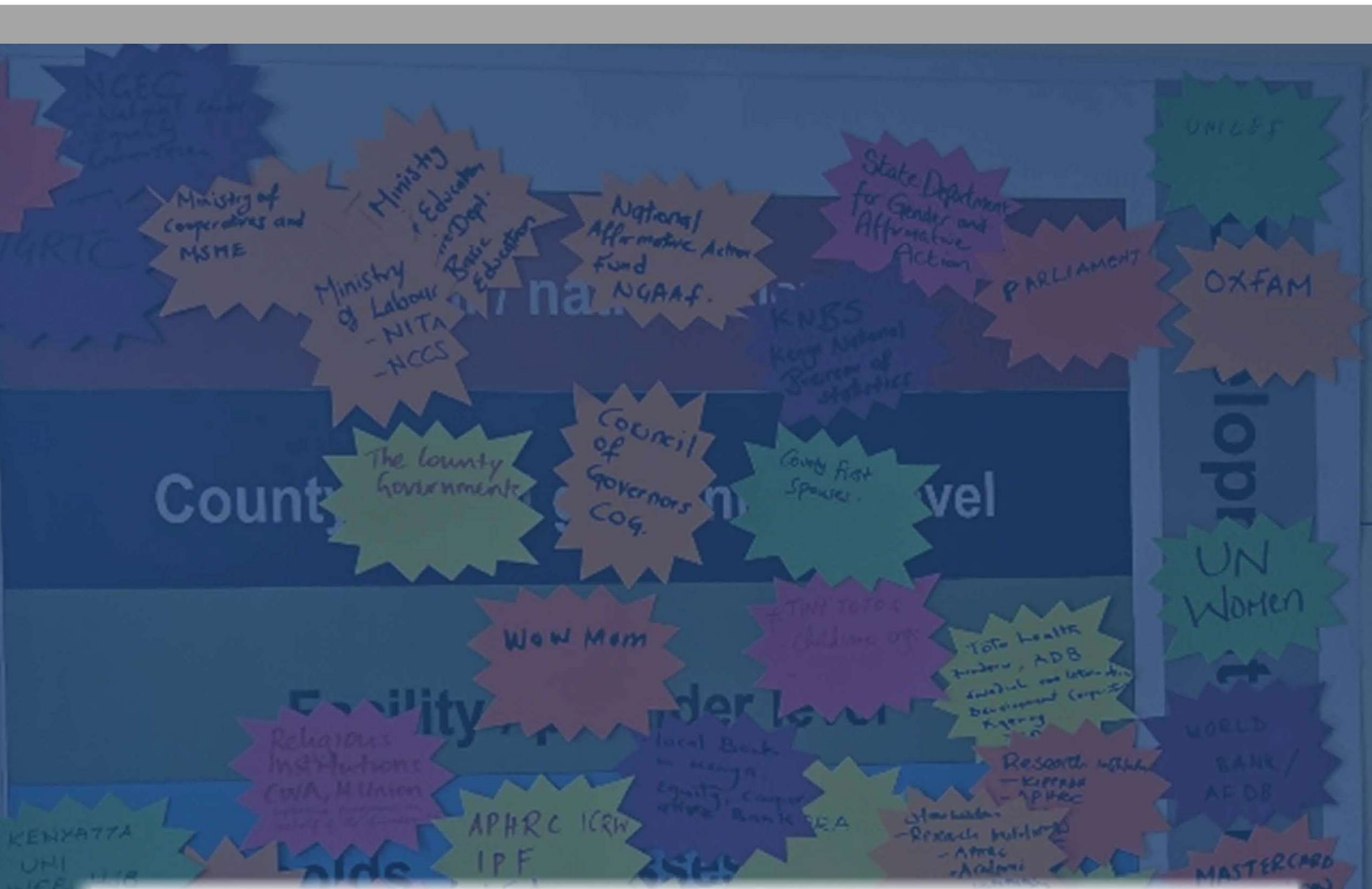




DEVOLUTION AND MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE AS AN OBSTACLE AND OPPORTUNITY TO CHILDCARE IN KENYA



DEVOLUTION AND MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE AS AN OBSTACLE AND OPPORTUNITY TO CHILDCARE IN KENYA

**Localizing Women's Economic Empowerment
and Childcare in Kenya
Technical Working Group**

December 2025

DEVOLUTION AND MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE AS AN OBSTACLE AND OPPORTUNITY TO CHILDCARE IN KENYA

Executive Summary

Kenya's devolved constitution—adopted in 2010—assigns the power and responsibility for the provision of childcare facilities to the county government level. It is therefore easy to blame the absence of public sector support or regulation of childcare facilities on county governments.

In reality, however, the provision of devolved public services—in Kenya, as well as in countries around the world—requires not only an effective county (or local) government level, but an effective multilevel government system, where national government officials, local government officials, and civil society work together to ensure the inclusive and effective delivery of public services.

With the understanding that stakeholders across all government levels need to work together to achieve effective public sector outcomes, this report considers the current state of devolution and multilevel governance as an obstacle to, as well as an opportunity for, the emergence of well-regulated, well-functioning childcare ecosystem in Kenya. It considers the current involvement of stakeholders at all levels of government in the childcare ecosystem; what additional efforts stakeholders (both within the public sector as well as beyond) should pursue; and what keeps stakeholders from pursuing these actions. The report concludes with proposed next steps to overcome the multilevel governance challenges being faced by the childcare sector in Kenya.

This report applies the Local Public Sector Alliance's Multilevel Governance as an Obstacle or Opportunity to Development (MOOD) framework to the childcare sector in Kenya, using a structured multilevel governance lens to diagnose both system performance and reform pathways. Specifically, the MOOD framework guides the analysis through a sequence of interrelated questions:

First, the MOOD framework establishes the multilevel status quo of childcare systems in Kenya (Section 2) by mapping key stakeholders across national, county, provider, and civil society levels and assessing the roles and activities each undertakes in shaping access to safe, affordable, and quality childcare. Second, the report identifies the multilevel governance obstacles that reduce access to safe, affordable, and quality childcare (Section 3) by comparing current practices to what would be expected in a well-functioning system and analyzing the political economy factors that explain gaps between the actual and desired situation. Third, the report explores multilevel governance opportunities (Section 4) by examining ongoing reform efforts and identifying actionable, politically feasible entry points to strengthen coordination, regulation, and support across government levels.

In applying the MOOD framework to Kenya's childcare sector, the report moves beyond a single-level or narrow sectoral perspective, instead offering a comprehensive, system-wide assessment of how multilevel governance dynamics shape the effectiveness of childcare provision in Kenya and how multilevel governance reforms can potentially be leveraged to improve outcomes.

This report was prepared by the Localizing Women's Economic Empowerment and Childcare in Kenya Technical Working Group as part of the Local Public Sector Alliance's Localizing Women's Economic Empowerment in Africa project. The report was prepared by Jacqueline Muthura and Jamie Boex, with inputs from Asayya Imaaya, Elaine Wacuka Hurt, Peninah Ndegwah, Cindy Lithimbi, Chryspin Afifu, Susan Mtana, Susan Wanja, Martin Kinyeg, Linda Muthoni, Rahab Nderu, and Angelina Cikanda. Support for this report was provided by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

DEVOLUTION AND MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE AS AN OBSTACLE AND OPPORTUNITY TO CHILDCARE IN KENYA

1. Introduction	1
1.1. Childcare and women’s economic empowerment in Kenya	1
1.2 Recognizing the multilevel governance nature of childcare and women’s economic empowerment.....	5
1.3 Our hypothesis: the role of (in)effective multilevel governance on childcare and women’s economic empowerment.....	8
1.4 Structure of the report.....	10
2. The multilevel governance context of childcare in Kenya	11
2.1 Stakeholders in childcare and women’s economic empowerment in Kenya	12
Stakeholders: National government	12
Stakeholders: County governments	13
Stakeholders: Childcare facilities and providers	14
Stakeholders: Citizens and civil society.....	14
2.2 Situation analysis of childcare in Kenya.....	15
Situation analysis: National government	16
Situation analysis: County governments	17
Situation analysis: Childcare facilities and providers	20
Situation analysis: Citizens and civil society.....	21
3. Multilevel governance obstacles to well-regulated childcare (and their root causes) in Kenya	23
3.1 Multilevel governance obstacles to childcare in Kenya.....	24
What should be going on: National government.....	24
What should be going on: County governments	27
What should be going on: Childcare facilities and providers.....	33
What should be going on: Citizens and civil society	34
3.2 Underlying causes of multilevel governance obstacles to childcare in Kenya	34
Why are things not moving: National government	35
Why are things not moving: County governments	36
Why are things not moving: Childcare facilities and providers	37
Why are things not moving: Citizens and civil society.....	38
4. Multilevel governance opportunities to childcare in Kenya	39
4.1 Strengthening the childcare ecosystem across different government levels.....	39
Where is the opportunity? National government.....	39
Where is the opportunity? County governments	40
Where is the opportunity? Childcare facilities and providers.....	41
Where is the opportunity? Citizens and civil society	41
4.2 Concluding thoughts.....	42
References	43

DEVOLUTION AND MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE AS AN OBSTACLE AND OPPORTUNITY TO CHILDCARE IN KENYA

1. Introduction

1.1. Childcare and women's economic empowerment in Kenya

Achieving equal rights for women is “the unfinished human rights struggle of this century” (UN 2021). While important progress has been made in recent years toward greater gender equality, women in all parts of the world still face significant obstacles to participating in the economy on equal terms with men. Low-income women in particular face disproportionate barriers—including limitations on the right to own property, and lack of access to capital, digital tools, markets, and childcare—that limit their ability to pursue a livelihood. This is exacerbated by skills gaps and social norms that inhibit women's full participation in economic life.

The public sector—as the main mechanism for achieving society's collective ambitions—has an important role to play in moving the needle on women's economic empowerment in countries around the world. Yet, it appears that central government officials and entities are often too far removed from the people to be able to effectively implement women's economic empowerment interventions. Similarly, it appears that resource constraints and other obstacles prevent local governments—when acting on their own—from effectively promoting women's economic empowerment or providing an optimal level of childcare services.

Kenya has been lauded as one of the most progressive countries in Africa with respect to decentralization (devolution) and childcare, as the country devolved political, administrative, fiscal and functional powers to its 47 county governments through the promulgation of the 2010 Constitution. All these features of Kenya's decentralization are protected in the constitution and cannot be unilaterally changed by either the national or county governments. County governments derive their powers and functions from the Fourth Schedule of the 2010 Constitution, and each level of government is directly elected by and accountable to its citizens. The fourth schedule of the constitution devolves key public services—such as health services, agriculture extension, and county transportation and infrastructure—to the county level, in addition to devolving responsibility for pre-primary education, village polytechnics, homecraft centres and childcare facilities. Despite the highly empowered structure of devolved county governance, counties are struggling to fulfill their mandates with respect to provision of childcare services.

Various reports in recent years have sought to assess the extent to which devolution has benefited Kenyans in terms of a service delivery dividend with respect key devolved public services, such as health care, ECDE centres, public infrastructure, or water and sanitation (e.g., Muwonge et al 2022). This report will complement existing assessments of devolution in Kenya by shining a light on the obstacles at the different levels of government that undermine the delivery of affordable, safe and quality childcare services in Kenya and how improved multilevel governance can unlock opportunities for a well-regulated, well-functioning childcare ecosystem.

Defining the development or social transformation challenge. This report was prepared by the Technical Working Group on Localizing Women’s Economic Empowerment Project and Childcare in Kenya, as part of the Local Public Sector Alliance’s Localizing Women’s Economic Empowerment in Africa (LWEEA) Project. The working group brings together stakeholders from different government levels and civil society from different institutional backgrounds to identify whether—and if so, how—ineffective multilevel governance systems form a binding constraint to women’s economic empowerment in Kenya. In particular, the focus of the working group is on the ability of more effective county-led regulation and support of childcare to be a catalyst for women’s economic empowerment.

The LWEEA Project seeks to promote the adoption, funding, and implementation of intergovernmental policy solutions for women’s economic empowerment as a gender-responsive ‘macro-level’ (or multilevel) policy response that supports all women’s opportunities, access to resources, well-being, and agency. To achieve this, the project aims to elevate the debate and catalyze action with respect to women’s economic empowerment by enhancing access to safe and affordable childcare services.

This report explores the extent to which an effective multilevel governance system—where national and county governments, providers, citizens, and civil society work together to ensure access to safe, affordable, and quality childcare—can serve as a catalyst for women’s economic empowerment in Kenya. In addition, it considers the broader social and economic benefits that may arise from a well-regulated and well-functioning childcare sector.

Defining the scope of our analysis. The term ‘child care’ (or childcare) is used by different people in different ways, and may have different meanings in different contexts. In its broadest sense, the term has been used—in Kenya and beyond—to refer to the wide range of activities that aim to meet the physical, psychological, and emotional needs of children as part of a wider “care agenda” (e.g., UN Women 2024). In the more common application of the term (and in line with our use of the term throughout this document), childcare—also referred to as day care—refers to the temporary (daytime or nighttime) care and supervision of one or more children. The same term—childcare or “care reform”—has also been applied in Kenya in a very specific and much narrower sense to focus on the reform of systems and mechanisms that provide care for children separated from their families or at risk of separation (e.g., NCCS 2023). We do not intend to use the term “childcare” in this narrow sense.

In order to be clear and consistent, within the context of this assessment, we define childcare as ***the provision of supervision and care of infants and young children aged 0-3 years, during the daytime or nighttime, particularly so that their parents can hold jobs, or go to school or engage in any other activity.***

Box 1. Childcare or Care for Children: Confusing Terminology Alert

The *Kenya Children Care Act*, officially called the *Children Act, 2022*, is a law adopted in 2022 which is designed to protect the rights and welfare of children, covering aspects like adoption, child care, children in conflict with the law, and administration of children services; it aligns with international standards like the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Despite the general name and terminology used in the *Children Act, 2022*, the Children’s Act has a rather narrow focus, by limiting its attention to children in need of permanent care as a result of, for instance, being orphaned or abandoned by their parents. The Act does not actually regulate or child daycare (i.e., childcare in the meaning as defined above), beyond defining that a ‘child care facility’ means a childcare facility established by a county government pursuant to paragraph 9 of Part 2 of the Fourth Schedule to the Constitution....”. A separate piece of draft national legislation, *The Care and Protection of Child Parents Bill, 2023*, would impose national legislative requirements for county governments to provide day care services to child parents (i.e., a father or mother who has not attained the age of eighteen).

