

March 2026

PUBLICATION

JOFA-ACTE Project Learning Brief on Assessment of Child Protection Models

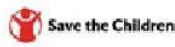


JOINING FORCES For All Children



Co-funded by the European Union

Learning Agenda Brief



JOFA-ACTE Project Learning Brief on Assessment of Child Protection Models in Madagascar, Mali, Burkina Faso and Malawi

This learning brief comes as the final brief in a series of learning briefs produced within the framework of the JOFA_ACTE project with the aim of addressing child labor in Mali, Malawi, Burkina Faso and Madagascar from a holistic and comprehensive approach. This learning brief on the Assessment of Child Protection Models highlights key success in each of the countries of implementation when it comes to child protection as well as lessons learnt and possibilities of scalability in other regions.

Introduction

The aim of this brief is to showcase the child protection tools and approaches that have been adopted in the four implementation contexts of Mali, Malawi, Burkina Faso and Madagascar within the framework of an European Union (EU)-funded project on bringing an end to child labour (JOFA-ACTE). Those tools are adaptable and scalable to other contexts, especially in conflict and fragile settings. The decision in each of the contexts to focus on a particular child protection tool to eradicate child labour in the areas of implementation depended on national priorities, local civil society priorities and communities' local needs. The child protection tools which were identified build on the long-standing experience of the implementing partners in the countries and their partnerships with authorities and civil society organizations. Therefore, those tools and approaches are the outcome of a participatory approach of identifying priorities with a wide range of stakeholders.

This brief adopts the Framework for Action's¹ Child Protection System, an interagency initiative, led by UNICEF, Save the Children and World Vision, to situate the different tools and approaches. The Child Protection System is defined as a set of informal and formal laws, policies, regulations, services and support that are required across multiple sectors to prevent and respond to the violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect of children.

The framework is centralized around social welfare system and workforce, along with a strong justice system, both of which function in close coordination with other key systems, such as health, education, social protection, and civil registration to mitigate risks and ensure



that children and families receive the support they need to thrive

More concretely, the Framework for Action outlines six priority actions that can be implemented by governments and civil society organizations to make national child protection systems stronger and more inclusive. Those six priority action areas are: Policy & Legislation, Governance & Coordination, Human & Financial Resources, Continuum of Services, Child & Community Participation, and Data & Evidence.

The tools and approaches carried out by the implementing partners in the four contexts contribute to some of the priority actions of the Child Protection Systems. For example, Mali's approach focusing on policy and legislation which has led to the introduction of a decree establishing the list of light work authorised for children aged 13 to 14. Moreover, Burkina Faso's approach on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support and Madagascar's tool on education have both contributed to the priority action point on continuum of services. Finally, Malawi's *Supporting Children's Rights through Education, the Arts and the Media* (SCREAM) tool has contributed to the Child & Community Participation priority action.

¹ Framework for Action: The Child Protection System.

<https://childprotectionsystems.com/framework-for-action/>

Madagascar

In Madagascar, as part of the JOFA Project, an educational tool called iLalao (I learn, apply, live and advocate for others) has been developed and implemented in the Ranopiso and Betroka sites². It has been rolled out to five children’s clubs in each area. The educational and entertainment kit has been developed through co-creation and testing sessions. It is a learning tool that incorporates children’s rights and can be adapted to different age groups and socio-cultural contexts. An adapted guide was developed which includes diagrams to make it easier for the activity leader to understand and take ownership, as well as activities based on traditional games.

² Ranopiso and Betroka are municipalities in Madagascar. They are part of the Anosy Region in the south of Madagascar. The municipalities are predominantly rural. The project tackles child labor in mica mines in this area.



Modules of iLalao

iLalao comprises six modules:

- Module 1: Introduction to children’s rights
- Module 2: Children’s duties and rights in everyday life
- Module 3: Children’s active participation
- Module 4: Conflict and conflict resolution
- Module 5: Advocacy techniques
- Module 6: Small, feasible actions



Implementers have generally started with a participatory sport session, including a warm-up, awareness-raising game, and debate, in order to keep children alert and curious. Each module encompasses co-creation of activities based on sports, cultural and collective activities—all with a basis in children’s rights. When appropriate, activities were undertaken in gender-segregated groups. An evaluation of the entire approach has also been conducted.

