

School Violence and Bullying of Children with Disabilities in the Eastern and Southern African Region: A Needs Assessment

Leonard Cheshire

Acknowledgements

Leonard Cheshire and UNESCO would like to express gratitude and appreciation to all of those who gave their time to participate in this study. In particular, we want to thank the children and young people with disabilities, their parents/caregivers and teachers who contributed their voices to this piece of work. We would also like to acknowledge and thank our data collection partners who made this work possible through their own networks, as well as with the facilitation of the focus group discussions with respondents and key informant interviews. A special thanks also to the Ministries of Education in each country which supported the qualitative research.

The technical work and authoring of this report was undertaken by a team of researchers at Leonard Cheshire: Thesandree Padayachee (Policy Consultant, Leonard Cheshire), Nithya Srinivasan (Qualitative Research Consultant, Leonard Cheshire), Dr Mark Carew (Principal Researcher, Leonard Cheshire), Marcella Deluca (Senior Researcher – Inclusive Education, Leonard Cheshire) and Aryn Lajji (Senior Research Operations Manager).

UNESCO

Patricia Machawira (Regional Advisor on Education for Health and Well-being, East and Southern Africa), Parviz Abdurahobov (Programme Specialist – M&E and Research), Ruvarashe Matambo (Junior Programme Assistant – Education for Health and Well-being, East and Southern Africa), Alice Saili (Senior National Project Officer – Education for Health and Wellbeing, Zambia), Martin Mosima, (National Project Officer, Botswana), Malesaoana Molapo, (National Project Officer, Lesotho), Buyiswa Mpini, (National Project Officer, South Africa), Jane Kamau (National Project Officer, Kenya).

Data collection partners

Camphill Community Trust (Botswana)

Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (Lesotho)

Wisena Consultancy (Kenya)

Tygerberg Association for Persons with Disabilities (South Africa)

Zambia Association of Persons with Disabilities (Zambia)

Table of contents

Foreword: UNESCO	4
Foreword: Leonard Cheshire	5
Executive summary.....	7
Key recommendations	8
Introduction	10
Study and regional context	12
Study aim and objectives.....	13
Policy analysis	15
Methodology	15
Findings	18
Cross-cutting policies.....	25
Summary of findings	32
Qualitative research	33
Methodology	33
Findings	36
Summary of findings	51
Key recommendations.....	53
References	55

Foreword: UNESCO



Prof Lidia Arthur Brito, Director and Representative, UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa

“Because I looked so different from them, some pupils started laughing, some pupils spit saliva at me, others were even scared, some pupils were mocking me, they even refused to sit next to me”.

Young person living with a disability from Zambia

This experience from a young learner with disability demonstrates the sad reality that indeed learners with disabilities are being bullied in schools. Evidence suggests that children with disabilities are at an increased risk of physical and sexual violence with specific disabilities, such as difficulties with communication increasing their vulnerability. There is need to scale up efforts to ensure that school and community environments are made safe and more inclusive for all children and young people including those with disabilities to avoid the dire consequences of bullying such as missing classes, avoiding school activities, and dropping out of school which negatively impacts academic achievement and future employment prospects.

Addressing school violence and bullying against children and learners with disabilities is imperative in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities **for all**, and SDG 16, which aims to promote peaceful and **inclusive societies**. It also contributes towards The Agenda 2030 and the African Union Agenda 2063’s common resolve, which is to ‘Leave no one behind’.

Through UNESCO’s flagship Programme Our Rights, Our Lives, Our Future (O³) we see this determination to achieving SDG 4 and SDG 16 as well as ‘Leaving no one behind’ through supporting the development and implementation of laws and policies to protect children and young people from violence that they may encounter in and around school settings thus ensuring that schools and community environments are safer, healthier, and inclusive for all young people including those with disabilities.

As UNESCO we are excited about this report as it not only sheds light upon the problem of school violence and bullying but it also offers important recommendations on what can be done to address the issue. These include reviewing of education policies, capacity building and provision of adequate support and resources to teachers in special schools and addressing harmful cultural and gender norms which increase learners with disabilities’ vulnerability to bullying.

Foreword: Leonard Cheshire



Dr Ruth Owen, OBE, Chief Executive, Leonard Cheshire

For every one of the millions of schoolchildren across the world, numerous identities overlap. One of these overlaps is the intersection between disability status and gender. And sadly, in many environments, children at this intersection face complex barriers to staying in education on this basis. Both girls and boys too often face a dangerous, unaccommodating environment where stereotypes about disability gender and the threat of bullying and sexual violence combine to make obtaining a quality education difficult.

As this report outlines, a key cause of violence and bullying of girls and boys with disabilities in schools is disability-related stigma and discrimination. For girls and boys, this overlaps with harmful gender and cultural norms to create a uniquely difficult situation. Compounding the challenge again is the fact that these barriers are not confined to school walls, but are present in the wider community too, in the attitudes of parents and neighbours. This risks a vicious cycle wherein learners and adults who are victimised at home become more likely to bully and abuse others at school – we should remember that, crucially, this includes teachers as well as pupils.

Our research with UNESCO East & Southern Africa Regional Office, outlined here, seeks to identify the above problems but also what measures governments and policymakers can take to rectify them.

One of the most powerful interventions is education in a broader sense. Our findings underscore the vital importance of comprehensive sexuality education within schools to challenge the gender norms that too often lead to girls with disabilities facing disproportionate violence or abuse compared to boys. Aside from this, another theme we encountered was a need for proper training and sensitisation on disability in schools.

Beyond schools, we see how crucial it is to educate the community too. Both the abilities and rights of girls with disabilities need championing to parents and community members, especially in settings where these girls are traditionally seen in a very negative light.

As you'll see in this report, our research uncovered a clear link between stigma and discrimination and rising levels of violence and sexual abuse in the settings we examined, and the imperative need to challenge harmful norms. But addressing the

problem doesn't start or end there. In the countries we examined we also uncovered a clear gap between government-level policies and their implementation, and a need for alignment between these policies and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. There is a link between these high-level disconnects and the situation in communities and classrooms.

These issues are interlinked, and so the solution needs to be holistic. We hope that the needs assessment outlined in this report reflects that. We are certainly excited to share it.

Policymakers and educators, take note.

Executive summary

- This study looked at the robustness of policy and legal frameworks and the needs of teachers and learners with disabilities in regard to addressing school violence and bullying within the Eastern and Southern African region.
- The study comprised both a policy analysis and primary qualitative research within five countries in the Eastern and Southern African region (Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, South Africa and Zambia).
- In total, 48 policies were found with relevance to education, disability and/or school violence and bullying. Of the 48 policies, 24 were education or school-focused, 8 were disability specific policies and 16 were categorised as cross-cutting or intersectoral policies with a focus on child protection against violence, abuse and harassment.
- Eight Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and 6 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted in each of the 5 focal countries selected for the study, resulting in a total of 70 detailed interviews for analysis. Respondents included policymakers, technical experts, NGO representatives, teachers, parents/caregivers and children with disabilities.
- All countries have some form of policy supporting inclusive education. They also have relatively well-developed disability inclusion policies which clearly identify the need for additional protections for people with disabilities.
- However, children with disabilities are not always specifically mentioned as a population needing additional protections against school violence, nor is school violence and bullying highlighted as a particular context of risk.
- There was a noted policy implementation gap in all countries. In most policies reviewed, information on how disability inclusion would be operationalised was lacking. The approaches and methods to evaluate and monitor policy implementation were found to be a general weakness across the policies.
- Experiences shared by our qualitative research respondents were consistent with a wide prevalence of violence and bullying in schools in each country.
- Lack of a strong, inclusive education system that caters to children with disabilities with specific needs was seen as a key reason why learners with disabilities were vulnerable to violence and abuse.
- Lack of resources and training leave schools and teachers under resourced and constrained, creating an imbalance of opportunity and power among learners with and without disabilities. This is then further exploited by some non-disabled learners to violate and abuse learners with disabilities.
- Clearer guidance at school-level on dealing with school violence and bullying were seen as crucial, including anonymous reporting mechanisms in schools and communities as well as establishing stricter punitive consequences for perpetrators.
- In every country, stigma and cultural beliefs around disability contributes to increased bullying and violence. This indicates an urgent need for further advocacy, awareness and sensitisation efforts within schools and communities.

- School violence and bullying cannot be addressed without addressing needs and challenges of learners outside schools (e.g. stigma). Therefore, sensitisation and capacity building efforts must target learners' ecosystems holistically.

Key recommendations

1. Education Acts in all five countries may need some level of review and re-assessment of their alignment with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) and the extent to which it explicitly supports disability inclusion.
2. Similarly, education policies need to be reviewed to ensure alignment to the UNCPRD and protections for children with disabilities against school violence and bullying.
3. Due to the rising incidence of school violence and bullying as well as other types of harms including sexual violence and abuse, it is critical that policies outline the additional vulnerability of children with disabilities to such acts and how these incidents should be addressed.
4. Education policies must demonstrate linkages to other government policies that serve as additional mechanisms to support children with disabilities who experience violence and bullying. This is vitally important considering the multi-layered and complex nature of school violence and bullying.
5. There exist gaps between the policies and implementation in all five focal countries. For policies to be successfully implemented, there needs to be well outlined plans, budgets and monitoring frameworks to ensure accountability.
6. Segregation in education creates an imbalance of power that precipitates violence and bullying in schools. Strengthening the inclusiveness of education systems at every level of education (i.e. starting with Early Childhood Development) would expose teachers and non-disabled learners to children with disabilities and help stop disability stigma.
7. Capacity building and provision of adequate support and resources to teachers in special and mainstream schools is crucial for education and protection of learners with disabilities. Teachers require training, resources and disability sensitisation, beginning during pre-service teacher education, to address the needs of learners with disabilities. This includes staff with a crucial role to play in addressing school violence and bullying, such as guidance counsellors. Governments should allocate resourcing to these positions.
8. Clearer guidance at school-level on dealing with school violence and bullying, including anonymous reporting mechanisms in schools and communities and establishing stricter punitive consequences, would help prevent school violence and bullying.
9. Disability stigma and discrimination is a key cause of school violence and bullying and intersects with harmful gender and cultural norms. There is an urgent need to address this stigma at school-level. In particular,

comprehensive sexuality education is a crucial and effective route by which to challenge the harmful gendered norms that interact with and influence disability stigma.

10. Additionally, stigma and violence reduction efforts must extend beyond the school and into the learners' wider ecosystems (e.g. with parents and the wider community). For example, many parents and community members have no expectation of success from children with disabilities and do not find it useful to invest in them. Moreover, learners and adults (e.g. teachers) who are victimised at home may be more likely to bully and abuse others in school settings.

Introduction

The existence of key global frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989), and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (United Nations, 2008) mandates governments to ensure all children, including children with disabilities, enjoy their rights without discrimination. One recent global analysis estimates that there are 240 million children with disabilities worldwide (UNICEF2021). Despite this, the available evidence to date shows that globally they face numerous barriers (e.g. lack of access to school infrastructure, lack of access to a quality, inclusive education) that put them at a disadvantage relative to their peers without disabilities (United Nations Department of Economic & Social Affairs, 2019).

While urgent progress is needed to close the multitude of these gaps globally, perhaps the most distressing and indeed life-threatening form of discrimination that children with disabilities face is an increased risk of violence and abuse (Devries et al., 2014; Njelesani et al., 2018). This can take many forms and be experienced from many areas of a child's life. For example, in some communities in Tanzania and Malawi, there have been horrific cases where children – and adults – with certain disabilities like albinism are abducted, wounded and killed by strangers due to the belief that their body parts possess curative properties (Amnesty International, 2021, Division for Social Policy and Development, 2016). Cases of infanticide (e.g. in Kenya) where a child is killed simply *because* they are disabled have also been documented (Inguanzo, 2017). Violence and abuse can also be expressed more passively, with children with disabilities more likely to experience neglect and malnourishment from their caregivers (Njelesani et al., 2018). Moreover, certain groups of children with disabilities are more at risk than others from violence and abuse. This includes girls with disabilities (Kvam & Braathen, 2008) and children with intellectual disabilities (Phasha & Myaka, 2014), which is consistent with patterns of risk from violence within the population of adults with disabilities (Malahmaki, 2021). One systematic review estimates that children with disabilities experience three to four times the level of violence compared to children without disabilities (Jones et al., 2012), with one in five being subject to physical violence, rising to one in four for any form of violence (United Nations Population Fund, 2018).

Against this background, it is no surprise that children with disabilities usually experience more violence and bullying at school, relative to their peers. School violence is multifaceted, encompassing physical violence (e.g. physical fights, corporal punishment), psychological violence (e.g. verbal abuse) and sexual violence (e.g. sexual harassment) (UNESCO, 2019). These categories are not mutually exclusive, as sexual harassment can contain elements of physical violence (e.g. groping) and psychological violence (e.g. coercion). Bullying can comprise any of these forms of violence, but is additionally marked by a power imbalance between the perpetrator and victim and recurrence over a period of time (UNESCO, 2019). While this report is primarily concerned with learners with disabilities as victims of school violence and bullying, it is worth noting that some studies have found victims of bullying who have a disability are also more likely to perpetrate bullying compared to non-disabled victims (Eisenberg et al., 2015) and that learners with disabilities are also more likely to join in with bullying started by another student (Malecki et al.,

2020). One reason for this behaviour is thought to be because learners with disabilities experience greater violence and bullying themselves (Eisenberg et al., 2015).

