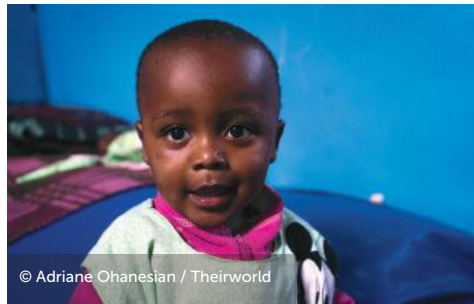


INVESTING SMART, INVESTING EARLY

A Business Guide to Early Childhood
Development in Kenya



INTRODUCTION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



The Global Business Coalition for Education brings together over 100 companies to accelerate progress in delivering quality education for all of the world's children and youth. One of the most important investments, in terms of business and social returns, is early childhood development.

Investing Smart, Investing Early focuses specifically on business support for early childhood development in Kenya, building on the Global Business Coalition for Education's business case for early childhood development (2016) as well as the summary guide on family-friendly policies (2017). This guide outlines the

early childhood development investment case for the business community and provides concrete policies and guidelines that can allow companies to do more to effectively invest in the early years.

This guide highlights successful early childhood programs implemented by Kenyan companies, illustrating how these policies can be put into practice. Naturally, the diversity of company size, industry, location, and employee composition means that policies and programs cannot be one-size-fits-all. No company can do everything, but the wide range of possibilities means that every company can do something

to support healthy early childhood development. This guide is intended to assist with designing and implementing internal family-friendly policies, as well as community outreach and corporate social responsibility projects, aimed at improving and safeguarding children's early childhood development for all children in Kenya. While the focus is on Kenya, many of the lessons are universal.

There are many diverse ways for companies large and small to support Kenya's youngest children. What's the best approach for your company?

Report by Molly Curtiss and Kolleen Bouchane with Julia Kilgore and Bethany Ellis.

This report is the result of a collaboration between the Global Business Coalition for Education and Theirworld. This report would not have been possible without the exceptional work of companies and nonprofit organizations in support of early childhood development. We are especially grateful to the Aga Khan Foundation, Frigoken Limited, the Kenya Private Sector Alliance, Serena Hotels, and Tiny Totos for their support in the creation of this guide.

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BUSINESS VOICES



AMBASSADOR DENNIS AWORI, TRUSTEE, KENYA PRIVATE SECTOR ALLIANCE FOUNDATION

Women are key players and contributors to the national development agenda through their engagement in employment and entrepreneurship. Women make up nearly half of the workforce in Kenya, spending most of their reproductive years in employment. In light of women's significant role in the Kenyan workforce, the private sector has a responsibility to support their unique needs in order to enable women to fully participate and succeed in the workplace.

Without proper support, women with young children face many barriers to reaching their full potential as employees. Recognizing that women are often balancing both professional and personal responsibilities, employers have a responsibility to create conducive working environments and flexible policies that support women and children's health and welfare. Fortunately, many of the solutions are easily within reach. Breastfeeding, for example, brings significant health and development benefits for babies, and as such, simply ensuring that female employees have a clean, private place and paid breaks to breastfeed or express milk at work without fear of discrimination from supervisors or colleagues can make a substantial impact. Paid maternity leave and flexible, baby-friendly company policies that permit women to care for a sick child or arrange last minute childcare carry tremendous benefits as well.

The numerous advantages of this support greatly outweigh the perceived negatives. Early childhood policies bring companies a significant return on investment, and in the long run, support the development of a healthy future workforce due to the improved health and development of the children. But companies don't need to wait decades to see the results of these policies. Employers also benefit from decreased employee turnover and absenteeism that results from better supporting working mothers, along with improved employee loyalty and enhanced company image.

By providing this essential workplace support for breastfeeding women and working mothers, employers will be contributing to the achievement of all of the Sustainable Development Goals. Let us all commit to taking our role in moving this agenda forward.



Sarah Brown, Executive Chair, GBC-Education & President, Theirworld

The benefits of early childhood development extend far beyond the individual, impacting families, businesses, and communities. The private sector has a crucial role to play in supporting the health and well-being of children and families. If we are serious about achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, we must all work together to ensure that every child — no matter who they are or where they were born — receives these critical interventions in the early years.



Emma Caddy, Co-Founder, Tiny Totos

The success of Tiny Totos' strategy is our belief in the resilience of women. We are betting on the resilience and potential of women to want to grow their own businesses, to go to work to earn money to look after their families, and their commitment and desire to give the best possible care to their children. Being from the slums does not make the dreams of a woman and a mother any different from those from the leafy suburbs of Nairobi.



Teresa Mwoma, Head of Secretariat, Early Childhood Development Network for Kenya & Senior Lecturer, Kenyatta University

Early childhood is a critical period that lays a foundation for human development. Providing quality early childhood development, care, and stimulation is a great way of preparing children for success and greater returns in society. This can be achieved especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds when stakeholders in early childhood development collaborate and partner in providing services to children in their formative years of development. Early childhood programs and services should therefore target families and children in relation to health, nutrition, protection, education as well as financial support to families.



MAHMUD JAN MOHAMED, MANAGING DIRECTOR, SERENA HOTELS

Early childhood development (ECD) is a crucial national issue and contributes to the achievement of a number of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, challenges and barriers to achieving quality and comprehensive ECD persist, and our experience tells us that children below 5 years face barriers to even access a book, let alone early learning facilities.

We as the private sector need to bring the letters of the alphabet to 'our children'. It is our responsibility to promote educational initiatives that have a holistic, positive impact on a child's upbringing, which in the medium- to long-term will assist in gradually transforming the quality of life for future generations.

Providing ECD support is crucial not only for improving the quality of life for these communities, but also for business practices. Every company wants employees who are prepared for success in the modern workplace, but this requires investing long before adulthood. Building an ecosystem that supports literacy in the early years is a critical place to begin the formation of a skilled workforce. By investing in activities that encourage learning and offer fresh opportunities in literacy, the private sector can support not only the health and learning of young children but also the future prospects of our communities and country.

The private sector has the potential to make an even larger impact through effective collaboration and partnerships. Serena Hotels' core business is not early childhood development, yet we have utilized our resources to help establish ECD in the regions in which we operate by partnering with organizations like the Madrasa Early Childhood Programme. Combining Serena's resources with the expertise of Madrasa teachers, we are able to positively impact the lives of children and families.

It is with such partnerships and innovations that we can bridge gaps, transform the quality of life for future generations, and find a way to relate the values of the past, the realities of the present, and the opportunities of the future. It is said that 'Today's children are the force, hope and leaders of tomorrow' and so I urge the private sector to play its pivotal role in complement to the government's literacy efforts, as together we can create a catalyst for social, national, and global progress.



Karim Dostmohamed, CEO, Frigoken Limited

With a large workforce made up of women, Frigoken saw the growing need of providing childcare. We didn't think that the childcare services available to our staff were adequate and tried to create that on site. Some challenges with running the crèche are the costs involved and maintaining quality care for the children that does not alienate them from the quality of life they have at home, but the benefits of investing in our employees and childcare is invaluable. The private sector needs to take their social corporate responsibility seriously. The well-being of employees is important and having the crèche is just an addition to our efforts.



