AB Journals

African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research
ISSN 2689-5129 • Volume 9, Issue 5, 2026 • pp. 122–137

RESEARCH ARTICLE Received: 7 Sep 2026, Accepted: 8 Oct 2026, Published: 9 Nov 2026

Gender Equality as a Driver of Inclusive and Sustainable Development in Cameroon

Emmurana Morray[1*]; Youmbi Zidenie Afanya[2]

[1]Pan African University of Governance, Humanities and Social Sciences, Yaoundé, Cameroon.
[2]Pan African University of Earth and Life Sciences, Ibadan, Nigeria.

[*]*Corresponding Author's Email: morrayemmorana_paughss@pau-au.africa*

Abstract

Although gender equality is often viewed because of development in many countries, it is also a fundamental driver of sustainable and inclusive development in Cameroon. To explore this relationship, this paper examines the extent to which gender equality contributes to human capital formation, economic participation, land and financial inclusion, political representation, public accountability, and poverty reduction.

Using a qualitative approach, the study adopts a systematic integrative desk review of national statistical data, international development databases, policy documents, and peer-reviewed literature. Rather than estimating causal effects, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how gender inequality affects sustainable development in Cameroon and to propose relevant policy recommendations.

The findings show that gender inequalities persist across multiple domains, including education, labour markets, land governance, political participation, violence against women and girls, and humanitarian settings. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of considering intersectionality and regional disparities. Factors such as rural residence, conflict, displacement, linguistic marginalization, disability, and poverty often intensify the vulnerabilities and discrimination experienced by women and girls. Ultimately, the study argues that gender equality should be recognized as a form of development infrastructure that is essential for Cameroon's sustainable development.

Keywords: Cameroon; Gender Equality; Governance; Inclusive Development; Intersectionality; Sustainable Development; Women's Economic Empowerment

How to Cite: Morray, E., & Afanya, Y. Z. (2026). Gender Equality as a Driver of Inclusive and Sustainable Development in Cameroon. African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research, 9(5), 122–137. https://doi.org/10.52589/AJSSHR-PXJTTR

© 2026 by the authors. Published by AB Journals. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) license.

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality (GE) and women's empowerment have been central themes in Cameroon's development agenda, as articulated in both Vision 2035 and the National Development Strategy 2020-2030. Both policies emphasize human capital development, productive transformation, social inclusion, and improved governance as key pillars of Cameroon's development trajectory. Despite these commitments, there exist significant discrepancies between formal policies and practical realities. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2025, Cameroon ranked 93rd out of 148 countries assessed, with wide disparities in education attainment and political empowerment. Similarly, the United Nations Development Program's 2025 Human Development Report highlights substantial gender inequality, which stems from persistent reproductive health issues, lack of empowerment, and labor market participation (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2025; World Economic Forum, 2025).

It is important to note that these statistics reflect the multi-sectoral implications of gender inequality. A young female student who fails to complete her secondary education will likely encounter limited employment options during adulthood and restricted financial services (World Bank. (2023) On the other hand, a rural female farmer without secure land ownership rights cannot make informed investments, use the land as collateral, and safeguard productive resources. (World Bank. (2026). World Bank Group. In situations involving domestic or economic violence, women suffer the loss of earnings, assets, freedom of movement, and bargaining power. The inadequate representation of women in executive and local politics may lead to fewer allocations for these issues in budgeting, service provision, and reforms. Consequently, gender disparities act as a structural barrier that influences educational attainment, health outcomes, productivity, household welfare, and good governance. The current body of knowledge about Cameroon includes studies related to education, women's land ownership, economic empowerment, gender-based violence, and political representation. However, these topics tend to be analyzed separately in existing scholarships, thus failing to capture the multidimensional nature of gender barriers. For example, disruptions to schooling may result in poor labor market outcomes, insecure property rights can hinder entrepreneurship finance, domestic violence undermines employment prospects and freedom of movement, while insufficient political agency delays legislative reforms (Amacher et al., 2018). Against this backdrop, this paper seeks to answer the following questions: How does gender inequality affect inclusive and sustainable development in Cameroon? What is the impact of regional disparities, conflicts, and displacement on these effects? As proposed in this paper, gender equality can be considered both a key determinant and an essential product of development processes.

