



How can child-friendly spaces help protect children in cocoa-growing communities?

Findings from an innovative pilot project in cocoa-growing communities in Côte d'Ivoire

June 2024



International
COCOA
Initiative

Protecting children and their families in cocoa growing communities

The International Cocoa Initiative is a non-profit partnership organisation dedicated to improving the lives of children and adults in cocoa growing communities. We are experts on child labour and forced labour in cocoa, advising governments and corporations to inform their practices and influence decisions-making, and working with NGOs in the field. We are committed to achieving sustainable cocoa production that protects the rights of children and adults worldwide.

Supported by:



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

Contents

Background and context	6
Learning questions	7
Data sources and methods	7
Findings	8
Which children attended the spaces, and how regularly?	8
How have knowledge, attitudes and practices in terms of child protection developed amongst parents in the communities?.....	10
How do the facilitators assess the centres and the benefits for children?	11
How are the child-friendly spaces perceived by parents in the community?.....	13
How were the centres perceived by children?.....	15
Were the centres effective at addressing hazardous child labour in the community?	17
What obstacles prevented some children from using the centres, and how can they be overcome?	19
Conclusions	20

1. Background and context

Children living in cocoa-growing communities in Côte d'Ivoire grow up in a context of poverty, which is associated with a high risk that children are exposed to adverse experiences during their childhood. These include child labour, limited access to quality education, healthcare and other essential services, caregivers with low overall levels of education, lack of access to parenting support, and gender inequality.

The International Cocoa Initiative, with support from the Jacobs Foundation, piloted the use of **child-friendly spaces** (known as “Centres amis des enfants”, CAE) as a means of helping families in cocoa-growing communities to better protect their children. Child-friendly spaces are supervised environments where children can come together to play, relax, express themselves, feel supported and learn skills to deal with the challenges they face. The spaces are run by local facilitators who have been trained in child-centred pedagogical approaches. They offer children in the community the opportunity to take part in group activities outside of school hours and when schools are closed, and help promote children's development by supporting children to exercise their rights to play and participate.

The project had the following objectives:

- Tackling child labour through providing supervised activities for children, offering an alternative to going to the farm outside school hours
- Providing a safe space for children, where they can express themselves and see their rights promoted
- Creating links between peers, particularly between children in and out of school, between working and non-working children
- Giving children the opportunity to learn new skills and develop in a safe environment
- Deepening the understanding amongst adults in the community of child development and child protection, and creating positive attitudes towards the importance of extra-curricular activities, in addition to traditional education, for children
- Detecting cases of child abuse and violence and referring children in need of additional, specialist support to existing child protection structures.

This approach was tested in three communities in Côte d'Ivoire:

- Teady (department Bangolo, region Guémon)
- Belle-Ville (department Bangolo, region Guémon)
- Biakou (department Gagnoa, region Goh)

In each of the three communities, an appropriate locality for establishing a child-friendly space was identified in a participatory process with community members. Three animators were recruited in each community, who were trained by ICI and the relevant ministries. The opening hours of the spaces were agreed upon jointly with the communities; while at the beginning they were to open every day, the communities decided to open only on Wednesdays and Saturdays, as well as during school holidays, so as not to compete with school. The spaces accepted children aged between 5 and 18 years. Children were divided by age group for different activities, with the maximum number of children per group and per animator linked to international norms.

2. Learning questions

While the concept of child-friendly spaces has been used in many other contexts, it has not been tested as a measure to protect children and help prevent and address child labour in cocoa-growing communities in West Africa. The aim of this pilot was therefore to assess the feasibility of setting up and operating child-friendly spaces in this context and to assess their effectiveness at protecting children from harm, including from hazardous child labour.

This report focuses on learnings related to the effectiveness of this approach, focusing on the following questions:

Take-up:

- Who attends child-friendly spaces? (age, gender, socio-economic groups)
- How regularly do individual children attend?
- What prevents some families from using the child-friendly spaces?

Changes in caregiver knowledge, attitudes and practices:

- Has the set-up of child-friendly spaces led to changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices related to child protection, children's rights and child development?

Perspectives of caregivers and children:

- How are the child-friendly spaces perceived by adults and children in the community?

Benefits for children:

- Do children who attend the child-friendly spaces do less hazardous work?
- What other benefits do children derive from attending the spaces?

Facilitators' perspectives:

- How do local facilitators perceive the effectiveness of the spaces, the benefits for children, and their own role as facilitators?

3. Data sources and methods

To answer the questions above, we used a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches. The following data was collected and analysed:

- **Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) surveys amongst parents in the community** before the intervention and after the spaces had been operating for 12 months. The surveys aimed to assess whether the operation of child-friendly spaces in the community and the accompanying community information and awareness-raising sessions had led to changes in parents' knowledge, attitudes and practices related to child protection, child rights and child development.
- **Child registration and attendance data:** When a child attended the child-friendly space for the first time, a registration sheet was filled with basic information about the child and their family (child's sex, age, school enrolment status, family composition, parents' names, whether they are cocoa farmers). Subsequently, the facilitators filled out attendance lists on each opening day to track attendance.
- **Data on children's engagement in hazardous work** collected through household visits under a Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation System (CLMRS).
- **Qualitative interviews with the facilitators**, held after the spaces had been operating for approximately one year, to gather perceptions on their role and the changes observed since the spaces opened.

