Safe Online Network Forum 2023 Africa

A space for learning, networking and problem-solving

Thursday 11 May 2023,
Nairobi (Kenya)

Safe
Online

Contents

Introduction

Safe Online invests in evidence, solutions, technologies, programmes, and capacities across sectors to tackle online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (online CSEA) within the broader context of violence against children and online safety. It plays a critical role in developing a global evidence base along with advocacy, influencing policy, and facilitating collective action across intersecting areas of digital harm such as cyberbullying, harassment, mental health, and the internet's role in facilitating abuse.

As of 31 December 2023, Safe Online's investments reached US$ 80 million in investments, extending its footprint to over 85 countries worldwide. Funded projects cut across three priority areas:

- **Networks and Systems:** programmes supporting governments and key stakeholders to build strong systems at country and regional levels.

- **Research and Data:** initiatives such as Disrupting Harm that generate large-scale, action-oriented research and data insights.

- **Technology Tools:** designing new and scaling-up existing tech-based solutions.

Full descriptions of the investments, along with an interactive map showcasing their scope is available here. For more information about Safe Online's work, please visit the website.

The Safe Online Regional Network Forum convened **18 grantees** and partners directly working in **eight African countries**: Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Participants included representatives from **nine NGOs**, **six UNICEF Country Offices** as well **as three global and regional organizations** (INTERPOL, UNICEF Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa, and UNICEF Global Office of Research Innocenti). The detailed list of participating organizations is provided in the table below:

Name of the Organization	Focus Area	Country
1. ECPAT International	Evidence generation	Global
2. INTERPOL	Evidence generation	Global
3. UNICEF Global Office of Research and Foresight - Innocenti	Evidence generation	Global
4. ChildFund International Kenya	System strengthening	Kenya
5. Childline Kenya	System strengthening	Kenya
6. Childline Zimbabwe	System strengthening	Zimbabwe
7. Life Skills Promoters Kenya	System strengthening	Kenya
8. UNICEF Ethiopia	System strengthening	Ethiopia
9. UNICEF Ghana	System strengthening	Ghana
10. UNICEF Kenya	System strengthening	Kenya
11. UNICEF Madagascar	System strengthening	Madagascar
12. UNICEF Namibia	System strengthening	Namibia

13. UNICEF South Africa	System strengthening	South Africa
14. ZanaAfrica Programs	System strengthening	Kenya
15. Kenya Alliance for Advancement for Children - Royal Roads implementing partner	Tech Coalition Research Fund	Kenya
16. Save the Children Kenya - Save the Children Hong Kong implementing partner	Tech Coalition Research Fund	Kenya
17. DeafKidz International	Tech Tools	South Africa, Zambia
18. UNICEF Regional Office for Eastern & Southern Africa	Partner	Regional

Purpose and objectives

The Network Forum's aim was for grantees in the Africa region to connect and learn from each other and co-create a body of collaborative knowledge and solutions to tackle online CSEA within the broader context of violence against children. The main objectives were as follows:

- Share knowledge, new trends, best practices, and approaches to end online CSEA.
- Identify pressing and challenging issues along with strategic needs and opportunities.
- Network to build working relationships between grantees and foster future collaboration.

The program design was informed by feedback and lessons learned from previous Safe Online grantees' convenings held in Ethiopia (December 2019) and Belgium (May 2022). Participants explored countries' progress, grantees' initiatives, areas for improvement, lessons learned, pressing needs, and opportunities for collaborations. The detailed program is provided in **Annex A.**

The Network Forum was conducted in conjunction with ECPAT's Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Workshop: A step toward collective action to end Sexual Exploitation of Children in East and Southern Africa on 9 – 10 May 2023, in Nairobi, Kenya, to maximize results and cost-effectiveness. The workshop brought together ECPAT's members from the region, experts, government officials, academics, and the ECPAT Board of Trustees. Its primary focus was sharing lessons learned and collectively identifying evidence-informed advocacy opportunities following Disrupting Harm national and regional activities, to better protect children against sexual abuse in the region.

