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LEARNING BRIEF

JOFA THEMATIC
REVIEWS 



JOINING FORCES
For All Children



Co-funded by
the European Union

JOFA Project Thematic Review: Application of the Project's Learning Agenda

Joining Forces for Africa (JOFA)



ChildFund
Alliance



Terre des Hommes
International Federation



BACKGROUND

The coming together of the six biggest child-focused agencies under JOFA represented a rare and valuable opportunity to gather, disseminate and exchange learning to improve programming, not only among the partner agencies but also among the broader global networks in which these agencies operate. Accordingly, the JOFA project has built into its design and implementation a strong emphasis on learning and the sharing of best practices. These foundational principles were articulated in a “Learning Agenda” which was explicitly linked to the project’s Specific Objective 4: Increased learning and sharing of knowledge and best practice related to child protection approaches.

The Learning Agenda was designed to support knowledge management within the JOFA project and help identify and solve implementation problems throughout the project lifespan. In this way, the Learning Agenda aimed to contribute to the overall effectiveness and quality of the project’s achievements on the ground. Specifically, the Learning Agenda’s objectives were to (1) improve project effectiveness through learning and documentation, and (2) increase the project impact through research and dissemination of lessons and innovations within and beyond the Joining Forces agencies. Informed by the Joining Forces research agenda, the Learning Agenda also identified three pre-defined key areas of inquiry to help set the learning objectives and serve as a common learning ground across the five countries. These three key areas of inquiry were selected to ensure a focused agenda, and to facilitate the management of information, including targeted tracking, monitoring and probing of relevant data.

Key Areas

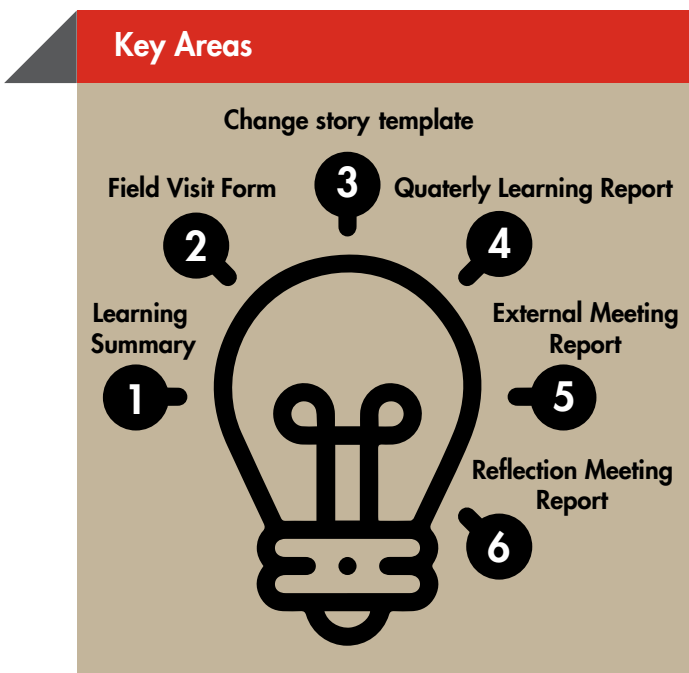
1. The impact of child participation on the effectiveness of child protection programming.
2. Implementation of common technical approaches and methodologies across different countries and contexts.
3. Effective collaboration within the consortium for greater impact.



COMPONENTS

The Learning Agenda is a multifaceted approach aimed to capture and facilitate reflections and learning at the local, national, and global levels. Conducting quarterly project reviews and reflection and learning meetings through local and national workshops was an explicit activity under Specific Objective 4 of the JOFA project.

The project developed learning tools to collect data, which included the following:



The JOFA project hosted three specific Learning Series exploring each of the three key areas of inquiry.

A Learning Series on Child Participation was held between November 2021 and February 2022, to explore the impact of child participation on the effectiveness of child protection programming. A Learning Brief was prepared and disseminated as one output of this series. The project team also engaged with the Joining Forces country platforms in Latin America and Asia and the global and regional hubs of the JF Alliance members in online workshops to discuss the area of child participation and provide input to the Learning Brief.

