



Project Document

Localizing Women's Economic Empowerment in Africa



LOCAL PUBLIC SECTOR
ALLIANCE



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Project Document

Localizing Women’s Economic Empowerment in Africa

RESOLVING MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE CONSTRAINTS TO WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN AFRICA

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Abstract

The Local Public Sector Alliance (LPSA) seeks to promote inclusive, equitable societies and sustainable global development by enhancing the understanding of decentralization and localization as complex, cross-cutting and multi-stakeholder reforms. In doing so, the Alliance recognizes that multilevel governance systems often present obstacles as well as opportunities for inclusive governance and inclusive, sustainable development. Unless decentralization and localization practitioners work more closely with adjacent practice communities—in fields such as urban development, climate change, conflict and fragility, and women’s empowerment—it is likely that ineffective multilevel governance systems will continue to form a binding constraint to global progress.

For instance, in the area of gender equity and women’s empowerment, the nature of multilevel governance (MLG) systems in Africa—including weakly empowered local governance institutions and ineffective intergovernmental (fiscal) systems—is likely to form a systemic ‘macro-level’ binding constraint to effective women’s economic empowerment (WEE) interventions, such as improved access to affordable, safe and quality childcare.

This Project Document describes the project design for LPSA’s ‘Localizing Women’s Economic Empowerment in Africa’. Through this project, LPSA will engage with global, regional, national, and local partners—especially in Kenya and Ghana—over the next two years (2024-2025) to promote the adoption, funding, and implementation of intergovernmental policy solutions for women’s economic empowerment as a gender-responsive ‘macro-level’ (or multilevel) policy response that supports all women’s opportunities, access to resources, well-being, and agency. For instance, we expect that well-developed conditional grant scheme that supports local (e.g., county-level) women’s economic empowerment efforts and provides funding to improve access to affordable, safe and quality childcare is likely to garner considerable political and institutional support at all levels.

The project will enable LPSA to leverage its understanding of multilevel governance systems as a convener and catalyst, by working with lead partners—Uthabiti Africa and Collaborative Action for Childcare in Kenya, and the Institute for Local Government Studies, Ghana—to convene and strengthen women’s rights organizations, childcare policy advocates and other civil society actors, as well as national policy makers, local governments and local government partners, researchers and think tanks, as well as development partners and IFIs to develop and advocate for local-level WEE interventions through improved MLG policymaking and implementation.

The project budget plan for the initial two years of ‘Localizing Women’s Economic Empowerment in Africa’ is approximately \$260,000 (2024-2025). The project’s implementation is contingent on LPSA receiving adequate general operating support from the Hewlett Foundation to support this project’s activities over this period.

Project Document

Localizing Women’s Economic Empowerment in Africa

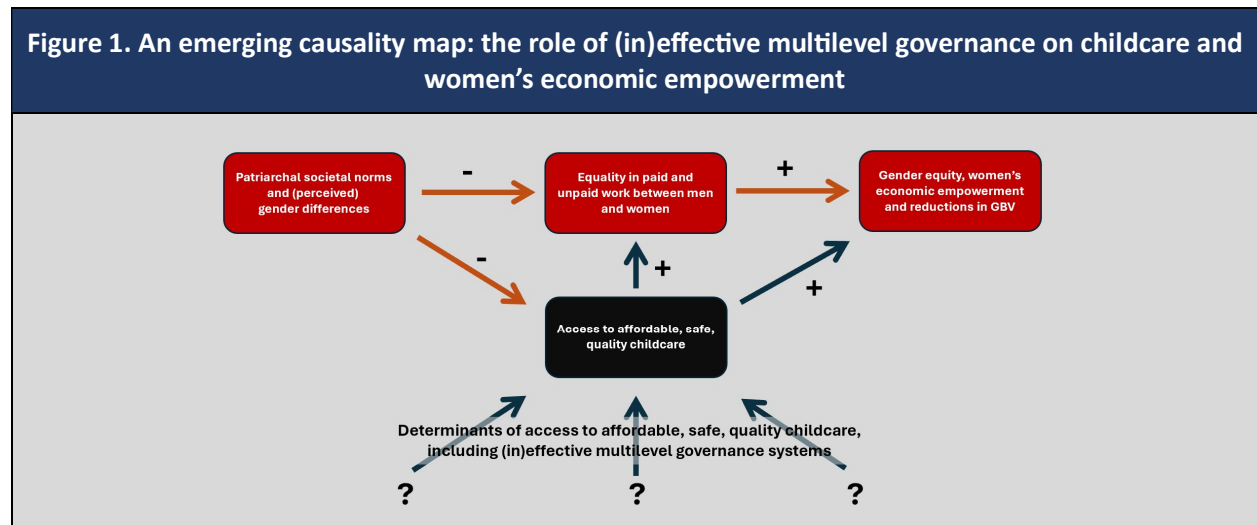
RESOLVING MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE CONSTRAINTS TO WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN AFRICA

1. Background

1.1 Multilevel governance as a binding constraint to women’s economic empowerment in Africa

Achieving equal rights for women is “the unfinished human rights struggle of this century”.¹ While important progress has been made in recent years toward greater gender equality, women in all parts of the world still face significant obstacles to participating in the economy on equal terms with men. Low-income women face disproportionate barriers—including limitations on the right to own property, and lack of access to capital, digital tools, markets, and childcare—that limit their ability to pursue a livelihood. This is exacerbated by skills gaps and social norms that inhibit women’s full participation in economic life.²

Although the obstacles to gender equality and WEE are diverse and complex, **the lack of free or affordable childcare is consistently identified one of the most consistent barriers to women entering the labor market and improving their family’s income.**³ This is true all around the world, including in low-, middle- and high-income countries: without a safe and healthy place for their young children to go, mothers are less able to earn money to help support the family (Figure 1). Regardless of a country’s income level, public support for the provision of affordable, safe and quality childcare services is a development strategy with a high rate of return, not only in terms of greater equity in economic power between men and women, but with significant secondary effects in related areas, such as increased labor force participation and economic growth, reductions in violence against women, and better educational outcomes for boys and girls.



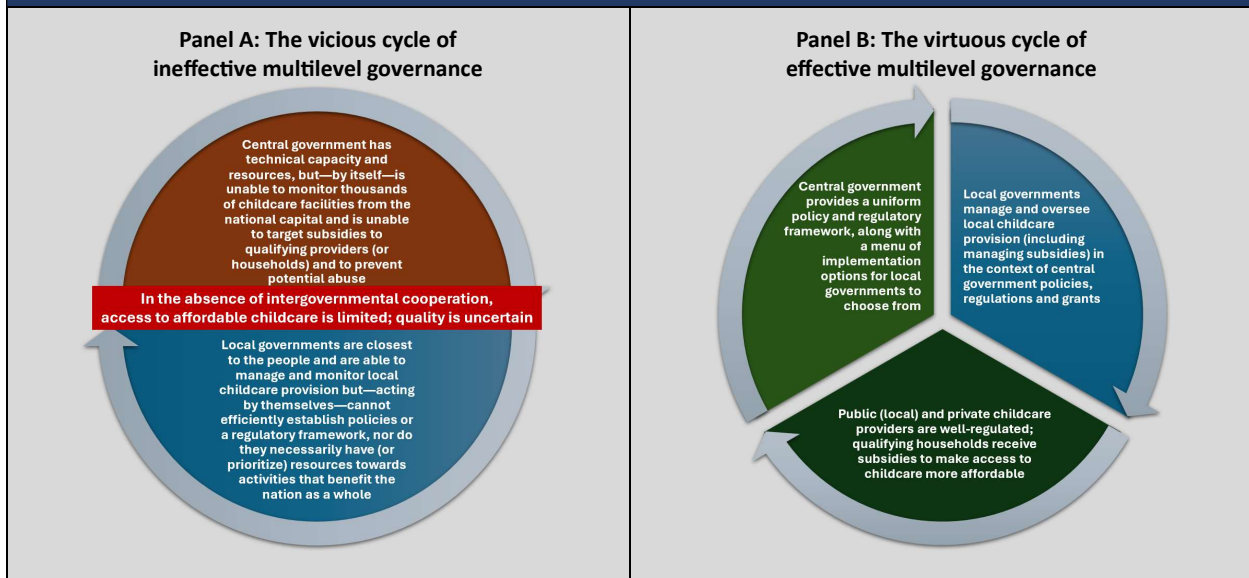
What is different around the world is the ability of the public sector to support the provision of childcare and other WEE interventions. **Reviews of policy experiences suggest that the sustainable provision of childcare services requires the public sector to play an active role, and in turn, that successful public sector interventions require effective collaboration between different government levels within a country.**⁴ Neither central governments by themselves nor local governments by themselves are well-positioned to promote women’s economic empowerment or to provide an optimal level of childcare services. In the global experience, the expansion of access to childcare services (for instance, in North America and Nordic countries in the 20th century) almost always relied on a combination of, on one hand, localized provision of childcare services (by local public childcare providers and/or by locally regulated and monitored private providers), and on the other hand, a national policy framework along with central government subsidies or local government grants.⁵ An effective multilevel governance system—where central and local government effectively cooperate in promoting women’s economic empowerment or providing an optimal level of childcare services—is therefore a key determinant in the public sector’s ability to meaningfully pursue WEE.

Beyond improving access to affordable, safe, and quality childcare, there are other areas where local governments—in the context of a well-functioning multilevel governance system—may be able to address constraints on women’s economic empowerment (include education and labor force participation). The nature of circumstances, constraints, and possible solutions may vary across countries, and even localities: in particular, there are likely to be considerable differences in women’s economic empowerment strategies in urban and rural settings. While improved localized access to childcare is likely to be among the most critical interventions, the co-creation process described later in this project document will help us target locally relevant specific obstacles to WEE in Kenya and Ghana.

