

*An Initiative in Kisarawe  
Primary Schools*



**HAPPY & SAD SUGGESTION  
BOXES**

In 2018 FEED THE CHILDREN Tanzania and C-Sema partnered in collecting children's views and creating awareness on Violence Against Children through an initiative called Happy & Sad Opinion Letters. Over 15,000 children were reached across 20 primary schools in Kisarawe district. Happy & Sad Opinion Letters is an outreach program in which C-Sema reaches school going children encouraging them to speak out about issues that are important to them and challenges they face through letter writing.

The aim of the outreach in Kisarawe was to; sensitize children in schools on identifying and reporting incidences of violence against children (VAC), create awareness on the available reporting system and to empower children to speak out when they experience or witness abuse.

The programme also trained over 45 child protection stakeholders including school staff (teachers and school principals), Ward Education Officers, local government leaders as well as a District Social Welfare Officer and a representative from the Police Gender & Children's Desk.





School is a place where children spend most of their time. In school settings children learn to socialize and through socialization they learn and adopt numerous things and habits – both good and bad. In this same vein, children can encounter abuse or different forms of violence at the hands of teachers, their peers or other adults they come into contact with.

A child may be safe at home but then encounter abuse on the way to school or child-to-child abuse in school. Children that have gone or are going through abuse at home are more likely to do the same to other children in school or to their peers. Oftentimes, issues such as bullying, physical violence and abusive language by children are rooted in a child's upbringing at home.

To address this issue, this activity was conducted from July to September 2018 in primary schools in Kisarawe district sensitizing children on issues of reporting VAC and school monitoring in terms of student-teacher relationship, student-to-student relationship and monitoring the implementation of FEED's programmes. **Approximately 15,289 children were reached in 20 schools across the district.**

1. Boga Primary School
2. Chang'ombe Primary School
3. Chang'ombe B Primary School
4. Gumba Primary School
5. Kauzeni Primary School
6. Kazimzumbwi Primary School
7. Kibuta Primary School
8. Kibasila Primary School
9. Kikwete Primary School
10. Kiluvya B Primary School
11. Kisanga Primary School
12. Kitanga Primary School
13. Marumbo Primary School
14. Mengwa Primary School
15. Mfuru Primary School
16. Mhaga Primary School
17. Msanga Primary School
18. Msimbu Primary School
19. Mwanzo mgumu Primary School
20. Sanze Primary School



## THE MAIN OBJECTIVE:

- To sensitize children in schools on identifying and reporting incidences of violence against children (VAC).
- Feedback and monitoring the project that FEED runs.

## THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

- To measure students' awareness and knowledge on VAC, types of VAC and the signs of violence and abuse.
- To sensitize children on the available reporting mechanisms and to empower children to speak out when they experience or witness abuse.
- To introduce C-Sema and 116.

# THE INTENDED OUTCOME

- Students are aware and well informed about VAC, types of VAC and the signs of VAC.
- Students are well informed about the reporting system, 116, Social Welfare Officers, Police Gender & Children's Desks, Local Government Authorities and their responsibilities.
- Student are well informed about their rights and their responsibilities.
- Children become proactive in preventing and assisting other children in reporting once they experience violence.



# ACTIVITY MODALITY

The District Education Office selected schools randomly. The team then held a joint session with the heads of all 20 schools to brief them on the project and how children will be involved in voicing concerns in school and home settings. Thereafter, VAC facilitation sessions were held with children where they were able to learn about VAC using examples from their own experiences. During the sessions, children admitted that some of them have been abusing each other on the school compound especially bullying, physical violence and abusive language amongst themselves.

Children were also oriented on how they can anonymously write letters explaining why they are happy, or why they are sad and how this would help bring their concerns for teachers, parents, child protection workers and leaders to work on. In each session, children were given the opportunity to write their opinions and put them in a mobile Happy & Sad Opinions Box. After each session, facilitators opened the Happy & Sad box with all teachers present and together with the teachers, children's opinions were sorted and grouped according to issues raised.

