



Roundtable session
Inter-sectorial collaboration:
Sexual Exploitation in and around schools in Africa

Defining the issue and context

Sexual exploitation and sexual violence in or around schools is a serious and pressing problem throughout Africa that necessitates greater policy attention. The World Health Organization estimates that 150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 years have experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence. This, combined with the fact that such violence is generally carried out by offenders known to the child (relatives and authority figures, including teachers and school authorities), provides a hint of the magnitude of the problem of school-based sexual violence. Examining what little quantitative information exists for West Africa reinforces this. According to a 2006 survey of 10 villages in Benin, 34% of school children interviewed confirmed that sexual violence occurs within their schools and 15% of teachers acknowledged that sexual harassment takes place within the school and yet rarely are such incidences reported or perpetrators held accountable¹. In Ghana, a study conducted in 2003 suggested that 6% of the girls surveyed had been victims of sexual blackmail over their class grades, 14% of rape cases had been perpetrated by school comrades, while 24% of boys in the study admitted to having raped a girl or to have taken part in a collective rape (UNICEF Bureau Regional Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre 2008). The long-term consequences of such high incidence of sexual abuse and exploitation are profound; above all sexual exploitation at and around schools compromises the rights to education, freedom from oppression and equality as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. For girls, sexual exploitation also undermines gender equality and prevents girls and women from obtaining equal educational and public sphere opportunities access to quality education, or feeling intimidated in or en route to the classroom, can also reinforce poverty by lowering school attendance rates. Sexual abuse may also result in serious health effects, such as the transmission of sexual infections, particularly HIV, unwanted pregnancies and psychological trauma.

During the First World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Stockholm 1996, child commercial sexual exploitation was defined as “a fundamental violation of children’s rights. It comprises sexual abuse by the adult and remuneration in cash or kind to the child or a third person or persons. The child is treated as a sexual object and as a commercial object. The commercial sexual exploitation of children constitutes a form of coercion and violence against children, and amounts to forced labour and a contemporary form of slavery.

Sexual exploitation take place within schools, perpetrated by teachers and other care providers, but also between students and whilst journeying to and from school.

Sexual abuse in a transactional capacity is a particular problem in African school settings. According to one estimate 6% of female students interviewed in Ghana said that a male teacher

¹ Interviewee: Patrick Sottin (Initiative pour la Recherche et les Actions pour le Développement Mondial (IRADM). Interview conducted by email, translated from French by Karen Moore, (Jones et al., 2008).



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had at some point blackmailed them with sexual favours for good grades (Pinheiro, 2006). Other research by Plan Togo has highlighted a wide range of language used by students to refer to girls' sexual relations with their teachers (PLAN Togo 2006). Forms of transaction include 'sexually transmittable grades' in which sexual favours are given by students to teachers in exchange for good grades, as well as 'sexually transmittable means' which describes sexual acts in exchange for school materials, food or tuition support. Complex experiences of abuse such as these are poorly researched and/or documented and therefore the figure of 6% likely represents only the tip of the iceberg. Often such threats go unreported as girls feel ashamed, due to cultural values and the importance placed on purity and/or do not know who to inform.

Social-Cultural Causes

Cultural dynamics

Schools— like any other social context — are the sites of power relationships between teachers, staff and students and among students themselves. In particular, the power relationships between elders and juniors that flourish in the home also exist in the school environment. Sometimes these relationships are articulated in abusive ways, in part reflecting broader authoritarian and hierarchical models (authoritarian political structures; a history of military rule; and/or a very hierarchical socio-economic structure based on gender, age, ethnicity, religion, class and wealth differences). As such, in many country contexts the use of violence at school has been legitimized as a “natural” form of discipline and a way of establishing and maintaining hierarchical teacher-student and boy-girl relationships. As a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) study on school-related gender-based violence in developing countries noted, the problem “takes place in a context of gender inequality and specific cultural beliefs and attitudes about gender roles, especially those concerning male and female sexuality, a pattern of economic inequality, and in some instances significant political unrest and violent conflict” (Kim and Bailey 2003: iii). Authoritarian school cultures where physical discipline is viewed as an integral part of the classroom (Mugawe and Powell, 2006) as well as pervasive patriarchal values and norms that encourage male aggression and female passivity are identified as critical underlying reasons for sexual school violence (Harber 2001; Nhundu and Shumba 2001).

