ABSTRACT

In the fifteen years since Beijing, there has been enormous progress in awareness of multiple forms of violence against girls, with research, policy and practice increasingly focusing on and attempting to address violence in and out of school settings. This paper traces these important areas of progress as well as the gaps and challenges. The key question in our analysis is why it is that despite growing awareness and action at international, national and local level, we still have insufficient knowledge about how to combat violence, with girls lacking adequate support and capacity to protect themselves. To address this question, we discuss four broad areas. Following a discussion of theoretical issues and concepts, we examine research evidence on violence against girls. We then consider how violence has been addressed in policy and practice in recent years. Finally, we make some tentative suggestions for the way forward.

THEORETICAL DEBATES ON THE MEANING OF VIOLENCE

Violence is a complex, contested concept, and different ways of understanding the meaning of violence have produced different kinds of research and action. In popular understandings, violence is associated with physical acts of force, but increasingly broad definitions are now widely used, incorporating psychological as well as physical acts, with the recognition that harm can be inflicted through psychological means. The UN World Report on Violence Against Children (2006), for example, refers to: ‘All forms of physical and mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse’. Drawing attention to the gendered dimensions of violence, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of all forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW, 2003) refers to: ‘Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life’. In these definitions, the incorporation of non-physical forms, like childhood neglect, threats, and depriving of liberty through, for example trafficking and forced prostitution, has expanded understanding of the meanings of violence.

Increasing coherence in the ways violence is defined has facilitated identification across boundaries of multiple forms of violence, leading to revelations about widespread violence against girls in schools and communities in the global north and south. Violence against girls occurs frequently in intimate private spaces deemed to be outside the public gaze. These include families and homes, educational institutions, neighbourhoods and other social sites in communities. Acts of violence are often hidden, sometimes taken for granted and hence, unrecognised; and at other times violence is unreported for fear of repercussion or rejection (even parents have been reported to fear repercussions on them and their affected child). Drawing attention to violations of girls in these private spaces has been a major achievement since Beijing. However, focusing on the prevalence of violence can create problems. Firstly, an over-emphasis on acts of violence can downplay the workings of power that underpin these acts. All too often, the gendered dimensions of violence are ignored. Second, the quest for universal definitions can detract from the importance of subjective meanings.
Violence is inextricably related to power, serving to reinforce or change the social order. Physical punishment for example, is used to maintain the balance of power between adults and children. Intimate partner violence may be used to perpetuate male authority, particularly when a man feels this is threatened by for example a woman achieving higher status in education or the labour market (Silberschmidt, 2001 and 2005). Violence against women and girls in wars and civil conflicts can arise from men’s struggles to wrest power, resources and political control. Recognising these links between power and violence in relation to girls in school, Fiona Leach has distinguished between explicit and implicit gender violence (Leach 2006). Explicit gender violence includes overtly sexual acts, like sexual harassment, including touching, groping or verbal abuse, and forced sex or rape, assault and intimidation. Implicit gender violence includes practices that that reinforce gender discrimination, like teachers’ toleration of boys’ domination of classroom space, or of gender differentiated punishments in which girls do cleaning while boys do gardening or giving blind eye to overt acts of violence against girls. These practices, in reinforcing unequal gender relations, may increase the likelihood of explicit or perpetuation of acts of gender violence.

The focus on power relations has been an important development in thinking about violence as it draws attention to the ways in which acts of violence are always embedded within a social context, and emphasises the need for broader structural and institutional transformations to combat violence. But as well as examining structural forces, increasingly work on violence against girls pays attention to the subjective meanings of violence and the ways in which these vary within and across contexts. An act of physical punishment might, for example, be seen as a human rights abuse in one context, while in another it is understood to keep order in a way that protects girls – ironically, ‘in the interest of girls’. Practices like early marriage or female genital mutilation (FGM), which are deeply rooted in local traditions, may not be recognised as violent at all, proving particularly intractable to change. Paying attention to subjective meanings reveals how girls are far from passive victims, sometimes committing acts of violence themselves, often resisting and challenging violence. As young men and women negotiate their own gendered identities, frequently they police their own and each other’s behaviour, excluding those who do not fit in, and struggling to prove their own credentials within the gendered hierarchies of schools. The acts of violence that can erupt within these struggles can only be understood through examining subjective understandings.

