Pathways to impact: how care economy businesses are transforming the lives of women

KORE GLOBAL

The Care Economy Knowledge Hub

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Foreword

Care work is essential for our economy. It includes all the care and domestic tasks needed to keep society and the formal economy running.

This work enables all other types of work. However, the current setup of the care economy limits women's economic participation and well-being, negatively affecting society, the economy, and the planet. There is a growing need for systemic change and investment in the care economy, requiring serious action from the public sector. The private sector also has a role to play. Understanding the private sector's role in transforming the care economy is crucial, as is developing better ways to measure this impact to ensure it aligns with changes that reduce, recognize, redistribute, and reward care work, and foster representation of care workers. How can private sector involvement in the care economy help move away from privatization and contribute to shared responsibility for building a more caring society?

This report builds on IDRC's Transforming the Care Economy through Impact Investing programming. Authored by Kore Global, it uses data from 20 detailed business case studies carried out in 2023 and 2024 by Kore Global, Intellecap, Core Woman, and Busara, all part of the Care Economy Knowledge Hub. The report looks at how businesses can make a difference by recognizing, reducing, rewarding, and redistributing paid and unpaid care work. It gives useful examples of how to measure the impact of these efforts. Finally, the report offers clear advice for businesses, investors, funders, and practitioners on how to better measure impact, support changes in norms, and design programs to maximize the positive - and even transformational - impacts of these investments on the lives of women and on broader society.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and purpose

The care economy, with its potential to recognize, reward, reduce, and redistribute care work, offers transformative pathways for societal and economic advancement, driving gender equity and empowering women globally. Rewarding care work through fair pay and opportunities for career growth ensures that care providers, who are predominantly women, gain financial stability and professional dignity. Recognizing care work elevates its visibility, positioning it as essential, productive labor that underpins economies and communities. Redistributing care responsibilities across households, the public sector, and private enterprises, combined with efforts to reduce the burden of unpaid care, frees up women's time for broader participation in the labor market and supports their enhanced wellbeing. Together, these four strategies—rewarding, recognizing, redistributing, and reducing—are mutually reinforcing, creating a system that values care work and fosters gender equality both at home and in the workforce. Figure 1 illustrates these potential impact pathways and tangible benefits of care economy innovations.

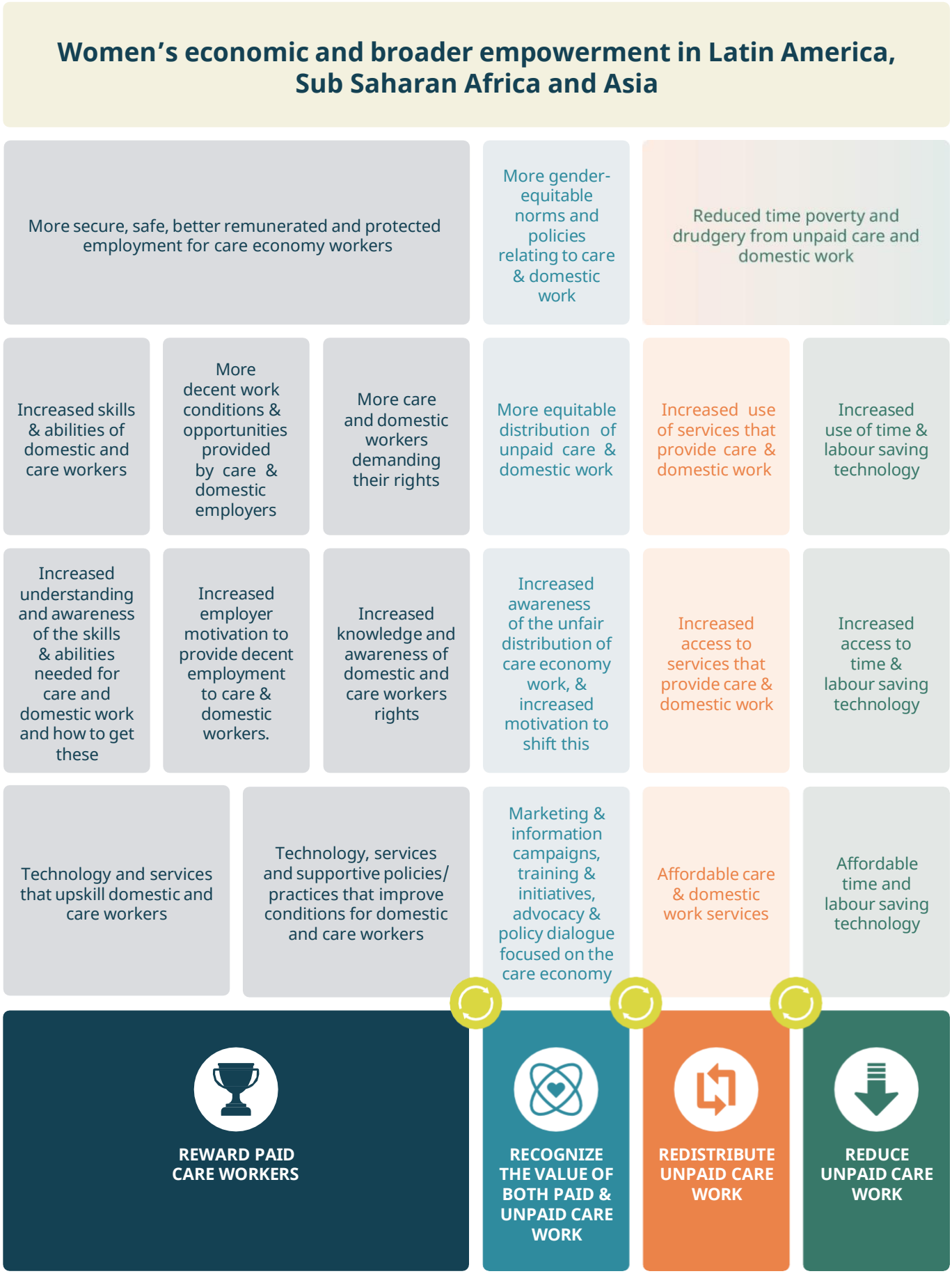
Box 1: Defining care work

Care work encompasses a broad range of tasks, including caring for people (such as children, elderly or sick relatives) and domestic work, such as cleaning, cooking and other household duties. Care work can be paid or unpaid, and be carried out in the home by household members or service providers, or externally, at specialized facilities such as childcare centres.

In 2021, Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Soros Economic Development Fund (SEDF) at the Open Society Foundations (OSF) launched the 'Transforming the Care Economy through Impact Investing' (TCEII) program to generate knowledge and evidence to direct investment into these social and for-profit care economy enterprises. Under this flagship program, Kore Global led a research consortium to assess market opportunity in the care sector in select countries in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. The Care Economy Knowledge Hub, a key outcome of this program, is the first comprehensive resource offering systematically collected data about the role of the private sector in the care economy, collected and analyzed by Kore Global, Intellecap, Busara, and CoreWoman. This research provides critical insights for impact investors, highlighting the financial viability and societal benefits of care economy businesses.

This report draws on 20 in-depth case studies from the Care Economy Knowledge Hub, to explore the varying impacts that care economy enterprises are having on women workers and consumers. Each case study includes a theory of change (ToC) outlining how core business activities are expected to contribute to outcomes for women aligned with the four impact pathways of reward, recognize, redistribute, and reduce (the four 'Rs'). The case studies also provide a snapshot of the outcomes these businesses are contributing to for women care workers (recognize and reward), and women end-users (redistribute and reduce), drawing on both secondary quantitative monitoring data and primary qualitative insights from interviews with female clients and end-users. Through secondary analysis of the quantitative and qualitative outcome data presented in each case study, this report illustrates how these businesses are contributing to women's enhanced social and economic empowerment and how the four pathways are being implemented in practice.

