



# POLICY BRIEF



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## Picturing Change Through PhotoVoice: Participatory Evaluation of a Daycare Intervention in Kenya.

PhotoVoice is a useful tool to see the impacts of development projects "through the eyes" of individuals who are marginalized by society and by traditional research processes. The numerous benefits of subsidized childcare for mothers and their children are captured in this PhotoVoice evaluation of a daycare intervention in Kenya.

### WHAT'S AT STAKE?

In societies throughout sub-Saharan Africa childcare is largely the responsibility of mothers and other female family members, which can limit their employment options. Yet in urban areas, factors such as wage labor, the monetized economy and cost of living increasingly compel women to seek new employment options in order to earn an income and contribute to their household. Thus, balancing work and childcare remains a dilemma for many women.

### KEY RESULTS

Findings from the PhotoVoice evaluation indicate that following the start of the daycare intervention, mothers saw numerous improvements in their lives and that of their families:

- Fewer children accompany their mothers to work.
- A reduced number of children play unattended in the streets.
- Children's exposure to hazardous environments has been reduced.
- Employment opportunities for the mothers has increased.
- The physical and emotional well-being of family members has improved.
- There remain numerous intervention gaps and the need for follow up.

This policy brief discusses the methodological process and findings of a PhotoVoice participatory evaluation conducted as part of a larger randomized study, which provided vouchers for subsidized daycare to selected mothers living in Korogocho slum in Nairobi, Kenya. A detailed description of this intervention is presented elsewhere (see Clark et al. 2017).

## RESEARCH APPROACH

The PhotoVoice exercise was conducted in two phases. The first phase recruited 47 mothers in Korogocho slum with at least one child between the ages of one and four. Researchers provided the mothers with cameras and asked them to take photos illustrating the challenges they face living in the slum area and balancing work and childcare responsibilities.

Approximately 115 photos were taken by the mothers during phase one. The mothers were then asked to use these photos to create thematic “poster-narratives,” which are visual boards featuring selected photos and captions to describe their significance (Mitchell, 2011). In total, 16 poster-narratives were created by the women participants in phase one. The mothers were then interviewed in focus groups about the meaning behind their photos and poster-narratives.

Phase two of the PhotoVoice exercise engaged a sample of 31 mothers in the intervention arm of the larger voucher program to understand the changes they experienced resulting from access to subsidized daycare. In this phase, the mothers participated in a workshop, during which they worked in groups to take photos and create poster-narratives capturing how their life, and the lives of their family members, changed from participating in the voucher program. This component of the study set out to understand what was working, or not working, in the voucher intervention, and how the project could be improved.

After the PhotoVoice exercise, follow-up interviews were conducted with the mothers in which they discussed their photos and elaborated upon how their daily lives, and the lives of family members, had changed from participating in the voucher program. The poster-narratives also became part of a traveling exhibition, titled “Picturing Change,” which was showcased at numerous public events, ranging from a stakeholder conference held in Nairobi in May 2017, a research dissemination event in Korogocho in June 2017, and an international conference on childcare held in Montreal, Canada in August 2017.

## KEY FINDINGS

Findings from the PhotoVoice evaluation indicate that following the start of the daycare intervention, the mothers saw numerous improvements in their lives and that of their families.

### Fewer children accompany their mothers to work.

Mothers remarked that since the start of the daycare intervention they no longer had to take their children to work with them. According to some mothers, this had positive ripple effects on child nutrition. For example, before the introduction of the daycare program, children who accompanied their mothers to work regularly missed meals because feeding them on the job was not possible.



*This photo taken by the mothers was captioned: "The mother does not go early to the market with her child."*

### A reduced number of children play unattended in the streets.

The mothers indicate that following the implementation of the voucher program, a reduced number of children could be found playing unattended or loitering in the streets because they were now attending daycare. Attendance at daycare reduced children’s exposure to injury and accidents, such as those involving vehicles and motorcycles. In this way, provision of daycare was found to improve the safety and security of women’s children while they attended work.