Countries' progress and grantees' initiatives

The objective of this session was to share countries' progress, facilitate networking and possible collaborations. To achieve this, Safe Online facilitated an interactive game designed to highlight the work of the grantees and start scoping out possible collaborations, including opportunities to create communities of practice around selected priorities or areas of interest. The intended outputs were for participants to have an increased understanding of Safe Online investments in the Africa region and an idea of opportunities for cross-country learning and potential collaborations. Some highlights shared during the session:

- **Multisectoral approach to build capacity** of prosecutors, lawyers, social workers, police, and other officials in protecting children within the court system. For example, UNICEF Namibia developed a comprehensive manual with technical support from justice professionals and social workers aiming to enhance skills and prepare children for Court proceedings. *An exchange of training materials and tools between Ghana and Namibia was proposed.*

- **One-stop centers** dedicated to addressing child online protection via bringing together social workers and law enforcement officials to collect evidence and support children in accessing justice in cases of violence or abuse. For example, in Madagascar the active six centers across regions served 1,600 children in 2022, mostly girls. Potential challenges were noted:

  - Stigmatization of children accessing one-stop centers.
  - Limited availability and challenges in accessing one-stop centers.
  - Inadequate adherence to minimum service standards.
  - The presence of law enforcement officials as a deterrent for children.

  Participants shared experiences and strategies to overcome some of these challenges. For example, in Zimbabwe and Namibia police officers working at these centers dress in civilian clothing to create a more comfortable child-friendly environment for children seeking assistance. Some centers in Zimbabwe have incorporated playgrounds, where children can engage in recreational activities. In Namibia, centers are typically located in close proximity to hospitals, facilitating a comprehensive response to cases of gender-based violence. *These adaptations demonstrate the importance of context-specific solutions in enhancing the effectiveness and accessibility of one-stop centers.*

- **Digital learning packages for vulnerable children** to equip deaf children with the knowledge and skills to protect themselves, particularly in the context of online abuse. They offer a valuable alternative to in-person teaching methods, addressing the unique needs of children with disabilities through innovative technology. DeafKidz International has developed seven digital packages with virtual animations and interactive games to make learning engaging and accessible. The packages focus on teaching children about trusting adults, emphasizing the importance of understanding boundaries and recognizing trustworthy individuals. They also explore the concept of saying "stop," helping children assert their boundaries, and address topics such as safeguarding against online bullying, identifying imposters online, and understanding the potential risks associated with online activities. *Several participants in the workshop expressed interest in knowing more about digital packages for deaf children and discussed potential adaptations to extend the benefits of these tools to vulnerable children in their respective countries, further highlighting the global relevance and impact of this investment.*

Common challenges and areas for improvement

The objective for this session was to work towards a more coherent and harmonized approach to pressing needs, with a specific focus on capacity building of key sectors. Participants focused on key challenges, needs, best practices and opportunities for cross-country learning specific to capacity building of key professionals across relevant sectors. Key challenges identified:

National infrastructure, including the capacity of law enforcement

- Low capacity of law enforcement and social services when it comes to tackling online CSEA.
- Low levels of disclosure by children, both to law enforcement and social services, which hinders the ability to pursue investigations, gather data and support children.
- Limited public finance for children's protection programs in Governmnents' budgets across the board, which poses significant challenges for sustainability of existing programs funded by the international development community.
- Lack of trust in the system by children: Restoring trust requires transparency and accountability within the child protection system, as well as credible and effective support programs.

Early interventions and victim support to assist in recovery

- Lack of trust in front-line workers, sometimes linked to poor quality of services, lack of multi-sector approaches, and inadequate accountability when reports are received.
- Investments are needed around parenting to enable early interventions and throughout recovery processes, including awareness of children's rights, especially in vulnerable settings.
- Tech products lack general age-appropriate tools and safety measures, putting children at risk. Mismatch between education programs fostering digitalization among children, without adequate digital skills on risks and harms.
- Low prioritization of and public/private investments on prevention efforts, and failure to integrate awareness raising efforts targeting online CSEA into other relevant initiatives.