The recognition that “WEE challenges require intergovernmental solutions” collides with increasing evidence that multilevel governance systems in Africa and Asia are generally quite weak with unempowered local governance institutions. LPSA’s research on the state of local governance institutions is finding increasingly clear evidence that there is a rather sharp dichotomy in multilevel governance systems around the world: whereas local governance institutions in OECD countries and Latin America are generally relatively well-empowered devolved institutions and intergovernmental systems work to support the overall effectiveness of the public sector, political economy constraints in many countries in Africa and Asia continue to limit the empowerment of local governance institutions and multilevel governance systems.⁶

Concretely, the ineffectiveness of multilevel governance systems results in a situation where weak MLG systems form a binding constraint to the provision of childcare services and other WEE interventions (Figure 2). On one hand, development partners and central government agencies have access to financial resources and expertise, but central government actors are often too far removed from the community to deliver frontline services in an inclusive, sustainable and efficient manner, or to deliver effective oversight over localized services. On the other hand, in many African countries, local governments are close to the community and have the legal power to provide childcare services and early childhood education (ECE), but lack the policy framework and financial resources to ensure that childcare is available.

Figure 2. Expected impact of (in)effective multilevel governance on childcare and women’s economic empowerment



In the absence of a catalyst to bring together representative from all government levels, along with policy experts, advocates, and policymakers from both the MLG and WEE Communities of Practice, this binding constraint is unlikely to be identified and brought into mainstream policy discussions—let alone be resolved. Mutual understanding and collaboration between these two Communities of Practice are likely to result in concrete policy proposals that may be able to resolve this binding constraint. For instance, an effective intergovernmental solution might be for the central government to develop a policy framework that sets up a national mechanism for the provision of childcare services at the local level, while at the same time providing local governments with Women’s Economic Empowerment Grants. Within such a policy framework, and with funding support from the center, local governments would then—for instance—be able to monitor, inspect and license childcare facilities, and provide childcare vouchers for eligible mothers who meet program criteria, allowing mothers to pursue employment or educational opportunities by selecting an affordable, trusted, registered childcare provider in their local community. Private childcare providers and civil society organizations (including women’s and childcare advocates) play an equally critical role in a functioning multilevel childcare system, by increasing the supply of trained childcare providers and by making sure that women are aware of (and opt into) the childcare options available to them.

While the Hewlett Foundation and other organizations support women’s advocacy groups and other stakeholders promoting WEE at the central government level as well as at the local or community level in different African countries, the insight that LPSA brings to the table is that—in order to be successful—stakeholders need to work together across different government levels to be successful in a multilevel governance public sector. To this end, the project will leverage LPSA’s understanding of multilevel governance systems as a convener and catalyst, by working with women’s rights organizations in Kenya and Ghana (e.g., [CREAW Kenya](#), [Network for Women's Rights in Ghana \(Netright\)](#), [Abantu for Development](#)), childcare policy advocates and other civil society actors (e.g., [Uthabiti Africa](#), [Collaborative Action for Childcare](#), [Women in Informal Employment; Organising and Globalising \(WIEGO\)](#), [Wow Mom](#),

[Kidogo](#), Local Governance Network (LOGNet)), local government partners (e.g., [Council of Governors](#), National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana (NALAG), [Local Governance Practitioners Forum](#)), researchers and think tanks (e.g. [IPF Kenya](#), Ghana [Institute for Local Government Studies](#), International Center for Research on Women), development partners and IFIs (e.g., World Bank, UN Women, UNICEF, Oxfam)—to develop and advocate for local-level WEE interventions through improved MLG policymaking and implementation.

1.2 Solving a weak MLG system as a constraint to WEE requires understanding the root causes of weak multilevel governance

To the extent that the ineffectiveness of multilevel governance systems results in a situation where MLG systems form a binding constraint to the provision of childcare services and other WEE interventions, it is critical to understand exactly what doesn't work well in the multilevel governance system. This shouldn't be done on the basis of a specific, preferred approach to decentralization (i.e., devolution). Instead, it is increasingly understood that “the key underlying question [in making multilevel governance systems work] is not whether to ‘decentralize or not’ or even opt for a specific decentralization model, but to look at ways to improve capacity and coordination among public stakeholders at different levels of government to increase efficiency, equity and sustainability of public spending” (Charbit 2011).

It is sometimes assumed that weak multilevel governance systems are a technical problem or policy oversight. This is generally not the case. **Instead, there are often considerable political economy obstacles to establishing effective multilevel governance systems that result in local governance institutions being weakly empowered to contribute to localized services and development, including in the realm of women's economic empowerment.**

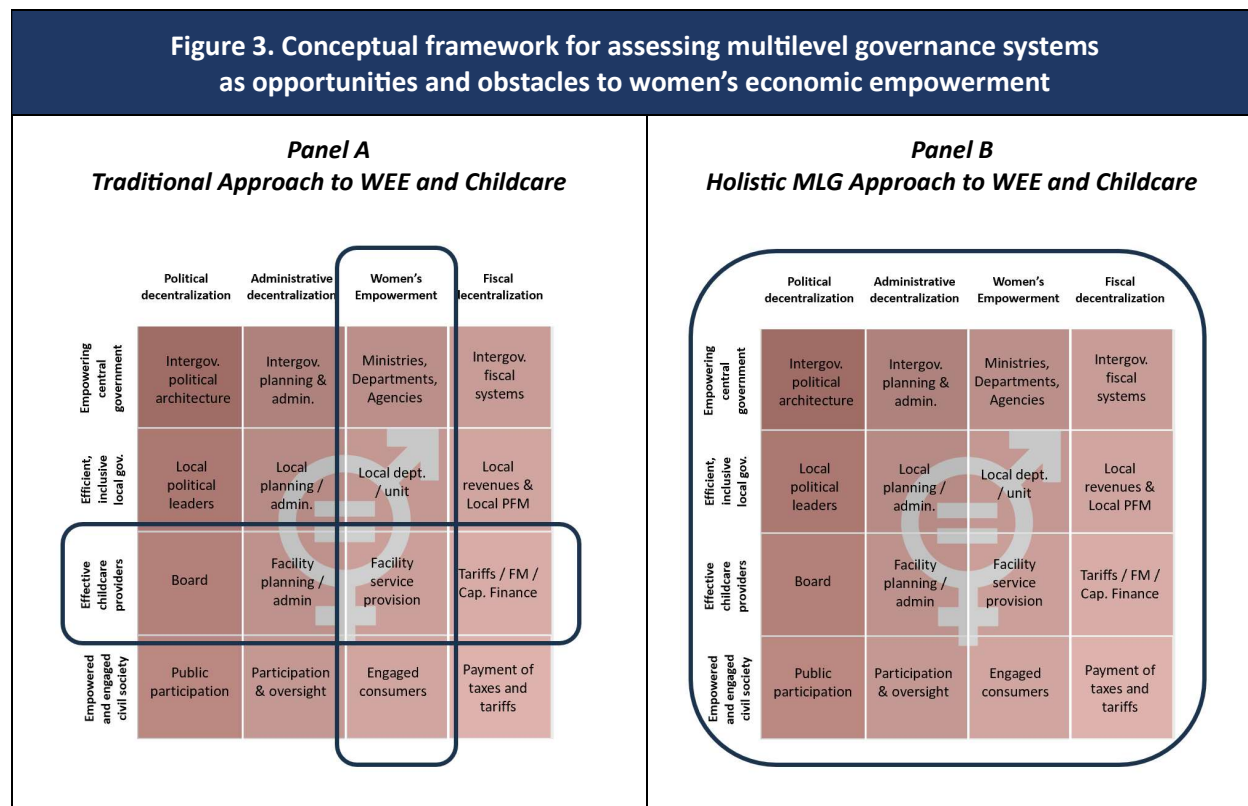
While many countries in Africa, with a history of centralized administration and government, pay lip service to decentralization, devolution (the decentralization of powers and functions to elected subnational governments) is a rare and ‘unnatural’ reform. Central government leaders and economic elites will typically only agree to a decentralized ‘development bargain’ if a decentralized multilevel governance system is likely to result in sufficient long-term political and economic benefits (benefits to the ruling elite resulting from economic stability and long-term economic growth) to offset the reduction in direct control over the public sector (Weingast, 2009; Dercon, 2022).

While development partners have supported local governance reforms in Sub-Saharan Africa for over three decades, **global efforts to promote inclusive and responsive local democratic institutions and effective multilevel governance in the region have not been as successful as hoped.** While local government officials in Africa would like to play a role as decentralized development actors (UCLG 2023), central governments have often clung to power and resources, leaving little or no policy space for local officials. With Kenya and South Africa as important exceptions in the region, LPSA's ongoing global assessment of the state of local governance institutions (SoLGI) finds that local governance institutions in Africa and Asia are often more weakly-empowered than expected. Even when local elections are held, and local governments are assigned legal powers and functions, local governments' *de facto* powers and functions are often seriously constrained.

Even though decentralization and multilevel governance reforms have the potential to improve inclusive governance and sustainable development across a range of different sectors and policy areas, it has proven difficult for decentralization reforms to address key public sector services or to break out of its ‘silo’ or ‘stovepipe’. This has meant that decentralization and localization practitioners have focused on

its narrow reform interventions—typically under the Ministry of Local Government—while sectoral development efforts have often taken place in parallel under the relevant central line ministries, often with little or no attention paid to vertical or intergovernmental aspects of service delivery and little or no interaction with decentralization and localization efforts. Similarly, civil society champions of WEE—like those in other sectors—have often overlooked the local and intergovernmental aspects of women’s economic empowerment. This lack of cross-sectoral coordination has been exacerbated by the fact that international development partners, international financial institutions, as well as foundations and INGOs often operate in similar silos or stovepipes, thereby limiting the support for crosscutting policy reform areas (such as improved governance or improved public financial management) that have the potential to benefit all development efforts in a holistic manner.

