



Gender Task Team
Gender Strategies in Emergencies,
Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction
Contexts

Preventing and Responding to Gender Based Violence in and through Education

Minimum Standards References

The Minimum Standards make a number of explicit and implicit references to strategies to prevent gender-based violence in and through education.

Access and Learning Environment, Standard 2 (Protection and Well-being)

'learning environments are secure, promote the protection and mental and emotional well-being of learners'.

"Students, especially minorities and girls, often become targets for abuse, violence, recruitment or abduction when going to and from school. In these cases students' security can be improved by a combination of community information campaigns and by having adults from the community escort them. In addition, education programmes should include monitoring of the level of harassment experienced by girls and women".

Teaching and Learning: Standard 3 (Assessment)

Guidance Note on an 'Assessment Code of Ethics':

"Assessment and evaluation should be developed and implemented according to a code of ethics. Assessments and evaluations should be considered fair and reliable and should be conducted in a way that does not increase fear and trauma. Care should be taken that there is no harassment of learners in return for good marks or promotions within a school or programme".

Teachers and Other Education Personnel: Standard 2 (Conditions of Work)

Protection for students from sexual exploitation and abuse by teachers is also addressed more explicitly by the recommendation of a code of conduct for all teachers and other education personnel which includes the teachers' responsibility to, promote among other things, a positive learning environment and the well-being of learners.

This code of conduct should state, among other things, that education personnel:

- "– exhibit professional behaviour by maintaining a high standard of conduct, self-control and moral/ethical behaviour;
- participate in creating an environment in which all students are accepted;

– maintain a safe and healthy environment, free from harassment (including sexual harassment), intimidation, abuse and violence, and discrimination”

Background to the Issue

It is a sad reality of schooling systems around the world that the very places which should be a haven for children and youth - with trusted adults helping to create environments in which girls and boys can thrive – are often places in which students live with the constant fear of violence. This is especially so for girls, who may experience gender-based violence (including verbal harassment on the way to and from school, on the school premises, and even in the classrooms. Furthermore, in some contexts girls’ desire to attend school is so strong and the resources to pay for it so limited, that they are forced into risky relationships and transactional sex to obtain money for school fees and other schooling costs. Although such situations are not limited to emergency or transitional contexts, a number of factors create higher levels vulnerability in the latter: cultures of violence and aggressive masculinity, the presence of armed forces - and even peacekeepers - in and around communities, extreme poverty and lack of income generating activities, break-down of protection mechanisms and safety nets. Specific to the school, contributing factors may include untrained and unprofessional teachers, unmotivated and un(der)paid teachers, lack of any supervisory mechanisms, male-dominated environments (few female teachers).

The UNHCR/ Save the Children UK report (2002) which drew widespread attention to the extent of the exploitation of girls and young women by humanitarian workers in refugee camps in West Africa. Teachers were identified as one of the key groups of perpetrators, and the report highlighted how teachers were taking advantage of their positions and their authority over girls, offering good grades and other school privileges in return for sex. Most schools there are staffed by virtually all male teachers, and especially in the higher grades there are very few girls enrolled. Although the report highlighted the situation in West Africa, the issue is not limited to this region. Refugee and IDP girls in different locations - as well as those in their own countries and homes but who are living in times of crisis and state fragility – are often economically vulnerable and highly dependent on external assistance; this puts them at risk of sexual exploitation. Because education is so important to them, and such a critical means to improving their situation, they are also desperate to succeed, factors which sadly also put them at risk of exploitation from teachers and other influential men. Furthermore, there are often also very few checks and balances in place to protect the girls in this situation, including in schools and learning spaces.

Policies and practices of education in emergencies are, however, premised on the recognition that children in emergency, chronic crisis and early reconstruction contexts have particular protection needs, some of which may – at least to a certain extent- be met through schooling. Protection in this

context encompasses both physical and psychosocial protection, and education providers should ensure that this includes protection for all students from sexual and gender-based violence. The key indicators and the strategies of the Minimum Standards should also be complemented by other tools specific to addressing GBV, some of which do address education (see for example, Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force on Gender and Humanitarian Assistance (2005) *Guidelines for Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings: Focusing on Prevention of and Response to Sexual Violence in Emergencies*).

Promising Approaches

Some ways of addressing these issues, and of creating safe learning environments that have been tried – or at least discussed in different contexts – include:

Preventing GBV in and through education

- Encourage school management, PTAs, teachers and students to work together to create a 'safe school' policy, with specific actions to address the risks that exist in the specific school context. This involves making explicit the fact that witnessing GBV or knowing GBV is happening but taking no action is not acceptable.
- Ensure that all teachers and students recognize the many different and localized forms of GBV that exist, including verbal harassment, as well as other local forms of abuse ('eve teasing', for example).
- Ensure that the development of a Code of Conduct for teachers and other education personnel is done in a participatory way through discussions and inputs from all stakeholders including teachers, parents, students, community members and if relevant government authorities, unions etc. These stakeholders should also be involved in the monitoring of the code of conduct.
- Ensure that all areas of the school compound are safe for all students and that there are no 'no go areas' in which students feel threatened or afraid
- Involve students, parents, community members etc in clearing bush or undergrowth which may make paths on and around the school compound unsafe
- Ensure separate latrines and washing areas for male and female students
- Be aware of the particular risks for younger girls in the school if there are large numbers of over-aged male students
- Take actions – and collaborate with others, for example local shopkeepers and public transportation workers- to ensure that students are not at undue risk on the journey to and from school
- Take steps to ensure that checkpoints and army posts are located away from the school and do not create a risk for girls on their way to and from school

- Involve community members in a roster of chaperones to accompany girls on the way to and from school
- Try to ensure that there are women teachers in the school who may be able to help to create more comfortable school environments for girls and can advocate on the girls' behalf for protection from the risk of GBV
- Where it is not possible to recruit women as full teachers, develop alternative possibilities for women to be employed in the school, for example, as classroom assistants. At the same time, ensure that there are longer term measures in place to address the lack of women teachers - for example by providing opportunities for classroom assistants to continue their education and access teacher education.
- Work with local women's groups active on GBV issues to provide information and training to students and teachers
- Engage male teachers – and older male students in discussions of 'positive masculinity' and in what their role can be in creating safe and non-threatening environments for all students and teachers.