Our focus is further on paid childcare providers or childcare programs, rather than on (unpaid or paid) in-home childcare, such as childcare provided within the context of the child’s own home by family members or by nannies.

In line with our use of the term childcare, **childcare providers** or **childcare programs** are individuals, enterprises, or institutions that own, manage or operate a childcare program or group of childcare centers. Childcare programs include both **facility-based childcare providers** as well as **home-based childcare providers**, where children from multiple families are cared for in a home-based setting, typically the home of the childcare provider. Childcare facilities may go by different names in Kenya and around the world, including daycare centres, creches, or nursery schools.

As explored further below, according to the Kenyan Constitution, childcare facilities fall within the functions and powers of county governments.

It is further important to recognize that childcare services for children up to age four—as defined above—are distinct from other aspects of care and early childhood development. For instance, as noted above (Box 1), the Children’s Act (2022) makes provisions for children rights, parental responsibility, and alternative care for orphans and abandoned children, but explicitly excludes day care centres, nurseries, and similar establishments from its legislative remit. Similarly, from age 4, children in Kenya are eligible to enroll in county-provided Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centres. Childcare services for children up to age four—especially the first 1000 days—are increasingly recognized a critical element in a child’s overall social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development, distinct from the benefits of ECD services that are provided by county governments and private sector establishments to children aged 4-5. Affordable, safe, quality childcare services for infants and toddlers under four thus form an important part of the comprehensive provision of (child)care services and social protection.

Why is access to childcare important to women’s economic empowerment? Our initial or primary interest in achieving more affordable, safe quality access to childcare in Kenya results from the inequitable gender impact that the lack of such access has on Kenyan society.

The provision of childcare services has a major impact on gender equity in Kenya, as the unpaid care provided by mothers with children aged 0-3 forms a major share of the unpaid work provided by women and is an important obstacle to their economic empowerment. In Kenya, as in many patriarchal societies across the globe, women perform a disproportionate share of unpaid care work. Childcare constitutes a considerable proportion of this unpaid work, often invisible, undervalued, under-rewarded, and unevenly distributed despite being vital to both the economy and society. Women's unequal and unpaid care work limits their benefits from productive activities, mobility, access to market resources and participation in decision-making processes. Childcare may enable women to work outside the home, be more productive in their existing jobs and businesses or shift to more desirable work incompatible with childcare responsibilities.

This entry-point does in any way negate other reasons for promoting affordable, safe, quality childcare. Once parents or caregivers, due to economic necessity or for any other reason, decide to use childcare services, it is obvious that the needs of the child to be in a safe and developmentally appropriate setting are key. Expanded access to affordable, safe, quality childcare is likely to have numerous economic and social benefits for children, families, communities and society as a whole both at the national and local levels (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Potential benefits to society of more affordable, safe quality access to childcare		
Transmission mechanism of benefits/impacts	Nature / size of social and economic impact	Level of impact
Human rights / basic fairness (men and women should have the same opportunities)	Equity impact	National
Improves educational and economic outcomes (lifetime earnings) for mothers (and fathers)	Lifetime earnings increase (econ. growth); tax revenues increase	National
Transforming unpaid work into paid work promotes women entrepreneurship and results in local econ. dev. (LED)	Women entrepreneurship increases; multiplier effect in LED	National / County
Access to affordable, quality childcare makes a community a better place to live	Increased property values. attracts workers and businesses	County
Childcare and women's (economic) empowerment reduces gender-based violence (GBV)	GBV decreases	National
Quality childcare results in better social, psychological, educational, and socio-economic development outcomes for children and society	Better health & educational performance; reduced unemployment / criminality	National / County
Other benefits (e.g., redistributive social policy; formalization of economic activity; gender-inclusive governance)	Greater business license revenue, etc.	National / County

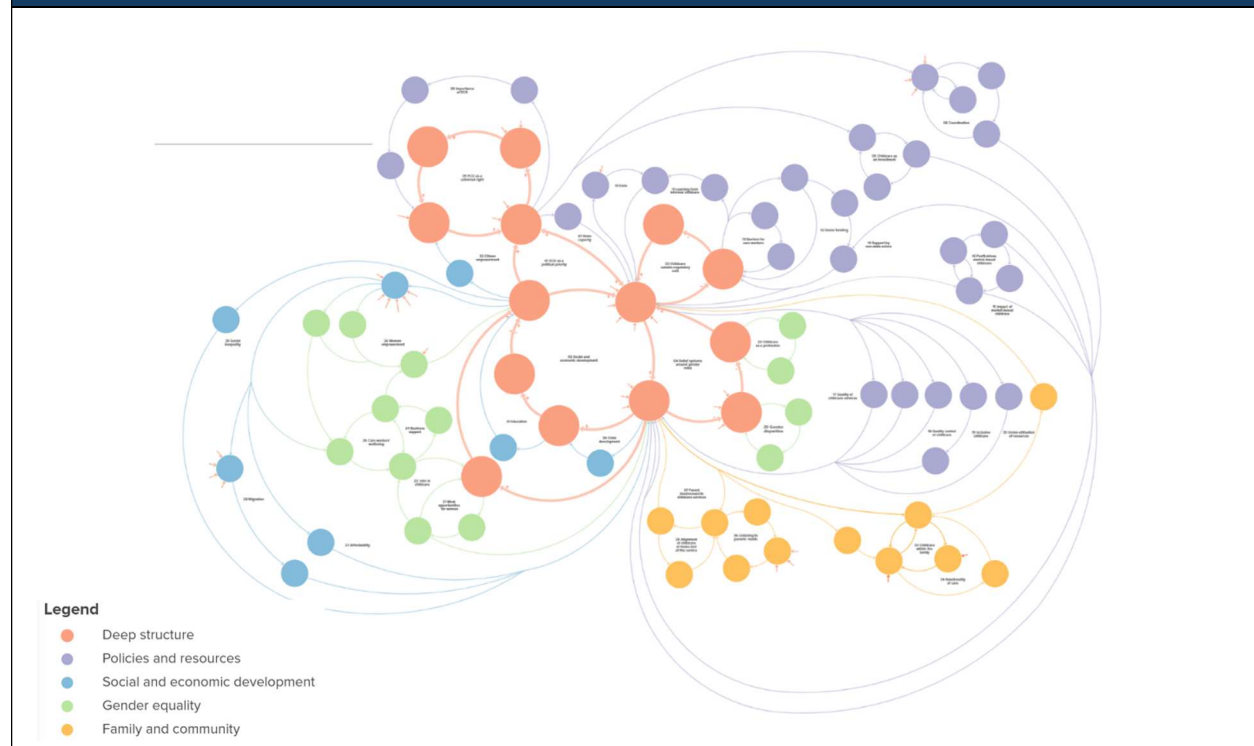
1.2 Recognizing the multilevel governance nature of childcare and women’s economic empowerment

What would a childcare system in Kenya look like if our ultimate policy ambition is to arrive at a childcare system that is driven by the individual needs of the child and which provides equitable and developmentally appropriate childcare services for children, their families and caregivers?

Before getting to the specifics of Kenya’s multilevel governance system, and its connection to childcare and women’s economic empowerment, it is useful to consider the state of knowledge within the early childhood development (ECD) Community of Practice with respect to the obstacles and opportunities to affordable, safe and quality childcare. Addressing this question requires a systems-based analysis of the childcare ecosystem. A recent exercise was conducted by ECDAN et al (2024) to analyze what factors—in general—influence the provision of equitable and developmentally appropriate childcare services for children, their families, and caregivers.

Introducing systems-thinking into the childcare ecosystem. Inadequate access to childcare is not caused by a single stakeholder or caused by a single obstacle. The inclusive and efficient provision of childcare services involves a range of stakeholders and actors—including households, childcare providers, and government actors—that need to work together to achieve an effective childcare ecosystem.

Figure 1.1 Factors influencing the provision of equitable and developmentally appropriate childcare services for children, their family and caregivers



Source: ECDAN et al (2024).

A detailed childcare systems map (developed by ECDAN et al 2024) highlights the complexity of the childcare ecosystem and illustrates key dynamics that drive the childcare system's behavior and keep it stuck to producing undesired outcomes for society (Figure 1.1). Understanding these dynamics can support the identification and design of leverage pathways for transformation. The map is centered around a "deep structure" which illustrates the core of the system along with four main regions or spheres of factors that influence the effectiveness of the system to produce desired childcare outcome, including policies and resources (purple); gender equality (green); social and economic development (blue); and family and community (yellow).

With respect to public policies and resources, the systems mapping conducted by ECDAN et al (2024) suggest that multiple dynamics in the childcare system contribute to childcare not being considered as a meaningful political priority. Across global practices, the following policy and resource-related challenges were identified as obstacles to developing contextually-appropriate policies and allocating resources toward ensuring quality childcare:

- First, insufficient public information and awareness with regard to childcare and early childhood development results in a rather low demand for quality childcare services. In many cases, the blocking factor is not the intention to promote ECD as a meaningful political priority but rather the public sector's capacity to effectively implement such a priority.
- Moreover, challenges in coordination and the resulting siloed approaches to childcare contribute to duplication of efforts. In most contexts, childcare is not perceived as an investment by either public or private sectors, resulting in limited or non-existent subsidies for childcare.
- Additionally, data on childcare tends to be scarce, leaving little to inform and guide governments in policy design and implementation, especially as most of the best practices from the informal childcare economy are not properly codified or shared. Such childcare services outside regulatory nets are usually not accounted for or supported by the government. The only support some of the services receive comes from international donors and non-state actors. Paradoxically, in attempts to regulate and ultimately support those informal services, some governments are creating significant compliance barriers for care workers (e.g. too high license fees, unrealistic facilities requirements, etc.) and therefore encouraging them to stay in the informal economy.
- Furthermore, in instances where equitable access to quality childcare is lacking, non-state actors often step in to fill the gap left by the state. This lack often leads to the emergence of market-based solutions. While these solutions can enhance the provision of quality childcare services available, they also impact the equity of accessing childcare, as some of these market-based solutions are only accessible to those with sufficient financial means.
- Lastly, the absence of relevant policies and the insufficient resources allocated to childcare often lead to minimal or no training for care workers, limited infrastructure and challenges in implementing a Nurturing Care Framework. Additionally, the childcare needs of vulnerable children are often left unmet. Further, the lack of appropriate state quality control often raises concerns about the safety and adequacy of the conditions for ECD across different childcare services. Collectively, these issues, along with the previously mentioned dynamics, negatively impact the quality of childcare provision.

Ineffective multilevel governance systems as a possible constraint to effective childcare. The childcare systems mapping exercise conducted by ECDAN and partners is a useful tool for exploring underlying challenges in the childcare ecosystem. Despite its general applicability, the effort has

identified many relevant challenges and constraints that appear to be quite relevant to the Kenyan context. However, the mapping is not intended to be context- or country-specific. Nor is the childcare systems mapping approach helpful in a detailed exploration of the role of different public sector actors in strengthening access to safe, affordable, quality childcare, or in identifying the specific obstacles and opportunities that result from stakeholders at different government levels not working together effectively to achieve their common objective.

The purpose of this assessment—referred to as the Multilevel Governance as an Opportunity or Obstacle to Development (MOOD) Assessment—is to guide policymakers, sector specialists, and policy advocates in systematically identifying the strengths and weaknesses of a country’s approach to multilevel governance, decentralization, and intergovernmental relations within a specific sector or development area, such as early childhood development. In doing so, the framework seeks to leverage a country’s intergovernmental system, wherever possible, to enhance the effectiveness of public sector performance in achieving targeted development outcomes (LPSA 2024).

The MOOD framework suggests that both national and subnational (i.e., county) governments have a role to play in ensuring access to affordable and quality childcare in multilevel governance systems. National government is best placed to develop childcare policies and regulatory standards, as it would be inefficient for each county to develop its own standards and regulations. Secondly, national government also has an important role to play in funding the promotion of childcare, as the nation as a whole will benefit from greater gender equity and women’s economic participation as a result of increased access to childcare. In turn, subnational (county) governments are best placed to engage in specific tasks related to childcare regulation, oversight, and support, given their proximity to communities. If either the national or subnational government level fails to play its part—or if either government level fails to coordinate its efforts with each other, with civil society, or with childcare providers—the system as a whole is likely to fail.

A MOOD assessment is different from other assessment frameworks and other decentralization and localization tools in that it does not start from a specific theory about decentralization or localization, but rather, starts from the viewpoint of a specific development challenge, in this case, ensuring optimal access to safe, affordable, quality childcare services. The MOOD assessment framework then asks three questions:

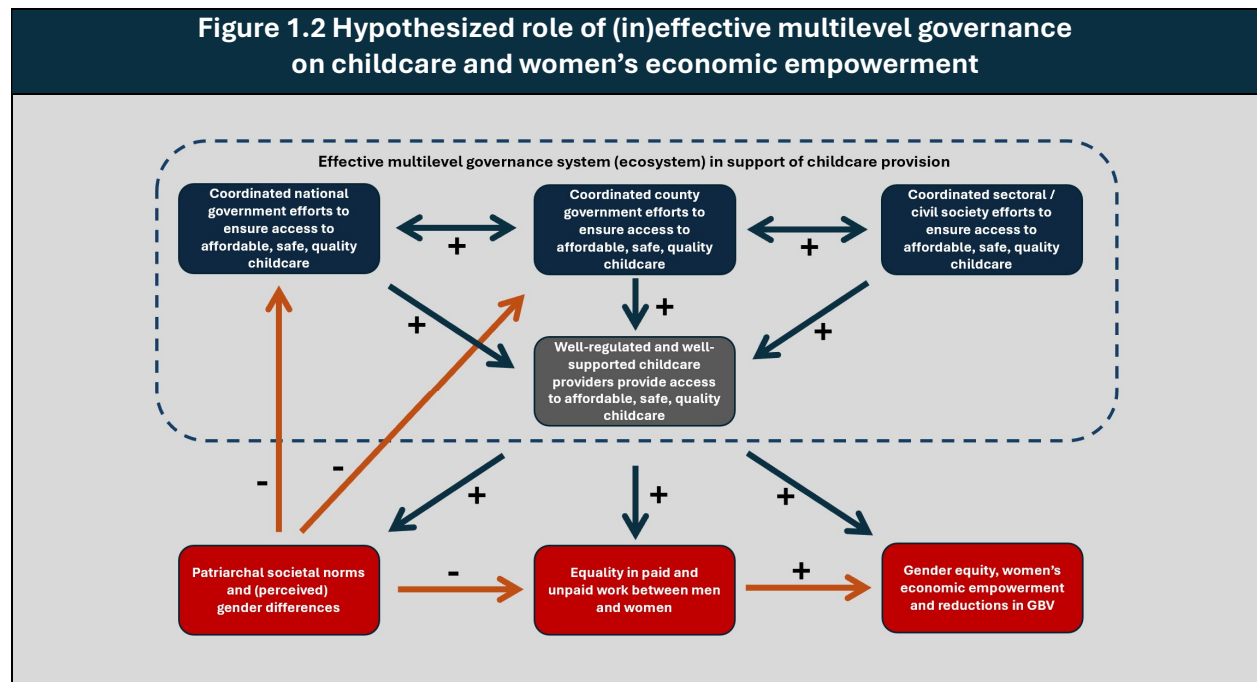
1. What is the current role of stakeholders at different levels of the public sector and civil society in addressing the development challenge?
2. What more can stakeholders at different government levels do to address the development challenge at hand?
3. What opportunities exist to improve the effectiveness of the multilevel governance system to promote resilient, inclusive, sustainable and effective development?