Specifically, a recent review of more than 1,500 research articles highlighted that globally learners with disabilities are at least as likely and usually far more likely than their non-disabled peers to be victims of violence and bullying at school at every level of the education system (UNESCO, 2021). Among all children who experience school violence, bullying is the most common form of violence experienced (UNESCO, 2019). For instance, a study of 11,000 primary age children across 11 European countries identified that children with disabilities were twice as likely to experience bullying (Sentenac et al., 2013). As for any child, experiential accounts suggest that the experience of bullying is devastating for children with disabilities. One learner with a disability from a study of Leonard Cheshire's (2021) in Zambia relates:

“Because I looked so different from them, some pupils started laughing, some pupils spit saliva at me, others were even scared, some pupils were mocking me, they even refused to sit next to me.”

Moreover, learners with disabilities experience school violence and bullying not only from their peers but also from their teachers. In Uganda, Devries et al. (2014b) found that teachers were more likely to be emotionally abusive toward learners with disabilities. A Leonard Cheshire study (2021) identified multiple instances of violence and bullying from teachers, ranging from mocking and neglect to physical violence:

“She can't push her wheelchair and finds no one to help her mostly and that's how she started crawling from her room to the classroom and ... she tried to explain to her teacher but the teacher started to shout and beat her not to come crawling in a classroom.”

Multiple factors are thought to underpin the increased frequency of school violence and bullying for children with disabilities. Some of these are due to the characteristics of an individual learner with a disability and how these characteristics interact with the wider social and cultural learning environment. For example, learners with communication disabilities are often targeted for violence and bullying because they are more socially isolated from peers (Chiu et al., 2017). Learners with intellectual disabilities are targeted because they are assumed to be less likely to report instances of violence and bullying as they do not understand what is happening to them (Aley, 2016; Inguanzo, 2017; Phasha & Nyokangi, 2012). Other sources point to violence and bullying being rife in special schools for learners with disabilities (Nyokangi, & Phasha, 2016). However, as the broader epidemic of violence toward adults and children with disabilities suggests, the drivers of school violence and bullying are not only related to specific school contexts or particular demographic characteristics. Rather, people with disabilities are subject to stigma and discrimination worldwide on the basis of their impairment(s), and this causes much of the violence and bullying they experience (Njelesani et al., 2018; Rohwerder, 2018). In one of its most pernicious forms, disability stigma is expressed in the belief that people with disabilities are not human, that they are cursed, or that they are possessed by an evil spirit (Mostert, 2016). This is all the more concerning

as dehumanisation is a noted cause, consequence and catalyst of violence (Loughnan et al., 2021).

While there are very likely comparatively few teachers globally who believe children with disabilities are not human, this and other stigmatising beliefs about children with disabilities (e.g. that they cannot learn; de Boer et al., 2011) contribute to teacher violence toward learners with disabilities, in addition to driving the bullying behaviour of peers without disabilities (UNESCO, 2021). Ultimately, the impact on learners with disabilities, as with children more broadly, is profound, with school violence and bullying severely affecting the wellbeing and self-esteem of victims, causing high levels of depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation (Mitra et al., 2013). School violence and bullying is also a predictor of lower levels of educational attainment and participation among learners with disabilities, partly because it may lead victims to miss or drop out of school (Delprato et al., 2017). As such, school violence and bullying is a contributor to the current global learning crisis – with at least half of the world’s children with disabilities out of school (International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity, 2016).

Clearly, urgent action is needed to prevent school violence and bullying. Recent work by UNESCO (2019, 2021) highlights a number of priority areas, as well as constraining factors (e.g. the emergence of new areas of bullying, such as cyberbullying; see Kowalski et al., 2015). The highlighted strategies by UNESCO (2019, 2021) are wide-ranging and invoke both systematic reform and the involvement of multiple stakeholders. Two prominent areas of priority are the development of a robust legal and policy framework to address violence (including school violence) and the training and preparation of teachers on school violence and classroom management (UNESCO, 2019). Yet, little is known about the robustness of policy and legal frameworks to address school violence and bullying. While evidence highlights in general that many teachers feel underprepared to educate learners with disabilities, little is known about their needs, especially within specific national contexts. Such a granular analysis is important to highlight ways forward to address school violence and bullying. For example, strong commitments to prevent school violence and bullying may seem impressive, but they must be matched by mechanisms to allocate resources.

The present study considers how school violence and bullying is being addressed in Eastern and Southern Africa within policies and programmes in the region. The study also explores the needs and challenges facing learners with disabilities and how teachers need to be supported to address school violence and bullying in the region.

Study and regional context

The present study is part of a broader partnership between inclusive development agency Leonard Cheshire and UNESCO on school violence and bullying in the Eastern and Southern African region. This partnership has already produced a study led by youth with disabilities chronicling the experiences of school violence and bullying in one country, Zambia (Leonard Cheshire, 2021). The present report provides new converging evidence on school violence and bullying in the Eastern and Southern Africa region, with respect to the policy, legal and programmatic landscape, the needs of learners and the extent that teachers are prepared and

capable of addressing school violence and bullying towards learners with disabilities. Within the region, the five focal countries for the study are Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, South Africa and Zambia. This report now turns to consider the general school-based violence and bullying context in the Eastern and Southern Africa region.

Compared to Europe where a quarter of all children have been bullied (25%), almost half of all children (48%) have experienced bullying in sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2019). Thus, while school violence and bullying disproportionately affects learners with disabilities, it represents an intractable challenge to the sub-Saharan African region more generally. Additionally, some studies conducted in the Eastern and Southern Africa region have identified rates of school violence and bullying so high as to suggest school violence and bullying is the norm and not the exception within a child's life. For example, in one district of Uganda, Devries and colleagues (2014a, 2014b) found that 95% of all primary school girls surveyed had been subjected to physical violence, while more than 90% of girls and boys had experienced violence in their lifetime from a school staff member. Over half of the children surveyed had experienced violence in the week leading up to when the survey was carried out. At focal country level, the median prevalence nationally of students who were bullied ranges from approximately half (52% in Botswana) to about two-thirds (65% in Zambia; UNESCO, 2019). Thus, robust policy and legal frameworks to address school violence and bullying, as well as teacher preparedness, stand to benefit *all* children, not just children with disabilities.

Exactly how many children with disabilities experience school violence and bullying in the Eastern and Southern African region is not known due to the absence of disaggregated data on disability and/or school violence and bullying, including *good quality* disaggregated data (see Abu Alghaib et al., 2019). However, the extant evidence suggests that at least half, and commonly more, children in the region will experience school violence and bullying (UNESCO, 2019) and that all children with disabilities are disproportionately at risk (UNESCO, 2021). Moreover, the individual characteristics of some learners with disabilities (e.g. being female, having an intellectual or communication disability) further increase risk (Inguanzo, 2017; Phasha & Nyokangi, 2012). This means that for some learners with disabilities it is exceedingly unlikely that they will *not* experience violence. For example, findings from one study suggest that only 1 in 100 girls with disabilities attending primary school in the Luwero District of Uganda in 2012 were still safe from physical violence (Devries et al., 2014).

Study aim and objectives

The overarching aims of this study were to understand:

- a) How school violence and bullying towards learners with disabilities is being addressed within policies, laws and programmes.
- b) The needs, challenges and opportunities of learners in relation to school-based violence and bullying.
- c) The support that teachers need to tackle it within Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, South Africa and Zambia.

A desired outcome of the research was for it to inform the delivery of Comprehensive Sexuality Education in the region as this is a crucial mechanism by which to address school-based violence and bullying (Council of Europe, 2020). The study was divided into two components, reflecting the two areas of activity (policy analysis and qualitative research) undertaken in the five focal countries.

The objectives of the policy analysis were to:

- a) Identify and map out specific programmes being delivered for learners with disabilities in education settings.
- b) Identify and assess specific policies that have been developed to support the inclusion of learners with disabilities in education settings with respect to school violence and bullying.

The objectives of the qualitative research were to:

- a) Identify current needs, challenges and opportunities of learners of diverse disability types specifically in relation to school violence and bullying.
- b) Identify the support teachers and schools need to ensure the effective prevention of school violence and bullying regarding learners with disabilities.

Detailed methodological information for each component is given in its respective section. We present the policy analysis first, before turning to the qualitative research.

Policy analysis

Methodology

To fulfil the first objective under this component, programmatic interventions to address school violence and bullying were identified by searching relevant websites, academic databases and triangulation of data from the qualitative interviews. Many local initiatives were found that were not published more widely. Therefore searches for such programmes were guided by searching the websites of local and international NGOs active in the field of inclusive education. A list of identified programmes targeting school violence and bullying is presented in Annex 1 (Section A) for each country with contact details of the programme (where applicable).

The second objective was fulfilled via a cross-sectoral policy analysis, serving to assess how well policies address the rising burden of bullying and violence against children and support efforts to include children with disabilities in school violence and bullying programmes. The policy analysis adopted the Lang et al., (2019) approach to critically assess school violence and bullying related policies in Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, South Africa and Zambia and the extent to which children with disabilities are included. A pre-determined set of criteria was developed and used to identify relevant policies that related to the domains of inclusive education and school violence and bullying. Due to the cross-cutting nature of school violence and bullying, the search for policies was not just restricted to the education sector but extended to include other relevant government departments (e.g. Departments of Health, Departments of Social Development). The inclusion and exclusion criteria for policies reviewed as part of this assignment are listed below:

Inclusion criteria:

- Main/core education legislation/policies of each country (i.e. the document that describes the government-endorsed norms for conduct of learners and staff within basic education settings).
- Education-led policies/guidelines specifically focused on violence in schools and bullying has reference to issues such as abuse, assault, bullying, harassment, sexual violence, serious incidents, gangs, gender-based violence, injury, initiation, rape, sexual harassment and sexual violation.
- Department of Education-led disability specific policies.
- Supporting policies from other sectors only if it is referenced in any of the core Department of Education-led policies.
- Policies that have been cited as core education policies by country leads.

Exclusion criteria:

- Policies published in languages other than English.

- Non over-arching policies that were developed prior to 2010 (though a pragmatic approach was applied in assessing the relevance of the policy to the topic).

Included policies were restricted to those found online and written in the English language or those made available to Leonard Cheshire through local UNESCO country teams. To ensure that country teams were provided with an opportunity to contribute to the identification of relevant policies, a standard questionnaire (see Annex 1, Section B) was circulated to all UNESCO National Program Officers within the five focal countries, requesting inputs on what policies should be included.

Each included policy was then rated using the criteria adapted from Lang et al (2019) (rights, accessibility, inclusivity, implementation, enforcement mechanisms, budget and finance, management information system and relevance to school violence and bullying) outlined by Lang et al (2019). This method employed a 4-point rating scale, with higher ratings indicating comprehensiveness of the policy on a given policy element. The content of the policies was then synthesised and reflected on in terms of disability inclusion and its alignment to UNCRPD mandates as well as its relevance to school violence and bullying.

Adaptations to the Lang et al (2019) scoring matrix were incorporated to focus the policy elements and scoring definitions towards disability inclusion and school violence and bullying. The scoring matrix used for the policies is given in Table 1. Each policy could receive a minimum score of 8 (i.e. “1” on all eight criteria) and a maximum score of 32 (i.e. “4” on all eight criteria).

Table 1: Scoring matrix for school violence and bullying policy analysis

Element No.	Element	Rating criteria 4 (compliant)	Rating criteria 3	Rating criteria 2	Rating criteria 1 (not compliant)
1	Right to education, health, social protection consistent with protection from harm and school violence and bullying for people with disabilities	Policy explicitly acknowledges the right for people with disabilities	Policy explicitly acknowledges right but not in a universal manner (for example only 1 or 2 levels of education)	Policy mentions right but does not mention children and adults with disabilities specifically	No mention of disability inclusion or very limited mention of some relevant aspects (for example special education)
2	Accessibility of services related to education, health and social protection against school violence and bullying for people with disabilities	Policy fully addresses relevant physical and informational accessibility (for example transport, assistive devices, information) - as it relates to programmes and services to prevent and deal with school violence and bullying	Policy mentions many but not all strategies for improved access to school violence and bullying programmes – some gaps	Policy addresses some of these strategies to improve access but many gaps and focus is entirely on individual needs with no reference to creating an accessible facility	Policy does not specifically mention any strategies to improve access to services or programmes relating to school violence and bullying or only mentions these in relation to individual

3	Inclusivity of education, health, social protection systems/mechanisms to reduce risk of school violence and bullying for people with disabilities	Policy addresses all levels and human resources within domain relevant school violence and bullying areas and activities	Disability not addressed in every policy and when addressed for only some of the levels, human resources and activities	Only addressed within disability-specific services and not for general domain related services; for example, training of teachers in special education but not mainstream teachers	Policy does not mention any needs to be met for inclusion of people with disabilities
4	National education, health, social protection plan for school violence and bullying and people with disabilities	Policy has clear plan of action including specific actions to be taken and responsible parties with respect to people with disabilities	Policy mentions a clear plan of action with different components but does not specify the detail of who does what, how and when to monitor and budget guidelines	Policy sets out an action plan but without any specific mention of actors, monitoring, budget, etc.	Policy does not set out any plan of action or monitoring plan
5	Enforcement mechanism for education, health, social protection, protection against school violence and bullying aspects for people with disabilities	Clear enforcement mechanism is described with a named enforcement agency; clear penalties for non-compliance (for example through an Act related to the policy); not taking proactive steps to implement the policy is seen as non-compliance in addition to obstructing the implementation	Describes the enforcement mechanism and contains penalties but no mechanism for enforcement is specified in the policy; there is no mention of penalties for not implementing the policy proactively	Minimal description of an enforcement mechanism with minimal penalties and only a focus on obstruction of the policy implementation rather than lack of proactive implementation	No mention of enforcement and penalties
6	Budget for education, health and social protection relating to school violence and bullying and people with disabilities	Budget guidelines for people with disabilities are clearly specified in terms of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has to be budgeted for • Where budget should be allocated from • Funding is mandated and must be made available. Specified budgeting for school violence and bullying programmes 	Budget guidelines for people with disabilities are specified in terms of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has to be budgeted • Where budget should be allocated from • Funding is conditional on budget availability 	Budget guidelines are not specifically for people with disabilities and funding is conditional on budget availability	No clear budgetary guidelines and no mandated budget for people with disabilities

