

Creating Safer Schools:

Lessons Learned; Strategies for Action



A dialogue hosted by

Raising Voices and The Ford Foundation

30-31st October 2006, Nairobi, Kenya



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Acknowledgement

Our appreciation goes to all the participants who invested their time, energy, resources, experience, and wisdom in this reflection. Without your commitment and contribution, this meeting could have been just another forum. Instead, it evolved into a thought-provoking space in which energies were rejuvenated and minds were opened to new possibilities. Special appreciation goes to Carla Sutherland for imagining the possibility of this forum, and for support at every stage of the process.



Introduction

Education has been declared a priority issue in key internationally agreed policy documents. Every major meeting addressing international development has had pertinent comment to make on the importance of education. Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) specifically addresses every child's right to education. The second millennium goal promises access to primary education to all the children of the world by 2015. Many African countries have already instituted credible programs to respond to this challenge, including implementation of a time-bound, universal access to primary education policy. Many countries, such as Uganda and Tanzania, declare themselves ahead of the agreed timetable and some are now even pressing on with the aim of creating universal access to secondary education. Clearly, these are important achievements.

However, while we may appear to be succeeding in a narrow interpretation of the goal – that of enabling children's physical presence in schools – in a more meaningful sense, we have more work to do. A clear consensus is emerging around the view that simply reporting higher enrolment numbers is not enough. The quality of the education and children's experience during the process of education is a better measure of the system's success.¹ The Dakar Framework for Action (2000) has established six, Education for All (EFA) goals, two of which specifically address the importance of quality education. Many policy and advocacy initiatives around the world emphasize the importance of a quality education in expanding children's possibilities.

A central concern regarding the quality of education is the issue of safety at school. There is considerable evidence to suggest that schools are not benign 'waiting rooms' within which children await adulthood.

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They experience ad hoc beating, degrading punishments, sexual violence, bullying, and humiliation routinely in our schools. In a recent survey commissioned by UNICEF in 11 Sub-Saharan African countries, 7 out of the 11 countries listed violence in schools as one of the top three priorities to be addressed². In a study conducted in Uganda³, more than 60 percent of the students said they experienced violence regularly in schools.

If a school is envisioned as a place that equips children with the primary building blocks that will enrich their lives, and a place that enables students to become vibrant and responsible members of a democracy as well as the economy, then a vast number of students are being denied that opportunity. If a school is seen as a place to enrich cognitive and emotional development rather than a place for generating compliant and intimidated individuals, then we need urgent responses that address the status quo.

¹ A recent study conducted by the independent evaluation group of the World Bank concluded that enrolment and number of years of schooling is not enough to conclude success. Learning outcomes based on a broader measure of children's development were more important. See www.worldbank.org/oed/education/findings/html

² Assessment of Violence Against Children in the Eastern and Southern Africa Region. F. Zuberi, UNICEF ESARO, (2005) downloadable from www.crin.org/docs/ESA_Regional_Assessment_final.doc

³ Violence Against Children. The Voices of Ugandan Children and Adults. D. Naker, Raising Voices, downloadable from www.raisingvoices.org/children/violence_research.php

There is a dearth of innovative thinking on what is needed to create a comprehensive and a sustainable response that will engage students and create a generation of political actors and active participants. It is in this context that Raising Voices, in collaboration with The Ford Foundation, hosted a forum in Nairobi, Kenya, for discussing the status quo in schools and developing workable responses. The forum brought together 15 experienced professionals over a period of two days to share their perspectives and develop practical strategies for action. The aim was to collectively reflect on what makes our schools unsafe, what responses we have come up with, and what we should be doing about it.

Meeting Schedule

Objectives

- a) Share experiences, ideas, and lessons learned in implementing programs for creating safer schools.
- b) Identify promising strategies and guiding principles for action to create safer schools.

Monday, 30th October: Day 1

09.00 – 09.30	Welcome and overview of meeting Introductions and getting to know each other
09.30 – 10.30	Session 1: Conceptualizing safer schools
10.30 – 11.00	Break
11.00 – 13.00	Session 2: Responses: Diversity and Efficacy
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch
14.00 – 16.00	Session 3: Guiding Principles for Action
16.00 – 16.30	Break
16.30 – 17.30	Optional Open session
19.00 till late	Cocktail followed by dinner

Tuesday, 31st October: Day 2

09.00 – 10.30	Session 4: Guiding Ideas: Developing a vision for safer schools
10.30 – 11.00	Break
11.00 – 12.00	Session 5: Next Steps: Where do we go from here?
12.00 – 12.30	Closure
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch



Session 1: Conceptualizing safer schools: What makes schools unsafe?

“We are talking about schools where children do not feel comfortable, and this covers a big spectrum: physical comfort, mental comfort, places where they feel threatened or vulnerable.”

Dr. Deborah Kasente

Key objective: Recognition of a variety of issues that contribute to children’s experience of school as an unsafe place.

Methodology: Dr. Sharon Rustemier, Research Coordinator for The Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, acted as an overall coordinator of the collective reflection in this session while Dr. Deborah Kasente, professor at Makerere University in Uganda, and Dr. Susan Nkinyangi, senior education advisor, UNESCO-Nairobi, were each asked to take a few moments to make brief remarks. The group then picked up the discussion as a response to, or building on, these comments.

