

ICRW Africa Portfolio

Ending Child Sexual Abuse



Background

ICRW is currently implementing its 2023-2026 Global Strategy which prioritizes three broad thematic areas critical to gender equity:



The thematic areas represent issues where ICRW believes it can have the greatest impact, based on need, opportunity, and expertise. Each issue-set includes a range of related areas, grouped thematically. Throughout all our work, ICRW applies a gender lens with the aim to challenge inequities and promote inclusive development. We are committed to understanding and highlighting how gender plays out in each of these thematic areas to shape discrimination, privilege, power, access to social services and life-long opportunities and outcomes.

While our global strategy clearly articulates our overarching goals, ICRW Africa is currently adapting and localizing its approach to effectively address the unique needs and challenges of the communities it serves on the continent. As part of our thematic work on SRHR, ICRW Africa is prioritizing efforts to end child sexual abuse and exploitation (CSA) in the region.

The problem

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines CSA as **the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society.**

According to UNICEF, each year, millions of girls and boys around the world are sexually abused and exploited at home, school, or in their community. Although sexual violence occurs worldwide, the risks increase in emergency situations. The growing use of digital technologies has also increased CSA risks. Sexual violence causes significant physical, psychological, and social damage. Victims experience heightened risks for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, unsafe abortion, pain, illness, unplanned pregnancy, social isolation, and trauma. To deal with trauma, some victims may resort to dangerous behaviors such as substance abuse. And, as children grow into adults, sexual abuse can impair their ability to care for themselves and others. CSA also takes a heavy toll on families and communities. Most children who face sexual abuse experience other kinds of violence. As abuse and exploitation of children become entrenched, progress towards development and peace can stall – with far-reaching consequences for entire societies (UNICEF, 2020).

Africa has one of the highest incidences of CSA in the world. A recent report on the region described CSA as a “silent epidemic”, stating that in some parts of the continent,

four out of every ten girls are victims of sexual abuse before the age of 15.



For instance, in Tanzania and Ethiopia, the incidence of CSA among girls is reported to be between 2.1% and 68.7%, while it is between 4.1% and 60% among boys in South Africa. (Selengia et al., 2020). Rapid social change, unrelenting patriarchy, growing access to social media technologies, conflicts and wars, weak legal systems, and poverty are among the known key drivers of the high prevalence of CSA in Africa (Badoe, 2017).



Between 4.1% and 60% of boys in South Africa have reported incidences of CAS

The growing urgency to understand and tackle the drivers of CSA in Africa, demonstrated, for instance, by the recent 2022 Pan-African Symposium on Violence Prevention, has not been matched by evidence-driven policies and programs. Currently, data on CSA remains sketchy and programmatic interventions are hardly grounded on evidence of what works. Among other issues, existing data are often not disaggregated by perpetrator-types, frequency of abuse, slum-non-slum settings, urban-rural settings, disability status of children and household socioeconomic status, leaving gaps in knowledge of the everyday and contextual dynamics of CSS. Evidence is also only generated sporadically, making it difficult to measure progress, change or persistence. Additionally, existing solutions continue to ignore the need for holistic and ecological methods, and instead focus primarily on select individuals and contexts, such as parents, teachers, families, communities, and schools. (UNICEF, 2020).

Our Program Goals

- ▶ Conduct robust research to better understand CSA (both online and offline) and its inter-sections with socio- economic and cultural dynamics and realities in Africa
- ▶ Furnish evidence-driven solutions for preventing and addressing CSA in African contexts.
- ▶ Develop and disseminate knowledge products to enrich the body of evidence on CSA in Africa and inform what works to address it.
- ▶ Foster and sustain debate, engagement, action, and dialogue on CSA among multiple audiences in Africa.
- ▶ Create and regularly update a comprehensive database of reported CSA cases in Africa to foster awareness and inform action.

Our Approach

- ① Rigorous research and evidence generation
- ② Gender transformative programming
- ③ Evidence-informed policy engagement and advocacy
- ④ Strategic collaborations with key issue actors and stakeholders

Key program questions:

1. What legislation and policies do African countries have in place to address off- and online CSA, and how effective are they?
2. Why does CSA remain prevalent in many parts of Africa, despite efforts to prevent it?
3. What are the most effective techniques and interventions for treating the causes of CSA?
4. What are the barriers to SRHR services for CSA survivors in Africa?

- How can children's, households', and communities' agency in preventing, reporting, and responding to CSA be strengthened in various African settings?
- What are the social and mental health consequences of CSA among its survivors in Africa?
- What are the emerging forms of online CSA in Africa, as well as the gaps in online safety measures and related law enforcement challenges?
- How are the risks of CSA evolving for different populations of African children?
- What is the efficacy of current efforts in Africa to combat online CSA?
- What are the underlying social norms and mechanisms that continue to fuel CSA in Africa?
- What works to prevent and respond to CSA?

