



Tackling Violence in Schools: a global perspective

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Our Classroom Golden Rules:

We want our classroom to be clean and tidy.

We want everybody to look after our books, cards and other materials.

We want everybody to talk quietly, including our teachers.

We want everybody to try to do their best work.

We want everybody to be kind and friendly to each other.

We want everybody to help each other and share.

We want everybody to keep their hands to themselves.

We want everybody to be safe in the school and playground.

Every so often children need to sit and discuss these again.

Gambella Primary School, Ethiopia¹

¹ UNICEF, *Manual. Child Friendly Schools*, p. 19.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Around the world, schools are uniquely positioned to deliver the quality education that is the right of every child. They can offer children the opportunity to cultivate their creative talents and critical thinking, gain life skills, develop social relations, and grow with dignity as individuals. They can also serve as important resources for the development and dissemination of values of non-violence, cooperation, tolerance and respect, not only among pupils and staff, but also beyond, in the wider community.

On any given day, more than a billion children around the world attend school.² Many of these children enjoy their right be taught in a safe and welcoming environment which encourages learning, personal development and social skills. For many others, however, schooling does not guarantee such opportunities. These are girls and boys who are exposed to sexual and gender-based violence, corporal punishment (with or without the overt or tacit approval of education ministries and other authorities that oversee schools) and other forms of violence at the hands of teachers and other school staff. Furthermore, many are exposed to bullying, schoolyard fighting, gang violence, assault with weapons and sexual and gender-based violence at the hands of their own peers.³

For these children, the potential and promise of schooling is undermined by pain, suffering and fear. In certain cases levels of violence, or the threat of violence, can be such that it keeps children out of school, with the result that educational opportunity, with all its benefits for the individual and society, is lost. The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education observes that, “[i]f schools play a central role in the prevention of violence and the promotion of a culture of peace, it is also true that violence can often take place in the school context with serious consequences for the enjoyment of the right to education.”⁴ Given the prevalence of violence in schools, the crucial importance of education in realizing the rights of the child and, moreover, the potential of violence-free schools to act as catalysts for non-violence in the communities that they serve, the Special Rapporteur is joining with the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children to dedicate particular attention to this issue in the course of 2011.

This paper outlines some of the key aspects of effective initiatives to end violence in schools, drawing on lessons from around the world and touching on issues ranging from the establishment of effective legal frameworks to understanding and influencing social norms, working with teachers and other school staff, working with children, and developing gender-sensitive approaches. It also emphasises the importance of promoting truly inclusive approaches to schooling and developing tolerance and acceptance towards all children, including those from the most vulnerable groups.

This paper also introduces some recent initiatives aimed at preventing violence against children. In particular, it examines initiatives that succeed in breaking away

² Some 689 million in primary schools and 513 million in secondary schools. UNICEF, *Manual. Child Friendly Schools*, p. 19.

³ Pinheiro, Paulo Sérgio, *World Report on Violence Against Children*, p. 116.

⁴ A/HCR/17/29, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Kishore Singh. The promotion of equality of opportunity in education”, 18 April, 2011, §7(g), p. 4.

from a strictly sectoral approach in favour of a whole school strategy that involves a range of actors and operates on a number of levels. School-wide interventions that aim to lower the violence rate are increasingly coming to be seen as the most effective: “[n]ot only do they reduce violent or aggressive behaviour, they can also reduce truancy, improve academic achievement, and enhance social skills and well-being.”⁵

1.1 The imperative of eradicating violence in schools

There are at least three compelling arguments for focusing on the issue of violence against children in the school setting.⁶ The first relates to the imperative to ensure that each and every child enjoys his or her human rights to the fullest extent. The human rights implications of violence in schools can be far-reaching: children who are bullied, for example, will often exhibit a decline in school achievement and a reluctance to participate in school activities. Their right to leisure, play and recreation may be compromised as they isolate themselves from other children and lose interest in hobbies and after-school activities. And bullied children’s mental and physical health is also at risk: they may show signs of depression, have problems eating or sleeping or complain of physical symptoms such as headaches or stomach aches.⁷ Equally, evidence suggests that children who bully may also suffer from poor mental health and often do not outgrow this behaviour, but rather carry it into their adult personal, family and work relations.⁸ This implies associated costs to the individual, those around him or her, and society as a whole. Furthermore, the negative impact of violence in schools goes beyond the children who are directly affected by it. It also has an insidious effect on pupils who witness it, creating an atmosphere of fear, anxiety and insecurity incompatible with learning. Ultimately violence or the threat of violence may be such that children drop out of school or are kept at home by concerned parents. Lima, a 15-year-old girl from Jalalabad City in Afghanistan recounts that,

*[t]wo years ago one of the teachers had beaten one of my classmates very badly. Her mother came to school and complained to the principal. The same teacher got angry with the parent and called her very bad words, and finally the student’s mother decided not to let her daughter attend the school. Many other similar events forced students to leave the school. I also wanted to leave but my parents wouldn’t let me.*⁹

The second argument for focusing on violence in schools relates to the social impact of this phenomenon and, inversely, the potential of violence-free schools to make an important contribution to social cohesion. Violence in the education setting both feeds and is fed by violence in society as a whole. As observed in the UN Study on Violence Against Children, “where the social and physical environment of the community is hostile, the school environment is unlikely to be spared.”¹⁰ In effect,

⁵ Plan, *Learn Without Fear: The global campaign to end violence in schools*, p. 46.

⁶ In keeping with the *World Report on Violence Against Children*, the term “school” is used in this paper as a generic term for all educational settings for children.

⁷ Children’s Safety Network, *Preventing Bullying: The Role of Public Health and Safety Professionals*, p. 2.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 2.

⁹ Save the Children, “Lima – Afghanistan”, Violence Free School project, case study, date of interview 17 January 2011.