This paper contributes to social sciences and humanities scholarship in that it combines evidence on education, labor market dynamics, land rights, gender-based violence, governance structures, and conflict contexts in a coherent development framework for Cameroon.GE is considered a necessary precondition for realizing sustainable development outcomes. Following the human capital theme, the paper moves to economic participation and asset accumulation, governance, and poverty reduction, acknowledging that each topic has feedback implications. Key areas covered include the informal economy, women's access to finance, land tenure and agriculture, violence against women, political participation, gender-responsive budgeting, and the effects of conflict and displacement on women. In addition, the analysis examines how these issues interact and reinforce one another. By doing so, it strengthens understanding of the links between gender equality and broader sustainable development

challenges in Cameroon. Furthermore, it situates these issues within the framework of national development policies and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As a result, the study provides a more comprehensive perspective on the role of gender equality in advancing sustainable and inclusive development. These linkages will contribute to an evidence-based framework to guide policymakers towards achieving sustainable development objectives in Cameroon.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Analytical Approach

Gender equality works via an interlocking set of development processes. Gender equality in education, health, legal rights, and security increases women's capacities and human capital stock. Human capital turns into economic contributions through access to labor markets, enterprise creation, asset ownership, and financial resources. Economic engagement improves household negotiation power, taxation capacity, and resilience, while active political participation enhances institutional responsiveness and budget allocations. Improved governance will strengthen educational opportunities, health services, social protection programs, land tenure systems, and violence prevention measures, establishing a virtuous circle. The present analytical approach does not presume automatic progress across all stages. Rather, it acknowledges the various conditions and contingencies that influence outcomes. Furthermore, it recognizes that the interaction between gender equality and development is shaped by social, economic, political, and institutional factors. As a result, development outcomes may vary across contexts.

Limitations and Assumptions

Economic autonomy could trigger resistance in contexts with poor legal frameworks. Political inclusion may continue to be symbolic despite constrained parties and executives.

Furthermore, protection from violence, accountable public budgeting, and meaningful political participation are necessary for advancing development. As a result, gender equality is more likely to produce sustainable and inclusive outcomes.

Figure 1. Analytical pathway linking gender equality to inclusive and sustainable development



Source: Author generated, 2026

Note: Gender-based violence, conflict, unpaid care burdens, discriminatory institutions, and insecure property rights can disrupt multiple stages of the development pathway. Consequently, progress towards gender equality and broader development outcomes may be slowed or reversed. Moreover, these barriers often reinforce one another, creating additional challenges for women and girls. However, responsive and inclusive institutions can help address these constraints. In addition, effective policies and interventions can generate positive feedback effects that strengthen earlier stages of the pathway and promote sustainable development.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs an integrative qualitative desk review of secondary evidence. The data draws on a wide range of sources, including national statistics, development databases, government policy documents, multilateral policy frameworks, human rights reports, and peer-reviewed academic literature. In addition, the study incorporates data from both national and international institutions to provide a comprehensive assessment of gender equality and development in Cameroon.

Key sources include the National Institute of Statistics of Cameroon and Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data. Moreover, information is drawn from databases and reports produced by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, UN Women, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Economic Forum, and Afrobarometer. Furthermore, the review examines scholarly literature on land rights, governance, gender-based violence, and conflict in Cameroon. Consequently, the study combines multiple forms of evidence to develop a nuanced understanding of the relationship between gender equality and sustainable development. However, the analysis remains dependent on the quality, availability, and coverage of existing secondary data sources.

Data sources were chosen based on their relevance to at least one step in the causal pathway between human capital and security challenges in Cameroon. These include human capital development, economic participation, asset ownership, governance and political representation, poverty, resilience, and sustainable development. Priority was accorded to recent national-level data and scholarly research on Cameroon. Older sources were considered when they are foundational or when recent data is unavailable. Findings were triangulated across various sources to ensure that key claims were not dependent on any dataset or institutional standpoint alone.

Wherever possible, evidence from sub-Saharan African at the regional level has been included only if relevant to explaining specific mechanisms observed in the case of Cameroon. In contrast to econometric approaches adopted in existing studies, the current paper adopts an interpretivist approach. Due to differences in sample periods, populations, and methodologies adopted in underlying studies, it would be inappropriate to attempt estimation of one causal coefficient linking gender equality and development outcomes. Rather, this paper seeks to uncover recurring mechanisms and relationships between gender equality and development. One important limitation of this methodology is that country-level aggregates may obscure sub-national disparities, and some gender variables lack coverage or adequate breakdowns. As such, this paper also includes an analysis of regional disparities and intersectionality in relation to armed conflict.

GENDER EQUALITY AND HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

Human capital – comprising the physical well-being, skills, competencies, and abilities of individuals in social and economic transactions – forms the bedrock of development. In Cameroon, despite achieving parity among boys and girls in certain dimensions of human capital, there is still a disparity in terms of educational progress along different pathways. Factors such as poverty, early marriages, teenage pregnancies, household chores, and insecurity may affect the likelihood of girls dropping out of school before making crucial educational milestones. Consequently, the Human Capital Index by the World Bank and national gender data should be analyzed with an understanding of the broader social determinants of retaining girls within education systems and translating schooling into subsequent opportunities (IMF, 2018; National Institute of Statistics of Cameroon, 2025; World Bank, 2020). Human capital and education inequalities have implications beyond personal remuneration. Recent empirical research continues to support this relationship. Using panel data from emerging-market economies (2000-2020), Tokal et al. (2023) found that higher levels of education significantly reduce gender inequality in the long run and that gender equality is closely linked to social and economic development. The authors argue that women constitute a substantial share of a country's human capital and that unequal access to education undermines sustainable development outcomes. Similarly, the OECD's 2023 *Gender, Education and Skills Report* highlights persistent gender gaps in educational attainment, skills acquisition, and participation in STEM fields, which later translate into labour market inequalities and underutilisation of human capital.

