



Save the Children

# MID-TERM EVALUATION

## PROTECTING CHILDREN AFFECTED BY ARMED CONFLICTS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA (2020-2023)

### SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS, AUGUST 2022

#### INTRODUCTION

The 'Protecting Children Affected by Armed Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa' programme is a SIDA-funded four-year intervention implemented by Save the Children International (SCI), which commenced in 2020, and is anticipated to be completed in 2023. The objective of the programme is to work in collaboration with a broad range of international, regional and local actors to ensure that all children affected by armed conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa are adequately protected from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

In November 2021, Bodhi Global Analysis was contracted by SCI to undertake a midterm evaluation of the programme to evaluate the planning and implementation and inform the next phase of programming through provision of recommendations. The team conducted a desk review of project documents, 47 Key Informant Interviews with programme staff and partners, and 1 Focus Group Discussion with Peace Support Operations staff in Uganda.

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## KEY FINDINGS ON THE LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVE 1:

### **‘Strengthened capacity for regional actors in Sub-Saharan Africa to prevent, resolve and deal with the effects of armed conflict on children.’**

Sustained engagement with the African Union (AU) has enabled the programme to ensure that Child Protection (CP) is integrated into and central to strategic decision-making processes and policies of the AU Commission and relevant AU organs. The coordination with the AU is contributing to reinforcing systems and policies at the regional level. For example, the development of a continental Monitoring, Reporting and Accountability Mechanism for children in situations of conflict and the adoption of CP policies for AU peace support operations by the Peace and Security Council are key steps towards increased leadership and accountability by the AU with regard to Children Affected by Armed Conflict (CAAC) issues. However, building on this momentum and seeing these processes through to the end will be crucial to securing long lasting changes.

The programme committed to enhancing the knowledge, skills, practices and capabilities of Peace Support Operations (PSO) personnel with regard to violence against children through sustained and

systematic training. The evaluation found that this work has led to a demonstrated commitment from Troop/Police Contributing Countries on the adoption and institutionalisation of CP training within PSO personnel training programmes. The CP training was found to be relevant for participants, and evidence suggests some early positive impacts, including increased knowledge and capacity of PSO personnel in Uganda, and improved practices of some police brigades in Burkina Faso. However, there are several challenges related to the content of the training and remaining unaddressed needs and gaps, and opportunities for further improvements to the training must be seized. For example, in Uganda, the absence of formal, systematic coordination and engagement with local communities and authorities hinders long-term efficiency of CP training. Mapping relevant stakeholders in specific conflict areas would be a key step to clarifying roles and responsibilities and facilitating coordination.

## KEY FINDINGS ON THE LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVE 2:

### **‘Increased influence and participation by children, youth and CSOs in processes for peace and reconciliation in Sub-Saharan Africa.’**

As the programme was committed to increasing the influence and participation of children, children were involved in various trainings and workshops, including on the importance of the Charter on the Rights of Children in Somalia. Unfortunately, the evaluation team was unable to engage with child participants and so there is limited data available to assess whether this participatory approach led to real changes in the capacity of CAAC to engage with the ACERWC, RMs, RECs, and National Governments. In the future, this child participation work should be supported by the production of clear ‘action plans’ at the country level reflecting how the views of children consulted under this programme will be acted upon.

As part of its efforts to advocate for the inclusion of children and youth in peace and security processes, the programme’s partnership with COMESA has led to a positive evolution of COMESA’s CAAC

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component, with improved strategic orientations, tools and systems, such as SOPs for duty bearers, including police officers.

At this stage of programme implementation, there has been limited progress towards increased engagement of youth in peace and security processes, although the mapping campaign has been a starting point to engage with child and

youth focused CSOs. It is yet to be determined how those early connections will translate into concrete partnerships. Similarly, whilst SCI has developed strong relationships with the Horn of Africa Youth Network, through provision of technical support in development of policy briefs and ministerial statements and creating a platform to exchange knowledge and experience, continued engagement is required.

