



► Providing care through the social and solidarity economy

June 2024

Zimbabwe: An assessment summary

Key points

- The decent work and employment context in Zimbabwe remains challenging with high levels of unemployment, underemployment, and informality.
- **Street vendors with family responsibilities often work and live in areas that are more likely to lack quality care provision**, which results in them bringing their care dependents, often children, to unsafe working environments.
- **Domestic workers in Zimbabwe face decent work deficits, including low pay, exclusion from social protection systems and low unionization rates.** The provision of childcare services through a cooperative model would not only provide them with a **safe place for their children** but allow them to **enhance their bargaining power with employers and governments.**

Background

Zimbabwe's economy is characterized by high levels of informality, predominantly affecting young people and women who are often engaged in low-security jobs such as street vending and domestic work. These workers face a host of challenges including exposure to violence, a lack of formal labour rights, and exclusion from social protection systems, which are further compounded by the absence of adequate maternity protection and accessible childcare services. Many parents, particularly mothers who more often undertake the responsibility of unpaid care responsibilities, are forced to bring their children to unsafe work environments. Furthermore, care workers often experience low wages, limited benefits, and poor conditions. Covid-19 further exposed the vulnerabilities of the care economy in Zimbabwe, highlighting the need for a more equitable and sustainable approach.

In light of this, the ILO's Gender, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Branch (GEDI) and Cooperative, Social and Solidarity Economy Unit (COOP/SSE), initiated "[Cooperative Care Provision as a Gender Transformative Decent Work Solution](#)", an innovative cross-regional, multi-country programme. It follows an established intervention model involving conducting assessments of local contexts, development of capacity-building tools and running pilot training programmes. Cooperative models and other entities in the social and solidarity economy, recognized for their potential to democratize workspaces and distribute benefits more equitably, are proposed as a viable solution to integrate care services into the informal economy. As a first step, and in response to requests from StreetNet International, a national assessment was conducted, focusing on childcare needs among informal workers in urban areas, with a specific focus on Harare. This included desk research and interviews with various stakeholders.

Key findings

The national assessment was largely targeted at street vendors and domestic workers and sought to better understand the legal environment around the provision of care services through cooperatives and other SSE entities, while identifying key stakeholders (public, private, community-based, multi-stakeholders). The study considered various economic models (NGOs and cooperatives) and concluded that despite some drawbacks, the cooperative model is the most viable option for Zimbabwe. Key findings from the study include:

- **Supportive legislative framework with gaps:** Zimbabwe's legislative environment is generally supportive of cooperatives, but implementation and awareness gaps remain.
- **Informal and fragmented market conditions:** The market for care services in Harare and other urban centres is characterized by a scarcity of formal care providers resulting in a gap in the availability of quality, affordable care services.
- **Societal perceptions and gender disparities:** Care work is predominantly viewed as a woman's responsibility, which not only perpetuates significant gender disparities in care burdens but also affects the valuation of care work and the economic opportunities available to women.
- **Economic and social potential:** Initiatives formalizing care through cooperatives have demonstrated potential to improve both the quality of care and the economic and social conditions of care providers, contributing to broader social and economic benefits. Cooperatives have an expanding presence in Zimbabwe but have not yet expanded into providing care services.
- **Challenges and opportunities for growth:** While existing cooperatives face challenges such as financial sustainability, limited organizational capacity, and a need for skills development, there are substantial opportunities for growth through leveraging cooperative networks and structures.

► A childcare initiative is good as it provides a cheaper alternative and enables our children to be safer. A childcare cooperative will give me peace of mind."

► Street vendor in Harare

Recommendations

- **Multi-stakeholder collaboration:** Establish a collaborative environment involving government bodies, local authorities, and organizations supporting informal workers to enhance the development and reach of childcare cooperatives.
- **Policy and legal framework enhancements:** Modify the cooperative policy and legal framework to allow cooperatives more autonomy and flexibility to respond to community needs more effectively.
- **Capacity building and financial strategies:** Leverage existing capacity-building initiatives and financial support like tax exemptions and grants. Establish connections with Savings and Credit Cooperative Organization/Society to facilitate access to finance, and consider service extensions to parents in the community as a financial strategy.
- **Trust-building and knowledge-sharing:** Implement continuous engagement and awareness-raising campaigns to build trust and ensure transparency.
- **Phased growth and operational planning:** Develop a phased approach for implementing childcare services, starting with pilot projects and expanding.

Next steps

The ILO will host a validation workshop in July 2024 to determine whether the assessment accurately reflects the needs and priorities on the ground. Participants will include representatives from relevant stakeholders including cooperative organizations, associations of street vendors and domestic workers, government representatives, cooperative support organizations, social partners, and non-governmental organizations. The primary goal is to validate the assessment findings, strengthen the proposed way forward, and deliberate on an action plan, including the roll-out of ILO training tools.



ILO capacity building tools for care cooperatives, Think.CareCoop & Start.CareCoop were developed in 2023 and are ready for roll-out in pilot-countries.

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