PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AT SCHOOL: A SYSTEMIC RESPONSE TO AN ENTRENCHED PROBLEM

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Determined Response

- In Uganda, corporal punishment at school has been prohibited since 1997
- Alternatives policy adopted in 2012
- VAC prevention policy adopted in 2015
- Investment in primary education has been prioritized within national education expenditure
- Considerable openness and willingness to find solutions within the MoESTS.
And yet, an old problem persists...

Evidence from diverse parts of the country suggests:

- High rates of violence against children at school.
- Our study found that more than 90% of children report ever experiencing violence at school and more than half the children had experienced physical violence at school last week.
Despite the will, why does VAC in schools persist?
Context: Conceptual

- Adults have a narrow (and different) conception of VAC compared to children.
- Adults distinguish between ‘legitimate’ (discipline) and non-legitimate (mistreatment).
- Many adults believe that controlled usage is good, beneficial and their duty as a good parent or teacher.
Context: Socio-economic

- Schools under-resourced
- Classrooms crowded
- Teachers under-trained and demoralised
- Children acculturated to have low expectations
Negative Feedback Loop

Conceptual Priming + Socio-economic context

= Negative feedback loop

Schools rely heavily on VAC to control and contain children

- Corporal punishment becomes preferred way of ‘disciplining’ children
- Children have limited opportunity to develop their cognitive and social skills
- Children’s experience of and identification with school curtailed or diminished and therefore many drop-out.
- Children emerging with poor learning outcomes and possibly negative mental health outcomes
- Teachers disengaged from students
- Parents feel demoralized and betrayed
Malfunctioning System

VAC becomes entrenched and normalized as part of schools/education and has a profound long term consequences for children, their families and their communities.

Complex problems need systemic solutions
Reconceptualizing ways forward
a) Reformulate the challenge as creation of good schools and not prevention of VAC.

b) Broaden conception of VAC
   - Expand conception of VAC beyond physical violence: aspirations, psychological, identity, participation, opportunity for self definition.

c) Systemic/holistic responses
   - Begin with the child’s experience of school and move out in concentric circles of influence to address the entire ‘ecosystem’ that sustains the problem.

d) Build interventions that foster synergy: ‘join the dots’
Reconceptualizing ways forward (continued)

e) Develop practical methodologies for holistic interventions.
   • Usable in resource poor environment
   • Endorsable by local officials/Ministry of Education
   • Implementable by teachers and students at school-level
   • Meaningful participation for all stakeholders including parents
   • Scalable
Reframing in Action: Good School Toolkit

Good School Toolkit

- Systems level approach addressing operational culture of school: 3 entry points (relationships, governance, participation)
- 6 step practical process
- Implemented by teachers and students
- Supported by parents
- Endorsed and monitored by local officials
- Used in 600 schools in Uganda