¹⁰ Pinheiro, Paulo Sérgio, *World Report on Violence Against Children*, p. 111.

violence in the home, in the school and in the community is a continuum, spilling over from one setting to another.¹¹ If schools can be established as violence-free environments, there is a possibility of creating a new continuum: as the Committee on the Rights of the Child observes in its general comment no. 8 from 2006, “[a]ddressing the widespread acceptance or tolerance of corporal punishment of children and eliminating it, in the family, schools and other settings, is not only an obligation of States Parties under the CRC. It is also a key strategy for reducing and preventing all forms of violence in societies.”¹²

The third argument is linked to the issue of a country’s capacity for development and the crucial importance of education in improving living standards for its citizens, children and adults alike, and for generations to come. To give one example, in the United Kingdom, 16-year-olds who were bullied at school are twice as likely not to be in education, employment or training, and to have lower wage levels at age 23 and 33 than those who were not bullied. In turn, young men who are not in education, employment or training are three times more likely to suffer from depression and five times more likely to have a criminal record.¹³ Considering only the cost to governments of children failing to complete their education (that is, not including costs associated with medical care, psycho-social support, the perpetuation of violence and violent attitudes into adult life and so on),

*the total cost of school violence in terms of foregone social benefits (i.e. productivity and tax revenues lost to each government as a result of children not finishing their education) in just 13 countries for which information is available is up to almost US \$60 billion. That’s the equivalent to the World Bank’s estimate of additional foreign aid needed to achieve every Millennium Development Goal by 2015.*¹⁴

In particular, the importance for national development of getting girls into school and keeping them there is widely recognised. For example, a study has show that each year Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria lose US \$974 million, US \$301 million and US \$1,662 million respectively for failing to educate girls to the same standards as boys.¹⁵ Violence in school is one of the most significant factors contributing to the underrepresentation of girls in the education setting. Ending violence in schools is therefore inherent to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and MDG 2 and 3 in particular (achieving universal primary education and eliminating gender disparity in education), and to UNESCO’s Education for All goal to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015.

¹¹ Antonowicz, Laetitia, *Too Often in Silence. A report on school-based violence in West and Central Africa*, p. 7.

¹² UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, “General Comment No 8 (2006). The right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment”, adopted 2 March 2007.

¹³ Ellery, F., N. Kassam and Bazan C., *Prevention Pays: the economic benefits of ending violence in schools*, p. 10.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹⁵ Plan, *Paying the Price*, 2008, cited in Antonowicz, Laetitia, *Too Often in Silence. A report on school-based violence in West and Central Africa*, p. 7.

2. WORKING FOR CHANGE

This section examines and illustrates some of the key considerations that must be taken into account when developing responses to violence in schools. These start with the establishment of a legal framework and also include changing social attitudes to violence against children, working with teachers and other staff working with children themselves to bring about change, adopting an explicit gender perspective and ensuring a focus on vulnerable children.

2.1 Establishing a legal framework

Clear, unambiguous legislation that places a ban on all forms of violence against children, including violence in school, is a key component of any comprehensive national strategy to address violence against children. Legal prohibition of violence against children in schools and all other settings is vital for creating the conditions for successful local initiatives. It also sends out a strong message to parents, teachers, school authorities and communities as a whole that violence against children is unacceptable to the State.

Legislation that specifically addresses violence against children, such as that recently introduced in Kenya, Poland and Tunisia, is recognised as being more effective than general legislation prohibiting violence, abuse and assault since general legislation is not always understood to cover the disciplining of children or to govern the situation in schools. In the case of Kenya, Article 29 of the new constitution, which came into force in August 2010, prohibits all forms of violence from either public or private sources, a ban that is binding for all State organs and all persons. Article 53 provides that every child has the right to be protected from abuse, neglect, harmful cultural practices, all forms of violence, inhuman treatment and punishment, and hazardous or exploitative labour.¹⁶

Other countries have introduced legislation that specifically refers to the school context: to take one example, on 8 December 2006, the Mongolian Parliament passed major amendments to the country's education law, which now prohibits all forms of violence in education settings. It also introduced a Code of Conduct under which school managers and teachers are held responsible for respecting students' inherent dignity and right to privacy. Mechanisms for monitoring and regulating breaches of the Code have also been established.¹⁷

In India, The Right of Children to Free Education Act of 2009 states that, “[n]o child shall be subjected to physical punishment or mental harassment” and indicates that, “[w]hoever contravenes the provision [...] shall be liable to disciplinary action under the service rules applicable to such person.”¹⁸ Like Mongolia's education law, this Act also provides mechanisms for monitoring the rights of the child to education and provides for redress of grievances: “The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights [...] or, as the case may be, the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights [...] shall [...] (a) examine and review the safeguards for rights provided by or under this Act and recommend measures for their effective implementation; (b)

¹⁶ A/HRC/16/54, “Annual Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children, Marta Santos Pais”, 28 February 2011, §15(a), p. 5.

¹⁷ -----, *Eliminating Violence Against Children. Handbook for Parliamentarians*, p. 49.

¹⁸ Government of India, “The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009”, §17.

inquire into complaints relating to child's right to free and compulsory education; and (c) take necessary steps [...].”¹⁹ Furthermore, “any person having any grievance relating to the right of a child under this Act may make a written complaint to the local authority having jurisdiction.”²⁰

Worldwide progress towards the prohibition of all corporal punishment in schools is monitored by the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children.²¹ As of May 2011, corporal punishment in schools is unlawful in 117 states, while 29 states have introduced legislation prohibiting corporal punishment in all settings, including schools and in the home.²²

Some countries have, in addition, introduced specific legislation to protect children against bullying. These include Korea, Norway, Sri Lanka, the UK and the US.

The introduction of new legislation or the amendment of existing legislation to provide children with protection from violence - be it a general measure or specifically directed at the school setting - should ideally be reinforced by a monitoring system to advance implementation as well as mechanisms to implement and enforce this legislation. This has, for example, been identified as a priority by the Council of Europe, the South Asian Initiative to End Violence Against Children and the member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in its Cairo Declaration.²³

Crucially, monitoring systems and enforcement must be allocated sufficient and reliable budgets to fund these developments, a measure that also signals a Government's political commitment to addressing the issue.²⁴ The effectiveness of legislation also depends on awareness-raising among schoolchildren, parents, caregivers and the public at large and, an essential corollary to this, the development of easily-accessible, child-sensitive, confidential and independent counselling and reporting mechanisms to address incidents of violence.²⁵

Furthermore, legislation to protect children in schools cannot remain removed from the work of relevant educational institutions: it must be incorporated in their structures and practices and be reflected in the training and ethical standards of professionals in this field. Experience from the field suggests that partnering with teachers' unions and education authorities is one of the most effective ways of enforcing legislation protecting children from violence.²⁶

¹⁹ *Ibid*, §31.

²⁰ *Ibid*, §32.

²¹ See www.endcorporalpunishment.org

²² Austria, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Kenya, Latvia, Lichtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia, Ukraine, Uruguay and Venezuela. Figures from Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, *Prohibiting all corporal punishment in schools: Global Report*, pp. 8-9.

²³ A/HRC/16/54, “Annual Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children, Marta Santos Pais”, 28 February 2011, §8, p. 4.

²⁴ Plan, *Learn Without Fear: The global campaign to end violence in schools*, p. 50.

²⁵ A/HRC/16/54, “Annual Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children, Marta Santos Pais”, 28 February 2011, §21, p. 7.

²⁶ Laurie, Emily, *Plan's Learn Without Fear Campaign: Campaign Progress Report*, p. 16.

