

Education Unions Take Action to End School-Related Gender Based Violence

*United Nations Girls' Education
Initiative, Education International,
Gender at Work, Global Affairs
Canada*

© UNICEF / UN1149560 / Scherbrucker

Midterm Report | October 2018

TEACHERS AND EDUCATION UNIONS AT THE FOREFRONT OF EFFORTS TO END SRGBV

School-related gender based violence (SRGBV) has a devastating impact on learners around the world. Every year, millions of children and adolescents – mostly girls – are deprived of their right to an equitable and inclusive education. Policy makers, governments, educators, parents and activists are increasingly confronted by this problem and looking for the most effective measures to end gender based violence in and around schools. Education unions are playing a unique role in this global effort.

Globally, teachers are recognised as the most important resource in education but the challenges of combating SRGBV are complex. Everyone in a school community – students, teachers, management and education support staff – can experience SRGBV, as victim, perpetrator or both. When educators experience or witness SRGBV in one form or another, they often turn to their trade unions for assistance. Education unions have a dual mandate of both promoting quality education and defending the interests of their members. Because unions represent large parts of the teaching profession in most countries, they provide a powerful forum for educators to respond to SRGBV. Launched in January 2016, the ***Education Unions Take Action to End School-Related Gender Based Violence*** is a four-year programme that supports education unions and their members in their efforts to end SRGBV through empowering teachers as active agents of change in seven African countries.

Schools are mirrors of society, and eliminating SRGBV will only come with a shift in norms, practices and behaviours. This programme enables education union members to lead the culture shift within their own organisations and the broader education community. Educators and union members are invited to question their own assumptions about gender roles in education, their unions and society, develop creative solutions and test out new ways of behaving. It is this type of transformative approach that underpins the ***Education Unions Take Action to End SRGBV*** programme.

This report provides a brief overview of the context, key players and approach, as well as some examples of work undertaken by education unions in the first two years of implementation.

WHAT IS SCHOOL-RELATED GENDER BASED VIOLENCE?

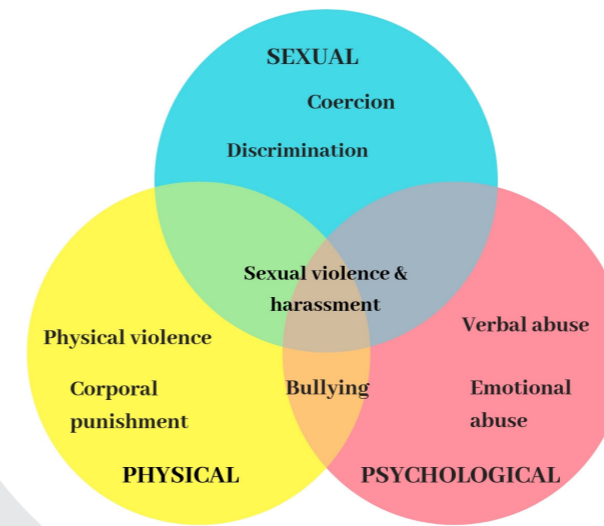


Figure 1. The different types of SRGBV

School-related gender based violence (SRGBV) prevents millions of children and adolescents worldwide – especially girls – from exercising their right to a safe, inclusive and quality education. As stated in a 2015 [report](#) published by the [Global Working Group to End SRGBV](#): “An estimated 246 million children experience violence in and around school every year and its impact causes compromised attendance, lower academic results and higher drop-out rates.”

SRGBV refers to threats or acts of sexual, physical or psychological violence occurring in and around schools. It is a result of gender norms and stereotypes, and enforced by unequal power dynamics between men and women, and between teachers and students.

It also refers to the differences between girls’ and boys’ experiences of, and vulnerabilities to, violence. Students, educators and education support personnel alike can be both victims and perpetrators of SRGBV. While men and women, girls and boys can all be affected, girls and women are most vulnerable to this type of violence.

