestic and unpaid care work, and when climate variability makes these resources

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<sup>2</sup> See IDRC’s project on Strengthening public policies for decent work in Francophone Africa in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Available from: <https://idrc-crدي.ca/en/project/strengthening-public-policies-decent-work-francophone-africa-context-covid-19-pandemic>.

<sup>3</sup> See IDRC’s project on the Impacts of public policies related to COVID-19 pandemic on the informal sector, young people, and women. Available from: <https://idrc-crدي.ca/en/project/impacts-public-policies-related-covid-19-pandemic-informal-sector-young-people-and-women>.

<sup>4</sup> UN-Women, Progress of the World’s Women 2015-2016.

<sup>5</sup> IPCC (2019), Global Warming of 1.5°C: Special Report, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Geneva. Available from: <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15>.

scarce, it affects the assets (such as time, security, and money) required for women to perform these tasks.

### **Fragility and conflict**

The unprecedented rise in armed conflicts in recent times (some driven by the climate crisis), have aggravated the plight of women who are already ill-equipped to cope with conflicts. In fragile contexts and with weakened institutions, insecurity, and interrupted services, women face multiplied unpaid care and domestic responsibilities stemming from school closures, food insecurity, and interruption of essential health and nutrition services (Urdal and Che, 2013; Ibnouf, 2020).

Using OECD's multidimensional fragility framework, three-quarter (75 per cent) of the Sub-Saharan contexts analysed in 2021 are considered fragile, compared to one-third (34 per cent) globally.<sup>6</sup> Nine of the ten countries with the widest gender gap are also fragile, and no fragile context is on track to achieve SDGs related to hunger, health and gender equality (OECD, 2022).<sup>7</sup>

While discriminatory social institutions and attitudes towards violence are seen as a root cause of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), women and girls caught in the middle of conflicts are more likely to experience sexual violence, physical and verbal abuse, barriers in accessing resources and having their human rights met simply because of their gender.<sup>8</sup> Beyond its physical and mental toll, SGBV hampers women and girls' economic empowerment by curtailing their opportunity to enhance their own livelihoods. Therefore, SGBV has implications for efforts to address broader gender inequalities in fragile contexts, especially as it appears that inequality and fragility are inextricably linked (Loudon et al., 2021). West and Central Africa hosted 11.2 million forcibly displaced and stateless people in 2022, of which 1.1 million were newly displaced due to armed conflicts, insecurity and human rights violations.<sup>9</sup>

There is a need for economic empowerment initiatives and policies to consider what works in fragile contexts to improve women's economic opportunities and outcomes, as well as how women's economic empowerment can drive progress towards more stable and cohesive societies.

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<sup>6</sup> Fragility, according to the OECD, is the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacities of the state, system and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks in a spectrum of intensity across six dimensions: economic, environmental, political, security, societal and human.

<sup>7</sup> Available from: [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/c7fedf5e-en/1/3/1/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/c7fedf5e-en&\\_csp\\_=ed992425c7db5557b78226a6c98c6daf&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/c7fedf5e-en/1/3/1/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/c7fedf5e-en&_csp_=ed992425c7db5557b78226a6c98c6daf&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=book).

<sup>8</sup> World Health Organization (2021). Factsheet: Violence against Women. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>.

<sup>9</sup> Available from: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/regions/west-and-central-africa>.

### **Constrained fiscal space and limited institutional capacity**

The strained fiscal and institutional environment of West and Central African states impede the realization of social protection policies and interventions that can address the multifaceted risks and vulnerabilities women face. This can be attributed, among other factors, to the colossal debt burden of these economies. Their high debt servicing levels means that they channel a substantial portion of their revenue and expenditure towards servicing interest payments – over 2.3 times of their expenditure on social assistance (Ecker et al., 2023). Out of the 36 Sub-Saharan African countries for which Debt Sustainability Analyses were conducted between 2008 and 2018, some 44 percent (or 16) of the countries were classified as either “in debt distress” or facing “high risk” of debt distress in 2018, up from 31 percent (or 11 countries) in such categories in 2011 (Ndung’u et al, 2021). The latest assessment in 2020 puts the percentage at 56 per cent (or 20 countries), partly driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. The drivers of debt build-up vary across countries and include exogenous shocks, and weak fiscal management and macroeconomic policy frameworks to support sustainable and inclusive growth among other factors (African Economic Outlook, 2021).

