

CARE CURRENCY NEWSLETTER (CACUN)



EDITORIAL NOTE

Welcome to CACUN: Where Care Becomes Currency and Justice Comes Into View

Whether it's in the quiet early morning hours as children are nursed or bathed for school, in the round-the-clock, all-consuming physical and emotional effort to keep elders comfortable and cared for, in the warmth of meals cooked over firewood, or in the cool cup of water drawn from a jerrycan filled at a borehole miles away to hydrate the family, clean the dishes, and cook more meals—care work is everywhere:

Invisible yet
all-sustaining

Overlooked yet
foundational

Unpaid yet
invaluable

What sustains life often goes unseen. What builds economies is rarely counted. What holds communities together is too frequently taken for granted.

This is the paradox of care in Southern Africa, and it is precisely what *Care Currency (CACUN)* exists to confront.

We are glad to welcome you to the inaugural edition of CACUN, a regional platform curated not only to centre care justice, but to stitch care into the heart of all our interconnected struggles from economic justice to climate resilience, from youth organising to the defence of civic space. Because care is not a siloed issue. It is the thread running through everything we fight for.

As Southern Africa faces converging crises of inequality, displacement, climate shocks, and shrinking democratic space, it is care work, often unpaid and feminised, that holds households, economies, and movements together. Yet, it remains structurally invisible. Our work at The Trust challenges this erasure through research, advocacy, and solidarity, and CACUN is our new space to elevate that challenge in public.

EDITORIAL TEAM



Janet Zhou



Nicola Nkhoma



Aliness Mumba

This newsletter is not just information. It is intention. It is a curated blend of evidence, voice, and action:

- We open with a regional policy analysis on the care economy, rooted in the findings of our scoping study across five SADC countries;
- We share first-person narratives from care workers and community organisers living the realities behind our policy asks;
- We offer tools and feminist language to reclaim power, from our Care Dictionary to intersectional youth-led civic reflections;
- We highlight advocacy campaigns, legislative developments, and cultural stories that remind us care is both an economic and political terrain.

Our editorial approach is intersectional by design. This platform will grow to reflect the full ecosystem of our work, including public infrastructure, livelihoods, trade justice, climate justice, and youth action, always filtered through a care lens that reminds us how we live matters just as much as what we fight for.

So, as you read this first issue, we invite you to see care not as a soft issue, but as the structure underneath the struggle and to speak of it in the languages of justice, dignity, and power. We invite and implore you, dear reader, to honour it, to fund it, and to fight for it.

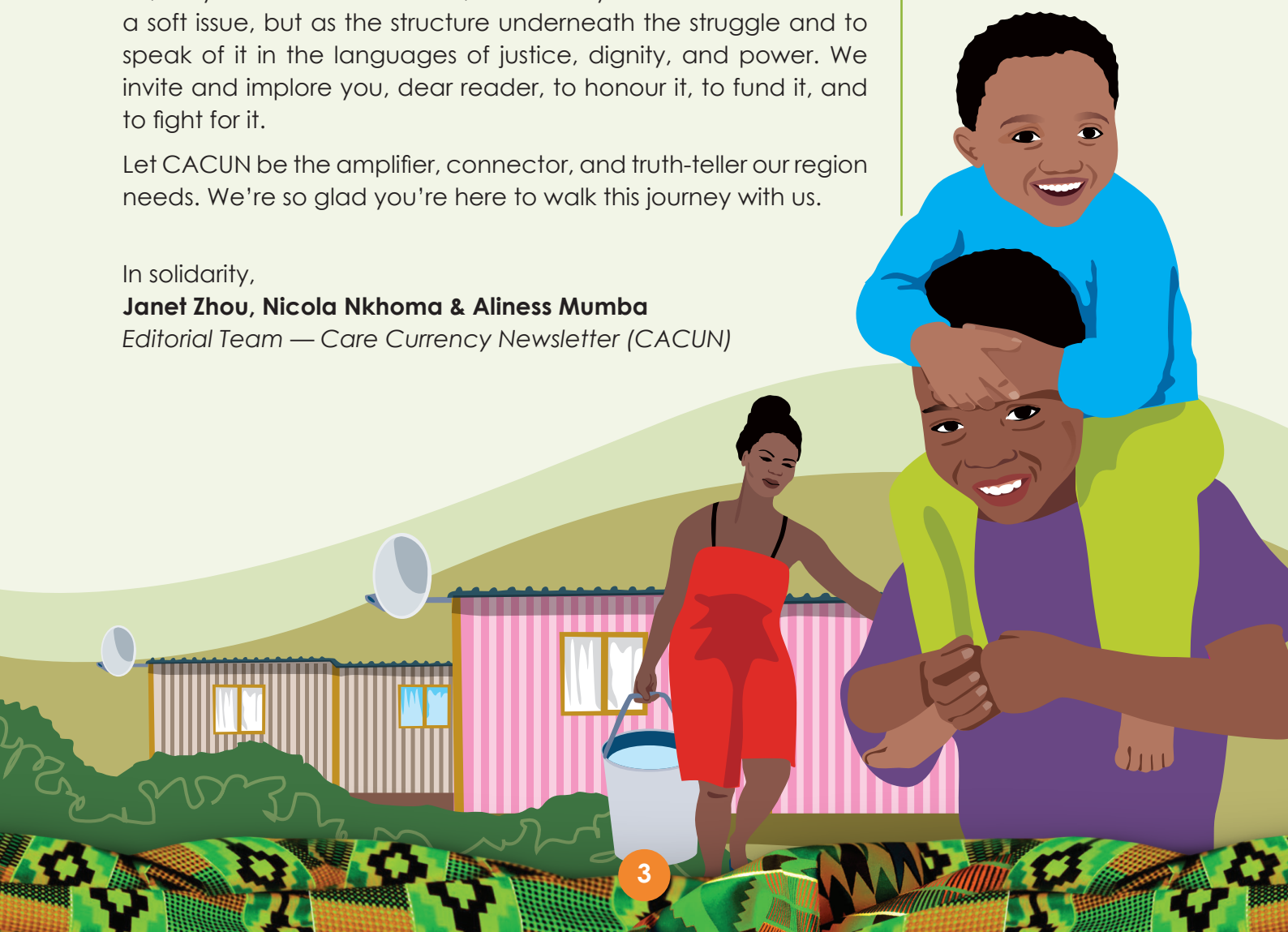
Let CACUN be the amplifier, connector, and truth-teller our region needs. We're so glad you're here to walk this journey with us.