7	Education and health and Information Management Systems (IMS) for monitoring and evaluating aspects of school violence and bullying relating to people with disabilities	The policy specifies clearly what information should be collected, by whom, at what intervals and what indicators will be used to monitor progress of people with disabilities	The policy specifies the need for data and a plan for what information should be collected concerning people with disabilities but with minimal detail on who should collect it, when and what indicators should be used for monitoring	No clear IMS for people with disabilities but some recognition that data collection is important for monitoring	There is no IMS specified nor the importance of data recognised for people with disabilities
8	School violence and bullying focus and application to protection against violence, bullying and harassment for persons with disabilities	The policy clearly stipulates the issue of school violence and bullying and protections/ interventions offered to people with disabilities	The policy outlines the types of violence and bullying that occur within the school environment and how these are to be addressed with linkages to other governmental support structures /programmes	Policy mentions school violence and bullying but not people with disabilities	The policy does not have any mention of school violence and bullying or the matter of people with disabilities

To assess each identified policy, inter- and intra-country comparisons were conducted using the scoring of the policies as well as reflecting critically on the content of the policy in relation to disability inclusion and relevance to school-based violence. These inter- and intra-country comparisons provided an indication of the performance of each country on disability inclusion, highlighting the policy gaps where appropriate. All policy analysis ratings were carried out by one team member and the ratings of the highest scoring, lowest scoring and two middling policies were checked by a second team member (MC). It is important to note that the policy analysis scores provided an initial broad overview of country policies and performance. The subsequent narrative provided on the content of the policies was equally or if not more valuable to establishing which policy elements needing strengthening.

Findings

In this section we present the findings of the policy analysis and identified gaps. Additionally, where relevant, we provide data from the qualitative research component to triangulate evidence from the policy analysis and contextualise the identified gaps. Across the five countries examined in this exercise, 48 policies in the review were found with relevance to education, disability and/or school violence and bullying. Of the 48 policies, 24 were led by Ministries of Education (or Health, if a school health policy) within the respective focal country, 8 were disability specific policies and 16 were categorised as cross-cutting or intersectoral policies with a focus on child protection against violence, abuse or harassment. We stratify our analysis by both policy type (i.e. education, disability and cross-cutting) and focal country (Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, South Africa and Zambia). We summarise our

findings narratively, but scores for all rated policies are available from the authors on request. Additionally, for particularly comprehensive policies addressing school violence and bullying, we provide a small case study (“spotlight”).

Education

Education in all five countries is guided by Education Acts that vary in their levels of disability inclusion. While each Education Act clearly articulated the right to education for all children, the levels to which this right was expressed within the Acts were weak. Despite three countries having developed their Education Acts after the UNCRPD came into effect, all required review in terms of assessing extent to which learners with disabilities are catered for and supported within the highest legal framework. The Education policies identified for this study are given in Table 2. We also include School Health Policies in this category.

Table 2: List of Education policies by focal country

Botswana	Kenya	Lesotho	South Africa	Zambia
School Health Policy 2019	Kenya School Health Policy Second Edition, 2018	School Health Policy 2005	Integrated School Health Policy 2017	Guidelines for the Implementation of School Health and Nutrition Programme Activities 2008
Botswana Education Act 1967	The Basic Education Act (No. 14 of 2013)	The Education Act 2010	SA Schools Act 1996	The Laws of the Republic of Zambia: Education Act 2011
Inclusive Education Policy 2010	National Education Sector Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022	The Inclusive Education Policy 2018	National School Safety Framework	Educating Our Future; National Policy on Education 1996
	Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2019 on A Policy Framework for Reforming	Education Sector Plan 2016-2026	Policy on screening, identification, assessment and support	Education National Implementation

	Education and Training for Sustainable Development in Kenya		2014	Framework III, 2011- 2015
	Implementation guidelines for the sector policy for learners and trainees with disabilities		Protocol to Deal with Incidences of Corporal Punishments in Schools	
	Safety Standards Manual for Schools in Kenya		Protocol for the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment in Schools	
	Sector policy for learners and trainees with disabilities			
	Education and Training Sector Gender Policy 2015			

Botswana's *Inclusive Education Policy* was the highest scoring education policy (16/40). The overall goal of the policy is for Botswana to achieve an inclusive education system that provides children, young people and adults with access to relevant, high quality education which enables them to learn effectively, whatever their gender, age, life circumstances, health, disability, or socio-economic circumstances. The policy principally advances a whole society approach to ensuring equal and equitable access to all learners. It also highlights the need for partnership and strengthened collaboration between schools and communities. This policy expands its reach beyond the school environment as it attempts to strengthen programmes that fall outside the traditional school environment. This bodes well given that a large population of children with disabilities do not attend formal schooling for a variety of reasons (e.g. accessibility of infrastructure). While the policy is inclusive in setting out to include those with severe disabilities, the specifics on how out of school support programmes will be provided are unclear.

An interesting aspect of this policy is the expectations placed on Government in terms of the professional development of teachers as lead agents. It promotes on-

going training as a key component for effective response to diversity as well as improving teachers' status and working conditions. This is an important aspect of any inclusive education policy, as competence in the education workforce is pivotal to successful implementation.

In terms of psycho-social support for learners with disabilities, a 'Buddy System' is outlined which promotes camaraderie and inclusion between learners with disabilities and those without disabilities. The Buddy System offers children with special educational needs a 'Buddy' in their class who lives near them and will travel to school with them to ensure that they are included in play or other informal activities. In principle this is a step in the right direction to promote inclusion. However, some thought needs to be given to the practical realities of how this programme is institutionalised. The school population may require sensitisation around disability inclusion so that the entire school culture understands the importance of such a programme.

The policy addresses school bullying and intimidation by stating that: "Schools will develop anti-bullying policies and practices to ensure that children with special educational needs are safe and happy in the school environment." In addition, it prescribes the use of Learning Support Workers to ensure that children are safe and happy in school during break times, so that children with special educational needs and other children who are not as robust as their peers are not intimidated. As with the Buddy System, these initiatives demonstrate an understanding of the day-to-day psycho-social challenges faced by learners with disabilities, and pave the way for a safer and more enjoyable learning experience for children with disabilities. The challenge, however, may lie in how these programmes are implemented and the level of commitment demonstrated by the school community in making these aspirations a reality.

While the policy implementation planning outlined demonstrates a level of granularity, the lack of an accountability framework leaves the measures vague and non-binding. Similarly, specifics around budgeting for improved access to school facilities for children with disabilities is lacking and should be outlined in greater detail in subsequent revisions.

Kenya's education policies have demonstrated a progressive move towards more inclusive policy design. Most policies are explicit in their reference to learners with disabilities performing well in policy elements related to scoring element 1 (*the right to education, social protection and inclusion*). However, aspects around budgets for disability inclusion and health information systems remain weaker areas which require policy strengthening. One document worth highlighting is Kenya's National Education Sector Strategic Plan which addresses policy weaknesses found in other policies with regard to governance and accountability.

Spotlight policy: Kenya National Education Sector Strategic Plan (2018 – 2022)

The Kenya National Education Sector Strategic Plan (NESSP) 2018-2022 is a five-year plan that outlines the education sector reform implementation agenda in five thematic areas. The thematic areas include Access and Participation; Equity and Inclusiveness; Quality and Relevance; Sector Governance and Accountability; and Pertinent and Contemporary Issues and Values. Each of the thematic areas is further divided into policy priority, programmes and activities. An implementation plan

in the form of a NESSP Results Framework has been developed detailing the outputs from the activities, targeted quantities and the respective financial implication. In addition, a monitoring and evaluation framework has been developed to enable tracking and reporting the implementation of the plan.

Of the four education-focused policies reviewed for **Lesotho**, the *Inclusive Education Policy 2018*, demonstrates a higher level of disability inclusion (16/40) compared to the others reviewed. The policy additionally speaks to the issues of violence against learners with disabilities, guiding school management to establish guidelines to ensure that all learners are protected against violence and other forms of abuse in schools. This policy suggests compulsory inclusive education training for all teachers and provides guidance on monitoring the implementation of the policy, but falls short in aspects relating to budgets and enforcement mechanisms.

In **South Africa** the highest scoring policies within the education sector were the *Policy on screening, identification, assessment and support* (18/40) and the *Protocol for the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment in Schools* (16/40). However, even though these two policies may have scored well in comparison to other education-focused policies, there remain gaps in ensuring that vulnerabilities of learners with disabilities are addressed with these policies.

For instance, while the *Protocol for the Management and Reporting of Sexual Abuse and Harassment in Schools* scored high in having a social protection plan for school violence and bullying and having enforcement mechanisms against school violence and bullying for learners with disabilities, commitments to the right to inclusive and safe education for learners with disabilities was lacking. Given that learners with disabilities face a high risk of bullying and violence, this policy has important relevance for school-based interventions. Strengthening such policies in terms of inherent vulnerabilities for learners with disabilities is recommended.

Spotlight Policy: Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support

On 19 December 2014 Minister Motshekga approved the *Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS)* in South Africa. The policy aims to ensure that all children of school-going age who experience barriers to learning, including those who have a disability, will be able to access inclusive, quality, free, primary and secondary education on an equal basis with other young people in the communities in which they live. The policy aims to standardise the procedures to identify, assess and provide programmes for all learners who require additional support to enhance their participation and inclusion in school, making teachers and parents central to the support processes. The successful implementation of the SIAS Policy will be an important step towards meeting the obligations of government in respect of the UNCRPD as ratified by Cabinet in November 2007, in terms of ensuring an inclusive education system at all levels (Article 24).

Spotlight Policy: Protocol for the management and reporting of sexual abuse and harassment

The purpose of the *Protocol for the management and reporting of sexual abuse and harassment* is to provide schools, districts and provinces in South Africa 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. Schools are mandated to assist victims of sexual abuse and harassment by following standard reporting procedures and through the provision of appropriate support to learners. This protocol therefore serves to ensure a safe, caring and enabling environment for learning and teaching, both inside and outside of the classroom. The protocol prescribes an approach that enables educators and employees of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to identify, intervene, report and provide support to all learners and school staff who are sexually abused or harassed in school, whilst offering an appropriate response to perpetrators of sexual abuse and harassment. As well as providing the step-by-step mechanisms for reporting incidents of sexual abuse and harassment, it also outlines the process for sanctioning perpetrators of sexual abuse and harassment. This protocol applies to all schools within the Republic of South Africa.

Zambia’s latest education policy, the *Education National Implementation Framework, 2011- 2015* scored well in terms of scoring element 1, (“the Right to education, health, social protection consistent with protection from harm and school based violence and bullying for persons with disabilities”). The policy is progressive in nature, as it appears to address some of the strategies to improve access for learners with disabilities, however; gaps remain in terms of guidance for policy implementation.

Disability

All focal countries in this review have a well-developed disability inclusion policy which clearly articulates the need for additional protections for people with disabilities. In all countries, the constitution additionally protects the rights and dignity of people with disabilities and promotes and supports the full equalisation of opportunities for people with disabilities, and their integration in society. Except for Lesotho, all disability specific policies currently active in these countries make mention of the UNCRPD and have a high level of alignment to its vision of inclusion set out in the convention. However, children are not always specifically mentioned as a population needing additional protections, nor is school violence and bullying featured as a particular issue needing to be systematically addressed using a multisectoral approach. The disability policies reviewed in this study are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: List of disability policies by focal country

Botswana	Kenya	Lesotho	South Africa	Zambia
National Policy on The Care of People with Disabilities 1996	The Persons with Disabilities Act of 2003	National Disability and rehabilitation Policy 2011	White paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016	Persons with Disabilities Act 2012
National Disability Policy 2020 – 2025	The Persons with Disabilities (Amendment) Bill, 2020			National Policy on Disability 2015

In **Botswana** the now outdated *National Policy on The Care of People with Disabilities* is addressed by the *National Disability Policy 2020 – 2025*. Botswana’s

aspiration is to be a “*A moral, tolerant and inclusive society that provides opportunities for all.*” This policy speaks to the needs of people with disabilities in Botswana who are often marginalised and economically disadvantaged. Inaccessible public spaces, employment, education, transport and health services are cited as barriers to full participation in society which the policy intends to address and change. It broadly outlines government and societal level approaches to including people with disabilities. The National Disability Framework is Botswana’s response to disability from birth throughout the life cycle, ensuring equality, participation and inclusion for people with disabilities. This includes removing the barriers to full accessibility to public spaces, communications, employment, education and essential social services such as education, health and transport. While the policy addresses gender-based violence and increased vulnerability of people with disabilities, it does not specifically reflect on the school context.

