



# **Policy Brief: Incorporation of Women's Economic Empowerment and Unpaid Care Work into regional policies: Africa**

Time to start caring – how ignoring Unpaid Care Work is holding back economic empowerment of Africa's rural women

POWER PROJECT POLICY AND RESEARCH SERIES

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## **Unpaid Care Work**

For most women, time spent on Unpaid Care Work (UCW) is disproportionately high compared to men. The burden of Unpaid Care Work affects all women but has the worst effects on women in poverty. Girls and women spend long hours fetching water, collecting firewood, doing laundry, preparing food, caring for children and elderly, and other household chores, as well as often carrying out agricultural duties. This time poverty limits women's opportunity to increase sustainable productivity and better access markets; to know how to claim their rights; and to participate in decision making. Unpaid Care Work is recognised in the Sustainable Development Goals but often not at community, national or regional government levels.

## **Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture**

Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture (CRSA) is an initiative that ActionAid and partners have been developing, based on the design and implementation of site-specific adaptation strategies aimed at increasing productivity, reducing vulnerabilities and increasing the resilience of smallholder production systems. However the burden of Unpaid Care Work for rural women farmers often means they have little time to learn about and to practice sustainable productivity; and so limits these women's economic empowerment.

## **Violence Against Women**

Violence Against Women (VAW) is central in perpetuating women's position of economic, social and political subordination, marginalisation and inequality. It can restrict women's movements and access to markets, and limits income generating opportunities. Women's Unpaid Care Work burden can also compound discriminatory social norms and greatly increase vulnerability to violence.

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FRONT COVER: Helen, 30, carries her son at her back whilst balancing a pan of local drinks on her head. Helen sells drinks at the Tizza local market market in the Upper West region of Ghana and is part of a women's group supported by ActionAid's POWER project.

PHOTO: DEBORAH LOMOTEY /ACTIONAID

# Introduction

Agriculture accounts on average for one third of Africa's GDP<sup>1</sup> and women make up as much as half of its rural workforce.<sup>2</sup> Given the various commitments made on gender equality, economic development and agricultural policies, African agriculture should be a success story for rural women but this is far from the case. The most obvious challenge is the staggering unequal burden of Unpaid Care Work.

In response to these challenges this policy briefing was developed as part of ActionAid's five year multi country POWER project.<sup>1</sup> This is the first in a planned series of policy and research papers. It provides an analysis of the current policies, and practices, across Africa<sup>2</sup> that relate to rural women's economic empowerment and, in particular, the inclusion of the issue of Unpaid Care Work. It considers the successes and the gaps, and identifies opportunities for improvement. It also seeks to link Unpaid Care Work and women's economic empowerment with the issue of Violence Against Women.

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1. A short description of the POWER project, and link to the project website, can be found on the backpage of this report.  
 2. A similar policy brief looking at policies in South Asia is also being developed.



# Summary and key recommendations

## Call for urgent action on African rural women's economic empowerment and Unpaid Care Work

The UNDP estimates that because of women's underused potential due to the burden of Unpaid Care Work, the annual economic losses to sub-Saharan Africa could exceed an equivalent of about 6% of GDP.<sup>3</sup> Alarmingly, according to the 2015 African Gender Scorecard, if the current rate of progress continued unchanged, it would take Africa at least another 81 years to achieve gender equality.<sup>4</sup>

Decision makers in the African Union and in national governments need to urgently re-evaluate their current priorities, policies and approaches. Women's economic empowerment must be understood beyond simply equipping rural women with skills and assets so they can compete in existing markets. Crucially, it must encompass their access to and control over productive and natural resources, control over their own time, being free from violence and abuse, and ensuring that they have voice, choice and control in all spheres of life.

### Key messages

- Rural women are the backbone of African economies, they play a fundamental role in ensuring food and nutritional security across the continent and drive Africa's agricultural development and GDP growth. Yet on virtually every single measure they are more economically excluded than men and, in global comparison, suffer from the highest rates of violence.
- In addition to the widespread gender discrimination that hinders access to productive resources such as land, rural women in Africa carry what can only be described as a huge, relentless and entirely unequal burden of Unpaid Care Work. This has massive consequences for their ability to secure decent livelihoods and to the detriment of their ability to enjoy human rights.
- Economic inequality borne by rural women is the result of deeply entrenched gender discrimination and a set of unsustainable macro-economic and development policies. This favours a high input, large scale agri business model across Africa, rather than climate resilient and sustainable agriculture which is essential to protect, promote and fulfill women's rights in this critical time, when rural women especially are feeling the negative impacts of climate change.
- African leaders have made laudable commitments to invest in women smallholder farmers, to champion their economic empowerment, and to end Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). For example in the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme, the Malabo Declaration, the Maputo Protocol and the Solemn Declaration. Yet in practice not enough has been done, especially with regard to the recognition, reduction and redistribution of rural women's Unpaid Care Work.

3. UNDP (2016), *The African Human Development Report 2016: Accelerating Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Africa*. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/2016-africa-human-development-report.html>

4. African Gender Scorecard, 2015, [https://www.au.int/web/sites/default/files/documents/31260-doc-2015\\_auc\\_african\\_gender\\_scorecard\\_en.pdf](https://www.au.int/web/sites/default/files/documents/31260-doc-2015_auc_african_gender_scorecard_en.pdf)

- Regrettably, the bulk of African Union policies, including those on agriculture, are to a large extent silent on women's Unpaid Care Work and/or face a lack of resources. At the same time national governments are systematically failing to invest in gender sensitive public services, time saving technologies and rural infrastructure needed to reduce and redistribute the burden of Unpaid Care Work.
- Decision makers in the African Union and in national governments need to urgently re-evaluate their current approaches to rural women's economic empowerment and pursue structural change instead of focusing solely on promoting rural women's participation in the existing markets.

### Key recommendations

1. Recognise, reduce, and redistribute women's Unpaid Care Work.
2. Shift to a new model of agriculture that is centred on and cares for women.
3. Connect the dots between Violence Against Women and Girls and rural women's economic empowerment.
4. Challenge discriminatory social norms and promote women's leadership at all levels.

*See pages 17-23 for more detail*



*"Before they built the tap, we had to walk long distances to fetch water and it was extremely tiring. With this water facility close to my house, I can get water quickly and be done with my laundry and cooking so I can go to the farm early during the season."*

**Vida Tibil, 28**, from the Damol-Tindongo community in the Upper East region of Ghana. Vida is part of a woman's group supported by ActionAid's POWER project.

PHOTO: DEBORAH LOMOTEY/  
ACTIONAID

# Women's agricultural work in rural Africa - a far cry from empowerment

Agriculture accounts on average for one third of Africa's GDP<sup>5</sup> and women make up as much as half of its rural workforce.<sup>6</sup> These women are the backbone of African economies, they play a fundamental role in ensuring food and nutrition security across the continent, and are the principal food producers for their families.<sup>7</sup> However, their work in agriculture is precarious, low-skilled and small scale, and much of it consists of subsistence farming.<sup>8</sup>

Given the various commitments on gender equality, African agriculture should be a success story for rural women but little has been done to support their economic empowerment. The most obvious gap is the failure to address the staggering burden of women's Unpaid Care Work, which alongside gender discrimination in access to productive resources, acts as a clear break on women's opportunities to take up decent work and engage in other activities like education, community life or political participation.

