

UN Women's strategy to transform care systems in West and Central Africa

October 2024



WOMEN'S UNPAID CARE WORK IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA



In **Sub-Saharan Africa**, women **devote 3.1 times more time on unpaid care and domestic work than men** on average (> 2.5 times, the global average).



62.7% of women in intra-African cross-border trade and 55% of women business owners in Africa spend between 2 and 5 hours per day on unpaid care and domestic activities.



Rural women in West and Central Africa are the most time-poor: Rural women can devote up to 12 hours daily to unpaid work. Rural women and girls are responsible for collecting water in 6 households out of 10.



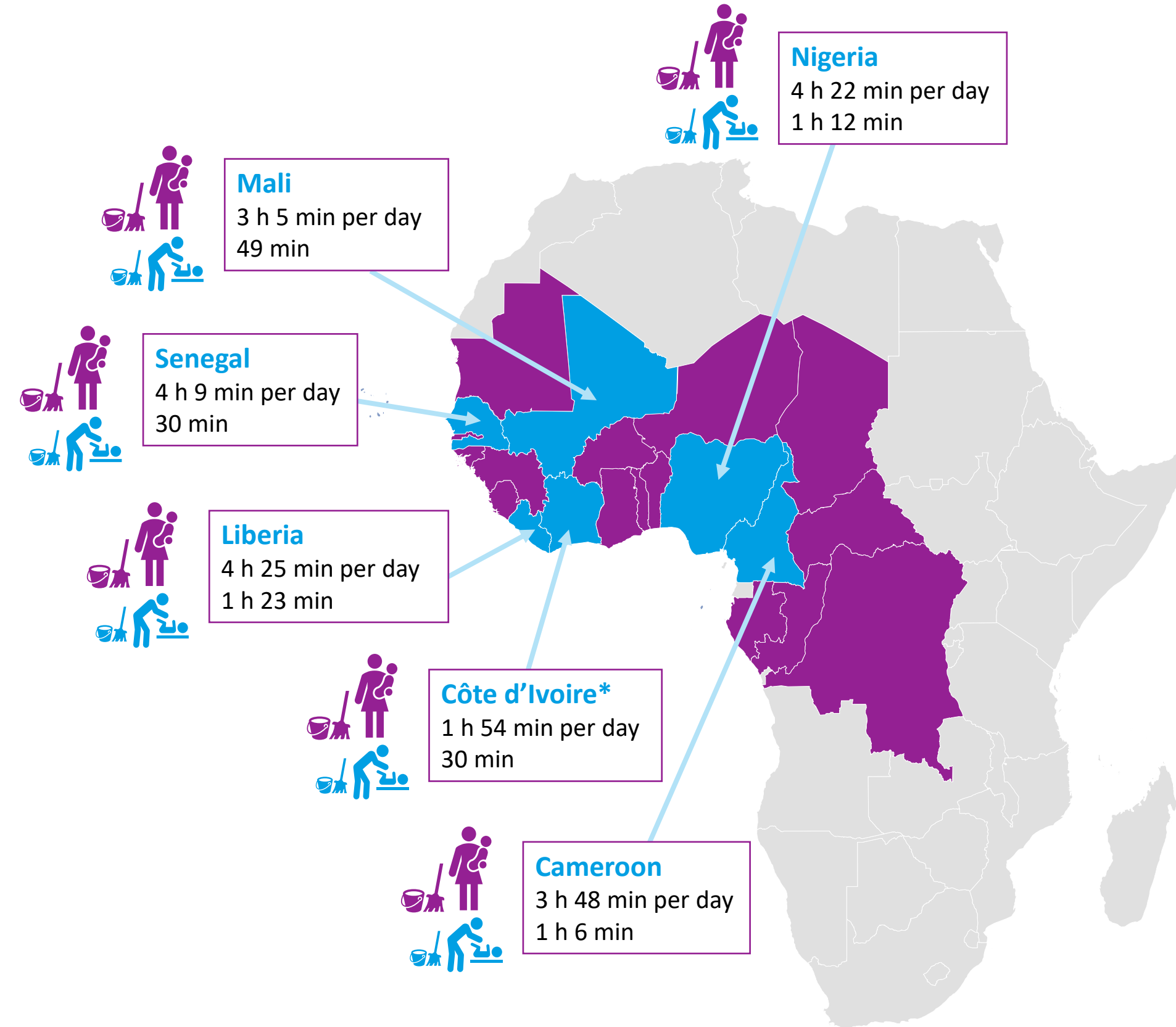
Climate change is intensifying rural women's care work increasing time spent collecting wood, and water because of deforestation and land degradation, as well as time spent caring for those who are sick as a result of climate induced diseases or natural disasters.