Professional guidelines can also be used to introduce standards of non-violence. In Bangladesh, which, with some 81,443 schools has the biggest primary education system in the world, the illegality of corporal punishment has not yet been confirmed in legislation, however it has been ruled unlawful under a Supreme Court ruling of 2011. Since 21 April 2011, teachers in Bangladesh have a clear set of guidelines produced by the Ministry of Education regarding “the prohibition of corporal and mental punishment of students in educational institutions”. The Guidelines open with a statement of the Government’s commitment “to ensuring children’s rights and providing a healthy environment for the mental growth of children in all educational institutions of the country.”²⁷ They go on to state that,

*A teacher or any person involved in the teaching profession or any officer or employee of any concerned educational institution, during studies or at any other time, shall not act towards any student in any manner which is treated as a punishment [as defined in the Guidelines]. Any direct or indirect involvement with any offence defined [in the Guidelines] shall be considered to be a contravention of the Government Servants (Conduct) Rules, 1979 and shall also be considered to be a punishable offence. Penal action may be taken against any such person on a complaint of misconduct under the Government Servants (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1985. If necessary, action may also be taken under criminal law against such person.*²⁸

Importantly, the Guidelines also include a provision concerning dissemination, whereby the appropriate officials, “shall together undertake dissemination activities to prohibit physical and mental punishment in educational institutions”, as well as measures to provide the “necessary financial support to implement the measures.”²⁹

2.2 Changing attitudes and working with social norms

Important as it is, legislation is only one aspect of a successful strategy to end violence in schools. Even where violent acts against children in schools is legally prohibited, in societies where violence is a norm the cultural acceptability of these practices often encourages weak enforcement of the law.³⁰ Efforts to bring an end to violence in school must therefore seek to change attitudes among teaching staff, school administrators, other professionals working with children, parents and wider communities. If children are exposed to violence in the home or on the street and understand it to be a legitimate means of conflict resolution or recognise it as a means of establishing dominance or status, then it is more than likely that they will bring these values into their schools. Where this is the case, efforts to reduce violence in schools may need to be complemented by violence reduction initiatives in communities or parenting programmes in families.

The UN Study on Violence Against Children underlines the importance of addressing violence in schools according to the socio-economic contexts in which the school

²⁷ Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Ministry of Education. Law Cell, “Circular no. 37.031.004.02.00.138.2010-151”, 21 April, 2011.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Plan, *Learn Without Fear: The global campaign to end violence in schools*, p. 16.

operates. The complexity of this issue is captured by Antonowicz in a study from West and Central Africa:

School-based violence is not a problem confined to schools but a complex, multifaceted societal issue. Schools are social spaces within which the power relationships, domination and discrimination practices of the community and wider society are reflected. Violence against children in schools is linked to socio-cultural traditions, political agendas, the weakness of education systems, community practices, and to global macroeconomics. Conditional aid flows, as well as internal efficiency in education expenditure, impact on national education systems and can result in insufficient recruitment of teachers and cuts in teacher training budgets.³¹

In many cases, violence against children is a social norm: it may reflect power structures in society and be considered an appropriate measure to help a child learn and mature. In many countries in Africa, for example, school corporal punishment often persists in the name of tradition. A teacher from Ghana is quoted as saying: “The African child is brought up in a culture that uses canes as a form of punishment for children to learn and follow instructions. If we do not enforce the same practices, our schools will experience reduced academic standards.”³² Likewise, a teacher from Afghanistan recounts that, “The traditional teaching method has been used for decades. It has strict rules and regulations and it allows teachers to beat and punish students [...] I remember a teacher who had beaten a student so badly that he had broken the student’s right hand.”³³ Children themselves may internalise these values and come to see violence as an inherent element of their childhood, a valid strategy to achieve the imposition of discipline and, consequently, an appropriate means by which to negotiate their own status and position with their peers.

Perhaps one of the clearest examples of how violence in schools is shaped by developments in wider society is the emergence of cyber-bullying. For children around the world new technologies offer opportunities to create new spaces of interaction and to develop new forms of socialization. At the same time, these technologies make children potentially vulnerable to harassment and bullying in guises and ways that are often difficult for adults – parents, caregivers, teachers and others – to detect and respond to, particularly since it is a phenomenon that tends to take place in spaces that do not come under adult supervision. Cyber-bullying may have its origins in face-to-face social interaction in the learning environment, however children do not escape its influence at the end of the school day. A study from the USA indicates that 4 per cent of students between the ages of 12 and 18 reported having been victims of cyber-bullying during the 2007-2008 school year. Another study found that approximately 13 per cent of students in grades 6 to 10 reported being cyber-bullied.³⁴

³¹ Antonowicz, Laetitia, *Too Often in Silence. A report on school-based violence in West and Central Africa*, p. 4.

³² *Ibid*, p. 18.

³³ Save the Children, “Haji Habibullah – Afghanistan”, Violence Free School project, case study, date of interview 10 April 2011.

³⁴ Suicide Prevention Resource Centre, *Suicide and Bullying*, p. 1.

Initiatives to end bullying must learn to navigate in the virtual spaces increasingly frequented by children. Mobile phone technology already provides easy access to child helplines for both emergency and non-emergency situations. Nor are these services the preserve of industrialised countries. For example, Plan Kenya and Childline Kenya worked together to set up a free 24-hour telephone helpline for children. Launched in March 2008, the service, delivered by the Government of Kenya in partnership with Childline provides both preventive and support services through referral and school outreach facilities. The Department of Children's Services provides personnel to manage rescue operations, court procedures and the preparation of children's cases. The three-digit number associated with the service is memorable and free on all telephone technology.³⁵

2.3 Working with teachers and other staff

In many respects, it is the attitude, approach and skills of teachers and other staff that most directly shape the child's experience in school. Ideally, when discipline is required it should aim at positive reinforcement, constructive criticism and clear guidance and instruction.³⁶ These teaching skills need to be communicated and learned through adequate training on alternative discipline. It has been observed that teachers who have received this kind of training are generally more favourable toward the abolition of corporal punishment than teachers who have not received such training.³⁷

In the absence of training in child-friendly approaches in the classroom, teachers and other school staff tend to rely on violent methods simply because they have not been provided with the skills and knowledge to maintain discipline or encourage learning any other way. Plan underlies the link between the violent behaviour of teachers and the values of the community to which they belong: "[u]nless teachers themselves have been educated about gender and power issues, they are likely to model behaviour that reflects their own experiences, and those of the wider community, which are often deeply unequal and violent."³⁸ The same holds true for other school staff: a survey of 12,326 children in 157 schools in France conducted on behalf of UNICEF found that 4.6 per cent of pupils considered that they had been subjected to racism on the part of an adult in their school, most often from ancillary workers in the school canteen.³⁹

In a focus group study of the system of school discipline in Nepal, both teachers and parents admitted that they beat children because they had also been beaten and humiliated in school and at home when they were children. They indicated that they were not aware of the negative consequences of violent methods of disciplining children and added that they had never considered alternatives to corporal punishment and verbal humiliation.⁴⁰ It was observed that children in turn internalize the view that violence is the only possible response when discipline is needed.⁴¹ Recognising that it is difficult, if not impossible, to address the school environment without also

³⁵ Laurie, Emily, *Plan's Learn Without Fear Campaign: Campaign Progress Report*, p. 5.

