



Localizing Women's Economic Empowerment in Africa

Progress Report 2024



PROGRESS REPORT 2024

**LOCALIZING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT
IN AFRICA**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Global efforts to address the grand challenges of the 21st century tend to happen in a fragmented and stove-piped manner. As a result, it is sometimes hard to see the obvious intersection between two important reform areas.

Although at first blush, the pursuit of gender equity, women's empowerment, and a well-functioning childcare system—on one hand—and an inclusive and efficient multilevel governance system—on the other—are seemingly unrelated challenges, in fact, they are critically related: one can't be achieved without the other.

Yet, the Communities of Practice working on these global development challenges have traditionally worked alongside each other in a stove-piped manner. Yet, without bringing together the different Communities of Practice in pursuit of common objectives, neither the grand challenge of an inclusive and responsible public sector nor the desirable social, political, and economic transformation brought about by gender equity and women's empowerment will be achieved. It is also essential for the global Community of Practice promoting gender equity and women's empowerment to acknowledge that a decentralized and well-functioning local public sector is crucial to achieving gender equity and women's empowerment.

The unfortunate reality is that governments in many countries are only weakly responsive to the needs of the people. This is unfortunate because governments—as platforms of collective decision-making at the national, regional or local level—are the most fundamental agents for development and social transformation. Therefore, if the public sector is not responsive to the needs of the people and women have even less power and a voice than men in public decision-making processes, then the public sector will certainly not become a catalyst for change.

LPSA brings together policymakers, local government organizations, central government champions, sector colleagues, researchers, civil society organizations, and development partners to promote inclusive governance, sustainable development, and social transformation. In pursuit of this, among other aspects of decentralization and localization, LPSA has established a global Gender Equity & Women's Empowerment working group and designed an outreach program in Kenya and Ghana specifically to promote the localization of women's economic empowerment.

The Localizing Women's Economic Empowerment in Africa (LWEEA) Project aims to address multilevel governance (MLG) constraints in the pursuit of formulating, adopting, funding, and implementing intergovernmental policy solutions for women's economic empowerment in Africa—especially in Kenya and Ghana. Recognizing that weak intergovernmental systems form a binding constraint to equitable development, the project seeks to 1) develop gender-responsive policy solutions that address and resolve these MLG constraints, 2) strengthen women's economic empowerment advocacy in Africa (including Kenya and Ghana), and 3) leverage the influence of IFIs to use their convening power to engage and pilot programs that resolve MLG constraints to effective WEE policies.

In Kenya, the project established a Technical Working Group (TWG), co-led by LPSA and Collaborative Action for Childcare (CAC), which spearheaded a MOOD assessment (Multilevel Governance as an Opportunity or Obstacle to Development). This assessment revealed highly

disjointed civil society efforts, as well as fragmented governance, with county governments constitutionally mandated but operationally under-resourced to oversee and regulate childcare. Despite policy frameworks like the National Care Policy, county initiatives remain limited to facilitating private or NGO-led services, lacking financial or regulatory follow-through. The project initiated the development of the Kenya Childcare Portal (KCP) to organize the largely informal childcare sector, enabling parents and caregivers to easily find suitable childcare options and enhance transparency and competition, thereby improving childcare quality in Kenya. It is hoped that this will, in the long run, contribute to addressing administrative and cost obstacles to acquiring licenses and provide county governments with access to data on childcare providers, as well as a low-cost regulatory mechanism.

In Ghana, the initial focus shifted from childcare to informal women traders due to systemic neglect of localized WEE interventions. A brainstorming workshop highlighted vulnerabilities faced by market women, including exploitative taxation, safety risks, and lack of access to credit. The project identified business licensing reform as a priority, aiming to link formalization with subsidized childcare or safety incentives.

Regional and global engagements reinforced the need for cross-country learning. A May 2024 workshop comparing Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa highlighted common challenges, including unclear intergovernmental roles, underfunded local governments, and siloed civil society efforts. The September 2024 regional exchange event, organized in conjunction with the Collaborative Action for Childcare Conference in Nairobi, showcased models such as Seychelles' integrated early childhood system, emphasizing political commitment, multisectoral coordination, and evidence-based development of regulatory, implementation, and monitoring frameworks.

In Kenya, the next steps include finalizing the MOOD assessment, piloting the KCP, and supporting the development of minimum standards and an assessment framework, a model county regulation, and an implementation package. Ghana will focus on conducting a study that elevates the debate on the binding constraints and opportunities to localize WEE in Ghana.

Progress Report 2024

Localizing Women’s Economic Empowerment in Africa

RESOLVING MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE CONSTRAINTS TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND CHILDCARE IN AFRICA

1. INTRODUCTION

Achieving equal rights for women is “the unfinished human rights struggle of this century” (UN 2021). 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.

The public sector—as the main mechanism for achieving society’s collective ambitions—has an important role to play in moving the needle on women’s economic empowerment in countries around the world. Yet, central government officials and entities are often too far removed from the people to be able to effectively implement women’s economic empowerment interventions. Similarly, resource constraints and other obstacles prevent local governments—by themselves—from effectively promoting women’s economic empowerment or to provide an optimal level of childcare services. An effective multilevel governance system—where central and local government effectively cooperate in promoting women’s economic empowerment, for instance, by providing optimal access to safe, affordable, quality childcare services—is therefore seen as a key determinant in the public sector’s ability to meaningfully pursue WEE.

The mission of the Local Public Sector Alliance (LPSA) is 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 furtherance of its mission, therefore, LPSA developed the concept note and project document for ‘Localizing Women’s Economic Empowerment in Africa’ with the intent to identify and catalyze action towards resolving multilevel level governance (MLG) obstacles to women’s economic empowerment in Africa.¹

The core objective of the *Localizing Women’s Economic Empowerment in Africa (LWEEA) 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 set out to work with women’s rights

¹ See the Project Document for further details.

advocates and childcare organizations, county/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. For instance, LPSA views a well-developed intergovernmental grant scheme that provides funding for local-level WEE interventions (in particular, to support free or low-cost childcare services) as an important long-term intervention required to ensure access to affordable, well-regulated, safe childcare. If well-developed, a policy proposal to introduce a grant-in-aid for local support to childcare services is likely to garner political and institutional support at all levels.

Considerable progress was made in 2024 with regard to the project's objectives, with requires—as a first step—key stakeholders to come to a consensus view on how weak and ineffective multilevel governance systems form a constraint to effective WEE and childcare provision. Key stakeholders were brought together in Kenya and Ghana; the project supported the Collaborative Action for Childcare Conference 2024 in Kenya, facilitating learning, knowledge sharing and advocacy. Considerable progress was made on collaborative assessment of Multi-Level Governance Obstacles to Development (MOOD) to identify barriers to affordable and quality childcare provision in Kenya. The project engaged CREAM to lead a study of county government programs, activities, and spending on childcare as an avenue for women's economic empowerment in Kenya. A regional learning and exchange program was organized in Nairobi, bringing together multi-sectoral experts from Kenya, Ghana, and Seychelles to share insights on women's economic empowerment and childcare initiatives. Development of a Kenya childcare portal was initiated to support formalization and regulation of childcare providers. Intercountry learning was facilitated between Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa, leveraging the LPSA network. Additionally, training sessions were organized for stakeholders, including childcare and women's rights advocates, on multi-level governance, role of public sector and political economy analysis (PEA) for intergovernmental systems, thereby enhancing the capacity of stakeholders to addressing women's economic empowerment challenges in multi-level government contexts.

This document provides a progress report for the first year of the *Localizing Women's Economic Empowerment in Africa (LWEEA) Project*. Through this progress report, this document seeks to make sure that all project stakeholders are informed and aligned on the progress that is being made towards the project's objective; on what is being learned; and what course of action should follow.

This progress report is structured in six sections. Subsequent to this brief introductory section, this report provides a brief background on the project and the proposed Theory of Change that was contained in the Project Document (Section 2). After this, Section 3 provides a summary of the project launch and project partners.

Next, Sections 4, 5 and 6 discuss the substance of the project's progress, aligned with the geographic scope of the project's interventions. Section 4 deals with the localization of women's economic empowerment and childcare in Kenya; Section 5 considers the localization of women's economic empowerment and childcare in Ghana, while Section 6 deals with regional and global interventions being pursued in support of the localization of women's economic empowerment and childcare in Africa.

In turn, each of these three sections is subdivided into three sub-sections, guided by three questions. First, what are we doing? In other words, what specific activities have we—LPSA and its partners, collectively—pursued in 2024 through the LWEEA project in line with our workplan? Second, what

are we learning? Are our initial findings aligned with our expectations in the project design? And, finally, how does what we are doing and learning impact our view of the next steps (starting with our activities in 2025)?

Key take away for project next steps. Our initial project horizon for the Localizing Women’s Economic Empowerment in Africa (LWEEA) Project was three years (with an initial funding commitment from the Hewlett Foundation for the first two years).

Our current assessment—one year into the project period—is that the three-year timeframe will be inadequate to achieve the project’s ambitions of a meaningful move toward resolving the multilevel governance failures that prevent the public sector in Kenya and Ghana from effectively promoting and supporting women’s economic empowerment. In order for meaningful progress to be achieved, a revised four-year time horizon should be considered more appropriate.



2. PROJECT BACKGROUND AND THEORY OF CHANGE

2.1 Multilevel governance as a binding constraint to women's economic empowerment in Africa

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. 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.

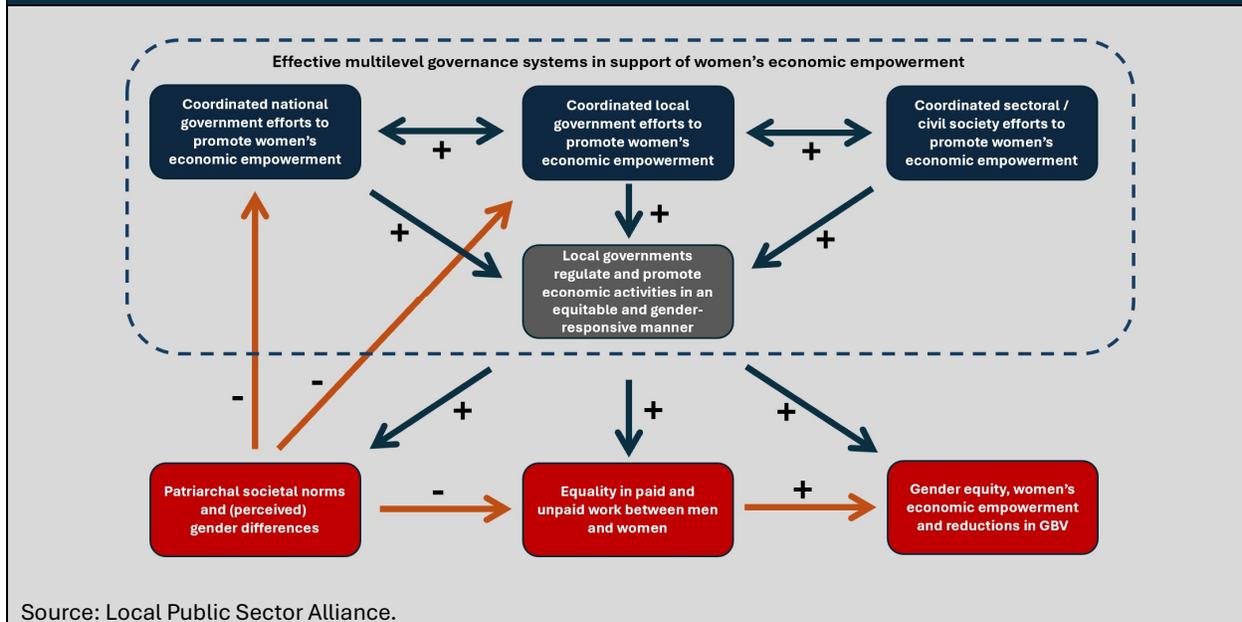
Regardless of a country's income level, public support for the provision of affordable, safe and quality childcare services is a development strategy with a high rate of return, not only in terms of greater equity in economic power between men and women, but with significant secondary effects in related areas, such as increased labor force participation and economic growth, reductions in violence against women, and better educational outcomes for boys and girls.

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. The role of local public sector institutions in promoting women's economic empowerment is often overlooked, even though the potential impact that the public sector could have at the local level on women's economic empowerment is likely much larger than at the central level.² For instance, local governments are often charged with the responsibility of issuing business licenses and managing local (or municipal markets), which often offer an important employment opportunity for women in the community. To the extent that the government services such a business licensing and market permits are offered in an ineffective, inefficient and inequitable manner, or to the extent that the public sector fails to serve men and women in equal measure in a gender-responsive manner, local governments could form a critical obstacle to women's economic empowerment. This appear to be especially true for women working in informal employment in Africa (e.g., market women). Recent evidence from an analysis of informal enterprises in Accra, Ghana, suggests that informal sector operators pay a range of local taxes and fees, which together amount to a significant burden, with lower-earning operators paying significantly more in relation to their earnings ([Anyidoho et al 2024](#)).

