



African Population and  
Health Research Center



POLICY BRIEF

# Improving Childcare Provision in Informal Settlements in Nairobi City County

## Background

The early years of a child's life are crucial for their health and development. However, many children in Nairobi's informal settlements grow up in environments that do not support their optimal development. As more women enter the workforce, the need for affordable and quality childcare becomes critical. The lack of such childcare options often keeps women out of the workforce and negatively impacts their productivity. Moreover, children who do not receive adequate care face significant challenges in their development.

## Our Work

The Early Childhood Development (ECD) Research Unit at the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) aims to enhance the health and wellbeing of children under three while increasing early learning opportunities. Through various studies, we have mapped and evaluated the quality of care in childcare centers within Nairobi's informal settlements. We have also explored caregiver and provider decision-making processes regarding childcare in slums.

Our long-term vision is to provide evidence to motivate improvements in the quality of paid childcare services in poor urban settings. We have engaged with stakeholders at national, county, sub-county, and community levels to share findings and collaboratively develop appropriate interventions.

## Current Situation

In response to the increasing demand for childcare, numerous informal childcare centers have emerged. However, these centers often fail to meet quality standards across various domains as shown below:

- **Nutrition:** Both the quantity and quality of food are often inadequate.
- **Health:** Childcare environments are crowded and lack proper water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities.
- **Safety and Security:** Buildings are often poorly constructed with numerous safety hazards.
- **Responsive Caregiving:** High child-to-caregiver ratios (averaging 22:1) prevent effective caregiving.
- **Early Learning:** Due to understaffing and lack of training and resources, early learning opportunities are limited.



## Key Findings from Research

Our extensive research around childcare has revealed the following key findings:

- Paid childcare is prevalent in informal settlements, with most centers being privately owned.
- The quality of childcare varies but is generally low, with parents expressing concerns about safety, health, and nutrition.
- Physical caregiving environments significantly influence enrollment decisions, along with caregiver attributes like warmth and patience.
- A plurality of childcare options is used in informal settlement settings where childcare decision-making is constrained by economics.
- A simple 'community of practice' model delivered by CHVs was shown to be acceptable and feasible for delivery within existing community health systems.
- There are numerous entry points for improving quality, including financing, regulation, supportive supervision, and quality measurement, but these areas receive little attention.



## Implications for Policy and Practice

Understanding the current state of childcare in informal settlements provides a basis for informing existing intervention programs and developing new ones. Implementing feasible models for highly mobile populations, such as migrants and residents of informal settlements, is essential.

Frontline healthcare workers such as community health assistants (CHAs) and community health promoters (CHPs) are valuable assets in urban areas of Kenya. These community health teams can be mobilized to enhance the quality of childcare provision while addressing the health and wellness needs of communities.

Streamlining the regulation and licensing of childcare facilities is crucial for improving quality in this growing sector.



## Policy Recommendations

- 1. Develop Quality Standards:** Establish and enforce clear quality guidelines for childcare centers to ensure all domains of the nurturing care framework are adequately addressed.
- 2. Develop Implementation Models:** Develop feasible models for implementing quality childcare programs in highly mobile populations, such as migrants and informal settlement residents.
- 3. Increase Funding:** Provide financial support to improve infrastructure, training, and resources in childcare centers.
- 4. Strengthen Regulation:** Streamline the regulation and licensing processes to ensure all childcare facilities meet minimum quality standards.
- 5. Leverage Community Health Teams:** Mobilize CHAs and CHPs to support and monitor the quality of childcare provision in informal settlements.
- 6. Promote Awareness:** Increase awareness among caregivers about the importance of quality childcare and the factors to consider when choosing a facility.
- 7. Stakeholder Engagement:** Engage stakeholders at national, county, sub-county, and community levels to discuss research findings and generate ideas for appropriate interventions as this is crucial for sustained improvements.



## Conclusion

Improving the quality of childcare in Nairobi's informal settlements is vital for the health and development of children and the productivity of working mothers. By addressing the identified challenges through targeted policy interventions and community engagement, significant progress can be made in providing safe, nurturing, and stimulating environments for young children.

*Contributors: Patricia Kitsao-Wekulo, Charity Waweru-Mwangi, Joash Moitui and Michael Mwaniki.*