



Lessons From Practice on Scaling Care in Africa

Scaling Care Innovations in Africa
Learning Brief

October 2026



IDRC • CRDI

International Development Research Centre
Centre de recherches pour le développement international

**SCALING CARE
INNOVATIONS
AFRICA**



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Introduction

Investments in care benefit women, families, and communities while driving more inclusive economic growth and sustainable development. Across Africa, governments, civil society organizations, research institutes, and communities are developing and implementing innovative solutions for childcare, elder care, disability care, and other forms of unpaid care and domestic work. These care innovations are generating promising results, creating opportunities to build on what works, address persistent gaps, and scale effective approaches.

Building on this momentum, the [Scaling Care Innovations in Africa \(SCIA\)](#) program, co-funded by the International Development Research Centre and Global Affairs Canada, offers a growing body of evidence on how promising care innovations can be strengthened, adapted, and scaled across diverse African contexts. Across 19 projects in 15 countries, the SCIA program supports implementation research on innovative approaches to recognizing, reducing, and redistributing unpaid care work and improving the quality and accessibility of care.

Drawing on evidence and learning from across the SCIA portfolio, this brief highlights care innovations that are demonstrating results and show potential for further scaling. It focuses on two thematic areas: expanding access to affordable, high-quality childcare and reducing and redistributing unpaid care work in rural settings. Using examples from the portfolio, the brief examines how these approaches are being strengthened, adapted, and expanded in different contexts and distills practical lessons on what supports effective scaling. The aim is to enable policymakers, practitioners, private sector actors, civil society actors, and donor agencies to build on existing innovations, adapt promising approaches to their own contexts, and strengthen care policies, services, and systems.

Creating Accessible, Inclusive, and High-Quality Childcare

Limited access to affordable, quality childcare can constrain women's participation in paid work and other economic activities, while also affecting children's development and well-being. Across the SCIA portfolio, projects are responding to these challenges by testing and scaling diverse approaches to expanding access to affordable, high-quality childcare, particularly for women working in low-income and informal settings. These include social-franchise models that support informal childcare providers to improve the quality and sustainability of their services; public and institutional childcare centres; childcare

services embedded within markets and workplaces; and community-based models adapted to the realities of rural and marginalized communities.

Experiences across these projects demonstrate that there is no single effective model for scaling childcare. Rather, effective approaches need to respond to the needs of families, caregivers, children, and local care systems. The examples below illustrate different approaches to expanding quality childcare and point to several lessons for scaling childcare in ways that are accessible, equitable, and sustainable.

Case Study: Scaling Childcare to Promote Women's Economic Empowerment and Child Development in Ethiopia

The Policy Studies Institute and ActionAid Ethiopia are supporting the Addis Ababa City Administration to expand access to affordable, quality childcare for working mothers through institutional (workplace) and public childcare centres. The goal is to inform the scaling of Ethiopia's institutional and public childcare programs, ensuring that expanded services are high-quality, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of low-income mothers. This is done through research and capacity strengthening; developing guidelines and standards for quality, safety, and inclusion; promoting decent pay for care workers; and strengthening the participation of care workers and low-income women in policy dialogue.

To date, the Addis Ababa City Administration has established 745 institutional and 49 public childcare centres, while this project has trained over 1,200 childcare workers to strengthen high-quality and inclusive service delivery. The institutional model provides childcare for children aged six months to four years within government workplaces, keeping children close to their mothers during the working day.

[Midline data from the project](#) show promising results for women and girls, as well as broader economic outcomes. Participating mothers decreased time spent on unpaid care by up to eight hours per week and increased their monthly income by approximately 746 ETB. Among users, 50% reported reduced absenteeism and 53% reported improved punctuality, while the share rating their work performance as high increased from 71% to 86%. Childcare also reduced unpaid family work among school-age children, with particularly large reductions for girls, suggesting benefits for girls' education.

This project demonstrates how childcare can be scaled as both social and economic infrastructure by combining government leadership with evidence, quality standards, and workforce development. Findings are also informing efforts to institutionalize a financially sustainable, quality-assured nationwide childcare system in Ethiopia through the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs.

Additional information and resources related to this project are [available online](#).

Case Study: Enhancing and Scaling Up Impacts of a Social-Franchise Model of Daycare Centres to Reduce Effects of Unpaid Care Work

Led by the Population Council and Tiny Totos Kenya, this project is strengthening the Tiny Totos Childcare Model (TTCM), a social-franchise model launched in 2014 that transforms existing community daycares in informal settlements into self-sustaining businesses providing affordable, quality childcare. The model equips informal childcare providers – primarily women – with training, access to capital, peer networks, and technology to improve the quality and sustainability of their services. Already operating at scale in Kenya and Ethiopia, TTCM has served more than 26,000 women in Nairobi alone and enabled many childcare providers to double or triple their incomes.

