

Joining Forces for Africa (JOFA) Newsletter

Two years of JOFA



JOINING FORCES
For All Children



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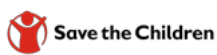
November 2022

NEWSLETTER

Q8



Towards gender equality



JOFA Q8 Newsletter

After two years of implementation, the Joining Forces for Africa (JOFA) project has made very 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 emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic

Join us and discover the outcomes of two years of JOFA

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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.



Defeating violence against children

TWO YEARS OF JOFA

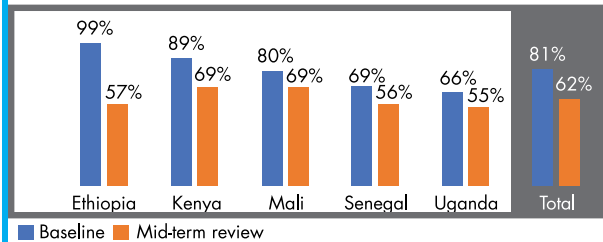
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After two years of implementation, the JOFA project has made very good progress overall towards reaching the final targets and making an impact on the reduction of violence against children. The year has seen all five countries emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, with most restrictions on movements and the threat to life having gradually lifted, what remains is disruption to economic and social structures amidst rising costs of fuel and basic commodities and a global hunger crisis that is particularly impacting on Kenya, Ethiopia and Mali. In Mali and Ethiopia, internal conflict, displacement and resulting economic and civic deterioration continues to put a strain on communities, and those working with them such as the JOFA implementing partners.

Good progress has been made against Specific Objective 1- **forging 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. Support to service providers has enabled them to more effectively reach children with individualized support, such as case management, with almost 29,000 children reached- 138% of our

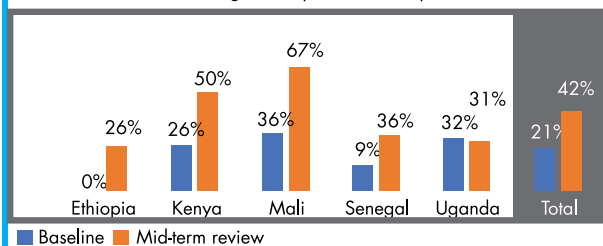
Impact

% of children aged 10-17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by guardians in the past month



Strengthen protection and response systems

% of child protection actors who report feeling self-confidence in their skills and knowledge to respond to child protection risks





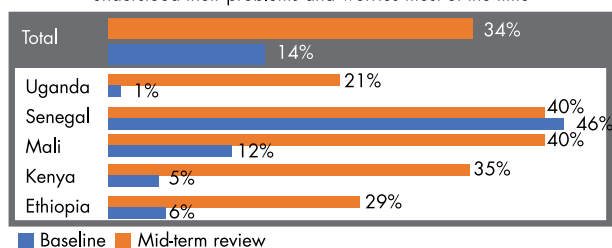
original target. As a result of these actions, the proportion of child protection actors who feel self-confidence that they have the skills and knowledge to respond to child protection risks has increased from 21% at baseline to 42% at mid-term review.

Good progress has also been made towards Specific **Objective 2. Mass communication campaigns are under way** and are already reaching large numbers of people in our target communities, particularly in Uganda, Mali and Kenya. 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. A particular emphasis on providing structured positive parenting programs across all countries has meant the project teams have reached over 26,000 parents directly, exceeding our targets and responding to the results of year 1 and year 2 needs assessments which showed increasing strain on parents and high levels of violence perpetrated by parents

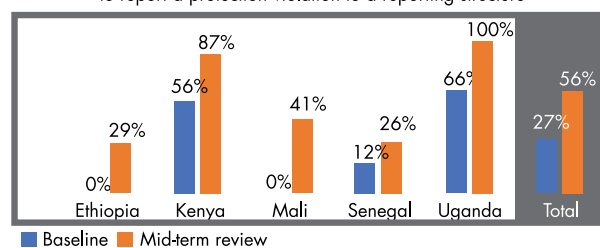
and caregivers on their children. The results of these programs are beginning to be reflected in our outcome indicators, with the percentage of children who state that their parents and guardians understood their problems and worries most of the time increasing from 14% at baseline to 34% at mid-term.

