

Enhancing Participation of Women in Cross-Border Trade: The Need for Childcare Facilities as a Complementary Border Infrastructure

Mary Mbithi^{ORCID}, Wanjiru Gichuhi, Rachael Keeru, Carlyne Manga, Gideon Muendo, Brian Mutune

Women's Economic Empowerment Hub (WEE), University of Nairobi, Nairobi, Kenya
Email: imbithi@uonbi.ac.ke

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Abstract

This study presents the findings of a needs assessment for childcare undertaken around the border towns of Busia and Namanga in Kenya. The study, which is based on feminist economic theory and uses the mixed-method approach, utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data collected in 2021. About half of the women involved in cross-border trade, who had children below four years of age, expressed a need for childcare, with the main challenges being limited availability, high costs, and low quality. As a coping strategy to lack childcare, women traders either went to work with their children or left their children with relatives or friends. Child caregiving responsibilities affected cross-border women traders' concentration on their business as they opened their business late, closed early, missed work or worried, and spent time on the phone to address child caregiving-related difficulties during business hours. Furthermore, child-caregiving responsibilities negatively affect traders' profit margins and engagement in productive activities. The study concluded that there is a need for quality and affordable childcare among women involved in intra-regional trade and that women involved in cross-border trade consider childcare as an important factor contributing to the productivity and performance of their businesses, as well as to participation in intra-regional trade. It is concluded that childcare is an important infrastructural facility for enhanced participation of women in cross-border trade and that government policies, including the development of markets and other border infrastructure aimed at facilitating cross-border trade, need to include childcare as part of border trade facilitation infrastructure. Further, the study recommends that because women form a large proportion of small-scale informal traders in urban centers, as

governments develop market infrastructure to support small-scale traders, they need to include childcare as part of these structures.

Keywords

Cross-Border Trade, Women Participation, Regional Integration, Childcare, Care Giving, Border Infrastructure, Public Policy

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Context

Cross-border trade is a significant economic and social aspect of many countries, contributing significantly to both individual and national economies. A large proportion of this trade continues to operate informally, with most participants being vulnerable and unregistered traders (UNCTAD, 2019). In Africa, informal cross-border trade plays a crucial role, contributing approximately 35% - 40% of GDP, supporting the livelihoods of approximately 43% of the population, and making up nearly half of all intra-African trade (Brenton et al., 2013). Informal cross-border trade has the potential to create jobs, improve food security, promote economic diversification, and contribute to poverty reduction. For many women living near border areas, engaging in cross-border trade is a vital means of earning sustainable income, as they are involved in formal and informal trading activities.

Informal traders remain the main actors in cross-border trade in Africa, with women of childbearing age making up about 70% - 80% of these traders (Brenton, & Soprano, 2018; UN Women, 2011). Furthermore, about 90% of these women traders depend solely on cross-border trade for their livelihoods (Bugingo, 2018). Small-scale women traders' businesses are characterized by low trade capacity, limited access to formal credit, and significantly high costs, including transport, customs duties, local levies, illicit payments, taxes, and the burden of unpaid care work (Trademark Africa, 2020). Childcare is increasingly recognized as a critical component of the economic infrastructure that enables women's participation in the economy. Studies show that a lack of access to affordable childcare services limits women's time and mobility and thus affects their participation in income-generating activities (Samman et al., 2016). Efforts to promote intra-regional trade in Africa have mostly focused on customs procedures and infrastructure for commodities and transport, with little emphasis on social infrastructure such as childcare that supports women traders (Mokomane, 2021).

To support both international and regional trade, countries have adopted trade facilitation strategies such as policy reforms and the streamlining of trade administration processes. These efforts aim to promote faster, more efficient, and better-coordinated movements of goods and services across borders. More recently, there has been growing recognition of the importance of incorporating gender perspectives into trade facilitation and policies, emphasizing the need to empower

women to achieve more inclusive and effective trade outcomes. Trade policies affect men and women differently owing to their varied economic roles, such as producers, entrepreneurs, workers, and consumers in both the formal and informal sectors. Without specific measures, trade agreements risk deepening the existing gender inequalities. As a result, the importance of trade in promoting women's empowerment and advancing gender equality is now acknowledged in global, regional, and national trade frameworks.