Kenya has updated and re-developed their disability policies as recently as 2020. For example, The *Persons with Disabilities (Amendment Bill), 2020*, now outlines a comprehensive set of substitutions to section 2 of No 14 of 2003. This Amendment Bill (or the Principal Act as referred to in the policy) creates greater congruence with the UNCRPD in terms of aspects relating to assistive devices, the definition of disability, discrimination, and disability mainstreaming. The definition of inclusive education has been updated and reads as:

“Inclusive Education includes educating students with disabilities in chronologically age-appropriate general and inclusive education classes in the schools or least restrictive environments and in regular classrooms and ensuring that they receive specialized instruction delineated by their individualized education programs within the context of the core curriculum and general class activities regardless of types or severity of disabilities, to the maximum extent possible.”

In **Lesotho**, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare’s *National Disability and Rehabilitation Policy 2011: Mainstreaming Persons with Disabilities into Society* calls for enforcement systems to protect the rights of people with disabilities against any form of discrimination and abuse in society. However, it does not specify children as a group needing additional protections. It does aim to promote equal access and inclusion of people with disabilities in education and training programmes. However, the strategies outlined are limited to accessibility of materials, curriculum development and learner support. The psychosocial aspects of inclusive education are not addressed.

South Africa’s *White paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016* makes clear mention of the UNCRPD and differentiates “disability discrimination” from “discrimination”, where the former refers to:

“Discrimination on the basis of disability means any distinction, exclusion or restriction of persons on the basis of disability, which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, on all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil, or any other field. It encompasses all forms of unfair discrimination, whether direct or indirect, including denial of reasonable accommodation.”

It further outlines harassment as:

“Unwanted conduct which is persistent or serious and demeans, humiliates or creates a hostile or intimidating environment or is calculated to induce submission by actual or threatened adverse consequences. ‘Prohibited grounds’ for harassment include disability, language and culture among others, as well as “any other ground where discrimination based on that other ground causes or perpetuates systemic disadvantage; undermines human dignity; or adversely affects the equal enjoyment of a person’s rights and freedoms in a serious manner that is comparable to discrimination.”

These two well outlined protections within the policy are suited to protections that can be applied in the context of school violence and bullying.

In **Zambia**, *the National Policy on Disability 2015* lists the right to non-discrimination and prohibits the use of derogatory names, abuse, violence and degrading treatment including gender-based abuse against people with disabilities. However, it is not specific to children attending school. The policy scored highly on the criteria “*monitoring and evaluating school violence and bullying in relation to disability*” as there is mention of the need to maintain a Disability Management Information System. Moreover, the policy emphasises the need for people with disabilities to be protected from exploitation, violence and abuse, and for perpetrators to be prosecuted for any offences. However, this policy does not mention funding mechanisms or allocation to support school violence and bullying prevention programmes.

Cross-cutting policies

Several supporting policies were identified across the five focal countries as outlined in Table 4 below. These were policies led by sectors other than Ministries of Education but deemed to have a potential role in addressing school violence and bullying. These policies may have also been referenced in some of the education-led policies. Some of the documents reviewed are strategies or partnerships but all have direct relevance to the issues of violence in schools, child welfare and enhanced protections for children. Overall, these policies did not perform well in terms of disability inclusion, highlighting the need for a more rigorous review of such policies to ensure that children with disabilities are more explicitly protected in light of their status as a population at higher risk for abuse, neglect and violence within the school context.

Table 4: List of cross-cutting policies by focal country

Botswana	Kenya	Lesotho	South Africa	Zambia
National Life Skills Framework 2010	The Sexual Offences Act No. 3 of 2006	Children’s Welfare and Protection Act	Criminal Law (sexual offences and related matters) Amendment Act NO 32 of 2007	Anti-Gender-Based-Violence Act 2010
Pastoral Policy (2017)	The Framework for the National	National Multisectoral	National Child Care and	National Youth Policy 2015

	Child Protection System for Kenya 2011	Child Protection Strategy	Protection Policy 2019	
	National prevention and response plan on violence against children in Kenya 2019 – 2023	National Strategic Development Plan II 2018-2023	Safety in Education Partnership Protocol between the DBE and SAPS	National Child Online Protection Strategy 2020
		Gender and Development Policy 2018-2030		
		Sexual Offences Act 2003		

Of the two relevant policies identified in **Botswana**, the purpose of *The Pastoral Policy (2017)* is to empower and equip students with skills that “promote accountability, responsibility, acceptable social values and patriotism.” The policy is about addressing moral decadence and instilling a higher level of learner participation in the governance and matters of the school so that learners become more skilled at making the right choices. In this policy, learners with disabilities are only mentioned once specifically. The policy does not speak directly to school violence and bullying nor to children with disabilities, but there is a sense that the policy is attempting to instil discipline and stem other behavioural issues that may be linked to school violence and bullying.

The *National Life Skills Framework (NLSF)* was developed to harmonise the life skills curriculum that is delivered across a variety of government programmes. The goal of life skills education is to produce the ability to act in ways that increase the wellbeing of self and others. The policy addresses bullying as part of interpersonal skills for inclusion, empathy and advocacy. Disability is not specifically mentioned, although the policy provides indirect protection as there are references made to stopping stereotyping, stigma and discrimination related to gender, ethnicity and other demographic characteristics. There is a particularly strong emphasis on stopping stigmatisation of those who are HIV positive. The policy appears to have good foundations for supporting the psychosocial development of children in Botswana in general but misses the opportunity to address the vulnerability of learners with disabilities.

In **Kenya**, the *Sexual Offences Act No. 3 of 2006*, conveys harsh penalties to any person who abuses children while in education settings including special institutions for learners with disabilities. Should they be found guilty of taking advantage of his or her official position and inducing or seducing a pupil, they will be guilty of an offence of abuse of position of authority and shall be liable upon conviction to imprisonment for a term of not less than ten years.

The *National prevention and response plan on violence against children in Kenya 2019 – 2023* is a recent strategy that aims to accelerate evidence-based multi-sectoral actions to address violence against children. It is led and implemented by the Government with the support of development partners, civil society organisations and community members. The plan is one of only a few supporting policies and plans that include and make explicit reference to children with disabilities, with Pillar 5 mentioning children with disabilities specifically as a vulnerable group. While the education section of the plan does not explicitly speak to interventions for children with disabilities, this policy scored highly on the criteria “*monitoring and evaluating school violence and bullying in relation to disability*” as there is mention of the need to maintain a Disability Management Information System. Moreover, on a positive note, children and girls with disabilities are highlighted as vulnerable and needing specific attention when it comes to violence, for example sexual violence.

Five relevant cross-cutting policies were identified in **Lesotho**. *The Sexual Offences Act 2003*, lists any sexual act with a child (under the age of 16) as an offence as well as the failure to report sexual acts against or involving children. The section dealing with persons with disabilities states that any sex act in relation to or in the presence of a person with disability is an offence; however, no specific mention is made of school violence and related offences.

The *Children’s Welfare and Protection Act* asserts the rights of children with disabilities to education and training and the right to protection from violence and discrimination. The Act enshrines that “A child shall not be discriminated against on the grounds of gender, race, age, religion, disability, health status, language, custom, ethnic origin, rural or urban background, birth, socio-economic status, refugee status or other status.” The Act aims to establish social programmes for the prevention of violence and abuse against children and care of victims (not school specific). This policy scored high on enforcement as clear penalties are outlined for abuse and neglect of children and clear policies in place for child offenders.

The *National Multisectoral Child Protection Strategy* lists stigma against children with disabilities as a form of child abuse to be protected against and recognises schools as a place when violations of child’s rights occur. The strategy aims to create a functional child protection information management system and develop a national child protection index that would be included in all monitoring systems. The strategy has specific budgeting for child protection activities included in the next national development plan. It additionally lists the accountability of different ministries in facilitating child protection. Mandatory child protection training for all social workers is described, but not for teachers or school staff.

The *National Strategic Development Plan II 2018-2023* deals with issues of disability and child’s rights violations separately. It aims to improve school infrastructure to become more disability friendly and improve access to education material for learners with special educational needs. The strategy promotes children’s development and protection, increasing the capacity to respond to violations and improving non-school based programmes to support vulnerable children, including children with disabilities.

The *Gender and Development Policy 2018-2030* acknowledges the disproportionate incidence of violence and discrimination against women and girls as well as

vulnerable population groups such as people with disabilities. It aims to implement guidelines against school related sexual and gender-based violence, promoting education programmes that are more gender responsive and inclusive of children with disabilities. The strategy asserts that people with disabilities are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence.

In **South Africa**, the *Safety in Education Partnership Protocol* mentions the right to protection and a secure school environment, but does not explicitly mention children with disabilities or the UNCRPD. This document is applicable to all schools, including special schools. Furthermore, the document makes mention of ecological factors including biological vulnerability and certain specific conditions (e.g. ADHD), but disability is not explicitly outlined as a risk factor. The document does contain a section on “Dealing with children with learning difficulties/disabilities” where these children are identified as being at a greater risk of becoming victims of violence. School staff are tasked by the protocol to assist in minimising their risks, as well as providing the necessary mental or psychosocial help to learners. The role of the school psychologist is outlined as being particularly instrumental in this process.

The *National Child Care and Protection Policy* provides a national road map for the provision of a continuum of child-care and protection programmes and services that are necessary to advance the SDGs and discharge national, regional and international responsibilities. The policy offers a comprehensive understanding of the risks faced by children with disabilities. It identifies disability as an accommodation that must be made in terms of care support. Children with disabilities are reported in the policy to be significantly more at risk than other children to adversities such as high levels of poverty, poor access to health services and early learning opportunities, inadequate responsive care from caregivers, and abuse and neglect. Equity, non-discrimination and social inclusion are framed as cardinal pillars which speak to the universality of children’s rights to survive, be protected from abuse and neglect, and develop to their full potential. It identifies that children with disabilities may be routinely excluded from access to any of the childcare and protection services provided for in this policy based on any of the constitutionally prohibited grounds, and that special measures have to be taken to ensure access for vulnerable children. The policy makes mention of the *White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2015)* and affirms the “rights of children with disabilities and obligates the formulation of policies and programmes within a social model of disability that prioritises their care, inclusion, protection and development to their full potential.” As such, this policy scored highly on multiple criteria.

Bullying is mentioned as part of glossary of terms as “frequent yelling at a child, or threatening, bullying or exposing him or her to violence or the abuse of others, whether it be the verbal or physical assault or abuse of a parent, a sibling, or even a pet.” It further identified the school environment as a potential setting for maltreatment, abuse, neglect or exposure to violence. The responsibility of various departments in relation to addressing these issues is clearly described including aspects around finance and education.

Three supporting policies were identified in **Zambia** as having relevance to school violence and bullying: the *Anti-Gender-Based-Violence Act 2010*, the *National Youth Policy 2015* and the *National Child Online Protection Strategy 2020*. Of these, the

Anti-Gender-Based-Violence Act 2010 was found to have limitations in its protections against school violence and bullying as it did not make specific mention of it in the context of gender-based violence. The school context is mentioned in relation to pregnancy. Disability is mentioned in terms of the legal implications of reporting gender-based violence where a person is required to intervene on behalf of the victim if they are a child or have a mental disability (called a “next friend” in the policy).

The *National Child Online Protection Strategy 2020* demonstrates advancements in disability inclusion as it references the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the UNCRPD. It aims to provide Child Online Protection programmes in schools but is not disability specific. The strategy highlights the current lack of protection for children with disabilities and acknowledges the increased vulnerability of these children to online grooming and sexual harassment. It describes how offline bullying and harassment may follow children with disabilities into the online environment. Problems faced by children with disabilities are clearly emphasised but no specific interventions are promoted to target this group. This is an area where the policy could be strengthened.

Through the *National Youth Policy 2015*, the Government of Zambia prioritises youth development and empowerment and their participation in National Development. For the purpose of this policy, a youth is defined as a male or female person aged between 15 and 35 years. This policy therefore has potential to address some of the issues faced by youth in a secondary school setting. It is contemporary in its design with relevance to current issues faced by youth, including unemployment, entrepreneurship, education and skills development, health and sport amongst others. The policy weaves in cross cutting issues of gender and disability as well as HIV and AIDS and the environment. While not tailored specifically around education, this policy aims to address many upstream factors that precipitate poverty, unemployment and a lack of connectedness to society. The policy specifically mentions youth with disabilities with reference to the provision of an enabling environment for youth participation by considering disability as a human rights issue. It also attempts to align with the Persons with Disability Act (2012). Of the seven key guiding principles of the policy, inclusiveness is highlighted in an attempt to address discrimination against youth on the basis of age, gender, race, disability and promote the elimination of discrimination at all levels.

The policy also includes commentary on strategies for integrating disability as follows:

“Strategies for integrating disability:

1. Promote equitable access of the differently abled youth to education, skills training, healthcare, empowerment and employment opportunities;
2. Promote the provision of youths with disability with appropriate Information Education Communication (IEC) materials to sensitise them on issues including HIV and AIDS;
3. Advocate for the provision of appropriate infrastructure for the physically challenged youth and ease their mobility; and

4. Strengthen the participation and inclusion of young persons living with disabilities in decision-making processes.”

In general, this policy is a strong supporting policy in that it aims to address some of the deeply entrenched issues faced by youth and holds potential to facilitate actions to address gender-based violence. With reference to school violence and bullying, this policy has some limitations, in that vulnerability is referred to as a general youth issue and in this way, youth with disability and their increased risk of school violence and bullying may not be immediately apparent. Other aspects of the policy that may need strengthening may be around cyber bullying and sexual violence against youth with disabilities.

