



# Tackling Childcare: The Business Case for Employer-Supported Childcare

CASE STUDY

**Safaricom**  
Telecommunications, Kenya

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**Economy name:**  
Kenya

**Main business city:**  
Nairobi\*

**Region:**  
Sub-Saharan Africa

**Income level:**  
Lower middle  
income

**Population:**  
45,545,980

**Female population:**  
22,824,526

**Labor force  
participation (15+):**  
63% female  
72% male

**Compulsory  
primary education  
enrollment age:**  
6 years



### Leave policies

Paid maternity leave	Yes	90 days
Paid paternity leave	Yes	14 days
Paid parental leave	No	0



### Legal obligation for employers to support childcare

	0-2 years	3-5 years
Obligation for employers to support childcare?	No	No
Based on the number of female employees?	N/A	N/A
Based on the number of employees regardless of gender?	N/A	N/A
Special legislation on employer-provided childcare?	No	No



### Government incentives to employers to support childcare

Tax benefits to employers to support childcare?	No	No
Non-tax benefits to employers to support childcare? (monetary and/or nonmonetary benefits)	No	No



### Quality of private childcare services

License or registration required?	No	Yes
Zoning requirements?	No	Yes
Pupil-teacher ratio required?	No	No
Penalties for noncompliance with laws?	No	Yes

*Note: The Nairobi City County Early Childhood Education Act, which applies to both private and public childcare centers, was adopted in May 2017 by the Nairobi City County Assembly and is pending the Governor's signature to come into force. Once signed, the amendment will expand the application of the 2014 Nairobi City County Early Childhood Education Bill to children under the age of six. This will affect some of the answers to questions covered in this study, such as safety measures, inspections, and teacher qualifications with respect to childcare services in the 0-2 years age group.*

\*The *Women, Business and the Law* data are based on domestic laws and regulations that apply to the main business city of the economy. For more information on the methodology including the maternity/paternity/parental leave calculation methodology, visit [wbl.worldbank.org](http://wbl.worldbank.org)

# Safaricom

## Telecommunications, **KENYA**

### PARENTS, WORK, AND CHILDCARE IN KENYA

Employment or lack of it is a key issue for many Kenyans. Current overall labor force participation in Kenya stands at an estimated 67 percent, with women experiencing lower participation rates than men (62 percent compared with 72 percent) (ILO, 2016a). Gender norms in Kenya, as elsewhere, indicate that women are the primary caregivers and spend much more time on the unpaid care of others, particularly of children (UNSG, 2016; Ethical Tea Partnership, 2015). One study shows Kenyan women spend around 90 minutes daily on childcare, compared to men's average of 12 minutes (ActionAid, 2013).

The 2007 Employment Act requires companies to provide female employees with three months of maternity leave at 100 percent pay and male employees with two weeks of paternity leave, both paid by the employer (Employment Act, 2007). The pending Employment Act Amendment Bill 2015 will introduce provisions for adoptive parents. Female employees who adopt a child under age three will be entitled to three months of paid adoption leave, two months for children aged three to 12, and one month for children older than 12. Adoptive fathers will be entitled to two weeks of adoption leave.

The new Health Bill (pending since 2015, awaiting presidential assent) will introduce mandatory requirements on employers to provide breastfeeding stations and additional breaks (beyond existing meal breaks) in which mothers can breastfeed or express milk. There are no legal provisions for flexible hours or part-time work for parents in Kenya.

During infancy and early childhood, children are typically cared for by family members or domestic workers, such as privately hired childminders or nannies. Domestic workers themselves are a vulnerable group, often from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups, lacking decent working conditions (ILO, 2015), and prone to switching employers frequently and with little notice. There is no public provision of childcare for children under three in Kenya. Early childhood education services for children age three and under exist but are mainly informal and home-based (WBL, 2016b; ILO, 2010).