Good Practice and Challenges



Based on the experience from the implementing partners in Madagascar, Modules 1 and 2 have had the most interest from participating children. Modules 5 and 6 have been a bit more difficult in the implementation. Nevertheless, iLalao can be considered to have been successful in the children’s clubs. During the endline evaluation, the children talked about their learning experiences. One child said: “We like iLalao games because they get us moving a lot and make us think.” Other children also rated the iLalao games positively and attributed significance to them because the games have made the children’s club meeting more enjoyable and fun. Another child said: “Thanks to the iLalao games, we have a better understanding of our rights as children.”

The playful Malagasy approach makes it easier for children to understand and take ownership of the material. In addition to teaching children's rights, the duplication of the kit is a legacy of the JOFA ACTE project, where it was produced to the benefit of children's clubs and schools within the larger Anosy Region. The activities can involve a large number of participants, making it a tool for inclusion. The kit has also been designed to be sustainable.

There have been some challenges with the training of facilitators and the deployment of activities. The trainers were not sufficiently prepared to grasp how to use the tools. Furthermore, translation of key messages into the local dialect proved a challenge to implementation. Additionally, the staff had to limit the practice of warm-ups and games to allow for exchanges and discussions. As some games are complex,

it was quite difficult to play them, because of physical limitations of some instructors. There have also been logistical constraints, such as the required open and secure spaces to play the games not being available.

The potential for extending the model to other regions is limited by the need for funds for the duplication of the kit and its manual.



Mali

Consortium partners in Mali have implemented a multi-level child-protection and advocacy model that contributed to the adoption of the Arrêté of 5 July 2024³ establishing the official list of light work authorized for children aged 13–14. This learning brief outlines how the model operated in practice, highlighting how evidence, partnerships, and coordinated advocacy translated local realities into a national regulatory framework protecting children from the worst forms of child labor (WFCL).

Mali continues to face significant challenges related to child labor, particularly in agriculture, mining and informal sectors. According to the implementing partners, addressing WFCL requires approaches that reflect local socio-economic realities while strengthening national protection frameworks. Within this context, the JOFA-ACTE partners implemented a multi-level child-protection and advocacy approach grounded in community evidence, broad partnerships and sustained institutional engagement.

The project model implemented in Mali was built around three interlinked dimensions: First, *shared learning* is generated through participatory evidence collection and the active involvement of children, ensuring that advocacy is grounded in lived realities. Second, *critical mass* is achieved through the mobilization of a broad coalition bringing together civil society organizations, public institutions and children's representative bodies. Third, *synergies* are created by connecting community-level experiences with national advocacy processes and cross-sectoral engagement. Together, these dimensions enabled local knowledge and community priorities to inform and shape a nationally recognized regulatory framework for the protection of children from the worst forms of child labor.

Shared Learning: Grounding Advocacy in Evidence and Participation

The model placed strong emphasis on learning generated at community level. Evidence was collected through participatory consultations with community protection committees, children's clubs, parents, teachers, and local coordination platforms. Field visits and direct observation of children's tasks allowed partners to distinguish between light work, socializing activities, and hazardous labor.

³The adoption of the list of light work authorized to children aged 13 to 14 is an important step to advance in the protection of the rights of children at work in Mali, where the list determines the types of activities that can be carried out by children aged 13 and 14, while ensuring their safety and well-being.

Local civil society organizations played a central role in documenting risks related to specific activities, including impacts on health, schooling, and child well-being. These findings were verified and consolidated to ensure that advocacy messages accurately reflected lived realities.

Children's participation formed a core component of the learning process. Through the National Children's Parliament, children shared testimonies, contributed to advocacy notes and carried messages to national-level events. This strengthened the legitimacy of advocacy and ensured that children's perspectives informed policy discussions.

