

EXPLORING SCHOOLS AS AN ENTRY POINT FOR THE INSPIRE FRAMEWORK STRATEGIES

A CASE STUDY



INTEGRATED APPROACHES TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO
VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

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Introduction

In 2018, the government of Uganda released the Uganda Violence against Children (VAC) Survey providing evidence of the breadth and nature of violence in schools, homes and communities.

Among the key findings of the national survey: 86% of girls stated that their first experience of physical violence was committed by a teacher and one in three females and one in six males reported experiencing sexual violence in their childhood. Disturbingly, less than one in ten children sought and received services following the incident.

In South Western Uganda, the Bantwana Initiative of World Education, Inc. (WEI/B) is working in 20 schools in Kabarole, Kyenjojo and Bunyangabu Districts to ensure that schools and communities are safe spaces where children learn and grow without fear of harm. This response to violence against children builds on the organization's extensive programming for vulnerable children and their families since 2008.

"The focus on violence prevention was a follow on phase of our core work around OVC. We leveraged the strengths of previous interventions, rather than introducing entirely new stand-alone programmes." – WEI/B Project Coordinator

WEI/Bantwana adopted the global partners' INSPIRE framework for prevention of violence against children with emphasis on social norms change to strengthen prevention of and response to violence against children in schools and communities (VACiSC). Community Development Officers (CDOs), at the local government level were also supported to increase their engagement with the community and schools.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

1. Positive shifts made by teachers around VACiSC and in particular around gender norms related to sexual violence against girls, teen pregnancy and early marriage

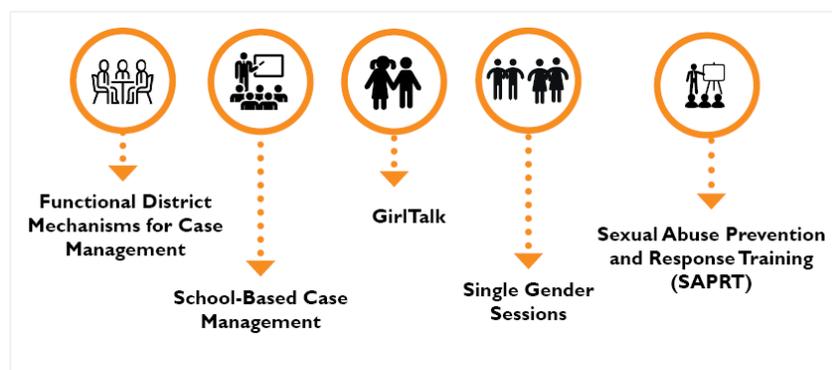
2. Positive shifts made by caregivers around VACiSC, and in particular around gender norms related to sexual violence against girls, teen pregnancy and early marriage
3. Improved agency of boys and girls to prevent and respond to VACiSC and to internalize and promote new positive gender norms
4. Functional mechanisms for addressing child protection issues in schools and communities are strengthened, and key child protection actors are capable of preventing and responding to specific issues around sexual violence

This study presents the findings of a qualitative field survey of the integrated approach of some of the interventions used by Bantwana in achieving project outcomes. The study provides real life evidence about how schools can be engaged to create awareness, transform mindsets and attitudes, build skills, engage multiple actors and thus trigger sustained action around VAC using the INSPIRE strategies.

Interventions

The project adopted a multi-layered approach that integrated evidence-based interventions to address specific challenges documented in previous OVC programming. This case study reviews a selection of the more promising ones based on the successes observed to date.

Figure 1: Selected WEI/Bantwana integrated VAC response and prevention strategies



WEI/B has been working in Western Uganda since 2008, investing significant time and effort to establish trust with schools and districts as a first and critical entry point to addressing VACiSC. WEI/B now targets critical actors and key reference group members with a range of interventions to increase accountability and leverage existing community platforms to elevate discussion and promote the adoption of new, positive norms.

