



International
COCOA
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Learning into action:

Child-friendly spaces in cocoa-growing communities

This brief summarises practical action to implement child-friendly spaces designed to protect children and reduce child labour. It draws on a pilot project implemented 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, express themselves, participate in structured activities, be supported and develop skills. They are run by local facilitators, trained in child-centred pedagogical approaches. They support children's development by providing children with opportunities to participate in group activities outside of school hours and during the holidays.

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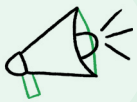
When I come to the child-friendly space, I'm happy and enjoying myself. But when I go to the field and take the machete to clean up, it hurts me.

CHILD ATTENDING THE
CHILD-FRIENDLY SPACES

Why invest in child-friendly spaces?

- **Support children's learning and development** – Child-friendly spaces offer learning and development opportunities for children. Structured activities and games allow children to improve their reading and cognitive skills. Likewise, interaction with others helps children develop social and emotional skills.
- **Provide an alternative to child labour** – 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.
- **Protect children** – Child-friendly spaces are a means of identifying children who are vulnerable and providing additional specialist support and appropriate referrals where needed.
- **Strengthen social cohesion** – Child-friendly spaces contribute to social cohesion as the whole community, including parents and children, are involved in setting them up. Likewise, the spaces enable children to create links with adults and other children they wouldn't otherwise interact with.

What works to implement a child-friendly space?



Spread the word

Child-friendly spaces are a new concept for many cocoa-growing communities. Organising preparatory information sessions about child-friendly spaces, how they work, and who can attend, helps caregivers know that the spaces exist, reassures them and encourages their use. Furthermore, raising awareness about the advantages and importance of extra-curricular activities, in addition to traditional education, motivates those hesitant to try this new approach.



Identify and train local facilitators

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



Mobilise the community

Actively involving the community in key decisions, such as the location of the space and the opening hours, helps the community take ownership of the child-friendly space, contributing to its success and sustainability in the future.



Encourage change in behaviours

Combining child-friendly spaces with awareness-raising sessions for parents on child labour, child protection, children's rights and positive discipline can contribute to improved parenting practices, a key factor of child protection.

Practical measures to increase participation in child-friendly spaces

Identifying and addressing barriers is key to encouraging participation and ensuring spaces are accessible to all.

- ✔ **Provide a wide range of activities.** If children get bored with the range of activities offered at the centre they may stop attending the spaces. Offering a wide variety of games and replacing damaged materials is key to retaining children.
- ✔ **Cater for different interests.** Games, materials and activities should correspond to the interests of girls and boys of the different targeted age groups.
- ✔ **Target awareness-raising sessions** about child-friendly spaces and their benefits to hesitant parents and families in situations of vulnerability to help child-friendly spaces reach children most at risk of child labour.
- ✔ **Plan for flexible opening hours** to accommodate parents' needs and ensure children can stay in the spaces while parents are working or unavailable.
- ✔ **Ensure a safe and protective physical environment.** Spaces should be equipped with first aid kits, electricity, drinking water, and latrines, and should be kept clean and fenced for security to reassure parents and ensure safety.
- ✔ **Provide meals** to encourage attendance and ensure children can enjoy activities without being hungry.
- ✔ **Monitor attendance and adapt.** Monitor attendance to see whether some age groups or genders appear to be less present than others. Attracting all groups may require targeted awareness-raising sessions or adapting the range of games and activities on offer.
- ✔ **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.



There were children who didn't know how to read. Once they started reading in the child-friendly space, the parents saw these changes and encouraged their children to attend the spaces.

FACILITATOR



Before, the children accompanied us to the field, but now they are free and happy to take part in the various activities at the child-friendly space.

PARENT OF CHILD ATTENDING THE CHILD-FRIENDLY SPACES



Want to learn more?

Learning report: [How can child-friendly spaces help protect children in cocoa-growing communities?](#)

Implementation guide: [Child-friendly spaces in cocoa-growing communities](#)

Video: [Child-friendly spaces from the inside](#)



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