AMPLIFYING TEACHERS' VOICES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

EXPLORING THE ROLES OF RELIGION IN COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION ACROSS FOUR AFRICAN COUNTRIES

A RESEARCH SYNTHESIS REPORT

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Contents

Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome
CSE	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
FBO	Faith-Based Organisation
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HIV	Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IAM	Inclusive and Affirming Ministries
KII	Key Informant Interviews
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer
LS	Life Skills/Orientation
MoE	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SOGIE	Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity and Expression
SRH(+R)	Sexual and Reproductive Health (and Rights)
VAC	Violence against Children

Executive Summary

This research synthesis report documents selected insights and lessons learned from high school teachers across South Africa, Malawi, Lesotho and Namibia who are involved in teaching or supporting Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in their local schools. It offers insights emerging from their practice on which activism for change can build. It has an emphasis on the visibility of "queer" learners but insists that gender and sexual minorities must not be treated as "special" cases or victimised, othered or singled-out through the teaching of CSE. An inclusive approach requires visibility and honest, robust engagement about human sexuality by not leaving any bodies behind. This report explores the understanding, reception and impact of CSE in SADC member state secondary schools and the role of religion and faith around this through the perceptions of 16 teachers within 16 government schools as well as two IAM school workers. Due to the small sample size, it does not claim that they are representative of schools across the regions but that their experiences may resonate with other teachers. It showcases the voices of teachers to show their potential and commitment and surfaces their embodied experiences as a form of practice-based knowledge (Palm & Clowes 2019) to develop a broad evidence base for gender-based violence prevention alongside grassroots practitioners.

The overarching research question which guided this study with the regional partners is: How does religion and faith impact the implementation (teaching and learning) of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) at high schools? Are learners referred to appropriate Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) services where necessary?

However, in exploring this question with CSE teachers, a range of other useful insights with regard to how CSE is understood as relevant, impactful and facing challenges by them were also collected and are included also.

This research report provides a synthesis of the study findings. The study employed a qualitative methodology to ask local incountry partners to use key informant interviews to explore the perceptions of 16 teachers around CSE and religion with a particular, but not exclusive, focus on SOGIE learners. Dr Palm then carried out an inductive thematic analysis of the data using Atlsa.ti8, a globally recognised gold standard technology for qualitative analysis and used these findings as the basis for writing this synthesis report. A large number of direct quotes were included to enable the teachers voices to shine through. The report is structured in three main data sections. It focuses on teachers impressions of CSE in Section 2, their views on the perceived roles of religion, positive and negative, in CSE in Section 3 and in Section 4 it looks at SOGIE learner support as well as referral systems around SRH and sexuality for learners. Section 5 concludes with a brief discussion of these data findings and flags some trends and concerns as well as some top tips emerging for future consideration.

The report highlights six ways highlighted by teachers in which religion has and is still often been playing a negative role in relation to school based CSE, namely resistance by learners, parental concerns, repressive school policies, a public backlash by many faith institutions and as a result conflicting messages for learners from their home, school and faith spaces. At the heart of these negative roles sits literalist and exclusivist interpretations of faith and its sacred texts and traditions being used to reinforce taboos on new generations.

In its place teachers offer six positive possibilities for the role of religion that are being nurtured in small ways, often by the teachers themselves but that need acceleration, namely the developing positive theologies of inclusion and diversity, the reinterpretation of harmful sacred texts at community level, a commitment to 'do unto others' and intersectional forms of inclusion that can generate practical action for safe spaces in schools, with NGOs helping to capacitating people of faith to become champions of change as part of their faith.

It offers peer learning for other teachers in the region and provides a small contribution to an evidence base for programme implementation for the future. Much global work on SRH and GBV has been done to date through a hetero-normative lens. This report offers an important contribution to the Schools Out project by drawing attention on the specific needs of SOGIE learners especially in relation to religious narratives. Harmful beliefs still shape their realities in schools today. For SADC countries who have made a public commitment to deliver CSE in their schools, it offers insights as to gaps between formal curriculum and practice in the field.

1. Introduction and Methodology

This research report provides a synthesis of insights and lessons learned from a research study with high school teachers from both Christian and state schools across South Africa, Malawi, Lesotho and Namibia who are involved in teaching or supporting Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in their schools. It offers insights emerging from their lived experience on which activism for change can build. It has an emphasis on the visibility of "queer" learners but also is grounded on the assumption that gender and sexual minorities must not be treated as "special" cases or victimised, othered or singled-out through the teaching of CSE. An inclusive approach requires visibility and honest, robust engagement about human sexuality by not leaving any bodies behind. This report explores CSE in SADC member state high schools and the role of religion and faith around this through the perceptions of 16 teachers all within 16 different secondary schools. Due to this small sample size, it does not claim that these insights are representative of schools across these regions but offers a lens into their embodied experiences which may resonate with other teachers. It showcases the voices of teachers to show their commitment to this task and as a form of practice-based knowledge (Palm & Clowes 2019) enabling context-specific knowledge to emerge that is embedded in their realities.

This study formed part of a wider two-year *School's Out* project implemented by the *HSRC* on creating safer inclusive school environments for learners around SRH support in East and Southern Africa. The research question which guided this specific study is: *How does religion and faith impact the implementation (teaching and learning) of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) at high schools? Are learners referred to appropriate Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) services where necessary?* In exploring this question with CSE teachers, insights on how CSE is understood as relevant, impactful and facing challenges were collected and are included as part of this report. The study has a focus in certain questions on the experiences of SOGIE learners, whose needs are often ignored or unmet and who can face heightened risks of gender or sexuality related stigma, discrimination, bullying or violence. By amplifying SOGIE learners SRHR needs and challenges, the greater need is also addressed in ways that are not at the expense of other learners needs. This offers a corrective contribution to research on CSE which still tends towards a heteronormative lens.