Context: The reflection began with an overarching theme; what is the reality behind the experience of schools that make them unsafe? Access to school has dominated recent dialogue, and success is often measured in terms of enrollment numbers. However, as the attention shifts from enrollment to retention numbers, pertinent questions are beginning to emerge regarding the nature of children’s experience at school. What is it about the experience of school that makes many children abandon this highly coveted opportunity? What is the reality that demoralizes children from persisting at school when their entire future depends on it?

Dr. Deborah Kasente focused her remarks on three issues. Firstly, the school environment is in a progressive state of dilapidation that sends out profound psychological messages to children regarding their value.

“We are talking about schools where children do not feel comfortable, and this covers a big spectrum: physical comfort, mental comfort, places where they feel threatened or vulnerable. Where they don’t have their basic requirements met. The walls have never been painted, and are bare and devoid of color. If children are thirsty, there is no clean water to drink. They are dreading going to the toilet because it is filthy.”

Secondly, the absence of information or guidance on their developmental needs, particularly their reproductive health, renders children vulnerable, and leads to poor decisions that curtail their possibilities. It renders them anxious and preoccupied as their energies become diverted to minimize humiliation.

“Children do not get information about the changes that are occurring in their bodies. A menstruating girl is terrified that everyone will become aware of her predicament. The sexual feelings that begin to emerge in a child are never discussed. It’s frightening. They have no clue from their parents and it’s poorly handled in the school.”

Thirdly, the authoritarian style of teaching that discourages curiosity and punishes creativity drives children to passivity.

“The teaching methods don’t excite them. They are teacher-centered and hostile. The children are scared to give a wrong answer, because they are hit on the head and they will never answer again. Of course in these circumstances, children do not perform well, do not learn skills as well. It makes learning very difficult and very unpleasant.”

Dr. Susan Nkinyangi emphasized that it is also important to analyze the issue from the teacher’s perspective. They are operating under highly demanding circumstances with limited resources. Often teachers are not properly qualified or trained and then they are asked to deal with a demanding situation.

“The introduction of free primary education, while in itself a good thing, has created many problems, particularly in lower primary where numbers are the highest. Teachers are ill equipped, having to just keep order in the classroom, to keep the noise level down. They just don’t know what to do. There is a huge gap between when the policies are announced and giving teachers a chance to address them. There are rarely guidelines or a training process. When the policies are introduced, teachers just have to interpret it on their own. They need in-service training, they need tools, guidance and counseling, they need their skills built. Teachers need techniques, they need to be competent in them, and they need to be encouraged to keep them up.”

Secondly, Dr. Nkinyangi stressed, free primary education does not include pre-



Sexual violence in schools

Anne-Marea Griffin, Executive Director for the Association for the Advancement of Higher Education and Development (AHEAD)

“When we talk about safer schools, it is important to make the link to the grander picture, to the notion that schools should provide a quality environment, that they should be places that enrich young people’s lives. But we also must address the very specific factors that make our schools physically unsafe for children, especially sexual violence. In Uganda, you see in the newspapers, almost on a daily basis, these most casual references to defilement in schools around the country. It is so unfortunate that there is no public outrage. Perhaps it’s because sexual violence is so widespread and because people read about it over and over again. It’s very sad, that people simply believe it will always be a part of life. It is particularly difficult for young women and girls who deal with this on a day to day basis, to the point where they factor it in as an expected part of their school experience, their school routine. Any notion we have of a safer school must address this issue.”

school education that would prepare children for entering formal classroom based learning. “A big part of pre-school is preparing a child for school – teaching them basic skills such as listening, holding a pencil. So now a teacher has a class of 70 to 80 children, and has to show this one how to hold a pencil, this one is running around, this one is crying. It is completely problematic in all regards.”

“Teachers are overstressed, and unprepared,” agreed **Dr. Richard Griggs**, an independent Consultant from South Africa. “There is no system of referrals, no support, no policies – and everyone is saying let’s give the teachers more to do. In developed countries, they have nurses, guidance counselors, all these other kinds of people in school. In our schools, it’s just the teachers, nothing else. This has to be addressed. I don’t think everything can rest on the shoulders of the teacher.”

Dr. Sharon Rustemier focused her remarks on the contribution of corporal punishment

in making schools unsafe for children. Dr. Rustemier said 98 countries have prohibited corporal punishment in schools, covering 42 percent of all schools. In Africa, 21 countries have prohibited it - that means about 48 percent of the child population in Africa is covered. However, in those countries where it has been prohibited, corporal punishment still goes on with impunity. Unless we focus on developing legal and practical strategies that complement each other, the violence will continue.

Corporal punishment is more related to teacher’s stress and inability to handle the situation, than it is to any theory about physical punishment making children learn, though that is often the rationalization offered for using it. In 18 different studies in Africa, anywhere from under 20 percent to up to 90 percent of children experience violence in schools. Clearly, the threat or the actual experience of corporal punishment intimidates children and affects their investment in their learning experience.