## KEY FINDINGS ON THE LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVE 3:

### **‘Strengthened capacity and competence for Country offices and Partners to engage with armed forces and groups in order to prevent, resolve and deal with the effects of armed conflict on children.’**

This evaluation found that the programme has made significant progress towards enhancing the capacity and competence of SCI Country Offices’ to engage dynamically with Armed Actors. In particular, tailored capacity and competence strengthening on humanitarian negotiations and access, for country offices in Mali, Sudan and South Sudan, including on advocacy, is good practice that strengthens SCI’s internal capacities and raises awareness of the role of frontline staff. In addition, participants mostly found the training on ‘Humanitarian Access and Negotiations in Situations of Armed Conflict’,

delivered in Mali and South Sudan by consultants, to be relevant, and improvement in knowledge was captured in the participants’ workshop evaluations. However, a lack of SCI involvement in the preparation of the training curriculum, a rushed selection of the participants and some gaps in the contextualisation of the content, and the lack of follow-up activity after the training, reduced the effectiveness of the training. SCI could increase its level of engagement with the training, with a more rigorous approach to identifying participants who are most relevant/not going on rotation, and tailoring the content to specific staff.

## KEY FINDINGS ON THE LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVE 4:

### **‘Strengthened humanitarian capacity and capability in Francophone conflict-affected countries in WCA, in particular local and national actors, to protect children affected by armed conflict.’**

The evaluation found that the learning programme was effective in achieving the programme’s commitment to strengthening regional and national humanitarian child protection response capabilities in Francophone conflict-affected countries in WCA. Despite some room for improving the density and contextualisation of the CP Emergency Professional Development Programme (PDP), and to better leverage the capacities of the implementing partner

to monitor and document impacts, the pilot cycle of the PDP training was successful in establishing an active community of practice, and in strengthening the capacities of the participants, with instances of participants having access to new career opportunities after the training.

Due to restricted data collection, this evaluation could not assess changes in the capacity of humanitarian

child protection practitioners in Francophone conflict-affected countries in WCA to use the revised Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (CPMS). In DRC and Niger, good progress was made towards the implementation of the CPMS roll out plan, albeit with limited evidence of increased practitioners' capacity to use them. In addition, the lack of a monitoring system, budget constraints and staffing issues further slows progress.

Slow and uneven progress was made on building practitioners' capacity on case management (CM) in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, DRC and Mauritania, due to initial delays in the recruitment of the Regional Roving CM Specialist, a lack of dedicated staff to take the lead in the implementation of activities at the country office level, and the lack of funding to support inter-agency capacity building activities. Nonetheless, the focus on CM and engagement with inter-agency groups and

local actors in the countries appears to be a relevant and sustainable approach to CP enforcement in the region. In addition, this programme's component has led to an increased level of influence of SCI at the country level, through consolidating its position in the national CP cluster and raising its profile with institutional donors. However, challenges persist, including a gap in information management (IM) for CM, and contributing actors raised the lack of dedicated funding for IM in their ongoing programming.

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## KEY FINDINGS ON THE LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVE 5:

**'Strengthened role of local humanitarian CP actors in Francophone conflict-affected countries in WCA in coordinated service delivery, through increased leadership and influence and access to humanitarian funding.'**

Significant progress was made towards building the capacity of local actors to contribute to CP coordination in humanitarian crises. Two best practices under this objective include the joint selection of the most relevant local actors with UNICEF, based on the guide relating to the framework of competences for the coordination of CP in humanitarian action, and the participatory approach taken to designing the partners' capacity-building plans. The localisation initiative has been widely praised by local partners, with already

some evidence of increased knowledge, skills and resources necessary to lead or contribute to CP coordination in humanitarian crises, and some examples of improved practices. However, issues of resources and capacities at the level of SCI's country offices are threatening the pace of implementation of the capacity-building plans, with concerns over the availability of local staff to implement activities as planned and fully meet the needs of the partners, in a timely manner.