- **Focus group discussions with parents in the community**, held after the spaces had been operating for approximately one year, to gather their perceptions on the spaces and the changes observed since the spaces opened
- **Qualitative interviews and focus group discussions with children** who attended the spaces, and with children who did not attend the spaces, approximately 18 months after the spaces started operating. Children were asked to provide their perspectives on which benefits they drew from attending the spaces; if they had any ideas for improvements; and if they did not attend the spaces, what prevented them.
- **Qualitative interviews with parents** whose children did not attend the spaces approximately 18 months after the spaces started operating. These interviews aimed to assess the barriers which prevented some families from using the spaces and to understand how these could be removed.

4. Findings

4.1. Which children attended the spaces, and how regularly?

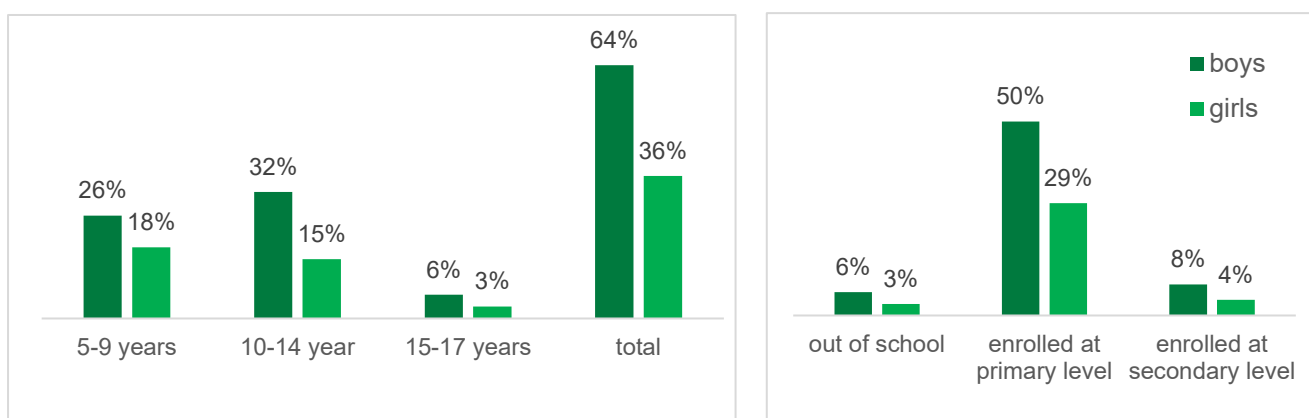
Each of the child-friendly spaces in the three communities had the capacity to host 25 children at a time. In total, 568 children attended the spaces at least once over the course of the first year of operation. The first time a child attended, staff filled a registration sheet with the child's and parents' names and basic demographic information.

Overall, more boys attended the spaces than girls, with boys representing almost 2 in 3 children attending. While in one community (Belleville), the attendance of boys and girls was relatively balanced (54% boys against 46% girls), in another (Teady) it was particularly unbalanced (78% boys against 22% girls).

All three spaces struggled to attract adolescent children, particularly adolescent girls. Only 9% of the children attending the spaces were aged 15 or above. Section 4.7 discusses these challenges in more detail.

Almost 80% of all children attending the spaces were enrolled in primary school, and only around 12% were enrolled in secondary school. Of all the children attending the spaces, 9% were out-of-school.

Figure 1: Characteristics of children regularly attending the child-friendly spaces, by age, sex, and schooling status.

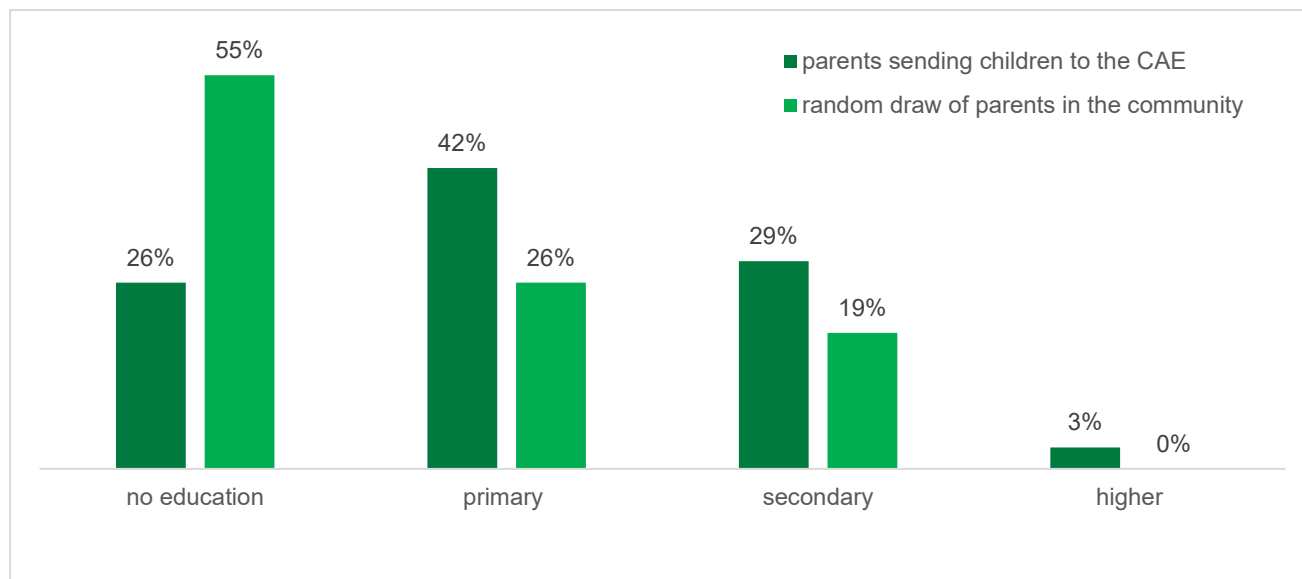


Note: Figures are based on registration and attendance records kept at the three child-friendly spaces during the first year of operation.

