

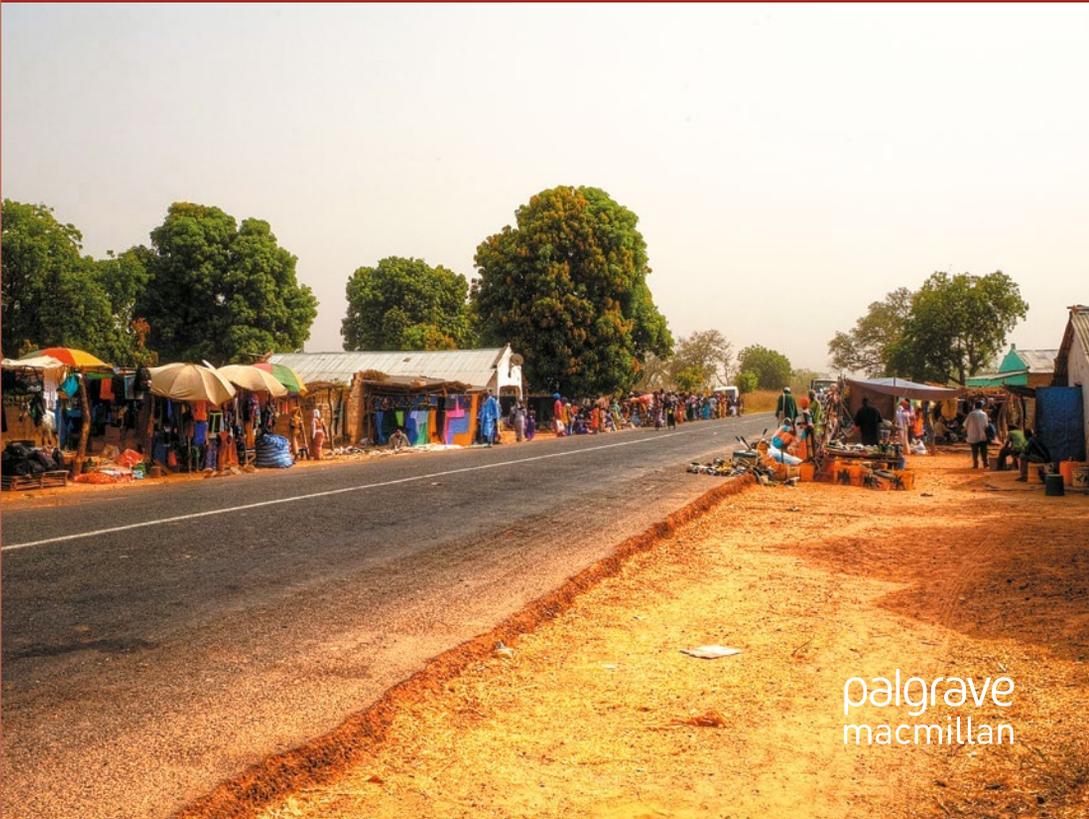


GLOBALIZATION, URBANIZATION AND
DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

Women's Contributions to Development in West Africa

Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives

Edited by Kelly Ann Krawczyk · Bridgett A. King



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Globalization, Urbanization and Development in Africa

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For the women of West Africa, whose contributions often go unrecognized, yet whose strength, tenacity, and courage help build families, communities, and countries.

Foreword

To understand who I am today you must understand my past, the people I come from, and my upbringing. To understand any woman, in fact, it is necessary to comprehend these things.

My four sisters and I were raised by my grandmother, our mama, and our papa. We lived with my grandmother, whom we called Ma, until I was two when my parents built a house right next door. My grandmother was a small woman who did not have a formal education. But, in a society such as Liberia's, where there is great value in cultural tradition, she was very powerful. Ma was a member of many secret societies, including those that were dominated by men. She was a member of the Sande, a traditional Liberian Society, and almost a priestess with the power to deal with snakes and snakebites. She was very highly respected in her village. She spoke with absolute authority, and when she spoke and put her foot down, there was no one who dared challenge her. My grandmother was an extraordinary woman who trained us to be resilient and self-sufficient and yet also fervently maintained her commitment to tradition.

The roles that my grandmother and also my father played in my early life do not reflect a stereotypical West African upbringing. I was blessed with a family that lived in the urban capital of Monrovia, but that was also still deeply rooted in, and had deep appreciation for, our traditional rural culture. Yet, despite our great respect for Liberian cultural

traditions, my sisters and I were not forced to marry against our will or to undergo female genital mutilation (FGM). We were taught the importance of education and of standing our ground. My parents and grandmother raised girls that could hold their own. My upbringing was a blend of my grandmother who held firmly to tradition, and my father who had only daughters and wanted the best for them because he had seen what the world was like for girls and women who did not have a formal education, family support, and economic opportunities.

