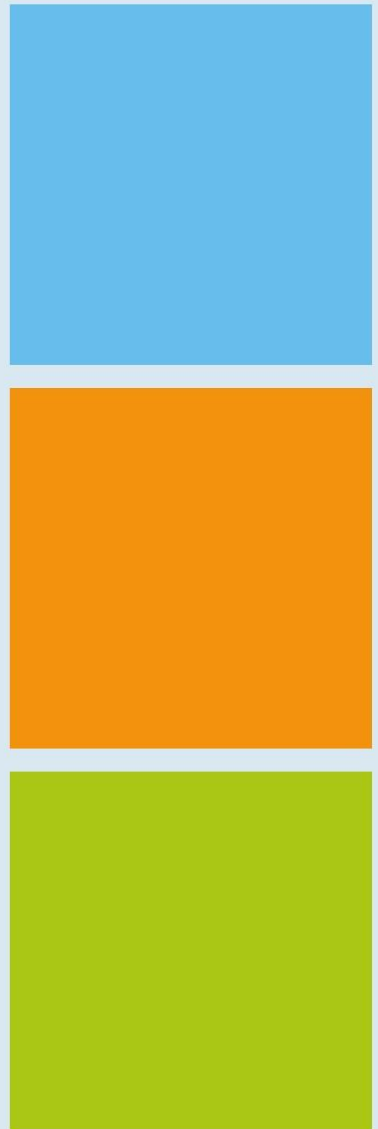


Evaluation of the implementation of the LNOB principle in the 2022-2026 programme of SOS Children's Villages Belgium

JANUARY 2026

Jan Van Ongevalle &
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INSTITUT DE RECHERCHE SUR
LE TRAVAIL ET LA SOCIÉTÉ

ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LNOB PRINCIPLE IN THE 2022-2026 PROGRAMME OF SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES BELGIUM

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Research director: Jan Van Ongevalle

Study conducted at the request of SOS Children's Villages Belgium

January 2026

Summary

This report presents the results of the evaluation of the implementation of the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle within the framework of SOS Children's Villages Belgium's Children4Change programme for the period 2022-2026. The LNOB principle, which is a fundamental commitment of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, emphasises the fight against patterns of exclusion and inequality through inclusive and rights-based approaches. The evaluation focuses on two case studies, in Burundi and Senegal, which represent contexts of multidimensional vulnerability. Using a mixed approach combining desk analysis, participatory workshops, interviews and field observations, the study examines how the programme's design and implementation respond to the needs of the most marginalised groups. The results indicate that the principle of 'Leaving No One Behind' is integrated throughout the programme cycle, particularly in targeting mechanisms, participatory planning and monitoring systems. In Burundi, the programme prioritises children and their families at risk of separation and promotes community-led inclusion strategies. In Senegal, interventions target talibé children in daaras, addressing systemic exploitation through multi-stakeholder collaboration and advocacy. Despite these achievements, structural constraints – limited resources and socio-economic pressures – limit the programme's ability to reach all vulnerable groups. Strategies such as community empowerment, peer education and partnerships partially mitigate these gaps. The report concludes with recommendations to strengthen indirect awareness-raising, improve qualitative monitoring of exclusion dynamics and deepen participatory mechanisms to ensure sustainable systemic change in line with LNOB principles.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
List of abbreviations	5
1 Introduction	6
2 Methodology	7
3 Children4Change	10
4 LNOB in Burundi	11
4.1 Context of vulnerability in Burundi	11
4.2 Identifying those at risk of being left behind	12
4.3 Programme design and implementation	13
4.3.1 Theory of change	14
4.3.2 Consideration of the most vulnerable groups left out of the programme	15
4.3.3 Participation of vulnerable groups in programme implementation?	17
4.4 Monitoring and evaluation mechanism	18
4.5 External factors influencing the operationalisation of the LNOB approach	19
5 LNOB in Senegal	21
5.1 Context of vulnerability in Senegal	21
5.2 The process of identifying participants in the project targeting talibé children	22
5.3 Programme design and implementation	24
5.3.1 Theory of change	24
5.3.2 Tensions to be managed in the programme	25
5.3.3 Taking into account the most vulnerable groups left out of the programme	26
5.3.4 Participation of vulnerable groups in programme implementation	28
5.4 Monitoring and evaluation mechanism	29
5.5 External factors influencing the operationalisation of the LNOB approach	30
6 Conclusions and recommendations	32
Bibliography	35

List of abbreviations

AEOE	Educational Action in an Open Environment
AGR	Revenue-Generating Activity
BCS	Basic Community School
C4C	Children4Change
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CSLA	Community Savings and Loan Association
DCCP	Departmental Committee for Child Protection
ICRC	International Convention on the Rights of the Child
IRF	Islamic Relief France
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
NCPC	Neighbourhood Child Protection Committee
FSP	Family Strengthening Programme
SC	Steering Committee
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SOS CVB	SOS Children's Villages Belgium
SOS CVI	SOS Children's Villages International
UNSDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Group
VAEN	Violence, Abuse, Exploitation and Neglect
VCPC	Village Child Protection Committee
VSC	Village Savings and Loan Association

1 | Introduction

This assessment was commissioned by SOS Children's Villages Belgium (hereinafter SOS CVB) to evaluate the implementation of the "Leave No One Behind" (LNOB) principle in its "Children4Change" programme, which runs from 2022 to 2026.

The LNOB principle is a political commitment that is at the heart of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Combined with the commitment to "reach the most disadvantaged first", the LNOB principle represents the ambition of UN Member States to eradicate poverty, eliminate discrimination and combat inequalities within and between countries. This commitment is aligned with the UN's normative standards and fundamental principles based on international human rights law and national legal frameworks (UNSDG, 2022).

The LNOB principle emphasizes the importance of identifying and addressing patterns of exclusion and their root causes: who is excluded or discriminated against, how and why (ibid.). Thus, LNOB requires a multidimensional approach to exclusion and discrimination, recognizing that they are influenced by various intersecting inequalities that can affect individuals (vertical inequality) and groups (horizontal inequality) (Klasen & Fleurbaey, 2019).

The overall objective of this evaluation is to assess the **implementation of the LNOB** principle in Children4Change. To this end, it proposes the following guiding question:

How and to what extent do the program's objectives and design respond to the needs and priorities of its participants?

Based on this question, the secondary objectives of this evaluation are: A) to draw lessons and identify good practices on how SOS CVB can strengthen the implementation of the LNOB principle in the programme cycles; B) to identify current challenges to its implementation and possible solutions; C) to identify whether other SDG principles are integrated into LNOB implementation; and D) to assess whether the LNOB principle has enabled SOS CVB to operate effectively in contexts where civic space is changing.

To achieve these objectives, the evaluation focuses on two case studies where Children4Change has been implemented: Burundi (Gitega, Cibitoke and Muyinga provinces) and Senegal (Fatick and Kaffrine administrative regions). The selection of these case studies was coordinated with SOS CVB and represents contexts in which participants face highly vulnerable situations.

2 | Methodology

The evaluation methodology combines document analysis, participatory workshops, semi-structured interviews and field observations. It draws on proven analytical tools designed to assess the implementation of the LNOB principle and its intersection with other SDG principles, as well as the dynamics of civic space in the programme contexts. The approach is both exploratory and capacity-building, assessing current practices while helping programme teams strengthen the integration of the LNOB principle throughout the programme cycle.

Analytical framework

The assessment was carried out using two tools. First, the SDG Proofing tool, which was previously developed and field-tested as part of the policy support research project "*The SDGs as a compass for Belgian development cooperation*" (Briones et al., 2021). The SDG Proofing tool is designed as a practical and reflective guide to help organisations strengthen the integration of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their strategies, programmes and working methods. This tool provides an overview of the elements that different actors can consider when striving to integrate SDG principles more systematically. In doing so, it highlights the fundamental dimensions of the 2030 Agenda – *leaving no one behind (LNOB)*, *indivisibility and interconnectedness*, and *multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs)* – and invites users to think critically about how their initiatives can promote inclusive, systemic and collaborative progress (see Annex 1).

The SDG Proofing tool also helps organisations distinguish between different approaches to the LNOB principle, in particular the balance between *mainstreaming inclusion* and *targeting vulnerable or marginalised groups*. It clarifies that contributing to LNOB does not always require organisations to focus exclusively on the most disadvantaged groups. Instead, they can choose between two complementary approaches, or combine them. *LNOB targeting* explicitly focuses on groups facing acute forms of exclusion, tailoring interventions to their specific needs. *LNOB integration*, on the other hand, incorporates consideration of exclusion, marginalisation and inequalities throughout the programme cycle, even when the programme does not directly target vulnerable groups (Briones et al., 2021).

The SDG Proofing Tool has been supplemented by an analytical framework developed as part of the REFRACT Policy Support Research Project. This framework makes it possible to analyse how LNOB is implemented in contexts characterized by shrinking or changing civic space in order to: A) understand an organization's context, the local and national dynamics of civic space and its potential effects on target populations; and B) analyze the different strategies used by various actors, including development organizations such as SOS CVB, to operate effectively in contexts of changing civic space (Villanueva Ubillús & Van Ongevalle, 2024).

