



ADVOCACY BRIEF



CARE WORK AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN THE LOW-CARBON TRANSITION IN WEST AFRICA

Photo: This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY

THE CONTEXT

The unprecedented pace of climate change has triggered a global mobilization around what is now perceived as a looming crisis. In response to the challenge, meetings and commitments are following one another internationally. In West Africa, policymakers, corporate leaders, grassroots organizations, and communities are rising to the challenge ingeniously to find sustainable and inclusive solutions. An inclusive approach is necessary for grassroots solutions and innovations embedded in local contexts to emerge and scale up, especially in the context of the intertwined nature of the challenges women are facing, when it comes to areas such as caring for their families and participating in the labour market.

THE CLIMATE CHANGE - UNPAID CARE NEXUS: KEY MESSAGES

MESSAGE 1: In the coming decades, there will be a rapidly increasing number of opportunities for women in the green economy. However, women's unpaid care responsibilities are one of the main barriers preventing women from fully profiting from these jobs.

The transition to the green economy will create 24 million new jobs around the world in the next 20 years, including in sub-Saharan Africa¹. These opportunities for women in the green economy are mainly in sectors of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, tourism, waste management, transport, energy, and construction. However, women are underrepresented in key sectors that will offer higher-end green jobs², due to structural barriers such as unpaid care work. On the continent, women spent 3.4 times more time than men on unpaid care activities (cooking, cleaning, fetching water and wood, and caring for the children and the elderly within households or communities)³. Persistent structural inequalities linked to social norms and women's roles in society and the economy will still place on women a disproportionately large share of unpaid care work, thus limiting their involvement in the economy. Despite these challenges of time poverty and the drudgery of domestic activities, women still seek to seize emerging opportunities of a low-carbon economy. To level the playing field for a gender-responsive green economy, policies, programs, infrastructures, and investments toward recognizing, reducing, and redistributing unpaid care responsibilities should be implemented.

MESSAGE 2: Investing in developing the care service sector in West Africa is a win-win solution for women and climate action.

Expanding care services could create many green jobs, the majority of which would be occupied by women while offering solutions to reduce women's unpaid care in the region. Broadening the understanding of the green economy as those jobs that do not harm the environment and/or that produce low emissions means that most jobs in the care-services sector (providing paid household services such as grocery shopping, cleaning, child and elderly care) would fall in the category of green jobs. Expanding the definition could lead to significant public investment in the care sector as part of green transition strategies. This could create many quality-green jobs for which women are extremely well positioned – 80 percent of domestic workers in Africa are women. This would also have multiplying effects in increasing other women's access to the labour market given that access to care services (to relieve unpaid care responsibilities) is an important determinant for women's labour force participation. For example, according to IRENA, lack of adequate work-life balance, care solutions, and flexible working measures is a critical impediment to retain women in the wind energy industry. UN Women estimates that investments to achieve free universal childcare could generate 0.9 million jobs in Senegal, 1.2 million in Côte d'Ivoire, and 17 million in Nigeria. The study

also shows that most jobs would be for women, reducing the gender gap in employment by up to 7 percentage points in some countries.⁴

MESSAGE 3: Grassroots women are at the front of the fight against climate change across Africa, and climate change aggravates women's time spent on unpaid care work. Timesaving, energy-efficient technology and infrastructure is essential to help women realize their full contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation and reduce their unpaid care burden.

The impacts of climate change, environmental degradation and disasters are unequally felt by men and women across

CALL FOR ACTION

Adopt appropriate public policies to ensure that women get an equitable share of green jobs.

Public policy should contribute to removing gender discrimination from law and business practices (in particular, access to land and lending practices) and addressing the manifestations and consequences of discriminatory social norms – for example, through policies that recognize, reduce, and redistribute women's unpaid care responsibilities or that tackle gender segregation in the labour market.

Balance men's and women's responsibilities for care.

Addressing inequalities in the distribution of unpaid care can have an important impact on enabling women to take paid jobs, including in the green economy. Governments should invest in expanding care services, investing in infrastructure and implementing policies to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care. A focus on recognition and making visible women's unpaid care work is particularly important in West Africa, where a large part of care work is informal. Changing social norms through education and communication and the involvement of men and boys are important means to affect change in this area in the medium term.

Support private sector development in the care sector to scale-up promising solutions.

West Africa is one of the most dynamic regions of the world in entrepreneurship, including women's entrepreneurship. In several countries in the region, public policies are already supporting entrepreneurship. In those countries, the state can play a more catalytic role to support private sector development in the care sector, which would have as an added benefit reduction of gender gaps in employment, as a large proportion of the jobs generated would be occupied by women and expansion of childcare services will boost female employment. One way to stimulate this would

be to set up an integrated framework with training and incubation programs for women entrepreneurs and businesses supporting women in the care industry that builds their capacity and increases their potential to attract financing to scale up their care solution.