In 2017, the WTO issued a joint declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment, aiming to promote gender equality and to support women's empowerment by implementing inclusive trade policies. The declaration acknowledges that such policies are important for economic growth and encourages the sharing of best practices and building evidence for more inclusive trade among WTO member countries. Thematic areas on trade and women's economic empowerment covered in the Declaration include promoting female entrepreneurship and trade, identifying barriers to women's trade participation, promoting financial inclusion and access to finance for women in traders, enhancing participation of women entrepreneurs in public procurement, enhancing the inclusion of women-owned businesses in market value chains, trade facilitation as a means of providing women entrepreneurs with equal opportunities and access to markets, and addressing gender-desegregated trade of data gaps (WTO, 2017). Furthermore, the WTO established an unofficial task force on gender and trade to advance this course.

At the African continental level, the African Agenda 2063 and its flagship project, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) places emphasis on gender equality and empowerment of women (AU, 2018). The AfCFTA objective is to establish a unified market for goods and services at the African continental level and has promotion and attainment of gender equality as well as inclusive sustainable development and Africa's economies' structural transformation as one of its general objectives. The AfCFTA has further incorporated the Protocol on Youth and Women in Trade as part of its implementation protocols, with an aim of ensuring the active and equitable involvement of women and youth in the free intra-African trade, mandates members to remove barriers related to trade, and provides a policy environment that supports this course. In addition, the protocol recognizes the important role of informal cross-border traders including women on the continent and also aims to simplify their trade processes. More specifically, the protocol focuses on the elimination of discrimination; incorporation of affirmative action; inclusive socio-economic development, including empowerment; enhancing access to information and capacity-building and training opportunities; protection against gender-based violence and harassment in trade processes and related activities; and simplification of trade processes for informal cross-border trade.

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) founding Treaty acknowledges women's important contribution to both development and

business (COMESA, 1993), emphasizing the importance of supporting women's participation in intra-COMESA trade and other integration efforts, especially those aimed at improving business climate. Likewise, the East African Community (EAC), recognizes gender equality and women's empowerment as an important component for enhanced regional integration, with the region aiming to enhance the contribution of women to social and economic progress as well as to entrepreneurial activities (EAC, 1999).

This study sought to establish the need for childcare among women involved in cross-border trading around the Busia and Namanga borders of Kenya/Uganda and Kenya/Tanzania, respectively. The study also established the extent to which child caregiving responsibilities affect the involvement of women in cross-border trade and related business opportunities, as well as child caregiving burden-related coping strategies. The findings posit that childcare is an important infrastructural facility for the enhanced participation of informal cross-border traders in regional cooperation and recommend that government policies, including the development of markets and other border infrastructure aimed at facilitating cross-border trade, should consider childcare facilities as an integral part of border infrastructure.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

Feminist economic theories, such as Marxist feminist theory (Marx & Engels, 1964) have argued that capitalism is the root cause of women's oppression, asserting that capitalism led to both an international and gender-based division of labor, where men took on paid, acknowledged roles in economic production, while women were relegated to unpaid and overlooked roles in social reproduction. In this context, women are expected to perform domestic and caregiving duties within households and communities, without pay or formal recognition. This unpaid labor is seen as a means through which women are systematically exploited and exclusion from paid work is further argued to perpetuate women's oppression. Marxist feminists propose that women should be integrated into paid work for their economic independence.

Economic empowerment theories focusing on women (Kabeer, 1999), argue that empowerment involves a process through which individuals who previously lacked the power to make choices gain that ability. According to this perspective, the capacity to make meaningful choices is shaped by three interconnected elements: resources, agency, and achievement. Resources include material, human, and social assets. Agency is individuals' ability to make decisions about their lives and pursue their goals. Resources and agency form "the capabilities", which is the potential individuals possess to lead the kind of life they value and to realize important forms of 'being and doing'. The social theory framework (Eagly, 1987) helps to understand how social constructions and expectations lead to gendered behaviours and labels. It outlines how the division of labor in traditional societies has led to discrete roles for men and women, where men take on roles related to

leadership and physical strength, while women take roles related to caregiving and domestic work.