Discussion

The overall discussion in this session added four further issues that made schools unsafe for children:

- a) **Dr. Salim Vally of University of the Witwatersrand**, said schools exist in the context of their environment. If children are not valued in the community then their experience in school will reflect that. If the community is a violent and unjust place then the school will also grapple with the same issues. Social challenges such as these translate into very violent ways of relating with children in schools.
- b) **Rose Odoyo, Chief Executive Officer of ANPPCAN-Kenya**, emphasized that basic reasons, such as poverty, should not be overlooked in our search to understand why children perform poorly. Children travel from far to reach schools and are coping with the broader consequences of poverty. The basic unmet needs of food, adequate shelter, or healthcare may put them at a considerable disadvantage when it comes to learning. "A hungry and an exhausted child cannot learn," she said.
- c) **Cheryl Frank, Executive Director of RAPCAN**, emphasized the absence of accountability. There appears to be a collective apathy regarding the state of our education system because the lines of accountability are blurred. It is often difficult to ascertain who is responsible for ensuring the entire system or some portion of it functions, as it should. In the face of unwieldy bureaucracy it is easier to surrender than persist in asking the difficult questions. This is what contributes to falling standards and therefore results in unsafe schools for learners.
- d) **Dr. Amandina Lihamba, Professor at the University of Dar-es-Salaam**, added that unless there is collective 'ownership' of our schools, where each one of us claims our share of the power and the responsibility in ensuring that the school functions as it should, the quality of education will suffer.

The link between home and school

Rose Odoyo - Chief Executive Officer, ANPPCAN Kenya

“ When we are trying to create safer schools, we must involve the caregivers, the parents, and the community, so we are speaking one language. If we are trying to sensitize teachers on the issue of positive discipline at school, and yet at home there is a lot of violence, the fathers are drunk and beating up the mothers in front of their children, there is quarreling, fighting, violence; then it won't work. At school, the teachers are trying to evolve non-violent disciplinary methods, but at home, the child is beaten, or the child is watching the father pounding the mother every evening. The child becomes confused. Children believe what they see, so parents have to set a good example to their children. ”

What makes our schools unsafe?

1. Children are not valued as individuals and their needs not prioritized. They do not have a 'voice' or power to influence decisions that may have deep impact on how their school is run.
2. Under-investment in the school infrastructure. The classrooms are falling apart, equipment and books are not there.
3. Teachers are overstressed and under-resourced. They are dealing with large classes with minimal training.
4. Authoritarian teaching methods that don't help children learn.
5. Corporal punishment that humiliates children and therefore prevents them from learning.
6. Context of the community; a school represents what a community believes.
7. Poverty affects children's ability to learn.
8. Absence of accountability: who is responsible for ensuring a safer school?
9. Lack of collective ownership: unless the entire community demands safer schools, no one will.

Key take-away points

1. Schools are a reflection of their community. They do not exist in a vacuum. However because schools represent our highest aspirations, we must demand higher standards in terms of what learning environments they create for our children. Furthermore, because they are publicly funded, we must demand progressive decisions from our policymakers that contribute to creating safer schools.
2. Unsafe schools are a consequence of multiple factors. However, dominant amongst the reasons cited is children's experience of authoritarian pedagogy. Intimidating and humiliating children is not helping them experience schools as safe, engaging places where they may grow and explore new ways of thinking.
3. Schools will be safer when there is a clear mechanism that holds relevant individuals accountable for failures and shortcomings. Furthermore, unless parents and community members claim 'ownership' of the schools in their neighborhood, and insist that what happens there is of concern to all of us, we will continue to create and foster unsafe schools.



Session 2:

Responses:

What needs to happen?

“In 1997, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) announced in a Circular that corporal punishment was prohibited in the schools. However, the wording of the Circular was ambiguous and there appeared to be no follow up strategy by MoES to ensure that the intention behind the Circular was clearly understood and practiced in schools. ”

Christopher Mugumya

Key objective: Identification of promising strategies to respond to some of the specific problems in schools.

Methodology: Dipak Naker, Co-director of Raising Voices, acted as an overall coordinator of the collective reflection while Christopher Mugumya of ANPPCAN Uganda, Dr. Sara Ruto of Kenyatta University and Rakesh Rajani, Executive Director of HakiElimu, were each asked to take a few moments to make brief remarks. The group then picked up the discussion as a response to, or building on, these comments.

Context: If the problem of unsafe schools is multifaceted, as discussed in the previous session, then our responses have to embody holistic approaches. Adopting a narrow response may make a specific contribution, however it will be the interplay of strategically crafted responses that is likely to establish safer schools as a norm in our communities. In this session, the reflection began with a sharing of what has worked for the participants as a basis for establishing the groundwork for the following sessions on developing guiding principles for creating effective responses.

Creating partnerships

Christopher Mugumya shared the experience of ANPPCAN Uganda Chapter in an attempt to create schools that practiced alternatives to corporal punishment. In 1997, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) announced in a Circular that corporal punishment was prohibited in the schools. However the wording of the Circular was ambiguous and there appeared to be no follow up strategy by MoES to ensure that the intention behind the Circular was clearly understood and practiced in schools.

ANPPCAN Uganda started working with the Ministry of Education to come up with the guidelines. However, after an intensely politicized process, the emerging guidelines were not passed on to schools. The key issue was that there was a strongly conservative power base within the MoES that saw the guidelines as a threat to the adult's authority over children. Furthermore, there may have been additional internal politics being played out that prevented the initiative to gain traction.

"No guidelines were provided to go along with this ban. No leadership was given on how discipline should be promoted in schools. So we had a ban in place, but teachers were at a loss how to deal with it," Mugumya said.

In the absence of guidelines sanctioned by the MoES, the situation became chaotic.

"Schools looked at 'us' [proponents of non violent forms of disciplinary actions] as disruptive forces. Teachers stopped disciplining children. In the absence of the cane, they said there was nothing else they could conceivably do. So, they let discipline get out of hand, and they turned back and said: 'you are responsible for this mess.' Other teachers instituted harsh non-caning methods, but students said they would rather be caned than be humiliated in this way. Still other teachers said alternatives were time

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Christopher Mugumya

consuming, where as corporal punishment, you do it and it's done."

