

# The Indispensable Role of Unpaid Care Workers in Early Childhood Development in Africa

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the critical role of unpaid care workers in early childhood development (ECD) across Africa, highlighting their indispensable contributions despite facing systemic challenges. These caregivers, predominantly women, provide essential nurturing and support during children's formative years, yet they often lack access to resources, training, and formal recognition (ILO, 2023; APHRC, 2023). The gender disparities in unpaid care work are pronounced, with women shouldering a disproportionate burden that restricts their participation in formal education and employment (Stats SA, 2021). The study reviews existing interventions, focusing on the work of organisations like the Early Learning Resource Unit (ELRU). ELRU provides comprehensive support to caregivers through home visiting, early learning playgroups, and centre-based services, enhancing cognitive development and building caregiver capacity (ELRU, 2022). To strengthen these efforts, the article proposes several recommendations. Collaborative partnerships between ELRU and other stakeholders can amplify impact by addressing systemic issues such as unpaid stipends for ECD centres (LRC, 2024). Policy advocacy is crucial for reforming policies to benefit unpaid care workers, including their inclusion in the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) and tax benefits for childcare expenses (Harambee, 2023).

Expanding capacity-building initiatives is vital, involving comprehensive training modules tailored to informal caregivers' needs (ELRU, 2022). Establishing more community-based ECD programmes can enhance access to quality childcare services and foster collective responsibility for care work (APHRC, 2023). Mobilising resources to support ELRU's programmes is critical, ensuring consistent financial support for ECD centres (ETDP SETA, 2020). This research underscores the importance of addressing unpaid care workers' needs as a strategic investment in Africa's future. By reducing the burden of unpaid care work and enhancing support systems, Africa can unlock its children's potential while advancing gender equality and fostering inclusive economic growth. Unpaid care workers are not merely caregivers but architects of community-driven educational progress and enablers of sustainable development, shaping future generations equipped to drive positive change across Africa.

**Keywords:** Unpaid Care Work, Early Childhood Development, Gender Equality, Care Economy, Sustainable Development

## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood development (ECD) is widely recognised as a pivotal and highly sensitive phase in a child's life, laying the foundational groundwork for lifelong learning, overall well-being, and future success (Shonkoff et al., 2021). This critical period, spanning from birth to age six, is characterised by rapid growth and development across physical, emotional, cognitive, and social domains. While formal educators and parents are often acknowledged as central figures in this developmental process, unpaid care workers—comprising family members, community volunteers, and informal caregivers—play an indispensable yet underappreciated role. These caregivers are responsible for nurturing children's development during their formative years, providing essential love, consistent care, and invaluable guidance (Engle et al., 2011).

The contributions of unpaid care workers are multifaceted and far-reaching. They not only support children's immediate needs but also foster an environment conducive to healthy development. This includes creating

opportunities for social interaction, promoting cognitive stimulation, and ensuring emotional security elements that are crucial for children's long-term outcomes (Hart & Risley, 1995). However, despite their vital contributions, unpaid care workers face systemic challenges that limit their ability to provide optimal care and comprehensive support. These challenges include inadequate access to resources, lack of formal recognition, and limited economic compensation for their labour.

Unpaid care work constitutes a significant component of ECD systems across Africa and South Africa. In South Africa, women spend an average of 30.5 hours per week on unpaid care work compared to 12.2 hours for men, highlighting stark gender disparities in caregiving responsibilities (Stats SA, 2021). The ECD workforce is overwhelmingly female, with women comprising 95% of practitioners. Yet many caregivers operate within informal settings and earn minimal wages often between R500 and R5,000 per month despite their critical role in child development (UNICEF South Africa, 2020). Furthermore, approximately 53% of children aged 0–6 years were not enrolled in ECD programmes in South Africa as of 2020 (Department of Social Development, 2020). These figures underscore significant gaps in accessibility and support structures for caregivers.

Across Africa, similar patterns emerge. Women disproportionately shoulder unpaid care responsibilities while facing barriers to formal employment and education. For instance, in Zanzibar, the establishment of childcare centres has enabled women like Munira Abdallah Abdallah to return to income-generating activities such as sea moss farming while ensuring safe childcare for their grandchildren (UN Women Tanzania, 2024). Such initiatives highlight the transformative potential of recognising and addressing unpaid care work through policy interventions. By investing in childcare services, not only can women's economic participation be enhanced, but child development outcomes can also be improved, leading to more equitable and sustainable societies.