Economic factors

Widespread poverty and limited livelihood opportunities for many families in West Africa, often as a result of conflict, can force children and adolescents to engage in transactional sex to pay for their education (Leach et al 2003). Girls in particular are often vulnerable to sexual abuse due to the lures of transactional sex where sexual services are exchanged for money, school fees, gifts or food (George 2001). Some teenage girls even come to see their bodies as economic assets and thereby normalise transactional sex (Burton 2005).

Teachers, who are often underpaid, or occasionally not paid at all, and frequently endure difficult living and working conditions, may perceive sexual favours from students as a form of compensation. This situation is in large part a reflection on the focus within education sector policies on infrastructural development rather than investments in educational quality. The economics of sexual violence are also linked to the breakdown of traditional family structures as



labour migration to urban areas of one or both parents increases. In such instances there may be even more onus on children to support themselves, resulting in a higher proportion resorting to transactional sex.

Gendered experiences

In the school context, children's experiences of sexual violence are highly gendered. Sexual harassment and violence appears to be overwhelmingly carried out against girl students by male students and teachers (Save the Children Alliance 2005). But there is also little common understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment because of cultural taboos which prevent frank discussion about issues of sexuality. This is reinforced by a broader culture of gender violence and inequality, including family violence and the dominant view that women 'belong' to men and have lower status and value (ibid). These attitudes and behaviours are often modelled by teachers who accept unequal power relations and differential behavioural patterns among boys and girls (Dunne 2007).. Through action and inaction teachers reinforce culturally acceptable gender practices and attitudes. Perhaps most importantly, by not reporting or responding seriously to complaints of sexual abuse, teachers and school authorities convey the message that sexual abuse is permissible or to be tolerated as part of life. In instances of sexual abuse teachers and male students frequently exploit cultural sexual dynamics by enforcing their gender and authority as a sign of power; often offering good grades or tuition for sexual relationships. In return female students make use of their physical assets to gain good grades. This is all part and parcel of a frequently corrupt school system which does not penalise sexual relationships between teachers and students. One example of this is the case of a school in Ghana where the head teacher's sexual misconduct over many years was an 'open secret' in the community, but where there were no outlets to voice complaints and/or take action (Leach et al. 2003).

Research suggests that the gendered dimensions of school geography are particularly important in cases of sexual abuse and exploitation (Burton 2005). Girls in particular are likely to feel unsafe in certain places for fear of harassment or attack. Girls report that they are most likely to be abused in or near toilets, empty classrooms or dormitories, the perimeter of the school grounds, as well as en route to school (George 2001).

The Political Environment

Children's issues receive little attention from politicians, in part because children do not represent politicians' main constituencies, but also due to the resource and capacity constraints of agencies responsible for children. Politicians themselves are frequently subject to the cultural norms of the society they come from and as such may be unaware or reluctant to push issues concerning sexual behaviour at the national policy level in West Africa for fear of rendering themselves unpopular- especially if they risk upsetting important voters such as teachers and school authorities. Another reason for the lack of political attention paid to issues of sexual exploitation and abuse is the absence of accountability mechanisms (e.g. national codes of conduct for teachers), particularly at the local and district level. The lack of local mechanisms prevents cases from being reported to higher levels of authority and given the weight they deserve at the national level. The result of this is frequently the perpetuation of a culture of impunity.



Throughout West Africa there is also a lack of inter-ministerial cooperation which is necessary in order to ensure coordinated action between Ministries of Education, Health, Justice, Interior and Social Affairs to develop adequate preventative responses (Jones et al 2008). There is also a lack of capacity amongst Parliamentarians to review law proposals and analyze national budgets to ensure that children's protection is taken sufficiently into consideration or managed by cross department initiatives (Plan 2008).

Although of critical medium and long-term importance, the current international drive to achieve education for all has also had an indirect impact on children's vulnerability to school violence throughout the region and African continent due to the very rapid increase in school enrolment. With an emphasis on quantitative expansion rather than educational quality, school classroom sizes and pupil to teacher ratios have increased dramatically, rendering it more difficult for teachers to maintain control (Woldehanna and Jones, 2006) or to intervene in cases of student violence. Even in contexts where regulations or legislation have been introduced to address school violence, this has not been met with a concomitant increase in resources to tackle violence and enforce new regulations. Similarly, the drive to increase girls' enrolment rates has in most cases not been met by increased resources to address their vulnerability to attack while travelling to school in rural areas. This combined with generally more entrenched patriarchal values and lower levels of awareness about children's rights and access to related information, means that rural children are often more at risk of school violence and sexual exploitation (Burton 2005).