So ANPPCAN Uganda decided to work directly with 20 primary and 10 secondary schools to help stakeholders create alternatives. They began by conducting a study to understand prevailing attitudes to corporal punishment and how that could contribute to developing more workable alternatives.

"What we found was that it was more acceptable to show teachers what corporal punishment does to their children," Mugumya said. "They are more receptive when they learn that it resulted in physical injury, that it affected their child's ability to learn, rather than coming from a rights-based approach. While we know a rights-based perspective is very important, the communities are more responsive if you start with the point of view of showing them

what their children have to lose. So we worked with stakeholders, got their views on alternatives, and put it all together. Then schools committed to use alternatives.”

While it may be too early to make any definitive statements about whether this approach is effective or not, there is anecdotal evidence that it contributes to enabling students to feel more positive about their schools. Students said teachers became friendlier towards them. “When students had a problem, they could approach and talk to teachers. Before, children would skip classes because of fear of punishments. With this new approach, they felt more confident to come to school,” Mugumya said.

This idea of creating partnerships – with all stakeholders – is vital to any strategy. “Creating links with teachers, supporting them to fight for what they care about, allows us to promote this idea of a collective effort, a joint initiative, rather than teachers feeling that we are out to get them,” said Christopher Mugumya. “If we focused only on the children, we incurred the resentment of many teachers who looked at us as if we were the enemy. So we try to work together with teachers.”

Using laws, policies, school-based strategies and research

Dr. Sara Ruto of Kenyatta University offered three practical ideas on how schools could be safer. Firstly, the ideas for safety should be addressed through laws, policies and administrative bans. If there were specific laws – such as education not just being universal but being compulsory - it would protect girls from early marriage. For example, Ruto said, in some Masaii villages, families book a child in school as soon as she is born. They pay a cow to the school and this child is ‘married’ to the school. In addition, schools also must have a specific code of ethics and conduct for teachers. Teachers must know that if they do certain things, they will face certain repercussions.

Secondly, Ruto said, specific, school-based strategies may have more impact than national policies. This includes a written code of conduct and rules that children and parents agree to adhere to. Specialized training to identify sources of violence that target all parties as stakeholders – the bully, the victim, the parents, and the school – can create lasting solutions. Clubs, with child-to-child forums, can share tips such as walking in groups or insisting on going with a fellow classmate if a teacher calls you to his house. These clubs can add credence to the overall aim of creating safer schools.

Thirdly, using research not just to help you identify a problem, but as a tool to convince others that you do have a problem. “This can really spur people into action. A lot of research is academic; we do it for knowledge’s sake. But I think as educators, this would be something we can’t indulge in. We have practical problems we need to solve. Research does not just stop with the collection of information and coming up with ideas. You have to start thinking about how you can make ideas serve the purpose of the problems you identified in the beginning,” Ruto said.

When **HakiElimu** held a public competition asking people, “What is a good school?” about 6,000 people participated. But virtually all talked about good schools as classrooms, order, neatness, and cleanliness. Some talked about books and enough teachers, and some talked about sanitation and toilets. A few talked about a school where teachers don’t hit you. This was a rude wake up call. People didn’t have very imaginative ideas about what schools are about. This competition was a good telling of where we are in the state of public imagination about schooling and education.

Using the media

Rakesh Rajani, Executive Director of HakiElimu emphasized that mass media is a highly effective way to begin a national debate on key issues of vital importance to the community, such as the quality of education experienced by children in our schools.

“I am increasingly convinced that radio, TV and to some extent newspapers, are institutions that are unrivaled by any others,” Rajani said. “The media is many times more powerful than the NGO community combined. Working with the media is an important strategy for creating safer schools. It allows you to go to a scale that is unrivaled.”

HakiElimu uses three media-based strategies:

Firstly, HakiElimu uses media spots. These are 30-second and one-minute adverts. There are numerous different spots and the frequency is very high. On a typical day, one might hear them 30 times. “They promote a debate about what works when it comes to creating an experience of high quality education. It is not about rights first and foremost, but about what works and what doesn’t work. The whole idea is that by

portraying real situations and putting them in front of people, you force the viewer to think, and to rethink. The aim is to provoke, rather than to preach. No one likes to be preached at,” Rajani said.

Secondly, HakiElimu creates a public forum for creating accountability. For example one activity that has been used successfully involves sponsoring journalists to go into the community in the morning to talk to ordinary people about some key issues. In the afternoon, another journalist gets the local leaders together. They have a community meeting, and the community gives their views on these key issues that they have already discussed in the morning, and the leaders are asked to respond. The program is then broadcast on national TV and radio, compelling leaders to be accountable.

Thirdly, HakiElimu promotes investigative journalism that asks deeper questions about the quality of our schools and helps to put the issue on the public agenda. “HakiElimu has a few rules the journalists must follow: talk to many sources, don’t try to minimize differences, and then report it. Beyond that, it’s up to the journalist. Every year, we have almost 1,000 stories - including features, editorials, and news stories - that get written and that give a different point of view.”