Ensuring that the local public sector regulates the private sector and promotes economic opportunities in an effective, efficient and inclusive (and gender-responsive) manner—including through business licensing and market permits, but also through vocational training and other activities—requires not just efficient and proactive local government organizations, but requires an effective multilevel governance system, which requires effective involvement of all government levels, and in turn, effective collaboration between different government levels and civil society within a country (Figure 1).

² The local public sector can be defined as the part of the public sector that interacts with citizens, civil society and the private sector in a localized manner.

Figure 1. Causality map: the general impact of (in)effective multilevel governance on women’s economic empowerment

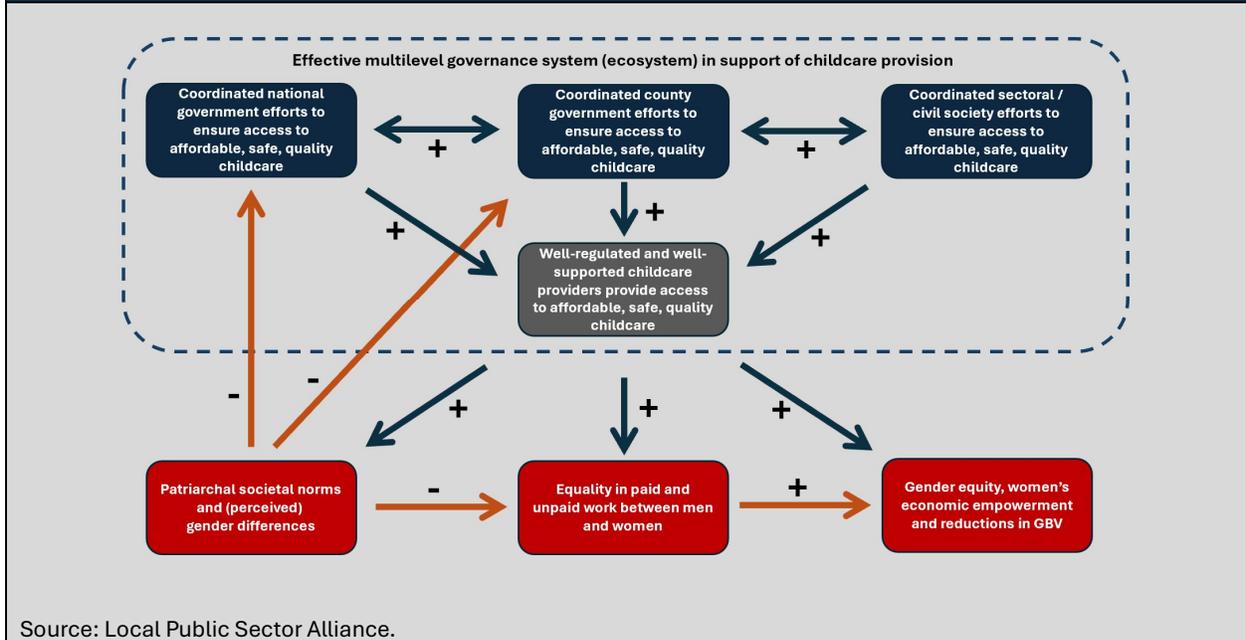


The nature of circumstances, constraints, and possible solutions to women’s economic empowerment may vary considerably across countries, and even across localities: in particular, there are likely to be considerable differences in women’s economic empowerment strategies in urban and rural settings. While improved localized access to childcare is likely to be among the most critical interventions, the LWEEA project pursued a co-creation process to help the project identify and target locally relevant specific obstacles to WEE in Kenya and Ghana.

Reviews of policy experiences around the world specific to childcare (as opposed to the more general case made above) indeed suggest that the sustainable provision of childcare services requires the public sector to play an active role at different levels, and in turn, that successful childcare ecosystem requires effective collaboration between different government levels within a country, as well as effective collaboration within civil society (Figure 2). 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.³

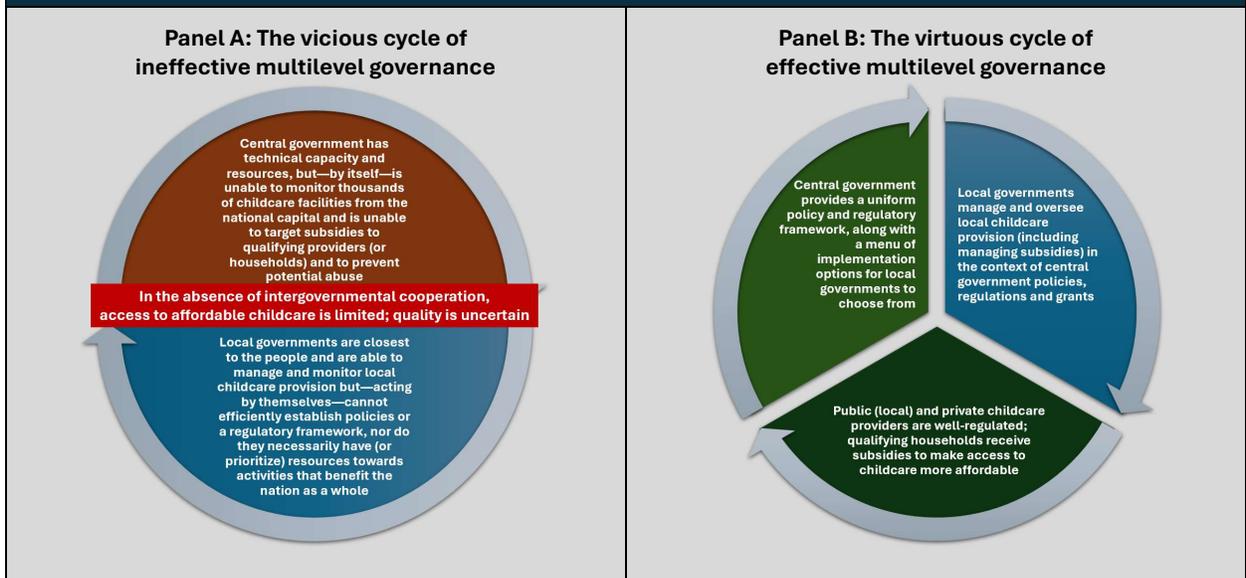
³ This is a generalized statement, of course. There are a number of examples in the Global South—including for instance, Indonesia, the Philippines, South Africa and Kenya—where local governance institutions are truly devolved local governments with extensive powers and functions.

Figure 2. Causality map: the role of (in)effective multilevel governance on access to childcare and women’s economic empowerment



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 3: Panel A).

Figure 3. Expected impact of (in)effective multilevel governance on childcare and women’s economic empowerment



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.

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.

2.2 Localizing WEE in Africa: Solving ineffective MLG systems as a binding constraint to WEE

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.

The technical approach and methodology proposed in our Project Document were 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 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. Aligning with the structure of Hewlett Foundation’s WEE Strategy, the three main proposed project components include:

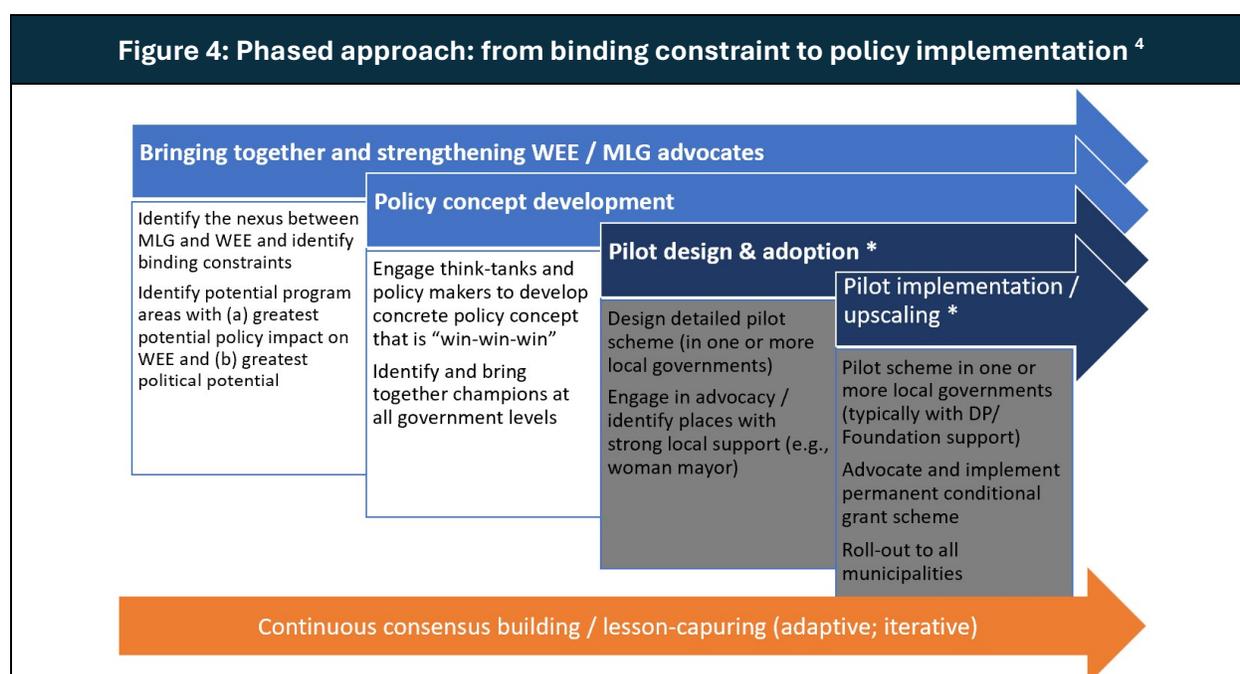
- **Component 1. Multilevel governance (macro-level) WEE Solutions.** LPSA will work with research institutions and policy actors in Africa (including Kenya and Ghana) to explore how weak and ineffective multilevel governance systems are a constraint to WEE, and to generate and position contextually 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.

Each proposed partner identified by LPSA during the project preparation phase already holds an important part of the key to improving WEE and childcare in Africa. Successful policy reforms require inserting multilevel governance ‘systems thinking’ into the WEE debate by building on the insights from these stakeholders: civil society organizations (at national and local levels) to advocate for the plight of women (e.g., CREAW, WIEGO); 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., WowMom, Kidogo); 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.

Working in a highly collaborative manner with partners at the global, regional, national and local levels, LPSA’s Project Document proposed to work in Kenya and Ghana to bring stakeholders together and to move from binding constraint identification to policy implementation in three phases over a three-year period (tentatively, CY2024-2026):

- **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.



In addition to phasing our efforts, our Project Document articulated a problem-driven iterative and adaptive approach to project implementation, with program design and being adaptive to lessons learned during the project period (hence, the structure of this progress report). Whereas LPSA tentatively identified the lack of childcare provision as the most relevant and most actionable binding constraint to WEE, we committed to proceeding 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 (potentially more impactful) 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

⁴ In line with iterative and adaptive project management, as discussed further in Section 5 (Figure 5), this sequence and timeframe will have to be adjusted based on what we have learnt during our 2024.

localized women's economic empowerment solutions, the project is committed to identifying and pursuing 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.