Safaricom's **Employee Profile**, March 2017:

- 51% of Safaricom's 5,085 employees are women

Safaricom supports **employees with children** through:

- On-site crèches
- "Bring your child to work" policy
- Additional paid maternity leave — (beyond statutory provision)
- "Mother's shift" — reduced working week at full-time pay
- Breastfeeding rooms
- Shift preference system (at Call Centre)
- On-site doctor and medical insurance

**Business impacts** of providing childcare supports:

- Improved punctuality, reduced absenteeism and stress
- Productivity and motivation gains for women and men
- Recruitment and retention benefits
- Progress against company vision for numbers of women in leadership and technology functions
- Demonstrates commitment to best practice in sustainable and responsible business, as part of the company's overall sustainability initiatives
- Helps company deliver on strategic priorities



PHOTO: COURTESY OF SAFARICOM

SAFARICOM CALL CENTRE CRÈCHE, NAIROBI.

Formal early childhood education (ECE) (for children ages three to six years) provision in Kenya is devolved to the county level under the over-arching national legal framework of the County Early Childhood Education Bill of 2014. The 2014 Bill sets out clear requirements on premises, safety, inspection, and staff qualifications. Compulsory free public school education starts at age six. Childcare can be expensive, especially for low-wage workers, and has been shown to suppress maternal employment in Kenya (Lokshin, Glinskaya, and Garcia, 2000; ILO, 2010).

Within this landscape in Nairobi and Kenya more broadly, this case study discusses how the telecommunications company Safaricom provides support for working parents within its three headquarters' office sites and single Call Centre site in Nairobi (85 percent of staff are in Nairobi) (Safaricom, 2016), as well as how it is currently considering provision for employees outside the capital.<sup>1</sup>

## COMPANY BACKGROUND

Safaricom, a telecommunications company operating in Kenya, provides voice, data, and mobile money transfer services to individual customers, businesses, and the public sector. It is especially well-known for pioneering M-PESA, a mobile money transfer service. Founded in 1997 and originally part of a state-owned corporation, Safaricom was formally licensed in 1999 and began operations in 2000 with Vodafone holding a 40 percent stake and the Kenyan government 60 percent (following its listing in the Nairobi Stock Exchange (NSE) in 2007, the government's stake is now 35 percent with 25 percent listed in the NSE). Safaricom is headquartered in Nairobi, with regional offices and shops throughout Kenya. The company has 44 direct retail shops, with more than 252,000 associated retailers and over 120,000 M-PESA agents across Kenya. In 2016, its annual revenue was 196 billion Kenyan shillings (\$1.8 billion) (Safaricom, 2016).

### Women at Safaricom, March 2017

51% **workforce**

59% **customer operations workers**

30% **board members**

25% **senior leadership team**

31% **department heads**



## **BUSINESS CONTEXT FOR SUPPORTING WORKING FAMILIES**

Safaricom has 5,085 employees, of whom 51 percent are women. The male to female ratio across the company is significant, including at the board level. Safaricom has been proactive in prioritizing gender balance and a supportive work environment for working parents across the company. This approach to gender balance in the workplace stems from the company's values of diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunity for women and men.

The company has different employee profiles in different areas of the business, with many working families (employees with children, either their own or from their extended families) among the staff—21 percent of staff are in their 20s and 64 percent of staff are in their 30s (Safaricom, March 2017).<sup>2</sup> At the company's Call Centre, staff tend to be slightly younger than those at headquarters, with an average age of 32 years, and many have young children.<sup>3</sup>

In other parts of the business, the workforce profile is older, with staff having older children and sharing childcare responsibilities with other family members as part of extended family networks.

Safaricom began offering childcare support at its Call Centre facility in 2010, aiming to provide a supportive environment to staff with childcare responsibilities. Call Centre staff are a crucial part of Safaricom's operations, supporting one of the company's strategic business priorities: "customer first." Their productivity in answering customer queries via calls and social media is captured in a key company metric, the Net Promoter Score (NPS), which measures how available Safaricom is to its customers. The NPS measures whether Safaricom's customers would recommend them to others—a vital factor in a fast-moving, competitive commercial space.

Safaricom had been experiencing some punctuality and absenteeism problems at the Call Centre, and managers

**"We continue to create the most mother-friendly working conditions we can for two main reasons. The first is to reduce the disruption and costs associated with replacing women leaving the workforce to raise families, and the second is to help address the shortage of women in senior management positions within the company. Aside from supporting new mothers, we are also actively identifying female employees with leadership potential and deliberately growing them at every level of the company."**

**Safaricom Sustainability Report 2015**

learned anecdotally that these were mainly caused by disruptions in employees' childcare arrangements (often concerning domestic staff, or "house girl dramas," as a company video describes it), children's illness, and occasionally conflict with breastfeeding times for mothers.