Discussion

- a) **Cheryl Frank** emphasized that a public health approach may be needed to create safer schools. "By conceptualizing schools as generally promoting the health and well being of children and existing for that purpose, we can help educators clearly focus on what their role ought to be. We see schools actually clamoring to label themselves as a healthy school because, for example, they follow five basic principles. They can tick those things off in a clean way, and they get excited about this notion."
- b) **Dr. Susan Nkinyangi** emphasized that encouraging and developing confidence of the teachers is crucial. "Using the idea of quality inspectors instead of school inspectors, provides positive feedback to the teachers, rather than inspectors just coming into a school and punishing teachers. We need to provide opportunity for professional development and support to teachers, to allow them to deal with challenges. Right now it is all top down, and the teachers are last in this hierarchy. We need to work to change that."
- c) **Dipak Naker** added that working with the school to re-conceptualize their role is crucial. Most teachers have inherited notions of what a school ought to be, and how teachers ought to behave around children. Unless we present workable alternatives that expand the teacher's imagination, we will keep talking about piece-meal solutions.
- d) **Dr. Richard Griggs** commented that we need partnering and community vigilance to ensure that our schools live up to highest standards. "The synergy of the whole school and the whole community owning the processes in their school, where student bodies are vigorous, active participants in the management of a school is so critical".
- e) **Dr. Carla Sutherland** advocated for using popular media like soap operas and radio dramas to shift broader public opinion. For instance, buying a story line in a TV drama about menstruation being a barrier to participating in education. This has worked well in Kenya and is growing as a region wide approach.
- f) **Rakesh Rajani** suggested that working with religious leaders is another successful avenue. "A faith-based leader who makes the case that in the Bible or the Koran, the appropriate religious vision is one of safety and security and not of being punitive, is more persuasive than a secular person."
- g) **Dr. Salim Vally** raised the issue of being aware of underlying causes. "It's a question of not just changing attitudes, but examining why they flourish. If we really, really want to get rid of violence in schools, we have to look at democratizing society as a whole, to look at how women are conveniently scapegoated, to look at issues of power, of peoples' frustration, of alienation among our youth."

Addressing power imbalances

Dr. Amandina Lihamba, Professor, University of Dar es Salaam

“ Relationships in school are based on the reality that students listen and teachers talk. When we are encouraging and facilitating the voices of children to be heard, it means we are subverting some of the teacher/student power relations that exist. Teachers are not familiar with having students who answer back more confidently. So this power relation, it’s a very good thing to be aware of, and to help teachers be aware of it for themselves, also. Furthermore, the power relations continue to go up the scale. When people – students and teachers – all of a sudden find their voices, they can question things. They don’t have to accept everything. Teachers also can question the administration; they can question why things are happening the way they are. They can realize they also have power relationships with the administration, and with the Ministry. ”

Key take-away points:

1. Creating partnerships with a variety of stakeholders, including teachers, and supporting them to fight what they care about, allows us to create a broader support for the idea of a safer school. It must be a joint effort so that there is a collective ownership of the ideas.
2. Public media is a powerful force whose potential as a tool for social change has to be tapped into to influence public discourse on the quality of education.
3. Public policy, research, and school-based strategies must create a collective accountability and an impetus to act.



Session 3: Guiding principles: How should we be responding?

Create public awareness and education. Educate people on the existence of the policy and what it means for them. Engage a wide range of people in the policy making process through a variety of means that makes the policy relevant to their day-to-day lives. It is only public pressure that will ultimately ensure just and equitable policies.

Key objective: To identify key guiding principles on how to create safer schools

Methodology: Cheryl Frank, Executive Director of RAPCAN, acted as an overall coordinator of the collective reflection in this session while Dr. Salim Vally of the University of Witwatersrand and Dr. Richard Griggs, an independent consultant, were each asked to take a few moments to make brief remarks. Participants then divided into two groups to discuss guiding principles from two different angles: first in reference to policy, legislation and governance and second, from the school and district level, specifically in reference to what is done on the ground. The group subsequently picked up the discussion in plenary as a response to, or building on, these comments.

A. Policy, legislation, and governance

A whole series of actions are needed to make policy and legislation more efficient. The participants identified five guiding principles on how policy and legislation can be used more effectively to create safer schools

1. Create public awareness and education. Educate people on the existence of the policy and what it means for them. Engage a wide range of people in the policy making process through a variety of means that makes the policy relevant to their day -to-day lives. It is only public

Beyond policy

**Dr. Salim Vally, Senior Researcher/
Lecturer University of the
Witwatersrand**

“When working to create safer schools, policy and legislation alone is not sufficient. It’s not unimportant, and it’s a step forward, but by itself, it is not going to bring about the requisite changes. What we need, amongst other things, is a training process, which is meaningful and not rushed, which recognizes the concerns that teachers and others have with the policy. This process should work through those concerns and be concrete enough to provide examples of good practice around non-violent education and safer schools. But quite often the education department does not invest enough resources for this training - it costs money and energy, and they are not prepared to do that. It is cheaper just to put out a policy directive and then police it, but that is not adequate and it can be counterproductive.”

2. Identify policy gaps. Survey the policy framework regarding delivery of education and identify in your own country and localities, the gaps in policies. Use the knowledge and experience from other countries that may be further along to supplement what exists in your country.
3. Foster effective implementation of policy and legislation.
 - Ascertain what resources are available for people to access their rights within the legislation.
 - Monitor implementation so it can be improved, and so the policy’s strengths and weaknesses are understood.
 - Create a mechanism to influence the indicators that the government bodies use to monitor policies, and to broaden the range to include qualitative indicators.
4. Utilize international instruments, declarations, and conventions.
 - Put pressure on governments to ratify and domesticate instruments they have signed.
 - Create regional partnerships where experiences from other countries can help strengthen internal advocacy.
 - Provide technical expertise to governments when needed to translate instruments into practical activities.
5. Create mechanisms for influencing policy. A combination of strategies is needed to change ineffective policies, including campaigning, research, use of the media, litigation, and other ways to access decision makers.

