

July 2023

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REVIEWS



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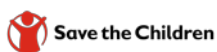
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# JOFA Project Thematic Review: Child protection programming with refugees and in conflict-affected settings

Joining Forces for Africa (JOFA)



ChildFund  
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## BACKGROUND

The JOFA project intervention sites were diverse, both between and within countries. They included urban, remote and rural areas, refugee camps, as well as conflict-affected settings. JOFA partners adapted and used a set of common technical approaches and standards across these different settings. This standardised yet flexible approach provided an unusual opportunity for partners to share and learn across major child-focused agencies and contexts. This discussion focuses on JOFA's child protection programming with refugees and in conflict-affected settings in Kenya, Mali, Ethiopia and Uganda.



In refugee camps and conflict-affected settings, child protection risks are heightened, including risks such as exposure to violence, early marriage, sexual exploitation and abuse, psychosocial abuse, child labour, hunger, and lack of access to education and services. These risks and vulnerabilities are often even greater for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing vulnerabilities in these settings in multiple, complex ways. Further, the risk of exposure to COVID-19 is heightened

where physical distancing is difficult, such as in conditions of overcrowding, where there is a need to queue for food rations, and where there is limited access to water, sanitation and hygiene, including hand-washing facilities. At the same time, COVID-19-related school closures also impacted children's learning and increased their vulnerability to violence at home and in their communities. Further, in some settings, "stay at home" orders or other movement restrictions heightened the existing tensions and pressures in these stress-filled contexts.



## INTERVENTIONS: A CROSS-COUNTRY SNAPSHOT

The JOFA project took a holistic system strengthening approach to child protection in the targeted countries, not just in refugee or conflict-affected settings, but also in host communities and other contexts. Interventions were designed to work towards the longer-term prevention of violence against children. The use of common technical approaches yielded important reflections and lessons regarding the specific adaptations that enabled effective work in these very different contexts. Key mutually reinforcing technical approaches used in these settings included TeamUp, Parenting without Violence (PwV), and Child Friendly Accountability (CFA).

JOFA interventions aimed to ensure that the most at-risk children in refugee camps and conflict-affected settings could remain connected to their peers, receive psychosocial support, and be better able to voice their concerns, grounded in a knowledge and understanding of their rights. The project worked to develop special safeguarding tools to support participatory activities and build children's confidence to share their experiences. JOFA interventions also sought to strengthen the protection systems, referral mechanisms, and capacity of key child protection staff and partners, as well as parents, caregivers and children.

### TEAMUP



TeamUp is a psychosocial support intervention of structured, movement-based activities consisting of games based on sports, play, movement and body awareness for children aged 6 to 18 years. The approach was jointly created by Save the Children Netherlands, War Child Holland, and UNICEF Netherlands and was intended for children affected by conflict. The aim of TeamUp is to improve the psychosocial wellbeing of children. Through inclusive participation, creativity and culturally- and age-appropriate play activities, children and their facilitators, establish friendships, strengthen bonding, and experience teamwork. These structured approaches were implemented in targeted schools and Child Friendly Spaces.




**ETHIOPIA**


In Ethiopia, the JOFA project target sites include the Gure Shembola and Tsore Refugee Camps (Assosa), and Babile and Chinaksen Districts (East Hararghe). Plan International had a long-established presence in the Assosa sites, working with both refugee and host communities, as well as local authorities, service providers and local partners. SOS Children's Villages International were working in the East Hararghe sites.

In the refugee camps in Assosa, one important adaptation for the PwV technical approach was the provision of specific support to foster parents who provide alternative care for orphans or UASCs, mostly within the refugee camps. This focus was a response to the high numbers of UASCs in these settings. These foster parents were also included in other ongoing project activities and received additional support and follow up by project staff. TeamUp, which offered a child friendly space for recreation and PSS, reportedly had positive impacts on children's well-being, as well as their school enrolment in implementation sites.

In refugee settings in Assosa, with a relative absence of government presence, the project team noted the effectiveness of working closely with community-based child protection mechanisms, including parent groups as well as child and adolescent friendly structures such as Child Rights Clubs. This differed from host community settings, in which government structures were more established.