In solidarity,

Janet Zhou, Nicola Nkhoma & Alines Mumba

Editorial Team — Care Currency Newsletter (CACUN)

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A Message from our CEO

We live in extraordinary times. As the world grapples with a cascade of interconnected crises - from the rise of far-right politics to the erosion of democratic gains, from funding shortfalls to threats against civil society - one truth becomes undeniably clear: care is not a luxury, it's a necessity.

Today, we bring you CACUN at a pivotal moment when our region faces unprecedented challenges. The geopolitical landscape is shifting beneath our feet. Nationalism is on the rise while multinational cooperation falters. The global polycrisis touches every corner of our lives, and the funding that has sustained our work for decades is drying up. Yet, amid this turbulence, communities across Southern Africa continue to create solutions, driven by an understanding that caring for one another is not just moral but revolutionary. The spirit of *Seriti* is fanning the momentum

Two Decades of Learning and a Bold New Direction

As The Southern Africa Trust marks 20 years of existence, we're not just reflecting - we're reimagining. Our new bold strategy, *Seriti*, represents a fundamental shift toward more deliberate feminist approaches that ask the key questions about power, agency, voice, resources among others that lead us to place gender justice, women, and youth at the center of everything we do in our quest to end poverty and inequality in the 16 countries where we work in southern Africa.

It is this approach that has necessitated us to shift beyond being just 'intermediaries' and fiscal hosts, to be more active ecosystem players who contribute towards strengthening the civic infrastructure and ecosystem that support communities, while challenging the very politics of philanthropy and partnership models that have limited civic formations' abilities to become more sustainable. Through a new operational model, our programming teams are now physically positioned closer than ever to the communities we serve, because we believe proximity breeds understanding, and understanding drives impact.

The Issues That Matter Most

This inaugural edition of CACUN zooms in on the challenges that have too long evaded scrutiny - the invisible costs of the care economy and the care work - that is largely provided by women and girls, as well as the barriers that keep these majority populations trapped in poverty. We bring stories that speak to:

- **Care justice:** Recognizing that care work is the foundation of every economy
- **Digital rights:** Ensuring technology serves justice, not just profit
- **Energy poverty:** Because power - literal and metaphorical - should belong to everyone
- **Data justice:** Making information a tool for empowerment, not exploitation
- **Youth engagement:** Creating space for young voices to shape their own futures

Voices of Hope

In the pages that follow, you'll hear directly from our partners across the region - community-based organizations, community leaders, and changemakers who understand that care is not women's work alone, but everyone's responsibility. Their stories illuminate a path forward, one where justice isn't an aspiration but a daily practice.

Dig in!

Voices from the Frontlines of Care

The lived experiences of those who embody the care economy every day—often invisibly and without recognition—remind us that care is not just a policy issue; it is a lived reality. Though these voices, through systemic exclusion, often go unheard, the impact of care shouts loudly that care is essential not only to thriving economies but also foundational to building and upholding thriving societies.

Through first-hand narratives, we honour the dignity, resilience, and insight of caregivers across our region.

Care Worker Diaries

Case Study 1: The Journey of Rudo (not her real name)



At dawn, Rudo, a 36-year-old mother of three, waits in a long queue at the Beitbridge Border Post, clutching a small bag with a few personal belongings and the documents that allow her to cross into South Africa for a short stay. She is one of thousands of Zimbabwean women who regularly cross the border to seek work as domestic workers and caregivers in South African households. Unlike formal labour migrants, many women like Rudo lack work permits and proper contracts, making their employment status precarious and their rights as workers almost non-existent. Rudo has travelled between Musina and Johannesburg for five years, working as a live-in nanny for South African families. Every month, she sends remittances to her sister, who cares for Rudo's children in a rural village outside Masvingo.

"I have to make this sacrifice," she says. "If I don't work, my children won't go to school."

However, this arrangement means she can only see her children once every six to 12 months, depending on border restrictions, financial constraints, and her employers' willingness to grant her leave.

Her journey is not without risks. Crossing the border without proper documentation exposes Rudo to exploitation by employers, harassment from authorities, and abuse by border officials. Women like her often rely on informal networks to secure work and housing, leaving them vulnerable to low wages, long working hours, and unsafe conditions. Yet, despite these challenges, Rudo remains determined.

"There are no jobs back home, and my children depend on me. So, I take the risk."