Despite its critical role in fostering child development outcomes, unpaid care work remains undervalued within economic systems and largely invisible in policy frameworks. This invisibility perpetuates economic inequities and restricts opportunities for caregivers to participate fully in formal labour markets. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-dimensional approach that includes recognising unpaid care work within economic metrics, improving remuneration for ECD practitioners, and expanding access to quality childcare services. Evidence from Burkina Faso and Kenya demonstrates that investing in childcare services not only boosts women's employment but also enhances child development outcomes and household incomes (World Bank Africa Gender Innovation Lab, 2024).

This article seeks to shed light on the indispensable role of unpaid care workers in ECD systems across Africa. By presenting compelling evidence from relevant studies and interventions, it aims to underscore the importance of supporting these caregivers through targeted policies and investments. Recognising their contributions is essential not only for advancing gender equity but also for fostering sustainable development across the region. Ultimately, acknowledging and addressing the challenges faced by unpaid care workers will be crucial in ensuring that Africa's future generations receive the nurturing and support they need to thrive.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The Hidden Workforce: Unpaid Care Workers as Pillars of African Communities

Unpaid care workers, predominantly women, form a vital yet often invisible workforce sustaining early childhood development (ECD) across Africa. The African Union (2020) estimates that approximately 46% of the continent's population engages in unpaid care work, with women—often grandmothers, mothers, aunts, or community volunteers—constituting the majority. These caregivers dedicate substantial time and energy to nurturing young children without financial compensation, motivated by strong cultural norms that frame childcare as a collective community responsibility (Nsamenang, 2006).

Their daily activities extend beyond basic care to include preparing nutritious meals, maintaining safe and stimulating environments, and providing emotional support essential for healthy development. These efforts begin early and often continue through late hours, reflecting a deep commitment to children's well-being. Research consistently shows that such attentive caregiving during early childhood significantly improves school performance, cognitive abilities, and emotional resilience (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007).

Unpaid care workers actively promote language development through stimulating conversations, storytelling, and singing, which are foundational for literacy and communication skills (Hart & Risley, 1995). They foster problem-solving and creativity via structured play, which supports critical thinking and resilience (Singer et al., 2006). Moreover, the secure, loving environments they create nurture social-emotional competence, enabling children to manage emotions and build positive relationships (Bowlby, 1988; Fisher et al., 2013). In many underserved and remote regions, where formal ECD services are scarce, unpaid care workers serve as primary educators and caregivers, extending their influence beyond immediate families to the broader community (Sifuna & Nambiro, 2019; UNICEF, 2017). They often rely on traditional knowledge and local resources to support holistic child development despite limited institutional support.

However, these caregivers face significant challenges, including lack of formal recognition, inadequate access to resources, and the physical and emotional toll of caregiving responsibilities, which often include caring for their own families alongside others (African Union, 2020).

### **The Impact unpaid care workers have on Early Cognitive Development: Nurturing Young Minds**

The significant influence of dedicated unpaid care workers on sustainable early childhood development in diverse African countries routinely transcends both basic caretaking duties and routine childminding, instead regularly providing enhanced support and crucially enabling young minds to reliably bloom and consistently flourish. A wealth of peer-reviewed research unquestionably underscores the long-term and invariably profound effect that regularly delivered quality care during a child's formative years invariably has on their sustained long-term cognitive and increasingly important emotional development.

Ever-increasing research, actively supported by the rapidly growing number of diverse studies in the field, consistently affirms that children who consistently receive demonstrably high quality care during their formative years invariably tend to perform considerably better in all aspects of their schooling, and routinely exhibit enhanced cognitive and increasingly significant emotional development throughout the many subsequent stages of their ongoing lives (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007; Walker et al., 2011). However, the main and increasingly recognised catalyst behind this undoubtedly impressive and hugely significant transformation is reliably attributed to the tireless dedication of committed unpaid care workers who, increasingly through their patient daily interactions and their reliably heartfelt engagement, successfully facilitate the routinely critical aspects of sustained cognitive development.