Moreover, rural women's work - both paid and unpaid - is getting harder today as climate change takes its hold, and in the context of governments' limited investments in essential infrastructure, labour saving technologies and public services. The combined effect is that, while Africa's long term economic outlook is promising,<sup>9</sup> rural women are sinking into deepening inequality, are affected by gender discrimination and suffer from high rates of violence.<sup>10</sup>

African leaders have made laudable commitments to invest in women smallholder farmers, to champion their economic empowerment, and to end Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). For example in the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme, the Malabo Declaration, the Maputo Protocol and the Solemn Declaration. But in practice discriminatory social norms prevail, while governments are pursuing agricultural policies advantageous to a high input agri business model rather than climate resilient and sustainable agriculture.

Now is the time for African leaders to move beyond the rhetoric and fully invest in the economic empowerment of rural women, with a particular emphasis on recognising, reducing and redistributing Unpaid Care Work. This will go a long way to achieving the socio-economic transformation promised in the African Union's 'Agenda 2063' and ensure that rural women, and men, can all live in 'The Africa We Want'.<sup>11</sup>

5. Agriculture sector contribution to GDP ranges from 3% of GDP in Botswana to almost 50% in Chad, the Central African Republic, and Sierra Leone. See for example: [https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Policy-Documents/Feed\\_Africa-Strategy-En.pdf](https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Policy-Documents/Feed_Africa-Strategy-En.pdf) and <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/jun/03/agriculture-africa-rise-to-economic-power>
6. FAO (2015), *Running out of time The reduction of women's work burden in agricultural production*, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4741e.pdf>
7. Ibid
8. See for example [https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/AEO\\_2016\\_Report\\_Full\\_English.pdf](https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/AEO_2016_Report_Full_English.pdf) See also: UN Women (2015), *Progress of the World's Women 2015-16. Transforming Economies, Realising Rights*, [http://progress.unwomen.org/en/2015/pdf/UNW\\_progressreport.pdf](http://progress.unwomen.org/en/2015/pdf/UNW_progressreport.pdf) p.102 -103
9. UN ECA (2017) *Economic Report on Africa 2017*, [http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/ERA/ERA2017/executive-summary\\_03.pdf](http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/ERA/ERA2017/executive-summary_03.pdf)
10. Estimates indicate that 74% of working women in Africa are in low productive agriculture and informal employment, compared with 61% of men: [https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/AEO\\_2016\\_Report\\_Full\\_English.pdf](https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/AEO_2016_Report_Full_English.pdf) In global comparison they also suffer from highest rates of violence with nearly 1 in 2 women (45.6%) experiencing some form of violence during their lifetime: <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/2016-africa-human-development-report.html>
11. <https://www.au.int/web/agenda2063/about>

# Struggling for time – how Unpaid Care Work is undermining rural women’s economic empowerment and rights

In marked contrast to large scale agri-businesses, women smallholder farmers are particularly poorly served by most agricultural policies on the continent. They face an uphill struggle in enjoying their right to land and other productive resources including inputs such as organic fertilisers, new technologies and local seed varieties.<sup>12</sup> They have little access to credit, are often excluded from extension services, and they face challenges in accessing markets, including restrictions on their mobility.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, rural women are still managing to make a major contribution to food production in Africa and drive the continent’s development and growth. Moreover, they do so whilst continuing to carry what can only be described as a huge, relentless and entirely unequal burden of Unpaid Care Work.

Unpaid Care Work includes cooking, cleaning, collecting water and firewood, taking care of children, the ill and the elderly. This work is absolutely central to the proper functioning and wellbeing of societies and reproduction of the workforce. Without it the rural economy would not function. Yet despite its importance, it is invisible in national accounts and statistics. It is simply taken for granted as ‘women’s work’. It receives little recognition in the AU policies. National governments are also systematically failing to support it by failing to invest in services such as clean water, cooking energy or early childhood development centers, instead relying on women and girls to pick up the slack when these services are non-existent and when they are cut back.

## Daily drudgery of unpaid caring

The usual working day of an African rural woman lasts up to 16 hours, or even longer in some cases, during which they perform many tasks, often at the same time.<sup>14</sup> They typically work 12 hours more per week than men.<sup>15</sup> In Ghana, for example, ActionAid’s POWER project baseline research found out that rural women spend at least 6 hours per day on Unpaid Care Work, which is almost ten times more than men.<sup>16</sup> In Rwanda rural women typically spend at least 5 hours per day on Unpaid Care Work while men spend only 1.5 hours.<sup>17</sup>

This pressure on women’s time becomes all the more pronounced during times of distress. For example, in the absence of quality and accessible public health services women globally provide between 70% and 90% of

12. The evidence of gender inequality in access to land is overwhelming. For example, in Kenya only 6% of women hold titles to land, while 96% of rural women work on family farms. In Malawi, only 3% of women are registered owners of commercial land, yet they represent 70% of the agricultural workforce. In Uganda, women account for the largest share of agricultural production but own just 5% of the land. See: UNDP (2016), *The African Human Development Report 2016: Accelerating Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Africa*. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/2016-africa-human-development-report.html>

13. See among others FAO (2015), *Running out of time The reduction of women’s work burden in agricultural production*, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4741e.pdf>

14. IFAD, *Reducing rural women’s domestic workload through labour-saving technologies and practices*, <https://www.ifad.org/documents/10180/c86179dd-ad6d-4622-864a-ed590016250d>

15. Ibid (IFAD, *Reducing rural women’s domestic workload through labour-saving technologies and practices*, <https://www.ifad.org/documents/10180/c86179dd-ad6d-4622-864a-ed590016250d>)

16. POWER project baseline report: Ghana (2017) <http://powerproject.actionaid.org/>

17. POWER project baseline report: Rwanda (2017) <http://powerproject.actionaid.org/>

care to people living with HIV and AIDS.<sup>18</sup> And during Africa's recent Ebola crisis women were at the frontline, caring for family members or children orphaned by the disease.<sup>19</sup>

To get by, families rely on the help of girls and young women who are pulled out of school to take care of their siblings and support with other tasks necessary to maintain the household and agricultural production. This compromises their right to education and perpetuates a vicious cycle of discrimination and gender inequality into future generations.

### Counting the hours

Women's disproportionate responsibility for Unpaid Care Work is universal, but the burden is far more time consuming and difficult to undertake in the context of poverty, in which most African rural women live.