³⁶ Pinheiro, Paulo Sérgio, *World Report on Violence Against Children*, p. 148.

³⁷ Plan, *Learn Without Fear: The global campaign to end violence in schools*, p. 47.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 26.

³⁹ Observatoire International de la Violence à l'École, *A l'École des enfants heureux... enfin presque. Synthèse des résultats*, p. 2.

⁴⁰ ----, *Violence Against Children in Nepal: A Study of the System of School Discipline in Nepal*, p. vii.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. viii.

addressing the social and cultural contexts in which the school is located, participants in the focus group study expressed the opinion that teacher training courses alone would not be enough to protect children, since acts of violence and humiliation in the home would perpetuate this practice in the wider community. The majority of participants therefore asked for training workshops to be organized for parents as well as for teachers.⁴² This echoes the observation in the UN Study on Violence Against Children that, “teachers cannot carry the whole burden”.⁴³ In assessing the needs of teaching staff it is important to, “look at ways in which education authorities, school heads, and other school staff, parents and communities may be undermining teachers’ work, and at ways in which they could be doing more to support it.”⁴⁴ This means that violence should not only be challenged in the classroom: non-violent values must be promoted daily throughout the school structure and should be integral to school management.

The learning atmosphere created by teachers’ lack of awareness of alternative forms of discipline and, in certain cases, their exploitation of pupils, especially girls, is often exacerbated by low salaries, growing class sizes and the sense among teachers that they are undervalued in their communities or in wider society. Recognising this, Save the Children Sweden, together with Friends in Village Development Bangladesh, has prepared a booklet called “Stories of Remarkable Teachers” in which children, through focus group discussion, speak of some of the remarkable teachers they have met and the teaching approaches they used. These include: “instead of giving punishment, cordially making students understand the lesson if they failed to prepare”; “friendly behaviour”; “speaking nicely”; “speaking with a smile”; “equal care to all students”; “punctuality”; and “singing songs and other extracurricular activities”.⁴⁵ Pupils from a school in Manikganj wrote, “Our favourite teacher [...] does not believe in using corporal punishments. Instead she advises students to be good and sincere. She encourages respecting elders and loving younger ones. She always gives honour to her colleagues.”⁴⁶ Pupils from Sylhet explained that,

*Our favourite teacher [...] always takes care of us. [...] She always gives special attention and care for the sick and weak students [...] She is sensitive to the disabled students. Anwar, a weak student who felt discomfort and fear and liked to stay alone in the class, gradually recovered himself with her extra care and attention.*⁴⁷

Teachers like these serve as models for non-violent interaction for children, even in situations where children risk falling victim to violence in their homes and communities.

Likewise, curricula that promote the values of social equality, tolerance toward diversity and non-violent means of resolving conflict can provide children with an

⁴² *Ibid*, p. viii.

⁴³ Pinheiro, Paulo Sérgio, *World Report on Violence Against Children*, p. 143.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 143.

⁴⁵ Basher, Sarwar and Ziaur Rahman Shipar, *Stories of Remarkable Teachers*, p. 15.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 22.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 29.

important structure for understanding the world, even in situations where violence outside the school undermines their communities and impacts their lives.⁴⁸

2.4 Working with children to end violence

Effectively addressing violence in schools cannot be done without the meaningful involvement of children themselves and, indeed, children have the capacity to become agents of change, to campaign and raise awareness of the issue, generate debate, sit on school councils, organize themselves and others, protect and support each other, and identify and support victims of violence among their peers. The UNICEF Innocenti Insight on the role of education in ethnic conflict observes that,

*if the border between schooling and society is [...] permeable, this opens up the possibility that students may carry non-confrontational and tolerant attitudes from the classroom into the broader community. Just as teachers may be role models to the students they teach, so students may play an active role in shaping the attitudinal and perceptual environment beyond the walls of the school.*⁴⁹

An example of this comes for the Save the Children Violence Free School project in Afghanistan. Thirteen-year old Omid recounts;

*One day I went with my classmate to the bazaar (market) to buy stationery. I saw a shopkeeper was beating and using bad language towards his son. My friend and I decided to talk to the shopkeeper. We politely greeted him and I asked him if he had any stationery, then I told him that we learned at school that adults should respect children and not beat or punish them. If children make a mistake, adults should help them to find a solution for their problem and should try to see things from the child's viewpoint. At first he got angry with me but slowly he started to understand that I was right. He apologized and promised not to beat his son again. Without the Violence Free School project I would never have done that.*⁵⁰

The readiness of children to respond to, and indeed, act upon the idea that schools must be free from violence, including violence carried out by children themselves such as bullying, sexual harassment and fighting, is enhanced by cultivating positive, peaceful and tolerant attitudes and behaviour in early childhood. Early childhood initiatives can improve developmental readiness among children, timely entry into school and better learning outcomes. It can also prevent patterns of bullying that appear at a young age.

⁴⁸ Pinheiro, Paulo Sérgio, *World Report on Violence Against Children*, p. 142.

⁴⁹ Bush, Kenneth D. and Diana Saltarelli (eds), *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict. Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children*, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Save the Children, "Omid – Afghanistan", Violence Free School project, case study, date of interview 1 December 2010.

2.5 Including a gender dimension

I feel really scared so during the day I do not go to the toilet. If I do go I will ask a friend to stand watch so nothing happens. Usually the toilets are full of gangsters smoking dagga and if you are alone they will try to rape you.

15-year-old female student, Western Cape, South Africa⁵¹

Gender-based violence affects both girls and boys and stems from gender inequality, stereotypes and socially imposed roles. Boys and girls are subjected to violence in different manners, experience it differently and themselves engage in violence in different ways. Boys, for example, are generally more likely to be subjected to corporal punishment than girls, while girls may find themselves harassed, taunted or even punished if they are seen to be behaving in an “inappropriate” manner, that is, in a manner perceived to be inconsistent with their assigned role in society. Boys are also more likely to engage in physical bullying, while girls most often engage in verbal forms of harassment of their peers. The UN Study on Violence Against Children recognises that, “(h)armful cultural stereotypes that demean children because of their sex or their known or suspected sexuality create environments in which children can be abused with impunity, including by adults in positions of trust and authority.”⁵²

The issue of violence against girls is a particular concern given the absence of girls from classrooms around the world. There are several reasons for girls’ low registration and high drop-out figures, including economic and cultural motives such as a cultural preference for boys or an expectation that girls should remain at home or work to support the family, however violence in or around school, or the threat of violence, also represents a major obstacle to girls’ schooling.

