

September 2021 - Q4

Joining Forces for Africa (JOFA) Newsletter



JOINING FORCES
For All Children



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One year of JOFA

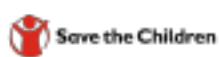
NEWSLETTER
Q4

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ChildFund
Alliance



About JOFA

Joining Forces is an alliance formed in 2017 of the six largest child-focused international NGOs – ChildFund Alliance, Plan International, Save the Children International, SOS Children’s Villages International, Terre des Hommes International Federation, and World Vision International. Together, they are working with and for children to secure their rights and end violence against children.



Welcome to the third edition of the Joining Forces for Africa (JOFA) Project newsletter! In this edition we will be providing an update on progress made by the JOFA project teams after one year of implementation and on how JOFA reacts to the findings of the Needs Assessment Report. Looking forward, we provide insights into how we will put into practice our Learning Agenda, and how we can adapt our response to the changing context and to the challenges faced in implementation to date.

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1 Year of JOFA

After one year of implementation, the Joining Forces for Africa (JOFA) project has made good progress overall towards reaching the final targets and making an impact on the reduction of violence against children. The year has seen all five countries hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, with all countries experiencing significant disruption to economic and social structures. In Mali and Ethiopia meanwhile, internal conflict, displacement and resulting economic and civic deterioration has put a strain on communities, and those working with them such as the JOFA implementing partners. All target countries have had significant periods during the first year of implementation when schools were closed, and restrictions have been placed on gatherings and movement of people.

Despite these challenges, the country teams implementing the JOFA project have built strong working relationships with government and civil society actors that make up national and local child protection systems. Support to national and sub-national level processes to strengthen standard operating procedures, guidelines, tools and referral pathways, as well as COVID-19 response plans has been provided, along with training, technical and material support to service providers.

A total of 1,565 child protection service providers have received training or material support so far after year 1. Apart from trainings, country teams have been providing support to coordination mechanisms at national and sub-national level, and support to the development of national standards- such as the harmonization process of the case management system in Mali. These processes help to define the role and mandate of all actors- a key step in building their capacity and self-confidence.





Good progress has also been made in terms of improving protection in resilient families, communities and institutions. Mass communication campaigns are under way and are expected to reach large numbers of people in our target communities in year 2. Parents and caregivers, school teachers and administrators, and community based child protection mechanisms have been engaged, trained and supported to play an effective role in preventing and responding to violence against children, according to their mandate as part of the local and national child protection system.

To date, 6,406 parents and caregivers have been reached with parenting skills sessions, whilst 1,440 education actors have been trained on child protection risks and how to respond.

Increasing the capacity and agency of children to prevent and respond to violence against them has been challenging. With schools closed for large periods of time across most countries, and restrictions of gatherings hindering the ability to meet up with groups of children, fewer children have been engaged in project activities than was originally planned.

Despite these challenges, we have so far reached 12,819 children (54% female) with life skills, peer support, and other structured support programs. We are increasing our efforts to adapt and innovate in order to reach

our final targets by the end of year 3, with increased exchange and learning to take place in year 2 on how to reach children with vital services and peer support structures outside the school context.

There has been an active exchange on best practice related to child protection approaches among the country teams. Baseline surveys and needs assessments have been completed in all 5 countries, and robust monitoring, evaluation and learning systems have been put in place including an outcome monitoring process. Learning and exchange events on best practice, evidence informed technical approaches and methodologies have enabled the team to refine their activities and learn from each other, whilst child friendly feedback and complaints mechanisms enable us to learn from children what is working and how to improve.

A significant added value of this project is the work in collaboration with the Joining Forces Alliance- the now established project governance and management mechanisms, and the learning and sharing amongst the six largest child focused INGOs has already proven in the first year of implementation to be an example of the benefits of collaboration.

Country teams are learning and utilizing evidence informed best practice approaches from their peers, and are joining forces to support national level child protection system strengthening process and to advocate jointly towards national and sub national government agencies, as well as coordinating support to these entities, ensuring synergies with other sectoral actors and EU supported projects.

Needs Assessment and JOFA's response

In each country a needs assessment to provide timely, comprehensive analysis of the effects of COVID-19 on child protection was conducted. These assessments revealed the immense pressures that children and families are facing in the five countries during the pandemic.

The full consolidated report can be found on our website: [Protecting children during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond](#).

The JOFA Project was designed at the outset of the COVID-19 crisis, informed by early assessments of the impact of the pandemic on child protection, and experience from past infectious disease outbreaks such as the Ebola crisis.

A complex crisis such as COVID-19 demands joined-up efforts to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic, especially on vulnerable

children. The JOFA Project aims to meet the immediate protection needs of children while regularly assessing the situation as it evolves, and adapting implementation to changing contexts and needs.

