

Ending School-Related Gender-Based Violence

A Series of
Thematic Briefs



Brief 6: Integrating SRGBV into national policies and education sector plans



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 Safe to Learn

Global Working Group to End School-Related Gender-Based Violence

The Global Working Group to End School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) was created in 2014 to respond to SRGBV by raising awareness and finding solutions to ensure schools are safe, gender-sensitive and inclusive environments, where boys and girls can learn to unleash their full potential. The Group has expanded to more than 100 members representing 50 organizations, including humanitarian actors, civil society organizations, and regional and national offices.

www.ungei.org/what-we-do/school-related-gender-based-violence

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Introduction

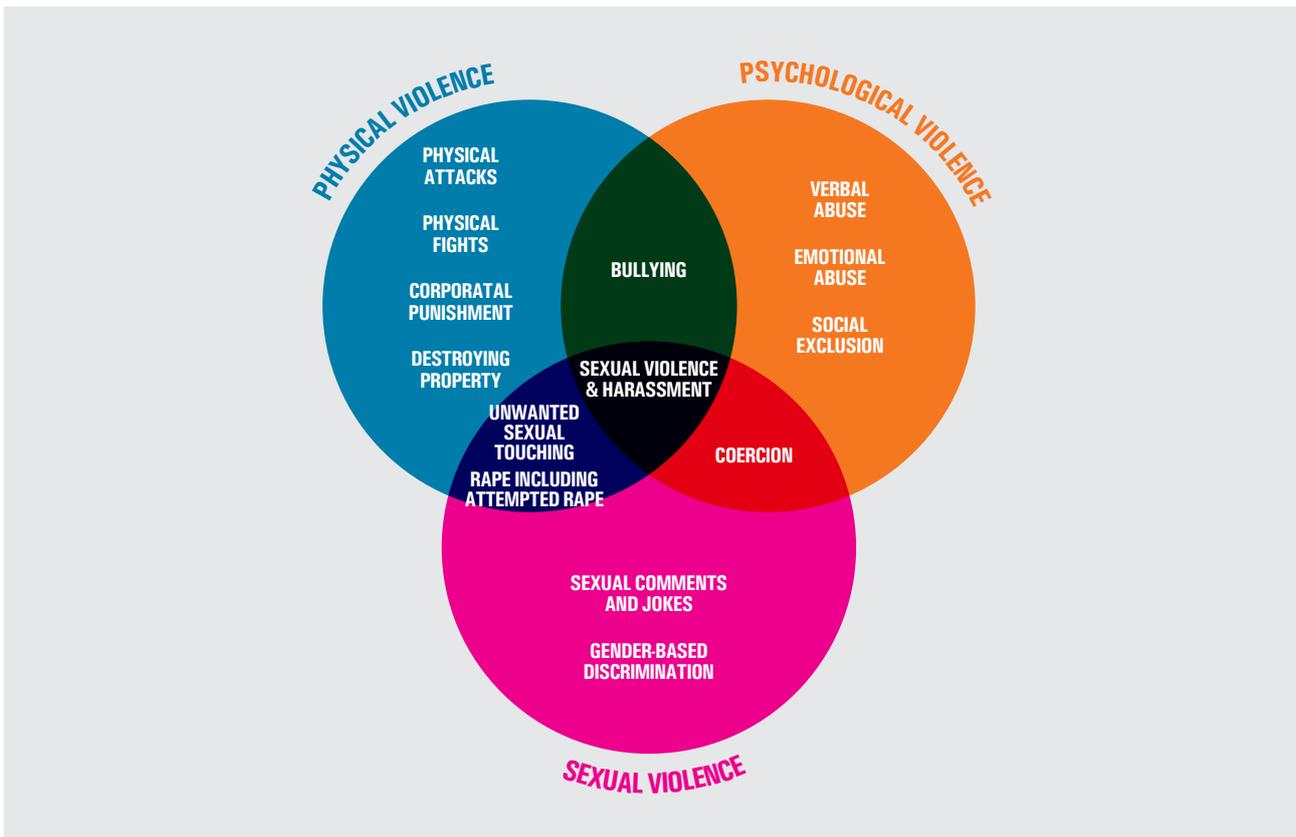
School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) refers to acts or threats of sexual, physical, or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes and enforced by unequal power dynamics.¹

Discriminatory gender norms are one of the key driving factors for many forms of violence, including violence in schools. This means that it is essential to apply a gender lens when developing violence prevention and response approaches. School-related gender-based violence violates children's rights and is a significant barrier for girls' and boys' access to and participation in education.

