

**Practitioners’ Network Private Sector Working Group**

**Women’s Economic Empowerment**

**– From strategy to implementation –**

**22 March 2022 - online**

On 22.03.2022, the ***thematic working group on Private Sector*** of the Practitioners Network met online and discussed the practical implementation of various economic empowerment policies around the world under the title *Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE):* *From strategy to implementation*. The event was divided into three thematic blocks, (i.) Strategic framework for Women Economic Empowerment, (ii.) Donor Committee on Enterprise Development, (iii.) Exchange experiences MSOs.

***During the session, the interest of DG INTPA and DG NEAR to further engage into a dialogue with MSOs on this topic became clear, and mutual for some PN members. Therefore, as a practical next step, the Private Sector Working Group will propose to the interested members to organise a follow-up call to look into the possibilities to continue the exchange.***

**Strategic framework for Women Economic Empowerment**

After a short introduction on the organization of the panel by Eelco Baan (SNV) and Caroline Monmarchon (GIZ), Joana Kahiluoto (DG INTPA), Ilektra Tsakalidou (DG NEAR) and Eloise Kilhoffer (DG NEAR) presented their work at the Commission on ***Strategic Framework for WEE***. Of central importance in this regard was the [***Gender Equality Strategy 2020***](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en#gender-equality-strategy-2020-2025), as well as the [***Gender Action Plan III (GAP III)***](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2184) *for EU external action (2021-2025)*. As Joana Kahiluoto described, the aim of this plan was to ensure that ***empowerment policies no longer remain in niches*** but play a central role in all areas of European external policy. The core of GAP III consists of ***6 thematic areas***; (i.) Strengthening economic and social rights and empowering women and girls, (ii.) Integrating the women peace and security agenda, (iii.) Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender based violence, (iv.) Advancing equal participation and leadership, (v.) Challenges and opportunities of green transition and digital transformation and (vi.) Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights. The GAP III furthermore allows projects to be classified with a *gender marker*. Thus the category G0 does not target gender equality. For category G1, gender equality is an important and deliberate objective, but not the main reason for the project. For category G3, gender equality is the main objective of the project. In order to actually move from strategy to implementation for gender policies, there is a ***need for increased access for women to decent work***, including increased access for women to financial services and products, productive resources and entrepreneurship opportunities. Especially the Southern Neighbourhood, women could become ***important agents of change***, continued Ilektra Tsakalidou. It could already be observed that women are becoming relatively better educated than men but are still denied access to equivalent jobs. The ***revenue gap*** in particular is therefore a major issue that is being addressed in GAP III. Women could increase a household's income by up to 25% by having access to decent jobs matching their qualifications. Thus, the integration of more women into the labour market could contribute to macroeconomic stabilisation in the region – especially in the agricultural sector. This will become even more crucial once the effects of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine will become more noticeable. Such integration into the labour market also requires digital training for women and girls. The regional *WEE* pilot programmes specifically support women in understanding digital programmes as emancipatory instruments.

Victoria Wulff, *Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo* (AECID), then emphasised above all the importance of present support for women on the ground. AECID has over 20 field offices which ensure connections with the political and trade part of the embassies. As a concrete example, Wulff mentioned the EU-funded [***‘Programme in support of the Cashew value chain of Mali’***](C://Users/akono_jea/Downloads/VCA4D%2025-%20Mali%20cashew%20ENG.pdf), which is implemented by AECID on the ground. The project supports actions to increase cashew production and create new job opportunities. This aims particularly towards women in rural areas, as they are usually not the head of the household, nor landowners, or owners of agricultural equipment and materials. Especially in rural areas, this means that many women are dependent on their husbands. At this year's [***European Development Days***](https://eudevdays.eu/), AECID, in cooperation with AFD, CDP and KfW, will discuss how broad and deep the spectrum of *WEE* really is, using *gender financing* as topic in a *Lab Debate*.

**Donor Committee on Enterprise Development**

Jim Tanburn, *Donor Committee on Enterprise Development* (DCED), Lisanne van Beek, *Netherlands Enterprise Agency* (RVO), Claudia Geiser (GIZ) and Dr. Kate Grantham (FemDev Consulting) then spoke on ***DCED and Women Economic Empowerment*** and ***Women Economic Empowerment and COVID-19***. Firstly, the focus was on how *DCED* practically [**implements *Women Economic Empowerment***](https://www.enterprise-development.org/implementing-psd/womens-economic-empowerment/). In specialised working groups, DCED tries to put ***theoretical knowledge on women's economic empowerment into practice***. Every year new specific topics, like *Formulating a response to COVID-19 from a WEE perspective,* are being selected and addressed within the [**working groups**](https://www.enterprise-development.org/organisational-structure/working-groups/overview-of-the-womens-economic-empowerment-working-group/#:~:text=The%20Women%27s%20Economic%20Empowerment%20Working%20Group%20aims%20to%20harness%20knowledge,and%20effectively%20into%20their%20work.). In addition, *DCED* has ***launched a podcast*** in which guests talk about interesting topics in the field of women's economic empowerment. *DCED* is also doing research on the topic and has recently published a [**working paper**](https://www.enterprise-development.org/wp-content/uploads/Donor-Engagement-in-Gender-lens-Investing_WEEWG-Paper.pdf), in which it was elaborated that gender expertise needed to be increased across the investment process, and that donor agencies could contribute through gap-bridging efforts. This means, for example, linking gender and finance professionals, contributing to standard-setting and challenging traditional frameworks, or funding research to build evidence-based methodologies to grow collective capacity of the field. In essence, the working groups are also concerned with the topic of social norms and their effect on *WEE* and programming. First concrete results from the different working groups are being expected in summer 2022.