Case Study 2: Dynamics of Care in Malawi

Care work remains predominantly unpaid and undervalued, particularly among women. Mulenga Chikondi (not her real name), a Project Associate at a youth organisation in Malawi, emphasises the cultural perceptions surrounding this issue:

“It’s women’s responsibility to take care of things,” she states, highlighting the societal norms that confine women to domestic roles.



The economic impact of unpaid care work is significant. Chikondi notes,

“It doesn’t contribute as it’s untaxed,”

reflecting the lack of recognition of the role of care work in the broader economy. Moreover, many caregivers face mental and physical challenges.



“Stress and abuse are common among caregivers,”

she shares, pointing to the emotional toll that this work can take.

Despite these challenges, caregivers find motivation in their roles.

“Passion and the money they get after working”

drive them to participate in care work, indicating a complex interplay between necessity and fulfilment. As climate change exacerbates economic pressures, the demand for care work continues to increase. Chikondi warns,

“When there’s climate change, people are limited to farming,”

forcing them to engage more in care work.

Goromonzi Community Diary: Mary Nyadome's Journey of Transformative Leadership and Unpaid Care Work

My name is Mary Nyadome, an informal trader from Ward 17 Yafeli Village in Goromonzi District, Mashonaland East Province—a peri-urban settlement situated just 37 kilometres from Harare, our capital city.



I am a wife and a mother to three boys, and I have proudly taken on the role of the family breadwinner since my husband lost his job five years ago. I joined Vendors Initiative for Social and Economic Transformation (VISET) as

a Community Front Lone Associate (CFA) when the organisation launched the CivActs project in 2021, and the many subsequent projects that were implemented by VISET across the country.

For years, I've managed to provide for my family by selling second-hand clothing bales at Majuru Business Centre. However, the burden of unpaid care work often weighed heavily on me. Balancing my responsibilities as a trader and a caretaker for my children was no easy feat, and I struggled to find time to engage in community activities or leadership roles due to the demands of household chores and child-rearing.

My journey took a transformative turn when I participated in the Valuing Women's Work Project facilitated by VISET. The project which was supported by Oxfam Zimbabwe, not only helped me to gain valuable insights into the importance of recognizing and valuing unpaid care work but also equipped me with the necessary skills for transformative leadership. I learned the significance of not only acknowledging the impact of unpaid labor but also advocating for changes that would support women domiciled in the rural areas like me in our dual roles as caregivers and economic contributors.

Empowered by this training, I found the courage to challenge for the position of Vice-Chair of the Goromonzi Primary School Development Committee (SDC)—a position traditionally dominated by men. My campaign highlighted women's commitment, hard work, and unique investment in children's well-being. It was time to dismantle the barriers that have historically excluded women from decision-making processes concerning our community's development.

For the first time, I secured a leadership position that allowed me to amplify the voices of women in my community. I attribute much of my success to the support I received from my husband, who has taken on a greater share of household responsibilities. This change has been crucial, allowing me to actively participate in significant decision-making forums, such as pre-budget consultations organised by VISET in collaboration with the Goromonzi Rural District Council. I thoroughly advocate for vital issues, including the need for accessible markets for informal traders, improved maternal health services, and infrastructure such as schools.

Through the guidance of VISET, I have been able to transform not only my life but also my community. I am dedicated to ensuring that women's needs are prioritized

in development discussions, highlighting the importance of our contributions. Our voices are essential, and I hope to encourage more women to take up leadership roles and challenge the status quo. At present, I also serve as Secretary to Village Headman Musonza, where I oversee crucial processes like food and inputs distribution. I remain committed to advocating for positive changes and elevating the role of women in leadership within my community.

Together, we can reshape our collective future and create a supportive environment where all women are recognized for the invaluable work they do, both in the home and in the public sphere.



Policy Watch: Tracking the Economics of Care

Policy Analysis: Care in Crisis Across SADC— A Regional Snapshot Drawing from Scoping Study Findings in Five Countries

A feminist care economy scoping study undertaken in Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe offers a sharp lens into how care work is treated or more often neglected in Southern Africa. While focused on five countries, the findings illuminate region-wide patterns of gendered injustice, state withdrawal, informal resilience, and structural invisibility that echo across the 16-member SADC bloc.

Across diverse geographies and political contexts, the burden of sustaining life through cooking, cleaning, nursing, caregiving, and community health work falls on women and girls, largely unpaid, uncounted, and unsupported. This is not just a crisis of welfare. It is a crisis of political economy.

Regional Reflections from the Five-Country Study

1 CARE IS UNPAID, INVISIBLE, AND FEMINISED

In all five countries studied, over 88% of care work is unpaid and overwhelmingly performed by women. Time-use data reveals that women spend 20–60 hours weekly on care tasks, often at the cost of formal employment or education. This pattern is widely echoed in SADC countries with similar gender and economic profiles.

2 POLICY FRAMEWORKS ARE SILOED OR ABSENT

None of the five countries have a coordinated national care economy policy. Where provisions exist in health, social welfare, or labour they are scattered, underfunded, and lack accountability mechanisms. This fragmentation is consistent with broader SADC observations, where care remains a peripheral issue.

“The findings illuminate region-wide patterns of gendered injustice, state withdrawal, informal resilience, and structural.”





3 INFORMALITY AND PRECARIY DEFINE PAID CARE WORK

Domestic workers, early childhood educators, and community health workers form the backbone of paid care yet remain informally employed, underpaid, and structurally unprotected. Even in South Africa, with more established systems, care workers face exclusion from benefits and labour protections; a reality shared across many SADC states.