Based on these two tools, the evaluation follows the conceptual framework proposed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Conceptual framework for the evaluation

<p>Preparation/analysis (e.g., context analysis)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Which groups are (at risk of being) left behind in the intervention area, and what are they excluded from? 2. Why are they left behind and by whom are they excluded (taking into account all contributing factors)? 3. Is your analysis based on clear definitions or criteria for poverty, marginalization, exclusion, etc.? 4. Does your analysis include the perspectives of people who are (at risk of being) left behind?
<p>Planning and implementation (e.g., theory of change, risk analysis, results framework, etc.)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you explain how the choice of target groups and the planning of activities are based on the LNOB analysis? 2. Does your theory of change clearly describe how your intervention should contribute to positive (sustainable) change for the target groups? 3. Have you considered whether the design and implementation reinforce existing mechanisms of exclusion or disadvantage vulnerable groups within and/or outside your target groups? 4. Have you designed corrective measures (by yourself, by partners or by others) to address/mitigate exclusionary effects (e.g. in the risk analysis)? 5. Are (highly) disadvantaged groups likely to be affected by the intervention actively and meaningfully involved in planning and implementation?
<p>Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Does the monitoring and evaluation system provide sufficient information on changes at the level of target groups and on the (in)direct contribution of the programme to these changes? 2. Are there explicit mechanisms for the participation of target groups in the MEAL plan? 3. Do you analyze beneficiaries (positive change), losers (negative change) and people likely to be excluded from the intervention within the target groups? 4. Does the MEAL plan provide sufficient scope for learning about important mechanisms and dynamics of exclusion and vulnerability, as well as for monitoring risks?
<p>Civic space and LNOB</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does the current socio-economic situation affect SOS CVBs ability to work? Are there any particular challenges? Opportunities? 2. Although this has presented challenges, has SOS CVB been able to overcome them? How? 3. Has working with vulnerable groups/from an LNOB perspective been an advantage in terms of dialogue or collaboration with public authorities at the local or national level? 4. Conversely, has it created additional challenges? 5. How could the situation in the country negatively affect SOS CVBs work in the near future? 6. What internal strengths or capacities does SOS have to address these challenges? 7. What kind of support does SOS CVB need to address these challenges? How could donors such as the DGD help organizations like SOS CVB in the country?

Data collection

Data collection consists of a combination of fieldwork in Burundi and online sessions with Senegal, supplemented by desk research and consultations with SOS CVB.

In the case of Burundi, a field visit was conducted from 11 to 17 October 2025. The visit included meetings and workshops with SOS Children's Villages teams in Gitega to collectively reflect on the programme's theory of change, identify existing LNOB strategies and identify good practices and initial challenges. In addition to meetings with team members, the field visit included six focus groups with the following stakeholders: parents (three men and nine women), volunteers (three women and eight men), members of CSLAs (two men and ten women) and OBCs (one man and eleven women), local authorities (hill chiefs) (3 men and 3 women), and steering committee members (youth representative, hill chiefs, representative of the Provincial Directorate for Family and Social Development, municipal social counsellor).

In the case of Senegal, data collection was carried out remotely. In this case, HIVA-KU Leuven organised two online working meetings with staff members from the SOS Children's Villages office in the country to discuss and explore the findings of an initial document review. Finally, an online feedback workshop was organised on 19 November 2025 to present the preliminary findings to the Senegalese team, validate the findings and discuss possible strategies to strengthen the implementation of the LNOB in the office's future monitoring and evaluation strategies.

3 | Children4Change

Children4Change is a multi-year programme developed jointly by SOS CVB and SOS Children's Villages organisations in Burundi (SOS BDI), Senegal (SOS SN) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (SOS DRC). The programme is mainly funded by the Belgian Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD). It aligns with the strategic framework of the three countries for the period 2022-2026, which proposes that by 2026, "more children and young people will grow up and flourish in a society that respects, listens to and protects them" (ToC Burundi, ultimate change).

In the countries covered by this evaluation, the programme proposed two desired outcomes:

- A) **In Burundi:** the rights of children and young people to protection, provision and participation are protected and claimed in communities in the intervention areas. In Burundi, the beneficiaries are children and young people, with a particular focus on women and children. Here, the LNOB principle is taken into account to reduce horizontal inequalities based on gender (girls and boys) and areas of residence (rural and urban areas), as well as to combat vertical inequalities (vulnerabilities among girls) (SOS CVB 2021).

- B) **In Senegal:** talibé children in the department of Fatick enjoy their fundamental rights and are protected from violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect (VAEN). In Senegal, the LNOB principle focuses mainly on the situation of discrimination and exploitation of talibé boys (SOS CVB 2022).¹

¹ Talibés are children entrusted by their relatives to Koranic schools (daaras) for their religious education. For many families, Koranic school is an important step in the religious education of young Senegalese Muslims. (See also page 21 in this report)

4 | LNOB in Burundi

4.1 Context of vulnerability in Burundi

Burundi is a landlocked country struggling with a low-income economy (World Bank Group, 2025). Of a population of approximately 12.3 million, 74% live below the poverty line and 84% are affected by multidimensional poverty (World Bank, 2022a). Economic disparities are marked by geographical location, with nearly 78% of the country's poor population residing in rural areas (ibid.). Although a significant proportion of the workforce (85%) is employed in agriculture, Burundi remains highly vulnerable to food insecurity, which affects approximately 18% of the population (GNAFC & FSIN, 2025). It is alarming to note that nearly half a million children under the age of five are expected to suffer or are already suffering from acute malnutrition (European Commission, 2024).

Access to essential services is also a major challenge for citizens. According to the Yale Environmental Performance Index, Burundi ranks 172nd among countries in terms of access to sanitation and drinking water, exposing its population to various health risks related to waterborne diseases (Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy, 2024). As a result, the country is at high risk of epidemics.

While primary school enrolment rates have increased for children aged 6 to 11, completion rates remain a concern: less than 60% complete primary school and less than 35% complete secondary school. In addition, an estimated 96% of 10-year-olds cannot read or understand texts appropriate for their age. Among newborns, only 39% are expected to reach their full productive potential (UNESCO, 2025; UNICEF, 2019).

These major challenges, combined with vulnerability to climate change and conflict, make Burundi highly exposed to humanitarian crises and disasters, ranking it 24th among fragile states (The Fund for Peace, 2024). This situation has direct repercussions on the future of children and young people in the country. The lack of economic resources and limited arable land exacerbate the rural exodus of young people, particularly men, in search of employment opportunities in cities and neighboring countries. As a result, men tend to be underrepresented in community organizations (e.g., savings and credit groups known as CSLA) as they leave their families to seek employment opportunities elsewhere (Visual Exchange, 2024).

Given the multidimensional nature of vulnerability in Burundi, Children4Change has targeted children (0-10 years old, girls and boys), adolescents (10-19 years old) from families at risk of separation between children and their families, and young people (14-24 years old) who are not in school or employed, through its family strengthening programmes (SOS Kinderdorpen, 2021). The focus was on empowering families to become self-sufficient, while empowering communities to support them (ibid.).

4.2 Identification of those at risk of being left behind

Issues related to the operationalization of the LNOB principle:

1. Which groups are (at risk of being) left behind in the intervention area, and what are they excluded from?
2. Why are they being left behind, and by whom are they being excluded (taking into account all contributing factors)?
3. Is your analysis based on clear definitions or criteria for poverty, marginalization, exclusion, etc.?
4. Does your analysis include the perspectives of people who are (at risk of being) left behind?

When SOS CVB BDI launches a new Family Strengthening Programme (FSP), a crucial first step is to rigorously and fairly identify vulnerable families whose children are at risk of losing family care. This process involves several successive stages, aimed at ensuring that the intervention effectively targets the most at-risk households.

Step 1: structured community mobilisation

The process begins with providing detailed information to authorities at all levels—provincial, municipal, zonal, and hill—and other organisations working with children (e.g., Red Cross, War Child, CDF, CONCERN). Together, they establish a schedule of hill meetings to facilitate workshops on the Accelerated Participatory Research Methodology (APRM). The hill chiefs then distribute the invitations, ensuring that all relevant members of the community are informed.

Step 2: Participant identification workshop - APRM workshop

During the APRM workshops, the hill chief presents the hill map. SOS Children's Villages Burundi describes its history and programmes, while the invited organisations (NGOs, community-based organisations, child protection committees) explain their roles. This framework creates the conditions for an open exchange, where everyone can contribute. A central aspect of the process is the definition of vulnerability criteria. The hill assembly proposes its own criteria, which are then compared with those in the official SOS Children's Villages manual. Criteria frequently used include difficulty in providing more than one meal a day, lack of or insufficient land ownership, inability to pay for healthcare or school fees, and lack of income. This collective work makes it possible to accurately document the difficult situations faced by families and establish a shared basis for selection. In APRM workshops, vulnerable families are identified through a participatory exercise in which heads of households who meet the vulnerability criteria are invited to rank themselves according to a collectively established order of vulnerability. This exercise is validated by the assembly, including for absent families, to ensure a shared and contextualised assessment of situations.

Step 3: Individual verification in each household

Following the APRM workshop, a social survey is conducted among the identified families. SOS CVB Burundi social workers use a tool integrated into KoboCollect to confirm the selection, based on the vulnerability of households and their ability to actively participate in their own empowerment, with the support of SOS and programme stakeholders.

