

Development of an Intervention to Prevent School-Related Gender-Based Violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Presenter Disclosures

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(1) The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:

No relationships to disclose

Extent of Problem

“Estimates indicate that almost half of all female students and a sizable number of male students experience some form of sexual violence in the educational context.” - USAID EQUATE Project Technical Brief

School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is a difficult subject for many people to discuss openly.

We like to think that schools provide a refuge from insecurity and violence, but unfortunately the opposite is true in many post-conflict regions such as DRC.

Health impact: Harassment and violence in and around schools is a serious problem and one that has a negative impact both on students' academic performance as well as their physical health and mental well-being. This has a far-reaching and long-lasting effect on future generations.

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in DRC

Conflict Zones- High levels of sexual violence in DRC, but this is not limited only to zones of armed conflict

Post-conflict zones- domestic and school-related gender-based violence are the legacy of years of conflict and breakdown of societal norms

In response to a request from USAID, The Communication for Change (C-Change) Project has designed an anti-gender-based violence intervention strategy focused specifically on **school-related** gender-based violence, and we are now piloting this approach in Katanga Province of southeastern DRC

Definition- SRGBV

“School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) results in sexual, physical, or psychological harm to girls and boys. It includes any form of violence or abuse that is based on gendered stereotypes or that targets students on the basis of their sex. It includes, but is not limited to: rape, unwanted sexual touching, unwanted sexual comments, corporal punishment, bullying, and verbal harassment. Unequal power relations between adults and children and males and females contribute to gender violence. Violence can take place in school buildings (including dormitories), on school grounds, or going to and from school and may be perpetrated by teachers, students, or community members. Girls and boys can be victims or perpetrators.”

-USAID Office of Women in Development

Project Summary and Objectives

Project Summary: In 2010, the USAID Communication for Change (C-Change) project began a new initiative promoting positive social and gender norms to prevent and mitigate school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) among school-aged children in Katanga Province of southeastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

Project Objectives:

- Equip young girls and boys with knowledge and understanding of SRGBV and the skills to resist/avoid it.
- Increase knowledge and build skills of school administrators, teachers, school SRGBV focal persons, and parents to identify, discourage, and intervene in incidences of SRGBV.
- Establish policies and structures in the school to discourage SRGBV and encourage school administrators, community members, and parents to enforce and support them.
- Increase the number of students who report incidences of SRGBV and who seek supportive services if they experience it.
- Increase girls' and boys' understanding of the consequences of SRGBV and change the attitudes that underlie SRGBV.

Beneficiaries

Direct beneficiaries: male and female students ages 10–14 in 25 primary and 6 secondary schools of Katanga Province, DRC

Indirect beneficiaries: parents, teachers, school administrators, and community members in 3 districts of Katanga Province (Lubumbashi, Kasumbalesa, Likasi)

Levels of Intervention

SRGBV is a very complex issue, resulting from harmful gender norms and a power imbalance between males and females

Given the deeply rooted causes of SRGBV it must be addressed at all levels; from the individual students, to the school level, the local community and ultimately the national level.

The C-Change Project is using the USAID *Safe Schools Program* materials as the basis of training and capacity building activities to address SRGBV at the following 3 levels:

1. Institutional
2. Community
3. Individual

Levels of Intervention

1. At the Institutional Level –

- The project is working with teachers and administrators to develop codes of conduct that are transparent, well understood and enforced
- Teachers are being trained to identify and avoid improper behavior
- Focal teachers at each school are being trained as 1st responders or counselors to assist students who have experienced violence, and these focal teachers will be trained to refer students to existing community-based psychosocial, judicial and health services

Levels of Intervention

2. At the Community Level-

The project is engaging parents and community members to raise awareness and get them actively involved in improving conditions in and around schools and promoting healthy gender norms in the family

3. At the Individual Student Level-

The project has developed a life skills curriculum to increase girls' and boys' understanding of the consequences of SRGBV and to change the attitudes that underlie SRGBV. This training will equip youth with the knowledge and skills necessary to resist and avoid sexual violence

Baseline Survey

In November 2010, a baseline study was conducted among key stakeholder groups (students, teachers, parents) in 42 communities of Katanga Province, DRC to assess the level of awareness, prevalence of SRGBV and attitudes/behaviors of various stakeholders addressing the issue.