4 INFRASTRUCTURE DEFICITS COMPOUND CARE BURDENS

In Malawi, Zambia, and Mozambique, women walk for hours daily to fetch water, fuel, and food. Poor access to basic services exacerbates care burdens and traps women in unpaid labour cycles. This pattern is mirrored across the region, particularly in rural and low-income communities.



5 MIGRANT AND CROSS-BORDER CARE ECONOMIES ARE UNSEEN

The study surfaces how women migrate especially to South Africa for domestic and care work. Their labour is critical to regional economies, yet cross-border care chains remain unregulated, and remittance economies unaccounted for. SADC-wide, this care mobility is both an economic driver and a legal blind spot.



6 COMMUNITY RESPONSES ARE ACTIVE BUT UNDERVALUED

From informal savings groups to home-based caregiving networks, women are creating care systems where the state has withdrawn. These models which are resilient, feminist, and decentralised exist across the region, but lack public investment, policy visibility, and structural support.

Implications for a Regional Care Justice Agenda

While the study focused on five countries, the patterns are unmistakably regional. The absence of comprehensive care infrastructure, social protection, and gender-transformative public investment is a shared regional challenge and it demands a collective response.

SADC cannot achieve inclusive development or regional integration without:

- Recognising care work in national accounts and planning tools;
- Redistributing care responsibilities through gender-equitable policies and public services;
- Revaluing care by formalising and protecting paid and unpaid workers;
- Resourcing community-led and cross-border care systems through bold public investment.

The Takeaway

The crisis of care is not marginal.

It is central to how inequality is reproduced and how economies are sustained.

A care-centred regional agenda is the foundation for justice, resilience, and dignity across Southern Africa.

An analysis for the Informal Economy and Care Work in the Zimbabwean Context

Contributed by VISET

Introduction

The 2025 national budget took effect on January 1, 2025, with projected growth estimated at 6%, a notable increase from the 2% anticipated in 2024. This growth projection is anchored on assumptions that include a stable local currency, low inflation rates, and the maintenance of tight fiscal and monetary policies.

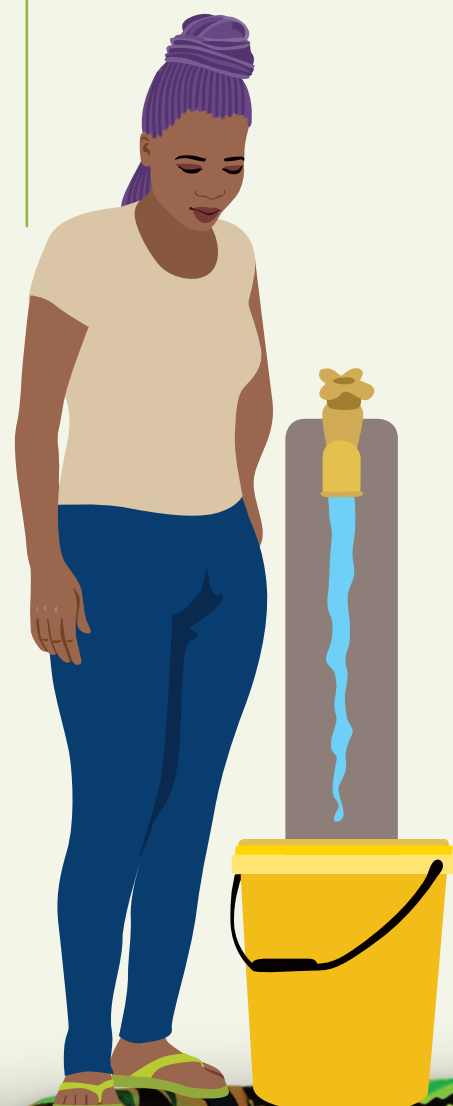
However, a concerning trend over the recent years has been the chronic underfunding of critical social sectors, including health, education, and social protection. While the education sector has received commendable allocation of 20.6% of the national budget, in line with the Dakar Declaration, other vital areas like health, water, sanitation, and social protection have not seen similar commitment. Noteworthy efforts have been made to address inequality and poverty by channelling resources to marginalized groups through initiatives such as the Basic Education Assistance Model (BEAM), support for People with Disabilities (PWDs), and aid for the elderly. Nonetheless, programs like BEAM face significant challenges such as late disbursements, bureaucratic hurdles, and persistent arrears, ultimately giving rise to increased school dropout rates. The Deputy Minister of Primary and Secondary Education, Angeline Gata, reported that over 49,555 students dropped out in 2024 due to these issues.

Access to water remains another critical area requiring urgent government attention, as scarcity can lead to waterborne diseases and negatively impact educational attendance. Additionally, it exacerbates the caregiving burden, disproportionately affecting women and hindering their economic participation.

The Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small-to-Medium Enterprise Development received an allocation of ZWL 1016 billion (USD 330 000), which marked an increase specifically for women in the informal sector. However, these funds still grapple with the same challenges prevalent in other ministries, including late disbursements and inflation-related value erosion. Moreover, additional barriers such as the requirement for collateral by financial institutions like the Zimbabwe Women's Microfinance Bank (ZWMB) and Empower Bank only serve to compound these issues.

Given these challenges, it is essential to advocate for critical adjustments in anticipation of the Mid-Term Budget and Expenditure Review by the Minister of Finance, Economic Development, and Investment Promotion, scheduled for July 31, 2025.

“Access to water remains another critical area requiring urgent government attention.”