There has been increasing recognition of SRGBV as a pressing issue requiring global attention if the Sustainable Goals 4, (Education), 5 (Gender equality) and 16.2 (Violence against children) are to be met. Much work remains to be done requiring accelerated and multi-dimensional prevention and response efforts.

This series of **thematic briefs** is targeted at policy makers and practitioners. It aims to summarize the latest learning and evidence synthesized from two regional workshops on how best to prevent and address SRGBV held in West and Central Africa and East and Southern Africa. Other briefs in this series include: 1. Applying a whole school approach to prevent school-related gender-based violence; 2. Engaging teachers to create safe and gender-responsive learning environments; 3. Shifting harmful gender norms through curricular approaches; 4. Establishing Safe and Confidential Reporting Mechanisms; 5. Investing in data and evidence to inform the response to SRGBV.

Figure 1: Violence in schools takes many forms, many of which are rooted in gender norms and inequality



Why incorporate SRGBV into national policies and education sector plans?

Addressing school violence, including gender-based violence, requires effective national laws, policies, and procedures aimed at preventing violence against children, promoting gender equality and protecting children from violence, in all settings where it takes place - families, schools, and communities. Laws and policies signal a government's commitment to violence response and prevention, providing a framework for creating safe learning environments and a foundation for addressing SRGBV.

In relation to SRGBV, the way laws and policies are framed, operationalised and strengthened can either support or undermine equality between men and women. For example, do policies about harassment or bullying place the responsibility on the perpetrator or the victim, and how do practices at school reflect this norm? Do existing laws about rape respect the rights of married women to bodily integrity — that is, the ability to make decisions about their bodies and be secure against assault? In reviewing existing laws and policies, this analysis can help determine whether laws and policies need to be amended to better support prevention of SRGBV and promote gender equality more broadly.

The Global Guidance on Addressing School-Related Gender-Based Violence states that governments can demonstrate leadership at the national level by:

- developing and implementing laws to protect children from violence, ensure accountability and treat all children equally;
- adopting a comprehensive, multi-sectoral national policy and action plan to prevent and respond to SRGBV;
- strengthening connections between the education system and child protection policies, procedures and systems; and
- reforming the education system for a stronger, more holistic response.

