



Generate and Use Evidence to Ensure Every Child is Safe to Learn

Safe to Learn Sub-Saharan Africa Regional Roundtable #1
Outcome Document



Safe to Learn



End Violence
Against Children



Civil Society Forum
Ending violence
against children

GPE



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In June 2022, Safe to Learn held the first in a series of roundtables for Sub-Saharan Africa, to discuss the **Safe to Learn Call to Action**. Countries in the region focused on the call to action's fifth pillar: the need to **generate and use evidence to end violence in and through school**. Fifty (50) delegates from the five countries in Africa that have endorsed the Call to Action - Ghana, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, and Uganda - joined the event including representatives from Ministries of Education and of Social Affairs (or equivalent), representatives from national and international civil society organisations, the United Nations, academics, and other partners, as well as senior leaders from Namibia. Representatives from regional offices and Headquarters of Safe to Learn members and sister organizations were also present.

The roundtable, co-convened by the Safe to Learn Secretariat/End Violence Partnership, the CSO Forum to End Violence against Children, the Global Partnership for Education, UNESCO, and UNICEF, was organised in collaboration with the End Violence Lab at the University of Edinburgh. In addition to the outcome document provided here, a supplement is also available, which provides links to key resources to support the implementation of Call to Action priority 5.

Cover photo: UN0240596

Disclaimer: *The designations in this publication do not imply an opinion on legal status of any country or territory, or of its authorities, or the delimitation of frontiers.*

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Safe to Learn

Safe to Learn (STL) is a global initiative dedicated to ending all forms of violence against children in and through schools. It was established in response to a 2018 youth manifesto where young people **demanded an end to violence in school**.

Safe to Learn works to ensure all girls and boys, in all their diversity, and including the most vulnerable have access to safe and inclusive learning environments and that schools become platforms to safer and inclusive societies.

Ending violence in and through schools means:

- Ending all violence that happens while at school, on and around school grounds, while getting to and from school, and in online activity linked to a student's school life.
- Using school as an entry point to reduce violence in other areas of children's lives (in the home, community, and online, as well as other places where interpersonal violence occurs).

The STL initiative brings together education, child protection, health, and violence prevention sectors under a common vision and strategically builds on complementary strengths and expertise of its 14 members including major leaders from civil society, donors, global partnerships, the business sector, United Nations System, and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children.¹

STL work is rooted in the STL Call to Action which sets out, in high level terms based on global evidence, what needs to happen to end violence in and through school.

Call to Action

1. Implement policy and legislation: National, regional, and local governments develop, fund, and enforce laws and policies that protect children from all forms of violence in and around schools, including online violence.
2. Strengthen prevention and response at the school level: School staff, students, and management committees provide safe and gender-sensitive learning environments for all children that promote positive discipline, child-centred teaching and protect and improve children's physical and mental wellbeing.
3. Shift social norms and behaviour change: Parents, teachers, children, local government and community leaders recognize the devastating impact of violence in schools and take action to promote positive social norms and gender equality to ensure schools are safe spaces for learning.
4. Invest resources effectively: Increased and better use of investments targeted at ending violence in schools.
5. Generate and use evidence: Countries and the international community generate and use evidence on how to effectively end violence in schools.

¹ The members of the Safe to Learn Global Initiative include: Civil society - the Civil Society Forum to End Violence against Children (CSO Forum); Donors - Global Affairs Canada (GAC), the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (UK FCDO), the World Bank; Global partnerships - Education Cannot Wait (ECW), the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children (GP EVAC), the Global Business Coalition for Education (GBCE), the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), the United Nations Girl's Education Initiative (UNGEI); United Nations System - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organisation (WHO). Safe to Learn is also supported by the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children (UN SRSG VAC).





Call to Action pillar 5: Generate and Use Evidence

Pillar five of the STL Call to Action reinforces the need to generate and use evidence to inform interventions to end violence against children in and through school. To facilitate translating this pillar into country-level action and results, within this pillar are a series of benchmarks, developed based on international child rights frameworks, United Nations guidance and minimum standards, and good practices from the field of child safeguarding and child protection.²

Under Call to Action pillar 5 there are three benchmarks:³

Benchmark 1. Information and reporting of incidents allow for disaggregated baseline information and monitoring of trends and reflect needs and gaps in the system.

Benchmark 2. There is regular data collection on prevalence and forms of violence in schools using methods that follow high ethical standards.