Legal Framework

Most of the countries in West Africa have legislation which provides general protection to children against sexual violence. Legislation on sexual violence is explicit throughout the region, covering such concerns as genital cutting and proxenetism (pimping), with the exception of Guinea, Liberia, Senegal and Togo. However, in these four countries children are still protected from sexual violence and exploitation through Penal Codes (see Appendix 1). All of the countries in West Africa ratified the CRC of 1989 between 1990 and 1993. Reinforcing this international agreement in 1999 the African Union and its member states passed the 'African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.'

There are therefore considerable safeguards which can be enacted to protect children from sexual exploitation when and if they have access to harness their rights. Restrictions on the strength of these legislative and rights-based measures are however shaped by the dual legal systems that characterize many African countries. Customary regulations, laws and norms often exist in tandem with modern judicial frameworks, and at the community level, the former often dominate. Accordingly, any legislative or policy strategy must pay particular attention to the implications for traditional laws and their gatekeepers. Another limitation upon the exercise of these safeguards is limited awareness of international and national legislation amongst judicial personnel, local administrative officials, teachers, parents and children. When cases of sexual exploitation are reported to the police or legal officials they are also frequently hindered by under-developed child justice systems, which may dissuade future victims from speaking out.



RECOMMENDED POLICY AND PROGRAMME ACTION TO TACKLE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN AND AROUND SCHOOLS²

<p>RAISING AWARENESS AND INFORMATION SHARING: <i>'Improvement in the situation of violence in schools must occur through: awareness-raising; communication of messages to change behaviours; training; the struggle against poverty especially in grassroots communities; implementation of laws; and legislation.'</i> (Initiative pour la Recherche et les Actions pour le Développement Mondial worker: Benin, Painful Lessons 2008).</p>
<p>National Strategies:</p>
<p><i>Educating children about gender equality:</i> Launch programmes to promote understanding about child rights as well as unequal gender power relations and to find ways to encourage greater gender equality; foster the conscious awareness of adults and children of the rights of the child and CEDAW; promoting personal responsibility and respect often through use of multi-media methods, dramas or storytelling approaches; identifying and supporting positive role models and mentors or peer educators to work with children and young people and teach them about their rights and responsibilities (i.e. Plan Togo 2006 and as recommended at the Arab-African Forum Against Sexual Exploitation of Children, Rabat, Morocco, October 2001).</p>
<p><i>Training teachers:</i> Given the powerful influence that teachers have in shaping children's values and modelling acceptable adult behaviour, ensuring that teachers understand the root causes and ways to address school violence is of critical importance. Programmes should include 'train the trainer' initiatives focusing on teachers' attitudes and equipping teachers with the necessary skills to serve as positive role models; the development of life skills and sex education modules in school curricula that teachers feel comfortable teaching and the development of professional codes of conduct, especially during teacher training courses in order to address the high rate of sexual violence perpetrated by especially newly graduated young male teachers (see Shumba 2001 and Nhundu and Shumba 2001). <i>'Improving the situation of violence in schools requires training teachers in gender, peace education; restoring the teaching of Civic and Moral Instruction; introducing the teaching of the culture of peace in the curriculum; strictly applying rules in schools'</i> (Sociology lecturer: Niger, Painful Lessons 2008).</p>
<p><i>Civil Society:</i> Strengthen youth civil society organizations so that they might advocate against sexual abuse and violence at school more effectively.</p>
<p>INVOLVING MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS: There is increasing recognition that if sexual abuse is to be effectively tackled a wide range of stakeholders need to be made aware of the problem, take ownership over and implement community-appropriate responses.</p>
<p>National Strategies:</p>
<p><i>Manuals:</i> Developing manuals to educate community leaders and parents about the problem and how to report it to judicial authorities where necessary (see id21 2001). Involve parents associations, Ministries of Education and teachers unions in the fight against sexual exploitation and school corruption which prevents accountability (As Recommended by UNESCO Expert Meeting, 2007).</p>

² Increasing Visibility and Promoting Policy Action to Tackle Sexual Exploitation In and Around Schools in Africa: Focus West Africa, ODI, September 2008 (commissioned by Plan West Africa)



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Civil Society: Encourage and assist local support groups/civil society orgs attempting to tackle sexual violence and support/strengthen national civil society groups' capacities for networking and advocacy.

