



Joining Forces for Africa - Newsletter

Welcome to the first edition of the Joining Forces for Africa (JOFA) Project newsletter! In this edition we will be providing a brief **update on progress** made by the JOFA project teams in the five target countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Senegal and Mali, as reported for the first two quarters of the project from August to December 2020.

We will also share some news on our **global events**; and updates about what we are **learning** and how we are taking maximum advantage of the added value of working together as a consortium of the six largest child focused INGOs.

We hope you also find the summary of our **child protection needs assessments** insightful and you will find links to further details on this and other topics throughout the newsletter.

The journey so far on implementing the first Joining Forces project on the ground has demonstrated to us all the incredible gains that can be made when we are able to draw on the collective resources, expertise and experience of the six agencies; it has helped us all to raise our standards and learn from each other on how we can make the most impact for children.

Update

Preparatory activities across the five countries have been concluded and the initiation of project activities contributing to the project objectives has started successfully. As envisaged most progress was made regarding the **strengthening national and local protection and response systems**. Identification, reporting and referral mechanisms were strengthened and adapted to respond to COVID-19 across the five countries, whilst initial training and support to child protection service providers, child help lines and alternative care providers was conducted in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Senegal.



Some progress was made in terms of **improving protection in resilient families, communities and institutions**. Initial awareness raising activities were conducted in Mali, Kenya and Senegal related to COVID-19 and associated child protection risks. Parents are beginning to be engaged in preparation for structured positive parenting programs in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda and community-based child protection mechanisms have been supported in Uganda and Kenya, with initial engagement with such mechanisms in Ethiopia and Senegal.

Some progress was also made **increasing capacity and agency of children to prevent and respond to violence against them**. Our teams in Senegal and Uganda made the most progress in engaging and supporting peer networks whilst some initial work with peer-based networks has begun in Kenya.

In regards to **learning and sharing of knowledge and best practice related to child protection approaches**; the focus is on the realization of needs assessments and progress towards the completion of baseline surveys and the set-up of MERL Frameworks. A series

of global technical sharing workshops was concluded, and the country teams in Uganda, Kenya, Mali and Ethiopia already completed the country level technical approaches and methodologies workshops.

Country teams have also established **coordination mechanisms and steering committees** at country level involving **all six Joining Forces Agencies** in country. The level of interaction between the six agency country directors and the level of joint activity on advocacy, sharing and learning varies by country, some teams having had a stronger basis of collaboration prior to the project. The Kenya team is progressing well with strong collaboration and joint action, Senegal, Uganda and Mali are starting to consolidate and accelerate joint action, and Ethiopia is just starting out on the journey towards a strong, coordinated Joining Forces Alliance in country.

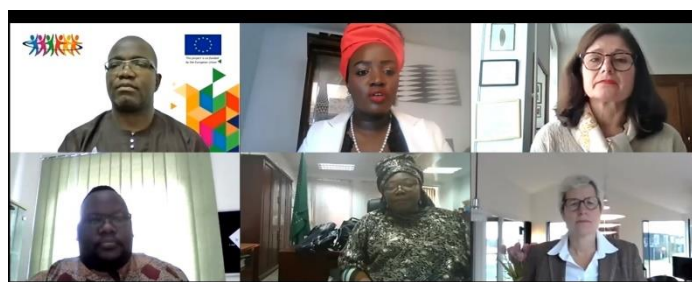
"I believe that children need to be sensitised about their rights so they can reject, or report people keen on harming them through practices like FGM and Child Marriage during the COVID-19 pandemic."
Mary, 12, Kenya

Global Project Launch

The Joining Forces for Africa global project launch was held on 20 January 2021 and focused on the critical challenges to protecting children during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, and how to address them.

During the event, over **175 participants from 42 countries** were privileged to hear from the expert panellists including Ms Henriette Geiger of the European Commission and Her Excellency Professor Sarah Anyang Agbor of the African Union Commission who shared valuable insights on the challenges we face in protecting children during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

At the global launch event, Joining Forces colleagues and children the project works with in Uganda, Senegal, Mali, Kenya and Ethiopia shared their experiences about protection needs and risks. Important themes such as child participation, crosscutting themes of gender equality and disability inclusion, nexus programming and the added value of working in a consortium were discussed. There was also a call for European policy makers to increase support for African civil society and governments to address the "silent pandemic" of violence on the continent.