B. School and district level work - what do you do on the ground?

The participants identified 10 guiding principles on how to create safer schools.

1. Build consensus at many levels for strategic partnerships. This includes the media, parents, students, educators, district heads, relevant government departments, civil society, faith-based organizations, and opinion leaders.
2. Create public discourse to develop a holistic vision of a safe school.
3. Work with the entire school to develop a vision and mission on safety. Create collective ownership and ensure participation by all, including students.
4. Develop a plan of action involving all stakeholders that is SMART. (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time bound). It must include cost, so interventions are not beyond the implementer's capacity.
5. Carry out capacity assessment and capacity building. To create safer schools, the stakeholders need skills on roles and responsibilities to ensure implementation.
6. Roll out and take action with continuous monitoring.
7. Evaluate. Learn lessons, measure change and document positive outcomes.
8. Reflect on the evaluation and incorporate lessons learnt and feedback to the community and school program.
9. Review and share at other levels, including getting the district involved for the sake of improving policy.
10. Inform policy makers and service delivery agents through the district, through publications, and via all forms of media.

Key take-away points:

1. Creating a public discourse, a public desire, and public awareness is crucial for normalizing safer schools.
2. Policy alone is not enough. A just policy framework supported by practical mechanisms that ensure collective monitoring and training to actualize policy are essential.
3. The entire ecology of the education delivery must be addressed when creating a safer school in order to create collective ownership and to ensure participation of everyone, including learners.



Session 4:

Guiding ideas: Developing a vision for safer schools

“We have agreed that children are people and people have rights and dignity. They have inherent energies and vision that they want an opportunity to develop and manifest. If children feel safe and respected then we are well on our way to creating safer schools.”

Dipak Naker

Key objective: To bring together key themes and common viewpoints and to synthesize the discussion in order to develop a jointly agreed perspective of what it means to have a safe school.

Methodology: This was a collective discussion that involved summarizing key discussions of the past session and synthesizing as a group the collective vision of what we have come to mean when we refer to a safer school.

Dipak Naker opened this session with an overall summary of what the group had discussed. “We have agreed that children are people and people have rights and dignity. They have inherent energies and vision that they want an opportunity to develop and manifest. If children feel safe and respected then we are well on our way to creating safer schools. If children know that they matter, and that other people recognize that they matter, that their voice is important and that their views count, then we are enabling children to develop capabilities, and we are creating a place where school is a joy.”

“In the minds of many people, a safer school is summarized as one in which there is no corporal punishment,” said **Dr. Susan Nkinyangi**. “But it’s much more than that. The violence that children experience as corporal punishment is very clear, but the other parts need to become clearer too. I hope we can think of some ways to monitor progress, to create a vocabulary that allows us to easily explain and monitor what a safe school is and ask ourselves if we are creating it.”

So, what are the core components of a safer school? Based on the discussions of the two days, the group summarized the components of a safe school into six categories.

1. Clarity of vision and purpose. There must be clarity of vision and purpose around what we mean by a good education, about what is an educated person, an educated child. We must realize that the purpose of a safe school is to deliver a high quality education to every child. When we talk about high quality education, we are not referring simply to passing exams, or having a certificate that validates time served. Quality education is more about what students are able to do. How are they able to thrive in the world? How are they able to relate? What are the capabilities that students develop? Schooling should be measured in terms of capabilities: the ability to analyze, to do critical thinking, to be creative, to have self-confidence, to care about others and yourself, to appreciate difference, diversity and dissent. These are the same capabilities that will allow children to flourish in the world, to get by in an unjust economic environment, and in relationships with other people. That’s what children should be able to do, and that’s what a safe school should be able to provide.
2. Basic standards. Standards are a set of values we declare and aim to live by. They declare the collective aspirations and inspire participants to stretch themselves to grow and reach a higher place that represents the better part of themselves. Many schools have rules, but not standards. Too often rules such as ‘no spitting on the floor,’ or ‘no talking while the teacher is talking’ are seen as sufficient substitution for standards. While being very useful, rules without standards diminish our aspirations; shrink the vision by which we hope to grow. Without clear standards such as respecting each other’s dignity or striving for excellence and highest discipline, written and shared by all, it is difficult to have a safe school.
3. Voice. Voice is a unique manifestation of a perspective, priorities, and experience. It is a fundamental tool for participation. If a stake holder’s voice is not valued or given space and due consideration, they learn to become passive within the larger system. They learn to surrender and resign to the fact that nothing they say, do or think, matters. Lack of a voice in any given system is the most reliable predictor of stagnation and onset of decay. Healthier systems develop space for

- a diversity of voices. If a safe school aspires to be a healthy system, then it must embrace the principle of participation and celebrate diversity of views.
4. **Teacher/student relationship.** This is the heart of what a safe school is about. Is this relationship characterized by a mutual respect, by the teacher helping the student to think and grow and ask questions? Is the teacher using teaching methods that allow children to explore, ask questions, and to create? While the circumstances under which many teachers operate are demanding, this is where fostering deeper awareness of the role that teachers play in a student's growth have to be emphasized. By instilling pride and establishing a culture of accountability in teachers, a safe school fosters a teacher/student relationship based on mutual respect.
 5. **Accountability and responsiveness.** Accountability is the hallmark of a functioning and a vibrant system. If a child experiences abuse at the hands of a teacher, are there consequences? If something happens to a student, can she count on being taken seriously? If things are managed in a way that's below high standards established collectively, would someone be held accountable? Does it foster a feeling in all the stakeholders that there are people within the school who care about their experience and who will be responsive to their needs? A safe school provides avenues for seeking justice, actively demonstrates responsiveness, and earns the faith of individuals through their regular experience of accountability.

