

Closing the Gap

Legal and Policy Reform Priorities on Climate Change, Digitalisation, and Violence Against Women & Girls

NIGERIA | GHANA | CAMEROON | TOGO

Women Aid Collective
Tamar SARC

West & Central Africa Women's Rights Coalition
(WAWORC)

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Closing the Gap

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Feminist Collective Action as a Visual — Day III of the ACT Regional Conference convened by WACOL. Banjul, The Gambia, May 2026.
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Women Aid Collective (WACOL), lead organisation for the West & Central Africa Women Rights Coalition (WAWORC)

2026

1 THE EVIDENCE: WHY THIS POLICY PAPER MATTERS

WHY THIS POLICY PAPER

Across Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon and Togo, climate shocks and the rapid spread of digital connectivity are reshaping the risks women and girls face, yet the legal and policy architecture meant to protect them has not kept pace. This brief distils the Her Voice research findings into the specific legal and policy gaps that stand between women and effective protection from violence against women and girls (VAWG), and sets out priority reforms for national governments, ECOWAS and ECCAS.

International instruments such as CEDAW, its General Recommendation No. 37[1], the Maputo Protocol[2], and the 2025 AU Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (AUCEVAWG)[3], already recognise disasters, environmental stress and digital harm as legitimate, intersecting drivers of violence against women. The gap is not in the global normative framework: it is in national transposition, enforcement capacity, and the near-total absence of climate–digital–VAWG integration in domestic law.

THE GAP, IN ONE LINE

The laws exist on paper; national transposition, enforcement capacity and climate–digital–VAWG integration do not.

AT A GLANCE

88% of Ghanaian households report increased violence during food shortages	**66.7%** IPV among Cameroon's flood-displaced households, vs. 41.5% non-displaced
0.04% of global climate finance is dedicated to GBV prevention	**0–10.4%** of women have ever used a digital channel to report violence
1 in 3 women globally experience VAWG in their lifetime — rising to 65% in Central Africa	**8.6M** people required GBV assistance in West & Central Africa in 2023 alone
$1.5T annual global 'violence tax' from VAWG in lost earnings & healthcare costs	**0** of the four study countries has a comprehensive TFSGBV law



Figure 1. The climate–GBV financing gap — only 0.04% of global climate finance targets GBV prevention. Source: UN Spotlight Initiative (2025).

2 THE MATRIX: LEGAL & POLICY GAP

Her Voice research across Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon and Togo surveyed 751 households and 74 institutions, producing one consistent finding: **the laws exist, but they fail survivors.** Fieldwork and desk review mapped each country against five dimensions of legal and institutional readiness — the matrix shows where protections exist on paper, where they are partial or ambiguous, and where they are entirely absent.

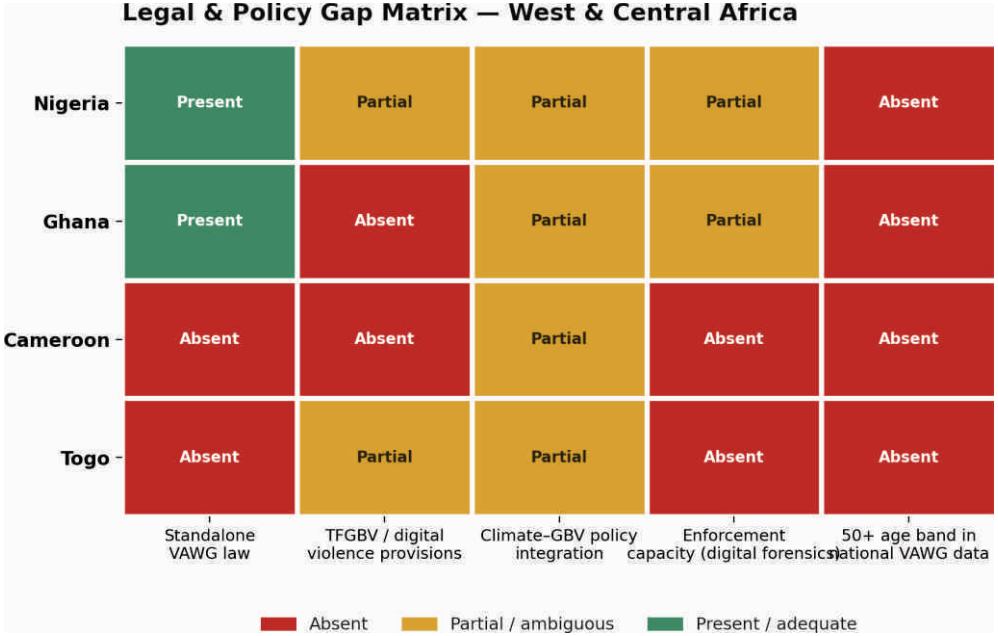


Figure 2. Legal & policy gap matrix — Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Togo. Source: Her Voice country desk reviews and fieldwork, 2025–2026.

