



Research, Data, and Policy:

Making Care Visible in Public Decisions

African countries face increasingly complex demographic, economic, and social challenges requiring new evidence and analysis to inform decision-making. Governments must navigate rapid demographic change, evolving care needs, human capital priorities, and long-term development commitments amid difficult planning and budgeting decisions. Researchers and statistical institutions play a critical role not only producing data but also generating the evidence and analytical frameworks that inform policy and investment.

The challenge is no longer data availability, but policy translation—ensuring evidence informs planning, budgeting, and decision-making. Experience across Africa shows that transforming data into actionable policy tools requires analytical innovations helping decision-makers connect evidence to public priorities and resource allocation.

Care illustrates this challenge. Although unpaid care work remains invisible in conventional economic and statistical systems, it influences labor markets, human capital development, household welfare, and long-term development outcomes. As governments seek to strengthen investments in human development and social wellbeing, improving the visibility of care within data systems becomes increasingly important. Strengthening the connection between measurement, analysis, and decision-making is essential to ensure care-related evidence informs planning, budgeting, and public policy.

This brief argues unpaid care work represents a major blind spot in current data and analytical systems. Making care visible in statistics is an essential first step toward improving economic measurement, but realizing its value depends on translating evidence into better planning, budgeting, and policymaking.

Making Care Visible Improves Analysis and Public Decisions

How care data move from measurement to policy use



Care
What people
do and need



Measurement
Care enters
data systems



Analysis
Patterns are
revealed



Evidence
Findings inform
priorities



Decision-making
Planning,
budgeting, policy

Better care data improve evidence, planning, and public policy.

Why Care Systems Matter

Care work sustains human capital and supports economic productivity. It influences many outcomes shaping development trajectories, including labor force participation, poverty dynamics, human capital accumulation, demographic change, and economic growth. Thus, understanding these outcomes requires approaches capturing how care is organized, distributed, and experienced across societies.

Care systems comprise the policies, services, infrastructure, institutions, and social norms influencing how care is provided and received. Effective care systems support those requiring care while recognizing, reducing, and redistributing unpaid care responsibilities, which continue falling disproportionately on women and girls.

A care systems perspective helps explain how unpaid

care responsibilities interact with public services, infrastructure, demographic dynamics, labor markets, and social institutions to shape development outcomes. Rather than viewing unpaid care as an isolated household activity, this perspective provides a framework for understanding the broader relationships and constraints influencing economic and social change.

Unpaid care work remains only partially reflected in statistical and analytical frameworks, meaning evidence used to inform planning, budgeting, and policymaking may be incomplete. Strengthening care's integration into national data systems is therefore not simply a measurement issue – it is essential for generating more robust evidence to support more effective policy and investment decisions.

Key Evidence Relevant to Researchers and Statistical Institutions

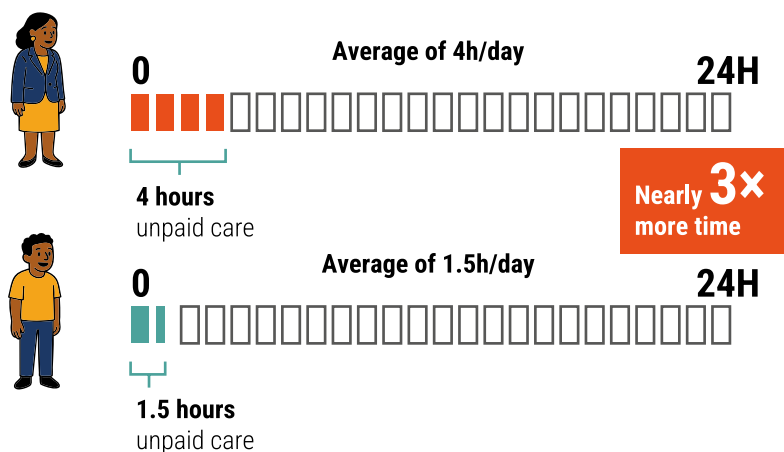
Unpaid domestic and care work makes a substantial contribution to economic activity, yet much of it remains outside standard economic accounting systems, limiting conventional measures' ability to fully capture the drivers of economic activity and wellbeing.¹

