



COMMITMENT AT EVERY LEVEL

# The Policy Landscape for Preventing Violence Against Children in Africa's Schools

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Coalition for  
Good Schools



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# Acronyms

ACPF	African Child Policy Forum
ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children
APEVAC	African Partnership to End Violence Against Children
AU	African Union
CAR	Central African Republic
CESA	Continental Education Strategy for Africa
CSE	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSSP	Comprehensive School Safety Policy
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DV	Domestic Violence
ECOSOC	The United Nations Economic and Social Council
ESDP	Education Sector Development Program
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
HIV	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
HLPF	High-level Political Forum
KII	Key Informant Interview
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
NAC	National Agenda for Children
NSSF	National Social Security Fund
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SRGBV	School Related Gender Based Violence
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights on the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
VAC	Violence Against Children
VACiS	Violence Against Children in Schools
VNRs	Voluntary National Reviews
WHO	World Health Organisation



# Executive Summary

## A: Background

Violence against children (VAC), and in particular violence against children in schools (VACiS) remains a significant problem in Africa, where physical punishment is largely applied as disciplinary measure by teachers and bullying by fellow learners is commonplace. The Africa Hub of the Coalition for Good Schools commissioned a study to analyse the policy landscape around VACiS to build evidence and knowledge that will support targeted engagements on prevention of this particular and ubiquitous form of violence.

The objectives of this study were to: 1) *analyse existing legislative and policy measures that contribute to reducing the risk factors and enhancing protective factors related to VACiS; 2) identify what is hindering implementation and provide recommendations to member states and their partners that address these challenges for the next decade, and; 3) contribute to developing consensus at the continental level for the integration of holistic responses to violence against children (VAC) in education policy and practice.*

The study employed both primary and secondary data collection methods, including a desk-review of laws, policies, standards, a self-administered questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in the five countries selected for in-depth case studies. The study sought to highlight countries in the region with more explicit policies dedicated to preventing VACiS, to provide examples for countries where policies may be limited to responding to VAC or child protection issues more broadly.

## B: Findings

A growing number of African countries have made commendable efforts towards preventing and responding to VACiS through development and implementation of policies, laws and plans of action. However, both a review of secondary data and consultations with stakeholders in the study countries confirmed that the level of implementation of the existing laws and policies is not sufficient. The limited implementation was attributed to, among others, lack of resources, inadequate skills, and unfavourable cultural norms and practices.

## Existing Policy and Legislative Frameworks

### a. Global Frameworks

- **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:** The protection of children from all forms of violence is a fundamental right enshrined in UNCRC. All 55 African countries have ratified the UNCRC; a considerable number have adopted its optional protocols and have made efforts to domesticate its provisions into their national laws. While most countries submit periodic reports on the progress of implementation of the UNCRC, there is no continent-wide status report on its implementation.

- **Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGs):** SDG target 16.2 aims at the realization of the right of every child to live free from fear, neglect, abuse and exploitation. Other SDG targets that address specific forms of VAC include target 5.3 on child marriage and female genital mutilation and target 8.7 on the eradication of child labour. The study found no comparable and reliable data on the level of implementation among African countries.
- **The INSPIRE Strategies to end VAC:** A group of 10 international agencies under the leadership of WHO developed the INSPIRE strategies for ending VAC. Sixteen African countries have successfully applied the INSPIRE framework to their violence prevention work including Burkina Faso, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The uptake and implementation of INSPIRE by African countries has led to increased political will to prioritise VAC prevention. However, no in-depth review has been undertaken to evaluate the impact of the INSPIRE strategies.
- **Pathfinding Countries:** The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children has successfully promoted the concept of pathfinding, which aims to raise awareness, stimulate leadership commitment, galvanize action, and establish standards for national violence prevention throughout the world. Pathfinding countries use the INSPIRE strategies for Ending VAC. Thirteen countries in Africa have become pathfinding countries which means that they have made formal, public commitment to comprehensive action to end all forms of VAC.
- **Safe to Learn Initiative:** Safe to Learn is a global initiative dedicated to ending VACs in every country across the world by 2024 through a five-point call to action including: implementing policy and legislation, strengthening prevention and response at the school level, shifting social norms and behaviour change, investing resources effectively, and generating and using evidence. Six countries that have endorsed the call to action in Sub-Saharan Africa are Ghana, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Uganda and Mozambique. South Sudan and Uganda have conducted a diagnostic study to gauge governments' compliance, identify best practices, gaps and priorities, and establish a baseline for tracking countries' progress.

## b. Continental Frameworks

- **The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child:** The ACRWC in Article 16 obliges States to protect children from violence. Fifty one out the fifty five countries (87%) have ratified the ACRWC. Countries that have not ratified the ACRWC include; Morocco, Somalia, South Sudan and Tunisia. The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) developed Comprehensive Guidelines on Preventing and Addressing Violence Against Children in Africa, which outline the necessary legal, policy, institutional, research, and resource mobilization strategies required to support VAC prevention and response efforts. The Guidelines streamline the principles, standards and guidance provided in various documents by the Committee to support African Union (AU) Member States to develop measures to protect children from violence. The Guidelines also build on the African Union's Agenda 2063, the African Children's Agenda (Agenda 2040), and the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development (Agenda 2030) and aim at promoting the harmonised delivery on continental and global targets by strengthening AU Member States' capacities to prevent and address all forms of VAC. However, there was no information regarding dissemination and implementation of the guidelines and Agenda 2040 by African countries.

- **African Partnership to End Violence Against Children:** APEVAC was established to promote an Africa-wide movement and conversation to contribute to the global, continental, regional and national agenda on ending VAC. As a result of APEVAC's interventions, many African countries have developed robust policies and legislative frameworks for protecting and responding to VAC. Among these countries in Africa with strong policies and laws are; Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

### c. Country Level Frameworks

Having ratified global and continental conventions, most African countries have also enacted national legislations that domesticate provisions of the international and regional instruments albeit with variations in comprehensiveness. The legal frameworks have gaps and hence do not provide adequate protection in a number of areas including laws relating to corporal punishment where it is not prohibited in all settings, laws related to age of sexual consent and marriage where some countries set ages below 18 years. VAC surveys that have been carried out reveal that VAC is still prevalent in most countries even where policies are in place.

## Factors Hindering Effective Implementation of VACiS Legislation, Policies and Programs

- **Social norms:** Cultural tolerance of violence, either as an accepted way to resolve conflict or as a normal part of child rearing, is a risk factor for all types of interpersonal violence.
- **Gaps in legislation and weak implementation arrangements:** In some African countries existing legislation is not comprehensive, leaving loopholes for VAC. For example, in some African countries, legislation does not prohibit corporal punishment in all settings. Implementation arrangements are often lacking, weak or inadequately funded and with no interventions that strengthen life skills among learners to protect themselves.
- **Lack of reliable national data on VAC:** National disaggregated prevalence data on VAC have been limited, and this has hindered the development of data-guided action plans to support effective child protection interventions.
- **Limited resources for implementation of plans:** most interventions aimed at eliminating VACiS are financed by development partners which is not sustainable. There is inadequate implementation of laws and policies on VACiS because of lack of funding by governments.
- **Poor dissemination of policies and inadequate reviews of programme initiatives:** While several initiatives have been put in place to prevent VACiS, most have not been evaluated to establish their effectiveness and impact. Some initiatives that have been developed by the AU have not been adequately implemented due to poor dissemination.

## Recommendations

- **Policy and legal reform:** African countries should be supported to carry out policy and legal reform through domesticating provisions of international and regional child protection instruments with an explicit focus on the issue of violence in and around schools.
- **Strengthen implementation frameworks for national policies, laws and plans:** Countries should develop guidelines and adequately resourced plans of action for prevention and response to VACiS. Governments should review/develop education sector plans to ensure that they include specific objectives and strategies aimed at addressing VACiS.
- **Establishment of data banks on VACiS:** African countries should invest in robust data collection systems, research studies, and evaluations to inform evidence-based policies and programs.
- **Scaling up of best practices in VACiS prevention and response:** Successful evidence-based programmes and interventions such as the Good Schools Toolkit which was developed by Raising Voices should be scaled up and diagnostic tool to monitor progress on implementation of intervention to prevent VACiS should be adopted.
- **Address social norms and practices:** Efforts should be made to change the mindsets and behaviours of adults and address social and cultural norms that sustain violence.
- **Capacity building of duty bearers:** Governments ought to carry out public awareness campaigns, about the impact of violence on children. Training programs on child protection, gender-based violence, positive discipline and identifying signs of abuse should be conducted.
- **Strengthening prevention and response at the school level:** African countries should adopt a whole school approach that involves all actors within and beyond the school to prevent VACiS.

# 1. Background and Context

Globally, violence during childhood is estimated to affect up to 1 billion children aged 2 to 17 years every year, with significant health, social and psychological consequences.<sup>1</sup> Experiences of violence have immediate physical consequences in the form of injury and can lead to disability or death during childhood.<sup>2</sup> The pandemic of violence against children (VAC) takes place at home, online, at school and in communities.<sup>3</sup> It happens in every country, city and community, and in all socio-economic and cultural contexts.<sup>4</sup>

An estimated 246 million girls and boys experience violence in and around schools (VACiS) – including on the way to school, on school grounds, and within classrooms<sup>5</sup> and this figure is likely to be an underestimate. VAC takes many forms including physical, sexual, or emotional – online and offline. School-related violence includes any acts of physical, sexual, and psychological violence against students perpetrated by school staff, other students/pupils, or persons unaffiliated with the school, either in school or around schools. This has a long-lasting impact on children’s lives and the future of their communities and societies. It hinders learning, it can decrease self-esteem, reduce school attendance, and lower academic achievements. Children who experience violence have worse educational outcomes and are at increased risk of financial and employment problems in later life<sup>6</sup>. Intersectional barriers such as gender, race, age, disability status or sexual identity often hinders already marginalized children from attending school and gaining education altogether. In some cases, this can increase the risk of child marriage, child labour, and inter-generational poverty. Such violence undermines global investments in health and education while eroding lifetime productivity and earning potential.

VACiS is a global problem, where the use of physical violence by teachers is legally accepted as a disciplinary measure in 64 countries worldwide, mostly low and middle-income countries in Africa and Asia.<sup>7</sup> Reports still show high prevalence of violence in school settings with Africa accounting for 40% of all countries globally which lawfully allow physical punishment in the education context. Systematic reviews indicate high lifetime prevalence rates of more than 70% and up to 100% for physical violence by teachers in low- and middle-income countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Notably, prevalence rates were also high in countries where physical violence in schools is unlawful, suggesting that a legal ban may be a necessary, but not sufficient condition for ending the use of violence against students. Like physical violence,

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<sup>1</sup> Hillis S, Mercy J, Amobi A, Kress H. Global Prevalence of Past-year Violence Against Children: A Systematic Review and Minimum Estimates. *Pediatrics*. 2016 Mar; 137(3):e20154079. doi: 10.1542/peds.2015-4079. Epub 2016 Jan 25. PMID: 26810785; PMCID: PMC6496958.

<sup>2</sup> Know Violence, 2017; Pinheiro, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> The Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> End Violence website. Available: <https://end-violence.org>

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO. 2017. School Violence and Bullying: global status report. Paris: UNESCO. Available: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246970>

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF. Hidden in plain sight: a statistical analysis of violence against children. New York: UNICEF, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Global Initiative to End all Corporal Punishment <https://endcorporalpunishment.org/global-initiative/>

studies from various countries including Uganda, Tanzania and Nigeria reported high rates of emotional violence by teachers ranging from 18% up to 100%.

There is already a huge momentum on the continent to end VAC. African countries have accelerated their efforts to meet the targets of ending VAC laid out in Africa's Agenda 2063 – The Africa We Want, Africa's Agenda for Children 2040: Fostering an Africa Fit for Children and the Sustainable Development Goals specifically target 16.2. A growing number of African countries have made commendable efforts towards preventing and responding to VAC through, development of legislative frameworks, and comprehensive multi-sectoral plans of action for ending VAC that are guiding the prevention and response efforts and strengthened the child protection environment. These developments notwithstanding, violence in schools persists and there is little information about the reach of these policies on the continent as well as their effectiveness in addressing the problem.