Kidogo



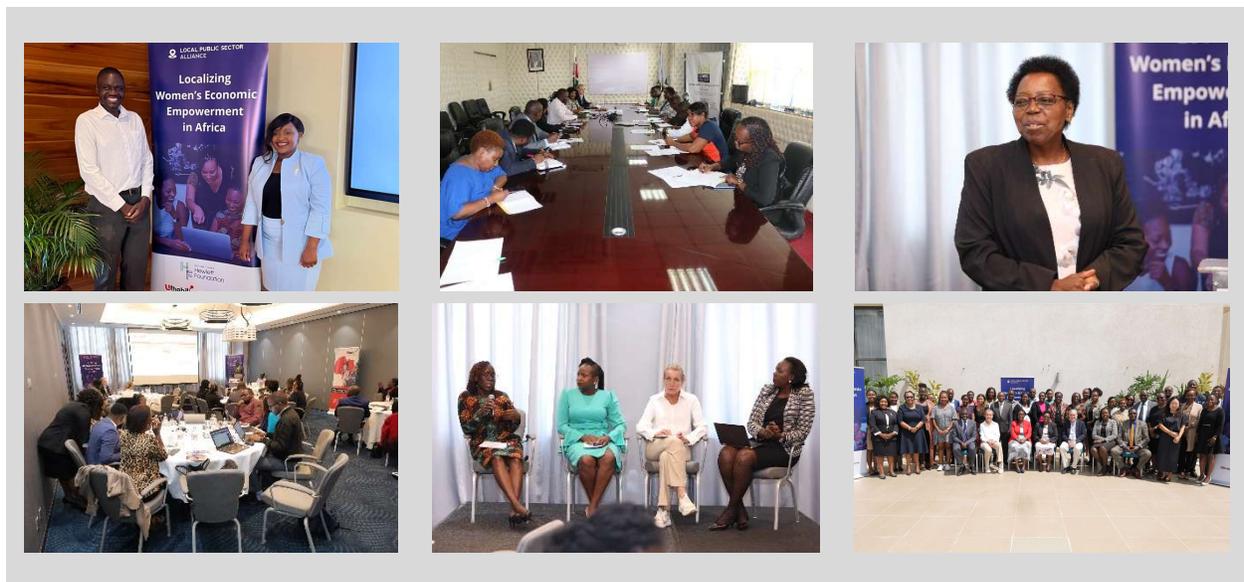
3. PROJECT LAUNCH AND PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

3.1 Project Launch

On March 6, 2024, the Local Public Sector Alliance, in partnership with the Collaborative Action for Childcare and numerous other partners, formally launched the Localizing Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE) in Africa project at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Upperhill, Nairobi, Kenya.

The *Localizing WEE in Africa* Project was formally launched by the Chair of the National Gender and Equality Commission, Dr. Joyce Mwikali Mutinda. Before declaring the project launched, Dr. Mutinda highlighted the important role of the public sector—both national and county governments—in promoting equal economic opportunities for men and women and the importance of ensuring public services are provided in an inclusive and gender-responsive manner.

In addition to the Guest of Honor, Dr. Joyce Mutinda, notable guests included Dr. Jane Kiringai (ODP) and NGECC Commissioner Thomas Koyier. In addition to senior government officials and project organizers and partners, the launch brought together national and county government representatives, multi-level governance experts, women’s rights organizations and childcare advocates, and research institutions. Representation from international development institutions included UNDP, UNICEF, and UN Women.



The Localizing WEE in Africa project launch also included a panel discussion with a diverse set of experts, researchers, and practitioners, including Judy Oduma, Former CEO of the Kenya County Assemblies Forum; Ann-Christine (Anki) Dellnas, senior governance Advisor at UNDP; Penina Ndegwa, CEO of WowMom Kenya; and Dr. Marion Ouma, a senior research scientist at the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). The panel shared perspectives on resolving multi-governance constraints and obstacles to women’s economic empowerment.

3.2 LWEEA’s partnership approach and partners

The Hewlett Foundation has noted that efforts and funding to promote women’s economic empowerment and childcare service have often been disjointed and siloed, often centering on one-dimensional outcomes decided by the group driving the work. The solution that has been identified has been cross-sectoral collaboration and investment: if women’s empowerment leaders can link up with child development leaders and those who promote access to health, nutrition, education, and other critical services that can be delivered through childcare centers, they can create a formidable alliance.⁵ Synergies are created when actors focused on women’s empowerment consider what makes care most beneficial for children. This includes having childcare providers trained to support children’s early learning through play, nutrition, health, and basic safety and security. Conversely, those working on childcare with children in mind must attend to the needs of women and families, for instance, as they determine when and for how long childcare centers will be open, or where they are located. After all, when families are released of the burden of inadequate childcare, women can determine what economic opportunities exist for them to thrive.

The recognition that systemic reform requires cross-sectoral, multi-disciplinary, and multi-stakeholder reform coalitions aligns closely with LPSA’s observations about how public sector transformation is achieved: a coalition of central and local government officials, civil society actors, policy specialists, and development partners is often required to affect permanent changes in the way the public sector acts or works. As such, achieving a more gender-responsive (local) public sector—one that recognizes that achieving its developmental mission requires creating economic opportunities for both women and men, and recognizes there is a childcare dividend to be gained by society—requires not only bringing together women’s rights advocates and childcare champions, but should bring other key partners to the table, including those who specialize in formulating and developing public policies. To the extent that the role of the local public sector is particularly relevant when it comes to the wide range of local public services and public sector interventions that are key to the livelihoods and lives of women, expertise in local governance and intergovernmental relations should also be brought to bear. These insights inform the coalitions that are being brought together in Kenya and Ghana under the Localizing Women’s Economic Empowerment (and Childcare) in Africa.

Ghana

Organization	Super-power (or contribution to “elevating the debate and catalyzing action”)
Institute of Local Government Studies (ILGS)	Offers technical assistance and training to local governments in implementing gender-responsive policies and programs, and policy informing research at the ILGS Gender Center of Excellence.
Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)	Advocates and supports informal workers, particularly developing childcare solutions for women working in urban informal markets in three African cities - Accra, Durban, and Kigali, supports women informal workers in 17 countries in Africa.

⁵ See Dana Schmidt et al, [Investing in communities means investing in child care options for families and children](#). Also see [Hewlett \(2023\)](#): *Things we learned from a year of implementing our Women’s Economic Empowerment strategy*.

Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT)	Network building and collective action and grassroots mobilization with membership of 187 organizations and 274 individuals.
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Kenya

Organization	Super-power (or contribution to “elevating the debate and catalyzing action”)
LPSA	Serves as convener of choice with global and Kenya-specific expertise in subnational and multilevel governance policy formulation.
Uthabiti Africa	Ecosystem builder and market facilitator, creating strategic partnerships to catalyze change in the childcare sector. Strong relationships with county governments in Kenya's Lake Region Economic Block.
National Gender & Equality Commission (NGEC)	Acts as the principal organ of the State to coordinate and facilitate mainstreaming of issues of gender, children's and women's rights in national development and advises the Government on all aspects thereof.
Intergovernmental Relations Technical Committee (IGRTC)	Provides a neutral platform for consultations between national and county governments, facilitating coordinated public delivery service including unbundling of functions such as childcare and resolving intergovernmental disputes.
Council of Governors (COG)	Advocates for county governments' interests, particularly in maintaining devolved functions like Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) management and facilitates inter-county learning by documenting success stories and publishing it on Maarifa Center.
Kidogo Early Years	Social franchise model supporting women entrepreneurs (Mamapreneurs) in running quality, affordable childcare centers in low-income communities, trains and supports Mamapreneurs to run sustainable childcare businesses with high quality standards.
Tiny Totos	Transforms informal childcare market by incubating childcare entrepreneurs and implements data driven childcare provider economic empowerment programs e.g. providing innovative financial solutions for unbanked women
WowMom	Evidence-based advocacy and works with county governments to provide daycare services in markets to support women's economic participation and child development.
Nurture First	Implements systems-changing initiatives in Kenyan communities, focusing on childcare (currently working with counties in Home-based Childcare Services) and women's economic empowerment.
Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW)	Women's rights advocacy across 11 Kenyan counties using a comprehensive approach, challenging inequitable practices, promoting women's participation in decision-making, and advancing women's empowerment through innovative interventions, financial services, legal aid, psychosocial support, and leadership training to foster gender equality at grassroots and national levels.
International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)	Conducts research on the childcare ecosystem and its connection to women's economic empowerment in Kenya; lead agency in supporting the State Department of Gender in developing the National Care Policy.
Strathmore University	Conducts research on the burden of childcare on women's economic empowerment in Kenya, supporting gender-responsive tax systems

Institute of Public Finance	Provides technical assistance to county governments on gender-sensitive budgeting; Produces comprehensive reports on government investments in women's empowerment; conducts research on fiscal justice for women and girls
Community Initiative Agenda	Special focus on marginalized groups such as teenage mothers and their children in pastoralist communities.
SOS Children's Villages Kenya	A member of SOS - Kinderdorf International, the world's largest private child welfare organization, focused on supporting children without parental care and families at risk.

3.3 An initial assessment of LWEEA's partnership approach

The LWEEA Project took an important gamble, namely, that women's rights champions, childcare advocate, think-tanks, and local government organizations, and others—in Ghana, Kenya, and elsewhere in Africa—would be interested in engaging with LPSA in policy conversations about the nexus between women's economic empowerment and childcare and concepts such as “multilevel governance” and “localization”. It is already clear that this gamble was well worth taking, with the project's basic thesis—that effective multilevel governance is critical for a functioning ecosystem for childcare and women's economic empowerment—being embraced by an increasing number of high-profile partners.

Uthabiti Africa / Collaborative Action for Childcare (CAC). “The project enhanced the profile of the Collaborative Action for Childcare platform by engaging new partners in Kenya that we had hitherto not engaged with, including the Gender and Equality Commission and the IGTRC. Furthermore, it benefitted Uthabiti by enabling it to create inroads into Ghana, and potentially setting the foundation for expansion into that country. At the Annual Collaborative Action for Childcare Conference, the project enhanced the event by enabling the participation of experts from Ghana and the Seychelles, expanding the reach of the Collaborative Action for Childcare Platform. It has enabled the development of new connections through which Uthabiti and the CAC will be able to advance the childcare agenda on the continent. The LWEEA Technical Working Group of the CAC became the most active in 2024, thanks to LPSA taking the co-leadership role and helping advance the agenda. ... LPSA has provided a great platform to continue building the CAC as a neutral platform for collective action and we look forward to more support in 2025.”

Kidogo Early Years. “The Technical Working Group activities conducted by LWEEA regarding the definition of quality childcare have enabled more coordinated responses and enhanced alignment among stakeholders in the sector. These initiatives are aimed at fostering a comprehensive approach to licensing, including the establishment of a childcare sector registration portal, which will significantly advance Kidogo's mission. ... Continuing to enhance collaboration within the Early Childhood Development and childcare sector, which is essential for the advancement of aligned definitions between sector actors including implementers, policy makers, care providers and parents and the development of innovative products, and cooperative projects. [Kidogo Early Years] envision[s] that work done jointly will establish comprehensive frameworks that enable county governments to effectively and sustainably implement national childcare objectives including the establishment of quality standards, the promotion of increased enrollment in daycare services, and the mitigation of disparities in access to childcare.”

Wow Mom. “LWEEA TWG has been the doorway for Wow Mom to connect with childcare sector players including Uthabiti, Tiny Totos and Kidogo, policy makers researchers among others, fostering partnerships and sharing best practices on quality and affordable childcare. Through the convening's, the TWG created a platform for knowledge sharing through the multiple speakers from across Africa including Ghana, Seychelles and South Africa. In addition to deepening our understanding on the role of multi-level Governance in Localizing Childcare services for Women's Economic Empowerment, Wow Mom was accorded several opportunities to participate in panel discussions shedding light on the scaling of Wow Mom's childcare model in the market center in

partnership with governments. The honor of hosting LWWEA TWG Delegates in Mwariro Daycare in the just concluded CAC 2024 created a platform for Wow Mom to not only showcase the quality of daycare services provided but also provided a benchmarking session and constructive critique from sector players. The valuable insights received have been integral in assessing our operations and identifying areas for improvement, particularly in formulating a policy to guide Nairobi City County government on the establishment of daycare services across other markets. Looking ahead, 2025 can only be greater. Wow Mom will continue being an active member of the TWG, sharing insights of the just concluded research on the childcare needs of the female traders in markets centers in Nairobi shaping policy development, advocacy on Care work. We also hope to unravel the complexities of expanding childcare services in decentralized systems, leveraging on the LPSA's expertise on intergovernmental policy solutions in shaping the childcare sector in Kenya.”

Institute of Local Government Studies (Ghana). “[T]hanks to the LWEEA project the Institute of Local Government Studies (ILGS) has gained additional valuable actionable insights into Women’s Economic Empowerment. These insights are now fueling new collaborations and training initiatives to empower women at the local level in Ghana. In 2025, LWEEG [plans to] conduct action research on Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) in Ghana to provide evidence-based recommendations to empower women and enhance the capacity of local institutions. This aligns with the institute's mandate of building capacity for effective local governance in Ghana. ... Our partnership has deepened our understanding of these issues and strengthened our commitment to supporting women's economic empowerment.”