Parents who sent their children to the child-friendly spaces had higher levels of education, compared to the average education level within the community (see Figure 2). Single parents were also more likely to send their children to child-friendly spaces than parents living together. One possible explanation for this is that the spaces closed an important gap in childcare facilities available in the communities, which was particularly important for single parents. On the other hand, single parents also rely more on their children's help with farm work and household chores, so the child-friendly spaces benefitted a particularly vulnerable group of children.

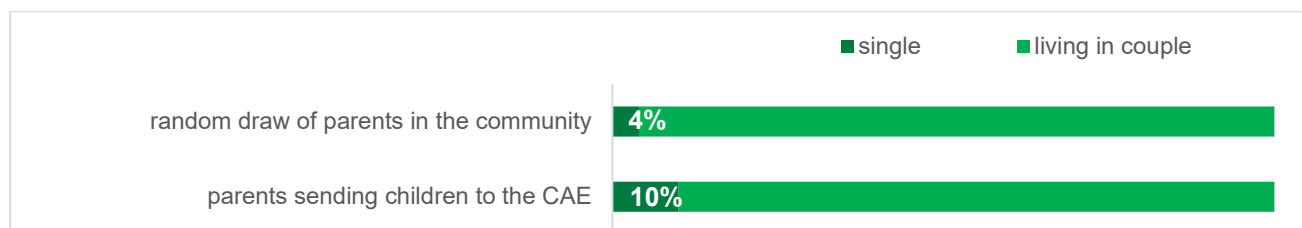
How can child-friendly spaces help protect children in cocoa-growing communities?

Figure 2: Education level of parents whose children attended the child-friendly spaces



Note: Figures are based on the endline KAP survey administered to parents in the community; 53% of respondents were female.

Figure 3: Share of single parents amongst families sending their children to the spaces



Note: Figures are based on the endline KAP survey administered to parents in the community; 53% of respondents were female.

Cocoa farmers were more likely to send their children to the child-friendly spaces than parents in the community who do not produce cocoa. Amongst the parents whose children attended, 94% were cocoa farmers; against 81% of cocoa farmers amongst a random sample of parents within the communities whose children did not attend. Among the cocoa farmers in the community, those who were members of a cooperative were also more likely to send their children to the child-friendly spaces: 76% of cocoa farmers sending their children to the child-friendly spaces were members of a cooperative, against 47% cooperative members amongst cocoa farmers not sending their children to the child-friendly spaces.

Cocoa farmers and single parents, whose children are at higher risk of child labour, took up the offer, hence the spaces reached two important target groups within the community. On the other hand, families with higher education levels and cocoa farmers who are organized in cooperatives were overrepresented among those using the spaces. This indicates that sensitization for the benefit of the spaces must be planned carefully to reach out to all socio-economic layers within the community equally.

It is encouraging to see that some out-of-school children attended the spaces. For these children, we expect that attending the spaces may have offered particular benefits as it ensured their social integration with peers and gave them an important opportunity to learn social skills.

Additional efforts could have been taken to make sure that the spaces benefit girls as much as boys, as well as to increase the attendance of older children. To better understand the barriers which prevented girls, particularly adolescent girls, from attending the spaces, additional data was collected in the second year of operation from children and their parents in the three communities. The results are presented in section 4.7.

4.2. How have caregivers' knowledge, attitudes and practices changed in relation to child protection?

Surveys to measure Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices were administered to caregivers within the community before the project started, in August 2021, and again, one year after the opening of the child-friendly spaces, in February 2023. At baseline, 120 respondents were randomly selected for the survey amongst all caregivers within the community, of which 50% were mothers and 50% were fathers. At endline, the same survey was administered to 178 randomly selected caregivers within the community, of which 53% were mothers and 47% were fathers. Of the endline respondents, 37% were parents of children who attended the child-friendly spaces.

The survey covered the following topics:

Knowledge

- Definition of a child and the key stages of a child's development
- Definition of child labour and legislation on child protection in place in Côte d'Ivoire
- Children's rights and responsibilities, and equality between boys and girls

Attitudes

- Importance of schooling and right to play
- Children's participation in decisions which concern them
- Importance of children's interaction and learning amongst peers
- Child abuse

Practices

- Discipline
- Children's time allocation across schooling, work and play

In each of the pilot communities, the setting up of the child-friendly spaces was accompanied by three information and awareness-raising sessions addressed to all parents within the community, children, and teachers. One session informed the community about the concept and operational modalities of the child-friendly spaces. The other sessions covered a broader field of topics, with a focus on child protection and children's rights, the definition and risks of child labour, and the concept of positive discipline.