Step 4: collective validation and public communication of results

The lists resulting from the social surveys are then reviewed by the Local Steering Committees, forwarded to the Programme Director, and validated by the National Management of SOS CVB BDI. This multi-level validation process reinforces the rigour of the process. The final results are announced at a neighbourhood meeting, open to all families and community members. This public feedback helps to maintain transparency around the selection process.

Assessment of the identification process in relation to the LNOB

Analysis of the process for identifying beneficiary families shows strong consistency with the principles of the LNOB. Targeting is based on explicit vulnerability criteria defined collectively and transparently, combining the institutional benchmarks of SOS CVB BDI and local perceptions of poverty and exclusion. This approach makes it possible to prioritise households facing multiple deprivations and a high risk of family breakdown, thus answering the question of who is at risk of being left behind and on what basis.

Furthermore, the analysis explicitly incorporates the perspectives of those affected by vulnerability. Broader community participation and the opportunity for community members to identify absent or less visible households help to reduce the risks of exclusion linked to dynamics of silence, shame or low representation capacity. This participatory dimension is particularly consistent with LNOB principles, as it makes visible situations that might otherwise remain unknown to more technocratic targeting mechanisms.

Another important advantage of the process, from a LNOB perspective, is the production of comprehensive demographic and social data at the intervention area level. The mapping and prioritisation of families provides structured information on the number of households, the population and various aspects of vulnerability at the colline level. This data provides an objective basis for situating beneficiaries in relation to the entire population concerned, analysing who is included and who remains outside the intervention, and comparing the results achieved with the programme's objectives expressed as a percentage. This ability to document the actual coverage of the programme is an important lever for monitoring the risks of exclusion and adjusting interventions accordingly.

The process also demonstrates explicit vigilance with regard to the risks of unintended exclusion. The creation of prioritisation lists, the possibility of integrating new households as others leave the programme, and the involvement of former beneficiaries in identifying their successors are all mechanisms that mitigate the effects of targeting that is necessarily limited by available resources. These practices help to maintain a certain continuity in the management of vulnerable situations at the community level, even when not all at-risk families can be included simultaneously.

In addition, the transparency of the process and its local roots reinforce its social acceptability and limit tensions related to selection. The fact that criteria and decisions are discussed and validated collectively helps to reduce perceptions of arbitrariness, favoritism or unjustified exclusion, which are often major obstacles to the operationalisation of the LNOB principle in highly vulnerable contexts.

However, the analysis also highlights certain structural limitations. The limited number of places available means that a significant number of vulnerable families remain outside of the programme, despite having been identified. This constraint generates a persistent risk of feelings of exclusion, particularly in communities where needs far exceed intervention capacities. While prioritisation and replacement mechanisms partially mitigate this risk, they do not fully address the extent of the vulnerability observed.

4.3 Programme design and implementation

With a view to operationalising the LNOB principle, the analysis of programme design and implementation pays particular attention to how programme choices aim to meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups and reduce the risks of exclusion. This section examines the extent to which the C4C programme's theory of change explains the ways in which the intervention aims to bring

about positive and sustainable change for its target groups, while taking into account the complexity of the individual, relational, community and societal factors that influence their situations.

4.3.1 Theory of change

Questions related to the operationalisation of the LNOB principle:

- Does your theory of change clearly describe how your intervention should contribute to positive (sustainable) change for the target groups?

In line with the LNOB principle, the C4C programme's theory of change explicitly describes how the intervention is expected to contribute to positive and sustainable change for the target groups. It is based on a holistic approach to the child, covering eight dimensions of well-being to address multidimensional non-monetary poverty, i.e. care, housing, education and skills, protection and social inclusion, food security, physical health, livelihoods, and social and emotional well-being. In addition, the theory of change is based on a socio-ecological approach, which recognises that children's situations are influenced by individual, relational, community and societal factors. The expected changes are therefore sought simultaneously in these different areas:

- **At the individual level**, the intervention aims to strengthen the capacities of children and young people so that they are aware of their rights and can develop in all dimensions of their well-being.
- **At the relational level**, the focus is on strengthening relationships within families and on the participation of children and young people in decisions that affect them.

To contribute to lasting change at the individual and relational levels, an individualised approach to monitoring children, adolescents and families based on the "case management" model is being pursued. To this end, SOS Children's Villages International (SOS CVI) has developed a digital tool, the programme database, to track registration, core assessment, development planning, activities, monitoring and exit evaluation. A significant part of the activities is devoted to capacity building through training and targeted awareness-raising activities for children and adolescents (e.g. on children's rights and responsibilities, gender and the environment), young people (e.g. on life skills, sexual and reproductive health, employability and new information and communication technologies) and families (e.g. parenting, community life, resource mobilisation techniques, financial education and budget management). Finally, the programme also uses direct support (material or financial) to help families meet the essential needs of children (on a sliding scale depending on the autonomy of the families) in terms of education (school fees), health (care, targeted nutritional support) and housing for the most vulnerable (household kits, decent housing). This type of activity is also planned to support the economic empowerment of families (micro-enterprise start-up kits) and communities (material and financial support for social enterprises – collective micro-enterprises).

- **At the community level**, the intervention aims to strengthen local family protection and support systems, working both with existing state structures such as Child Protection Committees and with community structures such as savings and credit associations (CSLAs) and community-based organisations (CBOs), while encouraging families to participate in these initiatives in order to break their isolation. In addition, the programme works with these structures to ensure the sustainability of its interventions through community ownership facilitated by SOS Children's Villages/the programme.
- Finally, **at the societal level**, advocacy is used as a lever to contribute to broader changes in favour of children's rights. The programme aims to influence political and administrative decision-makers to take decisions to change situations that are unfavourable to the promotion

and protection of children, and even family conditions that could lead to separation and jeopardise children's vital parameters.

4.3.2 Taking into account the most vulnerable groups left out of the programme

Issues related to the operationalisation of the LNOB principle:

- Have you considered whether the design and implementation reinforce existing exclusion mechanisms or disadvantage vulnerable groups within and/or outside your target groups?
- Have you designed corrective measures (by yourself, by partners or by others) to address/mitigate any exclusionary effects (e.g. in the risk analysis)?

SOS CVB is fully aware that, given limited resources and the very large number of families and children at risk of marginalisation, a significant proportion of them cannot be included in the programme. This means that a large number of vulnerable households are at risk of continuing to be left behind. This concern was clearly expressed by the various stakeholders met during the field visit. To address this structural challenge, the programme is pursuing several strategies.

The first measure is to mobilise the civic-driven change approach. This approach aims to build on existing capacities and initiatives to develop strong local social support systems that can sustainably protect the rights of all children, including those who cannot be included in the programme. In the C4C programme, this strategy is operationalised through, among other things, capacity building and awareness raising among CBOs and CSLAs.

- Based on the results of focus groups conducted with beneficiaries and stakeholders during the field visit, there are several indications that the CBOs and CSLAs involved in the programme are effectively extending their activities to vulnerable children and families who are not included in the SOS programme. Feedback suggests that, on average, various CBOs participating in the programme provide support to between 10 and 30 vulnerable children who are not participating in the programme, particularly in terms of schooling, nutrition and health assistance cards. This support is made possible by the resources generated by the groups economic activities, such as market gardening, livestock farming, collective savings and small commercial activities such as soap production. The focus groups also highlighted that members now have a better understanding of the benefits of CBOs, which helps to strengthen their sustainability and empowerment. However, it should be noted that this empowerment remains fragile due to the resource and capacity constraints that these community structures continue to face.
- The focus groups also highlighted the complementary role played by **CSLAs**, in which vulnerable families participating in the programme often take part. These CSLAs have succeeded in increasing their savings and credit provisions, which are frequently used by members to finance income-generating activities. Several CSLAs have even started new IGE activities, and in some cases, part of the income is set aside to support the schooling of children who are not part of the programme. In addition, women's involvement in these activities has sometimes led to greater recognition of their role within the household, particularly by their husbands when they have been able to contribute financial resources. Some also grant interest-free loans to cover urgent medical needs. However, these groups face several challenges, including inflation, which forces them to focus on small agricultural products such as avocados, bananas, vegetables and tomatoes. In addition, access to credit remains limited, with applications having to be processed in order of priority.

A second measure involves mobilising peer education as a mechanism for indirectly reaching vulnerable families not selected by the programme. Three complementary mechanisms are being pursued as part of this strategy.

- The first mechanism is based on community organisations taking ownership of the programme through **practical demonstrations**. It was explained that these demonstrations enable communities to replicate certain elements of the programme, which has already led, for example, to the emergence of new CSLAs inspired by those set up under the programme.
- A second mechanism involves **demonstration sessions** organised in participating households, during which neighbors are invited to observe and learn about income-generating activities such as family vegetable gardens or other economic initiatives. These sessions enable non-participating families to acquire practical knowledge at low cost and to consider similar actions.
- A third mechanism is based on a **train-the-trainer** model for both young people and adults. **Two young people per hill** are trained and tasked with passing on the information they have received to other young people, often members of youth clubs. For adults, the programme works with a system of **focal points**: forty community members are trained per hill, organised into groups of five, each responsible for two of the eight areas of well-being. These focal points, like the young trainers, are supported by SOS social workers and programme volunteers. However, the evaluation shows that the effectiveness of this train-the-trainer model remains limited at this stage. Discussions during focus groups did not reveal any significant impact of this mechanism, suggesting that it is not yet fully operational or sufficiently embedded within communities. One respondent in particular pointed out that a challenge arises when young people who are not members of the programme seek support after receiving information from a trained peer. In such cases, it is sometimes difficult to provide concrete support if these young people are not part of the programme. Furthermore, the follow-up provided by volunteers and social workers remains limited due to their heavy workload, which reduces the capacity for support needed to enhance the effectiveness of the model.