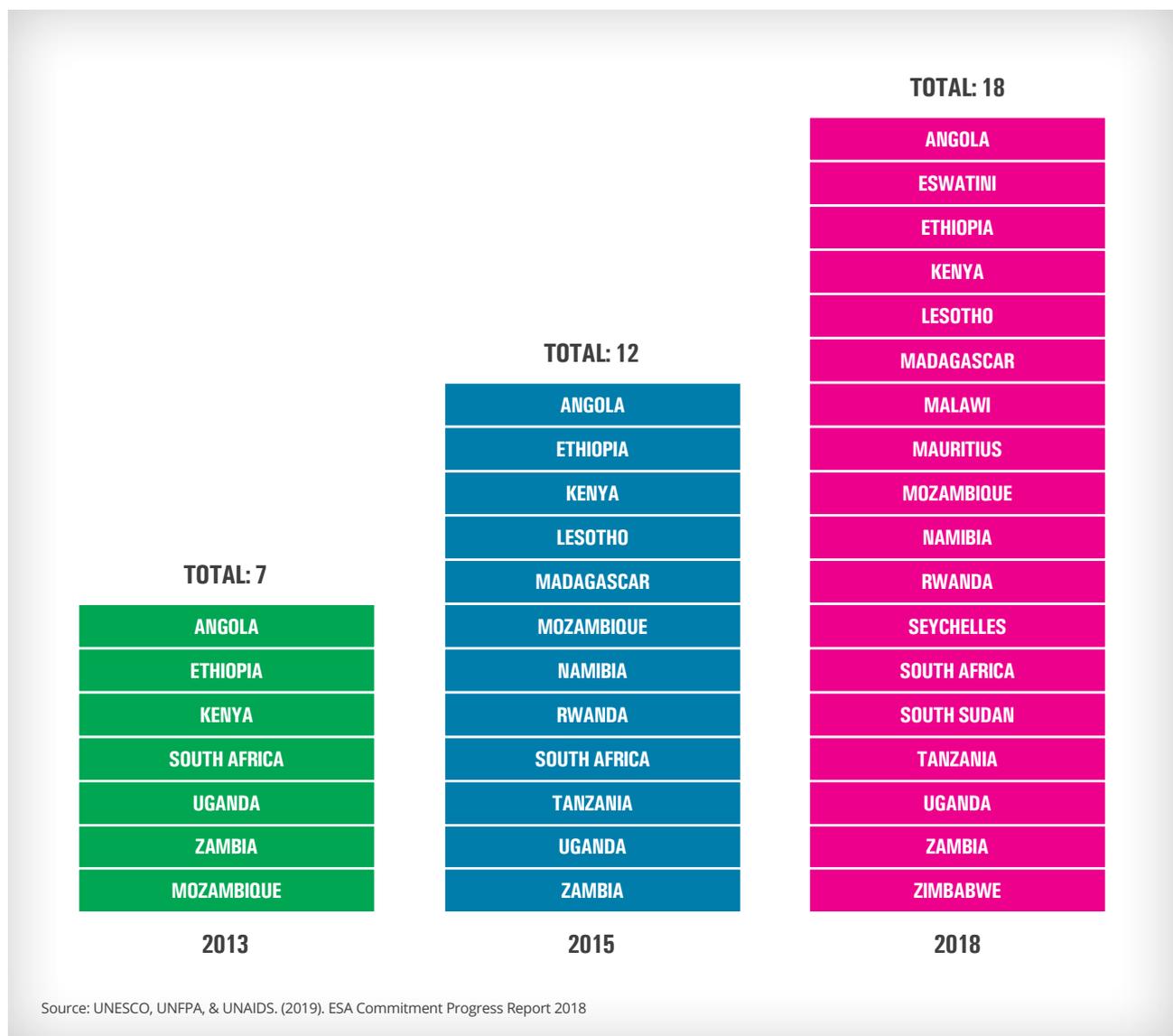
The multi-dimensional nature of SRGBV requires working with many different ministries and government departments, including education, health, gender, child and social welfare, justice, finance and social protection. There are often gaps in implementing policies at the national, provincial, district, or school



levels because the various individuals and groups involved do not coordinate their efforts. This is often true not only within the government but also among multilateral and bilateral agencies, donors and civil society organizations. Strategies to address SRGBV at the district or school level can begin with a review of existing policies and programmes that are being implemented either by the education ministry or civil society to provide a comprehensive picture of ongoing work and identify gaps.

Within the education system, sector plans often address issues of girls' access to and retention in school, with violence in and around school as one of the key barriers. Integrating SRGBV prevention and response strategies and addressing gender and social norms, within Education Sector Plans (ESP), provides an entry point for implementing programmes at the provincial, district and school level (see figure 7). ESPs may include activities to address specific forms of violence, and school-based strategies for prevention such as codes of conduct, curriculum-based approaches, and strengthening reporting and child protection systems in schools.

Figure 2: Countries in the Eastern and Southern Africa region whose education sector policies address SRGBV



What have we learned about integrating SRGBV in education sector plans?

Many governments are showing leadership by integrating prevention and response strategies into policy. For example, in 2018, of the 21 countries in the Eastern and Southern Africa region, 18 reported ESPs that address SRGBV, part of an upward trend from seven in 2013 and 12 in 2015.

It is important to remember that legal and policy frameworks by themselves are not enough to address SRGBV. In some contexts, good national laws and policies exist but are not being implemented or enforced or have inadequate budget allocations. For instance, even where there are national-level policies on codes of conduct for teachers and other education staff, many schools are either unaware of them or have no incentive or support to implement them. More effort is needed to make education authorities at provincial and local levels, members of the broader community, parents, caregivers, school staff and students aware of existing policies on SRGBV. For example, part of a school action plan may be to adapt a nationally-developed code of conduct and include specific strategies to address SRGBV in the school.



Implementation of policies related to SRGBV requires coordination between multiple ministries and sectors

Cross-sectoral platforms at the national level support work on SRGBV by coordinating efforts among the ministries of education, women and child welfare, and health, as well as non-governmental organizations, donors and civil society organizations. This has been effective where stakeholders were brought together in working groups, committees, or national coalitions to discuss SRGBV, as part of broader efforts on girls' education, violence against children, or child marriage and early pregnancies.