In research, policy and practice, violence against girls is understood in different ways, leading to different forms of action. A focus on acts of violence leads to interventions to protect victims or punish perpetrators. A focus on subjective meanings leads to interactive work within communities and individuals to create dialogue and debate on beliefs and practices as well as relevant life skills. Arguably, however, the focus on physical actions, and on diversity and complexity can be seen as deterring from or sidelineing the structural inequalities which are at the root of violence against girls (Reilly 2009). Focusing solely on acts of violence, and on individual perpetrators and victims portrays violence as an aberration, uprooted from its social context. However, the increasing attention to the gendered dimensions of violence illuminates how these are not isolated acts but produced through structures of inequality. Focusing on the complexity of dynamics within a local context further deepens our understandings, but can all too easily lose the bigger picture. However, we argue that synthesising these different theoretical understandings can generate nuanced research studies, which both expand and deepen our knowledge, as we discuss in the next section.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM EMPIRICAL WORK ON GIRLS AND VIOLENCE

A major area of progress over the last fifteen years has been the increasing research attention to violence within education. Much of this research – and in particular gender based violence (GBV) that targets schoolgirls and young women in educational institutions- tends to be small scale and qualitative. This
may be mainly because GBV touches on sensitive issues that challenge traditional gender and sexuality cultures thus creating difficulties for ‘outsiders’ who choose to conduct research in that area (Mirsy 2003). With the borders and boundaries of violence disputed between ‘experts’ it is hardly surprising that researchers find that violence against girls may be shrouded in silence, with cultural stereotypes and myths regarding gender relations and violence creating situations whereby such violence goes unchallenged and even unrecognised. Consequently, a culture of voicelessness/silence serves to perpetuate the violence from one generation to the next. In drawing attention to these silences, researchers risk causing distress and further harm to girls, who may be punished for talking of such experiences (WHO 2001; Action Aid 2010). Research therefore requires immense sensitivity to ethical considerations and to specific contexts.

While generalising beyond these small scale contextual studies is problematic, there are a number of key themes recurring across studies. Empirical evidence is increasingly illuminating the multiple forms of violence affecting children, with women and girls suffering disproportionately from many forms of violence throughout their lifecycle – from the prenatal stage (as in foeticide), to infancy, childhood, adolescence, reproductive stage and finally to the old age (neglect/ lack of care). Analysis of GBV and its effects on the education of girls reveals complex interconnectedness of various forms of violence. Physical acts of violence often mask the everyday inequalities and power differentiations of educational settings. Gender relations intersect with other inequalities based on age, socio-economic, regional, location, ethnicity, and sexual orientation in shaping girls’ experiences of violence. Violence affects girls’ health and education with effects that continue to haunt girls into adulthood. Along with the physical injuries and reproductive health complications linked to GBV, are psychological and emotional costs affecting girls’ access to and achievement in schools (Bott, Morrison, and Ellsberg 2005). Repeated exposure to violence has cumulative costs, with studies in the USA, Britain, South Africa and Canada reporting that although boys and older children were more likely to have experienced physical violence, girls reported more post traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) and depressive symptoms (Jaycox, Stein, Sheryl and. Kataoka et al 2002, Seedat et al 2004).