On the other hand, women's enhanced education is linked to improved health, low fertility rates, and high investment in children's wellbeing (Klasen, 2002). These dynamics are relevant in Cameroon since impediments to school attendance are heterogeneous. Armed conflicts and population displacements disrupt education access in Northwest, Southwest, and Far North regions. Rural poverty and childcare duties may preclude schooling even when schools are functional. While national parity ratios exist, specific girl-child cohorts experience significant disparities in education.

Developmentally, the implications are intergenerational. Low levels of educational attainment limit job access and credit utilization, hinder awareness about health and legal services, and limit intra-household negotiation capacity. Education retention policies, early marriage prevention, teenage pregnancy prevention, and education continuity amid emergencies enhance female labor force engagement and build household resilience. Therefore, human capital development should be understood beyond its traditional policy framework as an instrument through which gender disparities perpetuate across generations.

Gender Equality and Economic Participation

Women in the Informal Economy

While human capital enhances development potential when translated into economic opportunities, women in Cameroon often translate such assets via the informal economy, characterized by precarious jobs and non-contribution to contributory social protection systems. National statistical estimates highlight gender disparities in employment status and informality in Cameroon, with females mainly engaged in own-account activities and helping families economically, depending on location (National Institute of Statistics of Cameroon, 2025). First, informal employment enables women's households to survive. Second, informality constrains female access to contractual arrangements, pension schemes, maternal

protection programs, unemployment benefits, and easy business financing options. In addition to paid labor, women in Cameroon engage in unpaid care work, which poses significant barriers to achieving economic empowerment.

According to UN Women Cameroon data, women and girls spend significantly more time undertaking unpaid care and domestic work compared to men (UN Women Data Hub, 2024Time poverty, defined as a situation in which individuals have insufficient discretionary time due to the combined demands of paid and unpaid work, disproportionately affects women because they undertake a larger share of unpaid care and domestic responsibilities. This unequal burden constrains women's opportunities to participate in education, formal employment, entrepreneurship, civic engagement, and leisure activities. Recent evidence from UN Women indicates that women and girls spend more than 2.5 times as many hours on unpaid care work as men globally, limiting their ability to fully realize educational, economic, and social opportunities. (UN Women, 2024). Hence, policies aimed at increasing women's labor force participation may fail without interventions to address childcare needs, transport costs, water availability, among other care responsibilities. Such policies may instead shift care burden without enhancing women's agency.

Women's Entrepreneurship and Access to Finance

While entrepreneurship has been widely encouraged as an avenue for promoting women's economic empowerment in Cameroon, business growth requires asset endowment, financial resources, access to markets, and legal protection. Women without titles to land or other immovable property will have fewer options available to them regarding acceptable collateral. As such, they might rely more on savings clubs, rotational credit schemes, or small-scale digital financial services products. Such interventions are crucial; however, they do not entirely replace structural access to substantial financial resources over an extended period. Consequently, numerous women-owned businesses operate within low-capital businesses incapable of employing staff, shock absorption, or transitioning into formalized value chains (World Bank Group, 2022).

An improved economic inclusion strategy should link financial inclusion with property ownership rights, business registration, public procurement, digital connectivity, market intelligence, and social protection programs. While the aim should not be limited to increasing the number of economically engaged women, the focus should be on improving their productive capabilities, enhancing security, and promoting sustainable growth in women-led ventures (International Finance Corporation (IFC, 2019).

Gender-Based Violence as an Economic Development Issue

GBV constitutes a health and human rights violation. Nevertheless, it is equally an economic and governance problem that must be understood within the broader developmental context. The evidence derived from Cameroon's 2018 survey shows significant prevalence rates of intimate partner violence. More recent research conducted by Human Rights Watch demonstrates different forms of GBV – physical, psychological, and economic violence, including confinement, restriction of movement outside the home, and limitations on employment opportunities and ownership of property. In particular, the economic aspect of violence may involve confiscation of productive resources and earnings (Human Rights Watch, 2026a; Human Rights Watch, 2026b). This practice undermines household stability while limiting women's asset accumulation and economic participation capacity.

Empowerment programs need to consider the potential unintended negative impact on women's safety when implementing interventions aimed at fostering economic independence. Evidence derived from empirical research utilizing Cameroon's survey suggests that economic empowerment may lead to increased reported violence within households characterized by inequality, whereby the shift in household dynamics triggers backlash. Economic interventions cannot simply focus on economic benefits because of their complex relationship with empowerment. Policy makers must recognize the risk of exacerbating violence among those experiencing gender inequalities. These include legal protections, confidential counseling services for victims, safe referrals, community mobilization efforts, and interventions aimed at combating discrimination. There is an urgent need for such interventions since institutional mechanisms remain inadequate. According to Human Rights Watch (2026a; 2026b), as of 2026, Cameroon had failed to achieve its objective of reducing violence against women by half by 2026. In addition, Cameroon lacked a national response strategy to guide efforts to prevent domestic violence and provide support to victims. Violence against women has significant economic consequences. It generates direct costs, such as the treatment of injuries sustained by survivors. In addition, it creates indirect costs through lost labour productivity and increased medical expenses. Furthermore, affected households may experience asset depletion and disruptions in education. As a result, the negative effects extend beyond individual victims and families. Over time, these impacts reduce social welfare and hinder development across generations.

