



WOMEN ECONOMIC
EMPOWERMENT
COMMUNITY OF
PRACTICE

WEE CoP Promising Interventions

Evidence from four
innovative projects
enabling women
to transform their
communities and
build wealth



This report highlights best practices and strategies for advancing women’s economic empowerment drawn from four pioneering programs under the Women’s Economic Empowerment Community of Practice (WEE CoP) in Kenya. WEE CoP is convened by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The programs were selected for their impressive results and potential impact in informing policy and practice.

Two programs are skilling women entrepreneurs and giving them access to networks, credit and technology, while another two focused on tooling young women to enter the male-dominated construction skilled labour market.

The report demonstrates the value that each of these initiatives is contributing to a stronger economy and better society: they not only tackle an existing social problem but also create opportunities for individual women to thrive economically, and therefore can be replicated in other sites and societies. These experiences locate WEE CoP as a critical launchpad for influencing policy and harnessing the potential of women to participate in the economy in fields as diverse as childcare and technology or construction.

Together, partners have brought down barriers to women’s economic participation and inclusion while chalking up lessons from their experiences.

The highlights from the four programs in the Community of Practice are hereunder.

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BuildHer Training Program

BuildHer is Kenya’s first and only technical training facility that exclusively trains women for careers in the construction industry. Founded in 2019, the organization’s primary objective is to promote gender equality and provide low-income women with access to sustainable careers and enterprises in the booming \$7 billion construction industry. Ultimately, it aims to directly and indirectly increase the proportion of skilled women in the construction industry from the current 3% to 10% by 2030.

Target Group

Women between 18 and 50 years from underprivileged, challenging backgrounds, who have struggled to access education opportunities due to poverty. Those recruited are often mothers (70%), and most likely single parents, while 10% are refugees, or impacted by the criminal justice system, who come to the program through established NGOs and Community Based Organizations. Majority previously earned below \$2 a day or \$12 per week, from odd and undignified jobs.

How it Works

BuildHer offers a 12-month holistic, accredited construction skills training program split into two phases:

- 1 Six-month Training:** Participants receive comprehensive training in carpentry & joinery, painting, and tiling.
- 2 Six-month Internship:** Trainees complete a six-month internship at a construction company, gaining hands-on experience and applying their newly acquired skills in readiness for employment.

Upon completion of the internship, participants join the BuildHer alumni program, which provides women artisans with resources for upskilling, performance improvement, and professional development. This ensures that the women excel in both their professional and personal leadership roles.



► Key Highlights of BuildHer Training Program

BuildHer's dedication to empowering women in the construction industry has realized significant achievements:

- * **Industry engagement:** BuildHer has established partnerships with over 75 employers, ensuring its training programs align with industry needs and requirements.
- * **Expanding training offerings:** The organization currently offers three training tracks (carpentry and joinery, painting, and tiling) and is set to add two more tracks (solar and electrical installation, as well as cabinetry) by the end of 2024, providing women with a broader range of career options.
- * **Women trained and placed in jobs:** To date, BuildHer has trained 680 women and equipped them with the skills to build successful careers in construction. An impressive 80% of these women are now earning dignified wages, allowing them to improve their lives and those of their families.
- * **Increased incomes:** The women trained by BuildHer have seen significant increases in their income over time, with an average daily income of \$4.5 to \$6 after six months. This growth has enabled them to access better living conditions, nutrition, and overall well-being.

* **Informing policy and practice:** Beyond its training programs, BuildHer is working closely with key players like the State Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Women in Real Estate to advocate inclusion of tradeswomen in the policy agenda.

Last year, the organization convened the first Women Fundis in Construction Conference, bringing together over 400 stakeholders to facilitate discussions among practitioners and artisans on how to address challenges related to women's integration. It also published guidelines on gendered approaches to construction training.



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► Impact and lessons learnt

Many young women are carving out dignified careers in the construction sector through this program, with numerous employers embracing BuildHer trainees. This success story demonstrates that the gender gap in construction can indeed be bridged, and that targeted programs can yield significant results.

2

Women-in-Business Incubation Project

This collaborative initiative between the Women Economic Empowerment Hub (the University of Nairobi) and TechnoServe, running from September 2021 to August 2024, seeks to empower women entrepreneurs in Kenya through capacity building, access to credit, linkage to markets, linkage to information and technology, and mentorship and networking.

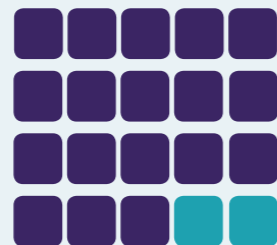
Target

240 women entrepreneurs engaged in micro, small, and medium enterprises across 16 counties in Kenya, including those facing barriers to accessing credit and resources.

Key Highlights

The Women Economic Empowerment Hub is on its way to surpassing all its targets in transforming the entrepreneurial space, thus providing evidence that incubating businesses through capacity building, mentorship and networking can deliver economic change.

*** More enterprises and more jobs:** Some 58 new businesses were established -- against a target of 60 for the full term; and 76 new product lines had been launched against a target of 100 at the end of the project. Some 59 new jobs were created within women-led enterprises where women employees held 59 per cent of the positions, thus making a significant contribution to local employment and economic development.