Media and Resources: Undertake media monitoring in order to track how cases are reported and handled and then establish decentralised child abuse resource centres which empower communities to take responsibility for combating child abuse (see Save the Children Alliance 2005:100);

International Strategies:

Issue Champion: Establish a single well-resourced issue champion to oversee a regional international framework and encourage and support the creation of regional observatories to combat sexual exploitation in schools (as suggested at the Arab-African Forum against the sexual exploitation of children, Rabat, Morocco, October 2001).

Legal and Judicial Reforms: Train intermediaries to support children in the court system in child abuse cases (as in South Africa) and offer free legal advice, including legal caravans for more remote rural populations on sexual violence cases. Train female police officers so that girls feel more comfortable reporting cases of abuse (as in Rwanda) and pro-child police training modules (as in Uganda), develop programmes to rehabilitate young sexual offenders.

PROVIDING GENDER SPECIFIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES: Due to social, cultural and economic determinants women are more commonly affected by or involved in sexual exploitation and therefore sustainable strategies need to focus on providing educational facilities that take the geography and gender dimensions of abuse into consideration.

National Strategies:

Geography and Infrastructure: Take into account gender-dimensions in infrastructural development such as schools and pay attention to particular gendered-specific dangers in physical environment, such as improving street lighting and creating safe routes for children on their way to school. Good examples of this are girl-friendly schools and school planning i.e. in Burkina Faso an initiative has been set up to build such schools. Working closely with communities and local government, this project ensures schools have child-friendly classrooms equipped with appropriate furniture and textbooks, a borehole to provide safe water, separate male and female latrine blocks for sanitation, and housing units for teachers. The children also receive a mid-day meal and there is a take-home ration for girls who achieve an attendance rate of 90% or more. Some of the schools also have an on-site child-care centre that allows mothers to leave their youngest children under safe supervision and let their older daughters go to school while they work in the fields (see BRIGHT Project, Plan Burkina February 2008). It is also recommended that children are involved in the infrastructural development process (As recommended by the UNESCO Expert Meeting, 2007).

PROVIDING FOR THE LONG TERM EFFECTS OF SEXUAL ABUSE:

National Strategies:

Health schemes: Implement health orientated schemes which pay attention to treating the contraction of sexually transmitted diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS, whilst psychologically orientated initiatives should seek to provide counselling, advice and psycho-social support (see PLAN's mobile counselling units in Burkina Faso, Togo, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cameroon. June 2008, see above).

Scale-up local health initiatives and advocate for mental health issues to be considered in national health strategies.

INCREASING POLITICAL WILL:

National Strategies:

Policy: Motivate and train parliamentarians on child protection including issues concerning sexual exploitation and budget work. This should be conducted alongside a media campaign.



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Encourage political support for improving systematic data collection, quality education, child protection and psycho-social support for victims.

International Strategies:

Identify and support issue champions to oversee a West African framework.

IMPROVING LEGAL MECHANISMS:

National Strategies:

Periodic reporting: Efforts should be made to ensure inclusion of sexual exploitation at school in national periodic reporting on child rights, women's rights and torture as well as USP process.

Meet international standards: Review and improve legal frameworks and national policies that ensure that laws and policies meet international standards, are socially adapted and consistent.

More detailed national legislation: Lobby for national legislation that renders all sexual relationships between teachers and students illegal and introduce systematically the component 'sexual exploitation' in the documents concerning the situation analysis of children and women (as recommended at the Arab-African Forum Against Sexual Exploitation of Children, Rabat, Morocco, October 2001).

International Strategies:

Situational Analysis: A situational analysis of the legislative framework of a country should be included in the UN Country Team planning process, with specific focus on the country's gaps and weaknesses in relation to the CRC and CEDAW.

Meet international standards: There should be a regional campaign to improve and systematize legal frameworks to ensure laws are consistent with international standards and are sufficiently detailed.

PROMOTING PROTECTIVE LIFE SKILLS

National Strategies:

Self-defence training: Encourage the police or community leaders to provide classes/training in self-defence and awareness, as in the example of Ghana. "In one school that I have read about, a self-defence class was given to schoolgirls of the ages 13-16 at SS Level. The rationale behind this was to increase the confidence of the girls and also show the males at school that females are not weak. I would recommend this measure as very effective and theoretically sound" (Researcher: Central Region, Ghana, Painful Lessons 2008).

Sexual rights and health training: Develop strategies and mechanisms for encouraging the participation of juveniles in order that they might better protect and defend themselves, notably through sexual education. (As recommended at the Arab-African Forum Against Sexual Exploitation of Children, Rabat, Morocco, October 2001).

