



# COMBATting CORRUPTION AND ABUSE IN SCHOOLS

VoiceMore Report

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## VOICEMORE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

VoiceMore is War Child's youth advocates development programme which empowers young people affected by armed conflict to share their experiences and act to combat issues impacting them.

VoiceMore Groups in our programme countries discuss and debate how conflict affects children and youth in their area and what they feel could be done to help improve their lives. They are then supported to design and run their own advocacy projects in their local community, with War Child helping them elevate these concerns onto national and international platforms.

### Objectives:

- Support young people to identify the challenges they and other children and youth face in the regions and country where they live, and to undertake advocacy action which brings about positive change within their communities and beyond.
- Enable young people to improve their well-being by gaining confidence, knowledge, and skills to honestly express their views, needs and rights, including understanding how to conduct research and advocacy.
- Promote the participation of youth in decision-making and raise the voices of young people affected by conflict to those in power.



## VOICEMORE IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

In 2016 VoiceMore participants in Bangui, Central African Republic (CAR) reported to War Child that demands for sexual favours and money from teachers in state schools was having a detrimental impact on many children's education and well-being.

The children reported incidences of this type were common, and children were intimidated, upset and frustrated at the way in which this was happening. This pertained to two practices in particular; the 'selling of notes' and 'sex for grades'.

'Selling of notes' refers to children being asked to offer money in exchange for the marking of papers, exams or other moments when tests or gradings are concerned.

'Sex for Grades' - or as local children refer to it 'sexually transmitted grades' - relates to teaching professionals asking for sexual favours from children in exchange for any of the above activity.

The group also described children being asked for payment to just attend regular classes, get necessary photocopies for class, or access information about up-coming syllabuses. The group reporting the issue decided they wished to work to combat this, by raising awareness and demanding better systems to protect children and deter these kinds of behaviours in schools.

*"One day we had a new teacher at our school. He wrote on the board his mobile number and said if we ever needed any help with our work we could call him for support. We were happy because we thought he really wanted to help us learn. My friend in the class, she was confused about her homework, so she called him. He tried to make her come to his house. She felt afraid, so she did not go. After this he was angry at her and gave her bad marks. She is scared and now she is thinking about dropping out of school." Neville, 14 VoiceMore Participant*

## WHAT IS HAPPENING IN SCHOOLS

Behaviours reported by children in the group as common practices in schools in CAR:

'Sexually transmitted grades'; teachers asking for sexual favours from children who can't pay (mostly male teachers ask)

Have to pay teachers for things like papers, then they don't just hand them out as they are meant to

All students are asked for money, including the most poor

Teachers do a minimum of work (late, don't show up)

Have to pay to get information on upcoming syllabus for term

Only a minority of teachers don't do these things

Teachers abuse their power

Is worse around exam periods

No right to ask questions, or question behaviours

Male and female teachers do these practices

Lack of respect for pupils

Verbal humiliation – teachers insult or make person remarks to students

**Corruption and abuse in State Secondary Schools, Bangui**

Teachers deliberately make classes hard to encourage payments of bribes

Teachers are drunk at school

Having to pay to get note books corrected

Teaching at teacher's homes forced.

