Evidence Brief, Whole School Approach, Uganda and Kenya 2019-2020

The Whole School Approach for sexuality education (WSA for SE) moves beyond classroom teaching of sexuality education to address the whole school environment, including supportive school policies and school facilities, links with parents and the community and collaboration with health services.

About the research
The Whole School Approach started in 2012 and has been developed together with SchoolNet Uganda, Centre for the Study of Adolescence and Straight Talk Foundation Uganda. It has been implemented for seven years by several organizations in more than 1000 schools in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Indonesia. The first pilot studies done between 2013 and 2015 showed promising outcomes. The results showed that an increased number of students received sexuality education due to the introduction of the WSA. It was also found that the sense of safety among students increased and, subsequently, drop-out and absentee rates decreased. Finally, the number of collaborations between schools and external stakeholders and support for teachers and other SE educators increased. The two research trajectories that have been done in Kenya and Uganda in 2018 and 2018 are seeking a deeper level of understanding of how the WSA is addressing challenges, scalability and sustainability regarding the implementation of sexuality education.

WSA components have been linked to the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research to develop a conceptual framework for this study. The CFIR incorporates five perspectives within interventions that should be addressed during implementation research: (1) the intervention, (2) the inner setting, (3) the outer setting, (4) the individuals involved, and (5) the implementation process.

This qualitative case study included 12 schools in Uganda and 30 schools Kenya. A total of 80 interviews were held with students, peer educators, teachers, the school management and local government. Interviews also took place with staff of Straight Talk Foundation (STF) and the Centre for the Study of Adolescence (CSA), the organizations working with the schools.

Research results
Organizational level

School management attitudes towards the WSA are mostly positive. Schools embrace the WSA and the management aims to implement WSA within their capabilities. The school management affirms the positive impact of involving and sensitizing all key stakeholders both within the school environment and beyond, like parents, the teachers of the school, staff members from the local district and health workers. By doing this the schools’ culture and environment better reflect the values that are being taught in their sexuality education.
lessons. This impact is manifested in parents discussing the topic of sexuality with their children more often, the school staff and management supporting the sexuality education teachers, the making of re-usable menstrual pads that girls can use, schools tackling corporal punishment, increasing youth involvement and a good connection with health centres.

“Reducing corporal punishment and going to alternative forms ... CSA gave us good pointers, like apology after sitting with a child and enabling them to understand their mistake. The alternatives are public apology and maybe just light punishment like mopping a room and all that. So less of caning.” Teacher, mixed school, Kisumu County, Kenya

Moreover, schools mention that the number of girls that attend and remain in school increased, students are less shy and openly talk about topics related to sexuality and the relationship between parents and students seems to have improved in terms of discussing sexuality.

“I’m positive because I see a positive behaviour change among young people. Before the WSA, there were challenges, children were fearing to express themselves, like during menstruation periods. That changed, they talk about it. Second, rapport has been built between teacher and students, there is no fear for teachers, this relationship is positively changed. Also, children open up to their parents due to the exhibition.” Head teacher, Iganga, Uganda

In Kenya most schools have timetabled sexuality education for all students in the first grade of secondary school; in Uganda this seems a bit more challenging. Kenya has obligatory life skill hours that were previously used by schools in other ways, so it was quite easy for schools to transform this. In Uganda, it was more challenging: the school schedule was already full and most schools could not see how to fit SE into the official timetable. Nevertheless, Ugandan schools that implemented the WSA made efforts to make sexuality education available to as many students as possible.

Cascading training to other staff members and the involvement of external stakeholders (like health workers) is an important strategy to enable more people to provide SRHR information to the students.

“We wanted it to be integrated and now even our head teacher advised us that whenever you go for a workshop the first thing you come to do is to go the office. You report what inspired you in the workshop and after that we have to call the whole staff. You brief them about what have learnt and how to move on. So that if you are not there somebody else can do your job and, indeed, that thing is working. It is working because, now there is that solidarity every person knows what to do. Even someone who is not a patron can arrange the youth corner very well.” Teacher, Iganga, Uganda
The WSA stimulates to create youth corners who are led by students, to provide more SRHR information and exchange among each other. Most schools have youth corners, especially in Uganda. These spaces have been found to serve several goals: some are used to make reusable pads for girls to use, some to undertake incoming generating activities, like the creation of backpacks or necklaces that can be sold, others serve as a washing/changing/resting room for girls during their menstruation. While these are very good causes which support students, there were few spaces led by students and not all spaces were always accessible to students.