Given that absenteeism and lateness impacted productivity and the "availability to customers" metrics, helping staff address those issues became business-relevant, and the company began to consider how childcare provision could benefit both company and staff (women and men). Safaricom also felt that providing crèche facilities would support staff in their personal and professional growth, providing a more enabling environment at work.

Safaricom believes in a diverse workforce. As in other technology companies, fewer women hold technical roles. Safaricom has taken steps to address this issue by seeking to understand the root causes of gender imbalance that lead to fewer female engineers, and considering how to address those causes directly, with partners and for the benefit of the industry at large. That activity led to the development of the company's Women in Technology (WIT) program in Kenya. WIT involves a range of activities targeting girls and women "from the classroom to the boardroom," working with schools and universities to encourage more women into science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields. Safaricom believes that its package of human resource measures, from childcare through career progression programs, helps to maintain the diverse and talented workforce the company wants to generate.

## HOW SAFARICOM SUPPORTS EMPLOYEES WITH CHILDCARE NEEDS

The company provides a suite of policies and practices that help support both male and female employees with children, including on-site crèches for younger children. Beyond crèche provision, this includes a "bring your child to work" policy, maternity leave beyond statutory provision, reduced working hours options for mothers, breastfeeding rooms, an on-site doctor, and medical insurance that includes children. Additional policies recognize the shift regime of Call Centre employees: a shift preference system and an open approach when employees need to change shifts (there is no childcare provision that can accommodate night shift work). Finally, the company is considering expanding existing childcare support beyond Nairobi to staff in all of Kenya's regions, including in the six new regional offices and beyond.

### On-site crèches

Safaricom has two on-site crèches in Nairobi—one at its Call Centre, established in 2010, and the second at one of its three headquarters sites, established in 2013. The second crèche was established to ensure fair access to such services for all Nairobi staff. All employees can use the crèches, and there are no fees. Both sites are open to children from three months to seven

years, and parents bring their own food, clothes, and diapers for infants. At the Call Centre site, the crèche is open from 6:30 a.m.–6 p.m., seven days per week, including weekends and holidays. The center has one room for all children, with a separate sleeping room and separate kitchen, as well as an outdoor play area. Access to a doctor is provided separately for all staff as well as for children using the crèche. The Human Resources department reports that staff without childcare needs still value the crèches as an indication of the company's overall approach to employee care.

At the headquarters' site crèche, hours are 7:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m., weekdays only. Here there is also one room for all children, with separate changing facilities and a food preparation room. All staff at the crèches have qualifications in first aid.

Safaricom wanted to ensure that the best quality care was provided for children at the crèche. Thus, from their inception, both crèches have been operated by Children's World, an independent, qualified, private, external provider of crèche, play, and childminding services, under the overall management of Safaricom's Health, Safety, and Wellness Team (part of the Human Resources division). Parents are welcome to give feedback about the crèche services. Over time, this has included suggestions to have more structured activities for the children, to improve provision for children over age three, including adding more educational activities, and a request for childminders to have first aid training.

A range of employees, both women and men, use the crèches, although Call Centre staff who work shifts make most use of the Call Centre site. The parents of some very young children

**"You know your baby is safe, so you're a happy mother, you are settled."**

**Call Centre employee and crèche user, female**

**“Having the crèche makes you feel more comfortable, in terms of concentration levels. You don't have to call home to check on the house help, it is better if you need to administer any medicine if your child is sick, and being here means you can form a psychological bond with your child.”**

**Call Centre employee and crèche user, male**

use the crèche as their main form of childcare because this allows them to visit during the day and feel reassured that they are close by. Yet at both sites, the crèche facilities' main use is for back-up care when employees' regular childcare arrangements break down during a standard working week. For employees at the Call Centre (which operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year), the fact that the Call Centre crèche is open on weekends and holidays when domestic staff may be unavailable is also especially important.