International Strategies:

Hold a West African regional forum to draw attention to the problem of sexual exploitation and other forms of school related violence, to disseminate knowledge on how to alleviate the problem and to teach skills for personal protection.

DISSEMINATION AND COMMUNICATION

National Strategies:

Media campaign: Launch a media campaign to improve reporting on sexual violence at schools. This should include training of media professionals and inclusion of child rights and protection in the curriculum of media schools (An information campaign to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation was one of the key recommendations of the Yokohama Congress in December 2001).

Print and multi-media: Develop appropriate print and multi-media communication and training materials for professionals, community members and children. This could include radio and TV programmes to



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raise awareness about sexual violence and how to tackle it.

Incentives: Create a national competition to acknowledge best practices and to grant public recognition for schools with a healthier educational climate.

Accessible legal documentation: Nation-wide dissemination of the official State Party report on violence against children, and other relevant legal docs, showing process and gaps.

International Strategies:

Communities of Practice: Support the development of West African networks and/or communities of practice to share experiences and strategies and to tackle school based violence.

SERVICE PROVISION

National Strategies:

Preschool programmes: Introduce preschool enrichment programmes to help children and adolescents develop social skills, manage anger and develop a moral perspective.

Child-sensitive facilities: Establish child abuse hotlines and shelters which are easily accessible to allow children to report abuse confidentially (a recommendation of the Yokohama Congress, December 2001).

Training: Train healthcare professionals in identification and referral of victims of sexual violence. Train judicial and police personnel so that they are aware of and understand dynamics of school-based sexual violence and are familiar with legal provisions.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M and E) AT THE LOCAL, NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVEL:

Revise laws in accordance with M and E findings: Monitor the implementation of legislation designed to address sexual exploitation, and revise laws in accordance with M and E findings to strengthen their impact and tackle loopholes.

Best practice: Evaluate implementation of strategies by government organisations and NGOs to tackle sexual violence and identify best practice, including the way that issues are framed to resonate with national policy frameworks.

Accountability mechanisms: Encourage accountability mechanisms in school management, with clear policies and procedures for responding to problems of sexual violence, including holding educators and other service providers accountable for their actions. These should feed into national and international reporting systems.

Monitor risk behaviours: Routinely record data on interpersonal violence in educational settings so as to build a more accurate profile on the problems.

Incentivise the media: National and regional actors should monitor media content with regard to reporting on sexual exploitation and discrimination. Awards or incentives could be created to promote child's rights-based publicity.



Facilitator: Wambui Njuguna, Vice President ANPPCAN

Rapporteur: Odette Houedakor, Child Protection Advisor Plan West Africa
Victorine Djitrinou, Girl Education Advocacy coordinator Action Aid

Facilitator's Instructions:

1. **Presentation of the Briefing Paper: 30 minutes (15 min presentation, 15 min discussion)**
2. **Provide Instructions for the working groups: each group to select a rapporteur and a facilitator/president (5 min)**
3. **Breaking up into 3 working groups (5 minutes)**
4. **Group discussions (1 hour 20 min)**
5. **All reporters of the working groups are requested to harmonize the group work and present it in a final document according to the format provided.**

Guiding questions for roundtable discussion:

For the roundtable discussion, the plenary will break into 3 Groups discussing:

Group 1: Causes of Sexual Exploitation at school.

1. Have the causes been sufficiently described?
2. What additional causes do exist?
3. Which causes have not been well described?

Recommendations:

1. Do the existing recommendations outlined in the briefing paper take sufficiently the causes and consequences into consideration?
2. **Formulate time bound goals from the recommendations**

Group 2: Existing practice

The group exercise will start with a short presentation of a case study on youth advocacy against sexual violence at school from Togo, followed by discussions about existing programs and projects to address the problem of Sexual Exploitation at school and formulations of recommendations based on lessons learnt.

1. What other existing and documented practice does exist?
2. What can be done to reinforce learning and sharing and systematization of efforts?
3. Formulate time bound goals in regard to learning and sharing and systematization of efforts.



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Group 3: Recommendations: linking the Dakar recommendations with the recommendations from Rabat and Yokohama

1. what in regard to sexual exploitation at school has not been considered in the Rabat and Yokohama recommendations?
2. What additional recommendations need to be made to take sexual exploitation at school into account?
3. What progress has been made since Rabat and Yokohama relevant for the problem of school violence?
4. What can we learn there?