



Achieving safe and healthy business growth: Expanding the concept of consumer protection to include child protection within women's economic empowerment initiatives

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Abstract

Drawing on data from in-country qualitative research and published literature, this article examines the intersection between women's economic entrepreneurship (WEE), child labor, and unacceptable conditions of work (UACW) to develop a framework for healthy business growth that can be applied in any developing setting. The findings suggest that as investments in women's businesses increase, the risk of child labor or harmful working conditions may also increase. This article outlines how specific financial services can be utilized and improved by WEE Actors to prevent child labor.



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Introduction

Few would expect that investments in women's enterprises are increasing the risk or incidence of child labor or harmful working conditions for an entrepreneur and her children. However, as women entrepreneurs struggle to manage the labor burdens of their businesses with household tasks and unpaid care work, many are turning to those closest in reach for help – their children (Camillo et al. 2019).

Financial service providers (FSPs) who support women's economic empowerment (WEE) through the provision of financial and non-financial services face both a responsibility and an opportunity concerning child protection. Any service that increases women's time and investment in income generation or that contributes to financial tradeoffs within the household can create the unintended consequence of child labor. While FSP client protection principles ("Consumer Protection" 2021) address the risk of over indebtedness, they do not--but should--extend to other unintended consequences that may impact more than the client, such as child labor, gender-based violence, financial stress, or environmental degradation. On the other hand, FSPs have an opportunity to better meet the financial investment and protection needs of women entrepreneurs through the provision of financial services, familial support, quality education, and safe, legal work, which contributes to FSPs' financial and social bottom lines.

The following sections highlight the research on unintended consequences of supporting women's enterprises through the provision of financial services and propose a practical way forward for FSPs to address child protection within their mandate.

Methods

Search Strategy and Study Selection

The literature review portion of this study was conducted between April 2019 and September 2021. The project team reviewed approximately 400 research studies, papers, legislation, videos, and other documents. The search was restricted to content published from 2000 and onwards. Only those available in English were considered. Specific search terms included “‘child labor’ OR ‘child protection’ OR ‘working children’ OR ‘forced labor’ AND ‘women’s empowerment’ OR ‘economic empowerment’ OR ‘microfinance’ OR ‘health loan’ OR ‘health insurance’ OR ‘health savings’ OR ‘agriculture loan’ OR ‘agriculture insurance’ OR ‘education loan’ OR ‘savings group’ OR ‘cash transfer.’”

Qualitative Research

A series of targeted interviews were conducted by phone and in-person with pilot-country stakeholders representing 36 organizations. In El Salvador and the Philippines, 28 focus groups with female and male entrepreneurs at various stages of business implementation in rural and urban communities, children (ages 11 to 17), and FSP field staff were also conducted.

Focus group participants shared common beliefs about what constitutes child labor, why children are employed, perceived labor burdens, business needs, and the impact of social norms on their business growth. Direct quotations for these interviews are included where relevant.

Data Analysis

After completion of the field visits, the authors analyzed information from the literature review and qualitative data to draw out similarities and differences between the global and country levels, and between the two pilot countries.



Results

Women's Enterprises

Approximately 163 million women in 74 economies around the world were starting or running new businesses in 2014, while an additional 111 million were operating established businesses (Kelley et al. 2017).

Unpaid domestic work falls disproportionately on women; women spend three times as many hours as men on unpaid domestic and care tasks, approximately 4.2 compared to 1.7 hours (UN 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to greatly restrict women's future economic participation (UN 2020). Women are 20% more likely than men to start a new business out of necessity and are primarily concerned with survival rather than growth. This holds true at all levels of development (Kelley et al. 2017). Women resort to entrepreneurship for the flexibility it offers to balance work and family responsibilities as most women start businesses during their reproductive years (Kelley et al. 2017). Women in developing economies face greater barriers to formal labor market entry turning to entrepreneurship as an answer to unemployment and poverty (Minniti and Naude 2010). While developing countries show a greater affinity for entrepreneurship, relatively fewer businesses reach a mature stage (McKenzie and Paffhausen 2017).

Child Labor and Unacceptable Conditions of Work (UACW)

Child Labor

Global progress against child labor has stagnated since 2016 (ILO and UNICEF 2021). In 2020, an estimated 160 million children were engaged in child labor; 86.6 million in Sub-Saharan Africa, 50.6 million in Central/Southern/Eastern Asia, 10.1 million in North Africa and Western Asia, 8.2 million in Latin America, and 3.8 million in Europe and North America (ILO and UNICEF 2021).

Child labor compounds social inequality and places children at greater risk of falling behind in school and being vulnerable to poverty and exclusion (UNICEF 2021). With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, an additional 8.9 million children may be in child labor by the end of 2022 due to rising poverty (ILO and UNICEF 2020).