Afzal Habib, Co-Founder & Chief Imagination Officer, Kidogo

Investing in early childhood development is no longer a question of corporate citizenship or brand building — it is an economic imperative. Companies must invest in young children, both to empower their current workforce, and to build the next generation of talent that will lead their business growth for decades to come.



Lynette Okengo, Executive Director, African Early Childhood Network

Investing in a child's life is an opportunity to impact not only that child but also the world. By investing early, we reduce the long-term costs of educational and development programs, and we enhance the skills and potential of our future workforce. The best investment with the greatest returns is found in ensuring that our youngest children survive, thrive, and become agents of transformation.



WHAT IS EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT?

Early childhood, from pregnancy to the start of primary school, is the most critical period of growth and development, laying the foundation for future learning, behavior, and success. During the first 1,000 days of a child’s life, the brain develops 700 neural connections per second¹ and by age five, roughly 90 percent of brain development is complete.² High-quality care and support for healthy physical, mental, and emotional development during these first few years enables children to grow up to become “healthy and productive citizens with the intellectual skills, creativity, and well-being to reduce global inequities and ensure sustainable global development.”³ However, inadequate care and mental stimulation and toxic stress⁴ can permanently harm cognitive and emotional development, while insufficient nutrients in the early years of life can forever stunt the potential growth of a child’s body and mind.⁵

To ensure they experience healthy growth and reach their full developmental potential, all children need access to:



1

QUALITY, NURTURING CHILDCARE, either at home or in an affordable care center



2

ADEQUATE NUTRITION, including exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months and access to clean water and sanitation facilities



3

HEALTH CARE, including antenatal and postnatal checkups, delivery by a skilled attendant, full immunization, and screening for developmental milestones



4

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PLAY, MENTAL STIMULATION, AND EARLY LEARNING, including low-cost activities in the home and access to pre-primary school



5

PROTECTION, including registration at birth and protection from physical and emotional abuse



Globally, early childhood development programs remain under-prioritized and underfunded. More than 250 million children in low- and middle-income countries are at risk of not reaching their full developmental potential, with the highest prevalence of children at risk in Sub-Saharan Africa.⁶ Those most in need of support during the early years — poor, rural, disabled, and disadvantaged children — continue to be left behind and excluded in the greatest numbers. Key services routinely fail to target the youngest children (ages 0 to 3), even though this is the single most critical period of development for young children. Lack of investment in early childhood education has a direct implication on social and economic outcomes for a community. For instance, the new Lancet series on early childhood development reports that children at risk for poor development outcomes are “likely to forgo about a quarter of average adult income per year,”⁷ perpetuating the cycle of poverty for their families and communities.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA

Kenya has made vast strides in improving the situation for young children and their families. During the last 15 years, maternal mortality rates have been cut in half and primary education has been made free for all. Many challenges remain to ensure all Kenyan children — particularly the most vulnerable — survive and reach their full developmental potential.

- Approximately 38 percent of 3 and 4 year olds in Kenya are not reaching their cognitive and socioemotional milestones.
- 34 percent of Kenyans live below the international poverty line and more than half of Kenya’s urban population lives in slums.
- While chronic malnutrition (stunting) has been reduced significantly to 26 percent, prevalence is very unequal by income. Just 60 percent of Kenyan children are breastfed exclusively during the first six months.
- Only about half of mothers and one-third of newborns receive a postnatal health check.
- Just 36 percent of Kenyans have access to improved sanitation facilities and 3,100 children in Kenya die each year from diseases caused by unsafe water and poor sanitation.⁸
- Nationally, enrollment rates in pre-primary school have reached 74 percent, but access to these programs and early learning outcomes still differs significantly by socioeconomic background.
- In three counties, an average of 50 percent of children under 5 have been left alone or in the care of another child in the past week.⁹

BUSINESS INVESTMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

The current scale of unmet need for early childhood programs and services in Kenya means that the government alone will not be able to achieve universal coverage any time in the near future. The private sector can make a significant contribution to this challenge in ways that not only ensure all Kenyan children reach their full potential but also help businesses achieve their strategic goals, such as the development of a skilled and healthy workforce.

Within their own companies, business leaders can make positive impacts on the healthy development of their employees’ children by instituting family-friendly policies such as paid

parental leave, flexible working hours, on-site lactation rooms, and support for affordable childcare. Companies can also have serious impact in local communities by investing in early childhood programs and services, providing business expertise and research and development support, ensuring business practices respect children’s rights, and being a champion for investment in early childhood development.

Far from being an act of charity, the private sector stands to gain significantly from improved early childhood outcomes. Within companies, family-friendly policies reduce employee absenteeism and turnover,

increase employee productivity and loyalty, and attract the best talent. In society more broadly, protecting the healthy development of children — particularly the poorest and most marginalized — contributes to the development of a skilled and productive workforce, reduces poverty and socioeconomic inequities, increases economic growth, and reduces the negative impacts of lost human capital. Finally, investments in improving the development outcomes of local children increase brand visibility and customer loyalty within communities and solidify a company’s reputation as a contributor to social good.



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THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Kenya's economy stands to gain significantly from scaling up quality early childhood care and services. The earlier the investment in a child's development, the greater the long-term returns. Quality early childhood interventions lead to better school readiness and academic achievement, and help develop essential skills that are key to success both in school and in the workplace. Early investments therefore reap twofold rewards: (1) ensuring children grow up with strong brains and bodies, and (2) contributing to a more skilled, equal, and empowered workforce.

Investments in every sector of early childhood services have been shown time and again to reap significant economic returns, resulting in gains for families, communities, and economies. For example, **every dollar invested in preschool education has been shown to return up to \$7.**¹⁰ Lower cost initiatives such as food fortification (which can

cost approximately \$0.20 per person per year)¹¹ can reap significant returns of up to \$37 for every \$1 put in. It is important to note, however, that these early childhood investments are mutually reinforcing and the long-term returns and benefits are interconnected. Therefore, great results can be seen from adding components to existing programs, such as building toilets or providing nutritious meals at existing pre-schools.

In contrast, inadequate support for early childhood development not only hinders the growth and prospects of children and their families, but also has significant negative impacts on economies. The costs to gross domestic product of not investing in early childhood development can be double the size of current health spending.¹² In Kenya, the Lancet estimates the costs of not reducing stunting to 15% could result in an economic loss equivalent to 5.4% of GDP, or more than \$7 billion dollars.¹³ Kenya's current spending on health is 4.5% of GDP.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO BUSINESS OF FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES?