The project's implementation in Assosa was also impacted by the conflict in Ethiopia, with an attack by an unidentified armed group on the Gure Shembolla refugee camp (a project target area) in the Mao-Komo district in December 2021. However, in an example of effective adaptation, the Ethiopia team was able to continue working with these populations following their relocation to the Tsore refugee camp in the Homosha district.

In project sites in East Hararghe, JOFA project teams worked mainly with IDPs and returnee populations. Staff from SOS emphasised the importance of the PSS interventions in this context, given the trauma that students and parents/caregivers had experienced.





## ETHIOPIA

The project engaged teachers, parents/caregivers, and community leaders, who were trained to help identify those students who may be most likely to benefit from the TeamUp and PSS interventions. One SOS staff member shared, “The teachers knew the communities who were most affected and the students who were most affected, like those who lost mothers and fathers.” The project team was also able to contextualise the TeamUp manual to ensure it was relevant to their work with children and communities returning to their homes following conflict-related displacement. For example, the contextualisation of TeamUp allowed for the inclusion of traditional games that had been lost or forgotten in returnee communities in the East Haraghe project sites.

In the JOFA team’s work with returnees in the East Hararghe sites, staff collaborated with established school, community and government structures that could support the project’s work. JOFA project teams also coordinated with other organisations and government structures, including those providing PSS, who could refer children to the TeamUp programming. TeamUp was a new approach in the intervention sites, and SOS staff suggested it was likely to continue beyond the JOFA project in their ongoing and future interventions in emergency and conflict settings. Working with community-based child protection mechanisms, including traditional councils, elders, and women’s associations was key to the successful implementation of the project’s approaches, and the likelihood of sustainable benefits. Further, in East Hararghe sites, TeamUp was successful in helping to facilitate the return to school of child returnees who had dropped out due to conflict, displacement and other reasons. This was noted by Education officials. Some components of TeamUp were subsequently incorporated into school systems in East Hararghe project sites, particularly in the Sports Education curriculum.

## PARENTING WITHOUT VIOLENCE



The Parenting without Violence (PwV) approach is designed as a universal preventative program for use in development and humanitarian contexts to prevent physical and humiliating punishment of children and to improve positive parenting capacities of fathers, mothers, and caregivers of girls and boys of all ages. Developed by Save the Children, the approach has the following objectives:

- Reduce the physical and humiliating punishment of children in the home
- Improve parent/caregiver’s capacity to practice positive parenting
- Improve the quality of parent/caregiver-child relationships
- Increase children’s resilience and confidence to express their views and feelings in their home and to seek support when they feel unsafe
- Strengthen social norms and gender and power dynamics that support equal responsibility for positive, non-discriminatory parenting
- Strengthen equitable and gender sensitive child protection systems that prevent and respond to violence in the home.

The approach comprises four complementary core components, including (1) Providing fathers, mothers, and other caregivers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to parent positively without using violence; (2) Empowering children so that they feel valued, respected and safe within their family and community; (3) Supporting communities so that they are willing and able to protect children from violence; and (4) Strengthening equitable and gender-sensitive child protection systems.



In Kenya, one of the JOFA project sites is the Kakuma Refugee Camp, located in Turkana County in northwestern Kenya. World Vision International (WVI) has been working in the Kakuma refugee camp since 2013 and was therefore in a strong position to mobilize rapidly and effectively for the implementation of JOFA activities. JOFA project activities required the endorsement of the Child Protection Technical Working Group, under the leadership of UNHCR. While other actors were already engaged in different aspects of child protection in Kakuma, the JOFA project's deliberate focus on children's and parents' engagement and the longer-term prevention of child protection issues provided a different and complementary approach to the more response-focused agencies or initiatives already underway. One staff member shared that PwV was a new approach for them, and in Kakuma: "Other agencies are mostly working on child protection in emergencies, responding to emergency issues. Our approach was new, with more concentration on prevention and case management." Another staff member shared that the focus on parental engagement was very limited before the project, and that "ensuring that parents are trained and sensitized in a systematic way was very new."