WHAT THE MATRIX SHOWS

Standalone VAWG legislation exists in only two of the four countries. Digital/TFGBV provisions are absent or ambiguous everywhere: even where cybercrime laws exist (Nigeria's Cybercrimes Act 2015, Cameroon's 2010 Cybercrime Law, Togo's 2018 Cybersecurity Law), none clearly criminalises non-consensual image sharing, sextortion, or psychological and economic forms of technology-facilitated violence.

Climate–GBV policy integration is partial across the board: climate policies increasingly reference gender but rarely translate into operational GBV protocols during emergencies. Enforcement capacity, digital forensics, equipment and trained personnel are the weakest dimensions everywhere outside a few urban pilot sites (e.g., Lagos's Domestic and Sexual Violence Case Management System, DSVCMS).

KEY POINT

- Legal text and lived protection diverge sharply: police in Ebonyi State, Nigeria were documented as lacking functional computers for digital evidence; Togo's National Cybersecurity Agency (ANCy) recorded **zero** official cyberbullying complaints despite documented prevalence.

3 SIGNIFICANT LEGAL & JUSTICE GAPS

1 MARITAL RAPE IS NOT FULLY CRIMINALISED

in any of the four countries. Nigeria's VAPP Act[4] is explicitly silent on marital rape. Ghana repealed the colonial provision permitting it, but parliamentarians called the reform 'foreign and inconsistent with Ghanaian values'; enforcement remains contested. Cameroon and Togo have no explicit provision — sexual violence within marriage is the most under-reported form of violence documented.

2 NO COUNTRY HAS A COMPREHENSIVE TFSGBV

[5] **LAW.** Nigeria's Cybercrime Act does not criminalise sextortion, image sharing, or digital surveillance. Cameroon's MINPROFF[6], ANTIC[7] & MINPOSTEL[8] confirm no dedicated TFSGBV policy exists. Ghana's Cybersecurity Act bypasses rural women (100% use only basic phones). Togo's HAAC[9]: 'we don't have the specialised tools' for cyberbullying.

3 JUSTICE 'COMMODIFIES' SERVICES FOR THE POOR

In Ghana, survivors routinely pay for police transport and medical forms — a 'pay-to-play' barrier that decriminalises domestic violence for the poor. The mandated DV fund has never been operationalised: DOVVSU[10] officers told us, 'There is supposed to be a domestic violence fund. But so far, we've not seen that fund.'

"For a survivor of digital violence, the path to justice is split across at least four agencies, potentially discouraging help-seeking." **— Ghana Fieldwork Report, 2025**

98.9% of Ghana DV cases not recorded in the DOVVSU database	**0%** of survivors in Ghana used a digital tool to report violence	**40.9%** of women in Togo do not know where to seek help	**0** countries have a functional, disaggregated national GBV data system

Fragmented mandates: these three deficiencies compound with a fourth, structural one. In Cameroon, MINPROFF holds the GBV mandate, ANTIC handles cybercrime, and MINPOSTEL governs digital regulation — no single agency has jurisdiction over technology-facilitated domestic violence. In Nigeria, the national INSPIRE GBV monitoring data room remains non-functional. A Togolese Social Action official: 'We have a solid legal framework. But in terms of coordination, everyone still works in their field. There is no system that links climate, social, and digital.'

4 WHAT MUST REFORM — AND THE ACT PROGRAMME RESPONSE

Survivor-centred reform means designing responses from the survivor's perspective — not institutional convenience. Based on the evidence, six reforms are priorities:

1 Criminalise marital rape explicitly

Amend Nigeria's VAPP Act; enforce Ghana's DVA[11] without cultural qualification; add explicit provisions in Cameroon and Togo penal codes.

2 Enact comprehensive TFSGBV legislation

Criminalise cyberstalking, sextortion, image sharing, doxing. Lagos State's sub-national model is a ready precedent for national adoption.