Implementing family-friendly policies in the workplace is not just good for employees and families, but also brings significant, tangible benefits to business. In a survey of American companies, more than two-thirds reported that the benefits of employer-sponsored childcare programs either outweighed

the costs or were cost-neutral and more than three-quarters reported the same findings about flexible work and family leave policies.^{22,23} Other studies have found the benefits of family-friendly policies cancel out their expenses, so that at the very least they pay for themselves.²⁴ Additionally,

family-friendly policies make companies more competitive; research has shown that "firms that invest in their workforce with higher pay, fuller training, better benefits, and more convenient schedules outperform their competitors."²⁵



“Employees that feel their employer values their work-life balance and the well-being of their children have better morale and loyalty towards their company.”

Returns to Early Childhood Interventions

Intervention	Benefit-Cost Ratio
Access to safe water in rural areas ¹⁴	3.4:1
Basic Sanitation ¹⁵	5 - 8:1
Early childhood programs targeted at disadvantaged children and families ¹⁶	6.3:1
Food fortification with iron and other micronutrients ¹⁷	Up to 37:1
Home visits for children with signs of language delay ¹⁸	3:1
Immunizations ¹⁹	Up to 20:1
Pre-School Education ²⁰	4:1
Stunting Reduction ²¹	18:1

Family-friendly policies have been shown to have significant impact on employee productivity and performance:

- **REDUCED ABSENTEEISM.** Employees that have access to reliable childcare options and that have the option to work from home or rearrange hours in the event of a child's illness are significantly less likely to miss work or arrive late.²⁶
- **IMPROVED PRODUCTIVITY.** Employees that are less stressed about childcare and feel they have more control to balance their work and home life can better focus on their work and be more productive, increasing employee effectiveness²⁷ and work quality.²⁸ One study of a call center in China found that productivity improved by 22% when employees were allowed to decide their own work location.²⁹
- **HIGH-QUALITY APPLICANTS.** Studies have routinely shown that job candidates highly value family-friendly policies³⁰ and are often willing to sacrifice a lower salary in return for family-friendly benefits.³¹ One study finds that nearly 50 percent of working parents report turning down a job offer they wanted because the situation would not work for their families.³² With these policies in place, businesses become more appealing places to work and therefore recruit the best talent.³³
- **IMPROVED EMPLOYEE RETENTION.** Family-friendly policies increase employee retention and incentivize women to return to work after maternity leave. The reduction in employee turnover lowers the costs of hiring and training new employees and means companies retain the knowledge, skills, and institutional memory of a veteran worker.³⁴
- **IMPROVED EMPLOYEE MORALE AND LOYALTY.** Employees that feel their employer values their work-life balance and the well-being of their children have better morale and loyalty towards their company, resulting in greater productivity and job satisfaction and lower turnover and burnout.³⁵ Employee engagement has a significant impact on the bottom line, as "employees most committed to their organizations put in 57% more effort on the job — and are 87% less likely to resign — than employees who consider themselves disengaged."³⁶
- **BETTER OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN.** Paid leave, health benefits, and parental involvement in the care and nurturing of young children leads to better health and cognitive development outcomes such as higher birth weight,³⁷ deeper family bonds, better school readiness, and increased family stability.³⁸

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO BUSINESS OF INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES?

Supporting the health, learning, and well-being of children is not only good for society, it’s also good for business.³⁹

- **HIGH RATES OF RETURN.** The earlier the investment in a child’s human capital, the greater the return on that investment. In contrast, poor development costs economies big, reducing GDP, depressing adult wages, and depriving countries of human capital.
- **DEVELOPMENT OF A SKILLED WORKFORCE.**⁴⁰ Nurturing childcare and quality early learning programs prepare children for success in school and in the workforce by developing critical cognitive and social-emotional skills, such as self-discipline, teamwork, and communication. Children who take part in early childhood programs are more likely to enter primary school, less likely to repeat a grade or drop out, and tend to earn higher grades.⁴¹ Investments in early childhood development therefore lead to a more skilled, competent, and equitable workforce that is better prepared to meet the professional challenges of the 21st century and reduces the high costs of training necessary when employees have received an inadequate education.⁴²
- **HEALTHIER WORKFORCE.** Investments in maternal and child health care, nutrition, water and sanitation, and quality care programs lead to healthier pregnancies, healthier children, and healthier employees.⁴³ This improves worker productivity and reduces the economic costs of poor health, including loss of human capital and higher health care expenditures.
- **INCREASED ECONOMIC GROWTH.** Children at risk of poor development due to poverty and malnutrition risk losing an average of 26% of their adult income every year,⁴⁴ which depresses economic growth and traps families in the cycle of poverty. Moreover, the costs of not improving early childhood development outcomes for all children are estimated to be up to twice the amount of governmental expenditure on health.⁴⁵ Investments in children’s healthy development are therefore investments in long-term economic growth and poverty reduction.
- **IMPROVED SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EQUITY.** Children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit the most from early years interventions, gaining developmental ground not only in nutrition and health outcomes but also in cognitive development, school achievement, and noncognitive skills. Investment in early childhood development therefore helps to close the achievement gap and to prevent the potential loss of talent and economic production that occurs when children are ill or malnourished, die young, or are excluded from learning.⁴⁶
- **IMPROVED GENDER EQUALITY.** Access to affordable childcare and preschool options allows mothers, grandmothers, and older sisters to work and attend school rather than staying home with young children. Investment in early childhood development offers the opportunity for more girls and women to become educated, to enter the workforce, and to contribute their skills to the local economy,⁴⁷ helping close the gender gap in health, education, and professional achievement.⁴⁸ Additionally, better-educated girls tend to raise healthier children and earn more as adults.⁴⁹
- **BETTER STANDING IN THE COMMUNITY.**⁵⁰ By supporting local early childhood initiatives and investing in better quality of life for young children, businesses improve their reputation, leadership, and relationship with local communities⁵¹ and can increase brand visibility and customer loyalty.⁵²

“Businesses improve their reputation, leadership, and relationship with local communities and can increase brand visibility and customer loyalty.”

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IMPLEMENTING FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES

Balancing work and home responsibilities is a significant challenge for working caregivers, particularly for single parent families or households where both parents need to work.⁵³ Concerns over childcare — whether it be undependable daycare options or the sudden need to care for a sick child during a work day — are a significant source of stress for parents and, as such, reduce employee focus, productivity, and effectiveness.

they need for healthy growth and development. The diverse range of options means that all companies, small and large, can choose policies that work for both them and for their employees. A good place to start in the creation of family-friendly policies is with the workforce itself; surveying employees or creating an employee focus group can help a company determine the particular challenges and needs of its own workers and elucidate what policies would best support them.