According to [UNESCO and UNGEI](#), SRGBV includes physical violence, bullying, verbal or sexual harassment, non-consensual touching, sexual coercion, assault and rape. Also, in some contexts where corporal punishment is still used as a form of discipline in schools, this often manifests in gendered and discriminatory ways. Other acts of SRGBV stem from everyday school practices that reinforce stereotyping and gender inequality, and encourage violent or unsafe environments.

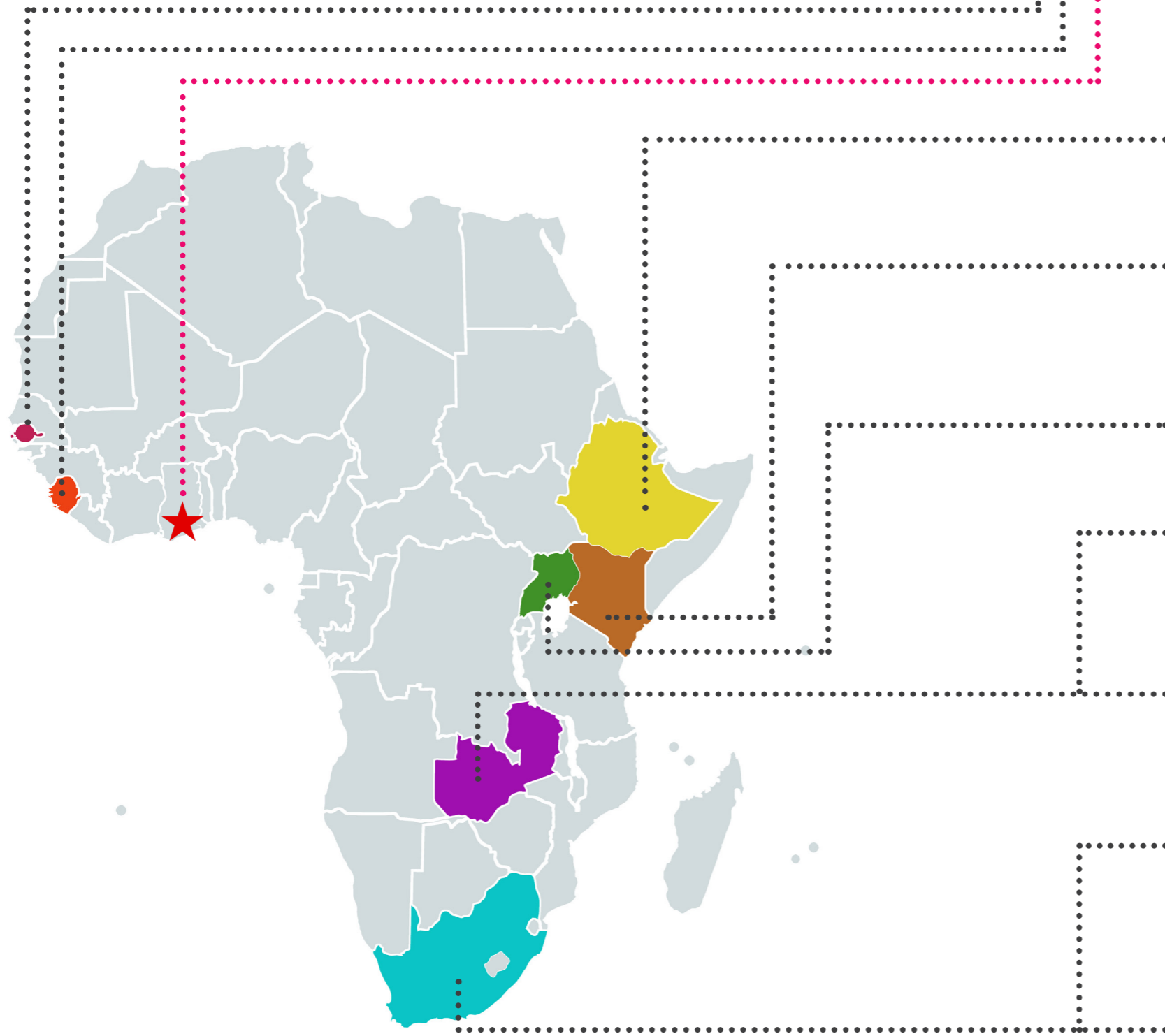
“Sometimes as female teachers we scold and dismiss girls who report SRGBV. We tell them they asked for it and ask questions like: ‘why did you visit the teacher? Why were you the last one to leave the class?’ We forget about the power relations at play.