Figure 1: Care economy impact pathways



The report offers valuable insights into "what works" to achieve a positive impact for women through care economy businesses. Further, it provides an overview of how these businesses are currently capturing outcomes and impact, identifies gaps in current impact measurement systems, and provides example actionable metrics for care economy businesses and investors to track impact related to each of the 4Rs. The report concludes with concrete recommendations for businesses, investors, funders, and practitioners on how to enhance impact measurement, support normative change, and guide program design and advocacy efforts to maximize the potential gender impact of these investments.

1.2 Sample of care economy businesses

The analysis draws on information and data from 20 care economy businesses spanning 12 countries across Africa (8; 40%), Asia (6; 30%) and Latin America (6; 30%). Seven businesses in the sample (35%) focus on providing affordable, clean energy/ water products to consumers, while six (30%) offer job platforms and services for care economy workers. Five businesses in the sample (25%) are service providers offering childcare, domestic/cleaning, or personal care services to customers. The two remaining businesses in the sample (10%) primarily focus on formalization and training for care economy workers. The majority of businesses (15; 75%) are for-profit companies, and most (11; 55%) are in a growth stage. The vast majority (16; 80%) have women in leadership roles within the company, while over half (12; 60%) have a female founder. See Figure 2 for a summary of the care businesses reviewed, and Annex 1 for a complete breakdown of the sample.

Figure 2: Overview of care economy businesses in the sample

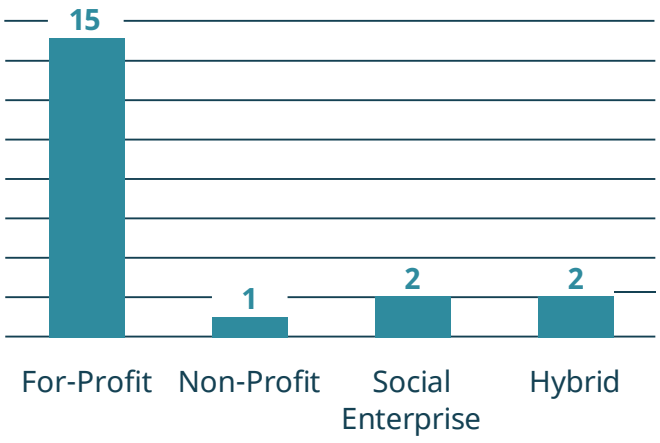
Care Economy Business Service Areas

- Affordable and clean energy / water products
- Formalisation and training for informal care workers
- Care worker job platforms
- Care service provider

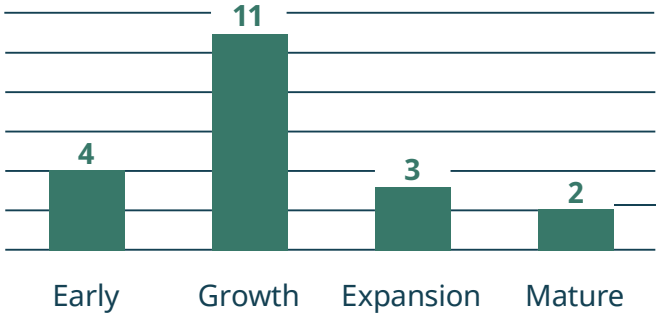
80% have female leadership

60% have a female founder

Business Type



Business Stage



Region	Country	Number
Africa	Bangladesh	2
	Bangladesh & Cambodia	1
	Colombia	3
	Colombia & Mexico	1
	Honduras	1
	Kenya	5
Asia	Kenya & Indonesia	1
	Kenya & South Sudan	1
	Mexico	1
	Nigeria	1
	Philippines	1
	Vietnam	1
Latin America	Zambia	1
	Total	**20**

2. How and in what ways are care economy businesses contributing to outcomes and impact for women?

2.1 Rewarding and recognizing care work

Reward

Products, services, and initiatives that ensure that care and domestic workers are paid fairly and have professional growth potential, providing them with financial reward and security.

Recognize

Initiatives that increase visibility and recognition of paid and unpaid care and domestic activity as "productive" work that creates real value and contributes to economies and societies.

The issue

The care economy has long been undervalued, with care workers—predominantly women—often working in informal, underpaid roles with little recognition for their essential contributions. Care workers in the informal sector often face low wages, limited opportunities for professional development, and a lack of legal recognition, which leaves them vulnerable to exploitation. Without formal contracts, these workers have little protection in disputes over pay, working conditions, or unfair dismissal. Additionally, care workers are frequently paid less than those in other sectors with similar levels of education and responsibility, and they have fewer chances for career advancement (ILO and WIEGO, 2020). This not only impacts their economic well-being but also affects the quality of care and education provided to children (Clark et al., 2017).

Care economy businesses addressing the issue

A growing number of businesses across Africa, Asia, and Latin America are reshaping the care landscape by both recognizing and rewarding care work. The Care Economy Knowledge Hub profiled 13 businesses in Africa, Asia, and Latin America that focus on rewarding and recognizing care work (see Table 1). The featured businesses span a range of initiatives that recognize and reward care work by improving working conditions, providing training, and offering formalization for their majority female workforce. These businesses offer insights on what works to not only improve working conditions but also empower care workers economically, transforming their roles from invisible, undervalued laborers to respected professionals.

Table 1: Businesses associated with the Reward and/or Recognize pathways

Business	Country	Services
aeioTU	Colombia	Care & education for children 0 to 5 years; consulting; special projects with migrants and rural communities
Best Care	Honduras	Personal care services for individuals (hospitalization, home care, telecare)
Fair Employment Foundation	Philippines	Market solutions to support migrant domestic workers from the Philippines/Indonesia to work in Hong Kong, Singapore, or Malaysia (training and placement)
HelloTask	Bangladesh	Digital platform connecting domestic workers to households; connects onboarded domestic workers to training opportunities
Hogaru	Colombia	Digital platform connecting domestic workers to households and businesses; formalizes relationships with existing domestic workers
Homely	Mexico	Digital platform connecting domestic workers to households and businesses
Jazza Centre	Kenya	Training and connecting domestic workers to households and businesses
JupViec	Vietnam	Digital platform connecting domestic workers to households and businesses for cleaning services; training for domestic workers
Phulki	Bangladesh	Care for children from low-income households; training and awareness for women on health and rights; training for domestic workers
Strong Start	Kenya	Childcare services for high-income households & upskilling for their existing care workers (e.g., nannies); training for external care workers; advocacy; connects households with childcare workers
Symplifica	Colombia & Mexico	Digital platform facilitating: formalization of domestic workers, affiliation into national security systems, payroll, benefits calculation, labor relationship management with employers, and reporting for both parties
Tiny Totos	Kenya	Knowledge, tech, capital, and network for informal daycare businesses; advisory services to NGOs, government agencies, and private sector entities to assist creation of childcare solutions
Xalco	Kenya & South Sudan	Personal care services for the elderly from certified nurses, doctors, caregivers; caregiver training and placement; post-hospitalization clinic offering care to recovering patients

How care economy businesses are rewarding care work through fair wages, improved working conditions, and benefits

Many of the businesses featured in the Care Economy Knowledge Hub are not only helping care workers increase their income but are also supporting the development of their financial skills and promoting financial inclusion. Tiny Totos, for example, helps owners of daycare centers in Kenya enhance their financial performance by providing business management training, access to microloans, and financial management tools, including a digital app to track profitability. As a result, some daycare centers have doubled the number of children they serve, leading to more sustainable and profitable businesses. Strong Start has also significantly improved the economic well-being of care workers, with post-training monthly incomes ranging from KES30,000 to KES45,000 (US$219-US$328), which exceeds Kenya's national average. Jazza Centre similarly boosts the income of domestic workers, with post-training earnings rising to an average of 12,750KES (US$80) from 9,800KES (US$61), with many workers now saving regularly, something they struggled to do before. Additionally, 95% of domestic workers on JupViec's platform report receiving stable and punctual income, while HelloTask in Bangladesh has increased income for 71% of its workers, with 80% reporting they can better support their families. Homely offers competitive salaries that are 40% higher than the minimum wage, and 89% of its workforce has opened bank accounts, further improving their access to financial services. Similarly, Hogaru in Colombia provides domestic workers with consistent and better pay, social security benefits, and additional perks like access to loans, health insurance, end-of-year bonuses, and household appliances on credit.