In summary economic, feminist economic and social theories show that childcare is not only a family issue but is an essential social and economic foundational service that shapes both child development and women's empowerment and thus emphasizes why access to childcare is vital and why many families seek to secure it.

This study is based on the feminist economics theory (Barker, 2010). The theory examines the economic aspects from a gender perspective, critiquing the traditional beliefs that overlook or underestimate women's contributions to the labor force and economic experiences. The aim is to create a more equitable economic system that addresses gender inequality, while advocating for policy changes that will address these inequalities. It challenges male dominative biases in traditional economic theories that discriminate against and underrate unpaid care work. The theory focuses on the economic value of unpaid labor, including childcare and other care work, such as care of the elderly and housework. Feminist economists argue that care work critically contributes toward economic development and societal well-being, and therefore, the need to recognize these contributions. More importantly, scholars have argued for policy changes that promote gender equity in the economy. These policies include those that support affordable childcare to enable women to have a work-life balance.

Feminist economics theory informed the conceptualization of this study by guiding the examination of how childcare responsibilities influence women's participation in cross-border trade. Specifically, the theory informed the study variables related to women's access to childcare; childcare-related constraints such as cost, availability, quality, and distance; coping strategies adopted by women traders; and the effects of unpaid caregiving responsibilities on business participation, productivity, profits, and engagement in other social and economic activities.

The theory also informed interpretation of the findings by framing women's childcare burden as a structural economic issue rather than an individual or household challenge. The findings that women traders frequently opened businesses late, closed early, missed work, experienced reduced concentration, and reported lower profits due to caregiving responsibilities demonstrate how unpaid care work constrains women's economic participation and productivity. Similarly, the finding that only a small proportion of women reported leaving children with spouses reinforces feminist economic arguments regarding the unequal gender division of unpaid care work.

Using Feminist Economics Theory therefore enables this study to position childcare as a critical component of trade and market infrastructure necessary for enhancing women's participation in cross-border trade, economic empowerment, and inclusive regional integration.

1.3. Literature Review

The Supply and Demand Theory (Marshall, 1890), explains how the interaction

between the availability of a good or service and the desire of consumers to purchase it determines its market price and quantity that is available in the market. The demand theory posits that if price of a good or service rises, the quantity demanded by consumers decreases, while the theory of supply on the other hand argues for a direct and positive relationship between the price of a good or service such that when the price of the good increases, the quantity supplied increases. From the point of view of childcare, supply and demand theories explain availability or lack of it. On the demand side, even when parents as consumers want to utilize childcare services, high costs, limited facilities, or social stigma could present barriers. On the supply side, providers could be confronted by barriers including regulation challenges, lack of capacity such as trained staff or low funding. Together, these theories illustrate that affordable and trustworthy childcare is essential to achieving gender equity and inclusive development.

Studies on demand for childcare have found willingness to use childcare but unmet needs in Bangladesh, Türkiye and Ethiopia respectively, among other regions (Ahmed, Rahman, & Hossain, 2020; Australian Government, 2025). In urban Dhaka, Bangladesh for example, mothers reported that not having reliable care limited their ability to work or hold steady jobs and that important determinant of their use of childcare was safety, convenience, and affordability. Formal childcare services were expensive or unavailable and many families relied on informal or family-based care.