As such, a MOOD assessment combines features of is a multilevel governance stakeholder analysis, a situation analysis, a SWOT analysis (an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats), and a political economy combined into one. It aims to form a critical input into achieving policy consensus ahead of an iterative, adaptive process of policy reform.

1.3 Our hypothesis: the role of (in)effective multilevel governance on childcare and women’s economic empowerment

Although the obstacles to gender equality and WEE are diverse and complex, the lack of free or affordable childcare is consistently identified one of the most significant barriers to women entering the labor market and improving their family’s income. This is true all around the world, including in low-, middle- and high-income countries: without a safe and healthy place for their young children to go, mothers are less able to earn money to help support the family. The hypothesized role of (in)effective multilevel governance on childcare and women’s economic empowerment is illustrated in Figure 1.2 (next page).

Figure 1.2 highlights that, in a multilevel public sector—there are four sets of stakeholders or actors involved in the provision and production of well-regulated childcare services: (1) national government, (2) subnational (county) government, (3) civil society, which includes households, businesses, and civil society organizations, including childcare networks; and (4) childcare providers. An effective multilevel governance system (or childcare ecosystem) in support of childcare provision emerges when there is coordination within and between stakeholders at all levels (i.e., national, county, provider and civil society) work together effectively. For the multi-government system to successfully ensure the delivery of services such as well-regulated childcare services, there must be (1) effective and empowered subnational (county) governments (2) effective intergovernmental coordination and collaboration between national and county governments, (3) effective collaboration with civil society and the private sector (i.e., childcare providers and their networks).



When observed through the lens of the MOOD framework, our hypothesis suggests that regardless of a country’s income level, when coordination takes place between stakeholders across different

government levels in support for the provision of affordable, safe and quality childcare services, the public sector’s support of childcare (both in terms of appropriate regulation, as well as in terms of funding and other support) has a potentially high rate of return, not only in terms of greater equity in economic power between men and women, but with potentially significant secondary effects in related areas, such as increased labor force participation and economic growth, reductions in violence against women, and better educational outcomes for boys and girls.

How is Africa different from other global regions in terms of childcare? The hypothesis expressed above holds true in any patriarchal country, whether in the Global North or Global South. However, a recent review of policy experiences around the world suggests that the empowerment of local governance institutions and the effectiveness of collaboration between different government levels within a country varies considerably across countries and global regions (LPSA 2024b).

The recognition that “public sector challenges (including the regulation and support of childcare services) require intergovernmental solutions” collides with increasing evidence that multilevel governance systems in Africa and Asia are generally quite weak with unempowered local governance institutions. LPSA’s research on the state of local governance institutions is finding increasingly clear evidence that there is a rather sharp dichotomy in multilevel governance systems around the world: whereas local governance institutions in OECD countries and Latin America are generally relatively well-empowered devolved institutions and intergovernmental systems work to support the overall effectiveness of the public sector, political economy constraints in many countries in Africa and Asia continue to limit the empowerment of local governance institutions and multilevel governance systems.¹

In the absence of a catalyst to fix the ineffectiveness of the multilevel governance system, by bringing together representatives from all government levels, along with policy experts, advocates, and policymakers from both the MLG and WEE Communities of Practice, this binding constraint is unlikely to be identified and brought into mainstream policy discussions—let alone be resolved.

Mutual understanding and collaboration between these two main Communities of Practice (early childhood education/ childcare on one hand, and decentralization / multilevel governance in the other) is needed to result in concrete policy proposals that may be able to resolve this binding constraint. For instance, an effective intergovernmental solution might be for the national government to develop a policy framework that sets up a national mechanism for the provision of childcare services at the county level, while at the same time providing county governments with conditional grants to pursue women’s economic empowerment, including childcare. Within such a policy framework, and with funding support from the national government, county governments would then—for instance—be able to monitor, inspect and license private or non-profit childcare facilities, and/or provide childcare vouchers for eligible mothers who meet program criteria, allowing mothers to pursue employment or educational opportunities by selecting an affordable, trusted, registered childcare provider in their local community. Private childcare providers and civil society organizations (including women’s rights advocates and childcare networks) play an equally critical

¹ This is a generalized statement, of course. There are a number of examples in the Global South—including for instance, Indonesia, the Philippines, and South Africa—where local governance institutions are truly devolved local governments with extensive powers and functions. Although county governments in Kenya should also be considered truly devolved local governments with extensive powers and functions, the transition to an effective, inclusive and responsive devolved public sector in Kenya is still ongoing.

role in a functioning multilevel childcare system, by increasing the supply of trained childcare providers and by making sure that women are aware of (and opt into) the childcare options available to them.

1.4 Structure of the report

The structure of this report is based on the overall structure of the MOOD Assessment (LPSA 2024a). It will sequentially engage in a series of analyses dealing with the extent to which stakeholders at different levels (i.e., national, county, facility, and community level) within Kenya’s multilevel public sector work to ensure optimal access to safe, affordable, quality childcare services:

First, what is the multilevel status quo with respect to devolved childcare in Kenya? (Section 2)

- Stakeholder analysis: Who are the relevant stakeholders at each government level with a stake in ensuring optimal access to safe, affordable, quality childcare services? (Section 2.1)
- Situation analysis: What activities are pursued at each government level (by each stakeholder) as it relates to access to safe, affordable, quality childcare services? (Section 2.2)

Second, what multilevel governance obstacles to a well-regulated childcare system exist in Kenya? (Section 3)

- Identifying obstacles: In pursuit of optimal access to safe, affordable, quality childcare services, what should be going on at each level in an effective MLG system? What more should each stakeholder do? What is the gap between the actual situation and the desired situation?
- Political economy analysis: Why is there a gap between the actual situation and the desired situation? What is the political economy of the ongoing reform efforts? What are the proximate causes and the root causes?

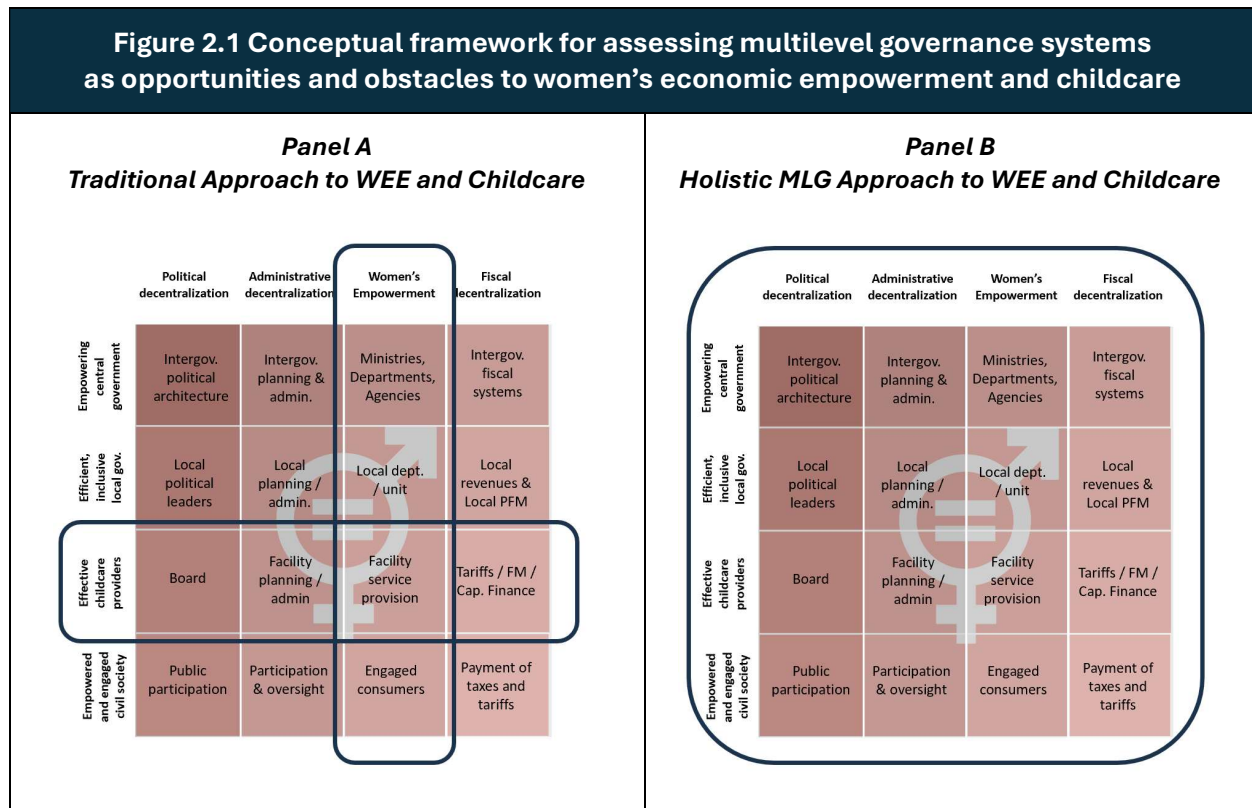
Third, what multilevel governance opportunities to a well-regulated childcare system exist in Kenya? (Section 4)

- Are there already efforts underway to fix the multilevel governance challenges? Are existing efforts adequate and succeeding (and if not, why not)?
- What more can be done about to fix the multilevel governance challenges? What is the lowest-hanging fruit, when considering both development impact and the likely political/institutional support at all government levels?

Before proceeding, it is important to note that this report does not aim to provide a comprehensive account of all details (or definitive answers) regarding devolution and childcare in Kenya. Specific efforts and initiatives being pursued by different national and county government stakeholders, along with the interventions being pursued by a range of childcare champions and civil society actors are too numerous for this report to detail them all. However, the aim of this report is to provide the big-picture overview, so that different stakeholders and actors have a better sense of what is going on in the ecosystem, and so that all stakeholders can better coordinate their efforts towards the common objective of optimal access to well-regulated, affordable, safe, quality childcare services in Kenya.

2. The multilevel governance context of childcare in Kenya

The decentralization and localization assessment framework—as represented by the 4x4 matrix presented in Figure 2.1—is the foundation for the MOOD assessment. The framework recognizes that all levels of governance or administration—national, county, facility-level, and civil society—are involved in shaping an inclusive and efficient decentralized multilevel public sector. The analysis of multilevel governance systems further recognizes that multilevel governance systems can be separated into four key dimensions: political, administrative, sectoral and fiscal. An effective multilevel governance system is achieved when each of the resulting 16 intersecting elements of the decentralized multilevel governance structure are effective, well-structured, and fit together well.

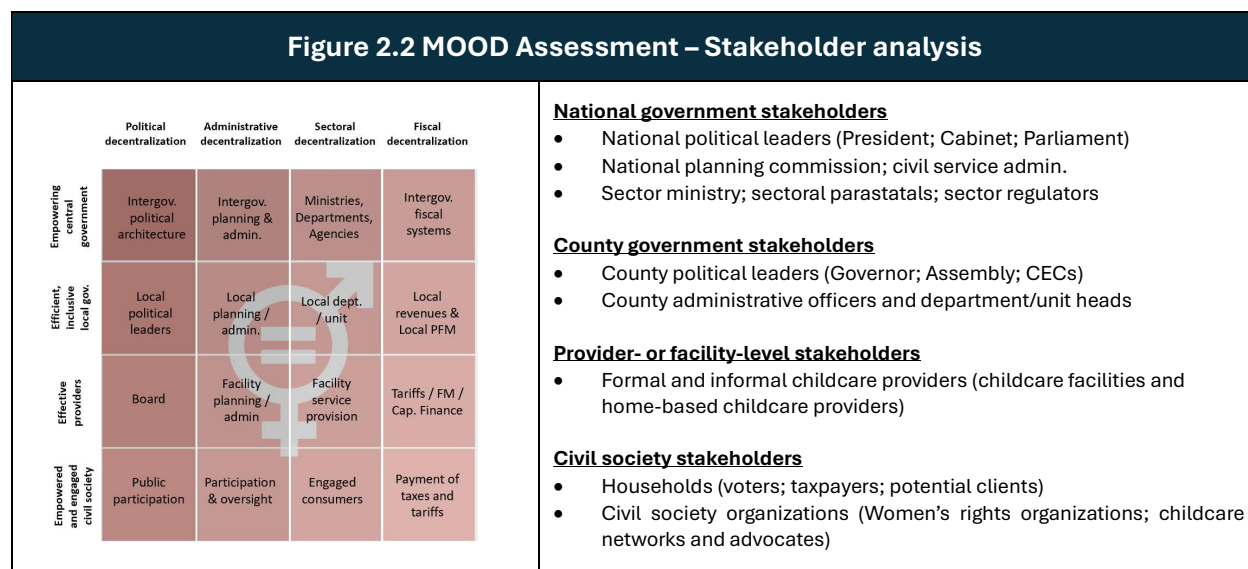


Traditional approaches to analyzing multilevel governance and service delivery systems tend to fall into two traps. First, focusing narrowly on the vertical sectoral stovepipe tends to place excessive focus on the national government ministry or ministries at the apex of the public sector hierarchy. Second, focusing on civil society-driven solutions or facility-level reforms, without adequate connection to stakeholders at other levels within the multilevel public sector, tends to overlook the connection between frontline service delivery providers and the ecosystem in which they are expected to function. More traditional assessments tend to come up short when they don’t adequately take into account the role and incentives of stakeholders at different government levels, or without accounting for the complex multilevel governance obstacles that stand in the way of progress when the scope of the sector is too narrowly defined.