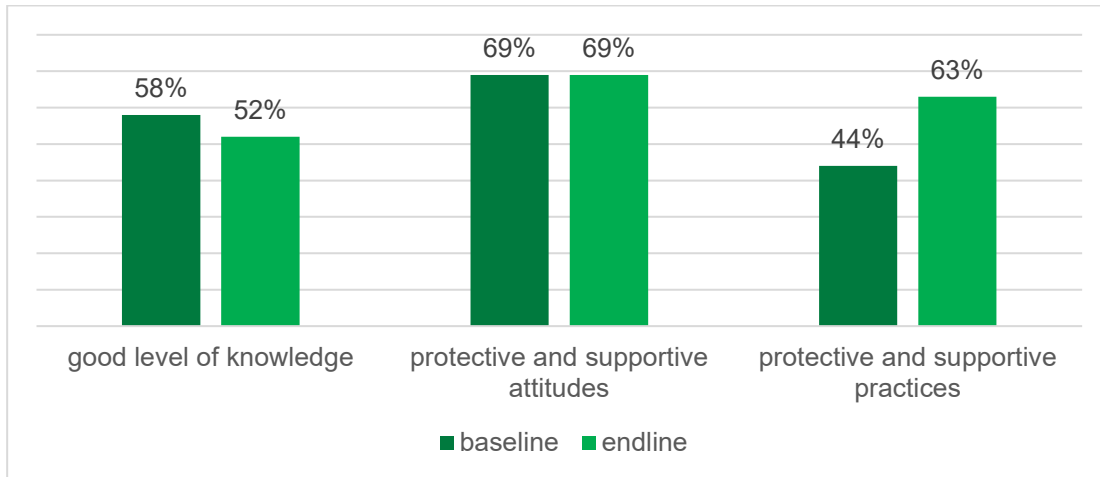
Caregivers were asked if and when they had participated in an awareness-raising activity related to child development or child protection. At baseline, 75% of the respondents reported they had attended some awareness raising over the course of the last 12 months preceding the survey, compared to 80% at endline. The overall level of access to awareness-raising on child protection in the three communities was therefore high, even before the project was implemented.

Overall, caregivers' knowledge of child protection, children's rights and child development decreased slightly from baseline to endline. While the share of respondents with "good" knowledge of the definition of a child and key stages of a child's development increased slightly, the share of parents with "good" knowledge of child labour decreased strongly between baseline and endline.

There was no change on average in caregivers' attitudes towards child protection, children's rights and child development. However, there was a positive change in terms of caregivers' practices between baseline and endline: the proportion of caregivers reporting that they avoided violent discipline and prioritized their children's schooling and play time over work climbed from 44% to 63%.

These results indicate that **the project was associated with an improvement in parenting practices, a key factor of child protection in the project communities**. While respondents' knowledge of child labour decreased, parenting practices improved.

Figure 4: Levels of knowledge, attitudes and practices concerning child protection, children's rights and child development amongst parents in the community, measured at baseline and endline.



Notes: Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices survey was administered to a random draw of parents within the three beneficiary communities. The baseline sample size was 120 respondents (of which 50% were female), the endline sample size was 178 respondents (of which 53% were female; and 37% had made use of the child-friendly spaces).

4.3. How do the facilitators assess the child-friendly spaces and the benefits for children?

Narrative interviews were held with seven facilitators after the child-friendly spaces had been operating for one year. They were asked to give feedback about:

- the training they received for their role
- the modalities of operation of the child-friendly spaces and their working arrangements
- which benefits they saw for children and the community overall, and
- any challenges encountered or potential for improvement.

The facilitators were satisfied with the training they had received. They found the contents and scope useful and appropriate and felt well-prepared for their role.

According to the facilitators, the child-friendly spaces also improved cohesion among parents within the community. For children, they noted that the child-friendly spaces offered learning opportunities which were complementary to school. First, the children developed social skills through interaction with other children. Some facilitators also noted a more respectful interaction between children and adults in the community. One facilitator summarized this as follows: *“[The children] have experienced a variety of games, they have developed a protective behaviour and adopted better hygiene practices, they got to know their rights and duties, and this has helped bring the children closer together.”* Second, the activities children engaged in at the child-friendly spaces allowed them to improve their reading skills and to develop their cognitive skills through games. One facilitator reported that such positive effects were also noted by the teachers at school.

When asked whether, in their view, some children benefitted more than others, the facilitators assured that all children attending the child-friendly spaces were treated equally. However, they remarked that the choice of games and materials available in the child-friendly spaces should be widened to ensure that they were of

How can child-friendly spaces help protect children in cocoa-growing communities?

interest to children of all age groups, including older children. Also, some facilitators also advocated for admitting younger children below the age of 5.



Regarding challenges encountered, some facilitators said that they faced resistance from some parents in the community who did not want their children to attend the child-friendly spaces. This is illustrated in the following quote from a facilitator in the community of Biakou: *“We came up against the reluctance and ignorance of some parents. The space was seen as an obstacle by parents, preventing them from using their children as labourers in the fields.”*

A second shortcoming noted by facilitators was that no meals were provided for children in the child-friendly spaces. They said that children sometimes arrived hungry, which compromised their ability to enjoy and benefit. They recommended that the child-friendly spaces should be equipped with canteens.

Further, facilitators highlighted that it was crucial for all child-friendly spaces to be equipped with first aid kits, electricity and drinking water. They also recommended that the play spaces around the child-friendly spaces should be fenced for children’s security.¹ Lastly, they noted that the space was too confined to host the large number of children present. When asked whether they had witnessed any case of child abuse, none of the facilitators said they had.

As regards their working hours, the facilitators said that in theory, the opening hours and their expected working times were appropriate, however, in reality, the opening hours of the child-friendly space were often extended to better accommodate parents’ needs. As stated by one facilitator in the community of Biakou: *“We work beyond the set hours because we do it for the children. When a child arrives [late], we have to extend the*

¹ In response to the feedback received, it was decided to add fences around the child-friendly spaces in the three communities, installation is ongoing at the time of writing.