Families and caregivers engagement in preventing and responding to online CSEA

- Limited meaningful participation of children in preventing online violence.
- Perception of online CSEA as a different and lesser crime, compared to others, due to lack of awareness, socio-cultural barriers, and inter-generational digital gap, among many others.
- Poverty and vulnerability as factors that de-prioritize this issue over other needs and problems, and put children at higher risks of online CSEA.
- Insufficient support from authorities in responding to online CSEA cases, discouraging reporting and undermining prevention response efforts.

Lessons learnt, accomplishments and best practices

The objective of this session was to strengthen the knowledge of other grantees' initiatives and best practices, as well as promote collective achievement to facilitate knowledge sharing across the portfolio. Building on the previous session, participants shared lessons learned, accomplishments and best practices across key areas of implementation, including examples of how they addressed some of the key challenges discussed earlier. Key highlights from the session are listed below.

Ghana conducted the *Global Kids Online study*, which highlighted the growing concern of child online safety in the country. Following the publication of the report, consultations were held with government counterparts to address critical aspects identified through program interventions. As a result, child online safety has been progressively integrated into Ghana's child protection systems. Key developments include but are not limited to:

- Establishment of a **Cyber Security Unit** and **a digital forensic laboratory** within the criminal justice system for child protection.
- Creation of accessible **points of contact** for reporting online incidents.
- Implementation of multiple **reporting channels**, such as internet apps, websites, and SMS, to facilitate the reporting of online incidents to the Cyber Security Authority.

The collaboration with the International Watch Foundation complements existing points of contact provided by the Cyber Security Authority and strengthens efforts to ensure comprehensive child online safety in the country.

DeafKidz Defenders is an interactive learning tools for children with disabilities to prevent online risks and sexual exploitation. It incorporates computer games, animations and role-play to specifically address challenge deaf children face due to limited literacy skills and lack of understanding of safety concepts. A teacher's guide accompanies the games to facilitate effective implementation. Assessments were conducted before and after the training sessions to evaluate the program's effectiveness. Results showed that:

- **50% of the children** doubled their scores after the trainings, indicating notable improvement.
- Children demonstrated increased ability to recognize and refuse abuse, becoming **seven times** more likely to take protective action.

Kenya National Prevention and Response Plan (NPRP) to violence against children has been costed based on data, latest models and in consultation with key actors and it was included in the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection's budget request. Efforts are ongoing to ensure that the costing model is fully utilized by Ministries, Departments, and Agencies during the annual budget process. A mapping of the social service workforce for child protection will be carried out and will inform the development of an investment case for strengthening workforce. Plans are underway to establish a course on Public Finance for Child Protection at the Kenya School of Government to further build capacity in this area.

Capacity building, pressing needs and collaboration

The objective of this session was to work towards a more coherent and harmonized approach to pressing needs and specifically to the capacity building of key sectors. Building on the previous discussion, participants focused on best practices and opportunities for cross-country learning specific to capacity building of key professionals across relevant sectors. Some key highlights from the session:

Strengthen national infrastructure, including law enforcement, criminal justice, and social care capacity to tackle online offending

1. Priorities

- Implement comprehensive programs for parenting, community engagement, and peer support to.
- Teachers' training programs, particularly in rural areas.
- Collaborate with private sector, ICT companies, to leverage their resources and expertise.
- Integrate child protection and online safety into government development plans.
- Continuously evaluate and adapt strategies to address emerging challenges.
- Share best practices and successful programs to support global efforts.

2. Collaborative actions

- Foster coordination and information-sharing among grantees, providing a shared repository of events, tools, programs, and models.
- Reactivate international webinars to facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration.
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation efforts to track progress and measure impact.
- Create a dissemination plan to share Disrupting Harm findings, including integration into programing and generation of government interest and support.
- Incorporate Disrupting Harm questions into national surveys to gather data on online child safety.
- Establish new partnerships beyond the child protection sector to enhance collective efforts.

Improve early interventions to prevent victimization of children and support to assist in recovery

1. Priorities

- Promote children's understanding of their rights and educate them on how these rights can be violated, including in the online sphere.
- Empower children with critical thinking skills, assertiveness, and digital literacy to better navigate and protect themselves online.
- Recognize online violence as a form of violence to ensure it receives adequate attention.
- Address underlying economic challenges, such as poverty, that may contribute to children engaging in risky online behaviors, such as sharing explicit images of themselves.

