



The Intersectoral Committee on Violence against Children in and around Schools

Violence against Children (VAC) in Uganda is widespread, occurring in almost all settings. Children have a right to protection from all forms of violence and harm. They have a right to a safe school environment where they can learn to the best of their ability.

In addition, violence free schools play a critical role in the achievement of MDG goals 2 and 3, i.e. achieving universal primary education and promoting gender equality and empowerment of women respectively.

Uganda has a strong policy and legal framework for the protection of children against violence, including the Constitution, the Children Act and the Penal Code provisions. In 2009, three critical pieces of legislations were also enacted—(i) the Domestic Violence Act, (ii) the Female Genital Mutilation Act, and (iii) the Trafficking in Persons Act. Challenges however remain in ensuring that these translate into actual protection of children from violence.

Violence against children occurs on a large scale and in virtually all settings. Available evidence shows that children in Uganda are routinely exposed to physical, sexual and emotional violence in their homes, schools, care and justice institutions, communities and places where children work. Corporal punishment, physical and psychological violence, and sexual abuse, are cited as the most common forms of violence experienced by children in almost all settings.

Working to tackle violence against children

To date 3 meeting have been held bringing together different stakeholders to work together to tackle VAC. These meeting are chaired by MoES and co-chaired by MoGLSD and members include UNICEF, FENU, JLOS, UNATU, Kyambogo University and Parliament

Responding to different types of violence requires planning and practical action. VAC cases cannot be effectively handled without a plan of action. Teachers and staff play a critical role in implementing planned responses, both before and after referring cases to the service providers. Therefore, their participation in, and understanding of, the planning process is essential. Children also need to be involved in the planning process to help highlight the challenges children who experience violence face in the process of reporting and obtaining necessary support. It is important to hear from both girls and boys, as well as children from different age groups and with special needs.

The level of VAC is shocking. For example, a 2005 study by Raising Voices and Save the Children in five districts—Apac, Iganga, Kasese, Nakapiripirit and Wakiso—found that 98 percent (n=1,406) of children (including in and out of school children, ages 8-18 years) had experienced physical or emotional violence. Sexual violence is also widespread. In the same study, more than two-thirds (75.8 percent) of children reported having experienced sexual violence such as being touched, being exposed to adults having sex, being forced to touch adults in sexual ways, or being forced to have sex.

The National Baseline survey of Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards (BRMS) conducted in 2010 by the Directorate of Education Standards (DES) with UNICEF also depicts a situation of great concern, especially in schools. 91% of P3 learner and 88% of P6 learners reported that beating was used as punishment. In addition, 9% of P3 and 13% of P6 pupils report defilement as a type of violence which takes place in their school, while 6% of P3 pupils and 7% of P6 pupils report that sexual abuse happens in their school.

The same survey found that the response to cases has not been robust in the majority of schools: only 33% of the schools referred cases of violence to the police for further action.

Rationale

While VAC is prevalent in Uganda in all locations including homes, schools, communities, care and justice institutions, places of work and other settings, there is a need for a phased approach. Inter-sectoral stakeholders should focus on one critical setting which requires urgent and consolidated efforts before gradually starting to tackle violence in other settings.

Violence against children in and around school is recognized as one of the utmost priorities as well as a strategic entry point to address the issue due to the following reasons:

- Violence against children in and around schools denies children's right to education with devastating impact on children's wellbeing, academic attainment and healthy development.
- Schools collectively reach a large number of child population and school going children spend most of their waking hours in schools
- Teachers have opportunities to identify and respond to cases of violence happening not only in and around school but also outside of schools
- Laws and policies that govern / prohibit violence against children in schools already exist.
- School based violence is not a problem confined to schools but is a manifestation of complex and multifaceted societal issues which make children vulnerable to violence in all other settings.

In order to tackle violence against children in and around schools, the key line Ministries—the the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD)—reached an agreement on the need to establish an inter-sectoral committee to address VAC in and around schools (ISC VACiS).

Taking a phased approach, the inter-sectoral and consolidated approach is intended to pave the way for tackling violence against children in other settings (e.g. home, communities, justice and care institutions and places of work etc), building on the work to be carried out through ISC VACiS.