Good progress has been made towards Specific **Objective 3. Large numbers of children have been engaged in life skills, psycho-social support and social accountability mechanisms**, with over 43,000 children benefiting- 80% of our target. Overcoming the challenges of reaching children during the COVID-19 related restrictions, the country teams in year two have rapidly expanded our reach, implementing life skills programs in schools, scaling up psycho-social support programs such as TeamUp, and supporting child clubs to function effectively and to engage with duty bearers. The results of these programs are evident in the performance of relevant outcome indicators, with the % of children who state that they are confident to report a protection violation to a reporting structure increasing from 27% at baseline to 56% at Mid-term.

% of children aged 10-17 who report their parents and guardians understood their problems and worries most of the time



% of children who state that they are confident to report a protection violation to a reporting structure



Good progress has been made towards Specific **Objective 4. Year 2 needs assessments, outcome monitoring and mid-term reviews have been completed in all 5 countries**, and robust monitoring, evaluation and learning systems have been put in place. Learning and exchange events on child participation and technical approaches have enabled the team to 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 learning brief on child participation was published and widely disseminated, and quarterly newsletters also distributed to global child protection stakeholders.

A significant added value of this project is the implementation of the Joining Forces for Africa project Learning Agenda, which includes sharing and exchange with members of the Joining Forces Alliance globally. Country teams are learning from each other through the Learning Series on Child Participation and the series on Technical Approaches and are joining forces to collaboratively support national level child protection system strengthening processes 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.

Year two of the JOFA project started with the COVID-19 pandemic still impacting on the project team's capacity to work directly with

children and communities, as restrictions on movement and public gatherings were still in place in Senegal and Uganda, and the immediate effects of the pandemic were still being felt in all countries during quarter five of the project. Steady improvement of conditions was then seen from quarter six onwards, with Uganda being the last country to re-open schools at the beginning of quarter seven and gradually all restrictions on movements and direct impacts of the pandemic being less prevalent across all countries.

Vaccination campaigns continued at a slow pace across all target countries, with priority populations such as health care workers and teachers mostly covered, as well as NGO staff including JOFA project teams. All country teams are now operating without restrictions on movement and the direct risk of COVID-19 is now greatly reduced.

The economic and longer-term impact of the pandemic are now being felt, with the cost of fuel and food causing distress and strain on household finances across all countries by the end of year two. Many households are still unable to afford their children's needs, resulting in higher levels of child labour, exploitation and neglect as reflected in the project's year two needs assessments. Recent increases in fuel prices have resulted in increased prices of basic household items like soap; salt; sugar; cooking oil etc. This, amidst the low household income, compounds the already dire situation of the families with whom we work.

Mid-term report: lessons from 2 years of JOFA

After two years of implementation, the Joining Forces for Africa (JOFA) project has conducted a comprehensive mid-term review to assess progress and provide inputs to shape our final year of implementation.

Overall, the project was found relevant. Its design was based on a global framework of action which was developed based on best practices and evidence-based approaches which had been tested in other contexts.

At the design phase and throughout implementation, the project managed to adapt to the needs and specificities of each context, and it seems that there was rather

limited tension between the need to standardize the approach and the need to contextualize it.

Most stakeholders consulted considered the project relevant to the needs and context. However, in some cases, community members understandably prioritize basic needs- food, income, water, and sanitation- over child protection needs and concerns.

Download the mid-term report summary

The midterm review assesses the relevance, coherence and synergies, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability of the project beyond the lifecycle, monitoring, evaluation and accountability, and learning.

Read more about the impressive results obtained so far, the challenges remaining to reach our impact and outcome targets, and the plans for ensuring sustainability and documenting and sharing our learning.