**Corporal punishment in school: –the most visible form of violence?**

Research shows that one of the key avenues for GBV, including sexual violence against girls in schools and educational settings is corporal punishment. This form of punishment is characterised by generational as well as gender-based power inequalities, and dispossesses children of their rights to bodily and emotional integrity. Portrayed as a ‘discipline measure’ that is effective in socialising children, corporal punishment is made to look ‘acceptable’ even to the recipients, their families and communities particularly in Africa, parts of Asia, the Middle East and East European countries (see Pinheiro, 2006: 117; Newell 2007). Globally, the UN World Report on Violence against Children confirms that less than half (106 out of 223) of the countries and states that were tracked by the Global Initiative to end all Corporal Punishment of Children had instituted the relevant laws. Where laws were explicit, corporal punishment may still (and still does) occur but with a magnitude that is relatively less severe than in countries where laws do not exist, thus underscoring the power of legislation. However, the observed reluctance to enforce legislation against corporal punishment in many countries provides little motivation to remove structural barriers and re-construct schools as sites where girls and boys are empowered to identify, challenge and report violence (Mitchell and Chege, 2006, Ruto and Chege, 2006). Age and gender clearly influenced the manner in which teachers administered corporal punishment, with older girls more likely to be sexually harassed in the process. Sometimes, disability and socio-economic background also directed the form of GBV. In countries of the Eastern and Southern African region, for example, teachers, both male and female, were reportedly more likely to use caning, beatings, and whippings on boys, while being more likely to use verbal abuse and psychological humiliation for the girls (Human Rights Watch, 2001; Pattman and Chege, 2003; Chege, 2006; Chege, 2007; Save the Children Denmark & MoE Ethiopia, 2008). In West Africa, the Child’s
Right Information Centre (CRIN, 2006) explains the prevalence of violence against girls within the context of two key sociological traits, namely the fact that West African societies function in contexts that are ideologically egalitarian but ideally structured by gender and seniority.

In what Mitchell and Chege (2006) refer to as ‘pedagogical spaces’ in schools, physical assault is often constructed as an acceptable means to teach children or punish for unsatisfactory academic performance. Accordingly, a rap across the knuckles for giving a wrong answer in class becomes part of the pedagogy as demonstrated in studies in Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Togo, and Cameroon. UNESCO (in Hart and al., 2005) however, argues that there is hardly any research-based evidence to support the commonly-held view that corporal punishment improves learning. To the contrary, it is more likely to compromise learning because it increases fear and anxiety, thus encouraging withdrawal and absenteeism that, logically, precipitates dropping out of school altogether. Action Aid International (2004) notes that while the academic consequences of violence are not easy to measure, the fact that extreme cases of girls committing suicide because of being violated in school raises concern. One Vietnamese schoolgirl who reportedly committed suicide after her father refused to go to a parents’ meeting, explained in her suicide note that she knew she would be punished ‘by standing… in front of thousands of eyes of other pupils’ adding, ‘That is too shameful’ (Action Aid International, 2004). Children from Bangladesh recommended being ‘talked to’ (counselled) rather than being punished while many Brazilian students claimed inability to concentrate because they got upset and indignant from being punished and hence they lost desire to attend school. At the same time support for these practices by girls, who sometimes see physical punishments of boys as protecting them from sexual violence, or boys, who might see it as a way of demonstrating tough masculinity, points to the complexity of subjective interpretations and the interconnections between different forms of violence and gendered inequalities (Morrell 2001; Parkes 2007).

For girls, the intimidating fear of violence creates an unchallenged avenue for other forms of violence, including sexual violence. Punishment that takes the form of sexual acts is more difficult to detect, but a number of studies have traced links between corporal punishment and sexual violence, through for example children’s drawings and other graphic representations in South African, Uganda, Botswana and Zimbabwe (Mak and Mitchell, 2000; Action Aid, 2004 and 2006; Chilisa, Dube, Tsheko and Mazile, 2005; UNICEF, 2005; Mak, 2006). The video on Unwanted Images (Mak, 2006), portraying a male teacher administering corporal punishment on a boy’s buttocks with the boys’ genitals fully exposed and emitting urine, demonstrates the sexual nature of the punishment which may not be obvious to an observer because of its camouflaged nature under the guise of the more overt act of caning of the boy. Schoolgirls in Kenya complained of male teachers fondling their thighs, or caressing their buttocks with a cane before pinching or striking them hard (Akunga, Muiya and Kwamboka; 2004, Chege, 2006). Research shows that teachers (male and female) tend to beat the boys harder than the girls because schools tend to problematise boyhood, while at the same time girls claim that male teachers often expected ‘something’ (sexual) from the girls in return for the comparatively ‘softer’ punishments. Some male teachers reportedly even exempt girls completely from the much dreaded corporal punishment only to seduce them later by seeking sexual gesture of gratitude. Male teachers reportedly invite their female teachers in the privacy of their offices and sexually molest them (see Leach & Pamela Machakanja, 2004). In a study in Ghanaian schools, Leach and Hayford, (2003) demonstrated that 10 out of the 16 girls interviewed claimed to know a teacher who was having sex with a girl in the school and that they themselves had been propositioned for sex by a teacher. Instructively, the parents were aware that male teachers were sexually abusing their daughters but they did not know what to do, or were too afraid to raise the issue with the school administration because apparently the head-teacher was a culprit. These
findings corroborate earlier findings by Chege (2001) who described the conspiracy among teachers to protect each other when any one of them was accused or caught sexually abusing female pupils.

