

April 2022

LEARNING BRIEF

Joining Forces for Africa: Learning series on child participation

Joining Forces for Africa (JOFA)



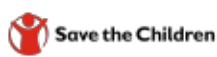
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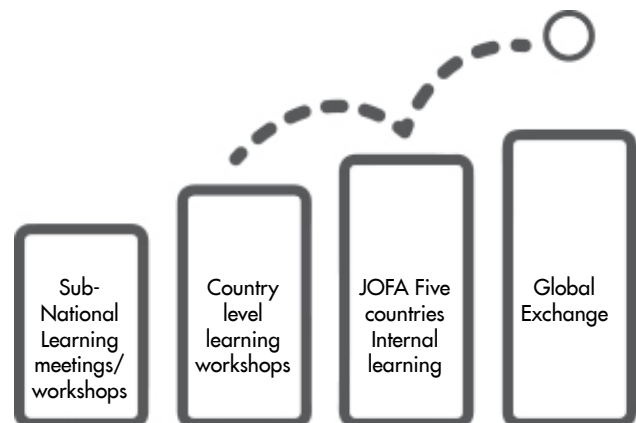


1. INTRODUCTION

Between November 2021 and February 2022, the [Joining Forces for Africa](#) project team organised a series of meetings, workshops and webinars on the impact of child participation on the effectiveness of child protection programming.

Our purpose

The purpose of the learning series is to contribute towards the improvement of the quality of child participation and the range of engagement methods for direct child beneficiaries in the JOFA project and in the global child protection sector.



Objectives of the learning series

- 1. Share the experience and the learning gained by JOFA country teams in engaging direct child beneficiaries in project activities.
- 2. Explore challenges faced and innovative approaches & adaptations to activities made by JOFA country teams to ensure meaningful child participation

Methodology

Country level: JOFA Project country teams in Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali and Senegal each held sub-national and national level learning meetings or workshops to discuss the main learning questions related to child participation, as per the JOFA Learning Agenda. As a result of these meetings, a series of 8-15 “lessons learned” were documented by each country.

JOFA Internal learning: Each of the five country lessons learned documents were discussed and analysed during a 2 day learning workshop between the five country teams, with similarities and interesting, innovative practices identified. At the end of this workshop, each country team identified key follow up actions to continue to improve the quality of child participation in JOFA project implementation.

Global exchange: Joining Forces country teams from Asia, Latin America and Europe joined the JOFA country teams on learning webinars where the lessons learned were further discussed, risks and assumptions were analysed, and concrete actions and commitments identified.



2. CHILD PARTICIPATION LEARNING QUESTIONS

As Outlined in the JOFA Project Learning Agenda, the following questions were used to prompt and generate the initial lessons learned:

The impact of child participation on the effectiveness of child protection programming

- How are different groups of children and young people involved in the activities?
- How are different groups of children listened to about what works best for them (degree and quality of participation)?
- What needs to change next time around so that they can meaningfully participate?
- What was the impact of children's participation on the outcome of the activity or the design of future activities?
- How are children and young people views taken into consideration at different phases, from strategic and operational planning to implementation and monitoring, evaluation and learning?
- What needs to change next time around so that they can meaningfully participate?
- How is specific attention paid to questions of inclusivity and accessibility, with respect to different needs for girls and boys, for different ages and ethnicities, and different physical and cognitive abilities?
- What factors, structural contexts and spaces constrain or enable children to meaningfully participate?
- How has COVID-19 impacted children's participation?



3. LESSONS LEARNED

1. Child Friendly Accountability

Across all JOFA Project countries, implementing teams are supporting children to hold their local and national governments to account in regards to their responsibilities towards protecting children.

In Ethiopia, child parliament members attended district government council meetings to present their child protection related concerns and request concrete action. In Senegal, during events to mark the Day of the African Child, children were able to dialogue with and challenge local authorities and decision makers. Similarly, members of the Kenya Children's Assembly have presented their case to government officials through a series of dialogue sessions. In Kenya, the team reflected

Kenya



In Kenya, the team reflected that in processes which involved selected children representing the views of their peers, clear and transparent communication to all children should be made about how those children were selected as representatives.



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Advocacy also takes place at a more local level, with Parent-Teacher-Student councils in Ethiopia and with religious and traditional leaders in Ethiopia, Mali and Kenya. Country teams found it challenging to meaningfully engage children with disabilities, and children from remote areas- it is crucial to ensure that as far as is feasible, diverse children's voices are heard, representing the most marginalized.

