

June 2023

LEARNING BRIEF



JOINING FORCES  
For All Children



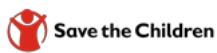
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# Collaboration

Joining Forces for Africa (JOFA)



ChildFund  
Alliance



Terre des Hommes  
International Federation

World Vision

## BACKGROUND

The “Joining Forces for Africa (JOFA)- protecting children during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond” is the first major project implemented by the Joining Forces Alliance. Implemented in five countries (Senegal, Mali, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda) across three years (August 2020-2023), the €10 million EU funded project aims to reduce levels of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect among children and adolescents. It has four specific objectives:

### Learning agenda

The JOFA project has a learning agenda which is designed to support knowledge management within the project to help solve implementation problems, and to increase the overall effectiveness and the quality of the project’s achievements on the ground. The learning agenda is explicitly linked to the specific objective 4 and has three defined learning areas:

- The impact of child participation on the effectiveness of child protection programming.
- Implementation of common technical approaches and methodologies across different countries and contexts.
- Effective collaboration within the consortium for greater impact

A “learning series” has been implemented for each area, with this learning brief specifically addressing collaboration.

### JOFA Objectives

- Strengthen national and local protection and response systems.
- Improve protection in resilient families, communities, and institutions in the context of COVID-19 and during recovery phase.
- Increase capacity and agency of children to prevent and respond to violence against them during COVID-19 crisis and recovery phase.
- Increase learning and sharing of knowledge and best practice related to child protection approaches.

### Collaboration and Joining Forces

- **The Collaborative Advantage framework** has been used by the Joining Forces Alliance to help define the added value of working together. Of the 11 collaboration mechanisms identified in the Framework, 7 have been identified as being most relevant to our Alliance:

## COLLABORATIVE ADVANTAGE FRAMEWORK

- 0 CONNECTION**  
Creating collective legitimacy and knowledge
- 1 COMPLEMENTARITY**  
Bringing together essential complementary resources
- 2 SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION**  
Harmonization / coordination of key system actors' resources / instruments

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- 3 STANDARDS**  
Creating collective legitimacy and knowledge

- 4 INNOVATION**  
Combining diverse resources, thinking, approaches

- 5 HOLISM**  
Convening holistic range of actors across traditional silos

- 6 SHARED LEARNING**  
Creating a mechanism for collective learning and capability-building

- 7 SHARED RISK**  
Collectively sharing risk of major investments / implementation

- 8 SYNERGY**  
Aligning programmes / resources and cooperating to exploit synergies

- 9 SCALE**  
Combining delivery capacity across geographies

- 10 CRITICAL MASS**  
Collectively providing sufficient weight of action

**The JOFA project has prioritized Scale, Shared learning, Standards and Critical Mass. We also explored the mechanism of Synergies.**

## FINDINGS

The Collaborative Advantage framework is a very useful tool to help us define the added value of working together. For the JOFA project, the collaboration mechanisms used were:

### JOFA Collaboration Mechanisms

- **Shared Learning** through the project having a specific objective based around learning and a defined Learning Agenda,
- **Scale** through the application of common technical approaches
- **Standards** through the setting of common agreed Guidelines, Standards and Templates in the project MoU and
- **Critical Mass** the national level work on Advocacy as part of project activities.

We also explored the collaboration mechanism of Synergies, but found that this was less relevant given the fact that all six agencies had a similar programmatic focus on child rights and prevention of violence against children.

**Recommendation:** Future Joining Forces projects should explicitly work on the collaboration mechanisms defined in the framework from the outset. Joining Forces teams can select the most appropriate collaboration mechanisms that apply to their specific interventions/ projects, and agree on how these mechanisms will be applied within their project.

### Factors that influence collaboration

The most influential factor in the success of the collaboration is the commitment of senior leadership to the Joining Forces Alliance.

Commitment of leadership at all levels (Country Director, regional, global, fundraising offices) is important as it acts to ensure accountability of country level leadership to the goals and principles of Joining Forces.



Other important factors influential in the success of Collaboration are:

### Attitudes and behaviours, institutional commitment

- Open communication, transparency and mutual accountability
- Strong Inter-personal relationships with mutual understanding, respect and trust
- Openness and readiness to learn

### Structures, plans, documents

- MoU/ agreements to clarify objectives, roles, expectations, commitments from each agency
- Integration of agreed joint workplan priorities into partner strategies
- Regular reflection and review of the collaboration
- Transparent discussions and consensus building on communication, visibility and branding

### Time, resources (including money, personnel) and management support

- Mobilization and allocation of financial resources to support long-term collaboration,
- Mobilization and allocation of technical resources to Joining Forces initiatives

### Engagement with other Civil Society Actors and Child Protection stakeholders:

Joining Forces country platforms must define their position vis a vis existing coordination mechanisms, technical working groups etc. through the use of stakeholder mapping tools and thorough discussion amongst partners.