West Africa. Climate change is increasing women's time spent collecting wood and water because of deforestation and land degradation as well as frequent and intense drought and heat waves. At the same time, women and girls play a significant role in climate change adaptation and mitigation in the region through their activity in food and agricultural systems, and management of natural resources. Providing women with adapted timesaving, labour-saving and climate-resilient solutions not only addresses the climate emergency but also significantly reduces women's unpaid care work. Over the years, Canada's International Development Research Center (IDRC) and UN Women have supported several research initiatives, innovative programs, and policy solutions across the region in this area.



be to set up an integrated framework with training and incubation programs for women entrepreneurs and businesses supporting women in the care industry that builds their capacity and increases their potential to attract financing to scale up their care solution.

Increase access to time-saving equipment and other labour-saving solutions, especially for women at the bottom of the pyramid.

Rural and urban poor women and girls spend significantly more time on unpaid care work, as they are less likely to have access to time-saving equipment and basic infrastructure. The provision of and access to reliable and affordable clean household electricity and safe drinking water and sanitation services is vital. Moreover, it is imperative that access to labour-saving solutions such as refrigeration, grain grinding mills, washing machines, electric stoves, water mills, etc., is expanded to reduce the time spent on domestic work and free up time for educational, leisure or income-generating activities.

IDRC AND UN WOMEN'S WORK ON GREEN JOBS AND THE CARE ECONOMY

IDRC is partnering with the Soros Economic Development Fund at the Open Society Foundations, UN Women and South Africa's Harambee, among many others, to generate knowledge and evidence to increase investment in enterprises that offer care and domestic work solutions. Through local market analysis and case studies, impact assessments, incubation and acceleration of care economy businesses, research on regulatory frameworks and policies, and industry-policy dialogues, the partnerships seek to find sustainable solutions to the global care crisis.

In the region, as part of IDRC's support:

- In Senegal and Guinea, more and more women earn a living growing commercial flowers and crops using small-scale irrigation systems powered by solar energy.
- In Benin, women are forgoing firewood for solar cooking technology in salt production and fish smoking. With this new technology they help in preventing the mangrove ecosystem's extinction, earn an income and save time.
- In Cameroon, women and minority groups' engagement in land restoration contribute to the country's commitment to restoring 12 million hectares of degraded lands across its agroecological zones as part of the **African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative** under the **Bonn Challenge**.
- In Rwanda, households are adopting clean and energy-saving cooking stoves to save time and enable women to attend to income-generating activities. The stoves are part of an assessment **of holistic participatory programs on reducing and redistributing unpaid care work among women in Rwanda**, supported by the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women – East Africa Initiative.
- Across Africa, a blended incubation and mentorship initiative is building the capacity of women and young **innovators and entrepreneurs in green sectors**, with tailored support, mentorship, and seed grants to market their innovations and scale up.

In the West African region, UN Women supports governments and regional institutions in integrating gender in green economy policies and develop innovative, gender-responsive approaches to improve access of rural women to tailored microinsurance (crop insurance) and other financial services.

UN Women works to recognize, reduce, and redistribute women's unpaid care work by supporting the development of solutions, policies and investments tailored to women's unpaid care needs that are originated and adapted to the reality of countries in West Africa — as many of the existing solutions do not align well to countries with high levels of informality and low fiscal space.

As stated before, unpaid care duties limit women in their opportunities to participate in the labour market and take the opportunities green jobs will offer. At the same time, ongoing climate change complicates the life of rural women working in the agricultural sector. UN Women is supporting rural women to reduce their time spend on unpaid care duties via the provision of timesaving equipment, the inclusion of investments and public provisions of basic infrastructure in local development plans, and access to health insurance for themselves as well as their families, to cushion care related shocks.

- In Senegal, UN Women is supporting more than 5000 rural women agricultural farmers to access time-saving technology for productive and domestic use (mini solar hullers, solar millet mills, multi-functional platforms), and 7000 rural women to access improved cooking stoves. These stoves reduce fuel costs, decrease firewood usage, reduce carbon emissions, and decrease women's unpaid care responsibility.
- In Mali, UN Women's CEMALI project supports women's participation in the biomass value chain through training in the production of improved stoves and sustainable fuels (500 women trained, 150,000 improved stoves manufactured, 119 tons of sustainable charcoal briquettes manufactured), reforestation activities, management of tree nurseries, training on improved and efficient carbonization techniques and establishment of women-led forest management mechanisms.



Photo: UN Women Senegal

ENDNOTES

- 1 UN Women and African Development Bank, 2021, Green Jobs For Women In Africa, [link](#).
- 2 Higher-end green jobs include energy (especially wind and solar), transportation, construction and some niche areas of services (e.g., green advisory). See UN Women and the African Development Bank, 2021. « [Green Jobs For Women In Africa](#) »
- 3 UN DESA, The World's Women 2020: Trends and Statistics.
- 4 UN Women and African Development Bank, 2021, Green Jobs For Women In Africa, [Link](#).
UN Women, 2021, Investing in Free Universal Childcare in Sub-Saharan Africa: Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal and the United Republic of Tanzania: Estimating spending requirements, gendered employment effects and fiscal revenue.



IDRC • CRDI

International Development Research Centre
Centre de recherches pour le développement international



Canada 