

INVESTING IN CHILDCARE FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

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Two thirds of sub-Saharan Africa's citizens depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Women make up a large part of the agricultural workforce: in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), over 80 percent of women work in farming compared to 60 percent of men. However, women face a variety of constraints which limit the time they can devote to working or supervising farm labor and reduce the productivity of their plots. Increasing women's agricultural productivity has the potential not only to improve their own economic status, but also to enhance economic growth and food security in their communities.

The Gender Innovation Lab (GIL) used a combination of consultations in the field, desk research, and primary data collection to understand the patterns of time allocation in rural households in Western DRC, and to assess the factors to consider when designing effective interventions aimed at increasing women's agricultural productivity.

HERE'S WHAT WE FOUND

- Women farmers in the Western DRC bear the disproportionate burden of providing unpaid carework. Women spend less time than men on their plots and more time on domestic work.
- The gender differences in time allocation are striking: female plot managers do 1 hour and 52 minutes more of domestic work per day than male plot managers, the gender differences are higher in male-headed households, and female plot managers spend significantly more time taking care of children when farming or going to market than their male counterparts.
- The agricultural productivity of female plot managers is on average 26 percent lower than that of male plot managers. Having young children is associated with lower productivity for women but not for men.

These findings suggest that subsidized childcare could be used by women to shift their time-use patterns, and thereby increase their economic productivity. More than 60 percent of individuals surveyed by GIL reported being likely to leave their children in childcare if it was available. However, the effectiveness of offering childcare as a pathway to increasing women farmers' productivity in Sub-Saharan is mostly unknown. Building on the results from the study, GIL designed an intervention that would be suited to the population's needs, to start bridging the knowledge gap on using childcare to alleviate time constraints faced by women farmers. This intervention is embedded within the larger DRC Western Growth Poles Project, a IDA-funded project implemented by the Ministry of Finance.

GENDER INNOVATION LAB

The Gender Innovation Lab (GIL) conducts impact evaluations of development interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa, seeking to generate evidence on how to close the gender gap in earnings, productivity, assets and agency. The GIL team is currently working on over 50 impact evaluations in 21 countries with the aim of building an evidence base with lessons for the region.

The impact objective of GIL is increasing take-up of effective policies by governments, development organizations and the private sector in order to address the underlying causes of gender inequality in Africa, particularly in terms of women's economic and social empowerment. The lab aims to do this by producing and delivering a new body of evidence and developing a compelling narrative, geared towards policymakers, on what works and what does not work in promoting gender equality.



TAILORING IMPLEMENTATION: KEY FACTORS TO CONSIDER

The Gender Innovation Lab identified three key factors to be considered when designing a childcare intervention, to specifically address the time constraints faced by women farmers.

First, one must determine the degree of formality of the center. This is particularly crucial considering that lack of trust emerged as a key challenge for take-up, based on survey results. For women who are unwilling to leave their children in a childcare center, lack of trust in the quality of care others would provide (through witchcraft, neglect or ineptitude) is extremely prevalent in communities. Women are also concerned about the cost of formal childcare centers, while this is less of a concern for community-based care. Based on these considerations, GIL developed a hybrid intervention to test whether it can adequately address the population's needs.

FORMAL	INFORMAL	HYBRID
<p>Infrastructure – such as a school or classroom – is financed by the project</p> <p>Food is provided</p> <p>Children are provided with toys and activities designed to aid their cognitive stimulation</p>	<p>Informal arrangements between community members</p> <p>Includes rotating scheme, where groups of women band together and take turn as “caretaker”</p>	<p>Only infrastructure already existing in the village is used</p> <p>Low-cost play-based curricula found highly effective in other settings is used to promote child development</p>
<p>Parents can usually not afford to pay the actual cost</p> <p>Centers are thus heavily subsidized</p> <p>Once funds run out, they can no longer be maintained</p>	<p>Distrust towards other members of the groups (ex fear of witchcraft) can make this arrangement difficult to implement</p> <p>Concerns about early childhood development outcomes due to an inexperienced, rotating care provider</p>	<p>Center is run by a community member, but they are provided with in-depth professional training and are remunerated by the project for their work</p>

A second consideration is the age of children who will be enrolled in the childcare center. Opening up the center to children below the age of two raises a host of logistical issues, such as different types of training of care providers, activities that children this young can engage in, and breastfeeding needs -which prove very cumbersome for the mothers in the field. A potential arrangement is offering a shorter time window during which children between the ages of 1 and 2 can be left in the childcare center.

A last factor is how the success of these programs is evaluated. Childcare interventions are typically implemented to affect early childhood development outcomes. The impact on mothers is rarely comprehensively addressed, though we know that lack of time can be a binding constraint for women's economic participation. GIL will analyze the impacts of the childcare centers on women's productivity in farming and non-farming activities.

With the support of various stakeholders, we will pilot the provision of childcare services, evaluating their impact on women's time allocation to productive activities, as well as on their productivity. This study will fill a knowledge gap on what works to increase women's agricultural productivity.

To learn more on this study: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/30118>

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