



International
COCOA
Initiative



IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

Child-friendly spaces in cocoa-growing communities

October 2024

This practical guide is for anyone interested in creating and setting up child-friendly spaces in cocoa-growing communities.

It describes how to design and set up a child-friendly space to support child protection and help tackle child labour, including practical recommendations to address common challenges. This guide is based on a pilot project implemented by the International Cocoa Initiative in cocoa-growing communities in Côte d'Ivoire.

What are child-friendly spaces?

Child-friendly spaces are supervised environments where children can come together to play, relax and express themselves. They are run by local facilitators, trained in child-centred pedagogical approaches that support children to participate in decision-making and develop new skills.

They provide children with opportunities to participate in group activities outside school hours and during the holidays. They offer learning opportunities for children through structured activities and games and help children develop social and emotional skills by interacting with others.

Child-friendly spaces provide a safe childcare option for cocoa-producing families, providing an alternative to taking children to the farm where they may get involved in hazardous work.

1. Selecting the community

The first step to setting up a child-friendly space is to select the community. Consider choosing locations where:

- There is already a primary school, either in the community or nearby – access to formal education should be a priority in communities with no primary school, so investment should be made in that domain first
- There is existing infrastructure that could house the child-friendly space or an appropriate site where a child-friendly space could be built

The following criteria could be used to **prioritise** communities:

- There is a higher prevalence of child labour
- The community does not already have similar activities

2. Mobilising the community and selecting a space

Mobilising and involving the community from the start is key to ensuring that the community accepts and takes ownership of the child-friendly space, which helps contribute to its success and sustainability in the long term.

1. **Organise information and awareness-raising sessions for community leaders and members.** This is crucial as child-friendly spaces are a new approach for many cocoa-growing communities and parents may not value the importance of extra-curricular activities.

2. **Establish minimum requirements.** Work with the community to determine the number of children who are likely to use the space and use this to develop the requirements for a possible location. Consider how much indoor and outdoor space is needed; key infrastructure, such as toilets, running water and electricity; safe access, and what will be necessary to secure the site – for example, fencing around the perimeter.
3. **Plan for the long-term from the start.** Think about how the space could continue to function efficiently in the longer term. Might it be possible to use an existing building before constructing a new one? Or to maximise the use of a new structure through sharing premises? For instance, the space could function as a kindergarten during school hours, when child-friendly spaces are closed. Planning for this, including setting up the infrastructure and equipment, is key for the potential transition.
4. **Select a location.** Actively involve the community in selecting a location for the child-friendly space. Organise in-depth discussions to understand possible locations for a child-friendly space, and their pros and cons. It is crucial to verify who owns the proposed land or premises and assess the potential implications. For instance, if the Ministry of Education owns the land or the premises, it may have to be transferred to the community or another Ministry or public entity first. For each possible location, check it meets the minimum requirements established above.

3. Planning for project sustainability

Planning for the sustainability of the project from the start is crucial to ensure the child-friendly spaces can continue to operate once the initial project ends. A funding mechanism should be developed in consultation with the community and relevant local stakeholders to ensure facilitators' salaries can be paid and child-friendly spaces maintained in the longer term.

Discussions with community members about future plans should take place from the very beginning and should consider the following:

- Which institutions or partners could be involved in supporting the space, now and in the future?
- Are there government programs in the area that could continue to support child-friendly spaces?
- Could community members contribute to costs related to the child-friendly space through a community funding pool or in-kind provision?

Funding mechanisms can take different forms depending on the needs and context of each community. One possibility is to combine support from relevant national authorities, that provide social workers and a budget for equipment, with a community funding pool for facilitators' salaries.

Keep in mind...

- Child-friendly spaces are a new approach in many cocoa-growing communities. Community members may be reluctant to pay for facilitators' salaries if they are unfamiliar with child-friendly spaces. Supporting facilitators' salaries for the initial year and enabling community members to witness the benefits of child-friendly spaces can motivate them to contribute towards facilitators' salaries in the future.
- If the plan is for national authorities, like the Ministry in charge of child protection, to take over the project, it is important to involve them in key decisions from the start to avoid obstacles during the transition phase.