How can child-friendly spaces help protect children in cocoa-growing communities?

closing time to accommodate these late arrivals.” The facilitators were also concerned that after the end of the project period, the operation of the child-friendly spaces would not continue due to a lack of funds to pay their salaries. Without compensation, they would not be able to continue their service; and they doubted that the community would be able to mobilize funds to cover their salaries.²

You can watch the facilitators’ testimonies in [this video](#).



4.4. How are the child-friendly spaces perceived by caregivers in the community?

To capture the perceptions of caregivers, three focus group discussions were held in February 2023 (after the centres had been operating for one year) in each of the project communities. Each focus group was composed of 8 participants (4 mothers and 4 fathers), including both parents of children attending child-friendly spaces, and those not attending.

All focus group participants were familiar with the project and were well-informed about the child-friendly spaces and how they operated. They mentioned that the information sessions had reached everyone in the community and that community leaders had been actively involved in that communication. In their view, communication about the project and their involvement helped the community take ownership of the project. The fact that the community had agreed jointly to make a plot of land available for the installation of the child-friendly space had also reinforced the sense of ownership of the project. Caregivers were also asked whether

² Facilitators’ salaries are covered from project funds up to September 2024. After that, there are different possibilities how the funding and management of the spaces could be assured over the longer term: for example, the Government could take over the spaces under its Centres d’Action communautaire pour l’Enfance (CACE) programme; the communities could mobilize funds and manage the operation of the spaces; or private sector partners could commit to long-term funding under an ongoing programme to address and prevent child labour.

How can child-friendly spaces help protect children in cocoa-growing communities?

they thought that children had been sufficiently informed and consulted about the functioning of the child-friendly spaces. Responses to this question were mixed, overall parents thought that children had been well informed, although some did not see a need for children to be *consulted*. They saw children as the direct beneficiaries but felt that parents, not children, should advise on the operation of the child-friendly spaces.

Most caregivers stated that they saw benefits for the children, mostly because they enjoyed the playtime, and because the spaces offered learning opportunities. Parents noted that attending the spaces helped their children progress in terms of cognitive, emotional and social development.

- *"The children are very attentive thanks to the child-friendly space, one child drew an incredible picture at home and his father was surprised" (parent in Téady)*
- *"The children know their rights and duties. The children are getting better and better at reading and writing, they are clean" (parent in Belleville)*
- *"The children enjoy the child-friendly space because they are happy, and they tell their parents about the games they play. The parents are also happy because their children come back from the child-friendly space happy. The children's feedback led me to go and see the games at the child-friendly space." (parent in Biakou)*

Importantly, parents appreciated the child-friendly spaces as a safe childcare option when they had to go to work in their fields. Several parents across the three project communities affirmed that the child-friendly spaces allowed them to not take the children with them to the fields, since they now had a safe place to stay while they were gone. Parents in Belleville and Teady said:

- *"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."*
- *"The project has been very well received, because it allows parents to go to the fields. The children are at ease, and so are their parents."*

Some parents noted that children were in good hands and that they were also more disciplined since they attended the child-friendly space:

- *"This project has enabled our children to learn outside school hours. For us, it's a daycare centre for our children. When we're out in the field, we know that our children are safe. The child-friendly space has helped us to guide our children to listen better and show more respect." (parent in Belleville)*

Parents also gave very positive feedback about the facilitators. They appreciated their commitment and availability, and their pedagogical competencies. One parent in Biakou said, "The activity leaders teach the children how to play, express themselves (how to read and write) and respect their parents."

When asked about areas of improvement, parents noted similar points as expressed by the facilitators. They expressed a demand for:

- Meals to be provided to children at the child-friendly spaces
- Drinking water to be available at the child-friendly spaces
- A wider variety of games and materials available, and for games and materials to be replaced regularly as many were in poor condition
- The outside play areas to be fenced to improve security
- The spaces to be equipped with electricity

Parents also noted that they felt the child-friendly spaces were often overcrowded, and that the spaces should be enlarged, and more facilitators hired.

How can child-friendly spaces help protect children in cocoa-growing communities?

Overall, the child-friendly spaces were highly appreciated by parents within the community, both because they promoted children’s learning and their development because they saw their children’s joy, and because they offered a safe childcare option so that children didn’t have to accompany their parents to the fields to work. The areas of improvement mentioned by parents overlapped with those mentioned by facilitators and were concerned mainly with the physical infrastructure and resourcing of the spaces.

4.5. How were the child-friendly spaces perceived by children?

To capture the perspectives of children on the child-friendly spaces, one focus group discussion was held in each of the project communities in August 2023 with children who had attended regularly. Each focus group was composed of 8 children, including boys and girls. The focus group discussions were complemented by individual qualitative interviews with the same children. The parallel approaches were found to be effective in motivating all children to express their views, with some children feeling more at ease speaking in the group situation and other children feeling more at ease in individual interviews.

The children overall expressed a high level of appreciation for the child-friendly spaces as a place to play, to meet and have fun with other children, and to be carefree and happy. They also liked the interaction with the facilitators, saying that it was great to have adults playing with them. Children also said that the child-friendly spaces were spaces for playing and therefore served a very different purpose than school. However, if they had to choose which of the two was more important, it would be school because what they learned there was crucial for their future.