## SHARED LEARNING

The Collaboration mechanisms of Shared Learning was applied in the JOFA project via the project-specific Learning Agenda, which has been implemented through three learning series; Child participation, Technical Approaches, Collaboration

Shared learning actions have helped teams acquire new skills and knowledge and to overcome common implementation challenges and improve programming. Comparing results and progress across multiple partners enhances transparency and mutual accountability.

### Lesson Learned and best practices

The project has a specific objective focused on shared learning, with budgeted systematic and regular learning activities and expected results. Regular reporting on learning and incorporation of learning into action plans has ensured learning was acted upon during the project period.

The shared learning actions have introduced a culture of learning and knowledge sharing in the JOFA project team which is spreading within agencies and with other projects and programs. Involvement of senior management in shared learning events at appropriate times helps to overcome institutional challenges.

Identifying the specific focus areas for the learning agenda at the beginning of the project helped create a common understanding and consistency among the six agencies.

A strong project M&E system that produced useful, credible data to be used in shared learning events created legitimacy and stimulus for further action and improvements.

### Recommendations

All future Joining Forces projects should have dedicated learning result areas and budget, ensuring that the detailed lessons learnt and best practices from the JOFA project learning agenda are taken into consideration.

Shared Learning collaboration mechanisms so that they can support country teams to develop their own learning agenda.

The Joining Forces technical support pool should be oriented on the key aspects of the

Exchanges (online and in-person) between Joining Forces Country teams should be facilitated to stimulate shared learning and to exchange ideas on the best way to arrange learning actions and learning agendas.



## SCALE

The collaboration mechanisms of Scale was implemented in the JOFA project through the introduction of common technical approaches implemented by multiple partners across different countries and contexts, and the learning series on technical approaches. The learning series was focused on three specific technical approaches, and a learning brief was produced for each approach: [Parenting without Violence](#), [Child Friendly Accountability](#) and [TeamUp](#)

As a result of the collaboration, Parenting without Violence was scaled up by all partners in Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda and Mali. A total of 27,097 parents have been reached to date by 10 implementing partners representing all 6 JF agencies.

Child Friendly Accountability activities were implemented in all countries, reaching 21,994 children, although fidelity to the methodological guidelines was not consistent across all countries.

TeamUp was implemented by all partners in Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya reaching 26,996 children. 9 implementing partners implemented TeamUp representing all 6 JF agencies.

### Lessons Learnt

The process of sharing best practice and evidence informed approaches in child protection at Global level, and then at national level, whilst utilizing an objective set of criteria for selecting the most appropriate approach for each JOFA country team resulted in many country teams selecting the same evidence-based approaches (TeamUp, PwV, CFA).

The Joining Forces agencies participating in the JOFA project embraced and used each other's

approaches to deliver interventions. Many of the common technical approaches (TeamUp, PwV, CFA) are now being scaled up in other projects of Joining Forces agencies within the JOFA target countries.