4. Selecting and training facilitators

Selecting facilitators

Supportive, qualified staff are essential to create a safe and enjoyable environment for children. Selecting facilitators from within the local community creates employment opportunities. Training facilitators in child safeguarding and child-centred pedagogical approaches is key to ensuring staff have the required skills to operate centres safely.

Consider the following factors when selecting facilitators:

- Select proactive, innovative and highly motivated individuals who can accompany children and support their development beyond academic performance
- Seek out individuals who are interested in listening to children and who understand and support the concept of child participation
- Consider the gender composition of staff, aiming for a gender balance
- Run background checks on individuals before employing them to ensure they don't pose any risk to children – this can include checking references and the candidate's reputation in the community

The number of facilitators in each child-friendly space depends on the number of children and should respect child protection standards.¹ At least two facilitators should be present in the child-friendly spaces at all times.

Keep in mind...

Sustainability considerations during the selection process include:

- Involving the institution that will take over the project in the selection process is key to ensuring that they accept the facilitators, making the handover easier.
- Determining facilitators' salaries that align with working hours, sector benchmarks, and national legislation is important to ensure that the community or institution in charge of taking over the project can sustain the same salaries in the future.

Training facilitators

Once selected, facilitators should be trained on child-centred pedagogical approaches and child safeguarding to ensure child-friendly spaces are safe environments.

Mandatory topics:

- Relevant child safeguarding policies and code of conduct
- Child protection and children's rights
- Child participation, including ideas for children to participate safely and meaningfully
- Detecting abuse and referral of child labour cases

Additional topics:

- Designing activities for children of diverse ages and genders.
- Supervision and facilitation techniques, including skills to facilitate interactive and participatory activities that promote children's learning and psychosocial well-being.

¹ Minimum supervision standards to be respected per facilitator, per age group ([Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action](#)): - 20 children aged 5 to 9 years; - 25 children aged 10 to 12 years; - 30 children aged 13 to 18 years.

Once the child-friendly space is up and running, it is important to regularly monitor facilitators' performance and assess whether additional training is required. Adequate compensation for supervisors should be planned and budgeted in advance.

Keep in mind...

Child-friendly spaces are a new approach in many cocoa-growing communities, meaning that it may not always be easy to recruit facilitators or trainers with the required skills and experience.

- If suitable candidates are hard to find, remember that skills can be developed during training.
- Sometimes it can be easier to find facilitators familiar with supervising younger age groups (0 to 4). Training sessions can focus on working with older children (5 to 17).
- Partnering with specialised organisations or external trainers can be helpful to ensure that newly recruited facilitators are supported to develop the necessary knowledge and skills.
- Local social centres can support facilitator training and supervision.

5. Equipping child-friendly spaces

Child-friendly spaces should offer a wide range of activities that are accessible, culturally appropriate and tailored to the different needs and interests of girls and boys of different ages. Providing suitable equipment is key to attracting children of different ages and genders.

Ensure a safe and protective physical environment, by providing:

- Ventilation, protection from the sun and rain
- Drinking water
- Latrines and handwashing facilities
- Protective fence around the perimeter, and ensuring the space is free from hazards
- Hygiene and first aid kits
- Cupboards to store equipment

Playing and learning materials should be safe to use and suitable for both boys and girls of different ages and abilities. These could include:

- Musical instruments
- Sports equipment
- Games (board games, playground games...)
- Drawing and art materials
- Books and comics

Keep in mind...