Integration in practice

“From the very beginning, there was consensus that we needed to address the limitations from Phase III in order to be able to improve our response to violence. This enabled us to come up with a multi-faceted approach that wasn’t just one thing but several solutions working together to improve outcomes.”—Country Director, WEI/B

The WEI/B VAC interventions are co-existent, both reinforcing and dependent on each other. The success of one intervention automatically strengthens the others due to the inter-linkages between schools, communities and duty bearers.

► SINGLE GENDER SESSIONS SUPPORT FAMILY RESILIENCE TO VIOLENCE

Rose, a 25 year old widow with three children, was away at the hospital in the evening when her 13 year old daughter was defiled by a stranger who took advantage of the remoteness of the home.

“I used to attend the women gender sessions where they gave us information about protecting our children especially girls, but I never used to care until it happened to my daughter,” says Rose. “I remembered that they told us what to do when it happens. Immediately I called Vincent, the Community Case Care Worker who called the Local Chairperson who mobilized community members to arrest the perpetrator.”

Rose was supported by the case worker to take her daughter to the health unit to provide medical evidence which was presented in court. **“I feel so powerful because the gender sessions gave me courage. We never had a way out since we did not have money, but the knowledge and information we received is helping us,” says Rose.**

The case was discussed during the monthly district case conference to ensure that the family received legal support against the perpetrator.



Picture 1: Single gender sessions were effective in allowing men and women the privacy to express their concerns and relearn new ideas about children and family

The Single Gender Sessions targeted caregivers while simultaneously encouraging greater male involvement in VAC prevention efforts during school meetings and community outreaches. In the current project phase, sessions are held separately for women and men to discuss topical issues. The sessions have increased male participation in addressing social norms that perpetuate violence. The mobilization of men was done in collaboration with the Local Council Chairman (LC) and community mobilizers who invited men from existing groups like village loans associations and parenting groups established in previous project phases.

In these sessions, ‘peer innovators’ have emerged –men and women who dissent from the cultural norm and exemplify a new mode of thinking or practice supported by personal experience. This is especially useful as interventions are no longer viewed as a foreign practice imposed on them but as a potential improvement to their lives as ‘endorsed’ by the peer innovator who is part of their social group. The peer innovators therefore, quicken adaptability of new norms. As role models, they are invited to speak at various community platforms including dialogues and parenting sessions.

“Gender sessions changed attitudes. We used to have few parents attending school meetings, but now the number attending has tripled. Men no longer say that parenting is for the women; they are concerned about their children’s performance in school and how to be better parents.”

—School Teacher

► SEXUAL ABUSE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE TRAINING (SAPRT) OF TEACHERS INCREASES CASE IDENTIFICATION AT SCHOOLS

Fred Tibemanya is the patron of the Child Rights Club at Hamukuku Primary School.

“The training empowered us to understand and care about child protection. Before, I used to think it was none of my business if a child was defiled. Now I make it my job to follow up every case quickly.”



Picture 2: Boys were engaged as change agents and role models to establish norms around respect for girls and prevention of violence

“A girl studying at a school belonging to a tea plantation company was defiled by a plantation labourer as she came from the garden. Walking back to class her peers noticed that she was distressed; when she narrated her ordeal, the children, some members of the child rights club, wrote a letter to me describing the case. I immediately informed the Head Teacher who informed the community case care worker and together with the police, came and arrested the labourer,” recalls Fred, the Child Rights Club Patron.

The SAPRT trainings were conducted during Lunch and Learn sessions where teachers discussed and reflected on a curriculum around unequal gender relations. Rather than training teacher representatives, the sessions were opened up to allow as many teachers as possible to gain skills in child protection from sexual violence.

