



WHY ENDING SCHOOL-RELATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (SRGBV) IS CRITICAL TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



An estimated 246 million children experience violence in and around school every year

A BOLD NEW AGENDA FOR ACTION ON GENDER EQUALITY AND EDUCATION

When the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015, it committed to strive for a world guided by human rights, a world that is just, equitable and inclusive, and a world that is free from fear and from violence. Working towards sustained economic growth, social development and environmental protection for all, the agenda seeks to invest in children and young people and provide them with a nurturing environment for the full realization of their rights.

Agenda 2030 places gender equality and inclusive and equitable quality education at the heart of its concerns. It addresses violence against girls and boys as a cross-cutting concern, and includes concrete commitments under a number of Goals and Targets. In particular, under Goal 4, on inclusive and equitable quality education, the Agenda highlights the importance of knowledge and skills on human rights and the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, the provision of child, disability and gender

sensitive education facilities and safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all (target 4.a).

Quality education is critical to development both of societies and of individuals, and it helps pave the way to a successful and productive future. When all children have access to a quality education rooted in human rights and gender equality, it creates a ripple effect of opportunity that influences generations to come.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS: A GLOBAL CRISIS

Yet, for millions of children and young people across the world, the school environment is not as safe and supportive as it should be. Instead, school days are marred by gender-based violence, which includes physical, verbal and sexual harassment, bullying, sexual abuse, and corporal punishment. Situations of protracted conflict, displacement and poverty exacerbate the risks of gender-based violence.

An estimated 246 million children experience violence in and around school every year and its impact causes compromised attendance, lower academic results and higher drop-out rates. Children themselves attest to the impact of violence on their ability to get to and from school, to learn effectively while in school, and to remain in school long enough to reap the benefits of education.

While school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) affects all children, girls are particularly vulnerable. School violence can also have an impact across generations, resulting in higher fertility rates, lower health status and a weakened household economy. The victims and perpetrators of this violence are not only the students; but those who have a responsibility of care, including teachers and other school staff.

SCHOOL-RELATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE - THE FACTS

- ▶ School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is associated with the loss of 1 primary grade of schooling, translating to a yearly cost of around \$17 billion to low and middle income countries.¹
- ▶ More than 1 in 3 students between the ages of 13 and 15 worldwide experience bullying on a regular basis.² Students who experience bullying, a form of SRGBV, score lower in math and reading than those who do not.³
- ▶ In Uganda, 78% of primary and 82% of secondary school students reported having experienced sexual abuse at school, 67% perpetrated by male teachers.⁴ Fear for girls' safety in countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan

and Papua New Guinea have led parents to withdraw girls from school.

- ▶ Corporal punishment is associated with poorer outcomes at age 8 and 12. Children who experience corporal punishment have lower maths scores, poorer engagement in school and capacity to learn impacting their chances later in life.
- ▶ School-related homophobic and transphobic bullying effects 70 per cent of LGBT students in the United States, 31 per cent in Thailand and 45 per cent in Argentina.⁵

1. RTI, International. (2015). Fact Sheet: What is the Cost of School-Related Gender-Based Violence? Washington, DC, U.S. Agency for International Development.
2. United Nations Children's Fund, Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children, UNICEF, New York, 2014.
3. Kibriya et al. (2016). The Effects of School-Related Gender-Based Violence on Academic Performance: Evidence from Botswana, Ghana, and South Africa. College Station, Texas, Center on Conflict and Development, Texas A&M University.
4. EFA GMR (2015) School Related Gender Based Violence is preventing the achievement of Education for All. Policy Paper #17. UNESCO and UNGEI
5. UNESCO (2016). Out in the Open: Education Sector Responses to violence based on sexual orientation and identity/expression. Paris, UNESCO <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002447/244756e.pdf>



Children who have been severely abused or neglected are more likely to experience learning difficulties and perform poorly at school.

THE IMPACT OF SRGBV ON CHILDREN AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT

Several reports, studies and meta-analyses⁶ have shown the immediate and long-term consequences of violence in childhood. Its impact is often irreversible, impeding the optimal development of the young brain, and compromising children's development and wellbeing. Children who have been severely abused or neglected are more likely to experience learning difficulties and perform poorly at school, and at times end up dropping out. They may have low self-esteem

and suffer from depression, which can lead, at worst, to risky behaviours and self-harm which, in turn, can lead to deterioration of relationships, exclusion from school and risk of involvement in criminal activities.

Violence in childhood is also linked to higher risk of sexually-related negative outcomes including further sexual exploitation, multiple sex partners, being a victim or perpetrator of rape, unwanted pregnancy, and risk of

HIV/AIDS. Beyond HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, experiencing violence in childhood has been linked with heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and tobacco, alcohol, and drug addiction, among others⁷.

Put simply: violence undermines the sustainable development agenda of education and health for all and the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment.

