

# Women's Economic Empowerment Working Group (WEE WG)

Online meeting 19 January 2026

## Minutes

### Participants

- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| 1. IDRC, Chair | 9. BMZ   |
| 2. GAC         | 10. GAC  |
| 3. NL CBI      | 11. ILO  |
| 4. GIZ         | 12. SDC  |
| 5. Norad       |  |
| 6. Sida        | Ella Duffy; Melina Heinrich-Fernandes (DCED Secretariat) |
| 7. UK FCDO     |  |
| 8. UNIDO       |  |

**Apologies:** FAO

### Agenda Items

1. **Welcome, objectives and introductions**
2. **Updates on active workstreams**
3. **Member agency updates**
4. **DCED Global Seminar & Annual Meeting 2026**
5. **Any other business**

#### 1. Welcome, objectives and introductions

Colleen Duggan opened the meeting and welcomed new members through a full round of introductions.

#### 2. Updates on active workstreams

Task Team leads updated the group on the two active workstreams and re-iterated that **any WG member is welcome to join any workstream by emailing Ella/Colleen:**

1. **Care work and climate change** – GIZ provided an update in Martha's (IDRC) absence. Kore Global were commissioned to produce research on good practices to address care work and climate change simultaneously, looking both at solutions for women-led SMEs and care systems/investment. Kore

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Global are now deep into the research process – they have surveyed care businesses in the global south on how their business is affected by climate shocks and what public and private support is useful, and are in the process of completing key informant interviews. Their inception report was approved by the task team and **initial findings from the research will be presented at a sensemaking workshop at 16:00 CET on 5 February 2026, to which the whole WG is invited. A calendar invite will be shared with everyone.**

2. **Gender lens investing** – DCED Secretariat provided an update in absence of a task team lead. As mentioned at the last meeting, the task team is focussing on knowledge sharing through a series of meetings involving guest speakers. **A learning session with KfW, Germany's development bank, will take place at 14:00 CET this Friday 23 January 2026 to which the whole WG is invited. A calendar invite has been shared with those who have shown interest; relevant colleagues are welcome to join.** Ella Duffy asked the room for any questions to KfW to be included in the agenda:

- a. SDC would be interested to learn what strategies KfW use to really get the message across about the benefits of GLI to colleagues with no gender-related training.
- b. BMZ are interested in different GLI approaches and impact assessments.
- c. Sida indicated that they would check with colleagues and send any questions over email.
- d. IDRC commented that Canadian experience could be shared in a future session with CAFIID. GAC shared a link to an [interim evaluation of FinDev Canada's 2X Challenge Investments](#).
- e. SDC shared that Korea Global have recently published a [meta evaluation on DFIs involvement with GLI](#), including on aspects such as the use of the 2X criteria.

IDRC reminded the WG that we are coming up to the time of year to start thinking about any future priority topics the WG wants to focus on in the next financial year. **Any agency is welcome to suggest topics either for future work items, or for presentations to the WG, and should reach out to Colleen Duggan and Ella Duffy over email.**

The [GESI conversation series](#) from The Canopy Lab was shared by SDC as something this WG could build on the findings of through a presentation or work item. Ella flagged that there is a [BEAM Exchange webinar on 29 January](#) with the Canopy Lab, presenting this work.

### 3. Member agency updates – more information available in [slide deck](#) circulated to members over email

**BMZ/GIZ** shared the new reform plan from BMZ, details of which were only recently released. It is focused, strategic and partnership-oriented, and emphasizes 4 overarching themes: economic cooperation for sustainable and equitable growth; hunger, poverty and inequality; peace and stability; and multilateral partnerships. Strategically, these will be delivered through a more concentrated approach to key region and thematic priorities and partnerships on equal terms – repayable loans for emerging economies and grants for least-developed countries. The German private sector will play a larger role in overseas development.