Benchmark 3. Decisions on replication and scale-up of violence prevention initiatives are based on evaluations of trailed models and approaches.



My challenges to leaders and governments: to create a more enabling environment for education and continue prioritising education for out of school children.

Madina, child rights activist, Nigeria

Global evidence shows that violence in and around school has devastating consequences on the child, as well as wider social and economic implications

Violence also prevents many girls and boys, from attending school and accessing equal educational opportunities. A 2021 World Bank and the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children/Safe to Learn investment case, demonstrates that violence against children negatively affects educational outcomes and undermines educational investments. The report provides global estimates on the cost of violence in school and shows that ending violence is also a smart economic investment.⁴



² The Safe to Learn. 2021. [Global Programmatic Framework and Benchmarking Tool. From Call to Action to Programme Responses](#).

³ For further information on the Call to Action, benchmarks, examples of initiatives to support the implementation of the Call to Action and key resources, see the [Safe to Learn Global Programmatic and Benchmarking Tool](#) and the Supplement to this Outcome document.

⁴ Wodon, Q., C. Fèvre, C. Malé, A. Nayihouba, and H. Nguyen. 2021. [Ending Violence in Schools: An Investment Case](#). Washington, DC: The World Bank and the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children

* Madina photo credit: Save the Children





Research shows that violence, in all its forms — physical, sexual, or emotional, can leave children with visible and invisible scars with negative health and social outcomes reaching well into adulthood. These same outcomes can be passed down from generation to generation.

The COVID-19 pandemic had an enormous impact on education, health, and child protection in Africa. Today, as African countries multiply their efforts to recover from the education crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring schools and all learning environments provide the safe and supportive space that all girls and boys, in all their diversity, need (and deserve) is more crucial than ever.

Violence, pre- and post-COVID too often goes unreported due to stigma, shame, embarrassment, fear of repercussions, or lack of access to reporting mechanisms. Data and evidence offer powerful ways to make visible these detrimental effects, a critical first step towards ending it.

Violence in and around schools is preventable

Robust, and ethically collected data is critical to develop effective and efficient policymaking and programming and to reach the children who need it the most. Monitoring and evaluation are essential to measuring progress, providing critical information on implemented interventions, including how effectively they are preventing and responding to violence in and through school.

Education, child protection, health and violence prevention must be interlinked to establish safe learning environments that prevent and respond to violence. Education itself, can also play a vital role in ending violence that affects children outside of the school environment, be it in the community, in the home, online or other settings.

The question is: How do we turn challenges of this complex crisis into opportunities that make our children safe to learn? It is data, evidence and documented practices that tell us what is working and what needs to be done to have even greater impact.

Dr. Joan Nyanyuki, Executive Director, African Child Policy Forum, and End Violence Executive Committee Co-Chair

Turning challenges into opportunities

Millions of children, across all stages of childhood, face multiple and overlapping forms of violence in and around school every year. A variety of factors including age, gender, sexual orientation and expression, disability status, refugee, migrant or displacement status to cite just a few can increase their vulnerability. The COVID-19 pandemic worsened this situation with a marked increase of child abuse, including gender-based violence, and with school closures around the world resulting in **“the worst education crisis on record.”**⁵

In Africa, far too many children experience violence at school, around school, on the way to and from school. Related risks for violence can co-occur online, at home and in the community. In the face of multiple global challenges- including political, economic, and climate-related crises - we must turn challenges into opportunities that make schools and learning safer for children.

⁵ The World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF. 2021. *The State of the Global Education Crisis: A Path to Recovery*. Washington D.C., Paris, New York: The World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF.





Using available data, the World Bank shows that **investing in children to be safe to learn** can reap benefits that can have broad effects at the individual and national level and across nations.

THE KNOWLEDGE ENVIRONMENT. Stakeholders involved in violence prevention, work within complex environments where knowledge, expertise, influence, capacities, and resources can flow in different directions. This knowledge environment includes young people, the wider public, media, the private sector, policy makers, traditional leaders, school staff, as well as civil society organisations, technical and financial partners and researchers and academics and parents and students. Harnessing these diverse points of view and approaches is important.

SCALE AND NATURE OF THE PROBLEM — A MOVING TARGET. Keeping informed on the nature, scope, and impact of violence as well as on how best to respond with effective solutions is a complex undertaking for the field. Structural conditions are constantly changing including due to political instability, socio- economic crises and climate catastrophes and these directly influence the on the ground situation that makes children vulnerable to violence. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were deeply disruptive and remind us that violence is always a moving target.