Observations

1. Care Work Provisions

The National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) emphasizes the integration of gender considerations across all sectors to ensure equal opportunities for women and that they are not excluded from the development process. Furthermore, it champions initiatives aimed at women's empowerment, including economic participation and resource access. However, these commendable policy aspirations lack the necessary fiscal commitments to support the care economy specifically. The absence of a dedicated budget line for care work means that it remains indirectly addressed through broader allocations for health, social welfare, and education.

2. Social Safety Nets

Women in the informal sector represent nearly 70% of the workforce and encounter limited formal social protections. Many of them endure long working hours, unsafe working conditions, inadequate remuneration, and limited economic opportunities further constrained by the demands of Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW). The Harmonized Cash Transfer system included in the 2025 budget is insufficient, failing to meet the needs of vulnerable women requiring support. The Ministry of Women Affairs also suffers from inadequate budgetary allocations, which limits their overall impact.

3. Access to Capital

There is a noticeable absence of specific provisions for working capital aimed at women in the informal sector within the current budget structure. This lack of focus hinders women's ability to maximize their economic potential. The funding options available through ZWMB and Empower Bank do not adequately reflect the realities of women in the sector, such as their struggles with collateral requirements, high-interest rates, and excessively bureaucratic application processes.



Recommendations

Practical Ways to Support Unpaid Care Work and the Care Economy

-  **Recognition and Investment in Unpaid Care and Domestic Work**

It is crucial to introduce a specific budget line dedicated to reducing or compensating for UCDW. This measure could involve funding community care initiatives for the children of informal traders and developing home-based care programs. Such funding would alleviate the caregiving burdens that hinder women's participation in the workforce, ultimately allowing them to pursue economic opportunities.
-  **Establishment of Universal Cash Grants**

The piecemeal approaches of programs like the Harmonized Cash Transfer system have made them vulnerable to corruption, as outlined in the Auditor General's report to Parliament in 2021. A structured social security fund catering to informal sector workers, anchored in the National Social Security Authority's framework, would enhance both transparency and accountability, allowing for effective support for vulnerable groups.
-  **Investment in Labour-saving Infrastructure**

Allocating resources for infrastructure improvements in vital sectors such as water supply and energy access is essential. Enhancing these services would reduce the time spent by women on domestic responsibilities, enabling them to invest more time in productive economic activities.
-  **Inclusion of Care Work in GDP Calculations**

By recognizing and quantifying the value of care work in GDP calculations, the government can legitimize and elevate the status of care work within the economy. This could lead to more strategic allocations and policies aimed at enhancing care work sustainability and support.
-  **Establishment of Women's Savings Clubs**

It is imperative to provide seed capital for the formation of women's savings clubs, which would facilitate low-interest, collateral-free loans targeted at women in prominent urban centers and commercial areas. These clubs could offer vital financial resources geared toward enhancing women's economic participation aimed at enhancing care work sustainability and support.



Importance
of Monitoring
and Tracking
the Budget

*“ Zimbabwe
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the workforce. ”*



Monitoring and tracking the budget's alignment with gender-responsive measures is crucial for several reasons:

1. **Accountability and Transparency:** Systematic tracking ensures that budget allocations indeed reach their intended sectors and demographics, enabling advocacy groups and stakeholders to hold the government accountable. For instance, in Zimbabwe, organizations like the VISET could track budget allocations for healthcare and education, ensuring that funds are being utilized effectively to benefit women and girls.
2. **Informed Policy-making:** Regular monitoring provides vital data that can inform policymakers about gaps in budget allocations related to care work. This feedback can foster necessary adjustments to finance systems that effectively cater to women and marginalized communities. For example, Zimbabwe's National Gender Policy emphasized the need for gender-responsive budgeting. Monitoring budget allocations for initiatives like the National Gender-Based Violence Strategy could help identify areas for improvement.
3. **Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups:** By keeping a close watch on budget disbursements and outcomes, organizations like VISET can advocate for strategies that meaningfully invest in and uplift women in the informal sector. In Zimbabwe, this could involve monitoring budget allocations for initiatives like the Women's Fund, which aims to support women's economic empowerment.
4. **Resource Allocation for Care Work:** Monitoring efforts can help highlight the importance of recognizing unpaid care work and push for appropriate resource allocations to support this critical sector. For instance, Zimbabwe could allocate resources for childcare services, enabling women to participate in the workforce and reducing the burden of unpaid care work.

VISET's Efforts in Budget Tracking

VISET has actively engaged in comprehensive budget tracking functions to assess expenditure effectively and advocate for the needs of women and informal sector workers. Under the Local Accountability and Citizen Engagement (LACE) project which aims to empower informal economy workers, particularly women, persons with disabilities and other marginalized grassroots communities, VISET has managed to mobilise communities in six provinces to actively participate in Public Finance Management (PFM) processes, in particular budget and expenditure tracking processes in the health sector and influence informal tax policy and practice reforms. To date the organization has:

- ✔ Established collaborative relationships with grassroots organizations to gather qualitative data on the experiences of women regarding budget impacts.
- ✔ Conducted training sessions for members on how to analyze budgets and understand expenditure tracking to ensure community involvement in advocacy efforts.
- ✔ Participated in public forums to raise awareness of the importance of budget allocations for social protection, care work, and women's economic empowerment.

Through these initiatives, VISET aims to amplify the voices of marginalized groups and ensure that care work and the economy receive the attention and resources they deserve in national budgets.