Care economy businesses can also play a key role in improving working conditions and safety for care workers. Initiatives like Strong Start help care workers establish professional boundaries, fostering more respectful employer relationships, while businesses such as Jazza Centre and JupViec provide safety training and emergency support. JupViec provides workers with emergency support through a digital app, and HelloTask offers a platform where domestic workers can report mistreatment or abuse, blocking abusive employers from future use. This has resulted in a significant improvement in workers' perception of safety, with 98% of HelloTask's workers reporting feeling safer, and incidents of physical assault dropping from 12% to 1.5%. Additionally, companies like Homely and Tiny Totos offer paid maternity/paternity leave and other benefits, contributing to financial stability. However, despite these benefits, many workers across businesses like Jazza Centre and Homely remain uncertain about their rights and entitlements, highlighting the need for more education on their legal protections and benefits.

> "Since starting my new job, my life has improved. I'm now able to afford housing, support my mother, my daughter, and my grandchildren, and even rent land for farming."
>
> - Domestic Worker, 59 years old

Source: Jazza Centre case study.

How care economy businesses are elevating care work through professionalization

Care economy businesses in the sample are playing a critical role in professionalizing and elevating the status of care work and care workers. Tiny Totos, for instance, provides comprehensive training to independent childcare providers, covering topics like early childhood education, nutrition, and first aid, which has helped shift perceptions of childcare from informal to formal, valued work. As a result, providers

> "I am grateful and thankful because it has helped me become more professional and it has helped me take good care of the kids that I am raising. The certificates can help you for example get a good payment because the employer will see that you are a professional."
>
> - Care Worker, 33 years old

Source: Strong Start case study.

express increased confidence, improved knowledge, and a sense of professionalism in running their centers —transforming informal babysitters into successful childcare entrepreneurs. Similarly, aeioTU provides training for informal caregivers in remote and low-income areas of Colombia and Mexico, with the aim of elevating child care skills and assisting caregivers to formalize their own early childhood care and education (ECCE) businesses. JupViec, a digital care work platform in Vietnam, has formalized domestic work through service contracts that outline job responsibilities and conditions, helping workers gain recognition as professionals. HelloTask's community presence in Bangladesh has also shifted societal views, with more people now recognizing domestic workers as dignified professionals capable of supporting their families, challenging long-held stigma around care and domestic work.

Care economy businesses can also offer vital pathways for women's employment and career advancement through ongoing training, skill development, and support systems. For instance, Tiny Totos provides continuous training for daycare providers, boosting confidence and career satisfaction, with 90% of managers reporting personal growth. This creates local employment as providers expand operations and hire additional staff.

Strong Start connects upskilled care workers in Kenya with better-paying jobs through a comprehensive database, while JupViec provides career progression through training on cleaning, communication, and worker's rights, with opportunities for workers to advance into supervisory or training roles within the company. Strong Start educates both domestic care workers and their employer households on the importance of employment contracts and best practices and, as a result, many employers engaged in the program are now actively supporting care workers' professional development. HelloTask workers have expressed a growing demand for specialized training, particularly in modern household technologies and caregiving for children and the elderly, highlighting how tailored skills development can further improve employment prospects and meet evolving needs in the care economy.

Many of the care economy businesses reviewed connect women with broader professional networks, which brings additional benefits beyond formal training and accreditation. As an example, Tiny Totos facilitates knowledge exchange and peer support among daycare providers, encouraging the sharing of best practices, experiences, and expertise. This collaborative environment enables care providers to learn from one another and collectively improve their services. Similarly, Strong Start offers care

> "If someone asked me what I do before, I used to say I do housework. Now, if someone asks me what I do, I say I work in a household and do it with a company. There has been a change in the way they speak with me."
>
> - Domestic Worker, 40 years old

Source: HelloTask case study.

Box 2: How Standards and accreditation are central to the professionalization of care work

The following examples show how care economy businesses have set standards and offered formal accreditation to enhance the credibility and employability of care workers.

- **Tiny Totos** introduces formal accreditation and standards for daycare providers, giving formal recognition to their skills and services, and helping to shift perceptions of caregiving as a valuable and legitimate profession.
- **Strong Start** offers skill verification through certification in more specialized areas, such as first aid and motor skills, providing care workers with formal recognition of their expertise. These certificates not only validate their skills but also give care workers a competitive edge in the job market, making them more attractive to employers.
- **Xalco** supports unemployed women in Kenya by offering training and certification through its branded institute, Ujuzi Fursa Africa, which equips prospective caregivers with recognized qualifications to improve their employment opportunities.
- **Phulki** in Bangladesh provides certified training in early childhood development (ECD), with companies and individual care workers investing in this training to improve the quality of childcare that they provide.

> "The ECD materials, the business training that they have given us and the nutrition training has helped me a lot to give the children a balanced diet. The resource center has also helped me a lot because we get materials from there and they improve our daycare."
>
> - Care Worker, 56 years old

Source: Tiny Totos case study.

workers access to a supportive community where they can connect with peers and mentors, fostering camaraderie and mutual learning. Throughout and following their training program, aeioTU actively facilitates connections between caregivers and other childcare institutions, playing a crucial role in expanding their professional networks. By being part of these networks, childcare workers gain access to valuable support systems that enhance their skills, confidence, and sense of belonging, ultimately contributing to better care services and personal growth.

Reward and Recognize: What works for women?

The profiled care economy businesses primarily focus on paid care and domestic workers, many of whom are unaware of their own rights. Some businesses, like Strong Start and Jazza Centre, incorporate awareness-raising initiatives on worker rights, which emphasizes the value of care work at the same time as helping paid care workers better understand their entitlements. Phulki goes further by engaging families, communities, and employers, to promote awareness of the rights of workers to quality childcare support from their employers. However, these businesses, by nature, focus on paid rather

than unpaid care work. Consequently, there is limited evidence that these businesses are increasing recognition of the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work on women - a crucial step towards redistributing unpaid care work within the household (e.g. towards more equal distribution between women and men).

The case studies provide evidence of the empowering effects for women care workers from the increased recognition and reward for their labor. Workers in these care economy businesses report greater respect, dignity, and pride in their roles, leading to positive changes in both their personal and professional lives. Tiny Totos participants expressed newfound pride and confidence, strengthening their commitment to their businesses and deepening their passion for childcare. Strong Start's self-advocacy training has helped care workers view themselves as professionals, fostering ownership and pride in their work— particularly in specialized areas like newborn care. Domestic workers trained by the Jazza Centre reported improvements in economic conditions, self-confidence, and life satisfaction, feeling more empowered than in previous roles. Domestic workers registered on the HelloTask platform similarly experienced a boost in self-confidence and pride from being able to support their families with the income gained from these job opportunities. Some domestic workers employed by Hogaru in Colombia reported achieving economic independence and a stronger voice within their households due to their enhanced position, no longer having to rely on their husbands, children, or relatives for financial support, which in turn enhanced their sense of autonomy and self-worth. Domestic workers working part-time for Homely reported to have a better work/life balance due to flexible schedules and supportive work environments, improving their social lives and free time. However, some full-time workers reported declining physical health due to long commutes and less self-care time, highlighting the trade-off between full-time stability and the flexibility of part-time work. Figure 3 highlights insights from the profiled businesses on effective strategies for recognising and rewarding care work.

> "I have been talking to several early childhood institutions. They tell me they want to talk to me. They say, 'I want to talk to you so that you can be part of our team when you finish at aeioTU."
>
> - Care Worker, 33 years old

Source: aeioTU case study.

Figure 3: What works for Recognize and Reward businesses

2.2 Redistributing and reducing the burden of care work

Redistribute

Services and initiatives that redistribute care work from individuals to public and private sector entities, and redistribute care and domestic work within the household.