Some of the most serious violence-related barriers to girls’ education include sexual abuse – or the threat of such abuse – on the part of teachers, other school staff or male pupils: school drop-out because of unwanted pregnancies (and, in certain countries attitudes or even regulations that prevent girls returning to school after giving birth); the distance that girls must travel to school, and the dangers associated with this daily trip; hostile learning environments (including gender-biased teaching materials, favouritism shown to boys and the allocation of menial tasks to girls); the unsafe physical environment of schools, including the failure to provide separate and adequate toilet facilities; and the decision of parents to keep their daughters out of school because of the risks associated with the school environment.⁵³

The vulnerability of girls can be exacerbated – particularly in developing countries – by patterns of economic inequality and, in some cases, significant political unrest or violent conflict.⁵⁴ Poverty is a particularly significant factor in cases where girls engage in transactional sex with teachers, school staff or other adults to financially support their education or family. In West Africa and Central Africa, for example, the

⁵¹ Wilson, Felicia, *Gender Based Violence in South African Schools*, p. 9.

⁵² Pinheiro, Paulo Sérgio, *World Report on Violence Against Children*, p. 119.

⁵³ Mitchell, Claudia and Iwani Mothobi-Tapela, p. 20.

⁵⁴ Wilson, Felicia, *Gender Based Violence in South African Schools*, p. 4.

most reported practice of sexual exploitation is sex for grades, usually involving a male staff member and a girl student.⁵⁵

All too often, girls subjected to sexual abuse – or their parents or families – prefer not to denounce the perpetrator or perpetrators. In a UNICEF study on gender-based violence in and around schools in Swaziland and Zimbabwe, it was noted that,

*[p]eople do not want to speak out against neighbours or relatives, parents do not want to ‘make waves’ in the school if their daughter is being abused, and teachers themselves [...] do not want to speak up even though they know that abuse is taking place in the school or community.*⁵⁶

In many cases the status of teachers affords them a degree of immunity from the repercussions of their abusive acts and they exploit uneven power relations to protect themselves:

After the war went I was 14 years old, my mother decided to send me back to school in Kolashan town. I had to drop out one year later. The 45-year-old teacher approached me and I became pregnant. I have a baby now, but apart from my mother no one helps me take care of it. The teacher denies what happened and refuses to pay for the child.
17-year-old girl, Liberia⁵⁷

A good practice to reduce gender-based violence involves the development of life-skills curricula that include modules to build both boys’ and girls’ awareness of the power dynamics of gender inequality, and practical sex education and sexuality classes to provide alternative models to abusive relations that children may see modelled in their own homes or communities.⁵⁸ Similarly, in many countries teachers also need support to understand and influence gender relations. Workshops and appropriate training materials can help them explore the gendered dimensions of teaching and learning. Teachers, and the education system as a whole, can play a key role in reducing gender-based violence– not only in schools, but also in the community in general – if they themselves are empowered to act.⁵⁹

A safer environment can also be achieved through employing a higher number of female⁶⁰ teachers and school-based social workers, and ensuring that they receive adequate training in preventing and responding to gender-based violence.⁶¹ To address concerns about gendered violence against girls in schools in Guinea and Sierra Leone, the International Rescue Committee recruited and trained female classroom assistants to work alongside male teachers in some refugee school

⁵⁵ Antonowicz, Laetitia, *Too Often in Silence. A report on school-based violence in West and Central Africa*, p. 5.

⁵⁶ Mitchell, Claudia and Iwani Mothobi-Tapela, *Taking Action: Gender-Based Violence in and around Schools in Swaziland and Zimbabwe*, p. 36.

⁵⁷ Antonowicz, Laetitia, *Too Often in Silence. A report on school-based violence in West and Central Africa*, UNICEF, p. 22.

⁵⁸ Plan, *Learn Without Fear: The global campaign to end violence in schools*, p. 30.

⁵⁹ Mitchell, Claudia and Iwani Mothobi-Tapela, *Taking Action: Gender-Based Violence in and around Schools in Swaziland and Zimbabwe*, p. 60.

⁶⁰ Plan, *Learn Without Fear: The global campaign to end violence in schools*, p. 46.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, pp. 29-30.

classrooms, where most teachers are men. An evaluation of the pilot project found that the presence of the classroom assistance led to significant decreases in pregnancies and dropouts and increases in girls' attendance and academic achievement. In addition, both girls and boys reported that they felt more comfortable in the classroom. Where necessary, classrooms assistants reached out beyond schools and followed-up with student in their homes.⁶²

2.6 A special focus on vulnerable children

In addition to girls, certain specific groups of children are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and other human rights abuses. These include indigenous children, children with disabilities, children from ethnic and linguistic minorities, children from cultural or religious minorities, refugee children, children affected by HIV/AIDS, children from lower castes in India and other parts of South Asia, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) children and youth.

Often the discrimination and exclusion these children experience is multilayered and affects many if not all aspects of their lives. In the case of education, children belonging to vulnerable groups not only face obstacles to gaining access to schooling, but also struggle to remain in school. The sad outcome is that children who often have the greatest need for support, acceptance and dignified treatment are those who are most easily and frequently targeted for violence in the school setting, by their peers, and even by school staff. It is reported for example, that children belonging to vulnerable groups are more likely to be subjected to violence, including corporal punishment, than their peers.⁶³ They may also struggle to have their situation taken seriously should they seek to report violence to school authorities or others, and in some cases they may simply choose not to report violence – even serious violence, including sexual abuse – for fear of drawing attention to an already stigmatized and marginalized family or community.

In the case of children from ethnic, linguistic or cultural minorities, teachers from the majority culture may display negative attitudes towards them, expect very little from them, and fail to recognize and encourage their individual talents.⁶⁴ This is a dimension of what Bush and Saltarelli have called “the negative face of education”, which manifests itself in “the uneven distribution of education to create or preserve privilege, the use of education as a weapon of cultural repression, and the production or doctoring of textbooks to promote intolerance.”⁶⁵ Refugee children may be subjected to similar treatment: there are, for example, reports that children displaced from Anglophone Sierra Leone to francophone Guinea Conakry were physically punished in their new schools for not being able to understand French.⁶⁶ A refugee girl and fourth grade pupil in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire explains that,

[t]he pupils here treat us as DG (déplacés de guerre); as attackers and they often yell at us in the corridor, 'attackers, go

⁶² The International Rescue Committee, *Classroom Assistant Professional Development Training Manual*, 2003, cited in UNICEF, *Manual. Child Friendly Schools*, chapter 5, p. 24.