- According to a study by ActionAid, rural women in Ghana and Rwanda spend three to four hours per day collecting water and firewood for household use.<sup>20</sup>
- A total of 40 billion hours a year is spent collecting water in sub-Saharan Africa,<sup>21</sup> equivalent to one year's labour by the entire workforce of South Africa.<sup>22</sup> In Ethiopia, women are twice as likely to spend time collecting water, compared to men.<sup>23</sup>
- Wood collection can take up to 700 hours per person per year in Africa, with distances to fuel wood sources up to 5 kilometres.<sup>24</sup> This is equivalent to more than a third of a full-time job.<sup>25</sup>
- Women do over 75% of all Unpaid Care Work globally, with that proportion rising even higher in certain countries.<sup>26</sup> For example, in Tanzania women on average devote three times as much of their time as men to household maintenance, in addition to spending a similar share of their day on agricultural work.<sup>27</sup>

### The cost to women's human rights

The UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights has argued that heavy and unequal care responsibilities are a major barrier to women's equal enjoyment of human rights and a key driver of poverty.<sup>28</sup> This is because the amount of time women spend caring holds back their economic empowerment, makes it difficult for them to engage in paid work, access education, take part in community initiatives and meetings, actively participate in politics, or engage in personal development activities such as learning new skills as well as enjoying self-care and leisure.<sup>29</sup>

18. Faith A. and Blackden M. (2009) Unpaid Care Work: UNDP policy brief, UNDP <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/gender/Gender%20and%20Poverty%20Reduction/Unpaid%20care%20work%20English.pdf>

19. See, for example, <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/blog/2014/11/10/Ebola-response-cannot-be-gender-blind.html>

20. <http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/full20report20final20public20281129.pdf>

21. UNDP Resource Guide on Gender and Climate change, 2009 <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/resource-guide-on-gender-and-climate-change.html>

22. Assuming working days are 232 per year and 8 hour day, amounting to 1,856 working hours per year. Total labour force in SA in 2016 was 21,119,236. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.TOTL.IN?locations=ZA&view=chart>

23. Oxfam (2017), Starting with People. A human economy approach to inclusive growth in Africa, <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/starting-with-people-a-human-economy-approach-to-inclusive-growth-in-africa-620266>

24. UNDP (2016), *The African Human Development Report 2016: Accelerating Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Africa*. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/2016-africa-human-development-report.html>

25. A full time job is calculated as consisting of 1,856 hours per year, based on an 8 hour day and 232 working days.

26. GADN, Sharing the Load, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/536c4ee8e4b0b60bc6ca7c74/t/5899e0316b8f5bbffd74b7d4/1486479412285/GAD-N+Sharing+the+load+briefing+2017+final.pdf>

27. ActionAid (2015), Delivering Women's Farmers Rights, [http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/delivering\\_on\\_women\\_farmers\\_rights.pdf](http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/delivering_on_women_farmers_rights.pdf)

28. United Nations (A/68/293), Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F68%2F293&Submit=Search&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F68%2F293&Submit=Search&Lang=E)

29. [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F68%2F293&Submit=Search&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F68%2F293&Submit=Search&Lang=E)





**Icyimpaye Jacqueline, 25**, from Twigeheza women's group, Gitesi sector, Rwanda, stands with her family in front of their new water harvesting tank which reduces the time spent on water collection.

PHOTO: ANATOLE UWIRAGIYE/ACTIONAID

Moreover, women's disproportionate responsibility for Unpaid Care Work also further exacerbates wider gender discrimination in society, including intensifying vulnerability to Violence Against Women and Girls, which affects nearly one in two African women during their lifetime.<sup>30</sup> And while it is a fact that women from all walks of life are at risk from violence, women are far more resilient and empowered to stand up and speak out if they are economically empowered, have a voice, and are able to enjoy all aspects of socio-economic rights.<sup>31</sup>

### Five ways Unpaid Care Work keeps rural women in poverty and violates human rights

1. **It affects their economic empowerment.** 'Time poverty' resulting from an overload of care work limits the time that women can put into farming and other income-generating activities, as well as learning how to farm in sustainable climate resilient ways, get access to markets or adopt new technologies.
2. **It affects their food security.** As so much of their time is directed towards care and unpaid activities, women's ability to be on the farm is reduced, and they may have only limited access to do paid work to cover the costs of buying food thereby increasing hunger among women.
3. **It affects their education, mental and health rights.** Heavy workloads limit women's and girls' access to education, undermine their physical and mental health, and deprive them of time to rest.
4. **It affects their political voice.** Overburdened with Unpaid Care Work, women have little time to participate in local decision-making forums or to take on leadership roles. This perpetuates the stereotype of women as second-class citizens, and men as breadwinners and community leaders.<sup>32</sup>
5. **It contributes to self-reinforcing cycle of intersection between VAWG and women's economic inequality.** Disproportionate responsibility for Unpaid Care Work impacts on women's vulnerability to poverty, which in turn increases their vulnerability to violence and wider gender discrimination in society, which in turn exacerbates their economic inequality.<sup>33</sup>

30. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/2016-africa-human-development-report.html>

31. See, for example: <http://www.osisa.org/buwa/regional/political-economy-violence-against-women-africa> and ActionAid (2016), Double Jeopardy, [https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/actionaid\\_double\\_jeopardy\\_decent\\_work\\_violence\\_against\\_women\\_6.pdf](https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/actionaid_double_jeopardy_decent_work_violence_against_women_6.pdf)

32. See, for example, 'Beyond Caring: Enabling women's leadership in disaster risk reduction by breaking down the barrier of Unpaid Care Work, ActionAid 2017 [http://peuples-solidaires.org/sites/files/actionaid/2017\\_womens\\_leadership\\_in\\_drr\\_and\\_barrier\\_of\\_unpaid\\_care.pdf](http://peuples-solidaires.org/sites/files/actionaid/2017_womens_leadership_in_drr_and_barrier_of_unpaid_care.pdf)

33. See, for example, a self reinforcing cycle on how VAWG and women's economic inequality intersect in ActionAid (2016), Double Jeopardy, [https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/actionaid\\_double\\_jeopardy\\_decent\\_work\\_violence\\_against\\_women\\_6.pdf](https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/actionaid_double_jeopardy_decent_work_violence_against_women_6.pdf) p7.

# Swimming against the rising tide of large scale agriculture and climate change

Rural women's disproportionate responsibility for Unpaid Care Work, and their economic inequality more broadly, are no accident. They are the result of a combination of deeply entrenched gender discrimination and a set of unsustainable macro-economic and development policies driving African agricultural production and GDP growth. At the same time, women smallholder farmers are struggling with the reality of climate change. Unsurprisingly, and despite ambitious political commitments from the AU and national governments in support of Africa's rural women, women's economic empowerment has not been achieved while overall drudgery of their Unpaid Care Work has increased.

## The rise of large scale agri-businesses

Through the Malabo Declaration, African countries are committed to reach an agricultural growth rate of 6% and to end hunger by 2025. To this end, there has been an active drive, especially under the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, towards the large scale corporate agri-businesses and commercial monoculture production intended primarily for export, and including fuel and food crops.<sup>34</sup> Such production is underpinned by a farming model that relies on the intensive use of resources, including land, water and soils, and the use of non-traditional farming inputs like pesticides, non local seed varieties and chemical fertilisers. To a large extent this model relies on governments supporting agri-investors through large-scale land deals, as well as through offering a range of tax incentives – both with a detrimental impact on the rights of women farmers.<sup>35</sup>

Large scale land deals often involve rural women being forcibly pushed away from their land, and destruction of their livelihoods and natural resources, while money that is 'lost' by governments through tax incentives could have paid for public services and infrastructure that women and girls so desperately need to reduce and redistribute their Unpaid Care Work.

ActionAid has estimated that, in 2012, Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda collectively lost up to \$2.8bn through the use of tax holidays and incentives offered to companies, many of which involving agri-businesses. For Rwanda, at the time, the losses would have been enough to more than double spending on health. These estimates were revised to \$2 billion in 2016.<sup>36</sup>

## Living and surviving in the face of climate change

Agriculture is one of the sectors worst affected by climate change, and the impact on women smallholder farmers has already been profound.<sup>37</sup> As weather patterns are disrupted it becomes more challenging to collect water and keep land irrigated, to protect crops and livestock from flooding, and to adjust farming cycles to new and unpredictable calendars. Women also need to work around the degradation of water, soils and forests that is associated with more intensive monoculture farming.

