



SUMMARY REPORT

Africa's Commitment to Safer Education: The Policy Landscape for Preventing Violence Against Children in Schools



Coalition for
Good Schools

Summary Report

Background

Violence against children in school (VACiS) remains a significant problem in Africa, where children experience multiple forms of violence from teachers as a disciplinary measure, and bullying by fellow learners is commonplace. How much children learn is deeply dependent on how they feel at their school. A growing number of African countries have made commendable efforts towards preventing and responding to VACiS through developing and implementing policies, laws and national plans of action, but there is still a long way to go to end all forms of VACiS in Africa.

The Coalition for Good Schools conducted an initial global evidence review in 2021 to synthesise evidence from VACiS prevention programmes implemented and evaluated in the Global South (Mathews et al., 2021). A recent 2024 regional study focused this analysis on sub-Saharan Africa to provide regional practitioners, policymakers and funders a stronger understanding of what works to prevent VACiS. Building on these efforts, this policy landscape study sought to map existing continental policies and legal frameworks that underpin the success of these interventions. It is the hope of this study to support the region to grow its collective effort to prevent these ubiquitous forms of violence against Africa's children.

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 to address these challenges*
- 3. Contribute to developing consensus at the continental level for the integration of holistic responses to violence against children in education policy and practice.*

Through a review of existing policy and consultations with education stakeholders across the region, this study confirmed that violence is still legally condoned in schools in many countries, and that implementation of laws and policies where they do exist is often insufficient to explicitly address

violence at school. Implementation remains limited by lack of sufficient dedicated budgets, low awareness of policy, lack of resources and skills to implement, and unfavourable cultural norms and practices. To ensure bans on violence in schools translate to practice, these challenges – and the policy landscape they relate to – need more explicit attention.

The study employed both primary and secondary data collection methods, including a desk-review of laws, policies, and standards, a self-administered questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in 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 and those who have been more outspoken on these issues to provide examples for those countries where policies may be more limited.

Existing Policy and Legislative Frameworks

Global Frameworks

- Nearly all African nations have ratified the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** (except for Western Sahara), and many have adopted optional protocols to domesticate provisions into national laws, though there is no continent-wide status report on its implementation.
- While **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.2** aims at the realisation of the right of every child to live free from fear, neglect, abuse and exploitation, and other SDG targets such as 5.3 and 8.7 address specific forms of violence, there is no comparable and reliable data on the level of implementation of SDGs among African countries.
- Sixteen African countries have endorsed the WHO-led **INSPIRE strategies for ending violence against children**, leading to increased political will to prioritise VAC prevention, though no in-depth review has been undertaken to evaluate the impact of these strategies in Africa.
- **Safe to Learn**, a global initiative dedicated to ending violence against children in and around schools has seen its five-point Call to Action endorsed by six African countries; the **Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children's** 'Pathfinding' initiative, which has made 13 African countries 'pathfinding countries', aims to provide formal, public commitments to comprehensive action to end VACiS. However, there remains much work to be done to increase regional participation in these bold commitments.

Africa's Continental Frameworks

- **The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC)** Article 16 obliges states to protect children from violence. Fifty-one out of the 55 countries (87%) have ratified the ACRWC (Morocco, Somalia, South Sudan and Tunisia have not).
- **The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC)** developed [Guidelines on Ending Violence Against Children in Africa](#), which outline the necessary legal, policy, institutional, research, and resource mobilisation strategies required to support VAC prevention and response efforts. The Guidelines streamline principles, standards and guidance to strengthen capacity of African Union (AU) Member States to this end. 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.
- **The 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 violence against children. As a result of APEVAC's interventions, many African countries have developed more robust policies and legislative frameworks for protecting and responding to VAC.