The hidden nature of sexual violence
While neither girls nor boys are immune to any particular form of violence, statistical studies in many parts of the world show that girls (and women) are much more likely than boys (and men) to experience sexual violence (Brown and Bzostek, 2008). In USA for example, it is reported that women are 2 to 7 times more likely to be victims of sexual abuse and rape. Instructively, in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Middle East, this trend may be even higher considering the relatively low level of awareness of women’s and girls’ rights. Reportedly, worldwide, approximately 1 in 5 women experience sexual violence in the form of rape or attempted rape during her lifetime with women in Asian and sub-Saharan African countries having high female mortality rates due to female infanticide and nutritional neglect of young girls of school-age – and even domestic violence. A WHO survey confirms that while levels of violence against women tend to vary by country, generally women in developing countries experience higher rates of violence than those in developed countries (Blanchfield, Margesson, Seelke et. al, 2008).

FGM affects between 100 and 140 million women and girls globally and is a common feature in 28 countries in Africa - where the prevalence varies widely, from 5 per cent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to 98 per cent in Somalia - and to a lesser extent prevalent in the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf region. It also occurs among some minority groups in Asia, and among immigrant women in Europe, Canada and the United States (The State of World Population 2000 Report). In condemning FGM, the WHO cites its negative effects on the physical and psychological health and education of girls as manifested in the related early sexual encounters and marriage that linked to early transition to adulthood, thus demonstrating FGM as inconsistent with the rights of girls to education and schooling – not to mention that it denies them the right to be children. By encouraging child brides, FGM exposes girls to the dangers of GBV, particularly sexual abuse and HIV infection as well as other reproductive health complications.

Sexual violence at school is particularly hidden, owing primarily to the sense of shame felt by victims. The WHO presents an explicitly gendered pattern of sexual violence with estimated 150 million girls and 73 million boys who were under 18 years old having experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence by people known to them, including teachers (Jones, Moore, Villar-Marque and Broadbent, 2008). Less frequently captured is the prevalence of sexual harassment among young women in colleges or institutions of higher learning. Trainee teachers from Ghana provide graphic descriptions of the threats presented by cultures of sexual harassment – mainly from male lecturers, tutors, clerks and prefects who reportedly demanded sexual and domestic favours in exchange for personal protection, or securing positive exam and test grades (Tesi-Atinga, 2006). In Kenya, university students of education documented memories from childhood violence which had continued to haunt them as young adults (Chege, 2006b).

Research shows that sexual violence against girls within or in relation to schooling worries many parents who may decide to keep their daughters away from schools or marry them off early. In this context, seclusion of pubescent girls in countries of Asia and Middle East is cherished as a way of upholding the family honour in protecting female virginity. Honour Killings that are reported for example in Bangladesh, Brazil, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, Sweden, Turkey, Uganda and the United Kingdom amount to an estimated 5,000 women and girls who get murdered annually by members of their own families, many of them –quite ironically -linked to the dishonour of having been raped (see State of World Population Report, 2000).
A considerable proportion of GBV occurs in intimate relationships. A multi-country study on domestic violence and women’s health conducted by the WHO in fifteen sites in 10 developing countries shows that between 13-62% of women reported having experienced physical violence by a partner over the course of their lifetime, and between 3-29% of women reported suffering violence in the relationship within the past year of the study (Bott, Morrison, Ellsberg, 2005). In the USA, approximately 1 in 5 female high school students reported being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner (Silverman et al 2001; U.S. Department of Justice, 2001). Studies in South Africa have analysed the ways violence in intimate partner relationships reproduces a hierarchy of gender, with young men striving to assert their tough heterosexuality, and young women tolerating beatings and even viewing them as an expression of ‘tough love’ (Wood and Jewkes 1997; Wood 2002). Girls who fail to give in to sexual advances by boyfriends, older boys and men, and sometimes teachers and family members risk getting raped, with concomitant increased risks of unwanted pregnancies, HIV and STIs (CIET, 2001).