Dr. Kate Grantham (*FemDev Consulting*) continued the session with an input on *Women's Economic Empowerment and COVID*-*19* and on how *DCED* members should adapt their programmes to ensure women's economic empowerment during and after the pandemic. ***COVID-19 disproportionately affected women and girls***. During the pandemic, girls disproportionately dropped out of the education system compared to boys. She highlighted the importance of connected topics such as the share of women workers in the care economy, sexual and gender-based domestic violence or housing and the access to land and property rights for women. Donor and development agencies responded to the pandemic in three different ways; (i.) Adjusting their operations and programming, (ii.) In the form of money, equipment and expertise and (iii.) By collecting and publishing data. However, policy areas such as women-owned enterprises and entrepreneurship, digital and financial inclusion or paid and unpaid care-work, continued to be neglected. Two flagship projects for women's economic empowerment during and after the pandemic were the [**Kidogo Childcare Centres in East Africa**](https://www.kidogo.co/) and the [**Women in Business Programme in Mozambique**](https://www.win-moz.org/home).

**Exchange experiences MSOs**

Ariane Philis then presented the approach of *Expertise France*, whose support in the field of women economic empowerment mainly takes place in three areas; (i.) Technical assistance and financing of support structures dedicated specifically to women entrepreneurs, (ii.) Strengthening the digital and entrepreneurial capacities for women and (iii.) Reform of the business climate in favour of women economic empowerment.

Linda Kalengafrom the EU Delegation in Zimbabwe presented the implementation of the [**Spotlight Initiative**](https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/fr/node/17545)and ***active work against gender-based violence***, especially in rural areas. In Zimbabwe, it was clear that women were more disadvantaged by the economic changes taking place than men. It is interesting to note that during the pandemic, a trend has emerged where men have started to do so-called *womens work* because they have lost their jobs in industrial so-called *mens work*. The government Zimbabwe has a relatively progressive on gender issues compared to other social policies and compared to other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Zimbabwe has made gender-equality and women's empowerment a priority. However, in practice, women are still underrepresented in politics and in decision-making positions and thus economically excluded. The lack of *women economic empowerment* is not only a problem of political commitment, but first and foremost one of practical implementation. This problem of practical implementation was to be solved through various [***Team Europe Initiatives* (TEIs) in Zimbabwe**](https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/tei-jp-tracker/zimbabwe?tab=tei). One particular focus is on access to economic empowerment opportunities. For example, the ***agricultural sector is a central component for women's access to the labour market***. But also ***improving women's digital skills will be key*** for women’s economic empowerment in Zimbabwe and beyond.

Irene Danquah then presented the work of the *Investment Climate Reform Facility* (ICR) on women's economic empowerment. Together with the *Rwanda Development Bank*, the ICR has identified key policy areas for *WEE* and addressed them in three reports – [**support women-owned businesses**](https://www.icr-facility.eu/business-environment-reforms-to-support-women-owned-businesses-in-acp-countries)**,** [**promote equal opportunities for women in labour market**](https://www.icr-facility.eu/business-environment-reforms-to-promote-equal-opportunities-for-women-in-the-labour-market-evidence-from-acp-countries)**,** [**promoting women's organisations into public-private dialogues to foster WEE**](https://www.icr-facility.eu/fileadmin/files/downloads/icreports/icreport_wee_3_ppd.pdf). Key findings of the reports were; (i.) Reduce of complicated and lengthy administrative barriers to support women in formalising and operating their businesses, (ii.) Enable public procurement opportunities for targeting increased participation of women to promote a more inclusive labour market, and (iii.) Understand women's participation in PPDs (Public-Private Dialogues) as key factor to support reforms that benefit women-owned businesses and female workers. Finally, Irene Danquah highlighted possible future areas of support to women's economic empowerment through ICR. Of particular interest could be to ***highlight data gaps for gender sensitive investment climate policies***, ***challenge gender biased policies and practices***, and ***strengthen women's participation in investment climate reform processes***.