⁶³ Plan, *Learn Without Fear: The global campaign to end violence in schools*, p. 12.

⁶⁴ Bush, Kenneth D and Diana Saltarelli (eds), *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict. Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children*, p. 14.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. v.

⁶⁶ Antonowicz, Laetitia, *Too Often in Silence. A report on school-based violence in West and Central Africa*, p. 19.

*back home!’ Those of us who can’t take these insults don’t come to school.*⁶⁷

In the case of indigenous children, these girls and boys belong to communities that often face extreme discrimination and high levels of violence, especially where they occupy land or use resources that are considered to be of significant commercial value. Furthermore, the traditional social structures that would normally provide protection from violence for indigenous children are often torn apart when indigenous peoples are exploited, forced off their land or driven to move to urban areas. In most countries with indigenous populations, indigenous children have low school enrolment rates and, if they do attend school, are less likely than their non-indigenous peers to have the support to perform well. Where schools replicate the prejudice and violence that characterizes the communities in which they are located, those indigenous children who do attend school risk being subjected to violence by their peers or, indeed, by teaching staff.⁶⁸ A survey in Laos included in the 2005 regional consultation in East Asia and the Pacific for the UN Study on Violence Against Children found that 98 per cent of girls and 100 per cent of boys had witnessed bullying in schools, and that the majority of victims were girls or children from ethnic minorities.

Studies indicate that LGBT youth experience more bullying, including physical violence and injury, at school than their heterosexual peers. The UN Study on Violence Against Children notes that, “violence [in educational settings] is increasingly directed against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered young people in many States and regions.”⁶⁹ A 2005 survey of students between the ages of 13 and 18 in the United States found that 65 per cent reported being verbally or physically assaulted over the past year because of “their perceived or actual appearance, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, race/ethnicity, disability, or religion.” Already high, this figure rose to 90 per cent for LGBT teenagers. A research review in the United States also found that the relationship between bullying and suicide risk was significantly stronger for lesbian, gay and transsexual youth than for heterosexual youth.⁷⁰

In the case of children with disabilities, precise global data on exclusion for education do not exist, however there is a general consensus that at least one third of the world’s 72 million children who are not in school have a disability of one form or another, while estimates from the World Bank and others suggest that at most 5 per cent of children with disabilities reach the Education for All goal of primary school completion.⁷¹ Like other vulnerable children, children with disabilities may never be registered for school, or they may be registered but fail to attend or subsequently drop out. Social stigma,⁷² barriers to physical access, lack of information and material in

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 32.

⁶⁸ For more on indigenous children, see UNICEF, *Ensuring the Rights of Indigenous Children*, 2004.

⁶⁹ Pinheiro, Paulo Sérgio, *World Report on Violence Against Children*, 2006. p. 15.

⁷⁰ Suicide Prevention Resource Centre, *Suicide and Bullying*, p. 1.

⁷¹ International Disability Alliance, *The Right to Education: Enabling Society to Include and Benefit from the Capacities of Persons with Disabilities*, p. 1.

⁷² Studies from Nigeria and Burkina Faso, for example, indicate that children with epilepsy are highly stigmatised in school because their illness evokes fear of supernatural forces among fellow pupils and even teachers. Antonowicz, Laetitia, *Too Often in Silence. A report on school-based violence in West and Central Africa*, p. 32.

appropriate forms, and lack of training for teaching staff all contribute to this phenomenon, however violence directed at children with disabilities also plays an important part. The powerlessness, social isolation and stigma faced by children with disabilities make them highly vulnerable to violence and exploitation in a range of settings, including in schools. As observed in the UN Study on Violence Against Children, “children with disabilities are at heightened risk of violence for a variety of reasons, ranging from deeply ingrained cultural prejudices to the higher emotional, physical, economic and social demands that a child’s disability can place on his or her family.”⁷³ The Global Survey on HIV/AIDS and Disability notes that persons with disabilities have a significantly elevated risk of experiencing physical violence, sexual abuse and rape. At the same time, however, they have little or no access to protection and redress through police and legal systems and enjoy less access to medical care and counselling than their non-disabled peers.⁷⁴

Impairments often make children with disabilities appear to be “easy victims”, not only because they may have difficulty defending themselves or in reporting the abuse, but also because their accounts are often dismissed.⁷⁵ It is also the case that violence against a child with a disability may be considered as somehow less serious and the child’s testimony may be regarded as less reliable than that of a child without disabilities.⁷⁶ Children with disabilities may also be more likely to put up with violence and abuse from their peers in order to gain access to social groups.

The problem is compounded because initiatives to protect children from violence and abuse often do not include children with disabilities in their remit.⁷⁷ Including a disability perspective in all initiatives to eliminate violence in schools will go a long way to helping to ensure that children with disabilities are able to enjoy their right to education. This may mean giving extra training and support to teachers, mobilizing parents and school governors, galvanizing student bodies such as school councils, where these exist, facilitating leadership opportunities for children with disabilities and, of course, working with children themselves to promote respect for children with disabilities and other vulnerable children.

The attitude of children to their disabled peers can and does change. The UNICEF Innocenti Insight on children and disability in CEE/CIS and the Baltic States quotes Teddy and Milena, two 16-year-olds living in an institution in Bulgaria. Speaking about their relations with other children they observe that it is a case of getting to know each other:

*[f]or example, in our school, we study with children from town. In the beginning, they thought, ‘who are they, they are invalids’ but when they got to know us, they adopted very different attitude towards us and now they even count on our support.*⁷⁸

The same principles apply to all vulnerable children. The first step is to ensure access to schools and other learning settings. The next step is to ensure the quality of their

⁷³ Pinheiro, Paulo Sérgio, *World Report on Violence Against Children*, p. 68.

⁷⁴ Cited in Plan, *Learn Without Fear: The global campaign to end violence in schools*, p. 26.

⁷⁵ UNICEF, *Promoting the Rights of Children with Disabilities*, p. 19.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 19.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 19.

