WE-FI KNOWLEDGE SERIES | 15 SEPTEMBER 2026

Building Resilient Care Businesses

Evidence, Quality and Climate Resilience for Women-Led Care Enterprises

Webinar summary

SPEAKERS: Sarah Kabay (presenter, IPA) | Frances Beaton-Day (presenter, Invest in Childcare, World Bank) | Martha Melesse (presenter, IDRC) | Sonia Plaza (World Bank) | Priyanka Verma (EBRD) | Kate Cooper (opening remarks, FCDO) | Felicia Siegrist (moderator, We-Fi Secretariat)

SNAPSHOT

We-Fi brought together researchers, practitioners and implementing partners to discuss what it takes to build resilient, high-quality and sustainable businesses in the care economy. The session built on an earlier We-Fi webinar on the opportunities and challenges facing women care entrepreneurs and followed the approval of We-Fi's first funding round dedicated to care, for women-led care businesses through ADB, EBRD and the World Bank.

Three knowledge products were presented: an IPA evidence review on childcare, a World Bank guidance note on childcare quality and safeguarding, and a DCED and Kore Global report on the care and climate nexus. Implementing partners from the World Bank and EBRD then outlined their We-Fi care projects. The overarching message was that financing alone is not enough: quality standards, trust, affordability and climate resilience all shape whether care businesses can grow.

KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE PRESENTATIONS

What the evidence says on childcare (Sarah Kabay, IPA)

- The review identified 10 randomized evaluations of childcare. All 10 assessed outcomes for mothers, but only six assessed outcomes for children. Results were generally positive for mothers' workforce participation and income, and for children, with caveats on service quality.
- Two evidence gaps stand out: the impact on other household members, including older siblings, and the childcare workforce itself, who are almost always women and often caregivers too.
- Cost is the main barrier to uptake, and context matters. In Uganda, 37% of women business owners bring children to work and were more likely to run out of stock. In the DRC, childcare reduced work interruptions and multitasking.
- Household composition changes results. In Uganda, childcare subsidies raised labor supply and earnings for single mothers but not for mothers with partners, where fathers' employment rose. In Rio de Janeiro, public daycare mainly benefited grandparents and older siblings.
- Early IPA findings from Kidogo in Kenya show better service quality and spillovers to providers outside the program. Providers did not change fees, so enrollment and revenue stayed flat, raising the question of public subsidies for affordability.

Quality and safeguarding in childcare (Frances Beaton-Day, Invest in Childcare Initiative, World Bank)

- According to the guidance note, quality matters for three reasons: child safety (risks are highest for ages 0 to 3, and provision is often small, fragmented and unregistered), child development (low quality can bring no benefit or even harm), and parental trust, which drives uptake.
- Common obstacles include limited training, missing or unrealistic quality standards that deter registration, and weak monitoring. These are magnified for small, isolated childcare businesses.
- Quality has a structural side (safe space, adult to child ratios, materials, trained staff) and a process side (play-based activities, responsive interactions). Systems tend to over-focus on structure, which is necessary but not sufficient. Images from Kenya showed quality is achievable in low-resource settings.
- Entrepreneurs need at least two to three weeks of training on childcare and business skills, followed by site-based coaching, realistic standards and practical tools such as daily routines and safety protocols. Investing in the workforce should be a top priority.
- In the Republic of Congo, a four-month training with internship is followed by 12 months of coaching with weekly supervision visits, while standards are developed with government. BRAC in Tanzania and Uganda uses community committees, including parents, as the frontline for child protection.

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Care as Climate Infrastructure (Marta Meleis, IDRC)

- The report, commissioned by the DCED Women's Economic Empowerment Working Group and carried out by Kore Global, combined a literature review, a survey of 23 care enterprises and 13 key informant interviews.
- Climate shocks raise care demands while weakening the systems that support care. For women-led MSMEs this means fewer working hours, business interruptions and higher costs, and weaker economic resilience.
- Ninety percent of surveyed enterprises said climate change already affects their operations, mainly through rising costs, supply chain disruption and staff absenteeism. Women-led MSMEs face overlapping physical, social and institutional vulnerabilities.
- Care enterprises are both vulnerable and essential to adaptation, for example through cookstoves, solar solutions and care for people with disabilities. While 73% had adopted at least one adaptation measure, 64% felt only slightly prepared or not prepared at all.
- The central conclusion is that resilience is not enough. Entrepreneurs need finance, technical assistance, stronger social protection, investment in care infrastructure and a voice in climate decisions.

WE-FI CARE PROJECTS AND CLOSING

World Bank: Care Initiative for Women Jobs Creation (We-Fi Care Initiative)	Proposals cover the Republic of Congo, Liberia, Malawi, Nepal, Tajikistan, Uganda and Lesotho, plus a global proposal. They support women to establish and scale care businesses (for example 120 women trained in Congo to set up 20 to 25 day care centers), expand finance through matching grants, guarantees and risk-sharing, and pair this with regulatory reform. Uganda will pilot a financially sustainable childcare model in a public market, aiming for replication across 20 countries.
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD): WE Care (The Pilot)	The proposal includes credit lines for women care entrepreneurs through partner financial institutions with ring-fenced proceeds and bespoke products, for example to address collateral. These come with mentoring and safeguarding training for women SMEs, results-based compensation and capacity building for the lenders, and ecosystem building in selected countries, including regulation, certification and new models such as cooperatives. Delivery runs through EBRD's Women in Business platform.

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