Asking for money with no reason

Teachers sell handouts (photocopies) for classes

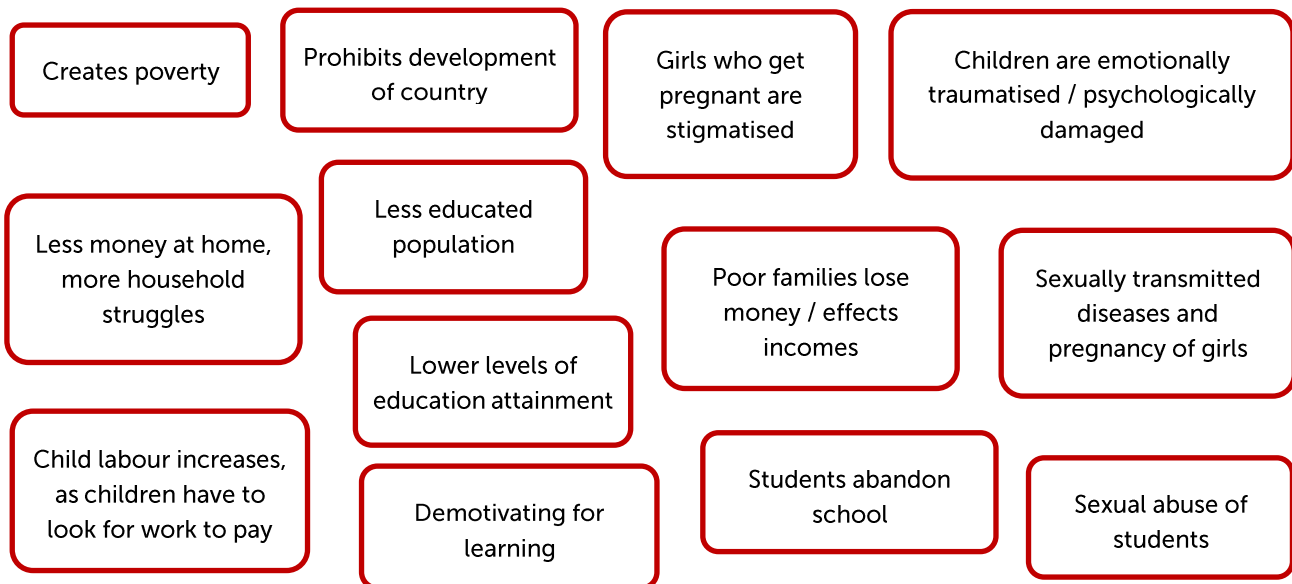
'Black Box' in class (have to put money in it to attend class)

Requesting a drink / refreshment be brought in for them by students

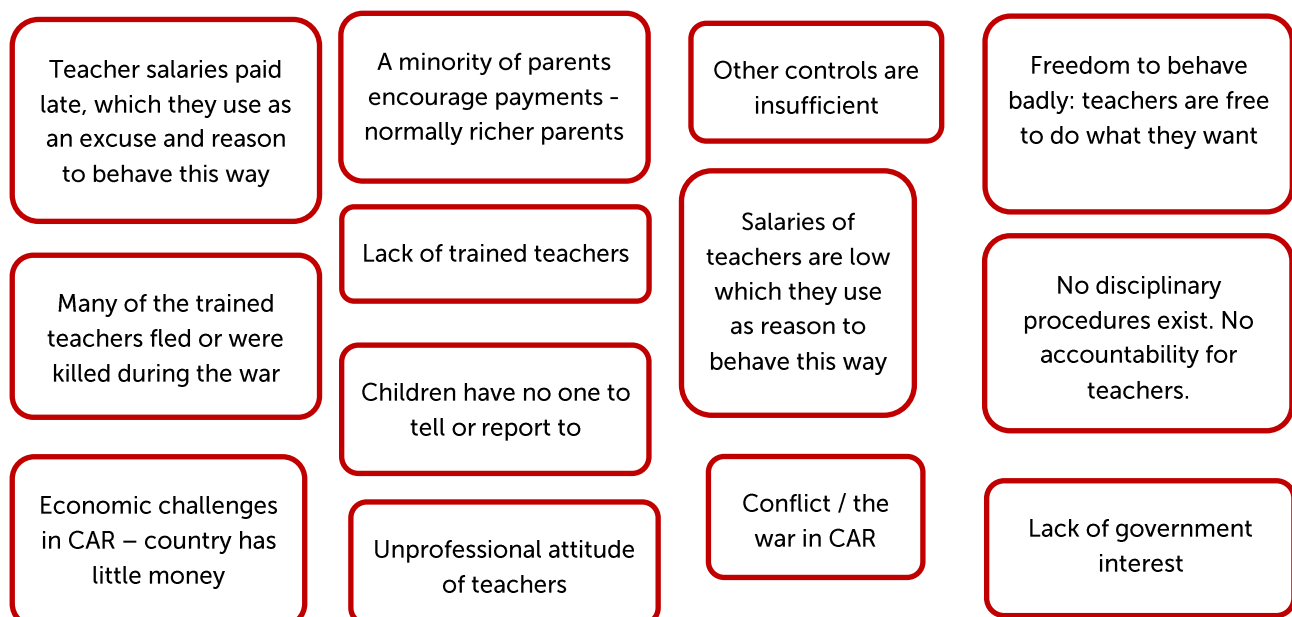
## CAUSES AND IMPACTS

What the children felt are the causes and contributing factors to the issue, as well as short and long-term consequences and impacts:

### Impacts of the issue



### Corruption and abuse in schools: 'sex for grades' and 'money for papers'



### What causes the issue

## RESEARCHING THE PROBLEM

The group designed and conducted their own research to try and ascertain the scale and extent of the issue in their area.

From 100 child respondents in 10 state schools in Bangui who participated in the research, 75% of children reported the 'selling of notes' as happening in their schools. 73% of students reported that 'sex for grades' as occurring in their classrooms, with 83% of correspondents saying this happened secretly, with teachers being the most implicated. Girls were much more likely to be impacted by requests for sexual favours. 95% of children interviewed said they felt these practices were bad for education in CAR.

### Results

1) Does the selling of notes exist in your school?	Males	Females	Total
Yes	42%	33%	75%
No	6%	10%	16%
Abstain	4%	5%	9%

2) Does 'sex for grades' exist in your school?	Males	Females	Total
Yes	41%	31%	72%
No	7%	6%	13%
Abstain	4%	11%	15%

3) How does the sale of notes manifest itself?	Males	Females	Total
Publicly	5%	3%	8%
Secretly	44%	39%	83%
Other	5%	4%	9%

4) How does sex for grades manifest itself?	Males	Females	Total
Publicly	9%	5%	14%
Secretly	42%	35%	77%
Other	5%	4%	9%

6) When does Money for Notes happen?	Total
All of the time	4%
When filling in grades sheets	41%
When marking papers	24%
During the exam period	16%
At any moment	11%
Other	4%

5) When does sex for grades happen?	Total
All of the time	4%
When filling in grades sheets	44%
When marking papers	20%
During the exam period	14%
At any moment	13%
Other	5%

7) Who is implicated in Sex for Grades?	Total
The Principals	10%
The Teachers	59%
The Parents	3%
The Students	16%
All of the Above	7%
Others	5%

8) Who is implicated in Money for Notes?	Total
The Principals	12%
The Teachers	46%
The Parents	7%
The Students	25%
All of the Above	7%
Others	3%

9) Sex for grades affects:	Total
Girls more than Boys	69%
Boys more than Girls	9%
Girls and Boys to the same level	22%
10) Money for notes affects:	Total
Girls more than Boys	47%
Boys more than Girls	8%
Girls and Boys to the same level	45%

11) Do you think money for notes and sex for grades is good for education in CAR?	Total
Yes	4%
No	95%
Abstain	1%





## A WIDER ISSUE

The children's findings reflect other research and reports of sexual abuse and corruption in school systems in Africa<sup>1</sup>, where sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) is a common issue for children, particularly girls, where they face coercion and sexual violence from teaching staff, peers and members of the community in the journey to and from school.<sup>2</sup>

In 2015 UNICEF 'U-Report' asked children in Liberia an open question about what their biggest concerns were, and eight out of ten children responded saying sex for grades was their biggest worry<sup>3</sup>. Research into abuse and corruption in the school system in CAR specifically is limited, however in 2017 Maastricht University published a report on children's right to education, which outlined corruption and the use of violence, coercion and corruption in schools by teaching staff.<sup>4</sup>

These issues are further exacerbated in places affected by conflict, where protective systems in community and state are eroded and education provision broken, underfinanced and under supported. Contributing factors are numerous and include:

- Late or no payment of teachers
- A prevalence of unqualified 'parent- teachers' used in schools in place of professional teachers
- A lack of systems for reporting and enforcing codes of conduct
- Lack of resource invested in school programmes
- Lack of functioning justice systems to deal with perpetrators
- Poor school governance systems and parental engagement with schools to address the issue, tackle corruption and hold teachers to account
- An acceptance and normalising of a culture of corruption
- Lack of power and status children have against adults, particularly those in position of authority, such as teaching staff

These issues also need to be regarded against a wider context where corporeal punishment is commonly accepted and the role of women and girls as subjects of sexual and gender-based violence often normalised. Most children are also incredibly eager to get an education, as they see it as chance to improve their life chances for themselves and their families. This desire for education can be easily manipulated by some teachers, who use pressure and coercion to get money or sexual favours from students.