Important commitments and actions secured through such work include the re-integration of out-of-school children into education, commitments from local governments to increased budget allocation for child protection actions, and increased understanding among religious and traditional leaders of their legal obligations for referral and reporting of abuse.

Throughout all of these processes- well trained and supported facilitators are crucial- be they teachers, social workers, volunteers or NGO staff. Children and the adult supporters need to be supported at each stage of the process, and it is important to purposively select the right moment to engage children so that their input is informed, timely and relevant, and does not come too late in the process to be considered by duty bearers. Manage the expectations of children. Not all of their demands will be readily met by duty bearers.

A key recommendation for teams supporting child friendly accountability activities is to ensure mechanisms are put in place to document and follow up on commitments made by duty bearers- creating a list of commitments to children, which can be prominently displayed in government offices and referred back to can be a powerful tool to ensure accountability.

3. LESSONS LEARNED

Feedback should also be provided to children who present their issues, so that they know how this has been used by decision makers.



2. Multiple entry points to engage children of all ages

Project teams in Kenya and Uganda observed that engaging children in trainings, peer group meetings and life skills sessions was a challenge when schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Once schools re-opened, regular school based dialogue sessions were organized in Kenya and other target countries.

Working through schools has several advantages- teachers can be readily trained as facilitators and can provide reliable data and information on the number of children reached, and children can be engaged with information and activities that are age appropriate within each classroom.

All country teams acknowledged the need to also have ways to reach children out-of-school, particularly when schools are closed, but also to ensure the most vulnerable children are reached.

In Mali, members of children's clubs were grouped by age around a tea party, a card table or another common interest using the "grin a grin" methodology. These smaller groups ("grin's") were supported by community mobilizers and other responsible adults to contribute to make tea or buy snacks. They hold dialogues in the open air under trees or sheds, in front of small shops, or along the streets- enabling age-appropriate

3. LESSONS LEARNED

sharing of information and discussion of concerns, with the community mobilizers accompanying the process to reinforce key child protection messages.

In Uganda, out of school children’s club leaders were relied on to deliver key child protection messages to their peers through awareness sessions during the long school closures. However, messages did not come out clearly to fellow children which affected their uptake and retention of knowledge on their rights.

In Kenya, school based life skills sessions in classes were complemented with additional sessions during non-class hours, bringing together children of different ages, with some all-male session and some all-female sessions, depending on the topic. Peer sessions were also organized by the children themselves bringing together children and youth who live in the same neighbourhood during their free and relaxation time, including during the school holidays. Such sessions allow children more freedom to speak their minds and share with peers.

Recommendation



When working with children’s clubs outside of a school setting, ensure that there are available responsible adult community members who can support the children and reinforce accurate and useful messages on child protection.



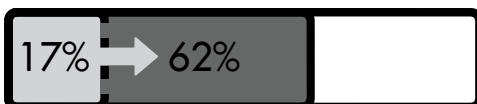
JOFA colleagues recommended that where mixed age groups are used, staff should take actions to ensure youths do not negatively influence children, and to safeguard against potential abuse of younger children by youth or by older children. A thorough risk assessment of such activities is essential, and will also help identify when all-male or all-female sessions are advisable.

Outcomes in Kenya from life skills and peer group sessions

Increase in confidence of children to report a protection violation from 56% to 76% in the past year



Increase in children’s knowledge of child protection risks and how to seek help from 17% to 62% in the past year



Senegal



In Senegal, Intergenerational dialogues were conducted, where children were supported to discuss challenging issues with their parents and elders in a safe, facilitated space, challenging negative norms and addressing complex issues such as domestic violence and child marriage.

3. LESSONS LEARNED

3. Raising awareness, changing attitudes, influencing norms whilst having fun!

JOFA project teams in Uganda and Ethiopia have been supporting children and their peer groups to use art and drama to raise awareness of important child protection concerns.

In Uganda, child rights club members integrated drama into child led community dialogues in a bid to address harmful socio-cultural practices such as; caning, early marriages and teenage pregnancies that were on the rise during the COVID pandemic. During and after the drama, discussions were triggered among the custodians of such cultural norms (religious and cultural leaders) and responses provided to children, with leaders making commitments towards ending these harmful practices.

Creative methodologies such as drama, art, songs and poems are effective at engaging children and adults alike, but should form part of an overall campaign strategy with clear, well informed objectives, messaging and targets to ensure maximum effectiveness.