Perspectives on policy and legal frameworks to address school violence and bullying

Participants from our qualitative research provided their perspectives on the policy and legal frameworks within the five focal countries. In **Botswana** some respondents noted that while existing policies (such as the *National Disability Policy 2020 – 2025*) address issues related to health services and social empowerment, there were not adequate and clear guidelines specifically for school violence and bullying, particularly in relation to children with disabilities:

“Bullying has not been prioritised...the disability act it mostly encompasses what people living with disabilities should have to make life more comfortable for them, in terms of mostly the health services that they are going to get, and the...disability policies at the social welfare department.”

Key informant interview (NGO)

Our interviewees also often indicated that Botswana’s policies are frequently not implemented due to several other roadblocks. They saw bridging this policy to implementation gap as crucial:

“The problem with us as a country is that we are good with documents, our documents are well written then the problem is actually implementing what we have written.”

Key informant interview (Office of the President, Disability Coordination office)

Other key informants noted how the government was supporting learners with disabilities through inclusive education policies in general (e.g. *The Inclusive Education Policy, 2010*) and highlighted that expertise should be brought in to support the government's efforts specifically on learners with disabilities:

“I know that the Ministry is prioritising support for learners with disabilities and implementation of inclusive education policy. And I, I think the government is not short of what they want to do and I think you know as partners as organisations, it is important you know for one, for them to understand where is the government now, where does the government want to go and then provide technical expertise knowing where the government is and seeing how it will complement what the government would like to do.”

Key informant (UNICEF)

In **Kenya**, while several policies exist, participants highlighted the need to bridge the gap from policy to implementation. Participants shared several insights, for example that national policies need to be translated into school-level policies and must be designed in an institution-friendly manner. Further, there is a need for participatory processes while developing policies, to better understand and address the factors that contribute to school violence and bullying (such as cultural and economic factors) and targeted research on entry points. Moreover, they suggested that school violence and bullying and its factors and consequences must be understood in detail in different regional contexts in the country, and accordingly addressed.

In **Lesotho**, some participants saw the need for a stronger national policy and legal commitments towards school violence and bullying, including that of children with disabilities, as well as translation of these national level commitments to school-level requirements and policies. Specific commentary from respondents on school-level policies is covered in the qualitative research section.

In **South Africa**, key informants explained that a lot of work has been done around child protection. NGOs and advocacy groups have worked hard on increasing awareness on these topics. Increased coverage of these issues in the media has also made a substantial difference in terms of awareness. However, lack of well-defined and timely follow-ups and consequences on reported cases are a challenge. Legal and policy frameworks need to be strengthened to increase the translation of intent to action:

“The Child Protection Act covers so much and it’s a very comprehensive Act and that has been developed but it would be nice to see it actually being implemented. So, I see a lot of that not being implemented – there are no consequences. I mean, we’ve reported parents before and nothing’s really happened. So, it’s protecting the child that sometimes just doesn’t follow through. We can only go so far and then it’s just the caseload as there are too many to deal with. So, I think that’s a huge roadblock in terms of helping kids dealing with this stuff.”

Key informant (NGO)

One participant highlighted the need to include consultations with children with disabilities in future policy design, to truly achieve inclusive and participatory policies:

“These policies are not inclusive, but they integrate disability and there is a huge difference between the two. There is need to involve children with disabilities in the consultation process to really understand their needs and challenges – formulate policies for them, with them.”

Key informant (Policy expert)

In **Zambia**, legal backing to help enforce the practice of strategies to address school violence and bullying was noted as crucial by a key informant, particularly with respect to strengthening school guidance services (see qualitative research section), but also more broadly;

“Legal backing is what is needed because I think with our policies, those issues are reflected. What is lacking is practice and practice, in most cases, you know, you will find that we fail to practice certain things because these

policies, in most cases, they are only found in the offices here where we are and not in the teacher colleges of education. What is lacking is the legal backing, the implementation strategy, how do we implement some of these things so that we stop bullying. So those are some of the things that we need to put in place. How do we implement? How do we stop bullying? By practicing what is in our policies.”

Key informant interview (Ministry of General Education)

Summary of findings

In summary, the policy review has revealed that some progress is being made in the design of disability inclusive education policies across the five countries. All five countries have strong legislation that calls for equal access to education and promotes disability inclusion. However, the specifics of how these rights and protections are articulated within policies varies between countries. The right to education for all children is clearly articulated in the Education Acts of each country. However, the level to which the right is expressed in relation to children with disabilities is relatively weak. Despite three countries having developed their Education Acts after the UNCRPD came into effect, all Education Acts may require reassessment of the protections provided to learners with disabilities, as these are the highest legal frameworks specifically governing education.

A promising finding was that all countries have some form of policy supporting inclusive education. In addition they have relatively well-developed disability inclusion policies which clearly identify the need for additional protections for people with disabilities. This demonstrates political will to ensure that children with disabilities are provided with the best opportunities to access a good quality education in an inclusive and accommodating learning environment. The overarching finding, however, is that resources to implement such policies are scarce. This presents a major challenge for successful implementation. The general finding was that all disability specific policies currently active in these countries make mention of UNCRPD and have a high level of alignment to the vision of inclusion set out in the convention.

A weakness of some of these policies is that children with disabilities are not always specifically mentioned as a population needing additional protections against school violence, nor is school violence and bullying highlighted as a particular context of risk for children with disabilities. School violence and bullying is a complex issue needing a unique and focused multi-sectoral approach. Based on the findings of this review, there is evidence to suggest that all countries acknowledge the complexity of the issue of violence against children. The presence of a multitude of supporting policies is promising as it demonstrates an acknowledgement that no single sector has the sole responsibility to address the scourge of violence against children. The policy gap revealed through this exercise is the fact that the education sector itself cannot address and solve the issue alone and that where supporting policies do exist, these need to be reviewed to ensure that the heightened vulnerabilities of children with disabilities are catered for adequately.

For policies to be successfully implemented, the details around planning and budgeting for disability inclusion must be clearly outlined. In most policies reviewed,

information on how disability inclusion would be operationalised was lacking. The approaches and methods to evaluate and monitor policy implementation was found to be a general weakness across the policies reviewed. Looking at our qualitative data, key informants interviewed across the five focal countries were often cognizant of failures or difficulties in implementation, despite, in some areas, strong commitments within the policy text itself. As highlighted by our respondents, civil society and international organisations can play a crucial role in bridging the policy-implementation gap by providing their expertise and support to governments. Policy design should include consultations with the affected stakeholders (i.e. children with disabilities) to ensure the resulting framework best addresses their needs.

Qualitative research

Methodology

To address the two objectives under this component, the qualitative research involved primary data collection with diverse stakeholder groups (e.g. learners with disabilities, parents, teachers, policymakers, academic and technical experts). Eight Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and six Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted in each of the five focal countries selected for the study (Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, South Africa and Zambia), resulting in a total of 70 detailed interviews for analysis. Table 5 presents the sampling framework. Table 6 provides an overview of demographic coverage achieved. Detailed information about each respondent is presented in Annex 2: Section A.

Table 5: Sampling framework for the qualitative data collection

Country	KIIs	Parent FGDs	Teacher FGDs	Children FGDs	Total
Botswana	8	2	2	2 (Mixed gender FGD)	14
Kenya	8	2	2	2 (1 girls FGD, 1 boys FGD)	14
Lesotho	8	3	3	3 (mixed, but gender specific sub-groups)	17
South Africa	8	2	2	2 (1 girls FGD, 1 boys FGD)	14
Zambia	8	2	2	2 (1 girls FGD, 1 boys FGD)	14
Total	40	11	11	11	73

Table 6: Demographic coverage of the qualitative data collection

Country	Types of disabilities covered	Types of schools covered	School levels covered
Botswana	Children with physical, visual impairments, intellectual disabilities, albinism	Mainstream schools, special schools	Primary, secondary
Kenya	Children with physical, visual, hearing impairments, albinism, parents of children with intellectual disabilities and autism	Special schools, inclusive schools, integrated schools	Primary, secondary
Lesotho	Children with physical, visual, hearing impairments, intellectual disabilities	Special schools, inclusive schools	Primary, high
South Africa	Children with physical, visual impairments, intellectual disabilities, albinism	Mainstream schools, special schools	Upper, primary
Zambia	Children with physical, visual, hearing impairments, intellectual disabilities	Inclusive schools, special schools	Primary, secondary

The eight targeted KIs per country included Ministry officials (e.g. those responsible for disability, education, social services etc), teacher training institutions, other government bodies, international actors (e.g. UN), representatives of civil society organisations, and OPDs. Among the six focus group discussions conducted per country, two were focused on parents of learners with disabilities, two were focused on teachers from different types of schools (mainstream, integrated, inclusive, special), and two were focused on children with disabilities (gender specific groups in the case of Kenya, Zambia, Lesotho, South Africa and a mixed group in Botswana) in each country.

In four of the five focal countries, OPDs were chosen as fieldwork partners to make the research process more inclusive and gather more in-depth and nuanced perspectives on school violence and bullying from communities and schools. Diversity was also ensured by engaging a wide range of stakeholders, schools, communities and regions across the five countries to ensure representation across a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, disability types, and types of services/schools. This served to incorporate a wide range of stakeholder voices in this participatory research.

The fieldwork partners in the five countries were as follows:

- Botswana: Camphill Community Trust
- Kenya: Wisena Consutancy
- Lesotho: Lesotho National Federation for Organisations of the Disabled (LNFOD)

- South Africa: Tygerberg Association for Persons with Disabilities
- Zambia: Zambia Association for Persons with Disabilities (ZAPD)

These fieldwork partners were also supported by the UNESCO National Program Officer in each of the five countries.

Leonard Cheshire developed the data collection tools (See Annex 2 Sections B, C and D) and provided relevant training to UNESCO National Program Officers and OPDs, and worked with OPDs to coordinate data collection efforts. All OPDs participating in the data collection process were trained on data collection practices and safeguarding techniques. In particular, the tools contained questions on the following broad sections:

- Perceptions on disability among diverse stakeholders – parents, learners, teachers, policymakers, NGOs (sector experts)
- Perspectives on school violence and bullying among diverse stakeholders
- Extent and types of violence and bullying prevalent in schools, experiences of learners with disabilities
- Perpetrators of violence and bullying in schools
- Consequences of school violence and bullying
- Factors leading to violence and bullying in schools
- Existing policies and programmes in the state (that stakeholders were aware of)
- Existing support systems in trusted networks in schools
- Suggestions and recommendations to decrease and prevent school violence and bullying

Given COVID-19 restrictions and closures, participants were reached through a range of online and offline platforms to collect the necessary information. This data was then analysed by organising it into themes that arose from the interviews and FGDs, guided by the research questions.

COVID-19 posed several challenges in conducting fieldwork for this study. There was a high prevalence of COVID-19 cases in several regions of the countries under study, and hence most schools were closed during this period. Since identification of study participants required reopening of schools in some countries, there were delays in starting FGDs. In other countries, partnering OPDs went to the communities of participants to be able to hold the FGDs. However, this had its own set of challenges since some students with disabilities (particularly in boarding schools) were from a different district/state, hence bringing all participants together for the FGD was not possible. Thus, alternative participants were identified for the study, keeping in line with the study principles and ensuring diversity across age and gender. In situations where alternative candidates could not be identified, larger numbers of district-specific FGDs with smaller numbers of participants were conducted (e.g. Lesotho). Care was taken to follow all government rules and

protocols and ensure safety of participants, field staff and researchers involved in the study.

Findings

We stratify the findings of our qualitative research by country. To address the two objectives under this component, for each country, we cover emerging themes – firstly as they relate to trends, patterns and challenges of school violence and bullying facing learners with disabilities, and secondly the support required by schools and teachers to address it. The causes and consequences of school violence and bullying were also frequently mentioned by informants. We cover this under a third thematic cluster for each focal country.

Botswana

The interviews and FGDs on Botswana involved conversations with officials from Ministries of Health, Basic Education and Social Protection respectively, as well as the Office of the President, UNICEF, NGO representatives and academics. FGDs included representation from diverse disability types and age groups in communities in Kgatleng, Greater Gaborone, Northeast and Southeast.

Trends, patterns and challenges of school-based violence and bullying facing learners with disabilities

Several learners, parents and interviewees indicated that violence and bullying of children with disabilities is widely prevalent in schools. Poor inclusive education systems and structures were seen by respondents as creating imbalances of power which caused school violence and bullying:

“When a person living with disability is going to a non-disability school, you tend to find out that [they] are more reliable [to] other students and this gives power to the other person to do whatever they want to the other student. And it’s not only about that, we have a variety of students who are in school, those who are living with disabilities and those who have learning problems. So, you find out that they are all included in one class and there is nothing that is given to address each and every group of learners that are in that class. So, it’s not like a system for all.”

Key informant (NGO)

“The system doesn’t really have a more appropriate way of dealing with bullying or violence and the culprit. Most of the time you find that when a student has bullied another person either through cyberbullying, verbal bullying, or through physical bullying; the only thing that the child would get is a reprimand as a punishment. Thus, the system really doesn’t have anything to alleviate bullying or to stop bullying or rather to reduce it in schools, because we are dealing with minors. And as a minor you cannot really come to terms and go to the police and say this student has bullied me.”