Having ratified global and continental conventions, most African countries have also enacted **national legislative frameworks** that domesticated provisions of international and regional instruments, albeit with variations in comprehensiveness, which the full study explores in greater detail. Many of these legal frameworks have gaps and do not provide adequate protection for learners, including laws relating to corporal punishment where it is not prohibited in all settings, or those that do not explicitly recognise violent forms of discipline as a violation of children's rights. VAC surveys further reveal that violence is still prevalent in most African countries, even where policies are in place, emphasising that there is much more work to be done to ensure that policy is translating into practice.

Factors Hindering Effective Implementation of VACiS Policies and Programs

- **Harmful social norms:** Cultural tolerance of violence, either as an accepted way to resolve conflict or as a normal part of child rearing, remains a risk factor for all types of interpersonal violence. These social norms often prevent policies from being created in the first place, and frustrate efforts to put them into practice.

- **Gaps in legislation:** Even where bans on physical punishment in schools are in place, existing legislation is not comprehensive in many African countries, leaving loopholes for VAC to continue, for instance bans that do not prohibit corporal punishment in both school, and non-school settings.
- **Limited resources for implementation of plans:** Most interventions aimed at eliminating VACiS are still financed by development partners, which is not sustainable. Inadequate implementation of laws and policies on VACiS is often a result of a lack of funding by governments, which is linked to a lack of prioritisation of the issue.
- **Poor dissemination and implementation of policies:** Implementation arrangements are often weak, unknown or poorly understood, and are not paired with interventions that engage the whole school environment to strengthen skills among learners to protect themselves and among teachers to promote positive discipline methods. Some AU initiatives also have not been adequately implemented due to poor dissemination.
- **Lack of reliable national data on VAC:** National disaggregated prevalence data on violence against children in schools have been limited, and this has hindered the development of data-guided action plans to support effective VACiS prevention and response interventions.
- **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

There is robust evidence that adequate investment, policy and national leadership towards ending VACiS could have significant impact on learning outcomes, student retention, and mental health of the entire school population, and therefore societies as a whole. The following study recommendations ensure a sufficient commitment to violence-free education in Africa:

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 that move beyond broader, generalised child rights and protection assurances with an explicit focus on the issue of violence in and around schools.

- 2. Strengthen implementation frameworks for national policies, laws and plans:** African countries should develop guidelines and adequately resourced plans of action for prevention and response to VACiS. Governments should review or develop education sector plans to ensure that they include specific objectives and strategies aimed at addressing VACiS.
- 3. Budgetary investments:** Budgetary investments must be made to elevate the quality of schools and how children experience them. Therefore, ACERWC should develop a benchmark recommendation and seek formal commitments from its members to earmark the agreed amount – e.g., 0.5% to 0.7% of education budgets – to specifically address the school’s operational culture and prevention of VACiS.
- 4. Capacity building of duty bearers:** Governments should carry out public awareness campaigns about the impact of violence on children in schools and in other settings. Training programs on violence prevention, gender equality, positive discipline and identifying signs of abuse should be conducted at scale and embedded in teacher training curricula.
- 5. Establishment of databanks on VACiS:** African countries should invest in robust data collection systems, research, and evaluations to inform evidence-based policies and programs and track the impact that these and related interventions are having. Diagnostic tools such as that developed by Safe to Learn should be used to assess progress on implementation of intervention to prevent VACiS.
- 6. Address social norms and practices:** Collective, system-wide efforts should be endorsed at the most senior level to shift the mindsets and behaviours of adults and youth around violence, and should address the social and cultural norms that sustain violence through rigorous dissemination of policies and coordinated efforts in and around Africa’s schools.
- 7. Scaling of existing best practices in VACiS prevention:** Successful evidence-based programmes and interventions that involve all actors within and beyond the school – such as the Good School Toolkit’s whole school approach in Uganda – can and should be scaled with direct support from governments.
- 8. Accountability:** Regional and national Steering Committees chaired by a senior government representatives within the education sector, and including diverse members of civil society and the education system itself, should be established with the mandate to plan, monitor and document the implementation of VACiS prevention policy.





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