The default scenario

Dipak Naker, Co-director Raising Voices

“ We are competing for space in people's heads and in their hearts. If we do nothing, the default position in society will prevail, and as a result, perpetuate itself. The default scenario is that schools will reproduce the power relations that exist in society. So if children are treated as second-class citizens in society, you will see the same in schools. If conformity is valued in the society, the same will happen in schools. But it doesn't have to be that way. We see the potential of schools to be liberated, to be places where we break away from received ways of being and thinking. Unless we get in there, and make a clear and a compelling case for the alternative, people will continue normalizing what is essentially an unjust system. For a vast number of teachers, administrators and school policy makers, we need to make the bridge between the default situation and what our schools could be like. If we abandon them, they will resort to the default scenario; what is known, what is easy. ”

6. School environment. The physical as well as the psychological environment of a school clearly sets the tone of a child's experience of education. The environment in which an individual is immersed determines the conscious and many subconscious 'messages' a child imbibes. Each individual assesses their worth in any environment by asking how it prioritizes their needs; how it makes them feel about themselves, what psychological climate it fosters in their mind. Are their basic needs such as adequate sanitation provided for?

Is the environment one that induces pride in the school? Are the walls bare and what does that say about the faculty of imagination within that school? In a safe school, the environment is safe and conducive to creative learning.

It was agreed that each of these components need further analysis and reflection. "Outside of this room, and in our own environments, we can take this forward," Dipak Naker said. "But these are the guiding ideas. They open up paths, and we all have to walk along the paths ourselves. But we are agreeing that this begins to create a picture in our mind of what we mean by a safer school."

Key take-away points:

1. We must have a clear idea of what a safer school is and how it relates to the quality of education. Learning outcomes shouldn't be measured solely in the form of exam scores, but also what capabilities a student develops during the learning process.
2. The quality of education experience matters because we learn our values and our place in the world through the experience. If a child feels insecure, unhappy, threatened, she will not develop the capabilities she needs to be able to thrive in her environment.
3. A safe school is a school that has a clear purpose and basic standards, where students, teachers and parents have a voice, where the student/teacher relationship is based on mutual respect, where there is accountability and responsiveness and where there is a safe learning environment.



Session 5:

Next Steps:

Where do we go from here?

Inspire children and teachers to imagine and dream greater things for themselves in terms of education and school safety.

Puncture the narrow and bleak vision that has been offered to all of us and expand possibilities.

Integrate a more expansive vision of how the experience of education can be an ongoing process that happens throughout their lives.

Key objective:

To articulate the next steps, including what to do with some of the ideas discussed in this forum and how to create a dissemination infrastructure; to brainstorm ideas for generating political and programmatic will and regional synergy.

Discussion:

How do we go about generating public desire and demand for creating safer schools? What kind of actions will we encourage, persuade, and promote? Who are the key players and institutions that need to be reached?

Participants agreed that four main groups must be reached: The suppliers and creators of education; the users and participants; the influencers; and the regulators. They then detailed how each group could be reached.

A. Suppliers and creators: teachers, ministries of education, and teacher's unions

How can they be reached?

1. Develop incentives and commitments for 'buying into' safer schools. Link it to the core business of teachers and the ministry of education. For example, link the idea of safe schools to improved retention and performance, and other key indicators. Clearly show how a safer school achieves the specific objectives the ministries and unions use to measure success.
2. Conduct comparative assessment of schools, so schools can understand where they are. Do comparisons between schools performing well that are safer schools and those that are not. Bring together key stakeholders to begin to develop standards required for a safer school.
3. Learn from each other as we move ahead. Learn by doing and documenting your learning process. Make a documentary that can travel beyond your immediate vicinity. Involve the media in documenting this process, and create space for key players such as the teacher's unions or teacher's training institutions to get involved.

B. Users/participants: the learners

How can they be reached?

1. Inspire children and teachers to imagine and dream greater things for themselves in terms of education and school safety. Puncture the narrow and bleak vision that has been offered to all of us and expand possibilities. Integrate a more expansive vision of how the experience of education can be an ongoing process that happens throughout their lives.
2. Provide institutionalized space for

children to participate in school governance. Create opportunities for children and adults to learn how to share decision-making power. Demystify the process of participation through day-to-day activities as well as by creating new mechanisms through which power can be shared.

3. Encourage creation of other learning options and learning spaces especially by the children themselves. Help children create options for themselves about what they want to do and how to increase options for learning within the schooling environment.

C. Influencers: Funding agencies, teacher organizations, media, faith-based and traditional leaders.

How can they be reached?