Further high demand for childcare by working mothers in informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya has been established (Brown & Wodon, 2023; van der Gaag & Yousuf, 2023) with most families relying on low-quality, unregulated informal centres, but parents were eager for better options, with uptake limited by cost, safety, and infrastructure challenges. In addition to accessing the need for childcare, analysis of willingness to pay, perceptions of existing options, and work disruptions caused by lack of care has shown (UNICEF Ethiopia, 2022; International Labour Organization, 2024) that mothers reported missed work, lower productivity, or even job loss due to lack of dependable childcare and that parents showed strong willingness to use centre-based childcares if they were accessible and affordable. In addition, evaluation of distance to childcare centres, trust in caregivers, safety, and financial limitations (Maharaj & Dunn, 2022) shows that safe childcare is an essential social service for work and economic participation, and barriers to accessing childcare included high costs, safety concerns, lack of trust, and long travel distances. Furthermore, demand for childcare was found to be highest among dual-income households and families without alternative caregivers and that parents expressed need for childcare and were willing to use centre-based services if they were affordable and reliable, and safety (Li, Wang, & Chen, 2025).

These studies show there is unmet demand for childcare and that key barriers to access are availability, distance and costs. They show that factors influencing the decision to use such care services are affordability, childcare location and environment, trust in caregivers, child safety concerns and the distance to the child-

care centres.

1.4. Statement of the Problem

Among key trade facilitation programs benefiting small-scale cross-border traders the EAC and COMESA regions are implementing is the Simplified Trade Regime (STR) which is applicable to traders with trade values of not more than US\$ 2000. The benefits of this trade regime include easier and expedited border processes that lead to reduced delays and clearance costs at the borders, reduced informality, and reduced illicit trading with its associated risks, such as loss of trade merchandise, harassment, and exploitation, which are often gender biased. Most borders in the two regions have also extended the operation period to 24 hours, with this extension significantly enhancing safety and security for women traders. In addition, COMESA and EAC regions have separately developed gender policies, which, among other objectives, target to empower women to enhance participation in intra-regional trade. Additionally, the two regions have enacted non-tariff barriers (NTBs) reporting mechanisms, which would benefit both formal and informal traders, including small-scale women traders. These interventions notwithstanding, cost and time related barriers continue to hinder full participation of small-scale women traders in cross-border trade. For example, compliance with technical requirements for goods trade, such as sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) requirements, present costs and time-related challenges that motivate small-scale traders to remain informal. Furthermore, inadequate border infrastructure, including a lack of childcare facilities in cross-border markets, has negatively impacted how women traders work (APRM, 2022).

1.5. Purpose and Objectives of the Study

This study aimed at determining the need for childcare in the Busia and Namanga border areas of Kenya from the perspective of cross-border traders.

The objective was to analyse:

- i) The childcare options available for women in cross-border trade;
- ii) Strategies for child caregiving responsibilities for women involved in cross-border trade;
- iii) The impact of lack of childcare on women's participation in cross-border trade;
- iv) The need for childcare among women involved in cross-border trade.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Design of the Study

The study was conducted in two counties: 1) Busia, located along the Kenya-Uganda border, and 2) Kajiado, situated near the Kenya-Tanzania border. A mixed-methods approach was employed, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collected in 2021.

2.2. Study Population

The study population comprised women of childbearing age (15 - 49 years) and male traders involved in cross-border trade in the Busia and Namanga border areas in the counties of Busia and Kajiado, in Kenya.

2.3. Sample and Sampling Technique

A two-stage cluster sampling design was employed to ensure equal opportunities for participation among all cross-border traders in Busia and Kajiado counties. In the first stage, wards within each county were selected using the Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) method, where the size was determined by the number of households within each ward. In the second stage, the selected wards were stratified into rural and urban segments of approximately equal size, with these segments serving as Primary Sampling Units (PSUs). Households were selected from each PSU using systematic random sampling.

Given that the target populations in both Kajiado and Busia Counties exceeded 10,000 individuals, Cochran's (Cochran, 1963) infinite population formula was deemed appropriate for the sample size calculation:

$$n = (Z^2 pq) / e^2 \quad (1)$$

where:

n = Sample size for infinite population;

Z = Z-score corresponding to the desired confidence level;

p = Proportion of the population with the characteristic of interest;

$q = 1 - p$ (proportion without the characteristic);

e = Desired margin of error (precision level).