Reduce

Products and initiatives that reduce the time spent on and burden of unpaid care and domestic work.

The issue

Women in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) face a disproportionate burden of care and domestic work, leaving them with limited time for leisure, employment, and other activities. This heavy workload leads to significant time poverty, stemming from the long hours spent on labor-intensive tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, and caregiving. Many households rely on inefficient energy sources for cooking, which not only increases the time required but also exposes them to health risks from harmful smoke and pollutants. The emotional toll of caregiving is significant, particularly when women are responsible for the long-term care of elderly or sick relatives, leading to heightened stress and burnout. For most households in LMICs, the cost of professional care services for children, the elderly, and the sick is prohibitively high, further compounding the burden on women. As a result, their ability to participate in paid employment and pursue economic opportunities is severely restricted.

Care economy businesses addressing the issue

The businesses profiled in the Care Economy Knowledge Hub include two distinct groups of businesses which relieve the pressures and time spent on unpaid care work for their users (see Table 2). Firstly, the review includes five businesses that are providing low and middle-income households with an option for affordable and quality care services for children, people living with disabilities, and the elderly. These include community and workplace daycare services for children, with costs kept low through contributions from businesses, communities, or employers. Other businesses offer home-based care for elderly individuals, including those with disabilities, and also provide specialized care services for elderly patients transitioning from hospital care. Additionally, some companies offer in-home, hospital, and virtual healthcare services delivered by trained caregivers at affordable prices.

The second distinct group includes seven businesses offering innovative, labor-saving products and services, many of which are specifically designed to alleviate the daily strain of household tasks. These include companies that design and manufacture clean and cost-effective cookstoves and biomass-based fuel, which significantly reduce the time spent on traditional cooking methods, while also improving efficiency and lowering fuel consumption. Others provide affordable water filtration systems, reducing the need for time-consuming water collection and purification in rural and peri-urban areas. Additionally, some businesses offer a range of labor-saving technologies, from solar-powered devices to farm equipment, further decreasing the physical and time demands of household chores. By introducing these solutions, profiled enterprises are helping to ease the daily burden of unpaid domestic work, freeing up time for women to engage in other activities and improving their quality of life.

Table 2: Businesses associated with the Redistribute and Reduce pathways

Business	Country	Services
Redistribute Businesses		
Best Care	Honduras	Personal care services for individuals (hospitalization, home care, telecare)
Phulki	Bangladesh	Care for children from low-income households; training and awareness for women on health and rights; training for domestic workers
Tiny Totos	Kenya	Knowledge, tech, capital, and network for informal daycare businesses; advisory services to NGOs, gov agencies,and private sector entities to assist creation of childcare solutions
Xalco	Kenya and South Africa	Personal care services for the elderly from certified nurses, doctors, caregivers; caregiver training and placement; post-hospitalization clinic offering care to recovering patients
Reduce Businesses		
ATEC	Bangladesh & Cambodia	Clean cooking products
Bidhaa Sasa	Kenya	Labor-saving technologies (water tanks, cookstoves, LPG cylinders, electric pressure cookers, solar lights, grain silos, tarpaulins and bags)
BURN Manufacturing	Kenya	Fuel-efficient cooking appliances
Emerging Cooking Solutions	Zambia	Clean cookstoves and biomass-based cooking fuel
Nazava Water Filters	Indonesia & Kenya	Affordable gravity-based ceramic water filters
Powerstove	Nigeria	Clean cooking products and biomass-based cooking fuel
Tierra Grata	Colombia	Solar panels and lamps, drip water filters, and ecological dry toilets

How care economy businesses are contributing to women end-users' economic empowerment and wellbeing

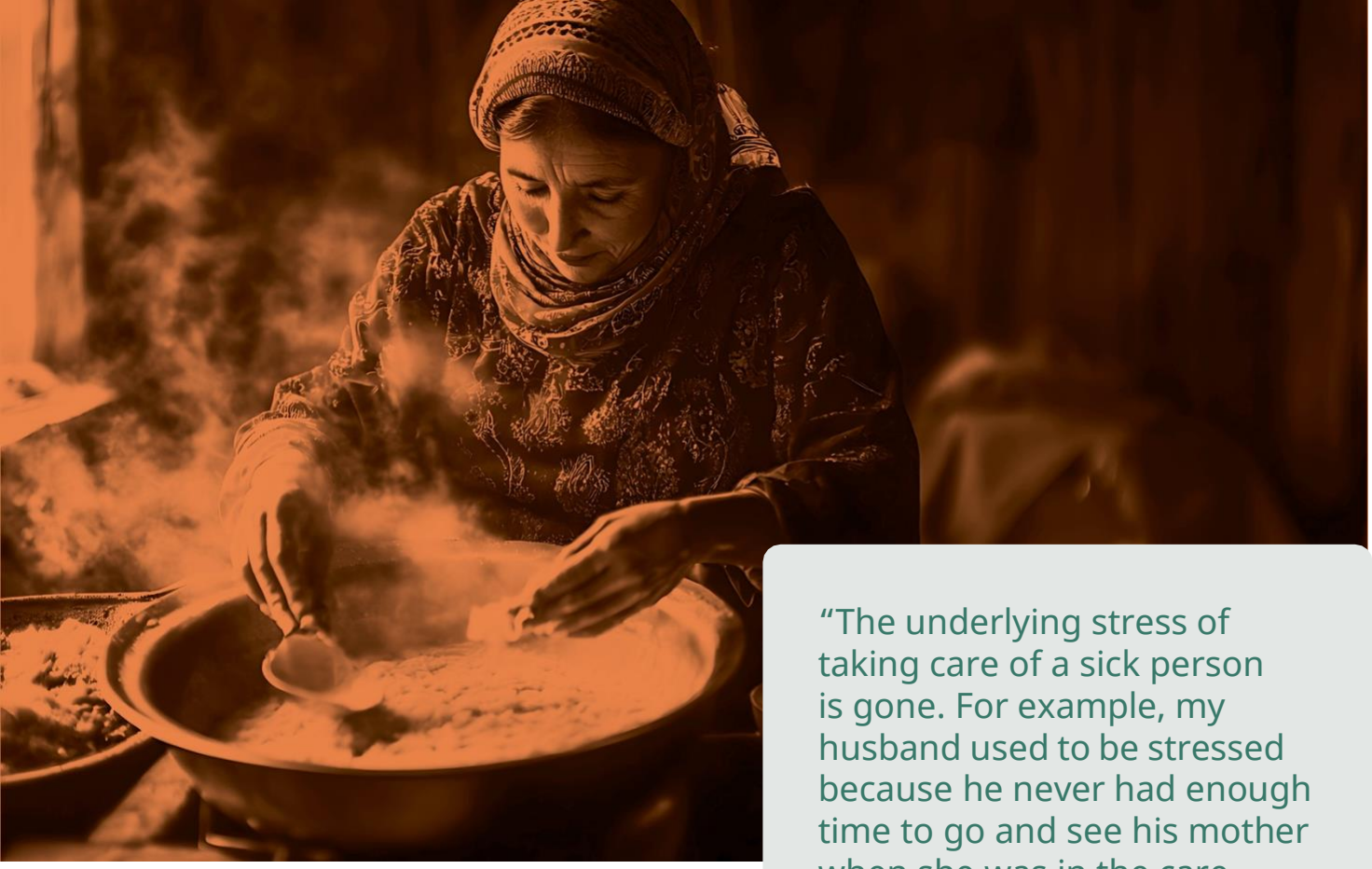
The availability of affordable care services can support mothers of young children to engage in paid work. In a 2019 survey of users of Phulki's daycare services, 96.9% of respondents said they could work enough hours thanks to their children being cared for, compared to 69.8% of respondents who did not use any daycare facilities. The service provided by Phulki also includes washing children's clothes, reducing the time women need to spend on washing at home. Women also reported that their relationships with their employers have improved, as they no longer need to leave work early to care for their children. Users of Tiny Totos' childcare services reported that they could focus more on work when leaving their children at the daycare center. In the case of Phulki, the increased incomes women have earned from employment has enabled them to achieve financial independence and support their families.