Staff also value the crèche services for school-age children (e.g., when they are ill) and the crèches are much busier during the holidays and on weekends. Safaricom is now considering partnerships with other daycare service providers in the regions to reach out to all staff. Employees report that many children prefer the crèche to being at home alone with a childminder, since they have the company of other children and prefer the atmosphere and facilities.

### **“Bring your child to work” policy**

At present, all staff at the company's three headquarters' offices can bring their children to work at any time. Staff can, for example, use the company's Resource Centre area, which provides books, television, electronic games, pool, and foosball. This facility is typically used by children who are too old for the

crèche, and there are no restrictions on its use. Many staff use it during the holidays for their own children or those of other family members. Using the Resource Centre in this way forms part of the company's “Safe Workplace for Everyone” activity under its “Children's Rights and Business Principles” policy. This policy, formulated as part of Safaricom's work with UNICEF on integrating child rights into business practice begun in 2014 (UNICEF, 2015), commits the company to “respect the rights of all people, including children, in the workplace, the marketplace, corporate social investment and business operations.”

### **Maternity and paternity leave**

Safaricom updated its maternity leave policy in March 2015, going beyond statutory provision to offer new mothers at least 16 weeks fully paid maternity leave. Beyond the 16 weeks, mothers can extend their paid time off by adding annual leave to maternity leave. Fathers are offered the statutory two weeks paid paternity leave. The option of increasing paternity leave to one month was explored during an informal staff survey in 2016, but results showed that staff felt the culture was already flexible enough, so additional measures were not needed. The company is also operating a new program called Safaricom Connect, a return-to-paid-employment program for women who have been out of employment between one and 10 years.

**“Family comes first at Safaricom, you don't have to carry work home and flexible shifts are much more accommodating to family life, so it can be about your priorities.”**

**Call Centre employee and crèche user, female, several years at company**



### Breastfeeding rooms

Safaricom provides fully equipped lactation rooms for breastfeeding and lactation in a hygienic, private environment, allowing women to continue to breastfeed after returning to employment. This service is not yet mandatory, and the company's provision of lactation rooms has been widely shared to encourage other private sector actors. For example, the company is featured as a best practice example in a national program to promote, support, and protect breastfeeding as a right of both mother and child. The right to breastfeed infants up to 24 months with a break of up to 40 minutes every four hours is also now documented in Kenya's Breastfeeding Mothers Bill 2017 (awaiting presidential consent as of July 2017).

### Reduced hours for returning mothers

New mothers working on shift patterns at the Call Centre have the option to work reduced hours for the first six months after returning to employment (known as "mother's shift," this consists of six instead of eight hours per day or 30 instead of 40 hours per week), while remaining on full-time pay.

### Shift preference system

There is also a shift preference system for mothers returning to work at the Call Centre after maternity leave. The business aims to allocate 60 percent of shifts according to staff preference, with 40 percent allotted according to business need, alongside a performance-related shift allocation system for all shift work staff (employees who meet performance targets qualify for allocation privileges that aim to take shift timing preferences into account). Call Centre managers have improved from meeting about 50 percent of staff shift requests in 2014 to about 65 percent of requests in 2016. Staff who are not parents or carers are also supportive of the policy for returning mothers as they believe it shows that the company cares for its employees and for wider society.

**"We use the crèche especially on weekends and holidays when the nanny is away. Our child enjoys it because there are activities here rather than being stuck at home."**

**Call Centre employee and crèche user, male**

### On-site doctor and comprehensive medical insurance

Safaricom provides comprehensive medical insurance for staff and their families. In addition, a doctor is available on-site at the Call Centre, so sick children can be seen at the staff clinic. This has also provided benefits for staff and the company—better health outcomes for children and improved staff availability and lower absenteeism.

### New activities in 2017 and beyond

Safaricom is exploring various other policies and practices for 2017 and beyond. For example, the company is exploring how to provide childcare support to Safaricom staff beyond Nairobi in all of Kenya's regions.