The study employed a 95% confidence level, corresponding to a standard normal deviation (Z) of 1.96. This confidence level ensures that there is a 95% probability that the sample statistics will fall within the specified margin of error for the true population parameters. The proportion of the target population estimated to possess the characteristic of interest was set at 45.5% ($p = 0.455$) based on the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census (KNBS, 2019). Therefore, the complementary proportion (q) was calculated to be 0.545 ($1 - 0.455$). The margin of error was established at 0.05, representing a 5% precision level and indicating the maximum acceptable difference between the sample estimate and the true population parameter.

Applying Cochran's formula yielded initial sample sizes of 385 and 382 respondents for Kajiado and Busia, respectively. To account for potential non-response and participant attrition during data collection, 10% was added to each calculated sample size, resulting in final sample sizes of 424 and 420 respondents for Kajiado and Busia counties, respectively. The sample composition was stratified by sex, with one-third of the participants (approximately 141 and 140 respondents in Kajiado and Busia respectively) being male and two-thirds being female. Although the primary focus of the study was on women traders and the

effects of childcare responsibilities on their economic participation, male respondents were included to provide comparative and contextual insights into household caregiving arrangements, division of labour, and decision-making dynamics related to childcare. Including men enabled the study to examine gendered differences in caregiving responsibilities and assess the extent to which childcare burdens disproportionately affect women's participation in cross-border trade. The inclusion of male respondents therefore strengthened the gender analysis by highlighting unequal care responsibilities within trader households and providing a broader understanding of how household dynamics shape women's economic outcomes.

Key informants who were knowledgeable, had a general understanding of cross-border trade, and had experience in the sector were purposively selected. These included women and men involved in cross-border trade, county trade officials, border officials, and local leadership.

2.4. Instrument for Data Collection

Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data. The questionnaires were made up of both closed and open-ended questions. Key informant and focus group discussion guides were developed and used to collect qualitative data.

2.5. Methods for Data Collection

An in-depth face-to-face interview was used to collect quantitative data, with the researchers administering the in-depth questionnaires to the selected study sample. A pretest was conducted to check the appropriateness, consistency, and integrity of the data collection tools, prior to the data collection. A total of 838 respondents (421 from Kajiado County and 417 from Busia County) were interviewed. Data collection used computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) system. Nineteen key informant interviews (KII) were conducted in Busia and 22 in Namanga, with the respondents including government officers working in cross-border trade, leaders of cross-border associations, and local leaders in the study areas. There were five focus group discussions (FGDs) in Namanga, and three in Busia.

2.6. Method for Data Analysis

The quantitative data analysis involved descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies and means and percentages.

Qualitative data obtained from interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed, cleaned, and analysed thematically. The ATLAS.ti software was used for qualitative data analysis. The coding process involved both deductive and inductive approaches. Initial codes were developed from the study objectives and key themes related to childcare access, caregiving responsibilities, coping strategies, and women's participation in cross-border trade, while additional themes emerging from participants' narratives were incorporated during analysis. Similar

codes were grouped into broader thematic categories to identify recurring patterns, relationships, and lived experiences among women traders. Mixed-methods integration occurred during the interpretation stage, where qualitative findings were used to contextualize and explain quantitative survey results. For instance, survey findings showing the need for childcare, constraints regarding access to childcare, reduced working hours, effects of lack of childcare on their businesses and personal responsibilities were reinforced by interview narratives describing how caregiving obligations constrained mobility, concentration, and participation in trading activities. This integration strengthened the study by combining statistical trends with in-depth experiential insights, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of how childcare influences women's economic participation in cross-border trade.

2.7. Ethical Considerations

This study design was approved by the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) under license number: NACOSTI/P/21/10596.

Informed consent for participation in the study was obtained, with the participants providing verbal consent. Data collection utilized the KAPI system and verbal consent rather than written consent was chosen because the data collection tools were interviewer administered and not respondents self-administered. The interviewer read out the consent to the participants with an option to affirm or not to. For those on the affirmative, the interview proceeded while for those not on the affirmative, the interview ended at that point. This study presents views from those on the affirmative.