A third measure is to strengthen collaboration with local public authorities, in particular hill chiefs and Child Protection Committees (CPCs), in order to extend the programme's reach beyond the families directly supported.

- The people interviewed during the focus groups emphasized that this close collaboration had encouraged greater involvement **of local leaders** in the programme. Several examples were cited: their recognition of SOS as a privileged partner, their joint participation with SOS in managing child protection cases, and their active support for awareness-raising activities, particularly during child rights days, which reach the entire hill community and not just the families in the programme.
- Similarly, **at the CPC level**, various respondents reported observing a significant strengthening of their role in child protection, particularly with regard to the most vulnerable children. According to these observations, CPCs seem to be more aware of children's rights and more involved in identifying and reporting situations of abuse. Other examples illustrate this increased involvement: CPCs can alert hill chiefs, monitor the situations of children raised outside their biological families in order to prevent patrimonial abuse, or collaborate with the competent authorities for civil registration, including in cases of refusal of paternity. In some cases, they also mobilise the community and the administration to support families facing the demolition of their homes.
- Another key element of this collaboration with public authorities is the Steering Committee (SC), set up by the programme as a governance body bringing together various actors, including local authorities. According to those consulted, this structure facilitates the effective participation of authorities at different administrative levels and strengthens the synergy between state priorities and programme interventions. The SC thus provides a forum for dealing with complaints or

complex situations that cannot be resolved immediately by actors in the field. Through its advisory role, it also helps to ensure that the programme's actions remain consistent with public policies, while identifying the priority needs of communities. Through these functions, SC potentially contributes to strengthening the programme's institutional anchoring and providing indirect but significant support to vulnerable children and families beyond the direct beneficiaries.

4.3.3 Participation of vulnerable groups in programme implementation?

Issues related to the operationalisation of the LNOB principle

- To what extent does the intervention offer marginalised groups likely to be affected by the programme the opportunity to participate actively and meaningfully in planning and implementation?

The implementation of the C4C programme is based on a participatory approach in which children and their caregivers are agents of their own change. Through consultation and co-decision-making mechanisms, families (parents and guardians) strengthen their protective capacities, while children express their needs and influence decisions that affect them. This active involvement ensures that interventions are tailored to local realities and respect the best interests of each child.

To this end, in addition to various training and awareness-raising activities aimed at children and young people, the programme also supports the establishment of youth rights clubs. These clubs provide spaces for expression and exchange, enabling young people to share their specific difficulties and collectively reflect on possible solutions. As highlighted during the focus groups, these mechanisms rely in particular on the support of volunteers, who can relay the concerns and complaints expressed, either at community level (e.g. through the OBC) or to the project team. At the same time, a challenge was highlighted during the discussion groups by one of the youth representatives. Clubs are not always able to provide concrete solutions to the problems raised, particularly when the young people concerned are not part of the SOS project. In such cases, access to the programme's resources and support mechanisms is limited, which restricts the clubs' ability to respond effectively to all the situations encountered.

In addition, the evaluation highlights that the participation of vulnerable groups in the implementation of the programme is based primarily on the family development planning process, which places each family at the centre of its own empowerment journey. Through an in-depth analysis of their situation and the development of a personalised development plan, families themselves define their priorities and the goals they wish to achieve, in line with SOS CVI's "Towards Independence" approach. This approach encourages their active engagement, but it also has certain limitations: several stakeholders have noted that families sometimes tend to set overly ambitious or unrealistic goals, requiring sustained support from social workers and volunteers.

In this context, the volunteer system appears to be a key mechanism for supporting the effective participation of vulnerable families. Present within the communities, volunteers act as intermediaries between SOS, families and local authorities, ensuring regular monitoring of development plans, organising awareness-raising activities (e.g. on hygiene or schooling) and quickly reporting any problems encountered. Their proximity also facilitates collaboration with village chiefs and community mobilisation in the event of difficulties or passivity on the part of a family. However, their action is sometimes constrained by a lack of transport and communication, as well as by the limited availability or commitment of certain families facing unmet basic needs. Despite these

challenges, discussions held during focus groups with families, local authorities and other stakeholders indicate that the contribution of volunteers is recognised as an important support for the participation of vulnerable families and constitutes an essential lever for their gradual empowerment.

4.4 Monitoring and evaluation mechanism

Issues related to the operationalisation of the LNOB principle

- Does the monitoring and evaluation system provide sufficient information on the changes observed in the different target groups and on the programme's (in)direct contribution to these changes?
- Are there explicit mechanisms for the participation of target groups in the MEAL system?
- Does the MEAL system analyse who benefits (positive changes) and who loses out (negative changes) and who may have been excluded from the intervention within the target groups?
- Does the MEAL system provide sufficient scope for learning about the important mechanisms and dynamics of exclusion and vulnerability, and for monitoring and tracking risks?

Analysis of the monitoring and evaluation system shows that the programme already has several tools and mechanisms in place to document changes among target groups, including monitoring instruments for children, families, CBOs and CSLAs, as well as regular focus-groups with target groups and quarterly SOS BDI team meetings, including at the national level. Families also have direct channels for communicating their concerns to SOS, which is an important basis for strengthening their participation in the MEAL system.

However, discussions during the field visit indicate that mastery of the entire system remains partial and that certain operational constraints, notably the high workload of social workers, which limits the frequency of follow-up visits, complicate the regular collection and analysis of data.

In this context, the transition to the CFE model offers new opportunities to involve community actors more closely in monitoring, although the still limited capacity of some CBOs to support families shows that additional support would be needed to consolidate this dynamic. This would also require more rigorous monitoring to determine the extent to which and how CBOs and other community-based organisations such as CSLA use appropriate approaches to identify the most vulnerable individuals and implement support activities in line with LNOB principles.

Furthermore, while the MEAL system makes it possible to monitor some of the changes within vulnerable groups, the information collected does not yet allow for a systematic understanding of whether certain groups that are not part of the programme are likely to experience negative effects. It would therefore be useful to strengthen the space dedicated to learning about exclusion and vulnerability mechanisms, as well as monitoring LNOB risks. Joint reflection with the various stakeholders concerned could help to enrich this dimension, while building on existing practices and the significant efforts made by teams to regularly feed into the MEAL system.

4.5 External factors influencing the operationalisation of the LNOB approach

Issues related to the operationalisation of the LNOB principle in a context of changing or shrinking civic space

- How does the current socio-economic situation affect SOS CVB's ability to work? Are there any particular challenges? Opportunities?
- If challenges have arisen, has SOS CVB been able to overcome them? How?
- Has working with vulnerable groups/from a LNOB perspective been an advantage in engaging or working with public authorities at the local or national level?
- Conversely, has it created additional challenges?
- How might the situation in the country negatively affect SOS CVB's work in the near future?
- What internal strengths or capacities does SOS have to address these challenges?
- What kind of support does SOS CVB need to address these challenges? How could donors help organisations such as SOS CVB in the country?

Analysis of external factors reveals that several contextual elements influenced the programme's ability to fully operationalise the *Leave No One Behind* (LNOB) approach. These factors, both constraining and enabling, affected the implementation of activities, the participation of vulnerable groups, and collaboration with institutional actors.

Challenges related to the socio-economic context

The country's current socio-economic situation is putting direct pressure on SOS CVB's operational capacity. Rising inflation and fuel shortages have had a significant impact on the mobility of teams and the regularity of follow-up visits, compromising the proximity needed to support the most vulnerable families. In addition, structural budgetary constraints limit the number of beneficiaries who can be directly supported by the programme.

These factors combined make it more difficult to empower families: for households that are already vulnerable, the increase in the cost of living reduces their ability to undertake income-generating activities or to mobilise the resources necessary to progress in their family development plan. This situation also affects collective initiatives set up at the community level. Even when income-generating activities are organised by CBOs or CSLAs, and despite the success stories mentioned in the focus groups, these structures face significant difficulties in developing, strengthening or sustaining their actions. Current economic conditions severely limit their ability to expand these initiatives, thereby reducing their potential to support vulnerable families. The context also limits the ability of local authorities to contribute fully to the programme's efforts.

Institutional challenges and limitations of the national protection framework

The analysis also highlights several institutional constraints that influence the operationalisation of the LNOB. Although established by the government, Child Protection Committees (CPCs) have very limited resources to effectively monitor vulnerable children. Without technical and material support from NGOs, including training programmes offered by SOS CVB these structures tend to remain passive and struggle to play a leading role in child protection. This constitutes a significant barrier to ensuring that children furthest from formal services are not left behind.

Operationalising the LNOB principle as an asset for navigating the constrained civic space

Despite these constraints, several external factors offer significant opportunities. The programme's objectives are generally well aligned with those of local authorities, which facilitates collaboration. Furthermore, in a context where civic space is shrinking and opportunities for direct political advocacy are limited, the LNOB approach adopted by SOS CVB seems, paradoxically, to play a

facilitating role. Field observations and analysed documentation show that several typical responses by civil society in fragile contexts correspond to the programme's practices.