### **Children's exposure to hazardous environments has been reduced.**

In the first phase of the PhotoVoice exercise, women took photos of children playing in and around garbage, open sewage, and unsafe drainage systems. In the second phase, the mothers captured in photos no children playing in these dangerous environments, and they attributed this to the introduction of the daycare intervention. With reduced exposure to hazardous environments, the mothers reported a decrease in incidences of child injury and illness. This subsequently resulted in household savings on medical expenses - money that could instead be used to buy food or to invest in family businesses, for example.



*This photo taken by the mothers was captioned: "There are no children playing in the sewage following the voucher program."*



*This photo taken by the mothers was captioned: "We have now managed to start businesses and expand them."*

### **Employment opportunities for the mothers has increased.**

The mothers acknowledged that access to reliable and affordable daycare services had given them more time to find and participate in paid employment, or to work with their husbands as part of family businesses. This resulted in increased household income.

### **The physical and emotional well-being of family members has improved.**

Access to affordable and reliable daycare not only contributed to the economic well-being of the mothers and their families, but also to their physical and emotional wellness. For example, assurance that their children were safe and well taken care of in daycare centres gave the women the peace of mind to go about their work, and to participate in social and leisure activities, including rest. Other family members also benefited. Access to subsidized daycare eliminated the obligation of older siblings to step-in as secondary caregivers when the mothers were at work. They were subsequently able to devote their time to other activities such as attending school, finishing their homework, and enjoying leisure time with friends.

### **There remain numerous intervention gaps and the need for follow up.**

The women pointed to remaining gaps in community services, making it clear that there were still areas for potential improvement and expansion of the daycare program. For example, they acknowledged that many mothers in the community still did not have access to childcare, meaning their children were still being exposed to danger and hardship daily.

## **POLICY INSIGHTS**

The findings from this PhotoVoice participatory evaluation demonstrate to practitioners and policy-makers:

### **Subsidized daycare is an effective strategy to promote the well-being of mothers and their families.**

Women across sub-Saharan Africa, are often restricted to participating in informal or subsistence work that takes place inside the home because it is "childcare compatible." Providing NGO- or government-subsidized childcare can expand women's employment options and increase household income. Several positive ripple effects also follow from women's expanded employment opportunities including the improved physical and emotional well-being of family members, and a reduced obligation of older siblings to step-in as secondary caregivers.

**PhotoVoice allows researchers to explore social issues, like childcare, from the perspective of individuals who are most affected by them.**

Participatory social research methodologies, like PhotoVoice, allow for the identification of locally appropriate and effective development interventions. In the case of this project, PhotoVoice was used to identify the challenges that mothers in Korogocho face balancing work and childcare responsibilities, and this helped researchers to determine the exact form the employment intervention would take.

**PhotoVoice is a useful participatory tool for evaluating development programs qualitatively.**

PhotoVoice is a useful tool to see the impacts of development projects through the eyes of individuals who are marginalized by society and by traditional research processes. In this study, researchers were drawn to the relatively holistic, participant-led nature of PhotoVoice, with its built-in processes for generating community engagement and reflection. The opportunity for participants to showcase their photos during community and research dissemination events creates additional opportunities to generate feedback on the project from the perspective of local stakeholders.

*This brief was authored by Nyariro, M., Muthuri, S., Hani Sadati, S.M., Mitchell, C. and M. Njeri, and designed by K. Grantham. It draws on key findings of their working paper, ["Picturing Change Through PhotoVoice: Participatory Evaluation of a Daycare Intervention in Kenya."](#)*

#### References:

Clark, S., Kabiru, C.K., Laszlo, S. & Muthuri, S. (2017). "Can Subsidized Early Child Care Promote Women's Employment? Evidence from a Slum Settlement in Africa." GrOW Research Working Papers Series, Institute for the Study of International Development, McGill University, Montreal, Canada.

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