Project activities were designed and implemented with schools, families, institutions and children themselves to strengthen child protection systems in Kakuma, having identified gaps through the baseline survey work and paid careful attention to avoid duplication through



coordination efforts with UNHCR and other stakeholders (e.g., through the Joint Child Protection Network). In a strong example of complementarity and coordination, the JOFA project trained local facilitators who were already engaged in child protection work with other partner agencies in PwV approaches. This meant that the skills to continue the PwV approaches would likely be embedded within child protection-focused agencies beyond the end of the JOFA project.

Within Kakuma's four camps (which are divided into 12 zones), the team enlisted the leaders of each block to help them identify those parents, including the foster parents of unaccompanied or separated children who were likely to benefit most from the PwV sessions. In this camp setting, the engagement of these community block leaders was central to fostering the necessary connections with the targeted parents, caregivers and children. One WVI staff member reflected that without the community leaders, "you would really have a challenge getting to know which households are to be part of the parenting programmes and other interventions."

Engaging through the blocks was also important for logistics and planning the implementation of activities, as households in a block generally share schools, health facilities and schedules (e.g., for food distribution). To various degrees, households in blocks also tend to share common languages and nationalities.



 **KENYA**

Through the project, the JOFA team worked with a range of stakeholders in Kakuma, including the police, law enforcement officers, staff from the gender-based violence desk at the police station, and health workers to strengthen capacity in child protection and referral and case management. The team also worked to strengthen institutions within schools, including teacher training on safeguarding and refresher training on reporting. Children within schools were also engaged through Child Rights Clubs.

The JOFA project also introduced TeamUp in Kakuma, which was implemented with the children who were participating in the PwV sessions. The TeamUp sessions targeted children who were at risk of violence in the home. The team also trained teachers in selected schools to help them implement the programming during Child Club Days and physical education lessons. School counsellors selected by education partners were also trained to help monitor TeamUp sessions to identify and take forward any child protection issues that may emerge in the sessions.



**CHILD FRIENDLY ACCOUNTABILITY**



Child Friendly Accountability (CFA) is grounded in the belief that it is possible to reduce violence against children, in part by holding leaders accountable for their obligations to protect children.

To support children’s meaningful participation in the effort to hold duty bearers to account and improve local and national child protection systems, CFA empowers children, enables children’s meaningful participation, helps children build knowledge, supports children in challenging negative social norms, enables children to engage with duty bearers, empowers children to take direct action to address protection gaps, and promotes joint action and the scale-up of community-based action.

CFA focuses on monitoring the effectiveness and accountability of child protection systems. It is not about monitoring individual cases of violence. The main direct participants are adolescents between 13 and 17 years-old and the methodology is designed to be applied with both in-school and out-of-school children.





In Mali, only certain project intervention zones included refugee populations (including children). Generally, the conflict-affected families and children supported through the project were not located in official humanitarian camps but were rather living in informal dwellings in established villages. Some of the work of JOFA partners to support these children was rooted in advocacy efforts towards waiving the fees for birth certificates and other vital registration documents for displaced children. Importantly, the JOFA project teams tried to minimize any distinction between displaced and village children as much as possible including ensuring all children, both village residents and displaced children, benefitted equally from project activities.

In order to curtail divisions and misunderstandings between host communities and displaced populations, JOFA project activities in Mali included sensitisation sessions to better explain the situation of those who were displaced to host communities, and to assure communities that JOFA activities were for both displaced and village populations. Meetings were also facilitated between these groups to build understanding and stronger relationships.

Centres d'écoute (Listening Centres) were set up specifically for displaced children to offer recreation and creative activities to address the post-traumatic stress of displacement and violent conflict, with each centre staffed by a trained facilitator. These spaces provided a place where children could express themselves freely and speak about their needs and hopes for their communities. Each Learning Centre facilitator was trained in identifying children in need of psychosocial support services, and how to refer them appropriately.