My mother was also a strong presence in my upbringing. To this day, she refuses to talk about her early childhood. Yet even though she does not feel comfortable sharing her story, we can see the impact of her story, and her childhood, reflected now in her passion for taking care of Liberian girls: promoting girls' education and standing up to prevent their abuse.

Both my mother and my grandmother were raised in a very traditional Liberian way, but they were able to transcend that upbringing, helping me to see that I could do anything, and be anything, that I wanted to be. My grandmother and mother were able to transform their experiences and their stories, and leverage them to raise girls who knew their self-worth and value, and who are capable of contributing positively to society. My father also helped by allowing us to engage in active discourse and "use our voices" in a way that was very atypical for most Liberian girls and that in many settings would be perceived as disrespectful.

Of course, this also meant that my sisters and I were very different from our peers. We would often hear people say things like, "don't go to that house, those girls are not good girls." People believed we were different, that we were spoiled, and that we lacked any kind of proper, traditional upbringing. Even among our family, we were perceived as different. Our home was a space of empowerment. We could talk to our father and have a back-and-forth conversation with him. My mother would ask him, "Why do you tolerate this?" She would tell him that other men had no tolerance for this sort of behavior and recommend that he discipline or beat us. My father would tell her, "I need to hear their side."

My upbringing was not a stereotypical West African upbringing. I grew up with one foot in the traditions and culture of the Kpelle tribe and the country of Liberia, and another in a space that allowed and

encouraged us to think about who we were in the world and who we could be outside of those traditions. Perhaps because of my own unique upbringing, throughout my childhood, as a teenager and young woman, and even to this day, I am drawn to and inspired by powerful women. How we understand power is vitally important, as there is not only one type of power. There are women who are powerful in formal systems and women who are powerful in nontraditional and informal ways. I have drawn inspiration from women who fit into both of these categories.

I am inspired by women who have rejected their current situation as their only possible reality. Liberian women, who sell produce such as tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers in our local markets in order to provide an income for their families, also inspire me. After President Sirleaf was elected, there were many market women who went back to school so they could write their names: they no longer wanted to simply use their thumbprint at the bank. They wanted to write their own names when conducting transactions at their financial institutions, as a symbol of economic empowerment. I have seen many examples of strong women who were living in the same conditions as my mother and grandmother, but they did not let that define their reality. There are so many women who have gone through some of the worst situations you can imagine, but are able to come out of it and be...extraordinary.

Africa as a continent is diverse in many ways, including in its geopolitical structure, economic, social, and cultural norms. Thus, trying to highlight a profile of a West African woman within traditional society is quite complex and does not do justice to the many roles we play. In trying to do so, there is the potential risk of unfair generalization because while there are similarities in some of our experiences, as you see even in my own family situation, there are unique variations. We cannot cluster West Africa as a singular block, because it is a unique place, as are the contributions of its women. In Liberia, women helped stop civil war. In Senegal, women have high representation in parliament. In Ghana, women help drive the economy through their involvement in small and micro-sized businesses. Yet despite these differences, one thing that rings true is that there is no way for the region to thrive if women are not included, and if their social, economic, and political contributions are not recognized.

West African women have always been active in the political and socio-economic pursuits of society, often in the informal sector. Furthermore, we assume the brunt of the household management, which places a heavy burden on us. This is because in the eyes of tradition, the African woman is always expected to put the interest of her family before any personal interest or ambitions. We function as partners and participants in upholding traditional values and norms and instilling such knowledge to our children. Serving as the backbone that strengthens and binds family structure must co-exist with socio-cultural norms that restrict our participation and access to educational and economic opportunities. While we might be faced with a plethora of legal, political, socio-economic, and cultural constraints, the status of the African woman within the community must be viewed with variation and depth, thus making each individual woman's contribution extraordinary in and of itself.

Although my upbringing and my own story are unique and unexpected, this should in no way overshadow the experiences and contributions of countless other West African women who are also extraordinary. This edited volume, *Women's Contributions to Social, Political, and Economic Development in West Africa: Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Lives*, seeks to share the stories of some of these women and to provide empirical evidence that illustrates their important and tangible contributions to the social, economic, and political spaces of the communities in which they live. Like me, the authors whose work is featured in this edited volume believe *no* woman is simply "ordinary" and that *all* women are, in fact, extraordinary. And this edited volume offers data that substantiates our steadfast belief.