Other efforts are being made in both countries to keep improving the schools’ physical environment, e.g. by providing clean and lockable toilets, fencing and guards.

For sustainability, the WSA stimulates schools to become responsible for the budget of the WSA and less dependent on NGOs; it is a challenge to budget for expenses related to the youth corners and improving the physical school environment. One successful strategy adopted by many schools in Uganda to generate an income to sustain the WSA is to undertake income-generating activities, like gardening and making jewellery. Another challenge is the monitoring and evaluation in schools, which makes it difficult to measure concrete numbers on the performance of students, drop-out rates and other improvements.

Socio-cultural and religious environment

There are differences within the socio-cultural and religious environment in Uganda and Kenya. In Kenya, The World Starts With Me programme is used, a comprehensive programme developed by Rutgers. In Uganda, a state approved curriculum is used, the only programme authorised for sexuality education in schools. In Uganda, no major signs of opposition have been noticed against the sexuality education programmes, perhaps because no sensitive issues are included in the materials. The WSA and sexuality education have been welcomed by most of the stakeholders. In Kenya, on the other hand, it is slightly more difficult, although this varies between regions. The WSWM does face opposition due to the inclusion of sensitive topics; it takes more effort to sensitize the community. In the Kisumu region, most people are very happy with the sexuality education that is provided in the schools, but in the Kajiado region schools have had to deal with more opposition from the community.

“So, in Maasai community we have found it very difficult with the parents, even with the community, including the leaders, the chief, the administration, because there are some of them who are advocating for the FGM and early marriages.” Teacher, Kajiado County, Kenya

The WSA has contributed to the involvement of cultural and religious leaders by creating awareness about the importance of sexuality education for young people and has also helped schools in the steps they need to take when sensitizing school staff and community members.

Individual level
Sexuality education teachers in general share positive views towards the WSA in both Uganda and Kenya, they feel that they are appreciated more for the work they do since the WSA is used in schools and their colleagues are sensitized around the topic of sexuality education.

“The support we get, one of them is emotional support. The school has been coming in and thanking us or thanking me for the work done, when they see changes, so only that has made me to feel so strong and love sexuality education in the school. The head teacher thanks teachers who are conducting sexuality education, saying that if it wasn’t for you maybe even we would be experiencing problems. So, I as a person have been developing a lot of strength whenever I receive such kind of support.” Teacher, Bugiri

Teachers recognize the importance of cascade training in increasing the capacity of other teachers and peer educators. Meetings are organized to share knowledge and skills. Unlike management, teachers are generally unfamiliar with the WSA manual, toolkit or quick guide; more awareness of WSA would enable staff to hold management accountable for implementation.

Peer educators are available in most schools and they show a great amount of initiative to improve their peers’ sexual health. They do face challenges like not getting the right support and back up from teachers and their role is not always clear to themselves nor to others.

“During lunchtime, we meet in the youth corner, share and get ready for sessions in the evening after classes. We also come over to school to meet on Saturday, as time allocated is not sufficient for S.E sessions … We often train ourselves, especially when we are going to discuss the topics, we support each other to understand the topics. When we discuss, we get self-confidence … We train others, we have other students in senior one and two whom we are mentoring. Because next year I am willing to step out and allow another person lead.” Peer educator, Bugiri

Health workers are available for students to reach out to. Health workers acknowledge the importance of participating within the school environment and referral systems has been improved since the WSA has been used.

“It is very important to visit the schools because in my visits we have been getting sexuality-related challenges from schools which the teacher does not know enough about. After visiting a school, the students come and call us and ask, Please come and help us, we have this issue, and we share, then sometimes solve the issue.” Health worker, Bugiri, Uganda

Sustainability and scalability

After five years, the organizations supporting schools will have to phase out their support due to the ending of the programme. After this time, schools should be able to continue sexuality education and keep on improving the school environment. Also, when sexuality education teachers leave, schools need to find solutions to educate new/other staff members.

The study identified the following elements as key to scaling-up: timetabling; inclusion of different stakeholders, especially the local government; the presence of peer educators; and
cascade training. Timetabling seems to have been particularly successful in Kenya, where sexuality education is part of the core subjects.