There is sparse evidence that children with disabilities may be at high risk of sexual as well as physical violence. The few documented studies accessed on violence against children and young persons with disabilities show that children who require assistance with personal care, such as going to the bathroom or changing their clothes for a physical education class may be at a comparatively greater risk of sexual abuse while those who have difficulty controlling themselves physically, for example because of spastic movements, may be particularly vulnerable to physical and psychological abuse, that includes bullying. For girls with disabilities, the situation is found to be worse if they attend residential schools where they may be exposed to the range of abuses associated with live-in institutions (Gichu 2010, Russo, 1996).

Violence and marginalisation in school

Much of the research on violence between peers has focused on bullying, with the WHO Global School-based Student Health Survey (GSHS) conducted between 2003 and 2005 in developing countries finding that between 20% and 65% of school-aged children reported having been verbally or physically bullied over the past 30 days of the surveys. The figure ranges widely from a low of 17% among girls in Beijing and the United Arab Emirates to 67% among boys in Zambia. Frequently taking place away from the prying eyes of teachers or other figures of authority, bullying occurs in secluded places such as school fields, toilets or through electronic technologies such as cell phones and the internet (Pinheiro, 2006:122).

Recent research on bullying has shifted from a gender blind focus on bullies and victims, to an examination of power dynamics between peers. As young people negotiate their gendered identities, conflicts arise, and in the quest to find a ‘safe’ space in the gendered hierarchy, ‘others’ seen as posing a threat may be excluded and victimised. Extreme forms of this are evident in the attacks on girls and girls’ schools in Afghanistan, Iraq and Kenya, when the perception that girls’ empowerment through schooling is seen as a threat to the gender order (IRIN 2003& 2007). South Sudanese boys, for example, were found in one study to taunt each other about their lack of masculinity and even harassed girls with verbal and physical gestures that are sexual in nature as a way of presenting themselves as real men (Pinheiro, 2006; see also Juvonen, Jovonen S and Schuster 2003; UNICEF 2003). In the UK or USA, girls who flout normative femininities by acting as ‘tomboys’ risked being rejected by other girls (Thorne 1993; Renold 2005). Homophobic bullying is a particularly toxic form, often tolerated and legitimised by school systems (Meyer 2006). In the USA and Britain, homophobic bullying takes many forms including taunts, obscene notes or graffiti, cyber or text messages, destruction of personal property, unwelcome sexual advances, mock rapes, and brutal physical attacks (Human Rights Watch, 2001). In Tanzania (UNICEF, Simbamwaka et al, 2002) boys who were perceived to be timid were referred to as shogalsense (homosexual). Few governments have enacted laws that explicitly protect students from discrimination based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.
The limited reporting of violence against boys and particularly sexual abuse may lead to the presumption that boys in school were safe. But focusing on boys as the perpetual perpetrators of various forms of violence leaves many questions unanswered regarding constructions of masculinities in societies where male strength and toughness are major defining components. The fact that boys in most communities are socialized to be tough, and are more likely to be subjected to put-downs and other verbal abuse as a way of toughening them up makes physical assault, teasing and bullying of boys accepted as a culturally acceptable norm in the process of making boys men (Chege, 2001, 2007; Pattman and Chege, 2003). Consequently, research shows that teachers and even parents tend to humiliate and physically punish boys who perform poorly in school compared to the girls or who portray traits that are perceived as feminine, instilling in them a feeling of worthlessness and frustration which could potentially result in male back-lash GBV against the girl peers who may appear favoured.