Child labor is more common in rural areas (122.7 million compared to 37.3 million in urban areas), with most children working in the informal sector, in temporary work, part-time, on-call, and other forms of non-standard work (ILO and UNICEF 2021). The largest percentage of child laborers are involved in agriculture (70%), followed by services (17%) and industry (12%). Within the agricultural sector, most child laborers work in subsistence and commercial farming, doing tasks such as planting, weeding, applying chemicals, and harvesting crops. Domestic work, which occupies 11.5 million children, is the most common type of service sector work. Additionally, child laborers are found working in hotels and restaurants, on the streets, (e.g. selling, washing cars, or shining shoes), in transportation, repair shops, markets, garbage dumps, and industry (e.g. carpets, handicrafts, and fireworks). An estimated 72% of all child labor occurs within families, primarily on family farms or enterprises (ILO and UNICEF 2021). While boys are more likely to be involved in agriculture, industry and hazardous work, girls are more likely to work excessive hours and do household chores (UNICEF 2019). Special attention should be given to informal microenterprises on the lower tiers of supply chains where child labor and human rights issues are most prevalent and where COVID-19 has been particularly devastating (ILO and UNICEF 2020).

UACW

Estimates indicate that 82% of women employed in developing countries are in vulnerable work, (i.e., low paying, under difficult conditions of work, and with a reliance on self-employment) compared to 72% of men (ILO 2018). The frequency of accidents is significantly higher for microenterprises, where more informal workers are employed, and where there is less regulation than in larger businesses. A survey



conducted by the ILO of 4,748 microentrepreneurs (both men and women) administered by 22 FSPs revealed that many of their workplaces were unsafe or dangerous, leading to accidents, lower productivity, and lower incomes (ILO and Mannheim University 2014). In developing countries, many accidents and illnesses go under-reported simply because there are fewer options for healthcare treatment. Workers in lower-paying positions in the formal sector often lack basic social protections, such as pension coverage, paid sick leave, unemployment insurance, and workers' compensation (Adlung 2014). Furthermore, women entrepreneurs, and their children who labor for them, in agriculture, sales, mechanics, simple manufacturing, and even food production, are exposed to work hazards, which can have both short- and long-term negative effects on their mental and physical health (Camillo et al. 2019).

The Intersection of Women's Entrepreneurship, Child Labor, and UACW

An Unintended Consequence of WEE: Child Labor

Interventions that have been shown to reduce child labor and UACW include conditional and unconditional cash transfers (CTs), health insurance, and those that facilitate access to education. Literature analyzing the effectiveness of other types of interventions such as awareness raising, advocacy, labor cooperatives, and savings groups is limited (Camillo et al. 2019).

However, there have been efforts to assess the unintended consequences of investing in WEE, such as the increased risk of gender-based violence (Gray et al. 2021) and environmental degradation (Allet and Hudon 2013; USAID n.d.). Research on the unintended consequence of child labor and UACW within women's businesses is growing. If any of the following conditions are met, the risk of child labor and UACW within a woman's business is high:

- **Business maturity is low.** There is a higher risk of child labor during the *nascent stages* of a family business, when production is small and concentrated in or near the home, and when the family may still be receiving resources (i.e., CTs or other equipment) to grow its business (Edmonds 2016, CIDA 2007). As household businesses mature and community incomes rise, so does the demand for higher quality, more specialized goods, causing production to shift to outside the home and reducing the likelihood that children are employed in the business (Edmonds 2016).
- **Focus on low cost of children's labor.** The use of child labor in a woman's enterprise significantly influences its lucrativeness since children tend to be unpaid, thus lowering businesses' overall costs (De Mel, McKenzie, and Woodruff 2008). One female entrepreneur in El Salvador shared, "*You have to have kids so that they support you; it's an investment and a savings plan.*"
- **Family labor preference.** Some entrepreneurs prefer family members to work in the business due to low trust of others and impact on their profits (Fumagalli and Martin 2015). For example, in El Salvador and the Philippines, women were often reluctant to hire outside help (Camillo et al. 2019), saying "*our sons and daughters are not paid, and the profit goes into the family income. If you hire an external person that money goes away.*" When these women were asked if they foresee a day of hiring a non-family member, they replied "*Never.*" While relying on children to work may raise current family income and resolve trust issues, it reduces families' future income (Beegle et al. 2006).
- **Experiencing an income shock.** When a family's business or investment fails, they may turn to children's labor to increase household income to repay loans or to create additional resources that act as a precautionary buffer against future shocks (Landmann and Frölich 2015). While sometimes considered a temporary solution, it can have long-term negative implications for the children's education, particularly if entry into labor disrupts their schooling (Blume and Breyer 2011). In Tanzania, when households were hit by an income shock, they increased their use of child labor, typically by having children substitute adult labor by gathering firewood and water (Beegle et al. 2006). A female entrepreneur in El Salvador shared her anguish over her husband's illness as they live "*Coyol quebrado, coyol comido,*" a metaphor to suggest that they live 'hand-to-mouth.'
- **Lack of social protections and support for family** (e.g., health care, child or elder care, social security systems, etc.) (Lehmann 2010). According to the United Nations (UN), 70% of women's



employment in developing economies is in the informal sector where protections such as paid sick leave and unemployment benefits are rare (UN 2020).