At this stage of the implementation, limited progress was made towards increasing opportunities for local actors to participate meaningfully in the humanitarian planning process, to access funding, and to reflect their experiences as frontline workers. Some initial steps were taken in Burkina Faso and Niger to initiate the governance reform and develop transition plans to co-leadership, although these are yet to be replicated in the other countries.

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## KEY FINDINGS ON THE LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVE 6:

**'Strengthened capacity of regional actors in Sub-Saharan Africa to deploy transformative policies and actions that promote sustainable solutions through evidence and learning.'**

This evaluation found that significant advocacy efforts have been made to document, share and encourage utilisation of programme learning, and to contribute to knowledge production and awareness of the issue, through products such as visibility materials for the 4th International Safe Schools Conference in Nigeria, and the conflict Sensitive Girl Strand Campaign. In addition, the programme actively contributed to strengthening policies and practices for CAAC. Through strategic networking

with various stakeholders and involvement in high-level initiatives such as the drafting of the AU CP policies, the programme has progressively gained prominence as a focal point for CAAC issues in the region. Building on this momentum and continuing to leverage this influential position and maximise strategic messaging through the programme will be key to further push for transformative policies and actions that promote sustainable solutions.

## KEY FINDINGS ON THE LOCALISATION AGENDA

Localisation is successfully mainstreamed across activities, with a strong focus on partnerships that empower local actors to take up a leadership role on CAAC issues. However, whilst the concept of localisation is largely understood and promoted at the programme level, knowledge of localisation at the local level is more limited. A good practice under the programme has therefore been to clarify

and contextualise the meaning of localisation with partners, in order to ensure that SCI's conceptualisation of localisation is not divorced from contextual needs, and doesn't create false expectations at the local level. As a result, the localisation initiative has been largely welcomed and appreciated by the various partners who highlighted that this constituted a relevant, valuable and innovative approach.

## KEY FINDINGS ON THE LEVEL OF IMPACT ON FINAL BENEFICIARIES AND "DO NO HARM"

The focus on localisation appears to be a successful strategy to minimise negative unintended consequences of the programme. However, whilst respondents are confident that the programme will lead to direct impacts on the children, it is too early to observe changes. At this stage in the programme implementation, systems, mechanisms

and resources have been put in place, but it will take time before these are fully implemented, scaled-up and monitored to the extent that they can have significant direct impact on the level of protection of CAAC. Therefore, ensuring ownership and accountability for these new systems will be key to securing the expected changes for the final beneficiaries.

## KEY FINDINGS ON THE ALIGNMENT WITH CONTEXTUAL NEEDS AND WITH STAKEHOLDERS STRATEGIES

Overall, the programme was found to be highly relevant to the regional context and aligned with contextual needs. All the partners engaged by the programme have highlighted the timeliness of the programme and the importance of the work on the issue of CAAC. The programme therefore fully fits within the overall CAAC protection space and complements ongoing partner efforts. The programme was able to adapt to contextual challenges effectively, mostly through mechanisms at the country level and a reliance on partners to understand the contextual situation and recognise emerging changes.

A key strength of this programme is its potential to yield systemic changes through collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders. Meaningful partnerships

have been established with institutional actors, CSOs and local NGOs with an emphasis on building relationships and understanding partners' needs and priorities and to offer relevant support that aligns with their ongoing work and strategies. However, several partners highlighted unaddressed technical support and resource needs. Ensuring that these are heard and addressed will be key to ensuring the best outcomes in the next phase of programming.

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## KEY FINDINGS ON THE INTERNAL PROCESS-DRIVEN ELEMENTS (LOGICAL FRAMEWORK, CAPACITIES AND RESOURCES.)

The programme's theory of change is plausible for achieving the expected outcomes and leaves enough flexibility to adapt to changing needs and priorities and to seize opportunities that arise along the way. However, several internal challenges are hindering the efficiency of the implementation. Most importantly, coordination and collaboration between teams, both between the national and regional level SCI offices, and across objective management teams, is minimal, with limited internal sharing of learnings. The channels of communication between country offices and objective managers, including bi-weekly coordination meetings and ad-hoc calls, appear to fall short of the needs of the country offices.