The Africa Hub of the Coalition for Good Schools commissioned this study to analyse VACiS policy landscape to build evidence and knowledge that will support targeted engagements on prevention of VACiS in Africa.

# 2. Objectives and Methodology

## 2.1 Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the assignment were to:

- i. *Identify what is working* by analysing existing legislative and policy measures that contribute to reducing the risk factors and enhancing protective factors related to VAC in schools.
- ii. *Identify what is hindering* implementation and provide recommendations to member states and their partners that address these challenges for the next decade.
- iii. *Contribute to developing consensus* at the continental level for the integration of holistic responses to VAC in education policy and practice.

## 2.2 Framework for assessment and guiding questions

The following questions guided the review of policies, laws and plans aimed at preventing VACiS in Africa.

1. What are the salient continental and regional policy frameworks that address VACiS?
2. To what extent do the reviewed national laws, policies, and standards related to education address the prevention of VACiS?
3. To what extent are the existing policies and laws related to prevention and response to VACiS being implemented by the different African countries?
4. What are the successful and programmatic initiatives related to VACiS prevention and response that can be scaled up or replicated in similar settings?
5. What can be done to mainstream violence prevention throughout the education system (from early childhood development to secondary education) at the country level?
6. What are the existing challenges that hinder the implementation of policy and legal frameworks on VACiS?
7. What urgent priority actions should be taken by African countries to reduce VAC? In their individual countries and on the continent?

## 2.3 Methodology

The study employed both primary and secondary data collection methods including, a desk review of laws, policies and standards and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in the five countries that were selected for in-depth case studies. It was beyond the scope of this study to analyse existing policy of every African country. The aim of this study was to review and analyse accessible and promising policy and programmatic interventions that have gained salience, and influence in continental policy and practice.

### 2.3.1 Desk review

We reviewed international, regional and country specific documents about the existing policies, laws and national plans/programs in the different African countries with a specific focus on availability of provisions on prevention of VACiS. The review also covered documentation of the extent of implementation of policies and laws. The list of documents reviewed is provided in Appendix 2.

### 2.3.2 In-depth Case Studies

The study also involved reviewing and analysing policies, legislation and standards in five African countries. We analysed provisions related to prevention of VACiS throughout the education system (from early childhood development to secondary education but not tertiary or technical institutions) at the country level. We explored the extent of enforcement and implementation of these normative frameworks through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The focus was both on the education sector and the child protection sector.

#### Selection of Case Study Countries

The selection of the five countries was informed by the need to have geographical, cultural, and contextual diversity. Our intention was not to imply a representative sample nor of a comprehensive analysis but to provide a snapshot of salient issues of current priority within the continent.

**Table 1:** List of Countries selected for in-depth study

Country	Criteria for choice
1. Côte d'Ivoire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Western Africa</li><li>• Country with high incidences of VAC</li><li>• Country affected by armed conflict</li><li>• French Speaking country</li><li>• Pathfinding country</li></ul>
2. Central African Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Central Africa</li><li>• Country affected by armed conflict</li><li>• High incidences of VAC</li></ul>

<b>3. Tunisia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northern Africa</li> <li>• Predominantly Islamic country</li> <li>• High incidences of VAC</li> <li>• Arabic speaking country</li> <li>• Has not ratified the ACRWC</li> </ul>
<b>4. Namibia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Southern Africa</li> <li>• Country with good policies and laws for prevention and response to VACiS</li> <li>• Relatively low incidences of VAC</li> <li>• English speaking country</li> <li>• Pathfinding country</li> </ul>
<b>5. Uganda</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eastern Africa</li> <li>• Country with good policies and laws for prevention and response to VAC</li> <li>• Country that has applied the Diagnostic Tool to Safe to Learn</li> <li>• English speaking country</li> <li>• Pathfinding country</li> </ul>

## Primary Data Collection Methods

Primary data sources comprised of engagements with national level stakeholders with a role in influencing the national policies, laws and programs related to preventing and responding to VACiS. The engagements with national level stakeholders were done through associates and partner organisations based in the five study countries.

**Quantitative data collection:** Quantitative data was collected through self-administered structured questionnaires completed by representatives of ministries in charge of education, social protection and other relevant institutions addressing issues of VAC in the school setting. There was low response to self-administered structured questionnaires in most of the study countries. A total of 21 completed questionnaires were received (10 from Uganda, 6 from Namibia, 2 from Côte d'Ivoire, 0 from Central African Republic and 3 Tunisia).

**Key informant interviews:** The study used a combination of physical and virtual key informant interviews (through Zoom or telephone) with relevant representatives of the institutions in the study countries. The key informant interviews gathered information about the current policies, laws and programs, potential additional secondary data sources and validation of “grey” areas identified in the secondary data. Each actor or category of actors had separate guides with appropriately tailored questions. We worked with Research Associates based in the study countries to support the process through scheduling appointments with respondents, carrying out interviews and following up on completion of the self-administered questionnaires. A total of 50 key informant interviews were conducted with relevant respondents in the five study countries. 2 webinars were conducted with Anglophone and Francophone African countries attended by a total of 70 participants.

The institutions and specific issues of focus of the interviews/questionnaires were as follows:

**Table 2: Institutions consulted**

Institution	Relevance to the study or role in addressing VACiS
<b>1. Academic and experts in the education sector</b>	Our aim was to engage experts with specific knowledge or who had been involved in generating data that had informed policy in their countries.
<b>2. The government ministries responsible for child protection</b>	Our aim was to engage with overall leadership and coordination in the formulation and review of policies, laws, guidelines and programmes relating to VACiS, coordinating and networking with VACiS stakeholders, and supporting training of service providers in VACiS.
<b>3. The ministry responsible for education</b>	Our aim was to engage with those involved in formulating and implementing policies and programs to address VAC in the education sector.
<b>4. Autonomous/semi-autonomous agencies responsible for child protection (National Children’s Council) &amp; National Human Rights Commission</b>	Our aim was to engage with those involved in monitoring and reporting on compliance of government and non-state actors with human and child rights human/child rights education and hearing complaints of applicable individual violations.
<b>5. UNICEF</b>	Our aim was to engage with staff who may have specific perspectives on government capacity to implement policies, programmes/services to prevent and respond to VAC, research, monitoring and advocacy on VAC.
<b>6. The Police Service</b>	Our aim was to learn from those involved in Investigating and producing evidence for prosecution of offences committed against children, including incidents of VAC.
<b>7. Non-Governmental Organisations with VAC related services</b>	Our aim was to engage with those who had in depth knowledge of implementing programmes or services to prevent and respond to VAC, research, monitoring and advocacy on VAC.
<b>8. Media</b>	Our aim was to engage with prominent journalists familiar with the national climate around Human and/child rights education, reporting VAC and child-sensitive violence reporting.
<b>9. Judiciary</b>	Our aim was to engage with those familiar with practical challenges of adjudication of VAC cases violating the criminal code and statutory laws; implementing applicable child justice standards.
<b>10. Parliament</b>	Our aim was to engage with and learn from those familiar with operationalization of legislation, budget appropriation and oversight over the executive including over budget execution and human or child rights compliance.
<b>11. Sub-national level consultations (Education Officers, Head teachers, Probation and Welfare Officers etc)</b>	Our aim was to learn from frontline workers at the level of implementation of policies to prevent and respond to VAC in schools.

## Data Analysis

Qualitative data was analysed using both content analysis for the desk review and thematic analysis for key informant interviews following the guiding questions of the mapping. Thematic analysis involved grouping similar responses into themes and grouping the themes under broader concepts. A draft codebook was developed and updated accordingly during synthesis of data. Emerging themes were further redefined and clarified based on discussions between coders. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS to generate descriptive statistics. Desk review data was synthesised using a matrix developed in line with the main research questions of the mapping.



# 3. Findings

The study revealed that although there has been considerable progress made in preventing VAC in general and VACiS in particular, the problem still persists. Many African countries have developed policies and enacted legislation aimed at preventing and responding to VAC in general but few have school specific interventions. However, both review of secondary data and consultations with stakeholders in the study countries confirmed that the level of implementation of the existing laws and policies is not sufficient. The limited implementation was attributed to, among others, lack of resources, inadequate skills and unfavourable cultural norms and practices.

## 3.1 Existing legislative and policy measures on preventing VACiS

Legislative frameworks on VAC exist at global, continental and national levels including; the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its optional protocols, the Sustainable Development Goals, UN Guidelines and General Comments related to VAC, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), the African Union Agenda 2063, Africa Agenda for Children 2040 and national policies and laws of the different countries.

### 3.1.1 Global frameworks to address VACiS

The global agenda for action on VAC is well articulated in various treaties, normative standards and declarations such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and its three optional protocols, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ILO Convention 182 on child labour, 2014 UN model strategies and practical measures on the elimination of VAC in the field in crime prevention and criminal justice, and UN global action plan against trafficking in persons (2010). This section analyses the global frameworks and normative standards that relate to VAC and the extent to which they have contributed to reducing risk factors and enhancing the protection of children from VACiS in African countries.

#### i. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The protection of children from all forms of violence is a fundamental right enshrined in The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 19 of the UNCRC places the responsibility on States to take all appropriate measures to protect children against “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.”

All the 55 African countries have ratified the CRC, and a considerable number have also adopted the three optional protocols to the CRC which has seen concerted efforts to uphold the rights of children including the right to protection against violence. Ratification demonstrates a government’s commitment to taking all necessary measures “including, legislative, administrative, social and educational measures” to protect children from all forms of violence. Having ratified the CRC, all African countries have made efforts to domesticate its provisions into their national laws. However, the policy review revealed that the African countries are at

different levels in terms of domestication and implementation of provisions of the UNCRC. While individual African countries are required to submit reports on the progress of implementation of the UNCRC, there is no continent-wide status report on CRC implementation.

## ii. Sustainable Development Goals 2030 (SDGs)

The inclusion of a specific target (SDG 16.2) in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to end all forms of VAC gave a renewed impetus towards the realization of the right of every child to live free from fear, neglect, abuse and exploitation. Other SDG targets that address specific forms of violence and harm towards children, include target 5.3 on child marriage and female genital mutilation and target 8.7 on the eradication of child labour, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers among others. As part of its follow-up and review mechanisms, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encourages member states to “conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven”. These national reviews are expected to serve as a basis for the regular reviews by the high-level political forum (HLPF), meeting under the auspices of ECOSOC. The voluntary national reviews (VNRs) aim to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The VNRs also seek to strengthen policies and institutions of governments and to mobilize multi-stakeholder support and partnerships for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. 20 countries of Africa have carried out VNRs including Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Chad, Congo (Republic of the), Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Guinea, Kenya, Libya, Mauritania, Mauritius, Namibia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

The study found out that there is no comparable and reliable data on the level of implementation of SDGs among African Countries.

## iii. The INSPIRE Strategies to end VAC

As part of the global violence prevention and response agenda, under the leadership of WHO, a group of 10 international agencies developed and endorsed an evidence-based technical package called *INSPIRE: Seven strategies for ending violence against children*. INSPIRE is an evidence-based technical package to help countries prevent and respond to VAC aged 0–17 years. INSPIRE is an acronym for seven strategies: **I** for the implementation and enforcement of laws; **N** for norms and values; **S** for safe environments; **P** for parent and caregiver support; **I** for income and economic strengthening; **R** for response and support services; and **E** for education and life skills. In addition, two cross-cutting activities (multisectoral action and coordination, and monitoring and evaluation) help connect and strengthen the seven strategies and track the extent of their implementation and impact on the problem. The INSPIRE framework is an essential tool to help achieve SDG Target 16.2, which calls for ending all forms of VAC, and also helps the achievement of goals 1, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, and 16 that target poverty, health, education, gender equality, safe environments, and justice.

Since its publication in 2016, INSPIRE has acted as a global resource for implementing, adapting and monitoring interventions to prevent and respond to VAC. Countries in Africa that have successfully applied the INSPIRE framework in the violence prevention work include Burkina Faso, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The uptake and implementation of INSPIRE by African countries has led to improvement political will to prioritise VAC prevention. However, no in-depth review has been undertaken to

evaluate the impact of the INSPIRE strategies.