Employers can institute a wide range of family-friendly policies to support working parents and ensure young children receive the care

01 Create leave policies that help working parents balance their professional and personal responsibilities.⁵⁴

- **IMPLEMENT PAID MATERNITY AND PATERNITY LEAVE. UNDER KENYAN LAW, A FEMALE EMPLOYEE IS ENTITLED TO 90 DAYS OF MATERNITY LEAVE WITH FULL PAY AND A MALE EMPLOYEE IS ENTITLED TO TWO WEEKS PATERNITY LEAVE WITH FULL PAY.**⁵⁵ Paid parental leave after the birth or adoption of a new child permits parents to develop deep bonds with the child, enables exclusive breastfeeding, and helps ensure the child receives adequate nurturing care and mental stimulation. Studies have shown that paid maternity leave can lead to better health outcomes for infants, such as higher likelihood of vaccination, and decreased infant mortality.⁵⁶ New fathers who take paternity leave tend to be more involved in childcare going forward.⁵⁷ Without paid leave, many parents cannot afford to stay home during these first few months, forcing them to choose between providing high-quality care and earning a living.⁵⁸
- **OFFER PAID SICK LEAVE FOR PARENTS TO GO FOR A ROUTINE DOCTOR VISIT, CARE FOR A SICK CHILD, OR BRING A CHILD TO THE DOCTOR.** Without paid sick leave, employees who cannot afford to take a day off may come to work ill, not only decreasing their own productivity but also spreading the illness to colleagues.⁵⁹ Expectant and new mothers require more frequent medical visits than other adults in order to protect their own health and the health of their child. Additionally, parents need flexibility to take a child to the doctor or care for a sick child when the need arises (often at the last minute).
- **OFFER PAID LEAVE BY THE HOUR INSTEAD OF BY THE DAY TO GIVE WORKING PARENTS GREATER FLEXIBILITY IN USING LEAVE FOR DOCTOR’S VISITS, SCHOOL APPOINTMENTS, ETC.** Consider combining paid leave and sick leave into one policy to give parents greater flexibility.

02 Offer flexible working options to parents. For many parents, working traditional office hours on site can conflict with childcare requirements. This can lead to absenteeism, lower productivity, and high employee turnover.

- **OFFER FLEXTIME OR COMPRESSED WORK OPTIONS.**⁶⁰ Flextime permits employees to work a flexible schedule. At the employer’s discretion, this can range from complete flexibility to requiring employees to be work during specific “core hours” but giving them the freedom to structure other hours as they see fit. A compressed work week allows parents to work full-time hours in fewer days than a traditional work week. These options give parents the flexibility to pick up or drop off children at daycare or school, attend school or health appointments, and meet other caregiver responsibilities without missing work.
- **OFFER TELECOMMUTING OPTIONS.** While not all types of work can be completed remotely, many jobs can be done from home at least some of the time. Enabling employees to work from home, either on an adhoc basis when a child is sick or on regularly scheduled days, eases parents’ childcare conflicts and reduces absenteeism.
- **CONSIDER PART-TIME OR JOB-SHARING ARRANGEMENTS FOR NEW PARENTS.** Allowing new parents to initially transition back to work part time eases the childcare burden and helps reduce employee turnover. Job-sharing means two part-time employees share the responsibilities for a single full-time position, which permits parents to continue working but on a reduced schedule.⁶¹

Including health care coverage for employees and their dependents as part of an employment package ensures employees and their children have access to essential preventative care and treatment, including health care during pregnancy, delivery, and early childhood. Health coverage leads to a healthier workforce in both the short term — as access to preventative care and medicine can reduce days that employees miss for their own or their children's illness — and in the long term.

SHOWCASE

Safaricom's Family-Friendly Policies



Safaricom, Kenya's leading mobile network provider, has been a private sector leader in developing family-friendly policies. Safaricom's focus on children pervades all aspects of their work, from instituting policies in the workplace to protecting children in the marketplace and investing in children in local communities.

Safaricom provides comprehensive health insurance for all employees and their dependents, which includes coverage of antenatal checkups and scans, natural and caesarean deliveries, post-delivery care, and immunizations, guaranteeing that working mothers have access to critical health care during pregnancy and beyond. Safaricom also hosts a clinic on its premises, where employees and their children can receive on-site care. In the case of a sick child, an employee can bring the child to the Safaricom doctor rather than take off work.

In the workplace, Safaricom offers an enhanced maternity leave policy, which includes four months of paid maternity leave, followed by six-hour working days upon the mother's return up until the child's first birthday. Safaricom also supports working parents by providing state-of-the-art lactation rooms for nursing mothers, flexible working hours, free on-site childcare, and the chance to work from home when a child is ill or childcare falls through. These policies all extend to adoptive parents. Further, Safaricom works to encourage "positive parenting" through their World of Work initiative, which includes access to materials on parenting and hosts a "bring your child to work day" every six months so that children can learn more about their parents' job.

Safaricom reports that these policies have had significant organizational returns, including reduced absenteeism, increased productivity, improved employee engagement, and the ability to attract the best talent. One employee of Safaricom's call center, Carol Menzi, describes how important the access to free on-site childcare has been for her:

"For me personally the crèche makes a very big difference. I used to work at a place where there was no crèche, so at times when I didn't have house help or had to be with the kids I didn't come to work. I used to miss work a lot of times. Now I don't really miss work at all... and staff will increase their output to the company as well. Having your kids well taken care of is just priceless."

Safaricom's devotion to child-friendly programs extends to its work in local communities, including investments in expanding maternal health care in remote areas, improvements to hospitals and clinics, and a digital literacy program that strives to ensure all schools have free connectivity.

Support employees' access to quality, affordable, dependable childcare.

Finding quality, affordable, dependable childcare is one of the biggest challenges and stressors for working parents. Many parents face the impossible choice of leaving their children in a low-quality care setting, pulling an older sibling out of school to care for a baby, or leaving a small child alone, which puts children at risk for neglect, abuse, accidents, and poor development. When childcare unexpectedly falls through, parents can be forced to stay home from work, driving up employee absenteeism and turnover and reducing productivity.

Companies have numerous options for supporting childcare for employees:

- Invest in improving and expanding local childcare facilities in the community, so parents have more affordable, high-quality options available to them.
- Partner with a local care provider or non-profit to subsidize or guarantee spots for employees' children.
- Issue childcare vouchers to employees that subsidize care at the provider of the employee's choosing. This offers greater choice for parents on program and location.
- Create an on-site care center, either free for employees or fee-based. On-site care is extremely convenient for employees and can conform to the specific working hours of the business. Parents can visit the child during lunch and mothers can breastfeed throughout the day, which allows them to spend more time with their children and be assured of the quality of care. Space is reserved for employees' children but can be opened up to community members for a fee if the center is not full.⁶²
- Companies that cannot afford to create a care center on their own can pool resources to jointly establish or support one.⁶³

SHOWCASE

Onsite Childcare at Frigoken



Established in 1989, Frigoken Limited (FKL) is one of the largest vertically integrated, export-oriented horticultural processors in East Africa, engaging thousands of small-scale farmers in its value chain. Frigoken is a part of the Agro-industry sector of IPS, which is the industrial and infrastructure development arm of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) a group of private, international, non-denominational development organizations that work towards improving the welfare and prospects of people living in the developing world.

Frigoken's vegetable processing facility employs 3,000 workers, 90% of whom are women. The facility is located in an area surrounded by low-income settlements, where many families only have one breadwinner (usually single mothers) or depend on two household incomes for survival, meaning mothers cannot afford to stay home with their young children.