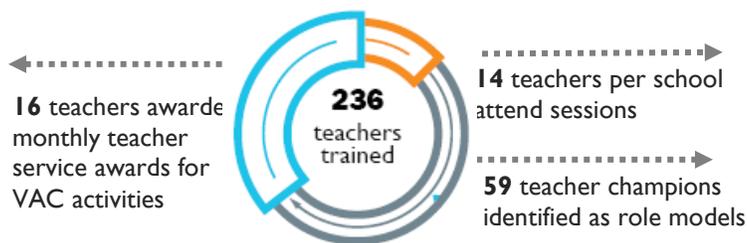
“During a Lunch and Learn session, the case of a malnourished boy, Kelvin, who never packed lunch, was brought up. We wondered why and



Picture 3: The project strengthened the capacity of school matrons like Anna Nuwagaba (above) and patrons to support child rights clubs and GirlTalk sessions to increase children’s agency to understand violence and support each other to seek appropriate services

sent a teacher to find out about his home situation. We discovered that his step mother was sending him to the river early in the mornings and not feeding him daily. The next day the boy returned with a cut on his neck. The community case care worker reported the case to the Community Development Officer who together with the police visited the home. Kelvin’s father who was disabled was not able to correct his wife’s behaviour and the child was placed in the care of a neighbor. Kelvin is now healthy and he was connected to another organization to pay his school fees,” says Anna, Senior Woman and Child Rights Club Matron. “The training enabled us to identify many types of child violence and to take action. Now we care.”

Figure 2: Teachers capacity strengthening for child protection



“The SAPRT trainings improved relationships between students, teachers and parents, because the teachers became more aware and equipped to identify and report violence, becoming allies of children and encouraging the parents to become more involved as caregivers.” –WEI/B Field Assistant

► GIRL TALK BUILDS AGENCY OF BOYS AND GIRLS TO RESPOND TO VIOLENCE

The recognition that girls have unmet needs which increase their vulnerability to violence is the basis for the Girl Talk, a project intervention targeting children. Menstrual hygiene products are a key need, the lack of which is the leading cause of school absenteeism for girls, keeping them at home and at risk of sexual violence. Girl Talk, which is open to both boys and girls, provides skills in making sanitary pads and a safe space for learner-led conversations around menstrual hygiene, sexuality, teenage pregnancy and early marriage.



“I liked the Girl Talk sessions because they gave us information and skills to make pads for our sisters during their menstruation.”- Joshua

In one school, the Girl Talk was able to jumpstart joint efforts were initiated by the community case worker, a member of the School Management Committee and school administration resulting in the provision of a separate changing room and uniforms at school for girls who started their menses while at school.

The Girl Talk sessions reinforced positive gender norms as boys’ and girls’ agency to prevent and respond to VACiSC was strengthened through a new appreciation of sexuality and other child protection issues.



Picture 4: Girl Talk sessions were led by teachers, matrons or patrons to provide information and skills around sexuality and menstrual hygiene. More girls are also involved in sports since the introduction of sanitary pad making sessions as they can be active without fear of staining their clothes.

► SCHOOL BASED CASE MANAGEMENT INCREASES CASE IDENTIFICATION AND IMPROVES PARENTING

School committees comprising a community case care worker (CCCW), member of the school administration, Senior Woman, Senior Man, Child Rights Club (CRC) Patron, Matron, parent and child representative identify child violence cases within schools and refer the children for services. Children can also report cases through a school-based suggestion box.

“A case of five children who had been abandoned by their father and later, their mother, was identified through the school committee when the children stopped coming to school. The school committee recommended that the case be discussed during the sub county case conferencing to identify service providers able to support the children. At the case conference, a partner organization was identified to provide scholastic materials, and fees. The mother, Jennifer, was eventually persuaded by the school committee to return home and encouraged by her peers to join the Village Savings and Loans Association group, narrates Richard Lule, the community case care worker who handled the case.