Approaches to these interventions were rooted in the principles of CFA. Staff reported that after implementing the CFA approaches, they

saw a “great difference” in children. Children who arrived in host villages unable to speak about their experiences started opening up and advocating for their needs. A staff member shared that when displaced children arrived in a village at the beginning of project activities, most would not even talk or express their opinions. Following programming, according to staff, children began to sensitise their parents and community leaders on child protection issues and began to identify cases of violence in their communities. Children also formulated action plans and wanted to plan and undertake advocacy activities within the village, involving other village stakeholders. They also held feedback sessions with community leaders to discuss progress on child protection issues. One Educo staff member shared, “If I have one point of pride from this programme, it is that we transformed these children into actors for change in their community.”

In Mali, the JOFA team also implemented PwV, both in communities with and without displaced populations. PwV included bi-weekly facilitated sessions with parents and children separately, and mixed sessions with both parents and children. JOFA project staff in Mali shared that through these sessions, parents and children were able to develop more empathy for each other’s perspectives and experiences, especially in the context of the stress of conflict and displacement.







## UGANDA

In Uganda, the project was implemented in the Central, Eastern and Northern regions. In the Northern Region, JOFA activities were implemented by Save the Children Uganda in the areas of Obongi and Gulu, particularly in the Palorinya settlement (in both refugee and host communities). This refugee settlement was established in December 2016 and is located in the Moyo district in the West Nile region of Uganda, hosting mainly South Sudanese refugees.

In Northern Uganda, among other activities, the JOFA project implemented PwV, TeamUp, and CFA technical approaches both within refugee settings and host communities. JOFA partner staff in Uganda reflected on some of the key differences of working in both humanitarian and development settings, as well as the challenges of trying to balance activities between the two contexts. For example, the team found that the number of children in schools in refugee settings was higher than they had expected, creating challenges for activities like TeamUp, where sessions were designed for 30 children at once. When sessions were held in Child Friendly Spaces or community settings, it was also difficult to regulate or limit the number of children who wanted to participate. Adaptations included holding more sessions, training more facilitators, training older children to become facilitators of some sessions with younger children, and training social workers to join and assist in the sessions.

The team also noted important differences in their work on case management in humanitarian settings compared to development contexts. For example, in refugee settings, it was necessary to pay case workers, while this responsibility rested with government in the development contexts. With many child protection cases and continued new arrivals in refugee settings, staff reflected that substantial budgets were needed for this work. "One

of our key challenges," commented one Save the Children staff member, "was that resources were really stretched working in both humanitarian and development settings, with humanitarian settings being more expensive." Later in the project, the costs of case workers were taken on or shared with other humanitarian partners who also used their services, leading JOFA partner staff to reflect on the importance of collaborating with other stakeholders in their work in refugee settings.

Staff also highlighted that while there was a high demand for case management in humanitarian contexts, the structures people approached for assistance were often different than in development contexts. In refugee settings, those looking for assistance might be more likely to approach Refugee Welfare Committees, parasocial workers, or case workers paid by other NGOs or INGOs, rather than going to a District Public Office or another government structure, as they might in development settings. Given this, the reporting of child protection cases by refugees to district professional social workers was relatively low. However, even in host communities, challenges with reporting child protection issues through government structures remained, particularly given issues of limited electricity and internet connectivity.

While there were challenges, working across humanitarian and development contexts meant that JOFA partners could bring together stakeholders from both settings for capacity building and coordination, to enhance case management approaches, and share experiences from programming including PwV and TeamUp. One Save the Children staff member noted that working across settings enabled stakeholders from each to develop a better understanding of the specific issues and challenges faced in refugee settings and host communities.

## DRIVERS OF EFFECTIVENESS IN JOFA PROGRAMMING IN REFUGEE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED SETTINGS

The document review and discussions with staff highlighted some key drivers of the effectiveness of JOFA's programming in refugee and conflict-affected settings including (1) the complementarity of JOFA's four specific objectives, (2) the targeted approach of PwV and TeamUp, (3) the ability to organise and mobilise in refugee and conflict-affected settings, (4) working with both host and displaced communities simultaneously, and (5) building on and working to enhance existing child protection systems.

### The complementarity of JOFA's four specific objectives

There appears to have been substantial value in the way that the JOFA project's four specific objectives worked together as a package to address child protection issues from multiple angles simultaneously in refugee and conflict-affected settings. This includes the design and implementation of specific technical approaches that engaged children as well as parents, caregivers, and other key child protection actors.