- Firstly, SOS CVB positions itself primarily as a **service provider** rather than a political actor, which allows it to maintain an active local presence without being perceived as a protest group.
- Secondly, the organisation takes **on advisory roles and maintains regular relations with local authorities**, particularly through the Local Steering Committee (SC) and operational collaborations related to the implementation of the programme. This dynamic is reflected, for example, in the organisation of Children's Rights Day, supported by the authorities with the backing of SOS CVB which raises the profile of protection issues and helps to raise awareness among the whole community, beyond the direct participants alone.
- Thirdly, the programme **raises the profile of vulnerable communities through the systematic collection of data** from monitoring target groups and community feedback. This information provides a solid basis for evidence-based advocacy, even in a context where citizen expression is limited. This approach has already enabled SOS CVB to influence certain national policies on child care, for example by working with the ministry to disseminate the national report on the African Charter on the Rights of the Child, by advocating against drug use with other NGOs and the police, by raising awareness of children's rights in legislation, and by organising workshops in schools to remind teachers that the Burundi Government's school regulations prohibit corporal punishment.

SOS CVB's internal capacity to respond to challenges

SOS CVB has several internal assets to address these challenges. Its experience in implementing community programmes and its strong partnerships with local authorities are important assets. In addition, volunteer schemes and coordination mechanisms (such as SC) strengthen the programme's ability to quickly identify risks, adjust its actions and maintain close ties with communities despite external constraints.

Added to these assets are the community mechanisms put in place to promote ownership of interventions by and for communities. In particular, the programme strengthens community focal points in key areas such as health, education, children's rights, agriculture and livestock, savings and credit, nutrition, combating GBV and advocacy. These community actors play an essential role as relays, disseminating the knowledge and skills acquired within their communities. Similarly, peer educators working with young people and abuse monitors contribute respectively to awareness-raising and reporting and response mechanisms. Facilitated and supported by SOS CVB staff, these community mechanisms strengthen communities' capacity to respond to the challenges identified in their respective contexts, even if their impact remains partially limited by the still restricted means of intervention at their disposal.

External support needs

To strengthen the implementation of the LNOB in a multidimensionally fragile context, additional support may be needed. Increased support from donors, particularly in terms of financing operating costs (mobility, supervision, training), would help mitigate some of the effects of the economic context. Initiatives aimed at strengthening the financial and technical capacities of public child protection structures would also be an important lever for these actors to play a more active and sustainable role in the inclusion of the most vulnerable groups. In this regard, greater involvement of other external actors also appears essential, particularly that of the government through the relevant sectoral ministries and decentralised and devolved state services. Furthermore, enhanced collaboration between NGOs at the local level, combined with operational synergies with community structures and other service providers, is seen as a promising avenue for improving the coherence of interventions and pooling efforts in areas where needs are greatest.

5 | LNOB in Senegal

5.1 Context of vulnerability in Senegal

With a population of 18.2 million, Senegal is considered a lower-middle-income country. The percentage of people living below the poverty line or in multidimensional poverty is significantly lower than in Burundi, at 18% and 33% respectively (World Bank, 2022b).

Despite macroeconomic conditions that are better than those in Burundi, Senegal's human capital prospects are severely affected by the vulnerability of one segment of the population: children. It is estimated that nearly 70% of 10-year-olds suffer from educational poverty, with 83% of children enrolled in primary school unable to read or understand texts appropriate for their age (UNESCO, 2024). As in Burundi, primary school completion rates remain at 60% for girls and 55% for boys (*ibid.*). Some organisations estimate that 31% of child deaths are due to malnutrition, while researchers have calculated that wasting, i.e. being underweight for height, affects 10% of children under five (GRET, n.d.; Tamir et al., 2025). Among children, talibés are described as being at the centre of systemic abuse, exploitation and neglect in the country (Podieh, 2024).

Talibés are children sent to traditional Koranic schools (*daaras*), mainly in urban and peri-urban areas, to receive a Muslim education. There, they are placed under the supervision of Koranic teachers (*marabouts*) who, in many cases, send them out to beg on the streets to collect money and food for the *daaras* and to send to their families back home (Human Rights Watch, 2019; Zoumanigui, 2016). The number of talibés is estimated at 100,000, and according to official sources, nearly a third of them are forced to beg daily (Furlan, 2025).

Forced begging is recognised as a form of human trafficking for forced labour and, in Senegal, it is the most widespread form of child exploitation (Furlan, 2025). This situation mainly affects boys, as girls are sent to *daaras* located in rural areas close to their homes, where schools depend on community support (*ibid.*). While the structural poverty of parents and families has been linked to the persistence of talibé exploitation, it is not the only cause of this phenomenon (Macleod, 2023). The long-term benefits that parents perceive in "entrusting" the care of their children to *marabouts*, the secular education system that does not adequately regulate *daaras*, the religious tradition of giving alms as part of the development of children's faith, and the urbanisation of this education system, far from the support of familiar villages, have all contributed to the persistence of exploitative tendencies (Furlan, 2025; Macleod, 2023; Zoumanigui, 2016).

Between 2017 and 2019, the national government launched a programme to remove children from the streets, targeting *daaras* and talibés. However, this initiative has been described as superficial, as it was limited to Dakar. Furthermore, it failed to reprimand and regulate *marabouts*, and lacked coordination between the relevant government departments and NGOs already working with talibés (Human Rights Watch, 2019; Macleod, 2023).

To remedy the situation of talibés, Children4Change has set itself the goal of improving the living conditions of children in 43 *daaras* (19 in Fatick and 24 in Kaffrine) and promoting the defence of their rights at local and national levels in order to ensure greater impact. To achieve this, the

organisation has proposed a multi-stakeholder strategy comprising A) a partnership with Koranic teachers to support income-generating activities and improve children's living conditions, B) the creation of community-based schools (BCSs) in the daaras to integrate formal education and vocational training, C) the mentoring of marraines associations (ndayou daaras), D) raising awareness among biological families of the importance of contributing to the daaras, and E) supporting protection committees and children's clubs to raise awareness of the situation.

5.2 The process of identifying project participants targeting talibé children

Issues related to the operationalisation of the LNOB principle:

1. Which groups are (at risk of being) left behind in the intervention area, and what are they excluded from?
2. Why are they left behind, and by whom are they excluded (taking into account all contributing factors)?
3. Is your analysis based on clear definitions or criteria for poverty, marginalisation, exclusion, etc.?
4. Does your analysis include the perspectives of those who are (at risk of being) left behind?

Identifying participants is a key step in the programme, particularly in a context as sensitive and complex as that of talibé children. Analysis of the process implemented by SOS Children's Villages Senegal (SOS SN) shows that it is participatory and widely accepted by community stakeholders, making it one of the foundations of the programme's local roots and sustainability.

A participatory process as the key to community anchoring

The identification process is based on a participatory and inclusive approach, mobilising various state actors (e.g. administrative authorities, local authorities, decentralised state services), community actors (e.g. religious leaders, associations of Koranic teachers, godmothers of talibé children and community child protection structures) and representatives of the beneficiaries. This co-construction extends to all stages, from the definition of selection criteria to the final validation of the list of daaras and children selected. This practice explicitly aims to ensure community and institutional ownership of the project. The process is structured in **14 stages** (see box below), ranging from initial meetings with the authorities to the signing of consent forms by the selected daaras². This methodology takes an average of two months and involves numerous actors who actively participate in defining the criteria, collecting and analysing data, and final validation of decisions.

² The term daara comes from the Arabic word "daar", which means "house, dwelling". It can be defined as any place of learning that is not structured in the form of classrooms, i.e. where there is a single learning space and where, under the supervision of a teacher called a serigne daara, Islamic education based on memorisation of the Koran is provided. The person receiving instruction there is called a talibé. Depending on the daaras, some talibés are required to beg, while others do not.

The participatory and inclusive method follows a 14-step process:

1. Meetings with administrative and local authorities to raise awareness about the project (Prefects, Sub-Prefects, Mayors)
 2. Official launch of the project in the intervention community
 3. Establishment of targeting committees responsible for setting selection criteria and identifying enumerators
 4. Development of selection criteria for the daaras (Koranic schools)
 5. Cross-referencing the mapping of daaras with that of daaras benefiting from other programs (and other lists, such as those from sponsoring associations, the IEF (Inspectorate of Education and Training), the Prefect, etc.)
 6. Updating the initial assessment tool for the surveyed daaras (see Tool)
 7. Recruitment and orientation of external enumerators
 8. Social survey of the daaras and verification of the collected data
 9. Data entry and synthesis in the tool
 10. Presentation of preliminary results to the SOS admissions committee SN
 11. Presentation of preliminary results to members of the targeting committees, state and technical services, and community members, including all leaders of the targeted and surveyed daaras.
 12. Validation of the list of participants (beneficiaries) by the National Directorate of SOS SN.
 13. Presentation of the project in detail to the selected participants (Koranic teachers).
 14. Signing of consent forms by the participating daaras for data retention.
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Clear and appropriate selection criteria

One of the strengths of the identification process is the establishment of **transparent selection criteria**, developed collectively and based on factors such as specific characteristics of the daaras (e.g. the daaras are not mobile, are located in the target municipality and are not already beneficiaries of other programmes), Koranic teachers (e.g. openness to awareness-raising organised by the programme, the establishment of community-based schools, changes in relation to the gradual abandonment of begging) or the willingness of biological families, through their various contributions, to strengthen ties with their children. In addition, 14 distinct criteria are used to assess the level of vulnerability of the 'daaras', including access to water, sleeping conditions, community support, exposure to violence and family stability.

