

Adapting the Good School Toolkit to a Refugee Context

A case study from End Violence Grantee AVSI Foundation



A child stands in front of an art mural created by her community as part of the Good School Toolkit programme in northern Uganda.

Refugee children around the world are struggling to continue their education and learn. After being forced from their home countries, many refugee children suffer from some level of trauma – a situation exacerbated by the limited capacity of classrooms inside refugee settlements and host communities. Globally, refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school than non-refugee children¹.

Often, the teachers of these schools are burdened with not only a lack of resources, but an overabundance of learners. And, in host communities, refugee children are sometimes at risk of discrimination, violence and abuse. Even so, these students are the lucky ones: nearly half of all refugee children – four million girls and boys – are out of school, according to UNHCR.

¹ Global Framework for Refugee Education, Global Refugee Forum Education Co-Sponsorship Alliance, November 2019

Many of those children live in Uganda, where 1.3 million refugees have sought refuge from conflict affected countries like Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan. Of those, 83 per cent are women and children, many of whom have been forced to rebuild their lives without the stability, community or opportunities that a healthy learning environment provides.

In two Ugandan refugee settlements, however, AVSI Foundation is ensuring schools are safe, secure environments for students to cope, rebuild and recover.



Students gather for a photograph with members of the AVSI and End Violence teams at a school.

Adapting the Good School Toolkit

With support from the End Violence Fund, AVSI brought the [Good School Toolkit](#) – an evidence-based intervention developed by the non-governmental organization [Raising Voices](#) – to refugee setting camps for the very first time in 2018.

The Good School Toolkit is a package of six steps to make schools safer for children. It aims to help teachers increase student confidence and success, and support school administrations to become more transparent and accountable. Led by a team of two trained 'protagonist' teachers, two students and two school-affiliated community members, the program influences school-wide culture through four entry points: **teacher-learner relationships**, **peer-to-peer relationships**, **the relationship between teachers, learners and schools**, and the **relationships between parents and community members** to school governance bodies.

Through these entry points, the toolkit works to improve the school environment – and reduce violence – by improving relationships between all those involved.

Though the resource had been implemented in over 750 Ugandan schools, before AVSI's intervention, the Good School Toolkit had not yet been adapted to a refugee setting. In non-refugee settings, this toolkit had been shown to reduce corporal punishment and violence in schools: one study illustrated that 50 per cent fewer teachers used physical violence against students after the program was implemented.²

AVSI's experience showed that such an adaptation can also reap rewards for children, families and both host and refugee communities albeit with some challenges. From April 2018 to March 2019, AVSI implemented the Good School Toolkit in seven schools, ultimately reaching 7,190 children in the Rhino Omugo and Kyangwali refugee settlements. To supplement the toolkit, AVSI also implemented a three-month parenting³ skills training program reaching 3,046 caregivers, 90 per cent of whom were refugees⁴.

The beginning

AVSI worked with parents, teachers and children to improve the learning environment and make schools safer for children.

"Initially, I thought a stick was a tool of teaching," said Robert Kizza, a teacher of Bugoma Primary School.

AVSI focused on seven schools in the north and the west of Uganda. These schools – three of which were in the Rhino Omugo and four of which were in the Kyangwali Refugee settlement – were identified by Ugandan government officials, UNHCR and the lead education partners in each settlement as schools that needed increased support. Students of these schools were both refugees and Ugandan host community children, many of whom have just as few resources as refugees themselves.

The logistics: adaptation and implementation

AVSI received \$494,978 from the End Violence Fund over a period of 12 months. This support was used to implement not just the Good School Toolkit, but also a three-month parenting skills program, case management and legal support, and birth registration services. AVSI allocated \$28,700 toward the implementation of the Good School Toolkit for the seven schools.

Though the project was overseen by one program manager, two project coordinators, and one monitoring and evaluation officer, a total of 24 staff were part of the project in its two locations. AVSI hired one social worker per school, who was responsible for guiding the set-up of teacher committees, learner committees and parent committees and to deliver weekly sessions to

² Devries KM, Knight L, Child JC, Mirembe A, Nakuti J, Jones R, et al. The Good school toolkit for reducing physical violence from school staff to primary school students: a cluster-randomised controlled trial in Uganda. *Lancet*. 2015;3(7):e378–e386

³ The Uzazi parenting program: https://issuu.com/avsiuganda/docs/uzazi_avsi_parenting_model_young

⁴ <https://www.avsi.org/doc/360/61a0898add134d579c2b2462d8357c60/>

different categories of learners based on the contents in the toolkit –step by step. This social worker was assisted by community incentive workers, who were provided with a stipend to follow-up on program activities and indicators. Each week, the social workers would send a report on activities to the program manager, who would visit each site in person twice a month. In addition, the manager held weekly meetings with all social workers to discuss the program’s work plan and explore any challenges social workers faced. There was also a monthly case management meeting, where program staff had a chance to discuss the planning and coordination of the project.