DATA AND EVIDENCE. Effective policies are evidence-based and practice-informed. While there is some school-based data on violence against children, data gaps remain, and data is not always accessible to the policymakers and practitioners who need it.

A variety of data has been generated by each country that participated in the roundtable. These include national surveys on Violence Against Children (eg. Uganda, South Africa), broader surveys such as the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys -MICS addressing on violence, education, and inclusion (e.g. in Ghana or Sierra Leone), National Diagnostic Studies on violence in school (e.g. South Sudan, Uganda). The Education Sector Analysis in some countries incorporates data on safe and inclusive schools (e.g. Sierra Leone) and studies or surveys were conducted addressing related issues such as teenage pregnancy (e.g. Uganda), out-of-school children (e.g. Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Ghana, Uganda) and risks and opportunities related to child online practices (e.g. the Global Kids Online study in Ghana). Many countries have also undertaken Disrupting Harm studies, generating high-quality evidence on online child sexual exploitation and abuse (e.g. [Uganda](#), [South Africa](#), [Namibia](#)). Additionally, country specific studies such as Ghana's study to assess people's knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) in child protection, including VAC in schools and South Africa's work around the social and economic burden of violence against children study are contributing to a meaningful body of evidence.

While Sierra Leone has conducted a [Global School-Based Student Health Surveys \(GSHS\) in 2017](#), Ghana and Uganda's GSHS are respectively dated 2012 and 2003 and these surveys are absent from the data and evidence landscape in South Sudan and South Africa.

Likewise, countries are working to strengthen administrative data systems. Uganda Ministry of Education has a mobile phone-based real-time data-collection system from schools ([EduTrac](#)), child helplines collect data in various countries which could be mined to enhance understandings of VAC in and around schools. As part of the Safe to Learn-funded project, Raising Voices developed the [Good Schools Mobile App](#), which digitizes monitoring and supported social distancing M&E during the height of COVID-19. Other data and evidence sources available in countries and mentioned by participants include related violence databases, health and education sector data systems, crime statistics, media reports, academic research, and practice- based knowledge. Coordinating these data sources through a data inventory will be an important next step.





Ethical Data Collection and Use – A Virtual Cycle

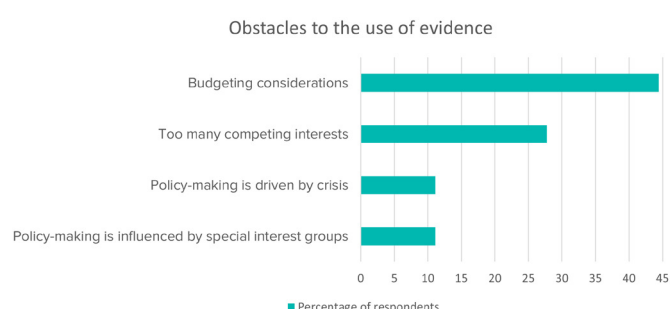
Data collection on violence against children does not always need to be costly nor lengthy - but must be done well respecting children's rights and avoiding revictimizing violence survivors, a serious and all too frequent risk. Collecting data on violence and on children entails ethical and methodological challenges that can't be overlooked.

When countries rigorously document the scale and severity of violence against children and evaluate interventions, this benefits not only the country's children and make policymakers and practitioners' job easier, but it can also help neighbours and peers.

Obstacles to the Use of Evidence – Budget Comes Up Top

How countries and organisations work with data and evidence is not straightforward. Participants highlighted that solutions to the problem need to be politically acceptable.

We queried participants around the major challenges that they face around effectively using data and evidence to build a stronger prevention and response in and around schools. Budgeting considerations were cited as a principal constraint among 44 percent of participants. Just over 27 percent participants felt that there are too many competing interests to consider when making policy decisions. Eleven percent (11 percent) of participants said policymaking is too often influenced by special interest groups, while 11 percent of participants indicated policymaking is crisis driven.



Current Efforts in Call to Action 5

To effectively embrace the power of using data and evidence, it is important for each country and stakeholder to effectively situate themselves within Safe to Learn's Call to Action 5. Leading this initiative, some countries including **South Sudan** and **Uganda**, have undertaken a **Safe to Learn diagnostic**. The diagnostic can be used to establish baselines and measure progress against the Call to Action at both country (at national, sub-national and school level) and global level. It appraises measures in place under each benchmark of the call to action, documents good practices and gaps and provides evidence-based recommendations under each benchmark to accelerate progress.