A second Learning Series was conducted on Technical Approaches. Within the Technical Approaches Learning Series, workshops focused on common technical approaches were organised in the first quarter of the project, which allowed countries to outline specific evidence-based child protection technical approaches that could be adapted to context as needed across JOFA countries. These workshops on technical approaches, conducted in English and French, included four themes (1) positive parenting (2) child participation and life skills, (3) psychological first aid and psychosocial support, and (4) community-based approaches and child helplines.





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After the completion of the global workshops, the country teams conducted internal workshops to highlight context-specific discussions and adaptability responses. As part of this process, the country teams identified 3-5 technical approaches to be implemented as part of the project. The teams developed follow-up action plans to guide the training of

trainers, adaptation of guidelines and visual materials, Technical Advisory Group (TAG) technical support, and budget and workplan adjustments. To further learning, informal communities of practice were created. After a period of implementation, exchanges and in-depth workshops were conducted to reflect on the application of the technical approaches and any changes or adaptations needed to increase their effectiveness, and also to capture lessons learnt and best practices. These are captured on the Learning Briefs produced for each of the three common technical approaches.

Three external learning events on the common technical approaches were held, covering Parenting without Violence (led by Save the Children), Child Friendly Accountability (led by ChildFund) and TeamUp (SOS Children's Village). Joining Forces Alliance members from around the globe participated in these learning events and members were encouraged to adopt these evidence-informed approaches in their ongoing programming.

A third learning series on Collaboration was held between January and May 2023, with a series of workshops in each country and a global workshop in Ethiopia to analyse the different collaboration mechanisms applied within the project. Lesson learnt, best practices and recommendations are captured in a Learning Brief on Collaboration.

The project also organised knowledge sharing exchanges between country teams (in-person and online) to share and strengthen learning. The project developed a Country Exchange Protocol to guide learning exchange between country-level JOFA project agencies to enhance the learning quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of these collaborating agencies. The project also engaged with external child protection stakeholders, for example, the EU, funding partners, UNICEF, UNHCR, Global Partnership to End Violence, and academic partners in many of the learning events.

APPLICATION OF THE LEARNING AGENDA: A CROSS-COUNTRY SNAPSHOT



ETHIOPIA



In Ethiopia, partner staff members described JOFA as a “learning project,” noting that the Learning Agenda had helped to guide the project from the earliest stages. Following the sharing of common technical approaches and methodologies from across different countries and partner organisations, the JOFA team implemented various approaches in project sites in western and eastern Ethiopia (Assosa and East Hararghe, respectively). These included Parenting without Violence (PwV), TeamUp psychosocial support interventions, and Child Friendly Accountability (CFA) approaches. One staff member shared that the PwV approach helped develop more transparent communication and enhanced relationships between children and parents/caregivers. TeamUp helped children in the conflict areas in which they work to improve their self-esteem and communication with their teachers and peers.

The CFA approaches encouraged partners to increase the effective engagement of children in child protection programming,

including their interaction with duty bearers. Teams highlighted the value of the project’s structured learning mechanisms between different levels of project implementation and management.

This included a system to identify knowledge gained from the grassroots level, feeding valuable learning upwards into national and global forums. As one JOFA partner staff member elaborated, “We have a lot of learning between us, as well as with other countries.” Opportunities for experiential learning through in-person exchanges were also appreciated. One Plan International Ethiopia staff member in Assosa noted that they had incorporated learning from the SOS Children’s Villages team in East Hararghe regarding the effectiveness of their close engagement with schools: “When we saw their programme, we saw they were working with schools closely.”

This led to an exploration and application of this approach by the Plan International team in Assosa.