34. <http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/new20alliance20new20risks20of20land20grabs.pdf>

35. <http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/actionaidfromundertheirfeet.pdf>

36. [http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/corporate\\_tax\\_incentives\\_in\\_east\\_africa\\_to\\_print\\_0.pdf](http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/corporate_tax_incentives_in_east_africa_to_print_0.pdf)

37. See, for example, FAO (2015), *Running out of time The reduction of women's work burden in agricultural production*, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4741e.pdf> and <http://www.osisa.org/buwa/economic-justice/regional/unpaid-care-work-and-climate-resilient-sustainable-agriculture-are-in>

The particular need to engage women in climate change efforts was recognized by the AU in its 2014 Malabo Declaration.<sup>38</sup> Women living in poverty are, of course, more vulnerable to the impact of climate change because of their reliance on natural resources, limited access to productive resources and exclusion from decision-making processes. In the specific context of limited rural infrastructure, unless women are supported, they will likely lose even more of their resilience as they are able to produce food less consistently. Women are also likely to lose access to land, water and fertile soils that had sustained their livelihoods, families and ecosystems, whilst their overall Unpaid Care Workload and economic inequality increases.



**Mukamuhirwa Valentine, 37**, a smallholder farmer from Karongi District, Western Province, Rwanda. With the animal manure that she collects from the cow given by the POWER project, the farm production is increasing and her family members are now food secure.  
PHOTO: ANATOLE UWIRAGIYE/ACTIONAID

### **Forced off their land - how women's Unpaid Care Work becomes part of the 'justification' for land grab**

Africa is by far the most heavily targeted continent when it comes to large scale transnational land deals in the agricultural sector. The latest report of the International Land Matrix estimates that 10 million hectares of land in Africa is already covered by concluded deals, and another 13.2 million hectares covered by intended deals. Acquisitions are concentrated along rivers and in East Africa, and involve primarily private companies. Nearly one third (32%) are intended for agrofuel production, and another 17% for unspecified crops.<sup>39</sup>

Such widespread phenomena of large-scale land deals has had severe effects on women smallholder farmers, who rely on the same communal land that is being leased out or sold, but find themselves pushed aside in the absence of formal land titles.<sup>40</sup> Instead, 'modern' big farming promises to make better use of such 'idle' or 'underused' land, and 'boost' small scale and traditional agriculture in general, by bringing new technologies, much needed jobs, schools and clinics, as well as boosting the country's GDP and balance of payments.<sup>41</sup>

But for too many women across Africa, the reality has been quite different: excluded from consent discussions and compensation payments, they do not benefit from the few low paid jobs that follow, while promises of an extra clinic and school do not materialise.<sup>42</sup> The women themselves are pushed off the land they have cultivated for generations, which has provided accessible firewood, fruits, wild foods and medicinal plants, water and grazing lands that sustained them and their families. Those who demand justice, including many women human rights defenders, have been decried as 'anti-development' and often faced violence and recriminations.<sup>43</sup>

38. [https://www.au.int/web/sites/default/files/decisions/9661-assembly\\_au\\_dec\\_517\\_-\\_545\\_xxiii\\_e.pdf](https://www.au.int/web/sites/default/files/decisions/9661-assembly_au_dec_517_-_545_xxiii_e.pdf)

39. Analytical Report of the Land Matrix II, October 2016, [http://landmatrix.org/media/filer\\_public/ab/c8/abc8b563-9d74-4a47-9548-cb59e4809b4e/land\\_matrix\\_2016\\_analytical\\_report\\_draft\\_ii.pdf](http://landmatrix.org/media/filer_public/ab/c8/abc8b563-9d74-4a47-9548-cb59e4809b4e/land_matrix_2016_analytical_report_draft_ii.pdf)

40. <http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/actionaidfromundertheirfeet.pdf>

41. <http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/actionaidfromundertheirfeet.pdf>

42. See <https://actionaid.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Fuel-for-thought-Addressing-the-social-impacts-of-EU-biofuels-policies.pdf>

43. <http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/actionaidfromundertheirfeet.pdf>

# How is Africa promoting economic empowerment of its rural women?

## Global call to action on women's Unpaid Care Work

In 2015 governments from Africa and all other continents signed up to the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, Agenda 2030) to guide their efforts to end poverty and achieve sustainability by 2030.<sup>44</sup> Gender equality and women's economic empowerment have been recognised as central to this ambition and reflected throughout the framework.

The SDGs include: a target on ensuring that women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic and natural resources including land (target 1.4); a target on eliminating all forms of Violence Against Women and Girls in the public and private spheres (target 5.2); a specific goal on ending hunger and promotion of sustainable agriculture (Goal 2); and a specific goal on promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all (Goal 8).<sup>45</sup>

The SDG Goal 5 'achieving gender equality and empowerment of all woman and girls' includes a specific target on recognising and valuing unpaid care and domestic work, and calls for the provision of public services, infrastructure, social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibilities within the household (target 5.4).<sup>46</sup>

The importance of recognising, reducing and redistributing Unpaid Care Work as essential for women's economic empowerment has also been put forward by the UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment led by the former UN Secretary General Ban-Ki-Moon.<sup>47</sup>

The Panel issued specific recommendations to support global efforts to implement the SDGs, including the need for a specific focus on women working in the informal sector and in agriculture as those who are the most likely to lack equal economic opportunities.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the Panel has called transforming gendered norms around women's Unpaid Care Work an "urgent task" for all governments,<sup>49</sup> and recommended that Unpaid Care Work should be supported by "policies and programs developed to guarantee caregivers' and care receivers' rights, agency, autonomy and well-being".<sup>50</sup>

44. The global unemployment rate stood at 5.7 per cent in 2016, with women more likely to be unemployed than men across all age groups. Youth were almost three times as likely as adults to be unemployed, with unemployment rates of 12.8 per cent and 4.4 per cent, respectively, in 2016. Moreover, in more than 76 per cent of countries with data, more than 1 in 10 youth are neither in the educational system nor working. Young women are more likely than young men to fall into that category in almost 70 per cent of countries with data.

45. <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

46. <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>

47. <https://www.empowerwomen.org/en/who-we-are/initiatives/sg-high-level-panel-on-womens-economic-empowerment>

48. Oxfam (2017), An Economy that Works for Women. Achieving women's economic empowerment in an increasingly unequal world' [https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file\\_attachments/bp-an-economy-that-works-for-women-020317-en-summ.pdf](https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bp-an-economy-that-works-for-women-020317-en-summ.pdf)

49. UN High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment. 2016. *Leave no one behind: a call to action for gender equality and women's economic empowerment*. <http://www.womenseconomicempowerment.org/assets/reports/UNWomen%20Full%20Report.pdf> p. 5

50. REPORT OF THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL'S HIGH-LEVEL PANEL ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC Empowerment (2017), LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND TAKING ACTION FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT, <http://hlp-wee.unwomen.org/-/media/hlp%20wee/attachments/reports-toolkits/hlp-wee-report-2017-03-taking-action-en.pdf> p.9



## Women's economic empowerment in African Union policies: the job unfinished

Bound to, and guided by, the global commitments, the AU has defined gender equality in general, and women's economic empowerment in particular, as a priority in its own right and as an instrumental strategy to achieve broader inclusive growth in many of its poverty reduction policies and frameworks.