A comprehensive conceptual framework—development by LPSA—will be used for assessing multilevel governance systems in Kenya and Ghana as opportunities and obstacles to women’s economic empowerment (Figure 3). Traditional approaches to WEE and childcare are often limited either by (i) women’s advocacy organizations and childcare champions operating narrowly within their thematic vertical stovepipe, which risks reform initiatives being captured by the central/national government ministry or ministries at the apex of the public sector hierarchy, or (ii) by focusing at civil society-driven solutions or facility-level reforms, without adequate connection to stakeholders at other levels within the multilevel public sector. These approaches fail when they don’t adequately take into account the role and incentives of stakeholders at different government levels within their narrow stovepipes, or without accounting for the complex multilevel governance obstacles that stand in the way of progress outside of the sector.



LPSA's so-called 'MOOD Assessment' framework provides for a holistic approach to WEE and childcare. Starting with the causal map or theory of change identified by country-level partners and stakeholders in a collective manner, a comprehensive multilevel governance assessment will use the entire four-by-four decentralization and localization assessment matrix to engage in a series of analyses:

- Stakeholder analysis: Who are the relevant stakeholders at each government level with a stake in women's economic empowerment (including through providing greater access to childcare)?
- Situation analysis: What activities are pursued at each government level (by each stakeholder) as it relates to women's economic empowerment (including through providing greater access to childcare)?
- Identifying obstacles: In pursuit of women's economic empowerment (including through providing greater access to childcare), what should be going on at each level in an effective MLG system? What more should each stakeholder do? What is the gap between the actual situation and the desired situation?
- Political economy analysis: Why is there a gap between the actual situation and the desired situation? What is the political economy of the ongoing reform efforts? What are the proximate causes and the root causes?
- Are there already efforts underway to fix the multilevel governance challenges? Are existing efforts adequate and succeeding (and if not, why not)?
- What more can be done to fix the multilevel governance challenges? What is the lowest-hanging fruit, when considering both development impact and the likely political/institutional support at all government levels?

1.3 Developing multilevel policy solutions requires an inclusive policy reform process and a political economy lens

There are other gaps between stakeholders that need to be overcome in order to move from problem identification to multilevel policy solution. Beyond the institutional silos and gap between the decentralization or local governance community of practice and the WEE community of practice, there is a gap between policy advocates and researchers on one hand and policy makers and implementers (government officials and development partners) on the other. In addition, there may be limited venues for officials from different government levels to have meaningful technical conversations around solving policy challenges such as limited women's economic empowerment. And as odd as it sounds, without an external actor facilitating dialogue, it can be difficult for different central ministries to work together effectively to achieve a shared policy objective in an area such as WEE.

Multilevel governance challenges are best solved by bringing stakeholders from different government levels (and civil society) together. Both problem identification as well as the process of identifying policy solutions requires that different perspectives on multilevel governance and the localization of development challenges are brought together. Women's advocacy groups and civil society organization are well-positioned to identify the problems caused by the lack of women's economic empowerment at the grassroots, but are likely to be unaware of the bureaucratic constraints of different central government offices. Gender specialists and researchers may have studied gender inequality, but may lack the expertise to design and implement policy interventions. Central government line ministries and development partners may be able to leverage resources in support of a solution, but may lack a solid understanding of the multilevel governance system how to reach the grassroots. Ministry of Finance officials may have been so focused on balancing the budget that they have given inadequate attention to the beneficial economic

and social impacts of women’s empowerment policies, including transforming unpaid work into paid work. Local government officials are often trying to manage from middle: they can see the perspectives and priorities of their local constituents, but they are often insufficiently empowered to respond at the local level without coordinated central government action.



Possible policy solutions can only emerge when all different perspectives are brought to the table; potential MLG solutions should not only be technically feasible but also have political or institutional support at different levels. When an inclusive policy reform process is able to isolate potential policy solutions and assess them through both a technical as well as political economy lens, it is often possible to identify viable policy reforms that are “win-win-win” for stakeholders at all levels.

1.4 Country Selection

Country selection: General. In order to have the biggest transformational impact on WEE in Africa, LPSA expects to work with partners at the global, regional, country, and local level in at least two countries in East and West Africa. Country selection will be based on a number of criteria, including (a) the assessed potential role of local governments in women’s economic empowerment; (b) the presence of a sufficiently functional intergovernmental fiscal system to permit intergovernmental solutions; (c) the likelihood of political support at different (central and local) levels; and (d) sufficient civil society advocacy and support for successful policy reforms.

Country Selection: Kenya. LPSA’s initial assessment of the *State of Local Governance Institutions in Africa* suggests that the nature of Kenya’s local governance institutions is among the most empowered in the region, with county governments being classified as devolved local governments with extensive powers and functions. As such, the country may hold important lessons for other countries that aim to pursue meaningful devolution. In terms of the selection criteria described above, Kenya is an obvious candidate: (i) its 2010 Constitution explicitly lists childcare (and other related WEE areas) as county government functions; (ii) county governments are devolved entities, but constrained by weaknesses in intergovernmental systems; (iii) political and civil society support for women’s economic empowerment

are high. If successful, Kenya would be well-positioned to share its experiences with other countries throughout Africa.

Relevant details of the multilevel governance context of childcare and women's economic empowerment in Kenya include:

- The Constitution of Kenya (2010) devolves the responsibility of quality Early Childhood Education and Childcare services to Kenya's 47 counties.
- The National Pre-Primary Education Policy of 2017 provides that young children stay home or in either formal or informal childcare spaces.
- Under-five childcare is largely the space of the private sector, including homecare, where a caregiver takes care of 3 to 15 children in their own homes, or a rented or own separate space specifically set aside for children to learn and play (popularly referred to as day or night cares)
- There is inertia and a lack of coordination across government levels: the national government is yet to come up with a policy to regulate childcare, while counties are also yet to move forward with relevant Pre-Primary and Childcare policies.
- Unregulated spaces may put children's well-being at risk of contracting illnesses due to a lack of proper hygiene or proper care because one caretaker may be in charge of a large number of children.
- While some NGOs are trying to fill the policy void by providing (and studying the economic impact of) childcare to low-income women, public action at both national and county level is required to ensure optimal regulation, provision, and provision of affordable childcare services.

Engagement in Kenya would allow LPSA to rely not only on excellent partner institutions (several of which are already Hewlett-supported), but would also allow LPSA to activate its existing network of contacts in policy circles in support of women's economic empowerment, including Jane Kiringai (former chairwoman, Commission of Revenue Allocation); Judy Oduma (former CEO, County Assemblies Forum), and Kithinji Kiragu (Chairman, Intergovernmental Relations Technical Committee).

Country Selection: Ghana. Unlike Kenya—where devolution was introduced relatively recently with the 2010 Constitution—decentralization has been pursued in Ghana since 1988, as part of decentralization policy framework that focused on grassroots citizens' participation for the effective and efficient services delivery. Since then, however, progress on the implementation of its decentralization ambitions has been nonlinear. Under the administration of President Nana Akufo-Addo, the Government of Ghana has renewed its efforts to deepen decentralization and strengthen local governance. The [Inter-Ministerial Coordinating Committee on Decentralisation \(IMCCoD\)](#) is focused on the implementation of the National Framework for Popular Participation, specifically recognizing that the involvement of women in decision-making processes in all structures of governance for sustainable development is critical to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. Relevant details of the multilevel governance context of childcare and women's economic empowerment in Ghana:

- Local government and decentralization are enshrined in the Constitution (1992). Article 35 requires the state 'to take appropriate measures to ensure administrative and financial decentralization and to give opportunities to people to participate in decision-making at every level in national life and government'. In practice, however, the pendulum of decentralization swings in line with the political party leading the national government.

- In practice, local government autonomy in Ghana is much more limited. Local councils reflect a mix of elected and centrally appointed members. Local administrators and staff are centrally appointed. The District Chief Executive is centrally appointed. Only around five per cent of local councilors are women.
- At the local level, the Social Welfare and Community Development Department is responsible for social development—including gender and youth—programs, whereas the Trade and Industry Department is responsible for local economic development. Due to the vertical, sectoral organization of the public sector at all levels, cross-cutting policy issues such as gender equity and women’s economic empowerment are hard to address.
- Despite considerable support for women’s empowerment and robust civil society support, effective women’s economic empowerment, and in particular, access to childcare services, has long fallen between the cracks of the ineffective multilevel governance system.
- For instance, in 1983, under then first lady, Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings, the Makola Market Childcare Centre was established in Accra, and initially run directly out of her personal office in coordination with market traders’ associations. When the Government changed in 2001, the responsibility for supporting the Childcare Centre was transferred to the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA), after which the management, quality and affordability of the childcare went into swift decline.
- The government is now undertaking a review of local government, which includes a commitment to introduce direct election of metropolitan, municipal and district chief executives. Other initiatives with potential impacts on women’s economic empowerment include the National Framework for Popular Participation (with special emphasis on improving women’s participation in local governance) and the World Bank’s Social Cohesion Project (which is being implemented by MLGRD in 48 districts).

2. Objective: Strengthening multilevel governance systems in support of women’s economic empowerment in Africa:

Pursuing multilevel policy solutions is neither an easy nor short-term process. The ability of many African governments to address women’s economic empowerment is constrained by the ineffectiveness of their multilevel governance systems. Without a catalyst to trigger multilevel policy solutions, the binding constraint will not be resolved. In fact, multilevel public sector reforms will most likely require “multilevel sausage-making”: policy advocacy and program adoption will likely require a shovel-ready pilot project that receives buy-in from (and thus, must consider the political economy impacts for) all parties involved (central government officials, local government officials, childcare providers, beneficiaries, civil society/foundations (champions), and development partners, as relevant). However, failure to explore and address the root cause of the inability of the public sector to effectively develop and implement women’s economic empowerment programs would merely perpetuate the *status quo* of gender inequality, and suboptimal economic and public sector performance.