Research on peer violence and particularly ‘girl violence’ in Western countries such as North America, the UK and Northern Europe reveals the ways in which ‘girl bullying’ and ‘boy bullying’ sometimes manifests itself in violence that targets the body image. For example, girls and women of colour are reportedly bullied and harassed because of having relatively bigger body size resulting in forced dieting to the levels of risking anorexia (Larkin and Rice, 200). Janssen (2004) found that obese children in the US are not only more likely than normal weight children to be bullied, but are also more likely to express their frustrations by bullying others who are visibly different, especially children of ethnic minorities. Disability or orphanhood, for example, also tend to attract bullying in frequencies and levels that are sometimes more severe than experienced by able-bodied youngsters.

Gender violence against girls has continued to emerge as a key player in pushing girls out of the formal education system compared with the boys. Studies show that more girls than boys leave school to escape the violence involved (USAID 2003). School attendance and failing academically due to violence-related reasons are manifestations of the denial of girls’ rights not only to education but also their rights in education and through education.

**FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE**

The demonstration of a life cycle of violence against girls – from prenatal stage to old age - captures the challenge to schools, families, governments and NGOs to work in partnerships to guarantee girls and boys alike the chance to not only complete schooling but also gain from quality education acquired within safe and secure environments that are gender friendly and protective of their rights as children/young people. In this section, we examine firstly how international and national bodies have addressed this challenge, and second the work of practitioners working at school and community level.

Increasing recognition of girls’ and women’s freedom from violence as a human right has emerged from 20th century movements for children’s and women’s rights. The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) followed a series of conferences and declarations through which the Global Campaign for Women’s Human Rights helped to place violence against women firmly on the agenda of intergovernmental institutions. Since Beijing, progress in the development of international standards and norms on gender-based violence has continued, with recognition of rape as a tool of war (1998), and the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), which emphasises the protection of women in conflict situations and their role in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction. These new global standards are increasingly visible in national legislation, with for example some 90 countries now having laws on domestic violence (Bunch 2009).
Because the work focusing on children’s rights and Education for All (EFA) has been slower in recognising violence as a key concern, and because the two movements have been somewhat disconnected, important issues relating to violence have fallen through the policy gap. The EFA emphasis has been on promoting girls’ and boys’ access to school, omitting for example to include gender violence in its quantitative indicators (George 2005). While international treaties like the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1981) prohibit discrimination against the girl child, and provide a mechanism for evaluating countries’ compliance, they have been criticised for paying insufficient attention to gender violence in schools (George 2005). However, increasingly violence is seen as a key issue hindering girls’ access to quality education, with for example education and conflict the planned theme for the 2011 Global Monitoring Report. Two Optional Protocols to the CRC, adopted in 2000, provide more detailed protection for children from particular forms of violence, including the sale of children, child prostitution and pornography, and the involvement and rehabilitation of children in armed conflict. Regional mechanisms have also expanded over the last decade, with for example the African Charter on the Rights of the Child and the African Protocol on the Rights of Women (2004) containing provisions to eliminate FGM and marriage under 18 years.

There is now a comprehensive and detailed set of international standards, and obligations on states to keep children safe. However, translation from ideological global commitments to programmes for action entails political will at multiple levels (Rose 2006; Wetheridge 2009). International pressure needs to be matched by issue-ownership which goes beyond rhetoric or a sense of external obligation. A study carried out in Ghana found evidence of political will to tackle violence against girls in schools at all levels, but identified gaps between formulating policies and implementing policy action plans, which blocked channels for redress and undermined the potential of political and legal commitments (Wetheridge 2009). A recent encouraging development however has been the engagement of NGO’s to work alongside Government in formulating a national Gender in Education policy (see the UNGEI paper by Figue et al). Many countries portray legislative gaps, with for example, laws on sexual violence excluding the school setting. In Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, only half out of 19 countries prohibit sexual violence in schools (Jones et al 2008). There have however been marked areas of progress over the last decade, with for example, the South African Government’s Girls Education Movement (GEM) promoting gender equality and safety in schools; or the UK Government embarking this year on a national awareness-raising programme targeting teenage relationships and violence against girls; or the Venezuelan Government’s Law on Violence Against Women and Families (2007), which promotes gender equality and conflict resolution in the school curriculum.