Key informant (NGO)

Further, social media has become an instrument for bullying among learners particularly in urban areas.

“Bullying is different depending on the environment or the location that the people are living in. The rural areas are more of cultural people so they tend to use physical violence while urban areas have evolved into not physically approaching somebody but using certain resources to do so (cyber bullying).”

Key informant (NGO)

Bullying is still largely prevalent in schools, particularly in regular schools where students face added discrimination and difficulty due to often not have resources for their needs (e.g. textbooks). Children with intellectual disabilities, cerebral palsy, albinism, and other physical impairments spoke about being abused and bullied in schools and in communities.

“Some learners without disabilities do ill treat them, they refuse to assist them when they request them to. One learner explained that she lost her eyesight when she was at tertiary school, where she suffered a lot. She was mostly charged P50.00 by anyone who assisted her even to take her to the taxi stop. The lack of specialized equipment made them powerless and dependent on others who feel that they are bothersome and at times some will want them to have sex with them as payment for the assistance they offered them.”

Participant at student FGD

Support required by schools and teachers to address school-based violence and bullying

Several teachers and stakeholders indicated the need for increased support and resources for schools and teachers, which is crucial for improving access to education for learners with disabilities. As indicated earlier, lack of equal opportunities for learners with disabilities causes an imbalance of power, which further leads to violence and bullying in schools. Further, the school ecosystem also contains several other stakeholders, such as parents and community members. Sensitisation and awareness building of the community outside schools was perceived by some respondents as essential to deal with several misconceptions related to disability and school violence and bullying:

“The school isn’t only made of the students and the teachers. The stakeholders we have are the students themselves, the teachers, the PTA, we also have the community, the local chiefs and the village development community, and the police, the social welfare and the law enforcement and what else, health sector and yes. I feel like those are the important stakeholders that should be included.”

Key informant (NGO)

As highlighted in the policy analysis section of this report, respondents highlighted the need for school-based violence and bullying towards learners with disabilities to be more comprehensively addressed in national policies. One particular interviewee spoke at length about how future policies could be designed:

“First of all, we need to; when we create a policy we need to bear in mind the inclusivity of the policy. Like the policy should include all the relevant partners

that are going to be involved in that policy. You cannot include only the perpetrators and not include the victims. If the person has been bullied, what should happen to the perpetrator and what should also happen to the victim. And what should happen to the bystanders or the people that can be affected by the bullying. It should be endorsed; the policy has to support the management. It should be relevant; it should be applicable to the organisation, to the society and to the parties that are involved. And it should make sense in a way that the punishment that is going to be given to the culprit and the intervention measures that are going to be given to the victim and the preventative measures that are going to be given to the community or the people who are affected by it. And it should be successfully implemented, it should be attainable, and it should adapt to the environment and to the community or to the organisation. And it should accommodate change. It should be able to change as the years go by because we are living in nomadic millennial. And it should be enforceable in a way that it shouldn't be an option for the other person to follow the policy. Yes, it should be statute. I believe those are the characteristics of a successful policy."

Key informant interview (NGO)

Causes and consequences of school violence and bullying

Discriminatory treatment of people and children with disabilities in communities was viewed as a major factor causing violence and bullying in schools in Botswana:

"There is a link between violence and bullying within and outside schools. These kids are also being bullied at home [and] because they can't express themselves, they can't say anything. We have one case this person with disability fell pregnant and mainly because the parent had left them alone when they went to work. The parent left them in the house, then somebody came and violated the child. Only to find that she is pregnant, she cannot say who did it. We have also had a case in which a parent will go to work at the drought relief program, and this parent tied the child in the goat kraal so that they do not go anyway in their absence or even locking them in the house, leaving them to mess themselves up there."

Key informant (Office of the President, Disability Coordinating office)

The consequences of school violence and bullying were noted to be severe and linked to adverse education and health outcomes of children with disabilities, further affecting their contributions to society and the workforce:

"Looking at it, I would say if a child is bullied a lot they end up emotionally damaged and others are bullied to the point of dropping out of school. You would find that sometimes the children who drop out of school are gifted and promising but because of bullying they end up [dropping out]."

Key informant interview (NGO)

Learners with disabilities felt that teachers did their best to support them in schools but are often constrained in terms of time and resources. However, perspectives at

home and in the community vary and several students reported having seen and faced discrimination due to negative attitudes in communities:

“‘Since people are different, they treat us differently,’ said one of the learners. Learners also noted that they are treated better in schools than outside the school. These learners noted that they are mostly shunned by the community, they are called various hurting names, some even go to an extent of giving them awful looks and honking at them, some social workers do not assist them.”

Data collector summary of student FGD

Lack of awareness, exposure and sensitisation often results in misunderstandings of what constitutes school violence and bullying among community members. Respondents noted that while parents often take physical bullying and violence seriously, emotional abuse is often not given equal attention, as it is not seen as causing any evident harm to the child. Further, parents commonly espouse harmful gender norms. For example, boys are told to be ‘braver’ if they complain about any such issue:

“For example, if a boy complains, even parents will say be a man, you are a man, men shouldn’t cry.”

Key informant interview (University of Botswana)

Moreover, derogatory name calling toward people with disabilities in particular has been normalised to a large extent in the community, in part due to the influence of culture:

“In our Setswana culture, we have made it a norm to name people living with disabilities. For example, if you have a child who has a hand problem, others will normalize calling the child ‘tshwane’ loosely translated as ‘short hand’ just because of the hand. You will find that even the elders will know the given name but will not act. The family will just accept that the child is given the name ‘tsogwane’ and the elders will not condemn that. The other one would be that of the mentally challenged. They also are given names such as ‘setseno’ or ‘mmasetsenwa’ translated as ‘the crazy one’ and no one condemns that. Their opinions are also never taken into consideration just because they are mentally challenged and they are never respected, noticed or listened to. Sometimes they are not even taken care of and we normalize that as elders. Other times they are stigmatized and that on its own is bullying. The deaf are also given names. When doing workshops with parents and caregivers we learn that the deaf are taught their names and how to spell them at Centres for the deaf. At homes they are referred to as ‘that one’, ‘call that one to come and eat’. They end up not knowing their names or their siblings. So there is much communication barriers with the deaf.”

Key informant interview (Botswana council of the disabled)

Kenya

The interviews and FGDs in Kenya involved conversations with diverse groups of representatives from the Ministry of Education, UNICEF, Kenya Institute for Special

Education, National Council for Persons with Disabilities, Action for Children with Disabilities, the Special Secondary Schools Principals Association, Teachers Service Commission, and the National EARC coordinator. FGDs also included representation of learners with diverse disability types and age groups in different communities in Kiambu and Nairobi.

Trends, patterns and challenges of school violence and bullying facing learners with disabilities

As noted in our policy analysis, Kenya has progressed significantly over the years in taking action on child protection and safeguarding measures (e.g. *National prevention and response plan on violence against children in Kenya 2019 – 2023*). Yet, our research suggests school violence and bullying among children with disabilities is widely prevalent, particularly in upper primary and secondary schools as children go through adolescence. Some respondents were of the opinion that sexual abuse in this age group may be particularly high, and while both boys and girls face sexual abuse, it is more common among girls. However, social taboos and cultural beliefs result in several of these cases either not being reported or being covered up. A key informant highlighted:

“The Teachers Service Commission (TSC) has been very clear and stern on the defilement of girls with disabilities. However, there has been a burden of proof since there is a lot of cover-up and conspiracy. Some cultural beliefs do not allow such cases to become public due to fear of embarrassment. The perpetrators are often influential and wealthy in the community and therefore comprise the parents and police. The children with disabilities may not have the capacity to protect themselves and provide evidence.”

Key informant (National EARC coordinator)

Lack of proper reporting mechanisms, strict punitive consequences and protection of the privacy of reporters further results in many victims not reporting abuse:

“For example, there was a case on social media in the Central region where a teacher caned a boy because he reported being abused by another boy as ‘kionje’ (handicapped) and called derogatory names. The case was reported to police; teachers were arrested but later released. The boy was not ready to report because he feared that teachers would punish him.”

Key Informant (National Council for Persons with Disabilities)

Emotional and psychological trauma and abuse due to disability was also frequently reported and was seen as more common among girls, while physical violence was reported as being more common among boys. While experience of school violence and bullying was reported across all disability types, some participants mentioned higher prevalence among learners with intellectual disabilities and those with communication impairments. Further, students with albinism also face severe discrimination within schools, and face violence in communities even in the form of kidnappings.

Participants perceived a strong link between violence and bullying within and outside schools, highlighting the need to target the issue holistically. Children often pick up violence and bullying related behaviours in the home and communities and follow

that in schools. Further, the stigmatising attitudes of parents and elders towards disability and violence often spill over to children:

“When society is violent, the violence is escalated to schools. Such children do not know a polite or diplomatic way of requesting. Instead, they interpret every move as an obstacle. Some become rebellious in their lives and become too vocal, expose themselves, and have poor intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. The community shapes the attitude.”

Key informant (Kenya Institute of Special Education)

Support required by schools and teachers to address school violence and bullying

policy analysis), participants recommended investing in school infrastructure and making schools safe for all students (e.g. cameras to monitor activities at the gate, proper lighting in dark corners) as well as concurrent investing in disability-friendly infrastructure (tables, ramps, toilets etc). Stricter measures and consequences for school violence and bullying as well as safer and clearer reporting mechanisms were also seen as crucial so that instances of school violence and bullying are prioritised and addressed in a timely manner.

Participants also commented on the need for improved and targeted teacher training, which was seen as especially important. Specifically, modules for teacher training must be assessed to see if they adequately incorporate inclusive education. Teachers in special schools must be thoroughly trained and equipped with skills to work with learners with different disabilities. All staff, including auxiliary staff, must be trained in child safeguarding and alternative means of ensuring discipline, and must be made aware of repercussions of violations of children’s rights and/or any kind of abuse. Furthermore, guidance and counselling departments must be strengthened and teachers mentored in order to influence the overall school culture:

“Need to mentor teachers using a model of ‘key resource resources’ or ‘teacher champions’ to influence the other teachers that inculcate the culture of schools free from school violence and bullying.”

UNICEF, Kenya

Participants recommended developing and/or improving a school behaviour policy that address all stakeholders within the school ecosystem as a mechanism for addressing school violence and bullying. Lastly, beyond the school ecosystem, capacity building and support services must also be provided to parents and caregivers, teaching them how to work with children with different disabilities. Wider communities must be sensitized.

Causes and consequences of school violence and bullying

Negative attitudes towards disability were widely prevalent across some stakeholders. Many parents and community members had no expectation of success from children with disabilities and did not find it useful to invest in them. This often trickled down to learners themselves who also felt that they were inadequate, majorly affecting their self-esteem and motivation:

“There is hopelessness in society among learners. Learners with disabilities feel that many people, including their siblings, have no job opportunities, so children imagine that once they leave school, they will be more frustrated and suffer more since they already have challenges.”

Key informant (Special secondary schools Principals Association)

Many communities appeared to harbour beliefs and attitudes that cause and perpetuate cases of violence and bullying. For example, sexual abuse cases are often hidden as victims are often seen as being weak and/or it is considered to be negative for the community’s reputation:

“Sexual abuse cuts across all rural, urban and marginalized regions and may go unreported due to culture. Some cultures discourage reporting such cases due to a lack of proper mechanisms of reporting such cases. In addition, the victims are seen as weak people when they report.”

Key informant (Action for Children with Disabilities)

Further, in several communities physical punishment is considered to be an effective way of shaping behaviour:

“Some regions still practice abuse of children with disabilities influenced by culture. For example, in Luo culture, despite being neutralized by education. In pastoral communities, there are still cases of children being abused sexually.”

Key informant (EARC Coordinator)

“Many society members believe that physical punishment is an effective way of shaping behaviour and discipline “mwafrika si mzungu” (an African is different from a white).”

Key informant interview (Ministry of Education)

“Further, some cultures perpetuate some forms of school violence and bullying. In cultures where men are seen as protectors, they tend to claim that space and force others to toe the line. When such is taken to school, they dominate others.”

Key informant (Action for Children with disabilities)

Elders’ perceptions in the community were quoted as being ‘double-edged’ swords. One key informant explained:

“If the elders are not the perpetrators, they become very stern of such actions. But also, most of the areas do not condone violence against children with disabilities. Elders easily compromise when they know the parties involved especially when its family members or friends.”

EARC Coordinator

Teachers interviewed stated that they find it very hard to work with children with disabilities and perceive them to be slow learners. They also reported not having adequate support from the rest of the school ecosystem and stated that many parents consider such schools as ‘rehabilitation homes’, and believe it to be the government’s responsibility to care for children with disabilities.

Lesotho

The interviews and FGDs in Lesotho involved conversations with officials from several units of the Ministry of Education, academics (National University of Lesotho), representatives from NGOs (LCN) and several OPDs (LNLVIP, NADL, NFAPD). FGDs also included representation from diverse disability types and age groups in Leribe, Maseru and Mafetang districts.