Responding to GBV in and through education

- Provide training to teachers and other education personnel in responding to child and youth survivors of GBV, with particular attention to women teachers who are more likely to be approached by female students
- Ensure that teachers and other education personnel are all aware of the steps they should take in responding to disclosures of GBV, including:

Acting in a calm, compassionate and non-judgmental way
 If required, ensuring appropriate and sensitive medical assistance is provided as soon as possible
 Being as honest and open with the survivor as possible as to what they personally can do to follow up
 Telling the survivor about the different choices that exist for referral (further medical, legal, psychosocial assistance, for example) and talking through each one
 Assisting the survivor by making introductions to the various services and supports which exist

- Ensure that information on services and response mechanisms for survivors is readily available in the school (ie the different steps to be taken by a student in the event of an attack taking place)
- Ensure that health and welfare providers and other possible 'first responders' in the community are trained to be sensitive and responsive to the particular needs of child and youth survivors, and that 'child friendly' tools are available to support them in their work (eg pictures and diagrams, dolls etc to help young people talk about their experience).

Issues to Consider

Clearly this is a sensitive topic to work on within the education sector, particularly if the teachers are perpetrators and/ or those who are turning a blind eye and therefore actually condoning abusive behaviours in the school. A multi-pronged approach may be necessary, which involves a number of different strategies and actors, and through which the contributing factors are addressed from different directions. These could involve, for example, the development of a code of conduct for teachers, which involves an open discussion of masculinity and gender violence, combined with the strengthening of the supervisory system, with capacity building to facilitate the inclusion of parents and community members in the monitoring of the safety of the learning environments and of the attitudes and actions of the teachers and other personnel. It could also involve a strengthening of the linkages between local women's groups and GBV action groups and the school for different awareness-raising activities.

As recommended above, one factor in the creation of safe and comfortable learning environments for girls is the presence of women teachers and/ or classroom assistants or mentors or similar. However, it is an important that through making explicit the link between women teachers and protection for girls the message is not given that this is only the concern of the women, or that the women should somehow act as physical barrier between the girls and either male teachers or students. Such an approach may not actually create much change in the underlying power dynamics of the school and in the attitudes of the males. Of further concern is the fact that women teachers or classroom assistants, who are often relatively young women, and in the minority on the school staff, may actually be at risk of abuse themselves, either from fellow teachers or older students. Even if this is not the case, and the women do feel safe and respected in the school, it may nonetheless be difficult for them to institute change, unless they are linked to other groups and networks beyond the school.

Mini Case Study

Classroom Assistants in Guinea and Sierra Leone

The Classroom Assistant program was initiated by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Guinea in 2002, and soon afterwards, adopted by IRC Sierra Leone in their education programs for Liberian refugees. Although there was no documentation of actual abuse and exploitation within the IRC programs, a UNHCR/Save the Children UK report (2002) drew attention to the widespread manipulation of girls into sexual relationships with teachers in exchange for good grades or other in-school privileges. It was therefore critical to address the male domination of the schools in order to create more protective conducive learning environments for girls. Although a long term gender equality intervention is to recruit more women teachers to the schools, this was impossible in the short term because of the few refugee or local women with the level of schooling and the time, family support and resources required to become a teacher. Well educated women are usually recruited for more lucrative positions in the UN, NGOs, or other agencies in the camps. Others are unable to leave family duties or other better paying income generating activities. This is especially true for the many refugee women who are single mothers, or who have lost their husbands to the conflict in Liberia.

There are flexible entry requirements (Grade 9 education) to become a Classroom Assistant and so the position is open to a larger number of refugee women. Women who are selected participate in a short 2 – 5 day training workshop, which includes lesson planning, team teaching, tracking girls' grades and attendance and report writing, in addition to prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation, child rights and child protection topics. Communication and counseling skills are also included in the training. The assistants are then deployed to Grade 3-6 classes and expected to be in class with the students all day, every day. They are visited on a regular basis by IRC supervisors, to whom they submit monthly reports detailing girls' attendance, activities and home visits.

The Classroom Assistants have an explicit mandate to mitigate abuse and exploitation of students, but more broadly the program was also designed to create more conducive, girl-friendly learning environments and support quality learning for all students. One critical task the assistants perform is the collection and safe-keeping of the class grades from the teacher. This means that the students do not deal directly with the teacher about their grades and therefore helps to avoid situations in which teachers can manipulate and exploit girls for sex in exchange for altering their grades. Additionally, assistants monitor attendance and follow up on absences with home visits. They also help the girls with their studies in addition to supporting health education activities, and some social club activities such as needlework, games and sports.

For many of the Classroom Assistants, the job means an opportunity for them to continue their own education; they are also encouraged to attend evening classes to complete their secondary school studies, to participate in different teacher trainings and eventually become teachers themselves.

Other Reference Documents

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Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. *Don't Forget Us: The Education and Gender-Based Violence Protection Needs of Adolescent Girls from Darfur in Chad*. July 2005. http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/Td_ed2.pdf