- **Business is agricultural.** Households in Tanzania with non-farm enterprises (NFEs) were less likely to employ children and had a higher rate of child school attendance than households with farm enterprises (Brandt et al. 2017). Due to a shortage of adult labor in Malawi, households in the agriculture sector used boys' labor in the fields (particularly among households with 5+ acres of land), while girls were more likely to engage in household economic activities (Hazarika and Saragui 2008).
- **Imbalanced household decision-making power.** When women have income-generating capacity and are empowered, their preference for supporting children's schooling has a positive impact on their children's school participation (Dammert et al. 2017). In Mozambique, the probability that daughters were enrolled in primary school was positively associated with women's level of autonomy in decision making (Luz and Agadjanian 2015). In Malawi, children from female-headed households were significantly less likely to work and more likely to go to school than children from male-headed households (Hazarika and Saragui 2008). However, in Tanzania, participation by female borrowers in microcredit programs increased the likelihood of girls working in the business (Tundui and Tundui 2018). In Bangladesh, NFEs owned by fathers were less likely to employ children than NFEs owned by mothers (Brandt et al. 2017).
- **Lack of awareness.** Many lack understanding of what constitutes child labor in women enterprises, often believing that only forced labor, or labor performed without the knowledge or supervision of the parents, and *not* work performed in support of their families (even when involving hazardous activities, long hours, or interruptions to schooling) is classified as child labor. To a group of entrepreneurs in the Philippines, child labor means "*being forced to work by their parents and are hurt when they don't comply... [parents] force them to steal, work in cybersex dens. They don't send their kids to school. All the earnings of the kids go to the parents only.*" WEE Actors may also lack awareness of these problems (Camillo et al. 2019).
- **Poverty.** Economic hardship or financial uncertainty, including poverty, has been identified as one of the most prominent risk factors for the use of child labor (UNICEF 2021). Studies have shown that as poverty rates decline, so does child labor (Edmonds 2007).

The Role of Financial Services in Mitigating or Exacerbating Risks of Child Labor and UACW in Women's Enterprises

Entrepreneurs' use of financial services has also been shown to influence the risk of their children experiencing child labor. The following sections will cover (1) the overall impact of the financial service, (2) known trade-offs the service may have, particularly regarding child labor, and (3) specific design considerations to improve how the product works.

Microcredit

Income poverty is one of the root causes of child labor; therefore, by increasing income, initiatives such as microcredit have the potential to reduce the incidence of child labor (Blume and Breyer 2011). Microloans are particularly relevant in the informal sector for small, rural businesses (Blume and Breyer 2011). Furthermore, access to financial services can help families manage risk and achieve greater long-term financial security, thus eliminating the need to resort to child labor (Blume and Breyer 2011; Islam and Choe 2010).

While microcredit, void of other alternatives, has been actively used by low-income households to meet emergencies (Karlan and Zinman 2012), it is not an effective means to manage risks due to loan sizes, eligibility, and unsuitability to address a household's short-term need for cash and has had inconsistent outcomes on business growth (J-PAL 2015). Researchers caution against the promotion of microcredit as a COVID-19 recovery strategy, suggesting that the lack of social safety nets would lead to increased physical and emotional exhaustion as women try to meet the terms of the loans while experiencing heightened levels of unpaid work (Brickell et al. 2020).



Tradeoffs of Microcredit

While the negative consequence of women's use of microcredit in the form of overindebtedness is the most documented (Schicks and Rosenberg 2011), microcredit product design features and FSP practices can also have the unintended consequence of increasing child labor and harmful business practices. Microcredit can have a greater adverse impact on younger children, particularly among girls in societies with traditional gender roles, and on children of low-income single parent and less-educated households (Islam and Choe 2010; Tundui and Tundui 2018). Furthermore, older children may take on heavier caretaking responsibilities when their mothers are not available or drop out of school for paid work or when the costs of secondary school are higher than primary school, to give their younger siblings a chance to go to school (Camillo et al. 2019). Among landowning households in rural Malawi, access to microcredit increased the probability of both boys and girls undertaking domestic work, but children kept up their attendance at school by sacrificing leisure time. In Bolivia, Egypt, India, and Tanzania, researchers found that the amount of time children spent working increased with the size of the loan (CIDA 2007).

When loan repayment periods are short, interest rates high, or recovery techniques very aggressive, families may resort to selling productive assets or borrowing from money lenders to maintain a clean record of repayment, and to ensure future access to microcredit from formal providers (Khandker and Mahmud 2012), resorting to use of child labor to supplement the household's income (ILO 2006; Islam and Choe 2011), or resulting in borrower suicide (Ashta et al. 2015).

Microcredit Design Considerations

When flexibility in product design is introduced (e.g. repayment schedules and liability models (group vs. individual)), FSPs and clients alike have experienced positive benefits (Gine and Karlan 2009, Field et al. 2012, Shonchoy and Kurosaki 2014). FSPs experience improvements in client acquisition and retention, a reduction in transaction costs, and lower defaults. Clients experience improvements in microcredit demand and consumption smoothing, increased investments in higher-return businesses, and reduced financial stress.