In conclusion, the commitment to tracking budget expenditures concerning unpaid care work and the support of the care economy is not only a matter of accountability but also pivotal in ensuring inclusive and equitable economic growth. The recommendations presented underscore the necessity of embedding care work considerations within fiscal policies, thereby promoting socio-economic development that benefits all citizens, particularly women.

“VISET aims to amplify the voices of marginalized groups and ensure that care work and the economy receive the attention and resources they deserve in national budgets.”



The Trust's Civic Corner

Youth Economic Participation and Political Accountability in Malawi

In this section, we spotlight agenda-setting voices from Malawi who are boldly reshaping discourse on youth economic participation and political accountability in the region. As Malawi transitions from its September 2025 elections into a new governance cycle, these strategic interventions challenge dominant narratives about youth exclusion, surface the overlooked realities of unpaid care work, and offer concrete pathways for systemic transformation. Through the Youth Manifesto Accountability Framework and stories of young leaders like Macpherson who have built movements from the ground up, we centre insights and calls to action that are actively influencing how youth empowerment, economic justice, and political participation are understood and prioritised across Southern Africa.

The Numbers Tell a Story of Contradiction

Malawi's economic statistics reveal a troubling paradox. While the country's overall unemployment rate has dropped to 5.4%, nearly three in ten young people aged 15-24 remain without work—a staggering 27.5% unemployment rate that rises to 23.0% for the broader 15-34 age group¹. Despite government claims of creating over 1.3 million jobs since 2020 and raising the minimum wage to MK90,000, the ambitious target of 2.5 million jobs remains unmet.

Behind these numbers lies a deeper crisis: a labour market that systematically excludes young people. Technical colleges and vocational training centres remain poorly equipped and inaccessible, with Malawi School Certificate of Education (MSCE) requirements that shut out rural youth who need skills training most. Even those who complete technical programs face insurmountable barriers—lack of capital, equipment, business mentorship, and the collateral that banks demand. Add bureaucratic red tape, inconsistent policies, and weak infrastructure, and entrepreneurship becomes a privilege rather than a pathway.



**MALAWI
UNEMPLOYMENT
5.4%**

**AGE
15-24**

3 in 10



**UNEMPLOYED
27.5%**

**AGE
15-34
UNEMPLOYED
23.0%**

**SINCE 2020
1.3 million
JOBS**



**TARGET
2.5 million
JOBS**

¹ <https://www.yasmw.org/resources>

These statistics mask an even deeper exclusion: the invisible economy of unpaid care work that young people—particularly young women—shoulder daily. While unemployment figures capture those seeking formal work, they fail to account for the countless young Malawians providing essential care for children, elderly relatives, and community members without recognition or compensation. This unpaid labour not only sustains households and communities but also creates barriers to accessing formal education, training, and employment opportunities. Young people trapped in cycles of unpaid care work are systematically excluded from economic participation, yet their contributions remain invisible in policy discussions about youth employment.

From Manifestos to Mechanisms

It was against this backdrop that the Youth Decide Campaign emerged—a consortium of over 40 youth-focused civil society organizations determined to move beyond the “launch and forget” syndrome that has historically plagued people-driven policy documents. Through a participatory, nationwide process, they developed the 2025-2030 Youth Manifesto, articulating collective aspirations across twelve thematic areas.

But the Campaign’s leaders understood a crucial truth: manifestos without mechanisms are just wish lists. Recognizing this gap, the Southern Africa Trust developed the Youth Manifesto Accountability Framework (YMAF) to accompany the manifesto—a practical tool designed to ensure that political promises translate into measurable progress. The framework operates on the premise that accountability “does not begin on polling day nor end with the announcement of election results,” but requires continuous democratic vigilance anchored in evidence and driven by youth agency.

The Framework in Action

As Malawi’s September 16, 2025, general elections conclude and political parties transition from campaign promises to governance, young people will be preparing to deploy the Youth Manifesto Accountability Framework to ensure this transition delivers real change. With this framework, youth have a concrete accountability mechanism to hold newly elected leaders to their commitments, moving beyond the familiar cycle of “vote-winning speeches that fade once ballots are counted.” The Youth Manifesto Accountability Framework will be essential in this post-election period, transforming political promises into tangible progress for young people systematically excluded from economic participation.



Voices of Accountability: From Creative Hustle to Political Disruption

One artist's journey from building movements to claiming political power—and why meaningful youth economic participation requires inclusive systemic transformation

When Honourable Macpherson Mwayi Ndalama started Zaluso Arts in 2014 as a second-year university student, people kept telling him that his chosen field was not the most sustainable career path in Malawi. Rather than accept that limitation, he chose to prove them wrong—*“not just for myself, but for every young artist who dared to dream.”*

What began as “a small project under ArtGlo” quickly spiralled into a full-fledged organisation. Eleven years later, Macpherson's organisation has touched thousands of lives and proven that *“you can actually put ‘artist’ on your business card in Malawi without starving.”*

Macpherson's mission reflects the Youth Manifesto's economic participation demands: *“We're here to make sure that young Malawian artists not only survive but thrive.”*

Where formal vocational training fails to reach rural youth, Zaluso Arts created alternative pathways. As Macpherson explains, they are one of the first Malawian creative hubs that is fully registered and compliant, acting as a stepping stone for artists who may not have formal training or access to big markets.