Stakeholder ownership and engagement

Close collaboration with administrative and territorial authorities (Prefect, Sub-Prefect, Mayors) and technical services is a key factor in the success of the process. Their commitment gives the project strong institutional legitimacy and ensures greater continuity in child protection efforts. At the community level, the systematic involvement of Koranic teacher associations, talibé godmothers and local protection structures strengthens collective support. The process also contributes to a **better understanding of the talibés' situation** by local actors and **increased ownership** of the intervention.

Challenges encountered in implementing the process

Despite these advances, several challenges remain. Some are socio-cultural in nature: the resistance of some Koranic teachers to change their practices, the persistence of social norms limiting the

involvement of biological families, and possible biases in the application of a process that is nevertheless rigorously defined.

Other challenges relate to technical or logistical constraints: the geographical dispersion of biological families, the difficulty of fully involving all stakeholders, and questions about the fate of vulnerable 'daaras' that do not meet the criteria and for which the children's situation may be even more critical. These limitations indicate that, despite the quality of the process, some highly vulnerable children may still remain outside the system.

³In order to address these technical and logistical challenges, the C4C project supports local child protection mechanisms from a sustainability perspective, bringing together institutional, community and civil society actors to ensure that the needs of children who are victims of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect are met in a sustainable manner.

5.3 Programme design and implementation

5.3.1 Theory of change

Issues related to the operationalisation of the LNOB principle:

- Does your theory of change clearly describe how your intervention should contribute to positive (sustainable) change for the target groups?

As in Burundi, the programme in Senegal takes a holistic approach to children, covering eight dimensions of well-being to address multidimensional non-monetary poverty, i.e. care, housing, education and skills, protection and social inclusion, food security, physical health, livelihoods, and social and emotional well-being. In addition, the theory of change is based on a socio-ecological approach, which recognises that children's situations are influenced by individual, relational, community and societal factors. The expected changes are therefore sought simultaneously in these different areas.

At the individual level, several avenues for progress are being considered. The first involves working directly with children to strengthen their skills, their knowledge of their rights and their ability to claim them. Another avenue focuses on improving access to and respect for rights in key sectors such as health, education, nutrition and protection from exploitation, including through a multisectoral approach. Strengthening parenting skills is also a key lever, with the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) emphasising the vital role of the family in child development. Finally, to contribute to sustainable change, the programme also supports Koranic teachers so that they can improve their practices in caring for talibé children in the daaras.

At the relational level, the objective is to promote a safer, more stable and caring social environment for children. The expected changes concern the quality of relationships between talibés, their families, Koranic teachers and their peers. In particular, the programme aims to strengthen family ties where these have been weakened and to promote the active participation of children in decisions that affect them, whether within families, in daaras or in children's clubs. The right to participation is considered essential as it enables the gradual transformation of power relations between children and adults, encourages listening and facilitates the recognition of children's contributions within their communities.

³ Local child protection mechanisms: Departmental Child Protection Committees (DCCP), Neighbourhood Child Protection Committees (NCPC), Village Child Protection Committees (VCPC)

At the community level, the desired change is for local structures – social services, schools, health facilities and community initiatives – to be able to play their role fully as guarantors of the rights of talibé children, ensuring the prevention, detection and management of situations of vulnerability. To achieve this, the programme relies on several complementary strategies. The first is to strengthen existing community initiatives, such as godmother associations, which play a key role in maintaining the link between talibés, daaras and the community. Strengthening these initiatives involves improving their collaboration with Koranic schools and developing their organisational and financial autonomy, in particular through savings and credit associations (AVE&C). The programme also aims to consolidate the capacities of local state structures, in particular child protection committees, so that they can more effectively fulfil their role in preventing, identifying and dealing with cases of violence, abuse or neglect. Finally, more profound changes are being pursued in terms of social norms and community practices, particularly with regard to certain traditions, gender perceptions and ingrained behaviours that influence the way in which talibé children are cared for and protected.

At the societal level, changes aim to create a more protective and inclusive national environment for talibé children, a group that is often invisible and sometimes excluded from formal public systems. The challenge is for the State to fully assume its responsibilities with regard to children's rights and develop policies tailored to the needs of talibés. Advocacy is the central strategy here, and can be carried out at various levels: community, national, regional (African Union) or international (UN, European Union, bilateral cooperation). This action aims to make the protection of talibé children a long-term public priority and to influence legislative, political and budgetary frameworks.

5.3.2 Tensions to be managed in the programme

The programme is being implemented in a complex environment where religious traditions, economic constraints, social norms and child rights requirements intersect. In this changing landscape, the SOS CVB team must continually navigate between different structural tensions that influence both the strategies deployed and the results observed in the field.

- **Navigating a contradictory narrative between children's rights and the daily realities of 'daaras'**

The first tension manifests itself in the gap between the discourse based on children's rights and the daily reality in many 'daaras'. While the principles of child protection, dignity and well-being form the programme's frame of reference, daaras are often faced with great social and material insecurity. This can lead to the continuation of practices such as begging, which are perceived locally as survival strategies or traditional forms of learning. In this space where contradictory narratives coexist, the programme is moving forward cautiously: it is focusing first on transforming perceptions, through dialogue with Koranic teachers, highlighting positive examples and involving families and associations of talibé children's godmothers. The challenge is to show that protecting children can reinforce, rather than contradict, the educational mission of the daaras. However, the path remains fragile. Reducing the daaras' dependence on begging requires greater community mobilisation, which is difficult in a context of widespread poverty.

- **Finding a balance between public regulation and religious autonomy**

The relationship between the state and the daaras is a second fundamental source of tension. Daara schools enjoy considerable religious and social autonomy; any attempt to supervise or regulate them may be perceived as interference or a threat to the fundamentals of religious education (.). The programme must therefore operate in a delicate space where religious legitimacy, public authority and child protection standards must coexist. To achieve this, SOS CVB favours an approach based on collaboration and dialogue through training on children's rights, reminders of the regulatory

framework, and regular exchanges with local authorities and religious leaders. Rather than creating a rupture, the team seeks to gradually integrate protection principles into the daily practices of the 'daaras'.

- **Reconciling immediate needs with the ambition for lasting change**

A third tension stems from a time lag: talibé children have urgent needs such as food, care and safety, while the programme aims to bring about profound changes in the system of child protection and care. The programme must constantly strike a balance between responding to emergencies and avoiding creating dependence on material aid. SOS CVB attempts to reconcile these two dynamics: on the one hand, it strengthens existing mechanisms, develops the skills of community actors and promotes, including through advocacy, structural changes such as the opening of BCS classes to talibé children, the implementation of the employability programme and facilitating access to social protection; on the other, it responds to the most pressing needs to ensure the dignity and safety of children. This dual approach sometimes creates divergent expectations: some actors hope for immediate and visible assistance, while the programme emphasises the importance of systemic change to ensure sustainable protection.

- **Acting in a context of unreliable data**

Finally, a cross-cutting issue concerns the need for reliable data to guide action, demonstrate impact, adjust strategies and advocate for change. However, local data collection and monitoring capacities are still limited. The programme seeks to address this challenge by strengthening stakeholder involvement in monitoring, for example through regular contact with families or by increasing the involvement of associations of female sponsors and Koranic teachers in targeting committees.

The tensions described are not isolated obstacles but constituent elements of the context in which the programme operates. Managing them requires sensitivity, dialogue, adaptation and patience. By working at the intersection of religious, community, institutional and social dimensions, the programme is helping to gradually transform a complex system, while recognising that profound change can only emerge in a climate of trust and cooperation.

5.3.3 Taking into account the most vulnerable groups left out of the programme

Issues related to the operationalisation of the LNOB principle

- Have you considered whether the design and implementation reinforce existing mechanisms of exclusion or disadvantage vulnerable groups within and/or outside your target groups?
- Have you designed corrective measures (by yourself, by partners or by others) to address/mitigate any exclusionary effects (e.g. in the risk analysis)?

The programme explicitly recognises that it can only support a limited number of 'daaras' and talibé children, even though the needs for protection, well-being and support remain very high. This structural constraint carries a significant risk, as many vulnerable talibés and daaras may remain outside the scope of intervention and continue to face precarious living conditions without direct support. Aware of this reality, the programme has sought to limit this exclusionary effect by developing complementary mechanisms to indirectly extend its reach beyond direct beneficiaries. These include, for example, support for local child protection mechanisms, the promotion of AVE&Cs as self-managed community structures, and capacity and skills building for godmother associations.

Peer support and child participation

The programme focuses primarily on promoting the expression and participation of children, including talibés, through the establishment and revitalisation of children's clubs. These spaces provide inclusive and safe environments where children can share their experiences, develop their self-protection skills, learn about their rights, and advocate for or demand respect for their rights. A peer education mechanism is integrated into these clubs, in which the children themselves become advocates for raising awareness among their peers and conveying advocacy messages within the community. This principle of active participation aims to ensure that even children who are not directly enrolled in the programme can benefit from its impact in terms of information, protection and social inclusion.