#### **Language Development:**

Consistently committed unpaid care workers are rightly recognised as the increasingly important architects of enhanced language development right across the continent. Their increasingly nurturing environments invariably encourage young children to successfully explore and fully embrace the endlessly fascinating world of words and sustained communication skills. They also reliably engage in lively and consistently stimulating conversations, eagerly share captivating stories from the local community, and diligently sing melodic songs, creating and fully maintaining a fertile ground for both consistent language acquisition and greatly improved literacy. In these increasingly commonplace moments of routinely shared and consistently stimulating communication, the participating children not only markedly expand their existing vocabulary but also routinely grasp the many intricacies of effective conversation, consistently learning the fine art of self-expression and increasingly understanding the complex nuances of positive social interaction. Significantly, consistent exposure to rich language environments throughout early childhood is unquestionably and increasingly positively correlated with long-term literacy development and sustained academic success (Hart & Risley, 1995).

#### **Problem-Solving Skills:**

Consistent and regular play has long been recognised as one of the essential cornerstones of ongoing early childhood development, and diligent unpaid care workers continue to reliably harness its inherent and ongoing power to successfully stimulate and encourage improved problem-solving skills in the participating children. Whether it is painstakingly unravelling the endless mysteries of a particularly difficult jigsaw puzzle, persistently stacking a variety of coloured building blocks, or perhaps enthusiastically embarking on a range of stimulating

creative adventures, these consistently hard-working caregivers consistently instil the intrinsic joy of fully structured exploration and enthusiastic discovery. Through active participation in such carefully planned activities, the enthusiastically participating children not only reliably develop their increasingly important critical thinking skills but also invariably cultivate enhanced creativity and consistently improving resilience. Significantly, they typically and routinely learn to consistently approach an ever-increasing range of potentially challenging situations with greatly increased curiosity and demonstrably increased confidence, building a fundamentally solid foundation for what is very often a lifelong love of sustained learning. Highly structured and reliably supervised play-based learning is an officially recognised and continually refined pedagogical approach that consistently promotes sustained cognitive development and enhanced problem-solving skills throughout the entire early years stage (Singer et al., 2006).

### **Social-Emotional Competence:**

The enduring emotional support regularly provided by unpaid care workers across diverse African communities is often immeasurable and cannot be readily quantified or simply written down in a ledger. In the consistently safe and reliably loving haven that they routinely and diligently create, participating children reliably learn to carefully navigate the frequently complex and increasingly fascinating landscape of a continually increasing range of emotions. They also reliably become adept at readily expressing their feelings and emotions with an increasingly sophisticated range of self-expression techniques, carefully and consistently managing their continually evolving emotional responses in a sensitive and highly appropriate manner, and, most crucially of all, consistently empathising fully with all those who are around them. These carefully developed and consistently refined essential skills are, beyond any reasonable doubt, one of the indisputable bedrocks of sustained emotional well-being and consistently form the cornerstone of what, in all probability, will become highly productive and mutually supportive long-term social relationships, crucially helping young children to reliably become not only academically competent learners but also impressively emotionally resilient individuals. Importantly, the existence of a demonstrably secure and clearly supportive attachment relationship with a designated caregiver is fundamentally essential for ongoing healthy social-emotional development throughout the most formative months and years of early childhood (Bowlby, 1988).

### **Filling Gaps in Access to ECD Services: Community Guardians of Early Education**

Across many regions of the vast African continent, where ready access to formal early childhood education services invariably remains highly limited and increasingly inconsistent, frequently committed unpaid care workers consistently emerge as one of the essential bridges reliably connecting young children to the continuously expanding world of ongoing learning and consistently sensitive and reliably structured care. Their consistently important role routinely extends well beyond their immediate families, reliably embodying the widely recognised spirit of continually shared responsibility and ongoing community-driven progress.