Population dynamics will impact women's unpaid care responsibilities: WCA Countries have a youthful population with 133.4 million children under 4 by 2050. At the same time, the number of elderly is rising with approximately 50 million individuals were aged 65 years and older as by 2050.



Across the region, **unless decisive policy action is taken**, women's unpaid care time is expected to increase from 3 hours 39 minutes in 2024 to 4 hours 8 minutes in 2050.



* This data covers housework only

CHALLENGE 1: INEQUALITIES IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF UNPAID CARE WORK BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

CAUSES



Adverse Social norms:

- Patriarchy, social expectations, discriminatory social institutions, practices and stereotypes around gender roles make care to be perceived as a woman's job



Limited access to care/social infrastructure and services especially in rural areas (health centers, childcare centers, energy, water and sanitation, etc.)



Lack of adequate labour market care-supporting policies (maternal, paternal, and parental leaves; social protection schemes, etc.)

In West Africa, 28.24 million women who would like to work are jobless, compared to 18.23 million men mainly due to unpaid care responsibilities.

RESULTING IN



Reduced women's participation in the labour market and increased gender equality:

- Lower-quality, low-pay, part-time, insecure and informal jobs for women



Limited choices, time, and opportunities for women in education, public life, and leisure:

- Lack of time to invest in education with implications for intergenerational transmission of poverty
- Underrepresentation in leadership and political spheres
- Intergenerational inequalities from mothers to daughters on care responsibilities
- Physical and mental health impacts on women



Reduced business productivity:

- Unpaid care responsibilities hamper women-led firms' productivity.

CHALLENGE 2: LACK OF ATTENTION AND LIMITED UNDERSTANDING OF THE CARE-DEVELOPMENT LINKAGES FROM POLICYMAKERS

CAUSES



Care Policy deficit

- Only 1/3 of national social protection strategies in the SSA recognize unpaid care and domestic work and propose specific actions to reduce, redistribute or support it



Fiscal space for care is not seen as a priority

- Care as an economic contribution is not linked to growth in the development narrative and policymakers view care as an expenditure rather than an investment

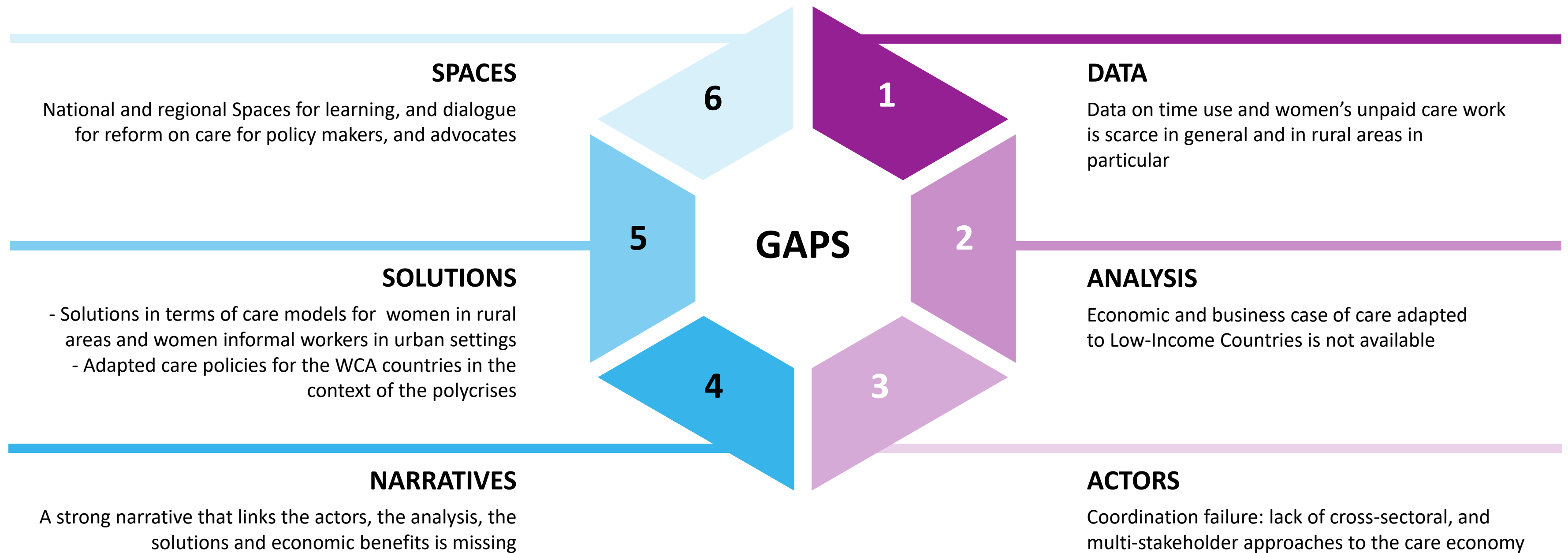
14 out of 24 countries in West and Central Africa reduce public spending in 2024 disproportionately affecting programmes that primarily benefit women, including healthcare, education, water, and sanitation.