In Ethiopia, children used different approaches during celebrations of universal children's day such as speeches by child representatives, songs, drama, poems and games to disseminate key messages about the rights of children, the main child protection concerns in their community and the role of various stakeholders to address such concerns.

Mali



In Mali, the JOFA project team supported the children's club of Sakoïba to organize a football match-adults versus youth. The football match provided a great platform for raising awareness and stimulating discussion about child protection issues in the community. Key messages were conveyed before and after the football match and during half-time through animated debates of fifteen to twenty minutes on child protection issues identified by the children's club as important concerns in their communities- child marriage being one of them. Community mobilizers reported that as a result of this effort, 8 young girls were spared from forced early marriage. The event was also an important moment to strengthen bond of cohesion between children in the community.

When using sport as a means of community mobilization, consultations with children and adults help to identify appropriate sports that will attract a large and diverse audience.

3. LESSONS LEARNED



Including the most vulnerable



Children with disability

How can we ensure that children with special needs participate in a more meaningful way without the risk of feeling stigmatised?

Consulting children on preferred communication channels for feedback mechanisms and referral pathways to address lack of reports or feedback.

Engaging religious and cultural leaders in dialogue with children.



4. Children's input on selection of program participants- targeting the most vulnerable

In Uganda, Mali, Ethiopia and Kenya the JOFA teams are implementing the "Parenting without Violence" (PwV) model of positive parenting sessions involving both parent groups and children's groups. Parents and children participate in a series of structured learning and sharing sessions in cohorts of 10-20 participants. Multiple cohorts can participate in one community over a three year project such as the JOFA project.

During the children's PwV sessions in Bugiri and Busia in Eastern Uganda, the first cohort of children began to identify children in homes that were facing violence and recommending them for participation in future cohorts of the PwV sessions. This has helped the project team to select families for the second cohort that are most at need of these PwV sessions, as opposed to the regular selection method based on willingness to participate, which sometimes resulted in the most vulnerable being left out. The participation of children in the PwV sessions has also increased focus on community issues identified and prioritized by the community members (especially children) themselves.

Our country team in Senegal is implementing the "Celebrating Families" approach to positive parenting. Issues around targeting and involving children in selection of participants are equally relevant, and will be further explored.

Involving children in the identification of participants helps targeting the most vulnerable, but also comes with risks, including the stigmatization of families grouped together for parenting sessions. We recommend risk analysis, mitigation, and data analysis on gender, age and disability status – both before and after involving children in identification of participants. Participation rates and retention of participants throughout the full PwV program should be monitored when families are selected based on vulnerability rather than based on willingness to participate.

4. ACTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Cross cutting actions:

- *Safeguarding Risk Assessments*: All country teams continue to conduct comprehensive assessments and strengthen practice.
- *Institutionalization of child participation mechanisms for Sustainability*: work with government agencies, education departments and school leadership to institutionalise child participation mechanisms and advocate for National Child Participation policies and actions plans.

1. Child Friendly Accountability

- Conduct further analysis of the effectiveness of CFA approaches through the JOFA learning series on Technical Approaches (April 2022-March 2023).
- Take action on recommendations such as clear documentation of commitments from

duty bearers, clear and transparent selection processes for child representatives, and providing ongoing feedback and managing the expectations of children involved in accountability mechanisms.

- *Strengthen disability inclusion* in CFA activities, including staff training.

2. Multiple entry points to engage all children

- *Increase engagement of children from currently excluded groups*-including secondary school children.
- *Review current practice* and where necessary *provide additional training* and support to patrons, mentors and community mobilizers supporting child clubs.
- *Review of supervision practices and content management* on digital platforms used by peer-to-peer groups.



4. ACTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

3. Raising awareness, changing attitudes, influencing norms whilst having fun!

■ *Share resources and good practices* in using sport, drama and art to mobilize communities and continue to scale up such activities.

■ Further *consider gender dynamics during sport, drama and art activities*, advocate for gender equality and challenge negative gender norms through the implementation of such activities.

4. Children's input on selection of program participants- targeting the most vulnerable.

■ *Review targeting strategies* for project activities, and assess the potential and risks of involving children in targeting.

Reflections on social norms



- Continue to train staff on gender equality including gender and social norms, and conduct further analysis on social norms related to child participation.

- Exploring opportunities outside the JOFA project to conduct research on social norms related to child participation, gender and violence and how they interact in different contexts.





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