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Driving Equality: Availing Affordable and Accessible Childcare in Market Centers in Kenya

Impact Story 5

KEY IMPACTS

This project sought to address the critical childcare barriers faced by women traders in Nairobi's informal markets, particularly in Mwariri and Gikomba. A central outcome of the project has been the formal validation and refinement of the Nairobi County Market Centre Childcare Draft Policy, positioning market-based childcare as a county-endorsed public good that advances women's economic participation. This reflects a significant shift from evidence generation to the institutionalisation of childcare within county governance and urban development systems.

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Project Overview

The project [*Driving Equality: Availing Affordable and Accessible Childcare in Market Centers in Kenya*](#), which commenced in March 2024 under the [Scaling Care Innovations in Africa](#) initiative, sought to address the critical childcare barriers faced by women traders in Nairobi's informal markets, particularly in Mwariro and Gikomba.

The project targeted low-income women traders while also engaging Nairobi City County Government, market committees, and broader childcare ecosystem actors to strengthen an enabling environment for market-based childcare.

The project aimed to reduce childcare-related barriers that limit women's productivity, earnings, and participation in trade by providing access to affordable, accessible, and quality childcare services within market centres.

Additionally, the project supported the development of a data-driven childcare policy for Nairobi City County, with the broader intended change of positioning childcare as essential social and economic infrastructure central to women's economic empowerment, inclusive urban development, and responsive governance systems.

Project Activities

The project combined service delivery, evidence generation, and policy engagement. Affordable, high-quality childcare services were delivered through [Wow Mom](#) daycare centres located within market environments, allowing women to access childcare close to their workplaces. In parallel, women traders participated in Financial and Economic

Development Training (FEDT) to strengthen financial literacy, business management, and childcare knowledge.

Evidence from service delivery and baseline research was used to inform county-level policy development. Through high-level meetings and multi-stakeholder workshops, the project worked with Nairobi City County to draft, validate, and refine the Nairobi County Market Centre Childcare Policy, ensuring alignment with legal, governance, and financing frameworks. Partnerships with Dalberg Research and BSD Group supported analysis, policy design, and communications.

Project Achievements

A central outcome of the project has been the formal validation and refinement of the Nairobi County Market Centre Childcare Draft Policy, positioning market-based childcare as a county-endorsed public good that advances women's economic participation. This reflects a significant shift from evidence generation to the institutionalisation of childcare within county governance and urban development systems.

Within the market centres, access to reliable childcare enabled women traders to participate more consistently in economic activities by reducing care-related constraints. Childcare services reached 8,982 children in Mwariri Market and 1,873 children in Gikomba Market, demonstrating substantial demand for accessible childcare within informal market settings.

The project also strengthened traders' economic resilience and caregiving capacities through targeted capacity-building on financial literacy, business management, childcare. In Mwariri Market, 81 traders were trained, including 68 women and 13 men, while 41 traders were trained in Gikomba Market, comprising 35 women and 6 men.

Collectively, these interventions strengthened women's ability to sustain and grow their businesses while reinforcing the role of childcare as critical economic infrastructure within market systems.

The project's impact is also visible in individual women's economic trajectories. One trader, Zipporah Wanjiku, described how access to Wow Mom daycare allowed her to focus on her tailoring business without juggling childcare responsibilities within the market. With childcare support and training, she improved customer service, strengthened stock management, and stabilised her income, illustrating how integrated childcare and economic interventions reduce unpaid care burdens and enhance livelihoods.

At the policy level, sustained engagement with Nairobi City County leadership strengthened political commitment towards the integration of childcare within market systems and county planning processes. County officials increasingly recognised childcare not only as a social protection intervention, but also as critical economic and gender-responsive infrastructure that enables women's productivity, participation in trade, and overall economic empowerment. This growing recognition was reinforced by the high utilisation of market-based childcare centres and credible baseline evidence demonstrating the link between accessible childcare, reduced unpaid care burdens, and improved economic participation among women traders.

Challenges & Lessons Learned

Policy advocacy slowed temporarily due to seasonal and administrative delays, particularly during holiday periods when policymakers were less accessible. The project learned the importance of maintaining momentum through multiple channels - technical engagement, political dialogue, community mobilisation, and media - to sustain visibility and commitment.

Another key learning was that effective childcare solutions require addressing systemic barriers beyond service provision, including urban planning, safety standards, governance, and affordability. Embedding childcare within county systems is essential for sustainability and scale.

Care Sector Contributions & Next Steps

The project's main contribution is demonstrating a scalable, market-based childcare model linked directly to women's economic participation and embedded within county policy processes. By combining operational proof points with policy reform, the project reframes childcare as socio-economic infrastructure rather than a private household issue.

Next steps focus on supporting Nairobi City County through the formal adoption stages of the Market Centre Childcare Policy, expanding daycare services as new market infrastructure becomes available, and positioning the model for replication in other counties. Continued advocacy, media engagement, and policy leadership will be critical to sustaining momentum and embedding childcare within Kenya's urban development agenda.

About the Africa Cares Together Community of Practice

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

Acknowledgements

This Impact Story was compiled by the 'Driving Equality: Availing Affordable and Accessible Childcare in Market Centers in Kenya' project team and the ACT CoP. Project partners include Wow Mom Kenya; Dalberg Research; and BSD Group.