Core Competencies

ICRW Africa has extensive experience in SRHR and CSA research and programming, program evaluation, policy development and advocacy. We regularly collaborate with research, funding, implementing, media, advocacy, policy and governmental organizations to foster understanding of, and address the critical SRHR and gender-related issues of our time. Our approach is intersectional, driven by our well-honed and in-depth understanding of how multiple forces shape outcomes and opportunities for communities, groups, societies, women, men, boys, and girls.

ICRW Africa draws on the expertise of researchers across disciplines to inform and drive its work. Our technical staff include public health specialists, social and behavioral scientists, economists, anthropologists, gender and youth specialists, lawyers, public policy specialists and other subject matter experts who combine academic expertise with field experience and deep contextual knowledge.

Some relevant past experience

1 Technical Support to East Africa Partners Working to End Sexual Violence against Children (2021-2024)

ICRW is strengthening the capacity of implementing partners in Zanzibar and Uganda in CSA prevention programming, monitoring, evaluation, and learning. The work also involves baseline research, strengthening documentation, promoting effective evidence uptake and measuring the efficacy of a multilayered CSA prevention interventions. Early findings from the study indicate that 9.1% of children aged 10-17 years in Zanzibar had experienced sexual violence in the past 12 months (4.7% were boys and 4.4% were girls).

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2 Understanding the Root Causes, Drivers & Possible Solutions to Child Marriage in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and Asia (2023)

ICRW undertook a scoping review to investigate the intersecting factors driving the persistence of high rates of child marriage (CM) in developing-world contexts. The assessment will shed light on why, despite years of substantial and ongoing investments, attempts to eliminate CM are not yielding the anticipated impacts, as well as inform new research, policy, and programmatic directions.

3 Integrated Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights Program in High Burden Districts of Uganda (2021-2023).

Between 2021-May 2023, ICRW Africa supported a consortium of program implementers working to advance the well-being of young people and women by empowering them with SRHR information, enhancing their decision-making skills, strengthening health systems to provide quality SRHR services, empowering communities to reject root causes of SRHR violations and SGBV and strengthening SGBV response in nine hard-to-reach districts of Uganda. ICRW's scope of work included generating evidence on youth SRHR issues including sexual abuse, conducting gender-sensitive capacity building and providing technical assistance for gender transformative program design, monitoring, evaluation, and quality improvement.

3 Gender and Adolescent SRH in West and Central Africa (2022-2023)

In partnership with IDRC, ICRW is assembling new research evidence on SRHR among young people for publication in a special issue of the African Journal of Reproductive Health. The project, the first of its kind the sub-region, brings together a new research and insights that allow scholars, practitioners, state actors, and the public to develop a more nuanced understanding of the intersections of gender and sexual and reproductive health, including violence, abuse and exploitation that are part of the everyday lives of adolescents in West and Central Africa.



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4 Understanding and Addressing the SRHR Needs and Challenges of Young Women and Girls in Humanitarian Settings in Nigeria and Uganda (2019-2023).

In partnership with Action Health Incorporated (AHI), Nigeria and the Uganda Red Cross Society (URCS), ICRW conducted a mixed-methods research to understand and address the unique SRHR challenges of girls and young women in humanitarian settings. Utilizing the findings from in-depth interviews and surveys, we are working with stakeholders to redesign SRHR services in these settings to better meet the needs of abused and marginalized girls and young women in contexts of displacement.

4 Promoting positive masculinity for SRHR and gender equality in urban informal settlements of Rwanda, Nigeria & DR Congo (2019-2023).

ICRW and its partners, the University of Nigeria, University of Kinshasa and the Rwandan Men's Resource Centre, implemented a project to generate and disseminate evidence on the implementation, effectiveness, and challenges of male targeted SRHR and positive masculinity initiatives in poor urban settlements in Nigeria, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In addition, ICRW assessed the gender attitudes, norms, and sexual practices, including practices related to sexual contact and marriage with minors, and supporting existing male-targeted SRHR and gender norms change initiatives to use the emerging evidence for program improvement and to strengthen the delivery of transformative male-targeted SRHR programs.

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Defining and measuring technology-facilitated gender-based violence

In 2018, ICRW developed a research project to inform a working definition of, and framework for understanding technology-facilitated gender-based violence (GBV) that links previously disconnected harmful behaviours. The research addressed how gender mediates an individual's vulnerability to technology facilitated GBV and how it is experienced across a spectrum of contexts globally, including where women, girls, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex individuals are disproportionately disadvantaged and targeted. **The study found that most CSA studies had focused primarily on heterosexuals and on school adolescents and young adults in high-income countries, leaving wide knowledge gaps on the continuum and intersections of social factors like race, class, or disability status in shaping experiences of technology-facilitated gender-based violence, and its impacts and consequences.**

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