Women are increasingly important players in the political arena in West Africa, at the national, local, and community levels. After a long and brutal civil war, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected as Liberia's president in 2005. She was the first female head of state on the African continent. Sitting at my family table, I was told to be a strong girl, while also hearing comments about Ellen such as, "That's why she doesn't have a husband...politics is not for women." I learned there was no sympathy or empathy for women who made the decision to enter male-dominated spaces. The same society that taught me I could do anything is the same

society that would remind me of what my role was as a woman. Gretchen Bauer's chapter in this edited volume, "Gender and Politics in Ayawaso West Wuogon: Women Standing for Parliament," addresses this same issue, using case studies of female aspirants for parliament in Ghana. She examines what inspires Ghanaian women to run for office, how Ghanaian political parties have tried to cultivate more female candidates, and the barriers women still face in gaining office.

Women have also shown themselves to be instrumental in peacebuilding efforts in West Africa. During the Liberian war, everything revolved around the men: the rebel groups, the fighting. In 2003, seven of us, sitting around a table, had a conversation about the war closing in on the capital Monrovia. We wrote a statement, named ourselves and had it published. We were demanding three things that our government then was refusing: immediate unconditional ceasefire, dialogue between the warring parties, and deployment of an intervention force. Charles Taylor, who was then President of Liberia, rejected our demands, stating he would fight til the last soldier dies, that he was the duly elected President and could not dialogue with rebels, and that Liberia was a sovereign nation and no foreign troops would be allowed on the ground.

We formed the women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace and nonviolently protested for the war to end. Prior to our movement in the early days of the war, women stepped up and became involved. Their work at first was mostly humanitarian, such as carrying food and clothing to those who were seeking safety from the warfare in the refugee camps. Women's involvement through groups like the Liberian Women Initiative (LWI) and the Mano River Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET) eventually shifted to protest and "shuttle diplomacy."

In Liberia, historically women had not been involved in politics or political processes as I earlier mentioned, hence peace and peacebuilding were seen by local women as a political process, and when we started the Mass Action we had to resocialize women about their roles and the impact they could make in the peace process. We helped women understand where they were situated in the peace process and how to tap the power they had to demand peace. This is further illustrated using the case of Guinea, in Nicole Gerring's chapter in this volume, entitled, "Relative

Peace in the Midst of Unrest: Guinean Women's Peace Advocacy During the Mano River Wars." Women peace activists in Guinea were vital in helping the country avoid a major war, despite being surrounded by unrest in Liberia and Sierra Leone, through their lobbying and advocacy campaigns.

After the signing of the peace agreement, many of the ills that women accepted in the past were no longer tolerated. Liberian women were determined to use the strength of mobilizing for peace to create a better future for themselves and the next generation of women leaders. Women are also creating economic independence for themselves and their families. In 2007, four years after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), my organization, Women Peace and Security Network Africa (WIPSEN—Africa), hosted a meeting on peace and security in post-conflict Liberia. Given funding was scarce, we mandated that women who were not registered and approved by us could not come to the meeting. Yet the delegates from Bomi, Western Liberia, brought a young girl who had been brutally beaten by the father of her four children. She had been rejected by him, as well as by her own family. One way to help her was to ensure the perpetrator paid for his crime. Another way to assist her was to offer some funds: I gave the girl a small amount of money and sent her on her way and did not give the donation another thought. About a year later, my mother called to tell me there were gifts of charcoal and food items waiting for me at the family home. The young girl used the money to start her own charcoal business, and bought her own piece of land, in order to secure economic independence for her and her children. The economic potential of women is addressed in Sandy Zook's contribution to this edited volume, "Informally Formal: Women's Mutual Aid Organizations in the Informal Sector of the Economy." Sandy analyzes these savings and fellowship groups as financial capacity-building mechanisms for women street vendors in Ghana and asks an important question: Is our lack of focus on these sorts of informal institutions leading us to seriously underestimate the economic and social power of women in these contexts?

