



Namibia launches National Safe Schools Framework to protect learners from violence

12 September, Windhoek: In order to ensure that no child is denied quality education because of violence, the Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) in partnership with UNICEF launched the National Safe Schools Framework (NSSF), a policy document for the effective prevention and response to all forms of violence, self-harm and substance abuse in school.

The launch of the NSSF comes within a week of UNICEF's global launch of the *#EndViolence Against Children - Safe in Schools* campaign, which highlights peer violence as a pervasive part of children's education around the world, impacting on learners in rich and poor communities alike.

According to the 2013 Global school-based student health survey (GSHS), 35% of Namibia's learners aged 13-17 years had been in one or more physical fights in the past 12 months of the survey, while 46% of learners aged 13-17 years reported being bullied once or more.

Other reports and anecdotal evidence speak of the prevalence of violent forms of discipline and sexual harassment of learners, which have long term social, psychological/emotional and physical impact on both the learners and the teachers, as learners opt to stay away from school when there is violence.

"At the heart of the National Safe Schools Framework is the creation of a culture of care between learners, parents and the community," said the Minister of Education, Arts and Culture, Hon. Katrina Hans-Himarwa. "It is the hope of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and UNICEF that the National Safe Schools Framework will help to break the cycle of school violence thus contributing to improved educational outcomes and a more peaceful, equitable and prosperous society," she said.

The National Safe Schools Framework is designed to respond to the dynamic and evolving nature of violence in schools. According to the guidelines of the NSSF, schools would need to identify the problem areas and difficulties related to violence and to institute child friendly infrastructure and policies for reporting, support and referral of incidences related to violence in schools.

It also recognises that schools have a unique position to promote societal values which can become ingrained in children such as good communication, extracurricular activities, respect, dialogue and non-violent behaviours.

“Many young people have substance abuse problems which are going untreated and which often fall between the cracks because of lack of services. There is urgent need to also support access to state rehabilitation centers when these are needed,” said First Lady, Monica Geingos during the launch. “With the launch of the National Safe Schools Framework in Namibia, there is a call for collaborative efforts to ensure the safety of every child in Namibia.”

“UNICEF is pleased that the Government is launching the National Safe Schools Framework as a show of solid commitment and leadership to address the challenges of violence in schools and to create safe, conducive learning environments for all learners,” said Gerrit Maritz, UNICEF Namibia Representative (OIC).