

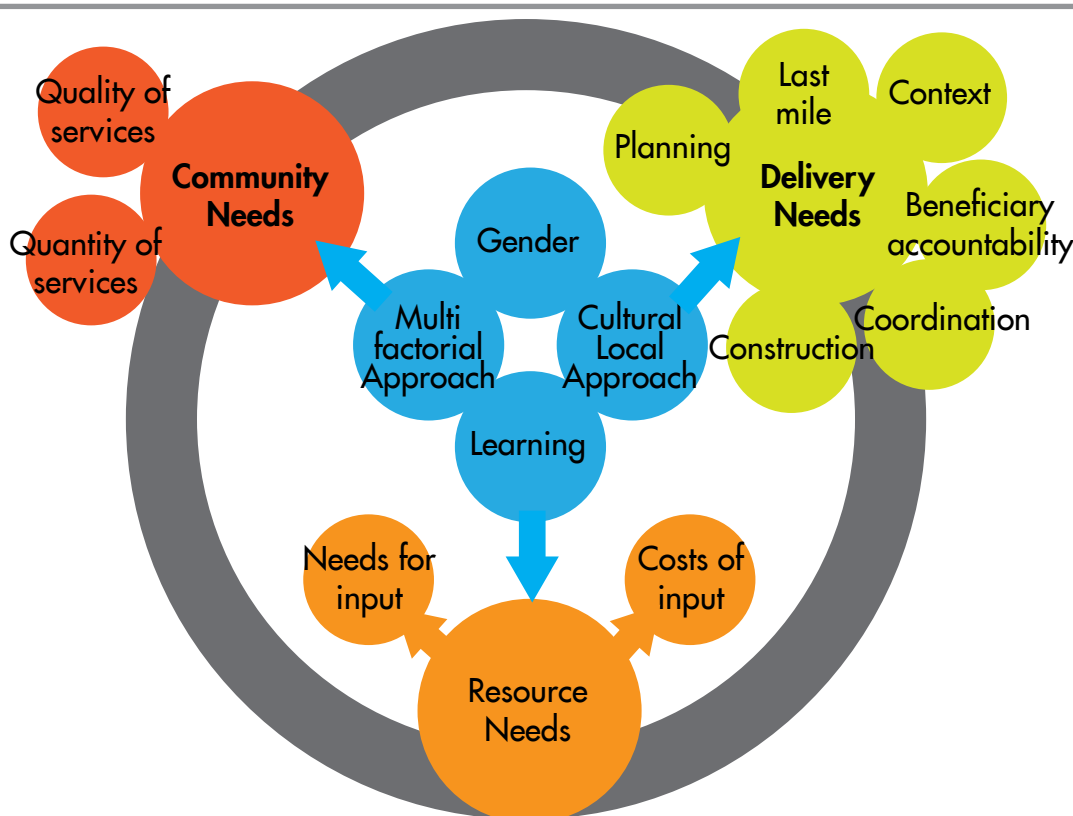
The Joining Forces for Child Protection in Emergencies (JF-CPiE) project aims to improve the protection of children and adolescents among refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), and their host communities. The consortium unites the 6 largest child rights organizations in Germany (i.e., ChildFund, Terre des Hommes, SOS Children’s Villages, Save the Children, World Vision and Plan International) and is operating in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Colombia, Ethiopia, and South Sudan.

Around project midpoint (i.e., August 2023), country teams carried out reflection workshops convening internal and external project stakeholders amongst others to discuss project challenges encountered and the lessons that can be learned from them. A global synthesis report provides a detailed account of the results of the workshops. The purpose of the present note is to highlight the project challenges and lessons identified. As such, it may help to provide insights into what potential steps may help to strengthen the current and potential future endeavours to improve child protection in emergency settings.

Reconciling community, resource, and project delivery needs as major challenges.

The figure below provides a schematised overview of both the project challenges and lessons learned which emerged across the different in-country reflection workshops. There is some thematic overlap between project challenges (highlighted blue) and project lessons (highlighted yellow). Project challenges can be divided into three sets of difficulties encountered.

The 1st set of challenges concerns community needs. It refers to the difficulties determining the type and quantity of support communities require within the field of child protection. Partly, the community demand for case management services, for livelihood support in form of cash vouchers or (non-)food items, and for dignity kits was underestimated. Once project the implementation was rolled out, project teams often seemed to gain a better oversight of the actual community needs in terms of both quantity and quality of services and assistance offered through project implementation.