“Since joining the savings and loans group I have been able to pay school fees for my other children and I am working hard to buy my own piece of land,” says Jennifer. “I also joined the parenting sessions. Today, we were



Jennifer with two of her daughters

learning about ‘special time’ with our children. For me, this means that I take time to rest, gather my children and talk to my girls about protecting themselves from pregnancy. I encourage them that even though their father is not there, I am there for them.”

► FUNCTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR ADDRESSING CHILD PROTECTION ISSUES

Resource constraints at the local government level often hinder effective case management; by strengthening key mechanisms and actors, the project was able to address identified gaps to support coordination and case resolution.

District and Sub County Case Conferences

Case conferences were particularly significant as they brought together critical actors, civil society, educators including key government child protection actors from districts and sub-counties (District Education Officers, Municipal Education Officers, Community Development Officers, Head teachers, patrons/matrons) to resolve specific cases on violence against children.



“These case conferences are critical as they bring together people who are able to make decisions, provide resources and create linkages. We played a key coordination role as the district and sustainability has been built in from the beginning because it is the district coordinating all the activities and the actors. With our without the project we continue with what has started.”- Kobusingye Diana, Senior Community Development Officer, Coordinator of the District Action Centres

Closed User Groups

In order to ease communication between actors for case management, a closed user group innovation was introduced to support 120 stakeholders including community case care workers, head teachers, patron/matrons, parenting facilitators, Community Development Officers, District Education Officers, Probation Officers, and project staff with free mobile

airtime. This significantly improved case coordination efforts as communication could be conducted frequently, with ease.

For instance, a grandmother who injured her eight year old child’s arm for stealing some coins was arrested quickly when a teacher at the school noticed the injury and alerted other members of the closed user group to ensure quick and successful resolution that involved the community case care worker, Community Development Officer, Probation officer, LC Chairperson and the police.

“Before, we used to wait for the monthly district case conferences to resolve cases, but now we use the closed user group to communicate quickly. More cases are being handled as a result.” – Kabahweza Juliet, CDO



“Bantwana complements our work; we are the technical partner while they are the resource partner. We both need each other. When government leads, the interventions are owned by the community which speaks to sustainability. “It is no longer Bantwana’s thing but it is owned by the community.”- Joselyn Mbabazi, Senior Probation Officer

“Improving government’s technical capacity in case management helps us to feed into the national OVC MIS database and produce OVC reports that inform government about key needs, allowing for more resource allocation.”

-District Community Development Officer, Twooli Yafesi Farouk



Impact

The selected interventions, delivered in an integrated manner, have steered good results for children and their families, holding promise for sustainable, community-led change.

- Increased involvement of caregivers in child protection:** More parents are attending parent teacher school meetings and many of them are now packing lunch for their children. The parenting group sessions have also become more popular as parents see better behaviour in their children when they spend more time with them.



Picture 5: Parenting sessions were delivered through a curriculum that supported caregivers with parenting knowledge and reinforced their responsibility to provide basic needs and to talk to their children about protecting themselves.

- Strengthened relationships between students and teachers and matron/patrons** who have become a reference point for children who have problems that are affecting their school performance; 799 cases were reported. This has improved retention of children in school, especially the girl child as menstrual hygiene management concerns are addressed practically at school.
- Teachers, communities and students equipped with skills to identify violence and manage cases collaboratively** with local government actors and community resource persons.



Picture 6: During a community dialogue members mapped out all unsafe spaces for children and took action: a forest, where children were often defiled was cleared within a week of the dialogue. In another instance, church night prayers were identified as occasions for sexual violence against children as they attended with their parents. As a solution, one clergyman instituted a law that required only adult attendance of night prayers.

- Government actors are supported to build an evidence base for OVC needs** to be able to justify more resource allocation to the community services department. This increased motivation and ownership of child protection mechanisms.