The core objective of the proposed project is to promote the adoption, funding, and implementation of intergovernmental policy solutions for women’s economic empowerment in Africa—especially in Kenya and Ghana—as a gender-responsive macro-level (or multilevel) economic policy response that supports all women’s opportunities, access to resources, well-being, and agency. LPSA will work with women’s rights advocates and childcare organizations, local government associations, think-tanks, development partners, and other policy champions to advocate effectively for local-level WEE interventions through improved MLG policymaking and implementation. A well-developed intergovernmental grant scheme that provides funding for local-level WEE interventions (in particular, support free or low-cost childcare services) is likely to garner political and institutional support at all levels.

Sustained engagement with, and commitment from, national and local governments—in addition to civil society actors and possibly development partners—will be crucial for the success of this effort. Successful MLG reforms face two general challenges or obstacles. The first obstacle is likely to be inertia and a lack of knowledge and consensus among policy actors, as MLG policy solutions typically require simultaneous action by multiple stakeholders who normally don’t communicate with each other (or worse: may even see each other as adversaries rather than partners in a zero-sum competition for resources). The inertia can be overcome by a neutral party—in this case, LPSA and its partners—acting as a catalyst for inclusive policy conversations.

Second, there are complex political motivators and bureaucratic challenges at different government levels that need to be untangled. The key to successful MLG policy reforms is to understand the political economy trade-offs being faced by stakeholders at all levels, and arriving at policy solutions that are “win-win” (or “win-win-win-win”) for all stakeholders involved. As such, coming up with MLG policy solutions for women’s economic empowerment efforts is a bit like playing three-dimensional chess: a proposed intergovernmental solution will thus have to focus on interventions where it is possible to engineer a political or institutional ‘gain’ for each stakeholder, in a way that keeps the ‘ask’ from each stakeholder or government level relatively low.

We are optimistic that considerable progress can be made. Although the political economy forces and possible policy mechanisms and solutions are likely to vary from country to country (and possibly even among different localities in the same country), we are optimistic that the high potential social, economic and political (including electoral) benefits of supporting women’s economic empowerment interventions

(such as ensuring access to well-regulated and lower-cost childcare) will make it possible to arrive such win-win-win MLG policy proposals in Kenya and Ghana, especially given the vibrant civil society support advocating for such policies.

Box 1. Illustrative outline of a possible intergovernmental WEE program in Kenya

- National government develops policy framework and commits to the provision of a conditional grant for women’s economic empowerment to counties who opt into the program;
- County governments register, monitor, and certify qualifying (home-based and facility-based) childcare providers as per the national policy framework and industry standards, with an emphasis on ensuring a safe and healthy environment for children;
- County governments identify program participants of a possible grant/subsidy scheme in line with WEE program guidance and define to pursue a combination of gender equity and economic development goals. For instance, program participants may include (with some local flexibility):
 - Informal women traders;
 - Indigent/unhoused women pursuing skills training;
 - Mothers for whom access to childcare is preventing them from pursuing (higher) education;
 - Other situations where public support of childcare would be appropriate.
- Each approved beneficiary will receive up to 12 monthly vouchers for 1-5 days of childcare per week. Vouchers could be paper-based or e-vouchers.
- Participating women could select their childcare provider from among all registered and approved providers.
- County governments ensure beneficiary eligibility, monitor childcare provision, and pay vouchers directly to the childcare providers.
- County governments/research agencies will monitor/evaluate the program’s impact on participating women’s economic empowerment, agency, and well-being.
- Relevant national agency or external validation agent verifies that participating county governments adhere to all program rules and conditions.

To be clear: LPSA’s objective is—through a multi-year process of policy dialogue—to be the catalyst for the development and design of gender-responsive macro-level (or multilevel) economic policy solutions to women’s economic empowerment, but not to implement this solution. It lies within the realm of the (national and local) public sector in different countries to adopt and implement development solutions across a wide range of public sector functions, including education, health services, community development, and so on. In countries such as Kenya and Ghana, the implementation of public service delivery—for instance, the operation and maintenance of early childhood education facilities, health clinics, or community centers—may be pursued by county governments or local authorities, often in partnership with higher-level government officials, development partners, international financial institutions, and trusted civil society partners. Part of finding multilevel policy solutions to WEE will require us to help identify the most effective implementation modality for women’s economic empowerment and access to childcare, which may rely on a combination of public, private or civil society providers. In the process of co-creating policy concepts and policy proposals with partners within and outside the public sector, LPSA will rely on the expertise of key partners in different areas of policy development, such as the development of (national and local) policies to ensure child protection and child safeguarding. While policy implementation and upscaling are not part of this proposal, LPSA aims to work alongside partners (e.g., World Bank, UNICEF, Oxfam GB, and so on) who have the necessary expertise and institutional capability to ensure that any policy guidance developed as part of this effort will incorporate appropriate child protection and child safeguarding mechanisms.

3. Strengthening multilevel governance systems in support of women’s economic empowerment in Africa: Description of approach, methodology and work plan

The description of the proposed technical approach, methodology and work plan is divided into three sections: Technical Approach and Methodology (Section 3.1); Work Plan (Section 3.2) and Organization and Staffing (Section 3.3).

3.1 Technical Approach and Methodology

LPSA proposed technical approach and methodology recognizes that creating strong and resilient communities and societies requires a commitment to inclusion and equity at every level (especially at the local level), and that decentralization and localization are complex, cross-cutting, and multi-stakeholder reforms. As such, the technical approach and methodology are structured to engage with three different sets of stakeholders that need to come together in order to arrive at a coalition of policy champions in support pursuit of the formulation, adoption, funding, and implementation of intergovernmental policy solutions for women’s economic empowerment in Africa—especially in Kenya and Ghana—supports all women’s opportunities, access to resources, well-being, and agency.¹ The three main proposed project components include:²

- **Component 1. Multilevel governance (macro-level) WEE Solutions.** LPSA will work with research institutions and policy actors in Africa (including Kenya and Ghana) to explore how weak and ineffective multilevel governance systems are a constraint to WEE, and to generate and position contextually relevant gender-responsive policy solutions that address and resolve these MLG constraints.
- **Component 2. Strengthening WEE Advocates.** LPSA will work with women’s rights organizations, local government associations, advocates, and feminist movements in Africa (including Kenya and Ghana) to effectively advocate for local-level WEE interventions through improved MLG policymaking and implementation.
- **Component 3. Leveraging the influence of IFIs.** IFIs and DPs can play an important role as catalysts for change. LPSA and partners will engage and leverage the World Bank (HQ and country offices) and other DPs to use their convening power to engage and pilot programs that resolve MLG constraints to effective WEE policies.

Methodology: inserting (multilevel governance) ‘systems thinking’ into the WEE debate. Each proposed partner identified by LPSA already holds an important part of the key to improving childcare in Africa. Successful policy reforms will require greater effort by numerous stakeholders: civil society organizations (at national and local levels) to advocate for the plight of women; cross-country learning about safeguards in childcare provision (e.g., REFELA); better regulation and funding (e.g., as championed by the World Bank); better models for training childcare workers and strengthening childcare providers (e.g., Wow Mom, Kidogo, WIEGO); think-tanks to develop specific policy proposals (e.g., IPF, ICRW, ILGS); and local-government champions such as County Governors and county administrations to implement and sustain childcare solutions. However, acting in isolation—and without a thorough understanding of the role of failed multilevel governance systems—a sustainable policy solution is unlikely to emerge.

¹ The proposed project components further align with the structure of Hewlett Foundation’s WEE Strategy.

² Note that project management and coordination is included in the financial proposal as Component 4.

Technical approach: Problem-driven iterative and adaptive project implementation. Whereas this proposal tentatively identifies the lack of childcare provision as the most relevant and most actionable binding constraint to WEE, we propose to proceed with an open mind. Depending on the nature of decentralization and the assignment of functions in any particular country, local governments may (or may not) be able to play a role in other aspects of WEE, including increasing women’s access to the labor market, promoting access to education, health services, clean water; safe transportation; or ensure access to the justice system or financial markets. Although the promotion of childcare solutions is likely to be an important element in any menu of localized women’s economic empowerment solutions, as part of co-created WEE policy reform process, it would be appropriate to pursue the reform opportunities that (a) have the biggest impact on WEE (e.g., as measured by lifetime earnings potential) and (b) have the highest (political) chance of success. Program design will have to be adaptive to lessons learned during the project period. Consideration needs to be given that different localized interventions may have a bigger impact (and/or a greater chance of political success) in different countries or contexts.

Although it is difficult to determine the specific features of WEE policy proposals to be developed in advance, it is likely that co-created intergovernmental policy solution(s) will have wide-ranging—direct and indirect—benefits. A possible multilevel governance intervention is likely to take the shape of a national regulatory framework for childcare combined with an intergovernmental grant scheme that provides national public support for the provision of localized childcare services, with a particular emphasis on low-income or vulnerable women (Box 1). The benefits of such a program are likely to be felt in different ways: improved access to free or reduced-cost childcare would likely have an important direct impact on the distribution of unpaid household labor between men and women, expand women’s economic opportunities, increase women’s labor force participation, and result in greater economic equality between men and women. Such programs will likely have major indirect effects. For instance, greater access to formalized childcare provision may be an important entry point for local job creation, a catalyst to support women entrepreneurs, economic formalization, or to promote good governance.³ Other indirect benefits are likely to include reductions in violence against women, as well as better long-term educational and health outcomes for boys and girls.