Climate and gender-responsive social protection requires investment in high-quality gender disaggregated data collection and management, state coordination with key stakeholders including women’s rights organizations and cooperatives; provision of public infrastructure and services, and a host of other strategies to tackle climate and gender risks and vulnerabilities (UN-Women, 2021). Yet, these priorities are often sidelined in the face of other competing claims on states’ resources or implemented in silos.

Furthermore, the limited institutional capacity of social protection actors affects the extent to which climate-related vulnerability, gendered gaps and risks can simultaneously be accounted for in social protection design and implementation. These actors include the legislature, judiciary and executive branch of government, but also women’s groups, political representatives and activists working in the social protection space (Holmes and Jones, 2013). The technical know-how that is necessary for delivering climate and gender-responsive features and building buy-in often lacks due to underinvestment in capacity strengthening for program implementers; fragmentation among government ministries, departments and civil society actors; and enduring gender-discriminatory ideas and interests across relevant institutions (Holmes et al., 2019).

### **3. Policy priorities for West and Central Africa: Blending interventions for a more gender equal, caring and holistically resilient region**

The intertwined challenges facing women and girls in West and Central Africa call for transformative social protection programs targeted at the nexus of the main challenges. On the one hand, the persistence of existing gender inequalities, including in unpaid domestic and care work is intrinsically linked to the development challenges facing the region. On the other hand, unpaid domestic and care work exacerbates the development challenges facing the region.

Although care is central to the reproduction and sustenance of a healthy labour force necessary for functional economies, it is still undervalued and unprioritized in policy considerations (Mugehera and Parkes, 2020). For instance, UNDP and UN-Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker reported that out of the 3,099 social protection and labour market measures that were initiated in response to the pandemic globally, only 10 of these policy responses implemented in Sub-Saharan Africa by the end of 2021 specifically addressed care vulnerabilities faced by women compared to 139 in North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand (UNDP and UN-Women, 2022).<sup>10</sup> Most interventions thus are not holistically addressing the numerous disadvantages that women face.

This note argues for a transformative approach that encompasses all key dimensions of women's vulnerability as discussed above and integrates care. The proposed approach extends Arnall et al. (2010) concept of Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) which refers to a series of measures that build resilience of the poorest and most vulnerable people into climate change responses by combining elements of social protection (SP), and climate action.

In a post COVID-19 pandemic context, multiple and overlapping crises are putting a toll on national budgets across the region. Securing the necessary fiscal space to tackle the various development challenges in silos may neither be sustainable nor strategic.<sup>11</sup> The proposed approach entails leveraging existing commitments at the national and international levels while tapping into private and blended finance capital to target the nexus of the key development challenges impacting women and girls in West and Central Africa.

In the following subsections we review a sample of promising initiatives with some reflections on potential provisions for a transformative approach.

### **The Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program**

The Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program is designed to strengthen systems' adaptiveness and the resilience of vulnerable households in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal. It focuses on both regional and country-level activities with most of the financing being disbursed as direct grants to governments to pilot innovative adaptive social protection programs. Its key features include adaptive safety nets programs which enable vulnerable households to meet basic needs and diversify their livelihoods, and contingency (risk) financing mechanisms to ensure timely and efficient financing of adaptive social protection interventions. According to the World Bank this can be easily scaled up to respond to various

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<sup>10</sup> Social protection refers to public and private initiatives designed to protect the poor and vulnerable from livelihood risks and promote their social rights in order to mitigate and reduce their vulnerability to shocks and stresses that would otherwise devastate their immediate and long-term wellbeing (Holmes and Jones, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Fiscal space refers to room in a government's budget that allows it to provide resources for a desired purpose without jeopardizing the sustainability of its financial position or the stability of the economy.

shocks.<sup>12</sup> Related measures include health, education, nutrition, and family planning, among others.

For these interventions to be holistically transformative there is the need to:

- Address discriminatory social norms to change attitudes on gender roles through interventions at the regional, national and grassroots levels with the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, including men and boys. For example, nationwide awareness-raising campaigns to address social stigma have proven effective (OECE, 2018).
- Promote state-provided health and childcare services embedded in national climate policies (Fruttero et al., 2023).
- Raise awareness on the benefits of care collectivization (in households and via community cooperatives) for gender equality and climate action (Fruttero et al., 2023).

### **The Sahel Women’s Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) initiative**

This initiative aims to promote the capabilities and opportunities of adolescent girls and young women across Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Cote d’Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. The goal is to increase women and adolescent girls’ empowerment and their access to quality reproductive, child and maternal health services, school and safe spaces, skills training, and income generation opportunities. SWEDD also includes “husband schools” aimed at changing household norms by engaging men. In its most recent expansion announced in May 2020, SWEDD also focuses on strengthening legal frameworks that promote women’s rights to health and education.