> "Thanks to the Phulki daycare center, I am able to work and earn with peace of mind, knowing my child is in safe hands. This has changed my life, allowing me to support my family while ensuring my child's well-being."
>
> - Female Customer, 23 years old

Source: Phulki case study.

Relieving the stress and mental burden of caring for children and relatives is another significant impact reported by end-users of care services. Almost all women using Phulki's daycare services reported reduced stress and worry about their children's safety and Tiny Totos' clients reported similar reductions in stress. Users of Xalco's care services also reported feeling less worried about their relatives' health, knowing that they are receiving professional care in a safe environment.

Receiving specialized care benefit from trained, professional carers brings significant benefits. For children, this often translates as improved learning outcomes thanks to the increased stimulation they receive in childcare centers. Parents using Tiny Totos' childcare services reported positive impacts on their children's language development, social skills, emotional wellbeing, and overall health. Users of Xalco's services reported that their relatives receiving care had an improved quality of life due to the holistic and personalized nature of the care being provided. Additionally, families can benefit from information and education provided by these businesses. Tiny Totos has an e-learning platform and sells affordable learning packets to parents covering content on childcare, learning, and development. Best Care and Xalco both provide guidance and support to family caregivers on appropriate care, which helps to increase confidence and relieve the stress related to caring for a sick relative.



How care economy businesses are helping to reduce women end-users' time poverty, enhance income, and contribute to broader outcomes for women and their families

One of the most significant ways these businesses are making an impact is by increasing access to affordable, time- and labor-saving devices. For instance, the use of energy-efficient cookstoves - like those produced by Powerstove Energy, Emerging Cooking Solutions, and ATEC - reduces the time spent on cooking and fuel collection. These stoves allow women to save between 30 minutes to 3 hours per day, which they can then allocate to other household tasks, leisure activities, or income-generating work. Nazava Water Filters and Tierra Grata further alleviate the time burden of cooking and care work by offering affordable water filtration systems that save women hours previously spent fetching and purifying water.

> "The underlying stress of taking care of a sick person is gone. For example, my husband used to be stressed because he never had enough time to go and see his mother when she was in the care home but now he can see her all the time and he feels better about that, and naturally that relieves stress for us as a family. Also, my son can spend time with his grandmother, and that is good."
>
> - Female client of 24 hour care

Source: Xalco case study.

> "There are many benefits like I can finish cooking early and spend time with my baby. All my work has become much easier after the arrival of eCook."
>
> - Peer-Influenced Purchaser, 40 years old

Source: ATEC case study.

Beyond time savings, these businesses are also helping to reduce household expenditures, allowing women to focus more on economic activities. For example, Emerging Cooking Solutions reports that 63% of its customers have reduced household expenses on fuel, while some women have been able to use the time saved to engage in income-generating activities. Similarly, Bidhaa Sasa enables 30% of its customers to use labor-saving products for productive purposes, such as renting out products, mobile charging, or using cookstoves for street vending, further boosting women's income. The cookstoves offered by BURN Manufacturing extend the life of firewood, which reduces household fuel expenses and the majority (97%) of users reported increased income generation opportunities because of less time spent cooking. Meanwhile, Nazava's water filters have allowed informal water retailers to earn extra income by selling purified water to their communities.

Health improvements are another significant benefit of these time-saving technologies. Clean cookstoves, such as those produced by BURN Manufacturing and Emerging Cooking Solutions, reduce exposure to toxic gasses from traditional charcoal cooking, leading to fewer incidents of respiratory issues, eye irritation, and other smoke-related health problems. Similarly, water filters reduce the risk of contracting waterborne diseases, with customers reporting fewer cases of diarrhea and overall improved family health. Many of these businesses are also enhancing climate resilience[1].

> "The issues of suffocating when you are using a brazier are no longer there with Supa stove, in terms of health SupaMoto cooker stove has no negative impact on your health."
>
> - Female Customer, 56 years old
>
> *Source: Emerging Cooking Solutions case study.*

Redistribute and Reduce: What works for women?

The care economy business case studies highlight how these businesses are not only easing the burden of care work, but also improving the quality of life for women in low-income households. With more time saved and better health outcomes, women report reduced fatigue and mental stress, greater freedom to rest, and more opportunities to participate in leisure or income-generating activities. These time-saving and affordable solutions can also empower women to take on more paid work and engage in community activities. However, in some cases, the time saved is reallocated to other unpaid domestic work, highlighting the persistent inequities in care responsibilities. This underscores the importance of broader social norm changes to truly reduce the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work on women. Without these shifts in societal expectations around caregiving, time-saving solutions— while valuable—will only partially address the deeper issue of gender inequity in unpaid work.

1 Care economy businesses addressing the care-climate nexus are explored in Grantham, K., Zelikson, B., and Calder, R. (2024). The care economy: where gender-smart investment and climate-smart investment meet. Kore Global, International Development Research Centre.

Figure 4: What works for Redistribute and Reduce businesses

Reduce & Redistribute businesses

Cost & Affordability

Flexible payment models and subsidized services improve accessibility for low-income households. Options like pay-as-you-go or installment plans (e.g., by **Bidhaa Sasa** and **Tierra Grata**) enable women to invest in time-saving technologies without high upfront costs.

Customer Support

Providing women with information and support on caring for their elderly or sick relatives (as done by **Xalco** and **Best Care**)— as well as orientation or training for women to fully understand how to use and maintain labour-saving products— enhances empowerment and wellbeing.

Reduce businesses

Product Variety & Customization

Offering a range of products tailored to different budgets and household needs, as Bidhaa Sasa and Tierra Grata do, ensures that women have access to technologies that suit their financial and practical requirements, making these solutions more accessible and relevant.

Income Earning Activities

Models that enable women to earn additional income, such as providing access to time-saving technologies that can be used for entrepreneurial purposes (for example, selling purified water or renting out solar products), help turn time saved into economic gains for women.

Addressing Household Expenditures

Products that lower household costs (For example, for fuel, water, or healthcare) enable women to allocate more of their resources to other priorities, including income-generating opportunities.

Innovative Financing Models

Subscription-based or rent-to-own models, like those used by Emerging Cooking Solutions and Powerstove, help reduce the financial barrier to accessing time-saving devices. By spreading costs over time, women can manage their budgets more effectively, freeing up resources for other needs.

Doorstep Delivery

Doorstep delivery, provided by businesses like Bidhaa Sasa and Emerging Cooking Solutions, adds convenience, particularly for women in rural areas. Combining this with orientation or training helps women fully understand how to use and maintain the products, improving long-term adoption and empowerment.

Community Engagement & Training

Engaging local communities through training and hands-on installation, as seen with Tierra Grata, empowers women with the knowledge to manage and troubleshoot their products independently. This fosters a sense of ownership and confidence while creating local employment opportunities for sales, installation and maintenance services.

Redistribute businesses

Professional & Specialized Care

Services from trained professionals, like at Best Care, ease stress for women with family members needing skilled care, while improving health, wellbeing, and developmental outcomes for those cared for.