3.2 Work Plan

Work plan scope and structure

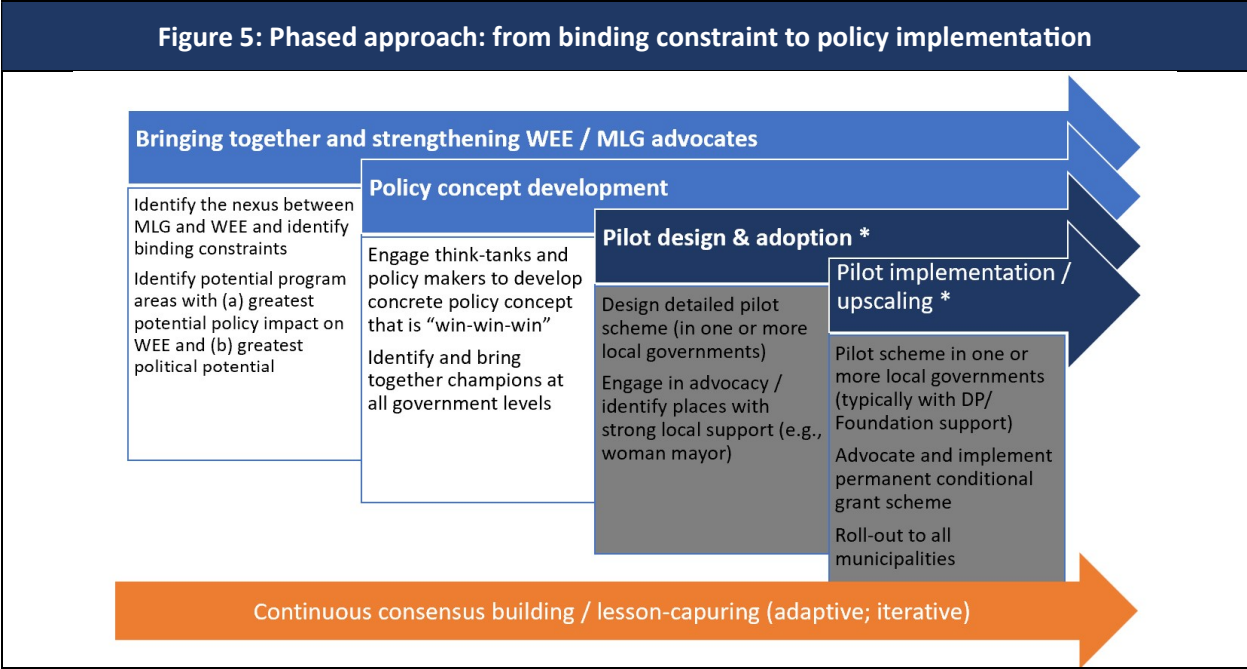
Working with partners at the global, regional, national and local levels, LPSA will work in Kenya and Ghana to move from binding constraint identification to policy implementation in three phases over a three-year period (tentatively, CY2024-2026). The work plan will follow the component structure identified in Table 1.

³ For instance, in some countries, local governments might prioritize access to childcare for women who are willing to obtain businesses permits, thereby promoting greater formalization of economic activities. In other contexts, the award of free or reduced-cost childcare could be used to stimulate local property tax compliance.

Table 1. Component and Activity Structure	
Component 1	Multilevel governance (macro-level) WEE Solutions
Activity 1.1	Global inputs into MLG WEE Solutions
Activity 1.2	Regional inputs into MLG WEE Solutions
Activity 1.3	Country-level policy concept development and policy design: Kenya
Activity 1.4	Country-level policy concept development and policy design: Ghana
Component 2	Strengthening WEE Advocates
Activity 2.1	Country level WEE advocacy and convening: Kenya
Activity 2.2	Country level WEE advocacy and convening: Ghana
Activity 2.3	Regional level WEE advocacy and convening
Component 3	Leveraging the influence of IFIs
Activity 3.1	Global IFI advocacy
Activity 3.2	Global GESI/WE Working Group
Component 4	Project management and coordination
Activity 4.1	Project management and coordination
Activity 4.2	Contingency

Based on these three main project components, Figure 5 (next page) presents an overview of the phased approach from binding constraint to policy implementation, with a view of rolling out project activities over the next two years (CY 2024 -2025) with a view on continuing in CY 2026 and beyond:

- Phase 1 (2024):** LPSA will bring together WEE and childcare advocates and local governance champions to jointly explore whether (and how) weak intergovernmental systems form a binding constraint to WEE in Kenya and Ghana, and collectively define the policy problem. On the basis of this collective understanding, LPSA will work with partners in the WEE and childcare space to prepare a shortlist of intergovernmental policy interventions (such as a conditional grant in support of local childcare provision, or other localized women’s economic empowerment interventions) that are (a) highest-value in terms of potential impact on WEE, and (b) most likely politically succeed;
- Phase 2 (2025):** On the basis of Phase I results, LPSA—alongside our country-level partners—will engage with one or more national research organizations to develop a concrete, operationalizable policy concept for local-level WEE interventions through improved MLG policymaking and implementation. Given that it is highly unlikely that any national government will adopt a highly visible national policy framework without testing or piloting it first, policy concept development will incorporate both a piloting and upscaling phase.
- Anticipated Phase 3 (2026 and beyond):** As an anticipated third phase, on the basis of the policy concept developed in Phase 2, LPSA aims to work with country-level and local level women’s advocacy organizations, think tanks, and other stakeholders—including development partners—to develop a detailed pilot program, while building policy support and pre-identifying local jurisdictions that are willing to pilot the program. Activities as part of this anticipated third phase of this project are subject to additional funding being secured by LPSA.



Component 1. Multilevel governance (macro-level) WEE Solutions

Activities under Component 1 will explore how weak and ineffective multilevel governance systems are a constraint to WEE, and aims to generate and position contextually relevant gender-responsive policy solutions that address and resolve these MLG constraints.

Because of our ambition to pursue localized development interventions in line with a problem-driven, interactive, adaptive approach, we do not aim to start identifying or imposing top-down policy solution in Year 1. Instead, during Phase I (CY 2024), LPSA and its partners aim to conduct participatory problem-identifying assessments (using LPSA’s MOOD assessment framework) in Kenya and Ghana to identify how weak and ineffective multilevel governance systems are a constraint to WEE. These MOOD assessments (to be done under Component 2) form an important crossover activity between Component 1 (generate and position contextually relevant gender-responsive policy solutions) and Component 2 (Strengthening WEE Advocates). Once there is a degree of consensus as to the MLG constraints, in Phase II and III (CY 2025-26), LPSA and its partners will work with think-tanks, research institutions, and other policy actors to generate and position contextually relevant gender-responsive policy solutions that address and resolve these MLG constraints.

Activity 1.1 Global inputs into MLG WEE Solutions. Before generating and positioning contextually relevant gender-responsive policy solutions to resolve MLG constraints to WEE, the nature of MLG constraints to WEE must be identified and recorded. Currently, there is little or no documentation in the global literature on the nature of these MLG constraints. In fact, since there is currently not even an assessment tool to help identify MLG constraints to WEE, LPSA will have to develop the policy tool necessary to identify and document MLG constraints to WEE as a context for the subsequent development of MLG WEE solutions.

During Year 1 of the project (2024), LPSA will finalize the development of its MOOD Assessment Framework (Multi-level governance as an Obstacle or Oppportunity to Development). The MOOD assessment is intended as a participatory assessment tool that will allow stakeholders from different government levels to jointly identify how multilevel governance systems form an obstacle to specific development efforts (including efforts to achieve gender equity and women’s economic empowerment), and to identify what opportunities exist to promote development outcomes through better MLG. The MOOD assessment tool includes basic multi-level stakeholder analysis, situation analysis, SWOT analysis, and political economy analysis on how multi-level governance systems form a binding constraint to effective WEE.

As noted further below, the MOOD assessments for Kenya and Ghana will be conducted in a participatory manner (including central and local government officials, but also women’s advocacy organizations, childcare advocacy organizations but also researchers and policy experts) during Year 1 of the project under Activities 2.1 and 2.2. In addition to the MOOD assessment framework itself, the assessments for Kenya and Ghana will form the basis of an LPSA global knowledge product that feeds back the country’s experiences on the potential for improved MLG as a macro-solution to women’s economic empowerment in Africa to a global audience (as no description of such a global policy solution currently exists).

The LPSA Project Director and Project Manager will further backstop (or leverage LPSA expertise, as needed) for think-tank partners in Kenya and Ghana on issues related to intergovernmental relations and finance. They will also provide an important global quality assurance role in guiding country-level policy concept development and policy design and ensure global and regional lesson-capturing throughout the project period.

Activity 1.2 Regional inputs into MLG WEE Solutions. Alongside the development and subsequent implementation of detailed MOOD assessments in Kenya and Ghana, efforts will be made to leverage regional knowledge as input into African MLG WEE solutions. This activity will allow the team to bring in one or more regional experts to identify good practices in East and West Africa (and beyond, as relevant) with respect to specific binding constraints. For instance, what regulations, standards, and practices are followed (and appropriate for context) for safeguarding children while in the care of childcare providers and/or ECE facilities? Sharing of such regional insights are likely to be an important input into arriving at a viable, contextually relevant gender-responsive multilevel governance (macro-level) WEE solutions.

Activity 1.3 and 1.4 Country-level policy concept development and policy design (in Kenya and Ghana). During Phase 2, once the playing field has been explored through the MOOD assessment, LPSA will select and engage with one or more think tanks and policymakers to develop a concrete policy concept considered a “win-win-win”. During the anticipated Phase 3 (2026), the policy concept would be transformed into a detailed project design that can be piloted in one or more county/local governments. Developing these country-level policy concepts and policy designs will not take place in a vacuum. Instead, this will be part of an ongoing process of engagement, that brings together a nascent coalition of stakeholders supportive of women’s economic empowerment.

In Kenya, the Institute of Economic Affairs (a current Hewlett Grantee) will be among the think-tanks to be engaged in policy concept development and policy design. In Ghana, the Institute for Local Government Studies (and one or more think-tanks) may play a similar role. As noted above, LPSA’s Global Secretariat and LPSA’s Gender Equity and Women’s Empowerment Working Group (as well as the Subnational Finance Working Group) will backstop these think-tanks and policy actors—and bring in expertise related to multilevel governance solutions and intergovernmental fiscal transfers—to ensure that country-level

policy actors can build on the latest global good-practices in terms of intergovernmental (fiscal) solutions (Activity 1.1).

