

SCHOOL-RELATED GENDER BASED VIOLENCE:

CASE STUDIES FROM MOZAMBIQUE, SIERRA LEONE AND ZIMBABWE

The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) is a global partnership for advancing gender equality in and through education. We lead the Global Working Group to End School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) together with UNESCO (since 2014). We also lead country-level programs that work to prevent and respond to SRGBV. The case studies from Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe¹ featured in this brief show how catalytic funding can be instrumental to address gender-based violence in and around schools in a short period of time. All interventions have applied global standards and tools prescribed by UNGEI and partners. The interventions have been generously funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, USAID and Gender at the Centre Initiative.

SIERRA LEONE

Context

Sierra Leone faces high rates of gender-based violence (GBV). 62% of women aged 15-49 report experiencing physical or sexual violence at least once in their life.² A large percentage of school authorities, teachers, caregivers and children approve of corporal punishment as long as it does not cause severe harm and they state that girls actively elicit sexual relations with authority figures for transactional purposes.³ Long distances to schools from villages expose girls to the risk of sexual predation as they commute to school.⁴

Intervention

UNGEI and UNICEF Sierra Leone implemented the 'End SRGBV' program in partnership with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and International Rescue Committee in Kenema and Kono districts from April 2023-March 2024. The program adopted UNGEI's 'whole-school approach' by working with students, parents, teachers, communities and school management committees. The intervention scaled up a previous UNGEI & UNICEF pilot implemented in 21 schools to 200 schools, reaching approximately 9% of the national population.

Key interventions included capacity development for teachers, principals, community members, and school

board members on SRGBV, Teachers' Codes of Conduct and SRGBV reporting mechanisms. The program helped establish school-level SRGBV reporting mechanisms and safe spaces. Students learned about SRGBV through age-appropriate life skills curriculum. Community GBV case management workers were supported, and all schools were jointly supervised with the Ministry.

Results

- The percentage of students who reported feeling unsafe at school reduced from 13% to 2% (almost the same for girls and boys).
- There was an 8 percentage point reduction among students experiencing at least one form of SRGBV among students, down from 99% to 91%.
- Sexual violence incidents reduced from 85% to 52%.
- 97% of students indicated they would feel comfortable reporting if someone hurt them at school, compared to 71% at baseline (almost the same for girls and boys).
- The percentage of students who believed that teachers should be allowed to use corporal punishment reduced from 51% to 17%.
- There was a 5-fold increase in positive gender attitudes, from 5% to 27%.
- 9% percent of students believed that a girl or woman should keep rape a secret, down from 70%.

1 All three countries have endorsed the Safe to Learn Call to Action.

2 Gender-based violence. UNFPA Sierra Leone, 17 March 2021.

3 Report on findings from school-related gender-based violence action research in schools and communities in Sierra Leone. UNICEF, January 2023.

4 Social Norms and Girls' Education in Sierra Leone. UNGEI, Dalberg, 2023.

MOZAMBIQUE

Context

In Mozambique the prevalence of teenage pregnancy and early motherhood is high. In 2018, 14% of teenagers had their first pregnancy before the age of 15 and 57% before the age of 18.⁵ Mozambique also has one of the highest early, forced, child marriage or unions rates globally.⁶ 47% of students state that violence – especially sexual abuse – occurs in schools.⁷

Intervention

In 2022, UNGEI partnered with UNICEF and UNESCO Mozambique for the capacity development of 37 district officials of the Ministry of Education, based on UNGEI's modular training on preventing SRGBV. These 37 district officials then trained school leaders who in turn supported teachers and students to understand and prevent SRGBV in their schools. Teachers discussed discriminatory practices, norms and beliefs with children at special school clubs. They shared practical knowledge on child rights, signs of abuse, causes of early pregnancy, consequences of child marriage, scenarios of SRGBV in school and in the community. School clubs provided counseling, guidance and referrals. This was supported with awareness campaigns to challenge harmful gender norms, promote gender equality and encourage reporting.

Results

- Students demonstrated a significant increase in awareness of different forms of SRGBV and violence against children, including child marriage, sexual abuse, bullying and early pregnancies.
- Students reported increased awareness of reporting procedures and higher trust in school mechanisms.
- All students knew at least two or three reporting mechanisms, including anonymous complaint boxes, designated staff members for confidential reporting, and online reporting platforms.
- Students developed insights into gender equality, consent, and respectful relationships, and actively began to stand up against discrimination and violence. As an example, a girl who was pregnant due to sexual abuse had dropped out of school. Her classmates and the school ensured that the girl continued studying.

5 Country Programme Document 2022-2026. UNICEF Mozambique, 2019.

6 Violence against children and youth survey in Mozambique, 2019.

7 CESC, CEP, 2017.

8 Country Programme Document 2022-2026. UNICEF Zimbabwe.

9 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and World Health Organization (2003). Global School-based Health Survey 2003: Zimbabwe; Chikwiri, E. and Lemmer, E.M. (2014). "Gender-based violence in primary schools in the Harare and Marondera district of Zimbabwe," *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology*, 5(1), 95-107; Rumble, L., Mungate, R., Chigiji, H., Salama, P., Nolan, A., Sammon, E. and Muwoni, L. (2015). "Childhood sexual violence in Zimbabwe: Evidence for the epidemic against girls," *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 46(1), 60-66.

10 Data from Violence against Children Surveys (2019).

11 The eight domains of the whole-school approach are: school leadership and community engagement, teachers and educational staff support, codes of conduct, parent engagement, child rights, participation and gender equality, reporting, monitoring and accountability, incident response, safe and secure physical environments in and around schools.

ZIMBABWE

Context

In Zimbabwe, more girls than boys complete primary education, but more girls drop out by Form 4, mainly due to pregnancy, early, forced, child marriage or unions, SRGBV and parents' prioritization of boys' education.⁸ IPV, corporal punishment, bullying, sexual harassment and sexual violence are accepted and widespread in society.⁹ More boys than girls experience physical punishment at the hands of a man teacher (7% boys versus 4% girls) and boys are more likely to perpetuate physical violence on their peers.¹⁰

Intervention

In 2021, UNGEI partnered with UNICEF Zimbabwe and Forum for African Women Educationalists Zimbabwe Chapter for School Visioning Workshops. These workshops brought together teachers, school heads, ancillary school staff, members of school development committees and students to identify entry points and operationalize UNGEI's minimum standards for a whole-school approach.¹¹ The intervention also supported the formation of school clubs to build awareness on different forms of violence.

Results

- Students had increased awareness of different forms of violence. Student clubs, where girls and boys were equally represented, centralized student leadership.
- Teachers and educational staff exhibited positive and gender-responsive behaviours, attributed to training on SRGBV and gender-responsive teaching and learning.
- School Visioning Workshops facilitated by local experts and African gender activists led to collective ownership and a shared understanding of SRGBV in the context. 61% of the participants reported that they were aware of laws against corporal punishment and were able to name laws that protect the rights of women and girls, up from 46% at the baseline.
- School level dialogues enabled school heads to identify existing levers and human resources to operationalize the minimum standards, without creating new processes.