Programme Summary
Good Schools Toolkit, Uganda

Programme at a glance

The Good School Toolkit is an approach which aims to create a safe school environment for children. It engages the whole school and the surrounding community in a two-year process, and to date has been implemented in 750 primary schools across 50 districts in Uganda. The objectives of the Good School Toolkit are: i) to equip teachers for increasing student confidence and success, ii) to create a learning environment that is safe and respectful, and iii) to support the school administration in becoming more transparent and accountable. **The intervention is one of only a few examples of a whole-school approach in the Global South.** A cluster randomised controlled trial (RCT) of the intervention showed that it was effective in reducing several forms of violence against children (VAC) in schools.

Background

The Good School Toolkit was designed in 2008 by Raising Voices, a Ugandan non-governmental organisation (NGO) that works to prevent violence against women and children. The Toolkit was developed to respond to the widespread occurrence of VAC in Ugandan schools. The programme is an excellent example of a *whole-school approach*, which intervenes in three key areas of a school's operational culture and is recognised as an effective strategy to prevent violence in schools.[1] The toolkit is currently being adapted for use in Botswana, Thailand and Tanzania.

Programme context

Rates of VAC are high in Uganda and affect the majority of children.[2] According to a 2015 National VAC Survey, 59% of girls and 68% of boys had experienced physical violence in childhood, and 35% of girls and 17% of boys reported childhood experiences of sexual violence.[3] The home was reported as the most common location for sexual violence among girls, followed by on the road and in school. Among boys, school was the most frequently reported place for sexual violence.

Baseline data from the programme found that:

- 90% of students aged 11-14 had ever experienced physical violence by a school staff member.

- Girls with disabilities reported higher rates of lifetime physical violence (99.1% vs. 94.6%), and considerably higher rates of sexual violence (23.6% vs. 12.3%) than girls without disabilities.

- There was no statistically significant difference in prevalence of violence against boys with disabilities than boys without disabilities.

Analysis of the data found that almost all children who were exposed to intimate partner violence (IPV) in their homes had experienced violence from parents and other perpetrators, and were more likely to use violence themselves.[4] These children were also more likely to experience mental health conditions than other children.
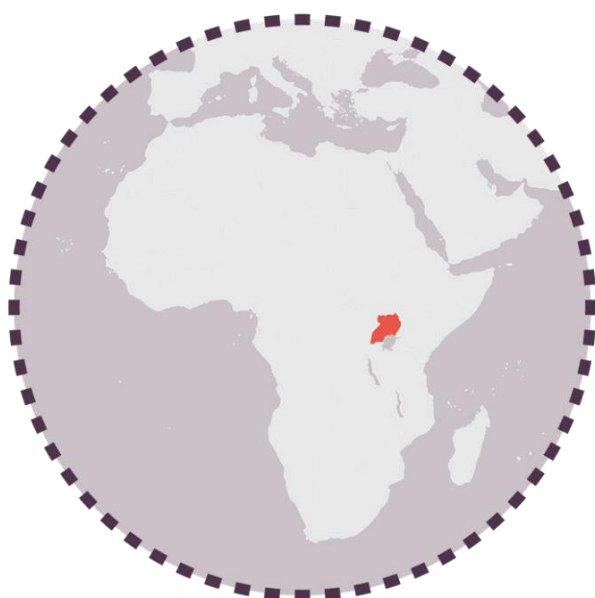
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Programme description

The Good School Toolkit views the **operational culture of a school** as an ecosystem, which is influenced by the combined beliefs, norms, behaviours and experiences that are held by teachers, parents, students, and community members. The intervention aims to prevent VAC in schools by influencing the operational culture via four key entry points (figure 1).

The initiative spans over two school years. The school goes through a six-step process, two steps per term, comprising about 60 activities. The activities primarily involve teachers and students, but some also engage parents, community members and local officials.

Source: Naker (2019) [Preventing Violence against Children at Schools in Resource-poor Environments: Operational Culture as an Overarching Entry Point](#)

PARENT & COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS TO THE SCHOOL: a series of school-led activities that engages parents and the surrounding community in a dialogue about the learning experience, and leverages involvement, support and endorsement of local school governance officials such as District Education Officers.

TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS: a series of activities aimed at helping teachers and students reflect on what makes a good teacher, what makes a good learning environment and who can provide leadership in creating such a culture at their school.

OPERATIONAL CULTURE OF SCHOOL

STUDENT & TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS TO THE SCHOOL: a series of activities and ideas aimed at inspiring all stakeholders to examine their relationship with their school. What opportunities exist to contribute and participate? What policies exist to protect all the stakeholders at their school? How are the most vulnerable members of the school protected and how does the school provide opportunities for leadership?

PEER-TO-PEER RELATIONSHIPS: aimed at helping students and teachers to develop their voice, learn about how they can participate more meaningfully at their school, how they can influence thoughts and behavior of their peers and how they can act as role models at their school.

SOCIETAL: The intervention is constructed with a view to influencing broader policy and frameworks that govern children's experience of school.

COMMUNITY: The intervention integrates community engagement and outreach. It creates opportunities for parents and community leaders to engage with the school and contribute their views and ideas.

INTERPERSONAL: The intervention aims to leverage the most significant relationships at school, particularly teacher-student and peer to peer relationships. They also broker a person's relationship with the institution of school.

INDIVIDUAL: The intervention responds to the personal characteristics of an individual including components that are gender and age sensitive and cognizant of differing abilities and capabilities.

Source: Raising Voices and LSHTM (2017) [Is Violence Against Children Preventable? Findings from the Good Schools Study Summarised for General Audiences](#)

Theory of Change

The programme is underpinned by two theoretical frameworks.

The Ecological Framework helps to understand how children's individual experience of the school is influenced by conditions flowing from the societal and community levels, as well as from interpersonal relationships. Whilst the intervention is centred on the school environment, it recognises that the surrounding community and stakeholders, such as parents and community leaders, can influence the child's experience at school.

The transtheoretical model[5] explains how behaviour change takes place on an individual level, from the early stages of contemplating change, to preparing for, acting upon, and maintaining behaviour changes. The programme's six-step process is designed to mirror these stages of behaviour change, as this is believed to increase the odds that changes will be sustained over time.

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Core components

The Good School Toolkit takes the school through a six-step process to become a 'Good School'. At the beginning of each step, the Good School Committee (which is established in step 1) meet for a 2-hour planning session to divide responsibilities and plan activities.

Step 1: **Your team and network**	**Purpose:** Form a Good School Committee and connect with the Good School Network. **Key activities:** • Recruitment of teachers, students and community members to a Good School Committee. The number of members varies depending on school size, but usually includes about 8 core members. • A 3-day introductory workshop for The Good School Committee. • Joining the Good School Network connecting with other schools in the region.
Step 2: **Preparing for change**	**Purpose:** Launch the project and generate interest in the school and community. **Key activities:** • Conduct a survey to document perspectives at the starting point of the project. • The Good School Committee and the whole school learn more about VAC and reflects upon what a good school is. • Launch the project with a community celebration.
Step 3: **Good teachers and teaching**	**Purpose:** Create teachers who are motivated and skilled to act as leaders of change. **Key activities:** • Provide opportunities for teachers to reflect upon and revalue their role. • Hold school-dialogues focusing on the teacher-student relationship. • Establish a routine of teacher meetings for mutual support and collective problem solving.
Step 4: **Positive discipline**	**Purpose:** Create a culture of positive discipline, where students believe in themselves. **Key activities:** • The Good School Committee and the whole school reflect on violence and learn about positive disciplinary methods. • The school develops written standards and rules. These can include zero-tolerance policies, Codes of Conduct, and classroom rules.
Step 5: **Good learning environment**	**Purpose:** Create a learning environment where students feel safe, respected and valued. **Key activities:** • The school learns about life-skills and how it can be integrated into the school day. • Develop school policies that address abusive behaviour, bullying and sexual violence. • Assess the physical school compound and make an action plan for how to improve it.
Step 6: **Good administration and the future**	**Purpose:** Transfer leadership to the school administration and plan for sustainability. **Key activities:** • Measure the impact of the project, using the same surveys as in step one. • Hold a transition meeting to hand over the leadership to the school administration and formalise ways for members of the Good School Committee to stay involved. • Hold a community celebration to share achievements and vision for going forward.