3. Findings and Analysis

3.1. Summary of Findings

This study sought to understand the need for childcare at the borders of the Busia and Namanga Counties. The findings revealed that 49% of women interviewed had children who needed to be looked for while they worked in their businesses. Regarding the challenges concerning access to childcare among women involved in cross-border trade, the cost of childcare, shortage of childcare for children under the age of four, and the quality concerns of the available childcare facilities were the major concerns reported by the women cross-border traders. The respondents also noted that transport to childcare facilities was a challenge.

Regarding childcare options available for women cross-border traders in the Busia and Namanga border areas, most of the respondents reported that they either worked with their children or left the child with a family member or a relative, with only a handful of mothers admitting to leaving their children with their spouses. A few women cross-border traders reported that they used either day care or house help.

This study also sought to determine the effects of a lack of childcare on the participation of women in cross-border trade. The respondents reported that they

missed work, opened their businesses late, shut down their firms early, and spent time on the phone during business hours dealing with child-caregiving issues. Consequently, respondents observed that child caregiving responsibilities affected their businesses, which negatively impacted their profit margins. In addition, the respondents also mentioned that lack of childcare negatively impacted their ability to engage in productive activities, community engagement, and the ability to visit places for leisure, respect in the household, and their self-efficacy. Additionally, more than two-thirds of the respondents expressed that their business's profit margins would expand significantly if they offered support, leading to a reduction in child caregiving responsibilities. Lastly, the results of the study confirm that child caregiving remains primarily the responsibility of women, which influences their capacity to trade and generally participate in labour markets.

3.2. Demographics

The quantitative analysis comprised 838 responses: 417 in Busia County and 421 in Kajiado County, while the qualitative analysis included a total of 41 key informant interviews and eight FGDs conducted in the two study counties.

Most of the respondents (93.6%) were between the ages of 15 and 49, with the remaining respondents being 50 years and above accounting for 6.4%. In Kajiado County, 70.4% of the respondents were female while for Busia County the female respondents accounted for 70.5%.

3.3. Need and Available Options for Childcare

The findings show that 49% (n = 838) of the respondents interviewed had children who were of less than four (4) years of age and needed to be cared for while they were working.

More than a third (35%, n = 411) of the women who had children under the age of four years observed that they worked with or alongside their children, with only 4% (n = 411) of them leaving their children with their spouses. A significant number (21%, n = 411) of the respondents left the children with a family member, a relative, or a friend, with only 8% (n = 411) leaving their child in a daycare. Another 10% (n = 411) left their children with a neighbour or a well-wisher or hired a house help. As multiple responses were allowed, percentage totals do not sum to 100%.

These findings confirm that the burden of child caregiving is left to women, who have to juggle between work and caring for their children. Based on time use survey (KNBS, 2023), women account for 90% of time spent on caring for children in Kenya. The proportion of time spent by women on unpaid work, including child caregiving responsibilities is five times higher (18.7%) that of men (3.6%).

The Focus Group Discussions agree with these findings, with the respondents observing that they leave their children with relatives, neighbours, friends, or day care centers, while those who can afford house help normally hire them to look after their children. Those who have no alternative options carry their children to work. As depicted in the statement below, one of the respondents said that women

cross-border traders, leave their children with them, and pay a small fee.

‘The children that I take care of belong to small-scale business traders ‘mama mboga’. Many times, the mothers go to work after dropping their children here. When they come to school, they pay the little they have and it looks as if we are sharing. They pay as little as 50 shillings so that they can go to their respective workplaces be it selling milk, vegetables, or domestic work’—KII respondent, Busia.

Another respondent, as detailed in the statement below, reckoned that women have to carry their children to work because they cannot afford to hire a house help because the returns from the business are not enough to cater to all household needs.

‘The reason why they carry their babies to work is that they do not have enough money to hire house help, this forces them to carry the children to work. Again, businesses are small and it’s difficult to pay for both rent and the house help’. Youth FGD Respondent, Namanga.

The respondents interviewed expressed that carrying the baby to work is very harmful since the children could get lost/kidnapped, hurt or hit by a motorcycle, or even get sick from the dust and cold.