The AU's gender policy is aimed at strengthening national gender machineries to accelerate the implementation of gender commitments. The Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004), for example, strengthens African ownership of the gender equality agenda in all socio-economic and political sectors, while committing governments to annual reporting on progress.<sup>51</sup> The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the so called Maputo Protocol), which came into force in 2005, was a game-changer for woman and is legally binding, obliging states to, among other things, address violence and discrimination against women and girls in public and private spaces.<sup>52</sup>

Agenda 2063 – the AU's strategic framework for the continents' socio-economic transformation over the next 50 years – has put achieving full gender equality in all spheres of lives as one of its main aspirations.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, gender equality and women's economic empowerment has also been prominent in the declaration of the AU African Women's Decade (2010–2020) and as a thematic focus of two consecutive AU Summits: "Year of Agriculture and Food Security" in 2014,<sup>54</sup> followed by the "Year of Women's Empowerment and Development towards Agenda 2063" in 2015.<sup>55</sup>

Overall, the AU's policy focus with regard to gender equality has been on education, ending Violence Against Women and Girls, women's political participation, and economic empowerment which is commendable.<sup>56</sup> However, and despite the Maputo Protocol calling upon African leaders to 'take the necessary measures to recognise the economic value of the work of women in the home' and step in with support (Article 13), Unpaid Care Work as a key dimension of women's economic inequality has hardly been mentioned in key AU policies, including in those of special relevance to rural woman.

For example, Agenda 2063 takes note of recognising, valuing, reducing and redistributing women's Unpaid Care Work as an 'indicative strategy' towards delivering on its priority area of decent work, income and jobs.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, this commitment has not made it into the first 10-Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063.<sup>58</sup> This overlooking of Unpaid Care Work will undercut AU commitments for women, not least because the 10-Year Plan to implement Agenda 2063 has put forward women's economic empowerment, including of rural women, and ending Violence Against Women and Girls as priority areas to progress on within the decade.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, the African Gender Scorecard, a monitoring tool for implementation of Agenda 2063, for now has no indicators to measure the amount of time women spend on unpaid care and domestic work, which is a key structural challenge to be addressed if African rural women are to enjoy their economic empowerment and rights.<sup>60</sup>

51. [http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/declaration\\_gender\\_equality\\_2004.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/declaration_gender_equality_2004.pdf)

52. [http://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/Resources/NGO/hr\\_protocoltotheafricancharteronhumanandpeoplesrightsontherightsofwomeninafrica\\_2003.pdf](http://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/Resources/NGO/hr_protocoltotheafricancharteronhumanandpeoplesrightsontherightsofwomeninafrica_2003.pdf)

53. <http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/agenda2063.pdf>

54. [http://www.ilo.org/addisababa/media-centre/news/WCMS\\_234519/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/addisababa/media-centre/news/WCMS_234519/lang--en/index.htm)

55. [https://www.au.int/web/sites/default/files/documents/31358-doc-au\\_echo\\_january\\_2015.pdf](https://www.au.int/web/sites/default/files/documents/31358-doc-au_echo_january_2015.pdf)

56. See, for example, VALERIA ESQUIVEL AND ANDREA KAUFMANN (2017), *Innovations in Care. New concepts, New actors, New Policies*, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/13282.pdf> and <http://www.unrisd.org/beijing+20-mohamed>

57. See <http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/agenda2063-framework.pdf> p131

58. <http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/agenda2063-first10yearimplementation.pdf>

59. See *Aspiration 6: An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children* p.76 -78 in <http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/agenda2063-first10yearimplementation.pdf>

60. African Gender Scorecard, 2015, [https://www.au.int/web/sites/default/files/documents/31260-doc-2015\\_auc\\_african\\_gender\\_scorecard\\_en.pdf](https://www.au.int/web/sites/default/files/documents/31260-doc-2015_auc_african_gender_scorecard_en.pdf)

On a more positive note, policies that contribute to the reduction and redistribution of women's Unpaid Care Work are often being situated within the broader sectoral development plans such as those related to, for example, infrastructure, education, agriculture or public health. Though not explicitly addressing the unpaid care agenda, they have the potential to reduce it and to boost economic empowerment and enjoyment of rights<sup>61</sup> - provided that they are properly resourced, respond to rural women's specific needs and are approached from the perspective of women's rights.

### **African Union agricultural policies - silent on Unpaid Care Work**

Regrettably AU policies on agriculture have so far missed this mark. They do not go far enough in terms of operationalising the gender equality commitments emanating from the SDGs, the Solemn Declaration or Agenda 2063. Nor do they apply the much needed 'care lens' to respond to the specific challenges faced by rural women to achieve their economic empowerment.

CAADP, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme launched in 2003, is the foremost mechanism supporting national objective setting and planning processes in African agriculture. It is seen as defining the agricultural 'space' of Agenda 2063, focusing on development that is agriculture led and towards eliminating hunger, reducing poverty and increasing food security. It is specifically linked to the political 'Maputo' commitment to invest 10% of national budgets in agriculture and to secure a 6% annual growth in agricultural productivity, particularly from small scale farming including women farmers. All of these commitments were further reinforced by the Malabo Declaration (2014) to accelerate implementation of CAADP.<sup>62</sup>

CAADP and the Malabo Declaration raise high expectations of African rural development policies that invest in women. Yet the reality still falls short. The 10% investment and 6% productivity targets are important, but there is no explicit commitment to allocating a specific share of financing to women smallholder farmers, or to supporting women led productivity growth. There is talk of preferential entry and participation by women and youth in gainful and attractive agri businesses, but the texts give no more of a steer and in no way speak to rural women's unpaid care burden, or Violence Against Women, as impediments that need to be addressed.

Critically, while CAADP has inspired and brought energy and focus to agricultural investments across Africa, its targets are not being met. Nearly 15 years since the launch of CAADP there is a persistent shortfall in allocating adequate financial and human resources to deliver equitable and sustainable agriculture in general, and for women in particular. For example, the 2014 study by ACORD showed that gender commitments were generally not provided for in the countries' National Agricultural Investment Plans (NAIPs) and national budgets.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, the accountability mechanisms underpinning CAADP – a review of which is to be presented in January 2018 - lack gender-specific targets and indicators including those related to women's access to financing and investments, support services or infrastructure that reduces their Unpaid Care Work.<sup>64</sup> This urgently needs to change.

61. VALERIA ESQUIVEL AND ANDREA KAUFMANN (2017), Innovations in Care. New concepts, New actors, New Policies, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/13282.pdf>

62. For more information, see <http://www.nepad.org/programme/comprehensive-africa-agriculture-development-programme-caadp>

63. <http://curtisresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/Putting-Small-Scale-Farmers-First.-Acord.-January-2014.pdf>

64. [http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/delivering\\_on\\_women\\_farmers\\_rights.pdf](http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/delivering_on_women_farmers_rights.pdf)

## CASE STUDY

## Putting women at the centre of climate resilient sustainable agriculture - lessons from Rwanda<sup>65</sup>

Rwanda is Africa's least urbanised but also its most densely populated country, where the agriculture sector is essentially small scale.<sup>66</sup> Rwanda was first to sign the CAADP, and has one of the strongest track records in meeting the 10% Maputo agriculture spending target, whilst showing a 5.3% agricultural productivity growth rate over the 2005 to 2014 period. In Rwanda an impressive 64% of parliamentarians are women. The benefits are seen in the falling share of the population living below the national poverty line which is now 39% (2013/2014).<sup>67</sup>

Rwanda's National Agriculture Investment Plan stands out in recognising women's majority role in food production, their inequitable access to land, training and rural credit, the importance of supporting women's rural organisations and women extension officers.<sup>68</sup> Although there is more to be done, Rwanda's ambition to support women farmers is coming to life through government initiatives such as its 'One cow per poor

family' which has demonstrated impacts of reducing malnutrition, increasing access to organic fertiliser and increasing incomes.<sup>69</sup> However, 19% of Rwandan households remain food insecure and that figure rises above 40% in some of the provinces.<sup>70</sup>

In 2013, ActionAid started working with groups of women in two communities in Nyanza and Gisagara districts of Rwanda, including in the Kibirizi Sector, a rural area located in the Southern Province of Rwanda. With very limited land for farming, the area has been suffering from irregular rainfall and prolonged droughts, affecting crop yields and leading to food insecurity and malnutrition. The project sought to support women in the transition to Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture, including squarely addressing Unpaid Care Work.