Unpaid Care Work Remains a Major Blind Spot in Economic Measurement



Time-use data reveal what conventional labour data miss

Average time spent on unpaid care work per day in sub-Saharan Africa



Across sub-Saharan Africa, women consistently spend far more time than men on unpaid care work.² This disparity shapes how women and men allocate their time across paid and unpaid activities, influencing labor force participation, employment, income generation, poverty dynamics, productivity, and inequality—patterns often difficult to understand using conventional labor market and household data alone.³ By making care visible, time-use data provide a more complete understanding of the factors shaping economic and social outcomes.

Demographic transitions, including fertility decline, population aging,⁴ changing household structures, and evolving dependency patterns, are reshaping both the demand for and provision of care. These shifts raise new analytical and policy questions traditional frameworks may not fully capture. Researchers are increasingly developing approaches integrating demographic and care-related evidence to better understand how changing population structures affect care needs, human capital investments, labor markets, and public expenditure priorities.

As fertility declines and dependency burdens decrease, countries may experience a demographic dividend, whereby a larger share of the population enters working age. Realizing this opportunity is not automatic; it requires sustained investments in human

capital, employment opportunities, and enabling institutions. Frameworks such as the Demographic Dividend Monitoring Index (DDMI) and Budgeting Sensitive to the Demographic Dividend (BSDD) provide practical tools for tracking progress and ensuring policy and budget priorities support demographic transformation.

Beyond generating data, researchers and statisticians must ensure that measurement frameworks capture the full range of economic and social activities shaping development outcomes. Better data on care can improve understanding of labor markets, demographic change, household welfare, and economic productivity, while strengthening the evidence base for planning, budgeting, and policymaking.

What This Means for Researchers and Statistical Institutions

Current data systems do not fully capture unpaid care work, leaving important dimensions of economic activity and household welfare poorly understood. Without care data, policymakers lack a complete picture of labor force participation, economic dependency, poverty dynamics, and household contributions to human capital development and productivity. Important questions therefore remain unanswered, including how care responsibilities shape participation in paid work, how changing population structures affect care needs over time, and how these dynamics influence the effectiveness of investments in health and education.

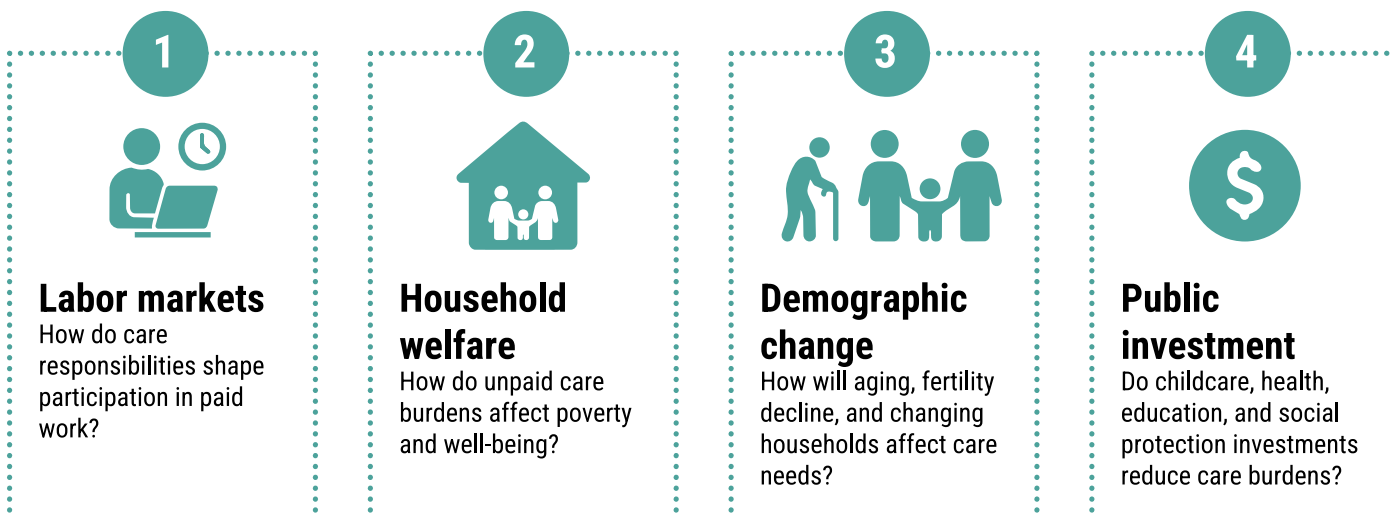
The lack of standardized and regularly collected care data also limits the ability of researchers, statistical