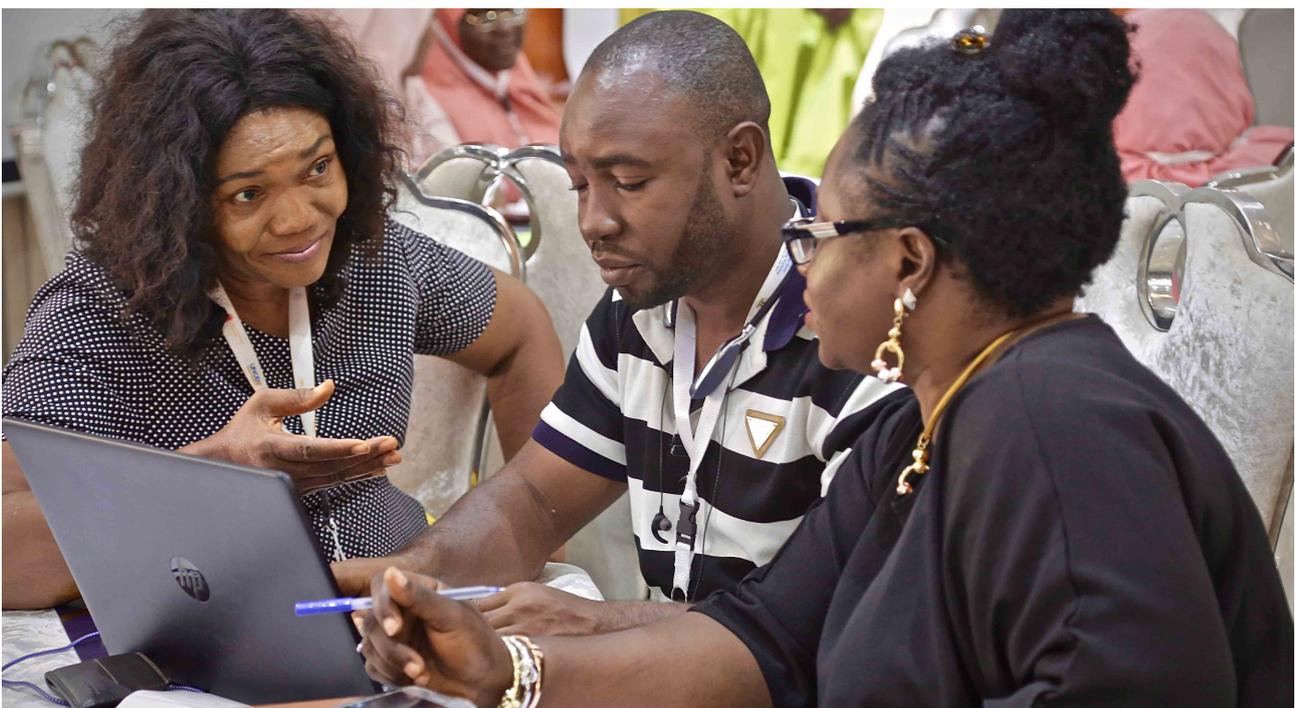
Education ministries lead the way in integrating SRGBV in education sector plans

ESPs can address SRGBV by including costed action plans with prevention and response activities for the national, provincial and school levels. ESPs from Zambia and South Africa (see examples 6.1 and 6.2), include indicators to

track progress on the action plans. These are a good start for translating policies into real action at the school level.

National EMIS (Education Management Information Systems) provide a good opportunity to collect data about how well policies are being implemented

Collecting data about SRGBV through the national EMIS, although challenging in many contexts, has potential (see Brief 5). EMIS can be used to generate data on how well national policies on gender-based violence, child protection and codes of conduct are being implemented in schools. Collecting and managing data about sensitive issues like sexual and gender-based violence and abuse requires strong response and protection measures that are often not in place at the school level. Monitoring progress on reporting and response protocols and prevention activities at the school level can be easier to manage and enable better data collection and reporting.



Example 1

Integrating SRGBV into an education sector plan and translating this into local action

Zambia

In Zambia, SRGBV has gained increasing attention, particularly since 2011 when the Anti-Gender-based Violence Act and Education Act generated a large amount of media attention. In the same year the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women) Committee commended legal reforms in Zambia aimed at eliminating gender discrimination against women and promoting gender equality, including these two acts. More recently, the Ministry of General Education has incorporated SRGBV into the 2017-2021 Education Sector Plan, including costed activities to address SRGBV. In 2016 a Code of Ethics for the Teaching Profession in Zambia was developed, which spells out broad principles, basic values and behavioural standards for teachers.