Key learning: Advocacy gained strength and credibility when learning processes were participatory, evidence-based, and inclusive of children's voices (girls and boys).

Critical Mass: Building a Broad and Credible Coalition

Policy change was enabled by a coalition that combined technical expertise, social legitimacy, and institutional access. Within the consortium, roles were complementary:

- **World Vision International (WVI Mali)** led coordination at national level, interfaced with government authorities and linked child labor advocacy with education, health, and social protection programs.
- **Terre des hommes (TdH Mali)** focused on mobilization and capacity strengthening at local and regional levels, supporting children and communities to engage in advocacy, and connecting grassroots efforts to national processes.

National NGOs and local civil society organizations implemented communication, awareness raising, and advocacy activities, while employers' organizations and trade unions contributed to economic legitimacy and promoted compliance among their members.

Engagement with public institutions was sustained across multiple levels, including the Ministry of Labor, Civil Service and Social Dialogue, the National Unit for Combating Child Labor, sectoral ministries, and decentralized services.

This institutional anchoring ensured ownership and continuity throughout the advocacy process.

Key learning: Achieving policy outcomes requires assembling a large and diverse coalition to influence decision making while maintaining coherence and shared objectives.

Synergies: Connecting Levels, Actors and Sectors

The model relied on strong vertical and horizontal linkages. Information and recommendations flowed from communities to districts, regions, and national platforms, ensuring coherence between local realities and national policy demands. JOFA Alliance partners harmonized advocacy messages, strengthening consistency and visibility. Synergies were also created across sectors by linking child labor advocacy to education, health, and child-protection systems. This integrated framing reinforced the case for reform and aligned the light-work decree with broader child development objectives.

Key learning: Coordinated action at all levels and across all sectors has enabled initially fragmented efforts to converge into a unified and structured advocacy process. This collaborative approach, involving institutional actors, civil society organizations and technical partners, has facilitated the production of evidence-based arguments, the consolidation of advocacy messages and their dissemination to decision makers.

Thanks to this collective and coherent approach, the relevant authorities became more aware of the importance of a strengthened regulatory framework, which helped to create an environment conducive to decision-making. This coordinated advocacy process thus played a decisive role in the outcome of the process leading to the signing of the decree, the Arrêté of 5 July 2024, marking a major institutional step forward for the supervision and implementation of the planned actions.

Burkina Faso

Given the importance attached to mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in the programs implemented in Burkina Faso, it is important to highlight how implementing partners have adapted the program to address those needs of child victims of the worst forms of child labor (WFCL) with a socio-economic approach by offering social and economic reintegration through education or employment.

In Burkina Faso, the MHPSS model applied to child victims of WFCL within the JOFA-ACTE project drew on a community-based approach. It aimed to enhance children's psychosocial well-being by strengthening existing local capacities (families, communities, schools), whilst improving access to specialist services where necessary. The intervention operated on four complementary levels: prevention through awareness-raising, group activities, community support, and specialized care for cases requiring psychological or medical support.

The MHPSS methods and tools that worked particularly well with this group of children included a structured case management approach supported by the digital tool CPIMS+ (Child Protection Information Management System Plus), which enabled secure, systematic, and coordinated monitoring of each child's situation. In addition, children were regularly screened for emotional and behavioral issues using the 'strengths and weaknesses' tool, integrated into monitoring activities at learning sites such as schools and training workshops, as well as during home visits. Initiatives to build the capacity of teachers, social workers, and community actors in the areas of child and youth mental health, psychological first aid and practical emotional support tools also proved effective. Furthermore, children's clubs and child-friendly spaces have played an important role in providing safe environments that have fostered self-expression, resilience and emotional well-being through cultural and recreational activities, group discussions, role-playing and debates on children's rights, WFCL, social cohesion and cybercrime.