The company is also investigating how to provide more appropriate workplace facilities for employees' older children, who are sometimes brought to the workplace, especially on weekends and during school holidays, both at the Call Centre and headquarters offices. At headquarters, there is some provision at the Resource Centre, but Human Resources staff believe it can be further improved and are exploring options. Already staff are accommodating young people across the company's offices, showing them how the business operates, allowing them to explore their areas of interest, and supporting them in work and study at computer stations

and structured job shadowing opportunities. The company is considering consolidating these activities into a young workers policy.

The business has had flexible work policies for some time, and is exploring extending them further. During 2017, additional workplace-related policies are being informally piloted and tested with senior management and leadership teams. Following such pilots, the aim will be to develop the policies across the company, with each division considering how the options would apply to their department, depending on the nature of work and type of operations in each department.

Finally, Safaricom is working to develop and implement company-wide training and awareness-raising on a new Anti-Gender-Based Violence Policy that looks at violence within and beyond the workplace and its impact in the workplace. This includes issues such as domestic violence and how they affect employees.

## **BUSINESS IMPACT OF SAFARICOM'S CHILDCARE SUPPORT**

Although the company's main aim in providing this range of support is in "doing the right thing" and supporting employees, there is nevertheless a business impact. Safaricom reports business gains in several areas deriving from its childcare support. Apart from supporting Safaricom's commitment to diversity, these include gains across the following areas: productivity and motivation; punctuality, absenteeism, and stress; recruitment and retention; company targets for women in leadership and technology functions; demonstrable commitment to best practice in sustainable and responsible business, as part of the company's overall sustainability initiatives; and delivery on the company's overall strategic priorities of putting customers first and operational excellence.

In terms of cost-benefit analysis, Safaricom does not directly monitor return on investment (ROI) data, either quantitative

or qualitative, on the crèche or other policies. However, the company does track service revenue and profit per employee as well as headcount ROI within a target range. These figures are benchmarked by Safaricom's parent company Vodafone against its other operations in the region, and productivity and retention gains are directly visible in those metrics (for example, through reduced recruitment and training costs at Safaricom against the company's own results from previous years).

### **Costs of providing childcare**

In 2016, the combined direct operating cost of both crèche facilities was \$33,300, on top of which there were some incidental maintenance and repair costs. Both facilities are on existing Safaricom premises. Safaricom pays the childcare provider, Children's World, directly, and Children's World manages the center staff and handles administrative tasks (enrollment of children and contact details). The provider's prices are based on a formula combining the costs of space, staff, food provision, materials and overhead, geographical location, and whether children drop-in or are present full time. Safaricom does not take out additional insurance in relation to the crèche; any liabilities related to crèche facilities are covered by Safaricom's extensive general insurance provision, and Children's World has an excellent performance record regarding accident incidence.

#### **Safaricom's Policies Under Development**

- **Workplace provision for school-aged children and adolescents**
- **Policy and training on tackling gender-based violence**

### Improvements in punctuality, absenteeism, and stress level

The Call Centre is perceived as a high-pressure environment (the “pulse” of the business), where employees may be dealing with repetitive work, demanding customers, and the regular introduction of new products and services. Call Centre staff are often studying as well as working, some also run small businesses, and many choose to work overtime to increase their earnings.

HR staff report that before the Call Centre crèche was established in 2010, Call Centre operations faced some absenteeism and punctuality problems, with staff taking “personal emergency” leave at short notice, which negatively affected their annual leave entitlement.

Through conversations with employees, HR staff determined that unexpected difficulties with childcare and children’s illness were the root cause of these problems, affecting both female and male workers. Furthermore, when new mothers used up their annual leave allowance on caring for their children, they lacked rest time and were tired and stressed at work. Having the crèche and medical facilities available on-site has substantially improved absenteeism and punctuality. Now, instead of having to find a relative or arrange nonfamily childcare, staff can bring their children to work, where they can also see a doctor if a child is ill. Shifts do not have to be

**“We understand that women’s issues are business issues and providing a work environment where women can thrive in their roles as mothers, while staying in employment and growing their careers, is part of Safaricom’s HR objectives, while also offering competitive advantage for us as part of employee benefits packages.”**

**Stephen Chege, Head of Corporate Affairs**

rearranged, or they can be changed to daytime when the crèche is available. Given that the Call Centre operates around the clock, and the crèche is daytime only, not all emergencies can be resolved, but there has been a substantial decrease in absenteeism, tardiness, and management time taken to rearrange shifts.