The team also held a focus group discussion with frontline child service providers including; Social Welfare Officers, Community development Officers, Ward Education Coordinators officers, local government leaders and a representative from the Police Gender & Children's Desk.



## THE SESSIONS WITH CHILDREN

Sessions with children were conducted by one staff member from C-Sema who was the lead facilitator and two staff from Feed the Children who were the host. The sessions involved students from nursery school to class seven and they were either divided into two groups according to classes or all of them attended a single session depending on the total number of children in the school.



The sessions began by asking students question to measure their understanding on matters related to VAC and to identify the gaps that need to be dealt with based on their understanding. Most of the schools that are nearby responded very quickly and were more interactive compared to those that are in more remote areas. Some of the children shared real-life scenarios of things happening in their neighborhoods which made it easy for the facilitators to explain how VAC occurs in different contexts and risk factors that children can look out for.



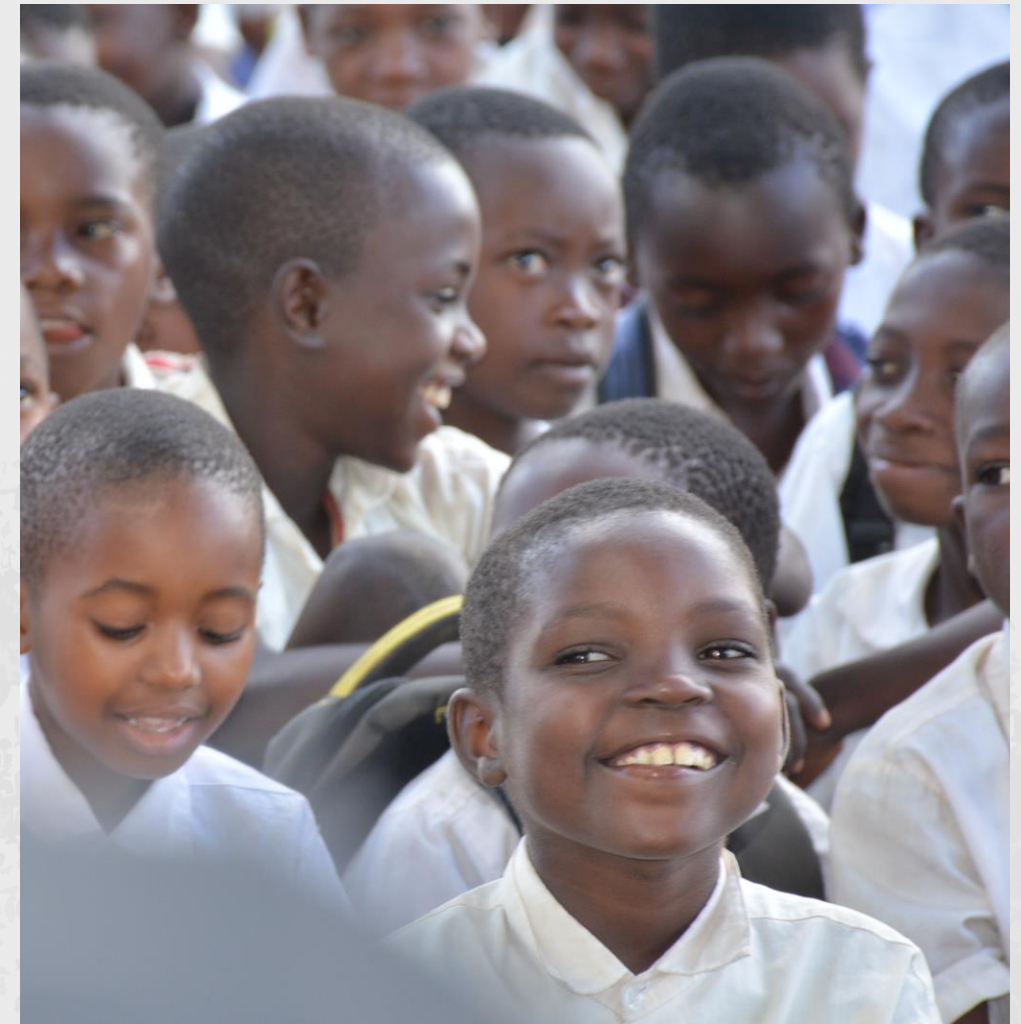


## **THE FACILITATORS EXPLAINED THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF ABUSE;**

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect abuse
- Spiritual abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Gender based violence
- Spiritual abuse
- And reporting system including 116

Every type of abuse was well elaborated with a few demonstrations for children to grasp the lesson easily.

In every session conducted, sexual abuse was given an emphasis because it's an area that communities regard as taboo to talk about but it happens in secret and is difficult to talk about. As a result, many incidences of sexual abuse go unreported and if reported to parents or guardians, there is a very high possibility of the case being solved within the family.





More time was spent elaborating on acts that are regarded as normal but are actually sexual abuse and can lead to more or serious sexual abuse. During this discussion, boys and girls testified witnessing some old men who call young girl names like 'mchumba' while touching and caressing their breasts which they said is a normal thing for that community and children were not aware that it is sexual abuse. The facilitator explained that if a child is being exposed to touching and caressing on their private parts, it is sexual abuse and this can later escalate.

In most of the schools, boys would deny the fact that a boy can also go through sexual abuse like rape and sodomy. They thought it only happens to girls although they are aware of sodomy being sexual abuse and they testified hearing of such incidences in their community. The facilitator took time and explained to them what sodomy means and the possibility of them encountering such incidences so they should be careful, do their best to protect themselves and their friends against it and once they suspect that there is some element of abuse, they should report it as soon as possible.