While international treaties and instruments have led to improvements in constitutional commitments and national legislation since 2000, major challenges continue to hamper implementation of country-level legislations. Frequently, despite the existence of national laws and policies, girls, boys and adults in local communities lack knowledge of their rights, of reporting systems, or of health and welfare support. A study in rural Kenya for example found that girls, boys, their teachers and parents had little knowledge of the laws, policies or official mechanisms for reporting violence (ActionAid 2010). The UN Secretary General’s World Report on Violence against Children (2006) recommended the integration of national planning processes to prevent and respond to violence, alongside the development of reliable national data collection systems. Focal points for gender and children’s rights, preferably at ministerial level are needed to ensure violence against girls is firmly on the agenda of Governments. National plans for action should involve teacher unions, teacher training institutions, and district education offices, to ensure Codes of Conduct for teachers exist and are acted upon. While international treaties have been criticised for their top-down approach to change, grassroots organisations have been instrumental in influencing their work. Only this year for example, 20 years on from the CRC, has there been agreement to develop a new human rights instrument enabling the Committee on the Rights of the
Child to examine communications from children alleging violation of their rights. Such moves can be seen as shifts towards an ‘equity-from-below’ approach (Unterhalter 2007), in which girls’ and boys’ participation is taken seriously.

A plethora of programmes have been developed to tackle violence against girls in schools, though the education sector has lagged well behind the health sector in this area. Some programmes specifically target girls, for example ActionAid’s girls clubs that seek to empower girls to combat violence and gendered inequalities (Figue and Parkes 2010). Others focus on girls and boys, including peer-led mentoring programmes (Mantell et al 2006; Mirembe 2006). Programmes like DramAid and Stepping Stones in South Africa and elsewhere have used participatory learning approaches including drama and critical reflection to address sex and relationships with young people and their communities (Jewkes et al 2008; Morrell et al 2009). Few school-based programmes focus specifically on boys, though in the health sector there are programmes engaging men and boys in combating gender-based violence (WHO 2007). The White Ribbon Campaign for Men and Boys to end Violence against Women and Girls engages groups of men and receives support in over 60 countries in the world. Khandekar et al (2008) reports on similar programmes in India that seek to examine and redefine men’s gendered attitudes and behaviour that was increasing risk of HIV and violence against women.

Many programmes work with teachers to strengthen their skills in supporting girls (Mukoma et al 2009). In Tanzania, for example, women teachers were trained as guardians to support girls with problems around sexual health, violence and harassment (Mgalla et al 1998). In refugee schools in Guinea and Sierra Leone, there were few female teachers, classroom assistants were trained to work alongside teachers to reduce sexual exploitation of schoolgirls (Kirk and Winthrop 2006). There are also programmes where school staff help to strengthen the curriculum on safety, peace, sex and relationships education, conflict resolution or life skills (Maxwell et al 2004; Ahmed et al 2006); or to prevent violence through improving school and classroom management (Carolissen et al 2000); or to build relationships with the community, including police (Harber 2001). In urban settings, there has been a strong focus on violence prevention, with the emphasis on how schools can stop young people, and especially young men, from engaging in crime and violence (Barker 2005; Illinois Centre for Violence Prevention 2001). A large number of programmes have also focused on strengthening school safety and security, or on improving resourcing through for example separate toilets for girls and boys (Harber 2001).