In many cases, it is women's everyday lived experiences and their own personal determination that drives them to take on great personal risk in

order to address community challenges. It also happens when women have positive examples and role models. There are women who have been through difficult and even devastating circumstances: poverty, war, FGM, abuse—but who came out the other side. How? They saw examples of strong women. They had role models who were strong women. They saw other women who were facing similar challenges, but refused to let these challenges be their long-term reality. They persevered, improving the lives of not just their own families, but also their local communities and ultimately the societies in which they live. Our hope is that the women featured in this book, and the contributions to development they are making, continue to provide strength and hope not only to West African women, but also to women everywhere. We wish to break the stereotypes associated with African women and provide rich and descriptive evidence of empowered, inspirational women who are helping to facilitate social, economic, and political development in their communities. We do not perceive of West African women as ordinary; in fact, we view them as nothing less than extraordinary. We believe you should, too. And now, I challenge all women to ask yourself this vital question: How do we maximize our contributions, and harness our power and the light we bring, to accomplish even more? This is the opportunity upon which our future rests.

Gbowee Peace Foundation
New York, NY, USA
June 2022

Leymah Gbowee

Praise for *Women's Contributions to Development in West Africa*

“This edited volume zooms-in on the human-centric aspects of sustainable development, illuminating the various barriers that women in West African countries face in social, economic, and political spheres. The book capitalizes upon rich empirical material and rigorous qualitative social science approaches to document such barriers as well as describe how women rely on both formal and informal institutions to achieve better voice and representation. The many lessons drawn from this work offer practical insights and ideas for future research that are applicable to a variety of developing democracy contexts beyond the African continent.”

—Alisa Moldavanova, *University of Delaware, USA*

“Considering the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’s principle of ‘leave no one behind’ which seeks to target the most vulnerable populations, this collection about the contributions by women to social, economic and political development in West Africa is on point. The qualitative approaches showcase stories that underline the voices of often the poorest of the poor. The authors recognize the challenges with entrenched discrimination and inequalities for women while also empirically demonstrating their relational agency and entrepreneurial spirit.”

—Susan Appe, *University at Albany, USA*

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Acronyms

ADB	African Development Bank
AFASCO—Association des femmes pour l’avenir social et cohésion	Association of Women for a Socially Cohesive Future
AFAF	Association des Femmes pour l’Avenir des Femmes
AFVVA	Association des Femmes Veuves Victimes de l’Abandon
AMA	Accra Metropolitan Assembly
AMA	Accra Municipal Assembly
ANC	African National Congress
APRC	Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council—changed to Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction
AWW	Ayawaso West Wuogon
BASICS International	Brothers and Sisters in Christ International
BYA	BASICS Youth Ambassadors
CBG	Central Bank of The Gambia
CDF	Constituency Development Fund
COFEG	Coordinating Committee of Guinean Women’s NGOs

CONAG—DCF	Coalition nationale de Guinée pour le droit et la citoyenneté des femmes; Guinean National Coalition for Women's Rights and Citizenship
COFEL	Coalition des Femmes Leaders
CNP	Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DoSA	Department of State for Agriculture
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ERP	Economic Recovery Program
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FC	Financial Company
FFI	Fiduciary Financial Institution
FIA	Financial Institution Act
GATA	Ghana Association of Trader
GCDB	Gambia Commercial and Development Bank
GDP	Gambia Democratic Party
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPP	Gambia People's Party
IDEA	Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IGAP	Increasing Girls' Assets Program
ILO	International Labor Organization
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
KMC	Kanifing Municipality
MARWOPNET	Mano River Women's Peace Network
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MFI	Microfinance Institution
MIDs	Militarized Interstate Disputes
MP	Members of Parliament
MSE	Micro and Small Enterprise
REFMAP	Mano River Women's Peace Network
NBFI	Non-Bank Financial Institution
NBFI	Non-Bank Financial Intermediary
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NFIS	National Financial Inclusion Strategy
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NHPSR	National Household Poverty Survey Report

NPP	New Patriotic Party
NRA	National Resistance Army
OWEDI	Organization of Women for Integrated Development
OSIWA	Open Society Initiative for West Africa
PDG	Parti démocratique de Guinée
PPP	People's Progressive Party
PRSP	Poverty Reduction and Strategy Paper
PSD	Program for Sustained Development
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
REFAMP	The French acronym for the Network of African Women—former Ministers and Members of Parliament
RFCIP	Rural Finance and Community Initiatives Project
RFP	Rural Finance Project
ROSCA	Rotating Savings and Credit Association
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SDF	Social Development Fund
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SPA	Strategy for Poverty Alleviation
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNMEER	United Nations Mission for the Emergency Ebola Response
UNPFA	United Nations Population Fund
UP	United Party
USG	Urban Solidarity Group
VISACA	Village Savings and Credit Association
WANEP	West African Network of Economic Partners
WEDA	Women Entrepreneurship Development Agency
WEEI	UN's Women's Economic Empowerment Index
WFP	United Nations and the World Food Program
WMI	Women Microfinance Initiative