### **A Beacon of Hope in Educational Deserts:**

Across many communities in diverse African countries, especially those reliably nestled in the more remote and consistently underserved regions, ready access to formal early childhood education services remains, for many, something that can only realistically be described as chasing an intangible mirage across a barren educational desert. In these frequently challenging educational deserts, hard-working unpaid care workers consistently shine as ever reliable beacons of hope, routinely stepping in to fill a significant and increasingly concerning void, reliably ensuring that participating young children consistently receive all of the early education and reliable care they both unquestionably need and fundamentally deserve. Crucially, their enduring commitment invariably goes well beyond the often narrowly defined call of duty, routinely transcending the perceived boundaries of their own immediate families and typically encompassing the consistently wider and more extensive local community.

### **Creating a Web of Shared Responsibility:**

Consistent unpaid care workers, who are often rightly referred to as the dedicated "community guardians of early education", do not reliably limit their consistent influence solely to their close and immediate family kin. Instead,



they typically embrace a clear sense of continually shared responsibility, routinely recognising that the sustained growth and consistent long-term development of every single child within the wider community actively matters. In this way, they are consistently instrumental in the successful creation of a reliably stable and highly supportive web of increasingly interconnected care and long-term learning, crucially nurturing not only individual and readily identifiable children but also proactively nurturing the reliably consistent long-term aspirations of the entire and increasingly cohesive community. This increasingly well-established ethos of willingly shared responsibility remains highly consistent with the long-established cultural norms.

### **Challenges Faced by Unpaid Care Workers in Early Childhood Development:**

Consistent unpaid care workers, who routinely perform an essential and increasingly important role in ongoing ECD throughout the African continent, nevertheless routinely face a number of often severely challenging situations and events that often hinder their clearly limited ability to consistently provide the necessary optimal care and widespread support.

#### **Lack of Recognition:**

Hard-working unpaid care workers routinely find themselves readily overlooked and widely undervalued within their particular societies and communities. Their reliably difficult work, which includes feeding, bathing, nurturing, and even reliably educating constantly increasing numbers of young children, consistently goes increasingly unrecognised and similarly unacknowledged (Tudge et al., 2020). This widely recognised lack of essential recognition is a major and increasingly concerning problem, not only directly affecting their own long-term self-esteem and continued motivation but also having increasingly broader implications for the sustained overall well-being of all those vulnerable children that they diligently care for on an ongoing basis (Tudge et al., 2020). Crucially, this consistently widespread absence of easily quantifiable recognition increasingly perpetuates the demonstrably unrealistic notion that all caregiving is not a legitimate and ever more essential occupation, which in turn consistently exacerbates the challenges routinely faced by all those increasingly committed unpaid care workers. More specifically, the long-term undervaluation of their increasingly complex care work is routinely intertwined with a more general tendency towards a deeply ingrained gender inequality, since much of this work is typically perceived as "women's work" and therefore readily devalued by many (Razavi, 2007).

#### **Limited Access to Resources:**

Another increasing significant challenge that constantly confronts dedicated unpaid care workers across the diverse African continent is their consistently limited access to even the most basic and routinely essential resources that they invariably require on a daily basis (Lansford et al., 2018). Routinely, and in far too many different cases, these dedicated individuals readily lack ongoing access to proper and essential healthcare, properly nutritious meals, safe water and modern sanitation, and even the basic and age-appropriate educational materials for the various constantly increasing numbers of children that they are dedicated to diligently caring for (Lansford et al., 2018). A sustained lack of even the most basic of resources can only serve to quickly hinder both a child's sustained physical and their ongoing cognitive development, reliably leading to perpetuating cycles of abject poverty and increasing social inequality. To tackle this increasingly concerning situation, adequate support systems, easily accessible financial assistance, access to information, and an ever-increasing range of carefully structured training opportunities must quickly be put in place to reliably ensure that highly committed unpaid care workers are routinely given the ongoing support that they so desperately need to enable them to provide the best possible quality of care for each of the many vulnerable children in their care.

