COMPANY CASE SAFARICOM
The State of Children’s Rights and Business

Driving a shared value approach through the Sustainable Development Goals
Safaricom, a Kenyan based communications and technology provider servicing more than 38 million customers, has long been working to make the SDGs a central pillar of their business. In doing so, the company as a whole has made sustainable development a part of the organizational and business culture, while also making sure the products and services they design present sustainable solutions to some of society’s most pressing challenges, including the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on their strategy, the company has made a specific effort to improve and secure respect for children’s rights through several initiatives, some of which are elaborated on here:

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Incorporating the SDGs across the business

Safaricom, has worked to bring their overall business into alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) since 2016.

The main idea has been to move from the more standard overarching corporate objectives to simple daily activities that could be put into practice throughout the organization using a top-down approach starting from the executive level, so that each division of the company is implementing projects or developing products and services in line with the SDGs. This approach includes both the Safaricom Plc as well as the company’s charitable arms, the M-PESA and the Safaricom Foundations.

The Safaricom Foundation operates from the principle of partnering up with Kenyan communities, organizations, and institutions to improve and transform lives, whereas the M-Pesa Foundation makes large scale grants to and investments in partners in order to create lasting positive changes in the lives of Kenyans.¹

¹ [https://www.safaricom.co.ke/about/transforming-lives/the-foundations](https://www.safaricom.co.ke/about/transforming-lives/the-foundations)
Safety through product design
In their home fibre service, Safaricom makes available a tool known as SecureNet which offers a parental control solution, empowering customers by putting the power in the hands of parents. The tool helps customers filter which content they would like their children to view, filter any spamming content, and protect them from malware and phishing sites.

Safety through education and awareness
In collaboration with the Communications Authority of Kenya and other industry players through the GSMA WeCare Initiative, Safaricom supported the development and launch of a child online interactive portal in February 2021 during the commemoration of the Safer Internet Day. The portal is aimed at creating a safer online environment for children with tips for guardians.

Safety through collaboration with others
Safaricom works with the Internet Watch Foundation to block sites that have illegal child sexual content from their network. The company has also teamed up with UNICEF to create awareness on online safety through the Spot it, Stop it campaign. For more information on the campaign, see “Driving transformational change for children with UNICEF” below.

Prioritizing Child Online Safety
Safaricom PLC has integrated child rights and online safety considerations into how they conduct business and management processes in several ways.
Promoting Quality Education and Equal Participation

In line with SDG 4 (Quality Education), Safaricom has implemented several initiatives to promote quality education and equal participation:

**Joining forces to promote quality education**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Safaricom partnered with UNESCO and Eneza’s Shupavu 291 solution to give students access to mentors and information on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects via SMS. Approximately 600,000 students have participated in the initiative by sending their questions via SMS. Read more on this partnership [here](#).

The Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) is a partnership between the Zizi Afrique Foundation and the Safaricom Foundation. It is an approach that ensures that children at risk of falling behind in literacy and numeracy are equipped with basic skills in reading and math. The programme is currently implemented in
140 schools, with 17,000 children enrolled for literacy while 12,000 learners are enrolled for numeracy, with 13,000 having already benefitted from the programme with improved skills in reading and math. Read more on the Accelerated Learning Programme here.

Furthermore, providing young students with early access to digital learning environments and tools can make a critical difference to their skillsets and future employability. To support this, in line with the company SDG commitment, the Safaricom Technology Division has set itself the target of installing a prefabricated computer laboratory in at least one primary school in every county in Kenya. To date, 21 labs out of the targeted 47 have already been founded.

Joining Forces to Keep Girls in School
Many girls are not able to access menstrual hygiene products. Statistics indicate that 65% of women and girls in Kenya cannot afford menstrual hygiene products, while 42% of school-aged girls have never used sanitary towels. This impacts educational outcomes: on average, girls miss 13 learning days in a term when they miss four days a month because of their periods.

By launching the “Keeping Girls in School” initiative, the M-PESA Foundation has, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, distributed three months’ worth of sanitary towels to over 180,000 girls across the country. Additionally, the M-PESA Foundation launched a KSh44 million² menstrual hygiene programme in December 2020 as part of Safaricom’s 20th anniversary celebrations, aimed at providing 30,000 teenage girls and 10,000 boys in Murang’a, Siaya and Kilifi counties with sexual and reproductive health education as well as innerwear, sanitary towels, and soap.