Gender Equality, Land Rights and Agricultural Productivity

Agriculture continues to be fundamental to rural livelihoods and food security in Cameroon, with women contributing significantly to agricultural production activities. However, the lands under cultivation are often not owned or controlled by women. Current estimates of women's ownership vary widely according to whether the indicator concerns land use rights, legal registration or officially issued land certificates. Although studies use different definitions and estimation methods, they reach a similar conclusion. Women make substantial contributions to agricultural production. However, they continue to face limited ownership of, and access to, land and other productive assets. Consequently, a significant gap exists between women's role in agriculture and their control over key resources (UN Women, 2018; Foretia Foundation, 2025; Pemunta, 2017).

Distinguishing between legal equality and actual access rights is crucial. In Cameroon, legal frameworks guarantee gender equality. However, customary land tenure and inheritance systems often limit women's ability to own and manage land independently. Instead, women may gain access to land through male relatives or intermediaries. Consequently, their control over productive assets remains restricted. As a result, gender inequality in landownership and management continues to be widespread across the country, particularly in the Anglophone region. Furthermore, evidence from Cameroon shows that women make significant contributions to poverty alleviation. Despite these contributions, many women still have insecure tenure rights over the land they depend on for their livelihoods (Fonjong, Fombe, & Sama-Lang, 2013). It goes beyond the issue of equity alone. Secure land rights impact investment incentives, collateralization, access to financing, sustainable soil management practices, and recovery capabilities following any shock affecting households and economies. Literature indicates that regional research reveals how the agricultural gender gap exists due to disparities in access to fertilizers, improved seeds, hired labor, agricultural extension services, financing, and secure land rather than reduced agricultural skills of female farmers (Rodgers & Akram-Lodhi, 2019; World Bank & ONE Campaign, 2014). Moreover, reforms

must address discriminatory practices embedded in marriage, inheritance, and customary tenure systems. Although many countries have adopted gender-equality legislation, women often continue to face barriers in exercising land rights due to weak implementation and conflicting customary norms (World Bank, 2023). Consequently, land reform programmes should incorporate measures that protect women's rights to own, inherit, manage, and transfer land independently. Such an integrated approach is more likely to promote gender equality, agricultural development, and poverty reduction (FAO, 2013; World Bank, 2026).

Where women have autonomy over profits earned from land holdings, impacts can spill over into increased agricultural yields, food security, educational attainment by children, and overall household resilience.

Gender Equality and Governance: Representation, Voice and Budgeting

Women's Political Representation

Cameroon has witnessed significant strides towards increasing women's descriptive representation in parliament. Specifically, the 2012 Electoral Code led to considerable gains in women's representation in parliament, with women occupying 33.9% of the total number of seats in parliament as of February 2024 (UN Women, 2013; UN Women Data Hub, 2024). However, descriptive representation alone cannot guarantee effective political power. Women have fewer opportunities to participate in some executive and local government decision-making processes. Having more women in office does not necessarily translate into gender-sensitive policy priorities and budget allocations for legislative actions.

These conclusions are based on country-specific evidence. Based on qualitative interviews with female parliamentarians, Fokum, Fonjong and Adams (2020) concluded that high levels of party discipline and dominance of the executive branch in politics may undermine substantive policy influence gained through women's descriptive representation. A key lesson from literature is that numerical representation should not be underestimated. However, increasing the number of women in legislative bodies does not automatically translate into substantive policy influence. Instead, women legislators are more likely to advance gender-responsive policies when they occupy influential positions within political institutions. Such positions include leading parliamentary committees, shaping legislative agendas, building coalitions across party lines, and mobilizing support both within and outside parliament. Furthermore, engagement with civil society organizations that represent women's interests can strengthen policymakers' capacity to advocate for gender-sensitive reforms. Consequently, substantive representation depends not only on the presence of women in decision-making bodies but also on their ability to exercise authority and influence policy outcomes (Pitkin, 1967; Childs & Krook, 2009; UN Women, 2023).