#### **Heavy Burden of Work:**

The workload of increasingly committed unpaid care workers across the vast African continent is becoming increasingly overwhelming and fundamentally unsustainable (Engle et al., 2007). They now routinely juggle multiple responsibilities on a daily basis, including domestic household chores, ongoing and increasingly intensive caregiving responsibilities for a great many of their local children, often including their own close family, tending to ever-increasing numbers of increasingly elderly or noticeably sick family members, and, in many cases, having to hold down an increasingly demanding and often poorly paid job in the informal sector to

consistently try to make ends meet. This consistently increasing burden of work can only too easily lead to long-term and often chronic stress, overwhelming fatigue, and full-blown burnout, quickly leading to a noticeable decrease in both the quality and consistency of the essential and ongoing care provided for the vulnerable children (Engle et al., 2007; Cameron & Sheppard, 2006). Consistently, as a direct consequence of these all too widespread shortcomings and increasingly difficult challenges, the often demonstrably very real burden of their frequently extensive and ever-increasing responsibilities, routinely including diligently caring for their own immediate families alongside the increasing numbers of vulnerable children they routinely look after, can readily become both physically and emotionally demanding and almost inevitably take a sustained and ultimately debilitating long-term toll on all of those hard-working individuals concerned.

### Source Selection and Evidence Synthesis

This review synthesises peer-reviewed research, reports from international organisations (e.g., African Union, UNICEF), and foundational child development studies (e.g., Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007; Hart & Risley, 1995). Sources were selected based on relevance to unpaid care work and ECD in African contexts, methodological rigor, and recency. Thematic analysis identified core contributions of unpaid care workers and challenges they face, forming the basis for practical recommendations.

### Summary of Key Empirical Insights and Recommendations

Empirical Insight	Practical Recommendation
Women perform majority of unpaid care work (African Union, 2020)	Recognise and formalise unpaid care work in policy
Quality care improves cognitive and emotional development (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007)	Invest in caregiver training and support programmes
Unpaid care workers fill gaps in formal ECD services (Sifuna & Nambiro, 2019)	Expand community-based ECD initiatives
Rich language environments enhance literacy (Hart & Risley, 1995)	Promote caregiver engagement in language activities
Secure attachments foster social-emotional skills (Bowlby, 1988)	Provide psychosocial support for caregivers

This concise and focused review highlights the indispensable role of unpaid care workers in African ECD systems and provides a clear foundation for targeted policy and programme interventions.

### Advocating for Recognition and Support:

Recognising, visibly valuing and actively supporting unpaid care workers throughout ECD is routinely becoming one of the most vital and increasingly important tasks and consistently delivering on that widely recognised task is not merely a continuing matter of social justice and increasingly sustainable long-term equity. In reality, it is also becoming more widely appreciated that one of the most readily effective and far-sighted strategic imperatives should increasingly focus on consistently achieving both realistic and entirely sustainable long-term development goals and fully ensuring the readily demonstrable well-being of future generations in all societies and cultures (UNICEF, 2019). It also routinely acknowledges and underpins the increasingly fundamental importance of each and every member of the long-term chain in nurturing the next generation of fully engaged citizens and in then actively contributing to building a reliably healthy, demonstrably equitable, and demonstrably thriving society that readily delivers for all its members. As a clearly demonstrable consequence of such readily deliverable recognition, it also consistently increases their enduring self-esteem, greatly improves long-term motivation, and reliably enhances their all-important sense of both independence and long-term

personal agency, greatly empowering them not only to continue in providing high-quality and readily accessible care to all those that demonstrably require it, but also to readily advocate for their own well-being, their increasingly important rights, and their reliably demonstrable and growing needs (Foster et al., 2017).

Crucially, providing carefully targeted access to a comprehensive package of demonstrably effective and reliably sustainable resources, including ready access to essential and ongoing healthcare, carefully designed and nutritious food and diet plans, carefully structured opportunities for ongoing and reliable long-term education, consistent provision of essential social services, and easy access to targeted financial assistance, can often dramatically improve the long-term overall well-being of both dedicated caregivers and the many vulnerable children that they routinely care for (Lansford et al., 2018). Furthermore, actively addressing the heavy long-term burden of work through the careful implementation of well-planned policies, the active encouragement of the adoption of long-term paid family leave measures, and the provision of consistent and carefully monitored access to affordable and appropriate childcare solutions, are demonstrably essential steps to consistently reduce undue stress on dedicated unpaid care workers, demonstrably enabling them to provide reliably better quality and more sustainable ongoing care for their various children and to then actively pursue their own personal and long-term professional aspirations to boot.