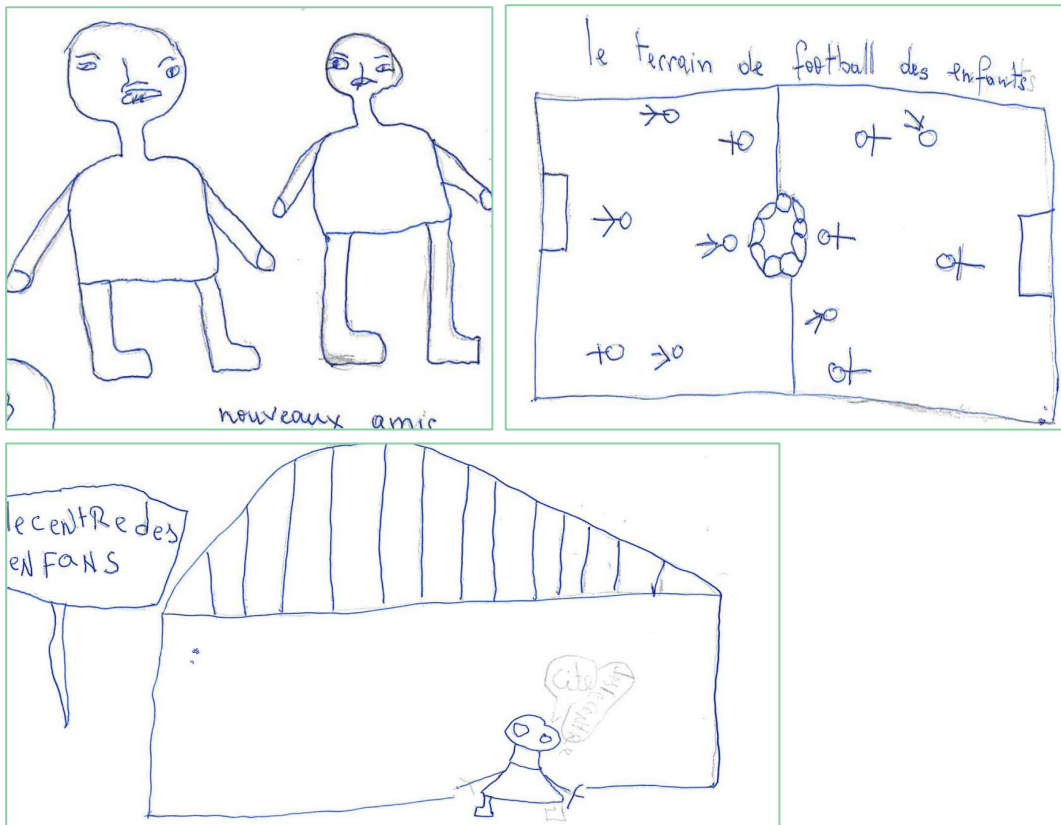
For all children interviewed, attending the child-friendly space was a very welcome alternative to helping their parents with work in the fields. One child said during a focus group discussion in Tedy *“When I come to the child-friendly space, I’m happy and enjoying myself. But when I go to the field and take the machete to clean up, it hurts me. [...]”*

Children were asked to express in words and in drawings what changes the child-friendly spaces had brought to their lives (see a few examples below). Children most frequently mentioned that they had made new friends

How can child-friendly spaces help protect children in cocoa-growing communities?

and enjoyed time playing with peers. Several children said that they no longer accompanied their parents to the fields since they attended the child-friendly space. Some children also realised that the child-friendly space promoted their learning progress, notably in reading, drawing, singing, and their French language skills. You can watch their testimonies in [this video](#).

Figure 5: Drawings of children when asked to express the main changes that the child-friendly spaces had brought to their lives (August 2023).



The children were also asked whether they saw any needs for improvement in the spaces. The first thing that came up was that they wanted damaged games and materials to be replaced and that they would like a greater range of games to be available. They said after some time, playing the same games over and over again was boring, and they suggested that games should be exchanged periodically. “*You should send us new games which we have never seen before*”, said one child in the community of Biakou.

An analysis of the attendance lists in August 2023, after the child-friendly spaces had been operating for almost 2 years, showed that the first wave of children who attended regularly when they first opened, came much less frequently. A new wave of children who had started attending more recently, were present much more regularly, around 4 days per week during the holiday period. These figures could be explained by the declining enthusiasm children experienced after having attended the child-friendly space for a while when they started to get bored with the variety of games on offer.

Children also confirmed requests by parents and facilitators that meals should be provided at the child-friendly spaces; and that the spaces should be fenced and kept clean.

Overall, children’s perceptions of the child-friendly spaces were extremely positive: they offered a place to play, learn and meet other children, and many reported that it stopped them from having to go to the fields with their parents to work. On the other hand, the children’s feedback also highlighted that if the child-friendly spaces

How can child-friendly spaces help protect children in cocoa-growing communities?

were to attract the same children over longer periods of time, they would need to keep offering new games and activities regularly.