During the regional roundtable, participants were asked a series of questions around the three benchmarks mentioned at the start of the document. For all participants, in all countries, we rated three benchmarks around generating and using evidence. The results indicate that while efforts are underway, more can be done.

Benchmark 1 an indicator of information and reporting of incidents to allow for disaggregated baseline information and monitoring of trends is only partially in place.

Mapping current efforts in Call to Action 5 (Generate & Use Evidence)

Map all efforts on Call to Action 5 that your country is already working on by placing dots.

What STL benchmark?	Place your dots here			
	In place	Partially in place	Not in place	Need more guidance
5.1 Information and reporting of incidents allow for disaggregated baseline information and monitoring of trends and that reflect needs and gaps in the system.		●●●●●●●●	●●	
5.2 There is regular data collection on prevalence and forms of violence in schools using methods that follow high ethical standards.		●●●●●●●●	●●	
5.3 Decisions on replication and scale-up of violence prevention initiatives are based on evaluations of trialed models and approaches.		●●●●●●●●	●●	●●●●





Benchmark 2 an indicator of the extent to which there is regular data collection on prevalence and forms of violence in schools using methods that follow high ethical standards is only partially in place.

Benchmark 3 and indicator of rigour that scaled up programmes are based on evaluations of trialled models and approaches, was spread across by generally in need of more guidance.

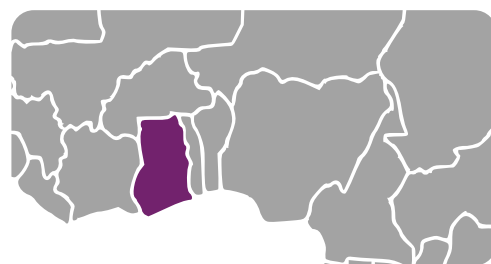
Data and Evidence in Action: Promising Examples from Policy and Practice

All five countries attending the STL Roundtable have implemented promising interventions that have effectively applied data and evidence to determine the scope of the problem and to build effective solutions to end violence in and through schools.

GHANA – SCALE-UP OF THE CHILD PROTECTION COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKITS TO CREATE SAFE AND PROTECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR CHILDREN

As part of its “[Social and Behaviour Change Communication Strategy for the Protection of Children in Ghana](#)”, the Government of Ghana has partnered with UNICEF and NGOs to develop and implement the Child Protection

Community Engagement Toolkits. The implementation of the Toolkits aims to increase knowledge and promote positive attitudes and practices among people in communities for the protection of children and reached over 3 million people in 100 districts across all regions of Ghana since 2016. The Toolkits engage a variety of audiences, including parents, community members, traditional and religious leaders, teachers and children themselves, in dialogues on a range of child protection issues and topics, including violence against children in and around schools.



UNICEF Ghana commissioned Knowledges, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) baseline and end-line surveys in 2013 and 2021 respectively, to investigate whether and how knowledge, attitudes and practices relating to child protection, including violence against children in and around schools, have changed over time, particularly in areas where UNICEF-supported community-based mobilisation and awareness raising interventions have been implemented.

Outcome: The KAP studies have offered an opportunity to track changes in community-based norms, attitudes, knowledges, and practices relating to a wide range of child protection topics over a period of seven years. Findings from the 2021 KAP study, which included measures around violence in school, indicate a significant improvement over time in attitudes and practices across a range of issues including a significant reported reduction in rates of violence against children from baseline to end line. For example, the rate of children reporting physical violence at school reduced from 34 per cent at baseline to 26.9 per cent at end line.

Findings further revealed that violence, abuse, and exploitation of children, are sometimes justified as discipline, and that high rates of violence against girls and women are persistent. This acceptability of this violence suggests that social norms promoting or encouraging violence against children and women in Ghana remain widespread and deeply rooted. The study revealed that structural drivers, such as poverty, and risk factors including low education levels contribute to high rates of violence. While the Child Protection Community Engagement Toolkits have raised awareness and achieved widespread reach across the country, evidence from the KAPs suggests there is more work to be done to address violence against children and gendered forms of discrimination. The study concluded that addressing violence requires holistic and multi-sectoral response to address these root causes and drivers.