**KENYA**

In Kenya, the Learning Agenda facilitated cross-learning from one project site to another, particularly with reference to technical approaches such as PwV and TeamUp. A team member from WVI shared, "For us, the application of what you've learned, how it is applied at the community and project level – this is an area that has really gone well." Staff from JOFA partner organisations especially emphasized how the knowledge and insight they gained from other JOFA partners in terms of technical approaches, such as PwV and TeamUp, led to an implementation approach in Kenya that better targeted families in children most in need of specific child protection support. For example, the PwV approach helped ensure the parents or caregivers considered to be at risk of abusing children were specifically selected to participate in structured sessions, as opposed to participating in broader community sensitisation forums. Similarly, children who had experienced violence or were at risk of violence were purposively selected for structured sessions as part of the TeamUp project activities.

The Learning Agenda was valued in Kenya not only for facilitating learning between organisations but also for its focus on regional and international learning. Specifically, the Kenya team valued the week-long "Learning Exchange" in April 2022, organised with the Uganda JOFA team. This learning exchange resulted in some specific shared lessons, for example, the timing and time allocation for PwV sessions, the value of participating parents as effective recruiters of other potential participants among their peers, challenges

to the participation of parents and caregivers with disabilities, and potential resistance to PwV programming from religious leaders. The Learning Exchange also addressed the challenge of gender imbalances in the PwV sessions, sharing lessons for enhancing men's engagement through previously tested approaches like the "male champion" model. The two country teams also shared lessons regarding how to increase the effectiveness of CFA mechanisms, for example, through enhancing engagement with school leadership to gain their full support before engaging in CFA activities in schools.

A TdH team member working in Busia shared that the Learning Agenda had led to changes in their CFA approach, with Child Rights Clubs and County Children's Assembly members being more empowered towards the end of Year 2 to structurally engage with duty bearers (for example, through developing a memorandum, documenting children's issues and recommendations, and submitting them to relevant stakeholders).

The enhanced CFA approach also included follow-up mechanisms, including seeking an audience with the duty bearers about the status of their submissions and duty bearers' plans for ongoing follow-up. In one instance, this approach led to the county government employing a dedicated nurse to manage the SGBV desk at the country referral. The documentation and sharing of case studies between countries were also valued by the Kenyan team: "There is a lot of learning when you read the case studies from other countries, and this motivates. Project staff get motivated to do more."

MALI

In Mali, JOFA project staff members described the “Learning Series” as one of the main innovations of the JOFA project. The Learning Series fostered knowledge exchange and sharing throughout the project not just with other actors within Mali, but also through regional and international exchanges. For example, one JOFA partner staff member highlighted that as part of the learning exchanges at the country level, Plan International shared and provided training on their Gender Marker Tool, which was taken up within project activities in Mali.

For the Mali team, the Quarterly Reviews provided an opportunity to regularly gather stakeholder feedback, opinions and perspectives, including from children, in terms of how they were experiencing the programme and what they felt could improve the programme and its activities.

These perspectives, including those from children, were compiled during the project

and presented during a national-level meeting held with all JOFA partners in Mali, the country's Director of Child Protection and other child protection stakeholders. This meeting provided an opportunity for stakeholders to share issues and receive feedback from project partners on how different challenges and concerns could be addressed including how to improve child participation in the project.

Feedback and input generated from local and national levels were shared upwards into international Joining Forces learning exchanges, and also back downwards to the community level. For example, JOFA partners in Mali learned early in the project that more emphasis was needed on building the capacity of children to engage in CFA mechanisms. While the project in Mali did not have a dedicated budget line for these additional activities, they negotiated with the global coordination committee to receive the funds and engage in this work.