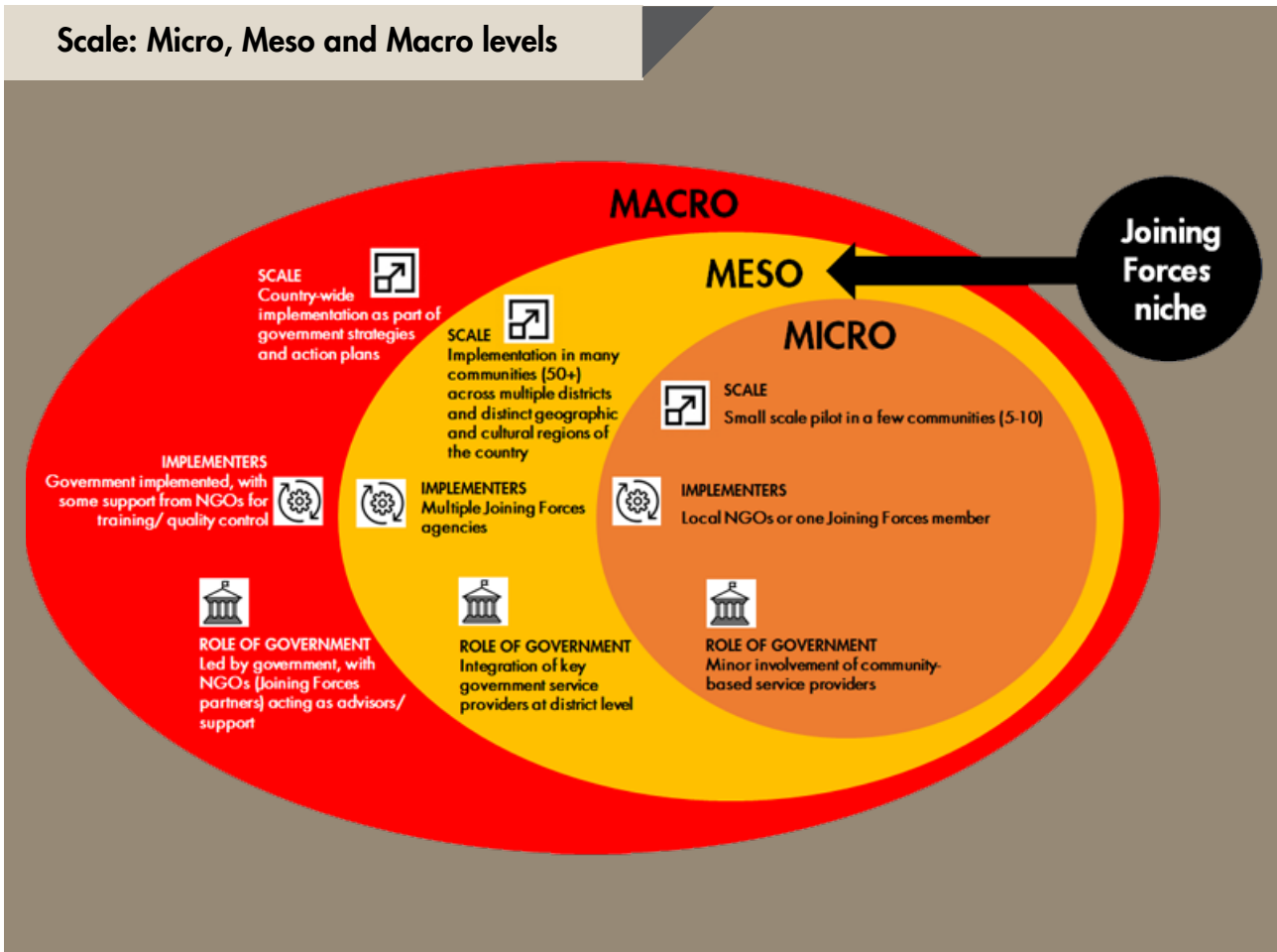
Whilst the process of identifying common technical approaches was highly participative and gave country teams the decision-making power and choice to select the most appropriate approach, it was also time consuming and resulted in some countries delaying implementing some key project activities.

Adoption of common technical approaches to scale was not consistent across the different JOFA teams. Failure to involve technical experts (or lack of available technical experts in key agencies) in a timely manner led to delays in the implementation of technical approaches. Effective communication strategies to build commitment and ownership of technical approaches at country level are essential from the outset.

Gaps in capacity or understanding led to delays in full utilization of M&E systems required to provide the evidence for scale up of technical approaches

Once common technical approaches are defined, budgets must be aligned so that all implementing agencies have the appropriate budget and staffing to adequately implement the approaches as per the agreed standards and guidelines.

Government backing is important to achieve larger (vertical) scale. In defining our position vis a vis the government in achieving scale in evidence-informed approaches, Joining Forces country platforms are able to demonstrate scale at the "meso" level.



Joining Forces country platforms can demonstrate scale at Meso level, where larger scale implementation challenges and issues of integration into government systems can be tested and resolved before they are taken to Macro level.

Evidence of the impact of the technical approaches gives legitimacy and justification for scale-up, as do examples of local government and community buy-in and support for the technical approaches across various regions which can be presented to national government for integration into national action plans etc. for scale.

**Best Practices**

Continuous peer and joint reviews, reflection, learning, feedback, exchange visits, and

their documentation promoted learning for scalability.

Joint capacity building of staff, community actors and government stakeholders on the technical approaches ensured full, common understanding of the approaches and sustained actions across larger geographical scales.

The use of standardized approaches, tools and guidelines for the delivery of technical approaches and monitoring and evaluation, combined with joint monitoring and evaluation activities ensured a degree of implementation fidelity and adherence to agreed standards and core components of the technical approaches.

