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REVIEWS 



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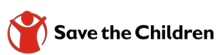
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JOFA Project Thematic Review: Joint national level advocacy to change or approve laws and policies

Joining Forces for Africa (JOFA)



ChildFund
Alliance



Terre des Hommes
International Federation

World Vision 

BACKGROUND


The JOFA project's consortium approach has provided important opportunities for partners to increase their organisational leverage by building joint advocacy approaches to address prioritised child protection issues at the national level. Before this project, Joining Forces Initiative member agencies in Senegal, Kenya and Uganda had already established a collective platform to work on issues related to violence against children. Given the pandemic context and the scope of activities prioritised under JOFA in its urgent responses to the COVID-19 crisis, there was limited focus on advocacy goals in the project design. Despite this, throughout the JOFA project, strong examples emerged in targeted countries that highlight how the consortium approach provided opportunities to build, strengthen and achieve tangible results through joint national level advocacy efforts in the area of child protection.

ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES: A CROSS-COUNTRY SNAPSHOT

In Ethiopia, different technical teams from the six JOFA partner agencies were engaged, including communication specialists, to jointly develop an advocacy framework geared towards influencing the government to enhance its consideration of child protection issues in the JOFA project sites of Assosa and East Hararghe. The advocacy framework identified a set of seven different child protection risks and concerns. Considering limitations in budget and time, the team ultimately decided to focus advocacy efforts on ending child marriage not only in the targeted sites but across other regions of Ethiopia where child marriage remains a pressing issue. The JOFA team also developed a ToR in coordination with the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs and organised an advocacy-focused consultative workshop that engaged stakeholders, including different department heads, child protection experts, advocacy and communication experts, and Child Parliament representatives to explore advocacy for ending child marriage.

The Ethiopia team also engaged in advocacy through activities associated with Universal Children's Day, at regional and Woreda (district) levels as well as within targeted refugee camps. Government stakeholders, JOFA partners, children and others attended these events, where JOFA partners delivered messaging related to child protection and the

🇪🇹
Successes: Ethiopia



- The JOFA partners' advocacy regarding child marriage has led to a stronger and more nuanced understanding amongst partners of the different drivers of child marriage in different regions of the country.
- The joint advocacy by the six JOFA agencies has laid the groundwork and advanced commitments among partners and government stakeholders to focus on ending child marriage through the greater allocation of resources and increased budgets dedicated to the issue, and through working together to disseminate information regarding child marriage to the government.

importance of adequate budget allocation for related programming. Children were closely engaged in these events, addressing the audience regarding their self-identified issues and concerns.



In Kenya, when the JOFA project began, the Government of Kenya was working to prepare its COVID-19 response plans and frameworks. JOFA partners engaged a range of relevant government institutions (such as the Department of Health and the Directorate of Children's Services) to advocate for these plans and frameworks to be responsive to the specific needs of children. JOFA partners in Kenya were well-positioned to bring a multi-sectoral perspective to these discussions, premised on the understanding that child protection issues cut across sectors such as healthcare, education, and justice.

In year one of the project, JOFA partners also engaged in a process of reviewing various government child protection-related Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), followed by subsequent engagements with the Directorate of Children's Services to seek a commitment towards the implementation of the recommendations from the review. The project teams also advocated for the fast-tracking of the implementation of the Government of Kenya's National Prevention and Response Plan on Violence Against Children.

JOFA partners jointly engaged with the National Assembly and Parliamentarians regarding national budgeting in relation to child rights and child protection, particularly considering the implications of COVID-19. For example, Joining Forces formally submitted a document on budget tips or suggestions to

the Cabinet Secretary, National Treasury and Planning, for consideration while preparing the 2021/2022 Fiscal Year budget, along with detailed budget-related memoranda for the consideration of the National Assembly.

Further, JOFA partners supported the provision of training and sensitisations for other civil society actors regarding how to develop evidence-based policies and how to analyse budgets and general public investment in children. The team held a series of capacity building sessions of child protection advocacy for the National Parents Association, with the participation of the Ministry of Education and the Directorate of Children's Services officials. JOFA partners in Kenya also used their national platform to engage in substantial advocacy leading up to the new Children's Act of 2022.