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Key principles for all steps of the programme:

A school-led process: Following the start-up process and introductory workshop with the Good School Committee, the implementation of the Toolkit is led by the schools themselves to encourage a sense of ownership of the process. Teachers and students are in charge of creating a vision of what a 'Good School' is and use the toolkit as a guide to achieve it.

Facilitators have skills in participatory methods: A facilitator (from the school or partner organisation) uses The Good School Training Manual to train the Good School Committee in the foundations of the Toolkit. The facilitator should be skilled in participatory methods in order to generate interest and excitement, and ensure that the Good School Committee walks away with the knowledge, skills and attitude they will need for a successful project.

Child-friendly approaches: Learning materials are designed to be playful and inspiring, and aim to explain complex ideas in child-friendly ways. It includes elements of peer learning to foster exchange of ideas and collaboration, as well as exercises that encourage child participation in decision-making and school governance, such as Student's Courts and Suggestion Boxes.

Focus on power dynamics: Shifts in power relationships, especially between children and adults, is integral to the Good School Toolkit. Changing power dynamics requires school-wide reflections on teacher-student relationships, and understanding what violence is and how it manifests within power relationships in schools.

Safeguarding of children: The Good School Toolkit underscores the responsibility of schools to safeguard children. Zero-tolerance policies and awareness of how to report incidents must be part of the school standards, and the Toolkit includes learning materials that communicate this in a child-friendly way. Step five includes a how-to guide for developing a children's referral directory; listing all services in the community and how to access these. Working in partnership with the district and local government is key to establishing safeguarding structures.

Monitoring and evaluation

Each step of the Good School Toolkit has a monitoring checklist that schools use to keep track of activities and to document challenges and achievements. One member of the Good School Committee is assigned the role of Monitoring Supervisor and is responsible for collecting monitoring data from other Committee members. This is consolidated into one monitoring checklist for each step, which is reviewed by the Good School Committee and the partner organisation before the school progresses to the next step.

The Good School Toolkit has been rigorously evaluated through a Randomised Control Trial (RCT).[6] The study assessed the intervention in primary schools in Luwero District in central Uganda. It found statistically significant changes in prevalence of VAC in intervention schools – including against girls, boys and children with disabilities, perpetrated by both teachers and peers. Children also gained a sense of being listened to and reported a shift in power dynamics between children and teachers, demonstrated by improved relationships and less authoritarian teaching styles.

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Lessons for programming

The implementation and evaluation of the Good School Toolkit in primary schools across Uganda have generated lessons learned that can be used when adapting and rolling out the initiative in other contexts, as well as for designing similar school-based interventions to create safer environments.

The effectiveness of utilising a whole-school, school-led approach: Raising Voice's implementation of the Good School Toolkit demonstrates that whole-school approaches can be cost-effective and have a significant impact on reducing levels of VAC in schools in the Global South. The toolkit was deliberately designed to be delivered at a low cost. Instead of contributing with financial resources, schools are required to dedicate time and commitment.

Violence can be reduced within relatively short programme timeframes: Schools have used the Good School Toolkit for an average of 18 months and have showed significant reductions in VAC in schools, including adult-to-child violence and peer violence.

Exposure and duration matters: The evaluation results suggest that teachers and students who were more exposed to the intervention were less likely to perpetrate or experience adult-to-child violence. As such, increased exposure could potentially reduce levels of VAC in schools even further. However, it remains to be understood if it is primarily the length or intensity of the intervention (or a combination) that drives this association.

The importance of community-wide approaches: The evaluation noted that when parents and community members reported improved relationships with the school, the acceptability of VAC within the community reduced. Given the linkages between children's own experiences of VAC, witnessing IPV at home and violence perpetration, these spill-over effects into the wider community hold the potential to leverage the outcomes on violence prevention in schools.