**Sida** shared that Sida is shifting in country prioritisation away from Africa with phase-outs of long-running programmes and decreased support for remaining countries. There will be more focus on humanitarian efforts where needed, particularly in Ukraine, and larger involvement of the Swedish private sector in

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overseas development. Gisela has led Sida's assignment on WEE and, despite constraints, Sida advanced the integration of gender equality in development, trade, investment and policy work in 2025 (see slides for data). Sida are very involved in EU Global Gateway partnerships, including through secondments to the European Commission, and **would welcome bilateral conversations about EU Global Gateway with other donors.**

BMZ reflected that their situation seems similar to Sida, and **would welcome a conversation about how to integrate WEE more into EU Global Gateway work.** The lead for EU Global Gateway sits with the German Foreign Ministry. The ICR Facility which some members may know from its resources on WEE and business environment reform, has been retrofitted to now have an EU Global Gateway focus.

Conversation then followed on whether bilateral donors have changed their narrative on gender equality in response to inclusion-related backlash. Sida has a team focussed on this and can share a briefing note following this call. BMZ are early in the process of implementing the reforms, so it is yet to be seen, but reflected that language at the G7 and G20 was noticeably changing and needs more effort from gender equality specialists to cement progressive language.

Reflecting on Sida's mention of trade, IDRC commented that they have new research on transport infrastructure and women entrepreneurs in trade corridors in partnership with FCDO under the RIDE initiative, which also involves Germany.

**GAC** shared that under recent reforms, the economic growth directorate will be focussing on a few key themes over the next three years: infrastructure, critical minerals, sustainable supply chains, trade, and communities aligned with specific economic trade corridors. There is an internal community of practice on the development and trade nexus, and GAC still values multilateralism. As a key Canadian value gender equality is still important, but it is unclear how this will practically be reflected in foreign affairs priorities. In terms of the WEE agenda, the focus going forward will be financial inclusion and entrepreneurship. GAC's care economy commitment is coming into its final year, which will involve knowledge dissemination. More broadly, GAC can share many resources on care economy as their WEE portfolio has focussed on care (as the main barrier to WEE). The gender equality directorate will also be focussing on trade and development as well as working more closely with other departments.

**IDRC** shared that they are also going through a reform process and will now focus more on communicating the outputs of research completed than on new programmes. GrOW East Africa, IDRC's care economy research programme, is closing, and their slide includes links to relevant publications from GrOW. They are also working on inclusive trade and have a project with the Trade and Law Center and University of Cape Town on fostering inclusive trade within the African Continental Free Trade Agreement.

IDRC mentioned a **Nancy Folbre talk on making the economic case for care, which was really interesting, and can share the link.**

**Sida would like to connect bilaterally on the care initiatives mentioned.**

**UK FCDO** recently signed off on their new WEE strategy which includes focus on: 1) more and better quality jobs for women; 2) care economy; and 3) women in trade and the finance sector, which includes inclusive growth and private sector involvement. The new strategy takes an economic argument over a rights-based approach. **They would be interested in any links that can be shared to care economy initiatives, and information from members on successes on language and narrative in the context of inclusion-related backlash.**

**CBI** did not share an update.

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**SDC** did not have specific updates but introduced herself as the new programme officer for WEE, in post since October 2025.

#### 4. DCED Global Seminar and Annual Meeting, 15-19 June 2026 in Nairobi

Melina Heinrich-Fernandes provided a short presentation with information about the DCED's in-person event, including on the 8 thematic strands and the structure of the week. She invited discussion from the WG on how agencies see opportunities for integrating inclusion and WEE across the agenda, including in a dedicated stream (stream 8).

Ella shared the link to the [Seminar flyer](#).

IDRC recommended a conversation with TRALC on inclusive trade, specifically on inclusion of women and youth in economic corridors. They have experts on inclusion in the African Continental Free Trade Agreement which could be relevant.

A conversation with the African Development Bank, an IDRC partner on care economy, would be useful.

**Members should reach out to Ella or Melina if they would like to discuss ideas for the Global Seminar agenda in more detail bilaterally.**

#### 5. Any other business

Ella Duffy mentioned an upcoming DCED and CGAP 2-part webinar series in February/March on gender norms and financial inclusion, building on a presentation from CGAP to this WG 2 years ago. She will share the invite when details are finalised.

Colleen Duggan thanked participants for their active contributions, and encouraged them to be in touch with regards to ideas for the Global Seminar agenda.