Rather than simply expanding the model, the SCIA project focuses on “scaling deep” – using evidence and learning to strengthen its efficiency, reach, cost-effectiveness, and impact. Drawing on evidence from daycare managers, parents, and caregivers, this project has introduced practical improvements, including the Mtoto App to connect daycare managers and parents and track child outcomes, and an e-learning platform offering accessible training on health, nutrition, child safety, and business practices. Endline data from this project demonstrate its reach and results: 18,684 women reported reduced amounts of unpaid care work, and 20,285 reported improvements in their economic empowerment.

This project demonstrates how established childcare models can be strengthened for deeper and more sustainable impact as they scale. Its experience highlights the value of investing in existing informal providers, using technology and continuous learning to improve quality and cost-effectiveness, and understanding what families value in childcare. Evidence on affordability and parental preferences also points to the

importance of tailoring financing and subsidies to different income levels to ensure that quality childcare remains accessible to low-income families.

Additional information and resources related to this project are [available online](#).

Case Study: Availing Affordable and Accessible Childcare in Market Centers in Kenya

In Nairobi's informal markets, where women make up around 80% of traders, childcare responsibilities can constrain women's ability to work and earn. Led by WowMom, this project builds on a successful childcare pilot in Gikomba market to test and generate evidence on affordable, high-quality childcare in Nairobi's market centres. The model combines market-based daycare with financial and business literacy training, mentorship, and efforts to challenge norms around unpaid care. Working in partnership with Nairobi County, the childcare centres provide trained caregivers, nutritious meals, early learning, and health and safety measures.

Since the initiative began, 335 women market traders have regularly used childcare centres in Gikomba and Mwariri, enabling them to dedicate more time and attention to their businesses. Over the past year, nearly all participating women reported increased daily earnings and productivity. This project is also generating evidence on the economic costs of inadequate childcare and the needs and preferences of women traders, helping build the case for integrating quality childcare into market infrastructure.

The WowMom experience demonstrates how locally grounded childcare models can generate evidence, inform standards, and build policy support for scaling. Rather than simply replicating a single model, this project is using evidence from market-based childcare to inform approaches that can expand affordable, quality childcare in other settings. Its advocacy has contributed to the *Nairobi County Sectoral Plan* and *County Child Protection Policy* and supported the development of a draft *Nairobi City County Policy on Childcare in Market Centres*. Strong county-level buy-in and engagement in national taskforces are creating pathways for childcare to become more systematically integrated into markets and public policy.

Additional information and resources related to this project are [available online](#).

Lessons for Scaling Childcare

- **Tailor childcare models to how families live and work.** There is no single model for expanding childcare. Social-franchise, community-based, institutional, and public-sector approaches offer different pathways to scale depending on factors such as where women work, existing childcare provision, and families' needs and ability to pay. Tailoring models to these different circumstances can help ensure that expanded provision reaches populations underserved by conventional childcare systems.
- **Balance affordability, quality, and decent conditions for care workers.** Expanding access cannot come at the expense of childcare quality or the livelihoods of care workers. Fees and financing models need to reflect families' ability to pay while ensuring that caregivers are adequately compensated and services meet appropriate quality standards. Sustainable costing models and public subsidies can help balance affordability, quality, decent work, and equitable access.
- **Build evidence and quality standards into the scaling process.** Scaling is not simply about increasing the number of childcare spaces. Research and implementation learning can help identify quality gaps, understand families' needs and experiences, and strengthen models as they expand, while clear standards can help maintain quality as provision grows. Evidence can also build the case for further investment and policy uptake.
- **Create pathways for childcare models to become embedded in public systems.** Government engagement can help move successful childcare models beyond individual projects and embed them within public policies, plans, budgets, and systems. Involving relevant ministries and agencies throughout the scaling process can build ownership, align childcare models with existing priorities and systems, and support the development of policies and standards needed for sustained expansion.

Transforming Care in Rural Settings

Women and girls in rural communities often face particularly heavy unpaid care workloads, shaped by limited access to water, energy, childcare, transport, and other essential infrastructure and services, as well as poverty and deeply rooted gender norms. SCIA projects are responding to these barriers through a range of interconnected approaches, including improving access to water and clean cooking technologies, childcare services,

economic empowerment initiatives, and interventions that engage men and communities in redistributing unpaid care work.

Experiences across these projects demonstrate that reducing and redistributing care work in rural settings rarely depends on a single intervention. Instead, effective approaches address the multiple and interconnected factors that shape women's care responsibilities and adapt solutions to local livelihoods, infrastructure, institutions, and social norms. The examples below illustrate some of the different ways this is being put into practice.

Case Study: Scaling Up Innovations for Reducing and Redistributing Women's and Girls' Unpaid Care Work in Rural Tanzania

Led by the Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF) in partnership with Women and Social Protection (WSP) and the Relief to Development Society (REDESO), this project is testing an integrated approach to reducing and redistributing unpaid care work in drought-prone communities in Kishapu District in Tanzania. It combines communal rainwater harvesting systems to reduce the time women and girls spend collecting water with entrepreneurship and job-skills training and Babajamii, a gender-transformative intervention adapted to the Kishapu context to promote more equitable sharing of unpaid care and household decision-making. Together, these interventions aim to empower women to decide how to use the time freed by water harvesting systems, whether for entrepreneurship, rest, or leisure, with support from their households and communities.