3 Abolish all fees for survivors

Medical documentation, police transport and court filing must be unconditionally free. Ghana's mandated DV fund must be operationalised immediately.

4 Fix the mandate fragmentation

Cameroon needs a joint MINPROFF–ANTIC–MINPOSTEL protocol. Every country needs inter-ministerial VAWG coordination linking gender, climate, digital and justice.

5 Build digital forensic capacity in police

Units in Taraba, Yobe and Ebonyi lack functional computers; DOVVSU cannot process digital evidence without a court order it cannot obtain.

6 Reform traditional justice referral protocols

Traditional leaders — first point of contact for most survivors — must be trained to refer criminal violence to formal authorities. Togo's Notsè Declaration proves it is achievable.

THE ACT PROGRAMME RESPONSE: WHAT IS BEING DONE

Under the ACT Programme, WACOL[12] — lead of WAWORC — runs *"Her Voice"*, a multi-country research, coalition-building and feminist-leadership programme producing the survivor-centred evidence that can no longer be dismissed.

On legal reform:

- **Nigeria —** WACOL, WARD-C and partners use the desk review's analysis of VAPP's silence on marital rape/TFSGBV to press for legislative amendment.
- **Ghana —** fieldwork on the DVA's TFSGBV gap and DOVVSU's 98.9% undercount feeds submissions to the Parliamentary Committee on Gender.
- **Cameroon —** WAWORC networks push for a joint MINPROFF–ANTIC–MINPOSTEL policy framework on TFSGBV.
- **Togo —** WAWORC uses ANPC/HAAC KII findings to advocate GBV provisions in national disaster policy and a digital-violence reporting mechanism in the north.

On data: the 98.9% DOVVSU undercount, Nigeria's non-functional INSPIRE data room, and the 40.9% of Togolese women who don't know where to seek help are now baseline accountability targets, not just statistics.

On coalition: 74 institutional KIIs opened new conversations — climate agencies in Ghana and Togo named climate-GBV links absent from their own policies — and surfaced innovations ready to scale: Togo's Notsè Declaration (22% fewer early marriages via CSO–traditional-leader partnership), Ebonyi community byelaws penalising perpetrators, and WhatsApp vigilance groups in Lomé.

"The laws are not absent. They are insufficient, unenforced, and disconnected from the realities of survivors."

— Her Voice Synthesis Report, 2025

Sustained, multi-year investment in WROs, data systems and advocacy coalitions is what now stands between this evidence and legal reform.

5 COUNTRY GAPS, ENFORCEMENT REALITY & READINESS

Country	Standalone VAWG law	Digital / TFGBV provisions	Priority legal reform
Nigeria	VAPP Act (2015), domesticated in all states but one.	Cybercrimes Act 2015 criminalises cyberstalking; NCII/sextortion provisions ambiguous or absent.	Activate NCII-specific enforcement protocols; complete VAPP domestication nationwide.
Ghana	Domestic Violence Act 732 (2007).	No digital-violence provisions in the DV Act; Cybersecurity Act lacks gender-specific enforcement.	Extend DV Act 732 to cover digital violence; establish the DV Fund mandated by the 2017 Supreme Court ruling.
Cameroon	No standalone VAWG law — only the Penal Code.	2010 Cybercrime Law gives partial coverage, no dedicated TFGBV framework; ANTIC–MINPROFF mandates divided.	Enact a dedicated national VAWG law with explicit TFGBV provisions in cybercrime legislation.
Togo	No standalone VAW law — Criminal Code / 2019 Code of Persons.	2018 Cybersecurity Law does not criminalise economic/psychological violence; no NCII provisions.	Adopt a standalone VAW law criminalising psychological/economic violence, with explicit NCII/sextortion provisions.