The organisation's hybrid model demonstrates sustainable youth entrepreneurship in action: *“We're building careers, developing capacity, and delivering professional creative services to clients, all at the same time.”*

Scaling the Vision

Now transitioning into formal politics, Honourable Macpherson is discovering how entrepreneurial skills translate to policy influence, though at dramatically different scales: *“In the NGO world, pulling off one program for 1,000 beneficiaries feels like a big success. In politics, you need 30 programs for 30,000 people—simultaneously.”*

Yet he's carrying forward essential competencies: strategic planning, project management, capacity building, monitoring, and evaluation. The difference is that now he applies them with even higher stakes and many more stakeholders.



Photo credit: Zaluso Arts

Honourable
Macpherson Ndalama

“We're here to make sure that young Malawian artists not only survive but thrive.”

The Translation Challenge

Macpherson describes his political role as bridging a critical gap:

"I see myself as both translator and connector. Grassroots movements often articulate the right problems, but their voices rarely reach the policy table in the language policymakers understand. On the other hand, policymakers create frameworks that never trickle down effectively to the people who need them most."

His solution?

"My role is to connect these two worlds—making sure community concerns are elevated into real policies, and policies are implemented in a way that actually works on the ground."

This translation function is precisely what the YMAF seeks to institutionalise—creating structured pathways for community concerns to become evidence-based policy demands.

Beyond Performative Support

Macpherson's critique of current economic policy reveals why accountability mechanisms are essential: *"COSOMA (Copyright Society of Malawi) is doing commendable work in formalising copyright and royalties, but more needs to be done to reach informal markets where most artists operate. More fundamentally, we need policies that don't just exist on paper but are fully implemented."*

He's witnessed how political attention to creative industries is often reduced to tokenism:

“Too often, political promises to support creatives end with cash handouts and free T-shirts during campaign season—we need real, sustainable creative infrastructure.”

Even more concerning is how opportunities concentrate among established networks:

"Opportunities often go to the same handful of artists. If Malawi is serious about creative industries, we must invest in discovering new talent across the country. This is how we build an ecosystem, not just a clique."

The Artivism Advantage

Macpherson's planned approach to formal politics reflects lessons learned from years of movement-building:

"Politics has, for too long, been dominated by big speeches, big budgets, and very little action. Artivism has taught me the power of disruption—sparking new ideas and creative solutions by putting people's needs at the centre."

His formula for political engagement? *"Less talk, more doing. Less ego, more impact."*

What This Means for Accountability

Macpherson's story illuminates why the YMAF matters beyond its technical components. Young people who have successfully navigated systemic barriers to create livelihoods and build organisations possess unique qualifications for holding political leaders accountable. They understand both community realities and the policy mechanisms needed for change.

As the Youth Decide Campaign moves from the "Demands to Declarations" phase into "Promises to Progress," bridge-builders like Macpherson will be essential. He has already demonstrated that sustainable economic participation is possible when young people have access to supportive infrastructure, mentorship, and markets—exactly what the Youth Manifesto demands at scale.

Macpherson's transition from creative entrepreneurship to political leadership suggests that Malawi's youth unemployment crisis isn't just about job creation—it's about creating pathways for young people to define and lead their own economic futures.

The Youth Manifesto Accountability Framework launches this year, backed by young leaders who have already proven that barriers can be overcome and systems can change.



Photo credit: Zuluso Arts

Honourable Macpherson Ndalama

“Promises to Progress”

Creative & Cultural Reflections For Care

Across many African communities, language is not taught in isolation. It is lived, felt, and shared. Oral traditions such as storytelling, proverbs, and songs pass down language alongside cultural values and collective memory.

For many, the nostalgia of growing up is filled with memories of sitting around a fire at night with siblings, cousins, and elders, exchanging stories, folklore, riddles, and instruction. These stories taught us, connected us, amused us, and grounded us in something greater than ourselves: our culture and our understanding of the world around us. This is a testament to the enduring power of language. Through these narratives, language helped us make sense of complex realities, develop critical thinking, and learn cultural norms.

As we begin to learn and shape the language of feminist care, let us reflect on its power to challenge dominant narratives, reframe reality, and disrupt the status quo, while also building a shared vocabulary for care, dignity, and justice.

GLOSSARY OF FEMINIST CARE CONCEPTS

Care Economy

Care economy encompasses all forms of care work, emphasising its critical role in sustaining economic and social systems. This sector includes both paid and unpaid activities related to providing care and support to individuals, particularly those who are dependent on others, such as children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. It comprises direct care activities, like nursing and childcare, as well as indirect care tasks, such as cleaning and meal preparation. The care economy is increasingly recognised as essential for individual well-being and the overall functioning of society.

Care Justice

Care justice broadly refers to the concept of providing care and support with an emphasis on fairness and equity. It aims to ensure that everyone has access to the necessary resources and opportunities, particularly in contexts of social and economic inequality. This concept encompasses various aspects, including access to healthcare, childcare, eldercare, and support for individuals experiencing exploitation or human trafficking. The framework advocates for the recognition, redistribution, and remuneration of care work, emphasising equity and social justice in care provision.

Care work

Care work is an activity that involves providing for the physical, emotional, and social needs of others, typically including both paid and unpaid labour, for example, childcare, elder care, and caring for the sick.

Community-Based Care

Community-based care is a practice that occurs within communities, often relying on local resources and networks, emphasising shared responsibility and support.

Collective Care

collective care is a model of caregiving that emphasises shared responsibilities among community members, challenging the notion that care should be solely an individual or family duty.

Climate Change and Care Burden

Climate change and care burden is the impact of climate-related events on caregiving responsibilities, particularly how climate crises increase the demand for unpaid care work.

Decent Work

Decent work is employment that provides fair wages, safe working conditions, and respect for workers' rights, including recognition of care work as valuable.