4. LOCALIZING WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND CHILDCARE IN KENYA

4.1 What are we doing? Localizing WEE and Childcare in Kenya

Localizing WEE & CC Kenya Technical Working Group. The project’s efforts in Kenya are led by a Technical Working Group that is co-chaired by Ms. Jacqueline Muthura (Local Public Sector Alliance) and Mr. Assaya Imapa (Collaborative Action for Childcare / Uthabiti Africa), the project collaborates with NGEK Kenya, the Intergovernmental Relations Technical Committee (IGRTC), childcare champions (including Kidogo, Tiny Totos and WomMom); the Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW); the Institute for Public Finance; and the International Center for Research on Women. The TWG in Kenya held several working group meetings between February and September 2024, focusing on several key areas: stakeholder mapping, situation analysis, training on Fiscal Decentralization 101, political economy analysis, brainstorming on the assessment of county initiatives and programs in childcare for women’s economic empowerment (WEE), collaborative identification of counties for childcare initiatives and programs assessment, preparation for the CAC Conference panel session on "Multi-Level Governance as an Opportunity or Obstacle to Access to Childcare for Women’s Economic Empowerment," and the formalization of the childcare sector, including the registration and licensing of childcare providers.

MOOD Assessment: Devolution and Childcare in Kenya. The idea of the MOOD assessment framework—the assessment of *Multilevel governance as an Opportunity or Obstacle to Development*, or MOOD Assessment—is to guide policymakers, sector specialists and/or policy advocates in a particular sector or area of development to systematically identify the strengths and weaknesses of a country’s approach(es) to multilevel governance, decentralization, and intergovernmental relations, and to leverage, whenever possible, a country’s intergovernmental systems to improve the effectiveness of the public sector’s performance in achieving specific development results.

The LWEEA Technical Working Group undertook the MOOD assessment through an iterative, broad based and consultative process. The report is at an advanced stage, and the TWG aims to complete the assessment report by March 2025. The process involved a series of brainstorming meetings and discussions with stakeholders, incorporating stakeholder analysis, situation analysis, SWOT analysis, and political economy analysis. The MOOD assessment framework asks and answers three main questions:

1. What is the current role of stakeholders at different levels of the public sector and civil society in addressing the development challenge?
2. What more can stakeholders at different government levels do to address the development challenge at hand?
3. What opportunities exist to improve the effectiveness of the multilevel governance system to promote resilient, inclusive, sustainable and effective development?

CREAW: Review of County Childcare Activities in Kenya. The project commissioned CREAW to conduct an assessment of childcare activities in six counties in Kenya. CREAW, a women's rights organization, was selected for this initiative for its neutrality, as it is not directly involved in childcare services, as well as its capacity to effectively engage with county governments while ensuring that the focus remains on enhancing childcare services without any potential bias from active childcare providers.

The review was initiated based on early discussions within the Technical Working Group (TWG) which indicated that while some work was being done by counties in the childcare space, the extent of county leadership in childcare discourse, initiatives, funding, and implementation was unclear and doubtful. Initial indications suggested that counties were often just the face of programmes, with actual implementation and funding of childcare coming from sources external to the multilevel governance system.

The assessment—currently at an advanced stage of completion—achieves the following objectives:

1. The report provides a narrative description of county efforts in providing childcare services in selected counties that are expected to be among the high-performers in Kenya.
2. The assessment report documents the current (rather limited) state of county initiatives and programs promoting access to childcare (i.e., daycare centres and/or nursery schools).
3. To report provides considerable details on specific aspects of county initiatives and programs promoting access to childcare, thereby clarifying the (limited) extent to which counties are actually delivering or supporting/funding public or private childcare services using county resources and/or staff. Instead, the report finds that despite considerable enthusiasm to promote childcare and women's economic empowerment at the county level, county activities in the realm of childcare are (largely or completely) limited to facilitating the operation and provision of private childcare services by the private sector, community-based organizations, and/or non-profit organizations.

The review included experiences from six counties (Nairobi City, Kisumu City, Homa Bay, Tharaka Nithi, Kitui and Narok), determined collaboratively through consultation with the technical working group and a desk study conducted by CREAW. This assessment will also support horizontal learning between counties to spread good practices in childcare provision and regulation.

KCP Portal Development. The Technical Working Group (TWG) identified the high level of fragmentation and the informality of Kenya's childcare sector as a major obstacle to an inclusive and effective childcare ecosystem. In fact, much of Kenya's childcare sector is currently invisible to policy makers and development champions. Consequently, parents and caregivers cannot determine the safety and quality of available childcare services. Additionally, in the absence of a formal sector, data on childcare providers remains limited, undermining counties' and other actors' ability to be responsive to the sector's needs. In the absence of quality ratings and accreditation, the quality of childcare service delivery is poor, resulting in a weak and underdeveloped industry. As such, the TWG identified the development of the Kenya Childcare Portal (KCP) as a solution to address key challenges in the childcare sector as identified in the (draft) MOOD report, including the lack of formalization of the sector and technical and financial resources challenges undermine counties' ability to provide oversight and quality assurance.

The LWEEA TWG held an in-person workshop on August 16, 2024, and virtual meetings to deliberate on establishing the Kenya Childcare Portal (KCP) with the aims to:

- Enable parents and caregivers to easily find suitable childcare options.
- Address administrative and cost obstacles to acquiring licenses.
- Provide county governments with access to data on childcare providers and a low-cost regulatory mechanism.
- Enhance transparency and competition to improve childcare quality in Kenya.

Through extensive consultations, the TWG identified the potential for civil society to set standards that could later be adopted nationally and the need to work with counties to simplify business registration processes at the county level to encourage the formalization of childcare providers.

4.2 What are we learning? Localizing WEE and Childcare in Kenya

The confluence of our efforts in 2024—including the MOOD assessment, the Review of County Childcare Activities, and the regional and country-level dialogues spearheaded by the TWG led by LPSA and CAC—suggests that the state of practice with respect to childcare in Kenya is mixed: there is a lot of positive energy in the ecosystem, there is a lot of goodwill within the public sector, but there is a lot of inertia and very little actual action in terms of public sector-led efforts to strengthen the childcare sector:

- **County governments.** County governments have an important constitutional role with respect to childcare and—as the government level closest to the people—have an important advantage in the operationalization of public sector oversight, support and strengthening of childcare services. A study conducted by CREAM under this project, along with discussions with the project Technical Working Group, revealed that several counties in Kenya have developed or are in the process of developing childcare-related policies. These counties include Nairobi, Kisumu, Kajiado, Mombasa, and Tharaka Nithi. In some counties, such as Homabay, Narok, and Kitui, childcare issues are integrated into health, education, and nutrition programs rather than having standalone policies. Notably, counties like Tharaka Nithi and Kisumu provide unique examples of collaboration and investment in childcare. These counties work in partnership with community-based organizations and other stakeholders to implement infrastructure upgrades for childcare facilities. Examples include the Chuka Market crèche in Tharaka Nithi and ECDE classrooms at Lake Primary School in Kisumu. However, these initiatives are largely project-based and often times externally funded. Despite solid policy intentions and policy discussions with respect to strengthening childcare provision, county governments in Kenya—with very minor exceptions—are not currently operationally engaged in the provision, oversight, or support of childcare (daycare) facilities or homebased childcare services. While there have been commendable policy intentions and discussions aimed at strengthening childcare provision, county governments in Kenya—apart from a few exceptions—are not yet fully engaged in the operational provision, oversight, or support (particularly financial support) of childcare facilities or home-based childcare services. County officials elected and non-elected, often find themselves navigating the space between well-meaning intentions and the challenges posed by limited clarity and actionable frameworks. Often, many implemented projects are spearheaded and funded by civil society organisations and/or development partners.

- **National governments.** Although the constitution assigns county governments a leading role in childcare, the national government nonetheless is expected to play an important role in the sphere of childcare. The national government has issued policies, regulations, and legislation on several closely related topics. The National Care Policy, initiated by the State Department for Gender and Affirmative Action, and the Childcare Giver Level III Curriculum, developed by the National Industrial Training Authority, are in their final stages of development. However, national entities such as the Intergovernmental Relations Technical Committee and Council of Governors are making concerted efforts to support greater access to childcare. The Intergovernmental Relations Technical Committee (IGRTC) has been actively working to delineate and unbundle functions related to pre-primary education, village polytechnics, home craft centres, and childcare facilities. According to the framework developed by IGRTC, the national government is responsible for implementing a national framework of norms and standards for childcare facilities and developing corresponding policies. On the other hand, county governments are responsible for formulating and implementing policies and legislation to regulate childcare facilities, establishing and managing these facilities, registering and regulating them, and enforcing quality assurance and standards.

In December 2024, IGRTC gazetted the delineation of childcare functions, providing clarity on the roles of both levels of government. This gazette represents a significant step toward ensuring effective governance and service delivery in the childcare sector. Additionally, counties are expected to engage communities in governance processes and assist in building local administrative capacity to support childcare initiatives. The Council of Governors (CoG) is also exploring partnerships with stakeholders to develop model laws that can guide counties in establishing comprehensive legal frameworks for childcare services.

However, for a long time, national-level ministries have been largely interested in the formulation of national policies and regulations, with little effort to engage in direct support of childcare provision, or in terms of leveraging public sector funding in support of greater access to childcare (e.g., through subsidies to either parents, providers, and/or grants to county governments). As such, national government actors are equally stuck between good intentions and (lack of) action.

- **Childcare providers.** Given the largely unregulated environment in which childcare providers in Kenya operate, there is no readily available comprehensive count of childcare providers across the whole country. An analysis of childcare providers in Nairobi City by Uthabiti suggests that there are around 7,000 childcare providers in Nairobi alone. However, the accuracy of this number is hard to establish, as most childcare providers operate in informal settings. A significant portion of childcare happens in homes, with women running these small daycares as microenterprises, typically without proper training or regulation.
- **Civil society organizations.** There are a number of emerging childcare sector champions within the private sector and the NGO space. This includes several childcare networks that are constructively and systematically engaging with the childcare providers in their networks to strengthen the quality of frontline childcare service provision. Given the multiple challenges that have to be addressed in the childcare ecosystem (and given the diffused funding landscape for the sector), only a few of the leading childcare champions are able to devote time and energy to pursuing sustainable systems-change.

Collective action within the childcare sector is complicated by the fact that the leading civil society / private sector champions in the sector are part-collaborator-part-competitors, and the sector lacks an effective, sustainable mechanism for coordination and collective action with national and county-level actors. In the absence of an effective mechanism for collaboration among stakeholders, opportunities for collaboration—for instance, in defining a common set of quality and safety standards for childcare provision—are being missed, leading childcare providers, networks, and actors to pursue opportunities in parallel, duplicating effort, and missing opportunities for knowledge sharing. Given the neutral role of LPSA, the TWG partner organizations have strongly endorsed the working group as an effective mechanism for coordination and collaboration in the pursuit of collective action among sectoral stakeholders.

4.3 Impact on next steps? Localizing WEE and Childcare in Kenya

A critical takeaway from our policy dialogues in 2024 is that while some county governments in Kenya have demonstrated a commitment to strengthening the childcare sector through policy formulation, there remains a significant gap in translating these policies into effective oversight and promotion of childcare services. This challenge largely stems from a lack of clarity on what operationalizing their constitutional role in providing and overseeing childcare actually entails. At the same time, since counties lack a meaningful framework to regulate and champion childcare provision, childcare providers (including both daycare centres as well as home-based childcare providers) are likely to see county governments more as an obstacle than as a champion to effective childcare services. For most providers, high county licensing fees and cumbersome inspections often outweigh the benefits of becoming formalized (licensed or registered) childcare providers. This is a lose-lose situation for counties and providers, as well as for parents (who are left to sort out the quality of informal childcare provider on their own) and the national government (as the country lack an efficient and equitable operational framework for providing safe, quality and affordable day-time childcare for children prior to age four).