To mitigate risk of increasing likelihood of child labor, these findings suggest that FSPs should:

- *Offer grace periods* between loan disbursement and the start of repayment (Field et al. 2012).
- *Allow repayment holidays* (e.g., instituting bi-monthly or monthly payments, allowing borrowers to identify times when they do not have to pay) (Schicks and Rosenberg 2011).
- *Align repayment schedules* with seasonal cash flows (Czura 2015).
- *Consider flexible interest rates and longer repayment periods* to help entrepreneurs be more long-term in their thinking (Czura 2015; Churchill 2003; Field and Pande 2008).
- *Restructure or refinance loans in case of crises*, such as crop failure, robbery, fire, or health emergencies (Schicks and Rosenberg 2011; J-PAL 2015).
- *Increase manageable loan sizes* to allow entrepreneurs to employ adult workers to reduce labor burden (Carothers et al. 2010).
- *Train field staff on appropriate loan recovery techniques* (Schicks and Rosenberg 2011).
- When delivering new loans, *collaborate with entrepreneurs* to set limits for children's time working in the business (CIDA 2007) and to identify the positive skills that children can gain in the business to ensure there are long-term benefits for children (Carothers et al. 2010).

Education Finance

When children are engaged in child labor, they experience poor test scores (Emerson et al. 2017) and poor educational attainment (Ray 2002). One third of child laborers are not able to attend school at all (ILO and UNICEF 2021). However, in some cases, children's working permits them to attend school by helping their families pay for school fees (Manacorda 2006).



While microenterprise loans are often used to pay school fees and school-associated costs, evidence suggests very little impact on educational outcomes (Banerjee et al. 2015a). Though microcredit often increases the demand for education because of income, risk-management, and gender effects, it also increases demands for child labor among credit-constrained households that cultivate land or operate labor-intensive microenterprises (Maldonado and González-Vega 2008). In India, though microcredit did not increase overall spending on education, it did increase spending on the greater social status of the family (Viswanath 2018).

Tradeoffs of Education Finance

Research on financial instruments designed specifically to assist households with out-of-pocket educational expenses is still limited. When FSPs provide education finance support, they often address supply- and demand-side constraints by providing financial resources for the creation of new schools and maintenance of existing ones, particularly for low-cost private schools (LCPSs) that provide alternatives to public education. Investments in LCPSs in Uganda were associated with improved education outcomes. Coupled with non-financial support such as financial literacy training, demand-side financial products for households include education loans to pay for school fees, uniforms, school material or books (RIFSC n.d.).

In Kenya, 98% of school loan clients reported using a school loan for school fees *and* lower rates of absenteeism, but 58% mentioned having difficulty repaying the loan due to sickness, deaths in the family, or poorly performing businesses (Opportunity EduFinance 2020). In Nigeria, a low interest loan designed to help parents spread lump sum school fee payments due at the beginning of the school year over a monthly repayment schedule had no significant impact on child labor incidence, schooling outcomes, or attitudes towards work and school (ILO and Mannheim University 2014). In fact, the study noted *increased* hours worked and missed school days. Over time, the FSP revised this product as they realized households were diverting the loan funds intended for education fees to other household needs; they now send the loan proceeds directly to the school (Ovenseri 2020).

Design Considerations

Opportunity EduFinance's Program estimates a worldwide \$23.9 billion market for education finance: \$7 billion for LCPSs and \$16.9 billion for household education finance products (Opportunity EduFinance 2018). FSPs lending to LCPSs should (Sheridan 2021):

- *Be done in tranches*; for example, after procurement of materials, after building the school, after hiring staff, etc.
- *Consider forms of collateral other than the school itself* as this would mean closing the school due to default.
- *Time the loan repayments* when the school is receiving school fees.
- *Provide technical support to the LCPS owners* as they may be educators by training and not skilled in school management, child protection, or mentoring other teachers. Moreover, lessons learned regarding financing for school fees suggests that FSPs lending to clients should (Opportunity EduFinance 2018):
 - *Conduct market research* to align the loan size with actual school costs.
 - *Disburse loan payments directly to the school* when school fees are due to avoid a client spending the money on non-educational expenses.
 - If direct disbursement to school is not possible, *consider offering small top-up loans to existing borrowers*.
 - *Time loan payments* to when income is earned by the client; ex. after harvest.
 - *Create loan terms that are no longer than the school term* to avoid over-indebtedness.
 - *Ensure the loan size is affordable*; e.g. within the 20-30% threshold of debt capacity (Sheridan 2021).

In 2016, the European Microfinance Platform award focused on innovations in education finance and noted that creative approaches to education finance can also include microinsurance products that can be linked to education savings plans such that if there is a household shock (e.g. the death or disability of a parent),



the insurance can cover school fees. Migrant families can be encouraged to use remittances for education by linking remittance products to matched savings, education loans, or savings for higher education (Mendelson et al. 2016).

Health Financing

Microinsurance is one of the most obvious financial tools that households can use to anticipate and respond to high-cost shocks, with the highest demand for health insurance and disability insurance (Soutter 2019). Most traditional and mobile microinsurance schemes cover hospitalization or in-patient costs (Matul and Churchill 2012; Raithatha and Naghavi 2018; Dammert et al. 2017). However, low-income households have low perceived value of hospitalization products, even though they are the most widely available (Matul and Churchill 2012). In India, low-income households were three times more likely to fall into poverty because of outpatient expenditures than hospitalization expenditures (Berman et al. 2010); over a ten-year frame, outpatient expenditures are ten times more burdensome for poor households than hospitalization expenses (Pott and Holtz 2013). Additionally, indirect health expenses, such as loss of income, transportation, special food, and bribes paid at the hospital can account for 70% of total treatment expenses (Magnoni et al. 2012).