institutions, and policymakers to monitor changes in care responsibilities over time and across populations. This makes it difficult to assess shifts in unpaid care burdens, evaluate the effects of investments in childcare and other care services, compare patterns across regions and countries, or anticipate emerging care needs associated with demographic change and population aging. As a result, the evidence needed for planning, budgeting, and policy design may remain incomplete.

Strengthening care measurement can reduce analytical blind spots in economic and social statistics while improving the completeness and policy relevance of national data systems.

Without Care Data, Key Policy Questions Remain Unanswered

Why better care measurement matters for planning, budgeting, and policy design



Priority Actions

To inform planning, budgeting, and policy decisions, researchers and statistical institutions must strengthen the systems, methodologies, and analytical tools making unpaid care visible within economic and social statistics. The following actions provide practical entry points for improving care measurement, strengthening analytical frameworks, and ensuring care-related evidence informs policy and resource allocation decisions.

1 Expand and institutionalize regular time use surveys, strengthening national capacity to analyze and apply the data to inform labor market, human capital, and demographic change.

2 Integrate care into national accounting frameworks—through satellite accounts and care-integrated Social Accounting Matrices (SAMs)—making unpaid care work's contribution visible within economic analysis and providing a more complete picture of production, resource allocation, and wellbeing.

3 Apply National Time Transfer Accounts (NTTA) and related demographic tools to analyze intergenerational transfers of time and care—deepening understanding of how demographic change, population aging, and shifting dependency ratios affect care demand and future investment needs.

4 Strengthen collaboration among researchers, national statistical offices, and policymakers to align care-related data collection and analysis with decision-making needs—drawing on frameworks such as BSDD to translate evidence into planning, budgeting, and investment decisions.

5 Develop and apply harmonized methodologies and standards to improve cross-country comparability and trend analysis—ensuring care-related evidence is generated consistently and used to inform planning, budgeting, and policymaking, rather than remaining a one-time research exercise.

Why This Matters Now

Strengthening care-related data systems is essential to ensure that statistical and analytical frameworks keep pace with changing demographic, economic, and social realities.

Researchers and statistical institutions have a central role to play in this process. By strengthening the measurement and analysis of care and integrating it into existing data systems and analytical frameworks, they can improve understanding of labor markets,

demographic change, human capital development, and household welfare — ensuring that evidence remains relevant to emerging policy questions and contributes to more informed planning, budgeting, and policy decisions.

The challenge is not simply to generate new data, but to ensure that evidence is routinely integrated into the institutions, analytical frameworks, and policy processes that guide decision-making.

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 International Labour Organization, n.d. Measuring Unpaid Domestic and Care Work. ILOSTAT. Accessed May 30, 2026. <https://ilostat ilo.org/topics/unpaid-work/measuring-unpaid-domestic-and-care-work/>

2 Kolovich et al., "Gender Inequality and Care Work," in Gender Equality and Economic Development in Sub-Saharan Africa (Washington, DC: IMF, 2024).

3 International Labour Organization, 2018. The Unpaid Care Work and the Labour Market: An Analysis of Time Use Data Based on the Latest World Compilation of Time-Use Surveys. Geneva: International Labour Organization. https://www ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@igreports/@gender/documents/publication/wcms_732791.pdf

4 Vicki A. Freedman et al., "The Changing Demography of Late-Life Family Caregiving: A Research Agenda to Understand Future Care Networks for an Aging U.S. Population," The Gerontologist 64, no. 2 (2024): gnad036, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnad036>.