‘Carrying the baby to work is also very challenging because they may get hit by a motorcycle, get lost or kidnapped because this is a border town. Child trafficking is very high. They also get sick from the dust and cold. Male FGD Respondent, Busia’.

3.4. Major Constraints Concerning Access to Childcare

Both quantitative and qualitative interviews showed that few childcare facilities exist around border towns. These facilities were private, located within the childcare service operator’s home, and quite on a small scale. Despite the existence of these childcare services, the respondents identified barriers preventing women from crossing border traders from accessing them. The top of the list of these barriers is high cost, lack of childcare within the vicinity, and quality concerns as identified by 41% (n = 411), 31%, (n = 411) and 11% (n = 411) of the respondents, respectively. Furthermore, about 10% (n = 411) of women cited transportation issues to the childcare facility, as well as family conflicts (6%, n = 411), as some of the barriers to childcare access.

The qualitative findings are in agreement with one respondent reporting that parents were worried that their children might not be well cared for, as indicated below:

‘We have a lot of worries because you don’t know if they (children) will be given food or they will be left to stay hungry or maybe they’re sick and they haven’t called you’—Female FGD participant.

The barriers observed in this study are in agreement with findings from other

studies (Grantham & Somji, 2022), which identified the key barriers to the uptake of childcare by female workers as the high cost of user fees, the distance from a worker's home or workplace, limited operating hours that do not accommodate long and irregular workdays, and concerns over the quality of care that children receive. In addition, a report (WIEGO, 2024) also confirms these findings as it highlights that even when childcare services exist, women traders are not able to access them because of the high cost of fees and charges. In addition to the mothers being sceptical about the quality of care being given in some childcare facilities, women would prefer to carry their children to their workplaces.

3.5. Effects of Lack of Childcare Facility

Regarding the effects of lack of access to childcare on women's participation in the market activities, majority of the respondents (32%, n = 411) reported opening their businesses late owing to child caregiving obligations, while nearly a third of them either missed work (29%, n = 411) and 25% (n = 411) shut down their business early. Besides, 14% (n = 411) of women observed that they spend time on the phone dealing with childcare, giving responsibilities related difficulties during business hours. Multiple responses were allowed for this question.

Findings from the key informant interviews and focus group discussions further cement these findings, as shown in the following KIIs responses:

‘There are very many challenges like you cannot get to work in good time. When you get there, the business will have started, and you will not carry out businesses. When you carry your child to work you also need to close early because you cannot stay with the baby in the market for too long—KII Respondent, Busia County.

‘Then you find she's losing many customers because of going to work at 10:00 am instead of 8:00 am’—Male KII respondent, Busia.

‘Sometimes she leaves the child sleeping and comes to work and has to keep calling to find out if the child has woken up. The neighbours also keep calling when the baby cries. -Male KII Respondent, Busia.

3.6. Frequency and Effects of Lack of Childcare on Women's Work/Businesses

With regards to the frequency the lack of childcare affected women's work/businesses, the study found that majority of the respondents (63%, n = 411) indicated that child care giving responsibilities as a result of lack of childcare sometimes negatively affected their engagement in productive activities as well as in community responsibilities at large, while 11% (n = 411) observed that lack of childcare frequently affected their work/business. About 15% (n = 411) of the respondents noted that lack of childcare did not affect their work/business.

The results from the KIIs further agree with these findings, as captured by these two key informants:

‘When they have nowhere to leave their child, it gives them a lot of stress. It

becomes very difficult for her to concentrate on her business, and she will be forced to go back home to look after the child. This affects their business. Female FGD, Busia.

‘Those who go with them to the market cannot concentrate fully on the business as there are customers to serve while the child requires the attention. Eventually, the customers leave and they end up losing that money’ Male FGD respondent, Busia.