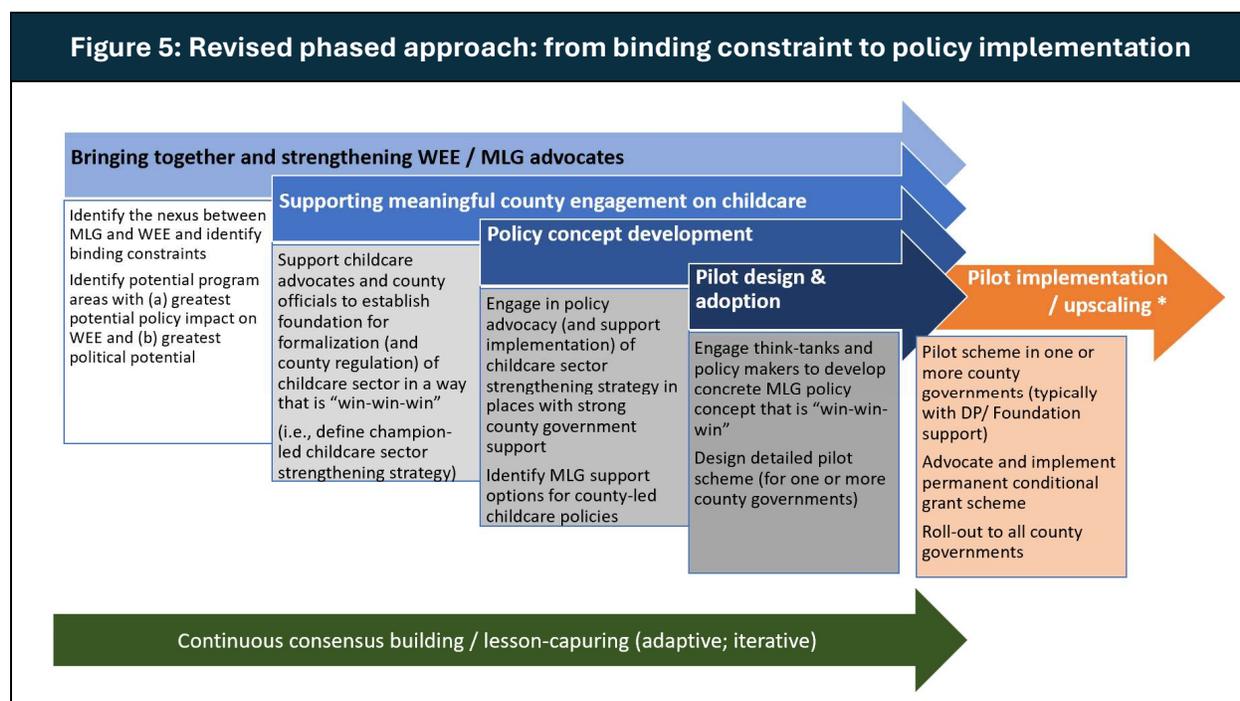
Given the relatively ineffective multilevel coordination in Kenya, and the top-down orientation of national government entities, it is unlikely that national government will step into the void any time soon to provide constructive guidance or a workable multilevel governance solution for the current impasse.

In contrast, the LPSA/CAC LWEE&CC Technical Working Group brings together the right stakeholders and expertise—from the childcare sector itself, as well as representative from all government levels—and is well-positioned to fill the constructively move the needle on a multilevel governance ecosystem in which county governments are constructive catalysts—rather than obstacles—for safe, quality and affordable childcare provision within their counties. This requires guiding county governments on how to establish a constructive and meaningful engagement on childcare between the county government and the community (households and businesses).

Getting county governments to engage effectively. Compared to the original project sequence (which assumed that counties were already operationally “doing things” in the childcare space), ensuring meaningful county engagement on childcare will add an additional link in the chain of project components (Figure 5). The LWEEA Project can move on to addressing the ineffective national-county linkage in the multilevel governance system only after counties have started

constructively engaging with their (currently almost exclusively informal) childcare providers. This would push the concept development, design, and adoption of a multilevel governance (national-county) intervention in support of women’s economic empowerment and childcare to later in the project.

As such, it is proposed that in 2025 (Project Year 2), the LWEE&CC Technical Working Group should prioritize supporting childcare advocates and county officials to define a “champion-led” childcare sector strengthening strategy that begins the process of county governments formalizing their relationship with the childcare sector in a way that is “win-win-win” (for counties, for providers, and for the sector as a whole).



A “champion-led” childcare sector strengthening strategy. It is likely that a “champion-led” childcare sector strengthening strategy will need to consist of two components, pulling together the demand and supply side in the childcare market. The strategy will have to distinguish between the medium- to long-term ambitions of county governments in the childcare sector, and the shorter-term options:

A long-term vision: direct county regulation of childcare providers. First, it is important to assist county governments to envision what a well-regulated childcare sector would look like in 5-10 years. Beyond a political commitment and adoption of county-level legislation, what would county regulation of childcare providers look like, and what are the missing operational pieces needed to achieve such a system? What would be the service delivery standards and norms to be applied and enforced? What would a county-implemented childcare regulatory apparatus look like? Which county department would be in charge? How many staff would they need? Even though a full-blown county-led childcare regulatory system may be another 5-10 years (or more) away, it is important for county governments to know what they are working towards. Building on regional and international

experience, the TWG should work in 2025 to develop a package of materials that would give counties a implementation trajectory to move from their current position (policy statements and general county legislation) to the operationalization and implementation of a coherent county childcare policy. Such materials would include a “model” (template) county childcare regulation / manual; guidance on the organizational positioning and structure of the county’s childcare oversight unit; well-defined registration and inspection processes; as well as standard forms to be used / completed by daycare facilities and home-based childcare providers to ensure compliance with county regulations.

Short-term action: regulation of childcare providers through a county-sector partnership.

Second, a champion-led childcare sector strengthening strategy would have to recognize that most childcare provision is informal, and that the formalized supply of childcare services in Kenya today is only the tip of the iceberg. As a result, most of the childcare sector is currently invisible to county governments, and county governments cannot regulate or engage with an informal sector that they cannot “see”. Yet, merely wishing for the formalization of childcare providers—or strategies that rely on coerced formalization—will not be a practical strategy. A practical next step will be to recognize the importance of establishing a collaborative partnership between the county and childcare providers to start formalizing the sector.⁶

With inputs from LWEEA, the process of working with county governments to formalize the childcare industry ought to be collectively led by the childcare champions united in the Technical Working Group. Since collective action among childcare champions is required (each of which have their own corporate interests), thought should be given to formalizing a Kenya Childcare Alliance that would facilitate collective industry action by coordinating the implementation of the childcare sector strengthening strategy.

As part of the formalization process, it would be prudent for counties to allow—for the time being, under a public-private partnership arrangement—considerable self-regulation by the childcare sector with limited direct county government involvement.⁷ For instance, counties could allow facility-based and/or home-based childcare providers that are registered as part of a country-wide childcare network or childcare alliance to operate within their jurisdiction. Rather than subjecting childcare providers to extensive registration and licensing requirements (and an excessive licensing fee), counties could subject childcare providers to a low licensing fee (to be collected by industry networks or alliance themselves and transferred to the county governments under a partnership agreement) and permit a greater degree of self-regulation than what is likely to be ideal in the longer term.

⁶ Collaborative governance refers to a process where multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, private sector entities, and citizens, actively engage in collective decision-making to address complex public issues, often by working together to design policies and solutions that cannot be achieved by any single group alone; essentially, it involves cross-sector collaboration to achieve shared goals through open dialogue and consensus building. Most county governments in Kenya approach governance and public service delivery in a more traditional (inward-looking or bureaucratic) manner and mindset.

⁷ Without setting “soft” conditions for providers to enter into a formalized childcare market, it is unlikely that providers would actually agree to formalize their operations and register with the county (or childcare network) as registered/licensed providers. At the same time, direct county regulation of childcare providers with less stringent conditions potentially exposes counties to a variety of risks.

During this phase, setting excessively high minimum standards or strict enforcement of such quality standards (by either county officials or industry groups) would likely keep childcare providers underground rather than setting the stage for formalization, growth, and quality-improvement in the sector (which form preconditions for formalization and eventual direct county regulation). As such, is proposed to begin the process of formalization by (a) introducing an industry-wide standard childcare assessment or inspection framework, (b) setting up an industry-led, arms-length inspection system that enable providers to be regularly assessed or inspected, and (c) relying on public disclosure of assessment/inspection results standards as a condition for formalized operation of childcare providers, rather than shutting down (or threatening to shut down) providers who do not meet all service delivery standards or requirements.

Impact of LWEEA activities. LWEEA will work with the Technical Working Group partners during 2025 to implement a “champion-led” childcare sector strengthening strategy. In so doing, it will explore the formalization of a Kenya Childcare Alliance that will set up and operate (on a pilot basis, at first) a Kenya Childcare Portal that will move towards industry formalization and self-regulation in partnership with selected county governments as described above.

Additionally, we will pursue partnerships with organizations like Kidogo Early Years to co-design funding models for childcare that ensure scale and sustainability within a system involving international financial institutions, philanthropies, government, and the private sector.



5. LOCALIZING WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND CHILDCARE IN GHANA

5.1 What are we doing? Localizing WEE and Childcare in Ghana

Uthabiti Africa's Exploratory visit and strategic engagement in Ghana. The LWEEA Project supported Uthabiti Africa’s Chief Operations Officer to travel to Ghana and participate in several key events. The trip took place between 4th and 11th February 2024. This visit was strategically scheduled to coincide with Uthabiti Africa's participation in the 2024 annual members' meeting convened by Global Schools Forum (GSF), a collaborative community, innovation accelerator, and partnership builder for non-state organizations working to improve education at scale for underserved children in low- and middle-income countries.

This activity significantly supported Uthabiti's efforts to connect, collaborate, and share knowledge and experiences with key stakeholders in the region. During the visit, Noah Kipkoech, Chief Operations Officer of Uthabiti Africa, met with the project partners in Ghana and also engaged with various strategic partners, including Lively Minds, Sabre Education, Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE-Ghana Chapter), Education Collaborative Kaya Childcare, IDP Foundation, ID Insight, and Opportunity Edu Finance International, among others. These interactions provided valuable opportunities for knowledge exchange and potential future collaborations.

Brainstorming Workshop on Advancing Women’s Economic Empowerment in Ghana. The project in Ghana, initiated after the activities in Kenya, was designed to leverage insights gained from the Kenyan experience while adapting to the local context. While childcare was initially a focal point of the project, it became clear that partners needed time to identify priority issues specific to Ghana's unique social, political and governance landscape. From February to July, bilateral discussions were held with local partners, including the Institute of Local Government Studies (ILGS), NETRIGHT, and WIEGO, culminating in a brainstorming workshop in August 2024.

The brainstorming workshop brought together a diverse group of participants, including representatives from various levels of government, scholars from academic institutions, and members of civil society organizations specializing in gender advocacy. The objectives of the workshop were to:

- elicit and validate challenges to Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) in Ghana.
- examine public policy and public sector action at the local level on WEE to date and identify gaps and limitations in addressing the challenges.
- identify ongoing strategies and interventions to promote WEE at the local level that could be strengthened by more effective Multi-level governance coordination and support.

5.2 What are we learning? Localizing WEE and Childcare in Ghana

Both the state of local governance as well as the state of civil society with respect to women's economic empowerment is more challenging in Ghana than it is in Kenya. Rather than proactive platforms for collective decision-making and service delivery, local governments in Ghana are quite reactive organizations, mainly geared towards ensuring public consultation (informing centralized decision-making) and implementing top-down central government policies and decisions. Our consultations established that there is current little constructive, proactive action being taken, either on the side of the public sector or from civil society (women's rights organizations, etcetera), with regard to establishing a functioning childcare ecosystem in Ghana.

Even though there is a (somewhat politicized) history of local government involvement in childcare provision in public markets, childcare is neither *de jure* or *de facto* a local government function, nor is it widely perceived to be a central government priority.⁸ *Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing* (WIEGO) is one of the few organizations operating at the intersection between local governance and childcare in Ghana as part of their support to women informal workers.⁹ While the Ghana Early Childhood Care and Development Standards recognize the important role that daycare play, little progress has been made in developing the sector with the standards only applicable to families and not applicable to childcare in daycare and nightcare centers.

After consideration by the project team, it does not appear that a core focus on the localization of childcare provision would form a "lowest-hanging fruit" intervention in Ghana in terms of women's economic empowerment. Instead, an area where there is likely greater impact at the intersection of women's economic empowerment in terms and local governance appears to be the plight of informally employed women, including as market vendors and street vendors.

Many young women come from North/rural areas to urban areas to work in markets, porters, and similar positions. Given the informal nature of their employment and the lack of formal (public) or informal (social) safety nets, these women are exposed to potential (health and economic) risks and exploitation. These women are often targets of criminal activities and a heightened vulnerability to victimization compared to their male counterparts. The lack of adequate infrastructure, such as proper street lighting in marketplaces (a function of local governments), exacerbates their security concerns.

In addition, women traders endure discrimination and criminalization, frequently facing harassment and abuse from local law enforcement officials. These officials may exploit their vulnerabilities by soliciting sexual favors or applying unrelated laws to arrest them. The women also face high levels of local taxation since they often pay multiple taxes in the day, which are undocumented and several times higher than those of traders with licenses.

⁸ As of yet, the impact of the December 2024 elections in Ghana on the topic is unclear.

⁹ For instance, the child-care centre in Makola Market in Accra has faced numerous challenges, exacerbated by tensions between the Accra Metropolitan Assembly and the trader organizations running the centre. Through dialogue, the WIEGO team formed a multi-stakeholder reference group and worked with the mayor and other officials to develop and implement child-care guidelines specifically designed for market-based centres.