### Targeted approach of PwV and TeamUp

Some stakeholders also commented on the value of the targeted approach of PwV and TeamUp in refugee and conflict-affected settings, where community leaders or block leaders were engaged to help identify vulnerable families and children, and trained to continue follow-up once the project was completed. In some contexts, such as Ethiopia, the intentional targeting of unaccompanied and separated children and their caregivers (including foster parents) was highlighted as a key approach, given the heightened vulnerabilities of these children.

### Ability to organise and mobilise in refugee and conflict-affected settings

JOFA project staff reflected that the ability to organise and mobilise in refugee and conflict-affected settings was a crucial driver of effectiveness, noting that this work required patience and time. The engagement of community-based structures within refugee settings was critical to this organising.







### **Working with both host and displaced communities simultaneously**

In some contexts, such as Mali, working with both host and displaced communities simultaneously was key to effective programming, to reduce tensions and build understanding between the populations.

A stakeholder in Mali shared that through this approach, a “common community synergy” was established, with a significant benefit for the success of the overall project.

### **Building on and working to enhance existing child protection systems**

Stakeholders highlighted the importance of building on and enhancing existing child protection systems as an important driver of effectiveness. This included ensuring complementarity and avoiding overlap with existing initiatives or interventions in refugee and conflict-affected settings. JOFA’s focus on longer-term prevention of child protection issues through PwV and child engagement is an example of this complementary approach.

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## **CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS**

Some key challenges to the effectiveness of this programming were also raised in the document review and interviews. In Kakuma, Kenya, stakeholders shared that the different nationalities, cultures and languages also represented a challenge at times. For example, in the PwV work, project teams had to work with “parents who were of different nationalities coming together not by choice, but by circumstances.” The transience and instability of refugee settings were also highlighted, in comparison with contexts in which people were in their home communities and contexts. Staff also highlighted the need for an enhanced historical perspective of child protection needs and risks in refugee settings, built on a solid understanding of the specific context of trauma and conflict from which children and families

have fled. In Uganda, stakeholders cited the challenge of the additional implementation costs in refugee camp settings, as opposed to host communities.

In Mali, the cultural differences and misunderstandings between displaced and host populations caused some conflict and divisions, with host populations blaming displaced populations for conflict and disruption. This was apparent even among children. As noted above, community sensitisation sessions and ensuring equitable access to interventions helped to effectively address this challenge.

In Ethiopia, conflict as a result of continued fighting between unidentified armed groups and government forces was a significant

barrier to implementation as planned, causing all project implementation in Mao-Komo special district to be suspended.

During attacks in the camps, more than 18,000 refugees were relocated from both camps to a temporary site, but in the process, they lost all their material possessions.

This raised significant challenges for the project, as routine camp service provision was non-existent at first, including a lack of basic material support for those displaced, and the temporary site lacked infrastructure, including schools, health centres and more. However, as noted above, the JOFA adapted to implement activities with the relocated populations.

## KEY LESSONS

1. Across different countries and settings, stakeholders reflected that one project and one agency alone cannot respond to all the issues faced by children in refugee and conflict-affected settings, highlighting the importance of linkages to other projects and other organisations working across sectors such as WASH, education, and health.

2. Addressing tensions and divisions between host and displaced communities through targeted sensitisation interventions and equitable inclusion in project activities was an important aspect of the programme's effectiveness, for example, in Mali.

3. Conflict in project sites in northwestern Ethiopia required the suspension of project activities in the area, highlighting the need for ongoing flexibility and adaptability in

child protection support work in conflict-affected and refugee settings.

4. The engagement of community leaders in refugee and conflict-affected settings to help identify children and parents or caregivers most at-risk of violence (or using violence against children) helped ensure that the PwV and TeamUp programming was well-targeted and effective. Engaging community leaders also may help build the sustainability of activities by enabling them to follow up with targeted households beyond the end of the project.

5. Some staff emphasised the importance of implementing partners having a strong skill set in community organising and mobilisation in conflict-affected and refugee settings.







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