Among the women involved was Leoncie Niyonsenga, a 40-year-old mother of 6 children from Mbeho village who was struggling to access firewood and water supplies, whilst coping with an increase in crop diseases and pests, a lack of irrigation systems and an absence of food and grain storage systems.

65. Sustainable livelihoods project supports women to reduce Unpaid Care Work, ActionAid case study, <http://interactions.eldis.org/economic-empowerment/country-profiles/rwanda>
66. Høglund Gieritz, Asa Margareta G.; Gray, George Richard; Mudahar, Mohinder S.; Rubaiza, Rhoda; Galperin, Diana; Suit, Kilara Constance. 2015. *Rwanda - Agricultural sector risk assessment*. Agriculture global practice technical assistance paper. Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/525111468180254519/pdf/96290-WP-P148140-Box393232B-PUBLIC-TAP-Rwanda-ASRA-WEB-10062015.pdf>
67. [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwigMP6v\\_UAhUC8RQKHTRXDxsQFggq-MAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.statistics.gov.rw%2Ffile%2F4135%2Fdownload%3Ftoken%3DcylGgLRl&usg=AFQjCjNH9jgV4dTp-buJBNH7cVB4IMfGFdQ](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwigMP6v_UAhUC8RQKHTRXDxsQFggq-MAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.statistics.gov.rw%2Ffile%2F4135%2Fdownload%3Ftoken%3DcylGgLRl&usg=AFQjCjNH9jgV4dTp-buJBNH7cVB4IMfGFdQ)
68. <http://www.acordinternational.org/silo/files/acord-naip-report.pdf>
69. Equity Case Study: One Cow per Poor Family, UNICEF [https://www.unicef.org/equity/archive/index\\_65274.html](https://www.unicef.org/equity/archive/index_65274.html)
70. Rwanda 2015: Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis, published 2016 <http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp284395.pdf>

## CASE STUDY

Critically, while Leoncie's major occupation was farming, in practice she was having to devote herself to the care of her family. With no government support, Leonie and other women like her were effectively denied the chance to take part in productive farming and other income-generating, political and social activities.

In order to mobilise women like Leoncie the 'Abishyizehamwe' women smallholder farmers' cooperative was formed, starting with 30 members, including HIV-positive women and women heading their families, most of whom had lost their husbands during the 1994 genocide.



**Leoncie Niyonsenga, 40**, standing in front of her farm.  
PHOTO: CELSO MARCATTO/ACTIONAID

Importantly, the cooperative was able to raise awareness around unpaid care issues among women, men and community leaders, helping to shift attitudes around responsibility for Unpaid Care Work so that workloads could be shared within the households and beyond. A new Early Childhood Development Centre, identified as a priority by the women, was also opened, freeing up to 5 hours per day for women to engage in other activities such as agricultural production and engagement in community life.

The cooperative - to which women now contribute financially each month - promotes sustainable agriculture as a way to enhance agricultural production, and to increase the adaptation and preparedness of women farmers to climate change. To do just that community seedbanks have been set up to store indigenous seeds, saving money that would have been spent on expensive and often unsuitable hybrid alternatives. Farm animals, provided by the project, provide milk and manure for compost, reducing the reliance on chemical fertilisers. Tree planting has improved soil quality and reduced erosion, while multi-purpose leguminous trees feed the domestic animals as well the soil. Finally, rainwater is also being harvested for households and watering kitchen gardens and livestock, saving women's time and protecting soil from erosion thus boosting productivity and resilience and women's economic empowerment overall.



# Recommendations

*“Across the world, millions of women still find that poverty is their reward for a lifetime spent caring, and Unpaid Care Work provision by women and girls is still treated as an infinite, cost-free resource that fills the gaps when public services are not available or accessible. ... Without further delay, public policies should position care as a social and collective responsibility and treat unpaid care givers and those they care for as rights holders.”*

**Magdalena Sepulveda Carmona, Former UN Special Rapporteur on Poverty and Human Rights<sup>71</sup>**

Decision makers in the African Union and in national governments need to re-evaluate their current approaches to agriculture and women’s economic empowerment, and crucially go beyond simply equipping women with skills so they can participate in the existing markets – without due attention on what terms they are being included. To achieve structural change and ensure that African rural women can enjoy their economic empowerment and rights would mean, at minimum, these four things:

## 1. Recognise, reduce, and redistribute women’s Unpaid Care Work

This briefing argues that rural women’s economic empowerment will only be possible when their Unpaid Care Work is recognised as a crucial public, societal and economic good, and seen as a collective responsibility to be shared within the household, and, crucially, between households and the state.

This is not about reducing overall amount of care, nor is it about taking a choice from women on when, how and on what terms they wish to engage in care work. It is about ensuring that rural women’s Unpaid Care Work is more fairly shared and supported, including through transformative state policies such as, for example, provision of quality, accessible, and gender sensitive infrastructure and care services. Most of all it is about human rights and the well-being of care givers and care receivers.

A growing body of evidence points to the transformational potential of investing in infrastructure and labour saving technology, in terms of freeing up time for income generation, participation in community life or leisure. For example, one study in Tanzania estimated that improving infrastructure for water collection, fuel collection and food preparation (e.g. grain-milling facilities) could reduce the burden for women by over 9 billion hours of unpaid work per year – equivalent to 5.5 million full-time jobs.<sup>72</sup> Improvements in access to water and firewood were also found to lead to approximately 900 hours a year work reductions in Uganda.<sup>73</sup> Critically, the introduction of rural electrification in South Africa led to a 9% increase in female labour participation.<sup>74</sup>

71. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/536c4ee8e4b0b60bc6ca7c74/t/5899e0316b8f5bbffd74b7d4/1486479412285/GADN+Sharing+the+load+briefing+2017+final.pdf> p.3

72. FAO (2015), *Running out of time The reduction of women’s work burden in agricultural production*, <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4741e.pdf>

73. UNDP (2016), *The African Human Development Report 2016: Accelerating Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Africa*. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/2016-africa-human-development-report.html>

74. OECD (2014), *Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes*, [https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/Unpaid\\_care\\_work.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/Unpaid_care_work.pdf)

Provision of care is a public good and governments must invest in public services which redistribute the workload, such as child care, health or education, funded through progressive taxation and by reducing tax losses resulting from illicit financial flows and harmful corporate tax incentives.