The importance of understanding gender norms and violence: Although the intervention is effective in reducing violence against boys, girls and children with disabilities – it sees less effect for girls than boys. This warrants a stronger focus on gender norms to analyse how the intervention can be more effective in reducing violence against girls.

Further work is needed to tackle sexual violence: The RCT could not draw any conclusions about impacts on sexual violence. Yet, we know that sexual violence and 'sex for grades' is common in many schools. We also know that reporting levels are very low, including in surveys. This needs further consideration in future iterations and adaptations of the programme.

Adapting to different contexts: The Good School Toolkit is not intended to be used as a one-size-fits-all intervention but should be adapted to the context and each school's unique needs and vision. There are ongoing adaptations for using the Toolkit in different countries and for implementation at scale, which will yield further insights into which components of the Toolkit are essential to keep regardless context and which components can be adapted and how.

Adapting for secondary schools: An adapted version of the toolkit is being piloted in 8 secondary schools in Kampala, Uganda, and the results will inform how the toolkit can be optimised for secondary schools. The design phase for the adapted version identified higher levels of IPV and sexual violence among secondary school students compared to those in primary school; highlighting the need to address these forms of violence more effectively.[7]

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Source documents

Preventing Violence against Children at Schools in Resource-poor Environments: Operational Culture as an Overarching Entry Point, Naker, D., *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 27, pp. 268-273, 2019

Is Violence Against Children Preventable? Findings from the Good Schools Study Summarised for General Audiences, Raising Voices and LSHTM, 2017

The Good School Toolkit for Reducing Physical Violence from School Staff to Primary School Students: A Cluster-randomised Controlled Trial in Uganda, Devries, K. M., Knight, L. Child, J. C., Mirembe, A., Nakuti, J., Jones, R., Sturgess, J., Allen, E., Kyegombe, N., Parkes, J., Walakira, E., Elbourne, D., Watts, C,. and Naker, D. *The Lancet Global Health* 2015; 385: e378-86, 2015

Links to further resources

- The Good School Toolkit is available here.
- What is a Good Learning Environment? Raising Voices, 2013
- The Good School Training Manual, Raising Voices, 2013
- A number of studies have stemmed from the data collected by the RCT, most of which have been published in peer reviewed journals and are available here.

Endnotes

[1] The Good School Toolkit uses the term 'operational culture' as opposed to the more common term 'school climate'. Operational culture is used to capture that values, beliefs, norms and behaviors that make up a school's culture are adaptable and within the control of individuals in the school, whilst the term climate can give the impression of a more fixed condition. See Naker, D. (2019) Preventing violence against children at schools in resource-poor environments: Operational culture as an overarching entry point. *Aggression and Violent Behaviour, 27* (2019), pp. 268-273.

[2] Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (2015), Violence against Children in Uganda: Findings from a National Survey, 2015, Kampala, Uganda: UNICEF.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Devries, K. M. Knight, L. Child, J. C. et al. (2017) Witnessing intimate partner violence and child maltreatment in Ugandan children: A cross-sectional survey, *BMJ Open 2017*(7)

[5] The Transtheoretical Model of Change, developed in the 1970s, focuses on individual behavior change as a cyclical process that involves progress through six stages of change. For more information, see Prochaska, J. O., & Velicer, W. F. (1997). The Transtheoretical Model of Health Behavior Change, *American Journal of Health Promotion, 12*(1), pp. 38-48.

[6] The study utilised a two-arm cluster RCT, with randomisation at the school level. The RCT included a total of 42 primary schools in the central district of Luwero, out of which 21 received the intervention and 21 were control schools. Data was collected at two points using cross-sectional surveys, first at baseline and again after 18 months of implementation. For more information about methodology, see Devries et al. (2015) (see *links to further resources*)

[7] Devreis K. M. (n.d.) *Good School Toolkit-Secondary Schools Pilot Trial*: Abstract