“Life skill lessons were usually used by teachers to complete the [academic subjects’] syllabus and all that. So, when the WSA came in, we insisted that we were going to use those lessons to deliver. So, when it was a club we were used to deliver only during club days which was usually for our school on Tuesday. But with this other one, we have 80 minutes in form one, then we have another two lessons in form two.” Teacher, mixed school, Kisumu County, Kenya

The phasing out process does not always follow a gradual path and schools do not always feel ready to go without the support of the organizations. Especially the financial support is difficult. Sustainability committees of stakeholders have been established to address all the challenges, principally the need to find alternative financing. Income-generation activities and parental contributions are working in some schools.

“They said they wanted the schools to take over the programme so that they run [it] on their own. So, kind of they stopped assisting financially, when they stopped, the support would get from the schools is very minimal sometimes, in terms of finance, so we could not carry out activities because of that limitation.” Teacher, boys school, Kisumu County

Other challenges that remain are the staff-turnover and the difficulty to cascade training to new teachers. This is mainly difficult when also the school-management staff have a lot of turnover, as they are the key stakeholders to ensure sustainability and support towards sexuality education.

District education officials involved in this study shared positive experiences of WSA. Their responses look promising for both scale up and sustainability. Both in Kenya and Uganda they provide support to scale-up and sustain in-school sexuality education. They also integrated the WSA in the evaluation tools they use to regular check the schools.

“I am a focal point person. I coordinate all the stakeholders’ offices to ensure that what we agree on as stakeholders is carried out. District officials committed themselves to helping the continuity of the GUSO programme. I ensure that my inspectors who go to the field look at the timetable and see whether GUSO is on the timetable. We also inspect if the youth corners have what is necessary.” District education officer, Bugiri, Uganda.

Conclusion

School management’s motivation and commitment to implement the WSA seem to be key indicators for successful implementation; where they have been brought on board and their skills strengthened, there has been some success.

Regarding the school environment much has changed in schools. Many schools are tackling corporal punishment and creating more youth involvement in decision making. The physical environment is also being improved, although this brings financial challenges. The purpose of the youth corner in the WSA is to make sure students are in the lead and can make decisions about their own space in school, find more SRHR information and interact with each other.
Due to the multiple important roles the youth corners have, this purpose is not always fulfilled.

The WSA has found to be contributing to the implementation of sexuality education by providing workshops for teachers and peer educators in which their SE knowledge, attitudes and skills are strengthened. Sexuality education teachers and peer educators are generally positive towards SE and the WSA and efforts are made to cascade training. Peer educators do face challenges in the support they get, and it is not always clear what role they have.

No major opposition towards sexuality education has been seen in this research, also due to the state-approved lesson package in Uganda. Only in one region in Kenya it was more difficult to get the community on board.

With regards to sustainability and scalability, the WSA has contributed by focusing on school ownership of the WSA. The major contribution to the process of scaling up is the emphasis on timetabling, the inclusion of in- and out of school stakeholders, peer educators and cascading training. Sustainability in terms of resource mobilization, such as additional parents’ fees and incoming generating activities are used as tools to sustain WSA activities. The involvement of local district officers has proven to be very successful, especially in Uganda where they are keen to continue and scale the WSA.

Recommendations

- The Whole School Approach should include training for management that focuses on monitoring and evaluation and the involvement of young people in school processes.
- The WSA should incorporate training on resource mobilization for schools. In this training examples can be given of income-generating activities and how to set these up, to write funding proposals and other ideas to attract finances.
- Teachers are unfamiliar with the WSA manual, toolkit or quick guide, as this is used more by school management. More awareness about the WSA would be good, so they can hold management accountable and better understand the processes.
- The WSA should make sure that the role of peer educators is clear and that they get the right level and type of support from teachers.
- To contribute to a positive school environment more focus can be put on creating a code of conduct in which students have an important voice. In this way a safe school environment with fair rules can be created for both students and staff members.
- The purpose of the youth corner is not always clear. Great initiatives have been developed by schools, like safe corners and washing/dressing rooms for girls. Nevertheless, it would be good also to focus on the primary purpose of the youth corners where students can be in the lead and which serves both boys and girls. The additional purposes (washing, changing, resting during menstruation) that schools came up with should be included in the WSA as well, perhaps with their own space.
- The process of phasing out should be better planned and explained to schools. This is a challenging mind-shift for both organizations and schools to make, therefore more support should be given to the NGOs on how to do this in the best way. More focus and clearer strategies are needed to enable a smooth phasing-out process that is understandable and manageable for the schools.