– Female union change team member, Southern Africa



COLLABORATING TO END SRGBV: KEY ACTORS

The primary agents of change in the programme are members of the participating education unions, who are taking action to combat SRGBV within their union structures, local schools and communities. The programme works directly with nine education unions in seven countries across Eastern, Southern and Western Africa and supports unions across the continent through the Education International (EI) Africa Regional Office based in Accra, Ghana. Together, these education unions represent over 1 million teachers at primary, secondary and tertiary institutions across the seven countries.



The Gambia Teachers Union (GTU)



Sierra Leone Teachers' Union (SLTU)



EI Africa Regional Office



Ethiopia Teachers Association (ETA)



Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT)



Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU)



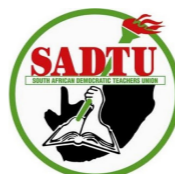
Zambia National Union of Teachers (ZNUT)



Basic Education Teachers' Union of Zambia (BETUZ)



National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA)



South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU)

KEY ACTORS



The [United Nations Girls' Education Initiative](#) (UNGEI) is a partnership of organisations committed to gender equality in education and the empowerment of girls and young women. Established in 2000, UNGEI is a global authority on gender and education and provides a platform for partners to exchange experience and speak with one voice to accelerate progress. UNGEI's role as convener and knowledge manager has been key in bringing multiple actors together and securing the resources to support the **Education Unions Take Action to End SRGBV** programme. UNGEI provides the platform for sharing the lessons emerging from the programme. In 2013, UNGEI set SRGBV as a policy and advocacy priority and since then UNGEI has supported initiatives that demonstrate the critical role teachers and unions play to end SRGBV. In 2014, UNGEI convened a [Global Working Group to End SRGBV](#) for joint advocacy, research, and global guidance on SRGBV. UNGEI also hosts the [e-resource](#) centre on SRGBV documentation. The UNGEI Secretariat is hosted by [UNICEF](#).



[Education International](#) (EI) represents organisations of teachers and other education employees across the globe. It is the world's largest federation of unions, representing 32 million education employees in 400 organisations in 170 countries and territories. Since it was founded in 1993, EI has worked to achieve gender equality within trade unions and in education as a key policy and programmatic priority. EI adopted a Resolution on SRGBV at the 7th EI World Congress in 2015, creating an institutional framework to work on SRGBV as a priority across its membership. In this programme, EI is responsible for liaising and coordinating with participating education unions (all of which are EI member organisations) and other collaborators, providing technical support through the Africa Regional Office in Accra, Ghana and the EI Secretariat in Brussels, Belgium.



[Gender at Work](#) is an international feminist knowledge network that works to end discrimination against women and build cultures of inclusion. Since its establishment in 2003, Gender at Work associates have supported more than 100 organisations to tackle gender inequality and discriminatory social norms. In this programme, Gender at Work is responsible for designing and facilitating Gender Action Learning (GAL) processes with participating unions, as well as coordinating programme implementation.



The programme is made possible by the generous financial support of [Global Affairs Canada](#).

EMPOWERING UNION MEMBERS TO TAKE ACTION

The programme uses Gender Action Learning (GAL) as a participatory approach rooted in principles of gender-transformative change. Through this approach, participants come to understand the nature of gender inequality and gender based violence in their context.