Research on women's political representation distinguishes between descriptive representation, which refers to the number of women in political office, and substantive representation, which concerns the extent to which women's interests are advanced in policymaking (Pitkin, 1967). Therefore, achieving gender equality in political institutions requires more than numerical gains. It also requires access to leadership positions, institutional support, strategic alliances, and sustained collaboration with women's advocacy groups and civil society organizations (Childs & Krook, 2009; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024; UN Women, 2023). Women's representation must go beyond national legislature. Most developmental policy decisions relating to markets, water management, land governance, local infrastructure, and public service delivery are made through ministries, local councils, and decentralized governance

structures. Consequently, women's participation in these institutions is critical for ensuring that development policies reflect the needs and priorities of diverse populations. Women in local government often bring perspectives that are closely linked to community welfare, social services, and livelihood concerns. Moreover, their inclusion can improve the responsiveness and inclusiveness of policy decisions, particularly in rural and informal settings where local institutions play a central role in shaping economic opportunities and access to resources (UN Women, 2022; UN Women, 2026).

Increasing women's representation within local governance structures can strengthen the connection between political representation and tangible development outcomes. When women participate in decision-making processes, they are better positioned to influence policies affecting land access, water governance, market participation, and basic service provision. In addition, greater female representation can contribute to more inclusive governance and strengthen institutional responsiveness to citizens' needs. As a result, local development interventions are more likely to address inequalities and support sustainable livelihoods, especially among vulnerable groups in rural and informal economies (UN Women, 2022; UN DESA, 2026).

Gender-Responsive Budgeting and Accountability

The use of GRB presents one way of translating political voice into tangible results. Unlike the establishment of an isolated 'women's budget,' the application of GRB entails an assessment of the impact of traditional budget policies and programs on women and men separately and whether public finance interventions tackle existing disparities. The Government of Cameroon has begun to implement GRB with the assistance of its national agencies and cooperating partners such as UN Women. Nevertheless, the efficacy of GRB interventions hinges on data availability and the capacity to trace gender goals throughout the entire policy cycle from planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

The lack of sex-disaggregated data undermines accountability. Without adequate disaggregated data on women's property ownership, income generation, care work burdens, experience of gender-based violence, access to services and variations at the sub-national level, GRB will merely become another planning tool without a robust accountability mechanism. The implementation of stronger GRB initiatives necessitates regular dissemination of disaggregated gender indicators, expenditure tracking and impact evaluations of expenditures made in the education, health, agriculture, transport, social protection and local infrastructure sectors.

Regional Inequality, Conflict and Intersectionality

Why National Averages are not Enough

An indicator of the gender situation in Cameroon reflects the average position of women in a context where the opportunity structure varies immensely depending on location, urban-rural distribution, economic status, age, disability, linguistic group, and experiences of armed conflict. There is a danger of obfuscation when 'Cameroonian women' are considered as one homogenous group since it conceals variations in development challenges faced by specific groups. According to the National Institute of Statistics of Cameroon (2025), women's participation in the labour market varies significantly between urban and rural areas. In addition, substantial geographic disparities exist in educational attainment, access to social services, and economic opportunities. These differences can influence women's ability to engage in productive employment and participate in decision-making processes. Moreover,

unequal access to education and essential services may constrain economic empowerment in certain regions. Consequently, efforts to enhance women's participation in development and governance should recognize these spatial inequalities and adopt context-specific interventions that address local challenges (National Institute of Statistics of Cameroon, 2025).

The policy implications of this argument lie in recognizing that one solution can mean very different things depending on the local context. While entrepreneurship training may benefit a woman living in an urban area who has access to digital networks, financial services, and market information, its impact is likely to be limited for women facing more severe structural constraints. For example, a displaced woman who lacks legal documentation, secure housing, and safe access to markets may be unable to translate entrepreneurial skills into sustainable economic opportunities. Moreover, forced displacement often creates barriers to labour market participation, financial inclusion, and access to livelihood support services. Consequently, entrepreneurship programmes alone may not be sufficient to improve economic outcomes unless they are accompanied by interventions that address protection concerns, legal status, social protection, and market access (UNHCR, 2025).

This distinction highlights the importance of context-sensitive development interventions. While skills training can strengthen individual capacities, broader institutional and structural barriers often determine whether women can effectively participate in economic activities. In addition, women entrepreneurs frequently face constraints related to mobility, access to markets, information, and business opportunities. These challenges are often more pronounced among displaced and vulnerable populations. Therefore, livelihood programmes should combine entrepreneurship support with measures that improve market access, legal inclusion, financial services, and personal security (World Bank; ILO & UNHCR).

Land titling schemes can assist certain rural women while ignoring others whose displacement disconnects them from traditional forms of ownership. Similarly, programs designed to improve girls' education enrollment rates will succeed in contexts of extreme poverty but must integrate additional factors such as security, psychological assistance, and alternative learning strategies in conflict-affected environments.

Conflict and Displacement as Multipliers of Gender Inequality

The security challenges facing Cameroon exacerbate the development continuum described above. Displacement in the country due to conflict in the North-West and South-West regions and insecurity related to Boko Haram insurgency in the Far North has disrupted education and economic activities while compromising access to healthcare, justice, and protection services. According to Human Rights Watch's 2026 report, the insecurity challenge in Cameroon poses significant risk factors that increase violence against women and girls while limiting access to essential but inadequate services (Human Rights Watch, 2026a). It is important to note that conflict does not merely create new issues of gender concern; rather, it could magnify multiple existing inequalities simultaneously.