#### iv. The Pathfinding Initiative

The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children has successfully promoted leadership commitments for action, while also establishing a standard of national violence prevention. Since its launch in July of 2016, the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children has promoted the concept of Pathfinding, which aims to raise awareness, stimulate leadership commitment, galvanize action, and establish a standard of national violence prevention throughout the world. Today, 38 countries have joined the partnership as Pathfinders, spreading the initiative's reach to every continent.

Pathfinding countries use the **INSPIRE Seven strategies for Ending Violence Against Children** to understand the drivers of violence and build integrated responses that improve the lives of children and young people. These strategies are seen throughout the Pathfinding process, including but not limited to the creation of a country's national action plan to end violence. The following 13 countries in Africa<sup>8</sup> have become pathfinding countries which means that they have made a formal, public commitment to comprehensive action to end all forms of VAC. They are expected to develop evidence-based and costed national action plans that set commitments for three to five years, and a related resource mobilization plan.

**Table 3:** Pathfinding countries in Africa

Country	Joining Date	Actions undertaken since becoming a pathfinding country
<b>Botswana</b>	2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implemented the Violence Against Children Survey (VACS) in 2015 and launched the VACS report in 2019.</li> <li>It is currently in the process of developing its response plan, and partners are working to prevent and respond to violence.</li> </ul>
<b>Burkina Faso</b>	2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The National Child Protection Strategy is operationalised through four strategic areas comprising of 22 priority actions, which involve all actors of the child protection system in Burkina Faso.</li> <li>Developed the 2020-2024 National Child Protection Strategy (SNPE)</li> </ul>
<b>Côte d'Ivoire</b>	2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The National Strategy for Social Protection focuses on improving the lives of the poor, reducing child mortality, VAC, child labour, and eliminating gender discrimination. The Strategy also advocates for the strengthening of institutional and legal frameworks around these issues.</li> <li>To strengthen coordination across sectors and create a common vision for child protection, the government of Côte d'Ivoire undertook a mapping of the child protection system.</li> <li>With the financial support of the INSPIRE fund, in February 2019 the Child Rights Coalition hosted a workshop on law reform to end VAC.</li> </ul>
<b>Ethiopia</b>	2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted the VAC survey in 2022 and the launch of the report was slated for 2024.</li> </ul>

<sup>8</sup> Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children Website.

Country	Joining Date	Actions undertaken since becoming a pathfinding country
Guinea	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guinea has strengthened national legislation to end VAC, creating numerous sectoral action plans and community awareness campaigns to combat the issue. This includes the National Strategic Plan for the Promotion of the Abandonment of Child Marriages, the Joint National Program to Combat Female Genital Mutilation, and the introduction of codes of conduct in schools regarding the formal prohibition of corporal punishment.</li> </ul>
Kenya	2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implemented the first VAC and youth survey in 2010 and launched the report in 2012.</li> <li>Kenya was one of the first countries to complete a second VACS in 2019 and launched their VACS report in 2020.</li> <li>Results from the 2019 Kenya VACS informed the National Prevention and Response Plan (2019-2023) concurrently with the report launch.</li> </ul>
Namibia	2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Namibia led the implementation of the VAC and youth survey in 2019, and launched the VACS report in 2021 in celebration of the Day of the Namibian Child.</li> </ul>
Nigeria	2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Government of Nigeria led the implementation of the Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (VACS) in 2014 and launched the VACS report in 2016.</li> <li>Nigeria launched the Year of Action to End Violence against Children in September 2015.</li> </ul>
South Africa	2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In 2019, the Ministry of Basic Education took the pledge one step further by endorsing the call to action of Safe to Learn, an End Violence initiative that aims to keep children safe and secure in school.</li> <li>South Africa is also being supported by the End Violence Fund through a project led by UNICEF South Africa and a large-scale data collection and research project called Disrupting Harm.</li> <li>South Africa has also endorsed the Safe to Learn Call to Action.</li> </ul>
Tanzania	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Government of Tanzania led the implementation of the VAC and youth survey in 2009 and launched the Tanzania VACS report in 2011.</li> <li>The final VACS report was followed by a one-year response plan for 2012-2013. A costed three-year “National Plan of Action to Prevent and Respond to Violence against Children” for 2013-2016 was released in June 2013, building on the previous plan.</li> <li>In 2017, Zanzibar also launched a plan on violence against women and girls and a study on gender norms.</li> </ul>
Uganda	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Government of Uganda led the implementation of the VAC and youth survey in 2015 and launched the VACS report in 2018.</li> <li>Uganda has developed its National Child Policy 2020, and partners are currently working to prevent and respond to violence through advocacy and public awareness efforts.</li> </ul>

Country	Joining Date	Actions undertaken since becoming a pathfinding country
Zambia	2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Zambia Health and Wellbeing Survey (H-Well) is the first VAC and youth survey conducted in the country.</li> <li>The government released the policy brief with key preliminary findings of the H-WELL survey in 2015. The findings were featured by UNICEF ESARO in the launch of the regional campaign on VAC held in South Africa in November 2015.</li> <li>The government launched the final VACS report in 2018.</li> </ul>
Zimbabwe	2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Government of Zimbabwe led the implementation of their first VAC and youth survey in 2011 and launched the VACS report in 2012.</li> <li>In 2017, the Government of Zimbabwe repeated the VACS, publishing the second report in 2019.</li> </ul>

The table above shows that the Pathfinding countries have taken deliberate actions aimed at preventing VAC in their areas of jurisdictions. Most of the countries have conducted national VAC surveys to establish the prevalence of the different forms of VAC in their countries. Some of the countries have already developed national plans of action and strategies to prevent and respond to VAC and others are in the process of developing evidence based national action plans to address the prevalent forms of VAC in their countries. The countries are now at different levels of implementation of the national plans of action.

As part of the global accountability framework, global solution summits are periodically convened at which countries that are part of the Pathfinding initiative share progress, challenges and opportunities for action. In 2021, government-led National Policy Dialogues that culminated in the presentation of statements summarizing progress in ending VAC since the country became a Pathfinder within the End Violence Partnership and setting out new commitments to accelerate progress. In Africa, National Policy Dialogues have been held by the governments of Burkina Faso, Guinea, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. As seen in the table above, the pathfinding countries have conducted national VAC surveys, amended their national laws, developed policies and action plans on VAC prevention but initiative has not yet been systematically evaluated.

#### v. Safe to Learn (STL) Initiative

Safe to Learn is a global initiative dedicated to ending VACiS in every country across the world. Launched in 2019, this global multi-agency and multi-sectorial initiative brings together civil society, United Nations agencies, donors, global partnerships, the business sector, and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on VAC. Fourteen partners of STL are major global leaders in education, child protection, health, and violence prevention. STL strategically builds on their complementary strengths and expertise to ensure children are safe to learn, no matter how or where their education may be provided.<sup>9</sup>

With a vision of ending all VACiS by 2024, the programmatic and advocacy objectives of Safe to Learn are set out in a five-point Call to Action:

<sup>9</sup> Safe to Learn Members: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (UK FCDO), the United Nations Girl's Education Initiative (UNGEI), the Civil Society Forum to End Violence against Children, the World Bank, Education Cannot Wait (ECW), the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), the Global Business Coalition for Education (GBCE), Global Affairs Canada (GAC), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, and the Coalition for Good Schools.

1. **Implement policy and legislation:** National, regional and local governments develop, fund and enforce law and policies that protect children from all forms of violence in and around schools, including online violence.
2. **Strengthen prevention and response at the school level:** School staff, students, and management committees provide safe and gender-sensitive learning environments for all children that promote positive discipline, child-centred teaching and protect and improve children's physical and mental wellbeing.
3. **Shift social norms and behaviour change:** Parents, teachers, children, local government and community leaders recognize the devastating impact of violence in schools and take action to promote positive social norms and gender equality to ensure schools are safe spaces for learning.
4. **Invest resources effectively:** Increased and better use of investments targeted at ending violence in schools.
5. **Generate and use evidence:** Countries and the international community generate and use evidence on how to effectively end violence in schools.

This Call to Action was translated into a set of benchmarks, which were developed in relation to international child rights frameworks, UN tools and minimum standards, and best practice from the field of child safeguarding. For each benchmark, there are national, sub-national/district and school-level checkpoints or requirements that governments and the education sector should meet to achieve their accountabilities in ensuring that schools are safe and protective. These benchmarks and checkpoints formed the basis for a Diagnostic Tool to gauge the degree to which governments were meeting these standards.

Six countries that have endorsed the call to action in Sub-Saharan Africa are Ghana, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Uganda and Mozambique.

In Africa only South Sudan and Uganda have conducted a diagnostic study to gauge government's compliance, identify best practices, gaps and priorities, and establish a baseline for tracking countries' progress on the Safe to Learn initiative. Uganda's diagnostic exercise revealed the existence of:

- National laws and policies that prohibit VACiS
- Strong collaborations between the GoU and development partners
- The national child helpline to report and respond to cases of VAC
- Guidelines for Reporting, Tracking, Referral and Response to cases of violence
- Professional code of conduct for teachers that streamlines how to support learners.

However, the exercise found out that there is a lack of national policies/guidelines specifically geared towards addressing social norms surrounding VACiS and the Education Sector Plan does not explicitly indicate specific strategies and key performance indicators directed towards violence prevention against school children, and that school actors, especially teachers, lack adequate training on violence response and prevention.

### 3.1.2 Continental frameworks to address VACiS

## i. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) recognizes every child's right to survival, development, protection, and participation. Specifically, ACRWC, in Article 16, also places the responsibility on States to protect children from violence. 51 out of the 55 countries (87%) have ratified the ACRWC. Countries that have not ratified the ACRWC include Morocco, Somalia, Tunisia and South Sudan.

Other policy frameworks with relevant provisions on prevention of VAC in Africa include Agenda 2063: under Aspirations 4 and 6, which provides for the protection of children from gender-based violence and Africa's Agenda for Children 2040 (Aspiration 7) which pledges to protect every child from violence, exploitation, neglect, and abuse. Other guidelines that relate to the preventing VAC include; the African Union Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2018–2028; the African Union (AU) Plan of Action on the Family in Africa; the AU's Social Policy Framework for Africa; and the Addis Ababa Declaration on Strengthening the African Family for Inclusive Development.

The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) developed Comprehensive Guidelines on Preventing and Addressing Violence Against Children in Africa, which outline the necessary legal, policy, institutional, research, and resource mobilization strategies required to support VAC prevention and response efforts. The Guidelines streamline the principles, standards and guidance provided in various documents by the Committee to support African Union (AU) Member States to develop measures to protect children from violence. The Guidelines also build on the African Union's Agenda 2063, the African Children's Agenda (Agenda 2040), and the United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development (Agenda 2030) and aim at promoting the harmonised delivery on continental and global targets by strengthening AU Member States' capacities to prevent and address all forms of VAC. However, there was no information regarding dissemination and implementation of the guidelines and Agenda 2040 by African countries.

## ii. African Partnership to End VAC

The African Partnership to End Violence Against Children (APEVAC) is a Pan-African platform established to promote an Africa-wide movement and conversation that contribute to the global, continental, regional and national agenda on ending VAC. It was also born of the need for a continental collective platform for innovation and cross-learning on VAC. APEVAC brings together governments, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), civil society organisations, activists, researchers, academia, media and children to inform, inspire, influence reform and support collective action to end VAC in Africa. Since its establishment in 2016, APEVAC has been at the forefront of galvanizing continental efforts and national dialogues to increase awareness of and prioritisation of prevention of VAC into national political priorities. Some of the undertakings by APEVAC that have contributed to prioritizing VAC in national policies and political priorities include:

- Convening dialogues for over 26 national governments from the five regions of Africa - Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Ghana, Lesotho, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, The Gambia, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe - engaged in continental, regional and national dialogues to increase awareness of and prioritisation of prevention of VAC into national political priorities.
- Capacity building for violence prevention policy and implementation; APEVAC undertook

a regional training that brought together 198 senior government officials and experts from relevant ministries including, children, health, education, social welfare, gender, culture, urban planning, justice, law and enforcement and representatives of select national CSO organisations from Botswana, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. They were trained in INSPIRE strategies to adopt a violence prevention lens in reviewing, developing, implementing, coordinating and monitoring their policy and all other measures.

