

POLICY BRIEF FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS



Why Local Governments Matter for Care, Productivity, and Inclusion

Local governments sit at the center of service delivery and are often the first point of interaction between citizens and the state. Through their direct engagement with communities, they play a critical role in understanding citizen needs, responding to public feedback, and shaping the quality and accessibility of essential services.

This brief builds on that role by demonstrating that care systems are fundamentally shaped at the

local level, where policy decisions on infrastructure, transport, water, health, childcare, markets, and social services directly influence how people spend their time, participate in the labor force, and contribute to local economies. By investing in care-responsive infrastructure and services, local governments can reduce unpaid care burdens, improve productivity, strengthen inclusion, and position local service delivery as a driver of economic growth and community well-being.

Care Sustains Local Economies



Why Care Systems Matter

Care systems comprise the infrastructure, services, institutions, policies, and social norms shaping how care is provided and received in households and communities. Locally, these systems rely on sectors such as water, transport, energy, health, education, sanitation, and social services, shaping the time, effort, and resources care requires. Care burdens thus reflect not any single sector, but how households experience these services as interconnected parts of daily life. For example, caring for children, older people, or people with disabilities may depend on water, transport, health care, energy, and social services. Gaps in essential services increase unpaid care demands on women and girls, limiting time for paid work, education, civic engagement, and productive activities. Because care depends on multiple interconnected services, improving one sector alone has limited impact if constraints elsewhere persist.

These impacts extend beyond households to local economies. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, women anchor local economies through market trading, street vending, and small enterprises that sustain livelihoods and generate revenue for subnational governments. When unpaid care responsibilities limit women's engagement in them, economic activity and productivity decline, reducing revenue from market fees, business licenses, and local taxes municipalities use to finance services and infrastructure.

A systems lens shows that care is not only a social concern but a local development issue. Coordinated investments across sectors can reduce unpaid care burdens, unlock economic participation, strengthen municipal revenues, and improve quality of life for residents.

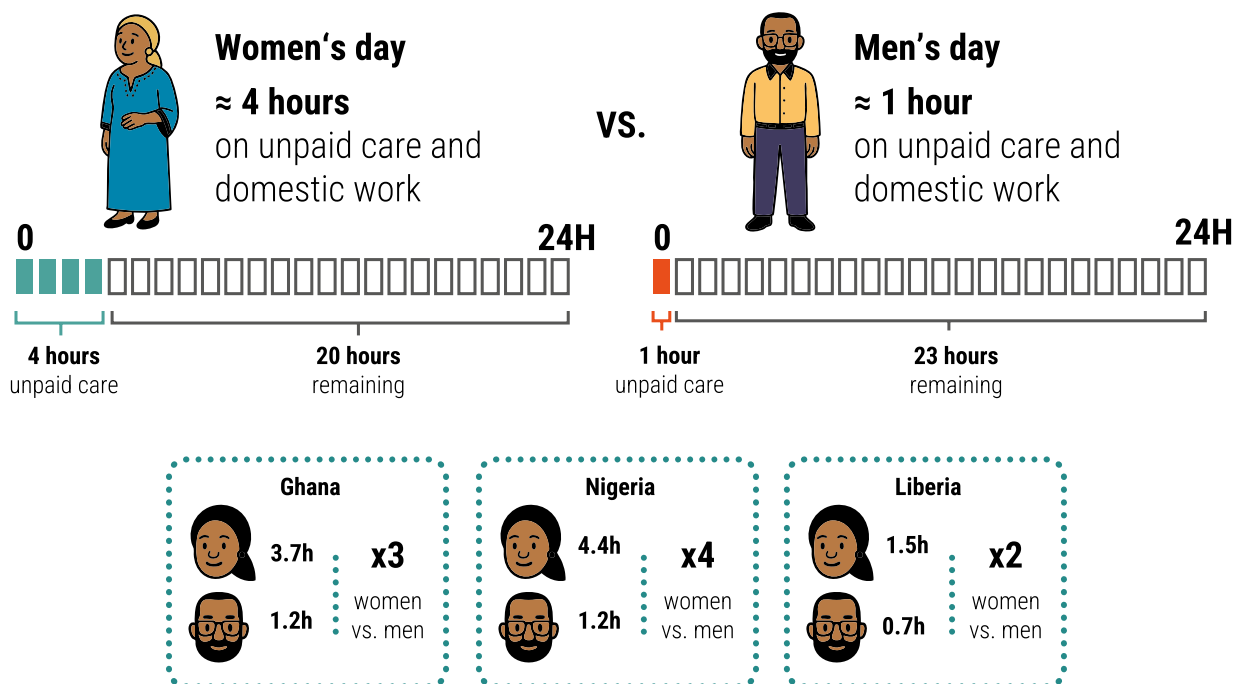
Key Evidence Relevant to Local Governments

Gaps in local infrastructure and services have direct consequences for household well-being, productivity, and local economic development. When access to water, clean energy, transport, childcare, health services, and other basic services is limited, households compensate through additional unpaid care and domestic work, crowding out time for paid work, education, rest, and other productive activities, and often resulting in time poverty (Population Reference Bureau 2026)¹.