Component 2. Strengthening WEE Advocates

The project's second component will focus on strengthening WEE advocates, by enhancing their ability to contextualize WEE as a MLG challenge and pursue MLG solutions. This will involve LPSA engaging with women's rights organizations, local government associations, women's advocates, and feminist movements in Africa and empowering them—largely, through convening, capacity development, knowledge exchange, and experience sharing—to enhance their ability to effectively advocate for local-level WEE interventions through improved MLG policymaking and implementation.

In line with its philosophy as an inclusive and diverse global professional alliance (and Hewlett Foundation's ambitions to pursue global development in a 'localized' manner), country-level activities will be fully led and owned by professionals and organizations at the country level.⁴ LPSA will largely function as a catalyst to share its 'niche' of knowledge and experience while learning from its partners how its knowledge may apply in the policy sphere around WEE. Partnering with—and empowering—likeminded organizations and professionals that are already operating at the country and local levels, LPSA will largely act in a convening and facilitating role.

Activity 2.1 Country level advocacy & convening: Kenya. In Kenya, the main mechanism for engagement for the *Localizing Women's Economic Empowerment in Africa* project will be the Collaborative for Childcare (CAC), which is a network spearheaded by Uthabiti Africa, a Nairobi-based African non-profit that exists to accelerate quality, affordable childcare in Africa.

As part of *Localizing Women's Economic Empowerment in Africa*, LPSA and Uthabiti will establish and jointly lead a CAC Technical Working Group on Localizing WEE & Childcare. The Technical Working Group (TWG) will bring together national government stakeholders, county government officials, civil society stakeholders, and IFIs/DPs interested in achieving multilevel policy solutions that improve localized access to childcare and women's economic empowerment. The group will be jointly co-chaired by Mr. Asayya Imaya (CEO, Uthabiti) and Ms. Jacqueline Muthura (LPSA Project Manager). This partnership effort will be launched during the March 2024 CAC Annual Conference in Kisumu.

Alongside existing CAC working groups (and drawing on overlapping areas of expertise as relevant), the Technical Working Group will convene 'virtually' every month; convene in Nairobi in person each quarter; and will be part of the annual national CAC conference (and/or the annual Pan African Childcare Conference) each year to report their annual progress. The working group will also be used as a platform to connect with other organizations and draw senior policymakers, government leaders, and thought leaders into the conversation as relevant.

During Phase 1 (CY 2024), the primary pursuit of the TWG will be to explore the current role of multilevel governance systems as obstacles or opportunities in women's economic empowerment and childcare provision in Kenya, using LPSA's MOOD assessment framework. This assessment would be the first systematic policy analyses of the (in)effectiveness of multilevel governance systems as a binding constraint to women's economic empowerment in Kenya, and thus, form an essential stepping-stone for future work.

⁴ LPSA's localization policy is noted further below, as part of Section 3.3 on Organization and Staffing.

The MOOD assessment process will also provide for the capacity strengthening of partners on multi-level governance and women’s empowerment. Where necessary, and as determined by need, LPSA may convene workshops for the working groups on specific topics, leveraging on the expertise within LPSA and its networks, e.g. LPSA may invite Kithinji Kiragu to speak about intergovernmental fiscal systems. For Ghana, there may be a need to organize training workshops on childcare and women’s empowerment with experts from Kenya or the region.

In preparing the MOOD assessment, the TWG will work closely with one or more of the women’s advocacy groups and partners (e.g., Centre for Rights Education and Awareness) to ‘ground-truth’ and validate the findings of the (draft) assessment, to make sure that the facts and findings of the assessment reflect the lived experiences of Kenyan women.⁵

During Phase 2 (CY 2025) and beyond, the TWG will select, guide, and oversee the efforts of one or more policy experts and/or think-tanks (e.g., Institute of Public Finance) which will be engaged to prepare—in a participatory manner—an initial policy concept (by the end of Phase 2), as well as a fleshed-out, concrete policy proposal for a possible multilevel pilot intervention (anticipated by the end of Phase 3). Although it may not be possible to align the funding cycles of development partners and international financial institutions, to the extent possible, the intent is to develop a multilevel WEE solution that could be piloted (and subsequently upscaled) by one or more development partners and international financial institutions.

Activity 2.2 Country-level advocacy and convening: Ghana. In many ways, the country-level advocacy and convening in Ghana will be similar to the approach taken in Kenya, although the institutional anchoring will be somewhat different—as appropriate for the different stages of decentralization and the different stages of the policy debate on childcare and women’s economic empowerment in Ghana.

As part of *Localizing Women’s Economic Empowerment in Africa*, LPSA will partner with the Institute for Local Government Studies (ILGS), Ghana, to establish and lead a Technical Working Group on Localizing WEE & Childcare, which will operate as part of ILGS’s *Local Governance Practitioners Forum*.⁶ The Technical Working Group (TWG) will bring together central government stakeholders, local government officials, women’s advocacy groups, NGOs, and IFIs/DPs interested in achieving multilevel policy solutions that improve localized access to childcare and women’s economic empowerment. The group will be co-chaired by Dr. Esther Ofei-Aboagye (along with a colleague from the [Network for Women’s Rights in Ghana, Netright](#)), with guidance from the Director of ILGS, Prof. Nicholas Awortwi.⁷ This partnership effort will be

⁵⁵ Similarly, as the Technical Working Group advances in its policy work into development policy concepts and policy proposals, these proposals will be validated at the grassroots level in the selected counties—through partnering women’s advocacy organizations—to ensure that the priorities identified are reflective of the priorities of women at the community level.

⁶ The Local Governance Practitioners Forum (LGPF) is a broad-based membership platform that comprises of key institutions of Ghana’s local governance system. The platform provides an inclusive space for diverse policy actors (researchers, central and local policy makers, local governments, private enterprises, bureaucrats, civil society organizations (CSOs), development partners, politicians and political parties, and the media) to share research and practice evidence on democratic and developmental local governance. More information is available online: <http://ilgs-edu.org/ddlgghana/>.

⁷ Prof. Awortwi was previously Director of Research at the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR) in Nairobi, Kenya. He was the founder of PASGR’s flagship research-policy community - UTAFITI SERA (<https://www.utafitiseras.pasgr.org>) which received Hewlett Foundation support for its activities in Kenya and Rwanda.

formally launched during the second half of 2024 event in Accra, potentially during the Ghana Childcare Conference

Although the country-level dialogue in Ghana will be fully Ghana-led, to the extent that insights from Kenya may be helpful to the policy dialogue (as childcare-specific advocacy does not seem to have developed in Ghana to the same extent as in Kenya), backstopping support to the policy dialogue may be provided by Ms. Jacqueline Muthura (LPSA Project Manager) and Mr. Asayya Imaya (CEO, CAC/Uthabiti).

Similar to the efforts in Kenya, during Phase I of the project (CY 2024), the TWG will engage in a participatory assessment of the multilevel governance obstacles and opportunities for WEE, which will strengthen the ability of different women's advocacy groups to coalesce around actionable policy proposals. Similar to the approach for Kenya (Activity 2.1), one or more women's advocacy partners will be engaged to ensure that the policy conversations at the national level are informed by the needs and priorities of Ghanaian women at the grassroots level.

During Phase II of the project, the Technical Working Group will collectively develop one or more policy concepts for multilevel governance solutions to WEE. In Phase III, these policy concepts will be fine-tuned into a concrete, actionable, policy proposal. Like in Kenya, if at all possible, potential funders of pilots or policy interventions (including central government and development partners) will have been at the table throughout the development of the policy proposals.

Activity 2.3 Regional level advocacy and convening. In addition to specific regional technical inputs pursued under Activity 1.2 (Regional inputs into MLG WEE Solutions), it is important to ensure exchanges of experience among other countries in East and West Africa: Kenya and Ghana might learn from good experiences elsewhere, while the WEE-related activities might inspire other countries in Kenya and Ghana.

As part of the project team, Ms. Jacqueline Moustache-Belle will engage with regional actors and pursue cross-country convening. Whenever possible, these convening activities will take advantage of existing events, such as the First Africa Childcare Forum (ACF2024), currently scheduled by Uthabiti/CAC to take place in Mombasa, Kenya, from October 16-19, 2024.

Component 3. Leveraging the influence of IFIs

Activity 3.1 Global IFI advocacy. International Financial Institutions (IFIs)—such as the World Bank—are an incredible source of technical expertise and have an important role to play in promoting sustainable development. However, the structure and nature of IFIs also gears them towards specific solutions: internally, IFIs are highly stove-piped, so that—much like their government and civil society counterparts—social development specialists within IFIs may lack exposure to multilevel governance expertise and solutions—while ultimately, IFIs are banks that need fundable projects. Thus, unless an outside source intervenes, IFIs may choose the path of least resistance by pursuing a centralized or projectized approach (with short-term, but unsustainable impact), as opposed to taking a longer-term, sustainable multilevel governance view of the challenge that WEE requires.

LPSA will pursue three entry points to engage with international financial institutions to promote the recognition of MLG constraints to effective WEE.⁷ First, LPSA will engage with the World Bank Governance Global Practice (responsible for promoting effective public sector management within the World Bank structure), as it engages with the Human Development Global Practice (responsible for women's empowerment). Second, LPSA will seek to engage directly with colleagues within the Human Development

Global Practice, in support of country-level efforts in Ghana and Kenya. Third, LPSA will engage with other IFIs through the informal Development Partner Working Group on Decentralization and Local Government (DeLOG), and/or through the possible establishment of a dedicated LPSA Working Group on Localizing Global Development.

Through the development of policy briefs, other knowledge products, and direct engagement (e.g., presentations during World Bank governance events), LPSA aims to engage with IFIs and other global stakeholders to elevate the debate on decentralization and localization, by shining a spotlight on multilevel governance as an obstacle and macro-solution to WEE. This effort will be led by the Project Director (Jamie Boex), supported by the Project Manager (Jacqueline Muthura).