The burden of balancing work responsibilities with household management and childcare duties adds further complexity to their lives. This situation was further aggravated during the COVID-19 pandemic when school and crèche closures forced many women to bring their children to the market, creating additional strain on their ability to focus on their businesses.

During a brainstorming workshop in August 2024, organized by the Localizing Women's Economic Empowerment in Africa (LWEEA) project in collaboration with ILGS and women's rights groups in Ghana, it was reported that due to the lack of business certification, women traders are often unable to access microcredit or secure loans in amounts sufficient to grow their businesses. This lack of access to financial resources not only stifles their entrepreneurial potential but also perpetuates cycles of poverty and financial insecurity.

Although local governments in Ghana have a less direct responsibility for childcare services, the role of local governments in the incremental formalization of informally employed women (especially market women and street vendors) is much more obvious. Local governments have a potentially direct role in formalizing women's economic activity through granting local (market or vendor) licenses. By pursuing market management and business (vendor) licensing in a more gender-inclusive and gender-responsive manner (for instance, by using the issuance of market/vendor licenses as an entry-point for public services to women in informal employment, and/or ensuring gender-inclusive market management), local governments would be able to create a safer and more economically empowering environment for women in informal employment in Ghana. It is possible (but not necessarily the case) that pursuing this angle would tie back into the provision of childcare services (e.g., by allowing licensed market vendors to access reduced-cost childcare at markets).

5.3 Impact on next steps? Localizing WEE and Childcare in Ghana

Due to the relatively weaker state of multilevel governance and civil society engagement in the realm of women's empowerment, Ghana is in a position to learn from the project's activities in Kenya. For instance, the MOOD assessment conducted in Kenya has been instrumental in enabling the Technical Working Group (TWG) to understand the complex challenges within the childcare sector and inform the development of strategic solutions. Building on the experience in Kenya and in response to the challenges identified during the August 2024 brainstorming workshop in Ghana, the project will support the Ghana TWG in conducting a MOOD assessment. This assessment will identify multi-level governance obstacles to women's economic empowerment at the local level, focusing on market and informal traders.

The project will support solutions aimed at reducing bureaucratic and financial obstacles to business licensing for low-income traders, especially women-owned microenterprises. To incentivize women traders to register their businesses, the design of mechanisms such as subsidizing childcare or other services through vouchers for registered traders will be explored.

Furthermore, stakeholders suggested engaging with the Ministry of Local Government to incentivize local authorities in promoting Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) by expanding gender indicators within the District Assemblies Performance Assessment Tool (DEPAT). This initiative is

considered feasible within two years and aligns with ongoing efforts by the Institute of Local Government Studies (ILGS) in similar USAID-funded projects.

An avenue to be explored in 2025 is a pilot program for business formalization (i.e., the gender-responsive issuance of business licenses and traders' permits_ will be implemented in two localities (municipalities/districts), allowing for evidence-based advocacy to expand gender indicators in DEPAT. This approach will enable the project to gather concrete data and insights to support broader policy changes and interventions aimed at enhancing women's economic participation at the local level.

6. LOCALIZING WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND CHILDCARE IN AFRICA: REGIONAL AND GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE SHARING

6.1 What are we doing? Regional and Global Activities

May 2024: Regional experience sharing & Technical Working Group Meeting (Kenya, Ghana, RSA). The Technical Working Group (TWG) meeting for the Localizing Women's Economic Empowerment in Africa (LWEEA) Project, held on May 23, 2024, in Nairobi, Kenya, brought together experts from Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana to compare multilevel governance (MLG) contexts for childcare across the three countries. The working group benefited from presentations by Prof Jaap de Visser, Dullah Omar Institute, University of Western Cape on the role of local government and intergovernmental systems in early childhood development, Prof Nicholas Awortwi, Institute of Local Government Studies, Ghana on the ECD in Ghana and Dr. Jamie Boex’ presentation on Political Economy Analysis for Multi-Level Governance Systems. The meeting highlighted significant differences in the organization and implementation of childcare services among these nations.

September 2024: Nairobi CAC Childcare 2024 Conference. The project’s contribution to the CAC conference focused on three main aspects: financial sponsorship, expert presentations and panel discussions. Regional expert presentations were delivered by key speakers from Seychelles. Jacqueline Moustache-Belle, Co-chair of LPSA Gender Equality/Women's Empowerment, who spoke on the need for governments to invest in the care economy, while Shirley Choppy, Director of IECD Seychelles, shared valuable lessons from Seychelles' experience in building a childcare system. These presentations have also been shared on decentralization.net to allow for a wider reach.

The Kenya LWEEA TWG organized a panel discussion during the conference titled "Multi-Level Governance and Childcare for Women's Economic Empowerment." The panel was moderated by Jacqueline Muthura, the LWEEA Project Manager and brought together experts from researchers, childcare providers, county government, intergovernmental relations and women’s rights and childcare advocates to explore the intersection of decentralization, childcare provision, and women's empowerment in Kenya.

Half-day Regional Exchange Learning Workshop. The Localizing Women's, focused on childcare services and involved visits to three key stakeholders: Kidogo Early Years Childcare facility in informal settlements, the County Government of Nairobi, and the he workshop aimed to explore the organization of childcare sectors across these countries and identify innovative practices, lessons learned, and recommendations for enhancing childcare systems. Key objectives of the session included:

- Understanding the organization of childcare sectors in Kenya, Ghana, and Seychelles, including the roles of different actors.
- Discussing innovative practices, lessons learned, pitfalls, and recommendations in childcare programs across the three countries.

- Exploring specific areas such as capacity building, workforce development, formalization of childcare enterprises, advocacy, regulations, and cross-sectoral coordination.

The workshop featured presentations from ILGS, IECD, and Kidogo Early Years, providing insights into the childcare landscapes of their respective countries. After the country presentations, participants engaged in group discussions on capacity building, workforce development and research, advocacy at the county and national levels, regulations and standards, quality, and cross-sectoral and intergovernmental coordination.

Field visits to Nairobi Childcare Facilities and Nairobi City County Government. The study visit held on September 20th 2024, focused on childcare services and involved visits to three key stakeholders: Kidogo Early Years Childcare facility in informal settlements, the County Government of Nairobi, and Wow Moms market facility. Participants for the site visit were drawn from ILGS Ghana, IECD Seychelles, Wow Mom Kenya, Kidogo Early Years, Uthabiti Africa, WIEGO, and Nairobi City County departments of gender, youth, education and markets.

October 2024: ASD –supporting NGENC and IGRTC. In October 2024, the LWEEA project supported Josephine Mwatibo, Programmes Officer at the National Gender and Equality Commission, and Samuel Chepkwony Kipkurui, CEO of Intergovernmental Relations Technical Committee (IGRTC), who are part of the LWEEA Kenya Technical Working Group (TWG) and the LPSA LWEEA Project Manager to attend the 2024 course on decentralization and human rights. The course is organized by the African School of Decentralization at the Dullah Omar Institute, University of Western Cape. The course covered a wide range of topics, including multi-level governance and civil & political rights, transparency and accountability, inclusive local governance, rights of children, persons living with disabilities, and LGBTQ individuals, environmental rights and climate change, local government financing for human rights, gender and youth empowerment, and the criminalization of poverty by local authorities.

Hewlett Foundation Women's Economic Empowerment Grantee Convening in Dar es Salaam. In September 2024, LPSA Project Manager Jacqueline Muthura and Uthabiti Africa's Executive Director, Asayya Imaya, attended the Hewlett Foundation Women's Economic Empowerment Grantee Convening in Dar es Salaam. This event provided an invaluable opportunity to learn from other grantees and share experiences in the field of women's economic empowerment (WEE). The convening fostered connections between diverse stakeholders, including feminist economists, women's rights organizations, care sector actors, and international financial institutions. Key connections were made with Strathmore University, ECDAN, World Bank, UNICEF, and IDRC. Some of these connections have already yielded results, with Strathmore University joining the LWEEA Technical Working Group and promising discussions with ECDAN for future partnerships ongoing.

6.2 What are we learning? The Global and Regional Context of Localizing WEE and Childcare

Regional knowledge exchanges. Our regional knowledge exchanges have proven to be highly valuable, fostering knowledge sharing, learning, and creating opportunities for collaboration and strengthening partnerships. Participants reported significant benefits from these exchanges, with local governance actors finding them particularly eye-opening. For instance, some county

government officials in departments related to Early Childhood Development (ECD) and childcare remarked, "I did not know that childcare is also my mandate or how to implement this responsibility."

These exchanges have underscored the potential for inter-country learning as African nations navigate the challenges of designing, implementing, and funding childcare models. Many African nations are struggling to implement childcare services due to limited resources and minimal local public sector involvement. Civil society organizations remain the primary drivers of the childcare conversation, reinforcing the need for public-private partnerships and robust policy solutions. Common issues identified include curriculum development, setting minimum standards, funding, and clarity in local-level administration. The cross-sectoral nature of childcare provision has led to debates about which institutions should take primary responsibility for coordination.

A workshop in May revealed that the childcare sector is predominantly private sector-driven across all three participating nations, highlighting the urgent need for effective regulation, stronger public-private partnerships, and improved coordination. It also stressed the importance of clearly delineating responsibilities across government levels and increasing support for local governments in delivering childcare services. Countries at different stages of childcare development stand to benefit from sharing experiences. For example, Kenya, which is in the process of developing its childcare sector, could learn from Seychelles' efforts in establishing standards and regulations. Similarly, Ghana could draw lessons from Kenya's successes and challenges in developing childcare policies and curricula at both the county and national levels. Kenyan actors could also benefit from Rwanda's government-led, nationwide community and home-based ECD centers, which serve over 1.2 million children, as well as from other childcare and Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) initiatives supported by the World Bank and UNICEF, and local government programs targeting WEE and childcare for market women.

The LWEEA regional learning activities have highlighted several key challenges and opportunities:

- Multilevel governance challenges persist, with unclear delineation of childcare responsibilities between national, regional, and local governments.
- Local government involvement is critical for scaling and sustaining childcare provision, yet many lack the experience, resources, or clear mandates to manage this role effectively.
- A policy-implementation gap exists, with national policies often facing barriers to local implementation due to funding constraints and poor intergovernmental coordination.
- The childcare sector in Africa remains predominantly private sector and civil society-driven, necessitating effective regulation and public-private partnerships. Most countries are still in the early stages of developing childcare systems.
- Inadequate funding for childcare initiatives, particularly at the local government level, hampers the delivery of sustainable, high-quality services.
- Capacity building is essential for local governments and childcare providers to effectively manage and deliver quality childcare services.
- Childcare for children aged 0–3 years is often lumped together with ECD or education, leading to its underprioritization in countries like Kenya, Rwanda, Ghana, and South Africa.
- Ongoing debates continue regarding standards, curriculum development, and regulation of childcare facilities across various government levels.

Leveraging existing and diverse opportunities for knowledge sharing is a cost-effective way to achieve multiple learning objectives. For instance, the 2024 regional exchange in May capitalized on the presence of local government experts from Ghana and South Africa in Kenya for an LPSA Sub-Saharan Africa working group workshop, enabling their participation in a LWEEA Technical Working Group (TWG) meeting with Kenyan counterparts. Similarly, the Collaborative Action for Childcare (CAC) conference provided a platform to enhance knowledge sharing by featuring keynote addresses from Seychelles experts, organizing side events, and facilitating visits to childcare facilities and counties.

These regional exchange events inspire knowledge sharing and have the potential to result in short- to medium-term policy wins while building momentum for systemic and structural changes. A critical insight from the grantee convening was that economic policies and women's empowerment interventions often focus on changing women to fit into existing systems, rather than adapting systems to meet women's needs and support WEE. This aligns with the Localizing Women's Economic Empowerment in Africa (LWEEA) project's approach, which promotes gender-responsive "macro-level" policy solutions to enhance women's opportunities, access to resources, well-being, and agency. Specific examples include intergovernmental policy solutions to improve access to childcare in Kenya and the formalization of women-led businesses in Ghana.

Global engagement with IFIs and DPs. Globally, we are learning that the stove-piped or siloed nature of development organizations and international financial institutions is alive and well. Whereas colleagues that work on the frontlines of solution-finding in the childcare sector instantly recognize the obstacles caused by a weak public sector and ineffective multilevel governance systems, it appears harder to find traction with this message higher up within the ECD or childcare stovepipe or silo.

6.3 Impact on next steps? The Global and Regional Context of Localizing WEE and Childcare

Taking advantage of future regional childcare fora organized by LPSA partners (such as the Africa Childcare Forum conference scheduled to take place in Rwanda in 2025), we aim to organize further regional exchange events that could showcase lessons from Ghana and Kenya through panel discussions and presentations, including the Kenya Childcare Portal currently being developed by LWEEA, thus reaching a wider audience in Africa. Such a regional exchange would also allow LWEEA to coordinate site visits for regional partners to municipalities such as Rwamagana, City of Kigali, or WIEGO's projects targeting women in markets.

