



At a Glance

RAISING VOICES

Raising Voices is a feminist organization based in Kampala, Uganda, working to prevent violence against women (VAW) and violence against children (VAC). For two decades, it has iteratively developed two evidence-based methodologies— the Good School Toolkit and SASA! methodology— that have become global models for effective violence prevention. The Good School Toolkit uses practical ideas and tools to help educators and students work together to create more caring and inclusive schools. It presents ideas and suggestions for activities that foster systemic change in the operational culture of schools and creates a violence-free environment conducive to learning. By using the Toolkit, Raising Voices seeks to influence the operational culture of the school through four main entry-points: teacher-student relationships, peer to peer relationships, student and teacher to school relationships, and parent and community to school governance relationship. SASA! Together, is Raising Voices' community mobilization approach that aims to inspire local activism to prevent intimate partner violence by encouraging women and men to reflect on and balance power in their relationships and communities.

Founding Background

Glasswing International is a nonprofit. Raising Voices was founded in 1999 by Lori Michau and Dipak Naker, whose early work with women and children in Tanzania revealed the limitations of responding to violence after it occurred as this did not resolve the past traumas or prevent additional violence from occurring. Seeking to address root causes, they established Raising Voices in Uganda to focus on prevention through collective learning and social change. The organization's first major initiative—[Mobilizing Communities to Prevent Domestic Violence: A Resource Guide for Organizations in East and Southern Africa](#) laid the groundwork for its enduring emphasis on community engagement, feminist theory, and the power of relationships to catalyze change. In 2004, Raising Voices expanded its mandate to include violence against children, which began with a national study centering children's own perspectives and experiences of violence. Building on these insights, the [Good School Toolkit](#) was created in 2008 - a program to support educators and students in exploring what makes a healthy, vibrant and positive school, as well as guide them through a process to realize their vision.

Overview of Programs Offered

The Good School Toolkit (GST) is a whole-school intervention that aims to make schools safer, more respectful, and

more inclusive spaces for children and adolescents. It engages students, teachers, administrators, and community members in a structured process of reflection and action that addresses power relations, discipline, and gender norms. Through participatory activities, the Toolkit encourages schools to replace corporal punishment with positive discipline, strengthen teacher-student relationships, and foster student voice. The Toolkit's principles of respect, empathy, and collective responsibility serve as the foundation for Raising Voices' broader efforts to transform the social norms that perpetuate violence.

Target Population

The Good School Toolkit targets male and female adolescents in primary and secondary school—students aged approximately 6–18 years—attending public and private schools in Uganda. The program also directly involves teachers, school administrators, parents, and local leaders to create a supportive ecosystem for adolescent well-being and gender-equitable relationships.

Relationship to Formal Systems

Raising Voices works in close collaboration with Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development. As members of the Inter Ministerial Committee on VAC and the Inter Sectoral Committee on VAC, it influences strategic conversations and decisions on the issues

of VAC. Raising Voices also contributed to the formation of coalitions on Sexual Violence and Positive Discipline that convene government and other CSOs to collaborate on addressing the related VAC issues.

The GST is recognized nationally as a model for violence prevention in schools and in November 2024, the Ugandan government pledged to scale the Good School Toolkit and outlaw corporal punishment in all settings nationwide by 2030.

Program Structure and Duration

The Good School Toolkit is structured as a six-step process implemented over approximately 18 months, corresponding to one school year and one follow-up term. Each step introduces participatory activities that engage the entire school community in rethinking daily practices, relationships, and discipline. Activities are aligned with the Transtheoretical Model of Change, supporting schools through stages of reflection, action, and consolidation. The process is designed to be cyclical, allowing schools to adapt and sustain the approach over time.

In 2025, GST Agile which is an adaptation of GST was developed. It builds on feedback from over 1,500 schools, in-depth consultation with education stakeholders, years of learning from implementation by Raising Voices staff and community activists, and research conducted by

IDinsight in 2020 (which is summarized in a report titled [Adapting for Impact at Scale: Lessons for Streamlining Raising Voices' Good School Toolkit](#)).

Program Delivery

Implementation of GST is led by Good School Committees composed of students, teachers, and community members who serve as “protagonists” of change. These committees coordinate school-wide activities, support peer learning, and promote shared accountability for maintaining non-violent, equitable environments. Raising Voices provides training, mentoring, and technical assistance, ensuring quality implementation and contextual adaptation. The program is deliberately designed to be low-cost and scalable, with schools leading much of the work independently after initial support.