RESULTING IN



Reduced economic growth for countries

- Multiplier effects in terms of job creation and future fiscal revenue: investing in childcare and long-term care could generate 1 million new formal jobs in Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal and up to 17 million in Nigeria
- If valued, women's unpaid care work would account for **13.9% of GDP in Senegal and 17.6% in Mali**



By 2030, in the West and Central Africa region

100,000 women and girls with access to care solutions

150,000 low-carbon decent direct, indirect and induced jobs created

10 legal frameworks strengthened through adoption of care normative changes

Increased access to unpaid care solutions for grassroots women and girls in rural and urban-poor areas in Low-Income Countries

Increased women-led care entrepreneurship for the provision of high-quality, accessible, affordable childcare, long-term and domestic care services in Middle-Income Countries

Enablers



Shift in Social Norms



Catalytic Finance for Care



Women-led solutions and innovations



Decent work for women

Approach



Data, research, and tools to build the economic case of care



Capacity-building of policymakers and advocates on care



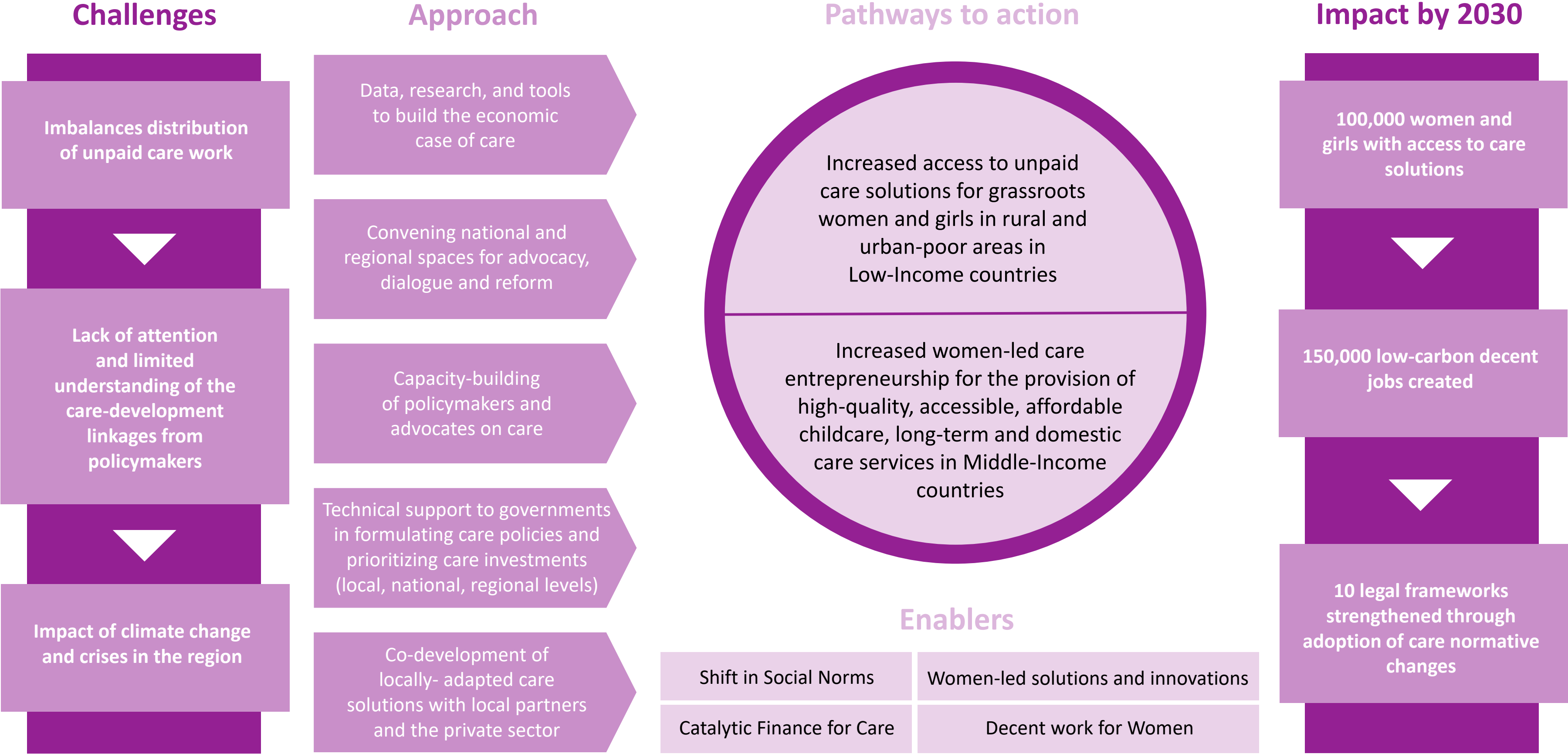
Technical support to governments in formulating care policies and prioritizing care investments (local, national, regional level)