⁷⁸ UNICEF, *Children and Disability in Transition in CEE/CIS and Baltic States*, p. 60.

learning experience once in school. Among its comprehensive provisions, and with the explicit intention of creating a child-friendly whole school environment, the 2009 Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act in India includes a provision whereby 25 per cent of entry-level places in private schools are reserved for disadvantaged children from the local neighbourhood (reservation norms for government aided schools were already in place). The same Act also stipulates barrier-free education for children with special needs, and requires all schools to constitute a School Management Committee, comprising local authority officials, teachers, parents and guardians. The Act mandates the inclusion of 50 per cent women and parents of children from disadvantaged groups in these Committees.⁷⁹

Schools that teach tolerance, value diversity and thus welcome children who would otherwise face discrimination are likely to be safer and more rewarding places for *all* children to learn and develop. In the case of children affected by HIV and AIDS, for example, schools that are organized and managed according to child-friendly principles – that is, the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child – can provide day-to-day support and protection, while offering a sense of normality and belonging, and the opportunity to play and form friendships. Schools can set an example to the community by promoting understanding, solidarity and positive attitudes toward children – and teachers – infected with or affected by HIV.⁸⁰

2.7 Obtaining reliable data

Obtaining data on the phenomenon of violence in schools represents a significant challenge to work in this area. Child victims and their families may be reluctant to report incidents of violence, or may be unaware of how to do so, while governments or education authorities may not consider collection of data of this kind a priority. The result is that available information is often sketchy and analysis is limited. Without reliable data, it is hard to be sure of directing actions where they are most needed, or indeed, of the impact of such actions.

Data from some regions tend to be more readily available than in others. Thus, for example, the World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe collaborates with the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children research study to promote understanding of young people's health and well-being, their health behaviours and their social context. One aspect of the study involves collecting data in countries within the WHO European Region. This has included data on issues such as bullying and physical fighting.

In its annual Global Monitoring Reports UNESCO monitors education statistics from around the world in order to assess progress towards the 2015 Education for All goals. The Reports provide comprehensive data on enrolment, intake, out of school children, dropout rates, expenditure on education and other important measures of educational achievement, however their coverage does not extend to the issue of violence in schools.

Without reliable data, national planning is compromised, effective policymaking and resource mobilization are hampered, and targeted interventions are limited in their

⁷⁹ Government of India, "The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act", 2009.

⁸⁰ UNICEF, *Caring for Children Affected by HIV and AIDS*, UNICEF, p. 15.

ability to address and prevent violence against children in schools and elsewhere. For this reason, assessing progress in violence prevention and responses is another area that is receiving special attention from the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence against Children in 2011.

3. WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACHES TO ENDING VIOLENCE

Many of the principles addressed in this paper are included in practical projects operating around the world. This section briefly introduces three such projects from Save the Children, Plan and UNICEF.

3.1 Violence Free Schools

Save the Children has initiated the Violence Free Schools project in Afghanistan, a country characterised by high levels of violence, conflict and gender inequality. The country's schooling system also faces serious challenges, including low literacy rates, and low school enrolment and retention rates. Dropout rates are particularly high among girls. Since 2008 corporal punishment in schools has been prohibited under the Education Act, however Save the Children reports that beating and humiliation is a daily reality for many children.

In this challenging setting, Save the Children launched the Violence Free School project in 2008 in ten schools (five girls' and five boys' schools) in Jalalabad in Nangarhar Province, and in 20 inner-city schools in Mazar-i-Sharif in the north of Afghanistan. The project focuses on the development and implementation of school-based child protection systems to address physical and humiliating punishment and prevent sexual abuse and gender discrimination in schools. The project provides technical support and capacity building for school administrations and teachers. It also develops a protection policy for each school and creates procedures to protect children from all forms of violence and abuse. One of the key elements of the project is the establishment of three different committees in each school: a child protection committee to address directly specific issues arising in the school; a parent, teacher and student association to facilitate dialogue among these groups and with the community in which the school is located; and a student's council to promote communication among pupils, help them organize themselves and address issues affecting them. Save the Children staff are attached to each school, conduct regular classroom observations and work with the committees and the school administration. They partner with teachers, headmaster and students to address challenges and structural issues as they emerge.⁸¹ Children appear to show a clear appreciation of the changes the Violence Free School project is bringing about:

Since I joined the Student Council, I learned a lot of things and I am very happy and feel proud. [...] I am one of the members of this council, where all members with the Violence Free School facilitator discuss issues and find solutions. This council has managed to respond positively to many issues so far, and this is one of the reasons why students can enjoy their school

⁸¹ Save the Children, "Lima – Afghanistan", Violence Free School project, case study, date of interview 17 January 2011.

environment and study just with the purpose of learning and not from the fear of teachers.

Basira, 15-year-old girls, Balkh Province⁸²

3.2 Learn Without Fear

The Learn Without Fear campaign is a global effort to end violence against children in schools launched by Plan in 2008. Focusing particularly on the 66 countries in which Plan operates, the campaign addresses a range of violence issues, including sexual abuse, neglect, verbal and emotional abuse, corporal punishment, bullying, peer-to-peer violence, youth gangs, harassment on the way to and from school, and the use of weapons in and around schools. The campaign, which aims to raise the profile of these issues among the public and persuade governments, schools and other key players of the need to act, is founded upon a seven point plan:

- working with governments to develop and enforce laws against school violence;
- working with partners to develop reporting and referral mechanisms for children affected by school violence and advocating for the establishment or expansion of confidential child hotlines;
- recognizing children and young people as critical participants in the development of strategies and solutions to address violence in schools;
- working with governments to establish holistic data collection systems and carry out research to ascertain the scale and severity of violence in their schools;
- ensuring that sufficient resources are earmarked by governments and international organizations to tackle violence in schools;
- advocating with UN agencies, multilateral donors, development banks and international NGOs to increase support to governments to tackle violence in schools;
- working with pupils, parents, school staff, education authorities and the community to expel violence from schools.⁸³

As of August 2010, the Learn Without Fear Campaign was operating in 44 countries around the world. It has contributed to changes in legislation, the creation of safer schools and communities, and improved awareness of the issue. In two years, anti-violence campaign messages have reached 94 million adults and children through radio and television shows, leaflets, training sessions and workshops. Children are involved in all aspects of the campaign, ranging from campaign planning in Malawi and Egypt, to running radio shows three times a week in Senegal, and participating in regional art collaborations across Asia.⁸⁴ Over the same period, the campaign trained more than 19,000 teachers in non-violent teaching methods. As a result, 33 of the 44 countries in which the campaign has been implemented report an increase in non-violent practices among educators.⁸⁵ Learning Without Fear also addresses reporting of and response to violence in schools. To date it has contributed to improvements in mechanisms that provide children with the opportunity to report violent incidents and hold perpetrators to account in 27 of the 44 participating countries. A further 36 campaign countries provided access to medical support for injuries related to school violence and 28 countries also provided counselling services for affected children.⁸⁶

⁸² Save the Children, “Soraya, Lima and Basira – Afghanistan”, Violence Free School project, case study, date of interview 30 November 2010.

⁸³ Plan, *Learn Without Fear: The global campaign to end violence in schools*, pp. 55-57.

⁸⁴ Laurie, Emily, *Plan’s Learn Without Fear Campaign: Campaign Progress Report*, p. 5.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 18.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 22.