Trends, patterns and challenges of school violence and bullying facing learners with disabilities

Education of children with disabilities is severely compromised due to insufficient schools and resources catering to all disabilities. Participants from the teachers FGD noted:

“Education is a challenge, especially in mainstream schools, and there are challenges such as insufficient resources in special schools (although the classrooms are a bit more conducive than in mainstreams which are mostly overcrowded). Resources don’t accommodate them and this affect children badly. Resources such as books are a great challenge. Children with disabilities are forced to go to special schools and a few attend mainstream schools where they are mostly integrated. Due to lengthy syllabuses, we (teachers) are unable to cater for them in our lesson plans. Children are unable to access some of the materials even in those schools that have such because they are mostly locked in safe places and more often than not it is difficult to access them. (e.g. one school has magnifying lenses that can be used by albinos or short-sighted learners but it’s a struggle for them to access them.)”

Teachers FGD participant

This lack of education and equal opportunities was cited as a major reason for discrimination of children with disabilities in schools and communities. Additionally, several participants highlighted that despite there being a legal commitment against corporal punishment (*Education Act 2010, Commitment 4*), it is used by teachers in several schools to enforce discipline. One teacher elaborated:

“Children with intellectual disability are usually lashed to instil behaviour because teachers are impatient with them thus forcing a child to dropout. Learners would tell you teachers are abusing them either physically, emotionally, and psychologically, its during counselling that you will learn/ hear of all these. Even when training teachers on life skills, they will tell you government has not put in place/ measures on how to punish learners apart from corporal punishment: that says corporal punishment is still rife in schools. Reporting mechanisms have to be developed and learners should be sensitized as to how to go about it.”

Key Informant Interview

Several children with disabilities quoted being bullied by peers and teachers on account of how they looked, walked or learned. Physical violence was commonly reported among boys while emotional, verbal and social bullying was commonly

reported among girls. Sexual violence among girls with disabilities, particularly teenage girls, was also widely prevalent.

Support required by schools and teachers to address school violence and bullying

schools and weak repercussions often resulted in many of these cases going unnoticed or unreported. Participants felt a dire need to strengthen school level reporting mechanisms and referral systems and create stronger legal frameworks to deal with reported cases of violence and bullying. Further, awareness must be built about these systems and mechanisms among teachers, parents, and learners of all age groups. Any incident reported must be taken seriously and immediately inspected:

“Children with disabilities are weak and vulnerable hence others take advantages. Children with disabilities are more at risk as they depend more on others. They easily forget, for example, forget who has abused them. They are usually rejected when reporting their cases, they are dismissed e.g. when a girl with ID reports that she is raped a response maybe: ‘oh, this one I know, she wants food, give her something to eat’.”

Parents FGD

“School violence and bullying encompasses no clear reporting mechanisms, bullying normally not reported, usually reports are made way later than expected time frame. I know of bullying in counselling contexts, I have never counselled anybody with disabilities, learners don’t have proper/ clear reporting mechanisms/directions.”

Key informant interview

Participants additionally made a series of recommendations around teachers. Teachers were seen as agents of change in schools, and often an integral part of a student’s support system. Capacity building and provision of adequate support and resources to teachers in special and mainstream schools is crucial for education and protection of learners with disabilities. Training teachers with necessary skills and knowledge for working with children with different disabilities, sensitising them towards the needs and challenges of learners with disabilities and building their awareness on child protection and safeguarding measures are strategies that participants felt would go a long way in dealing with violence and bullying issues in schools. Further, adequate facilities and resources need to be provided to teachers and schools, through increased funding and outreach, to teach learners with various disabilities.

Participants further suggested that regulating what happens at schools via policies, for example what the consequences of school violence and bullying are, mechanisms for reporting, and awareness building, would help schools to develop into safer communities for all learners. It will empower learners to take responsibility to report what happens to them and also stipulate the code of conduct for teachers

and learners. Such policies must also elaborate on the role of multiple stakeholders (parents, peers, teachers) in preventing and dealing with issues of school violence and bullying.

“Yes, there is a need to have a policy at school level so that the consequence is stipulated and also that school violence and bullying is clearly explained. [The] school violence and bullying policy should stipulate importance of parental engagement- discipline from home, how teachers should interact with learners as well as interaction among learners.”

Key informant interview

Causes and consequences of school-based violence and bullying

Negative attitudes towards disability and harmful cultural beliefs within certain communities were seen as contributing to heightened violence and bullying of learners with disabilities. Violence and bullying in schools is closely linked to that outside schools, and both the environment at home and the wider community have a significant impact on both victims and perpetrators. Lack of awareness and sensitisation towards the needs and potential of children with disabilities were cited as causing these perceptions (e.g. perceived weakness of children with disabilities) to exist. Further, lack of adequate training, capacity building and sensitisation of teachers working with children with disabilities often leads to teacher-student violence in schools (including widely reported use of corporal punishment, despite its illegality). Teachers in special schools indicated higher levels of awareness. However, they are severely constrained in terms of time, skills and resources to work with children with disabilities:

“Most bullied children are those with intellectual disabilities because others perceive them as not normal. Sometimes when children grow up their caregivers, parents give them inappropriate names as compared to other children with different disabilities. They get abused because of their disability. Due to lack of awareness on issues of disability they just get isolated and abused. Also, the cultural beliefs are also factors which contribute to the abuse. Lack of understanding also contributes to this situation.”

Key informant interview

“Children take it from home, family background and community background for instance not seeing [the] relevance of education in their lives, so due to idling minds some children bully. Cultural constraints and religion e.g. if a certain child does not believe in certain things, they may be mocked or get teased by others. Teacher’s attitudes may be another contributing factor.”

Teachers focus group discussion

“Children who are ill-treated at home are likely to be perpetrators. One could be a victim because they are undermined and they cannot do anything about the situation also because no one will believe them. That is [why] most children with disabilities don’t report incidents of school violence and bullying.”

Teachers focus group discussion

As a solution, one of the key informants suggested:

“Sensitize the people about bullying and school violence, adopt life skills sexuality-based education, it will teach our kids how to help one another and will help them in skilling them with the skills of knowing when to say no, whom to report to if things don’t go well in their lives. It is to be included in the curriculum. Also, sensitize the whole community and parents during parents meeting on all media platforms about the dangers of bullying and school violence.”

Key Informant Interview

Sensitisation programmes and campaigns in schools and communities are crucial to deconstruct several of the negative beliefs and attitudes towards disability, one of the leading causes of violence and bullying for children with disabilities. Awareness must be built of child protection and safeguarding policies and laws, particularly for children with disabilities, and systems must be set up to take appropriate legal action in case of any violations.

Participants also reported consequences of school-based violence and bullying. Violence and bullying undermines the self-esteem of students and leads to poor academic performance, disinterest and fear of going to school, as well as school dropouts. Physical, verbal and emotional bullying affects the physical and mental health of children. Sexual violence, seen as widely prevalent among adolescents and children with disabilities, also severely affects the physical and mental health of learners:

“An intellectually disabled child who was abused by a neighbor in the village. She was taken to a special school whereby she was mocked based on that situation. The child ended up living a loose life.”

Girls focus group discussion

Violence and bullying, at home and in schools, also causes children to further perpetuate that violence on other learners. Violence itself is used to combat and deal with violence, both by teachers and peers:

“A learner who was being abused and took it out on other learners. Tearing others’ shirts because he was neglected at home. In one of the special schools there was a learner who was staying with caregiver who abused and neglected him, and when he got to school he tore other children’s shirts and shoes.”

Girls focus group discussion

South Africa

The interviews and FGDs in South Africa involved conversations with officials from OPDs, NGOs and schools. FGDs also included representation from diverse disability types and age groups in communities in Western Cape (Ravensmead, Parrow, Kuilsriver, Westbank, Bellville, Mfuleni, Elsies River).

Trends, patterns and challenges of school-based violence and bullying facing learners with disabilities

School violence and bullying was seen as highly prevalent but not openly discussed in South African society. Several participants observed that lower functioning children are more frequently bullied (across all disabilities) due to being perceived as weaker and 'easier targets'. Further, children moving from mainstream schools to special schools also tended to become bullies in the special schools, copying what was done to them. One key informant noted:

"In my experience children coming from the mainstream schools were bullied there. They were the low-functioning at that school, now they're coming to us, now they're the high-functioning. Then they come and they do to our children what was done to them at their previous school. That's very prevalent at our school."

Key informant (Educator)

Peer to peer violence between children with disabilities in special schools is common. Perpetrators of violence are often those who have faced violence, bullying and discrimination in their schools and communities. Further, increased incidence of gang violence in communities also causes children from these communities to become perpetrators of violence in schools. Participants also reported an increase in cyber-bullying, particularly in more urban communities and among teenage children, due to increased usage of phones and social media. While stronger repercussions have been created for physical bullying and violence over time (including expulsions from schools), emotional and social bullying is still widely prevalent.

There is a crucial link between the home and school environment, as highlighted by several participants. Several children who practice violence in schools, come from violence-filled homes and communities (where they are exposed to gang violence, substance abuse, crime etc.). Further, discrimination seen and faced by children with disabilities at home affects their behaviour in schools, either as victims or perpetrators of violence:

"Oftentimes, the children that we work with come from very violent communities and it seems like that's the way that we deal with conflict is that we exert our power."

Key informant (NGO)

Support required by schools and teachers to address school violence and bullying

Several teachers reported being overwhelmed working with children with disabilities and not having adequate resources and skills to work with children with special needs. There is a strong need to support schools and teachers to become more inclusive, by supporting infrastructure development (e.g. ramps, accessible toilets) and supporting the skill development of teachers (e.g. sign language, various pedagogical techniques for working with different types of learners), as well as smaller class sizes. Besides, teachers form an integral part of children's support systems. Participants noted that teachers should be trained on mental health and bullying concerns and taught about how to deal with these issues. Further, there is a

need for dedicated and trained guidance counsellors at every level. Teachers and staff must be engaged in this conversation early on. Coupled with sensitisation efforts, participants felt these holistic trainings can go a long way towards helping teachers address school violence and bullying.

Participants also noted that reporting systems in schools must be strengthened and clear referral systems should exist. Awareness about existing systems and consequences of violence among learners and teachers is also crucial.

One participant highlighted the mismatch between overarching legal frameworks in South Africa and how perpetrators and victims are dealt with in practice:

“There is no real punishment for bullies. Victim’s rights are not always respected even though they are supposed to be protected by the SA constitution.”

Key informant (Educator)

Participants also spoke about bridging the gap between policy and implementation. This is expanded upon in the policy analysis section of the report.

Causes and consequences of school violence and bullying

Negative attitudes and beliefs towards disability is one of the major causes for discrimination and exclusion (including regional segregation) of children with disabilities. This further translates into physical, verbal and psychological bullying in communities and schools. Several parents mentioned being bullied on account of their child’s disability and being looked down upon in society. Siblings of children with disabilities are also discriminated against. Having a child with disability is considered as something disgraceful and difficult to deal with by the community. This marginalisation further leads to violence and bullying towards children with disabilities in communities and schools. These negative perceptions also exist about schools dealing with children with disabilities. Such stigma affects learners’ self-esteem and their perception towards their disability:

“Community members make us feel bad for attending these (special) schools. Community members refer to these schools as ‘mad schools’ and so we don’t want to attend.”

Boys FGD

“Everywhere I went for help I would always be mocked, lots of mockery and name calling.”

Parents FGD

Further, respondents noted that sexual violence among both boys and girls with disabilities is common. Cases are seldom reported due to taboos surrounding this issue.

Zambia

The interviews and FGDs in Zambia covered a wide range of experts including officials from the Ministries of Education and Community Development and Social Services, academics (University of Zambia), representatives from NGOs (SOS, Disability Rights Watch, Catholic Medical Mission Board) and OPDs(ZAFOD,

ZAPCD). FGDs also included representation from diverse disability types and age groups in Lusaka Province (Kafue District and Chilanga District) and Central Province (Chisamba District).

Trends, patterns and challenges of school violence and bullying facing learners with disabilities

According to the interviewees, bullying and violence is largely prevalent in primary and secondary schools, although no systemic research has been undertaken on this issue in the context of Zambia. While school violence and bullying was reported by participants to have decreased over the years (due to increased awareness, child protection and safeguarding programmes and commitment letters in schools) it is still widely prevalent. In particular, participants reported that children with communication impairments and those with intellectual disabilities face high levels of violence and bullying. Further, several respondents referred to the large prevalence of sexual violence in schools and communities, particularly for girls.

Support required by schools and teachers to address school violence and bullying

Segregation often exacerbates inequality and negative attitudes in society. A strong recommendation that emerged from one of our key informants was the need for inclusive education at all levels:

“I would encourage inclusive education, right through all the stages of learning. So, I would encourage that right from early childhood development we have inclusive education so that the children get to have the acceptance of their fellows with disabilities. So that would greatly reduce school violence and bullying in schools because then children or the learners would know that it is okay to learn with a colleague of mine who has a physical impairment or any other disability.”

Key informant interview

Another recommendation was to strengthen guidance services in schools and make them paid positions. Specifically, while school guidance and counselling services are crucial support systems that must exist in schools to prevent and address school violence and bullying, several schools do not have guidance counsellors. Even if these positions are present, they are often staffed by volunteers and unsalaried staff. A key informant from the Ministry of General Education elaborated on this point:

“The first thing is to strengthen school guidance services. When you look at school guidance services in a school, firstly school guidance teachers are not motivated in that the position of school guidance teacher is not a salaried position. It is coupled with volunteers or is just nominated by the school to do those activities, but when you look at guidance and counselling, that is very serious – an activity that needs a motivated workforce in schools. I had to take some study where I went round in schools trying to find out about guidance teachers; the majority of those teachers are not trained in guidance and counselling. So, you find a school picks on someone who they feel is credible enough to be the guidance teacher. And you know, there are more male guidance teachers than female guidance teachers in the school system and

the services that they provide in schools mostly are not related to guidance and counselling. They do not do counselling and guidance sessions with learners because they are not qualified in that area and they don't know what to do.”

