



Advancing Transformative Social Policies in Gabon: Bridging Gender Gaps for Inclusive Development

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Executive Summary

The Constitution of Gabon guarantees equality for all citizens before the law, yet disparities between men and women persist in access to essential resources such as education, employment, land, credit, and technology. Research conducted under the Gender Equitable and Transformative Post-COVID-19 Social Policy in Africa project – covering Gabon’s social policies from the colonial era to the post-COVID period – shows that while Gabon has introduced social protection measures, they have not been transformative. The COVID-19 crisis exposed significant weaknesses in policies targeting vulnerable populations nationwide. In this policy brief we argue that gendered social policies must be central to Gabon’s social transformation.

To improve the living conditions of vulnerable groups, policymakers should design and implement policies that not only ensure equality but actively promote women’s representation in public and private spheres, support youth entrepreneurship, and strengthen institutional and legislative protections. We therefore recommend a transformative approach to social policy that focuses on human development and the collective well-being of all citizens, ensuring that gender-responsive policies become catalysts for both social and economic transformation.

Introduction

Social policies are generally designed to reduce social risks and protect the most vulnerable. However, they also serve as powerful tools for social transformation when designed inclusively. In Gabon, progress has been made through measures such as the creation of the *Caisse Nationale d’Assurance Maladie et de Garantie Sociale* (CNAMGS), the national health insurance programme, and the provision of higher education study allowances. Yet, deep social inequalities persist. Current policies have failed to deliver transformative outcomes, leaving women, children, and the elderly disproportionately marginalised.

This is despite constitutional guarantees in Article 2, paragraph 2 of the Constitution, which affirms that:

“The Gabonese Republic ensures the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race, sex, origin or religion”

In practice, however, significant gender gaps remain. Women have limited access to continuing education, face higher unemployment rates, and are often excluded from factors of production such as land, credit, and technology. These disparities highlight the urgent need to place gender-responsive policies at the heart of Gabon's development agenda.

In this policy brief, we aim to advance the national dialogue by providing empirical evidence on the need to shift the social policy paradigm toward approaches that directly address gender-based inequalities.

Methodological Approach

Under the Gender and Transformative Social Policies in Post-COVID-19 Africa Project (GETSPA), we conducted research that examined the trajectories of social policy in Gabon, from the colonial period through to the Covid-19 era. Subsequently, advocacy efforts were undertaken with public, parastatal and private institutions through radio broadcasts, video reports, and a training workshop.

Towards a Transformative Social Policy for Gabon

Transformative social policy is a powerful driver of both social and economic change. In Gabon, adopting a gender-responsive and transformative approach is not only a matter of equity but also a national priority. While the financing of social policy is generally shaped by its strategic implementation framework, Gabon's social transformation policy typically relies on four main sources:

- 1 Fiscal contributions (taxes and social security payments).
- 2 Profits from public and parastatal enterprises.
- 3 Support from development organisations.
- 4 Sponsorships and partnerships.

Despite these funding channels, the limited impact and efficiency of existing social policies in sustainably reducing inequalities make it clear that a new paradigm that places gender concerns at the heart of all strategies is needed. Historically, social policy in Gabon has focused heavily on promoting income-generating activities. While important, this narrow focus has not delivered the structural changes required to close persistent gender and regional gaps.

Achieving truly transformative social policy will require a decisive shift toward gender equity, inclusive economic growth, and the integration of social and environmental priorities into all policy frameworks.

Gender Equity

Affirmative action is often employed as a tool to achieve gender equity. It involves policies and practices designed to drastically reduce inequalities. The strengthening and implementation of such legal instruments to fight against all forms of discrimination against women and empower them must therefore be the priority of new social policies.

Economic Growth

Social policies have been accused of being passive and not delivering on economic transformation. While we acknowledge the social protection approach, which has been the target of social policies, there is a need for a new paradigm that makes social policies more dynamic and its beneficiaries active agents of change. Therefore, social policies, for example those aimed at employment, must lead to much more financial investment in entrepreneurship.

Social Priorities

Social policies are the institutional expression of solidarity at the national level and often limited to provincial capitals. Consequently, rural populations only partially benefit from these policies. For the entire country to benefit from social policies, there is a need to improve policies targeted at access to housing, transportation, water, electricity, education and health for vulnerable populations and to take into account the gender dimension in these policies.

Environmental Priorities

Social policies cannot ignore environmental policies because in this era of climate change, especially, environmental conditions shape the social life and destinies of people. Conversely, poor social conditions such as increased poverty and inequality also have an impact on the ecological balance.

Conclusion

Every social policy rests on a vision of a social ideal – an aspiration to be pursued, secured, and realised. For Gabon's Gendered and Transformative Social Policy, that vision is "Zero Social Inequality and Zero Poverty by 2025."

Its central goal is to ensure social equity and well-being for all in Gabon by 2025, guided by the challenge of achieving equitable and sustainable social and economic development nationwide.

Reaching this goal demands more than incremental reforms. It requires that public, parastatal, and private-sector leaders design and implement policies that act as genuine levers of society that move equality from a constitutional guarantee to a lived reality for every Gabonese citizen.

Recommendations

Based on the evidence and analysis from this project, we propose a transformative social policy framework for Gabon built on seven pillars:

1 Social policy as an engine of growth and development

Position social policy at the core of economic strategy, focused on human development and collective well-being. By 2025, make social policy a driver of economic growth and a true instrument for sustainable social transformation.

2 Engendering the state and governance

Ensure greater representation of women at all levels of public administration, the private sector, and political leadership. Guarantee equal access to employment and the labour market, enabling women to participate fully in all sectors of production.

3 Promoting youth entrepreneurship

Foster a dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem for young people by:

- a Simplifying administrative procedures for starting businesses.
- b Expanding financing opportunities for youth-led projects and income-generating activities.
- c Facilitating youth access to public procurement.
- d Supporting local authorities to establish job creation centres targeting young entrepreneurs.

4 Equitable development across territories

Extend the reach of social policies to rural and remote areas, ensuring that all regions, not just urban centres, benefit from social and economic initiatives.

5 Ensure environmental sustainability

Integrate environmental protection into all social policies to safeguard natural resources and secure the well-being of future generations.

6 Secure sustainable funding

Identify and diversify funding sources to ensure the long-term viability of social policy programmes.

7 Strengthen institutional and legal frameworks

Reinforce laws, policies, and institutional capacities to support gender-responsive and transformative social policies, ensuring accountability and impact.

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