During the first two years of the programme (2016-2017), representatives from seven unions from across Eastern and Southern Africa developed new skills and established union-led initiatives to combat SRGBV. Following this initial experience, two more unions in West Africa joined with the EI Africa Regional Office to participate in the programme starting in late 2017.

The Gender Action Learning (GAL) process has allowed each union to test its own approaches to combat SRGBV, while sharing the experience with others. Peer learning within and between the different unions has been a core and successful strategy to sustain participants' commitment and to find creative solutions to challenges encountered.



SADTU change team members at the third peer learning workshop held in Lusaka, September 2017 (Photo courtesy: Lexi Stergakis).

WHAT IS GENDER ACTION LEARNING (GAL)?

Gender Action Learning (GAL) uses experiential, peer based learning to allow people to grapple with gendered power dynamics at individual, organisational and community levels. The GAL process for the **Education Unions Take Action to End SRGBV** initiative has included the following steps:

Engaging leadership – The General Secretaries of the participating unions have met on several occasions to share their commitment and experiences in tackling SRGBV.

Hearing our Stories – an initial meeting of 20 to 35 union leaders and members is held in each union's head office or training facility. Participants share their experiences of GBV in their schools and unions and build a shared understanding of the issues.

Change Teams – each union forms an internal change team, made up of four or five members from different levels of the union structure. These teams identify change experiments to fight SRGBV and work on them over 15 months.

Peer Learning Workshops – within the 15-month period, members of the different change teams come together at three peer learning workshops to share what they have tried through their change experiments and to reflect on how to combat SRGBV in their different contexts.

Mentoring and capacity building – Gender at Work facilitators provide mentoring to the change team members as they test out their change experiments, to build knowledge and skills to fight SRGBV within their unions, schools and communities.



Figure 2. Gender Action Learning

“Thank you for creating the space for each change team to work and focus on their change experiments. I am grateful for the opportunity to bond with my change team and other teams. My mind opened up to gender relations. There are moments I felt sad, hopeless, withdrew because of the intensity of what was coming out. And then there were moments when I felt inspired that am not alone. You cannot come into this experience and not be touched personally, and not be affected by the experiences.

– Female union change team member, Southern Africa



Mrs. Anais Dayamba, El Africa Regional Office staff member speaking in Lusaka, September 2017 (Photo courtesy: Lexi Stergakis).

HOW UNIONS ARE FIGHTING SRGBV: SOME EXAMPLES

Since the *Education Unions Take Action to End SRGBV* programme was launched in January 2016, 396 union staff and members have been directly engaged in actions to tackle SRGBV¹. These actions have in turn reached over 30,000 individuals². Here are some examples of the actions unions have taken in the first two years of the programme:

Ethiopia Teachers Association (ETA): Building a Culture of Equality to Fight SRGBV

During the first meeting in July 2016, women union members identified the lack of space for women to talk about their issues within the union as a serious constraint to understanding and taking action against SRGBV. Since women's voices were not being heard, the change team decided to work towards increasing the number of women officers within the union. When ETA held elections in late 2016, change team members actively encouraged women members to run for union office, resulting in an increase in the number of women elected. Change team members then worked with the newly elected women to raise their awareness about SRGBV and mobilise them to fight it. In October 2017, the ETA Executive Council agreed to establish a Women's Leadership Group, to allow current women leaders to share experiences and to bring young women teachers into leadership positions. This is the first time that ETA has established a union structure for addressing gender inequality within the union where roughly one quarter of the members are women.

