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Scaling Up an Inclusive Childcare Policy Framework for the Informal Sector in Benin (CPGESI)

Impact Story 8

KEY IMPACTS

This project aims to remove a structural barrier to the economic empowerment of women working in Benin's informal sector: the lack of affordable, flexible and high-quality childcare services tailored to their working conditions. By combining the implementation of a pilot project with evidence generation and structured policy engagement, the project frames childcare not only as a social service but also as a strategic tool for economic transformation and gender equality.

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Project Overview

The [Scaling Up an Inclusive Childcare Policy Framework for the Informal Sector in Benin \(CPGESI\)](#) project, launched in February 2024, aims to remove a structural barrier to the economic empowerment of women working in Benin's informal sector: the lack of affordable, flexible and high-quality childcare services tailored to their working conditions.

In a context where most economically active women work in the informal sector, have irregular incomes and work long hours, inadequate childcare options limit productivity, income stability and access to economic opportunities. The project seeks to implement an inclusive childcare policy framework, in accordance with Decree 2023-291, by testing community-based childcare models for vulnerable women, particularly mothers working in the informal economy, while strengthening the evidence base for public policy reform.

Project Activities

The project has entered its operational pilot phase, putting the preliminary diagnostic and design work into practice. Two Community Childcare Centres (ECGEs) opened: one in Tchatchégou on 18 September 2025 and the other in Ouidah on 17 November 2025. Each ECGE was designed to accommodate up to 40 children and operates flexibly to accommodate the varying schedules of women traders, processors and self-employed workers.

The pilot project relied on Community Mothers and Facilitators (MACs), identified by local communities and trained by early childhood professionals in quality standards, child safety, hygiene and basic educational practices. The project adopted a community-led outreach approach to reduce transport costs, build trust and foster community ownership.

A baseline study was also conducted at the two pilot sites. Trained staff collected data from 175 parent-child pairs; the data were disaggregated by sex and included socioeconomic variables related to women's work and livelihoods. The project also undertook advocacy and institutional consultations with local authorities, including the Tangbo/Djèvié district council in Zè and the municipal authorities of Abomey-Calavi and Glazoué, to strengthen institutional support and explore pathways to sustainability.

Project Achievements

The main achievement during the reporting period was the opening and sustained operation of two community-based childcare centres, demonstrating both the feasibility of, and demand for, a flexible childcare service - grounded in the community and integrated into the informal sector.

Over 133 days of operation, 74 children (36 boys and 38 girls) were enrolled across the two centres, with an average daily attendance of 51 children, representing an occupancy rate of 70%. These services directly supported 74 women working in the informal sector, confirming genuine and sustained demand for locally accessible, socially acceptable and affordable childcare solutions.

Initial findings show high participation among women heading households, as well as growing demand for longer, more flexible opening hours. These trends underscore the relevance of models designed for people with irregular incomes and long working days. At the same time, the qualitative analysis indicates that the most vulnerable households remain sensitive to user fees, highlighting the importance of targeted subsidy mechanisms to prevent exclusion based on ability to pay.

The baseline study achieved a high response rate and established a rigorous empirical basis for future assessment of changes in women's economic participation and income trajectories, and in children's well-being. At the policy level, dialogue with municipal authorities has increased the visibility and legitimacy of the models and helped secure agreements in principle to test and support pilot childcare projects. This demonstrates the political acceptability of flexible childcare approaches within local governance.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Although no major strategic changes were required, the pilot phase revealed operational constraints, including the time needed to secure and prepare premises and difficulties in accessing services for the most vulnerable women. This experience showed that childcare interventions must balance financial viability and inclusion, and that community-based models require careful adjustment of fees, governance mechanisms and support measures. Thorough upfront technical preparation - mapping, design, training and community engagement - proved critical to achieving tangible results during implementation.

Care Sector Contributions & Next Steps

The project's main contribution lies in demonstrating that flexible, community-based childcare services offer a credible means of supporting women's economic activity in the informal sector while providing a practical pathway for adapting public policy. By combining the implementation of a pilot project with evidence generation and structured policy engagement, the project frames childcare not only as a social service but also as a strategic tool for economic transformation and gender equality.

Next steps focus on consolidating the pilot phase, refining the operational and financial models, strengthening safeguards and using the findings of the diagnostic study, together with baseline data and the pilot projects, to inform dialogue on revising or expanding the existing childcare policy framework. This will help ensure that the policy framework better reflects the realities faced by women in Benin's informal sector.

About the Africa Cares Together Community of Practice

The Community of Practice [Africa Cares Together](#) (ACT CoP) is a vibrant, inclusive network of diverse actors committed to amplifying care work across Africa. It is coordinated by ActionAid International (AAI) and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and is funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Global Affairs Canada (GAC), and the Hewlett Foundation. The ACT CoP network is made up of members from the 19 projects of the [Scaling Care Innovations in Africa](#) (SCIA) initiative, a partnership between IDRC and GAC.

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