This matters for local governments because time poverty is not only a household issue: it can reduce income generation, skills development, civic participation, health, productivity, labor force participation, and economic activity, ultimately weakening the effectiveness and inclusiveness of local development efforts. Across West Africa, women shoulder a significantly greater share of unpaid care and domestic work than men,² constraining their opportunities for paid employment, education, and participation in community and economic life.

Who Carries the Heaviest Time Burden?

Across West Africa, women spend 2 to 4 times more time than men on unpaid care and domestic work.



Limited Access to Clean Energy Creates a Heavy Time Burden



more than 80%
of households in the ECOWAS
region rely on biomass fuels
for cooking and heating.



50 hours per week
spent by women and girls
collecting firewood, cooking, and
fetching water across Africa.



Less time
for paid work, education, rest,
and participation in community
and economic life.

In the ECOWAS region, limited access to clean energy increases the time required to meet household energy needs,³ leaving less time for paid work, education, and other productive activities, and deepening time poverty.⁴

Similar constraints arise where water, sanitation, transport, and childcare services are inadequate, particularly in rural and underserved areas, limiting opportunities for economic participation and local development. Investing in basic services, community-level childcare, and care-supportive infrastructure can reduce unpaid care demands, freeing time and resources for economic participation and inclusive local development.

What This Means for Local Governments

Local governments play a critical role in shaping care outcomes through their responsibilities for planning, budgeting, service delivery, and citizen engagement. Decisions about water, transport, energy, sanitation, health care, childcare, and local infrastructure directly influence the time and effort households spend meeting care needs, with important implications for labor participation, productivity, and local economic development.

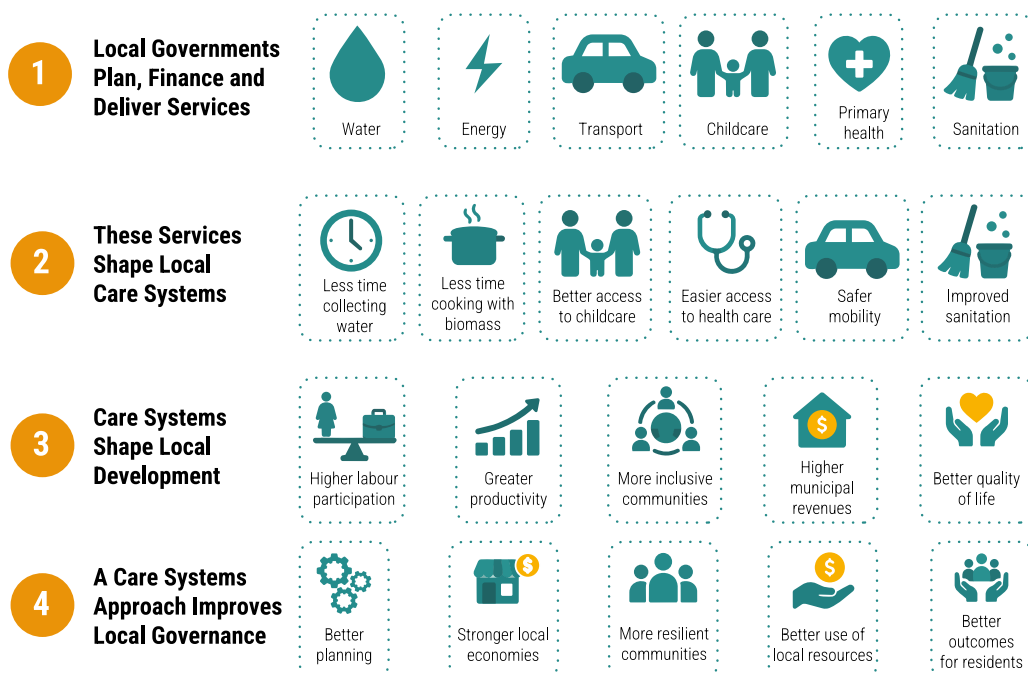
As the level of government closest to citizens, local authorities are often the first to see how gaps in services and infrastructure affect daily life—and the first to be held accountable when services fail to meet community needs. Addressing care is therefore not only a service delivery and development priority, but also a matter of responsive and accountable local governance.