As a result of APEVAC's interventions, many African countries have strengthened their policy environments and legislative frameworks for protecting and responding to VAC, including Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

### **3.1.3 National Legislative Frameworks on VAC**

The mapping study reveals that most of the countries in Africa have ratified the international and regional instruments for protection of children from VAC. Most of the countries have also enacted national legislations that attempt to domesticate provisions of the international and regional instruments they are party to albeit with variations in the levels of comprehensiveness. Furthermore, several African countries have established institutional frameworks for implementation of VAC national plans of action and programmes. The above notwithstanding, VAC surveys that have been carried out in a few countries reveal that VACiS is still prevalent in all the African countries, although there are variations in the level of prevalence. Studies have also revealed that several countries have developed and implemented successful interventions for VACiS prevention and response which can be scaled up and replicated in similar settings.

#### **i. Laws banning corporal punishment**

The status of laws governing corporal punishment varies greatly among African countries from those covering prohibition of corporal punishment in all settings, including family homes, schools, day-care centres, alternative care facilities, penal institutions, and as a punishment for crime under state, customary and religious laws. On the extreme end of the spectrum are a few countries where corporal punishment is not covered in any of the above settings.

Nine out of the 55 countries of Africa (16%) have laws prohibiting corporal punishment in all settings namely Benin, Cape Verde, Congo (Republic of), Kenya, Seychelles, South Africa, South Sudan, Togo and Tunisia.<sup>10</sup> In 21 African countries (38%) corporal punishment is not prohibited in schools. Countries where corporal punishment is not prohibited in schools include Angola, Botswana, Central African Republic, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. This therefore means that physical VACiS by teachers is still legally acceptable as a form of punishment and hence a very common practice in African countries. Focus Group Discussions in the 5 study countries revealed that following the banning of corporal punishment in schools, there is a remarkable reduction in the practice of corporal punishment in schools save for few isolated cases.

#### **ii. Laws setting minimum age of marriage and sexual consent**

The policy mapping revealed that sexual VAC is still prevalent in several African Countries. This was attributed to a range of factors including weak policy and inadequate legal frameworks

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<sup>10</sup> The African Report on Child Wellbeing 2020 (ACPF).

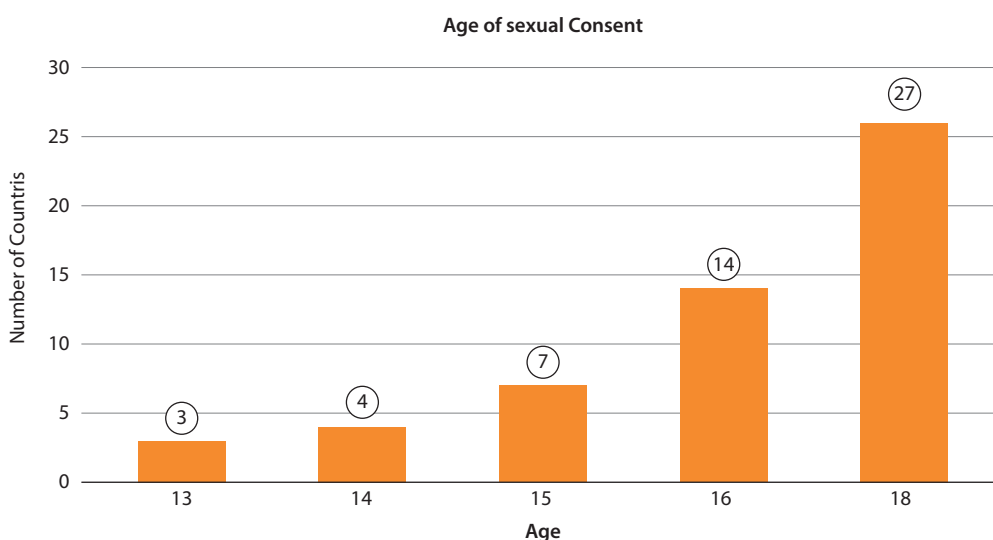
that are meant to protect children from sexual violence as well as weak mechanisms for implementation of the existing laws.

In Africa, 36 countries (65%) have set the minimum age at marriage at 18 years or above, equally for both girls and boys. Algeria, Lesotho, and Rwanda have a higher minimum age, with no gender discrimination, while in Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo, it is 18 years or above for girls but higher for boys. The remaining 19 countries (35%) either have a minimum age at marriage that is below 18 years for both girls and boys, or a discriminatory minimum age at marriage, with that of girls being below 18 years. This means that children (below 18) are sexually abused within the provisions of the laws by way of early marriages and lower ages for sexual consent by children in contravention of the provisions of the UNCRC and the ACRWC to which most of the countries are signatories.

**Table 4: Age of sexual consent**

Age of sexual consent	Number of Countries	Name of countries
13	3	Chad, Niger, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic
14	4	Angola, Cape Verde, Madagascar, Sao Tome and Principe
15	7	Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Gabon, Mali, Seychelles, Togo
16	13	Algeria, Benin, Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, Zambia.
18	27	Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, CAR, Congo, DRC, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zimbabwe

The above table shows that the legal framework in 29 countries in Africa (53%) does not offer adequate protection to children (below 18) against sexual violence. The minimum age of sexual consent is as young as 13 in Chad, Niger, and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, while in Angola, Cape Verde, Madagascar, and São Tomé & Príncipe, it is only 14 years old.



### iii. Minimum age for marriage

It is important for any given country to have a minimum age of marriage as this legally protects children from abuse, harm, violence and exploitation (especially sexual exploitation). Legal protection against child marriage particularly for girls is a protective measure to keep them in school, where VAC can be prevented. There are some countries which despite providing for a minimum age of marriage, provide for an exception to that minimum age upon parental consent or court's authorisation. For example, in Angola, the minimum age of marriage is 18 years but the law allows for marriages below the age of 16 years for boys and 15 years for girls upon obtaining consent of parents, which is mandatory in such cases. In Burkina Faso, the minimum age of marriage is 17 for girls and 20 for boys, but the Civil Court must undertake the necessary investigation where an exemption will not be granted for a boy under 18 years and a girl under 15 years. In Ethiopia, the minimum age of marriage is 18 but the law authorises the Minister of Justice to authorise marriages of persons aged below 18. In Malawi, even though the constitution provides that persons aged 15 may marry, they can only do so with parental consent unless one is aged 18 or above. Such an approach, of having exceptions to the minimum age of marriage, violates the children's right to protection.

The study revealed that where the minimum age for marriage is legally set, the practice of early marriage has reduced significantly and is only practiced clandestinely as authorities are on standby to stop them. Notably, in some countries there is limited legal protection for children against early marriage. For example, in 5 countries the minimum age for marriage for girls is either below 18 or vague. In Mali and Seychelles, minimum age for marriage is 16 and 15 respectively. Sudan prescribes puberty as the minimum age for marriage. Sahrawi Arab Republic does not set a minimum age for marriage.

**Table 5:** Minimum age for marriage in African Countries

Country	Without parental or judicial consent		With Parental consent		With Judicial Consent	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Algeria	19	19			None	None
Angola	18	18	16	15		
Benin	18	18	18	18	None	None
Botswana	18	18	18	18		
Burkina Faso	20	20	20	17	18	15
Burundi	21	21	21	18		
Cameroon	21	21	18	15		
Cape Verde	18	18	16	16		
CAR	18	18	13	13	13	13
Chad	18	18	18	18	18	18
DRC	18	18	18	18	18	18
Djibouti	18	18	18	18	None	None
Egypt	18	18	18	18	18	18
Equatoria Guinea	18	18	14	14	14	14

Country	Without parental or judicial consent		With Parental consent		With Judicial Consent	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Eritrea	18	18	18	18	18	18
Eswatini	21	21	18	16		
Ethiopia	18	18	18	18	16	16
Gambia	18	18				
Gabon	21	21	18	15	-	-
Ghana	18	18				
Guinea	21	21	18	18	-	-
Guinea Bissau	18	18	18	18	18	18
Congo Brassavile	21	18				
Cote d'Ivoire	21	21	20	18		
Kenya	18	18	18	18	18	18
Lesotho	21	21	18	16	-	-
Liberia	21	18	18	16	-	-
Libya	20	20	20	20	None	None
Mauritius	18	18	16	16	None	None
Madagascar	18	18	18	18	18	18
Malawi	18	18				
Mali	18	16	18	16	15	15
Mauritania	18	18	18	18	None	None
Morocco	18	18	18	18	None	None
Mozambique	18	18	18	18	-	-
Namibia	21	21	18	18	None	None
Niger	21	21	18	15	-	-
Nigeria	18	18	18	18	18	18
Republic of the Congo	21	18	21	18	None	None
Rwanda	21	21	21	21	21	21
Sahrawi Arab Republic D.R.	No minimum age					
Sao Tome and Principe	18	18	16	14	-	-
Seychelles	18	15				
Senegal	18	18	18	16		
Sierra Leone	18	18	18	18	18	18

Country	Without parental or judicial consent		With Parental consent		With Judicial Consent	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Somalia	18	18	18	16		
South Africa	18	18	18	15	None	None
South Sudan	18	18	18	18	18	18
Sudan	Puberty	Puberty	Puberty	Puberty	10	10
Tanzania	18	18	18	15	14	14
Togo	18	18	18	18	16	16
Tunisia	18	18	18	18	18	18
Uganda	18	18	18	18	18	18
Zambia	21	21	18	18	-	-
Zimbabwe	18	18	18	18	18	18

#### iv. Laws to ban harmful social/traditional practices

African countries have done fairly well in prohibiting harmful social practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and early marriages. To date, 42 countries have laws that prohibit harmful social/traditional practices, but 12 countries – Botswana, Burundi, Cape Verde, Comoros, Congo (Republic of), Eswatini, Gabon, The Gambia, Libya, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone – are yet to enact a law that criminalises these practices. FGM/C is still a common harmful practice in some areas. However, it is illegal in at least 28 African countries. Eleven of these have separate statutes or policies on the prohibition of FGM/C or other harmful practices. Practices such as FGM while still in existence in a number of African Countries, are no longer done in public and therefore elusive and difficult to curb.

## 3.2 African Countries with Promising Policies, Laws and Plans on VACiS

### 3.2.1 Policies and Laws

According to the study, most African countries do not have specific policies and laws against VAC in schools and learning environments, even where there exist laws and policies against VAC in general, or with a broader focus on child protection. Among countries with explicit policies and laws on VACiS are Senegal, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Togo, Zambia, South Africa, Namibia, Ethiopia and Eswatini. The table below outlines countries in Africa that have what this study considers to be promising laws and policies aimed explicitly at preventing VACiS.