Hospital cash insurance products, which provide a cash payout in the event of a hospital stay, are designed to cover indirect expenses (Rohatgi et al. 2019). Mobile money, such as that provided by M-PESA in Kenya, has also been found to function like self-insurance whereby domestic remittances protect households experiencing a health shock from reducing their consumption on nonmedical expenses. Nonusers gave up other consumption items (like food) to cover their medical expenses (Jack and Suri 2014).

Tradeoffs of Health Finance

Health crises often cause financial shocks in poor households that lead to child labor, as children work to earn income to pay for family medical expenses or forgo schooling to provide care for a relative (Chandani and Garand 2013). Demand for health financing support is often higher than any other financial risk management solution, and demand far exceeds the supply (Matul et al. 2013). Combining microcredit with additional services can better support families because they reduce the pressure families feel to use their limited microcredit funds to satisfy immediate or basic needs (STRIVE 2015a).

Households in Pakistan experienced a decrease in the incidence of hazardous labor, overall hours of work, and school absences when families received microinsurance for every member of their household, and training on how to make claims (Landmann and Frölich 2015). The reduction in child labor tended to be greater for boys, who were more involved in work than girls.

In Bangladesh, the effects of insurance interventions varied by income level; in extremely poor households that were given quasi health and/or credit-life microinsurance in combination with microcredit, child labor rates were lower. Advanced payments from employers or landlords were found to significantly reduce child labor. However, while microcredit helped reduce child labor in moderately poor households, microinsurance had no effect on child labor in households over the poverty line (Chakrabarty 2012).

Design Considerations

Grameen Foundation documented several lessons for designing effective health financing products (Gray et al. 2019):

- *Conduct market research* to understand the types and amounts of out-of-pocket health expenses, cash-flow constraints (to match loan, savings, or insurance payments with available household cash), women's decision-making power related to their ability to decide when, where, and how they will seek treatment, and the tradeoffs households make when an illness or accident occurs while using existing financial services.
- *Be flexible and superior to borrowing from one's social network.* Funds from friends, family, and moneylenders often are easier to access and provide more flexibility when borrowing and



repaying. Otherwise, mobile money is one way to leverage social networks for health expense support (Jack and Suri 2014).

- *Minimize paperwork and validation of health costs*, which can create barriers to use since health events are perceived as emergencies.
- *Design fast and easy disbursements*; patients should not have to pay first and get reimbursed later.
- *Provide a portfolio of health financing options* as no one health financing tool can cover all health costs. Products should aim to address preventive care (e.g. annual check-ups) and curative care (e.g. illness), as well as financing that responds to small-impact (e.g. cough or cold) and large-impact (e.g. catastrophic illness or accident, or disability) health issues.
- *Be careful of bundling insurance*. Not all clients benefit from obligatory products and may drop-out altogether to avoid paying for an unwanted service.
- *Cover the entire family, not just the primary user* so that minor ailments do not escalate into major issues by putting off seeking treatment.
- *Evaluate client satisfaction with the availability, quality, and access to the health services themselves*, as dissatisfaction with health care providers may limit use of health financing services. This may require partnerships between the health and financial sectors. Informal health providers, such as traditional healers, should not be overlooked as low-income households often use them as a first line of care.

Agricultural Financing and Insurance

Limited access to financial services has long been recognized as a major constraint to agricultural development (FAO 2002). FSPs often cite lack of collateral, high transaction costs for reaching rural clients, lag between farmer investment needs and revenues for repayment, crop failure, and price risks for their lack of investment in agricultural financing (Langyintuo 2020). When households do not have access to savings, credit, and insurance, the likelihood of using child labor as an extra source of income and buffer against shocks increases; therefore, theoretically, access to financial services among farming households should reduce child labor. However, there are very few studies that have tested this hypothesis within agriculture (Ravetti 2020).

Risk is a key barrier to investment for smallholder farmers (Karlan, Ratan and Zinman 2014). Jack and Suri (2014) found that mobile money had a significant impact on the ability of households to share risk, which is attributable to the associated reduction in transaction costs for sending and receiving money and resulted in users' consumption being unaffected by the shock. A systematic review on financial instruments designed for risk management (e.g. those provided by banks, self-help groups, input providers, agribusinesses, and insurance providers) concluded that most studies have focused on the take-up of financial instruments and the short-term impacts on productive investment, and little on the longer-term impact such as human development or vulnerability (Barooah et al. 2017).

Tradeoffs of Agricultural Financing

The largest percentage of child laborers are involved in agriculture and are often invisible on family farms or rural enterprises, where there is a high incidence of work hazards and risks (ILO and UNICEF 2021). Accidental crop loss—through pests, rodents, and other calamities—has been shown to increase use of child labor by substituting adult labor in household activities with child labor (Beegle et al. 2006). Wealthier households, in response to crop loss, were likely to borrow in response to the shock while low-income households exhausted their assets to buffer the impact of the shock. Lower-income households with more assets were less likely to rely on child labor.