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1

Introduction: A Dichotomy of Development—Women’s Empowerment and Women’s Inequality

Kelly Ann Krawczyk and Bridgett A. King

A Dichotomy of Development: Women’s Empowerment and Women’s Inequality

Existing scholarship reveals a perilous dichotomy that impacts long-term development outcomes: on the one hand, extant literature highlights the critical roles women play in facilitating sustainable development, and the importance of gender equity in ensuring women can fulfill their full potential in social, economic, and political spheres. Yet on the other hand, the literature concurrently illuminates pervasive gender inequity and the continued marginalization of women, in all three of these areas of society: social, economic, and political. This dichotomy between the vital role of women in development and the concurrent barriers they face in fully participating in development presents a serious quandary since, as noted by Bawa and Sanyare, “[a] woman’s status as a person in society

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depends crucially on her participation in economic, political, and social activities” (pg. 283). Given this dilemma, this volume fills a gap in the existing literature, by offering rich and nuanced empirical evidence about the contributions of women to social, economic, and political development in West Africa. The emphasis of this volume is not simply on the challenges women face in fully and authentically participating in the social, economic, and political spheres of their communities, but it focuses instead on elucidating the important contributions women are currently making, despite the barriers they face.

There is a well-established body of literature that acknowledges the vital importance of women in global development. We know, for example, that as women enter the marketplace, social and economic development increases. And societies that promote the rights of women are less likely to initiate violence (Benard et al., 2008). Indeed, women’s knowledge, agency, and collective action are central to identifying and building sustainable pathways to social, economic, and political development (United Nations, 2014).

We also know that to successfully facilitate sustainable development, women’s empowerment and equality is necessary, in order for women to authentically participate in the social, economic, and political spheres of their communities and in broader society. To create what UN Women (2014, p. 12) envision as a more “just and sustainable world ... to enhance women’s roles in sustaining their families and communities,” gender equity is an indispensable component. Indeed, gender equity is deemed important enough to be named as one of the United Nation’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which provide a roadmap for ending poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring that all people enjoy peace and prosperity (United Nations, 2022). And, the benefits of gender equity, especially relating to economic advantages, are increasingly well-documented. Increased gender equity boosts economic growth, reduces income inequality, strengthens economic diversification, and increases economic resilience. All of which ultimately leads to better overall development outcomes (IMF, 2018).

The work of Revenga and Shetty (2012) offers three examples of how gender equity promotes development. First, women are an increasingly large part of the workforce: they now comprise nearly 40 percent of the

global labor force (World Bank, 2021). When we fully integrate women into the workforce and fully utilize their skills, overall productivity increases. Second, when women have equitable control over their household resources, we know they are more likely to spend those resources in ways that benefit their children and their families. Third, empowering women to be “integrated and equitable” social, economic, and political actors allows them to have authentic voices in shaping policy outcomes, and in creating representative institutions (Revenga and Shetty, 2012, p. 41).

Yet, despite the vital role of women in development and the importance of gender equity for successful development, a host of research also reveals that gender *inequity* across social, economic, and political realms remains pervasive throughout the world, and that gender disparity is substantially higher in developing versus developed countries (UN Women, 2014; Ahmed et al., 2001). If this inequity is not addressed, sustainable development is simply not possible, and development outcomes will continue to be impeded. In fact, existing gender inequity comes with a huge economic cost and contributes to sustained social, political, and environmental inequities across the globe and especially in Africa (Stevens, 2010).

Thus far, we have touched on both the vital role of women in development, outlining the specific benefits women bring to development outcomes, as well as pervasive and systemic gender inequity, and its causes and consequences. A large portion of the work in these areas is documented through gray literature—technical reports by international donors, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and think tanks—that focuses on documenting gender inequity and recommending policy prescriptions to address it (see, e.g., UN Women, 2014; Hallward-Driemeier, 2013; Revenga & Shetty, 2012). There is a dearth of work, however, that focuses on a specific geographic region of the developing world, and that provides rich and detailed empirical evidence about the contributions of women in that region to social, economic, and political development. This volume helps fill this gap, offering a micro-level, nuanced view of the contributions of West African women to social, economic, and political development. Furthermore, we approach this in a unique way, as each chapter in this volume is written by a woman who is herself an academic and/or practitioner with expertise in the West African region, as well as

in her subfield. The contributors to this volume are women who represent both the global North and the global South, coming together to illuminate and expound on the important social, economic, and political contributions made by women in West Africa. This edited volume is written *by women, for women*.