Flexible & Needs-Based Services

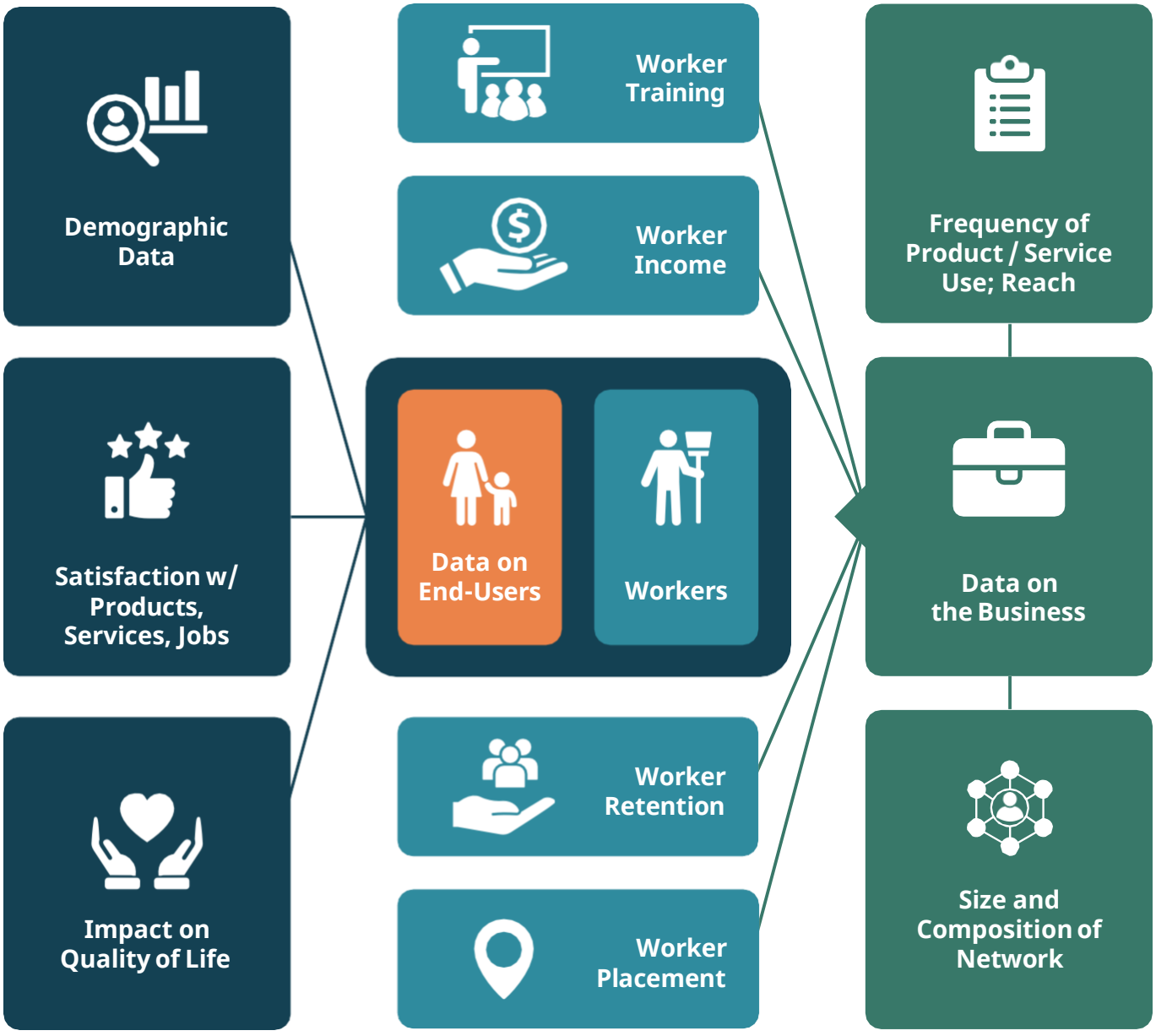
Flexible child pick up and drop off times, as are offered by Phulki, help to accommodate women's varying work schedules. Others, like Xalco and Best Care, offer personalized care plans at home or in clinics, depending on clients' needs.

3. How are care economy businesses capturing impact?

3.1 Data and impact measurement

Care economy businesses in the sample collect three main types of data: information about end-users, data on care workers, and data about the business itself (see Figure 5). This data is typically captured through routine, internal monitoring systems using quantitative and/or qualitative methods, such as online or phone-based surveys and interviews. Apps and online platforms are commonly used for routine data collection, storage, and analysis. For example, Tiny Totos uses in-house apps called Manager App and Field App to collect data from care workers, and ATEC uses three platforms (i.e., HubSpot, Angaza, and Amazon QuickSight) to store and analyze their data.

Figure 5: Types of outcome and impact data collected by care economy businesses



Data on product/service use and the businesses' network

Businesses in the sample collect various forms of operational and usage data including on the frequency of end-users' product or service use, as well as the size and composition of their network. Businesses providing labor-saving technology and devices typically monitor the frequency of product or service usage in real-time. For example, both Powerstove Energy and ATEC monitor real-time data on the frequency of product use among customers, with BURN Manufacturing utilizing IoT technology to track customer engagement within a sample of households. Others - such as Nazava, Jazza Centre, Hogaru, and Strong Start - focus on tracking the number of units sold or distributed, and/or the number of households or organizations served by the business. Some businesses, such as Nazava, gather data on their network size, including partnerships with distributors, resellers, or service providers. Additionally, several collect detailed data on customer types, such as the number of households, SMEs, or schools served, as well as metrics related to performance, such as service standards (e.g. Tiny Totos) and customer engagement levels.

Data on care economy worker training, placement, retention, and income

Businesses focused on paid care workers in the sample collect a variety of output data on care economy workers, including placement, training, income, and retention metrics. These businesses typically track the number of care workers trained and placed in jobs. Several businesses also monitor worker retention and the average length of employment, along with indicators like income levels and job transaction rates. In some cases, data is collected on outcomes for workers post-training. For example, Xalco gathers data from its training institute to measure trainees' progress in academic performance and employment post-training through learner management software. Strong Start undertakes pre/post surveys to better understand the effectiveness of training. A short survey is administered at the start of the training program to understand what the care workers hope to gain from the program, and whether they have received any previous training. Care workers are then resurveyed at the end of the program to assess if the content covered during the training was absorbed.

Demographic and feedback data among end-users and workers

Most care economy businesses in the sample collect simple demographic information from customers, as well as customer feedback on their experiences and satisfaction with care-related products or services. For example, HelloTask collects demographic data on customer households through their in-house app, and administers periodic surveys to solicit customer feedback on the service(s) they received from workers through their platform. AeioTU undertakes satisfaction surveys annually with caregivers to gather feedback on the childcare services it provides from parents. Further, Powerstove Energy's distribution partners collect information on customer experiences with their cookstove products, and a mobile app aids with the collection of data on customer satisfaction. This data is then used to improve product design and marketing.

Care economy businesses directly supporting or employing domestic workers typically gather demographic information as well as feedback data on care workers. Examples include Strong Start, which focuses on collecting detailed demographic data such as income bracket, family size, education, and experience, among others, for the care workers that enroll in its training programs. Symplifica conducts routine worker satisfaction surveys with a gender-based approach that has been designed and applied by Value for Women, while JupViec, collects customer satisfaction ratings as well as data on worker satisfaction. Tiny Totos conducts customer satisfaction surveys as well as deep dive surveys with daycare entrepreneurs/managers, including an annual manager survey that asks

about which training/support/service provided by Tiny Totos the care workers appreciate the most.

Care economy businesses capturing impact

For childcare providers, impact measurement primarily focuses on child development and health outcomes. For instance, Tiny Totos has established a robust data collection system that uses key child development indicators to monitor the growth and wellbeing of children in its supported daycare centers. This approach enables continuous tracking of general health and developmental progress. Similarly, aeioTU conducts longitudinal studies in partnership with the National Institute for Early Education Research to assess child-level outcomes. They maintain a comprehensive database capturing detailed information on child development, health, and nutrition to guide informed decision-making. However, it is less common for these businesses to track outcomes for parents, specifically the economic impact on mothers who access paid childcare. This represents a notable gap in measuring the broader impact of childcare access on families.