3.7. Perceptions on Effects of Lack of Childcare on Profit Margins

The respondents further observed that on overall, lack of childcare negatively affected their businesses since they tend to spend a lot more time dealing with child caregiving and related issues, resulting in low profits from their businesses. Nineteen percent of the respondents reported that lack of childcare affected their profit margins to a moderate extent, 12% (n = 411) observed it affected their profits to a small extent, 10% (n = 411) of the respondents said lack of childcare affected their profit margins to a great extent, and 2% (n = 411) noted their profit margins were affected to a very great extent. A study carried out in Uganda, which confirms these findings, noted that women entrepreneurs who carried their children to work affected their profits (UN Women, 2015).

3.8. Respondents Perception of Effect of Support on Child Responsibilities on Profit Margins

Access to quality and affordable childcare can have a tremendous impact on the growth of the businesses of women cross-border traders because they have more time to attend to their businesses and access other markets where they can sell their goods. Respondents were asked what their expectations were regarding their profit margins if their child caregiving responsibilities were reduced. majority of the respondents (68%, n = 411) observed that if received support which led to reduction in child caregiving responsibilities, the profit margins from their enterprises were likely to increase to a great extent, while 25% (n = 411) noted that their profits would improve by a very great extent, with 7% (n = 411) of the respondents indicating that there likely would not be an increase.

These findings agree with those of a study conducted in Uganda, which showed that women with children aged 3 to 5 years who were offered one year of full-time subsidies for private childcare centers increased their business revenues by 47 percent on average compared to women who were not offered childcare subsidies. From these findings, women cross-border traders believe that if they are supported by affordable and quality childcare, their profits are likely to increase, which in turn would lead to the growth of their businesses, thereby contributing to their economic empowerment.

3.9. Effects of Lack of Childcare on Personal Responsibilities

When asked how lack of childcare affected their personal responsibilities, major-

ity (22%, n = 411) observed that lack of childcare affected their engagement in productive activities, 21% (n = 411) noted that it affected engagement in community work and responsibilities, 21% (n = 411) observed that it affected their ability to visit places for leisure, 21% (n = 411) observed that it affected self-efficacy, and 15% (n = 411) said it affected their respect in the household. Additionally, as mentioned by respondents during the focus group discussions, lack of childcare affects women at a personal level, as they lack enough sleep and have many time-consuming activities to undertake once they get home from their business, affecting their participation in the business. This question allowed for multiple responses.

This is a challenge because women have less time to sleep. They have got so many things to do, and when she thinks of all these things, she will not handle her business well due to this stress. Youth FGD respondent, Namanga.

4. Recommendations

The study recommends that government policies towards the enhancement of women's participation in cross-border trade, including the development of markets and other border infrastructure aimed at facilitating cross-border trade, need to include childcare as part of the border trade facilitation infrastructure.

Additionally, because women form a large proportion of small-scale informal traders in urban centers, governments at various levels need to consider childcare as part of market infrastructure development to support small-scale traders.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that there is a need for childcare facilities in the Busia and Namanga border areas for women involved in cross-border trade. Challenges such as the cost and shortage of childcare, lack of quality childcare, and distance to daycare facilities hinder access to childcare for women cross-border traders. In addition, child caregiving options are restricted to women cross-border traders, with available alternative main options being carrying their children to work or leaving them with relatives or neighbors. Lack of childcare was reported to have profound effects on the participation of women in business, including missing work, opening their business late, shutting their business early, and spending significant time on phone dealing with child caregiving and related issues that negatively impact their business profits. Lack of childcare also affects the ability of women to participate in other activities such as community engagement and leisure, which are crucial for their well-being. In conclusion, this study finds that childcare is an important infrastructure facility for the enhanced participation of informal cross-border traders.

6. Limitations of the Study

This study is based on cross sectional, self-reported data, which constrains the ability to draw causal inferences. The associations reported between childcare re-

sponsibilities and business outcomes such as profits, productivity, and participation reflect respondents' perceptions rather than objectively measured effects. Because data were collected at a single point in time, temporal relationships cannot be established, and self-reported measures may be subject to recall bias, social desirability bias, or unmeasured confounding factors. Future research using longitudinal or experimental designs would be necessary to confirm causal pathways and provide more robust evidence on the impact of childcare on women's participation in cross-border trade.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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