### Productivity and motivation gains

Female and male staff at both the Call Centre and headquarters offices report that having the crèche facilities improves their productivity as they feel more settled, concentrate better, and are more focused on their tasks. At the Call Centre, this is directly visible through metrics such as service levels (how many queries are answered and queuing and abandonment rates) and customer satisfaction rates (as measured by the Net Promoter Score mentioned earlier).

Safaricom’s headquarters office houses more senior staff, including management, and working parents at headquarters rely on at-home nannies more than their Call Centre



PHOTO: COURTESY OF SAFARICOM

CEO BOB COLLYMORE VISITS THE HEADQUARTERS CRÈCHE IN NAIROBI.

counterparts. Nevertheless, anecdotally both female and male headquarters staff report that knowing they have the crèche as a back-up when needed helps them give their best at work. It also saves them time and disruption since previously they took breaks and disrupted their work schedule to rearrange their childcare. Managers reported that these gains are visible in the annual staff survey via rising scores on how engaged staff feel at work.

### Recruitment and retention benefits

Although the company itself has not publicized the crèche facilities to potential employees, media attention has meant that potential candidates are aware of the crèches, which have helped attract both male and female staff. At headquarters, the company is recruiting highly skilled staff in a competitive market, and the crèche facility offers a competitive advantage compared to benefits offered by other employers. It also sends a clear message that the company understands that staff have family commitments, which has indirectly impacted women's

career progression. Previously, staff report that some female employees were afraid that they would “fall down the career ladder if they had children since they would accumulate less experience and be seen as less ‘available’ to the company.” Now, the company can attract men and women equally by demonstrating that it is open to those who want to combine career and family life.

At the Call Centre, new staff receive eight weeks of full-time training, which is a substantial financial investment. Retention of staff is therefore important. In the past, Safaricom found it was losing new mothers as they struggled to manage their employment and child rearing commitments, and many did not return to paid work. Some were constrained by the cost of childcare, so the free crèche helps retain those with financial constraints.

### Progress toward company targets for women in leadership

Safaricom has a system of targets on diversity and inclusion. Although overall Safaricom is doing well on gender diversity, the company is still working toward its targets on women in leadership and women's representation in the company's technological functions. Childcare support is part of a range of programs aimed to help women remain at Safaricom after maternity and thus fully participate in the management and leadership functions of the company over time.<sup>4</sup>

### Support for company commitment to best practices in sustainable and responsible business

Safaricom's childcare support is part of the company's overall sustainability strategy, which has generated extensive external interest. Although not unique in Kenya, most other companies providing childcare support at work are in more rural settings, such as flower and rose farms (KEPSA, 2017; UNICEF Kenya, 2015). Interest in the company's activities has come from international organizations, the local media, investors, especially from Europe, and other stakeholders. The company's Head of Corporate Responsibility reports that sustainability activities are a key area of interest to potential investors.

**“The crèche was established to handle staff being MIA [missing in action]. It was especially a problem with new mothers. It has really helped reduce that a lot, so there's more stability in the workplace. It also helps your motivation at work, knowing that the company cares and provides an extra service for free. Honestly speaking, I feel mothers here are privileged; we are market leaders and others are trying to catch up.”**

**Call Centre employee and crèche user, female**

**“My wife’s work is less flexible than mine, she cannot drop a day’s work if our child is sick. Compared to my previous employer, where we had worries about what to do if childcare failed, now we have peace of mind, which makes me more productive. I can deliver my best at work.”**

**Headquarters senior manager, male,  
occasional crèche user**

## LESSONS LEARNED

Safaricom’s crèche facilities and other childcare-related employee policies are popular with staff. The company believes it has learned lessons about these policies and facilities, and that there is still more that can be done. As a result, the company is continuing to make plans for further development, for example, at the regional level.

Offering childcare supports for free was more viable despite the company bearing the cost. When Safaricom established the Call Centre crèche, it learned that charging employees for its use was not workable for staff there. The company decided to offer the crèche for free, which led to increased take-up and then succeeded in the company’s objective of reducing childcare-related absenteeism and disruption.