Key informant (Ministry of General Education)

Causes and consequences of school-based violence and bullying

Several participants pointed to the crucial link between violence and bullying within the home/community and that in schools. Increased violence in homes and communities was cited as one of the major factors causing violence and bullying in schools. As one of the KII participants noted:

“There is a link between the home and the school so children who usually bully others come from homes which have challenges. That's why you'll find that when they come to schools, they maybe compensate for what happens in their home to the weaker members in the school. Some teachers who may be violent to some learners. It is also going back to where they are coming from, if there is violence in the homes they would also bring this into the schools by bullying these learners. Then most of these communities where we are, especially for children with disabilities and then the younger child, you'd find that there is very little information about child protection amongst the community members...So when you talk about the violence in schools, we should not forget about the communities where they are coming from because most of these characteristics may be the same, because we are dealing with the same people. The same pupils are going back to the community, the same parents are sending pupils to the school, so the school and community may have similar characteristics of violent activities and bullying that takes place.”

Key Informant Interview

Further, some parents also reported being bullied in communities due to their child's disability, and this affected their livelihood and employment opportunities. Ultimately, several negative attitudes and biases exist towards children with disabilities. This leads to and exacerbates issues of violence and bullying in schools. One of the key informants explained:

“Yes, negative attitudes, cultural beliefs, these two are the biggest factors that contribute to bullying for persons with disabilities and the traditional beliefs about disability, how it starts, the causes, all those as they are transmitted to children. To tell them do not play with another, that child is not a human being. Those factors really bring about a lot of disadvantages to children with disabilities in school. So, children move with this attitude from their homes, from their cultures into their school. The school therefore, has got a mandate to change those perceptions in these children. And that's the battle that we actually have, especially for inclusive education, because now, instead of concentrating on how best these children should learn, we also have to fight the negative attitudes these children come with from their homes.”

Key informant interview

Lack of laws that address the issue of bullying and lack of sensitisation efforts thus result in an unfriendly and unstable school environment where the negative attitudes of peers (and even the school administration) pose a major challenge for learners with disabilities. Traditions and cultural beliefs exacerbate and contribute to many of these negative attitudes and harmful practices in schools.

“One major challenge I think are the traditions as people dwell so much into tradition ...making it difficult to implement the policies in school violence and bullying as what is acceptable in one community might not be acceptable in another community. Hence you find teachers get entangled between modernity and traditions.”

Key informant interview

“There are traditional beliefs, that having sexual relations with a person who is disabled helps you to become cured from a particular disease such as HIV and AIDS. That persons with disabilities can be used as avenues for cleansing and that takes a step further from bullying into sexual violence, sexual abuse, and so on. So I think there is a strong link.”

Key informant interview

School violence and bullying can have several dire consequences. Often as a result of school violence and bullying, children with disabilities feel excluded and do not continue with school. It affects children’s mental health and lowers self-esteem. Dropouts from school were frequently mentioned as a consequence of school violence and bullying. In certain cases, violence and bullying can also lead to permanent disabilities and more serious health concerns. For instance, one key informant reported:

“In violence sometimes we have had situations where children are permanently disabled because of the state or condition of the violence impacted on them. I had a situation when I was District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) for Mkushi, one child’s eye was perforated and the eye became permanently damaged. Many of these things have happened and some children have died in school from the violence that takes place. Then some children have been bullied and have stopped school.”

Key informant (Ministry of General Education)

Summary of findings

School violence and bullying has severe consequences at the individual, regional and national level. Awareness and action towards child protection and safeguarding has significantly improved over the years. However, a lot still needs to be done to strengthen systems in Eastern and Southern Africa and ensure safe and violence-free schools. Our qualitative research (KIs and FGDs) in five countries suggested a wide prevalence of violence and bullying in schools in all countries, across all disability types. Children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to abuse and bullying from peers and elders. A key reason for this is the lack of a strong, inclusive education system that caters to their specific needs.

Lack of resources and training leave schools and teachers under-resourced and constrained, creating an imbalance of opportunity and power among learners, which is then further exploited to violate and abuse learners with disabilities. Further, stigma and cultural beliefs around disability contributes to increased bullying and violence. This indicates an urgent need to further advocacy, awareness and sensitisation efforts within schools and communities. Further, clearer guidance at school-level on dealing with school violence and bullying, including anonymous reporting mechanisms in schools and communities and establishing stricter punitive consequences, is crucial.

Moreover, school violence and bullying cannot be addressed without tackling the needs and challenges of learners outside schools, thus, sensitisation and capacity building efforts must target a learners' ecosystem holistically. As indicated in every country, negative attitudes and perceptions in communities as well as abuse of children with disabilities by their parents often spill over to schools. Time and effort must be spent to address disability stigma and harmful cultural beliefs through widespread community sensitisation efforts.

Key recommendations

1. Education Acts in all five countries may need some level of review and re-assessment of their alignment with the UNCRC and the extent to which it explicitly supports disability inclusion.
2. Similarly, education policies need to be reviewed to ensure alignment with the UNCRC and protections for children with disabilities against school violence and bullying.
3. Due to the rising incidence of school violence and bullying as well as other types of harms including sexual violence and abuse, it is critical that policies outline the additional vulnerability of children with disabilities to such acts and how these incidents should be addressed.
4. Education policies must demonstrate linkages to other government policies that serve as additional mechanisms to support children with disabilities who experience violence and bullying. This is vitally important considering the multi-layered and complex nature of school violence and bullying.
5. There exist gaps between the policies and implementation in all five focal countries. For policies to be successfully implemented, there needs to be well outlined plans, budgets and monitoring frameworks to ensure accountability.
6. Segregation in education creates an imbalance of power that precipitates violence and bullying in schools. Strengthening the inclusiveness of education systems at every level of education (i.e. starting with Early Childhood Development) would expose teachers and non-disabled learners to disabled children and help stop disability stigma.
7. Capacity building and provision of adequate support and resources to teachers in special and mainstream schools is crucial for education and protection of learners with disabilities. Teachers require training, resources and disability sensitisation, beginning during pre-service teacher education, to address the needs of learners with disabilities. This includes staff with a crucial role to play in addressing school violence and bullying, such as guidance counsellors. Governments should allocate resourcing to these positions.
8. Clearer guidance at school-level on dealing with school violence and bullying, including anonymous reporting mechanisms in schools and communities and establishing stricter punitive consequences, would help prevent school violence and bullying.
9. Disability stigma and discrimination is a key cause of school violence and bullying, and intersects with harmful gender and cultural norms. There is an urgent need to address this stigma at school-level. In particular, comprehensive sexuality education is a crucial and effective route by which to challenge the harmful gendered norms that interact with and influence disability stigma.
10. Additionally, stigma and violence reduction efforts must extend beyond the school and into the learners' wider ecosystem (e.g. with parents and the wider community). For example, many parents and community members have no expectation of success from children with disabilities and do not find it useful to

invest in them. Moreover, learners and adults (e.g. teachers) who are victimised at home may be more likely to bully and abuse others in school settings.

References

- Aley, R. (2016). An assessment of the social, cultural and institutional factors that contribute to the sexual abuse of persons with disabilities in East Africa. *Advantage Africa*. Retrieved from: <https://www.advantageafrica.org/file/advantage-africa-full-research-report-sexual-abuse-ofpersons-with-disabilities-pdf>
- Abualghaib, O., Groce, N., Simeu, N., Carew, M. T., & Mont, D. (2019). Making visible the invisible: Why disability-disaggregated data is vital to “leave no-one behind”. *Sustainability*, 11(11), 3091.
- Amnesty International (2021). Malawi: Resurgence of killings and abductions of persons with albinism spells a dangerous escalation. Retrieved from: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/02/malawi-resurgence-of-killings-and-abductions-of-persons-with-albinism-spells-a-dangerous-escalation/>
- Chiu, Y. L., Kao, S., Tou, S. W., & Lin, F. G. (2017). Effect of personal characteristics, victimization types, and family-and school-related factors on psychological distress in adolescents with intellectual disabilities. *Psychiatry Research*, 248, 48-55.
- Council of Europe (2020). *Comprehensive sexuality education protects children and helps build a safer, inclusive society*. Retrieved from: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/-/comprehensive-sexuality-education-protects-children-and-helps-build-a-safer-inclusive-society>
- De Boer, A., Pijl, S. J., & Minnaert, A. (2011). Regular primary schoolteachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(3), 331-353.
- Delprato, M., Akyeamong, K., & Dunne, M. (2017). The impact of bullying on students’ learning in Latin America: A matching approach for 15 countries. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 52, 37-57.
- Devries, K. M., Child, J. C., Allen, E., Walakira, E., Parkes, J., & Naker, D. (2014a). School violence, mental health, and educational performance in Uganda. *Pediatrics*, 133(1), e129-e137.
- Devries, K. M., Kyegombe, N., Zuurmond, M., Parkes, J., Child, J. C., Walakira, E. J., & Naker, D. (2014b). Violence against primary school children with disabilities in Uganda: a cross-sectional study. *BMC public health*, 14(1), 1-9.
- Division for Social Policy and Development (DSPD). (2016). *Toolkit on Disability for Africa – Culture, Beliefs and Disability*. New York: United Nations.
- Eisenberg, M. E., Gower, A. L., McMorris, B. J., & Bucchianeri, M. M. (2015). Vulnerable bullies: Perpetration of peer harassment among youths across sexual orientation, weight, and disability status. *American journal of public health*, 105(9), 1784-1791.
- Inguanzo, I. (2017). *The situation of indigenous children with disabilities*. Brussels, Belgium: European Union.

- International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity. (2016). *The learning generation: Investing in education for a changing world*. New York: *International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity*. Retrieved from: <https://report.educationcommission.org/report/>
- Jones, L., Bellis, M. A., Wood, S., Hughes, K., McCoy, E., Eckley, L., ... & Officer, A. (2012). Prevalence and risk of violence against children with disabilities: a systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies. *The Lancet*, 380(9845), 899-907.
- Kowalski, R. M., Morgan, C. A., Drake-Lavelle, K., & Allison, B. (2016). Cyberbullying among college students with disabilities. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 57, 416-427.
- Lang, R., Schneider, M., Kett, M., Cole, E., & Groce, N. (2019). Policy development: An analysis of disability inclusion in a selection of African Union policies. *Development Policy Review*, 37(2), 155-175.
- Leonard Cheshire, (2021). *Stories from the classroom: how learners with disabilities can promote safe and inclusive education*. London, UK: Leonard Cheshire.
- Loughnan, S., Koike, M., & Bevens, C. Dehumanization, Violence, and Genocide. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Psychology*. Retrieved from <https://oxfordre.com/psychology/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.001.0001/acrefore-9780190236557-e-271>
- Malecki, C. K., Demaray, M. K., Smith, T. J., & Emmons, J. (2020). Disability, poverty, and other risk factors associated with involvement in bullying behaviors. *Journal of School Psychology*, 78, 115-132.
- Malahmaki (2021) *Gender-based violence against women and girls with disabilities*. Brussels, Belgium: Foundation for European Progressive Studies.
- Mitra, M., Mouradian, V. E., & McKenna, M. (2013). Dating violence and associated health risks among high school students with disabilities. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 17(6), 1088-1094.
- Mostert, M.P. (2016). Stigma as a barrier to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa. *African Disability Rights Yearbook*, 2-24.
- Njelesani, J., Hashemi, G., Cameron, C., Cameron, D., Richard, D., & Parnes, P. (2018). From the day they are born: a qualitative study exploring violence against children with disabilities in West Africa. *BMC public health*, 18(1), 1-7.
- Nyokangi, D., & Phasha, N. (2016). Factors contributing to sexual violence at selected schools for learners with mild intellectual disability in South Africa. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 29(3), 231-241.
- Phasha, T. N., & Myaka, L. D. (2014). Sexuality and sexual abuse involving teenagers with intellectual disability: Community conceptions in a rural village of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. *Sexuality and Disability*, 32(2), 153-165.

Phasha, T. N., & Nyokangi, D. (2012). School-based sexual violence among female learners with mild intellectual disability in South Africa. *Violence against women, 18*(3), 309-321.

Rohwerder, B. (2018). *Disability stigma in developing countries*. Sussex: Institute for Development Studies.

Sentenac, M., Gavin, A., Gabhainn, S. N., Molcho, M., Due, P., Ravens-Sieberer, U., ... & Godeau, E. (2013). Peer victimization and subjective health among students reporting disability or chronic illness in 11 Western countries. *The European Journal of Public Health, 23*(3), 421-426.

UNESCO. (2019). *Behind the numbers: Ending school violence and bullying*. Paris, France: UNESCO.

UNESCO (2021). *Violence and bullying in educational settings The experience of children and young people with disabilities*. Paris, France: UNESCO.

UNICEF, (2021) *Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities*. New York: UNICEF.

United Nations Department of Economic & Social Affairs (2019). *Disability and Development Report*. New York: United Nations.

United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. New York: United Nations.

United Nations. (2008). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. New York: United Nations.