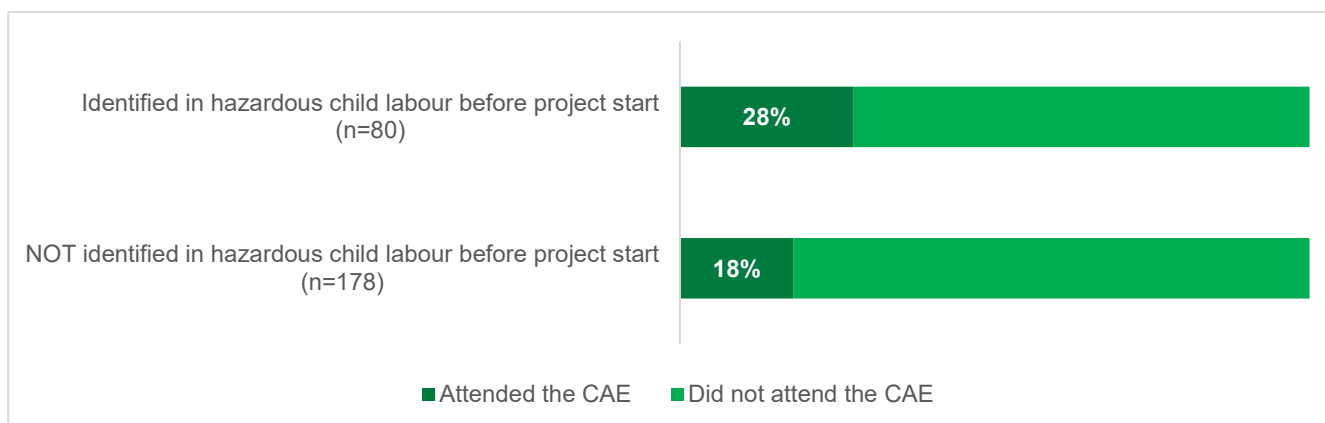
4.6. Were the child-friendly spaces effective at addressing hazardous child labour in the community?

As highlighted by parents, one key benefit of the child-friendly spaces was that they provided a safe childcare option and allowed parents to avoid taking their children with them to work on the cocoa fields. Of course, even with access to childcare, some parents may still have decided to rely on their children's help with fieldwork. Therefore, we looked at the results from child interviews conducted through the Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation System (CLMRS) before the project started and compared them to results after the child-friendly spaces started operating, to check whether we see a change in children's engagement in hazardous work.

A total of 258 children were covered by a CLMRS implemented by ICI in the three project communities and were monitored before the start of the project (between April and September 2021). Amongst these, 80 children (31% of children monitored) had engaged in hazardous work in cocoa production before the project started.

Of the 80 children previously identified in hazardous child labour before the project started, 22 then attended the child-friendly spaces when they started operating. Amongst the 178 children who had not reported engaging in hazardous work before the project started, only 32 children attended the child-friendly spaces afterwards. Children identified in child labour were thus more likely to attend the spaces (28%) than children not identified in child labour (18%), which indicates that the service indeed found higher take-up amongst the key target group of children in child labour (figure 5).

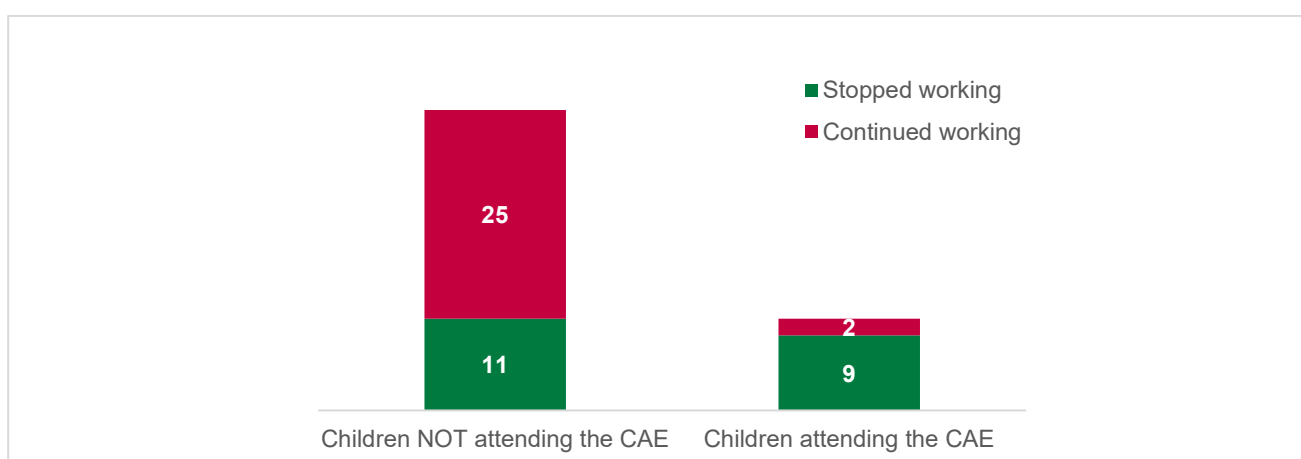
How can child-friendly spaces help protect children in cocoa-growing communities?



Of the 80 children identified in child labour by the CLMRS, 47 children had received support and a follow-up visit in the period September 2022 to February 2023,³ while the child-friendly spaces were in operation. Of these 47 children, 20 children (43%) had stopped doing hazardous work by this follow-up visit. The rate of 43% corresponds to the average rate of success we see from data of follow-up visits in ICI-implemented CLMRS in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.⁴

When we compare children who attended the child-friendly spaces and those who did not, **we find that children attending the child-friendly spaces were much more likely to stop hazardous work (at least in the short term) than children not attending.** Of 11 children previously in child labour who attended the spaces, 9 children had stopped doing hazardous work according to a follow-up visit between September 2022 and February 2023; whereas of the 36 children previously in child labour who did not attend the child-friendly spaces, 11 children had stopped doing hazardous work according to a follow-up visit in the same period (see Figure 6). Since the number of children followed up in the relevant period is small, the rates cannot be examined for statistical significance. However, the numbers suggest that having access to child-friendly spaces represented a significant support to children previously in child labour.

Figure 6: Children previously identified in hazardous child labour who stopped working according to one follow-up visit when the child-friendly spaces were in operation (Sept 2022-Feb2023).



