

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

Online meeting 9 April 2025

## Minutes

### Participants

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Colleen Duggan (IDRC, Chair)   | 12. Hoda Zakria (UNIDO)                                  |
| 2. Bartol Letica (IFC)            | 13. Jessica Neumann (UNIDO)                              |
| 3. Diepak Elmer (SDC)             | 14. Judith van Doorn (ILO)                               |
| 4. Elena Mayer-Besting (UN-ESCAP) | 15. Karen Moore (GAC)                                    |
| 5. Emmanuel Trépanier (GAC)       | 16. Nathalie Hoffman (World Bank)                        |
| 6. Esther Verhaegh (NL RVO/CBI)   | 17. Ophelie Bouquet (EC)                                 |
| 7. Fabian Werner (BMZ/GIZ)        | 18. Thomas Vintges (NL MoFA)                             |
| 8. Fredrik                        |  |
| 9. Georgina Shepherd (SDC)        | Ella Duffy; Melina Heinrich-Fernandes (DCED Secretariat) |
| 10. Gisela Strand (Sida)          |  |
| 11. Grace Cameron (UK FCDO)       |  |

**Apologies:** Nozomi Ide (FAO), Reneta Lambreva (GAC)

### Agenda Items

1. **Welcome, objectives and introductions of any new members**
2. **Updates from the DCED Secretariat**
3. **WEE WG 2025/26 work plan**
4. **Planning for the DCED Annual Meeting**
5. **Member agency updates**
6. **Any other business**

#### 1. Welcome, objectives and introductions of any new members

Colleen Duggan opened the meeting and welcomed new members from UK FCDO, GAC, NL RVO/CBI, and SDC, and a returning member from EC.

v. 11 April 2025

## 2. Updates from the DCED Secretariat

Ella Duffy provided information about the DCED Annual Meeting, happening in Geneva, 16-19 June. Further information was sent via email from Melina Heinrich-Fernandes - there will be an in-person meeting of the WEE WG on Monday 16 June. **Members are requested to email to confirm their attendance, specifying which days and/or sessions they plan to attend.**

Ella also set out the timeline for work planning; WG work plans should be drafted by 24 April, to be presented by WG Chairs at a meeting of the Chairs and DCED Executive Committee at the end of April/ early May. The total DCED Work Plan will then be circulated to voting members in advance of the Annual Meeting, to be hopefully approved at the Business Session on 19 June. Ella explained that WGs have a budget ceiling to aim for of 45k per year or 90k over two years, with 70k potentially allocated to Care Climate Nexus and Gender Lens Investing projects, but other funds potentially available if other WGs do not use their budgets.

## 3. WEE WG 2025/26 work plan

It was decided that the workstream on care economy and climate change should continue under the 2025/26 work plan; ToR are currently being drafted after a period of consultation with external experts on the topic. The view is to finalise the ToR this DCED-year and contract a consultant/cy to work with in 2025/26.

Jessica Neumann provided an update on the gender-lens investing workstream; it has been difficult to pin down a direction to take the work due to members' differing priorities. **She plans to convene the task team to discuss the direction of the workstream in the coming weeks.**

**Ella Duffy encouraged any new members to join either of these existing workstreams by sending an email.**

Discussion then turned to strategies for promoting women's economic empowerment in the face of backlash and shrinking spaces for gender equality work, and whether there is opportunity to work on this topic under the 2025/26 work plan. It was broadly suggested that using economic empowerment can act as a softer entry point to address other rights-based issues. Others agreed, noting they've had to rephrase topics around women's economic empowerment and focus on ongoing programs rather than new gender-specific initiatives. There was also a helpful optimistic reminder from Judith van Doorn against regressing too far, as many international organisations are continuing to focus on gender equality and inclusion more broadly. Bartol Letica reported continued strong support for gender strategies in their organisation, and Gisela Strand shared that Sweden has received a government assignment to increase engagement in women's economic empowerment. Emmanuel Trepanier shared that GAC are currently doing some early analysis of the effects of global policy changes and may have more to share in the June meeting. The group also discussed the importance of careful communication and messaging in this context, and agreed that more in-depth conversation between this group would be helpful.

**Ella Duffy agreed to draft the work plan using last year's format and send it to Colleen, then to the WG, for review.**

#### 4. Planning for the DCED Annual Meeting

Based on the discussion under the previous agenda item, it was agreed that an in-person session at the Annual Meeting in June could focus on resource and knowledge-sharing around backlash against gender equality. The group considered implementing Chatham House rules and ensuring in-person participation only.

The group discussed the inclusion of external experts to facilitate discussions. Jessica Neumann suggested bringing in perspectives of practitioners from the global south, and Bartol Letica emphasized the need to explore if and how this backlash is being felt in different regions. Colleen Duggan suggested bringing in a successful woman in business to provide the private sector viewpoint. Gisela Strand proposed inviting Naila Kabeer, an expert in women's economic empowerment, to share her insights from her book on renegotiating patriarchy. Ella Duffy noted that ODI have some work on countering backlash. The team agreed to further explore these ideas and consider the potential involvement of external experts; **Colleen Duggan agreed to explore her network for relevant experts, including Naila Kabeer, and particularly those based in Geneva.**

#### 5. Member agency updates – more information available in slide deck circulated to members over email

**IDRC:** Colleen Duggan provided information on IDRC's care-climate nexus work; a recent open call for proposals under the [Climate and Care Initiative](#) attracted an overwhelming response as did a closed call for research hubs addressing the topic. Colleen also shared resources on care and climate through the lens of impact investing, and shared the news of two new projects on inclusive trade, and on innovative financing mechanisms in the care economy in Asia.

**ILO:** Judith van Doorn shared that ILO will launch their new strategic priorities for the WED programme in Q2. Recently, they have also initiated research on women entrepreneurs and AI, and have begun a new project with NORAD supporting women in the Ethiopian garment sector through the establishment of workplace childcare services. Lastly, Judith shared a new ILO brief: [Women and the economy: 30 years after the Beijing Declaration](#).

**IFC:** Bartol Letica shared an overview of IFC's work in women's economic opportunity, including their strategic aims and implementation model. He also shared information about the recently launched MOSAIC programme which works to scale local manufacturing and service delivery around assistive technology, first presented during the Global Disability Summit in Berlin last week. Lastly, he shared the link to a new report: [Unlocking Social and Environmental Impact: Outcome-based Finance in Clean Cooking, Distributed Renewable Energy, and Small-Scale Agribusiness](#)

**UK FCDO:** Grace Cameron shared FCDO's new approach to women's economic leadership and empowerment, which focuses on access to decent jobs, care economy and mobilising public and private capital to close the gender financing gap. She also shared that the FCDO's flagship WEE programme, [Work and Opportunities for Women \(WOW\)](#) has now closed, after a successful 8 years.

**UNIDO:** Jessica Neumann shared a new publication on good practices for advancing WEE that was developed with Norway: [Advancing Gender Equality, Empowering Women](#). She also shared that UNIDO are working on the reformulation of their operational strategy for gender equality, and recommended a great documentary “The Day Iceland Stood Still”.

**Sida:** Gisela Strand discussed the changes in their work approach at Sida, but shared that women’s economic empowerment is actually an increased area of focus. Sida currently Chairs UN Women.

## 6. Any other business

Ella Duffy mentioned the upcoming publication of a toolkit on gender-responsive nature-based solutions from the DCED’s Green Growth Working Group, and passed on regards and farewell from Ruta Adis, the previous Chair from USAID. Ella indicated that she would share the meeting minutes and slides over email, and the group showed appreciation for Colleen Duggan’s leadership as the new Chair.