

Women's Economic Empowerment Working Group (WEE WG)

Online meeting 2 October 2025

Minutes

Participants

- | | |
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| 1. IDRC | 7. BMZ/GIZ |
| 2. ILO | 8. World Bank |
| 3. IFC | 9. FAO |
| 4. UN-ESCAP | |
| 5. GAC | Ella Duffy; Melina Heinrich-Fernandes (DCED Secretariat) |
| 6. NL RVO/CBI | |

Apologies: Sida

Agenda Items

1. **Welcome, objectives and introductions of any new members**
2. **Updates on active workstreams**
3. **Member agency updates**
4. **New issues in WEE: identifying trends and directions**
5. **Any other business**

1. Welcome, objectives and introductions of any new members

Colleen Duggan opened the meeting and welcomed back returning members.

2. Updates on active workstreams

Ella Duffy 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** – Kore Global have been 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. A kick-off introductory call with Kore Global and the Task Team happened earlier this week, with an inception report due from them in the coming weeks.

v. 11 April 2025

The task team will keep sharing updates at WG meetings, and invite Kore Global to present at full WG meetings at key points in the research if suitable.

2. **Gender lens investing** – as mentioned at the last meeting, the task team is focussing on knowledge sharing through a series of meetings involving guest speakers. Jessica Neumann who was organising this has handed over to Ella and GIZ colleagues, who are looking to organise a meeting with KfW in the coming weeks – the invite will be shared with the WG when ready.

Colleen mentioned that her IDRC colleagues will be attending the upcoming Madrid feminist financing conference. IFC may have European counterparts attending; **Bartol Letica can check**. It was suggested these colleagues could feed back any learnings to this working group.

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

IDRC shared information on three key updates in their slide. Their five regional research hubs on climate change and care work will emphasize the financing angle among other context-specific data and evidence, and their Scaling Care Innovations Africa venture has had a really big take up – more so than expected. **ILO expressed interest in learning more about this bilaterally**. IDRC will also be present at the 12-14 October W20 South Africa Summit in Johannesburg.

FAO shared updates on recent WEE initiatives and publications in their slide. For example, their multi-year program disseminating the [Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition](#) and newly updated report on [The status of women in agrifood systems in sub-Saharan Africa](#).

ILO: Amongst other updates detailed in their slide, the Women's Entrepreneurship Development (WED) team is hosting a webinar launching a new guidance note on Just Transition and WED – **invites will follow over email**. ILO also has a new [programme strategy document](#) for 2025-2030 introducing a transformative approach to WED around three pillars, and a new [LinkedIn page](#). **IDRC suggested that the [South-4-South Care Platform](#) should consider linking to the Global Care Alliance**, and IFC asked if the [WIDB](#) is open to new partnerships. ILO gave some more context on the WIDB programme (it started as a digital skills training offering with Microsoft, but has now expanded its remit with the realisation that there are many external factors impacting women entrepreneurs). **ILO and IFC will follow up bilaterally**.

IFC provided updates on two programmes and three new publications in their slides, and mentioned the SME Finance Forum which is managed by IFC and involves private sector leaders – they next meet in Johannesburg. **IDRC would like to connect and find out more about the agenda**, as it may map on to some work they are looking into on gender and trade.

NL CBI emphasized with a slide that policy priorities are as yet not officially decided in the Netherlands, but the new policy on international development more broadly is expected to represent a shift to serving Dutch interests and working on the core themes of food security, water and health. CBI will concentrate on countries within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs policy priority on trade and the economy, involving Colombia,

DRC, India, Mozambique, South Africa, Ukraine and Vietnam. IFC asked about the discontinuation of the Feminist Foreign Policy; it will be incorporated into the new overall Netherlands development strategy. At CBI, they are still focussing on gender equality in their policies and are reframing things when required. **IDRC would like to know when the information is available whether the trade focus is on bilateral or regional agreements e.g. under the AFTA.**

GAC shared reflections from the Foreign Minister's recent speech on possible upcoming priorities in humanitarian, economic and trade themes. GAC has always had trade as a priority, but now this is more sharply in focus, with lots of internal discussion on how to best include gender equality in trade strategy. The DCED will be a helpful forum for GAC to learn from others on this. Focus on the care economy continues – it is also a priority domestically. After making a number of investments in the care economy in low- and middle-income countries, they are now assessing what works.

UNIDO shared their new [SDG 9 Progress Report](#) which includes lots of sex disaggregated data on women in industry, particularly manufacturing, and links this data to trade. The [21st Session of the UNIDO General Conference](#) is happening in Riad at the end of November, hosted by Saudi Arabia. It will feature three thematic days on investment; youth; women's empowerment. **Members of the Working Group are invited to participate**, and the main plenaries will be available to watch live online.

4. New issues in WEE: identifying trends and directions

Colleen opened the floor for members to share the overarching shifts and trends they are seeing in their work, and what the DCED might do to support members in these new / continuing trends.

One overarching trend brought up by many in the discussion was closer links between development (specifically WEE) and trade. Many agencies are currently unpacking what this linkage looks like in practice and what it means for their work. GAC shared that there are lots of good practices already out there on inclusive trade, particularly from Sida, and perhaps a role for the DCED would be to gather the most relevant and point towards what the key findings mean in the current context of a more volatile international system.

At BMZ, work on transparent economic policies and enabling framework conditions for growth and investment facilitation is staying a focus. German development cooperation will continue to promote diversified, resilient, and sustainable economies in partner countries and will aim to create opportunities for German and European companies. In general, BMZ will work more closely with the private sector and jointly contribute to mobilizing more large-volume private investment through blended finance instruments. Within the federal government and at the EU level, it will step up efforts to scale up Global Gateway and make it more strategic to strengthen socially and environmentally sustainable supply chains, among other things. A link to a new UN Women flagship report was shared: [Unfinished business: Private sector and gender equality](#).

At World Bank / IFC, digitalisation and inclusive technology is becoming more of a focus, including AI. It was noted that digitalisation is still quite a vague and broad 'add-on' to other topical areas, but that it should be kept in mind as an angle to any new work.

At IDRC, linkages between gender and climate finance are an area of increasing focus; how to work with developing country governments to unlock these potential pools of climate finance in a way that is also gender smart.

In terms of what this means for the DCED, members would like to see closer linkages across the DCED's Working Groups on areas of topical importance. Particularly, between the WEE and GG Working Groups on areas like just transition and green jobs for women and youth, between the WEE and PSE Working Groups on the role of the private sector in advancing development (e.g. private capital mobilisation) and on the topic of trade across all Working Groups.

Ella probed whether the name "WEE" Working Group still well reflects members' work at their agencies – would a name like the "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)" Working Group fit better with the wider lens of intersectionality and social inclusion that many WG members are working within? Discussion followed on the terminology used in member agencies to describe their work. Some members are indeed using language like "gender equality" but others are moving away from "gender" and talking more about "women and girls". It was suggested that now is not the time for radical name changes given the increased political scrutiny inclusion work is currently under in member agencies. Members also like that "WEE" is a very clear term with a distinct body of work, and felt "GESI" risks making the WG's work too broad (though it was noted that intersectionality is important). It was suggested that other aspects of social inclusion (disability, Indigenous rights) should be mainstreamed throughout all DCED Working Groups anyway, not just a focus of the WEE WG. Colleen reassured members that this discussion was just a conversation starter at the moment, and any actual name change would involve surveying all WG members and making a decision based on the results.

5. Any other business

Colleen shared that **she would forward on a new resource from ODI on inclusive market systems development** that may be interesting for members.