Partners held formal and informal sessions with a total of 50 Members of Parliament, who then engaged with the Parliamentary House Business Committee to table the Children's Bill for the First Reading. Once it passed, the Act replaced the 2001 Act, providing enhanced legal provisions to safeguard the rights of children. The Act represents an important addition to Kenya's increasingly strengthened efforts in national planning action toward child protection. Partners drew on different strategies in their advocacy efforts related to the Children's Act of 2022, including engagement with Ministers and donors, and concerted media advocacy.



Successes: Kenya



frameworks and plans at the national level by utilising joint evidence from across the partners and different project sites.

- JOFA partner staff highlighted that their joint national level advocacy leading up to the new Children's Act of 2022 had been intensive, and that specific provisions of the final Act could be traced to content originally drafted by JOFA partners.

- Through the JOFA project, the six JOFA country directors engaged closely together to strengthen child protection-related

In Mali, one JOFA partner staff member described advocacy as being at the “centre of JOFA and Joining Force activities” at the national level. JOFA partners developed an “Advocacy Note” with all members of the Joining Forces alliance in Mali, identifying two major advocacy priorities and key allies associated with each priority. These included (1) child protection and the prevention of violence against children in the contemporary context of the complex, multidimensional crisis in Mali, and (2) vital registration of children.

To address the first advocacy priority, one key approach included the dissemination of information via mass media (radio and television) on the various child protection risks and issues facing Malian children. Key issues highlighted through information and live debate included weak education systems, food insecurity, armed group attacks on children, sexual violence against children, and others. A second key approach focused on advocacy for budget lines in the Education, Health and Justice sectors dedicated to child protection. Representatives from existing regional Child Parliaments were also supported in Bamako on the Day of the African Child (16 June) to advocate these issues for themselves. The JOFA consortium in Mali also advocated for and participated in the development of a standardized case management system for cases of violence against children. Different actors in the JOFA network were also part of

a national group which facilitated training on these standardized case management systems and processes.



In terms of the vital registration of children, the JOFA team in Mali advocated jointly for free vital registration (e.g., birth certificates and national identity cards) for displaced children and the harmonizing of the cost of vital registration across all communes in Mali (which had previously varied by

commune). The absence of vital registration and associated documentation increases the risks of statelessness for children both in Mali and those living abroad. The JOFA team developed key advocacy documents, including recommendations to relevant high-level government stakeholders, as well as an advocacy document from children to the government of Mali regarding this issue. With a joint advocacy approach to guide them, JOFA members used opportunities such as an invitation to participate in a Universal Children's Day event at the national level to advocate for access to free-of-charge 'auxiliary' birth certificates for the children of Internally Displaced Persons who do not have birth certificates.

The participation of children was central to identifying different child protection issues and advocating for solutions, as Child Clubs in each village identified their own issues that were fed upwards within the project into the discussions of JOFA alliance partners at the national level. In November 2022, an "advocacy dinner" was also held with JOFA partners, lawmakers, Ministers and other civil society stakeholders, as well as children, with an Advocacy Note passed onto government officials. Following this event, a committee of JOFA actors followed up with key stakeholders and decision makers.

In Senegal, national level advocacy activities under the Joining Forces Alliance have mainly focused on addressing issues of early marriage, drawing together representatives from each Joining Forces Senegal partner into an advocacy group. Early marriage advocacy activities have been implemented through the National Coalition for the Abandonment of Child Marriages, a coalition that was put in place by the Joining Forces Alliance in Senegal before JOFA activities. The first hurdle for JOFA partners was to convince national decision-makers that this culturally and religiously charged issue merited attention. The coalition was careful in its strategy to engage closely with government stakeholders from the beginning through activities such as workshops and

🇲🇱 **Successes: Mali**



Forcer un enfant à se marier est une atteinte à ses droits.