Kenyan National Union of Teachers (KNUT): Developing Friendly and Peaceful Learning Environments

KNUT chose to create friendly and peaceful learning environments in a number of pilot schools. Four counties were targeted in 2016 to develop pilot SRGBV-free schools. Three change team members from primary schools (in Makueni, Muranga and Bungoma counties) and one from a teacher's training college (in Mombasa) were responsible for working within their own institutions to introduce the SRGBV programme, and to reach out to additional schools in each of their counties via their local KNUT branch. In 2017, additional pilot schools were targeted in three counties (Makueni, Muranga and Mombasa). KNUT members were trained using the Gender Action Learning (GAL) methodology to act as SRGBV resource people for their schools. These teachers have worked with school clubs and at sporting events to talk to learners about SRGBV. They have engaged other teachers in informal spaces, such as tea and lunch breaks, and have reached out to guidance and counselling teachers.

Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU): Building Women Teachers' Confidence and Leadership

Building the voice and leadership of women within unions can shift organisational cultures to support work on SRGBV. One important and sometimes overlooked reality is that women teachers may experience GBV in the course of their work and in their unions. The UNATU change team has sought to lessen the vulnerability of women teachers through building their confidence and leadership skills since low pay and precarious job status can make teachers more vulnerable to GBV and other forms of intimidation. In August 2017, the UNATU change team trained sixty female and five male school representatives to enhance their knowledge and skills on entrepreneurship and leadership with the aim of getting more women into leadership positions. The participants came from the remote and hard to reach schools of Mayuge, Kaliro and Namutumba in the Busoga region. The workshop named several barriers preventing women from taking on leadership positions within the union, including lack of confidence, low self-esteem, gender stereotypes, inadequate qualifications and low income, the same conditions that render teachers and learners vulnerable to SRGBV. Each participant came up with an action plan related to personal empowerment and strategised on how to collectively support more women to be more effective leaders.

Basic Education Teachers' Union of Zambia (BETUZ): School Clubs as Entry Points to Addressing SRGBV

Change teams members have worked with school clubs as useful entry points to address SRGBV. Most interventions have engaged girls separately from boys, to give both boys and girls space to speak freely, gain confidence, and improve their knowledge, attitudes and practices in managing violence and inequality. To further this aim, BETUZ introduced suggestion boxes in some schools. Both teachers and learners can suggest topics the school clubs should address. It is also being used as a safe, less intimidating way for learners to report SRGBV cases. They have also tested the use of notice boards where learners, teachers and support staff can post informative media articles focusing on SRGBV. The initiative challenges the norm that only teachers can provide information in the school settings and invites learners to share what they're reading about SRGBV and learn from others. Change team members note that previously, cases of SRGBV were rarely reported, but now people are reporting and inquiring about SRGBV. BETUZ has become a 'go to' source of information on radio and television in Zambia, further breaking the silence that surrounds SRGBV.

¹ Cumulative figure of all participants from Eastern and Southern Africa in GAL events in 2016-17.

² Participants at all awareness raising on SRGBV in Eastern and Southern Africa held in schools, union meetings and communities 2016-17.

Zambian National Teachers Union (ZNUT): Changing Policies to Build Commitment to Fight SRGBV

As an initial step, ZNUT revised the union's gender equality policy to focus more explicitly on how to handle SRGBV. Their approach to dealing with union members who are accused of perpetrating SRGBV has changed. Previously perpetrators could turn to the union to defend them. Now the union cautions that it will not represent members who are clearly guilty of perpetrating SRGBV. ZNUT engaged actively as a knowledgeable partner in defining the Zambian government's new code of ethics for the teaching profession (adopted in January 2018) and is playing a leading role in informing teachers about the provisions of the code. ZNUT also modified its constitution to create a new national youth committee with core responsibilities in fighting SRGBV. The change team members feel that by enlisting young teachers to lead in the union's efforts to end SRGBV, they will not only be more successful in reducing GBV in schools but also open the door to a new generation of union leaders.