We will explore creating learning visits to countries in the region such as Rwanda or Ethiopia to facilitate knowledge sharing. For instance, a regional knowledge exchange with Rwandan experts could be accomplished by leveraging networks such as WIEGO and Rwanda Cooperation, could empower partners, particularly government and childcare advocates, to learn from Rwanda's World Bank-funded Social Protection Transformation Project. Kenyan actors could also gain insights from Rwanda's government-led nationwide community and home-based ECD centres, which serve over 1.2 million children, as well as other childcare and WEE initiatives supported by the World Bank and UNICEF, and local government initiatives in WEE and childcare for market women. The Ghana and Kenya TWGs can potentially also benefit from Rwanda's experience in providing childcare in markets

and for cross-border traders and the City of Kigali's initiatives supporting women informal workers. Alternatively, a learning visit to Addis Ababa City Administration is lauded for positive steps in Early Childhood Development programs covering universal preschool, home visits, establishing daycare centres, and expanding public play spaces.

In addition to such regional experience sharing, the LWEEA project aims to organize a series of webinars in partnership with the Dullah Omar Institute and ICRW to increase knowledge on the critical role of subnational governments in WEE, targeting both WEE advocates and government officials. Given the importance of intergovernmental finance and funding for childcare, we will explore organizing a TWG/Training session for the LWEEA TWG, taking advantage of LPSA experts who may be visiting Kenya in 2025 for other activities. Discussions with ECDAN have also identified opportunities for collaboration, particularly in organizing webinars related to childcare and multi-level governance.

Building on our connection to ECDAN, we hope to organize two global webinars in the coming year for knowledge sharing drawing on the experiences in Kenya and Ghana and leverage LPSA's and ECDAN's network for regional experience and technical expertise. Given LPSA's expertise in intergovernmental finance and ECDAN's work on bridging the gap between early childhood and gender equality advocates, we may contribute to ECDAN's proposed multi-donor fund and financing campaign for early childhood. This collaboration could focus on innovative financing models and contribute to technical meetings and pledging summits.

ANNEX. LESSONS FROM REGIONAL & GLOBAL ACTIVITIES

A.1 Regional Experience Sharing Workshop (Kenya, Ghana, South Africa)

The Technical Working Group (TWG) meeting for the Localizing Women's Economic Empowerment in Africa (LWEEA) Project, held on May 23, 2024, in Nairobi, Kenya, brought together experts from Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana to compare multilevel governance (MLG) contexts for childcare across the three countries. The meeting highlighted significant differences in the organization and implementation of childcare services among these nations.

In Kenya, where the government is two-tiered, childcare is clearly mandated to county governments as part of their devolved functions. The national government focuses on policy development, while implementation is largely left to counties. However, many counties lack the experience and resources to effectively manage this role, undermining the scaling of childcare provision. The sector is largely unregulated, with little investment by county governments. Notably, the constitution devolves childcare facilities but not childcare services, which may explain county governments' bias toward infrastructure over more holistic services. Similar to South Africa, the proximity of childcare to education sectors (rather than social services), coupled with low capacities for result-oriented approaches in county governments, could also contribute to this focus on infrastructure.

South Africa's system is more complex, with responsibilities shared across national, provincial, and local levels. The country employs an integrated approach combining education, health, and social development sectors. Local government plays a role in "Childcare Facilities," including water, sanitation, town planning, and environmental health. However, debates persist about the extent of local government's role in childcare provision, particularly regarding curriculum development, qualification criteria, and funding responsibilities. There is also ongoing discussion about shifting childcare oversight from the education sector to social services. Advocates argue that social services may be better equipped to address the comprehensive needs of young children—such as health, nutrition, and social support—rather than focusing primarily on education.

Ghana's childcare sector is less developed compared to Kenya and South Africa. Childcare is part of the broader Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) framework involving a multi-sectoral approach with various ministries. While district-level governments have the mandate for implementing and managing childcare services, they are doing very little in practice. Ghana's more conservative society tends to view childcare as a family issue rather than a public concern. Furthermore, childcare is a political issue because it has historically been driven by the Office of the First Lady. At the local level, childcare initiatives often face political tensions due to conflicts between local assemblies and market leaders influenced by partisan politics. As we see in Kenya, childcare and ECD is led by civil society through the ECD Network Ghana, of which WIEGO the lead organization championing childcare is a member of.

A common challenge across all three countries is that childcare is often lumped together with Early Childhood Development (ECD), leading to it being overlooked as a distinct priority. Additionally, the

childcare sector is predominantly private sector-driven in all three nations, underscoring the need for effective regulation and stronger public-private partnerships.

The meeting emphasized several critical points:

- Despite relatively vibrant childcare sectors in Kenya and South Africa compared to Ghana, all three countries face challenges related to curriculum development, setting minimum standards, funding for the sector, and clarity in administration at local levels.
- Childcare development remains largely led by civil society and private sector actors across all three countries, with local governments playing a secondary role.
- Sector actors struggle with the cross-sectoral nature of childcare provision and debates about which institutions should coordinate or take primary responsibility for it.
- Presentations highlighted the importance of understanding the political economy of actors involved in childcare provision—including their power dynamics, resources, interests, motivations, capacities, and values.
- The need for clear delineation of responsibilities across government levels was stressed alongside improved coordination and increased support for local governments in implementing childcare services.

A.2 Nairobi CAC Childcare 2024 Conference

i. Expert Presentations

Regional expert presentations were delivered by key speakers from Seychelles. Jacqueline Moustache-Belle, Co-chair of LPSA Gender Equality/Women's Empowerment, who spoke on the need for governments to invest in the care economy, while Shirley Choppy, Director of IECD Seychelles, shared valuable lessons from Seychelles' experience in building a childcare system. These presentations highlighted innovative practices and strategies that could inform care and childcare policies and programs in other contexts. These presentations have also been shared on decentralization.net to allow for a wider reach.

Jacqueline Moustache-Belle highlighted the need for monetizing care work through government compensation for caregivers, creating employment opportunities via daycare centres and supporting vulnerable women, particularly those who are homeless, pregnant, or underage mothers. The presentation emphasized the importance of formalizing informal employment to provide women with long-term financial security and benefits, calling for a societal mindset shift to recognize caregiving as a legitimate job deserving financial compensation for both men and women. These solutions aim to empower women economically, reduce vulnerabilities, and ensure recognition for the critical role of caregiving in society.

Ms. Shirley Choppy, Director at the Institute for Early Childhood Development (IECD) in Seychelles, presented on the development and success of the country's early childhood care and education (ECCE) system. Her speech highlighted the IECD's role in setting standards and coordinating multisectoral efforts, showcasing Seychelles' journey in building a robust ECCE system and offering valuable lessons for other countries. A key achievement was the establishment of the IECD, which by 2015 was recognized by UNESCO as a "best practice hub" and later became a UNESCO Category 2 Institute for ECCE. Political commitment played a crucial role, with the government establishing a High-Level ECCE Policy Committee and Institute for ECD to ensure strong, sustained support and coordination across sectors.

Seychelles implemented a comprehensive 5-Year Framework Plan, unifying efforts across sectors to deliver integrated care for children. The country introduced pre-registration training and certification programs for childcare providers, with 80% of registered childminders now holding a certificate in childcare and development. IECD also introduced national standards and regulations to ensure consistency in care between center-based and home-based services, conducting rigorous inspections before issuing registration certificates.

Multisectoral coordination and government funding was critical to Seychelles success. IECD worked closely with various ministries to ensure children receive coordinated care. The government also introduced financial support systems for childcare providers, including subsidies and tax exemptions, recognizing that investing in quality early childhood care creates a foundation for building engaged, productive citizens who contribute to the country's broader social and economic success.

ii. Panel discussion titled "Multi-Level Governance and Childcare for Women's Economic Empowerment"

The Kenya LWEEA TWG organized a panel discussion during the conference titled "Multi-Level Governance and Childcare for Women's Economic Empowerment." This session sought to:

1. Highlight the local and national public sector's role in addressing childcare challenges (policy, infrastructure, and services) to promote women's economic empowerment in a multi-governance context.
2. Elaborate on the multi-level governance obstacles hindering the availability, affordability of quality childcare services.
3. Identify solutions to address these challenges by presenting examples of localized efforts and initiatives to overcome these obstacles and empower women economically through childcare interventions.
4. Based on the lessons learned, propose actionable recommendations for strengthening multilevel governance systems enhancing affordable and availability of quality childcare provision for women's economic empowerment.

The panel discussion on multi-level governance and childcare for women's economic empowerment was moderated by Jacqueline Muthura, the LWEEA Project Manager and brought together experts from researchers, childcare providers, county government, intergovernmental relations and women's rights and childcare advocates to explore the intersection of decentralization, childcare provision, and women's empowerment in Kenya.

The discussions identified significant gaps in documenting county-level childcare efforts, limited understanding of county autonomy in childcare provision, and inadequate data on collaborative initiatives. The panel also highlighted discrepancies in implementation across counties, insufficient focus on informal childcare providers, and the need for an oversight body to regulate care services. These issues collectively point to a fragmented approach to childcare provision in Kenya, with uneven progress across different regions and a lack of coordinated efforts among stakeholders.

Box. Panel Submissions during the CAC Conference

Chryspin Afifu, Senior Gender and Women's Economic Empowerment, ICRW-Africa, highlighted key research gaps in understanding this intersection. He noted a limited understanding of county-level autonomy in childcare provision, inadequate data on collaborative initiatives, and discrepancies in implementation across counties. Chryspin emphasized the need for more focus on informal childcare providers, who form the majority of childcare services, especially in urban areas like Nairobi. He suggested the establishment of an oversight commission for care services to address the fragmented nature of care across different sectors.

Susan Wanja Njuki, Principal Officer of the Intergovernmental Relations Technical Committee (IGRTC), emphasized that devolution and multi-level governance present an opportunity to improve access to affordable and quality childcare. She referenced Article 174 of the Kenyan Constitution, which aims to promote social and economic development and provide easily accessible services throughout Kenya. Njuki outlined IGRTC's role in coordinating agencies, assessing the performance of devolved functions, and advising on effective cooperation between levels of government. She highlighted lessons from Australia's national quality framework and Brazil's empowerment of community-based caregiving centers as potential models for Kenya.

Scholastika Tuwei, the County Executive Committee Member for Education in Nandi County, shared perspectives from the county level. She acknowledged challenges in fully devolving education functions and the need for a multisectoral approach to address childcare issues. Tuwei emphasized the importance of county governments taking the lead in addressing childcare, noting that many counties have focused on early childhood education while neglecting the broader aspect of childcare.

Tracy Koske, Early Childhood Specialist, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), shared insights from market-based childcare initiatives in Ghana, Rwanda, and South Africa. She highlighted the importance of understanding informal workers' needs, such as flexible childcare hours and proximity to workplaces. Koske discussed successful partnerships between market leaders and municipal governments, the development of guidelines for childcare facilities, and innovative infrastructure designs that cater to childcare needs within market settings.

Peninah Ndegwa, founder and managing director of Wow Mom Ltd, shared her experience of collaborating with county governments to improve childcare provision and support women's economic empowerment in Kenya. Wow, Mom Kenya has demonstrated the effectiveness of such partnerships, particularly in their work with Nairobi City County Government in the establishment of daycare centres in markets where many women work. Organizations can leverage public resources by partnering with county governments and gaining legitimacy for their initiatives. Wow, Mom's approach involves advocating for policy reforms and working directly with county officials to implement childcare solutions to address the immediate need for quality, affordable childcare. The adoption of similar initiatives by other counties, such as Mombasa, further underscores the potential for scaling up these partnerships across Kenya. Peninah also shared the lessons on working effectively with counties, highlighting the need for organizations engaging in policy dialogue and demonstrating the tangible benefits of childcare provision for both economic development and women's empowerment. By doing so, they can create sustainable, community-centred childcare solutions that have the support and resources of local government structures.

To address these challenges, several recommendations were proposed. These include enhancing data collection and documentation at the county level, building capacity for county governments to implement national childcare policies within local contexts, and encouraging collaboration among stakeholders to break down existing silos. Other key recommendations involve supporting informal childcare providers through policy frameworks and resources, establishing an oversight body for care services, strengthening multilevel governance to empower counties in childcare provision, and drawing lessons from international examples.