During a session in one of the schools, children shared a story of one student in standard three who sexually abused a nursery school boy. All the children seemed to know about this case but surprisingly, the teachers were completely unaware until we shared the information with them after the session. The boys were not in school that day but they promised to follow up and find out what was going on.

## **'SAD' OPINIONS**

- Most children complained about the abusive and harsh language used by their teachers and parents.
- Majority reported their parents leaving them with their grandparents or extended families.
- In some schools, children – especially girls – reported on forced marriage after standard seven. They reported that parents tell them not to perform in their final examination so that they can get married but also, they have witnessed some of their fellow students intentionally failing their examinations so that they can get married.
- Children reported on bullying around the school and regular fighting with each other
- Some children reported about having few teachers and shortage of books.
- Some children also wrote about the classrooms not being enough for them, toilets flooding and some have no doors which makes it difficult for girls to have privacy.
- They also reported not having enough games and sport facilities.
- Some children complained about not having a flag in their schools as well as a school badge to differentiate them with other schools since they have the same uniform.
- Some girls also complained about old men touching them inappropriately while calling them 'mchumba'.
- Some schools complained about the afternoon activities when the sun is too harsh.

## **'HAPPY' OPINIONS**

- They were happy with the initiatives done by FEED in making sure they are enjoying their school time including providing them with porridge and cups.
- They were happy with the facilitation and the knowledge they have added.
- Children were happy to know about 116 but they were not sure if they can access it since they have no phones but they promised to use the happy and sad boxes.

## EXPERIENCE FROM TEACHERS

In each school, the team met with teachers before and after the sessions with the students.

- ✓ Teachers stressed on neglect issues and the challenges they face in handling them. Most of the children live with their grandparents while their parents are in town. Teachers reported that they have been facing a lot of challenges in monitoring their development because there is no cooperation from their grandparents since a majority of them are too old to keep up with the pace of their grandchildren. Neglect was evident in the physical appearance of the children – a majority of them wore very old, dirty clothes and teachers reported that many of them do not have basic school essentials like books and pencils.