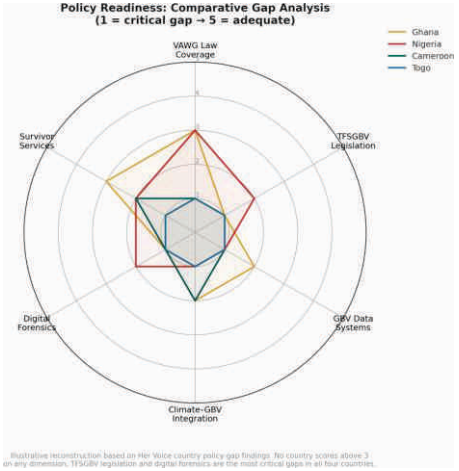
***Note** — national DHS-style surveys cap at age 49 in all four countries, structurally excluding older women from VAWG data — a gap Her Voice fieldwork in Ghana's Upper East Region (mean respondent age 50.3) was able to partially fill.*

ENFORCEMENT REALITY

- **Nigeria —** police gender desks outside Lagos lack computers and forensic tools; Lagos's DSVCMS is the national benchmark.
- **Ghana —** DOVVSU's digital reporting tools presuppose smartphone literacy absent in the highest-risk rural populations.
- **Cameroon —** the ALERT GBV digital platform is not integrated with police or justice referral pathways.
- **Togo —** institutional channels remain largely inaccessible to rural and disabled women despite a formal digital-harm law.

INTERVENTION READINESS

Each country was scored across six policy dimensions, 1 (critical gap) to 5 (adequate). No country scores above 3 on any dimension; TFSGBV legislation and digital forensics capacity are the most critical gaps across all four.



No country has a comprehensive TFSGBV law or adequate digital forensics capacity — the two most acute readiness gaps region-wide.

Ghana and Nigeria lead on baseline VAWG legislation; Cameroon and Togo lag on nearly every dimension.

Figure 3. Policy readiness — comparative gap analysis across six dimensions. Illustrative reconstruction based on Her Voice country policy-gap findings, WACOL/ACT Programme, 2026

6 REGIONAL PATHWAYS, PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS & CALL TO ACTION

REGIONAL POLICY PATHWAYS — ECOWAS & ECCAS

ECOWAS' 2015 Supplementary Act on Gender Equality already names climate change as a threat to women's role in agriculture[13], and its Gender & DRR Strategy (2020–2030) recognises that disasters heighten domestic and sexual violence[14]. Implementation depends on member states, and follow-through remains uneven.

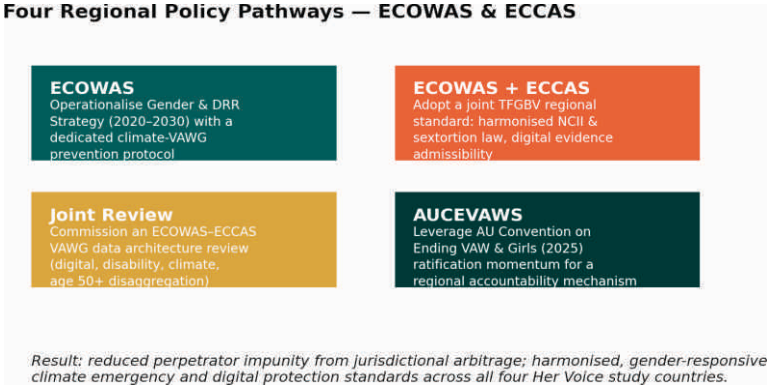


Figure 4. Four regional policy pathways for ECOWAS and ECCAS. Source: Her Voice Integrated Report, 2025–2026.

REGIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Operationalise the ECOWAS Gender & DRR Strategy with a dedicated climate-VAWG prevention protocol, requiring GBV risk assessment in every climate emergency declaration.
- Adopt a joint ECOWAS–ECCAS TFGBV standard: harmonised NCII/sextortion criminalisation and digital-evidence admissibility rules, closing the cross-border jurisdictional-arbitrage loophole.
- Commission a joint regional VAWG data architecture review, setting minimum disaggregation standards (digital, disability, climate-context, age 50+) with funded national implementation.
- Use AUCEVAWG ratification momentum to build a regional accountability mechanism tracking legal reform on TFGBV, climate-VAWG integration and data systems.