Curriculum

The Toolkit includes a sequenced set of participatory materials—activity guides, reflection cards, posters, and videos—that encourage critical thinking about power, respect, and relationships. Topics include positive discipline, empathy, communication, and gender equality. Activities are integrated into school routines and emphasize learning through dialogue and practice rather than instruction. Key tools, such as class rule-making, suggestion boxes, student courts, and “Walls of Fame,” provide tangible

structures for modeling fairness, inclusion, and mutual accountability. A cartoon booklet entitled “Are you promoting gender fairness in your school?” is designed to foster critical awareness and dialogue about adolescent gender norms ([see curricular materials here](#))

Geography and Reach

As of 2024, the Good School Toolkit is implemented in approximately 2,000 schools across 34 districts in Uganda,

reaching hundreds of thousands of students and educators. Through its partnerships, the Toolkit has also been adapted and applied in Tanzania. Building on this reach, Raising Voices’ 2023–2027 Strategy aims to scale implementation to 5,000 schools by 2027, with an explicit focus on strengthening adolescent mental health, expanding to secondary schools, and integrating gender-transformative practice into national education systems.

For more information, see: raisingvoices.org

OVERVIEW AND MISSION

Raising Voices is a feminist organization based in Kampala, Uganda, working to prevent violence against women and children by transforming the social norms and institutional practices that sustain it. Since its founding in 1999, the organization has been recognized for developing participatory, evidence-informed methodologies that link individual reflection with community and institutional change. Its work is grounded in the conviction that safe relationships—whether between teachers and students, or partners and peers—can only emerge when power is used with fairness and empathy rather than control or fear. At the heart of Raising Voices’ mission is the belief that schools and communities can become sites of learning, safety, and respect when they are guided by shared values of dignity and equity.

The organization’s Good School Toolkit (GST) provides a structured, whole-school approach to creating such environments by engaging teachers, students, administrators, and parents in collective reflection and action to replace violent discipline with positive and participatory practices. The Toolkit does not only address acts of violence; it seeks to shift the underlying norms, attitudes, and institutional cultures that normalize it. Complementing this school-based work, Raising Voices also implements SASA! Together, a community mobilization approach designed to prevent violence against women by challenging the misuse of power and promoting gender-equitable relationships. Both strands of work, SASA! And GST share a common approach centered on dialogue, participation, and transformation of everyday power relations.

Through these programs, Raising Voices aims to build capacity within schools, communities, and government systems to prevent violence and change school culture. The organization’s mission is to prevent violence against women and children so all can flourish in safety and dignity. This is operationalized through practice, learning, and influencing.

Approach to Shifting Adolescent Gender Norms

Raising Voices’ approach to shifting adolescent gender norms begins from the recognition that schools are powerful social institutions where gendered expectations are formed, reinforced, and—importantly—can be transformed. The Good School Toolkit (GST) was designed to work within these institutions, supporting teachers and students to reimagine the relationships, rules, and routines that define everyday school life. The Toolkit embeds reflection on power, relationships, fairness, and empathy into the fabric of the school, engaging adolescents as participants in shaping the culture of their learning environment.

At its core, the GST operates through four interconnected domains: teacher–student relationships, peer relationships, student and teacher engagement with the broader school, and connections between the school and its surrounding community. Activities across these domains encourage dialogue about respect, cooperation, and shared responsibility. As teachers learn to maintain discipline through encouragement rather than punishment, and as students are given structured opportunities to express their views, new norms of interaction begin to take hold. These shifts in everyday behavior can foster an environment in which equitable gender relations can emerge and be sustained.

Raising Voices views shifting adolescent gender norms as inseparable from broader efforts to shift the power relations that underpin violence - particularly in the school and community context. Teachers and administrators are supported to see that corporal punishment and other forms of coercion mirror the same dynamics of control that sustain gender-based violence. By reducing violence in teacher–student interactions, the Toolkit creates the opportunity to shape alternative, caring relationships. As new relational practices become normalized, they can influence how young people negotiate their relationships beyond the classroom—at home, with peers, and in intimate relationships.



THEORY OF CHANGE

How Does Raising Voices' Programming Shift Gender Norms and Prevent Violence?

The design of the Toolkit draws on the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska & Velicer, 1997), recognizing that transformation occurs gradually as individuals and institutions move from awareness, to reflection, to action, and finally to consolidation of new norms and practices. Raising Voices' theory of change is grounded in the conviction that lasting reductions in violence emerge when people learn to use power positively and relationships become spaces of fairness, empathy, and care.

At the individual level, the Good School Toolkit works directly with students and teachers to examine the social expectations that shape the school culture. Through participatory activities including class rule-making, student courts, and suggestion boxes, young people practice dialogue, negotiation, and fairness in their daily interactions. The "Gender Fairness" booklet explicitly challenges stereotypes such as "girls belong in the kitchen," "boys should not cry," and "leadership is for men." These discussions help students distinguish between biological sex and socially constructed gender, recognize unfairness, and imagine new roles and ways of relating.

GST trains and mentors teachers to equip them to replace corporal punishment with positive discipline, demonstrating that authority can be exercised through care rather than fear. As teachers model empathy and respect, and as girls and boys see themselves reflected as capable and valued, new norms of equality and nonviolence can take hold.