In addition, ongoing advocacy efforts should reliably focus on continuing to carefully promote policy changes that not only explicitly recognise the undeniably valuable and increasingly important role of often unpaid caregivers throughout the existing ECD sector but also routinely ensure that their often very clear and readily demonstrable voices are reliably heard and that their own reliably demonstrable needs are increasingly addressed in future national and regional development plans and in increasingly appropriate budget allocations (DSD, 2015; Budlender, 2008). Ultimately, creating a demonstrably supportive and demonstrably enabling environment for all those dedicated unpaid care workers is becoming one of the most demonstrably essential tasks for both carefully unlocking the readily apparent and increasingly important potential of all of Africa's diverse children and consistently building a more just and greatly more prosperous long-term future for each and every one of them (UNICEF, 2019).

## CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND A ROADMAP FOR ACTION

Unpaid care workers, predominantly women, are the cornerstone of early childhood development (ECD) systems across Africa. Their contributions, which include nurturing, educating, and providing emotional support to young children, are vital for shaping future generations. Yet, these caregivers operate in conditions of systemic inequity, facing challenges such as limited resources, inadequate training, and a lack of formal recognition. Despite their indispensable role, unpaid care work remains undervalued and invisible in policy frameworks and economic systems (ILO, 2023; APHRC, 2023).

The Early Learning Resource Unit (ELRU) has been instrumental in supporting unpaid care workers through comprehensive programmes that enhance the cognitive development and executive functioning skills of vulnerable young children. ELRU's interventions include home visiting, early learning playgroups, and centre-based support, all aimed at building the capacity of caregivers and providing essential services such as nutrition, health, and social support (ELRU, 2022). However, to further strengthen ELRU's work and address the broader challenges faced by unpaid care workers, several recommendations emerge:

### High level recommendations

1. **Collaborative Partnerships:** Other organisations can partner with ELRU to amplify its impact. For instance, collaborating with groups like the Legal Resources Centre (LRC) could help address systemic issues such as unpaid stipends for ECD centres, ensuring sustainability and stability for caregivers.
2. **Policy Advocacy:** Partners can support ELRU in advocating for policy reforms that benefit unpaid care workers. This includes lobbying for the inclusion of informal workers in the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) and advocating for tax benefits for childcare expenses to alleviate financial burdens on caregivers.
3. **Capacity Building and Training:** Organisations can assist ELRU in expanding its training programmes for caregivers. This could involve developing more comprehensive modules on child nutrition, health, and

cognitive development, tailored to the needs of informal caregivers.

4. **Community-Based Initiatives:** Partners can work with ELRU to establish more community-based ECD programmes. These initiatives can provide essential support to caregivers, enhance access to quality childcare services, and foster collective responsibility for care work.
5. **Resource Mobilisation:** Collaborative efforts can focus on mobilising resources to support ELRU's programmes. This includes securing funding for centre-based development and enrichment programmes, ensuring that ECD centres receive consistent financial support to maintain quality services.

### Proposed Action Plan: Strengthening Support for Unpaid Care Workers in ECD

This action plan delineates specific, practical steps for key stakeholders in the early childhood development (ECD) sector across Africa to improve support for unpaid care workers, enhance ECD programmes, and drive better outcomes for children.

#### Polymakers: Creating an Enabling Environment

**Goal:** Establish policies and allocate resources that recognise, value, and support unpaid care work as integral to national development.

Action	Timeline	Expected Outcome	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
Formal Recognition and Integration	1-2 Years	Unpaid care work explicitly included in national ECD strategies and policy frameworks, acknowledging its economic and social value.	Number of national ECD strategies and policy frameworks that include specific references to unpaid care work.
Dedicated Funding Allocation	Ongoing	Increased budgetary allocations for ECD, with a specific percentage earmarked for programmes supporting unpaid care workers.	Percentage of ECD budget allocated to programmes directly supporting unpaid care workers.
Gender-Sensitive Policies	2-3 Years	Increased male involvement in childcare and reduced burden on women through legislative and public awareness initiatives.	Number of fathers taking parental leave; shifts in societal attitudes towards gender roles in childcare.
Improved Data Collection	1-2 Years	Comprehensive data on unpaid care work informing evidence-based policymaking and targeted interventions.	Number of national surveys conducted on unpaid care work; availability and accessibility of data for researchers.
Social Protection Mechanisms	3-5 Years	Extension of social protection schemes to include unpaid care workers, providing a safety net and ensuring their economic security.	Number of unpaid care workers covered by social protection schemes; reduction in economic vulnerability among this group.