6. These include:

Toward a World Free from Violence: Global Survey on Violence against Children. Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, New York, 2013.;
United Nations Children's Fund, Hidden in Plain Sight: A statistical analysis of violence against children, UNICEF, New York, 2014;
World Health Organization, United Nations. Global Status Report on Violence Prevention 2014. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO Press; 2014
Hillis S, Mercy J, Amobi A, et al. Global Prevalence of Past-year Violence Against Children: A Systematic Review and Minimum Estimates. *Pediatrics*. 2016;137(3):e20154079;

7. Felitti VJ, Anda RF, Nordenberg D, et al. Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *Am J Prev Med* 1998;14:245–58.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER: UNLOCKING THE 2030 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA TO ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES OF SRGBV

Until the root causes of SRGBV are addressed, from gender and social norms and stereotypes to systematic inequalities and unequal power dynamics, children and young people will continue to be denied their fundamental right to a quality education.

As the world now begins to implement Agenda 2030 and looks towards a world "free from fear and violence" and "with universal literacy... a world which invests in

its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation", we must recognize that no country can achieve the vision of this Agenda while children are not learning in school and are physically and psychologically affected by gender-based violence in the very institutions that are meant to protect and nurture them.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of inter-related and mutually reinforcing goals with a network of related

targets and offer a strong framework for action to eliminate SRGBV: goal 4 on inclusive quality education, goal 5 on gender equality, goal 3 on health and well-being and goal 16 on access to justice and accountable and inclusive institutions. All contain ambitious targets that, if achieved, would see children and young people around the world learning in safe and supportive environments, free from fear and gender-based violence.



4: ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ALL AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING

- 4.a. Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, nonviolent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all
- 4.5. Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training
- 4.7. Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including gender equality



3: ENSURE HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING FOR ALL AT ALL AGES

- 3.4. Reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being



5: ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

- 5.1. End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
- 5.2. Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation
- 5.3. Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels

AGENDA 2030 TARGETS WHICH ADDRESS SCHOOL-RELATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

16: PROMOTE JUST, PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

- 16.2. End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against, and torture of, children



17: REVITALISE THE PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS ARE NEEDED TO ELIMINATE SRGBV

PREVENT AND RESPOND TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN AND AROUND SCHOOLS, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHER SECTORS AND WITH SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

- **Governments should adopt comprehensive, integrated and multi-sectoral action plans to prevent and respond to violence in and around schools.** These plans should be gender transformative to take into account the diversity of experiences and support the needs of all girls and boys including the most marginalized.
- Improving school governance is central, with guidelines and action plans on eliminating violence in schools, including corporal punishment, developed and enforced with the support of teachers, parents and children.
- Strategies to eliminate SRGBV should be integrated into other school-based initiatives such as violence prevention in schools, children's rights, gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, HIV and comprehensive sexuality education, life skills or citizenship education, disaster preparedness and peace-building.
- **Education content, including curricula, textbooks, pedagogy and classroom practices can be designed to be gender-transformative and promote peace, gender equitable norms, attitudes and behaviours.**
- Reporting and response mechanisms and protocols should be strengthened within educational institutions.
- Provide training and support to school personnel and teachers to respond to violence and use positive, gender-sensitive teaching practices.
- **Violence prevention programmes should address gender norms, power inequalities and dynamics that interact with poverty, disability, sexual identity and orientation, race and ethnicity in the manifestation of violence.**
- Children who experience violence at home are more at risk of bullying others or being bullied in school. Addressing SRGBV requires working in partnership with communities (including parents) and stakeholders at all levels, including the judiciary, child protection authorities and the transportation sector.
- Listening to children's voices is critical in understanding the nature and causes of violence; girls and boys must be recognized as key participants in developing solutions to SRGBV and in accountability mechanisms.

STRENGTHEN RELIABLE DATA, EVIDENCE AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT WHAT WORKS TO END SRGBV

- **Wide ranging research is needed to address gaps in knowledge on the drivers of SRGBV including vulnerability of children marginalised by poverty, ethnicity, language, caste, disability, religion, refugee status, sex, sexual orientation or gender identity.**
- Integrated programmes and policy evaluations are needed to better understand SRGBV: effective interventions to eliminate it; and its impact on psychological and physical well-being and learning outcomes.
- **Systematic reporting and data collection on SRGBV should form part of education sector plans.**
- Further investments must be made to support formative and action research, and programme and policy evaluations, in order to build the evidence base and good practice on SRGBV prevention and response.

PRIORITIZE AND EXPAND FINANCING TO SUPPORT PROGRAMMES ADDRESSING SRGBV, ESPECIALLY AMONG MARGINALIZED AND UNDER-SERVED POPULATIONS

- **Donors and partners should invest in interventions that address SRGBV** through partnerships among civil society and non-traditional development actors including the media.
- Support formal and non-formal learning environments that are safe and free from gender-based violence, including conflict and fragile settings.



MONITORING PROGRESS ON SRGBV THROUGH THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Whilst no SRGBV-specific global indicators have yet been agreed at international level, a number of indicators are included in Agenda 2030 which offer an opportunity to track progress on violence against children and adolescents.

- Percentage of students experiencing bullying, corporal punishment, harassment, violence, sexual discrimination and abuse (4.a)
- Proportion of girls 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the last 12 months, by age group and place of occurrence (5)
- Percentage of children 1- 17 years who experienced any physical and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month (16.2)
- Percentage of young women and men 18-29 who experienced sexual violence by age 18 (16.2)