Continuous learning and adaptation to context of common approaches is key for scalability, whilst maintaining adherence to evidence-based core components.

## Recommendations

Joining Forces country platforms in JOFA countries (and beyond) should continue to scale-up the successfully applied common approaches and develop specific scale up plans for the successful common technical approaches, utilizing the Joining forces guide to adaptation and scale.

Continue to generate and disseminate collective evidence of the impact of the technical approaches at (meso-level) scale to promote further scale up, including vertical scale with governments.

Joining Forces at global level (content team) and at country platform level should work to endorse a range of evidence-based technical approaches in order to be able to

advocate for their further (vertical) scale up by government, and to rapidly adopt these approaches in any future Joining Forces project(s) at country and multi-country level.

Joining Forces at global level and at country platform level then intentionally fundraise for the adaptation (including contextualization) and scale up of these technical approaches.

Any technical approach endorsed by Joining Forces must have; a clear M&E framework, guidelines on adaptation and contextualization and a training mentoring and support system to support scale up and continuity across Joining Forces partners, and for wider dissemination and understanding of guidelines and supporting materials.



## STANDARDS

The application of common Standards to create collective legitimacy and common knowledge was achieved in the JOFA project through application of the agreed Guidelines, Standards and Templates outlined in the project MoU.

The guidelines, standards and templates used responded to key categories such as safeguarding, M&E, communication, coordination, financial standards, project cycle management, reporting, HHRR, and contract compliance.

## Lessons Learnt and best practices

The JOFA project put in place a large suite of standards and guidelines at the start of the project, which helped to clarify expectations, which was appreciated by partners. Thorough orientation, training and communication on these standards and guidelines are essential from the start.

The project Standards and Guidelines enabled effective and efficient project cycle management and helped partners to regularly assess the impact and results of the project, allowing adjustments to be made where necessary.

The financial standards and the safeguarding standards put in place for the project were clear and easily understood. No partners had difficulty in applying the standards and organizational policies and practices were mostly in line with the standards.

The application of an adaptive management approach, with the ability to change standards/guidelines etc. when they were effective, but must be well communicated and staff must be supported to understand the rationale behind any change and how to apply any new (versions of) guidelines or standards.

The lack of a standardized human resource structure across teams and countries resulted in gaps in specific technical expertise (especially M&E and Communications) within some of the country teams and partner organizations to enable the application of the project standards and guidelines.

The establishment of a comprehensive, high standard monitoring and evaluation framework takes time and expertise, both of which were lacking at the start of the JOFA project, with capacity added as the project evolved.

Most partners existing M&E systems and capacities were not capable of producing adequate disaggregated data at the level required of the JOFA project M&E standards, which meant that new tools and methodologies had to be introduced specifically for the project.

Establishing communication protocols aligned with project governance structures is essential. Such protocols and communication practices must consider different organizational structures and levels of management when communicating between partners within the Joining Forces Alliance.

### Recommendations

Joining Forces project should aim to reach high standards, and these expectations must be effectively communicated to all stakeholders to enable allocation the necessary human, financial and technical resources to meet such standards.

For future Joining Forces projects, a thorough start-up and continuous training of staff on the standards and guidelines must be planned and implemented. An agreed procedure for reviewing and revising standards and guidelines to adapt to changes to context or respond to implementation challenges should be put in place and well communicated.

When developing future Joining Forces projects, adequate staffing to meet the

high standards expected of a Joining Forces project should be planned for, including specialized staff in monitoring and evaluation and communications. Standard staffing structures for project teams should be more closely followed, regardless of individual agency preferences or ways of working.

Many of the guidelines, standards and templates developed for the JOFA project can be easily adapted and used in future Joining Forces projects. The Joining Forces secretariat should maintain ownership of these resources and keep them in an accessible shared site so that they can easily be shared and used by any ongoing or future Joining Forces projects.



## CRITICAL MASS

The JOFA project teams and Joining Forces country platforms in implementing countries combined, aligned and coordinated resources to create the critical mass needed to influence laws and policies related to child protection through the development and implementation of joint advocacy plans and actions.

### Lessons Learnt and Best Practices:

By working together as six agencies strategically, building on the strengths and skills of each organization partners have been able to secure commitments from governments, donors and other stakeholders for child protection and the prevention of violence against children. Strategic media engagement and a clear communications and visibility plan supported these successes.