#### ELRU and Partner Organisations: Empowering at the Grassroots

**Goal:** Enhance the capacity of ELRU and its partners to deliver impactful support to unpaid care workers.

Action	Timeline	Expected Outcome	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
Enhanced Digital Training Platforms	1 Year	Accessible, scalable, and high-quality training available to unpaid care workers in remote areas.	Number of caregivers trained via digital platforms; user satisfaction ratings; certification rates.



Strengthened Community Partnerships	Ongoing	Increased reach and effectiveness of ECD programmes through leveraged local knowledge, resources, and networks.	Number of formal agreements with community stakeholders; participation rates in joint workshops.
Policy Advocacy Initiatives	Ongoing	Policy changes supporting unpaid care workers, including increased ECD funding and inclusion in social security schemes.	Number of policy changes enacted; level of engagement with policymakers; media coverage of advocacy efforts.
Mentorship and Peer Support Programmes	1-2 Years	Ongoing guidance, encouragement, and emotional support for unpaid care workers.	Number of mentorship pairings; participation rates in support groups; caregiver well-being scores.
Provision of Resources and Materials	Ongoing	Increased availability of essential resources (ECD kits, learning materials, nutritious food) to support caregiving activities.	Number of kits distributed; reach of food supplementation programmes; caregiver satisfaction with resources.

### Communities: Fostering Shared Responsibility

**Goal:** Create a supportive community environment that recognises and values unpaid care work and actively promotes ECD.

Action	Timeline	Expected Outcome	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
Culture of Shared Responsibility	Ongoing	Increased community awareness of ECD importance and active support for unpaid care workers.	Number of community events organised; shifts in community attitudes towards shared childcare.
Support for Local Caregivers	Ongoing	Enhanced recognition and resources for local caregivers, including respite care and material donations.	Number of caregivers receiving support; resources provided by the community.
Participation in ECD Programmes	Ongoing	Increased enrolment in and support for community-based ECD programmes.	Enrolment rates in ECD programmes; volunteer hours contributed; funding raised.

### International Organisations: Catalysing Global Support

**Goal:** Provide sustained financial and technical assistance to ECD programmes in Africa and promote global awareness of the importance of unpaid care work.

Action	Timeline	Expected Outcome	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
1. Financial and Technical Assistance	Ongoing	Increased funding and expertise supporting ECD programmes, particularly those empowering unpaid care workers.	Amount of funding allocated to ECD programmes in Africa; number of technical experts deployed; capacity of local organisations strengthened.
2. Global Awareness Campaigns	Ongoing	Enhanced global understanding of the value of unpaid care work and its impact on sustainable development.	Reach and impact of awareness campaigns; policy changes advocated; shifts in global attitudes.

ELRU's existing work demonstrates the potential for transformative change when caregivers are empowered with the right resources and support. By strengthening partnerships, advocating for policy reforms, and expanding capacity-building initiatives, other stakeholders can enhance ELRU's impact and contribute to a more equitable and sustainable ECD system across Africa. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can create a more supportive and enabling environment for unpaid care workers, enhance ECD programmes, and improve outcomes for children across Africa. Collective, sustained effort is essential to achieve these goals and build stronger, more equitable, and more sustainable communities. This will contribute to building stronger, more equitable, and more sustainable communities for generations to come.

In conclusion, supporting unpaid care workers is not merely an act of recognition it is an investment in Africa's future. Long-term policies must focus on reducing the burden of unpaid care work through increased access to well-resourced childcare services, formal recognition of caregivers' contributions, and equitable redistribution of care responsibilities. By addressing these systemic challenges with targeted interventions, Africa can unlock the potential of its youngest citizens while advancing gender equality and fostering inclusive economic growth.

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