In 2012, the Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports passed a policy that banned corporal punishment, with penalties as high as seven years in prison for violence against children. Because the Good School Toolkit was implemented with this policy already in place, the programme came to life within an environment conducive to its success.

Technical support and collaboration

Throughout the project’s duration, Raising Voices provided technical support and capacity-building both on- and off-site. On the ground, Raising Voices staff met with AVSI staff, teachers and student committee members to review progress, and helped those involved develop a step-by-step action plan. Raising Voices also coached AVSI staff and trained them on violence against children, later helping them share knowledge among committee members in schools. In addition, they trained parents committees whose role was to link the school leadership team to the community. These parents volunteered to meet regularly to offer and receive feedback to the school management on child safeguarding issues in the community. AVSI also proposed ways of making the schools and surround places safe places for all children.

Off-site, Raising Voices helped AVSI staff, teachers and related stakeholders better understand the toolkit, and provided guidance on how to support schools. This support was instrumental to the project’s implementation and success.

The impact

Over the project’s 12 months, AVSI **reached 133 teachers and 7,190 children through the Good School Toolkit program**. Sixty per cent of these children were refugees (primarily from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo), while 40 per cent were Ugandan children in host communities. Because the full roll-out of the toolkit takes 18 months, AVSI was only able to complete the first four out of six steps⁵.

AVSI also engaged 3,046 caregivers in a three-month parenting skills program, 90 per cent of whom were refugees. As part of the parenting training, AVSI also worked extensively with a group of 120 pregnant adolescent and young mothers who were out of school in those settlements and provided them with life-skills training. However, they realized that they needed more support, such as economic strengthening activities, which no partner was able to provide at the time.

⁵ This included creating a Good School committee, creating an environment conducive for change, providing teachers with a renewed sense of their role and greater professional support and establishing a culture of positive discipline. More information available at: <http://raisingvoices.org/good-school/>

“Through the project, we saw positive changes in students’ conduct, teachers’ attitudes toward corporal punishment, and students’ awareness of their basic rights,” said Alfred Agaba, AVSI End Violence Project Manager.

AVSI conducted a baseline and end line study on the programme. Some results included:

- **Improved positive discipline.** Teachers mentioned that there had been a reduction in corporal punishment and that positive discipline had become more common. **Between baseline and end line, only 1 per cent of schools still reported using corporal punishment, as compared to 96 per cent at baseline.**
- **Improved governance.** Girls were more involved in leadership and the school governance structures felt more effective. At end line, 95 per cent of school management committees were meeting at least once a term compared to 53 per cent at baseline.
- **Reduced dropouts and absenteeism of pupils from school.** The programme’s activities, such as handling different forms of child abuse in a more effective manner, following up with students who drop out due to family break-ups, and managing girls’ menstrual hygiene, greatly contributed to this reduction in dropout rates and absenteeism.
- **Improved communication between learners, parents and teachers** as a result of instituting parent teacher and learner committees.
- **Increased participation of children** in school activities through, for example, more active suggestion boxes where pupils aired their views for change. Students were also reported to be more respectful, disciplined, confident, assertive, and good time-keepers by teachers
- **Improvements in the school environment.** Learners and teachers reported that their schools had better water and sanitation facilities after the intervention.

Monitoring and evaluation

At the start of the project, AVSI created a monitoring and evaluation plan with indicators and set targets, along with an indicator performance sheet that was filled in each month and shared with End Violence team. AVSI created check lists to measure levels of violence pre- and post-intervention, which was conducted in each of the seven schools. The focus was however on corporal punishment and overall improvement of school environment rather than all forms of violence.

Questionnaires for the parenting programme were also administered before and after the three-month course. This questionnaire found the programme actually reached more parents than initially anticipated, though some only attended the training for part of the total programme duration.

Challenges and lessons learned

As with any project, adapting the Good School Toolkit to the refugee setting came with some challenges. In the first phase of the project – Step 1: *Building Your Team and Network*– AVSI staff were met with some resistance from adults.