Recognizing the need for a range of partners to be involved, strong links have been established among the government, teachers' unions and non-governmental organizations, providing a foundation for developing collaborative initiatives on SRGBV. Zambian teachers' unions

are engaged in national efforts to address SRGBV. Education International, in conjunction with the Government of Canada and UNGEI, have been working with the two teacher unions — Zambia National Union for Teachers (ZNUT) and the Basic Education Teachers Union of Zambia (BETUZ) — to strengthen their approach to gender and SRGBV specifically. In 2017, ZNUT amended their constitution to include the issue of SRGBV. They have formed 'change teams' in each province comprising teachers who act as change agents, sensitizing parents and teachers on SRGBV.

This is an example of local action resulting from a strong national level strategy. The existing legislative and policy framework, structures to support policy implementation, and the range of initiatives underway in Zambia provide the foundations for further efforts to address SRGBV.

The work is not without its challenges, however. The government recognizes that SRGBV is a critical issue, but it is one of many competing priorities. In addition, the 'gender portfolio' is often an add-on responsibility for officials, which means that gender work can often be undermined or neglected.



Example 2

Strengthening SRGBV prevention and response efforts in South Africa

South Africa

Gender-based violence (GBV) is recognized as one of the greatest social issues affecting South Africa, and schools are no exception. The government has invested in data collection which sheds light on the ongoing issues of violence in schools, including psychological abuse, robbery, physical assaults, gang violence, corporal punishment, sexual violence, and bullying. They have responded with a commitment to promote human rights, including the right to a safe learning environment, through strong educational policies.

A National School Safety Framework was developed in 2015 to serve as a management tool for provincial and district officials responsible for school safety. It gives a mandate to principals, senior management team members, school governing body members, teachers and students to identify and manage risk and threats of violence in and around schools. The Framework is seen as critical for empowering all responsible officials in understanding their responsibilities regarding school safety.

Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Sexual Violence and Harassment have been developed and distributed to schools to support them in responding to cases of sexual harassment and violence against students. The guidelines set out clearly how public schools should treat victims of sexual harassment and violence and the steps that must be taken to deal with those who have or are alleged to be perpetrators.

The department has also released a handbook for students on how to prevent sexual abuse in public schools, entitled 'Speak Out - Youth Report Sexual Abuse'. The purpose of the handbook is to equip students with knowledge and understanding of sexual harassment and sexual violence, its implications, ways to protect themselves, and where to report. The handbook also provides contact details for a range of services.

As in many other countries, while the policy and legislative environments are encouraging, a key challenge is effective implementation of policy and programmes that can help address the issue of violence in children's lives. Recognizing that ongoing systems for reporting incidents of violence are needed to assess the success of new policies, the Department of Basic Education is promoting accountability with protocols for schools to report incidences of corporal punishment and sexual violence.