As a result, there are many drop-outs and children with poor performance. Many youth are in town and only come during harvest time sell crops and leave with the money. During holidays, some children visit their parents in the city but then take too long to report back to school and the follow up is not easy, which gets teachers into trouble with their management (Government).





- ✓ Sexual abuse is an issue in Kisarawe but it is often associated with witchcraft. Due to the sensitivity around this topic, many students are affected in one way or another but reporting is a challenge and even when they report, taking action is also a problem because even child protection agents are threatened with witchcraft so eventually, cases are solved within the family. Teachers explained that many incidences of sexual abuse are also a result of high level of neglect since many parents have left their children with their grandparents who are old and can no longer take care of children.
- ✓ Teachers requested for capacity building seminars for them to be able to handle child protection issues in schools.
- ✓ They also requested for community awareness on VAC issues and to call upon all the parents to take care of their children rather than leaving them under their grandparent's care. They explained that children are aware now since more focus is on the children but all interventions focus on children forgetting the parents who are the source of a lot of abuse children face.

## THE EXPERIENCE AND OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FIELD

- ❖ Based on observation and listening to children, teachers, social welfare officers, community development officers and ward education officers' explanations and testimonies, sexual abuse and neglect are common in Kisarawe district. However, they are not reported or they reconcile within the family and if reported it's difficult for cases to proceed to the court because of fear of witchcraft and superstition. Many perpetrators have been reported threatening child protection workers that they will bewitch them if they pursue cases and this happens even to the family members and eventually, they give up trying to get justice.
- ❖ Children had little-to-no clue on violence against children, child abuse and only a few could explain clearly on the rights and responsibilities of a child, reporting systems like police gender & children's desks and local government authorities. This low level of awareness calls for attention on designing more outreach programs. There are some NGOs working to serve children in Kisarawe but they mainly focus on the tangible issues including infrastructure and child feeding programmes and less on child protection issues.



- ❖ In some schools visited children were not well informed about child abuse, risky behavior, appropriate and inappropriate physical contact, dealing with peer pressure, identifying abuse and responding to disclosures which has contributed a lot to child-to-child abuse in schools.
- ❖ Due to location challenges, children in Kisarawe don't get enough opportunities to mingle with other children or to attend children's events that can help them to learn more about other issues out of the formal education system. There are no clubs or extracurricular activities to promote peer-to-peer education, awareness and also to build their confidence.



- ❖ Concerns about a child safety, allegations of abuse and disclosures must be reported and any concern or disclosure should be recorded in an appropriate place as described in the school's child protection procedures. However, this is a nightmare in the school settings, and teachers have contributed to more abuse and humiliation of children because of lack of knowledge.
- ❖ There is no link between the District Social Welfare Officer and school management. Some of the teachers are not aware that Social Welfare Officer is part of the child protection team in school and they should communicate regularly or anytime they encounter a child protection issue.

The experience in Kisarawe and especially children's opinion letters gave FEED a motive to spread wings and do more work for children on child protection issues.





# **FOLLOW UP ON HAPPY & SAD BOXES IN KISARAWAWE**

In the months of July and August Feed the Children and C-Sema did a follow up visit to see the results of the Happy and Sad boxes that had been placed in schools. The team met with Guidance and Counseling Teachers who are responsible for recording all the information provided by children through their letters or by direct reporting when the issue is urgent and can't be placed in the box.

Children in each school raised different issues but two issues seem to cut across almost all schools; the issue of neglect; where children complained of being left to live with their grandparents or step parents and the issue of sexual abuse especially for children in class 3, 2, 1 and nursery school.



## **FOLLOW UP VISIT – NEGLECT**

In one school, letters placed in the boxes led to the identification of sick children who were not getting treatment despite having told their parents about it for a while. Some children are HIV+ but their parents/guardians were not taking them to the hospital to get their medication. The Guidance and Counseling Teacher identified the children and summoned their parents to the school for a talk and parental guidance. As a result, children were taken to the hospital for treatment and those that are HIV+ are now undergoing treatment.

