

Strengthening Childcare Models that Advance Women's Economic Power

Grand Challenges

Request for Proposals

BACKGROUND

A global lack of childcare has left nearly 350 million children and families who need care without access, with nearly 80% of those children living in LIC and LMICs ([World Bank, 2021](#))ⁱ. This has had a disproportionate impact on women, creating a heavy burden of unpaid care that limits women's ability to enter, remain, and thrive in the workforce; evidence shows that globally, 606 million women are not in the paid workforce due to household responsibilities compared to 41 million men ([ILO, 2018](#))ⁱⁱ. Lack of childcare has high costs for women even when they enter the workforce. For example, one study in Uganda found that for women operating microenterprises, as many women do in emerging markets, childcare duties are correlated with a "baby-profit gap" as businesses where children are present earn 48% lower profits than other female-owned businesses where no child is present. ([SSRN, 2021](#))ⁱⁱⁱ

Investment is needed to both understand the most impactful, cost-effective, and sustainable interventions that address the full scale of the childcare crisis and scale childcare interventions to policy solutions and sustainable programs at scale.

High-quality childcare, when accessible, can drive multi-generational impacts by improving women's employment and opportunities, business productivity, family welfare, and child development and nutritional outcomes ([World Bank, 2021](#))^{iv}. Investment in the care economy can drive economic development by generating between [\\$2 to \\$4.5 trillion of additional GDP each year](#)^v (with LIC and LMIC countries with the most to gain), creating decent work in care sectors, strengthening social protection systems, and closing long-standing gender gaps at work and at home that were only exacerbated by the pandemic.

Addressing the childcare crisis would yield a triple dividend with positive benefits for mothers, children, and economies.

Benefits to mothers: Strong evidence shows that providing access to suitable and affordable childcare increases women's economic wellbeing and agency by reducing the burden of unpaid care work and freeing up time to work outside the home, access more desirable work, and increase economic productivity. ([J-PAL 2023](#))^{vi}.

Benefits for children: Further investments in high quality childcare would have benefits for children's development and outcomes ([WBG 2022](#))^{vii}.

Benefits to economies: Investing in comprehensive care infrastructure would drive employment rates for women to rise by 10% and reduce the gender gap in employment by 7.5% ([ILO 2022](#))^{viii}. On a macro-level, models estimate 300M jobs could be generated by 2035 if countries made wide-ranging investments needed in the care economy. Given the female predominance in the care sector, it is likely that many of these jobs would go to women ([ILO 2022](#))^{ix}.

THE CHALLENGE

This RFP seeks to support evidence-based testing and learning of childcare models in South Asia and Africa that support women's workforce participation by offering paid work opportunities, reduce and redistribute the burden of unpaid care, support women's pathways into leadership and/or shift gender norms related to paid work and caregiving.

We are looking for projects with an up to 3-year timeline that will achieve at least one of the following objectives:

- *Support Women's Economic Opportunity:* Advance childcare models that support women's economic opportunities and/or pathways to leadership by expanding access to childcare services, reduce and redistribute the burden of unpaid care for women, and/or increase decent work opportunities for women in the childcare workforce.
- *Advancing Evidence:* Advance evidence of scalable, sustainable, effective and gender intentional models of childcare, including (but not limited to) pilots which test and compare multiple models of childcare provision, proposals that study applicability and customization of successful care models in target geographies, programs that demonstrate business models which can sustain themselves (either with public or private resources) and/or pilots which help to understand the minimum and optimal levels of childcare quality.
- *Shift Gender Norms:* Accelerate the economic benefits and impacts of childcare for women by shifting gender norms to expand women's economic agency through (but not limited to): increasing acceptability of women working outside the home, increasing women's control over newly gained income (inside or outside the care workforce), and shifting social norms regarding acceptability of women using care services.

Ideally, proposals should also:

- Improve children's learning, social, emotional, and physical outcomes through high-quality curriculum.
- To the extent possible, measure the effect childcare has on early child development in low-resource settings, including a measurement of school readiness.
- Use data-centered and cost-effective approaches to study and shape effective strategies that can guide policies on childcare.
- Tailor approaches to address the specific and targeted needs of the segment of women you're aiming to serve.