As a first concrete step, the MOOD assessment of childcare and WEE in Kenya should ask (and answer): who are the relevant stakeholders at each government level (and civil society) with a stake in the ensuring that the multilevel governance system (i.e., the childcare ecosystem as a whole) provides optimal access to safe, affordable, quality childcare services (Section 2.1)? Next, the situation analysis (in Section 2.2) considers what activities are pursued at each government level (by each stakeholder) as it relates to women’s economic empowerment, including through efforts to provide greater access to childcare).

2.1 Stakeholders in childcare and women’s economic empowerment in Kenya

A stakeholder mapping conducted by the Technical Working Group (TWG) in March 2024 revealed that despite childcare being a devolved function, the role of the county governments is often overlooked.



Stakeholders: National government

At the national level, cutting across political, administrative, sectoral, and fiscal systems, there are dozens (if not more) national government ministries, departments, agencies or other stakeholders that play a role in shaping the national scene with respect to childcare and women’s economic empowerment.

Within Kenya’s political architecture, on the side of the national executive branch, the Office of the Women’s Rights Advisor to the President as well as the Office of the First Lady are important political or policy-level stakeholders in policy discussions surrounding care and women’s economic empowerment. On the legislative side, the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association (KEWOPA) gives voice to concerns of women elected representatives serving in Parliament (Senate and National Assembly).

Several institutions support intergovernmental planning and coordination, including the State Department of Devolution, the Intergovernmental Relations Technical Committee (IGRTC), and the Intergovernmental Budget and Economic Council (IBEC). Counties are represented at the national level by the Council of Governors (COG).

Since childcare and women’s empowerment are cross-sectoral in nature (laying at the intersection of early childhood education, social protection, and gender policy), national-level sectoral stakeholders from numerous sector agencies lay claim—in whole or in part—to being responsible for the national childcare and women’s empowerment agenda. Key stakeholders include the Ministry of Gender, the Ministry of Education, the National Council for Children's Services (NCCS), the National Industrial Training Authority (NITA), the Education Standards and Quality Assurance Commission, the State Department of Gender and Affirmative Action, the Secretary of Children's Services, as well as the National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC).

When it comes to intergovernmental funding decision related to childcare and women’s empowerment, institutions related to fiscal decentralization and intergovernmental (and subnational) finance in Kenya include the National Treasury, the Commission on Revenue Allocation (CRA), and the Controller of Budget (COB).

Stakeholders: County governments

Kenya is territorially divided into 47 counties, led by 47 county governments that are autonomous from the national government. It is not unusual for stakeholders to view the county government as a monolith or as a machine that acts and moves in unison. In reality, however, county governments consist of diverse actors with varying responsibilities and powers. Several of these actors have critical roles in shaping and implementing childcare policies and services, and the different stakeholders within the county governance structure may be subject to different incentives and constraints.

At the county level, key political leaders are directly elected by—and to some extent, at least, accountable to—their citizens, including the County Governor, Deputy Governor and Members of the County Assembly (MCAs). The Governor's Office and County Assembly are instrumental in enacting bylaws, budgets, and plans at the county level. The County Executive Committee Members (CECMs) and county departments oversee the implementation of county service delivery programs, while the County Public Service Board is responsible for hiring county staff.

County governments in Kenya have the autonomy to organize the county administration and public service in the manner they perceive best fit.² Therefore, the specific departments involved in childcare programs vary by county. For instance, in Nairobi, childcare efforts fall under the CECM for Talents, Skills Development, and Care; in Kisumu, they are led by the Health Department; and in Kajiado, they are managed within the Public and Social Services Department. Other key departments include Gender, Health, Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE), Vocational Training, and Markets. Some departments, such as those for health, markets, and gender, have intersecting functions that influence childcare. The County Department of Finance and Economic Planning also

² This is highly unusual in Sub-Saharan Africa. In most other countries in the region (with the exception of South Africa), local governments have considerably less autonomy, with central governments habitually ensuring administrative and/or fiscal control over local governance institutions.

plays a crucial role in budgeting, annual planning, and County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs). However, our analysis suggests that only a few counties across the nation are in the early stages of developing or implementing childcare initiatives.

Stakeholders: Childcare facilities and providers

Childcare services in Kenya are largely provided by small home-based childcare providers, privately-run childcare facilities (i.e., nurseries or day care centres), and childcare programs run by religious institutions, childcare networks, and social enterprises.

The vast majority of childcare providers in Kenya operate as part of the informal sector, in the sense that they are neither registered with the national government (e.g., registered as a company under the Companies Act, 2015), nor have been issued a license (or single business permit) by their county government.

Given the largely unregulated environment in which childcare providers in Kenya operate, there is no readily available comprehensive count of childcare providers across the whole country. An analysis of childcare providers in Nairobi City by Uthabiti suggests that there are around 7,000 childcare providers in Nairobi alone. However, the accuracy of this number is hard to confirm.³ A significant portion of childcare provision happens in private homes, with women running small daycares as microenterprises, typically without proper training or regulation.

In addition to childcare provided by the private sector or social enterprises, in some counties, some publicly supported childcare may be provided. Public provision of childcare services may take place when programs for children aged 2–3 years are provided at existing (county-operated) Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centres. In other cases, it is possible that public childcare centers may be operated by county governments to child parents. Little is comprehensively known about the extent of these practices.

Stakeholders: Citizens and civil society

An empowered and engaged civil society and community consists of households and businesses that engage with national and local governments through public participation (and vote in elections); may provide direct oversight over frontline services through facility-level committees; and pay taxes to national and county governments, and/or pay user fees to childcare facilities. Given that most childcare provision in Kenya is provided as part of the informal economy, it is unclear how many households in Kenya are in need of—or benefit from—childcare services provided by childcare facilities or home-based childcare providers.

Civil society organizations and social enterprises involved in children and women’s empowerment (including social enterprises and childcare networks) play multiple roles, including training childcare providers, operating childcare centers, conducting research, advocating for childcare policies, and, in some cases, supporting counties in policy formulation. Our review suggests that many childcare

³ To the extent that childcare services are provided by formal childcare providers, we are unaware of any national or county-level tabulations of the number of formal childcare providers (e.g., based on county-issued business licenses).

programs in Kenya are (in part or in whole) externally funded through local NGOs and CSOs, often implemented in “partnership” with county governments.

Although technically outside the public sector or civil society, development partners play an important supporting role in childcare advocacy in Kenya. Development partners fund civil society organizations to conduct research, upgrade the physical infrastructure of childcare facilities, implement nutrition programs, engage with counties to develop policies and facilitate dialogue with stakeholders. Development partners and philanthropies supporting childcare initiatives include: IDRC, TheirWorld, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, Cartier Philanthropy, ChildFund International, World Bank, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, ELMA Philanthropies, Hilton Foundation, Vanessa Grant Trust among others. It is important to note that a significant portion of funding is allocated to research, piloting new solutions, and scaling innovative childcare business models.

Box 2. Examples of civil society and development partner support in childcare

The Scaling Care Innovations in Africa partnership is co-funded by Global Affairs Canada and IDRC. It aims to scale tested and locally grounded policy and program innovations that address gender inequalities in unpaid care work across Sub-Saharan Africa. The partnership has supported WOW Mom in conducting research and gathering evidence on the childcare needs of market vendors to advocate for broader policy action, such as establishing childcare facilities in more markets and implementing other solutions to recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work. Tiny Totos has also received support through this partnership in generating evidence and learning on how to sustain and scale the positive impacts of the Tiny Totos Childcare Model (IDRC, 2024).

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation supports a range of initiatives in Kenya focused on advancing childcare and early childhood development through research, policy development, and advocacy. Its key partners include the Local Public Sector Alliance (LPSA), Strathmore University, and programs such as the World Bank’s NYOTA initiative. Additionally, the Foundation funds innovative childcare models and standards development through local organizations like Kidogo and Nurture First. Emphasizing evidence-based policymaking and capacity building, Hewlett also supports networks such as the African Early Childhood Network (AfECN) and collaborates on multi-donor initiatives like the GrOW East Africa program, which address gender inequality, unpaid care work, and the scaling of sustainable childcare solutions in Kenya.

The Australian High Commission in Kenya has provided support to Wow Mom for the upgrade and expansion of childcare facilities in Nairobi’s markets particularly Mwariro Market.

2.2 Situation analysis of childcare in Kenya

For the stakeholders identified in the previous section, how are they directly or actively involved in transforming inputs into outputs and outcomes in pursuit of optimal access to safe, affordable,

of Gender and Affirmative Action. The ECDE Policy aims to “provide a framework for a developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate **early childhood care** and education system, including the implementation of program **models, standards, and curriculum based** on research and best practices.” However, it focuses solely on education centers while neglecting childcare centers. Secondly, the standards set in this policy (for ECDE) are impractical for childcare centers in the current context. The care policy only covers broader aspects of care and merely mentions the need for investment in childcare facilities. However, it does not provide a framework for the implementation of childcare services.

While NITA has developed a basic training curriculum for childcare providers, which is a step in the right direction, there remains a significant lack of structured career development opportunities, making it challenging for individuals to pursue childcare as a long-term profession, even at the tertiary level. Therefore, the sector is unlikely to attract high quality manpower.

Despite the establishment of various institutions to promote intergovernmental coordination and collaboration, counties receive minimal (or no) technical and financial support to operationalize their mandate of delivering childcare services. There are no comprehensive guidelines, incentives, or mechanisms to enable proper planning, costing, or reporting on childcare-related performance indicators.

Beyond occasional general policy statements (if that), there is minimal concrete involvement from non-sectoral institutions such as the National Treasury, IGRTC, CRA in promoting or funding a well-regulated and well-functioning childcare ecosystem.

Critical actors in the women’s rights sphere, such as KEWOPA and the Office of the Women’s Rights Advisor to the President, are essential for advocacy to generate political will at the national level. However, their focus is currently largely on addressing the "triple threat": adolescent pregnancy, new HIV infections, and the GBV/femicide crisis.

Situation analysis: County governments

Providing a comprehensive summary of childcare activities across 47 county governments—one that captures both overall patterns and trends as well as detailed examples of good practice—is inherently challenging without undertaking a complete census of county-level efforts. Nonetheless, the combined experiences of the TWG—along with an analysis prepared by CREAM—provide a reasonable basis for a situation analysis of county-level childcare activities.

While the constitution assigns responsibility for “childcare facilities” to county governments, in contrast to other county functions (health, ECDE, and others), this was not an operationalized public sector function prior to the new constitution. As a result, counties were left to fill in this constitutional responsibility on their own. As a result, the childcare sector in Kenya grapples with significant coordination, financing, administrative, and structural challenges at the county level.

In the void of clear national regulations or expectations with respect to childcare, most counties have simply opted not to operate childcare facilities for children under four, to support private childcare facilities, or to operationalize childcare regulations for childcare facilities. To the extent that there are any childcare-related efforts within a county, these efforts are typically driven by civil society actors, with county government officials playing a symbolic or representative—rather than leading—role.

In the absence of clear technical support and guidance from the national level on how to operationalize their mandates, a small number of counties that are interested in promoting childcare have begun developing their own policies, legislation, and regulatory frameworks—often with support from civil society organizations active in the childcare space. However, where such policies or legislation exist, they frequently fall short of being practically implementable. In some cases, requirements are set at levels that are unattainable for most childcare providers, particularly those operating informally. In other cases, policies focus narrowly on infrastructure standards rather than adopting a more holistic approach to childcare services. As a result, while a few counties have taken initial steps to advance childcare—often driven by advocacy efforts—most remain far from establishing a comprehensive and functional approach to childcare and women’s economic empowerment (Table 2.1). For instance, it is notable that there is no evidence that any county governments, despite being significant employers of women, provide childcare services for their own employees.

Table 2.1 Examples of County Initiatives in Childcare

County	Initiative
Busia County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provided land for a childcare facility at the Busia Agricultural Training Centre. - Partnered with CCGD for construction and initial operation. After three years, the county will take over staff support.
Kajiado County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kajiado County passed the Child Care Facility Bill 2024 - Research partners including APHRC and the British Academy, and COG. - Established the Namanga childcare centre in partnership with CCGD.
Kisumu County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - implemented an on-campus baby care program in TVET centers, partnering with Kidogo Innovations for establishment and operation of three baby care centres
Kericho County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kericho County collaborated with UNICEF to develop day-care centres for tea workers, focusing on affordability and providing breastfeeding facilities.
Nairobi City County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Established daycares in 3 market centers in partnership with WowMom Kenya with donor funding. - Facilities run by Wowmom Kenya. - County provides spaces and utilities for free.
Machakos County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partnered with the WEE Hub to develop a Childcare Center supporting working women.
Tharaka Nithi County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tharaka Nithi County funded the construction and staffing of the Chuka Market Creche directly from county resources, investing about 1.3 million KES (10,000 USD) in construction. - Developed a curriculum and employed two skilled teachers, three caregivers and a cleaner to ensure the provision of care and support for the children.

Tharaka Nithi stands out as one of the few county governments that invested about 1.3 million KES (10,000 USD) in constructing a childcare facility at a market, developed a curriculum and employed two skilled teachers, three caregivers and a cleaner to ensure the provision of care and support for

the children.⁵ Similar initiatives in other counties often target markets or colleges. However, in almost all cases, except Tharaka Nithi Chuka market, the operation and management of such facilities fall to donor-funded CSOs and entrepreneurs.

The example of Nairobi City County (NCC) Government may also be instructive. The Nairobi City Care Facilities Act of 2017, requiring mandatory registration, licensing, and strict operational standards for facilities to ensure child safety. Policies emphasize formal caregiver training (early childhood development or social work), medical clearance, and proper facilities. Despite Nairobi's strong economic and fiscal base and NCC's relative advantage in terms of administrative capacity, NCC has been struggling to operationalize the policy through effective regulatory and oversight mechanisms. During discussions on the sidelines of the CAC Childcare Conference in 2024, participants emphasized the need for evidence-based policies that understand and address the existing situation on the ground, particularly in informal settlements where stringent conditions or minimum requirements may be too difficult for the informal providers to meet. In some instances, well-intentioned policies are developed without a clear understanding of on-the-ground realities, introduce costly or cumbersome administrative requirements for registration or licensing, deterring providers' transition towards formality.