1. Teachers unions and training institutions: Emphasize the importance of professional standards and how safer schools promote a public image (and therefore status) of a teacher. Link explicitly the connection between safer schools and the higher standards for teaching as a profession.
2. Media: Articulate a clear and a brief argument about how a safer school is of public value and interest. Disseminate facts, analysis, and examples of safe schools to the media and identify champions. Recognize the importance of media in monitoring what is happening on a day-to-day basis.
3. Faith-based and traditional leaders: Emphasize the importance of value-based learning and its contribution to creating responsible and ethical citizens. Align the outcomes sought by safer schools with much of what is valued by religious leaders and emphasize the common goal. Identify advocates within these communities that will help

to promote safer schools and promote them in the media.

4. Funding agencies: Develop a clear conceptual framework and share with this influential group. Advocate for the ideas to become part of their investment strategy.

D. Regulators: Administrators, policy makers, school management committees, watchdog groups judiciary, legislators, media

How can they be reached?

1. Educate a group of opinion leaders on the importance of safer school and present them with actionable suggestions.
2. Apply public advocacy and pressure for reform and better practice with administration, policy makers, and media.
3. Utilize public interest litigation to hasten legal reform and accountability. This includes judiciary, school management committees, and media.

Failure of the imagination

Rakesh Rajani, Founding Executive Director of HakiElimu

“ There are millions of parents who have children in schools who are being beaten, being abused, whose minds are being dulled. Why would parents not care about this? I think it’s because of a failure of imagination, a societal failure of imagination. One hundred years from now, we will look back at schools we ran and think how could people wake up and go to schools like this and think it was normal? How can this be accepted as the norm? Like how people talk about slavery today.

”



The way forward:

Participants identified 10 specific ideas to put into action:

1. Submit articles to Article 19 publication. Salim Vally offered to discuss with publishers a possibility of devoting an entire issue on safer schools. It was subsequently decided that if there was a volunteer who could coordinate the production of such an issue they should get in touch with Salim.
2. The Commonwealth Education Minister's Conference is planned for Dec. 10-16, 2006. The theme is "Quality Education for All." "There will be thousands of people, and it's an ideal opportunity to talk about this initiative," Salim Vally noted. He offered to share his space by putting publications there. "We can very easily incorporate some of the ideas we have been talking about in papers we are presenting. Or organize some sort of panel discussion or report for the Commonwealth meeting."
3. The World Social Forum is scheduled for January 2007 in Nairobi. Discussion was held around the possibility of having a space there, or a panel discussion on safer schools.
4. Two publications are planned as the outcome of this meeting: a workshop report, and a conceptual piece that summarizes thinking beyond the key discussions.
5. The possibility of creating a documentary video was highlighted. Many members offered to collaborate by finding schools to film, including Richard Griggs and Rose Odoyo. Rakesh Rajani mentioned that they have a budget for making films and would consider the idea of a 25-minute film that would visually bring home the point of why unsafe schools are in nobody's interest and how to imagine alternatives.
6. Look at partnerships with media, with the idea to get our issue into narratives of TV shows and community radio programs.
7. Target the teacher's unions. Develop a compact, a very simple document that says every teacher deserves or has a right to a decent salary, and to be paid on time. Then come up with 5-7 other things every teacher deserves. On the other side, put in what the responsibilities of a teacher are in relationship to what we've been talking about. Also say to teachers, if you want the community to get behind you, if they understand that you have certain standards in relation to their children and that you are not just someone complaining about salaries, then the community will get behind you. Then convene the heads of unions in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda and get endorsement for this idea of a compact. Then it becomes something unions want. Susan Nkinyangi added that the education service commission – the employers of the teachers – should also be involved. "We don't want this perceived as just a union issue. We want to bring the two together on these key issues."
8. Connect with the EFA movement. Create space within the EFA for dialogue and standards about safer schools.
9. Try to influence the various universities of education to have courses on violence and safer schools for teachers. Salim Vally suggested www.Gwsafrica.org/knowledge/masculinities-kenya.htm for a course idea.
10. Create space on the web for information. Susan Nkinyangi offered to post appropriate materials on UNESCO website, and Sharon Rustemier offered to post initiatives about corporal punishment on the Global Initiative website.



Concluding Remarks

There are not enough people trying to inspire others to imagine a school where minds are opened and possibilities are expanded and learning is a joyful experience. It is our collective work to spread this vision, to find a way of planting it so that safer schools become the norm rather than a privilege of the elite.

A safer school provides an environment, relationships and governance structures that encourage children to grow to their full potential. A safer school instills positive discipline in children and enables them to grow into compassionate, responsible, ethical, creative, and thoughtful individuals.

This is the promise of our generation to the children of today and of tomorrow. The vision is embodied in international agreements and most of our governments have committed to this promise. Yet even a cursory look at the reality of our schools injects a dose of reality into the picture. Unless action is taken now, we will continue promulgating the rhetoric in the full glare of the disjunctured reality.

It is time to ask: what will it take, how will it come to be, and who will make it happen? Most importantly, what contribution will I make in making it happen? Will I remain secure in my isolated problem-solving mode or will I reach out and contribute to the 'weaving' required to create a fabric that is needed to actualize this vision? Will I succumb to feelings of defeat under the vastness of the challenge, or will I become strategic and focused, and invest energy in taking meaningful action?

Many people are thinking about how education is experienced by our children. But not enough people are imagining what it could be like. There are not enough people trying to inspire others to imagine a school where minds are opened and possibilities are expanded and learning is a joyful experience. It is our collective work to spread this vision, to find a way of planting it so that safer schools become the norm rather than a privilege of the elite.

Creating Safer Schools Meeting

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