Empirical evidence in recent peer-reviewed studies supports this argument. Ngangue et al.'s study among internally displaced women in the Littoral Region demonstrated that displacement-induced poverty, GBV, and language marginalization interact to influence mental well-being and resilience. The authors argue that continuing structural challenges in hosting areas may play a crucial role alongside historical experiences of violence. Nsoma, Chowdharia, and Gupta (2025) demonstrate how structural violence and displacement-related challenges intersect to produce social exclusion among internally displaced women in the

Anglophone regions of Cameroon. Their findings show that displacement is not merely a consequence of conflict but also a process that compounds existing gender inequalities through restricted access to livelihoods, social networks, public services, and decision-making opportunities. These findings align with broader studies on forced displacement, which argue that women's economic and social exclusion is driven by a combination of institutional barriers, insecurity, and limited access to productive resources (UNHCR, 2025; ILO & UNHCR, n.d.). Moreover, the wider literature emphasizes that gender equality interventions are most effective when integrated with livelihood security, social protection, psychosocial support, and accessible communication mechanisms. Such an approach recognizes that economic empowerment alone cannot address the multiple and overlapping vulnerabilities experienced by displaced women. Consequently, the findings of Nsoma, Chowdharia, and Gupta (2025) support the growing consensus that holistic and context-sensitive interventions are required to promote both women's empowerment and sustainable social inclusion among displaced populations. This perspective is consistent with evidence from humanitarian and development research, which highlights the importance of combining economic, social, and protection-related support to improve outcomes for displaced women and girls (UNHCR, 2025; World Bank).

Conflict can reduce assets available for reconstruction activities. Women displaced by conflict lose access to farmlands, documentation systems, markets, and social ties. Moreover, demands for caregiving increase amid medical emergencies, closure of educational facilities, and other disruptions experienced during conflict periods. Women who predominantly engage in precarious employment become vulnerable to exploitation or adopt risky coping mechanisms due to loss of earning opportunities. Thus, the journey from human capital to economic participation becomes highly precarious among populations affected by conflict situations.

Implications for Inclusive Policy

An intersectional, conflict-sensitive approach to gender policy alters existing perceptions of effective gender policy interventions.

Gender data must be disaggregated not only according to the sex but also, when feasible and ethical, disaggregated according to geographical location, age, urban/rural dwelling, disability status, and forced displacement, among others. Gender-responsive budgeting seeks to allocate public resources in ways that address the specific needs of women and girls, particularly in crisis-affected regions. For example, it can support increased investment in educational services and programmes aimed at preventing and responding to gender-based violence (GBV). In addition, it can improve access to justice, maternal healthcare, and reproductive health services. Moreover, gender-responsive budgeting can promote women's economic empowerment by funding livelihood initiatives, skills development programmes, and employment opportunities. It can also strengthen social protection systems that support vulnerable populations during periods of crisis and recovery. Consequently, this approach helps ensure that public spending contributes to gender equality while addressing the multidimensional challenges faced by women and girls in conflict- and crisis-affected settings. Finally, recovery and peacebuilding initiatives must incorporate the participation of women as actors in matters related to security, local development, and resource distribution, among others. Such an approach to gender policy complements the core argument presented in the article. By framing gender equality as development infrastructure, it becomes apparent that regions where multiple forms of exclusion affect women are vulnerable points at which the development process will falter. Addressing such vulnerabilities does not undermine the

development policy framework at the national level; rather, it ensures the success of national averages.

From Governance to Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development

This paper explores the linkages between institutional quality and welfare outcomes through three core pathways: productivity, social safety nets, and human capital formation. Gender-based insecurity, poor health care utilization, and lack of social protection exacerbate poverty, health expenditure burdens, and lost livelihood opportunities for affected individuals. Insecure property rights hinder productivity investments. Unsafe labor conditions and informal employment undermine social protection and taxable income generation. Disrupted education leads to diminished earning capacity. Such accumulation creates a macro-developmental case despite apparent origins at the individual or community level. The reverse effect also holds true.

Improved educational attainment and economic empowerment enable women to engage in productive activities, childcare investments, and shock coping strategies. Land tenure security facilitates agricultural productivity and food security. Robust prevention policies and support services safeguard health, income, and asset ownership. Political agencies and gender-sensitive budgets orient governmental priorities toward dismantling structural impediments to equality. Such reinforcing effects constitute institutional dynamics that generate developmental gains beyond mere social dividends. The logic further reinforces the sustainability dimension of the argument regarding gender inequality and poverty reduction in Cameroon. According to the SDGs framework, achieving sustainable development necessitates ensuring that economic benefits persist across generations and that economic growth does not marginalize certain segments of society. Goal 5 on gender equality is thus directly linked to poverty eradication (Goal 1), hunger alleviation (Goal 2), quality education (Goal 4), decent work (Goal 8), reduced inequality (Goal 10), and effective institutions (Goal 16) (United Nations, 2015). This implies that any progress made towards achieving these goals will complement one another when gender equality is integrated into various sectors.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The evidence supports a coordinated policy package rather than a sequence of disconnected gender projects. Table 1 summarizes the principal constraints, recommended policy directions and development effects identified in the review.