## **FOLLOW UP VISIT – SEXUAL ABUSE**

In one school, a rape case was reported to the police and later taken to the court. Although a conviction hasn't been made yet, they have had two court sessions already. Some children have reported being threatened by people in attempt of sexual abuse which calls for more awareness and empowerment for them to report.

## **FOLLOW UP VISIT – EMOTIONAL ABUSE**

Children's letters reported that teachers name-called them but children also like name-calling each other which makes the school an uncomfortable place to be. Teachers spoke and agreed not to name-call or use nick names on children but also spoke to children and gave orders that no student is allowed to name-call others. Students have since written that teachers' language has improved when addressing children. The children that were most affected by name-calling/bullying were given counseling.

## **FOLLOW UP VISIT – PHYSICAL ABUSE**

Physical abuse was reported within the school setting but also at home. Cases that occurred in schools were dealt with during teachers' meetings and the Head Teacher advised staff to use alternatives to corporal punishment like collecting fire wood introduced to some schools. Teachers reached the agreement that punishment should not be so heavy as to harm a child but just enough to teach them and has to be age-appropriate. For physical abuse that happened at home parents/guardians were called to the schools for parental advice.

*A case study was given of a stepmother who was abusing her stepchildren indirectly by reporting and exaggerating all minor issues that happened at home to extent of deserving punishment from the father who would then beat his children. The case was reported to the police and the father was arrested. A decision was made that the children should go and live with their biological mother.*

## **FOLLOW UP VISIT – MULTIPLE FACETS**

Although neglect is among the most reported cases, oftentimes it is not reported in isolation and several issues lead to or result from neglect. Many children reported being left to live with their grandparents but also complained about stepmothers who abuse them physically. Conversations with teachers highlighted how child-to-child sexual abuse happens in the home. Housing is a problem that has led to siblings of opposite genders sharing rooms which sometimes results in child-to-child sexual abuse. A majority of their students who have seen adults having sex later practice what they've seen with their fellow and parents weren't aware.

## **FOLLOW UP VISIT - IMPROVEMENTS**

It wasn't all bad news. In their letters, children also expressed their appreciation to their teachers for teaching them well, loving and supporting them at any time that they need their support at school. Some children wrote that they appreciate being allowed to have long hair and are grateful to FEED for providing shoes and porridge during school hours. In some schools, children also requested for more teachers since they are few in number.

In some schools parents were informed about the Happy & Sad box being at the school and that children can write letters with opinions and report abuse that happens to them anywhere – including at home. They were also told the consequences of them being reported concerning violence and abuse. Since then, teachers have reported seeing some improvement in the way parents handle their children.

However, teachers complained about the lack of support from local government authorities in case they report any abuse that needs their intervention. This is due to some officials them being either friends or relatives with the perpetrators hindering the interventions. Teachers also requested for more sessions with children for them to not only be aware but to also internalize lessons.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Quite a number of teachers handle things in the wrong way. In the same way that this program reaches children, it needs to reach their teachers who are like their second parents at school or at the very least, the Guidance and Counselling Teachers where it is not possible to reach all teachers in the school.
- Peer mentoring is very important; children may be more likely to disclose abuse to a friend or peer. Peer mentors will need to be taught how to respond and be aware of the importance of passing on the concern to an adult as soon as possible, to help other children to protect themselves and help them report immediately should they encounter abuse.
- There is a need to design a mechanism to make sure that all the schools where FEED operates in have clubs and those that haven't been reached can be reached to ensure child protection.
- The community is a very important part of child protection – they should be involved by creating awareness on various issues especially on VAC and on school development projects that are for their own benefit.
- After this activity, schools have mobile Opinion Boxes for them to use after seeing how they work to collect children's opinions. The follow-up activity shows that concerns raised by children are being addressed although there are still challenges encountered by children and their teachers in following-up and addressing these concerns.