The event was a big success and we have received very positive feedback. You can access a [full recording](#) of the event and [video highlights](#) in English.

Needs Assessment

Although the negative impacts of COVID-19 are being felt by children and their families across the world, data about its impact is still limited. Most of the surveys that are being done are focusing on adults and households, with very minimal focus on children matters. A child protection needs assessment was carried out by the JOFA project to get a more comprehensive understanding of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls' and boys' protection risks including for children living with disability and to update our understanding between proposal stage and the implementation of the project. It revealed the immense pressures faced by many children and their families during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The main needs and risks identified in the assessments concluded in Kenya, Uganda and Mali include the following:

Economic and psychological stress

- Children pushed into child labour
- Risk of child sexual exploitation increased
- Family livelihood pressures lead to tension and stress, violence
- Higher cases of stress for children and parents

Abuse and violence

- Physical violence from parents and caregivers
- Sexual abuse targeted at girls
- Child marriage and child pregnancies

Child protection system concerns

- Urgent training and support needs of local CP structures and informal CP actors
- Decrease of children's participation
- Lack of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support interventions



Our latest blog [Economic impact of the pandemic puts pressure on Kenyan families](#) provides insights on key findings from the Kenya child protection in times of Covid-19 needs assessment report.

The presentations of the needs assessments from Kenya, Mali and Uganda are available on the website ([English](#), [French](#)). A comprehensive report including all JOFA project countries will be published, once all needs assessments are completed.

Technical sharing workshops

The JOFA project aims to use **evidence-based child protection approaches and methodologies**, building on the collective experience of the consortium members. In order to ensure we are starting from an understanding of what evidence based approaches have worked in the past, and **adapting these for both the local context, and the changed context due to COVID-19**, a series of Technical Sharing Workshops was conducted at the beginning of the project. Follow-up workshops on country level were organised to assess which approaches and methodologies will be incorporated into the JOFA project implementation in each country.

This workshop series was the starting point to create an informal community of practice in particular for technical and program implementation staff with access to support from the technical advisory group, in order to facilitate ongoing learning and sharing.

The Technical Sharing Workshops focused around different approaches in the following areas:

1. Positive Parenting
2. Child Participation and Life Skills
3. Psychological first aid and psycho-social support
4. Community based approaches and Child help lines

Documentation of the workshops incl. presentations and recordings are available in [English](#) and [French](#).

Country level technical approaches and methodologies workshops have been concluded in Uganda, Kenya, Mali and Ethiopia, with some emerging common approaches to be applied across multiple contexts as follows:

- [Psychological First Aid](#) – all countries
- [Parenting without violence](#) – Mali, Uganda, Kenya
- [Child Friendly Accountability](#) – Mali, Uganda, Ethiopia
- [TeamUp](#) – Uganda, Ethiopia

Work is ongoing to create exchanges and informal communities of practice around these approaches.

Outlook

During Quarter 3 and Quarter 4, country teams will be **increasing activities in communities** with awareness raising, engagement of parents and caregivers in structured positive parenting programs and supporting community-based child protection mechanisms.

There will be **increased attention to mental health and psycho-social support activities** with children and supporting peer-based networks to: meet safely, provide peer support, learn about life skills, and to engage in child friendly accountability mechanisms and dialogue with local and national decision makers.

Training and support to service providers in the child protection sector and allied services will continue, and monitoring and evaluation processes will be fully established, including the completion of baseline surveys in all countries.

Learning processes, exchange and mutual support amongst and between country teams will be increased during Q3 and Q4.

At a global level, the **JOFA project team** will be sharing about the process and results of the **needs assessments** conducted by JOFA country teams with the **Joining Forces country teams in Asia, Latin America and in other African and Eastern European** countries via webinars.

If you want to find-out more about the project, visit the Joining Forces [website](#), where you'll find all key information about the project.

Opportunities for engagement

If you have any interest in exploring opportunities for collaboration with the JOFA project on academic studies, on complimentary programming or on learning and sharing, don't hesitate to contact the project manager Andy Hill andy.hill@plan-international.org

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