Table 1: Priority policy pathways for gender-responsive inclusive development in Cameroon

Domain	Key constraint	Priority action	Expected development effect
Human capital	Early dropout, child marriage, adolescent pregnancy and crisis-related learning disruption	Protect the primary-to-secondary transition through targeted fee support or cash transfers; expand reproductive-health services; maintain safe and flexible learning options in crisis-affected areas.	Higher skills, earnings and intergenerational human capital.

Domain	Key constraint	Priority action	Expected development effect
Land and agriculture	Weak tenure security and unequal access to credit, inputs and extension services	Scale affordable land registration for women; protect inheritance and matrimonial property rights; link tenure reform to agricultural finance, extension and inputs.	Higher investment, farm productivity, food security and resilience.
Economic participation	Informality, time poverty, weak social protection and limited growth finance	Extend social protection to informal workers; improve childcare and care-support infrastructure; expand procurement, digital finance and formalization incentives for women-owned enterprises.	More secure work, stronger enterprise growth and a broader productive base.
Gender-based violence	Physical, psychological and economic violence; fragmented protection and data systems	Adopt comprehensive domestic-violence protections; expand survivor-centered services, legal aid and referral systems; build coordinated national GBV data and prevention systems.	Lower health and productivity losses; stronger autonomy and asset security.
Governance and representation	Numerical representation without equivalent policy influence; weak outcome tracking	Increase women's influence in executive and local institutions; strengthen committee and constituency capacity; institutionalize gender-responsive budget execution and evaluation.	More accountable institutions and gender-responsive service delivery.
Conflict and regional inequality	Displacement, linguistic barriers, service disruption and overlapping vulnerabilities	Use conflict-sensitive, regionally targeted gender budgeting; disaggregate data by region and displacement status; include women in recovery and peacebuilding decisions.	More inclusive recovery, social cohesion and reduced spatial inequality.

Note: Author-generated table (2026). Synthesising evidence from the literature on gender equality, human capital development, land governance, economic participation, gender-based violence, governance, and conflict-sensitive development in Cameroon. The table integrates findings from academic and grey literature reviewed in this study and is not reproduced from a single source.

Monitoring must incorporate quantitative metrics and reporting mechanisms to assess progress towards achieving stated goals. One recommended approach involves simultaneously measuring both outputs and impacts of interventions aimed at improving gender equality. Specifically, it entails evaluating both the number of women receiving titles, financing, and capacity building and any resulting changes in asset ownership. It also entails measuring budgetary allocations claimed as gender-responsive spending and assessing reductions in

disparities in access to services. Lastly, it entails counting female political representatives while assessing whether the concerns of women impact budgets, laws, and decision-making processes in communities.

CONCLUSION

Cameroonian gender equality cannot be viewed as one sector out of many others such as education, health care, agriculture, work, and governance. Instead, gender equality cuts across these sectors as an underlying structure. Gender inequality in access to educational opportunities may lead to low human capital levels. Low human capital and vulnerable productive resources hinder economic empowerment. Domestic violence leads to lack of freedom, mobility, income generation, and protection of assets. Political marginalization limits capacity for advocacy towards improving service delivery and defending rights. These connections create a reinforcing effect.

The core contribution of this paper is proposing a comprehensive development model that recognizes gender inequality at its core. There is another crucial consideration. The development pathway does not apply equally to every woman. Conflict, forced displacement, deprivation, rurality, linguistic factors, youthfulness, and disabilities can aggravate gender barriers and disrupt multiple developmental processes simultaneously. Thus, national progress needs to consider the distributional dimension of opportunity gaps and achievements among different geographic locations and social categories.

For Cameroon's Vision 2035 and the broader 2030 Agenda, gender equality must be considered an essential structural element of any inclusive and sustainable development strategy. Effective action requires a multi-dimensional approach to gender equality and development. First, policies should ensure that girls remain in school by addressing the barriers that contribute to school dropout. In addition, governments should strengthen and protect women's land tenure and property rights to enhance economic security and productive investment. Efforts should also focus on improving women's labour productivity through skills development, decent employment opportunities, and access to social protection. Moreover, comprehensive measures are needed to prevent and respond to violence against women. These measures should include legal protection, survivor-centered services, and effective referral systems. Furthermore, women's substantive participation in political and decision-making processes should be promoted at national and local levels. Finally, public expenditures should be monitored and evaluated through a gender-responsive lens to ensure accountability for development outcomes. Consequently, a coordinated approach across these domains can contribute to sustainable gender equality and inclusive development. Such synergies among interlinked interventions have the potential to deliver positive effects not just for individual women but also their households, communities, agricultural production, food security, institutions, and future generations.