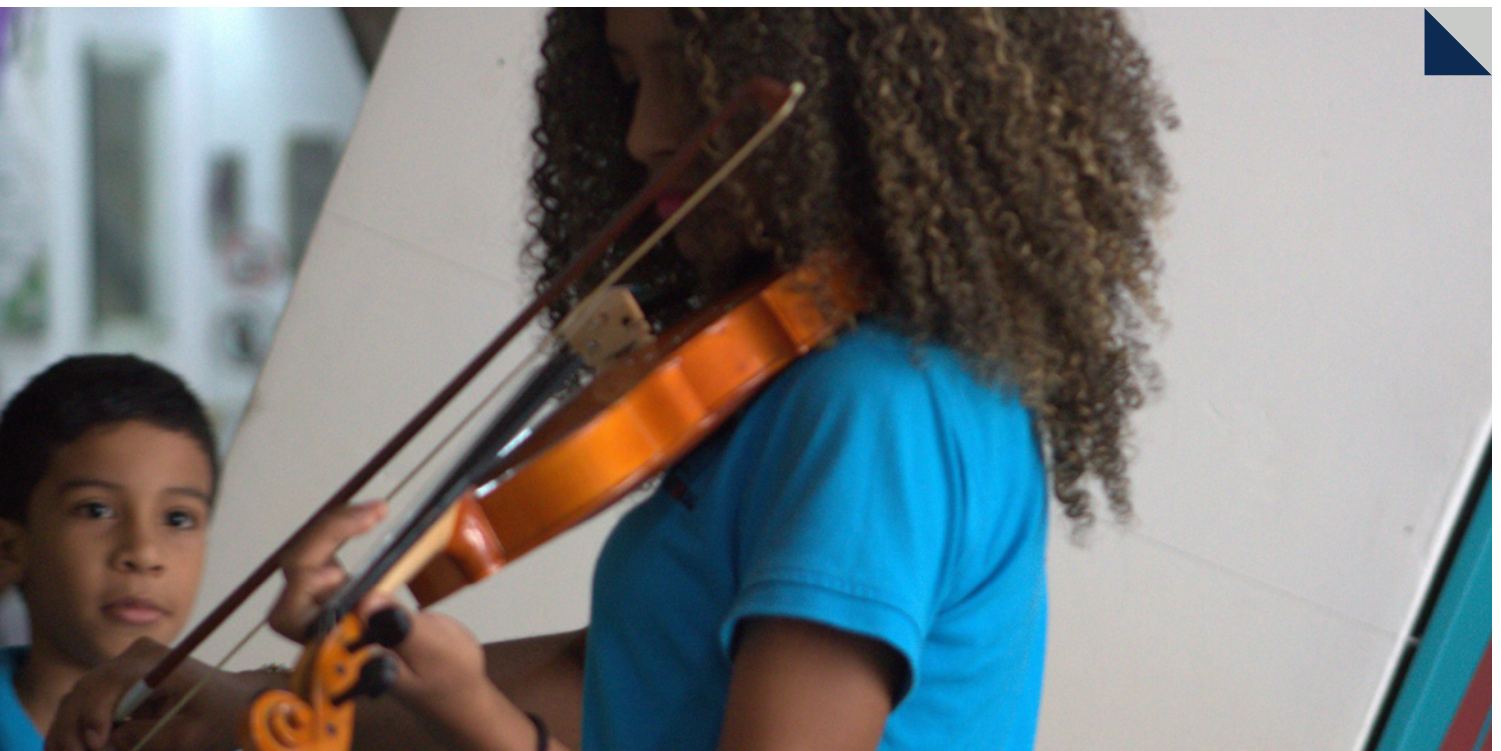


The second set of project challenges identified concerns the delivery of project activities to address community needs related to child protection. **Delivery needs** include a broad range of different challenges. **Coordination needs** refer to challenges related to coordination and harmonization of project activities with the work of other humanitarian actors such as international organizations or government bodies. For example, local case management processes need to be embedded into governmental child protection services to become effective. Coordination often starts with building strong relations with external stakeholders, which is something project teams should focus on more

Beneficiary accountability implies being transparent about the services provided to whom, and why. It also refers to the timely

The 2nd set of delivery needs concerns the project contexts. Contextual difficulties arise from the fact that the project operates within emergency settings. Thus, project teams have to cope with poor (communication and transportation) infrastructure as well as highly volatile environments. As for the latter, natural disasters (e.g., cyclones, floodings etc.) and armed conflicts rendered project operations partly impossible. As a consequence, project implementation was suspended in some target locations.

Another set of delivery challenges has been labelled the problem of the “last mile”. It refers to difficulties extending project services not only to target communities but also to intended beneficiaries within target communities. As workshop participants explained, it is not enough to deliver project services to remote areas.



communication of wider project activities such as monitoring and evaluation data collection. Workshop discussions revealed for example that the project had not always been successful in explaining why some groups (e.g., girls) receive some assistance (e.g., dignity kits) and others (e.g., boys) not. The lack of transparency could potentially cause jealousy and thus fractions within communities.

Within remote areas, project services need to be organized in a way that beneficiaries have access to these services. For example, daily chores may prevent caregivers from attending parenting groups. School obligations may prevent students from attend awareness-raising events. Thus, services offered through project implementation need to be carefully integrated into the daily lives of target beneficiaries.