For businesses focused on time and labor-saving products and services, data collection often attempts to measure environmental and/or social impacts. Nazava conducts an annual survey by phone to discuss the impact of product usage among customers, including measuring their money saved and the health of the family before and after purchasing a water filter. Similarly, Tierra Grata - which also offers sustainable energy and water solutions - conducts a baseline assessment prior to each community project, followed by ongoing monitoring to measure environmental impacts. Additionally, it conducts testimonial interviews with customer households to learn about the quality of life improvements they've experienced as a result of product use. Although less common, a few businesses also attempt to assess the benefits of their business model on last mile service providers. For example, Bidhaa Sasa conducts a Women Empowerment Survey with 100 'women leaders' (i.e., community-based sales agents) involving in-depth face-to-face interviews discussing topics such as motivation, leadership roles, challenges, and benefits of the work.

Some businesses in the sample, particularly those focused on selling clean energy and water products, track impact in terms of reducing women's time spent on domestic work. An example is ATEC, which, in addition to tracking real-time product usage, also tracks reduction in fuel expenditure among households, along with indoor air pollution and time spent by women collecting fuel and/or cooking. Though not routinely monitored, a study by academics from the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Chicago explored the impacts of BURN Manufacturing's cookstoves, including time savings and health improvements. Others, such as Nazava and Emerging Cooking Solutions, are not currently measuring time savings among customer households, though aim to in the future.

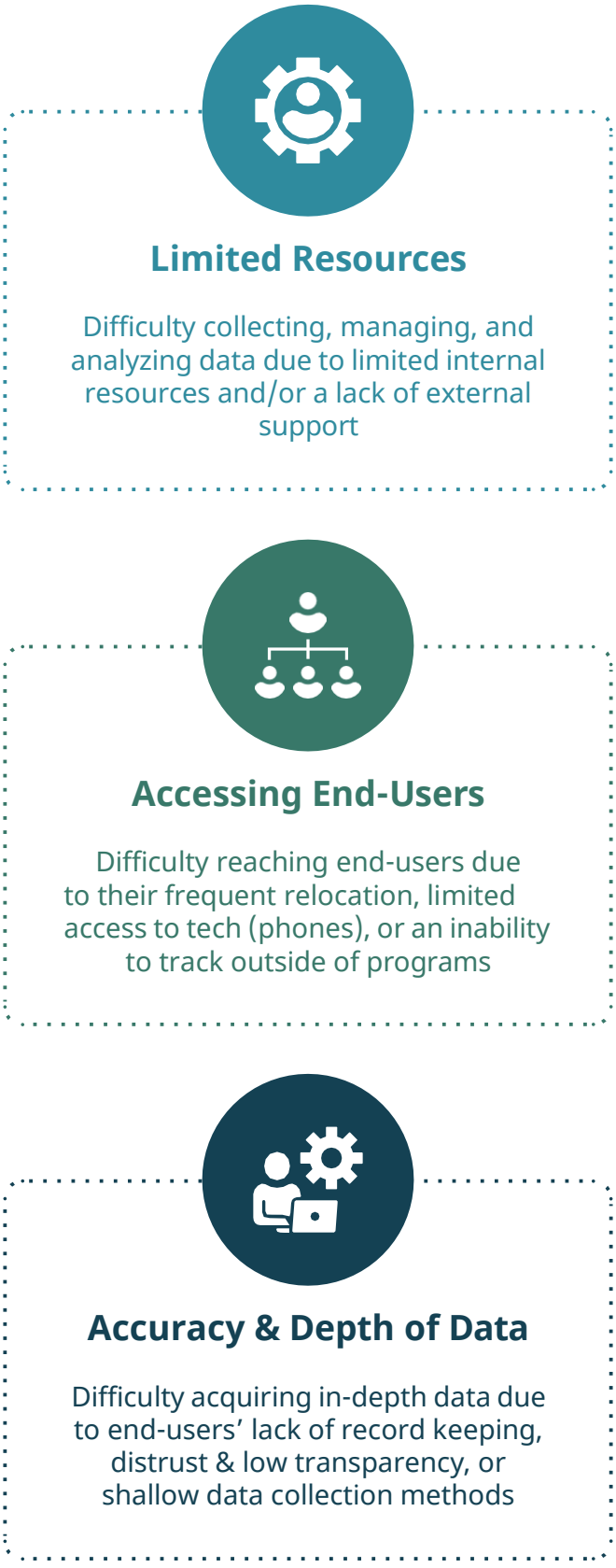
In contrast, businesses focused on paid care workers, less frequently track outcome-level metrics, such as improvements in care worker's livelihoods, enhanced skills, and changes in workers' economic situation. An exception is FEF's Fair Employment Agency (FEA), which, in addition to job placement and retention data, has begun to track household poverty levels and measure progress toward financial goals set by the trainees. Moreover, HelloTask collects data from domestic workers to better understand their challenges and the impact of its services through periodic surveys. These baseline and endline surveys among domestic workers explore topics such as their ability to use feature phones, ease of accessing jobs through HelloTask, changes in their income level, instances of mistreatment/harassment, access to mobile financial services, and their work satisfaction.

3.2 Common gaps and challenges in impact measurement

Care economy businesses in the sample face a variety of challenges with impact measurement. Many care economy businesses face challenges in measuring their impact due to limited resources, including financial constraints, time, personnel, and expertise. These limitations often prevent businesses from effectively consolidating and analyzing data over time, making it difficult to fully understand their impact. Furthermore, accessing end-users can be problematic, particularly when end-users frequently relocate or have limited access to technology, leading to incomplete or biased data. Accuracy and depth of data are also common issues, as businesses may struggle to collect detailed feedback or encounter reluctance from end-users to provide necessary information. See Figure 6 below for a summary of the most common challenges faced by businesses in the sample.

These gaps highlight significant opportunities to support care economy businesses in improving their ability to capture and measure impact. With external technical assistance, businesses can develop stronger methodologies, identify the right indicators, and enhance their data collection and analysis processes. Supporting businesses in these areas can enable them to make data-driven decisions and better understand their contributions to care workers' well-being and women's economic empowerment. Several businesses have already benefited from external partnerships that provided research, indicator development, and data analysis support, demonstrating the potential for more targeted research and impact measurement support. This, in turn, can lead to more comprehensive impact measurement and improved outcomes for both care workers and women end-users.

Figure 6: Common challenges in impact measurement



3.3 Priority indicators

The following are examples of actionable metrics for care economy businesses to track their impact in each of the "4 Rs" (Reward, Recognize, Redistribute, and Reduce) for gender equality outcomes. This is an indicative list, allowing care economy businesses to select and tailor metrics that align with their specific business needs and goals. By using these indicators, care economy businesses and investors can better track progress across the 4 Rs, capturing both quantitative metrics and the rich qualitative feedback necessary for a more comprehensive assessment of care economy businesses' outcomes.

Domain	Example indicators
Reward paid care workers	**Quantitative** • Average pay comparison between care workers and similar roles in other sectors • Percentage of full-time and part-time care workers with access to benefits (e.g. health insurance, paid leave, and retirement plans) • Percentage of care workers paid above minimum wage • Percentage of care workers reporting satisfaction with their compensation and benefits, tracked through annual employee satisfaction surveys • Training hours per worker annually and the percentage of workers accessing professional development • Percentage of care workers with access to flexible work schedules • Number or percentage of women sales agents (last mile service providers) who participate in training, workshops, or mentorship programs • Average percentage increase in income for women leaders since starting their role as sales agents, showing direct financial benefits **Qualitative** • Testimonials on perceived adequacy of benefits and work incentives • Testimonials from care workers on the impact of training on career advancement and job satisfaction • Qualitative feedback from workers on job flexibility and support in balancing caregiving responsibilities • Narratives from women sales agents on how their earnings or role positively impact their family, financial independence, or self-esteem
Recognize the value of both paid and unpaid care work	**Quantitative** • Number and proportion of care workers reporting awareness of care worker rights • Number of care workers formally recognized • Net Promoter Score (NPS) for care services as a reflection of client satisfaction and perceived professionalism • Engagement metrics (e.g., attendance, social media reach) for campaigns that celebrate care work **Qualitative** • Care workers' perceptions of respect and value from employers and clients, assessed through interviews • Community perceptions and attitudes towards gender equitable distribution of unpaid care work • Community perceptions and gender norms around paid and unpaid care work assessed through KIIs and FGDs