REFERENCES

Fokum, V. Y., Fonjong, L. N., & Adams, M. J. (2020). Increasing women's representation in the Cameroon parliament: Do numbers really matter? Women's Studies International Forum, 80, 102369. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2020.102369

Fonjong, L., Fombe, L., & Sama-Lang, I. (2013). The paradox of gender discrimination in land ownership and women's contribution to poverty reduction in Anglophone Cameroon. GeoJournal, 78(3), 575–589. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-012-9452-z

Foretia Foundation. (2025). Women's land rights and economic empowerment in Cameroon. https://www.foretiafoundation.org/womens-land-rights-and-economic-empowerment-in-cameroon/

Human Rights Watch. (2026a, June 24). *"I live in constant peril":* Discrimination, lack of economic autonomy, and violence against women in Cameroon. https://www.hrw.org/report/2026/06/24/i-live-in-constant-peril/discrimination-lack-of-economic-autonomy-and-violence

Human Rights Watch. (2026b, July 13). Poor governance enables violence against women in Cameroon. https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/07/13/poor-governance-enables-violence-against-women-in-cameroon

International Monetary Fund. (2018). Cameroon*: Selected issues* (IMF Country Report No. 18/256). https://doi.org/10.5089/9781484373378.002

National Institute of Statistics of Cameroon. (2025, February 21). Women and men, girls and boys in Cameroon. https://ins-cameroun.cm/en/statistique/women-and-men-girls-and-boys-in-cameroon/

Klasen, S. (2002). Low schooling for girls, slower growth for all? Cross-country evidence on the effect of gender inequality in education on economic development. The World Bank Economic Review, 16(3), 345–373. https://doi.org/10.1093/wber/lhf004

Ngangue, P., Mbang Massom, D., Yopa, D. S., Mbevo Fendoung, P., Dissak Delon, J. C., Tameh, T., & Dissak Delon, F. N. (2026). Understanding the nexus between gender-based violence and mental health among Anglophone internally displaced women in Littoral Cameroon through an intersectional socioecological lens. Discover Mental Health. https://doi.org/10.1007/s44192-026-00516-2

Nsoma, N. K., Chowdharia, B., & Gupta, A. (2025). Narratives of internally displaced women amid the Anglophone crisis in Cameroon. Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2025.2529498

Pemunta, N. V. (2017). When "property cannot own property": Women's lack of property rights in Cameroon. African Journal of Economic and Sustainable Development, 6(1), 67–85. https://doi.org/10.1504/AJESD.2017.082808

UN Women. (2013). Cameroon elections catapult women, more than doubling their representation in the National Assembly. https://www.unwomen.org/

UN Women. (2018, October 22). Securing rural women's access to land in Cameroon. https://africa.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2018/10/access-to-land

Rodgers, Y., & Akram-Lodhi, H. (2019). The gender gap in agricultural productivity in sub-Saharan Africa: Causes, costs and solutions (Policy Brief No. 11). UN Women. https://knowledge.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/04/the-gender-gap-in-agricultural-productivity-in-sub-saharan-africa

UN Women. (2023). Women Count Phase II*: Cameroon*. https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/Women%20Count/Women_Count_Brief_Cameroon.pdf

UN Women Data Hub. (2024). Country fact sheet: Cameroon. https://data.unwomen.org/country/cameroon

United Nations General Assembly. (2015). Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1). https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3923923

United Nations Development Programme. (2025). *Human Development Report 2025: A matter of choice: People and possibilities in the age of AI*. https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2025

World Bank & ONE Campaign. (2014). Levelling the field: Improving opportunities for women farmers in Africa. World Bank. https://doi.org/10.1596/17790

World Bank. (2020). Cameroon Human Capital Index 2020. https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext_download/hci/HCI_2pager_CMR.pdf

World Economic Forum. (2025). Global Gender Gap Report 2025. https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2025/

OECD. (2023). Gender, Education and Skills: The Persistence of Gender Gaps in Education and Skills. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. https://doi.org/10.1787/34680dd5-en.

Tokal, P., Sart, G., Danilina, M. D., & Ta'Amnha, M. A. (2023). The impact of education level and economic freedom on gender inequality: Panel evidence from emerging markets. Frontiers in Psychology, 14. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1202014

World Bank. (2025). Gender Data Portal: Education. [genderdata...ldbank.org]

UN Women. (2024). Care: A critical investment for gender equality and the rights of women and girls. Care: A critical investment for gender equality and the rights of women and girls | UN Women – Headquarters

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2025). Livelihoods and economic inclusion. [unhcr.org]

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2019). Refugee Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion 2019-2023: Global Strategy Concept Note. [data.unhcr.org]

International Labour Organization (ILO) & United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). A systemic approach to inclusive markets for refugees and host communities. [ilo.org]

World Bank. Access to Markets: Barriers, Themes, and Constraints. [digitalfor...ldbank.org]

UNHCR, 2025; World Bank, n.d. https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/build-better-futures/livelihoods-and-economic-inclusion