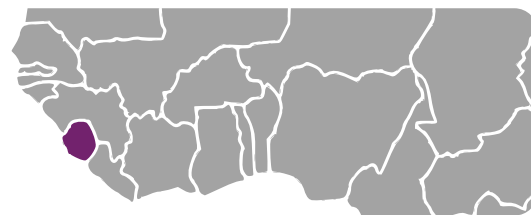


SIERRA LEONE – SCHOOL-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMME

Sierra Leone has employed a school-based violence prevention programme (SBVP) using a holistic approach across different stakeholder groups in schools.

The SBVP model, implemented by the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary School Education (MBSSE), ChildFund and the Daindemben Federation, has four components: a child component, an educator component; a caregiver component; and a school/community component. The child component works to increase children's ability to protect themselves through social emotional learning skills and information on forms of violence and protection. The educator and caregiver components aim to enhance the skills of caregivers and educators to prevent, mitigate, and respond to violence. The school/community component addresses the risk factors that lead to violence. The programme's curriculum and methodology are based on existing evidence-based prevention programmes which incorporate effective communication, clear expectations, positive feedback, limits and consequences, problem solving, emotion management, and monitoring and adult supervision.

Outcome: The programme, adapted from a similar initiative in Honduras which demonstrated success in reducing violence against children at school and at home, is currently being evaluated using a Randomised Control Trial (RCT).



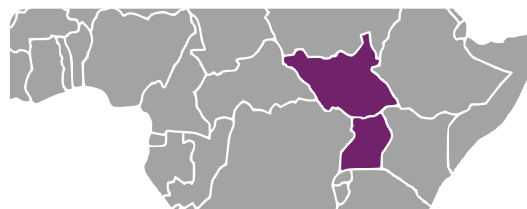
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SOUTH SUDAN, UGANDA - SAFE TO LEARN DIAGNOSTIC STUDY

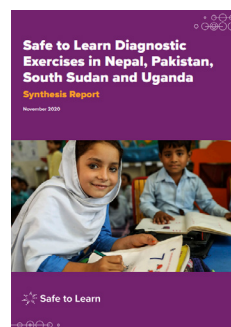
The STL Diagnostic study has been conducted in South Sudan and Uganda (and in three other countries worldwide) to measure national efforts to prevent and respond to violence in and around schools.



Diagnostic studies are based on a global diagnostic tool developed by the STL coalition. This is a tool that is adaptable to different country contexts. The STL diagnostic exercise assessed progress against each benchmark of the Call to Action at national, sub-national and school level. The methodology includes literature review, interviews with key informants at the central, decentralized and school level, including governments, partners, teachers and students and consultations using and adapting the Safe to Learn 'diagnostic' tool.

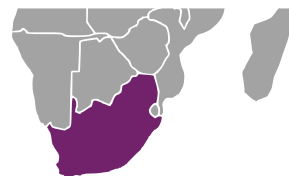
The coordination and management of the STL diagnostic has varied, depending on **specific contexts**. For example, in South Sudan, the diagnostic took five months, while in Uganda it was implemented in about five weeks.

Outcome: The diagnostic studies have provided highly useful data and evidence to inform country-level collective dialogue between national counterparts and Safe to Learn partners. They diagnostics establish baselines from which to measure progress under the Call to Action and identify good practices, gaps, and evidence-based recommendations to accelerate results. In Uganda, for example, the findings helped inform the new Education Sector Plan, ensuring the integration of an explicit objective in it on safe schools.



SOUTH AFRICA - SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BURDEN OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

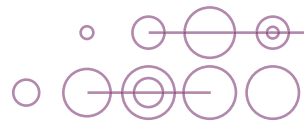
South Africa conducted a study on the economic burden of violence against children. The study used a mixed method approach including a literature review and a quantitative analysis of outcome studies looking at prevalence and incidence of violence. It used existing data to calculate lost time from work due to morbidity or mortality and assigned a cost to this.



Understanding the burden of violence on both society and the economy can be a strong advocacy tool. Burden is the impact of violence against children to both individuals and society as measured by financial cost (e.g. "cost" to society), mortality (e.g. premature death), and morbidity (e.g. 'consequences' especially health and health behaviour consequences). So, for example, if a child is violated, the study shows the many costs that will be incurred across the health, including mental health, education, and labour sectors. These studies can also predict the percentage of GDP spent on violence when violence is not prevented. In South Africa's case, this reached up to 5 per cent of the country's GDP (the study also notes this is like to be an underestimate).