The findings of the needs assessments offer valuable insights into how the pandemic and the public health measures to prevent COVID-19 have been affecting populations of children in the target countries over the past months. Some minor adjustments are necessary to ensure that we respond to the most pressing needs.

The assessments identified these child protection needs and risks across all five countries:

- Increase in child labour
- Increase in child sexual exploitation and abuse
- Increase in child marriage and other harmful practices (FGM/C)
- High levels of psychological distress – in children and their parents and caregivers
- Increase in physical and psychological violence against children perpetrated by parents and caregivers
- Increase in child neglect
- Specific and exacerbated vulnerabilities to violence for children with disabilities



The JOFA project will respond to the findings of the Needs Assessment Report by:

- Continuing and increasing our efforts to implement positive parenting programmes and group-based activities for child wellbeing – especially mental health and psychosocial support through approaches such as Parenting without Violence and TeamUp.
- Integrating content on prevention and response to child marriage and harmful practices and sexual violence and sexual exploitation and abuse, into planned interventions such as:
 - Positive parenting programmes
 - Communications and social behaviour change campaigns
 - Community engagement activities
 - Training of children's groups (peer-based networks, children's clubs etc.).
- Adopting gender transformative approaches that engage men and boys to positively change harmful norms and practices
- Pursuing advocacy asks with government and key policy makers, prioritising social protection programmes and a safe return to schools for all children.
- Integrating into planned interventions specific measures to prevent and respond to child labour and specific measures to help children associated with armed forces and groups in Mali and Ethiopia.
- Continuing to work with disabled people's organisations and other experts to ensure our activities are inclusive and address the needs of children with disabilities.



Download the report

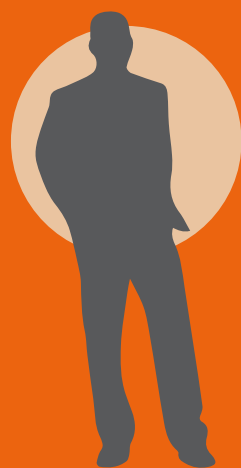
Joining Forces for Africa (JOFA), the consortium formed by six major child-focused NGOs (Child Fund International, Plan International, Save the Children, SOS Children Villages, Terre des Hommes International Federation, and World Vision) has released its new report “Protecting children during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond”.

The study highlights the most prevalent child protection risks in Mali, Senegal, Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia during the COVID-19 pandemic.



“I know of my friend who was beaten and burnt by her mother because she wronged her. I wish something is done to stop our parents from beating, caning and pinching us.”

Child during FGD in Gulu, Uganda



“During COVID-19 lockdown, as girls are forced to stay home, this created an opportunity for parents to undergo the act of FGM freely at any time, so that the prevalence of these traditional harmful practices on girls increased during the pandemic.”

Key informant, Chinaksen, Ethiopia



“Due to schools being closed, children have become labourers in the fields, and there are more child marriages for girls.”

Formal child protection actor, Mopti, Mali



Download the report “Protecting children during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond”



Outlook

The JOFA Learning Agenda was developed to support knowledge management, to help solve implementation problems, and to increase the overall effectiveness and the quality of the project's achievements on the ground.

With the learning agenda now well established with all implementing teams, in Q5 and Q6, the country teams will be zooming in on the learning areas, discussing the topics with communities, child protection actors, and with their own country JOFA teams. Learnings will be documented and shared between the five country teams, culminating in broader sharing and discussion at regional and global events- both with the wider Joining Forces Alliance and with external stakeholders.

Concrete action plans will come out of the learning process, to ensure we are adapting our implementation approach to respond to gaps and needs emerging from the analysis.

In particular, we will be focussing our learning on how to reach children with life skills, peer support and psycho-social support during lockdowns

and restrictions. Successful examples from our country teams on the use of social media and mobile technology, radio call in programs and mobilizing and supporting community actors will be shared and discussed for adaptation and scale up.

Given the importance of child participation for effective child protection programming, the challenges faced to date in engaging children due to the COVID-19 pandemic must be overcome in order to ensure we reach our goal of reducing violence against children. The advantage of working in consortium with thirteen implementing agencies across five countries, is the huge potential for learning from our peers- an opportunity we will be taking full advantage of in Q5 and Q6. And of course, Joining Forces being the alliance that brings together the six largest global child-focussed NGOs, we can count on the experience and knowledge of the wider networks within and between the agencies to enhance our own programming and ensure we are enabling the full participation of children in our project activities and in the child protection systems where they live.



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Opportunities for engagement

If you have interest in exploring opportunities for collaboration with the JOFA project on academic studies, on complimentary programming or on learning and sharing, [contact Andy Hill](#).

[Send us your stories](#), inspiring practices, thoughts, and comments.