2 Global Child Forum: this equals approximately 400K USD as per September 2021 exchange rate.
Improving Maternal, Newborn and Child Health

In line with SDG targets 3.1 and 3.2 (Good Health and Well-being), one of the Safaricom Foundation strategies focuses on strengthening survival and improved health for mothers and newborns during childbirth and early childhood through investment in a Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) programme. Another programme has been put into place to specifically address SDG 3.4: Preventing premature mortality from non-communicable diseases, such as cancer, cardiovascular diseases or diabetes.

Working to improve the health of mothers and newborns

Despite advances in maternal and child health in Kenya, the numbers in some counties remain higher than the national average in maternal mortality rates as well as in neonatal mortality rates.

In an effort to address this, Safaricom Foundation formed a partnership with PharmAccess Foundation and with GoldStar Kenya, and as a result, community health units in two of the worst impacted counties have been reinstated. The community health units consist of groups of volunteers who identify all households with pregnant women and/or children aged 5 years and below. They then deliver health messages and reminders for key health days, guide community health improvements and disease prevention and register households for monitoring purposes. They also accompany/ refer mothers to deliver in health facilities. Safaricom has facilitated the volunteers’ work by provision of smart phones and airtime. So far, this technology has ensured the real time monitoring of 49,000 mothers and their newborns who are registered in the system. When the MNCH programme started in 2018, only 53% of children had been immunized, a figure which has since increased to 84%. Delivery in hospital has also increased from 64% to 92%. An improved community awareness on MNCH related issues, an improved referral system and an overall improvement in the quality of the health infrastructure have all played a role in the overall success of the programme.

Working to improve child health through prevention of non-communicable diseases

Awareness of Type 1 diabetes, which occurs primarily in children, is low in Kenya.

So health, and more specifically diabetes management and treatment has been a key area of focus for Safaricom Foundation since its inception. To narrow the gaps in the prevention and treatment of diabetes in children, the Foundation partnered with the Pastoralist Girls Initiative (PGI) to increase awareness and understanding of diabetes as a non-communicable disease. The main aim of the programme has been to address the major bottlenecks, which include awareness, screening and early detection using a facility and community-based approach. In the first year of the programme, 296 children were enrolled. Since the programme was launched, 435 children have learnt the critical skill of management of their condition, while their parents have undergone supportive counselling to empower them with the information to understand the nature of the condition and the ways in which they can support their children with active monitoring and dietary management. Additionally, eighty healthcare workers and a hundred community health volunteers have been trained on how to identify, counsel and care for children in the at-risk target group.
Driving transformational change for children

To further demonstrate their fundamental commitment to a shared value partnership approach, which maintains that business can remain profitable while helping to solve social problems, Safaricom has also joined forces with UNICEF Kenya to further support Kenyan children in a range of areas, including education, child protection and emergencies. The collaboration, contributing directly to SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), aims at ensuring that children – especially the poorest and most marginalized - can access the Internet at school, are protected from violence and abuse, and receive life-saving information during droughts, floods and disease outbreaks such as COVID-19.3

Safaricom’s Head of Sustainable Business and Social Impact Karen Basiye concludes:

"We believe that the pandemic has made embracing shared value thinking and sustainable business practices even more imperative. We anticipate that more will be expected of companies like us in terms of supporting the economic recovery of the country and building a more resilient society. Through our long-lasting commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, we will continue seeking ways to deliver shared value propositions that disrupt inefficiencies and impact lives positively in the community we all live in."

About this case

Part of the Global Child Forum Corporate Sector and Children’s Rights Benchmark

This case is based on publicly available information and interviews with representatives at Safaricom. It was written for Global Child Forum by Laura Okkonen, Sirius BHR Advisory.

Disclaimer: Global Child Forum has not verified and cannot ensure that statements made by the company are accurate.

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Global Child Forum
Storkyrkobrinken 2
S-111 28 Stockholm
info@globalchildforum.org
www.globalchildforum.org