Half-day Regional Exchange Learning Workshop

The Localizing Women's Economic Empowerment in Africa (LWEEA) project convened a half-day workshop on September 19, 2024, in Nairobi, bringing together stakeholders from Kenya, Seychelles, and Ghana. The workshop aimed to explore the organization of childcare sectors across these countries and identify innovative practices, lessons learned, and recommendations for enhancing childcare systems.

Key objectives of the session included:

- Understanding the organization of childcare sectors in Kenya, Ghana, and Seychelles, including the roles of different actors.
- Discussing innovative practices, lessons learned, pitfalls, and recommendations in childcare programs across the three countries.
- Exploring specific areas such as capacity building, workforce development, formalization of childcare enterprises, advocacy, regulations, and cross-sectoral coordination.

The workshop featured presentations from ILGS, IECD, and Kidogo Early Years, providing insights into the childcare landscapes of their respective countries.

After the country presentations, participants were engaged in group discussions centered with lead discussants from partner organisations;

- Capacity Building, Workforce Development & Research – Dr. Patricia Wekulo, APHRC
- Advocacy at the County and National Level – Cindy Lithimbi, Nurture First
- Regulations, Standards & Quality – Shirley Choppy IECD and Raphael Kinyungu Nairobi City County Government
- Cross-sectoral and Intergovernmental Coordination – Asayya Imapa, CAC, Tom Kataka Council of Governors

Some key lessons identified;

i. Capacity Development and Workforce Development

Participants emphasized the need for formal certification and accreditation processes for Childcare and Early Childhood Development (ECD) workers. The establishment of a childcare board to set standards and provide accreditation of childcare professionals at various levels was proposed, with the aim of professionalizing the sector and ensuring quality standards. Seychelles' example of offering bachelor's degrees in childcare was noted as a progressive step. There was also a call to make childcare an attractive and marketable course.

ii. Advocacy at the County and National Level

Key lessons from county-level advocacy efforts include forming local collaboratives of state and non-state actors, which is crucial but challenging and requires significant time and resources. Investing in data collection in collaboration with local stakeholders is essential, particularly given the lack of data on Home-Based Childcare (HBCC) in many counties. Advocacy should extend beyond policy development to workplan and budget delivery, tracking how policy statements evolve into departmental workplans and protecting budget allocations in resource-constrained environments. Internal advocacy within government structures is vital, targeting multiple levels of government, particularly Chief Officers overseeing County Integrated Development Plans and annual work planning processes. Demonstrating what works through pilots and rigorous evaluation is essential, with advocates avoiding claims of success without supporting evidence. Strategies for influencing policymakers and gaining political support include packaging childcare initiatives attractively, engaging with county-level representatives, and conducting internal advocacy across multiple government levels.

Box. Lessons on Advocacy at the County Level from the LWEEA September 2024 Regional Exchange

In September 2024, the LWEEA project organized a knowledge exchange workshop on the sidelines of the CAC Childcare Conference drawing participants from Kenya, Ghana, and Seychelles. One of the topics discussed by participants, with lead discussant, Cindy Lithimbi of Nurture First was on lessons learned on effective advocacy at the local level.

Key lessons identified by participants on county-level advocacy efforts include:

Local Collaboratives: Forming local collaboratives of state and non-state actors is crucial but challenging. This place-based approach is fundamental to systems change, as solutions often exist at the local level. It's important not to underbudget this process, as it requires significant time and resources to convene effectively. County Working Groups can be established by inviting all relevant stakeholders, though not all will remain engaged long-term. These groups should define simple objectives and terms of reference, recognizing that home-based childcare (HBCC) is a niche area with limited prior engagement. Objectives should be regularly revisited and adapted as new opportunities arise.

Invest in Data: Investing in data collection to determine the target population for interventions at scale is essential. This process should be conducted in collaboration with local system stakeholders. In many counties, there is a lack of data on Home-Based Childcare (HBCC), prompting calls from government for county-wide data collection. Leveraging publicly accessible resources and co-designing data collection tools with county governments can serve both operational and advocacy purposes. Sharing raw data in accessible formats, such as Excel files, can be particularly helpful to local stakeholders.

Budget Allocation by Counties: Advocacy extends beyond policy development to workplan and budget delivery. It's crucial to track how policy statements evolve from budget estimates to annual plans and departmental workplans. This involves protecting budget allocations in resource-constrained environments and engaging with multiple touchpoints across various departments, as childcare-related service delivery is often not well-coordinated. For example, this might involve ensuring that Child Health Coordinators include HBCC coverage in their program workplans or that quality assurance in the Education department has adequate resources for their work.

Internal Advocacy: Internal advocacy within government structures is vital. Advocates should target multiple levels of government, particularly Chief Officers who oversee County Integrated Development Plans and annual work planning processes. However, it's often the Heads of Departments or Directors who are exposed to partners and technical learning opportunities. Persistence and consistency in government engagement are crucial, as demonstrated by the Kilgoris Project, which took three years to gain government approval for accepting children under 4 years into their integrated ECD program.

Evidence based Advocacy: Demonstrating what works through pilots and rigorous evaluation is essential. Advocates should avoid claiming success without supporting evidence. Inviting government officials to observe pilots and see the impact firsthand can be more effective than reports. It's also important to involve grassroots implementers in decision-making based on learnings from these pilots.

Participants stressed the significance of evidence in strengthening advocacy efforts. Recommendations included conducting rigorous, collaborative action research, sharing raw data rather than just summary reports, and designing studies with input from decision-makers. Persistence and consistency in government engagement are crucial, as demonstrated by projects that took years to gain government approval for their initiatives. A notable example was shared of a project that worked for 5-6 years to prove its model's effectiveness before gaining government support.

iii. Regulatory Standards:

Key areas for childcare standards and regulations were identified, including physical environment requirements, nutrition and health protocols, early learning practices, community engagement, safety measures, staffing ratios, and financing. The need for context-specific, evidence-based policies was emphasized, particularly for informal settlements with space limitations.

iv. Intergovernmental Coordination:

Discussions highlighted the need for improved sectoral coordination and centralized national frameworks for childcare. Promising practices included collaboration between state and non-state actors, community engagement (childcare providers) in policy development, and establishing performance indicators. Ghana's centralized national legal framework was cited as a potential model to emulate.

Common challenges identified included limited resources, lack of regulations in some countries, and coordination gaps. Opportunities discussed included leveraging decentralized governance structures, building on existing political goodwill, and utilizing community engagement in implementing childcare services. The importance of dedicated budgetary allocation for childcare and developing performance indicators were highlighted as areas for improvement.

The workshop concluded with a call for continued collaboration and knowledge sharing among the participating countries to enhance childcare systems across the region.

A.3 Field visits to Nairobi Childcare Facilities and Nairobi City County Government

The study visit held on September 20th 2024, focused on childcare services and involved visits to three key stakeholders: Kidogo Early Years Childcare facility in informal settlements, the County Government of Nairobi, and the Wow Moms market facility. Participants for the site visit were drawn from ILGS Ghana, IECD Seychelles, Wow Mom Kenya, Kidogo Early Years, Uthabiti Africa, WIEGO, and Nairobi City County departments of gender, youth, education and markets.

Kidogo Early Years demonstrated their approach to scaling quality childcare using a franchise model, focusing on building the capacity of local women to provide childcare services and integrating health, nutrition, and early learning in their model. The participants visited a childcare facility serving women in informal settlements of Kangemi in Nairobi set in a community center. However, they face challenges such as limited resources to expand services in informal settlements and the need for stronger government support in regulating and formalizing early childhood centers. Next steps suggested by the participants include exploring partnerships with local governments and considering linking Kidogo's capacity-building model to government training programs.

The County Government of Nairobi team, led by CECM Brian Mulama, outlined their plan to develop and enforce childcare regulations, showing willingness to collaborate with stakeholders to improve childcare service delivery. They provided insight into their multisectoral approach involving health, education, and social services. Challenges include limited resources allocated for childcare services and lack of a clear policy on regulating home-based daycare centers. The county is engaging partners to develop a regulatory framework and plans to organize training for county officials on localized childcare policies. The county expressed interest in receiving technical assistance from the IECD experts in developing childcare in the county.

Key discussions and feedback during the discussions with the county highlighted several important issues:

- The need for localization of childcare services was emphasized, with Uthabiti, co-chair of the LWEEA TWG, stressing the importance of collaboration at the county level. There is a clear need to involve local governments more actively in the provision of childcare services.
- Challenges in childcare regulation were discussed, particularly the lack of a clear policy framework for 0-3-year-olds, who often fall outside the scope of national regulations. The Director of Education from the Nairobi County Government acknowledged the need for a multisectoral approach to address this gap and mentioned that Nairobi County is formulating regulations for the Act. The Nairobi County Government officials also expressed interest in receiving support from IECD Seychelles experts in development of their policies, implementation and monitoring frameworks.
- Capacity building emerged as a crucial area, with participants emphasizing the need for continuous training for childcare providers. Inspiration was drawn from successful models in Seychelles, suggesting potential for cross-country learning and adaptation of best practices.
- The study visit identified several challenges, including the lack of clear regulations for childcare services, particularly for home-based centers, limited financial resources allocated to gender

and childcare issues at the county level, and the need for political will and support to implement childcare policies effectively.

Wow Mom Kenya, a social enterprise targeting market facilities, showcased their focus on early childhood development, emphasizing an inclusive environment for children, including those with disabilities, and using play-based learning as a tool for child development. Wow mom Kenya demonstrated partnership with county governments where they fund raise from development partners resources to renovate county owned spaces—markets and public toilets, to provide childcare centers and baby changing facilities respectively. While the county provides the space and meets utility fees, in a way subsidizing costs, Wowmom collects fees from women to pay for the staffing and maintenance of the childcare facilities. However, they face challenges in maintaining quality childcare services, particularly for low-income families due to low revenue, and limited government support in terms of subsidies or financial aid for infrastructure upgrade. Participants suggested engaging with the county government for potential collaboration in fund raising and sharing best practices with other organizations.

Opportunities for collaboration were identified among the stakeholders. These include potential partnerships between Kidogo Early Years and local governments for capacity-building initiatives, the county government's openness to learning from other regions and collaborating with private sector and civil society partners and leveraging Wow Moms' expertise in inclusive childcare services to support programs for children with disabilities.

A.4 Hewlett Foundation Women's Economic Empowerment Grantee Convening in Dar es Salaam

In September 2024, LPSA Project Manager Jacqueline Muthura and Uthabiti Africa's Executive Director, Asayya Imaya, attended the Hewlett Foundation Women's Economic Empowerment Grantee Convening in Dar es Salaam. This event provided an invaluable opportunity to learn from other grantees and share experiences in the field of women's economic empowerment (WEE). The convening fostered connections between diverse stakeholders, including feminist economists, women's rights organizations, care sector actors, and international financial institutions. Key connections were made with Strathmore University, ECDAN, World Bank, UNICEF, and IDRC. Some of these connections have already yielded results, with Strathmore University joining the LWEEA Technical Working Group and promising discussions with ECDAN for future partnerships ongoing.

The sessions yielded several key takeaways that were particularly beneficial for advancing Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) strategies. A critical insight was that economic policies and many women's empowerment interventions often focus on changing women to fit into existing systems, rather than developing systems that are responsive to women's needs and support WEE. This aligns with the Localizing Women's Economic Empowerment in Africa (LWEEA) project's approach, which seeks to promote gender-responsive 'macro-level' policy responses that support women's opportunities, access to resources, well-being, and agency, specifically developing intergovernmental policy solutions to enhance access to childcare in Kenya, and formalization of women businesses in Ghana.

The discussions emphasized that no single organization or perspective can solve the complex issues of WEE and gender equality alone, underscoring the need for field-building approaches and

collaboration across diverse sectors. Key lessons for WEE strategy highlighted the importance of diversity and building alliances across social and economic justice movements, climate finance, and social worker protection. This resonates with LPSA's worldview on global challenges and the LWEEA project's collaborative approach, bringing together various stakeholders including government entities (intersectoral and multi-level), women's rights organizations, childcare advocates, public finance practitioners, and research institutions in Kenya and Ghana.

Participants stressed the need for long-term investment with flexible funding and the need to advocate for more and better resources to provide strategic, reliable, and long-term support. The role of government investments in education, health, social protection, care economy, and WEE was emphasized as crucial for ensuring sustainability, rather than relying solely on external funding. This aligns with LWEEA's focus on advocating for intergovernmental funding for childcare.

The call for shifting power through decolonial and Africa-centered approaches, ensuring that the WEE agenda is owned and led by local institutions, resonates with LWEEA's approach of working with local partners and identifying local priorities, promoting locally designed, contextually relevant solutions requiring an agile and adaptive approach to programming.