Construction challenges refer to the different obstacles associated with building the physical spaces project implementation requires. The transportation of construction materials to remote areas such as refugee camps is often time and budget consuming. Thus, construction work often took longer than expected, leading to delays within some project activities such as safe spaces openings. Project staff partly considered alternative options such as renting rooms to operate the safe spaces.



Planning refers to the difficult task to reconcile the different delivery needs through careful planning. Volatile project contexts, poor communication and transportation infrastructure are a set of reasons why work plans and project timelines have to be frequently revised.

The 3rd main set of project challenges relates to **resource planning**. The complexities of project activities occasionally made it difficult to account for all project necessities. As a result, project implementation was hampered in rather unexpected areas of the project.

At times, for example, parenting groups and other awareness-raising sessions were not provided with (sufficient) refreshments, which in turn might have had an impact on attendance rates (i.e., problem of the last mile). Also, unit costs associated with communication, administration, and transportation often turned out to be higher than initially anticipated, which caused substantial budget shortfalls. Budget shortfalls in turn have a direct bearing on the scope of project implementation and the extent to which community needs can be addressed.

As a matter of fact, project challenges do not constitute a set of independent difficulties. They rather constitute interrelated obstacles that may mutually reinforce each other. Poor planning of project implementation, for example, may have to be compensated by additional budget mobilization and a scaling down of field operations.

Project learning reflects the complex nature of child protection risks

Project challenges and lessons learned are related especially within the domain of project implementation. For sake of brevity, lessons around project implementation will not be repeated here. Instead, the focus is on cross-cutting lessons learned that concern other project areas as well.

A first lesson learned highlighted during the reflection workshops was the need to adopt a **multi-sectorial/factorial approach** to strengthen child protection. Violations of child protection have root causes that all need to be addressed simultaneously to bring about long-lasting change within communities. Strengthening child protection thus requires comprehensive, mutually supportive interventions. For example, building up resilience of families does not only require psychosocial support but also income-generating activities that help them to meet their basic needs.

A second lesson learned concerns the need to adopt a **cultural/ local approach** when designing and implementing comprehensive interventions. Child protection risks are not

only the result of events within the physical world (e.g., natural disasters or armed conflict) but also the result of social norms and traditions. For example, addressing child protection risks such as female genital mutilation (FGM) may not only require a change in law but also the collaboration with local (opinion) leaders to bring about a change in awareness and understanding. In general, communication about child protection needs to be designed in a culturally sensitive way.

A third lesson learned concerns the need to adopt a **gender-sensitive and -transformative project approach**. Child protection challenges may vary for boys and girls. In conflict zones, boys may need protection from becoming forced into (non-state) armed groups, whereas girls may need help with menstrual hygiene management (MHM) through for example dignity kits. Also, while both male and female project staff can be employed to release boys from armed forces, it may be culturally inappropriate to rely on male staff to help girls with MHM.

The final theme is about **learning**. Implementing partners potentially implement new activities within new locations/communities in a new way and may face new challenges as a consequence that they may eventually be overcome through new solutions. Thus, learning is about the opportunities to reflect about new aspects for (future) project implementation.

The main workshop takeaways: manage in an adaptive and reflective manner!

The project challenges identified may actually be no surprise. Any resource-constrained endeavour to tackle complex community problems such as child protection violations through a broad range of different activities may suffer from these challenges. In the case of the JF-CPIE project, the challenges are further exacerbated given that the project has been operating in highly volatile and unpredictable environments. The longer the project operates, the higher the chances that initial assumptions adopted to strike a balance between community





needs, resource constraints, and delivery challenges do not hold true any longer. These assumptions may concern the political context of the project or the budget structure set up to produce project outputs that bring about change. Thus, especially within projects such as the JF-CPIE project that focus on complex community needs within emergency settings, **there is an overall need for an adaptive approach towards project management.** It allows to adjust project work at different levels to any anticipated or unanticipated changes within the project conditions.

The midterm reflection workshops lastly revealed a broad range of key lessons learned. Given the need for an adaptive approach towards project management, project learning may play a particularly important role. However, project learning may not only include reflections about the effectiveness of project interventions. **There is also a need for regular reflections about**

project work that help project management to adapt 'in the right way'. The more the project engages with communities, the more data are gathered on the extent to which initial assumptions actually hold true. These new data may help to not only determine if project adaptations are necessary, but may also help to determine the 'right' adaptation. If the construction of physical rooms for safe spaces does not turn out to be cost effective, interactions with the community may help to assess whether or not renting rooms may be a valuable alternative. However, to make use of such data and insights, it is required to incorporate project reflections into the very fabric of project design and implementation. Against this background, the midterm reflection workshops might have been an important step towards further strengthening adaptive and reflective project management procedures in the context of JF-CPIE project. Future iterations at the field level, country level, and the global level of the consortium should be encouraged.



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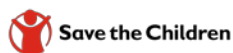


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