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF *Too Often in Silence: A Report on School Based Violence in West and Central Africa*: [https://www.unicef.org/wcaro/VAC\\_Report\\_english.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/wcaro/VAC_Report_english.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Plan Report 'Learn without Fear': <https://plan-uk.org/file/plan-report-learn-without-fearpdf/download?token=HMORNNVk>

<sup>3</sup> UNICEF U-Report Liberia 2015 <https://ureport.in/story/194/>

<sup>4</sup> The Right to Education in the Central African Republic: <http://kinderrechtenonderzoek.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Childrens-raport-ENG-OK.pdf>

The impacts of these problems on children, their education, families, communities and countries are substantial. Children who are asked for payment or sexual favours commonly respond by lowering school attendance or dropping out as a protective measure. For those who are coerced or forced, particularly girls, the effects of this sexual and emotional abuse on their psychological well-being are considerable, and can also result in pregnancy, contracting STIs, and - when it is known to peers and the community to have happened - social stigmatisation.

Corruption in schools contributes to intra-household stress by placing increased economic burdens on families and caregivers as well as the children themselves, who may have to engage in risky work to find money for class. In the longer-term the impact of abuse and corruption in the school system is the lowering of retention rates in schools and the academic success of generations of children, as well as a reduction of the country's chance of economic success.

## WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

Since completing their research the VoiceMore group have been campaigning for more attention to be paid to sexual abuse and corruption in schools.

The children have met with The Ministry of Education in CAR and the UNICEF coordinated Education Cluster to raise their concerns and are currently designing their own sensitisation activities for schools and the community. To ensure real change however, the international community, states and donors need to pay more attention to safety and accountability in schools. War Child calls on international donors and governments to ensure:

- **Safety is Put First:** In recent years there have been huge efforts internationally to get more children into schools. Globally, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals and other international campaigns, many countries have committed to drastically increase school attendance. In the drive to raise numbers safety and accountability cannot however be forgotten, and more emphasis is needed on ensuring schools are safe places for children to learn.
- **Greater Accountability:** Teaching staff committing these abuses should be held to account for their behaviour. A lack of adequate systems in schools to monitor teachers, and disciplinary procedures if they are found to be behaving in these ways, means teachers in many places can act with impunity. Governments need to take a greater interest in this issue and ensure a zero-tolerance message is communicated to schools and Head Teachers, with those committing such sexual abuse being reported to relevant authorities.
- **Ways to Report:** Corruption and abuse in schools is a hidden issue. It is very difficult for children to speak up, which is why demands for money and sexual favours often result in children dropping out of school. Children also don't have ways to report when abuse is taking place. Every school should have child-friendly systems in place that allow children to report when demands for sexual favours or payment are being made.
- **Raising Awareness:** Most children are not aware of their rights or that these practices are illegal. While codes of conduct might exist in some schools, children do not know about them and schools do not communicate to pupils or communities what these should be. All schools should have clearly defined protocols for expected behaviour of staff and students. They should also help ensure that children and adults are informed about the Convention of the Rights of the Child and the protections and assurances it contains relating to education and protection from abuse.

*"Corruption and abuse in school is a subject of great concern. We must break the silence around these issues and do something today to hope for a positive change tomorrow. I have a great conviction that if we act together today, tomorrow our country will be better."*  
Stephanie 16, VoiceMore participant.

*"If we want a better future for our nation we should not take anything lightly. We must look further into the future. One child being abused in school is too much. We must promote a culture of honesty."* Jean, 17  
VoiceMore Participant

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