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A lack of cohesion is also reflected by discrepancies between regional expectations and national capacities. The structure of the CAAC programme as a continental programme, with some implementation at the national level by SCI country offices, appears to be a plausible strategy to foster localisation. There is evidence of this having a positive bearing on national-level structures and processes (as highlighted in the findings by objectives), however, it appears to create some confusion regarding roles and responsibilities. Insufficient staffing in country offices and lack of clarity on project's objectives and activities are hampering progress, in particular towards achieving Objectives 4 and 5. In addition, issues of staff recruitment and staff retention at the regional level have directly impacted the implementation of activities.

## KEY FINDINGS ON SUSTAINABILITY

The design of the programme, with complementary objectives, multi-level interventions, and collaboration with a range of local, national, and international stakeholders reflects intentional mainstreaming of sustainability. By focusing on strengthening national and regional level actors, structures and processes, so that they can continue running with minimal technical support beyond the end of the programme, and on documenting and

sharing programme learnings, the programme affirms its commitment to promoting sustainable solutions. However, whilst adequate processes and partnerships have been identified and initiated to ensure sustainable impacts, addressing shortcomings, such as gaps in capacity and resources at the national level (SCI country offices), and reflecting on a closure strategy will be key to ensuring the success of the efforts put in place.

## KEY FINDINGS ON MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS

Whilst the design of the M&E framework at the programme level provides a good structure to track progress, with a range of tools aligning the programme logic to the implementation process, it requires some changes to better measure outcomes and more complex impacts, such as attitudinal and behavioural changes. Some challenges have already been raised, but, given that most of the programme implementation started in 2021, it should be stressed that it is still too early to assess the most complex impacts. In particular, there is a lack of tools to measure systemic impacts, as outcomes are mostly output-oriented. Continuous engagement with partners following the implementation of activities and involving them in monitoring will be essential. In addition, gaps in M&E at the activity level hinder overall understanding of progress to date, with a lack of clarity and precision on activities completed, dates, upcoming milestones, etc. For example, there are challenges in observing the results of the programme for activities with national stakeholders and measuring accountability, as there

is a gap in the measurement of long-term progress beyond immediate post-training tests.

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# SELECT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NEXT PHASE OF PROGRAMMING:

**RECOMMENDATION #1:** SCI to build on regional momentum to ensure CP policies are implemented (related to Outcome 1.1 and 6.2).

**RECOMMENDATION #2:** Relationships with local partners to be further strengthened to support programme cohesion and progress against localisation plans (general recommendation).

**RECOMMENDATION #3:** Opportunities for the development and improvement of CP training for Peace Support Operations personnel within the UPDF must be seized (related to Outcome 1.2).

**RECOMMENDATION #4:** Enhanced use of children's voices to be used in advocacy (related to Outcome 2.1).

**RECOMMENDATION #5:** Ongoing capacity needs of CSOs to be assessed, with CSOs' staff to be trained in as gender-balanced a fashion as possible (general recommendation).

**RECOMMENDATION #6:** SCI's regional expertise should continue to be used to support the work of country offices, and the reported mismatch between regional expectations and country-level capacities elucidated and addressed (general recommendation).

**RECOMMENDATION #7:** Increase the emphasis on Humanitarian Negotiations training as a core activity (related to Outcome 3.2 and 3.3).

**RECOMMENDATION #8:** Monitor the impact of the first cycle of the PDP and adapt future cycles to the PDP model developed at the global level by SC (related to Outcome 4.1).

**RECOMMENDATION #9:** Build on progress being made on case management (related to Outcome 4.3).

**RECOMMENDATION #10:** More formal M&E and communication systems to be established (general recommendation).



**Save the Children**

Save the Children believes every child deserves a future. In Africa and around the world, we give children a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn and protection from harm. We do whatever it takes for children – everyday and in times of crisis – transforming their lives and the future we share.

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