Feminism

Feminism is a diverse range of social and political movements and ideologies aimed at establishing political, economic, personal, and social equality between the sexes. It recognises that all individuals deserve equal respect and dignity. At its core, feminism challenges and seeks to dismantle existing systems of inequality and discrimination based on gender, acknowledging that women have historically been marginalised and denied opportunities solely due to their gender. Key issues addressed by the movement include bodily autonomy, employment equality, fair wages, property ownership, education, and legal, marital, and parental rights. Feminism prioritises ensuring that all women and girls have access to opportunities on par with those available to men and boys.

- **Feminist Economics:**

A branch of economics that focuses on the role of gender in economic analysis, challenging traditional economic theories that often overlook women's contributions, especially in care work.

- **Feminist Political Economy:**

An analytical framework that examines the interplay of gender, economics, and power structures, focusing on how these factors influence care work.

- **Intersectional feminism**

means recognising how injustice is woven into both the past and present. Centuries of violence, racism, and discrimination have created deep inequalities that continue to shape people's lives today, determining who has access to education, safety, decent work, healthcare, and political power.¹

¹ Intersectional Feminism: What it means and why it matters right now <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/intersectional-feminism-what-it-means-and-why-it-matters-right-now> 12 June 2025

Gender Dynamics:

The social and cultural factors that influence the roles and expectations of different genders within caregiving often lead to unequal distributions of care responsibilities.

Gender Equity:

The fair treatment of individuals of all genders, ensuring equal access to resources, opportunities, and rights, particularly in the context of care work.

Migration and Care

is the movement of individuals, particularly women, seeking better employment opportunities, often leaving caregiving roles to family members back home.

Intersectionality

is a concept that examines how various social identities, such as gender, race, class, and ability, intersect and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege.

Intersectionality theory

was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw as the idea that when it comes to thinking about how inequalities persist, categories like gender, race, and class are best understood as overlapping and mutually constitutive rather than isolated and distinct.

Unpaid Care Work (UCDW)

are activities performed without financial compensation, often involving household chores and caregiving, predominantly undertaken by women.

Unpaid Labour

is work that is not compensated financially, often performed in the home or community, including caregiving, domestic tasks, and volunteer work.

Social Protection Systems:

Policies and programs designed to provide economic support and security to individuals, particularly in times of vulnerability, including maternity leave and childcare services.

Social Reproduction:

The processes through which societies reproduce their members, including caregiving, education, and health, emphasising the economic value of these activities.

The meaning of care in different African languages

Luganda

Okulabirira

Means to look after or care for.

Nyanja

Amene

Can mean care, concern, or kindness.

Sesotho

Tlhokomelo

Refers to care or attention.

Somali

Daryeel

Means to protect or care for.

Shona

Kuchengeta

Means to take care of, to look after.

Ewe

Beléle na ame

Implies caring for someone.

Tigrinya

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(Ankibkabe)

Similar to Amharic.

Gikuyu

Menyerera

Means to take care of or protect.

Zulu

Ukunakekela

Refers to taking care of or looking after someone or something.

Kinyarwanda

Ubwitonzi

Implies gentleness and care.

Wolof

Noppaliku

Refers to caring or taking care of someone.

Yoruba

Itoju

Refers to care, especially in the context of health or nurturing.

Swahili

Huduma/Tunzio

Huduma often refers to service or care in a general sense; tunzio is more about nurturing or looking after.

Lingala

Soin

Borrowed from French, used in medical or emotional contexts.

Xhosa

Ukukhathalela

Similar to Zulu, it means to care for or be concerned about.

Ndebele

Ukukhathalela

Similar to Zulu, means to care for.

Igbo

Nlekota

Means care or attention, especially in caregiving.

Amharic

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(Enkibikabe)

Refers to care, attention, or concern.

Twí (Akan)

Adwene so/
Hwɛ so

Hwɛ so means to look after or care for.

Oromo

Eeggachuu

Means to protect or care for.

Fula (Fulani)

Ndeerude

Refers to caring or nurturing.

Chichewa

Chisamaliro

Means care or protection.

Setswana

Tlhokomelo

Same root as in Sesotho.

Afrikaans

Sorg

General term for care or concern.

Malagasy

Fikarakarana

Refers to nurturing or caregiving.

Hausa

Kulawa

Means to care for or be concerned about.



A Call to See, Value, and Transform

Having engaged with the stories, analyses, and voices in this inaugural edition of CACUN, we hope you now carry with you a deeper recognition of care work's centrality to our collective struggles.

Care justice is not a distant ideal—it is an urgent necessity demanding action today. Every policy debate, every budget allocation, every election promise, every movement for change must grapple with this fundamental truth: our economies, our democracies, and our futures are only as strong as our commitment to giving care work the value it deserves.

The frameworks, lived experiences, and tools you've encountered here are not just information—they are resources for transformation. Take them into your advocacy, your organizing, your policy work. Challenge what counts as “real work” in your spaces. Demand that care be valued where you hold influence. Build coalitions that recognize care as the foundation upon which all other justice struggles stand.

The work of making the invisible labour that sustains households, communities, and movements seen continues beyond these pages. The movement for care justice needs your voice, your analysis, and your commitment to ensuring that when care becomes currency, justice comes into view.

**Thank you for joining us.
That's all from us for now. We'll catch
you in the next issue in the next
quarter, where we'll be diving into
Climate Justice.**

— The CACUN Editorial Team.
The Southern Africa Trust