Considering the demographics of its staff and recognizing the above predicament, Frigoken established an on-site crèche facility for employees' children. The facility strives to provide a safe, healthy, and caring environment that promotes the social, emotional, cognitive and physical development of children between the ages of 6 months and 3 years, while maintaining familiarity and consistency with their home life. Services provided at the crèche include the provision of nutritious and well-balanced meals, constant holistic care, and structured learning with an emphasis on early childhood development (ECD). The crèche also works closely with the on-site nurse and visiting doctor for routine check-ups and other health issues. The staff at the crèche are trained in ECD and also provide parental education sessions and mentoring to all employees.

The crèche facility is affordable for parents, who pay monthly fees that are heavily subsidized by the company. Parents pay 20% of the cost for their children to attend the crèche, which is market rate, if not

lower. This contribution acts as a form of commitment for the parent to bring their child to the crèche consistently and attend parent information and education sessions. The administration of the crèche follows a strict wait list policy where children are provided spots in the crèche on a first come, first serve basis. No employee is given preferential treatment for selection; enrollment is purely decided on the date the child was registered on the waitlist.

The crèche facility allows parents working at the plant to concentrate on their work and earn an income without having to worry about the well-being of their young children. As a result of this program, Frigoken has seen decreased employee absenteeism and turnover and increased employee retention, particularly after maternity leave. Eric Oyondi, Operations Manager, reports, "the crèche has an impact on productivity because instances of mothers going away to attend to their young kids have gone down. It gives the parents some level of comfort, and naturally when you are comfortable, your productivity is better." Frigoken has also observed significant benefits for the children — participants make significant strides in achieving key health and development milestones and a majority of children that 'graduate' from the crèche are reported to be high achievers in primary school and beyond.

The program's success has resulted in an increased demand from employees for the service, which cannot be met solely with the on-site facility. In response, Frigoken partnered with the Aga Khan Foundation and Daraja on the "Babycare Project," which aimed to build the capacity of local childcare centers in the surrounding settlements, in order to give employees additional quality childcare options. The program's capacity building included providing technical expertise on childcare and early childhood development as well as material support to improve the facility environments.

FKL management believes that when creating new family-friendly policies and programs it is critical to assess the specific needs of a company's employees in order to tailor programs and policies accordingly. Securing full commitment from management is also critical, as such long-term programs require significant resources, both financial and human. Recognizing that an on-site crèche facility, for instance, can be expensive and may not be the right choice for all businesses wishing to support their employees' childcare options, the team suggests that companies that cannot host their own on-site care centers could consider other options, including voucher systems, partnerships with local actors, and investments in care facilities in the local community.



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Provide space and time for working mothers to breastfeed or express milk.

The World Health Organization recommends babies are exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life, and then breastfed with complementary foods up to age two. Breastfeeding is the best source of nutrition for infants, providing all of the calories and nutrients that a baby needs as well as supplying antibodies to build up a baby's immune system. Breastfeeding also protects children from illness and death caused by poor water and sanitation; children who are breastfed ever are six times more likely to survive and children who are breastfed exclusively are 14 times more likely to survive than non-breastfed children.⁶⁴

The Kenya Health Bill 2015, which was approved by Parliament in May 2016, makes it mandatory for employers to provide lactation rooms or stations for female employees with all necessary paraphernalia and to give nursing mothers up to an hour of time off to nurse/express milk in addition to regular breaks for eating.⁶⁵

To enable breastfeeding for working mothers, employers should:

- Provide clean, private lactation rooms where mothers can nurse children or express milk. These rooms must have comfortable chairs to sit on, a place to wash hands, a place to plug in a breast pump, and adequate storage for breast milk. Small organizations that share a building can pool resources to create a shared lactation room.
- Give employees paid breaks to breastfeed, up to an hour each day.
- Foster a company culture that encourages and promotes breastfeeding and ensure that working mothers do not experience harassment, discrimination, or recriminations from colleagues or superiors for breastfeeding at work.
- Offer information to new parents on the benefits of breastfeeding.

{ Management Buy-In

Complete management buy-in and support for family-friendly policies is critical to their success. Employees must feel empowered to take advantage of the policies to which they are entitled, such as paid parental or breastfeeding breaks, and not fear that this will negatively impact their reputation, career trajectory, performance reviews, or result in termination. For example, studies have shown that many men do not take paternity leave even when it is technically available to them, as they fear being perceived as not committed to their work and worry they will be passed over for opportunities or promotion. It is critical to train supervisors on why such policies are important, how they help the company in the long run, and how best to support the family responsibilities of their employees.

Educate employees on safe pregnancy, breastfeeding, and early childhood development.

Through posters, leaflets and information packs, brown bag lunch seminars, parenting workshops, and health resources, employers can ensure parents are well informed about health care during and after pregnancy, the importance of breastfeeding, how to support children's healthy growth and development, as well as local parenting and community resources.⁶⁹ Further, employee education can also include childcare referrals for quality programs in the area and access to parenting literature and resources.

It is also critical to educate managers on how to best support pregnant women and working parents, including ensuring pregnant women are not given potentially harmful work and fostering a family-friendly work environment.⁷⁰ Without full buy-in from management and a supportive attitude from supervisors, employees may not feel comfortable using family-friendly policies, even if they exist.



SHOWCASE

KEPSA - Fostering "Better Business Practices for Children"

© KEPSA



KEPSA CEO Carole Kariuki signing the commitment to promote workplace support for breastfeeding employees in 2010

The Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA) is a private sector umbrella group made up of more than 100,000 direct and indirect private sector members, which serves as a key champion for the Kenyan business community and aims to improve Kenya's international standing in global competitiveness, corruption, and sustainable development.

In 2010, KEPSA along with UNICEF and the Ministry of Health created and launched a statement of commitment to Better Business Practice for Children (BBPC). In signing, more than 30 KEPSA member companies committed to comply with the 90 days of maternity leave provided for under Kenya law, to review and revise company policies on flextime and breaks for breastfeeding, to foster a supportive work environment for breastfeeding mothers, and to promote breastfeeding in the workplace through offering private, well-equipped lactation rooms.⁶⁶ In spite of signing,

however, many companies have since failed to enact such policies.

In response to this issue, in July 2016, the KEPSA Foundation began implementing the second phase of the Better Business Practices for Children initiative. Aimed at improving maternal and infant nutrition through making the workplace mother and baby friendly,⁶⁷ this two-year program will focus primarily on supporting and advocating for KEPSA member companies to adopt and implement Better Business Practices for Children.

In November 2016, KEPSA undertook a baseline survey measuring the knowledge and attitudes of its member organizations towards breastfeeding practices in the workplace.⁶⁸ The findings will inform KEPSA's advocacy efforts moving forward and serve as a baseline for tracking the initiative's progress and impact.

Knowing that some private companies view implementing BBPC as a significant financial burden, a major focus of the initiative is to demonstrate the benefits to companies of these investments. KEPSA has identified 10 champions who help encourage the other members to adopt and implement the initiative and plans to set up model breastfeeding spaces within offices to showcase the practicability of the recommendations to companies.

Additionally, KEPSA Foundation is working to advocate for government stakeholders to promote the development rules and regulations in support of Better Business Practices for Children and will spearhead the development of private sector guidelines for the implementation of BBPC at the workplace.

