



SADC Boys and Young Men Vulnerability Framework

Executive Summary

Background

It is estimated that by 2050 Africa will be home to one billion children.¹ It is therefore essential that education systems be substantially strengthened to reverse development losses and delays in order to contribute to sustainable development.

Boys and young men face multiple risks, including that of early fatherhood and child marriage, and they are at higher risk of dropping out of school and are more prone to high risk-taking behaviour, thereby acquiring a variety of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV&AIDS.² Boys and young men are also prone to drug and substance abuse.³ (For example, a recently published systematic review found that the overall prevalence of “any substance use” among adolescents in sub-Saharan African is 41.6%, with alcohol and tobacco being the most prevalent substances [i.e. 40.8%]). In Africa, about eleven people per 100 000 per year die by suicide, higher than the global average of nine (per 100 000). This is due in part to insufficient action to address and prevent the risk factors.⁴ Southern African Development Community (SADC) Member States have also been recording high numbers of mental health and psychosocial challenges (including suicide and depression) among boys and young men.⁵ All these challenges decrease the opportunities adolescent boys have and they jeopardise their future.

The SADC Region comprises a cluster of *lower and middle income countries* that suffer heavily from not only these phenomena, but also from additional risk factors such as high HIV prevalence, gender-based violence, conflict and high numbers of adolescent pregnancy.⁶ Moreover, the region is impaired by limited contextually-appropriate youth-focused mental health services.⁷



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Motivation for the framework

The age range 14 to 25 (referred to as “youth” or “young people”) is a critical time for development and transitioning to adulthood. Therefore, investments to help young people, in particular boys and young men, in making informed and healthy decisions in the early stages of development is directly related to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, African Union (AU) Agenda 2063, AU Agenda 2040 and related international and regional human rights instruments. Achieving gender equality requires a rights-based approach where boys and young men are viewed as *rights holders*; it is also critical for the realisation of the rights of girls and young women. Promoting gender equality in all spheres of life, including family and community life, requires enabling policies, practices and programmes that support boys and young men to take an active part in their own personal development and in the development of their female peers. Education is therefore a particularly important sector where boys and young men can have an impact on addressing gender disparities.

The *Boys and Young Men Vulnerability Framework (BVF)* has been developed to:

- Provide and promote the rationale for the focus on boys and young men’s vulnerabilities to ensure no one is left behind in SADC’s sustainable development agenda
- Highlight the importance of ensuring that education reform measures initiated within the Care and Support for Teaching and Learning Policy Framework pay equal and focused attention to the needs, vulnerabilities and constraints of boys to achieving their full potential and the role they play in contributing to gender equality
- Provide practical guidance on the standards and measures required for effective mainstreaming of gender equality in education systems

Premised on international and normative frameworks that protect the rights of children, this *BVF* is intended to augment and guide an education curriculum reform process, and to identify basic social and other services to ensure that all education and protective systems in the region serve their purpose in contributing to achieving gender equality. In addition, it is intended to bring about a whole-system reform process to position education and the school curriculum as the engine of inclusive sustainable development, working closely with other key sectors (including the ministries responsible for gender, health, social development and children and youth affairs, as well as the Ministries of Labour, Finance and Planning) that have an impact on boys’ and young men’s lives.

The five focus areas of the BVF

The framework consists of the following five focus areas for utilising the education system to address the needs of boys and young men in the region.

Focus Area 1: Utilisation of the education curriculum

Education, in all its diverse formats and contents—formal, non-formal, supplementary, informal, lifelong learning—is widely recognised as a key contributing factor to addressing gender inequality. While their delivery mode, governance structures and programmatic contents may vary across Member States, both formal and non-formal educational programmes should incorporate some basic principles of a gender equitable teaching-learning experience. Through specially designed texts and learning tasks, education curriculums should provide guidance of how boys and girls can examine notions of masculinity and gender relations. School curricula should provide learners with basic information about sexuality and mental health and the social services available to address their specific needs.

Focus Area 2: Access to age-appropriate support and services

SADC Member States should include strategies for professional training for teachers and programme coordinators to interact with learners in gender equitable ways, both in the learning environment and in broader social settings. Ministries of Education in the SADC Region are urged to establish technical guidance on specific extracurricular activities for male and female engagement to discuss gendered norms and practices that affect their development and to provide age-appropriate and sufficiently resourced gender-specific programmes for boys that enable them to have a greater agency to discuss specific issues affecting them, and opportunities to explore gender-equitable behaviour.

Focus Area 3: Addressing gendered social norms and practices

Targeted education programmes have been successful in changing boys and young men's attitudes on their role in achieving gender equality, and how they can overcome the challenges that they face.

Providing boys and young men with crucial information on available tailored services for them has the potential of increasing uptake of services that address their needs. The SADC Secretariat calls on each Member States, with their Ministries of Education taking a lead, to develop a country-specific boys' and young men's vulnerability framework, where an analysis of the immediate and root causes of boys' vulnerabilities in the Member State is conducted to provide a comprehensive picture of the challenges boys and young men face.

Focus Area 4: Enabling legal and policy environment

An enabling legal and policy environment provides the impetus for educational investments to keep both boys and girls in schools. Gender discriminatory laws relating to child marriage, school re-entry and continuation, as well as on the minimum age of access to age-appropriate *sexual and reproductive health and rights* information all play a key role in either alleviating or exacerbating boys' vulnerabilities.

SADC Member States are called upon to conduct regular policy audits and revise their laws to ensure they are in line with global and international standards for ensuring boys remain in school. Ministries of Education should implement school re-entry and continuation policies effectively, to ensure teacher and school community attitudes to young fathers and mothers and pregnant girls are addressed, and that there is adequate infrastructure and support in schools to retain young fathers and mothers. This focus areas guides SADC Member States to identify and embed gender-sensitive benchmarks within the CSTL *monitoring, evaluation and reporting* system to ensure that education outcomes are measured in terms of how they are responsive to boys' and young men's vulnerabilities.

Focus Area 5: Building partnerships

Government, civil society organisations (CSO) and the private sector in SADC Member States deliver services for boys and young men; these sectors must work together (plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate policies, strategies and programmes) to meet the complete needs of vulnerable boys and young men. CSO's actions should be in line with the government's national education policies and priorities, thus allowing for every level to provide the best care and services and ensure harmonisation, cooperation and effective referral mechanisms so as to ensure marginalised and vulnerable boys stay in school and are provided adequate opportunities to develop the skills required for sustainable development. A multisectoral coordination mechanism at ministerial level should be established to map out a standard referral pathway to ensure boys and young men receive the necessary support and services at all levels (national, district, local and community). Such referral pathways should emanate from a government-led multisectoral approach at national level, with, for example, close collaboration between the Ministries of Health and Education, or the Ministry of Education with multisectoral focal points within social development, health, child protection and gender sectors.

References

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