Change inside schools is reinforced when families and communities participate in the conversation. Toolkit materials invite parents to value girls' education, assign chores equitably, and talk openly with their children about what is going on in their lives. Through meetings and outreach activities, teachers and community committee members share stories about fairness and cooperation, helping adults see how supportive parenting and open communication protect children from violence. Used in conjunction with SASA!, Raising Voices' programming attempts to promote the same principles of power sharing and mutual respect among adults. Community activists use discussions, theater, and reflection circles to question norms that justify male control and to model equitable partnerships. Together, the two programs create a feedback loop: adolescents bring new expectations home, while parents and community leaders encounter alternative visions of gender and authority that affirm children's voices.

At the institutional level, Raising Voices works with Uganda's Ministry of Education and Sports to embed the Good School Toolkit within national strategies for safe and inclusive education.

This collaboration positions the program not as an external project but as a government-endorsed approach to improving school climate and teacher practice. By influencing curricula, teacher-training syllabi, and policy frameworks, the Toolkit can make positive discipline and participatory decision-making part of school culture. Over time, these systemic changes help redefine what “a good school” means in Uganda: one that values inclusion, gender equity, and non-violence as indicators of educational quality. In the short term, students and teachers gain knowledge, empathy, and communication skills. In the medium term, schools establish norms of mutual respect and accountability, reducing corporal punishment and gendered hierarchies. In the long term, Raising Voices hopes that these relational and institutional shifts reshape broader social expectations, including reducing tolerance of violence, expanding opportunities for girls, and promoting caring, non-violent masculinities among boys. The goal is to move communities toward a culture in which power is used to nurture rather than to control.

Research and Program Evaluations

Raising Voices has collaborated with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Makerere University, and the University College London Institute of Education to examine the effects of its programs, particularly the Good School Toolkit. Research combining randomized controlled trials, qualitative inquiry, and internal monitoring has offered insights into how participatory, relationship-centered approaches can influence school culture and norms around violence and gender. The Good School Study (2012–2014) found a significant reduction in the risk of physical violence from staff to students after 18 months of implementation. Qualitative findings suggested that these reductions were associated with improved student–teacher relationships, greater student voice, and the adoption of positive, non-violent discipline. Teachers described experimenting with alternative ways of maintaining order, while students reported feeling more respected and safe at school.

Follow-up research has explored how these changes unfold over time. Evidence from interviews and focus groups indicates that the Toolkit has helped some schools foster more open communication and strengthen mutual respect among teachers and students, with spillover effects on family and community relationships. Evaluations of SASA! have similarly found reductions in the acceptance of intimate partner violence and greater support for gender-equitable decision-making.

Promising practices

Several features of Raising Voices’ approach stand out as promising practices for other efforts to prevent violence and shift adolescent gender norms through education. Central among these is its emphasis on changing the culture of the school rather than introducing a single program or set of lessons. The Good School Toolkit positions violence prevention and gender equity as collective responsibilities shared by teachers, students, and community

members. By engaging the entire school in structured reflection, action, and dialogue, the Toolkit helps to reconfigure the cultural practices inside of schools including what discipline looks like, who holds power, and how respect is expressed.

Another promising practice is the Toolkit's integration of school and community change. Teachers, students, parents, and local leaders work together to create consistent expectations for fairness, safety, and care across both settings. This alignment reinforces messages about equality and nonviolence, ensuring that what children learn at school is not contradicted at home. The approach also builds ownership: rather than depending on external facilitators, schools and communities become the main drivers of transformation.

The program's ability to address violence directly while linking it to gender is a distinctive strength. Rather than treating corporal punishment or gender discrimination as isolated problems, Raising Voices sees these as interconnected expressions of power. This framing allows teachers and students to recognize how the normalization of violence in schools mirrors broader gender hierarchies in families and communities. It also makes the concept of gender equity concrete—experienced in daily interactions

rather than abstractly discussed.

Connected to this is the Toolkit's focus on relationship building and the cultivation of care. The program defines a "good school" not only by academic performance but by the quality of relationships among its members. Activities that encourage empathy, shared decision-making, and communication model what nonviolent, equitable relationships look like in practice. This relational focus helps teachers see that authority need not depend on fear, and it allows students to experience fairness and voice as central features of learning.

Finally, the approach demonstrates the potential of embedding social change within formal education systems. By working in partnership with the Ministry of Education and aligning its materials with existing structures, Raising Voices has shown how violence-prevention work and efforts to shift adolescent gender norms can move toward institutional sustainability. Together, these practices suggest that meaningful reductions in school-based violence and shifts in gender norms are possible when change is approached as a collective, relational process that is grounded in care, mutual concern, and the shared aspiration to make schools safer and more equitable for all.