{ Existing policies do not go far enough

While family-friendly policies already exist in many companies, often they are only extended to high-skilled, salaried, or managerial-level workers, while low-skilled, low-paid, and hourly workers are typically excluded.⁷¹ Problematically, these low-paid workers are often those employees who would most benefit from such programs, as they are less likely to be able to afford to take unpaid family leave or to pay for high-quality childcare out of pocket. A few companies such as Hilton have already recognized the benefits of extending these policies to all employees,⁷² but it is critical moving forward that family-friendly policies be made available to low-skilled and hourly workers.

Further, although company-sponsored family policies are fundamental to supporting healthy early childhood development, these programs do not reach those working in the informal sector or unemployed, ill, or disabled caregivers. This issue is particularly relevant in Kenya, as a 2015 study found that a **staggering 77.9% of Kenyan workers are employed in the informal sector**.⁷³ All parents need support to provide environments and opportunities for their young children to grow and develop fully.⁷⁴ Too often it is assumed that parents not working in formal employment have the means to provide full-time childcare themselves, but in reality women in the informal sector or looking for work usually cannot afford to

stay home or bring a child to work, forcing them to seek out low-quality care or leave children unattended.⁷⁵

Therefore, public and community programs and social safety net policies are critical to reaching the most disadvantaged and providing support to those working in informal employment and out of employment. In addition to instituting internal policies, the private sector can have a significant impact on the creation and development of such external programs by becoming a champion for early childhood services in local communities.

INVESTING IN ECD IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

In addition to implementing family-friendly policies within their own companies, businesses can also support early childhood development through investments in their local communities or even globally. Early investments offer businesses the best opportunity for maximum impact, while simultaneously reducing the high costs of later interventions, such as adult training programs. Further, investments in the youngest children lead to healthier communities, support better school readiness and learning outcomes, diminish poverty and inequality (and their

economic costs), and foster a more skilled, productive, and equal future workforce. Investments in early years programs therefore create an environment that is more conducive for business, where companies can thrive and expand.

Businesses have a myriad of options for engaging in early childhood in local communities, which can be tailored to the company's size, industry, and desired level of involvement:

01

Invest in high-quality childcare facilities and preschools in local communities.

As an alternative to creating on-site daycares or supporting care and preschool options solely for the children of employees, companies can directly invest in the development, maintenance, and running of local childcare facilities and preschools. Support for these programs can take numerous forms, from fronting initial capital to cover startup costs, construction, or expansion projects, to longer term financial and in-kind support to assist with operating costs and maintaining affordability for low-income families.

Financial and in-kind support for childcare facilities and preschools can include:

- Facility construction, expansion, and maintenance
- Support for teacher training and salaries
- Subsidizing fees for low-income and marginalized children
- Creation and purchase of play and learning materials

02

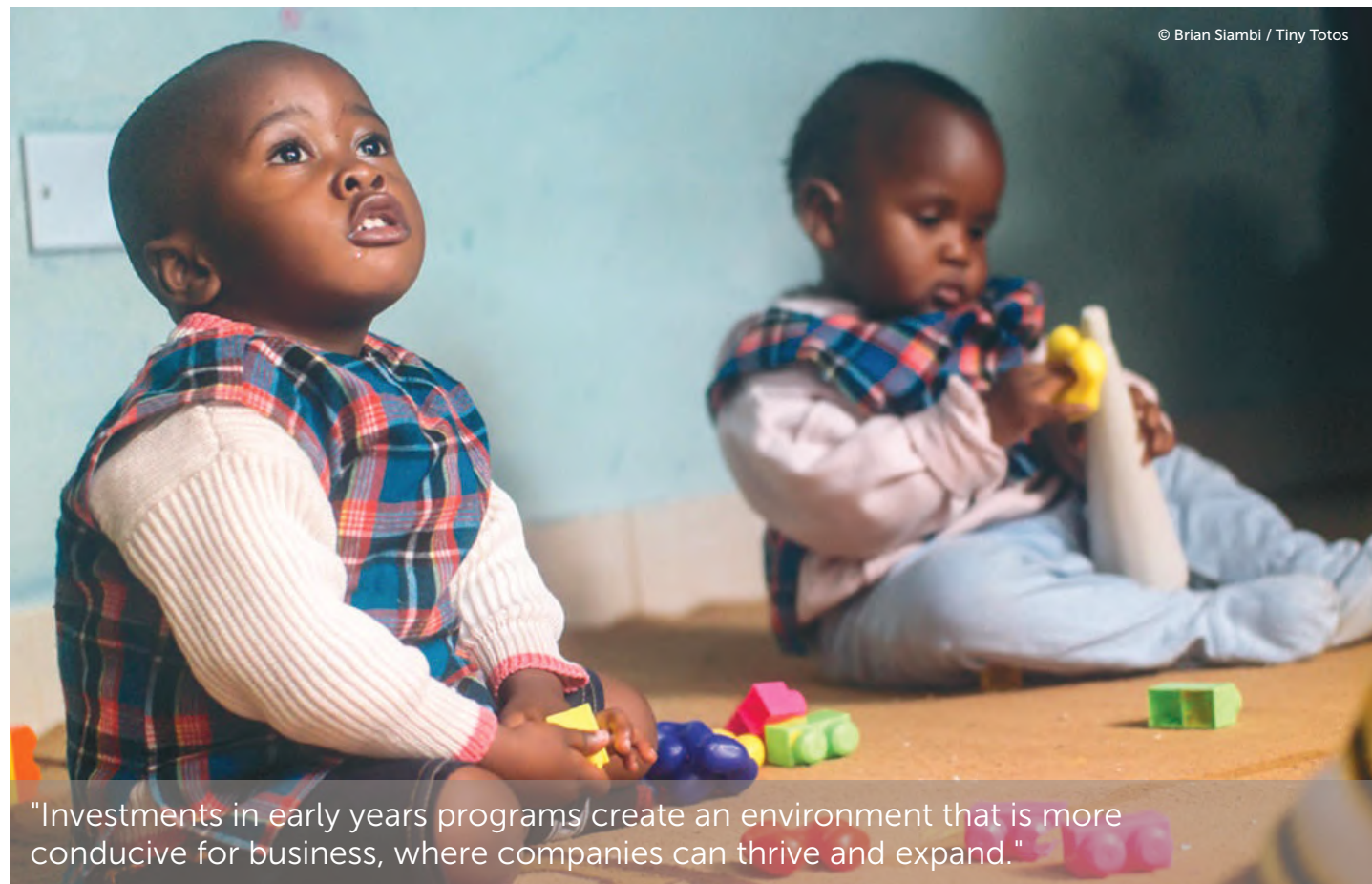
Help fill in the gaps: invest in missing elements of early childhood development services.

Supporting the creation of new programs and services is a large undertaking, but businesses also have the opportunity to provide support for early childhood development by investing in adding missing elements of early childhood services to existing programs. This serves to support and improve already successful initiatives and to scale up essential services at a significantly lower cost and risk.