Capacity building and community ownership

The programme also relies on the essential role of community structures to broaden its reach. Koranic teachers' associations and godmothers play a special role here: strengthening their capacities not only improves the quality of care for children, but also gives them a collective voice in decision-making bodies such as the Departmental Child Protection Committees (DCCP), Neighbourhood Child Protection Committees (DCCP) and Village Child Protection Committees (VCPC). Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) are also essential channels for supporting community autonomy and strengthening local capacity for action. This process of ownership promotes an approach in which community actors themselves become the bearers of solutions for vulnerable children, including those who are not directly monitored by the programme.

Standardised case management

Taking vulnerable children outside the programme into account also requires structured and coordinated management of situations of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect (VAEN). The project has contributed to the establishment of clear and shared standard operating procedures for the management of VAEN cases, thereby facilitating coordination between community services, such as VCPCs, NCPCs and DCCPs, and decentralised technical services, such as EAOE and Social Action, among others. This common approach not only strengthens the consistency of interventions but also ensures a faster, more sustainable and better coordinated response to cases involving children who are not direct beneficiaries but are victims of various forms of maltreatment and abuse.

Local synergies and partnerships

Finally, the programme seeks to create strong synergies with local authorities. The DCCP, in particular, is a key coordination mechanism enabling SOS CVB to ensure that the voices of talibé children are represented at the municipal and departmental levels. These synergies facilitate joint awareness-raising and advocacy actions, whether through radio broadcasts, community marches or other initiatives aimed at reaching a wider audience. They also promote the mobilisation of additional resources, particularly through partnerships with other organisations such as IRF (Islamic Relief France), World Vision, I'm Talibé, the International Bureau for Children's Rights, etc.

Persistent challenges

Despite these efforts, several challenges remain in ensuring that talibé children outside the programme are taken into account in a more systematic and equitable manner.

- Strengthening the capacities of associations of godmothers accompanying children in daaras that are not partners in the project remains an important issue.
- Strengthening the functionality of community structures and their collaboration with children's advocacy frameworks to maximise their impact in terms of advocacy.
- Few civil society or child protection actors carry out interventions specifically targeting talibé children.

- Capitalisation based on successful models and the visibility of these models must be strengthened to support the scaling up of effective practices.
- Finally, strategies still need to be developed to encourage more regular and meaningful participation by talibé children in community children's clubs.

5.3.4 Participation of vulnerable groups in programme implementation

Issues related to the operationalisation of the LNOB principle:

- To what extent does the intervention offer marginalised groups likely to be affected by the programme the opportunity to participate actively and meaningfully in planning and implementation?

Beneficiary participation is a central element of programme design and implementation. Several mechanisms have been put in place to ensure the active involvement of talibé children, Koranic teachers and, more broadly, community actors and decentralised technical services throughout the programme cycle.

Firstly, the participation of talibés and Koranic teachers in the various stages of formulation is encouraged through the organisation of focus groups, which enable their needs, priorities and concerns to be identified. These spaces help to tailor interventions to the realities experienced in the daaras and by the children and young talibés themselves, thereby promoting the relevance and ownership of awareness-raising and training activities during the implementation phase. This participatory approach is complemented by community feedback mechanisms, notably through annual meetings bringing together various stakeholders, during which participants' observations and feedback are used to adjust and improve the intervention.

The programme also builds on existing community dynamics, such as associations of talibé children's godmothers organised into AVE&C groups and income-generating activities (IGAs), which bring together community members beyond the direct beneficiaries. These spaces provide additional channels for participation, as their members are listened to and involved in the planning and implementation of activities. This approach helps to broaden the programme's participatory base and strengthen its local roots.

In addition, the principle of 'getting things done' is implemented from the outset, with a view to sustainability. Sponsorship associations are thus involved in awareness-raising and advocacy activities, while decentralised technical authorities in particular are involved in educational and health monitoring. This division of roles aims to strengthen local actors' ownership of the programme and to integrate actions into existing dynamics. More broadly, the involvement of all stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring-evaluation phases, particularly through frameworks such as the DCCP and NCPC, helps to structure multi-stakeholder participation around the programme's objectives.

However, discussions also highlight several aspects that require particular attention. In particular, it appears important to strengthen the leadership of community structure members in planning their own actions, paying greater attention to assessing the needs expressed by talibé children and Koranic teachers. Similarly, greater empowerment of community actors is identified as a lever for supporting sustainable initiatives in favour of talibé children. Finally, the findings highlight the need to strengthen advocacy and awareness-raising actions in order to increase the State's involvement in the

formalisation of 'daaras' and the organisation of the sector, but also to generate greater interest and understanding among child protection actors regarding the specific situation of 'talibé' children.

5.4 Monitoring and evaluation mechanism

Issues related to the operationalisation of the LNOB principle
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the monitoring and evaluation system provide sufficient information on the changes observed in the different target groups and on the programme's (in)direct contribution to these changes?• Are there explicit mechanisms for the participation of target groups in the MEAL system?• Does the MEAL system analyse who benefits (positive changes) and who loses out (negative changes) and who may have been excluded from the intervention within the target groups?• Does the MEAL system provide sufficient scope to learn about the important mechanisms and dynamics of exclusion and vulnerability, and to monitor and track risks?

The teams have operational monitoring and evaluation tools at their disposal, mainly geared towards quantitative indicators, which provide a basis for tracking the progress of activities and expected results. In this context, the system in place provides regular visibility on the achievement of targets and the progress of the programme.

However, several limitations emerge from the findings shared. The current system produces relatively little qualitative data, which limits a detailed understanding of the changes observed, their mechanisms and their dynamics. As highlighted in the mid-term evaluation of the C4C programme, this interpretation of performance is sometimes limited by structural difficulties related to the calibration of indicators. The evaluation notes that some indicators appear to be oversized or insufficiently aligned with the realities on the ground, which complicates the assessment of the programme's actual performance. The analysis of transformations beyond the quantified indicators therefore remains limited.

In addition, capacity building for teams on qualitative methods, such as outcome harvesting, has been initiated. Although this approach has not yet been fully utilised in current monitoring practices, it demonstrates a willingness to broaden the methods used to better capture the changes brought about by the programme. This approach is also in line with the participatory evaluation processes already implemented, notably through the mid-term impact evaluation of the C4C programme, which involved various stakeholders in the analysis of the results and effects observed.

From an LNOB perspective, these participatory approaches are particularly important in that they provide opportunities for vulnerable groups to be actively involved in monitoring and evaluating the interventions that affect them. Their participation not only contributes to a better understanding of the changes observed, but also makes more visible the dynamics of exclusion, differentiated effects or situations of vulnerability that may escape quantitative indicators alone.

In addition, participatory monitoring and evaluation approaches face significant time constraints: data collection, processing and reporting require considerable effort from teams, reducing the time available for in-depth analysis and reflective discussion.

In this context, opportunities for improvement have been identified. More systematic use of qualitative methods such as outcome harvesting in capitalisation activities, for example through technical data sheets, could help to better document significant changes and programme

contributions. Similarly, formulating and exploring research or evaluation questions directly related to the challenges identified would provide a structured framework for strengthening learning, informing strategic thinking and supporting the ongoing adaptation of interventions.

5.5 External factors influencing the operationalisation of the LNOB approach

Issues related to the operationalisation of the LNOB principle in a context of changing or shrinking civic space

- How does the current socio-economic situation affect SOS CVB's ability to work? Are there any particular challenges? Opportunities?
- If challenges have arisen, has SOS CVB been able to overcome them? How?
- Has working with vulnerable groups/from a LNOB perspective been an advantage in engaging or working with public authorities at the local or national level?
- Conversely, has it created additional challenges?
- How might the situation in the country negatively affect SOS CVB's work in the near future?
- What internal strengths or capacities does SOS have to address these challenges?
- What kind of support does SOS CVB need to address these challenges? How could donors help organisations such as SOS CVB in the country?

The implementation of the programme takes place in an environment marked by several external factors that influence, either favourably or unfavourably, its ability to achieve its objectives and operationalise the principle of 'Leaving No One Behind'.

Favourable factors

Among the favourable factors, the political context appears to be generally conducive. It is marked in particular by the existence of a national programme to modernise *daaras* and by the government's "Save the Talibés" initiative. These frameworks have facilitated the identification of the children concerned and strengthened coordination with local structures involved in child protection. This institutional context thus provides a foundation on which the programme can build its interventions and engage in dialogue with public authorities.

The existence of social protection mechanisms for the most vulnerable people is also a favourable factor. Mechanisms such as the family security grant programme for destitute families, the equal opportunities card for people with disabilities and the Universal Health Coverage programme (mutual health insurance) are in place, and the programme plays a facilitating role in enabling the families and children concerned to access them.

Furthermore, working with state actors makes it possible, in some cases, to overcome major difficulties through the coordinated mobilisation of the relevant services. When a complex situation is referred to the Departmental Child Protection Committees (DCCP), various actors may be called upon to find appropriate solutions, for example the EAOE in cases of violence, abuse, exploitation or neglect (VAEN) or social services in situations of high vulnerability.