While this expansion of school and community based programmes is remarkable, problems with these programmes exist in relation to evaluation, scale and scope. Evaluations tend to be weak or non-existent, with those studies which have been systematically evaluated tending to come from the global north. However, despite the dearth of high quality evaluation from the south, the evidence to date suggests that programmes can make a difference (Asare 2009). Summarising the evaluations of programmes cited above, for example, demonstrates potential in several areas: teachers increasing confidence and skills to address sensitive topics in the classroom; enhanced confidence of girls to report and challenge sexual harassment; decreases in levels of violence and increases in safe sex practices with decreases in HIV infections. Some studies, however, have found that the capacity of schools to implement programmes effectively varies considerably with schools where levels of violence are highest and least responsive to efforts to change (Carolissen et al 2001). An action research study in South Africa which set out to train teachers on gender-based violence in school found that it was important to begin by acknowledging and addressing teachers’ own attitudes and experiences, since many of the female teachers had themselves suffered intimate partner violence (Dreyer 2002). Care is needed therefore in initial analysis of the education setting and in particular of the gender relations, along with careful tailoring of programmes according to local needs and conditions. The impact of an intervention may also be short-lived, with impetus for change evaporating once a programme is ended (Morrell et al 2009).
Many of these programmes are small scale, piecemeal and scattered, with insufficient communication and collaboration to expand their scope and build partnerships between NGOs and government sectors that advocate for change at national level. There are however, increasing attempts to share information about effective programming particularly through worldwide websites. UNIFEM, for example, is currently finalising a knowledge asset on Ending Violence Against Girls and Women in Education, which will be a valuable web-based resource for programme planners (see http://www.endvawnow.org/). Further many programmes on violence against girls are too limited in their scope, attempting to address violent acts without looking more broadly at gender structures, relations and identities (Morrell et al 2009). As we have argued above, violence against girls cannot be understood or addressed without considering the gendered inequalities surrounding these acts. It is important therefore for programmes and interventions to work at the many levels to address acts of violence, the interactions in girls’ lives that produce these acts and the institutions and structures that create the conditions for violence. ActionAid’s Stop Violence Against Girls project is one effort where partnership involves advocacy, research and community intervention in Kenya, Ghana and Mozambique. Combining top-down approaches driven by international and national laws and policies, with grassroots programmes and advocacy may also strengthen effectiveness for change.

CONCLUSION: DEVELOPING A VISION FOR THE NEXT DECADE

We conclude the paper by returning to the question posed in the introduction, when we asked why it is that despite growing awareness and action at international, national and local level, we still have insufficient knowledge about how to combat violence, with many girls still lacking adequate support and capacity to protect themselves. Drawing on key conference themes, we frame our conclusions and reflections on key issues for the next decade under the sub-themes of power, participation and partnership.

Power – One reason hampering progress with combating violence is that it is not enough to focus attention on acts of violence, uprooted from the social context. If we are to build on the enormous strides in research, policy and practice on violence against girls, we need to understand how violence serves to maintain and increase inequalities. If we are to combat acts of violence, we need to address the broader gendered structures of power and inequality that produce violence and their intersections with inequalities relating to class, race, socio-economic status, sexuality and disability. We need to consider how to respond to changing dynamics of power and violence against girls arising from current crises, including for example changing patterns of war and conflict as well as electronic technology that complicates the private nature of gender violence.

Participation – Although empirical studies are helping to expand knowledge, there are still few in-depth evaluations looking at change over time, and across different contexts to strengthen our understanding of effective approaches to change. Increasingly, girls’ accounts of experiences of violence are heard, but participation also means examining the constraints and barriers that prevent many girls reporting and resisting violence. Strengthening girls’ participation in actions to contest violence is crucial, but must be combined with building relational programmes involving boys as girl’s allies – not antagonists. It is important to respond effectively to transform the near-absence of boys from work on gender violence which clearly jeopardises the possibilities of developing harmonious relationships as a strategy for improving girls’ education, reducing violence and preparing the youth for more equitable gender relations.
**Partnership** – Although commitment to combating violence has expanded at international, national and local levels, there are a series of disjunctures which disrupt the pace of change. Building links between women’s movements and children’s rights/education movements can help to foreground issues of violence in policy and legislative frameworks. Strengthening legislative frameworks and policy action plans need to address implementation, ensuring access to services, and clear and effective mechanisms and systems of support at local level. Building links between stakeholders across different spheres of health, education, justice and social welfare will strengthen local systems of support. School based partnerships can help to promote gender-friendly schools and above all, partnerships need to facilitate female and male parents/guardians to learn how to work with their daughters and sons towards non-violence as a way of enhancing gender equality at family and community levels.

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