Examples include:

- Investing in play and learning materials for health clinics, daycare centers, preschools, and community centers.
- Building water and sanitation facilities at health clinics, schools, and daycare centers to protect children's and community's health and hygiene.
- Providing nutritious meals for children at daycare centers and preschools to safeguard their healthy growth.
- Supporting health care interventions at daycares and preschools such as routine checkups and vaccinations.
- Assisting with the development of school or community gardens, where children can learn about growing food and healthy eating and can bring home nutritious produce to share with their families.
- Partnering with local organizations to help bridge technology gaps or add capacity for data analysis

Further, by going into communities to assess what services are missing and what is needed, companies establish themselves more firmly as part of the community, contributing to the well-being of employees, families, and children. This deepens the rapport and relationship between companies and communities and enhances brand image and customer loyalty.



"Investments in early years programs create an environment that is more conducive for business, where companies can thrive and expand."

SHOWCASE

Aga Khan Foundation and Madrasa Early Childhood Programme expands access to high-quality, affordable preschools



For over 30 years, the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) has been partnering with the Madrasa Early Childhood Programme (MECP) to support communities across East Africa to establish high-quality, culturally relevant, age-appropriate, pluralistic, and sustainable preschools for their children. In doing so, MECP has trained over 6000 teachers and supported more than 150,000 boys' and girls' access to quality pre-primary education. In recent years, MECP has started to partner with the governments of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda to support the wider implementation of government policy and early childhood development plans to further improve the provision of pre-primary education at a national level.

Established in 1986 in Mombasa, MECP has since expanded to Zanzibar in 1991 and Uganda in 1997. The MECP model is based on five interconnected and mutually reinforcing components that drive quality and sustainability at the local level. These are:

- **Community engagement.** By working with the community to develop an understanding and appreciation for the importance of pre-primary education, the preschool becomes a community-driven process that is owned and managed by the local community.
- **An integrated curriculum.** MECP has developed a holistic child-centered curriculum that supports the development of the whole child
- **Teacher professional development.** With both face-to-face training and in-school mentoring and support, MECP's two-year certificate course has been tailored to ensure teachers are able to deliver quality learning in the classroom. This course is now government recognized across all three countries.
- **School environment.** Using materials that exist in the immediate environment of the school and community, MECP supports teachers

to develop low-cost teaching and learning resources to support children's learning.

- **School leadership.** Community-driven school committees lead the on-going management of the school and ensure the delivery of quality programming.

This model is designed to promote local ownership and sustainability as MECP gradually reduces the level of support. An initial endowment was established through joint community and AKF funding which is used to meet on-going costs, which themselves are kept at a minimum by drawing on local materials. After three to four years, the preschools 'graduate,' but remain connected to the wider MECP school network. To date, MECP has supported over 200 communities to establish and sustain high-quality

preschools with an annual enrollment of more than 10,000 boys and girls.

In recognition of the experience and quality of MECP and AKF, governments from across the region have engaged both organizations in supporting the delivery of high-quality pre-primary education, enabling systemic impact and influence. For example, in Kenya six county offices in the Coast Region have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with AKF and MECP and will be funding MECP to deliver professional development courses to government officials and pre-primary teachers. In Tanzania, AKF and MECP have provided the Tanzanian Institute of Education with technical support to develop and deliver the school readiness program, which has reached nearly 3000 communities across the country.



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SHOWCASE

Promoting early literacy through Serena Hotels and the Aga Khan Foundation's Reading for Children Program



© Serena Hotels



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Serena Reading for Children

According to a 2015 survey, 9% of 6 and 7 year olds attending first grade in Kenya could not identify a single letter and 11% could not recognize a number.⁷⁶ Only 2% of primary schools in Kenya have libraries and most of these schools are located in urban areas, which means many young Kenyans do not have access to diverse, age-appropriate books. The lack of accessible reading materials can hinder children's long-term learning and development, as reading and hearing stories helps children develop a love for reading and expands their vocabulary, knowledge, and curiosity. Children who have been read to during their early years are consistently shown to do better in school.⁷⁷

To help address this lack of reading materials and promote literacy and early learning opportunities, Serena Hotels has implemented the Reading for Children Program in partnership with the Aga Khan Foundation, Madrasa Early Childhood Programme, and Lions International. The program aims to ensure young children have access to age-appropriate, locally-relevant reading materials, to teach parents about the importance of early childhood

development, and to provide training and support for caregivers to read to children from a young age. The Aga Khan foundation first launched the program in Kyrgyzstan in 2007, and has since expanded to work in 14 countries with numerous partners. Over the last two years, Serena Hotels has launched 43 libraries in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Rwanda with more than 20,000 beneficiaries.⁷⁸

Serena sets up "mini libraries" in schools, community centers, health clinics, places of business, and homes and trains a local community member to serve as librarian. The mini-libraries can be simple — even just a trunk or box — but each is filled with 100 culturally-relevant storybooks.⁷⁹ The program also offers a multi-day workshop for parents, teachers, and community members about the importance of engaging with young children through reading, storytelling, and singing, to help them develop skills and confidence to support their children's learning and early childhood development. Serena has also created libraries in orphanages, at schools for disabled and disadvantaged children, and for its own staff.

This project has seen positive outcomes not just for young children, who experience better learning and development outcomes, but for the communities as a whole. Older siblings can enjoy the books and practice reading to younger siblings. Parents, caregivers, and community members can increase their knowledge and skills to support children's learning. The training sessions also help parents to be more engaged with their children and help motivate illiterate caregivers to learn to read and write themselves.⁸⁰ The use of local stories and languages additionally preserves traditional and cultural stories.

The communities themselves are charged with library upkeep and sustainability and are taught about raising funds for the library as well as methods for creating homemade books. To protect the growth and sustainability of the Reading for Children initiative itself, in 2015 Serena published its own set of children's storybooks. Proceeds from the books, which are sold at the hotels' gift shops, go to purchasing and developing more books for the mini libraries.

SHOWCASE

Tiny Totos supports female entrepreneurs to provide quality, self-sustainable daycare services



Launched in 2012, Tiny Totos Kenya (TTK) is a social enterprise incubator stimulating improved service delivery and revenues for preschool daycares operating in the informal economy, and improved conditions for children in their care. TTK works with private for-profit daycare entrepreneurs operating in Nairobi's slums providing them training and investment that help them meet set standards of care.⁸² Access to childcare is a necessity for families living in these informal settlements, where an estimated 70% of households are headed by single mothers. Many of these women are unskilled, working long hours at often distant jobs, and depend on affordable daycare near their home in order to go to work. With no state provision of care, childcare services are generally provided by untrained, informal care centers, typically set up ad hoc by women with only basic, traditional knowledge and informal resources to provide care. Daycares in slums can therefore be unsafe or unpredictable, with erratic hours and poor standards, both of which can lead to women having to miss work or even quit their jobs or leave children unsupervised to work around the poverty of care. Meanwhile children below 5 in the critical developmental stage of life are failing to meet health and developmental standards, and are unlikely to ever recover from the neglect experienced during these critical years.