Whenever the value of agricultural activities increases, the likelihood of child labor also increases. When CTs are provided to smallholder farming households, they tend to work better if they provide a sufficiently large increase in income to make up for the lost income provided by children (Ravetti 2020). In Zambia, when weather index agricultural insurance encouraged insured farmers to significantly expand their maize fields, family labor inputs increased (Beegle et al. 2006). In Benin, when households had access to an



agricultural input loan to purchase farm machinery, more family labor was employed and hired labor was reduced; however, they also experienced a positive impact on net farm income, food security, food quality, and women's empowerment (Sagbo 2019).

Design Considerations

Consistent with findings from other financial products, to mitigate risks that agricultural financing increases child labor, FSPs should:

- *Raise awareness and promote discussion* about the extra labor that may be needed as households make investments on their farm (FAO 2012).
- *Design agricultural financing products to allow for hiring adult labor* (FAO 2012).
- *Provide different agricultural loans* for input purchase, planting, harvesting, and storage costs, as well as for *warrantage* (using harvest to pay off a loan) (Sagbo 2019).
- Repayment for agricultural credit should be tailored to the cycle of the crop or the activity (Sagbo 2019).
- Value chain financing, which often allows for input purchases on credit, should align loan repayments with harvest income (Langyintuo 2020).
- *Be careful when bundling agricultural insurance with other financial services*, such as microcredit, since only one product may be necessary to promote investment (Karlan, Ratan and Zinman 2014).
- *Build on FSP delivery infrastructure* and trust it may have in the community to better market and distribute insurance products that are not well understood (Karlan, Ratan and Zinman 2014).
- *Explore the benefits of mobile money*, given it is a convenient and safe method to lower transaction costs for sending and receiving money (Jack and Suri 2014).

Savings Groups and Products

Savings have resulted in households adopting higher-risk but higher-return income-generating strategies, protecting their business capital in times of health shocks, becoming less risk averse, increasing household income, and building household resilience to shocks (Moore et al. 2019; Brody et al. 2016). Savings can be a strategy for asset-building and self-insurance, and can be accessed through formal (e.g., bank accounts) or informal products (e.g., savings groups or investing in livestock), individual or group-based means, or voluntary or compulsory methods

However, accumulating sufficient savings to make investments or to protect a household from shocks is a challenge. While commitment savings devices (such as accounts that bind people to reach specific goals before accessing their savings) can result in households meeting their savings goals (Moore et al. 2019), and improve household business outcomes and women's empowerment, they can also result in unintended consequences of reduced food consumption, increased work burdens, and financial stress (Karlan et al. 2017; Gash and Gray 2016; Rickard and Johnsson 2018). The constraints that hinder adoption of savings products by low-income households include transaction costs, lack of trust and regulatory barriers, information and knowledge gaps, social constraints, and behavioral biases (Karlan et al. 2014).

Tradeoffs of Savings Groups and Products

The minimal research that has examined the effects of savings on child labor and UACW is mixed. While savings groups can reduce child labor by allowing children to attend school for longer durations and more regularly, they can also result in more work for enrolled children, though often for a shorter period of time (Baland et al. 2020). In Tanzania and Burkina Faso, daughters of savings group members often joined their mothers in economic activities until households reached a higher level of affluence, when additional labor could be hired, upon which the girls would return to school (Boyle 2009). In Kenya, however, savings groups led to a reduction in child labor, but the impact was neutral in Burundi (Cameron 2013).

Loans provided through savings groups may be too small to positively influence children's education or workload and may even increase the risk child labor and school absenteeism if children become involved



in their parents' businesses or carry out domestic work as a result of their parents' increased participation in income-earning activities (Jahns 2012; Baland et al. 2020).

Furthermore, earning money in youth savings groups sometimes results in them spending less time in school (STRIVE 2015b). In Ghana, two school-based financial literacy education programs were offered in government-run schools. One program integrated financial and social education, whereas the second program only offered financial education (Berry et al. 2015). Both programs included a voluntary after-school savings club. After nine months, both programs had significant impacts on savings behavior relative to the control group, mostly because children moved savings from home to school. Financial education, when not accompanied by social education, led children to work more compared to the control group; however, the effect on child labor between the two groups was not statistically significant (Berry et al. 2015).

Design Considerations

To mitigate the risk of savings groups/products increasing child labor, findings suggest that FSPs should:

- *Provide a variety of savings products* (e.g. contractual savings, programmed savings for a goal, regular saving accounts that allow quick access to funds, and savings accounts with automatic or digital savings wallets) to encourage micro-saving by reducing saving account costs and allowing people to manage their savings privately (STRIVE 2015b).
- *Couple contractual savings with financial education and better financial planning.* Social education should be included in financial literacy programs (Berry et al. 2015).
- *Encourage savings groups* to plan for regular or unexpected household expenses (STRIVE 2015b).
- *Monitor and evaluate child-level indicators* for early identification of unintended outcome risks (Chaffin and Rhoads 2013).
- *If saving initiative programs involve vulnerable children and youth*, consider the following:
 - *Age-appropriate training* should accommodate children and youth's cognitive development and life experiences (Aflatoun 2010);
 - *Time required* to conduct training should not conflict with school attendance, homework, or studies;
 - *Higher mobility of older youth* due to labor migration or marriage may make retention difficult (Allen 2018);
 - Youth may have *lower capacity to save* because of irregular sources of income and added expenses associated with child-headed households (Allen 2018); and
 - *Increased protection risks*, including potential exposure to gender-based violence or child labor (Chaffin and Rhoads 2013).