Priority will be given to proposals that:

Partner considerations:

We particularly encourage applications that include the following,

- **Local Leadership:** are led by in-country partners.
- **Centering Women's Expertise:** applications involving projects led by women and/or from women-led organizations, and/or projects that integrate women's voices and experiences throughout the project.

Program design considerations:

Priority will be given to proposals that deliver on several (not necessarily all) of the below criteria,

- **Community Engagement:** lends itself to community-ownership through mechanisms such as participatory design or community advisory boards.
- **Multi-stakeholder Consultation:** designed in partnership with private sector, policy makers, local government entities and/or program implementors, that include a line of site from implementation to policy change, sustainability and/or scale.
- **Cultural Knowledge:** demonstrates a deep knowledge and understanding of cultural norms, local context and specific needs of women and children in the target community.
- **Gender Intentionality:** is gender intentional by design.
 - Gender intentional investments will, through novel evidence-based testing and learning of childcare approaches:
 - increase understanding of gap or barriers to access to resources that have an impact on women's workforce participation,
 - address gender power relations and increase understanding of gaps and barriers in agency or control over resources that affect women's workforce participation,
 - and include an intersectional approach that considers the intersectionality of gender with other social determinants (such as religion, caste, tribe, age, or level of education) to understand the complex and unique challenges faced by differing populations in accessing childcare and economic opportunity.

Program elements:

Priority will be given to proposals that deliver on several (not necessarily all) of the below criteria,

- **Evidence Generation:** demonstrate effectiveness and measure outcomes for both women and children. *Examples of measures for care can be found in the accompanying document.*
- **Innovation:** demonstrate innovation in distribution and delivery of care.
- **Employment for Women:** provide employment opportunities for women.

- **Improved Care:** improve care options and centers accessibility and support to working mothers.
- **Sustainable Business Models:** demonstrate a business model that includes a credible revenue model in place to ensure ongoing sustainability, as a necessary element of scale.
- **Ability to Scale:** has the potential to contribute to strengthening childcare models within the proposed grant budget and timeframe and demonstrate a potential pathway to scale once GC funding is exhausted.
- **Systems Change:** have a point of view on how the proposed approach may change the broader system in which care is designed, delivered, or funded, e.g., considering how to incentivize key players such as government, private sector, donors, or local communities to change or collaborate in advancing access to quality childcare.

We will not consider funding for:

Programmatic considerations:

- Applications where the activities are limited to the evaluation of an existing program or an observational or overly general study.
- Care programs focused on care for a population that is not children, for example elder care or care for those with disabilities.
- Programs focused exclusively on effective childcare and child development outcomes, that ignore the needs of and impacts on the mother.
- Proposals that focus on elements essential to childcare provision but not provision itself (i.e., training of childcare givers without including childcare provision) or proposals that focus exclusively on training programs for childcare workers or community awareness raising.
- Proposals that fail to reach low-income women and/or proposals that require individual participants to invest excessive personal resources *beyond* what is reasonable and accessible for a low-income clientele.
- Programs that are unscalable and/or overly costly.

Partner considerations:

- Proposals led or driven by INGOs or entities that do not have a meaningful presence in Africa and Asia.
- Program teams that are composed mostly of leaders from the global north and/or do not include women in their leadership or implementation teams.

Funding Level:

We will consider proposals for awards of up to **\$400,000 USD for each project**, with a grant term of up to 3 years. Application budgets should be commensurate with the scope of work proposed. Indirect costs will be considered, and should be included in the budget for the up to \$400,000 USD award (subject to the [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's indirect cost policy](#)).

ⁱ <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/385821d3-bce3-5640-b140-48e27b58296b>

ⁱⁱ [ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_633135.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_633135.pdf)

ⁱⁱⁱ https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3830932

^{iv} <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/385821d3-bce3-5640-b140-48e27b58296b>

^v http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_838653.pdf

^{vi} <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/policy-insight/access-childcare-improve-womens-economic-empowerment>

^{vii} <http://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstream/44eaa523-faca-5760-9abc-569cfddcaea2/content>

^{viii} http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_838653.pdf

^{ix} http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_838653.pdf