Tiny Totos provides an applied package of continuous, financial and business advice and support to private daycare providers to enable them to develop affordable, self-sustaining, high-quality childcare

businesses. The strategy is to uplift rather than undermine existing businesses, helping the informal economy to flourish and not be distorted by external intervention and support. Through their mentorship, Tiny Totos helps expand access to quality, affordable care for young children, offers working parents peace of mind, and creates quality employment opportunities for women. Parents can also benefit from Tiny Totos' training programs on nutrition, health, and mental stimulation for their young children. In 2017, Tiny Totos is also extending financing of products such as water filters and clean cook stoves used in the daycares to parents of children in their partners' care in order to extend well-being services to homes.

Tiny Totos holds monthly training sessions for participating entrepreneurs, with information on early childhood development, first aid, health and nutrition, business practices, management skills, data collection, and transparency. These free training sessions enable the women to improve the quality of their care centers and establish more profitable and sustainable business practices. Women who have not previously run a care center can also participate in an initial training "boot camp." Participating entrepreneurs also come together every month during training sessions to share their experiences and learn from each other. Tiny Totos encourages mutual support but also healthy competition between the participating daycares, offering prizes each month for achievements.

While Tiny Totos may provide some financial assistance in terms of a low or impact-

oriented loan to help care providers raise their services to acceptable safety standards or to finance an expansion, the daycares remain in charge of all daily operational costs and are financially self-supported. By requiring participating daycares to finance themselves, Tiny Totos helps guarantee that the businesses will be self-sustaining in the future and avoids the potential for dependency on outside funding, which undermines a successful business model. Tiny Totos positions itself as a financial advisor not NGO to the partners, keen to avoid businesses being subsidized and ultimately undermined by grants, which is likely to cause entrepreneurs to relax and wait for help from TTK rather than ensure their businesses succeed, or could lead to parents failing to pay for daycare services believing a donor will do so instead.

Tiny Totos partners with local companies to further improve care services, such as working with a local technology company to install internet at the daycares or partnering with a food company to provide nutritious snacks for the children. Looking forward, Tiny Totos aims to engage local private companies that are "employing underskilled women laborers [and] suffering absenteeism, lost revenue and production due to employees' unreliable childcare arrangements to support daycares that can address this shared problem." They believe such partnerships would be mutually beneficial, helping to scale up their services more rapidly while simultaneously addressing problems the companies are already facing as a result of poor childcare access.

03

Provide business expertise to support the development and improvement of local early years services.

Private sector companies can counsel local service providers on how to improve business practices, expand services, and ensure long-term financial sustainability, advising on issues such as good management practices, tax code, sustainability, supply chains, human resources policies, and marketing.⁸¹ Through this investment of time and expertise, businesses can support the continued provision of essential early years services and the self-sufficiency of service providers, reducing the need for future financial assistance.

04

Invest in research and development to create better ways to deliver existing services or find new treatment and prevention options in support of healthy ECD.

In particular, food, nutrition, agricultural, health care, and pharmaceutical companies have many specific opportunities to support children's healthy growth and development through research, development, and innovation. These can include:⁸³

- Developing new or adapting existing healthcare products and services to reduce cost, increase safety, and better reach women and children in resource-poor settings.
- Adjusting value chains to local markets to lower costs and better address the health needs of poor and hard-to-reach women and children.
- Investing in fortifying existing food products and sourcing grains from farmers who grow micronutrient-enriched staple crops.

05

Ensure business practices are child friendly.⁸⁴

Businesses should take care to guarantee that their supply chains, products, and marketing are child friendly and respect children's human rights.

- Ensure supply chains are free of child labor.
- Invest in child-friendly marketing practices that label products clearly and fairly and empower families to make informed decisions.
- Take care that children are not exploited in marketing campaigns and all advertising is respectful of children's rights. Ensure child models and actors are well paid, protected from abuse and exploitation, and work no more hours than is permitted by law.
- Certify products and services are safe for small children and that products intended for children go through rigorous research and testing that complies with national and international standards.

06

Use your voice, influence, specific expertise, and/or relevant market to support and champion ECD.

According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, "business leaders make powerful messengers in support of public investment for effective programs" since they do not have an obvious vested interest in ECD.⁸⁵ Business leaders can use their influence to champion the importance of targeted early years services to both policy makers and communities by speaking, writing, and leading by example with messages on the business case for early childhood development and partnering with community groups and governments that are having an impact. Companies are particularly well suited to champion investment in early childhood development to others in the private sector, since they share similar concerns and challenges, speak the same language, and can share the successes and benefits of their own initiatives.⁸⁶

SHOWCASE

Sealed Air and Serena Hotels: Promoting good sanitation through sustainability



Every year 3100 children in Kenya die from diarrheal diseases caused by unsafe water and poor sanitation, and just 36% of Kenyans have access to improved sanitation facilities.⁸⁷ At the same time, a typical 400-room hotel generates approximately 3.5 tons of guest soap waste each year. In response to this simultaneous great waste and great need, the “Soap for Hope” initiative was pioneered by the U.S. Fortune 500 packaging company, Sealed Air to save lives by giving free soap to communities with limited access to sanitization, to create local entrepreneurs and to help hotels reduce waste through recycling. Since its launch in 2013, “Soap for Hope” has repurposed 738 tons of soap waste and produced over 6.1 million new bars of soap for more than 400,000 individuals globally.



Serena Hotels continue to roll out the “Soap for Hope” initiative in the schools and communities that they support around their properties across East Africa and Mozambique, enhancing access to hygiene and sanitation while allowing Serena to repurpose this common hotel waste in alignment with their sustainable and environmental business practices.

Mahmud Jan Mohamed, Managing Director of Serena Hotels, remarked that, “Serena is delighted to join the “Soap for Hope” initiative with Sealed Air. The initiative creates shared value between our business and the communities in which we operate. Providing access to better hygiene aligns closely with our “Adopt a School” initiative, which provides holistic opportunities towards a child’s upbringing and development that we believe will in the medium- to long-term assist to gradually transform the quality of life for generations to come.”

CONCLUSION

Investing in early childhood development makes good business sense. Effective initiatives targeted at young children and their caregivers promote healthy growth and development, ensure children are on track for success in school, support the development of a skilled workforce, and reduce economic and social inequalities. Investments in early childhood programs and services are also proven to reap significant economic returns, resulting in gains for families, communities, and economies.

At the same time, investing in early childhood services can have significant immediate benefits on a company’s bottom line. Instituting family-friendly policies within a company reduces employee absenteeism and turnover, increases employee

productivity and loyalty, and attracts the best talent. External business investments in improving the development outcomes of local children increase brand visibility and customer loyalty within communities and solidify a company’s reputation as a contributor to social good.

Every company has much to gain in both the short and the long term from investments in family-friendly policies and early years services. While no company can do everything, the wide range of possibilities means that every company can afford to do something to support healthy early childhood development. It’s time for business to champion the importance of the early years and lead the way in investments for our youngest children.

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