An important county function related to childcare—that happens to form a considerable obstacle to formalization of the childcare sector—is the cost and red tape of acquiring a county business permit or county business license, along with the cost and obstacles in completing a physical inspection of business premises by the county government. The issuance of county business permits is a general administrative county function that is typically considered outside the scope of the childcare sector (and outside the scope of any sector), but turns out to be a major impediment to women's economic empowerment in the childcare sector (and beyond).

For instance, a day care center or nursery in Nairobi City County with enrolment under 30 children is required to register for a unique Business identification Number (UBIN) and obtain a single business permit at a cost of KES 20,000. For reference, for a home-based childcare provider / microentrepreneur that cares for 12 children at KES 100 per day, the license fee itself would amount to close to a month's revenue. Although some counties (including Nairobi City County) have moved to facilitate business registration and permit payments through an online portal, many counties still use paper-based systems that require in-person payments, adding considerable time costs to the transaction.

In addition to obtaining a general business permit, counties may require childcare facilities and home-based childcare providers to undergo additional county inspections (for a fee), including a physical inspection of premises for fire safety, health and hygiene, and/or food safety. Few counties, if any, have a clear manual or detailed guidelines—specific to childcare facilities—to define the standards against which inspections should be conducted.

The unclear and limited county regulatory environment results in an underdeveloped sector where quality is undermined and there is little incentive for childcare providers to register with their county

⁵ The Council of Governors, through its Maarifa platform, has documented the Tharaka Nithi success story, which stands out for its investment in constructing a childcare center in the market. However, there is limited intercounty sharing of lessons and best practices on childcare initiatives.

government, or to improve the quality of their services. As a result of the obstacles posed by county governments in registering childcare facilities or home-based care as formal businesses, by and large, however, childcare services in Kenya are provided in the form of unregulated informal childcare providers, particularly in low-income areas.

With the absence of effective county licensing and regulation, the lack of comprehensive data becomes a critical issue plaguing the sector. Few counties collect information on childcare facilities, and there is no central database in Kenya. Data is often found with CSOs conducting research in an uncoordinated manner and only limited to certain geographical boundaries and for project purposes. This data vacuum makes it challenging to ascertain the number of childcare providers nationwide, hindering counties' ability to respond effectively or recognize the sector's investment potential. Moreover, the data shortage undermines children's safety, as there is little evidence of inspection of these largely unregulated facilities.

There is little evidence of county-led mechanisms to make childcare affordable through subsidies or vouchers. Nairobi County presents a rare example, providing space and covering utility bills for social enterprises to operate daycare centers. However, such efforts are often limited just a few creches within a county. While counties prioritize ECDE centres (investing about 9.1% of their budgets to construction, staffing and school feeding programs) in alignment with the Basic Education Act 2013, there is a notable absence of targeted funding mechanisms for childcare services. Consequently, quality, affordable childcare remains out of reach for a large portion of the Kenyan population.

Finally, county governments are ill-equipped for the effective implementation of other childcare related initiatives, such as capacity building interventions in support of childcare providers within their county. Due to the continued centralized mindset of national policymakers, funding for such sectoral initiatives tends to be retained at the national level (and therefore, to the extent that they occur, implemented by the national government).

In fact, county governments often lack clarity in their administrative structure for childcare, with uncertainty about which department is best placed to coordinate implementation of childcare mandates—be it education, gender, health, social services, labor and child protection, or social services. Further, most counties do not have dedicated childcare officers (separate from ECD), and in some instances, ECD officers are unaware that childcare is their responsibility. It also follows that none of the departments are budgeting for childcare. In some instances, there is confusion between budgeting for regulation of childcare (i.e., day care facilities and home-based childcare providers) *vis a vis* the county's child protection activities (to the extent that the county is involved in child protection functions).

Situation analysis: Childcare facilities and providers

In the absence of public provision of childcare services, the private sector and non-governmental actors have attempted to fill the void by providing childcare services. Although numbers are hard to come by, the majority of childcare appears to be provided by home-based childcare providers. In addition, childcare services are provided by facility-based providers (i.e., daycare centers or childcare facilities) often managed by private individuals or enterprises, religious institutions, and childcare network organizations. A few corporate organisations such as Safaricom also provide childcare facilities for their staff.

As noted above, the majority of childcare facilities in Kenya are largely unregulated due to administrative and cost barriers. First, given the cross-sectoral nature of childcare, childcare providers are often required to acquire permits from multiple government agencies, which is usually tedious and expensive. Additionally, with the lack of a comprehensive childcare framework and standards for ages 0-3 years, childcare facilities are either registered as a normal business (without much expectation to meet minimum childcare requirements), and/or as private ECD centres, which have very high costs for acquiring a license and guidelines that are difficult to meet. This undermines the quality of childcare services, particularly in low-income settlements where facilities lack enough caregivers, clean drinking water, proper sanitation, and spacious rooms, enough for sleeping, sitting, and playing. In the absence of quality ratings and accreditation and lack of government support to childcare providers, the quality of childcare service delivery is poor, resulting in a weak and underdeveloped industry.

Situation analysis: Citizens and civil society

The primary civil society stakeholders in the childcare sector or childcare ecosystem are parents or custodians, who are in need of daytime (or nighttime) childcare services. Unless parents or custodians are able to identify unpaid caregivers within familial or social circles, they are forced to rely on a largely unregulated market for childcare services. Given the issues already noted above, the actual quantum of demand or supply of childcare services in Kenya is unclear. Yet, as a result of the lack of formalization in the childcare sector, parents and caregivers often lack access to reliable information about available childcare options and cannot adequately assess the safety and quality of these services.

While the exact demand for childcare services in Kenya is currently unknown, some figures may provide an indication of the scale of the (potential) market. Out of Kenya's 12 million total households,⁶ 38.2 percent of households is designated as being female-headed households, including roughly 480,000 female-headed nuclear households (KNBS 2022: Table 3.11). In addition, 16 percent of households in Kenya—about 1.9 million households—are identified as constituting households with a (male or female) head of household with children or grandchildren (KNBS 2022). The vast majority (85 percent) of single heads of household with (grand)children are female-led households. In three-quarters of cases (3.4 million households), women heading a female-headed households are reported to be working (KNBS 2022: Figure 3.17). These figures suggest considerable need and demand for childcare services.

Given the ineffective coordination between national and county-level stakeholders, civil society organizations (CSOs) have attempted to address some of these systemic gaps by collaborating with counties to develop policies and pilot childcare programs, particularly in low-income areas. However, the childcare advocacy sector itself lacks internal coordination, as it is comprised of stakeholders that are (partially, at least) competitors by day and collaborators at night. Despite good intentions, the current (relatively uncoordinated) efforts by childcare networks often result in project-based, duplicative, unsustainable, and unscalable initiatives that do not address (and/or fail to resolve) systemic obstacles in the multilevel governance system that is supposed to regulate and support childcare.

⁶ Kenya's 12 million households include 2.4 million single-person households (i.e., a household without children), of which approximately 800,000 single female households.

Efforts to improve childcare quality are predominantly driven by donor-funded, project-based initiatives implemented by civil society organizations, religious institutions, and social enterprises. Some childcare provider networks offer training for providers. To the extent that foundations or donors have a social protection or poverty-reduction impetus, these efforts primarily target childcare for low-income women (e.g., market women). While redistribution is an important policy objective, the exclusive focus on childcare services for low-income urban women may actually stand in the way of garnering wider public support for more universal access to childcare, as the interventions do not benefit other working mothers (middle income earners, rural women) who also require childcare services.

Most childcare-focused civil society organizations (CSOs) play multiple roles, including advocacy, capacity building, policy development, the establishment and management of facilities, and conducting research. Additionally, several sector actors have formed various associations and networks aimed at supporting childcare initiatives. However, these efforts often lack collaboration and coordination, resulting in challenges such as competition, duplication of efforts, limited specialization, and inefficient use of resources. This fragmented approach exacerbates challenges within the sector and impedes the development of clear direction and cohesive strategies for advancing childcare initiatives.

While development partners provide support to national actors and civil society organizations in the childcare sector, they offer little or no direct, systematic assistance to county governments and fail to address systemic barriers within the multilevel governance system. The current focus on civil society-driven solutions and facility-level reforms lacks sufficient integration with stakeholders across all levels of the public sector, limiting the effectiveness, scalability, and sustainability of these initiatives.

3. Multilevel governance obstacles to well-regulated childcare (and their root causes) in Kenya

The previous section in this report identified the pertinent stakeholders at different government levels, and provided an overview of the actions that different stakeholders are already taking as part of the multilevel governance system in Kenya to promote optimal access to safe, affordable, quality childcare services.

While different actors are making efforts to achieve this collective policy goal (or societal goal), stakeholders working within the multilevel childcare ecosystem work in a rather uncoordinated manner, both vertically and horizontally. Some actors are taking on roles which would traditionally be outside their mandate (e.g., civil society actors trying to perform or take over public sector functions), while others are not doing things that one would expect in a well-functioning multilevel public sector. As a result, despite well-intentioned interventions, the system—as a whole—falls short in the delivery of safe and affordable childcare.

In order to identify the extent to which multi-level governance systems form a binding constraint to the optimal access to safe, affordable, quality childcare, the assessment asks: what *should* stakeholders at each level be doing in an effective multilevel governance system? In addition to (or instead of) current activities, what more should each stakeholder do? ECDAN et al (2023) refers to the ideal state of practice as its “Guiding Star”.⁷

Identifying any gaps between the current practice and the ideal practice (by specifying what *should* still be done, as is done in Section 3.1 below) requires the collective knowledge of stakeholders with the ecosystem, as well as a solid understanding of how multilevel governance systems could (or should) function. Once a baseline has been established how a multilevel governance system could (or should) optimally function, the absence of expected actions by key stakeholders indicates the presence of underlying constraints within the childcare ecosystem, which prevent the system from achieving its full potential.

Next, Section 3.2 considers the reasons between the gap between the current situation and the desired situation: what technical and political economy obstacles stand in the way of each stakeholder acting in an optimal manner? In other words, *why* are stakeholders not doing what they could be doing in support of a well-regulated and well-functioning childcare system?

The discussion in this section needs to consider the role of the private (non-state) sector versus the role of the public sector in achieving optimal access to childcare services, as well as the optimal distribution of functions across different government levels. In addition, the assessment needs to acknowledge that government resources (at any government level) are finite and cannot address every societal need. Instead, to the extent that public sector action on childcare is desirable in Kenya, tough decisions will have to be made at every government level about the best use of scarce public resources. The recognition that resource constraints exist underscores the importance of collaborative governance between the national governments, county governance, and the

⁷ ECDAN et al (2023) indicate that “Our Guiding Star is a childcare system which is driven by the individual needs of the child and which provides equitable and developmentally appropriate childcare services for children, their families and caregivers.”

communities that they serve. In this context, every stakeholder—both state and non-state actors—has a critical role to play within the multilevel governance system in realizing affordable, safe, quality childcare.

3.1 Multilevel governance obstacles to childcare in Kenya

What should be going on: National government

What should national government officials be doing in Kenya—that they are currently not doing—in the pursuit of affordable, safe, quality childcare in Kenya? There are three obvious areas where the national government actors can contribute to improve access to affordable, safe, quality childcare in Kenya: advocacy, regulation and funding.

National advocacy for access to affordable, safe, quality childcare. What national leaders say matters. It is important for national leaders to normalize, and advocate for access to affordable, safe, quality childcare. At the national level, advocacy and dialogue for childcare is still led by civil society. Childcare is yet to get to being championed at the national level. Networks such as the ECD Network and Collaborative Action for Childcare have been hosting national conferences to elevate the profile of childcare in Kenya. LREB and partners including Nurture First, Kidogo Early Years, CRS, FCDC, and the ECD Network have organized forums at the 2025 Devolution Conference, focusing on advancing ECD services through county-level coordination and investment. The sessions at the 2025 Devolution Conference called for national actors to support the development and enforcement of ECD and childcare regulatory frameworks in all counties and ensure regular review and evaluation, the need for collaborative planning between national and county governments, and shared accountability for service standards and outcomes. There was a strong focus on promoting supportive, not punitive, policies for both formal and informal childcare, recognizing the reality and necessity of home-based care. However, attention continues to be biased towards ECD with childcare receiving limited traction.

While national and county attention on childcare is growing, the childcare conversation is yet to gather significant momentum at the national level for reforms to take place.

Formulation of a national legal and regulatory framework for childcare. In a first-best scenario, the most important thing that the national government could do is to set a clear and consistent legal and regulatory framework within which county governments could provide oversight over—and promote—affordable, safe, and quality childcare.

To the extent that childcare services are one among many services provided within the market economy, one of the main economic functions of any (national) government is to regulate markets to ensure fair and efficient economic transactions.⁸ In the context of childcare services, ensuring a fair and efficient market would require establishing a legal and regulatory framework that (at a minimum) requires producers to inform consumers about the quality of their services, in a way that

⁸ As argued further below, childcare services are likely to have positive externalities, and there are equity considerations in determining the optimal level of childcare.

guarantees—as much as possible—that consumers are well-informed about the safety and standard of service provided.⁹

There is strong support for the argument that providing an overarching legislative and regulatory framework for childcare should be a national government (rather than a county government) function based on the “subsidiarity principle”, which states that a function or responsibility should be assigned to the lowest government level that can perform the function efficiently.¹⁰ As it would be rather duplicative and inefficient for each county to come up with its own childcare standards, national government would be justified in promulgating a single set of national childcare standards.¹¹

Given the cross-sectoral nature of childcare, the appointment of a coordinating lead agency would be essential to formulating a unified policy, legal, and regulatory framework at the national level. In April 2025, the Kenya government established, through an executive order, the State Department for Children Welfare Services as part of the Ministry of Gender, Culture and Children Services. This was an effort to allow for a more focused approach to children's issues, with the mandate to safeguard the rights and promote the welfare and protection of all children in Kenya. The Alternative Family Care Department under the State Department has, as part of its mandate, “coordinate implementation of Child Care Reforms in Kenya.” It is not clear whether this is for children in non-family-based homes or daycare centers. Either way, childcare still lacks a political entrepreneur or champion at the national level to elevate the conversation nationwide and advance childcare reforms with the new State department largely focused on child protection and ECD.