- JOFA advocacy efforts have resulted in obtaining 'auxiliary' birth certificates for displaced children, without parents needing to present an original birth certificate. This allows children to obtain key identity documents, enabling them to access state services, which was not previously possible.
- While the prices of vital registration documents, such as 'auxiliary' birth certificates, for all children living in Mali are not yet harmonised throughout the country, JOFA partners expressed that they are confident the law is moving in this direction thanks to their focused advocacy efforts.

technical meetings, advocating for increased budget lines dedicated to addressing early marriage. Joining Forces partners affirmed that acting as a consortium, rather than individual organizations, greatly strengthened their advocacy power and capacity. Within the JOFA project, most of the advocacy focus has been at the regional or local level, with the belief that local officials and entities are better positioned to provide more direct support and resources to advocacy initiatives than national bodies. The focus of its regional advocacy was largely on education and awareness-raising (including among children) regarding child rights and child protection, and the need to increase local budget lines to adequately fund child protection-related services at the local level.



Successes: Senegal

- At the national level, advocacy efforts under the Joining Forces alliance have contributed to the formulation of a national action plan to address early marriage, supported by relevant ministries and presented to the President. While this is a significant accomplishment, the operationalization of the action plan remains challenging especially in light of religious leaders'

varying positions on the topic and the politicization of the issue during election years.

- At the local level, through the JOFA project, children were supported to analyse local budgets and explore different ways of influencing local authorities' budget lines for child protection concerns.

In Uganda, the six Joining Forces partners worked together to develop a joint advocacy and campaign strategy, which it began to implement in the second year of the project. The project supported a range of advocacy activities and approaches to support progress towards child protection objectives in the country. Some of the key activities included budget advocacy training for staff from the six JOFA partners along with the Uganda Child Rights NGO Network to enhance the capacity of personnel to advocate for greater funding for child protection. The project also brought together children, decision-makers (including Members of Parliament, line Ministries, and representatives of the National Planning Authority) and all JOFA partners in a round table to mark World Children's Day through a discussion of child protection issues, strategies, and enhanced budget allocation needs. JOFA partners were also involved in running campaigns to support the Child Health Plan and the use of data to inform child protection actions. One partner staff member highlighted that through this engagement, the Child Health Plan is better known across the country, with many child protection actors involved.

JOFA partners also used opportunities such as participation in a Ministry of Education-organised "Safe to Learn" symposium, held to facilitate learning among stakeholders providing child protection services in schools. During this event, JOFA partners showcased the achievements of the Joining Forces' "Hands4Good" social behaviour change campaign to an audience including Ministers, Members of Parliament, donors, CSOs and other relevant stakeholders. The project also held a Hands4Good "Campaign Festival" to showcase campaign achievements to an audience of representatives from the EU, Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, UNICEF, Ministry of Education, Uganda Child Helpline, the Parliament of Uganda, PwV groups, and children. JOFA partners were also able to provide opportunities for children to express their concerns and raise their issues through television, including a call to action to duty bearers to apprehend and hold accountable the perpetrators of violence and abuse against children. In Uganda, advocacy events were also held around key international days such as the International Day of the African Child and World Children's Day.



Successes: Uganda

- Advocacy events and campaigns regarding ending violence against children (e.g., through Hands4Good) successfully engaged a wide range of relevant stakeholders at all levels, including all JOFA partner country directors, Members of

Parliament, community leaders, district and local government leaders and children.

- Enabling children to identify and advocate for their own issues had been a success, by empowering children and building their confidence to engage.



'Hands4Good' campaign helps reduce violence against children in 6 districts

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and two-year school closure in Uganda, cases of violence against children, especially physical violence – including beating and strangling- increased nationwide. This year alone, Uganda Child Helpline, Sauti116, received a daily average of 40 'child abuse' cases out of 1775 cases reported.

This made the 'Hands4Good' campaign timely, relevant and crucial, working directly with families to end violence in homes and create better relationships between children, parents and caregivers, calling for a behaviour change to reduce violence against children.

The campaign urged all parents and caregivers to use their hands to nurture, support, and guide children instead of using them for violence and inflicting pain.



The campaign collaborated with community champions who supported their communities in the six districts to work towards ending physical violence, identifying children at risk of physical violence, and ensuring that these children access services that will provide the support they need.