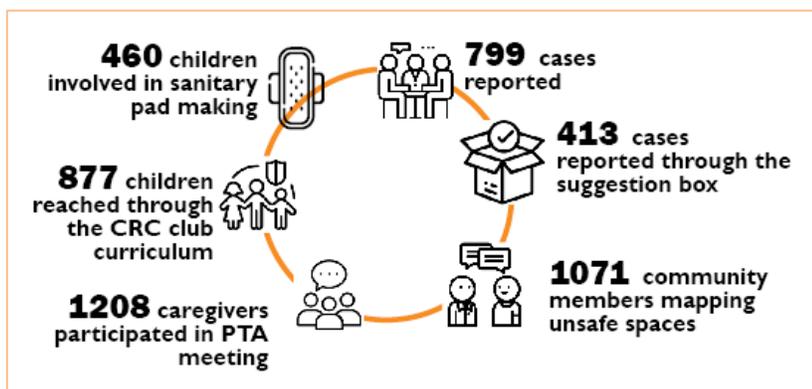


Figure 3: Selected outcomes supported by the interventions

Best practices: Developing programming resilience

As part of its continuous learning from previous programming, WEI/B leveraged a number of good practices to overcome implementation challenges and ensure the success of the interventions preventing and responding to VAC.

A common challenge faced in development programming arises from ‘interventions fatigue’ in communities due to the continuous introduction of new programmes, many of them for limited duration. There is a risk of communities becoming overwhelmed and disinterested in new programmes. WEI/B positioned the selected interventions as add-ons to already existing programmes championed by the same trusted community resource person. This fostered community buy-in and cooperation enabling gradual adoption of new interventions.

Changing social norms is a complex and slow process as it is founded on deeply entrenched cultural norms that determine mindset, attitudes and behaviour of community members. To address this challenge the project involved communities and local government from the initial stages to accurately understand the drivers, the influencers, and build the community’s capacity to own the interventions by teaching them to map problem areas and agree on sustainable solutions. For example, efforts were made to ensure collaboration between Local Councils and community case care workers in roles and responsibilities in resolving cases at the village level. To support this, key messages were delivered regularly through role models at different community-based platforms including VSLAs, parenting sessions, and community dialogue meetings.

Involving local government in planning and implementation processes also helped offset human resource challenges resulting from the transfer of project trained local government personnel including teachers, matrons, patrons



and CDOs. Training in case identification and management was extended to all teachers and the Child Rights Club activities integrated in school programmes to amplify child protection messages and promote prevention and response activities.

“Leave room for innovation; this is important as it speaks to our community-driven approach where we allow the community to identify needs and propose solutions.”-WEI/B Project Coordinator

The resolution of cases at schools created gaps in case documentation as school administrators were anxious to avoid bad publicity resulting from documenting these cases. It was observed that several cases of neglect were resolved quietly by teachers and peer leaders but not recorded in the case book affecting data collection around VAC cases. To improve documentation processes, WEI/Bantwana supported schools to manage all cases within the principles of child protection by strengthening their systems to handle non-statutory cases.

When families are resource-constrained, as is the reality in impoverished homes where the majority of OVC are found, perpetrator payoffs can hinder the reporting of cases. *“Some of these rural homes are so remote from health units and caregivers do not have transportation so cases like those of sexual violence can die a natural birth.” –Project staff.* The project focused its efforts on prevention as a resource-efficient strategy in low income communities by providing correct information on prevention and response and supporting communally agreed on action plans.

Finally, the starting point for a successful integrated approach to creating safe communities and schools hinged on building the capacity of the project team to understand and tackle social norms through a social norms discussion paper that acted as a job aid to ensure a consistent framework for all the interventions.

Methodology

The case study was developed based on a review of key project reports and qualitative field data collection. Interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders and beneficiaries including WEI/B project staff, Community Development Officers, Senior Probation Officers, Community Case Workers, teachers, matrons and patrons, girls and boys and their caregivers.

Success stories and insights shared by beneficiaries and stakeholders were reviewed to extract key themes that were able to illustrate the WEI/B integrated approach and correlate with the findings discussed in the annual report.

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