National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA): Taking a 'Whole Community' Approach

The union had initially undertaken research on specific forms of violence facing communities where NAPTOSA members work. In Western Cape, the issue of safety from gangsterism is a challenge. In Mpumalanga, sexual abuse and HIV are a challenge. In the North West province, the burning issue is teacher-learner relationships. Where poverty and unemployment are rampant, many people see a sexual relationship with a teacher as an opportunity. Parents often encourage their children to pursue relations with teachers and often prevent principals from reporting incidents of sexual violence. Law enforcement is not quick to assist principals and schools to deal with abuse of learners' rights. This analysis pointed out the need for a 'whole community' approach involving students, teachers, school administrators, parents and community leaders to reflect on gender norms and how they perpetuate SRGBV. Provincial union change teams have worked to raise awareness of SRGBV with union members at all levels, including specific work with male teachers, with school governing bodies, and with students and their parents. Participants connect with their own histories of violence, and work to find policies and practices that promote non-violence. This approach tends to secure greater buy-in across communities.

South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU): Bringing About Change Through Policy Reform

The SADTU change team are taking action at many levels to address SRGBV within their own structures, as well as at the school and community levels. The SADTU change team members worked to amend the union's gender equality policy to include SRGBV, which ensures dedicated funds for work on SRGBV. The process gave the union the opportunity to review their membership's professional code of conduct to identify how best to deal with members who perpetrate SRGBV. The change team also developed a draft LGBTQI³ policy that highlights the need to eliminate all forms of discrimination and to create a safe environment for all members and learners, regardless of sexual orientation. SADTU plans to work with relevant stakeholders to revise the school curricula to address discrimination that incites violence against LGBTQI learners and teachers.

West Africa Peer Learning Cohort: Gambia Teachers Union (GTU), Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU), Education International Africa Regional Office (EIARO): Building on Past Experience to Deepen and Broaden the Fight against SRGBV

The programme introduced Gender Action Learning to West African unions in 2018 but the unions there had already been fighting SRGBV in their contexts for several years. Based on this experience, SLTU intends to make greater use of national television, radio and newspapers plus the union's own newsletter to raise public awareness and acceptance of the need to fight GBV in and around schools. In the Gambia, GTU plans to work with their existing study circles to reach school drama club members and traditional communicators to carry messages concerning SRGBV into schools and communities in ways that allow many voices to be heard. The EI Africa Regional Office hope to monitor closely the many initiatives carried out by unions across the continent, capture stories and share lessons learned to build greater momentum among unions to eradicate SRGBV in Africa.

³ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex.

KEY FACTORS UNIONS CONSIDER WHEN TACKLING SRGBV

Education union members have identified a number of critical factors they need to take into consideration in their specific contexts when grappling with SRGBV.

Building Political Will

The commitment and formal engagement of unions' leadership and other key decision-makers has proven a key ingredient to sustaining action against SRGBV. Building on the important political foundations EI laid in the years prior to **Education Unions Take Action to End SRGBV**, General Secretaries of the participating unions have come together on several occasions to share their experiences and reaffirm their commitment.

Gathering and Using Data on SRGBV

Union activists have recognised the power of evidence as an asset in deepening union members' understanding of the breadth of SRGBV. Some of the participating unions made use of existing data or rapid baseline surveys to understand the problems at the outset of their change experiments.

Change Experiments

Programme participants identify the experiential nature of the GAL process as a powerful component of the methodology. While sharing a common goal, each change team was free to identify changes that they felt were most appropriate and strategic in their settings, resulting in a broad variety of change experiments and related activities. The cyclical, peer based, reflective practices in the process allowed change team members to draw inferences and adjust approaches from these experiments, even when they did not unfold as planned.



Mr. Humphrey Mwangi, KNUT change team member, Kenya

(Photo courtesy: Lexi Stergakis).

Selection, Structure and Mandate of Change Teams

Participants consistently acknowledged the importance of the change team model for sustaining change within their structures. Each union made slightly different choices in the composition of their change team and these choices created different advantages and challenges. For example, KNUT appointed classroom teachers in different regions of the country who succeeded in creating important changes at the local level. Several unions appointed elected union officials and senior staff who were able to mobilise resources for their change experiments. ETA replicated the change team structure at all levels of the union throughout the country, and integrated a representative from the Ministry of Education at each level. Working together across functions, levels and regions, union change teams have proven effective in bringing about organisational change.