The precise nature of intervention packages varies by country and is decided in coordination with country governments, but each aims for a multi-faceted approach to address the combination of binding constraints women and girls in the region face. The project also aims to improve regional knowledge generation, capacity and coordination.

Considering climate-change induced vulnerability and women’s overexposure to the same, there is a need for state-provided childcare services embedded in national climate policies as well. Beyond the strengthening of legal frameworks, there is also the need to promote access to justice through one-stop legal shops for instance where women can seek legal advice and receive free legal assistance.

### **The Foundation for Eco-development and Conservation (FUNDAECO)**

FUNDAECO works with Indigenous Forest communities in Guatemala and Central America to integrate climate action and reproductive health care. It officially recognizes midwives

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<sup>12</sup> Available from: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/sahel-adaptive-social-protection-program-trust-fund/overview>.



as community service providers. Its success in mobilizing climate finance raises hope that climate finance can be leveraged to address the twin crises of care and climate.<sup>13</sup>

However, to constructively draw on FUNDAECO's experience in West and Central Africa, there is a need to consider the disproportionate amount of time that women and girls spend on unpaid domestic and care work so that existing inequalities are not exacerbated by climate change interventions that require additional responsibility, work, and time from women.

There is also a need to consider care jobs as green jobs in recognition of the role of care work in a smooth transition to low carbon economies. That includes the enabling role of carers and the work they do for households to cope with climate-related shocks. The integration of care in green growth policies and programs would support the creation of gender and climate-just jobs.

Additionally, the critical role of natural resources in West and central African economies invites for a strengthening of natural resource conflict management capabilities, possibly at the community level. As articulated in a new report sponsored by the State and Peacebuilding Fund and entitled, *Defueling Conflict: Environment and Natural Resource Management as a Pathway to Peace*, natural resource exploitation and environmental pressures can fuel violent conflict. Compounding this threat, situations of conflict and environmental stress also have major gender implications (Ahmadnia et al., 2022). A bottom-up approach to conflict prevention therefore entails leveraging peacebuilding resources to tackle the issue of unpaid care work, some aspects of which lead women to draw intensively from surrounding natural capital.<sup>14</sup> This is consistent with Cevallos and Manzano (2021) identification of gender inequalities and the disempowerment of women in increasingly unequal polygamous marriages as a powerful explanatory root cause of conflict in the Sahel and the Greater Horn of Africa.

### **The Strengthening Women's Access to Improved Solar Irrigation Systems in West Africa (SISAM) initiative**

To increase the income of market gardeners and free up time, the SISAM initiative sought to disseminate solar irrigation technologies in Benin, Burkina Faso, and Togo, while providing childcare services to women involved in meetings and training.<sup>15</sup> A local production line and distribution of pumps was also built, and access to local microfinance (micro leasing) facilitated.

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<sup>13</sup> Available from: <https://fundaeco.org.gt/fe/en/2022/03/21/fundaeco-announces-financing-from-direct-carbon-backed-bond-facility-completed-by-axa-im-alts/>.

<sup>14</sup> Available from: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/state-and-peace-building-fund>.

<sup>15</sup> Available from: <https://www.ctc-n.org/resources/sisam-strengthening-women-s-access-improved-solar-irrigation-systems-west-africa>.

To replicate and scale up such initiatives sustainably across the region would require:

- Acting on discriminatory social norms regarding unpaid domestic and care work.
- State-provided health and childcare services embedded in national climate policies.
- Public and community awareness on the benefits of care collectivization (in households and via community cooperatives) for gender equality and climate action.
- A sound SGBV elimination strategy integrated in the design as women’s bargaining power and agency increase with more income.
- Efforts to improve the business environment beyond access to finance to target improvements in legal frameworks and access to justice. That is, improvements in civil justice, regulatory quality, control of corruption, and order and security.<sup>16</sup> Ashraf et al. (2020), for instance, present a model of female entrepreneurship and rule of law that predicts that women will only start businesses when they have both formal legal protection and informal bargaining power. The model's predictions are supported both in cross-national data and with a new census of Zambian manufacturers.