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Adding a component on income and economic strengthening, or a social protection component would address these concerns and reduce external factors that increase child protection risks in target communities. The project was found to be coherent with strategies and objectives of other actors working towards child protection across the five countries. It has also operated within internationally credible frameworks of child protection policy.

Despite numerous challenges, the project has made good progress at midterm towards the achievement of its intended outcomes. The MTR highlights reduction in the occurrence of violence in the targeted areas and other notable achievements in outcome indicators. Going forward, project teams in each country will have to pay particular attention to the potential negative effects and particularly the ostracism and resistance expressed against some peer educators and other members of the communities showing good involvement in the project.

The project has put strong governance mechanisms in place, which are able to provide support to the implementation of activities and to develop effective mitigation strategies when outputs are not delivered in a timely manner. This has allowed the project to manage time and resources efficiently. Other factors such as the working relationship among Joining Forces members and with government entities have also been identified as having a positive influence on the efficiency of the project. Working as a consortium is adding value to the work done. Nonetheless, in some countries, contextual factors, internal procedures, and staff turnover negatively affected the way the project has been implemented. At global level, coordinating such a big number of agencies also brings its own challenges.

Ultimately, the involvement of stakeholders (community structures, administrative authorities and services, resource persons, community members including children and young people) in the implementation of the project is an assurance of ownership, which is one of the elements necessary for sustainability. Thus, having strengthened their capacities, the project has created an environment conducive to the sustainability of its achievements. However, the development of a transition plan and strategies aiming mobilising financial resources and setting out roles and responsibilities among project stakeholders is necessary.

The project developed a comprehensive monitoring, evaluation and accountability system which allows for adequate tracking of results and identification of lessons learnt, feedback and recommendations to make timely adjustments. The downside of the system is its complexity and the level of capacity building, sensitization and harmonization effort necessary to ensure that it is adequately and consistently implemented in all countries. The accountability mechanisms in place are accessible due to the multiple options available. Nonetheless, some mechanisms based on direct communication seem to be preferred and should be prioritized especially for children and in areas where sharing feedback and complaints is less culturally appropriate.

Through a solid learning strategy, process and agenda developed from the onset of the project, JOFA has been able to collect valuable lessons and made extensive efforts to share the knowledge of the project with other actors working towards child protection. Efforts will also further intensify in the remaining year of the project to ensure that lessons learnt are documented and are widely accessible through international platforms.

Lessons for future child protection responses

Through putting in practice internationally credible frameworks for child protection practice, such as the INPSIRE strategies, the project has provided a comprehensive response to child protection risks exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, one lesson learned for future interventions is the importance of income, economic strengthening

and social protection for vulnerable families, as part of a comprehensive child protection response.

Families need support to address their basic needs, in order to be able to make sustainable changes in their lives for the protection and full development of their children, and future interventions must incorporate adequate support in this area.

Towards gender equality

Gender equality is mainstreamed across all project activities, and the project MERL system ensures monitoring disaggregated by age, gender and disability.



All country teams have provided detailed disaggregated data by age and sex for all activities (beneficiaries) and indicators. Disaggregated monitoring data has been used to identify areas for improvement and increase participation of boys, girls, men and women where a clear gender imbalance has been identified in regard to project activity participation. Activities involving children as direct beneficiaries generally involve 40-60% female participants, with some variation between countries, supervision areas and activities.

There is greater variance with activities involving adults, with positive parenting activities gaining more participation from females than males (62% females), and activities involving service providers often involving more men than women.

Analysis of outcome and impact indicators by gender gives us some interesting and challenging results at mid-term. In Ethiopia, more work is required to ensure girls develop confidence, knowledge and voice in child protection matters, as indicated in the different outcomes of relevant indicators at mid-term:

Understanding and addressing gender norms

In Uganda, Ethiopia, Mali and Kenya the country teams are implementing the “Parenting without Violence” approach across all implementing agencies and target areas. The approach draws attention to gender dynamics and power as an underlying cause of Violence Against Children. The model tackles social constructs around gender with both children and adults and within homes

and communities in a bid to ensure communities’ work towards gender equality.