Creating Space for New or Difficult Conversations

Participants spoke of the importance of breaking the silence around SRGBV. The workshops and mentoring gave change team members the necessary skills to take up difficult conversations about challenging issues such as bullying among students, sexual harassment among colleagues and inappropriate relations between teachers and learners. Participants appreciated the methodologies that allowed them to connect deeply and share their own lived experience, and to pull apart the social norms that underpin those experiences.



Leah Kasaji, Gender Director, ZNUT, Zambia; Yohannes Benti, President, ETA; Temesgen Kebebew, Ethiopia change team member; Juliet Wajega, Deputy General Secretary, UNATU, Uganda; Josephine Nabuyung, change team member, UNATU (Photo courtesy: Lexi Stergakis).

Mobilising Resources

The programme supported change teams to plan and learn from their change experiments, but each union had to find their own resources internally and externally to put their change experiments into action. Each team found creative and sustainable ways to ensure their work moved forward. The fact that the unions did not wait for external donors to take up the fight against SRGBV demonstrates their strong sense of ownership for these initiatives.

Collaborating with Stakeholders

In Southern and Eastern Africa, change teams and their unions have established new relationships with other stakeholders to ensure the sustainability and scope of anti-SRGBV work. This is a significant shift from the beginning of the project, when the teams were more internally focussed. Through the change experiments, unions have engaged with a range of new actors—including government ministries, teaching services commissions, NGOs and other education unions. In many countries, these stakeholders now look to unions as leaders in the struggle against SRGBV.

CHANGING ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND SOCIAL NORMS

While each of the unions participating in the **Education Unions Take Action to End SRGBV** programme has a specific history and established ways of working, education unions tend to have formal, hierarchical decision-making structures and procedures, with members coming from grassroots schools through to national councils. These structures allow education unions to build consensus and mobilise for action on a very large scale. These practices can also become formulaic, procedural and patriarchal in ways that weaken personal commitment and authentic relationships.

The GAL process has disrupted organisational norms within the participating unions by creating space for different kinds of conversations, and allowing teachers to reconnect with their motivation to educate and protect their students. At the same time, the unions' ability to sustain these changes depends on the formal decision-making processes that can stifle reflection and meaningful conversations. This tension between simultaneously disrupting and replicating organisational and social norms plays itself out in many concrete ways and raises many interesting questions:

- *How to encourage change teams to innovate and adapt their approaches while ensuring they respect the various procedures and protocols required by their profession and their union membership?*
- *How can educators reduce corporal punishment in the classroom in places where parents and traditional norms support its use in the home?*
- *How can teachers be prevented from engaging in relationships with students in contexts where gender norms and poverty make this behaviour appear normal?*
- *How to promote both compliance and commitment to union codes of conduct regarding SRGBV?*
- *How to ensure that those union representatives speaking out against SRGBV are themselves not perpetrating it?*

Education unions will continue to explore these questions over the remainder of the programme as they define their plans to ensure sustainability of their work to eliminate SRGBV.

LOOKING FORWARD

“*There cannot be any quality education while SRGBV remains.*”

– Male union change team member, West Africa

The **Education Unions Take Action to End SRGBV** programme is funded to the end of 2019 but the commitment of participating unions and the education union movement as a whole will carry forward their efforts to eradicate SRGBV well into the future. In the remaining months, the participating unions and implementing partners will focus on embedding the approaches they have developed to fight SRGBV more deeply into organisational policies and programmes. Together, they intend to share their experience combatting SRGBV with other education unions and key stakeholders locally, nationally and internationally in ways that inspire and mobilise a broader cross section of actors to take action against SRGBV and enable all learners to enjoy their right to safe, equitable and inclusive education.