### **The Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN) program**

The WOCAN W+ framework has gained international recognition as an innovative results-based financing approach for women’s empowerment. It creates shared social value in six domains: Time savings, health, education & knowledge, food security, income & assets and leadership. It ensures that women’s empowerment objectives are part of carbon trading programs. This follows the assessment that Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) as a policy instrument meant to mitigate climate change while also achieving poverty reduction in tropical countries perpetuates gendered divisions of labour with formal environmental decision-making moving upwards, and responsibility and the burden of actual environmental labour shifting further down in particularly gendered ways (Westholm and Arora-Jonsson 2018).

Impact investors and philanthropy funding to WOCAN shows potential for private capital mobilization to advance action on the twin crises of care and climate. For instance, a planning grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is expected to produce the ‘proof of concept’ for a result-based financing and market-based approach using the W+ Standard to provide rural women’s organizations and enterprises with revenue and technical assistance to support climate adaptation initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa and South-Asia.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Data from the 2022 World Justice Project’s Rule of Law Index show that most countries in West and Central Africa rank below average. Available from: <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/global>.

<sup>17</sup> Available from: <https://www.wplus.org/new-program-supporting-climate-adaptation-with-womens-organizations-with-support-from-the-bill-melinda-gates-foundation/>.

There is however the need to integrate cash transfers (and other financial mechanisms) that remunerate care work into climate finance schemes such as carbon trading programs.

As carbon markets are increasingly promoted both by businesses and governments as a predominant way to address climate change and considering the regional context, some effort may also be necessary to improve the business environment beyond access to finance and target the strengthening of legal frameworks and access to justice- civil justice, regulatory quality, control of corruption, and order and security. Such efforts can contribute to emissions-reducing projects also leading to gender and social justice (Arora-Jonsson S. and J. Gurung, 2023).

### **UN-WOMEN 3R programme**

In Senegal where women spend four hours on housework and childcare daily, compared to 30 minutes for men, UN-Women 3R programme is focusing on the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work.<sup>18</sup> Some of the programme's results include:

- Increased investment in care services in Local Development Plans, leading to improved solutions for unpaid care at the local level.
- The tailoring and scaling up of the National Health Insurance Agency's health insurance solutions which enabled rural women to access insurance to mitigate the risk of income loss due to illness in the household.
- Private sector-led innovations to address unpaid care risks by identifying and engaging selected private sector innovators, fintechs and service providers in the insurance, mobile savings and asset financing markets to design and adapt their products and services to rural women's needs and priorities.
- Reduction in rural women's unpaid care workload through energy-efficient labour/time-saving infrastructure and technology including solar-powered millet mills, rice huskers, improved stoves, and multifunctional platforms.
- A national roadmap for care reform formulated and validated by line ministries, local officials, women cooperatives, and the civil society under the leadership of the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Considering the overall context of fragility and persistent discriminatory social norms in the region, a more transformative approach would require that a strategy to address SGBV be integrated in the design as women's bargaining power and agency increase. It might also be necessary to aim to improve the business environment beyond access to insurance services, strengthen legal frameworks and access to justice. Improvement of civil justice, regulatory quality, control of corruption, and order and security are necessary for private sector solutions and innovations to thrive and scale. A transformative program could provision for the operation of one-stop legal shops, and for coordination between relevant government entities, civil society

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<sup>18</sup> Available from: [https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/20230622\\_un\\_women\\_local\\_approaches\\_to\\_care\\_policy\\_eng\\_webpages\\_0.pdf](https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/20230622_un_women_local_approaches_to_care_policy_eng_webpages_0.pdf).

organisations, community elders, and other key stakeholders. The focus on rural areas also justifies strengthening natural resource conflict management capabilities at the community level as articulated above.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This note lays out elements of a transformative approach to social protection, gender equality, and care in contexts of limited institutional capacity, fragility and discriminatory social norms and laws. It builds on lessons from recent and promising initiatives in West and Central Africa and beyond. Social protection and sustainable and inclusive development policies are intrinsically linked with care. Care policies must therefore be integrated in the design and implementation of social protection and sustainable and inclusive development strategies to transform gender relations and outcomes. Addressing deeply rooted gender norms and stereotypes is key to that effect and it requires redistributing care responsibilities within the household but also between the public and the private spheres. Against the backdrop of ambient fragility in West and Central Africa, the social protection, gender and care nexus will highly benefit from synergies between the sustainable development pillar and the peace pillar in international development matters. Such bridges are essential to optimize resources and generate long lasting impact at scale. Institutional support and quality evidence embedded in the local context are of critical importance for well-crafted plans and an effective implementation of the relevant strategies.

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