ELEVEN PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS & LEAD ACTOR

#	Recommendation	Lead Actor(s)
1	**Climate–VAWG.** Integrate explicit GBV risk assessments, safe accommodation standards, and survivor referral pathways into all NAPs, NDCs and DRR[15] frameworks.	Climate & Women's Affairs Ministries
2	**Climate–VAWG.** Establish seasonal VAWG alert protocols: flood onset / drought declarations automatically activate GBV outreach, hotline capacity, and emergency shelter.	NADMO / ANPC / DRR Committees
3	**Climate–VAWG.** Integrate GBV risk mapping into climate vulnerability assessments to identify high-risk communities before crises escalate.	Environment Ministries / Planners
4	**Digital Safety.** Cameroon & Togo: enact dedicated TFSGBV legislation. Nigeria: strengthen NCII enforcement. Ghana: update the DV Act to cover digital abuse.	Parliaments / Justice Ministries
5	**Digital Safety.** Redesign GBV reporting tools to operate via voice IVR and toll-free SMS in local languages, removing smartphone/internet requirements.	ICT Regulators / CSOs
6	**Digital Safety.** Establish cybercrime–GBV police units with digital forensic capacity and trauma-informed training in all four countries.	National Police Services
7	**Digital Safety.** Require Meta, X and TikTok to respond to TFSGBV escalations within defined timeframes and provide local-language safety resources.	ICT / Digital Governance Bodies
8	**Data Systems.** Establish interoperable national GBV case management systems with mandatory disaggregation by TFSGBV, disability, and climate context.	All Governments / UN Women
9	**Data Systems.** Expand national surveys (DHS) to include women aged 50+, disability status, climate-event exposure, and digital violence categories.	National Statistics Offices
10	**Social Protection.** Deploy backlash-sensitive cash transfers, pairing asset transfers with male-engagement sessions and GBV referral pathways.	Social Protection / Donors
11	**Social Protection.** Strengthen IDP protection: safe shelter design, secure food distribution, accessible GBV reporting, support for female-headed households.	Humanitarian / UNHCR / Governments

CALL TO ACTION

Governments & regional bodies: act on Recommendations 1–3 (climate integration) and 8–9 (data systems) now. Operationalise the Ghana DV Fund. Domesticate VAPP in all Nigerian states. Adopt the ECOWAS Gender & DRR Strategy with a specific climate-VAWG protocol and TFSGBV standard. **Coalitions & WROs with Communities & Donor Partners:** shift from project-cycle to multi-year institutional funding for anchor WROs (e.g. WACOL, FIDA Ghana/Cameroon, La Colombe Togo). The 0.04% climate-finance allocation for GBV prevention must be a floor, not a ceiling.

ABOUT · CONTACT · SOURCES

ABOUT THIS POLICY PAPER

This policy paper is drawn from 'Her Voice': Investigating the Connection Between Climate Change, Digitalisation, and Violence Against Women & Girls in West and Central Africa — a research initiative led by the Women Aid Collective (WACOL) as lead organisation for the West & Central Africa Women Rights Coalition (WAWORC), and partners. This initiative is funded under the Advocacy, Coalition Building and Transformative Feminist Action (ACT) Programme by UN Women and the EU ACT to End Violence Against Women Programme.

Fieldwork combined household surveys, focus group discussions and key informant interviews across Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon and Togo between 2025 and 2026.

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SOURCES

Citations are provided within this document and the complete bibliography is available in the Her Voice Integrated Report, references section.

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NOTES, CITATIONS & ABBREVIATIONS

NOTES & CITATIONS

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4. Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015 (Nigeria).

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6. Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Famille (Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family, Cameroon).

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10. Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (Ghana Police Service).

11. Domestic Violence Act (Ghana, Act 732, 2007).

12. Women Aid Collective (Nigeria), lead organisation of WAWORC.

13. ECOWAS. (2015). Supplementary Act Relating to Equality of Rights Between Women and Men for Sustainable Development in the ECOWAS Region.

14. ECOWAS. (2020). Gender-Responsive Social Protection and Disaster Risk Reduction / Gender and DRR Strategy 2020–2030.

15. DRR – Disaster Risk Reduction; NAP – National Adaptation Plans; NDC – Nationally Determined Contributions; NADMO – National Disaster Management Organisation.

ABBREVIATIONS

ANPC — National Agency for Civil Protection (Togo) • ANTIC — National Agency of ICT (Cameroon) • DOVVSU — Domestic Violence & Victims Support Unit (Ghana) • DVA — Domestic Violence Agency • HAAC — High Authority for Audiovisual & Communication (Togo) • INSPIRE — Nigeria's Federal INSPIRE national GBV data system • MINPOSTEL — Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications (Cameroon) • MINPROFF — Ministry of Women's Empowerment & the Family (Cameroon) • TFSGBV — Technology-Facilitated Sexual & Gender-Based Violence • VAPP — Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (Nigeria) • WARD-C — Women Advocacy Research and Documentation Centre • WAWORC — West & Central African Women's Rights' Coalition, led by WACOL



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