3.3 Child Friendly Schools

UNICEF's Child Friendly Schools initiative differs somewhat from the projects discussed above in that its principal aim is to take a holistic approach to children's learning and address a wide range of issues influencing the quality of a child's educational experience. Addressing violence is therefore one issue among several, including school design and layout, the provision of water and sanitation, teaching strategies in the classroom, curriculum development, inclusiveness and gender sensitivity, school management and budgeting, links with the local community and the actions of education authorities and governments. The approach unambiguously links the school to the wider community, recognising, for example, that the protection and safety of children in their homes has a direct impact on children's capacity to attend class and to learn. The interconnected nature of these different elements is well illustrated in the case of school design. Good school design as advocated by the Child Friendly Schools initiative and detailed in the manual produced for the project not only addresses issues of classroom size, ventilation, lighting, access and so on, it also connects these aspects to child protection by advocating for the design of classrooms and other spaces so that teacher-pupil interaction is readily visible from outside, the provision of separate and adequate toilet facilities for boys and girls (including facilities for children with disabilities), the minimisation of secluded areas where children might be at risk of abuse, and the erection of fencing around schools in order to create a safe, child-friendly space protected from harmful outside influences. The physical appearance of schools is also important: when the school environment is perceived as unwelcoming or threatening, attendance suffers. By contrast, clean and well-maintained buildings and colourful classrooms both contribute to and reflect a sense of pride in the school on the part of staff and children alike.⁸⁷

An evaluation of the Child Friendly Schools model commissioned by UNICEF in 2008 found that there were several Child Friendly Schools models around the world, but that all successfully applied the key principles of inclusiveness, child-centredness and democratic participation in varying contexts and with varying emphasis. Learners in Child Friendly Schools were found to feel safe, supported and engaged. They also believed that adults supported the inclusion and success of all students in schools that had high levels of family and community participation and that were implementing child-centred pedagogical approaches. Importantly, Child Friendly Schools were found to be successful in creating positive environments for girls' education. Recommendations emerging from the evaluation included identifying strong school leaders and equipping them with more skills and capacity to implement Child Friendly Schools projects.⁸⁸

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has examined a number of elements that are essential to the development of right-based, violence-free schools. This examination gives rise to the following recommendations for governments committed to eliminating violence in the school system. These recommendations cover only the issues discussed in this paper and are by no means exhaustive:

⁸⁷ See, for example, chapter 4 of UNICEF, *Manual, Child Friendly Schools*.

⁸⁸ UNICEF, "2009 Global: UNICEF Child Friendly Schools Programming Evaluation" http://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/index_51289.html, accessed 20 June 2011.

- 1) Introduce clear and effective legislation that: explicitly prohibits all forms of violence against children in all settings; sets out clear penalties for those who perpetrate violence against children; and provides systems of redress and rehabilitation for victims of violence. Assign adequate budgetary resources to ensure effective dissemination, enforcement and monitoring.
- 2) Work with relevant actors to change attitudes and norms that perpetuate violence against children in schools, at home and in the community. Offer alternative models of discipline to parents and teachers, and train all school staff in non-violent approaches to education. Ensure that curricula and teaching materials promote positive values and tolerance.
- 3) Listen to children and work with them. Children require access to confidential complaints and reporting mechanisms should they or others be subjected to violence in school, in the home or in any other setting. Recognise the potential contribution of children to the creation of violence-free schools and provide appropriate structures, such as student councils, for their formal participation in school management.
- 4) Assign particular attention to gender issues and ensure that lessons and teaching materials promote gender equity. Introduce a gender dimension into life-skills lessons for both boys and girls. Train teachers and other staff to address gender discrimination and gender-based violence.
- 5) Ensure that children from vulnerable groups are enrolled in school, and give special attention to their learning requirements to minimise drop-out. Cultivate inclusive values and tolerance toward children of all backgrounds and abilities.
- 6) Ensure that physical spaces in and around the school are adequately supervised and present no danger to children.
- 7) Promote violence-prevention programmes that address the whole school environment and encourage community outreach. This may require strengthening links between schools and communities and raising awareness of the value of schools as community resources. Recognise that addressing violence in schools may also require complementary efforts to work with communities and families to reduce violence against children in the home and elsewhere.
- 8) Introduce or strengthen data collection systems on all forms of violence against children, disaggregated by age and sex at a minimum. Promote analysis of data in order to inform national and local policies to reduce violence in schools.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The UN Study on Violence Against Children draws the conclusion that the most effective approaches to countering violence in schools are tailored to the specific situation and circumstances of particular schools, but it also recognises that these approaches have key elements in common:

*Specifically, they are based on the recognition that all children have equal rights to education in settings that are free from violence, and that one of the functions of education is to produce adults imbued with non-violent values and practices.*⁸⁹

Like the UN Study, this paper advances the concept of a rights-based, child-friendly school as a means to reduce and even eliminate violence against children. Such schools are proactively inclusive, academically effective and relevant, gender sensitive, healthy and protective, and engaged with the family and community.⁹⁰

Cultivating values of tolerance and dignity both inside and outside the school requires schools to operate as inclusive structures. Exclusion perpetuates privilege, prejudice, discrimination, divisive thinking and social tensions. A school that fails to cultivate positive values and social inclusion may succeed in managing violence through specific initiatives of a limited scope, but it is unlikely to become truly violence-free, or to serve a true catalyst for change in the community.

On the other hand, a school that includes all children is good for all children. Intercultural, inclusive education – that is, learning that promotes respect for and understanding of other cultures and caters for all children, irrespective of their individual characteristics – is a key element in eliminating discrimination and increasing respect among children and between teaching staff and pupils. In other words, diversity can become a pedagogical resource that contributes to a better and safer educational experience for all children, and this experience has the potential to spread beyond the school into society in general. To return to Bush and Saltarelli's metaphor of the two faces of education, the positive face reflects,

*the cumulative benefits of the provision of good quality education. These include the conflict-dampening impact of educational opportunity, the promotion of linguistic tolerance, the nurturing of ethnic tolerance, and the 'disarming' of history.*⁹¹

Thanks to the work of a range of committed actors, there is a growing body of information available on how to tackle violence in and around the school setting and provide children with a safe environment in which to grow and learn. Some countries have taken the lead in implementing the most promising approaches, while others still have some way to go. Opportunities to share and discuss this accumulated experience are crucial for advancing the goal of violence-free schools, moving toward violence-free societies and generating commitment to positive change for children around the world.

⁸⁹ Pinheiro, Paulo Sérgio, *World Report on Violence Against Children*, 2006, p. 138.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 138.

⁹¹ Bush, Kenneth D and Diana Saltarelli (eds), *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict. Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children*, p. v.

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