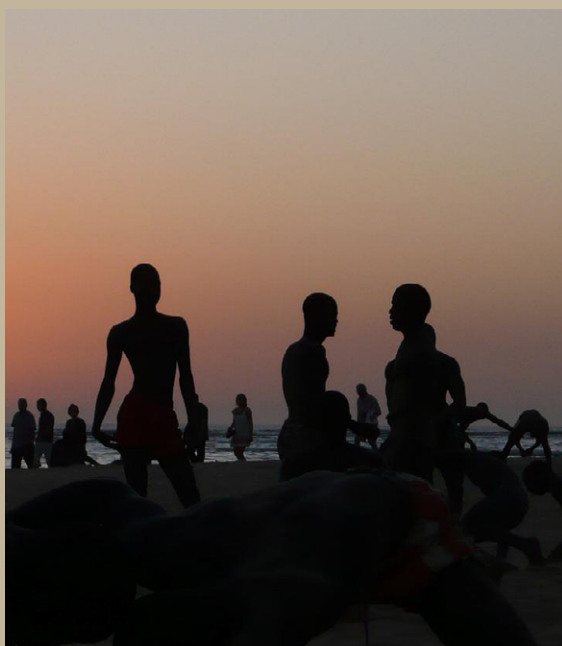


SENEGAL

In Senegal, the sharing of methodologies and specific technical approaches and tools between JOFA partners at the national and regional levels was particularly valued. Exchanges between partners were both organised (for example, through scheduled monthly meetings with national-level program directors in other countries to share successes, challenges and suggested approaches) and ad hoc, through informal calls between JOFA partners at the national level for advice and strategy sharing.

In Senegal, WVI shared its "Peace Roads" programme (a life skills programme for children) with other national partners. Peace Roads was implemented in Youth Clubs at the village level across Senegal and JOFA partner staff reported it was very well received by children. Similarly, SOS Children's Villages International shared its Positive Parenting program with partners in Senegal and regionally.

To facilitate improved local advocacy activities in Senegal, WVI also shared their training and experiences in advocacy with JOFA partner colleagues at the country level.



UGANDA



In Uganda, the Learning Agenda was also an important aspect of the project, as activities and approaches that facilitated JOFA team learning were built into the fundamental design of the project from the beginning. One Save the Children team member noted that this allowed the team to reflect and develop an action matrix that they could use to help inform changes to implementation based on structured learning. The structured tools shared by the project to capture data and learning were also valued.

The Uganda team undertook learning exchanges with Kenya and Ethiopia, sessions which focused on how to enhance men's engagement in programming, strategies for working with Child Assemblies, and mechanisms for improving child participation in the project activities. A JOFA team member from ChildFund shared that the CFA training in Kenya and online and video learning from Ethiopia was particularly insightful: "When we came, it gave me an insight on how to support the children here to be able to identify their own issues. This was a lesson for me from Kenya." There were also useful lessons shared regarding the PwV approach, including the importance of reaching out to children and parents at the same time, and how to refine implementation approaches to engaging schools.

THE ADDED VALUE OF JOFA

The articulation and inclusion of a clear learning agenda in humanitarian and development projects can add substantial value to the effectiveness and outcomes of project activities. The JOFA project presented a powerful opportunity to harness and even further amplify this potential value. Specific elements of the project's design and approach facilitated effective learning mechanisms,

Consortium approach

The value of the JOFA project's Learning Agenda is rooted in the exceptional learning opportunities provided by the very nature of the Joining Forces Alliance Initiative. The structured learning approach across these six child-focussed agencies meant that stakeholders had access to an unusually diverse and rich repertoire of knowledge, experience and expertise from which to draw. Further, the broad networks and reach of these six agencies (within countries, regionally, and globally) provided additional avenues for the dissemination and sharing of learning. The structured learning opportunities provided through the JOFA project enabled partner organisations not only to share knowledge, learn and apply those lessons within the project but also to carry those lessons forward into other projects or programmes. One JOFA partner staff member in Senegal highlighted the positive working relationships with other JOFA partners in the country, meaning they could readily call each other for advice or reflections as needed. This pre-established relationship was described as "very useful," as it facilitated easy



including: (1) the consortium approach, which allowed for the organized, consistent diffusion and application of learning across the six biggest child-focussed agencies and their extended networks, (2) the use of common technical approaches, while still allowing for contextualised adaptation during implementation in different settings, (3) the structured and intentional inclusion of learning as a core project objective from the beginning of project activities, with associated budgetary support, and (4) a participatory approach within the Learning Agenda.

feedback and collaboration. This staff member noted that the approach of JOFA helped move each NGO away from an "individual NGO" to a partnership-oriented mentality, fostering a collaborative spirit that would last beyond the project.