Local governments also provide an important platform for citizens and decision-makers to engage on local priorities, investments, and service delivery. Through inclusive and participatory planning processes, local authorities can ensure that investments respond to the needs of women, caregivers, and underserved communities.

Because care outcomes are shaped by multiple sectors, local governments are well positioned to move beyond fragmented interventions and support a more coordinated and integrated care systems approach. Importantly, many of the actions needed to strengthen care systems—such as improving basic services, expanding community childcare, investing in care-supportive infrastructure, and integrating care considerations into local plans and budgets—can be undertaken at the local level without waiting for broader national reforms.

Care Systems: At the Heart of Local Development

Local governments don't deliver care directly, but they create the conditions that make care easier or harder



Stronger local services reduce care burdens and support inclusive local development.

Priority Actions

Strengthening local care systems requires local governments to recognize care as a core local development issue and integrate care considerations into planning, budgeting, service delivery, and community engagement processes. Local governments can:

- 1 Invest in care-supportive infrastructure** – Fund water supply, clean energy, childcare, health care facilities, roads, public transport, sanitation, and other essential services through local plans and budgets to reduce the time and effort households spend meeting care needs.
- 2 Expand childcare services** – Support provision through local financing mechanisms, partnerships with private and community providers, appropriate regulation, and integration into local service delivery systems.
- 3 Coordinate across sectors** – Align investments and actions across health, early childhood education, water, transport, energy, and social services to address care needs more comprehensively and improve value for money.
- 4 Use local data and evidence** – Draw on administrative records, service access data, local surveys, community assessments, and time-use data to identify underserved populations and improve service targeting.
- 5 Engage citizens and caregivers** – Involve caregivers, service users, civil society organizations, and communities in identifying care-related priorities, ensuring local responses reflect lived realities and strengthen accountability.
- 6 Promote participatory governance** – Enable communities to influence investment decisions, monitor service delivery, and help shape locally appropriate care solutions.

Why This Matters Now

Rapid urbanization, population growth, population aging, changing household structures, and rising labor force participation are increasing care needs and placing growing pressure on households' ability to provide care. These demographic and social trends are reshaping local development and will continue to do so for decades to come. Decisions being made today on land use, infrastructure, transport systems, housing, service delivery, and territorial development will determine whether communities are equipped to meet future care needs and support inclusive, sustainable local development.

Delaying investments in care-supportive infrastructure and services can increase future costs, deepen inequalities, and make care challenges more difficult and expensive to address. Decisions about where

childcare facilities are located, how transport systems are designed, and how water, energy, and other essential services are expanded can either reduce or reinforce future care constraints. These choices influence people's access to employment and services, the time households spend meeting daily care needs, and the strength and resilience of local communities.

At the same time, care is increasingly recognized as a legitimate public policy issue and a growing concern for communities. While much of the policy debate remains concentrated at the national level, local governments have a unique opportunity to lead practical, context-specific responses that support economic participation, advance demographic dividend objectives, and promote inclusive and resilient local development.

Learn More

Explore the full reference report, companion policy briefs developed for different audiences, and additional materials.



[Elevating Unpaid Care Work as a Policy Priority in Francophone West and Central Africa](#). [More information about PRB's work on care](#)



(in English)



(en Français)

Explore Data and Analytical Tools



[National Transfer Accounts \(NTA\)-Country Briefs](#).

Tracks economic production, consumption, and transfers across age groups.



[National Time Transfer Accounts \(NTTA\)](#)

Measures unpaid care and household work across generations.



[Budgeting Sensitive to Demographic Dividend](#)

Assesses whether budgets support demographic dividend priorities.



[Demographic Dividend Monitoring Index](#)

Tracks a country's readiness to achieve a demographic dividend.



[ILO-Measuring Unpaid Domestic and Care Work](#).

Measures unpaid care and domestic work.

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1 Population Reference Bureau, Elevating Unpaid Care Work as a Policy Priority in Francophone Africa (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, July 2026). https://www.prb.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/PRB_Elevating-Unpaid-Care-Work-as-a-Policy-Priority-in-Francophone-Africa.pdf
2 UN Women. 2026. UN Women Care Snapshots for West and Central Africa. UN Women West and Central Africa Regional Office, May 2026. Accessed June 16, 2026. <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2026/05/un-women-care-snapshots-for-west-and-central-africa>
3 ECOWAS Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (ECREEE). "West Africa Clean Cooking Program." Accessed May 22, 2026. <https://www.access.org/west-africa-clean-cooking-program/>
4 Akon, Nathalie Kouassi. "Unleashing Opportunities for Women in Africa with Access to Energy." Africa Can (blog). World Bank. January 25, 2025. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/african/unleashing-opportunities-for-women-in-africa-with-access-to-energy-af-0125>