ActionAid's experience shows how the provision of child care can improve women's ability to participate fully in agricultural activities. For example, as set out in the case study previously, after the introduction of early childcare centres in Rwanda, women gained 5 additional hours per day to engage in income-earning activities as well as having more time to take care of themselves.<sup>75</sup> There is also evidence from Kenya, which shows how reducing the cost of child care for lower income households has increased Kenyan mothers' waged employment as well as older girls' schooling.<sup>76</sup>

Importantly, to strengthen maternity protection and respond to rural women's specific needs, governments should provide social protection through unconditional cash transfers and other social benefits. Labour market policies, which include maternity leave, old age pensions and family allowances, have improved in many African countries, yet are limited to formal workers who are in the minority, while the absolute majority of rural women work in informal agriculture and live in poverty.<sup>77</sup>

The provision of free social and care services should be seen by African governments not only as their duty, but also as a strategic investment to sustain countries' workforces, create jobs for women, and generate future broad based GDP growth and tax revenue.<sup>78</sup> Further, the support provided should not be for instrumental reasons but also part of the government's obligation to support fundamental social and economic rights. By contrast, the introduction of user fees and the privatisation or outsourcing of services have proved to increase women's Unpaid Care Work and increase gender inequality.

*"I sell porridge in the morning and it was very difficult doing so with my first child. There were days I could not go and sell or even go to the farm because I had to take care of her. But since ActionAid built this centre, I can now bring my daughter and go to sell at the market and later to the farm. I don't have to worry about balancing the two and this has allowed me to make more money."*

**Leticia, 35**, picks up her 4 year old daughter from the childcare centre in a village in the north of Ghana.

PHOTO: DEBORAH LOMOTÉY/ACTIONAID



75. ActionAid (2015), Delivering Women's Farmers Rights, [http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/delivering\\_on\\_women\\_farmers\\_rights.pdf](http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/delivering_on_women_farmers_rights.pdf)

76. GADN, Sharing the Load, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/536c4ee8e4b0b60bc6ca7c74/t/5899e0316b8f5bbffd74b7d4/1486479412285/GAD-N+Sharing+the+load+briefing+2017+final.pdf>

77. VALERIA ESQUIVEL AND ANDREA KAUFMANN (2017), Innovations in Care. New concepts, New actors, New Policies, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/13282.pdf>

78. ITUC (2016), Investing in the Care Economy, [https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/care\\_economy\\_en.pdf](https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/care_economy_en.pdf)

## 2. Shift to a new model of agriculture that is centred on and cares for women

If African leaders are serious about the rights of rural women, then they must take decisive action to transform existing agricultural policies, fully embracing an alternative model that is economically viable, addresses the specific needs of women farmers, and is environmentally sustainable.

Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture (CRSA) is a very feasible alternative model of agriculture based on agro ecology,<sup>79</sup> which contributes to climate change mitigation and adaptation, whilst putting women's rights and economic empowerment at its core. It is a model that is shaped in particular by women farmers' almost exclusive knowledge about cultivation, processing, and preservation of nutritious and locally adapted varieties of crops. It demands that women play a leading role in sharing knowledge and promoting innovations that can improve productivity, as well as improving women's own status and power. With its focus on long term environmental and social sustainability, CRSA specifically focuses on soil and biodiversity conservation and water management, and the diversification of livelihoods. Women's rights and gender equality, in particular the sharing and reducing of women's unpaid care burden, is central to its approach. ActionAid's work in Rwanda, outlined in the case study previously, demonstrates the potential that a shift to CRSA has, for women and for rural economies.

Concretely, to transit to such a model requires a clearer commitment, from the AU and through CAADP, to putting women, their needs and their rights, front and centre of Africa's agricultural ambitions. With donor support, a stronger push is needed for countries themselves to develop coherent national strategies that bring women's rights, food security and climate resilience together at their core. Such strategies will need to address climate change risk, ensure a shift away from high input farming subsidies, and reorient agricultural research and extension services to respond to women centred CRSA.

Demonstrating Climate Resilient Sustainable Agricultural practice in Nyeranzi community in Gisagara District of Rwanda. Women's groups are learning about CRSA practices as part of ActionAid's POWER project.  
PHOTO: ANATOLE UWIRAGIYE/ACTIONAID



79. [http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/crsa\\_backgroundunder\\_june\\_2012\\_design.pdf](http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/crsa_backgroundunder_june_2012_design.pdf)



### 3. Connect the dots: Violence Against Women and Girls and rural women's economic empowerment

Making economies and agriculture development programmes care for African rural women is also fundamental for preventing and responding to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). And conversely, living a life free from violence is essential for women to reclaim their economic rights.

For example, one study in Tanzania found that women who experienced severe intimate partner violence earned up to 43% less income than women who had never been abused by a partner.<sup>80</sup> The African Development Bank concluded that 'one of the biggest challenges that can potentially undermine Africa's future growth prospects is violence against up to half of the continent's population'.<sup>81</sup>

While African countries have made significant progress in adopting laws and policies to address violence, Violence Against Women and Girls has remained both pervasive and persistent. The World Health Organisation estimates that 45% of Africa's women experience intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence during their lifetime.<sup>82</sup> While available statistics do not disaggregate the data for rural women, we do know that women living in poverty and those facing other forms of discrimination such as those based on race, class, sexual orientation, age, occupation and geography are at greater risk.<sup>83</sup>

While economic empowerment is no silver bullet to end Violence Against Women and Girls, strategies to secure decent livelihoods, women's agency and their economic independence have shown some of the best-evaluated outcomes in terms of reducing women's subsequent experiences of violence.<sup>84</sup> For example, studies in Tanzania found that women's access to money has a positive effect on their lives and reduces their need to negotiate with male partners - a major trigger for violence. Similarly, there is evidence which points out that when rural women own land, they gain power within their relationships and are less likely to experience violence.<sup>85</sup> Because Unpaid Care Work reduces the amount of time spent on income generating activities, higher levels of Unpaid Care Work burdens can similarly trigger violence.<sup>86</sup> In some communities, ActionAid's POWER project has also begun to notice that unrealistic expectations for women and girls to balance farm work and care work resulted in domestic conflicts which triggered Violence Against Women. The project has also observed that redistributing care between men and women, and also the state and women, contributes to improved spousal relationships and reduced Violence Against Women.

However, women's economic empowerment programmes can also sometimes have the unintended consequence of increased Violence Against Women and Girls, especially if the social norms remain unchallenged and men remain economically disempowered. In South Africa, for example, men who have experienced long-term unemployment and lost their previous status as bread-winners admitted using violence against their female partners to re-gain a sense of 'control'.<sup>87</sup>

80. UNDP (2016), *The African Human Development Report 2016: Accelerating Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Africa*. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/2016-africa-human-development-report.html>

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83. ActionAid (2015), FEARLESS. Standing Together with Women and Girls to End Violence, [https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/fearless-standing\\_with\\_women\\_and\\_girls\\_to\\_end\\_violence\\_actionaiduk\\_1.pdf](https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/fearless-standing_with_women_and_girls_to_end_violence_actionaiduk_1.pdf)

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#### 4. Challenge discriminatory social norms and promote women's leadership at all levels

Last but not least, women's disproportionate responsibility for Unpaid Care Work, their persisting economic disadvantage and gender inequality overall are all a result of discriminatory social norms and patriarchal attitudes that prevail in Africa and all other parts of the world.