We recognize and laud the value of existing research: it highlights the importance of women to development, documents gender inequity and the continued marginalization of women across the globe, and makes recommendations on how to address this. However, we also feel it is important to shift the narrative from one that is focused on how women are excluded and under-valued to a narrative that explores the contributions women are making in the social, economic, and political realms of their communities, and that highlights these achievements using empirical evidence. That is why, in this edited volume, we highlight the contributions of West African women to social, economic, and political development, which are often missing from the literature, especially since informality means they often fall under the radar. We use qualitative methodology—interviews, focus groups, and case studies—that lend themselves to in-depth, thick description and analyses that is, in the words of one of our contributors, Gretchen Bauer, “rich, intensive, and holistic.”

To this end, the present volume consists of three main sections, and each section contains chapters relating to either the social, economic, or political contributions of women to development. Each chapter focuses on a specific country in West Africa and offers qualitative empirical evidence related to social, economic, or political development in that country context. While we organize the chapters in the volume according to the categories of social, economic, and political development, the existing literature, as well as the contributions in this volume, make it clear these categories cannot be siloed from one another, and that one type of development impacts another. The social, economic, and political development of West Africa remains deeply interconnected.

Part 1: The Role of Women in Social Development in West Africa

In Part 1 of this volume, we focus on the role of West African women in social development, while acknowledging the interconnections between all three types of development: social, economic, and political. Part 1 of this volume speaks to the ability of women to contribute to social development in West Africa, including their roles in solving individual and community problems. Social development includes access to basic services including education and health care, as well as infrastructure such as sanitation, roads, and mobile and internet technology. In Part 1, we explore how individual women, women’s organizations, and women-led NGOs provide social services such as educational and vocational skills training, health services, and social protection, highlighting the important ways in which West African women are actively contributing to improving their communities.

Social development, especially for women, is an important part of achieving broader sustainable development. For example, social development improves the standard of living for women and children, as it is associated with an increase in educational attainment for women, postponement of marriage, smaller family size, and an increased desire for financial independence (Owusu et al., 2014). It can lead to improved health outcomes, in particular related to reproductive and maternal health (OECD, 2008). While health indicators have improved globally, maternal death and adolescent fertility rates remain high, especially in countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (IMF, 2018). Thus, continued social development remains vital to address these issues. Social development also impacts economic development. Unequal access and opportunities for women, such as disproportionate access to education and health services, reduces women’s chances of succeeding in the labor market, which contributes to income inequality, especially in emerging and developing countries (IMF, 2018).

While gender equity is the driving force behind social development in developing nations, we know there is still a lack of gender parity in many contexts, which impedes not only social development but also economic

and political development. For example, women perform a disproportionate amount of unpaid childcare and domestic work, and this affects their ability to participate fully in economic and political activities. Additionally, a lack of public services, and limited access to and affordability of time-saving technology, keeps many women in both income and time poverty (United Nations, 2019). When formal government structures fail to provide public services and tools to address women's income and time poverty, other nongovernmental structures may step in to fill the gap (Clark, 2010). Many times, these nongovernmental structures take the shape of women's groups, often with the backing of development institutions, international donors, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) (Bawa & Sanyare, 2013). Local women's associations facilitate social development by providing social and economic support to beneficiaries in their communities (Fallon, 2003). Associations and NGOs address issues of safety and security, health care, childcare, and other related social needs (Awuah, 1997). For example, in Accra, Ghana, female market traders worked through the Ghana Association of Traders (GATA) to establish a daycare center for the children of female traders. The daycare center has been a success and is identified as a model for how women's groups can provide social services to address time poverty, and in turn allow women to increase their income and address gender equality (Kelly, 2019).

It is important to underscore, as we do in Part 1 of this volume, that women are not simply the beneficiaries of social development. Women are also important contributors to social development. Women advocate for improvements in their local communities, including infrastructure like wells and clean water, and basic health care and hygiene (King & Mason, 2001). They also advocate for progressive policies that contribute to improving society more broadly. Importantly, they are also in many cases the ones who are implementing social development activities, taking it upon themselves to provide social services such as health care, education and trainings, and social protection. Women very often see the problems facing their communities and step up to address them. We critically explore the contributions of West African women to social development in the first three chapters of this volume.