Linkage between MHPSS and socio-economic reintegration pathways

As part of the project, MHPSS activities were closely linked to socio-economic reintegration (particularly schooling and

vocational training). Depending on their level of vulnerability, the children identified received emergency care either before or during their training course or enrolment at school. This care included access to healthcare for children who had suffered physical or psychological harm due to PFTE, as well as hygiene, dignity, and food kits. This support aimed to stabilise the children's health, nutritional and psychological situation in order to create conditions conducive to their sustainable reintegration. In addition, children showing signs of psychological distress received support from psychologists, who provided individualized follow-up to help them overcome the trauma associated with their exploitation. This psychosocial support was essential for strengthening their emotional well-being, motivation and ability to adapt when returning to school or undertaking vocational training.

MHPSS has been integrated into the childcare process from the identification phase through to case management, enabling an initial assessment of their psychosocial needs. This has made it possible to identify those requiring emergency care or specific psychological support. Furthermore, mental health training for teachers, social workers, and communities was also provided as part of the project, to enable those in direct contact with beneficiaries to take psychological aspects into account in their care. A system for the regular monitoring of reintegrated children has been put in place to ensure that they remain in school or in training and, where necessary, to adapt the psychosocial support to changes in their situation.

Collaboration with stakeholders, groups, and institutions

Various groups and institutions have played an active role in the integrated approach explained above:

- **Social workers:** They took charge of children, analyse, and handle cases using a case management approach.
- **Community structures:** Community Child Protection Unit (CCPU), Provincial Child Protection Network (PCPN), Communal Child Protection Network (CCPN): During the project, parents and communities were made aware of the issues, cases were identified and referred to social services, and

community monitoring was ensured. The structure served as a link with technical services.

- **Ministry of Humanitarian Action and National Solidarity:** This ministry coordinated social protection, supported institutional care and provided targeted interventions.
- **Ministry of Labor, the Civil Service and Social Protection:** This ministry monitored working conditions, combated child labor and enforced regulations.
- **Regional Child Protection Brigade (BRPE):** It provided legal protection and handled cases of abuse. It enforced the law.
- **Teachers and master craftsmen:** They incorporated mental health into training and supported children at school and in their learning.
- **Psychologists:** They carried out psychological assessments, treated trauma, and provided therapeutic follow-up.

Coordination between the stakeholders involved in the JOFA-ACTE project has yielded tangible results in terms of child protection. Night-time patrols in liquor-selling establishments in Kaya are one example. Children's clubs and CCPEs (Community Child Protection Units) acted as community watch groups, whilst the Provincial Child Protection Network, with the project's support, organised joint patrols with the municipal police and social services. During the first half of 2025, this coordinated action made it possible to identify and address 9 cases of child labor, raise awareness among 16 bar managers, and provide immediate care for the children who were removed.

Nevertheless, certain shortcomings have been identified. One of these is the lack of

collaboration between the ministries involved in response activities. The inter-sectoral consultation framework could therefore be strengthened and the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder clarified. Furthermore, educational institutions (schools) have not systematically referred children in distress. A formal and systematic referral channel between schools and social services could be established to address this shortcoming. To address the lack of proficiency in psychological first aid (PFA) techniques, the capacity of those concerned should be strengthened through practical training in MHPSS. Furthermore, the consortium partner has identified insufficient follow-up of children receiving care. It therefore suggests strengthening the system for regular follow-up of children at community and institutional levels.

Elements that can be transferred to other regions or countries

Given the success of this model and this combined approach, certain elements could be replicated in other regions or countries. The emergency care kit, comprising healthcare, hygiene, dignity and food kits, is, for example, an easily replicable model, as it helps to stabilize the most vulnerable children and young people prior to their reintegration. Furthermore, mental health training for those in direct contact with children, which enables the psychological dimension to be sustainably integrated into the daily support provided to children, could also be implemented elsewhere. In addition, mechanisms for multisectoral coordination and individual monitoring of reintegrated children are transferable approaches that are essential for ensuring continuity of care and preventing dropouts.

Malawi – the SCREAM model

The SCREAM (Strengthening Children's Rights through Education Arts and the Media) is an International Labor Organization (ILO) program.⁴ It was launched in 2002 to help educators worldwide to promote understanding and awareness of child labor among young people.