Activity 3.2 Gender Equity and Women’s Empowerment Working Group. Outreach to IFIs and other global development actors will not occur in a vacuum. As part of its core operations, LPSA is committed to bridging the divide between the decentralization and localization community of practice on one hand, and the women’s advocacy and GESI community of practice on the other.

In this light, the LPSA Thematic Working Group on Local Women’s Empowerment seeks to assess, advance, and share the state of global knowledge on the role of multilevel governance and subnational governance on gender equality and inclusive governance. In particular, the Local Women’s Empowerment Thematic Working Group seeks to ‘elevate the global debate’ on local women’s empowerment in countries around the world by considering (1) women’s voice and political empowerment at the local level; (2) women in local administration; (3) gender-responsive subnational services and finance; (4) gender in the context of crisis; and (5) effective multilevel governance as an opportunity to women’s empowerment.

Box 2. LPSA’s Thematic Working Group on Gender Equity and Women’s Empowerment

LPSA’s Thematic Working Group on Gender Equity and Women’s Empowerment brings together government officials, policy practitioners, scholars, civil society organizations, and citizens who share an interest and expertise at the intersection of decentralization/localization with gender equity and inclusive governance, including local women’s empowerment.

The LPSA Thematic Working Group on Local Women’s Empowerment seeks to assess, advance, and share the state of global knowledge on the role of multilevel governance and subnational governance on gender equality and inclusive governance. In other words, the Local Women’s Empowerment Thematic Working Group seeks to elevate the global debate on local women’s empowerment in countries around the world, including by considering (1) women’s voice and political empowerment at the local level; (2) women in local administration; (3) gender responsive subnational services and finance; (4) gender in the context of crisis; and (5) effective multilevel governance as an opportunity to women’s empowerment. The working group’s activities include quarterly working group meetings, in order for working group members to update each other on efforts to localize women’s empowerment and achieve gender equity at the local level.

LPSA’s Women’s Empowerment & Gender Equality Thematic Working Group was launched with an Open Meeting that occurred on November 29, 2023, which considered the state of play on local gender equity and women’s empowerment efforts, and the need to move from ambition to action, with viewpoints contributed by panelists from around the world, including Dr. Jennifer Joel (A View from the Hewlett Foundation); Anil Chandrika (Local Women’s Representation in Nepal); Jacqueline Moustache Belle (Africa’s Local Gender Charter); and Julia Munroe (UCLG’s Efforts on Gender Equality).

Experiences from both countries will also be shared during webinars and meetings organised by the LPSA Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment and the Sub-Saharan Africa Working Groups. Further, LPSA collaborates with UCLG CIB in organizing workshops during the UCLG CIB annual meeting, a space for exchange among practitioners working on local government development cooperation projects at local government associations or cities. This will provide an additional opportunity to disseminate lessons from Ghana and Kenya. This will enhance the reach of knowledge sharing to a global level.

The Working Group aims to engage in knowledge development, knowledge sharing, and convening/outreach, thereby enabling the *Localizing Women’s Economic Empowerment in Africa* project to ‘punch above its weight’ in terms of engaging with IFIs and DPs, as well as bringing in experiences from other global regions. The Working Group further aims to work with partners—such as the Forum of Federations, UCLG-CIB, and others—to prepare a primer or white paper that explores these topics in the coming year.

3.3 Organization and Staffing

Organizational approach: localized project management and implementation. Regarding the localization of global development efforts, the Local Public Sector Alliance is committed to ‘practicing what it preaches’ in its own organization by following the subsidiarity principle. This principle states that activities should be pursued by the organizational level closest to the community that can perform a function in an efficient manner.

In practice, this means that country-level activities are led by the project manager at the country level, unless backstopping or inputs (for instance, technical expertise or experiences from regional or global experts) would be helpful. Similarly, regional-level efforts (e.g., exchange experiences between Kenya, Ghana, and other countries in the region) are coordinated by the regional coordinator. The role of LPSA’s global secretariat is limited primarily to broad technical guidance, outreach to global development organizations, providing quality assurance, and ensuring proper management and oversight over project resources.

Partnerships at all levels. LPSA understands decentralization or localization as the process of improving the effectiveness of multilevel governance systems by improving the capacity and coordination of stakeholders at all government levels to ensure greater public sector effectiveness. Successful multilevel governance reforms typically only happen when central government officials; local government leaders; as well as civil society and private sector have a shared understanding of the binding constraint(s), and their interests are aligned in achieving a common policy solution. As such, at its core, LPSA seeks to bring together—and partner with—stakeholders from all government levels (and civil society) around common policy challenges – in this case, resolving binding multilevel governance constraints to childcare and other women’s economic empowerment strategies.

Table 2. Proposed country-level partners and stakeholders in Kenya and Ghana: Localizing Women’s Economic Empowerment in Africa		
	Kenya	Ghana
Convening institution	Uthabiti Africa / Collaborative Action for Childcare (CAC)*	Institute for Local Government Studies*
Women’s advocacy	Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW)* WowMom Kenya	Network for Women’s Rights in Ghana (NetRight)* ABANTU for Development
Childcare advocates; Other Civil Society	Uthabiti Africa / Collaborative Action for Childcare (CAC) Kidogo	Local Governance Network (LOGNet) Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)
Researchers/Think-Tanks	Institute of Public Finance (IPF Kenya)* International Center for Research on Women (ICRW -Kenya)	Institute for Local Government Studies
Local-level actors	Council of Governors (COG) County Assemblies Forum (COF) County Governors, County Staff	National Association of Local Authorities Ghana (NALAG) Elected LA officials, LA staff
National/central actors	Intergovernmental Relations Technical Committee Commission on Rev. Allocation (CRA) Min. of Gender, Labour & Social Development.	Inter-Ministerial. Coord. Comm. on Dec. (IMCCoD) Ministry of Local Govt. & Rural Dev. Min. of Gender, Children, and Social Prot.
DPs / IFIs	World Bank UNICEF, UN Women, Oxfam GB Bilateral DPs	World Bank UNICEF, UN Women Bilateral DPs

Note: This list is indicative and tentative. * Indicates funded LPSA partners. Other organizations and stakeholders will be invited to take part in regular country-level Technical Working Group deliberations as well as related institutional development activities geared towards removing MLG obstacles to WEE and access to childcare.

LPSA proposes a strong and responsive project team, with a global, regional, and country-level presence.

LPSA proposes **Jacqueline Muthura**—based in Nairobi, Kenya—as the Project Manager for the *Localizing Women’s Economic Empowerment in Africa* project. Jacqueline is currently the Local Public Sector Alliance Co-Chair and Working Group Coordinator for Gender Equity and Women’s Empowerment.

Country-level activities in Kenya will be jointly led by Ms. Jacqueline Muthura and Mr. Asayya Imaya (CEO, Uthabiti). Country-level activities in Ghana will be co-led by Dr. Esther Ofei-Aboagye, ILGS, along with a representative from the [Network for Women's Rights in Ghana \(Netright\)](#).

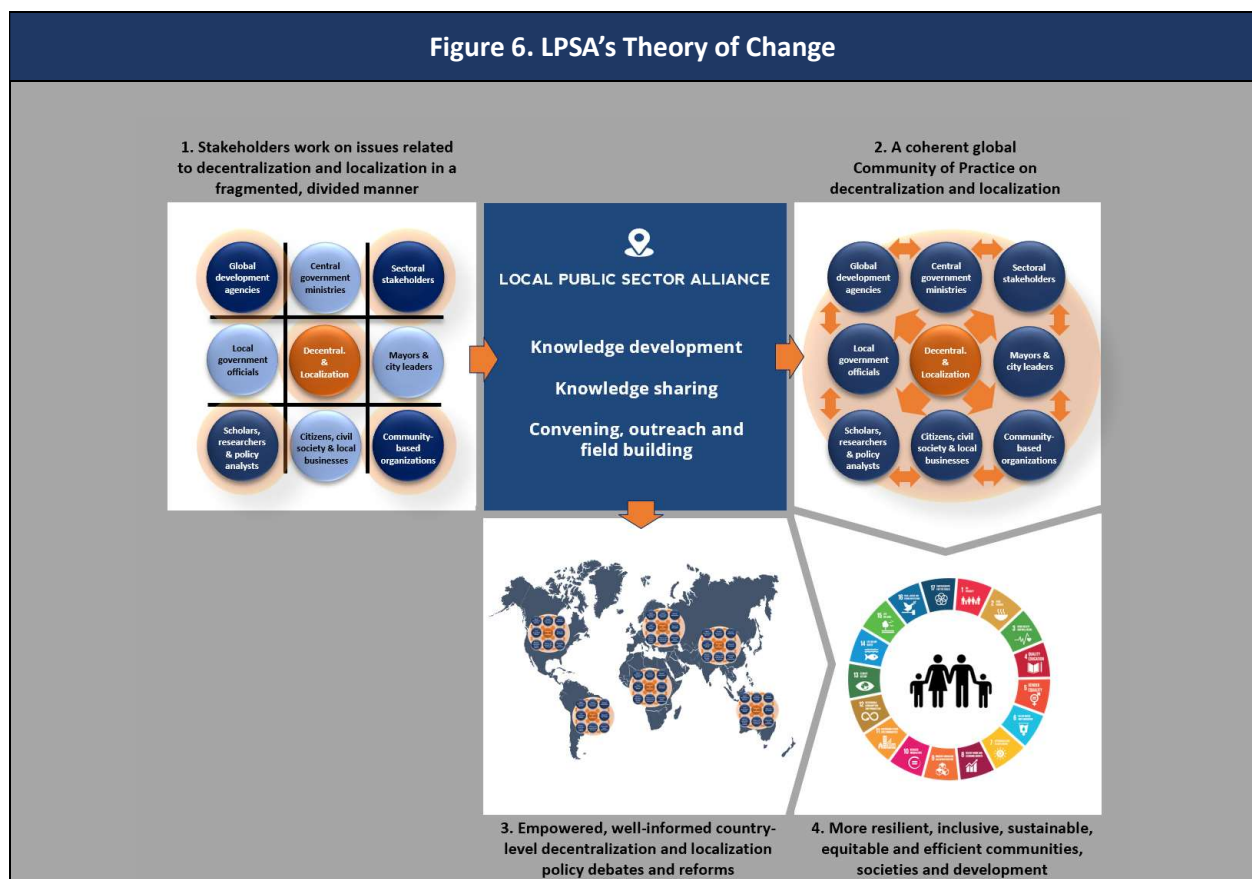
Region-wide knowledge exchange and coordination will be led by **Jacqueline Moustache-Belle**. Mme. Moustache-Belle is currently the Director of UCLG Africa’s Gender and Youth Department and REFELA (*Reseau des Femmes Elués Locales d’Afrique*).

