

Women's Economic Empowerment Working Group (WEE WG)

Online meeting 20 April 2026

Minutes

Participants

- | | |
|--------|-------------------------------|
| 1. GIZ | 6. SDC |
| 2. BMZ | 7. IFC |
| 3. GAC | 8. UN-ESCAP |
| 4. ILO | |
| 5. SDC | Ella Duffy (DCED Secretariat) |

Apologies: IDRC; FAO; UNIDO

Agenda Items

1. Welcome, objectives and introductions
2. Discussion on work planning for 2026-27
3. Any other business

1. Welcome, objectives and introductions

In absence of the WG Chair, Ella Duffy (DCED Secretariat) led the meeting. She opened with a welcome to all participants, and invited anyone new to the WG to introduce themselves: Florian Weber (SDC) introduced himself as Sarah Furrer's replacement.

2. Discussion on work planning for 2026-27

Ella opened the main section of the agenda with a summary of all ideas from the Miro board brainstorming that members were invited to take part in in advance of the meeting. Five distinct ideas for new/ continued work items for 2026-27 emerged on the board. Members discussed each idea in turn, including giving an early indication of whether they would support an item:

- Inclusive trade and looking at how to position WEE in trade / mutual benefits discussions at donor agencies.
 - ILO reflected that the clear concrete framing of this potential item is good. ILO will be working on this in their programmes, for example in Egypt, with a decent work angle.
 - GAC suggested that there could be an in-road here to bring in the care economy from the perspective of human capital development and supply chains of (care/domestic) workers.

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- A stocktake of how the changing development context is affecting WEE work – how are agencies re-strategizing or linking gender to other topics?
 - IFC reflected that this would be helpful if the output remained at the very practical level and did not get too academic.
 - GAC suggested looking at benefits for donor countries as a part of this work to connect the dots between mutual benefits/trade, and WEE.
- Informality – how are informal women workers and rural economies being affected by donor strategies shifting?
 - IFC reflected that there could be an angle to bring this together with the financing agenda – and feels currently this item is too broad. For example, the WG could look specifically at the impact of donors moving from a grants to a deals-based approach on rural informal women-led businesses.
- Digitalisation / AI – including a focus on online gender-based violence.
 - UN-ESCAP provided some background on their work supporting businesses and business support organisations to utilize AI, including women-led SMEs. They would be interested in knowing what other organisations are doing in this area, or on the risks of AI, across the DCED.
 - ILO reflected that they have some work in this area that is soon to be published, on how women's experiences of gender-based online violence shape their use of AI tools.
 - IFC reflected on a potential online financial abuse angle, being worked on in a parallel team at IFC. They will consult internally on a possible proposal in relation to this.
- Gender lens investing
 - BMZ suggested the WG consider different instruments and how effective they are at reaching women-led SMEs – for example, the product could be case studies from development banks.
 - SDC supports this item generally as it fits with their portfolio of GLI and support to 2X over the years. They would be interested in considering either how far finance is reaching (i.e. is it reaching rural or informal businesses?), or a stocktake of what instruments are best for reaching women-led SMEs.
 - GAC would like to see more on the benefits of GLI for women-led SMEs in the current context of less ODA and more donors focussing on mobilising private capital.

Ella summarized discussions and suggested that there were some similarities between the work items proposed and some could likely be combined. There was broad agreement that the “WEE stocktake” could feasibly include points on how WEE is being positioned in trade and mutual benefits topics, and it was suggested that the gender-lens investing item could have a possible focus on the impact of donors moving from a grants to a deals-based approach on women-led businesses in informal/rural/fragile contexts.

There was a short discussion of next steps where it was agreed that **members would now have 1 week to do a last internal check on which items they would support for the 26/27 work plan, and confirm over email.**

3. Any other business

Ella provided a summary of preparations for the DCED Global Seminar, happening in Nairobi in June, and encouraged anyone who is still interested in attending but not yet registered to get in touch as soon as possible.

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