2. Collaborative actions

- Diversify intervention, preventive education for children, campaigns for communities.
- Foster meaningful child participation to develop innovative solutions and prevention plans,
- Adopt a holistic approach that engages parents, teachers, community, and children.
- Collaborate with tech partners to embed child safety within social media platforms and incorporate emergency contact numbers via mobile operators.

- Prioritize funding for social behavior change initiatives to promote a shift towards proactive online safety measures.
- Increase awareness of online safety among educators, emphasizing the impact of life skills.
- Provide training to teachers on integrating online safety concepts into broader curriculum.
- Ensure proper costing and funding of prevention programs to support their implementation.

Engage families and caregivers in preventing the sexual abuse of children, and responding to harmful or otherwise unwanted experiences online and offline

1. Priorities

- Provide digital literacy and online child protection training for parents.
- Teach parents how to identify online violations against children.
- Promote child-friendly communication and connection between parents and children.
- Establish referral pathways and reporting mechanisms for parents.

2. Collaborative actions

- Provide parenting skills training, including educating parents on monitoring children's contacts and interactions with potential perpetrators.
- Sensitize caregivers on the safe and responsible use of social media and the internet.
- Train parents on fostering open communication with their children regarding online safety.
- Utilize engaging and child-friendly approaches to raise awareness among children.

The following **actors** were identified as key to maximise the impact and effectiveness of child online safety programs, in no particular order:

- Education institutions
- Community structures
- Religious institutions
- Justice sector agencies
- Social services
- Media and journalists
- Multi-sectoral bodies (task forces, committees)
- Children (festivals, parliaments, scouts, guides)
- Parliamentary committees on children protection
- Regulators and internet service providers

Communicating results for change

The objective of this session was to discuss best ways to communicate results, including but was not limited to identifying and communicating stories and solutions from the field to raise awareness and support resource mobilization and advocacy efforts. Selected grantees showcased best practice examples from advocacy and campaigns, to create a compelling and evidence-based narrative to raise the profile of child online safety and influence target audiences to act. The intended output was for participants to have increased knowledge of how to identify and communicate key facts, stories, projects results and solutions to support advocacy and promote change across levels.

Screens Online Project implemented by Childline Zimbabwe to promote positive online behaviours, increase knowledge, and encourage reporting. Under this project, they:

- Developed educational games with safe online rules to teach children about online safety.
- Organized symposiums, quizzes, and assisted schools in developing school safeguarding policies.
- Used school billboards and ''selfie-sheets'' for ongoing awareness on online safety.
- Involved youth parliamentarians to take leadership positions in schools or media outlets to enforce online safety rules and policies.

Web Safe Campaign implemented by ChildFund International Kenya

- Formed a youth advisory council with young people from Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia. The council is involved in advocacy and participation in children's parliaments.
- Trained journalists on reporting on online CSEA Establishing good relationships with journalists and budgeting for media engagements are essential.
- Tailored content to specific audiences to secure higher engagement. Communicating messages without creating fear and tailoring them based on age; gender transformative approaches to address the gender imbalance in reporting online CSEA cases.

Success factors from Disrupting Harm in Malaysia and Thailand

- Clearly defining the advocacy goals related to online safety and child protection is crucial. This helps to focus efforts and drive targeted actions.
- Identifying the key stakeholders involved in addressing the issue is important. In Thailand, for example, legislative subcommittees were recognized as key stakeholders. Understanding their current views on the issue helps align advocacy strategies and meaningful collaboration.
- Evaluating the level of influence and interests of stakeholders is essential. In Malaysia, influential stakeholders with genuine interest in addressing child exploitation abuse were identified and engaged in the advocacy process.
- Identifying Advocacy Partners and collaborating with organizations or individuals who can contribute expertise, knowledge, and influence is valuable. In Malaysia, advanced advocacy efforts were supported by strong political will and engagement from multi-stakeholders.
- Crafting compelling and context-specific advocacy messages that resonate with stakeholders is crucial to effectively communicate the importance of online safety and child protection.
- Having the right individuals or groups to communicate the advocacy messages is essential. In the case of Malaysia, youth advocates spoke about the power of youth voices, and a pre-campaign press briefing successfully garnered media attention and reached a wide range of stakeholders.