As Project Director, overall leadership, oversight, and quality assurance to the *Localizing Women’s Economic Empowerment in Africa* project will be provided by LPSA Executive Director, **Jamie Boex**.

Among this existing knowledge and expertise, LPSA’s value-add will be as a catalyst and convenor. LPSA will bring together key stakeholders at the global, regional, and—especially—country-level; facilitate actors to create a shared understanding of the multilevel governance binding constraint; elicit inputs from the various stakeholders toward a collective solution to the binding constraint; and facilitate the co-creation of an appropriate policy solution that will see to the public sector promoting improved access to safe, free and reduced-cost childcare provision in a way that empowers women to pursue their education and job opportunities to the fullest extent. From Day 1, LPSA’s convening and policy efforts will also focus on child protection and child safeguarding. While policy implementation and upscaling are not part of this proposal, LPSA aims to work alongside partners (e.g., World Bank, UNICEF) who have the necessary expertise and institutional capability to ensure that any policy guidance developed as part of this effort will incorporate appropriate child protection and child safeguarding mechanisms.

4. The Local Public Sector Alliance as a global catalyst for local change

The Local Public Sector Alliance (LPSA) promotes inclusive, equitable societies and sustainable global development by enhancing the understanding of decentralization and localization as complex, cross-cutting and multi-stakeholder reforms. In doing so, LPSA not only serves as a platform for the global Community of Practice on decentralization and localization, but seeks to work closely with adjacent practice communities and sectoral stakeholders to identify and resolve multilevel governance constraints to inclusive governance and sustainable development.⁸ As such, LPSA's desire is not implement large-scale development projects, but rather, to improve the public sector's effectiveness and improve the effectiveness of other organizations in the development space by enhancing their ability to understand multilevel governance challenges and solutions.



LPSA elevates the global debate on public sector decentralization and localization by (1) advancing the state of knowledge on decentralization and localization; (2) ensuring a more informed, interconnected global Community of Practice, where knowledge sharing takes place across countries, disciplines, institutions and sectors; and (3) engaging in convening, outreach and field building to achieve a larger, more empowered global Community of Practice, with country-level champions well-positioned to champion decentralization and localization reforms.

LPSA Regional and Thematic Working Groups. As a global professional network promoting inclusive governance and localized development around the world, LPSA recognizes the diversity and cross-cutting nature of the global Community of Practice working on different aspects of decentralization and localization. Inspired by the diversity and depth of experience and expertise of our global membership, the Alliance is organized in a decentralized manner, with a small global secretariat, but led by a number of regional and thematic expert working groups, including its global Thematic Working Group on Gender Equity and Women’s Empowerment.

Each LPSA Expert Working Groups consist of groups of practitioners, scholars and citizens who bring together skills and expertise in a specific region, topic, or cross-cutting issue within the field of decentralization and localization. Each working group seeks to assess, advance, and share the state of global knowledge within their topic area, with the objective of providing the global community with best-practice conceptual and operational knowledge to address development challenges on that particular topic.

LPSA is respected and partnered, globally, regionally, and locally. In a few short years, LPSA has grown from a handful of decentralization and localization practitioners to a sizeable global professional network of decentralization and localization specialists with over 1600 members around the world, with four regional working groups (Africa, Asia, ECA and LAC) and three thematic working groups (subnational finance, local democracy and inclusive governance; and gender equity and women’s empowerment). LPSA’s Advisory Board and working group co-chairs include leading thinkers and practitioners from around the world, and its institutional partners include the World Bank, UNDP, the Forum of Federations, the Development Partner Working Group on Decentralization and Local Governance (DeLOG), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), and numerous other partners.

LPSA understands how to resolve multilevel governance challenges and move from binding constraints to policy implementation. As a global professional network for policy professionals and civil society actors involved in decentralization and localization, LPSA has an extensive global network and unique insights into the multi-stakeholder nature of intergovernmental solutions. For instance, LPSA’s Executive Director, Jamie Boex played a significant role in the development and design of the World Bank’s Kenya Urban Support Program (KUSP), which played a major role in urban governance reforms in Kenya.

Box 3. National problems, intergovernmental solutions: urban governance in Kenya

- Kenya’s 2010 Constitution introduced 47 elected County Governments, but abolished the previously elected municipal governments. The Urban Areas and Cities Act (2011) provided for the establishment by county governments of appointed urban boards to manage the interests of urban areas.
- After the elected of County Governments in 2013, few, if any, County Governors, moved to establish urban boards. As most counties are majority-rural, Governors largely failed to see the political benefit of doing so.
- In 2016, LPSA’s Executive Director, Jamie Boex led a study “*Exploring the fiscal and financial framework for secondary urban areas in Kenya*”.
- This study informed the design of the Kenya Urban Support Program, which provides urban infrastructure grants to counties that established urban boards. The Kenya Urban Support Project was introduced in 2017.
- In addition to having provided US\$300 million for urban infrastructure investments, by 2023, the program was credited by President Ruto for having sparked county governments to establish 70 urban boards to better manage urban infrastructure, urban services, and urban space.

5. Project budget

Table 3. Project budget plan			
LPSA WEE Program Budget 2024-2025	2024	2025	Total
Comp 1. Multilevel Governance WEE Solutions	15,816	53,946	69,762
Act.1.1 Global inputs into MLG WEE Solutions	15,816	8,946	24,762
Act.1.2 Regional inputs into MLG WEE Solutions	0	15,000	15,000
Act.1.3 Kenya policy concept dev./ policy design	0	15,000	15,000
Act.1.4 Ghana policy concept dev./ policy design	0	15,000	15,000
Comp 2. Strengthening WEE Advocates	66,440	64,812	131,252
Act.2.1 Kenya advocacy & convening	31,440	29,812	61,252
Act.2.2 Ghana advocacy & convening	25,000	25,000	50,000
Act.2.3 Regional level advocacy & convening	10,000	10,000	20,000
Comp 3. Leveraging the influence of IFIs	6,048	6,048	12,096
Act.3.1 Global IFI advocacy	6,048	6,048	12,096
Act.3.2 Global GESI/WE Working Group	0	0	0
Comp. 4: Project management and coordination	26,852	20,892	47,744
Act.4.1 Project management and coordination	21,368	13,954	35,322
Act.4.2.Contingency	5,484	6,938	12,422
Total Program Expenditures	115,156	145,698	260,854
.....			
Budget Summary (Projected) by Partner	2024	2025	Total
LPSA	50,672	36,760	87,432
Regional Activities	10,000	25,000	35,000
Kenya Convener (Uthabiti / CAC)	14,000	12,000	26,000
Kenya Women's Advocacy (CREAW)	10,000	10,000	20,000
Ghana Convener (ILGS)	15,000	15,000	30,000
Ghana Women's Advocacy	10,000	10,000	20,000
LPSA Contracts (Kenya, Ghana Think Tanks)	0	30,000	30,000
Contingency	5,484	6,938	12,422
Total	115,156	145,698	260,854

In order to facilitate project budget management and internal tracking and reporting purposes, the project will be accounted for by LPSA as a separate sub-program 3.4 ('Specific Outreach - Gender Equity and Women's Empowerment') as part of LPSA's Program 3 ('Convening, Outreach, and Field-building').

END NOTES

¹ “Gender equality, the ‘unfinished human rights struggle of this century’: UN Chief”:

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1088512>

² <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/our-work/programs/gender-equality/womens-economic-power>

³ <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/ideas/articles/investing-in-child-care-good-for-economic-growth>

⁴ Important recent review include: Amanda E. Devercelli and Frances Beaton-Day. 2020. *Better Jobs and Brighter Futures: Investing in Childcare to Build Human Capital*. World Bank, as well as Alena Sakhonchik, Marina Elefante, and Hannelore Maria L. Niesten. 2023. *Government Financial Support For Childcare Services: A Study Of Regulations In 95 Economies*. World Bank Women, Business and the Law: Global Indicators Briefs No. 21.

⁵ We posit that ensuring and/or supporting (funding) equitable access to childcare services is an important function of the public sector. In this context, “localizing” refers the localized provision of services within the public sector, preferably in an inclusive, responsive and accountable manner.

⁶ This is a generalized statement, of course. There are a number of examples in the Global South—including for instance, Indonesia, the Philippines, South Africa and Kenya—where local governance institution are truly devolved local governments with extensive powers and functions.

⁷ It is worth noting that like government structures and development partners, the World Bank is a highly stove-piped organization, often with suboptimal coordination between different practices and units.

⁸ LPSA has identified seven thematic areas where its expertise is likely to be an important input into adjacent practice communities. These thematic areas are: (i) subnational finance; (ii) localizing services and development (e.g., health, water); (iii) local democracy and inclusive governance; (iv) gender equity and women’s empowerment; (v) cities and urban development; (vi) local climate action; and (vii) local responses to conflict and fragility.