Delivered through community groups, Babajamii engages couples in a 13-week hands-on curriculum focused on sharing care responsibilities, joint decision-making, communication, and preventing gender-based violence. The model has been deliberately adapted to rural realities: locally influential community members were selected and trained as facilitators, and participatory approaches including role-play, group discussion, and activity-based learning are used to enable delivery even in communities with limited infrastructure.

Early results are promising. Eight water tanks, each serving one community group, have been constructed close to homes, while more than 340 participants have received entrepreneurship and job-skills training. Babajamii participants report men taking on more childcare, water collection, cooking, and cleaning; greater joint financial

decision-making; improved relationships and well-being; and reduced household conflict. Some households also report increased income and savings.

This project demonstrates the value of combining labour-saving infrastructure with economic opportunities and gender-transformative approaches to address interconnected care burdens. It also highlights the importance of adapting interventions to local realities, building community capacity and ownership, and engaging local government to create pathways for wider scale.

Additional information and resources related to this project are [available online](#).

Case Study: Using Improved Cookstoves to Reduce the Burden of Domestic Work for Rural Women in Côte d'Ivoire

Led by the Centre Ivoirien de Recherches Économiques et Sociales (CIRES), this project is generating evidence to support the scaling of improved cookstoves as a way to reduce rural women's unpaid care burden while improving health and reducing environmental impacts. In Côte d'Ivoire, 87% of households rely on firewood for cooking, requiring women to spend significant time collecting fuel and exposing them to harmful smoke. Building on an existing initiative that distributed 20,000 improved cookstoves benefiting more than 100,000 people, this project is examining how clean cooking technologies can be scaled through evidence-informed policy, government investment, and public-private partnerships.

This project has supported the distribution of more than 2,200 additional TIKA improved cookstoves, surpassing its initial target. Local authorities have demonstrated growing ownership by integrating stove acquisition into annual budgets. At the national level, CIRES has engaged ministries responsible for energy, women's affairs, environment, and solidarity, alongside private-sector stakeholders, building broad support for clean cooking solutions.

Evidence and engagement from this project are also informing Côte d'Ivoire's *National Clean Cooking Strategy*, which aims to increase access to clean cooking from 20% in 2025 to 50% by 2030. Additional outcomes include the creation of a dedicated sub-directorate for clean cooking within the Ministry of Mines, Petroleum and Energy, and the introduction of concrete support measures such as butane gas subsidies, nationwide

price equalization for refills, and the mobilization of external funding for a four-year scale-up initiative — all drawing on insights generated through this project.

This project demonstrates how labour-saving technologies can be scaled by linking evidence on women's care burdens with wider energy, health, environmental, and economic priorities; building government ownership; and mobilizing public and private financing for sustained expansion.

Additional information and resources related to this project are [available online](#).

Lessons for Scaling Care in Rural Settings

- **Combine complementary interventions to address interconnected care burdens.** Rural care challenges often require a bundle of interventions rather than a single solution. Experiences from the SCIA program show the value of combining labour-saving technologies and infrastructure with economic empowerment programs, childcare services, and efforts to transform gender norms.
- **Build on existing community structures and strengthen local ownership.** Working through structures that communities already know and trust (such as producer groups, village savings and loans associations, and self-help groups) can provide an effective platform for scaling care interventions. Building the capacity of local actors to govern, maintain, adapt, and replicate innovations can further strengthen community ownership and sustainability beyond the life of individual projects.
- **Connect community-level innovation with government systems.** Early engagement with relevant ministries and agencies can help connect locally grounded care innovations with wider policy and development priorities. Sharing evidence on community, gender, and economic outcomes can build government ownership and create pathways for successful approaches to become embedded in policies, plans, budgets, and public systems.
- **Pair practical solutions with efforts to transform gender norms.** Labour-saving technologies and infrastructure can reduce the time and effort required for unpaid care work, but lasting change also requires addressing how care responsibilities are distributed. Engaging men and community leaders in efforts to shift gender norms and promote more equitable sharing of care can help translate practical improvements into lasting reductions in women's care workloads.

Conclusion

The experiences highlighted in this brief demonstrate that there is no single pathway for scaling care innovations. What works depends on the care challenge, population, institutions, resources, and wider context. Across childcare and rural care, however, SCIA projects show the value of building on locally rooted solutions, generating evidence as innovations are implemented and adapted, and creating pathways for successful approaches to become embedded within communities, policies, and systems.

African countries are not starting from scratch. Promising care innovations are already generating results across the continent. The opportunity now is to learn from these experiences, adapt approaches to different contexts, and invest in taking effective solutions to greater scale.

Learning Brief Information

This brief was prepared by Kate Grantham and Leva Rouhani of [FemDev Consulting](#). It draws on evidence and learning from the SCIA Mid-Term Review Report and the SCIA 2025–2026 Annual Report, supplemented by project-level evidence and learning from across the SCIA portfolio.

For more information, contact the Scaling Care Innovations in Africa program team at careinnovations@idrc.ca.