Notably, in December 2024, the Intergovernmental Relations Technical Committee (IGRTC) gazetted the unbundling of childcare functions, clearly defining the roles for each level of government: the national government is mandated to develop national policy, norms, and standards for childcare facilities, while counties are responsible for formulating and implementing policies and legislation to regulate childcare facilities, establishing and managing facilities, registering and regulating them, enforcing norms and standards, ensuring quality assurance, and implementing the national framework for norms and standards at the local level. As of August 2025, the NCCS was reported to be preparing to begin work on developing childcare standards, building on homebased childcare standards developed by the Mombasa HBCC Technical Working Group supported by Nurture First and Kidogo Early Year.

National funding support for childcare. Another action that the national government should consider in promoting greater access to childcare is whether the provision of funding would be an effective use of government resources. Strong arguments could be made—based both on efficiency and equity arguments—that a targeted national subsidy of childcare services would have a potentially high return on investment, both in economic as well as political terms. Whereas higher-income households would likely benefit directly from a better-regulated market for childcare

⁹ One concern is that national government, in its ambition to protect consumers, may set childcare service delivery standards so high that it drives up the cost of service delivery provision beyond the willingness or ability-to-pay of consumers.

¹⁰ This principle rules out intervention by a higher-level government when an issue can be dealt with effectively by lower-level governments.

¹¹ Beyond the concern that national government may set childcare standards too high (as pointed out in a preceding footnote), another concern would be that national legislation might overreach and impose unfunded mandates on county governments in a non-collaborative manner, resulting in county governments not imposing or enforcing said standards.

services, it is likely that affordability would preclude many lower-income households from accessing safe, quality childcare.

Policy experiences from around the world—including in the post-covid era—have highlighted the fact that women’s labor participation is strongly discouraged by the high cost of childcare, particularly at the lower and middle segments of the income scale. Many Global North countries have responded to this concern by subsidizing childcare, recognizing it as a merit good, and as an important tool for income redistribution and generation of entry-level jobs in the care industry.

One prudent way to subsidize the childcare sector would be to establish a conditional grant scheme for county childcare programs, which would provide an incentive for county governments to ensure a well-regulated and well-functioning childcare sector in their respective counties. In addition, such a grant scheme would provide childcare providers an incentive to formalize their operations and improve their standards, as presumably only registered childcare facilities of a certain quality standard would be eligible for grants. County stakeholders recognize that if ECD/childcare is required to raise its own funds by increasing fees, this will be unaffordable for most parents, making subsidies or public investment essential.

A county executive commented: "Where the rubber meets the road is understanding how I wish we could get the guidance on how to establish that function and have it costed, rightfully. Because I know with the right finances, the counties are much, much more willing to do much more and much better for the child."

Whereas an earmarked (conditional) grant for childcare and women’s economic empowerment is among the high-value multilevel governance solutions that should be pursued in Kenya, it would be premature for the national government to explore this option at the current stage. After all, such a grant program would require county governments to be in a position to pass funding (directly or indirectly) on to registered childcare providers that are subject to county regulatory oversight—which county governments are currently not in a position to do.

Following the gazettelement of devolved functions in December 2024 and July 2025, there have been strong calls for the proper costing of these functions, especially for Early Childhood Development (ECD) and childcare. At the 2025 Devolution Conference, stakeholders expressed several concerns:

- The Commission on Revenue Allocation (CRA) does not currently include ECD as one of its parameters for revenue allocation to counties. As a result, ECD often lacks appropriate financial consideration.
- Counties typically finance ECD from their basic share of revenue; however, this approach is not standardized or specifically targeted for ECD services, leading to inconsistencies in funding and implementation across counties.
- Advocacy is needed for ECD, including childcare, to be classified as a standalone, costed function at the county level. This would ensure dedicated budgeting and accountability for these critical services.

Stakeholders further highlighted that sustainable costing is challenging, particularly because childcare and ECD remain ‘lumped together’ with other budget lines and lacks its own distinct cost structure, ultimately undermining investment and strategic planning for early childhood services.

Other national actions. In addition to regulation and funding, there are numerous other things national government should do to support women’s economic empowerment and childcare. For one, it could offer childcare services to its own employees.

Based on the Safaricom experience, it could mandate or explore ways of incentivizing the private sector that large firms provide on-site childcare services—which is not only good for the mothers, but would be good for business. The national government could also promote the provision of childcare at higher learning institutions such as universities and colleges. Kenyatta University demonstrates a good example by supporting childcare for students through an on-campus daycare center specifically for children of student mothers and young women. The university also has a pre-primary playgroup at KU Academy. These childcare options allow student mothers to pursue their education while their children receive quality care

National government should continue to build a national curriculum for childcare workers. Currently, a first-level basic certificate course is in its final stages of development by NITA. During the LPSA-supported regional exchange workshop at the CAC 2024 childcare conference, stakeholders emphasized the need for an oversight government body responsible for monitoring, regulating, and ensuring the quality of childcare services, as well as coordinating relevant government agencies. Participants highlighted the importance of formal certification and accreditation processes for ECD workers—similar to standards in professions like engineering or medicine. The proposal to establish a childcare board to set standards and provide accreditation at various levels was discussed, with the aim of professionalizing the sector and ensuring consistent quality. Accreditation could range from diploma to university level, borrowing from lessons from countries like Seychelles already offering bachelor’s degrees in childcare.

What should be going on: County governments

Beyond the constitutional argument that childcare facilities fall within the constitution mandate of county governments, county governments in Kenya are well-placed—in line with the subsidiarity principle, as the government level closest to the people—to register local childcare providers, to provide oversight over their services (by enforcing standards), and to promote childcare provision by providing support to local childcare providers and managing subsidies (if any).

Similar to the main policy actions available at the national level, county government should support access to affordable, safe, quality childcare through a number of different interventions, including advocacy, ensuring regulatory oversight, and providing funding support. County regulatory oversight, in turn, would require counties to take action on different facets: including the adoption of county legislation and regulations; registration of childcare providers; inspection of childcare facilities and home-based childcare providers; and follow-up and enforcement actions.

County-level advocacy for childcare. Counties—under the leadership of their Governors' offices and County Assemblies—play a crucial role in enacting evidence-informed childcare policies that facilitate sector formalization. Given that half (if not more) of their electorate is comprised of women,

County Governors as well as Members of County Assembly should be natural champions for the provision of childcare services. As such, they should engage with childcare providers and parents as an opportunity to show their commitment to the community, monitor program implementation, and link constituents with county childcare services. Development of county-level childcare policies and programs should incorporate input from childcare providers to ensure policies are contextually appropriate.

An obvious way for the county government to advocate for the importance of childcare would be to provide free or subsidized childcare services to county employees, or at a minimum, coordinate on-site care (fee-for-service) for county employees at county headquarters and other key county facilities. Counties need to advocate for the Commission on Revenue Allocation (CRA) to include ECD as a parameter for county revenue formula, enabling predictable and protected funding. Counties should also explore ways of incentivizing private sector into investing childcare for their employees. Counties should design public spaces such as markets with provision for childcare facilities integrated into the designs. Counties should also have distinct childcare budgets and not lumping it together with other services.

Adopt county legislation and regulatory framework for childcare. Even though there may (or may not) be a national legislative or regulatory framework, each county will need to adopt its own laws and regulations. As noted above, several counties have already started the policy dialogue in this regard, which should bring together not only county political leaders, but also county administrators (from various departments) as well as civil society stakeholders from within and outside the county. However, the development of county legislation and regulatory frameworks should be evidence-based and draw decisions from reliable data and research to ensure interventions are result-oriented, but also that policies and regulations are supportive and not punitive, recognizing the realities of childcare provision in Kenya's context.

More important than establishing the county's policy intentions, it is necessary for the county laws and regulations to provide the framework for operationalization of the county government's regulatory oversight. It is also important to figure out how much the implementation of a county childcare policy will cost, and the political appetite by the Governor and Assembly there is to use available county fiscal space for this purpose. As such, county officials need to work together (across political and administrative stakeholders, together with sector representation from civil society—to think through—and reach consensus on the implementation steps before they move forward.¹²

County registration of childcare providers. In order to regulate an industry or sector, it is important to first register the suppliers of the service to be regulated. Constructive county regulation of the childcare sector will fail if childcare providers don't see a benefit from registering with their respective county governments.¹³

In this regard, the biggest—or at least, the first—hurdle that counties currently face is that much of the childcare sector in Kenya operates in an informal manner, as many childcare providers don't see

¹² As noted further below, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication, the preparation of a model county legislative and regulatory framework, along with model regulatory manual and model implementation plan / forms would be beneficial.

¹³ Under most circumstances, pushing childcare providers to register with the threat that unregistered childcare provider will be forcibly shut down is likely neither an effective nor politically viable strategy.

a positive value-proposition by registering for a single business permit with their respective county government. The most obvious policy response that counties could pursue is to drastically lower the county license fee (or permit fee) associated with operating a childcare microenterprise (either by operating a childcare facility or by providing a home-based childcare services). A lower license fee—or even a zero-rated license—for childcare facilities and/or home-based childcare services is likely justifiable both on redistributive grounds (current fees are likely regressive) as well as on efficiency grounds (childcare is a merit good deserving of public subsidy).¹⁴ To the degree that the process of obtaining a county business permit is cumbersome, that process should be simplified or facilitated as well.

A related way to entice childcare providers to register their businesses with the county government is for counties to view—and treat—their business community at large—and childcare providers in particular—as partners, and a clients worthy of receiving county services in exchange for the economic activity and county revenues they generate. In other words, the county’s mindset about its own role—one of collaborative governance, rather than one of top-down enforcement—will be critically important. In fact, to the extent that county governments can work with childcare providers to improve their quality in marketable way (so that registered childcare providers might be able to charge a slightly higher daily rate), childcare providers would be keen to work with the county.

One benefit of the gradual formalization of childcare businesses through inclusive business registration is that counties end up with a comprehensive database of all childcare facilities within their jurisdiction as part of their county revenue administration. County governments that operate in an inclusive, citizen centric, results-oriented, and evidence-informed manner should make a tabulation of the basic data from their licensing efforts publicly available in order to inform the public on the size and nature of economic activity in their county—including the number of childcare providers by type. This may also be an opportunity for the county to measure and identify women-owned businesses as a foundation for women’s economic empowerment.

County regulatory oversight (assessment/inspection and enforcement) of childcare facilities and providers. The registration of childcare providers—either through obtaining a single business permit, or through an expedited county registration process for childcare providers—is the first step. Once childcare providers are registered, the county has an opportunity to engage with childcare providers to ensure that childcare providers are assessed or inspected on a regular basis to ensure that they provide a safe environment for the children in their care. This regulatory oversight role is an important public sector function to make sure that the market for childcare services works well. Because it requires direct interaction with childcare providers, it is most efficiently done at the local (county) level.

Childcare requires assessment or inspection of several aspects of childcare provision, including an assessment of the good conduct and health of the provider; inspection of the physical premises for safety; an assessment of aspects of hygiene, health management, food handling, and/or emergency procedures; assessing the qualifications of the provider and staff; and assessing the educational or didactical programming and quality of childcare. Operationally, there are three elements to the oversight process. First, the inspection or assessment itself needs to be conducted on a regular (e.g.,

¹⁴ The lowering of licensing fees could also be a county revenue enhancement strategy. To the extent that childcare providers currently do not pay any license fees, any amount that they will actually pay should be seen as an increase, rather than as a decrease.

annual or multi-annual) basis. Second, there is a need to make the inspection or assessment results public, so that parents have as much information available as possible in order to assess the safety and quality of each provider. Third, there is a need to implement a process for follow-up action or enforcement in case childcare providers do not meet certain “minimum” standards of service provision.¹⁵

Operationalization of these three elements of county regulatory oversight (inspection, ensuring transparency, and enforcement) appear to be the prevailing binding constraint in a number of counties in Kenya today.

A critical—and often overlooked—constraint to effective county action on childcare in Kenya is the lack of institutional clarity regarding which county department should take the lead in coordinating and implementing childcare-related functions. In practice, responsibility for childcare is frequently fragmented across multiple departments—such as Health, Gender, Social Services, Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE), or even Labor—each of which may have a partial but incomplete mandate. This fragmentation results in limited ownership, weak accountability, and the absence of a clear administrative “home” for childcare within county structures. Without a designated lead department (or a clearly mandated coordinating unit), childcare remains deprioritized in planning, budgeting, and implementation processes, often falling between institutional silos. Establishing a clear departmental lead—supported by defined roles for other relevant departments and anchored in county legislation or administrative guidance—would therefore be an essential step toward operationalizing the county childcare mandate, strengthening interdepartmental coordination, and ensuring that childcare is systematically integrated into county development plans, budgets, and service delivery frameworks.¹⁶

Regardless which county department is assigned the coordinating role, all county departments that are designated as sharing responsibility for childcare oversight should integrate their efforts into all regular county processes, including the County Integrated Development Plans, the department’s annual plans, and the department’s program-based budget requests. They should implement childcare programs, including provisions for their own staff, train caregivers, and develop quality childcare service models.

An important element to be decided as part of the operationalizing of the regulatory oversight process is how much of the process should be done by the county government itself (in-house, by county government staff) and how much of the oversight process can be contracted out to a private sector partner or by a contracted social enterprise. Given the limited resources and considering

¹⁵ Enforcement of standards should not be considered punitive, especially in the context of an industry where capacity is low. Whenever possible, enforcement action should be taken through probation, so as to serve as an effort to ensure the safety of children in care and raise the standard of service delivery. No regulation, however, can provide an absolute guarantee as to the safety and wellbeing of children in care settings.

¹⁶ Another alternative would be for County Education Boards—which are county-level boards appointed by the national Ministry of Education—to extend their supervision to childcare programs. As a starting point to enhance inclusive participation and decision-making, the county education boards could include childcare provider representatives on the board, similar to how primary and secondary school representatives are included. Alternatively, the responsibility for county-level coordination could be assigned to County Children Advisory Committees. The National Council for Children’s Services (NCCS) is the appointing authority for County Children Advisory Committees. According to the Children Act 2022, the Council establishes these committees to manage child welfare, protection, and rights at the county level.

successful examples from other countries, counties may consider subcontracting NGOs or social enterprises to support the operation, management, and inspection of childcare facilities. Such collaborative governance could extend to conducting training and capacity strengthening of childcare providers as well as certifying childcare service providers. County Executives and Public Service Boards should appoint childcare officers to coordinate childcare programs.

