

### Introduction

In an era marked by global uncertainty and shifting economic paradigms, the need for investments that yield broad-based social and economic returns has never been greater. Conventional funding models often target isolated sectors such as economic development, healthcare, or security, without recognizing the interdependencies among these sectors. Yet, the integration of care work into economic and security policies offers a transformative pathway to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth. This essay examines the strategic value of adopting an integrated policy approach; one that combines the undervalued sector of care work with broader macroeconomic and security considerations. The analysis focuses on how such integration can lead to improved public health, enhanced economic productivity, and stronger social cohesion, thereby delivering substantial returns for funders who support systemic reform.

At the heart of the issue is the recognition that care work is not a peripheral concern but a fundamental driver of societal well-being. The labor associated with care work, whether performed within families or delivered by public services, underpins the overall functioning of communities. Yet, care work is routinely overlooked in national economic statistics, leading to policy neglect. When care is underinvested, households suffer from inadequate healthcare, insufficient educational support, and poor living conditions. These deficits have cascading effects on economic performance, as they reduce labor participation, elevate healthcare costs, and erode human capital. For funders, this represents a critical area of missed opportunity: investments in care can yield high returns by enhancing the overall resilience of a society.

Furthermore, an integrated policy approach addresses the interconnected nature of economic security and public safety. Traditional security frameworks, which focus narrowly on defense and law enforcement, fail to account for the everyday vulnerabilities that arise from the neglect of care work. When communities lack adequate care support, they experience heightened stress, increased health risks, and a diminished capacity to contribute productively to the economy. This, in turn, undermines public trust and social stability, key factors that influence the long-term viability of economic development. By integrating care work with macroeconomic and security policies, governments can foster a more stable environment that is conducive to sustainable growth.

### Discussion

A crucial element of this approach is the development of robust data systems that capture the multifaceted contributions of care work. Current data collection methods often aggregate economic indicators in a way that obscures the hidden labor of care work. For funders, investing in improved, disaggregated data systems is a strategic move that enables more targeted and effective interventions. Such systems provide a nuanced understanding of how care support impacts public health and economic productivity; revealing disparities

that can inform policy reforms. Moreover, transparent data not only facilitates better policy design but also strengthens accountability mechanisms, ensuring that investments yield measurable improvements.

In addition to data-driven insights, the integrated approach emphasizes participatory governance and community empowerment. Inclusive decision-making processes ensure that the voices of those most affected by inadequate care are heard and that public policies reflect local realities. When communities are actively engaged in the policy process, the outcomes are more likely to be sustainable and equitable. For funders, supporting initiatives that promote participatory governance is a prudent strategy. Investments in community-led projects and capacity-building programs have demonstrated that when local stakeholders are empowered, the ripple effects extend well beyond immediate economic gains, leading to more cohesive and resilient societies.

From an investment perspective, the potential returns of an integrated policy framework are multidimensional. Improved public health outcomes reduce the long-term costs of healthcare and enhance productivity. Enhanced care provisioning boosts labor participation and supports economic growth. Moreover, stronger social cohesion and participatory governance leads to more stable environments, which are critical for attracting further investment and ensuring sustained development. In short, investments that promote the integration of care, security, and macroeconomy deliver not only financial returns but also substantial social and political benefits.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the integrated approach to policy that incorporates care as a central pillar alongside economic and security considerations—offers a transformative opportunity for funders seeking to drive inclusive growth. By investing in initiatives that recognize the strategic importance of care work, funders can contribute to the creation of policies that enhance public health, stimulate sustainable economic development, and build resilient, cohesive communities. Such investments represent a shift away from traditional, siloed funding models toward a more holistic vision of development.

For those ready to catalyze systemic change, GENDERISE's CASM Program offers an innovative model that embodies these integrated principles. Through strategic partnerships, data-driven insights, and participatory governance initiatives, the program aims to redefine national priorities and deliver measurable returns across multiple dimensions. We invite philanthropic organizations, multilateral funding agencies, and private foundations to join us in advancing this transformative agenda.

## References

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