Remittances and Payments

In 2019, over 200 million migrant workers sent \$554 billion to family members in developing countries, representing more than three times the annual flow of development assistance and foreign direct investment, impacting almost one billion people; these remittance flows dropped 1.6% in 2020, most likely due to the adoption of digital technology by the migrant workers and their families, especially for migrants with access to bank accounts and credit cards (Ratha et al. 2021). Migrant women tend to remit a larger portion of their earnings compared to men and use private and less regulated money transfer businesses rather than banks due to the difficulties they face opening accounts and accessing the formal banking system (Azam et al. 2020).

Remittances have been found to increase the disposable income of recipient households, mitigate adverse impacts on household resources in case of shocks (Bargain and Boutin 2014), reduce liquidity constraint problems, and generate consumption and investment opportunities, particularly investments in children's human capital (Acosta 2011). Domestic remittances, in the form of person-to-person payments sent via mobile money have been found to smooth consumption when faced with an income shock (Jack and Suri 2014). Remittances have also been linked to increased school attendance as extra income from remittance



transfers may free up money for education, though greater probability of attending school does not always mean lower probability of child labor, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (Bargain and Boutin 2014).

Tradeoffs of Remittances and Payments

The relationship between remittances, school attendance and child labor is complex. After considering the endogeneity of remittances, migration and financial development, a sample of 82 developing countries indicated that remittances significantly reduced the prevalence of child labor in developing countries characterized by weak financial systems and strong income instability (Ebeke 2010).

The results of household access to remittances also appear to vary geographically. Households that received *international* remittances had children who were at lower risk of child labor in the Philippines (Sicat 2016), Ghana (Joseph and Plaza 2010), Bolivia (Coon 2016) and El Salvador (Acosta 2011). *Domestic* remittances had no statistically significant effect on the decision to engage children in work in Ghana (Joseph and Plaza 2010). However, in Vietnam, children belonging to recipient households of domestic remittances were less likely to be sent to work and more likely to attend school, as domestic migrants were more likely to keep a close eye over their children's welfare and how remittances were spent (Binci 2018). In Burkina Faso, remittances mainly affected the labor market participation of younger children (Bargain and Boutin 2014).

Furthermore, the size of the impact can vary by gender. In El Salvador, girls appeared to increase school attendance upon remittance receipts by reducing labor activities, while boys did not benefit on average from higher schooling but favored family work activities over paid jobs (Acosta 2011).

Design Considerations

While there are recommendations for remittance providers such as Western Union (Ratha et al. 2021), including improvements in the regulatory environment that facilitates FSPs' roles in the remittance market, the following considerations are most applicable for FSPs that support women entrepreneurs as remittance recipients:

- *Conduct research to understand gendered patterns of sending and receiving remittances to inform policies* (Azam et al. 2020) and *design of complementary services* such as credit and savings for recipients.
- *Credit products should move from asset-based lending to cash-flow lending* (e.g. emergency loans) when remittance flows are well-known and documented (Katakam and Gravesteijn 2020).
- *Digitize both remittance and savings account to promote saving* of a portion of the remittance amount—if cash-based, the entire remittance is likely to be cashed out (Katakam and Gravesteijn 2020). *Digitize utility bills and merchant payments* so that migrants and families understand the benefits of these solutions over cash-based channels.
- *Emphasize transparency in product design* to instill trust (Katakam and Gravesteijn 2020) and *limit the amount of paperwork needed* (Sil and Guha 2010).
- *Make marketing and user experience design gender aware*, as women make up most senders and receivers (Katakam and Gravesteijn 2020; Azam et al. 2020).
- *Bring remittance services as close to the recipient as possible* to reduce costs for access, such as agent-facilitated access (Sil and Guha 2010; Jack and Suri 2014).
- *Increase digital and financial literacy efforts* so that both migrants and recipients understand remittance products, requirements, positive uses, and how other financial services may support their financial goals (Sil and Guha 2010).

Cash Transfers (CTs)

Transfers of resources (cash or in-kind, conditional or unconditional) and graduation programs generally yield positive results for children because they give families a greater sense of financial security, incentivize school attendance (ILO 2021; Dammert et al. 2017), and lead to increased economic activity (Banerjee et al. 2015b). Transfers are effective because they reduce the income pressures on poor families that can lead to child labor, but they also generate incentives for households to stay in the informal sector (i.e.



programs discontinue benefits if families have certain income/benefit levels) (UNDP 2015). Additionally, conditional CTs that increase participation in schooling can reduce children's availability for work, thus decreasing their likelihood of being involved in child labor situations (Dammert et al. 2017).