To the extent possible, county governments should try to offer childcare providers—either directly, or through a designated contractor—a one-stop-childcare-inspection solution, rather than raising the compliance burden by subjecting childcare providers to multiple, parallel inspection processes through different county departments.

County funding support for ensuring more affordable childcare. County regulatory oversight over private childcare providers by itself is a complex challenge to get off the ground. Regulation itself will not be free of cost, particularly if it is funded in a way that seeks to avoid imposing the cost on small (often home-based) childcare providers that provide childcare services to families on the lower end of the income scale. In addition, however, county governments can choose to advance free or reduced-cost access to public services such as childcare, especially for low-income households, by providing direct funding support to childcare providers.¹⁷

County governments have different ways in which they may choose to improve the affordability of childcare (see Box 3). Different policy alternatives will obviously have different costs associated with them, and different stakeholders within the county (and in the county government) may have different preferences as to the specific policy choice.

Box 3. County policy choices for funding support to childcare

If a county government wants to promote access to affordable, quality, safe childcare by providing funding support, county governments have a range of policy options available. Different options will clearly have different financial implications and different administrative implications. The different options will also have different political economy implications. Options include one or more of the following approaches:

Providing funding support by providing public childcare: the county government could construct and operate public childcare centres, or provide public childcare services at existing county ECDE centres. Similarly, a county government may opt to provide on-site childcare at schools that serve child-parents. Public provision has pros and cons, but is generally not associated with high-quality public service delivery outcomes. Counties are encouraged to consider the value-proposition offered by outsourcing the provision of recurrent childcare services through a competitive contract.

Providing funding support by providing childcare infrastructure: the county government may choose to construct childcare centres, but makes the facilities available to operators for free (or at reduced charge). Childcare providers / operators may be identified on a competitive basis (with the recognition that the primary purpose is provide affordable childcare services, rather than to maximize return on investment). Such an approach may be appropriate at county markets or at county office facilities.

¹⁷ As noted above, such subsidies or funding support may be part of a conditional grant scheme for childcare services. In this case, the parameters of how to provide support will be dictated—in part or in whole—by the conditions of the grant program.

Providing funding support by providing parents with childcare vouchers: county governments could establish a county program for distributing county vouchers to parents who request support for childcare. The Nurture First study into HBCC in Kenya found that most parents served by HBCC are severely economically vulnerable (engaged in low-paying, unstable jobs). Childcare vouchers could target these parents particularly found in informal settlements.

Providing funding support by providing recurrent subsidies to childcare providers: Research has found that majority of childcare providers struggle to balance childcare responsibilities with other household/ personal duties. Providers also spend a disproportionate amount of time on feeding and sleeping, and less on stimulating early learning and play. Borrowing from the Seychelles models, subsidies could go into paying for childcare assistants who could reduce the workload allowing for more time to be spent on play with the children. Particularly for home-based childcare, where studies have shown that providers earn less than they spend per child, over 50% struggle to collect payments from parents, with 51% using their own resources to provide food, diapers, etc. Subsidies could also go to childcare providers handling children with disabilities who require much more support.

Providing in-kind support by providing public childcare: short of direct funding support for childcare (as discussed above), county government could support childcare providers by purchasing and distributing (for free, or at reduced cost) inputs used by childcare providers. For instance, county governments could implement feeding programs to improve nutrition by distributing nutritious snacks (e.g., porridge) to targeted childcare providers. Additionally, county government could distribute educational toys, diapers, hygiene products, or other inputs to lower the cost and improve the quality of childcare services for the county's children served by childcare facilities. This would be easy to do given that many counties have the infrastructure and experience for school feeding programs and provision of learning materials in ECD centers. Research by organizations such as Nurture First has highlighted that childcare providers prioritize support in areas like nutrition and access to play materials. Approximately 70% of providers felt that they lack adequate resources (toys, educational materials, etc.) for children. This results in less stimulating, play-based learning environments essential for early childhood development.

Providing training to providers to improve quality of childcare: To improve childcare quality, especially in home-based centers, counties could prioritize the training of childcare providers. According to NurtureFirst's study, 93% of home-based childcare (HBCC) providers have not received any ECD-related training. Currently, training is offered by civil society organizations in a limited number of areas, with only 3% of HBCC providers having received training or support from government or NGOs. Given the government's limited capacity to deliver training directly, counties should consider partnering with specialized training service providers through public-private partnerships (PPPs) to scale up access to training and improve quality.

It is likely premature and beyond the scope of this note to prescribe what option(s) might be preferred. In any case, different county governments may choose different options as a result of their different devolved contexts, as well as for institutional and political reasons.

County support of childcare services will require action from other county actors are well. County governments' pursuit of well-regulated, well-supported childcare services does not just require the coordinated involvement of county political leaders and the county department (or departments) that are selected to lead the county childcare program(s), whether it be the County Education Department or the County Social Protection Department (or any other department). County budget department need to be involved to ensure budget resources are allocated for County Departments of Finance and Economic Planning should budget for childcare in annual plans, identify

funding opportunities for childcare initiatives, and develop tax incentives for providers. The county licensing department should be engaged to ensure that county business permits are issued efficiently, and that business licensing data is used effectively to promote county economic development, including women's economic development.

County promotion and support of childcare services. Merely because the childcare sector is currently informal doesn't mean that it doesn't contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of the community and county. As such, the county government should approach the childcare sector as an integral part of the county's service economy, and incorporate the sector into the county's economic development strategy accordingly. Childcare providers should be treated as "paying customers" of the public sector, rather than being seen by county officials as entities to be controlled and subjected to regulation. As such, county government can support and promote local childcare services in smaller and bigger ways.

For instance, county government can make it easier or harder for childcare providers to operate and comply with county regulations. Beyond the formal regulations, the county could provide an operating manual or guide that links operating requirements to county regulations. The county government could make model CC operating forms available on a central website, facilitating compliance with county standards and regulations regarding a range of quality indicators.

In addition, it is not unusual for local governments in other countries to host or facilitate free or low-cost workshops for aspiring childcare providers on how to launch a childcare business (or to offer related training on basic business administration) as part of the local government's economic development activities. Doing so in Kenya would be particularly beneficial with an eye on promoting women's entrepreneurship and women's economic development. Unfortunately, such activities are sometimes seen in Kenya as one-off developmental schemes only to be pursued when funding is provided by a foundation or donor, rather than recognizing that facilitating such business services to the local community as an integral, recurring part of county government in promoting local economic development (and already paid for by Kenya's taxpayers).

Experience-sharing across county governments. One of the advantages of a devolved system (versus a centralized system) is that the public sector is no longer a one-size-fits-all affair. Instead, different counties can adopt policies, and if successful and popular among their constituents, other counties can adopt and replicate them. This is sometimes referred to as "yardstick federalism".

In this context, the Council of Governors has a role to work with counties and partners to document and share successful county-level childcare initiatives to foster intercounty learning and inspire counties to prioritize investments in childcare. The National Industrial Training Authority should expand its efforts by developing curricula for higher-level childcare positions, including university-level specializations, to establish childcare as an attractive and viable professional career path.

What should be going on: Childcare facilities and providers

Childcare providers themselves have an obligation—and often, a market-based incentive—to improve the quality of the childcare services that they provide.

When economically viable, childcare providers should register their businesses, improve service quality, and explore joining existing national or county-wide childcare networks. This will strengthen

their collective voice to lobby county governments for support. Being part of a network also provides opportunities to learn from other childcare providers. Additionally, childcare providers should invest in professional development by undergoing both basic and advanced training in childcare.

What should be going on: Citizens and civil society

Civil society organizations should collaborate with county governments to build capacity and support childcare providers effectively.

Numerous positive initiatives are already underway among civil society actors. Childcare networks are being set up and growing, but they are hindered in their growth by limited public sector buy-in and more so investment. Individual childcare networks engaging with county governments is good. Collectively engaging with county governments is better.

For reasons further noted below (in Section 3.2), the national government may not act in the near future as the main catalyst for reform in the childcare arena. As further discussed in Section 4, the childcare industry—led by an alliance formed by leading champions and providers of childcare services in Kenya—may have to step in to play that role.

In order to avoid unnecessary duplication, CSOs –through a coalition such as the Localizing WEE in Kenya TWG-- could support systems reform by developing a standard set of regulatory standards and indicators; through the preparation of a model county legislative and regulatory framework, along with a model regulatory manual and model implementation plan/forms.¹⁸ Progress will be facilitated when these documents are jointly prepared, rather than when each childcare advocate prepares their own.

At the same time, they could offer counties with a transitional solution: industry-led registration of childcare facilities. Alternatively, the coalition could develop a model platform for the registration of childcare facilities which willing counties could adopt.

In addition to their current support, development partners and foundations should preferably redirect some of their resources to a common platform that can collectively advance the interests of the childcare sector and coordinate among existing stakeholders.

3.2 Underlying causes of multilevel governance obstacles to childcare in Kenya

The previous section details what actions are required to be undertaken by stakeholders at different levels of the public sector to move towards a well-regulated and well-functioning childcare ecosystem that promotes access to affordable, safe, quality childcare. What stands in the way of stakeholders taking these actions? Common multilevel governance obstacles to development include systemic constraints, such as:

- Unclear or inefficient functional assignments
- Imbalance between responsibilities and powers (including unfunded mandates)

¹⁸ To some extent, this process has already started (Nurture First).

- Lack of central (national) government commitment to the implementation of decentralized services and development
- Lack of political or institutional incentives for local (county) leaders to support specific development initiatives and provide effective oversight.
- Lack of policy consensus among stakeholders
- Ineffective public sector institutions/processes/procedures
- Ineffective coordination between multilevel stakeholders

In order to shift from “obstacle” to “opportunity”, it is important to distinguish between **proximate causes** of inaction or poor service delivery and the **root causes** of a stakeholder’s (or the public sector’s) failure to ensure inclusive and sustainable development. Digging deeper often reveals that political economy factors play an important role in explaining the multilevel governance obstacles to sustainable development.

Why are things not moving: National government

Why are national government stakeholders falling short of taking the actions they could take to advance access to affordable, safe, quality childcare?

Technical reasons play a role. Technical reasons play a role in explaining why national government stakeholders are falling short of taking the actions needed to advance access to affordable, safe, and quality childcare in Kenya. Most notably, there is a lack of technical clarity on what an operational national childcare framework should look like in practice, including how to define appropriate service standards for children aged 0–3, how to balance quality and affordability in a largely informal sector, and how to design regulatory systems that are both enforceable and supportive rather than exclusionary. In addition, national institutions often lack the analytical tools and data needed to inform policy design, including reliable information on the scale, distribution, and characteristics of childcare provision and demand. The cross-sectoral nature of childcare—cutting across education, health, gender, and social protection—further complicates matters, as no single institution has the technical mandate or capacity to lead on policy formulation and coordination. As a result, even where there is recognition of the importance of childcare, national stakeholders face practical challenges in translating this recognition into coherent policies, regulatory frameworks, and financing mechanisms, contributing to the current policy and implementation gap.

The lack of political or institutional will also plays a role. At both the county and national levels, resources often flow to their highest political use. In a predominantly patriarchal system like Kenya's, childcare rarely emerges as a topic of political discussion despite its strategic importance. It is often overlooked during electoral cycles and is not regarded as a “political goodie” to attract votes. Even with gender quotas, the limited representation of women in decision-making spaces—such as county assemblies and parliament—combined with pressure to vote along party lines, often results in women’s empowerment issues being dismissed or ignored. Furthermore, there is little recognition of the opportunity cost associated with neglecting childcare, particularly the missed social and economic dividends it could bring to society as a whole. This lack of understanding undermines the political and public support necessary to secure goodwill from executive offices at both national and county levels. Consequently, there is minimal political or institutional incentive at the national level to champion women’s empowerment—let alone childcare—which continues to be perceived primarily as a woman’s responsibility.

The potential social and economic impact of childcare services is likely being underestimated by national policymakers (and development practitioners). Increasing access to well-regulated childcare services is likely to have a positive social and economic impact. Its transformational power is likely to be considerably underestimated. After all, the provision of childcare is not just a hand-out, but providing access to childcare liberates women to avail themselves of educational opportunities and achieve better-paying employment, which has an economic return. Just like more equal access to education has the power to unlock the potential of millions of “lost Einsteins” (the millions of inventors that society lost out on due to unequal access to education), greater access to childcare has the power to unlock the “lost Marie Curies” (Linke 2018). Moreover, higher-earning households are willing to pay for well-regulated childcare services, so that much of the cost of well-regulated service provision is born by directly by households. At the same time, higher quality and better regulated childcare will formalize employment in the childcare sector, promote women entrepreneurship, transition employment from the informal sector into formal-sector jobs. It will generate skills-enhancement and improve human capital.

Ineffective multilevel coordination in Kenya play a key role in weak public sector performance. Across sectors, national ministries in Kenya have often been slow to fully embrace the logic and practice of devolution, resulting in persistent tensions, unclear roles, and weak intergovernmental coordination. This is not unique to Kenya, but reflects a broader pattern observed in many devolving contexts, where central institutions are reluctant—or ill-prepared—to shift from direct control toward a more enabling and coordinating role. In Kenya, these dynamics are evident in several sectors. For instance, relations between the Ministry of Water and county governments were severely strained following the introduction of the Water Act (2016), which failed to align institutional responsibilities and sectoral funding with the constitutional assignment of water service delivery responsibilities to counties. A petition by Kenya's Council of Governors (CoG) to stop the implementation of the Water Act (2016) has been an ongoing, contested matter, with governors arguing the Act unconstitutionally centralizes water governance. Similarly, in the education sector, national reporting on Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) enrolment has weakened following devolution, as national institutions ceased compiling comprehensive data, leaving counties to collect and report their own figures with varying standards and levels of capacity. These examples illustrate a broader systemic challenge: when national and county governments do not operate within a coherent, collaborative multilevel governance framework, gaps emerge in policy guidance, data systems, and accountability mechanisms—gaps that are equally evident in the childcare sector, where the absence of effective intergovernmental coordination continues to undermine progress toward a well-regulated and well-functioning system.

Why are things not moving: County governments

Why are county government stakeholders falling short of taking the actions they could take to advance access to affordable, safe, quality childcare?

Inertia. Inertia is an important factor in the lack of inaction at the county level. Childcare fell between the cracks during the constitutional transition (as did, for instance, urban development).¹⁹ In the absence of a catalyst (a conditional grant program), childcare will likely remain stuck.

