

Gender Mainstreaming in Trade: Impacts of the Chuka Market Creche on Traders and Children

County:	THARAKA NITHI COUNTY		
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Introduction

A creche is a facility, within a building, that provides supervised care and early education for infants and young children, typically between the ages of three months to three years old. It is designed to offer a safe and nurturing environment where

children can engage in age-appropriate activities, receive proper nutrition, and receive attention from trained caregivers or teachers. Creches operate during regular working hours to support working parents by allowing them to leave their children in a supervised setting while they attend to their work or other responsibilities. In Kenya, limited access to affordable and quality childcare is a primary challenge faced by working mothers. Additionally, the high cost of childcare services makes them unaffordable for many families, forcing some mothers to resort to informal and potentially substandard arrangements such as leaving their children in the care of younger siblings who are often underage. The quality of services offered in daycare facilities is also a concern, as some facilities may not meet safety, hygiene, and developmental standards. This is a challenge for working mothers who strive to provide a nurturing environment for their children while managing the costs.

Acknowledging the mentioned challenges encountered by working parents, the Tharaka Nithi County Government has demonstrated proactive measures by introducing a creche within the Chuka Market. The Chuka Market accommodates approximately 2,000 traders, with an estimated majority of 1,300 traders being women. The creche initiative aims to assist and empower working parents, particularly mothers who are engaged in market trading, by providing a safe and nurturing environment where they can entrust their children with trained teachers and caregivers while they actively participate in income-generating activities. This initiative also provides support to working parents by reducing the financial burden of hiring house help and offering a high-quality and easily accessible space where they can visit and care for their children within the market.

Implementation of the practice:

In 2019, the Tharaka Nithi County Government through the Department of Education, Vocational Training, Gender, Children and Social Services in collaboration with the Department of Infrastructure conducted a comprehensive survey to identify opportunities for empowerment of women. During this assessment, it became apparent that a significant number of women faced a common challenge of caring for

their children while attending to their businesses in the market. Without caregivers, most parents were compelled to prioritize their children's care, resulting in business inconsistency and subsequent negative effects on household income.

In March 2019, the Department of Education, Vocational Training, Gender, Children and Social Services organized a public participation event aimed at notifying traders that a segment of the market space would be allocated for the construction of a creche. This was also aimed at gathering their input and suggestions regarding the creche idea. In July 2019, the County initiated a four-month project involving renovation of the Chuka market and the construction of the creche within the designated area of the market space. During this period, the County Government concurrently started developing a curriculum and employed two skilled teachers, three caregivers and a cleaner to ensure the provision of care and support for the children.

The County allocated a budget of Ksh 1,343,358 Million to establish the creche. This funding covered various aspects including the procurement of construction materials, sleeping mattresses for the children, playing tools, a television set, children's sitting area, and design work. In December 2019, the County Government operationalized the creche.

To ensure safety measures, the County Government of Tharaka Nithi maintains a registration book where parents can record their names and contact details, including their store numbers. This information is used for emergency purposes and facilitates effective communication with parents when necessary. With the children gathered in a centralized location, Health Department officials, accompanied by medical professionals, regularly visit the daycare facility to assess the health status and overall well-being of the children.

With the current capacity to cater to 15-30 children below the age of three, the County Government aims to implement a supportive policy that permits the establishment of similar daycare centers within public schools. This initiative is intended to assist a larger number of mothers by extending childcare assistance and support.



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Though the County doesn't have an existing policy, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, engaged in researching the influence of the creche on women in the County, is actively collaborating with the County to establish a policy framework. Through the implementation of a comprehensive legal framework, the County strives to ensure the long-term sustainability of the initiative.



Tharaka Nithi County Creche in Chuka Market

Results of the practice

Enhanced child development: Children have benefited from a structured and nurturing environment provided in the creche. They have opportunities for social interaction, early learning experiences, and cognitive development, setting a solid foundation for their future growth and education.

Increased income and maternal empowerment: the reliable childcare services provided by the creche have enabled more mothers to actively participate in their businesses, leading to increased income and overall financial independence and well-being.

Smooth reintegration after maternity break: With the creche, mothers returning to work after their maternity break experience a smooth transition. The supportive environment provided by the facility allows them to resume their professional responsibilities with confidence, knowing their children are well-cared for.

Enhanced economic participation: Entrepreneurial women have benefited from the flexibility offered by the creche, enabling them to engage in economic activities while ensuring their children receive proper care. This has empowered them to contribute to the local economy and pursue their business goals.

Emotional well-being and reduced stress: The creche initiative has provided emotional security for both mothers and children. Knowing their children are in a supportive environment has reduced stress levels for mothers, allowing them to focus on their work.

With children gathered in one location, healthcare professionals have been able to efficiently conduct medical examinations and administer immunizations to multiple children simultaneously. This streamlined process has improved efficiency and effectiveness, making healthcare provision more convenient and accessible for the children.

Lessons learnt:

Engaging the community in the planning and decision-making process enhances the effectiveness and acceptance of such initiatives. It fosters a sense of ownership and collective responsibility, ensuring the sustainability and success of the program.

There is a need for a comprehensive policy framework to guide the establishment and operation of such daycare centres. Having clear guidelines and regulations ensures the quality, safety, and sustainability of the initiative while addressing the specific needs of the community.



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To further enhance safety measures, it is crucial to implement additional protocols that prevent parents from abandoning their children at the daycare center. This includes implementing procedures that require parents to provide detailed contact information and emergency contacts who can be reached in case of any unforeseen circumstances. These measures ensure a secure and responsible environment for the children and maintain effective communication channels with parents or guardians in case of emergencies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the establishment of the creche in Chuka town has had positive effects on working mothers, improving their productivity and empowering them economically. Lessons learned include the importance of childcare support, its impact on women's empowerment, the value of community engagement, and integrating healthcare services within daycare facilities. The initiative has demonstrated scalability potential, with the opportunity to expand to public schools. Overall, the Chuka Market creche serves as a successful model for achieving work-life balance, empowering women, and fostering community development.

Photos of the creche in Chuka Market





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