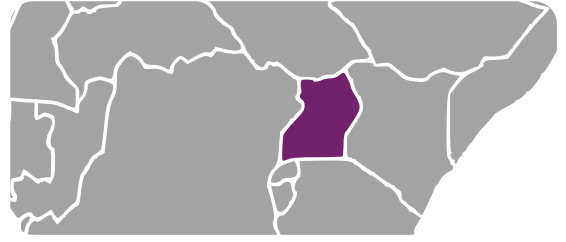
Outcome: The study is the first study of its kind in South Africa and places violence against children as a public health priority. It fills a key gap by building an investment case rather than a human rights case to motivate political will to prevent and end violence against children in South Africa. Since its publication, the research has maintained a high attention factor and has been cited in various journal articles and other media.





UGANDA - THE GOOD SCHOOL TOOLKIT

The Good School Toolkit (GST) developed by Raising Voices is a school-wide intervention led by teachers, students, and school-affiliated community members. Its whole school, holistic and context-appropriate approach works to influence the operational culture of the entire school community through four entry points: teacher-student relationships; peer-to-peer relationships; student-and-teacher-to-school relationships; and parent- and community-to-school governance relationships.



The GST initiative has been implemented in 887 primary schools and then expanded to 114 secondary schools through a [STL- funded project](#).⁶ It continues to show positive results and, as a result, it is being rolled out in 23 districts with the government having distributed materials in more than 5,000 schools.

Outcome: Results of the [Good School Toolkit evaluation using RCT design](#) demonstrates an effective approach in schools to reduce violence against students in only 18 months.



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⁶ This was made possible thanks to the generous financial contribution from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom (UK FCDO).





GUEST SPOTLIGHT- NAMIBIA

Ms. Sanet Steenkamp, Executive Director, Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture in Namibia

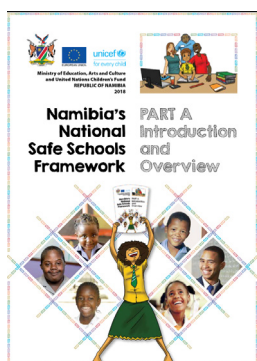
While the Republic of Namibia has not yet endorsed the Call to Action, it has demonstrated commitment to ending violence in and around school and has taken on a global leadership role in 2022. Namibia (with Italy and an SDG4 youth advocate) led the **Thematic Action Track 1 of the Transforming Education Summit on Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools**.

Like in all other countries, Namibia has seen the impact increased with COVID-19, with risk of suicide, substance abuse and all other negative impacts that affect children.



The statistics are worrisome; we still have more girls than boys reporting violence ... we still have gender oriented discrimination and stigma against children, we still have bullying. These are things that we can't take lightly - it is imperative we continue to discuss how to use data and evidence to create enabling and safe learning environments for children.

Ms. Sanet Steenkamp, Executive Director, Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Namibia



Namibia's National Safe Schools Framework was developed jointly by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and UNICEF to strengthen the provision of healthy, supportive, and conducive teaching and learning environment, in light of a worrisome level of violence in Namibian schools. It provides practical guidance to schools and school stakeholders to systematically improve the standard of school safety, to develop a culture of care in any school.





Conclusion

As African countries begin to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to ensure that children return and thrive in a safe learning environment.

While gaps remain, there is ample data and evidence on violence against children in Sub-Saharan Africa from which to build safe and inclusive school environments. The vital issue, however, is to transform that data and evidence into knowledge and into widescale practice supported by national policy.

Evidence on impactful solutions needs to be made more accessible, in user-friendly formats and translated to reflect stakeholders' needs and reflecting field conditions. Effectively mobilising knowledge can boost efforts to celebrate solutions that effectively prevent violence in and around schools.

The Safe to Learn coalition of partners can support countries in their endeavours to generate and use evidence.

Safe to Learn is available to organise a second regional roundtable in Sub Saharan Africa, to continue supporting countries working to end violence in and through schools by providing a platform for sharing knowledge, expertise, and tools and for informed peer to peer dialogue.

The Safe to Learn Roundtables Series (2022-24) adopts the Call to Action as high-level framework. The thematic focus of the next roundtable will be identified with participating countries to respond to their specific priority needs.

At the end of this first roundtable participants were asked to evaluate the activity and recommend a topic for a second STL Regional Roundtable in Africa. The topic ranked highest is the call to action pillar 3 'Shifting social norms and behaviour change'.

We encourage all the participants to continue sharing their experiences with each other including successes and challenges faced. We encourage you to reach out to the Safe to Learn Secretariat. We are a partnership of different organisations with different strengths and perspectives that can support your work.





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