¹⁹ The World Bank Kenya Urban Support Program (KUSP) was designed to break this inertia, and successfully put urban development on the policy agenda at the national and county levels.

Lack of technical knowledge. In the absence of a national framework, how would counties know what to do? Just like national-level officials, it is hard to define what to do to facilitate access to well-regulated childcare services, especially in the context of a low- to middle-income economy. It's hard for county governments to learn by copying what neighboring counties or neighboring countries are doing, because no county in Kenya (or country in the region) provides or effectively regulates childcare services.

County politicians in Kenya tend to have “four wall fixation”. They focus on constructing infrastructure. Instead, Governors and Members of County Assembly should see the benefits of bestowing recurrent benefits on their constituents by supporting access to childcare. Doing so would allow them to engage with childcare providers and parents, monitor program implementation, and link constituents with county childcare services.

Coordination among county stakeholders is not always settled. County governments are rather political in nature; the relationship between county political leaders and county administrative leaders is not always settled. This means that while county administrative leaders may be committed to a childcare agenda, county political leaders may not always be on board—or vice versa.

Collaborative governance: county as facilitator (rather than county as provider). Policy development in Kenya tends to follow traditional (inward-looking) planning processes, where—as a default—public services are provided by county government staff in county government-constructed facilities. This is unlikely to work well in the context of childcare in Kenya. For the county government to act as a facilitator leading a collaborative governance effort, the development and implementation of county policies should incorporate continuous engagement and input from childcare providers to ensure policies are contextually appropriate and maximize the contributions of childcare providers.

When the frontline position of the counties is not leveraged by conditional grants, taking action on childcare is less attractive for county governments. Given that wants and needs are unlimited while resources are scarce, convincing decision-makers of the value proposition of childcare over other priorities is crucial. In a somewhat cynical (but not necessarily incorrect) view of the public sector, national and county politicians prioritize winning elections, while bureaucrats aim to maximize budgets and staff. Households and businesses desire low taxes alongside effective public services. These competing interests shape the allocation of resources and policy priorities. County government officials may not fully appreciate the benefits of investing in childcare, nor do they necessarily prioritize resources toward activities that benefit society as a whole.

Why are things not moving: Childcare facilities and providers

The motivations that drive many childcare providers to remain informal have already been highlighted in this document. Even if clear regulations were available in every county, adhering to them—if enforced strictly—would probably cost most childcare providers their livelihood. As such, given the considerable lack of clarity, uncertainty, and risk of punitive or predatory regulatory enforcement, they opt to operate informally.

Why are things not moving: Citizens and civil society

What obstacles are preventing citizens and civil society organizations from advancing access to affordable, safe, quality childcare?

Better information about service delivery quantity and quality. In the absence of parents having an objective assessment of the quality or safety of childcare providers, many are understandably reluctant to rely on informal childcare arrangements, even when such services are the only option available. This lack of reliable information not only constrains demand for childcare services but also limits the ability of citizens and civil society to mobilize effectively for sectoral improvements. With most providers operating informally and outside any comprehensive registry or quality assurance system, there is little visibility into the number, distribution, or performance of childcare providers across counties. As a result, civil society organizations lack the evidence base needed to identify systemic gaps, prioritize interventions, or advocate convincingly for policy and regulatory reforms. In turn, this information deficit weakens accountability and collective action, allowing poor-quality provision to persist and reducing the pressure on both providers and public authorities to improve access to safe, affordable, and quality childcare services.

Affordability. To make safe and quality childcare more accessible, it must also be made more affordable, particularly for low income households. This necessitates allocating funds from government budgets at both the national and county levels to reduce the price paid by beneficiaries. The challenge lies in shaping the interests and incentives of political elites and bureaucratic decision-makers to support this ambition while engaging in power contestation to ensure that the interests of proponents of safe, quality, and affordable childcare prevail.

Lack of platform for collective action within the childcare sector to support localization of childcare. There is a clear gap in collective action within the childcare sector to support the localization and effective governance of childcare. While several technical working groups and networks exist, most remain focused primarily on early childhood development or operate only at the individual county level. Very few coalitions address the broader, cross-county and multilevel governance challenges that affect sustainable progress in childcare. In addition, most current networks and technical working groups rarely include or engage essential stakeholders such as public finance management experts, the IGRTC, CRA or other intergovernmental institutions—entities that are crucial for navigating the unique administrative and coordination obstacles within Kenya’s devolved system. Compounding this, many CSOs working in the childcare sector have limited experience and tools for addressing these complex intergovernmental governance issues, making it difficult for them to advance systemic solutions in a devolved context.

4. Multilevel governance opportunities to childcare in Kenya

4.1 Strengthening the childcare ecosystem across different government levels

Are there already efforts underway to fix the multilevel governance challenges? Are existing efforts adequate and succeeding (and if not, why not)? What more can be done to fix the multilevel governance challenges?

In order to identify multilevel governance opportunities to promote well-regulated, affordable, safe, quality childcare in Kenya, it is important to go beyond the list of “things that should be done”. Visioning a path forward also requires identifying a list of “things that *could* be done” by identifying actions that stakeholders at different levels are willing to pursue, for which the institutional benefits outweigh the institutional costs to the stakeholder.

Indeed, in some cases (in fact, in many cases), system-wide solutions will need to be found and implemented to create a set of conditions under which the incentives for stakeholders at different levels will start tipping in favor of reform action (as opposed to the status quo).

Among all policy alternatives, what reform path offers the greatest amount of low-hanging fruit, when considering both the development impact and the likely political/institutional support at all government levels for alternate reform trajectories?

Where is the opportunity? National government

The long-term opportunity for engaging national government in promoting a pro-childcare reform trajectory should not be underestimated. In the short term, however, the potential or opportunity for engaging with national government stakeholders in promoting a pro-childcare reform trajectory should not be over-estimated.

In a devolved system of government, the appropriate role of the national government should not be sought in the realm of frontline service provision: county governments have an advantage in direct interaction with the people. This does not mean, however, that the national government has no role to play in achieving a well-regulated, well-functioning childcare system: national government has particularly important roles to play when it comes to setting the policy framework and regulations and when it comes to providing funding (e.g., through conditional grants to county governments).

At the national level, mechanisms should be established to ensure consumer protection, including the development and enforcement of regulations and accreditation standards to uphold minimum safety and quality requirements. Additionally, mechanisms should address information asymmetry to protect parents and caregivers. For instance, a platform could be created to provide parents with access to information about the availability and quality of services offered by childcare facilities, enabling them to make informed decisions.

While it is neither unrealistic nor undesirable to expect the national government to establish a coherent and uniform regulatory framework for childcare, experience suggests that such leadership

may not materialize in the short term.²⁰ In this context, civil society actors have an important role to play in shaping the regulatory agenda by piloting standards, generating evidence, and building consensus around practical and context-appropriate approaches to childcare regulation. By setting the tone and demonstrating workable models, civil society can help lay the groundwork for a more formalized national framework, which the national government may subsequently adopt, refine, and scale within a unified policy and regulatory structure.

National-to-county childcare grants have the potential to serve as a powerful accelerant for expanding access to affordable, safe, and quality childcare services in Kenya. Well-designed intergovernmental transfers—such as conditional grants—could incentivize county governments to prioritize childcare within their planning and budgeting processes, while also enabling them to support providers through subsidies, infrastructure investments, or quality improvement initiatives. However, for such financing mechanisms to be effective, a minimum level of institutional readiness must first be achieved at the county level. In particular, counties need to have a functioning system for registering, regulating, and monitoring childcare providers, so that public resources can be channeled transparently and accountably to eligible providers. Without this foundational layer, grant funding risks being underutilized, misallocated, or ineffective in achieving meaningful improvements in service delivery.

There may be additional national-level policy instruments that can further strengthen the childcare ecosystem by stimulating demand for services. For instance, proposals such as child tax credits—currently being explored by institutions such as Strathmore University—could help reduce the financial burden on households and increase the affordability of childcare. While such demand-side interventions could form a valuable complement to supply-side and systems-focused interventions, it is important to recognize that stimulating demand in the absence of an adequate and regulated supply of childcare services is unlikely to yield the desired outcomes. Efforts to expand access to childcare must therefore proceed in a coordinated manner, ensuring that increased demand is matched by a corresponding expansion in the availability, quality, and regulation of childcare providers across counties.

Where is the opportunity? County governments

Progress in strengthening childcare systems is unlikely to occur uniformly across all counties, given differences across counties in political context and commitment, administrative capacity, and local priorities. Rather than seeking simultaneous uptake of childcare as a priority across all 47 counties, it may be more effective to engage first with a subset of counties that demonstrate strong interest and readiness to act as early adopters. By supporting these frontrunner counties in developing and implementing practical models for childcare regulation, financing, and service delivery, valuable lessons and good practices can be generated.

Over time, these experiences can diffuse through mechanisms of horizontal learning—such as peer exchanges, county networks, and platforms like the Council of Governors—as well as through forms of “yardstick competition,” where counties benchmark their performance against one another. In this

²⁰ There is a risk that, if and when national leadership on childcare regulation materializes, it may favor a more centralized and compliance-heavy approach, potentially resulting in regulatory standards that are overly stringent or insufficiently adapted to the realities of predominantly informal childcare provision, thereby discouraging provider participation and limiting access.

way, successful approaches can be gradually adapted and scaled across the country, fostering broader system-wide improvements without requiring uniform initial conditions.

County governments need to take proactive roles in both childcare and women's economic empowerment as part of a broader strategy focused on inclusive, responsive and collaborative governance. County initiatives aimed at simplifying the process of formalizing childcare businesses would contribute significantly by enabling providers to expand their reach, improve quality and access financial services while benefiting from county-led childcare programs. Counties, cognizant of their limitations may wish to, first, lobby national government for funding support; second, explore collaborative governance and work with CSOs in improving access and quality childcare services through enforcement of regulation and inspections, training and capacity building of childcare providers; and third, develop mechanisms to make childcare more affordable through subsidy schemes or development grants. Providers and CSO champions of women's empowerment must make a compelling business case for public sector leadership and involvement in the sector and recognize the role of the local public sector in the ecosystem.

Where is the opportunity? Childcare facilities and providers

Childcare providers have a unique opportunity to shape the future of the sector by constructively engaging county governments. Providers should advocate for the adoption of flexible, enabling regulatory approaches that facilitate gradual formalization and quality improvement, rather than punitive or overly demanding measures that risk pushing providers out of the market, especially for microenterprises and home-based caregivers. By joining existing or new childcare networks, providers can amplify their collective voice, enabling more effective dialogue with county and national authorities and building a constituency that can attract political attention and public support. These networks could support county government in future in inspection and strengthening the quality of childcare, and support attracting funding for childcare providers. These childcare networks can also facilitate peer learning, professional development, and the dissemination of best practices, empowering providers to continuously improve standards and service delivery while advocating for an enabling environment that fosters sector growth.

Where is the opportunity? Citizens and civil society

Civil society and childcare advocates can play a central role in steering the national policy agenda and catalyzing effective county-level implementation. There is an opportunity to engage directly with the newly established State Department for Children's Welfare, working collaboratively to prioritize and advance childcare reforms. Many childcare-focused CSOs have already developed practical guidelines, tools, and standards based on extensive field experience; by partnering with policymakers, they can ensure that these resources inform the development of coherent, evidence-based national and county-level standards and policies.

Stronger collaboration and synergies within the childcare advocacy community are essential. Networks should commit to sharing data, lessons, and policy tools widely. By pooling knowledge and supporting the exchange of evidence and experiences between counties (in line with "yardstick federalism"), CSOs can help ensure that as counties craft their childcare policies—often ahead of comprehensive national direction—they are informed by proven, contextually relevant research and solutions. For instance, civil society organizations could work with the COG Maarifa centre to establish a central childcare-focused repository for use nationwide to research and knowledge

products developed in the sector. Furthermore, childcare advocacy groups can support system development by creating or promoting adoption of model registration platforms and administrative tools, assisting counties in putting in place robust and user-friendly processes for provider registration, quality assurance, and oversight.

4.2 Concluding thoughts

In conclusion, bridging the gap between actual and desired childcare provision in Kenya requires concerted efforts from all stakeholders involved. Recognizing the vital role of county governments as active participants in delivering quality services is essential for developing effective policies and implementation models that enhance access to affordable childcare. By fostering intergovernmental collaboration, addressing regulatory challenges, facilitating intercounty learning from successful initiatives, reducing barriers for providers, and ensuring sustainable funding mechanisms are established, Kenya can create a more robust framework for delivering quality childcare services that ultimately supports women's economic empowerment and benefits society as a whole.

References

- Boex, Jamie. 2015. [The vertical assignment of functions and expenditure responsibilities](#). LPSI Working Paper. Local Public Sector Initiative.
- ECDAN, Mobile Creches, Smart Start, BRAC, Nurture First, One Sky, Spark Health Africa, Foundation for Communities of Learning (with technical support of Reimagined Futures.). 2023. [Childcare Systems Map](#).
- Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. 2022. Analytical Report on Household and Family Dynamics. Kenya Population and Housing Census 2019 (Volume XI).
- Linke, Rebecca. 2018. Lost Einsteins: The US may have missed out on millions of inventors. Feb 16, 2018. <https://mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/lost-einsteins-us-may-have-missed-out-millions-inventors>
- Local Public Sector Alliance. 2024a. [Multilevel Governance as an Opportunity or Obstacle to Development](#). Centreville: Local Public Sector Alliance.
- Local Public Sector Alliance. 2024b. [An Initial Assessment of the State of Local Governance Institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa](#) (February 2024). Centreville: Local Public Sector Alliance.
- Muwonge, Abdu, Timothy Stephen Williamson, Christine Owuor, and Muratha Kinuthia. 2022. [Making devolution work for service delivery in Kenya](#). Nairobi: World Bank.
- National Council for Children’s Services (NCCS). 2023. National Guidelines for Transitioning Child Care System in Kenya. <https://bettercarenetwork.org/library/social-welfare-systems/child-care-and-protection-system-reforms/national-guidelines-for-transitioning-child-care-system-in-kenya>
- UN. 2021. “Gender equality, the ‘unfinished human rights struggle of this century’: UN Chief”: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1088512>
- UN Women. 2024. The Care Agenda: A Regional Perspective for East and Southern Africa. <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/01/the-care-agenda-a-regional-perspective-for-east-and-southern-africa>