- **Children get bored of always playing the same games.** Provide a wide range of activities and games and invest in new ones throughout the year to avoid a decline in attendance. Involve children and parents in the selection of equipment to ensure its relevance.
- **Younger and older children have different interests, as do girls and boys,** especially during adolescence. Games and materials should correspond to the diverse interests of girls and boys of different ages to avoid excluding certain groups. Similarly, if the child-friendly space also functions as a kindergarten, it should be equipped with materials for early childhood activities.
- **Games and equipment get damaged frequently.** Budget to replace damaged equipment throughout the year and consider durability and maintenance when selecting how to equip the space. Lower-quality games may get damaged faster and have to be replaced more regularly.
- **Providing food** can also encourage attendance and ensure children can enjoy the spaces and activities without getting hungry.

6. Raising awareness with parents

Child-friendly spaces are a new concept to many cocoa-growing communities. Therefore, organising preparatory information sessions about child-friendly spaces, how they work, and who can attend, can help caregivers know that the spaces exist and encourage their use.

These information sessions can be combined with awareness-raising sessions on topics related to child protection, including:

- Children's rights
- Risks associated with child labour
- Positive discipline

7. Running child-friendly spaces

Once the child-friendly spaces are up and running, it is important to continue involving the community to ensure the spaces continue to meet their needs. Common considerations include:

- **Opening hours** should be agreed upon and set up with the communities, taking into account the needs of children and parents as well as school opening hours and holidays. Planning for flexible opening hours is a good approach to better accommodate parents' needs and ensure children can stay in the spaces while parents are working.
- **Barriers to attendance.** Identifying and addressing barriers keeping certain children from attending child-friendly spaces is key to encouraging their participation. Monitor attendance to see whether some age groups or genders appear to be excluded. This might require targeted awareness-raising sessions or adapting the range of games and activities on offer.
- **Out-of-school children.** Discuss with community members and teachers how to welcome out-of-school children into the spaces and how to create bridges to schooling.
- **Link to other services.** Collaborate with local referral services so child victims of abuse can be referred to receive the support and help they need.
- **Seek and act on feedback.** Listen to the wishes of children and caregivers and use these to make continuous improvements to the spaces. Establish a feedback mechanism to ensure that feedback is solicited and acted upon.

- **Facilitator salaries.** Ensure that facilitators receive adequate compensation for their work, now and into the future. Collaborate with external partners and relevant Ministries or develop a community funding pool to pay facilitators' salaries.

8. Monitoring and evaluation

It is important to keep a record of who is attending the child-friendly space and when. This is primarily for safety reasons but can also help understand usage, identify barriers to access and areas for improvement. Facilitators need to know who to contact in case of an emergency.

Information to collect should include:

- **Registration form** with basic information, filled in by the child the first time they attend the child-friendly space, each child should be given an individual code to avoid duplication in the count.
- **Attendance sheets:** the child is registered for each activity or day they attend the child-friendly space.
- **Facilitator attendance records:** indicating dates, opening/closing times, and the presence of the facilitators.
- **Timetables** showing which activities are carried out with children each week and when.

Registration data should be disaggregated by sex and age to better understand who the child-friendly spaces are reaching and what changes can be made to meet the needs of specific groups.

Children are key stakeholders in a child-friendly space and their views matter. It is important to make time and space to ask for feedback from children, in a participatory way, to understand likes, dislikes, preferences, challenges and areas for improvement.

Additional resources

- Learning report: [How can child-friendly spaces help protect children in cocoa-growing communities?](#)
- Practical recommendations: [Learning into Action: Child-friendly spaces in cocoa-growing communities](#)
- [Generic budget](#)
- [Training materials on child protection and safeguarding](#)



www.cocoainitiative.org | info@cocoainitiative.org

ICI Secretariat in Switzerland
Chemin de Balexert 9,
1219 Châtelaine | Switzerland
+41 22 341 47 25

ICI National Office in Côte d'Ivoire
Il Plateaux, 7ème Tranche, Lot 3244, Ilot 264,
Abidjan-Cocody | Côte d'Ivoire
+225 27 22 52 70 97

ICI National Office in Ghana
No. 16, Djanie Ashie Street,
East-Legon | Accra | Ghana
+233 302 998 870