- Policies need to be readily available and accessible as they facilitate implementation.
- Importance of measuring the effectiveness of communication efforts. It is essential to monitor whether the messages are reaching the target audience, if they are understood, and to assess the desired change or impact. Rushing to roll out messages should be avoided. Instead, a systematic approach should be adopted to measure their effectiveness and ensure meaningful impact.

Students clubs and life skills programmes for out-of-school children in Madagascar provide an opportunity for students to exchange information and discuss online safety. They reached approximately 15,000 children within six months, with support from the Ministries of Youth and Education. However, concerns have been raised regarding vulnerable groups without internet access or with low levels of literacy who lack knowledge about online safety and are at increased risk of online exploitation.

Youth Reporter Project in Madagascar partners with youth-led organizations to facilitate meaningful youth participation in the development and delivery of policies and programs at national and subnational level to secure commitments from the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Finance. The programme advocates for digital equity by guiding youth with internet access on how to share online safety messages and raise awareness to protect more vulnerable groups.
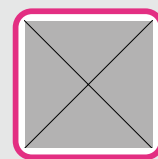
Annex A – Safe Online Regional Network Forum Program

Time	Session
08:30-09:00	Registration and tea/coffee
09:00-09:15	**Welcome, introductions and plan for the day**
09:15-10:15	**Countries' progress and grantees' initiatives** **Objective**: Share countries' progress and create a sense of community to connect the dots, facilitate networking and possible collaborations. **Methodology**: A facilitated game to learn more about the work of the grantees and start scoping out possible collaborations, including opportunities to create communities of practice for selected priorities or areas of interest. **Intended output**: Participants have increased understanding of Safe Online investments in the Africa region and an idea of opportunities for cross-country learning and potential future collaborations.
10:11-11:30	**Common challenges and areas for improvement** **Objective:** Build grantees' capacity to identify and address barriers and unresolved issues, as well as learn from each other's experiences. **Methodology**: Participants will workshop around common challenges, risks, and key gaps to identify areas for improvement and brainstorm about possible approaches and solutions. **Intended output**: Participants have better clarity on the areas that need attention and explore together ways to address them.
11:30-11:45	Tea/coffee break
11:45-13:00	**Lessons learned, accomplishments and best practices** **Objective:** Strengthen the knowledge of other grantees' initiatives and best practices, as well as promote collective achievement to facilitate knowledge sharing across the portfolio of grantees. **Methodology**: Building on the previous session participants will share lessons learned, accomplishments and best practices across key areas of implementation, including examples of how they addressed some of the key challenges discussed in the previous session. **Intended output**: Participants have increased knowledge of approaches and best practices used in the region across key areas of implementation.
13:00-14:00	Lunch

14:00-15:15	**Capacity building, pressing needs and collaborations** **Objective**: Work towards a more coherent and harmonized approach to pressing needs and specifically to the capacity building of key sectors. **Methodology**: Building on the previous discussion, participants will focus on key challenges, needs, best practices and opportunities for cross-country learning specific to capacity building of key professionals across relevant sectors as well as pressing needs identified in the previous sessions. **Intended output**: Participants have increased understanding of key needs, lessons learned and best approaches specific to capacity building and other priority areas emerged from previous discussions.
15:15-15:30	Tea/coffee break
15:30-16:45	**Communicating results for change** **Objective**: Discuss the best ways to communicate results from initiatives. This will include but not be limited to identifying and communicating stories and solutions from the field to inform key audiences, raise awareness and support resource mobilization and advocacy efforts. **Methodology**: Selected grantees will showcase best practice examples from advocacy and campaigns to create a compelling and evidence-based narrative to raise the profile of child online safety and influence target audiences to take action. **Intended output**: Participants have increased knowledge of how to identify and communicate key facts, stories, projects results and solutions to support advocacy and promote change across levels.
16:45-17:00	Summary and wrap-up

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