In Senegal, the project team is implementing the “Celebrating Families” approach which trains parents, and especially men, on: loving language, positive discipline, gender equality and conflict management within the family. The approach identifies and tackles negative gender norms associated with parenting.

In Ethiopia, the project team has assessed the traditional and cultural norms related to violence against children in their target areas, including opportunities and barriers to protecting children. Continuous dialogue with community representatives and religious leaders encouraged them to step forward and challenge existing social norms that condone violence against children. The project team is working closely with religious leaders and the elders to prevent and respond concerns of girls like FGM and early marriage, which are the major problems in the project target locations driven by harmful gender norms.

Strengthening girls’ and young women’s agency, building their knowledge, confidence and skills

In Ethiopia, through child friendly accountability activities, the JOFA project team has strengthened girls’ agency over the decisions that affect them, increasing their confidence and skills through life skills activities. As activities include a balance of boys and girls, the young boys are also supported to develop a sense of equality



for girls and encouraged to support and promote gender equality. Both girls and boys have actively participated in campaigns about the issues of eliminating harmful traditional practice on the children, gender-based violence and child rights. Such campaigns and the links with each other within the associations facilitated the girls and young women to build their confidence and skills through experience sharing amongst themselves.

In Senegal, girls in youth participation settings benefit from specific activities that strengthen their self-awareness and self-esteem, facilitate the development of their potential, their psychosocial well-being and the affirmation of their leadership in child participation settings.

The project team has worked extensively in the Kolda area on activities aimed at strengthening the status of girls and women in the community.

In Mali, during the implementation of “parenting without violence”, different implementation sites have approached the issue of gender in various ways considering the local context. In San, the groups of parents are separated (men and women) in the parenting sessions allowing women to be more active. In the other groups formed, both women and men are included together to ensure change at all levels of the family and community sphere and to encourage alternation in case one parent is not available. Both women and men have facilitated parenting sessions at the neighbourhood and village levels.

Adapting implementation approaches according to the local context has been essential in order to engage men to embrace positive masculinities.

In Kenya, lower participation of male beneficiaries was noted in positive parenting groups, despite efforts of mobilising them to attend.

Fostering an enabling environment where all stakeholders work together towards gender equality

Project teams in all countries have been integrating gender equality in trainings with service providers,

teachers, community based structures and other actors that have an impact on children’s protection.

For example, In Ethiopia, sessions on gender equality promotion addressed what would be done through the government and community structures and the position of each government agency (such as education bureau, women and children affairs bureau, social affairs bureau, etc). The project has also facilitated discussion platforms for religious leaders and other stakeholders to discuss how to promote child protection and prevention of gender-based violence.

In Mali, community dialogues, supported by community leaders, technical services and local organizations involved in child protection involved discussion on the importance of gender equality.

Specific advocacy events with local and national level government stakeholders have also been conducted, addressing gender-related issues such as Sexual and Gender Based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage.

In Kenya, the Teso North Girls Summit which focussed on changing harmful gender norms was supported by TdH and local partners with the involvement of local government and duty bearers. Experiential learning and life skills were passed on through the “Walk a Mile in my Shoes” methodology facilitated by teenage mothers and “Dadas Heal: journey towards the desired dream” a role-play by teenage girls and SGBV survivors as they shared critical lessons learned and their resilient journey.

Other cross cutting issues

In all countries, project teams have engaged with local disabled peoples organizations to support improved integration of children and adults with disabilities into ongoing project activities, such as life skills training for children, child clubs and other peer networks, community based child protection mechanisms and child-led advocacy/ child friendly accountability processes. Though challenged with limited specific capacity to work with all types of children with disability, through support from local organizations, the teams are starting to include increasing numbers of children with disabilities.



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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.](#)

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