DRIVERS OF SUCCESSFUL JOINT ADVOCACY APPROACHES

Across project documents and in the interviews with JOFA partners across the five countries, five key drivers of successful joint advocacy approaches stood out. These include (1) coordination and collaboration opportunities, (2) approaches to knowledge and evidence generation and sharing, (3) participatory approaches to advocacy, including capacity building with children and child participation, and (4) the development of a strong communication approach.

Coordination and collaboration opportunities

The value of the coordination and cooperation engendered by the Joining Forces approach was highlighted consistently as a key driver of effective advocacy approaches across the countries. In Kenya, for example, JOFA project staff members said that advocacy campaigns

supported by the leadership of the six largest child-focused agencies facilitated success: "When you see six country directors coming together to meet government officials together, it shows a commitment and other people follow suit." In Mali, JOFA partner staff members reflected that working with other organisations with similar objectives, but diverse strengths, had a positive impact on the advocacy process in their work. The consortium offered a "synergy for advocacy events" that could not have been achieved by one organisation alone, allowing for the sharing of approaches, tactics, experiences, data and resources to strengthen advocacy efforts. The JOFA project's coordination and collaboration beyond partners was another key factor of success, including other CSOs engaged in child protection issues. Others highlighted that the availability of a budget through the project for advocacy events was key to success in this area. Speaking of their national level advocacy budget, one Kenyan partner staff



member shared, “For this, you need venues and have to pay for it, so budget availability from the project was a driving factor.” In Mali, one staff member highlighted the importance of coordinating JOFA advocacy activities with international days of recognition, such as World Children’s Day or the International Day of the African Child, while also citing the importance of the training sessions on advocacy provided through the project to JOFA partners in Mali. These findings echo the view of the National Director of World Vision Senegal who stated, “We are excited that JOFA brings an opportunity to work on the critical and timely topic of violence against children in Africa in these unprecedented times ... The only way to address any of these challenges we face is the same way we have addressed our work as Joining Forces partners – together. The rule of the game is: together.”¹

Approaches to knowledge and evidence generation and sharing

The JOFA approach also provided opportunities to generate and share knowledge and evidence amongst partners and their networks, including government institutions, to ensure that advocacy efforts are evidence based. In Ethiopia, one stakeholder shared that the collaboration of JOFA agencies enabled them to share updated knowledge to inform their contextualised

advocacy work regarding ending child marriage. More widely, the knowledge generation and learning promoted through the project’s Learning Agenda enabled opportunities for evidence sharing both within and among JOFA countries to support advocacy efforts. Project data including the needs assessments (which engaged communities and government structures), the baseline survey, the mid-term review and specific assessments and surveys generated by the project and other agencies were specifically used as supporting evidence for the design of advocacy approaches.

Participatory approaches to advocacy, including capacity building with children and child participation

Project documents and JOFA partner staff also highlighted project teams’ use of participatory approaches as a key driver of successful joint advocacy efforts. This included the engagement of community-based structures, schools, local and district-level government agencies, national government institutions, and children’s forums such as Child Clubs or Child Parliaments. In Mali, for example, one Educo staff member shared that the participatory approach used with all stakeholders, including children, during advocacy efforts and activities ensured that local and children’s priority issues fed directly into regional and national conversations and

1. World Vision, Senegal (3 Feb 2021). Why joining forces is pivotal to addressing violence against children in Africa. <https://www.wvi.org/stories/senegal/why-joining-forces-pivotal-addressing-violence-against-children-africa>

advocacy efforts. In addition, elected officials and other stakeholders responded positively to children's active participation in advocacy events. For example, the inclusion of children in advocacy events for vital registration was considered particularly effective: "Children hold a great influence in Mali [...]. A lot of credit is given to what children say." The participation of children was also viewed as having a strong impact on educating and changing the perspectives of these children's parents and caregivers. In Kenya, JOFA team members also shared the importance of integrating children's voices into national level advocacy processes and connecting them directly to decision-makers. Similarly, in Uganda, one ChildFund staff member shared that working directly with children, empowering them to have a voice and speak out for the issues that affected them directly with duty bearers, had been an important component of their advocacy approach: "When we allow them to build their capacities, they are able to go." Participatory approaches and broad engagement also helped to create an enabling

environment for national level advocacy, a factor some also identified as a key driver of advocacy successes.