³ Generally, children identified in child labour under an ICI-implemented CLMRS receive at least two follow-up visits after remediation, usually one visit every 6 months. If during two consecutive follow-up visits children do not report any hazardous tasks, they are considered no longer in child labour. Follow-up data analyzed for this report cover a period of 6 months only, so we look at how the situation has changed according to one follow-up visit.

⁴ See for example a synthesis of CLMRS results in the [ICI Annual Report for 2022](#).

To summarize, the CLMRS data shows that **the child-friendly spaces were particularly beneficial for children who engaged in hazardous child labour before the project; and that when children previously in child labour attended the child-friendly space, they were very likely to stop hazardous work.** We conclude that child-friendly spaces can make an important contribution to strategies to prevent and address child labour in cocoa-growing communities.

4.7. What obstacles prevented some children from using the child-friendly spaces, and how can they be overcome?

Attendance at the child-friendly spaces was quite unbalanced between children of different age groups and between boys and girls. To better understand the barriers which prevented girls and adolescents, from attending, additional data were collected in the three communities in the second year of operation of the child-friendly spaces. Qualitative interviews were held with 6 girls and 6 boys between the ages of 12 and 17 years who never or no longer attended the child-friendly spaces, and a parent of each of these adolescent children, to understand whether they were interested in the spaces and what had prevented them from making use of them.

All adolescents interviewed were well informed about the existence of the child-friendly spaces and what they offered. None of the children said explicitly that their parents had prohibited them from attending, however, some boys were unwilling to explain why they did not attend and said later in the interview that their parents should be asked. Four out of the 12 children (one girl, and 3 boys) said it was their personal decision not to attend. Some explained that the games on offer had become boring after some time, so they were no longer attracted by the child-friendly spaces.

In most cases, children cited work obligations as the main barrier which prevented them from attending the child-friendly spaces: 3 girls out of 6, and 2 boys out of 6 said they were too busy helping with household chores; and 2 girls out of 6 and 3 boys out of 6 said that they had to help with fieldwork.

When they were asked what could be done to remove the barriers they faced, several children, both boys and girls, said that their parents would need additional sensitization to allow their children to attend the child-friendly spaces. Some girls suggested offering additional games and activities that correspond better to their age group's interests.

The parents of these children were asked about their perspectives on the child-friendly spaces and reasons why their adolescent children did not attend. Amongst the 12 parents interviewed, 4 had never received any awareness raising related to child protection, children's rights or child development. Even though they had all heard about the child-friendly spaces, only five of them had ever passed by to get a personal impression of the space. One parent was not aware that the child-friendly spaces were open to everybody; and one parent said they did not make use of the child-friendly space because it was too far from their house.

Seven of the 12 parents claimed that their children had never expressed their motivation to attend the child-friendly space; and some even said that they would be happy for their children to attend, and they wished for more promotion of spaces targeted directly at children.

Overall, it emerges from these interviews with parents and children that a lack of awareness amongst parents about the child-friendly spaces, how they worked and who they were aimed at may have been a key barrier. In addition, the data suggests that some parents may find it more important for their adolescent children to help with household chores and fieldwork. In addition, the activities and games on offer may need to be extended to be more interesting for adolescents.



5. Conclusions

Overall, the child-friendly spaces have helped improve the protectiveness of the environment for children in the three pilot communities. Children appreciated the child-friendly spaces because they offered them a place to play, learn and meet other children; and many children said it spared them from going to the fields with their parents to work. Even though CLMRS data were available only from a small sample of children in the project communities, these data show that the child-friendly spaces were particularly beneficial to children who engaged in hazardous child labour before the project; and that when children previously in child labour attended the spaces, they were very likely to stop hazardous work. This was also confirmed by qualitative data collected from parents, who stated that the availability of a safe childcare option allowed them not to take their children with them to the fields.

Moreover, parents observed that the spaces promoted their children's learning, their development, and their happiness. A positive change in the behaviour of parents towards more protective parenting practices was also measured amongst parents in the community, including among parents whose children did not attend the child-friendly spaces.

In terms of targeting, we have seen that the service was taken up by cocoa farmers and single parents, whose children are at higher risk of child labour. On the other hand, families with higher education levels and cocoa farmers who are organized in cooperatives were overrepresented among those utilizing the spaces. We conclude that information sessions on the benefits of child-friendly spaces must be planned carefully to make sure they reach all socio-economic layers within the community equally.

A key challenge observed was that the child-friendly spaces struggled to attract adolescent children, and adolescent girls in particular. Only one in three children attending the spaces was a girl, and only 9% of the children attending the child-friendly spaces were aged 15 or above. To remove these barriers, additional

How can child-friendly spaces help protect children in cocoa-growing communities?

awareness raising is needed among parents about how the child-friendly spaces work, and who can attend, especially as some parents may expect their adolescent children to help with household chores and fieldwork. In addition, the child-friendly spaces will need to adjust the activities and games on offer to make them more interesting for adolescents.

The following key areas of improvement of the spaces were highlighted by parents, children and facilitators:

- meals should be provided to children at the spaces;
- drinking water should be available;
- a wider variety of games and materials should be made available, and all materials need regular replacement;
- outside play areas should be fenced to improve security;
- the spaces should be equipped with electricity and first aid kits;
- the spaces should be enlarged and more facilitators hired to be able to accommodate more children.

The pilot has shown that child-friendly spaces are an effective approach to improving the protective environment for children in cocoa-growing communities. They offer a safe space for children to play, learn and interact, and a valuable childcare solution which prevents many parents from engaging children in farm work.