Adverse factors

However, several unfavourable external factors limit the effectiveness and scope of interventions. The lack of resources within technical services is a major constraint. The limited resources available for the holistic management of cases of VAEN or OEV within the DCCPs, as well as the non-payment of mutual insurance by the State, reduce the capacity of public structures to respond adequately to identified needs. In this context, the responsibility for support rests largely with community actors (often limited in terms of mobilising internal and external resources) and partner organisations.

The effects of climate change are also a negative factor, directly influencing the yield of agricultural and productive income-generating activities. This instability affects the capacity of households and community structures to strengthen their economic autonomy.

Finally, despite the existence of social policies, their impact remains limited given the extent of poverty and household vulnerability, which restricts their potential for sustainable reduction of inequalities.

Opportunities

In this context, several opportunities are emerging. Strengthening collaborations and partnerships with NGOs active in the areas of social protection or climate change adaptation appears to be a relevant avenue for complementing existing interventions. Similarly, developing stronger synergies could support targeted advocacy actions with public actors, by leveraging the specific knowledge and expertise acquired by the programme on the realities of the 'daaras' and the situation of talibé children. These opportunities are potential levers for mitigating certain effects of external constraints and strengthening the programme's impact in the medium and long term.

6 | Conclusions and recommendations

Analysis of the implementation of the C4C programme in Burundi and Senegal shows that the LNOB principle is consistently integrated throughout the programme cycle, particularly in targeting mechanisms, intervention design, participation modalities and monitoring strategies. This integration is based on a multidimensional understanding of vulnerability and an explicit recognition that the targeted children and families face cumulative risks of marginalisation, poverty and social exclusion.

In both contexts, the identification of groups at risk of being left behind is based on structured and participatory processes rooted in local realities. In Burundi, community mobilisation, collective definition of vulnerability criteria and multi-level validation contribute to the accurate identification of households exposed to multiple deprivations. In Senegal, the process of identifying *daaras* and *talibé* children is also based on strong community ownership and collaboration with those directly involved in caring for the children, despite the socio-cultural complexity of the context.

The theory of change is another strength of the programme from the LNOB's perspective. In both countries, it clearly describes the ways in which the intervention aims to contribute to positive and sustainable change for the target groups, linking actions at the individual, relational, community and societal levels. The holistic approach to children, covering eight dimensions of well-being, makes it possible to address multidimensional poverty and take into account the interconnections between different forms of vulnerability.

At the same time, the report repeatedly highlights the structural limitations facing the programme. The number of families and children exposed to situations of vulnerability far exceeds the available intervention capacities. As a result, despite rigorous targeting processes, a significant proportion of those identified as vulnerable remain outside the scope of direct intervention. This observation is shared by the teams, local authorities and communities, and is a key challenge for the operationalisation of the LNOB.

Faced with this constraint, the programme has developed several strategies aimed at indirectly extending its reach, notably through the strengthening of community structures, peer education, and collaboration with local authorities and institutional child protection mechanisms. The results presented in the report indicate that these strategies make it possible, to a certain extent, to mitigate the effects of exclusion linked to targeting, even if their scope remains dependent on the capacities and resources available at the local level.

Finally, the monitoring and evaluation system is an important lever for the operationalisation of the LNOB. Teams have operational monitoring and evaluation tools at their disposal, mainly geared towards quantitative indicators, which provide a basis for tracking the progress of activities and expected results. In addition, participatory mechanisms, such as focus groups and regular meetings with target groups, provide a space to gather beneficiaries' perceptions and integrate their feedback into the process. These elements are essential for making the MEAL system more inclusive and promoting community involvement, a fundamental principle of the LNOB. However, the use of mainly quantitative data and the lack of qualitative data limit the detailed understanding of the changes

observed and the underlying dynamics, particularly those affecting vulnerable groups not directly included in the programme and supported by community or state actors. Furthermore, although efforts have been made to strengthen the use of qualitative methods, such as outcome harvesting in the case of Senegal, these approaches have not yet been fully integrated into standard practice due to time and resource constraints. The high workload of teams, particularly social workers, also reduces the frequency of follow-up visits, complicating regular data collection and analysis. This also limits the capitalisation of data through strategic learning or advocacy.

Recommendations

R1. Consolidate indirect extension mechanisms for non-beneficiaries

The evaluation shows that, in both contexts, extending the programme's impact to children and families who are not direct beneficiaries relies heavily on community structures (OBC, CSLA in Burundi; associations of Koranic teachers, godmothers and community leaders in Senegal). While these mechanisms do help to mitigate some effects of exclusion, their reach remains fragile and uneven.

- R1.1. Further formalise the objectives and modalities of this indirect extension in order to better recognise, support and secure the role played by community structures in supporting non-beneficiaries.
- R1.2. In Burundi, strengthen support for CBOs and CSLAs in order to consolidate their capacity to provide sustainable support to vulnerable families beyond the circle of direct beneficiaries, while taking into account their economic and organisational constraints.
- R1.3. In Senegal, continue and structure the "faire faire" approach by clarifying the expected role of Koranic teacher associations and godmothers in identifying and referring talibés outside the programme, in conjunction with existing child protection mechanisms.

R2. Develop the monitoring and evaluation system to gain a better qualitative understanding of exclusion and LNOB dynamics.

The monitoring and evaluation system currently provides satisfactory documentation of activities and certain results among direct beneficiaries, but it remains limited in its ability to analyse exclusion mechanisms, indirect effects or dynamics affecting groups left out of the programme.

- R2.1. Gradually strengthen the use of qualitative methods already introduced, such as outcome harvesting, in order to better document significant changes, including those observed at the community level or among non-beneficiary groups.
- R2.2. Integrate a LNOB analysis dimension more explicitly into monitoring, paying particular attention to the risks of unintended exclusion, the differentiated effects of interventions and any tensions generated by targeting. A potential tool to support this analysis is to mobilise the three exclusion mechanisms identified by the SDC guide⁴.
 - Limited ability to participate.
 - Limited opportunities to participate (e.g. due to discrimination).
 - Limited ability to participate with dignity (e.g. when a person cannot present themselves with dignity due to extreme lack of resources).

These mechanisms can be combined with the five exclusion factors in the UNDP framework⁵ (geography, identity, socio-economic status, governance, shocks) or with the criteria already used by teams to identify potential programme participants. This approach makes it possible to understand not only who is at risk of being left behind, but also what and by what mechanism, thus providing a solid basis for developing appropriate indicators and monitoring strategies.

4 <https://www.sdc-pge.ch/en/leave-no-one-behind-in-practice>

5 <https://www.undp.org/publications/what-does-it-mean-leave-no-one-behind>

- R.2.3. Preserve the participatory nature of the monitoring and evaluation system by ensuring that existing feedback channels continue to incorporate the voices of vulnerable groups (including vulnerable children), while remaining compatible with the teams' workload.

R3. Strengthen SOS's position as a facilitator of systemic dynamics

Despite their commitment, public child protection structures have limited resources and remain heavily dependent on NGO support to fulfil their missions.

- R3.1. Further promote the data produced by the programme (mapping, monitoring of vulnerable groups, community feedback, success models) as tools to support dialogue and advocacy with local and national authorities. A concrete example from Burundi is the mapping and prioritisation of families, which provides detailed demographic data for the intervention area (number of households, population, vulnerability indicators). This data, currently used for internal monitoring, could become a strategic lever for informing public policy, particularly when combined with information on strategies and good practices for responding effectively and sustainably to the needs of the most vulnerable groups.
- R3.2. Continue to strengthen existing consultation frameworks (Steering Committees (SC) and Child Protection Committees in Burundi and Departmental Child Protection Committees (DCCP) in Senegal) as forums for coordination, resolution of complex situations and alignment with public policies.
- R3.3. Encourage, where relevant, greater synergies with other organisations working on similar issues in order to strengthen the coherence of responses to situations of vulnerability, as well as joint awareness-raising and advocacy actions.

R4. Adapt economic empowerment strategies to contextual constraints

Evidence shows that inflation, economic shocks and climate hazards undermine the sustainability of income-generating activities and savings mechanisms, which are nevertheless pillars of family and community empowerment.

- R4.1. Strengthen technical support for income-generating activities (IGAs) and savings and credit structures by taking greater account of local economic constraints and the actual capacity of groups to absorb external shocks.
- R4.2. Ensure more systematic monitoring of how community actors, such as CSLAs and OBCs in Burundi and AVE&Cs and sponsor associations in Senegal, integrate and apply the LNOB principle in their practices, particularly with regard to their ability to identify, include and support the most vulnerable groups beyond the direct beneficiaries of the programme.

R5. Deepen the meaningful participation of vulnerable groups

While participation is a central principle of the programme, the report highlights room for improvement in terms of the effective influence of vulnerable groups on programme decisions and directions.

- R.5.1. In Senegal, gradually strengthen the role of children's clubs as structured spaces for participation, clarifying their links with community bodies and child protection mechanisms, and ensuring the inclusion of 'talibé' children.
- R.5.2. In Burundi, involve vulnerable families more closely in discussions on the programme's strategic directions, as part of the planned shift from direct support for households to a more indirect approach based on strengthening community actors such as CBOs. Existing participatory spaces could be used for this purpose, such as the discussion groups with vulnerable families organised regularly by the project team. Volunteers and focal points could also play a role in this regard.

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