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*** Asset ownership:** Asset ownership and utilization for enhanced business operations increased -- with 58 participants acquiring equipment and machinery, alongside other assets to improve their business infrastructure and operational capabilities.

*** Efficiency and competitiveness:** More than half of the businesses in the project adopted digital payment systems, thus enhancing their operational efficiency and competitiveness.



\$100,000

Further, women entrepreneurs had accessed over \$100,000 in financing through rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs) and government affirmative funds.

Impact and lessons learnt

The program has significantly empowered women entrepreneurs by equipping them with vital knowledge, skills, and resources, leading to the growth of women-owned businesses across various sectors. This empowerment fosters financial independence, boosts local employment, and enhances asset ownership for improved business operations. The initiative also enhances resilience, mitigates losses, and strengthens participants to confront challenges. Notably, it

promotes digital inclusion, expands digital literacy, and establishes a supportive network for networking and peer learning among women entrepreneurs.

The enduring lesson is that while digital platforms provide scalability, physical training sessions remain crucial, as does readiness to adapt training and technology to local language and technological circumstances to ensure program accessibility to a wider audience.

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3

Kidogo Early Years Network

Since 2014, Kidogo network has been using a paid franchising model to sign on women entrepreneurs running childcare centers (mamapreneurs) and train them to maximize efficiency while guaranteeing quality, sustainability, and scalability of operations.

Target

Women who are currently offering informal childcare services or running their own childcare micro-business, most of whom are aged 35 years and have a primary school education.



1,500

Kidogo serves over 1,500 mamapreneurs and over 43,000 children across nine counties in 70 communities. The program aims to reach at least 50,000 mamapreneurs and a million children over time.

Key Highlights from Kidogo Early Years Network

Through its innovative approach, Kidogo has not only improved the economic status of women entrepreneurs and educational outcomes for children but has also played a significant role in shaping childcare policies at a national level, showcasing the broader impact of its work in low-income communities. The positive changes include:

***Economic Empowerment:** Kidogo's paid franchising model has significantly increased the income of women entrepreneurs (mamapreneurs) by 51% in revenue and 44% in profits within a year. Mamapreneurs joining the network have seen revenue growth between 50 and 200% within 18 months, making their childcare operations more sustainable.



✿ **Education Outcomes:** By providing standardized training and quality assurance, Kidogo has improved education outcomes for children in their care. Access to affordable quality childcare not only enhances children's educational outcomes but also enables women to access and remain in better-paying work.

✿ **Transforming Unpaid Care Work:** Kidogo has successfully transformed the crisis of women providing unpaid care work into an opportunity by encouraging women to establish childcare centers. This approach supports working mothers, ensures standardized training, and enhances quality assurance within the network.

✿ **Scalability and Sustainability:** Kidogo's model emphasizes efficiency, quality, sustainability, and scalability of operations. By focusing on high-impact, low-cost interventions at scale, mamapreneurs have been able to reduce the cost of care per child, ensuring the long-term sustainability of their operations.

✿ **Policy Advocacy:** Kidogo's impact extends beyond direct services to advocating for childcare policies. Their efforts have led to the creation of a National Care Policy and an integrated Early Childhood Development (ECD) Policy. Additionally, Kidogo actively participates in Multi-Sectoral Technical Working Groups on childcare, influencing policy decisions at a broader level.



4

Unveiling Her Star

The Unveiling Her Star programme, launched in 2015 and run by Times Women of Wonder Foundation, seeks to empower women economically by helping them to break into non-traditional sectors such as construction through three to five-month skills training and uptake of new trades. It also identifies unique opportunities for women's enterprise development.

Target

Women aged 18 years and above in Nairobi and Kiambu counties.

Key Highlights from Unveiling Her Star Program

The Star program attests to the transformative impact of empowering women economically and breaking gender barriers in traditionally male-dominated sectors. By focusing on skill development, economic independence, and policy advocacy, the program not only uplifts individual women but also contributes to broader societal changes towards gender equality and empowerment. Specific achievements include:

Economic empowerment: The program has significantly empowered women in the construction sector, leading to higher earnings and economic independence. Graduates of the program have experienced a substantial increase in daily earnings, from \$0-\$3 to \$8-\$15, showcasing the program's success in enhancing women's financial well-being.

Health and well-being: Women participating in the program have shown improved health consciousness and the ability to take charge of their nutrition and well-being, positively impacting not only themselves but also their families. This focus on health and well-being contributes to creating healthier families within the community.

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Capacity building: The program's success lies in its ability to build women's capacity, confidence, and skills to excel in non-traditional sectors like construction. By providing three to five-month skills training and promoting the uptake of new trades, the program equips women with the necessary tools to break into male-dominated industries.

Policy Influence: Through collaboration with regulators in the construction sector, the program has influenced policy changes to align health and safety regulations with the needs of women workers. This includes provisions for work gear, equipment tailored for women, and creating a conducive environment for breastfeeding and expectant women. Additionally, efforts to develop policies against gender-based violence and sexual abuse in the industry demonstrate the program's commitment to creating a safe and inclusive work environment for women.



\$8-\$15

DAILY EARNINGS HAS INCREASED, FROM \$0-\$3 TO \$8-\$15, SHOWCASING THE PROGRAM'S SUCCESS IN ENHANCING WOMEN'S FINANCIAL WELL-BEING.



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