The crèche began as a low-key business solution and grew into a reputation enhancer. The Call Centre crèche began as a limited solution to a concrete company problem.

However, over time, as both crèches were established, they have attracted attention from national and international organizations as well as the media. As a result, they have enhanced the company’s reputation on the regional and international levels, boosted its corporate responsibility credentials, and, through media coverage, helped to attract potential employees in a manner that the company had not foreseen. The company could capitalize on this by using the crèche facilities in recruitment campaigns as well as customer outreach, making sure to highlight these benefits for both female and male candidates.

When the crèche was set up, Safaricom expected that parents would use it as their main source of childcare. Yet the most common use of both crèches is for back-up care, as well as on weekends for Call Centre staff who work weekends, and during school holidays. Safaricom is now taking more formal steps to meet this demand.

The crèche began as a rather low-cost, basic service. Although the employee users of the crèche have no formal role in its governance, employee feedback about crèche operations made clear their increasing expectations about the care and education of their children. Over time, this has meant that the quality of care provision in the crèche has improved, leading to requirements for childcare staff, such as having first aid training, and for more educational activities and structured

**“I was attracted by the work-life balance here, and knowing the company has a crèche was part of realizing the attitude the company has to family life. In my previous role, I worked long hours and didn’t see my kids much.”**

**Headquarters employee and crèche user,  
male, recently recruited**

**“At a recent international investor roadshow, our CEO only took copies of our Sustainability Report, since he receives increasingly more questions from investors about our business responsibility and sustainability—will we be in business in 100 years? We feel that all our work in this area is really key for investors.”**

**Sanda Ojiambo, Head of Corporate Responsibility**

play for children. These changing expectations also reflect increased attention at the national level in Kenya to higher quality early childhood education (ECE) provision.

Human resources managers are working on ideas to cover the next challenge for staff—back-up care for school-age children and adolescents over holidays and weekends. The fact that existing facilities are trying to cater to those age groups shows a clear demand from staff in this area. Existing “bring your child to work” days have proved popular, and there may be scope for the company to conduct more of those or similar activities.

Childcare in Kenya, as elsewhere, is still seen as predominantly a woman’s responsibility. Focus group discussions with Safaricom employees revealed that it is primarily women who pay for nannies from their earnings and make decisions about childcare. As a result, the company felt female employees would especially appreciate benefits from the crèche and

other family-friendly policies. In practice, male employees clearly value the crèche facilities and other work-family policies more than the company initially anticipated, so the benefits have been felt more fully than anticipated across the whole workforce.

## CONCLUSION

The company currently summarizes its overall strategic aim (to be fully fit for a sustainable future) as its “Transforming Lives” agenda. This agenda aims to transform the lives of customers, communities, and colleagues. Its tagline is “We’re at our best when you’re at yours.” Company senior management feel that the commitment to support staff as a core company value is being put into practice by the suite of enhanced policies and practices related to staff with childcare needs as there are evidently direct benefits for both the staff and the business.

Safaricom’s crèche provision has been a key plank of that support. Provision has been maintained and enhanced, with plans for further development both in terms of deeper coverage for older children, and broader provision beyond Nairobi-based staff.



CALL CENTRE SUPERVISORS, NAIROBI.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF SAFARICOM



## Endnotes

- 1 Interviews for this case study were conducted in person in January 2017 in Nairobi. Researchers interviewed a range of Safaricom staff at two headquarter sites and at the company's Jambo Contact Centre. Interviews were conducted with personnel from the following departments: Human Resources—Health, Safety and Wellness; Corporate Responsibility; Finance; and Workforce Planning and Customer Operations. In addition to in-person interviews, focus group discussions were held with male and female employees of different seniority. Two on-site crèches were also visited. Two background interviews beyond Safaricom itself were also conducted, one with early years childcare provider Kidogo and one with Safaricom's crèche provider Children's World.
- 2 Information based on interviews conducted with Safaricom Call Centre staff in March 2017.
- 3 Information based on interviews conducted with Safaricom Call Centre staff in March 2017.
- 4 As in other technology companies, there are fewer women than men in technical roles at Safaricom, and the company has taken steps to address this, such as its Women in Technology (WIT) effort.

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