“Some parents and teachers simply argued that the rights approach spoils children,” said Alfred Agaba. “Because of that, we experienced resistance to some concepts, like the avoidance of corporal punishment.”

It was also felt that it took time for teachers to subscribe to the ideas in the Good School Toolkit. Children in refugee settlements often experience unparalleled levels of trauma – and as such, may act out more than their peers. Many teachers felt this behaviour needed to be met with harsh discipline, and as such, it took longer for the trained teachers to interest their colleagues. Another facet of this resistance had to do with refugees’ expectations in the settlements.

Although the intervention focused on step 1-4, AVSI felt that the 5th step, *Creating a Good Learning Environment* is challenging to implement in a refugee setting. Though the overall intervention does not require heavy costs, AVSI said Step 5 is more complicated and expensive to implement as it requires investment from the community.

In theory, the step is a good one: by requiring community members to contribute to improving the build in environment around a school, like a wall for example, there is more local ownership over the school and its maintenance. However, in refugee settings, people have so few resources to give – making contributing to a school nearly impossible. This is compounded by the fact that the refugee community is transient, often leaving one refugee settlement to go to another.

“In refugee settings, this can be tricky as refugees rarely have resources to contribute,” said Agaba. “External donors are then needed.”

That being said, Step 5 also includes improving children’s learning environments in other ways – both physically and psychologically. The programme can introduce opportunities for students to become leaders, promoting their voices in school-wide activities.

In addition, staff turnover created palpable challenges in the programme. One trained teacher who was passionate about the Good School Toolkit, for example, was transferred to another school. This impacted the progress in the school, as bringing a replacement teacher on-board with all the required training and mentorship took a substantial period of time. In addition, refugees are more mobile than others.

To respond to some of those challenges, Raising Voices is now developing a version of the Good School Toolkit that may be applicable to various contexts, including in refugee settings.

Lessons learned include:

- To implement the Good School Toolkit in refugee context, it is key to **understand community needs, vulnerabilities and opportunities** before beginning programme

implementation. This will help the organisation plan for what they need to provide, and to better match the challenges a community faces with what the programme can offer.

- **Coordination** at all levels is very important, including at the organizational level, inter-agency level, and coordination with humanitarian actors such as UNHCR or the Child Protection Working Group. When coordination was effective, better gains were reached.
- To work inside refugee settings, **time is a critical factor**. If the intervention is too long, you lose participants. Faster interventions seemed to work better in this context.
- The Good School Toolkit works better in **protracted refugee settlements**, as opposed to acute crisis or displacement situations, because time is needed to address social norms and attitudes that are deep-rooted.
- There is a necessity to **document and build a strong monitoring and evaluation system**. It can be difficult to measure the impact of the reduction of violence in only a short period of time and if this is not embedded in a monitoring and evaluation system.
- Assessing the level of violence against children in the community is key to working with parents beyond the school. In this project, those levels within the settlement were not known and therefore the impact on the reduction of violence more challenging to assess post intervention. There is a need for more **disaggregated data** in violence against children surveys.
- It is important to be **flexible** with the tool kit and willing to adapt it to different circumstances.
- Having at least one “**change agent**” in each school is crucial, preferably a head teacher.
- Changes register faster in **secondary schools**.
- **Different programs can be combined with the Good School Toolkit**, including parenting. In such settings, it is worth considering combining parenting programs with livelihoods and economic strengthening projects.
- There are **additional challenges in refugee settings**, such as working with parents and teachers and securing long-term funding.

Conclusion

AVSI’s experience illustrates how the Good School Toolkit can work in not only development settings, but in humanitarian contexts as well. Overall, those implementing the project should harness the efforts of the students, teachers, parents and local communities, using their engagement and collaboration to improve schools and make them safe for children to realize their full potential.

Of critical importance are the quality of good school committees and the resiliency of protagonist teachers. Also important is the involvement of all education actors in the implementation of the tool kit, ensuring that the programme is adapted as a community-led and grown approach.

Coordination from the start was key. This particular model creatively involved the District Education Offices, the Sub-county local government officials, UNHCR, the Office of the Prime Minister responsible for refugee welfare in Uganda, fellow education actors in the respective settlements, school management, parents, teachers and pupils.

“This training is an eye opener, and an opportunity for me and fellow teachers to contextualize, realize and believe that a violence-free learning environment is actually possible,” said Leonard Kyomba, the Deputy Head-teacher of Kasonga Primary School.

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