**Table 6:** African Countries with promising policies and laws VACiS

Country	Policies and Laws
<p><b>1. Senegal</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Law on compulsory education for 10-year-olds Law 2004-37 of 15 December 2004</b>, which introduced compulsory education for 10-year-olds aged 6 to 16. Under Article 14 the only punishments allowed in elementary schools are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ reprimand</li> <li>▪ detention after classes under the supervision of the teacher in charge of the class or the teacher on duty;</li> <li>▪ temporary exclusion for 1 to 8 days;</li> <li>▪ permanent exclusion</li> <li>▪ Corporal punishment is forbidden.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Sierra Leone</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Comprehensive School Safety Policy (CSSP)</b> aims to protect learners and education service providers from injury, disaster, violence, abuse, and harm in schools. The CSSP is built around three pillars: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Safe School Facilities and Learning Environment</li> <li>▪ Disaster Risk Reduction in Schools</li> <li>▪ Protection from Violence and Other Forms of Abuse and Harm in and around Schools.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>The Basic and Senior Secondary Education Act of 2023</b> prohibits corporal punishment in all its forms in schools. The Act also recommends the use of alternative forms of discipline including positive methods for child development (section 72(4)). In 2019, Sierra Leone endorsed the Safe to Learn Call to Action which aims to end violence in and around all schools through implementation of policy and legislation. However, corporal punishments remain lawful in the home, alternative care settings since the concept of reasonable and justifiable correction of children is still included in the Child Rights Act of 2007.</li> <li>• <b>The Child Rights Act 2007</b> establishes and maintains zero tolerance for all forms of School Related Gender- Based Violence (SRGBV) including exploitation and abuse, physical and humiliating forms of punishment, psychological abuse and child labour; (See Part III, Section 33(1). Section 30(1) of the Child Right Act, 2007) encourages positive methods to correct learners’ behaviour, promote discipline, and ensure zero tolerance for corporal punishment.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Nigeria</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Child Rights Act (2003):</b> Section 10: Prohibits the engagement of children in harmful practices, including physical and emotional abuse. Section 14 guarantees every child's right to dignity, freedom from torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, and protection from all forms of violence. Section 31: Establishes the obligation of parents, guardians, institutions, and the government to protect children from all forms of violence and abuse.</li> <li>• <b>National Policy on Education (2013);</b> Chapter 2: Outlines the objectives of education, including the provision of a safe and conducive learning environment free from violence and harassment. Chapter 4: Emphasizes the need for inclusive education and the protection of vulnerable groups, including children, from discrimination and violence.</li> <li>• <b>Sexual Offences Act (2015);</b> Section 31: Criminalizes sexual assault against children, including acts committed within educational institutions. Section 32: Specifies penalties for perpetrators of sexual offenses against children, including imprisonment and fines.</li> <li>• <b>State Education Policies:</b> These policies may vary by state but generally include provisions related to school safety, student protection, and disciplinary measures to prevent VACiS.</li> <li>• <b>Safe School Initiative:</b> The Safe School Initiative has various measures aimed at enhancing the safety and security of schools, including preventing VAC.</li> </ul>

Country	Policies and Laws
4. Togo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Constitution: Section 111</b>, Article 84 protects children from sexual offences including indecent assault and rape.</li> <li>• <b>The Penal Code:</b> Chapter II, section 5 talks about offences against children and Chapter III addresses sexual offences against children.</li> <li>• <b>The Children’s Code 2007</b> states that children in conflict with the law should be treated with humanity and with respect for their human dignity and prohibits inhuman, cruel and degrading treatment (art. 347).</li> </ul>
5. Zambia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Education Act 2011</b>, Article 18 prohibits contracting of marriage to a learner who is in school and Article 32 addresses issues related to gender based violences.</li> <li>• <b>The Children’s Code Act of 2022</b>, Article 18 protects the girl child from female genital mutilation, child marriage and harmful cultural, religious and traditional practices and Article 19 protects children from sexual exploitation.</li> <li>• <b>The Anti Gender Violence Act of 2011</b> seeks to address all forms of gender-based violence. It goes on further to list the types of abuses arising from cultural practices to include forced virginity testing, forced marriages, “sexual cleansing” and child marriages.</li> </ul>
6. Ethiopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Education Sector Development Program (ESDP6):</b> The Ethiopian government’s strategic framework for the development of the education sector includes provisions for addressing VACiS. ESDP emphasizes the provision of quality education, which includes creating a safe and conducive learning environment. Measures to address violence, such as promoting positive discipline and establishing codes of conduct are incorporated.</li> <li>• <b>The Code of Conduct on Prevention of School-Related Gender-Based Violence in Schools (2014):</b> This code is a comprehensive policy that aims to prevent gender-based violence in schools. It emphasizes the importance of creating a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students.</li> <li>• <b>National Child Policy (2013):</b> While not specifically focused on schools, this policy addresses the overall well-being and protection of children, which includes measures to prevent violence in all settings, including schools.</li> <li>• <b>Action Plan for School related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV) and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) for Refugee and Host Community Schools.</b></li> <li>• <b>National Strategy on Violence Against Women and Children in Ethiopia (2016 – 2020)</b></li> <li>• <b>Teacher Professional Development:</b> Training programs for teachers often include components on child protection and positive discipline strategies, which are essential for preventing VACiS.</li> </ul>

Country	Policies and Laws
7. Eswatini	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Constitution 2005, Article 29</b> states that “a child shall not be subjected to abuse or torture or other cruel inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment subject to lawful and moderate chastisement for purposes of correction”.</li> <li>• <b>The National Children’s Policy (2009)</b> overarching goal is "To promote, protect and fulfil/ the rights of all children and ensure their full development and long-term welfare including their physical and psychosocial development."</li> <li>• <b>Children’s Protection and Welfare Act 2012:</b> The Act is a constitutional requirement that will harmonize all legislation relating to children. The Act defines the rights of the child and the responsibilities of parents and of the State, defines the procedures for children in need of care and protection, criminalises the exploitation and neglect of children, outlines the requirements for family-based care of orphans, and specifies the requirements for children in contact with the law.</li> <li>• <b>The Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Act of 2018</b> makes the act of rape gender neutral whereas the previous laws narrowly defined rape as a forced sexual act of a male perpetrator and female victim.</li> <li>• <b>The National Social Development Policy (2009);</b> The Policy Statement reads “It is national policy to protect and promote the rights of children, to ensure their basic needs are met, and they are provided with opportunities to reach their full potential”.</li> <li>• <b>Ministry of Education and Training, Eswatini “The Guidelines on Positive Discipline”</b> The Ministry of Education and Training reports also reveal that a number of learners sustain serious injuries, and some are fatal, in the hands of teachers while administering corporal punishment.</li> <li>• <b>National Guidelines for Adolescents Sexual Reproductive Health Rights 2021;</b> aimed at reducing early sexual debut, teenage pregnancies, HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections by strengthening preventive services through Health Education and information to help adolescents and youth make informed decisions. (Ministry of Health, Eswatini, 2021).</li> </ul>

Country	Policies and Laws
<p><b>8. South Africa</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The South African Constitution</b>, Section 28 (1)(d) affords additional protection for children by providing that every child has the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse, or degradation.</li> <li>• <b>The Children's Act repealed and replaced the Child Care Act 74 of 1983.</b> It provides for the protection and rights of children in RSA, giving effect to section 28 of the Constitution. These rights include but are not limited to the best interests of the child as being of paramount importance, the right to family, parental or alternative care, and protection from maltreatment, abuse, degradation or neglect. Section 1 provides definitions of abuse which includes exposing a child to behaviour that might cause them harm either emotionally or psychologically, assaulting a child or deliberately inflicting injury to them and committing or allowing the sexual abuse of the child.</li> <li>• <b>The Criminal Law (Sentencing) Amendment Act, and the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and related Matters) Amendment Act</b> criminalise sexual abuse and rape and set out who is responsible for arresting, prosecuting, convicting and sentencing perpetrators of violence against women and children.</li> <li>• <b>The Domestic Violence Amendment Act 14 of 2021</b> amends the Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998 and continues to address violence against women, children and men in abusive situations. Adults who are aware of, or who suspect or believe based on reasonable grounds, that incidences of domestic violence (DV) against a child, person with a disability or an older person have taken place, must report this to a social worker or SAPS.</li> <li>• <b>The Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act</b> replaces the Sexual Offences Act 23 of 1957 while revoking common law provisions on sexual offences. It contains provisions that respond to both gender-based violence and VAC. The Act defines, among others, the crimes of rape, sexual assault, and incest. It specifically provides for and deals with sexual offenses against children.</li> <li>• <b>Protocol for the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment in Schools.</b> The purpose of the Department of Basic Education's Protocol for the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment (the Protocol) 'is to provide schools, districts and provinces with standard operating procedures for addressing allegations, and to specifically detail how schools must respond to reports of sexual abuse and harassment perpetrated against learners, educators and other school staff.'</li> <li>• <b>The National Protocol to Deal with Incidences of Corporal Punishment in Schools</b> – highlights the prohibition of corporal punishment in schools and provides guidance to provinces, districts and schools to implement this prohibition and deal with issues of corporal punishment.</li> <li>• <b>The South African National School Safety Framework</b> provide an all-inclusive strategy to guide the national department as well as the provincial education departments in a coordinated effort to address violence occurring within schools.</li> </ul>
<p><b>9. Malawi</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Malawi Constitution of 1994</b>, Article provides for the rights of children</li> <li>• <b>Child Care, Protection and Justice Act (2010)</b> division 6 provides for protection of children against undesirable practices such as child abduction, child trafficking, harmful cultural practices, forced marriage or betrothal and pledging of a child as security.</li> <li>• <b>Orphans and other Vulnerable Children Policy</b>, the Government of Malawi (GoM) launched a National Policy on Orphans and other Vulnerable Children in 2003.</li> </ul>

Country	Policies and Laws
10. Namibia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Article 56(1) of the Education Act 2001:</b> “A teacher or any other person employed at a state school or hostel or private school commits misconduct, if such teacher or person, in the performance of his or her official duties imposes or administers corporal punishment upon a learner, or causes corporal punishment to be imposed or administered upon a learner.” Prohibition is reiterated in article 228(3) of the Child Care and Protection Act 2015 (see “Alternative care settings”, above).</li> <li>• <b>The Namibian Code of Conduct for Teaching Service</b> states that a teacher “may not administer corporal punishment or any other degrading punishment upon a learner”.</li> <li>• <b>The Education Sector Policy for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy (2009)</b> aims at preventing and managing incidences of learner pregnancy and stopping any child from missing out on an education that is so vitally needed.</li> <li>• <b>The National Safe Schools Framework (2018)</b> focuses on promoting the health, safety and wellbeing of learners and other school stakeholders in Namibia, and the NSSF was developed to provide practical guidance to the schools and school stakeholders on how to systematically improve the standards of school safety, and how to develop a culture of care in any school.</li> </ul>

### 3.2.2 Countries with National Plans of Action on VAC

The table below shows that out of 38 African countries covered in the report, 19 had national plans of action for preventing child mistreatment (50%), out of which 5 were fully funded and 14 were partially funded. Three countries namely Zimbabwe, Kenya and Senegal had sub-national plans. 21 (55%) of the countries had school-based plans of action for preventing VAC, out of which 3 were fully funded (Sudan and Morocco), 17 partially funded and 1 country (Senegal) had no funding for its school-based plan.

Out of the 31 African countries featuring in the report only 2 countries namely Uganda and Tanzania had at least one prevalence indicator in its plan of action against VAC.

**Table 7:** Existence of National plans of action

Country	Plan on Child Mistreatment		School based violence		Youth Violence		
	Existence	Funding	Existence	Funding	Existence	Funding	
Burkina Faso	No	-	No	-	No	-	No
Cameroon	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	No
CAR	No	-	No	-	No	-	No
Chad	No	-	No	-	No	-	No
Comoros	No	-	No	-	No	-	No
Congo	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	No
Côte d'Ivoire	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	No
Eswatini	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	No
Ethiopia	Yes	Full	No	-	Yes	Partial	No

Country	Plan on Child Mistreatment		School based violence		Youth Violence		
	Existence	Funding	Existence	Funding	Existence	Funding	
Gabon	No	-	No	-	No	-	No
Ghana	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	No
Guinea Bissau	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	No
Kenya	Sub-national	Partial	Yes	Partial	Sub-national	Partial	No
Lesotho	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	National	Partial	-
Libya	No	-	No	-	No	-	No
Madagascar	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	No
Malawi	No	-	No	-	Yes	Full	No
Mali	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	No
Mauritania	No	-	No	-	No	-	No
Mauritius	Yes	Full	Yes	Full	Sub-national	-	No
Morocco	Yes	Full	Yes	Full	Yes	Full	No
Mozambique	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	No
Namibia	No	-	No	-	No	-	No
Niger	No	-	No	-	No	-	No
Nigeria	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	No
Sao Tome and Principe	No	-	No	-	No	-	No
Senegal	Sub-national	-	Yes	None	Sub-national	-	No
Seychelles	No	-	No	-	No	-	No
Somalia	No	-	Yes	Partial	No	-	No
South Africa	Yes	Partial	No	-	Yes	Partial	No
South Sudan	No	-	Yes	Partial	No	-	No
Sudan	Yes	Full	Yes	Full	Yes	Full	No
Tanzania	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	Yes
Togo	No	-	Yes	Partial	No	-	No
Tunisia	Yes	Full	No	-	Yes	Partial	No
Uganda	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	Yes
Zambia	No	-	No	-	No	-	No
Zimbabwe	Sub-national	-	Sub-national	-	Sub-national	Partial	No

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Existence of national plans of action has translated into implementation of activities aimed at VAC prevention. It was noted during the study that implementation of the plans of action on prevention of VAC in some African countries is hindered by several factors including inadequate funding.