In Ethiopia, for example, Plan International staff members shared that the new technical approaches they have learned, including PwV, TeamUp and CFA, have now been integrated not only into new projects and proposals in their country programme areas but also

regionally, including in Tanzania and Uganda. Further, learning across organisations has taken place between implementing agencies within the country, with SOS Children's Villages International implementing in the east of the country and Plan International implementing in the west: "The JOFA project team works like a family [...]. We have a lot of learning between us." One JOFA project staff member shared that in Mali, they "really felt the presence and benefit" of the Joining Forces network at different levels as these networks offered something tangible and practical to the partners and their work. In Busia, Kenya, a staff member from TdH shared that the CFA strategies they learned from JOFA are being carried over and applied in other project sites. In addition, PwV was one of the approaches they adopted to prevent violence against children, especially at the household level, and to address entrenched gender and social norms at the community level.



help partners contextualise these technical approaches for their own specific project sites. In Senegal, one WVI staff member shared that the flexibility to adapt programs from

Common technical approaches

Another added value of the Learning Agenda was the sharing of common technical approaches across partners, countries and project sites, which provided an opportunity for partners to share specific technical expertise, experience, best practices and lessons learned from within their respective organisations. These technical approaches are evidence-based, having been widely implemented, tested and evaluated by partner agencies, and honed over time. The structured sharing and uptake of these technical approaches across agencies is a strong example of amplified value. The JOFA project also enabled continuous learning opportunities throughout implementation to

other contexts to the local context (between countries, but also between regions) was key to the success of this approach. In this way, JOFA partners did not feel "stuck" or limited to replicating programming from other partners or countries but felt able to adapt it to their contextualised needs. There was also a synergy here with the JOFA emphasis on collecting and responding to beneficiaries' feedback, including feedback from children. Flexibility in the adaptation of project activities meant that project teams could respond iteratively and tangibly to specific beneficiary feedback, even down to specific needs identified at the community level.

One ChildFund staff member in Uganda shared that it had been important to learn



about the innovations or differences in how other partners or other countries were implementing these common approaches, at times using the same approach but different methods: "Sometimes when you implement the methodology, you might think you are doing it wrongly, and when you hear [from] other people you can hear how they are doing it, or watch that video of how it is being done. It supports and helps you to think outside the box and borrow from some of the examples that this person has been able to do, or this country is implementing." A Plan International staff member in Mali also shared that working within the JOFA consortium promoted a standardized approach to project activities, regardless of which partner was implementing the activity.

This provided consistency in programming that is likely to strengthen its sustainability, particularly when government structures and officials have participated in standardized capacity building and training.

Structured and intentional inclusion of learning

The intentional inclusion and clear articulation of the Learning Agenda and related activities in the project's design were pivotal to unlocking the learning potential of the JOFA project. Despite their recognised value, learning and knowledge

management approaches are often considered a deprioritised "add-on" to a project or programme's core activities and do not receive the attention or budget that they warrant within humanitarian and development projects.

Part of the added value of JOFA was the project's recognition of the exceptional learning opportunities it was positioned to generate, evidenced by the specific inclusion of increased learning and sharing of knowledge and best practices related to child protection approaches as one of the project's four specific objectives. Importantly, this knowledge and learning objective and related activities were supported by an adequate budget and prioritised by consortium leadership.

Participatory approach

Finally, some JOFA partner staff members highlighted that the emphasis placed by the Learning Agenda on participatory processes throughout the entire project was a strong innovation that added significant value to the project. This approach allowed for learning that was rooted at the local level, within community activities, and then translated upwards into national level exchanges and higher. It also enabled learning to be transferred in the other direction, from global, regional and national events back down to the local level of implementation.



Save the Children



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