According to the 2015 Afrobarometer survey, one quarter of Africans disagreed or strongly disagreed with the fundamental notion of equal rights between men and women.<sup>88</sup> Relatedly, research in 67 developing countries revealed that, on average, one in five men disagreed that women should be working outside the home, even if they have the necessary qualifications.<sup>89</sup>

Such discriminatory beliefs and attitudes need to be monitored and addressed if rural women are to enjoy their economic empowerment and live their human rights. Promotion of positive norms around equal responsibility for Unpaid Care Work, access to productive resources and ending Violence Against Women and Girls lies at the heart of the challenge for women's economic empowerment.

Critically, more must be done to support women's leadership and collective action at all levels, from participation in formal politics, to support for women's rights organisations and women human rights' defenders, farmers' groups, and cooperatives. Supporting such meaningful participation would send a strong signal that decision makers are serious about both addressing rural women's practical and strategic needs regarding their economic empowerment and Unpaid Care Work, and challenging social norms around women's position in societies and participation in the economy overall.



**Grace Sobey, 36**, is from Damol-Tindong community in the Upper East region of Ghana. She is one of the women's group volunteer facilitators, supported by ActionAid's POWER project. Grace works with the women in her community to identify the challenges they are facing and work out ways to overcome these.

PHOTO: JANE LENNON/ACTIONAID

88. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/2016-africa-human-development-report.html>

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# Recommendations for groups

## **The African Union is called upon to:**

- Provide clear and strong leadership on rural women's economic empowerment including on recognising, reducing, and redistributing their Unpaid Care Work. Most immediately by ensuring it is explicitly addressed in the 10-Year Plan to implement Agenda 2063, and that it is identified as a cross cutting priority across all other AU sector development policies, especially with regard to agriculture.
- Ensure that financial resources are allocated to sustainable, climate resilient and gender sensitive agricultural investments at national level within the context of CAADP and the Malabo Declaration, and that rural women in Africa are benefitting from the investment in rural infrastructure, trainings, services, land access and social protection.
- Develop a clear framework that integrates Unpaid Care Work and Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture and systematically review the impacts of agriculture policies, investments, infrastructure reforms, fiscal and other economic policies on economic empowerment of rural women (including their Unpaid Care Work) involving the full and meaningful participation of women from affected communities.
- Collect data on the gender distribution and time spend on Unpaid Care Work and strengthen accountability mechanisms for the fulfilment of women's rights commitments by setting clear gender goals, targets and indicators within the CAADP Results framework and the African Gender Scorecard. Prioritise implementation of instruments such as Solemn Declaration and Maputo Protocol, and fully resource the relevant AU directorates to enable them to effectively monitor progress.
- Monitor and challenge discriminatory social norms which perpetuate gender discrimination, portray unpaid care as 'women's work' and allow Violence Against Women and Girls to occur. Recognise, champion and prioritise women's collective action including through supporting women's rights organisations as key partners in ending Violence Against Women and Girls and women's economic inequality in Africa, and challenge the closing down of civil society space affecting women's rights organisations and women human rights defenders.

## **National governments are called upon to:**

- Prioritise and fully implement all international and African Union commitments on addressing women's Unpaid Care Work, fulfilling their economic rights, and ending Violence Against Women and Girls.
- Ensure delivery of gender-sensitive public services and rural infrastructure including clean and renewable energy, quality and free health, education and care services, water and sanitation services, and transportation and roads, as well as services to prevent and respond to Violence Against Women and Girls, to reduce burdens on women's time, increase their well-being, and ensure enjoyment of rights. Ensure access to social protection, which is universal, irrespective of sector or employment status and pay particular attention to rural women smallholder farmers.
- Mobilise domestic resources to invest in public services and gender sensitive rural infrastructure by ensuring that companies and wealthy individuals pay their fair share of taxes through developing progressive tax regimes, closing loopholes that facilitate tax avoidance and evasion, and removing harmful tax incentives. Ensure women are at the centre of policy-making and planning processes at all levels, including in decisions on how revenues are mobilised and spent.

- Prioritise investments in women-led small scale sustainable and climate resilient agriculture over support to large scale agri-businesses. Develop and implement programmes to support rural women farmers including through ensuring that they have access to and control over productive resources such as land, seed systems or credits, and that they benefit from extension advice.
- Ensure gender responsive budgeting processes and invest in sex-disaggregated data collection to measure time and gender division of labour regarding Unpaid Care Work. Include Unpaid Care Work in national accounts and in the calculation of GDP.
- Support and engage with women's rights organisations, women human rights defenders, farmers' groups and women's cooperatives and ensure their meaningful participation in defining, implementing and monitoring agricultural programmes and policies on women's economic empowerment.

### **Multi-lateral and bilateral donors are called upon to:**

- Prioritise African rural women's economic empowerment through, among other things, ending policies and conditions that restrict countries' fiscal and democratic space for allocating resources to reduce and redistribute Unpaid Care Work, achieve women's economic empowerment and respond to Violence Against Women and Girls.
- Strengthen their own accountability mechanisms for the fulfillment of women's rights and redress for harmful impacts of economic policies and practices.
- Allocate the necessary financial, human and material resources to support African countries' gender-sensitive agricultural development with a focus on climate resilient and sustainable agriculture, and women smallholder farmers. Support more research partnerships involving collaboration among poor farming communities, extension services and agricultural scientists and ensure research programmes examine what kinds of sustainable agricultural techniques, equipment and crops can most benefit women.
- Support women's leadership and collective action through resourcing women's rights organisations, women human rights' defenders, farmers' groups and women's cooperatives.

### **Private sector should:**

- Uphold the corporate responsibility to respect human rights by undertaking gender-sensitive human rights due diligence around actual and potential impacts of company activities, and by respecting and adhering to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and national laws.
- Recognise women's greater responsibility for Unpaid Care Work and help to reduce the burden through providing services such as child, dependent adult, and elderly care and paid family and medical leave, flexible working hours and paid parental leave.
- Ensure the participation of affected women and girls in identifying risks and impacts of agri and land related investment, and ensure access to remedy and redress where harmful impacts have occurred.
- Pay a fair share of tax and refrain from using strategies to artificially minimise corporate tax burdens - practice that deplete public resources to reduce and redistribute Unpaid Care Work, tackle Violence Against Women and Girls, and achieve women's economic empowerment overall.





Women in Rwanda working in a potato plantation field belonging to their women's cooperative: part of ActionAid's POWER project. PHOTO: MARIA KAITSEI/ACTIONAID

## The POWER project

ActionAid's Promoting Opportunities for Women's Empowerment and Rights (POWER) project is a five year initiative (2016-2020) supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands under the Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW) grant. The POWER project is working through local partners in Bangladesh, Ghana, Pakistan and Rwanda to mobilise and organise rural women to raise awareness of and claim their rights as farmers and carers. The project's objective is to increase the income, and the ability to control this income, of 21,000 rural women in Bangladesh, Ghana, Pakistan and Rwanda. It is doing this by addressing Unpaid Care Work and, at the same time, by increasing productivity and access to markets through the practice of Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture. It also addresses Violence Against Women as a cross-cutting issue. The POWER project is also working with policy and decision makers at local, national, regional and international level to ensure an environment that better supports women's economic empowerment. For more information see the POWER project website <http://powerproject.actionaid.org/>

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**ActionAid** is a global movement of people working together to achieve greater human rights for all and defeat poverty. We believe people in poverty have the power within them to create change for themselves, their families and communities. ActionAid is a catalyst for that change.

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