Tradeoffs of Transfers

However, CTs, provided along with income generation strategies, including microcredits, business training, and other similar interventions, can create a demand for children to do work activities, either in the family business or around the house (Dammert et al. 2017). Partial transfers, such as partial education subsidies, may increase child labor while simultaneously increasing schooling, as families work to make up the gap in costs.

In Nicaragua, CTs shifted children's activities from hazardous and more physical types of labor to less hazardous, more intellectual types of work (Del Carpio 2008).

In Brazil, schooling rates of conditional CT borrowers' children increased, but their workload shifted to non-program children in the community (Sinclair et al. 2013).

In Nepal, paying for schooling expenses through a scholarship promoted schooling, but only at the beginning of the school year when most expenses occur. When the scholarship was combined with the conditional stipend, school attendance increased by 11%, grade failure decreased by 46%, and carpet weaving was reduced by 48% (Edmonds and Shrestha 2014).

In rural Colombia, after participation in a conditional CT program, borrowers' children decreased participation in domestic work by 10–13% but income-generating work remained largely unaffected (Attanasio et al. 2010). Furthermore, school and work time were not fully substitutable, suggesting that some of the increased time at school may have been drawn from children's leisure time (Attanasio et al. 2010). In contrast, another conditional CT intervention in Colombia that postponed part of the monthly transfers until children re-enrolled in school, lowered the reward for attendance, and incentivized graduation and tertiary enrollment, significantly increased enrollment rates at both the secondary and tertiary levels (Barrera-Osorio et al. 2011).

In the Philippines, to support households that relied on child labor as a source of income, the government provided in-kind transfers worth approximately US\$518 in an asset of the beneficiary's choice, which most often was used for the creation or expansion of small convenience stores. Edmonds and Theoharides (2020) found that while the program increased business creation, income generation, and food security, it also increased child labor.

Design Considerations

- *Postpone attendance transfers to the time of re-enrollment*; this is particularly effective for the most at-risk children (Barrera-Osorio et al. 2011).
- *CTs should be accompanied by other supports*, such as education, health care, or other interventions.
- *Provide education support tailored to both in-school and out-of-school working children*, including computer-based learning that teaches working children business skills and the importance of safety (Carothers et al. 2010).
- *Offer dual purpose loans* to improve business profitability as well as children's working conditions (Carothers et al. 2010).
- *Improve the learning process within workplaces* so that work has long-term benefits for children (Carothers et al. 2010).
- *Evaluate the amount of labor that is needed* among participating households to work in the new economic activities and *pay attention to how such interventions impact adolescents and other groups* that may have limited voice within the family (Edmonds and Theoharides 2020).



Conclusion

To date, relatively little effort has been devoted to examining the intersection between WEE, child labor, and UACW. To our knowledge, this is the first report that provides a comprehensive assessment of the unintended consequences of investing in financial services interventions. These lessons not only provide a foundation for understanding the relationship between women's enterprises, child labor and UACW but expand the relevance for why child labor and UACW should matter to WEE Actors in any setting, as they are one of several unintended consequences women and their families can face as a result of their participation.

This study found that while there are differences in evidence and lessons regarding the relationship between different financial services, child labor, and UACW, there are some common design considerations for all products that are consistent with recent guidance provided by the ILO (2021) for the types of strategies that may be effective to create safe workplaces and eliminate child labor:

- *Evaluate the possible tradeoffs and negative consequences that households-- particularly women and children--will face when engaging in new economic activity, making payments on loans or for savings contributions, or seeking insurance claims reimbursements, paying particular attention to labor constraints. This evaluation should be conducted at the product or program design stage, through program monitoring (e.g. client satisfaction surveys), and when evaluating program outcomes.*
- *Ensure financial product designs are sensitive to the tradeoffs women face when trying to fulfill caretaking responsibilities and generate income.*
- *Products should be designed to support or incentivize hiring of adult labor when needed.*
- *Aim to improve both income security and household resilience by providing a comprehensive financial portfolio of services. Pressure for income and asset growth in addition to income shocks can result in households turning to child labor as a coping strategy; availability of different well-designed financial services can help households avoid tradeoffs. Women microentrepreneurs in the Philippines shared that financial institutions could help them by “provid[ing] capital for enterprises or businesses, and engag[ing] in programs that provide loans for tuition fees, health and life insurance, school scholarships, hospitalization and burial insurance.”*
- *Reduce administrative burdens such as paperwork, time and costs for accessing financial services.*
- *Align all product designs with common cash-flow and seasonal constraints, such as timing education loans, savings group pay-outs and educational CTs with the school calendar, loan repayment with income availability, etc.*
- *Contribute to awareness-raising efforts among staff and clients to build financial literacy (particularly for financial planning) and awareness of risks to child labor when using different financial services.*

This paper draws on grey literature where peer reviewed publications are lacking or where they provide product design descriptions or lessons learned that may be helpful for financial services practitioners. While most of the research was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, efforts have been made to draw on recent publications that may provide new or different guidance related to the role of financial services in rebuilding incomes or helping households manage income shocks. The findings documented in this report should be interpreted with these limitations in mind.

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