966 students, 923 parents and 457 teachers were included in the survey. Focus group discussions were conducted among 618 students (282 boys, 336 girls), 295 teachers (193 male, 102 female) and 389 parents (210 men, 179 women).

Both the survey and focus group discussions revealed that school-related violence is widespread in Katanga Province schools. Teachers and parents unanimously recognize its severity and are aware that students are victims in their schools. In all sites surveyed, the situation is very much the same. The primary types of violence mentioned are:

Baseline Survey – School-Based Violence

Physical violence: punishments for students are acute and exaggerated. They sometimes provoke wounds and a case of death was also reported. Many students stay away from school because of these punishments. Also, on their way to/from school and during recreation time after class, students, especially girls, report that they are unsafe and vulnerable to physical abuse

Sexual violence: sexual threats are frequent. Perpetrators include teachers and students. Primary and secondary school girls report that teachers and male students often try to touch their breasts or glance at intimate parts of the body.

- Many girls (20% of girls surveyed) report that teachers pressure them to have sex in exchange for good marks.
- In multiple schools included in the survey, students report that teachers have impregnated girl students.

Baseline Survey Findings

Moral and psychological violence: this violence is chiefly directed toward girls in order to humiliate them. Insults of every kind are used towards students and sometimes towards their parents as well.

Key Findings from Baseline Survey

- 20% of girls in the survey report that teachers pressure them to have sex in exchange for good marks
- More than 25% of students report that beating/whipping of students occurs regularly in their classrooms
- Teachers themselves admit that they beat/whip students regularly to enforce discipline in the classroom (22% of teachers surveyed)
- Only about half of schools have classroom regulations concerning violence (52%)

Key Findings from Baseline Survey

- Most schools do not have a person designated/responsible for dealing with SRGBV issues (75% of schools in survey do not)
- Majority of students are not aware of how to prevent/avoid SRGBV (78%)
- Only 16% of students state that issues of SRGBV are addressed as part of their in-school training
- Only 27% of students report that a procedure exists at their school for dealing with cases of SRGBV
- 73% of parents report that there are no active structures present in their communities for dealing with issues of SRGBV

Sequence of Interventions

- Start with Defining Rights of the Child– rooted in National and International Law
- Awareness Raising of SRGBV
- Establish Classroom Regulations and Teacher Codes of Conduct
- Practice Positive Discipline
- Establish Active SRGBV Oversight Committees at each target school
- Reinforce School-Based Activities through Community Media and Outreach

- Next Steps:
 - Enforcement
 - Referral System

Progress to Date

- 127 Teachers have been trained using the "Doorways III" Safe Schools teacher module
- 30 focal teachers have been trained as SRGBV first-responders
- Community Radio messages on “Rights of the Child, Positive Discipline and Corporal Punishment” have been produced and broadcast throughout Katanga Province (444 spots and 19 in-depth radio shows)
- “Doorways I” Safe Schools training curriculum for students has been developed and is now being used to train students directly on preventing and mitigating SRGBV

Progress to Date

- 6,000 copies of first two editions of the SRGBV Comic Book series (Rights of the Child, Positive Discipline) have been printed and distributed
- 123 Parents have been trained on the C-Change anti- SRGBV approach and parents' representatives have joined SRGBV Oversight Committees at each target school
- SRGBV Youth Clubs have been established at all 31 target schools

Local Support – Key to Sustainability

- National and provincial authorities:
 - Ministry of Education
 - Ministry of Gender, Family and Children
 - Police
 - Teachers' Union
- Teachers
 - Ex: After the first round of Safe Schools teacher training, a school discipline officer in Lubumbashi decided to throw away his stick and committed to not using it anymore to punish students.
- Students
- Parents

Call to Action

We are seeing that there is a link between violence in the home, violence in the school and violence in the community. Violence in one sphere leads to more violence in the others. By focusing this initiative on the school environment in eastern DRC, we seek to break this cycle and lessen the level of violence not just in the target schools, but in the communities at large.

I will close with this call to action in the form of a quote from Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan: *“Violence against children is never justifiable. Nor is it inevitable. If its underlying causes are identified and addressed, violence against children is entirely preventable.”*

—Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan 2006

THANK YOU

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