### 3.3 Policies, Laws and National Plans on VAC in the 5 Study Countries

#### 3.3.1 Namibia

##### a) Policies and Laws Preventing VACiS in Namibia

Namibia has a strong legislative and policy framework for the protection of children. At an international level, Namibia has ratified the UNCRC and ACRWC. Namibia also has strong commitments to fight child trafficking and exploitation through the protocol to the Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. The main legal frameworks on VAC prevention in Namibia include:

- The Namibian constitution: Article 15 provides for the rights of children, and states that children may not be subjected to any form of torture, inhuman, cruel or degrading treatment or punishment; have a right to education; should not be subject to arbitrary arrest or detention.
- The Child Care and Protection Act 2015 incorporates provisions from the international and regional instruments to which Namibia is a party. The Act also repeals and consolidates previous child protection laws (Children's Status Act, Maintenance Act). Provisions include, inter alia, protecting children from harmful social, cultural, and religious practices; corporal punishment; child labour and exploitation of children; and the unlawful removal and detention of children. Namibia has also prepared Child Care and Protection Regulations which provide detailed guidance for implementing the Act.
- In Namibia, corporal punishment is prohibited in schools. A Supreme Court judgment in 1991 ruled that the guarantee of human dignity in article 8 of the Constitution precludes the use of corporal punishment in schools as well as for adult and juvenile offenders.<sup>[7]</sup> This is confirmed – and extended to hostels and private schools – in article 56(1) of the Education Act 2001: “A teacher or any other person employed at a state school or hostel or private school commits misconduct, if such teacher or person, in the performance of his or her official duties imposes or administers corporal punishment upon a learner, or causes corporal punishment to be imposed or administered upon a learner.” Prohibition is reiterated in article 228(3) of the Child Care and Protection Act 2015 (see “Alternative care settings”, above).
- In 2016, a High Court ruling confirmed that the ban on corporal punishment in the Education Act applies in all Namibian schools, including private schools. Judge Elton Hoff stated that interpreting the laws prohibiting corporal punishment as applying only to teachers employed by the government would be “an absurdity in that children enrolled at state schools would be protected against invasive punishment while those enrolled at

private schools would not”[8].

- The Namibian Code of Conduct for Teaching Service states that a teacher “may not administer corporal punishment or any other degrading punishment upon a learner”. The Ministry of Education published circulars in 2018 reiterating that all corporal punishment in all schools was strictly prohibited and would not be tolerated. The circular instructed all schools to implement a safe mechanism to report incidents of corporal punishment and to submit quarterly reports on the issue.
- ARTICLE 56 (1) of the Education Act 2001 prohibits any teacher or person employed at a private or public school to administer corporal punishment on any pupil. This seems to be the most ignored article in that act, as some teachers at certain schools in Namibia still mete out corporal punishment, 29 years after independence. Some teachers as well as parents who experienced corporal punishment during their school days say that it teaches pupils discipline and good behaviour, which helps them to differentiate between right and wrong.
- Numerous policies bolster these laws, including the National Agenda for Children (2018-2022), the National Gender Policy (2010-2020), the Prioritised National GBV Plan of Action (2019-2023), the Education Sector Policy for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy (2009), the National Safe Schools Framework (2018), Namibia Paediatric and Adolescent HIV Care and Treatment Strategy 2019-2023, the National Strategic Framework for HIV (NSF) 2017/18-2021/22, the National Guidelines on Adolescents living with HIV (2019), and more broadly, Vision 2030, the fifth National Development Plan, the Harambee Prosperity Plan and other national-level development plans.
- The Combating of Rape Act 8 of 2000 prescribes minimum sentences for rape provides for the abolition of the rule that a boy under the age of fourteen years is presumed incapable of sexual intercourse and modifies certain rules of evidence applicable to offences of a sexual or indecent nature.
- The Combating of Domestic Violence Act 4 of 2003 covers a range of forms of domestic violence, including sexual violence, harassment, intimidation, economic violence and psychological violence. It covers violence between husbands and wives, parents and children, boyfriends and girlfriends and between family members.
- The Trafficking in Persons Act 1 of 2018 criminalizes trafficking in persons, especially women and children and assist victims of trafficking in persons, especially women and children.
- The Combating of Immoral Practices Act section 14 criminalizes any person who commits or attempts to commit a sexual act with a child under the age of sixteen years.
- The Labour Act Chapter 2 protects children from child labour. No one may employ a child under the age of 14 years.

## **b) National Action Plans for Preventing VAC in Namibia**

The main action plans that address issues of VACiS included:

- National Agenda for Children (NAC) 2018-2022 was a five-year strategy that implores all sector players in Namibia to ensure the rights of children are met.
- Namibia’s National Safe Schools Framework was developed jointly by the Ministry of

Education, Arts and Culture and UNICEF to strengthen the provision of healthy, supportive and conducive teaching and learning considering a worrisome level of violence in Namibian schools.

### c) Education Sector Plans

At present Namibia does not have a running Education Sector Plan. The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture Strategic Plan (2017/2018 – 2021/2022) expired in 2022 and a new one has not yet been developed.

### d) Institutional framework for prevention of VAC in Namibia

The National Advisory Council on Children is a government-appointed body with the task of promoting the rights and interests of children in society. The purpose of the Council is to bring together key stakeholders from different government ministries and civil society to encourage cross-sectoral cooperation on children's issues, and to advise the Ministry responsible for child welfare on matters pertaining to children.

## 3.3.2 Uganda

### a) Policies and Laws Preventing VACiS in Uganda

At the international level Uganda ratified the UNCRC in 1990 and its optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography in 2001, and the optional protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict in 2002. At regional level, Uganda ratified the ACRWC in 1994 signifying a commitment to protect children.

At the national level, a number of laws have been enacted by Parliament of the Republic of Uganda intended to fight VAC.

- **The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda 1995:** There are several articles in the 1995 Constitution which provides for protection of children against violence. Article 34 of the Constitution specifically provides for the rights of children. Under the article, children have a right to know and be cared for by their parents or those entitled by law to bring them up, they have a right to education at the expense of the state and the parents, and they are entitled to be protected from social or economic exploitation.
- **The Prevention of Torture Act, 2012:** The prevention of Torture Act was enacted to operationalize articles 24 and 44 of the 1995 Constitution, to the respect of human dignity and protection from inhuman treatment by prohibiting and preventing any form of torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, to define torture and to comply with Uganda's obligation as a state party to the United Nation's Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. **Children Act 2016:** The Children Act has several provisions to curb VAC as seen below.
- **Under section 7 of the Act,** no person is supposed to expose a child to any customary or cultural practice that is harmful to his or her health, well-being, education or social – economic development. Such cultural practices child early marriages, female genital mutilation among others.
- **Section 8 of the Children Act** prohibits the employment of children or engagement of children in any activity that may be harmful or hazardous to their health or physical, spiritual, moral or social development.

- **Section 8A** of the Children Act further prohibits sexual exploitation. The section states that a person shall not engage a child in any work that exposes the child to activities of sexual nature whether paid or not.
- **Article 106A** prohibits Corporal punishment in schools. (1) A person of authority in institutions of learning shall not subject a child to any form of corporal punishment. (2) A person who subjects a child to corporal punishment commits an offence and is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years or to a fine not exceeding one hundred currency points or both." As at March 2022, regulations to implement the law had not been finalised.
- **Domestic Violence Act 2020:** The Domestic Violence Act was enacted by parliament in 2020 to provide for the protection and relief of victims of domestic violence and to provide for punishment of the perpetrators of domestic violence.
- **The Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act 2010:** The Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act was enacted in 2010 to give effect to the decision of court and to fulfil Uganda's international obligation as a state party to the International Convention on Human Rights. The purpose for the enactment of the Act is to prohibit for the female genital mutilation and to prosecute and punish offenders and to protect victims, girls and women under threat of female genital mutilation.
- **Penal Code Act Cap 120:** The Penal Code Act is the major law in Uganda that criminalizes several offences generally as well as offences against children. Specifically, offences on VAC include, defilement, kidnap with intent to rape, etc. Generally, the Act provides for offences such as murder, manslaughter, abduction among other as well as penalising the offenders. A few are discussed hereunder.
- **The Prevention of Trafficking in Person's Act, 2009:** The Prevention of Trafficking in Person's Act prohibits the trafficking of persons; it creates offences and punishment for the offenders. The Act defines a child to mean a person below the age of 18 years. Under the act, no person shall be subjected to exploitation. Exploitation includes sexual exploitation, forced marriage, child marriage, forced labour, harmful child labour, use of a child in armed conflict, use of a person including a child in illegal activities, debt bondage, slavery or practices like slavery, human sacrifice, the removal of organs or body parts for sale for purposes of witchcraft, harmful rituals or practices.
- **Computer misuse Act No. 2 of 2011:** Section 23 criminalises child pornography; A person who commits an offence under this section is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding three hundred and sixty currency points or imprisonment not exceeding fifteen years or both. Section 24 criminalizes cyber harassment by stating that; a person who commits cyber harassment is liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding seventy-two currency points or imprisonment not exceeding three years or both.

## b) Plans of Action on VACiS in Uganda

The main national level plans that address issues that are related to VACiS include:

- National Plan of Action for Sexual and Gender Based Violence and Violence Against Children (2019–2030) by Ministry of Health. The goal is to strengthen the role of Uganda's health care system within a multisectoral response to address gender-based violence and VAC.

- National Child Policy Implementation Plan (2021/2022–2023/2024) by Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. The implementation plan provides a roadmap and a common agenda of action to operationalise the National Child Policy (2020).

### c) Education Sector Plan

Uganda does not have a running Education Sector Plan. The most recent Plan ran only to 2020 (Education Sector Strategic Plan 2017/2018 – 2019/2020). The Ministry had drafted a new plan but it has not yet been approved.

### d) Institutional Framework for implementation of VAC in Uganda

The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) is the lead for the social development sector, formulating and reviewing relevant guidelines, programmes, policies and laws. It coordinates and collaborates with VAC stakeholders; promotes children’s participation in tackling VAC and supports the training of VAC service providers. The Department of Youth and Children is responsible for leading VAC services, supported by most other departments within the ministry.

The National Child Protection Working Group (NCPWG) was established under the MGLSD in September 2009 after the Child Protection Sub-Cluster of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee was phased out. More than 40 bodies are represented, including government ministries and agencies, UN agencies, international and national CSOs.

Additional coordination rests with the Multi-Sectoral Taskforce on VAC, comprising the Ministries of Gender (host and convener), Health, Justice and Education, as well as development partners such as UNICEF.

## 3.3.3 Tunisia

### a) Policies and Laws Preventing VACiS in Tunisia

At the international level, Tunisia is party to the international conventions for the protection of children’s rights, as it acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on January 30, 1992, as well as the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict on January 2, 2003, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography on September 13, 2002.<sup>11</sup>

On October 15, 2019, Tunisia signed the Council of Europe’s “Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse”, also known as “The Lanzarote Convention”. The country became the only non-European country to adopt the convention - along 47 Council of Europe member states - that aimed at preventing and combating all forms of sexual offences against children. This includes laws to tackle sexual abuse of children, exploitation of children through prostitution, grooming and exposing children to sexual content and activities, and other offences related to child abuse material.