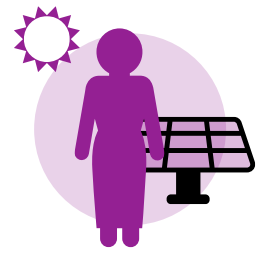


Convening national and regional spaces for advocacy, dialogue and reform

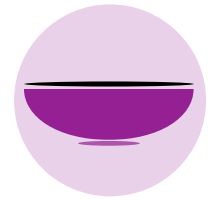


Co-development of locally-adapted care solutions with local partners and the private sector





9,772 women farmers access **timesaving climate-smart technologies** for productive and domestic use in Senegal



Unpaid care work reduced for 6,600 families in Mali via access to **improved cookstoves**



6 municipalities in Senegal integrate care provisions and solutions into their Local Development Plans in 2023. **19 municipalities** more being supported in 2024



7,000+ rural women and their household members enrolled for the first time **in the national health insurance scheme**, reducing **time caring for sick**



Improved capacity of 500+ local, national and regional stakeholders (government, civil society, unions, and research institutes, etc.) on the care-development nexus



3 regional Symposiums on Women's Economic Empowerment and the Care Economy in West Africa in 2022, 2023 and 2024



4 National Care multi-stakeholder policy dialogues in Senegal, Mali, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire



15 research pieces, knowledge products, tools, produced to develop operational solutions adapted to the reality of the region and to build economic case for care reform in West and Central Africa

Annex 1: UN WOMEN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA CARE ECONOMY STRATEGY: THE METHODOLOGY

Our Care strategy is shaped by three years of internal and external consultations with policymakers, women organizations, advocates, and stakeholders at the local, national, and regional levels.

- **National multi-stakeholder Care policy dialogues** in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Senegal in partnership with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Ministry of Population, and Ministry of Labour and Social Protection respectively
- **Focus groups with grassroots women** and municipal-level stakeholders dialogues on women's unpaid care in 13 municipalities in Northern Senegal
- **Symposium on Women's Economic Empowerment and the Care Economy** in West Africa 2022 and 2023 jointly organized by UN Women and IDRC with 250+ stakeholders from government, civil society, unions, and academia
- **Bilateral meetings with regional and international institutions** working on the care economy in Sub-Saharan Africa
- **Internal consultations with UN Women care experts and women economic empowerment specialists** at headquarters and across our 10 country offices as part of the development of the 'Transformative Approaches to Recognize, Reduce and Redistribute Work unpaid care work in women's economic empowerment' program and during the regional Women's Economic Empowerment Learning Week 2022 and 2023

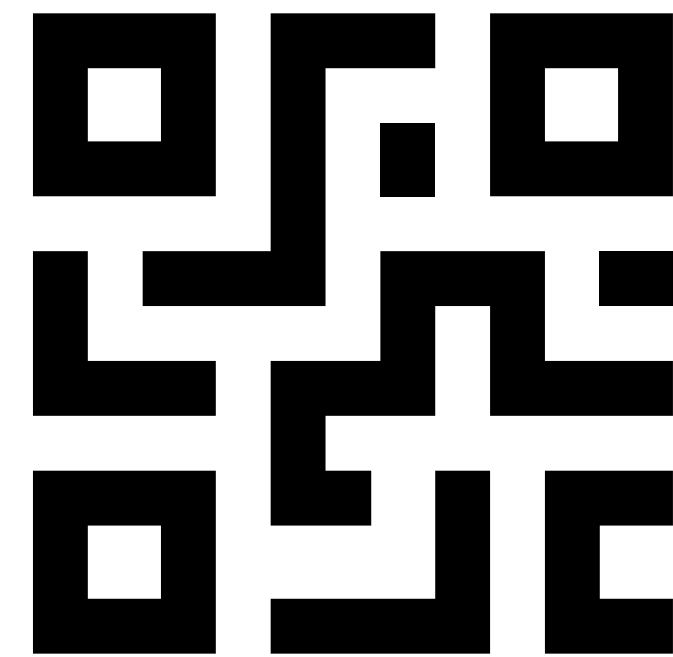
Alignment with **UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025**: Outcome 1 (norms), and 4 (access to goods, services, and resources), its **Gender Equality Accelerator on Transforming Care Systems, the Sustainable Development Goals 1.3; 5.4; 8.3** and the **Economic Justice and Rights Action Coalition** Pillar 1 on “Increasing women's economic empowerment by transforming the care economy”



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Learn more about
our work on the
[Care Economy](#)



Thank you