Development of a strong communication approach

Finally, another key driver of advocacy successes for JOFA partners was the careful and strategic use of communication expertise within the alliance and the use of consistent and highly visible advocacy approaches. For example, in Kenya, one JOFA partner staff member argued that their consistent media engagement and visibility helped to indirectly "influence the perceptions of government" about child protection issues and budgeting. In Mali, staff reported that a mass media approach to discussing child protection issues effectively reached a large population, noting that the combined skills and communication expertise of different team members of JOFA alliance members were "very useful during advocacy" to help increase the visibility of the JOFA campaigns.



CHALLENGES OR BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

Project documents and JOFA partner staff members also highlighted some of the key challenges or barriers they encountered in their advocacy efforts. These include (1) limited policy expertise among technical child protection experts, (2) competing priorities of governments in the context of limited budgets, (3) the expensive nature of working with some media, and (4) the lack of response by government regarding child protection issues.

Limited policy expertise among technical child protection experts

In Kenya, one of the challenges encountered in their high-level advocacy work (for example, in relation to the Children's Act of 2022 and their budget advocacy work) was that sometimes, individuals with technical child protection expertise did not necessarily have the capacity to analyse legal and policy frameworks, meaning that the engagement of external experts was required to support this work. "Child rights and child protection actors are experts in their field, but not so much with regard to policy and legislation," commented one JOFA partner staff member in Kenya.

Competing priorities of governments in the context of limited budgets

Another challenge encountered by some project teams was how best to advance child protection issues amidst the many competing priorities of governments, particularly in contexts of limited budgets. In Uganda, one staff member reflected on the scale of child protection needs in the country, as opposed to the resources the Government has been able to commit: "They have committed to the issues, but not committed the resources." A World Vision staff member in Kenya also highlighted the competing policy agendas of the government meant that sometimes child rights and child protection agendas were delayed or that other

matters were more pressing for the government at the time: "A lot of work needs to be done to help government prioritise child rights." This includes helping government stakeholders to understand that child rights and child protection issues cut across multiple sectors, including health and education services. In Mali, civil conflict has destabilized certain regions, taking government attention away from even the most basic child rights and protection priorities such as access to public education.

Expensive nature of working with some media

While concerted and broad-reaching media coverage was a successful advocacy strategy, some also highlighted that this approach of engaging media, especially television, was expensive. In Kenya, a stakeholder shared that while they negotiated with the media regarding entering a partnership to offset costs, the costs remained high.

Limited response by government regarding child protection issues

A final challenge raised was how to address limited responses by government once child protection issues are raised and shared through concerted advocacy approaches. In Uganda, for example, one staff member shared that they continue to be challenged by the lack of accountability for perpetrators of child violence, many of whom continue to not be held accountable at all, while others may serve short prison terms before being released to offend again. In Senegal, project staff explained that certain child protection issues such as early marriage or female genital cutting are culturally and religiously sensitive. Especially during election years, these issues can become politicized and government officials can be less responsive to avoid political damage.

Key lessons



1. The Joining Forces consortium provided an important platform for major child-focused organisations to amplify their influence by pooling expertise, experience and resources towards a coordinated and evidence-based approach to advocacy.

2. The use of participatory approaches that engaged a wide range of stakeholders at different levels (e.g., community-level actors, schools, local and district level officials, CSOs, government actors and children) helped build momentum and buy-in for key advocacy issues. The capacity building and meaningful participation of children in advocacy efforts were particularly valuable in building effective advocacy approaches and developing the next generation of advocates.

3. Some partners found significant value in building advocacy campaigns around key international days of activism, such as the International Day of the African Child, and World Children's Day.

4. For national-level policy advocacy, technical expertise to engage in legal and policy work may be needed to supplement child rights and child protective technical expertise.

5. There is a need to develop effective strategies for the enhanced prioritisation of child protection at national levels, in the face of competing government priorities and limited budgets.



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