At the national level Tunisia has enacted the following laws and policies that are aimed at preventing VACiS:

<sup>11</sup> UN Treaty Body Database, link : [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=178&Lang=EN](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=178&Lang=EN)

- **The Tunisian Constitution 2014:** In its national constitution promulgated in 2014, Chapter 47, Tunisia states that “The state must provide all types of protection to all children without discrimination and in accordance with the child’s best interests.”<sup>12</sup> The Constitution also stipulates in the following chapters (21-46-39-38-27-29-30-42-43) the right of children to equality and non-discrimination, as well as the right to education, the right to health, the right to protection and care, and the right to a fair trial in addition to the right to participate and develop capabilities.<sup>13</sup>
- **Law No. 92 of November 9, 1995** which issues the “Child Protection Magazine”, the most important legislative text for children in Tunisia. This magazine aims to promote childhood and tries to prepare the child for a responsible free life by appropriately engaging them in acknowledging and promoting their duties and rights.<sup>14</sup>
- **Law preventing human trafficking 2016; Article 2** of the Anti-Trafficking Law, criminalises the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring and receiving of children for the purpose of exploitation, including sexual exploitation.
- **Law on the Elimination of violence against women 2017;** in 2017, Parliament passed a new Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women and stipulated in its 19<sup>th</sup> chapter that employing children as domestic workers shall be punishable by six months to three years’ imprisonment and a fine ranging from \$1,000 to 2,500<sup>15</sup>

According to the “Child Protection Representative” website, the position of family judge and child judge has been newly created, with more than 80 judges appointed to this task.<sup>16</sup>

- **The Penal Code Act:** Corporal punishment is unlawful in schools under article 319 of the Penal Code as amended in 2010. Article 319 of the Penal Code punishes assault and violence which does not lead to serious or lasting consequences for the victim. Prior to law reform in 2010, it also stated that “correction of a child by persons in authority over him is not punishable”. Law No. 2010-40 of 26 July 2010 amended article 319 to explicitly repeal this clause, making it a criminal offence to assault a child even lightly. Publication of the law in the Official Gazette in July 2010, was accompanied by a statement from the Constitutional Council that the new law is wholly compatible with the Constitution and its effect is to make the provisions against light assault in article 319 of the Penal Code equally applicable to “correction” of children.

Serious assault is punishable under other articles in the Penal Code. The Code of Child Protection 1995 (amended 2006) protects children from “usual ill-treatment”, defined in article 24 as “subjection of the child to torture, repeated violations of his physical integrity, or his detention, or the habit of depriving him of food, or committing any brutal act which is likely to affect the emotional or psychological wellbeing of the child”.

In Tunisia, violent discipline of children is widespread, but few cases of corporal punishment by school staff are reported. According to a study by UNICEF (Tunisia Country Statistics), 93.2%

<sup>12</sup>[https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tunisia\\_2014.pdf?lang=ar](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Tunisia_2014.pdf?lang=ar)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.lasportal.org/ar/sectors/sectorhome/Documents/سنوت20%قبيرجت.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.legislation.tn/affich-code/\\_92](http://www.legislation.tn/affich-code/_92)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/society/2018/1/2/1-قانونسنوتللفظاطالعامع>

<sup>16</sup> <https://bit.ly/39VPWQP>

of children suffered violent discipline at home from 2005 – 2012 but only 0.2% of students in colleges and upper secondary complained of violent discipline by staff between 2011-2012.

## b) National Plans of Action for VACiS in Tunisia

- **National Action Plan to develop Children and Young Adults Participation;** in 2015, the Ministry of Women, Family, Childhood, and the Elderly, in cooperation with UNICEF, developed an action plan on preparing children and adolescents to exercise their rights to participate in laws, institutional mechanisms, family life and public life.<sup>17</sup>
- **The National Plan to Combat Child Labour in Tunisia 2015-2020;** Tunisia, in cooperation with the International Labour Organization, has prepared a national plan to combat child labour. This plan aims to develop scenarios and practical mechanisms to reduce the enrolment of children in the labour market and to effectively protect them.<sup>18</sup>

## c) Education Sector Plan

Tunisia has a running Education Sector Plan 2023–2030. The new 8-year education sector is accompanied by a three-year budgeted action plan (2023–2025) aligned to the national plan is being developed by the ministry of education in close consultation with education partners.

## d) Institutional framework for preventing VAC in Tunisia

The Ministry of Women, Family, Children and Seniors is the ministry dedicated to women and family. Its goal is to create a Tunisian society that is based on gender equality, respect for human rights, diversity of opinion, freedom and dignity.

### 3.3.4 Central African Republic (CAR)

#### a) Policies and Laws Preventing VACiS in CAR

The Central African Republic has made good progress, with the adoption of a Child Protection Code on 28 February 2020 and its promulgation into law by the Head of State on 15 June 2020. This is a significant step forward in the prevention of and response to VAC in the country, particularly, as it takes into consideration the armed conflict situation by criminalising the recruitment of children into armed groups and online sexual exploitation.

- **The Constitution 2016,** Article 3 states that no one may be subjected either to torture, or to rape, or to cruel, inhuman, degrading or humiliating acts or treatment. Article 7 states that the protection of the woman and of the child against violence and insecurity, exploitation and moral, intellectual and physical neglect is an obligation of the State and the other public collectivises.
- **Child Protection Code 2020:** Article 57 of the draft Child Protection Code, states that “the child has the right to be protected against all forms of violence. Parents must administer family discipline in a way which ensure that the child is treated with humanity. The State ensures that discipline is administered in such a way that the child is treated with humanity in schools, public institutions or private formal institutions” (unofficial translation). The

<sup>17</sup> نم ديزمل ، لفطلا فوق حة نجل ، ةيقافتال نم 44 ةدامل بجومب سنوت نم مدمومل سداسلا ىلا عبارلا نم ةيرونلا ريراقتلل عم اءال ريرقتلا  
ليصافتلا : <http://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPPrICAqhKb7yhsh-jFaTGrFeunIH%2F73cXHINAm0u5cwn9vhaS9oiSH%2FQnl57IK0wefDI2kEUuChwR02ideo5n5jAkRFX%2F-83c9PYOrO2Kx29uj6mxlGHkHGhUIB>

• <sup>18</sup> ليصافتلا نم ديزمل ، سنوت يف لافطال لم ةحفاكمل ينطول اططخمل  
<https://bit.ly/39VPWQP>



Government stated in February 2017 that corporal punishment would be prohibited.

- **Article 580 of the Family Code 1997** states that parental authority includes the power “to reprimand and correct to the extent compatible with the age and level of understanding of the child”. Provisions against violence and abuse in the Family Code, the Penal Code 2010, the Constitution 2016, Imperial Order No. 79/077 covering protection of youth 1979, and Law No. 280 1961 are not interpreted as prohibiting corporal punishment in childrearing. Act No. 06.032 2006 protecting women against violence defines violence against women as “including all acts of violence directed against females and which cause or might cause an adverse effect or physical, sexual or psychological suffering, including the threat of such acts and constraint or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether in public or private life” (art. 1), but it does not explicitly prohibit all corporal punishment in childrearing.
- **Imperial Order No. 78/034 (1978)** covers the physical and moral protection of young persons in residential educational institutions or boarding schools but does not prohibit corporal punishment.

#### b) National Plan of Action on VAC

CAR does not have a national plan on VAC.

#### c) Education Sector Plan

CAR is one of the three study countries that have a running sector plan (Education Sector Plan 2020–2029). However, this Education Sector Plan does not have a strategy or objective on preventing VAC in schools.

#### d) Implementation framework for preventing VAC in Central African Republic

The Ministry of Social Affairs is the government body that is charged with the responsibility of coordinating the prevention of VAC in the country.

### 3.3.5 Côte d’Ivoire

#### a) Policies and Laws Preventing VACiS in Côte d’Ivoire

In 2009, the Minister of Education signed a Ministerial Order<sup>19</sup> stating that corporal punishment should not be used by teachers in public or private schools, but there is no prohibition in legislation which has been passed by Parliament. It is expected that the Ministerial Order will be confirmed in legislation but as of yet, law reform has not been achieved. In reporting to the Human Rights Committee in 2013, the Government stated its commitment to reforming the law in this respect.<sup>20</sup> A 2014 Ministerial Order<sup>21</sup> prohibits in article 5.9 where “any form of physical, psychological or humiliating punishment against students” (unofficial translation). A contravention to this rule entails disciplinary sanctions.

The Minority Act 1970 regulates “paternal authority” and states that this includes the right and obligation to provide for the child’s maintenance, training, education and monitoring. It does not confirm the “right” of parents to punish or discipline children but neither does it

<sup>19</sup>Arrêté N° 0075 /MEN/DELIC du 28 September 2009 portant interdiction des punitions physiques et humiliantes à l’endroit des enfants en milieu scolaire.

<sup>20</sup> [https://endcorporalpunishment.org/reports-on-every-state-and-territory/cote-d'ivoire/#\\_ftn5](https://endcorporalpunishment.org/reports-on-every-state-and-territory/cote-d'ivoire/#_ftn5)

<sup>21</sup> Arrêté N° 0111 MENET/CAB du 24 December 2014 portant code de conduite des personnels des structures publiques et privées relevant du Ministère de l’Education Nationale et de l’Enseignement Technique.

explicitly prohibit the use of corporal punishment. Provisions against violence and abuse in the Constitution 2016 and Act No. 98-757 on violence against women do not include clear prohibition of corporal punishment. Article 421 of the revised Penal Code 2019 (Law no. 2019-574 of 26 June 2019) provides sanctions against “anyone who violates or assaults a minor or a person incapable of protecting themselves due to their physical or mental state, or voluntarily deprives them of food or care to the point of compromising their health”. But it does not explicitly prohibit all corporal punishment of children, however light.

## **b) National Plans of Action on VACiS in Côte d’Ivoire**

The NSSP focuses on the improvement of the quality of life of the poor; reduction of child mortality; reduction of child violence and child labour; elimination of gender discrimination and strengthening of the institutional and legal framework. To strengthen coordination across sectors and create a common vision for child protection, the government of Côte d’Ivoire also undertook a mapping of the child protection system. The first strategic pillar of the action plan on child protection focuses on preventing violence and abuse against children, including working on social norms and behaviours. Other pillars include victims’ assistance, fighting against impunity, strengthening means of implementation and a strategic axis. It remains unclear how the Ministry of Education’s policy ban on corporal punishment is enforced in schools. Corporal punishment is lawful in the home and is not explicitly prohibited in day care and alternative care settings. It is unlawful in the criminal justice system.

## **c) Education Sector Plan**

Côte d’Ivoire has a running Education Sector Plan (Education Sector plan 2016-2025). However, a review showed the plan does not have any strategy or objective that addresses VAC in school.

## **d) Implementation framework for preventing VAC in Côte d’Ivoire**

Côte d’Ivoire’s Ministry of the Family, Women, and Children supports the protection of children’s rights, family welfare, and gender equality and women’s rights.

# 4. Factors Hindering Effective Implementation of VACiS Legislation, Policies and Programmes

Nearly all African countries have ratified the relevant international and regional legal instruments identified in this assessment. All have taken steps to domesticate these instruments into their legal systems, thereby providing a strong normative and legal framework to protect children against violence. Most have also harmonised their national laws and policies with the international and regional legal frameworks, setting a minimum age of marriage and consent to sexual relations; minimum age of employment; minimum age of recruitment to armed forces and engagement in hostilities; and minimum age of criminal responsibility. National laws in most countries also protect children from sexual violence and exploitation, neglect, child labour and child trafficking.

However, significant gaps remain. Nigeria, for example, allows corporal punishment in any setting. Sudan has no minimum age of marriage. Governments lack the capacity to enforce laws that prevent and protect children against violence. Poor coordination and overlaps in mandates between the relevant sectors hinder governments' effort to address VAC. The geographic coverage, scope of service and quality of VAC prevention and response services are inconsistent, understaffed, and underfunded. Most VAC services rely on donors to finance them. Achieving a continent free of VAC at school requires all stakeholders, especially national governments, to identify and plug gaps in legislation, implementation and resource allocation and to enhance the capacity of institutions providing VAC services. Several hindering factors are discussed below:

## 4.1 Social Norms

Consultations throughout this study revealed that cultural tolerance of violence is a major barrier not only to VAC prevention and response, but to the adoption and implementation of policies aimed explicitly at VAC in school. Evidence has shown that cultural norms and values determine what constitutes violence, what is considered acceptable violence, and who is violent to whom, and that education settings may add further complexity to societies' understanding of VAC. Cultural tolerance of violence, either as an accepted way to resolve conflict or as a normal part of discipline and child rearing, remains a strong risk factor for all

types of interpersonal violence.

Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa suggests that social norms may contribute to other forms of violence in the region, including the social acceptability of violence in relationships. Most incidents are rarely disclosed and remain hidden, partly due to a culture of silence and shame. Furthermore, social norms generally maintain the belief that VAC is a private affair, that physical violence is an acceptable means to discipline and educate children, and that children are not expected to have a voice against perpetrators of violence if they are their parents, teachers, religious leaders, and other elders and authority figures. As a result, children are reluctant to report the incidents of violence that are committed against them, sometimes in fear of retribution against them or other family members, out of shame or guilt, or due to the belief that they merited such treatment or were, in some way, responsible.

Social, cultural and gender norms therefore underpin forms of school violence and bullying, condone or ignore the problem, and make it difficult to discuss or report school violence and bullying. This is a critical consideration for how challenging it can be to develop and ratify effective legislation for VACiS prevention and response, and how difficult it can then be to ensure these policies are implemented.

## **4.2 Gaps in legislation and weak implementation arrangements**

While many gains have been made, the movement for ending VAC continues to be limited by lack of legislation and policy explicitly focused on VACiS, or weak enforcement of and accountability for existing legislation and policy. In some countries the existing legislation is not comprehensive, with gaps that leave loopholes for VAC to continue in schools. In some African countries, legislation does not prohibit corporal punishment in all settings which means that even while children are protected from violence in some settings like school, they are left vulnerable in other settings including the home or on the way to school.

In other countries, acts of VAC are legally authorised by provisions of the law hence sufficient protection is not available for survivors. For example, in some countries the legal age for marriage is set at ages below 18 or vaguely stated as puberty which allows perpetrators to commit VAC without any hindrance, which further interferes with children's education in schools that could serve as a protective space for them.

The study revealed that two out of the 5 countries analysed did not have running Education Sector Plans (Education Sector Plans for Uganda and Namibia expired in 2020 and 2022 respectively), limiting the space available for VACiS guidance to reach schools through ministries of education. This was confirmed during the study by the fact that even national education sector plans where they did exist often did not have specific objectives, strategies and activities that are aimed at preventing VACiS.

## **4.3 Lack of skills to implement policies and programmes**

Where policies are in place there are limited capacity strengthening efforts to enforce them or support interventions that aim at preventing VACiS. Models such as the Good School Toolkit,

Community Engagement Strategy, INSPIRE, Village Child Protection Committees, the village child case management committees, and the Male Engagement Strategy implemented by MoES and MGLSD have registered positive impact in the reduction of VACiS. Yet there is limited awareness of these programmes that could be scaled up. Limited training and support for head teachers, teachers and other school staff to equip them to prevent school violence and bullying, identify and respond to incidents and use non-violent approaches to discipline and classroom management. There is lack of appropriate curricula and learning materials to address the underlying causes of school violence and bullying and to develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills for non-violence. Additionally, limited awareness among education policy makers, planners and professionals, families, communities and wider society of the harmful effects of school violence and bullying on the education, health and well-being of children and adolescents and of the benefits of non-violent schools exacerbate the challenge. Most countries in Africa do not have programmes or interventions that strengthen life skills among learners specifically to enhance their capacity to protect themselves from violence.

#### **4.4 Limited Coordination among stakeholders**

Weak coordination between the education sector and other sector ministries, such as health, social services and child protection, and weak partnerships with other key stakeholders including civil society, trades unions, parents and communities, continue to limit policy implementation in the region. Limited involvement of children and adolescents in planning and implementing interventions to prevent school violence and bullying and to make schools safer also contributes to their lack of sustainability and implementation. Even with policies in place, there remains a lack of safe, confidential, child-friendly reporting mechanisms that are accessible to all children and adolescents and that consider the barriers that some may face in reporting school violence and bullying. A lack of counselling and other support services with weak referral mechanisms to health and other services for survivors, perpetrators, bystanders and affected families continues to compound these challenges.

#### **4.5 Lack of reliable national data on VAC**

National disaggregated prevalence data on VAC have been limited, and this has hindered the development of data-guided action plans to support policy implementation through effective interventions in the country. The continent continues to suffer from a limited evidence base, with relatively few examples of good practice and few evaluations of interventions and programmes to prevent and respond to school violence and bullying, as well as lack of evidence about effective strategies in different contexts. Limited data on the causes, nature, scale and impact of school violence and bullying, reflecting the lack of standard definitions and indicators, lack of comprehensive data collection, and under-reporting of school violence and bullying all highlight the need to better use findings from prevalence surveys on VAC, investigations of particular child protection violations, and the analysis of regular administrative data, including information collected through case management.

#### **4.6 Limited Resources for implementation of plans**

Inadequate education budgets for VACiS prevention and limited implementation of laws and policies on child protection impact negatively on the children's right to education. In Uganda, for example, about 80% of interventions aimed at eliminating VACiS are financed by

development partners rather than by government itself, which is not a sustainable measure in the long run and demonstrates a lack of government commitment to the issue.

#### **4.7 Poor dissemination of policies and inadequate reviews of programme initiatives**

The study revealed that while several initiatives have been put in place to prevent VAC in Africa, no systematic effort has been put in place evaluate their impact on the status of violations in Africa. It was also observed that some initiatives that have been developed by the African Union have not been adequately implemented due to poor dissemination among the African countries.



# 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

While great strides have been made in Africa in the quest to prevent and respond to VAC in terms of policies, laws and programmes, prevalence remains unacceptably high, albeit with varying levels across different countries. The existing policies and laws are not adequately implemented for the benefit of the children. Most countries in Africa have not carried out national level studies to reliably establish the level of the different forms of VAC in their areas of jurisdiction.

The study revealed that African countries are at different levels regarding existence and implementation of policies and laws preventing VAC. There are gaps in the legal frameworks in some countries where acts of violence such as corporal punishment are not banned in all settings and are therefore legally acceptable. Secondly, most of the existing policies address issues of VAC in general but not specifically using schools as an entry point notwithstanding the fact that children spend most of their time in schools.

The study also revealed that some countries have national plans of action covering VAC while others do not. Education sector plans, where they exist, are devoid of specific objectives and activities addressing violence in school settings. Some plans are not adequately financed, compromising their implementation. In some countries initiatives that address VAC are spearheaded by development partners and non-governmental organisations. Social, cultural and religious norms and practices have also hindered enactment and implementation of laws.

The following are recommendations by the study team on how we can move closer towards a regional policy landscape that contributes to prevention of VACiS.

## 5.1 Policy and Legal Reform

African countries should be encouraged and supported to carry out policy and legal reform through domesticating provisions of international and regional child protection instruments into their policies and laws. Those without the appropriate policies and laws should be encouraged to enact them while those already with some policies should review and amend them to comply with provisions of the UNCRC and ACRWC. Specific gaps in the national legislations should be identified and state parties should be supported to amend them through legal reform that domesticates provisions of international and regional instruments to which they are parties. African countries should enact and enforce comprehensive laws that explicitly prohibit all forms of VAC, including in the school setting. These laws should provide clear definitions of violence, outline responsibilities of education authorities and other stakeholders and establish mechanisms for reporting and addressing incidents of violence.

Governments should develop comprehensive policies and guidelines that prioritize violence prevention and response throughout the education system. These policies should outline clear objectives, strategies, and responsibilities for preventing and addressing violence at all levels of education. Incorporating violence prevention education into the curriculum can assist in raising awareness, build skills and promote positive behaviors among learners. This can include teaching concepts such as conflict resolution, empathy, respect, and healthy relationships.

## 5.2 Strengthen implementation framework for the national policies and laws

The framework for implementing policies and enforcement of child protection laws need to be strengthened in most African countries to address the challenges that are currently being faced by many. All countries should be supported to develop guidelines and adequately resourced national plans of actions for prevention and response to VACiS. In keeping with provisions of the UNCRC governments should take the lead and establish partnerships with various stakeholders, including the active participation of development partners, civil society, private sector and children to tackle school violence and bullying.

African countries should review their education sector plans to ensure that they include specific objectives and strategies aimed at addressing VACiS. The existing plans are general in nature and do not use schools as entry points for violence prevention. The interventions should empower children and youth to speak up and advocate for their rights. Schools should provide opportunities for student participation, leadership development, and peer support networks to empower young people to become agents of change in their communities.

## 5.3 Establishment of data banks on VACiS

Countries should carry out regular surveys to determine the prevalence of VACiS in their areas of jurisdiction to provide evidence of the prevalence of VACiS, their nature, causes, extent and impact of school violence and bullying and effective responses to it. Availability of accurate data will inform the development of plans of action for the prevention and response to VACiS. Improving data collection and research on VACiS is essential for understanding the scope of the problem, identifying trends, and evaluating the effectiveness of interventions. African countries should invest in robust data collection systems, research studies, and evaluations to inform evidence-based policies and programs. In addition, the use of the Safe to Learn Call to Action and diagnostic tool to monitor progress on implementation of intervention to prevent VACiS should be adopted. Other avenues to access data are inclusion of school based questions in the VACS and the school based health survey as another way to access data on VACiS<sup>22</sup>.

## 5.4 Scaling up of best practices in VACiS prevention and response

There is need for review of the implementation of policies and initiatives that have been developed for prevention of VAC to their level of success in reducing VAC. This will enable identification of factors that may have hindered their implementation and modification of approaches. The study revealed that several successful programmes and interventions have been implemented in a number of countries which can be scaled up, adapted and replicated in countries with similar characteristics. The Good School Toolkit (GST), for example, was developed by Raising Voices as a school wide intervention led by teachers, students and school affiliated community members. The GST has been implemented in 887 primary schools and 114 secondary schools through the Safe to Learn Funding. It is being rolled out in 23 districts with government having distributed materials to 5,000 schools. The Good Schools Toolkit from Uganda, as well as other promising interventions like the National Safe Schools Framework from Namibia, should be

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<sup>22</sup> Noncommunicable Disease Surveillance, Monitoring and Reporting (who.int).

adapted in other similar countries in the region and beyond.

## **5.5 Address social norms and practices**

Policymakers should recognise that a systemic approach is needed to tackle these issues. With strong policies and implementation plans in place, there is need to change cultural norms and religious practices which seem to condone practices that violate the rights of children. Efforts should be made to change the mindsets and behaviours of adults, including parents and other caregivers, and address factors that contribute to VAC, such as economic and social inequities, social and cultural norms that condone violence, inadequate policies and legislation, insufficient services for victims, and limited investments in effective systems to prevent and respond to violence.

## **5.6 Capacity building of duty bearers**

Governments should invest in education and capacity building - training teachers, school staff, and education authorities on positive discipline, child protection, and responding to incidents of violence as well as raising awareness among parents and communities about the importance of preventing violence in schools. Governments should invest in public awareness campaigns, advocacy efforts, and media outreach to raise awareness about the impacts of violence on children and galvanize support for action. Training programs and workshops on child protection, gender-based violence, positive discipline and identifying signs of abuse should be funded and conducted to equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to address VACiS effectively. Community sensitization meetings to raise awareness about the importance of preventing and addressing VACiS should be implemented. These efforts aim to engage parents, learners, and traditional leaders in recognizing the signs of abuse, promoting positive behaviours and accessing available support services.

## **5.7 Strengthening prevention and response at the school level**

African countries should consider adopting a whole-school approach which focuses on transforming the school environment by engaging multiple stakeholders including the school administration, teachers, parents and students, as well as local and national government. Such programmes, while emphasizing skill-building among adolescents to resolve conflict without using violence or to intervene when witnessing violence, also work on addressing power relations between students and teachers to strengthen their relationship and create space for students to voice their opinion and seek support in the case of violence.<sup>23</sup> Such an approach recognizes the complexity of this issue and helps contribute towards a sustainable movement for preventing all forms of violence in and around Africa's schools.

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<sup>23</sup> UNESCO & UN Women, 2016; UNGEI, 2019; Applying a whole school approach to prevent school-related gender-based violence.





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