It is important for Joining Forces advocacy specialists to define the “niche” of the Joining Forces platform in country in regards to advocacy, especially in relation to existing networks, working groups and organizational advocacy priorities, and considering the specific national context.

Stakeholder mappings such as those utilized in the JOFA project are useful to inform such a discussion. This would help to avoid duplication of ongoing efforts by individual agencies.

Parallel advocacy actions by individual agencies can undermine the effort to align, combine and coordinate resources to create the required critical mass, particularly where the niche of the Joining Forces advocacy is not well defined.

Financing of joint advocacy actions requires annual budget commitments by all agencies based on the agreed advocacy action plans.

Utilization of technical expertise from all the agencies requires that staff who are involved in Joining Forces activities have clearly defined and measurable levels of efforts (LoEs) for Joining Forces activities & related accountability mechanism which need to be included as part of their performance objectives

Institutional commitment for advocacy actions is agreed through the signing of specific partnership agreements/ MoUs and continuous engagement of senior leadership from the six Joining Forces agencies. Where feasible, Joining Forces advocacy actions/ strategies/ priorities were integrated into the country strategies of each agency.

Joint engagement by JF teams of Government departments and agencies on common objectives is an enabler for more Government attention and focus on priority child rights issues that are being advanced by all agencies.

### Recommendations

Joining Forces country platforms must be supported to develop clear advocacy strategies that include terms of reference which outline the roles of both the lead/ host agency and other members, as well as the level of effort of individuals involved in implementation. Accountability mechanisms need to be agreed and consciously managed at all times for leadership, coordination and technical roles involved in implementing the advocacy plan/ strategy.

Country platforms must count with the active involvement and commitment from senior country office leadership (Country Directors), as well as involvement from non-project specific staff (Program Directors,

Communications and Advocacy specialists etc.) for institutional buy-in and support to the advocacy plan/ strategy.

It is crucial to involve relevant national and regional networks, which provide access to wider civil society in collaborative planning, implementation, monitoring of and reporting on advocacy actions.

Meaningful participation of children in advocacy actions should always be a strong consideration for all country platform advocacy plans/ strategies (including child-led advocacy). This should be well stipulated and anchored in the government frameworks.

## SUSTAINABILITY OF THE COLLABORATION

As part of the Learning Series on Collaboration, Joining Forces country platforms in all six of the implementing countries were asked about their current plans and prospects for continuation of the collaboration beyond the JOFA project.

The following are the main areas in which country teams aim to continue collaborating:

- **Joint advocacy:** continuation and further development of joint advocacy plans/strategies, aiming to amplify the voices of children for advocacy whilst different country teams had varying areas of focus for their advocacy.
- **Safeguarding:** continued sharing of best practice and standards within Joining Forces and actions to influence Safeguarding standards and practice of other actors (i.e. Civil Society actors or Government institutions).
- **Knowledge Sharing:** Development of a system or a platform for continued knowledge sharing on child protection technical areas, with support from the Joining Forces Technical pool
- **Child protection coordination structures/mechanisms:** work to share best practice examples of coordination structures at community/district/provincial/national levels
- **Joint Resource mobilization** for new projects, programs and initiatives.

### Recommendations

- **Support from leadership is the key factor in sustaining JF collaboration in country.** Commitment from CEOs must be translated to commitment from all levels of leadership within each agency, along with accountability mechanisms to ensure that commitments are followed through
- **The role of regional offices/ regional JF platforms vis a vis the country platforms should be well defined and built into accountability mechanisms for country leadership**
- **Where commitment and support at country level is lacking, an escalation mechanism must be in place to ensure accountability for all.**
- **To ensure commitment to Joining Forces collaboration is institutionalized at country level, all participating agencies should be encouraged to include Joining Forces actions in their country strategies and long term plans**
- **Further guidance, case studies and examples of best practice on how Joining Forces country platforms relate to other civil society structures, technical working groups etc. should be provided for all country platforms**
- **Further guidance and consistent messaging on joint resource mobilization should be provided for country platforms, particularly in responding to open calls for proposals, to avoid confusion, frustration and mixed messaging.**
- **JOFA staff highly value the collaboration and advocate for all partners to commit collectively to bid for funding calls for new, longer term Joining Forces projects/initiatives, putting aside organizational interests to join together in bids.**
- **Learning from the JOFA project on technical approaches (Scale), the application of the learning agenda (Shared Learning), and Collaboration in general should be shared and discussed within each Joining forces agency with a view to influencing the organization's wider project portfolio on ending violence against children**



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