Until the JOFA-ACTE project, SCREAM was

delivered in Malawi by educators, mostly teachers in schools using the SCREAM education pack consisting of 14 modules with an optional 15th module for children living in conflict-affected areas. These modules are generic and should be tailored to any geographical or cultural context, and to any formal or non-formal setting, depending on the time and resources available. In several countries, SCREAM has been linked to or integrated into national curricula, often with the active involvement of teachers' trade unions and public education authorities.

⁴<https://www.ilo.org/topics/child-labour/campaign-and-advocacy-child-labour/scream>

The JOFA-ACTE project in Malawi included children’s clubs in its beneficiary map. In an attempt to ensure sustainability, the project chose to work with Children’s Corners under the Department of Social Welfare. The Children’s Corners were also selected as they latently function as an entry point in the child protection referral pathway for case management. They also cater for out-of-school children, which caters for the limitation of the SCREAM model being largely used in school clubs. Children’s Corners have their curriculum; however, it does not comprehensively cover child labor. Therefore, there was need for complementing the curriculum with child labor modules and the SCREAM model came out best.

Why was SCREAM model the best choice?

The model includes **creative arts activities** (drama, music, visual arts) and children tend to connect strongly with modules that allow them to express themselves through dramatic performance, creative music, drawing, and other visual arts. These activities let them explore themes of rights and work through storytelling and performance in ways that feel fun, meaningful, and personally relevant. When children get to create media outputs, such as short videos, posters, plays, or radio messages, they often feel empowered because they are not just learning about issues like child labor but actively communicating their own messages to peers and communities. This boosts their confidence and sense of impact, especially on advocacy efforts.

SCREAM furthermore follows **peer-to-peer engagement** and **discussions**. It encourages children to teach and learn from each other, rather than just being passive listeners. Peer dialogue and collaborative projects typically resonate because they build a sense of agency and shared purpose. Part of the program is also a **debate** module. This module equips children with public speaking, debating, and communication skills. It has been effectively used by child parliaments within the project impact area, leading to children’s participation in significant events such as workshops on child-led complementary treaty reporting to the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) and the 2024 National Children’s Summit on Climate Change and Child Rights.



In the picture the Minister of Gender, Community Development, and Social Welfare Jean Sendeza (in blue school uniform) receiving petitions from children during the commemoration of the Day of African Child in 2024.

Community Integration is another module of SCREAM, that raises awareness about child labor within the broader community. This module emphasizes the importance of involving various groups in discussions, particularly in relation to the roles young people can play as agents of social change. Within the JOFA project in Malawi, 30 youth were trained in the community scorecard, holding meetings with children, parents, and duty bearers to improve service delivery and promote community led solutions. Through scorecards the youth have meaningfully participated in decision making on issues affecting their lives.



As shown in the picture, community facilitators are engaging children on issues that affect them including child labor through community scorecard sessions.

Moreover, the SCREAM modules are easily **adapted to reflect children's own cultural contexts**. Using local languages, cultural references or locally relevant issues children are more likely to engage deeply because the content feels familiar and personally relevant.

Results of implementing SCREAM as a Child Protection model in JOFA-ACTE Malawi

There are several results achieved through the SCREAM program. Children were for example able to conduct public debate competitions, showcasing drama and artwork to community leaders, as well as writing and sharing stories on child labor.

Some of these stories were documented and shared by the JOFA-ACTE project during advocacy and engagement meetings with duty bearers. Children also produced songs, Public Service Announcements (PSAs), jingles, and poems that were used in the project's Radio Programs and community campaigns. They also produced posters. Therefore, the children first put their ideas on a flip chart and then with support created the posters.



The photo shows some of the posters that children were supported to create for raising awareness on child labor.

This has raised awareness in most communities with leaders taking actions such as formulating by-laws on child labor, increased reporting on child labor by

the media, journalists that were engaged in the project's capacity building initiative. Children confidently engaged with duty bearers even at national level awareness events.