Domain	Example indicators
Redistribute unpaid care work	**Quantitative** • Percentage of eligible families or individuals using community care services • The number/proportion of end-user households that report increased sharing of caregiving responsibilities between genders. **Qualitative** • End-user testimonials on the positive impact of care economy products and services contribute to a more gender-equitable distribution of caregiving within households. • Community attitudes and social norms on gender roles in caregiving gathered through interviews or focus groups.
Reduce unpaid care work	**Quantitative** • Percentage of female end-users reporting decreased caregiving and/or unpaid care work responsibilities • Female end-user satisfaction with work-life balance improvements • Number of hours saved by women due to access to professional care services and products • Percentage of female end-users who report a reduced caregiving burden • Percentage increase in employment rates among female caregivers using paid childcare • Average increase in monthly or annual income for female caregivers after accessing childcare services • Increase in working hours or number of workdays per month, indicating improved capacity to engage in or return to work - for female caregivers accessing childcare services **Qualitative** • Female end-user feedback on value for money from care services, especially in terms of quality and satisfaction with services provided • Female end-users' perceived improvements in financial stability and reduction in economic stress due to the ability to work consistently as a result of care economy products and services

4. Conclusions & recommendations

The following recommendations provide actionable steps for care economy businesses, investors, funders, and practitioners to support women's empowerment, foster normative change, and enhance impact measurement, contributing to a more just, impactful, and sustainable care economy. These recommendations draw on evidence of what works from care economy businesses and their customers and outline what more can be done to advance social impact, especially in driving gender-equality outcomes, while offering insights to guide program and research design, monitoring and evaluation, and advocacy efforts.

4.1

Empowering paid care workers

What works?

- **Formalization and rights awareness:** Formalizing care work through legal contracts, fair wages, and social protections helps to stabilize worker income and provide security.
- **Skills development and accreditation:** Offering both soft skills and specialized training enhances job readiness and career growth, self-esteem, and agency, particularly when linked to accreditation.
- **Financial inclusion and professional networks:** Facilitating access to financial services and peer networks supports economic stability and fosters empowerment.
- **Flexibility in work arrangements:** Building flexibility into full-time roles enhances workers' overall well-being and job satisfaction.

Now what?

- **Ecosystem actors** can advocate for policies that support the formalization of care work, linking skills development with accreditation.
- **Care economy businesses** can incorporate efforts to increase workers' and employers' awareness of care economy workers' rights.
- **Care economy businesses** can use insights from this paper on 'what works' to enhance business models and activities. Investors can also use these insights to guide assessment of and engagement with care economy businesses.

4.2 Empowering end-users

What works?

- **Transforming gender norms:** Pairing interventions with community initiatives aimed at changing social norms around gender roles to reduce the unpaid care burden on women.
- **Engaging community groups:** Collaborating with local women's groups and community organizations to reach marginalized users and make care services more accessible.
- **Affordable and accessible services:** Maintaining affordability, especially for low-income, rural users, to support inclusivity and ensure greater reach.
- **Income-generating opportunities:** Empowering women end-users by creating opportunities for them to become sales agents or community mobilizers, as seen with Bidhaa Sasa and Tierra Grata.

Now what?

- **Care economy businesses** can support income generation for women end-users through opportunities like sales roles, carbon credits, and business models which support women's entrepreneurship.
- **Investors** can provide technical assistance to help care economy businesses maintain affordability and scale impact.
- **Care economy businesses** can use insights from this paper on 'what works' to maximize gender equality outcomes.
  Investors can also use these insights to guide assessment of and engagement with care economy businesses.

4.3 Enabling environment

What works?

- **Advocating for workers' rights:** Partnering with employers and policymakers to advocate for formalization and protect workers' rights strengthens the care economy.
- **Promoting social norm shifts:** Engaging in campaigns that challenge traditional gender roles and promote new more equitable norms to reduce the burden of unpaid care work on women.
- **Using data for advocacy:** Sharing impact data and case studies to demonstrate the effectiveness of care economy businesses in supporting women's empowerment and shifting social norms.

Now what?

- **Investors** can invest in businesses that challenge harmful and inequitable gender norms and promote care work's societal value, looking for those that advocate for gender equity in the care economy.
- **Investors and other ecosystem actors** can support care economy businesses to engage with policymakers to influence policies that formalize care work and provide social protections.
- **Ecosystem actors** can leverage data insights from successful models in advocacy efforts to influence policy and secure additional support from investors and development actors.

4.4 Impact measurement and evidence building

What works?

- **Collaborating with research partners:** Partnering with research institutions to track social and economic impacts, including time use, income changes, and financial inclusion, provides a robust evidence base.
- **Capturing women's voices:** Including qualitative data ensures that impact measurement captures the lived experiences of women, providing richer insights. Examples are provided in this blog.
- **Developing rigorous frameworks:** Adopting strong impact measurement frameworks that assess both quantitative and qualitative outcomes aids in tracking progress on gender equity goals.

Now what?

- **Investors and donors** can fund monitoring and evaluation to ensure impact assessment focuses on real beneficiary outcomes, particularly around economic independence and soft skills.
- **Ecosystem actors** can promote deeper, more meaningful benchmarking in impact data across the sector, moving beyond cursory metrics to track outcomes related to each of the 4 Rs. Focus on priority outcome metrics that measure the empowering effects of these businesses on women, and shifts in norms around paid and unpaid work. A list of priority indicators identified by this review is provided in section 3.3.
- **Investors and partners** can ensure technical assistance for businesses to develop theories of change and engage in impact deep dives, as this process has proven highly beneficial across many businesses as part of IDRC's Care Economy Knowledge Hub.

Annex

Sample businesses

Business Name	Service Area	Region	Country	Business Type	Business Stage	Female Founder
Powerstove Energy	Affordable and clean energy/water products	Africa	Nigeria	For-Profit	Early Stage	Yes
Emerging Cooking Solutions	Affordable and clean energy/water products	Africa	Zambia	For-Profit	Growth	Yes
Bidhaa Sasa	Affordable and clean energy/water products	Africa	Kenya	For-Profit	Expansion	Yes
Tiny Totos Kenya	Formalization and training of informal care workers	Africa	Kenya	Social Enterprise	Expansion	Yes
BURN Manufacturing	Affordable and clean energy/water products	Africa	Kenya	For-Profit	Expansion	No
Strong Start	Formalization and training of informal care workers	Africa	Kenya	For-Profit	Early Stage	Yes
Xalco	Care service provider	Africa	Kenya & South Sudan	For-Profit	Growth	Yes
Jazza Centre	Care worker job platform	Africa	Kenya	For-Profit	Mature	Yes
Nazava Water Filters	Affordable and clean energy/water products	Asia	Indonesia & Kenya	For-Profit	Growth	Yes
JupViec.vn	Care worker job platform	Asia	Vietnam	For-Profit	Growth	No

Business Name	Service Area	Region	Country	Business Type	Business Stage	Female Founder
Fair Employment Foundation	Care worker job platform	Asia	Philippines	Hybrid	Growth	Yes
ATEC	Affordable and clean energy/water products	Asia	Bangladesh & Cambodia	For-Profit	Growth	No
HelloTask	Care worker job platform	Asia	Bangladesh	For-Profit	Early Stage	No
Phulki	Care service provider	Asia	Bangladesh	Hybrid	Mature	Yes
Homely	Care service provider	Latin America	Mexico	For-Profit	Growth	Yes
Symplifica	Care worker job platform	Latin America	Colombia	Non-Profit	Growth	Yes
Hogaru	Care worker job platform	Latin America	Colombia	For-Profit	Growth	No
aeioTU	Care service provider	Latin America	Colombia	Social Enterprise	Growth	Yes
Tierra Grata	Affordable and clean energy/water products	Latin America	Colombia	For-Profit	Early Stage	Yes
Best Care	Care service provider	Latin America	Honduras	For-Profit	Growth	Yes

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