Example 3

Challenges of translating policy into practice

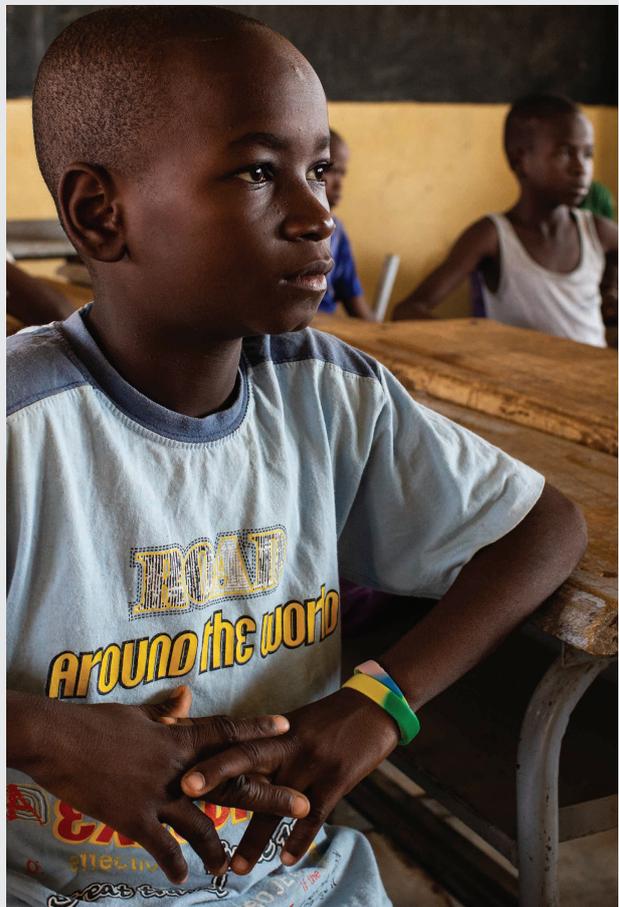
Burkina Faso

In Burkina Faso, the government has developed strong national policies to address SRGBV in schools. For example, the National Strategy for the Acceleration of Girls' Education, an implementation plan attached to the current Education Sector Plan (2012-2021), calls for a 50 percent reduction of SRGBV by 2021. In 2015 an extensive law addressing all forms of violence against women and girls was incorporated and in 2018 Burkina Faso passed a new law and criminal code that makes it illegal for educational staff to have sexual relations with a student under the age of 18.

However, research with a range of stakeholders found that knowledge about and support for these policies is lower at the provincial and district levels, and implementation in schools has faced a range of challenges. This study looked at the barriers to implementation of policies at the school level and found that teachers' attitudes towards gender-based violence, including sexual violence, tend to remain aligned with norms around gender, marriage, and consent, rather than the rights-affirming definitions outlined in the policy. For a minority of teachers who saw the benefit of the policy and wanted to see change, many felt that they were unable or unwilling to go

against strong social norms for fear of social consequences. At all levels, there was a general lack of accountability for implementing the strategies set out in laws and policy.

This research highlights the need for policies to be developed in a way that takes into account prevailing social and gender norms, which can create obstacles to implementation. In addition, a strong implementation strategy and budget allocations are needed so that education stakeholders at all levels, not least teachers and school staff, understand their roles and commitments under the policy and are able to fulfil these roles and commitments without risking social consequences or intimidation. Implementation needs to include capacity building and be sensitive to the realities of teachers' own status in society, understanding that efforts may be needed to shift their own existing attitudes and practices (see Brief 2).



Challenges

-  Issues such as SRGBV are often added to the portfolio of existing government staff who already have a substantive portfolio. When gender advisors or gender units are established to address SRGBV, they often lack enough resources to function effectively.
-  The education system has many competing priorities and pressures. Advocates for addressing and responding to SRGBV may come up against a range of other priorities that compete for time, funding and energy.
-  National laws and policies are often not enforced at the provincial level because of financial and human resource constraints within ministries as well as the lack of coordination between related line ministries.
-  Policy implementation is rarely systematically monitored, which makes it difficult to know if implementation is taking place. To date, few countries have integrated SRGBV-related indicators into national systems to track progress on prevention and response practices.
-  Even when a strong policy or action plan is in place, institutions such as schools reflect the norms and practices prevalent in the local community and may not embrace shifts that challenge these norms (see Brief 3).
-  There is limited high quality evidence from low and middle-income countries on what works to prevent and respond to SRGBV, which is needed to inform policies and policy implementation.



Recommendations



Strengthen links between central and local education authorities to enable dialogue and joint planning and implementation among national, provincial and local actors.



If recruiting dedicated government staff to lead the SRGBV portfolio is not possible, prioritizing SRGBV within their work plans and budgets can help tracking and reporting.



Create opportunities, through sector working groups or local education groups, for youth, teachers' unions, and other non-government groups to participate in developing action plans, joint monitoring and accountability activities. Use on-going joint sector monitoring to assess the impact of policy implementation related to SRGBV (see Brief 5).



Integrate efforts to address SRGBV into on-going education sector strategies aimed at improving learning and advancing gender equality. This could include curriculum-based approaches such as life-skills education or comprehensive sexuality education (see Brief 3) and teacher training and development (see Brief 5).



Invest in collecting, analyzing and sharing data on SRGBV, which can be used to inform policy and practice.



Endnotes

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- 2 UNESCO & UNGEI. (2015). School-related gender-based violence is preventing the achievement of quality education for all. Paris: UNESCO.
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Notes on figures

- 1 Source: UNESCO. (2019) Behind the numbers: Ending school violence and bullying, Paris: UNESCO. Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366483>
- 2 Source: UNESCO, UNFPA, & UNAIDS. (2019). ESA Commitment Progress Report 2018.

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