Challenges and Recommendations

Implementing the SCREAM program required constant supervision and support. The Child Protection Workers (CPWs, government officers) have been the best partners to engage with but were usually overwhelmed due to understaffing. If there is project-based supervision, there will be a need for field officers like CPWs to still accompany the project team for easy follow-up of agreed actions. Another challenge has been the lack of incentives to motivate facilitators in Children's Corners.

Furthermore, materials for running the Children's Corners may need to be procured and require replenishment from time to time. This is eased when projects are implemented, but it may be a challenge if relying on government funding. It may therefore require proportioning the number of clubs to staffing capacity as well as budget allocations.

It is recommended to keep activities age-appropriate and accessible. It is also important to break complex concepts into child-friendly language using stories, drama, drawing, and games. Also, the tasks asked of children should be matched to developmental stages: expression, play and basic art are good for younger children; discussions, advocacy planning and leadership are good for older children.

Additionally, it is important to create an inclusive space. Therefore, facilitators should encourage the participation of girls and boys, children with disabilities, and those less confident. Also, the adaptation of materials for inclusiveness (large print, mobility-friendly spaces, sign language interpretation where possible) could help create those spaces, as well as the use of mixed methods so children with different strengths can contribute.

Recommendations/Conclusion

Based on the overall implementation of the JOFA-ACTE project reflected in this learning brief, some overarching learnings that can contribute to shaping future programming are presented as follows:

1. No one-size fit all solution can address child labor: Child labor is a structural issue that is driven by economic vulnerabilities closely linked a wide range of interconnected conditions, such as poverty, precarious informal work, unemployment, disability, illness, violence. Addressing it therefore necessitates a variety of measures from relevant stakeholders, including, amongst others, states, international organizations, business and the private sector. The same applies to civil society programming where there is no one-size-fit-all response or child protection model to eradicate child labor. However, there are some commonalities between successful approaches that can be adapted to contribute to holistic engagement with affected communities. Those approaches are ones that rely on a *participatory approach* that amplify the voices of children and their families, as well as *long-term engagement* rather than specific short-term actions to allow for sufficient engagements and building relations of trust with children and their caregivers. In addition, providing *extensive technical and safeguarding training* is a cornerstone for stakeholders implementing work with children and young people. *Building holistic interventions* that combine access to education, financial support to families, strengthening legal systems, integrating robust social protection systems, and pushing for community-led advocacy is also an element of a successful approaches to addressing child labor.
2. More specifically for child-centred programming on child labor, adopting a participatory approach anchored in in-depth contextual understanding of local dynamics, conducting collaborative needs assessments, establishing strong collaboration and integration with local authorities and the communities, relying on long-standing experience of programmatic implementation in the area, and putting in place mechanisms for accountability are crucial aspects for the success of child-centred interventions.
3. Pushing for more politicised advocacy focusing on:
 - a. expanding social protection mechanisms with national governments, since all forms of social protection can impact child labor (even when not designed with an explicit child labor reduction objective)⁵ and
 - b. supply chains are a cornerstone to addressing deep causes of the perpetuation of child labor; this necessitates coordinated actions on holding businesses and companies accountable.
4. Programmes and models should also address the effects of child labor, such as on mental health, and should constantly focus on the needs of children and young people, as well as providing a safe environment and taking socio-cultural circumstances into account.

⁵ ILO and UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, The role of social protection in the elimination of child labour: Evidence review and policy implications. Geneva and Florence: International Labour Organization and UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, 2022.

https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@ipecc/documents/publication/wcms_845168.pdf

References

The role of social protection in the elimination of child labour. Evidence review and policy implications. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@ipecc/documents/publication/wcms_845168.pdf

Ending child labour by 2025: A review of policies and programmes. [https://soz-kult.hs-duesseldorf.de/personen/eberlei/PublishingImages/Seiten/Literatur-Kap1/ILO%20%E2%80%93%20International%20Labour%20Organization%20\(2017b\).pdf](https://soz-kult.hs-duesseldorf.de/personen/eberlei/PublishingImages/Seiten/Literatur-Kap1/ILO%20%E2%80%93%20International%20Labour%20Organization%20(2017b).pdf)