The study used a qualitative methodology and focused on the collection and analysis of primary data through eighteen semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) with high school (primarily life skills) teachers in local secondary schools across four countries. International ethical clearance for the study was received in 2020 across in-country education departments. *Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM)* carried out the interviews in South Africa while their regional partners took the lead in-country to carry out the interviews elsewhere as part of a partnership with the HSRC. Pseudonyms are used for all participants. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Coding and inductive thematic analysis of the data was carried out by Dr Palm using Atlas.ti8 software, a global gold standard technology for qualitative analysis and forms the basis of this synthesis report.

There were some limitations to this study. First, it is a small study with only 18 interviews. Originally seven countries across the SADC region had been identified with a wider set of research activities also planned, but due to COVID-19 realities in 2020, many of these had to be cancelled. In the end only four countries were able to do interviews and most of these took place using online formats. Only English-speaking participants were interviewed and the sample of teachers per country also varied considerably, from eight in Malawi to just two in Namibia. Resistance to the study was also encountered due to CSE often not being fully understood in-country resulting in delayed ethics approvals, and resistance from school principals to agree to teachers participating. Although their governments are signatories to the SADC inclusion of CSE in the life skills/orientation curriculum, a lack of political will to implement also shaped resistance to this research.

The report is structured in three main sections that reflect the impressions of the teachers interviewed. It gives some framing background in Section 1 and then focuses on the understanding, relevance, reception, challenges and impact of CSE in Section 2, the perceived roles, positive and negative, played by religion and faith in CSE in Section 4 and the realities of learner support and referral systems for learners in Section 4. Section 5 concludes with a brief discussion of these findings and a number of key insights to take forwards.

2. Research Background

According to global research, "Comprehensive sexuality education promotes the right of adolescents to receive education about their bodies, relationships, and sexuality by equipping them with skills, attitudes, values, and knowledge needed to determine and enjoy their own sexuality" (IPPFa, 2019:3). Since 1994, sexuality education has been expanded to include addressing gender-based violence and inequalities. One of its roles is in tackling harmful gender norms and inequitable relationships (IPPFb, 2019) This time of life is identified as a key stage where violence related to gender roles and intimate partners can be addressed and it therefore has significant implications for both GBV and for SOGIE learners. However, SRH has historically been engaged through a binary lens and this can still also be perpetuated in much GBV work. These issues need to be intersectionally linked so that gender and sexual violence against all bodies is engaged.

Increasingly *a gender-transformative approach* is recommended (IPPF 2019b) which aims to restructure gender relations in way that are more equitable and includes paying specific attention to current and desired power dynamics within classrooms, school and wider society as well as access to youth friendly referral services as a right. Increasingly, CSE is seen as offering pathways for prevention strategy for IPV with strong girls empowerment agenda. While this is important, without care, it runs the danger of heteronormative bias – identified as a concern in wider GBV research (Jewkes et al, 2020). Methods of teaching recommended for CSE includes the use of participatory techniques, enabling a reflexive process by students including *the questioning of social norms,* especially those related to gender, sexuality and violence. Guided critical reflection on their own beliefs about violence and increased ability to identify violence around them can shape behaviour change around patterns of GBV. (IPPF 2019b, 2019c) This requires skilled health educators specifically equipped in these methods as well as in content (IPPFc, 2019). The involvement of adolescents in program design stages is also seen as vital. Resistance to CSE by educational staff, family members and religious voices is a concern and needs careful strategies of sensitization (IPPFc, 2019)

At the same time, a global research agenda has emerged regarding safe, child friendly, rights respecting schools (UNICEF 2014) One significant aspect tackles school related sexual and gender based violence with global initiatives focused on early adolescence and safe schools (Parkes et al, 2015. Connecting discussions about CSE with these 'whole of school' approaches offer a more holistic response and ensures that SOGIE learner needs receive attention across all initiatives to end violence against children, GBV and supporting a safe school environment for all teachers and learners. CSE discussions require an *ecological approach* which involves all stakeholders both within the school and into the community (IPPFc, 2019).

In 2013, a regional accountability framework driven by UN agencies led to formal Ministerial commitments across ten East and Southern African countries around CSE and SRH services for adolescents (SADC, 2015). In the light of this a SADC strategy for 2019-2030 has been developed with specific targets (SACD 2018). However, there remain concerning silences around SOGIE learners (Starrs et al, 2018). Most SADC states have a secular legislative framework for schools with CSE formally part of the approved state curriculum. This offers opportunities on which to build. However, a concerning gap remains between theory and grassroots practice (UNFPA 2015). Resistance to CSE from various educationalists and parents have led to challenges and calls to scrap amendments and lesson plans. Much of this backlash is fuelled by a moral veneer of religious concern fueled by conservative faith-based media (Naidoo, 2020) which needs to be countered by other faith voices and research. Research in this region has explored how faith does violence to LGBTIQ+ persons and creates patterns of social exclusion (Gevissier, 2016, West et al, 2016, Kuravilla, 2018). At the same time progressive theological alternatives offer inclusive alternatives (Palm 2019, West et al 2016, Hadebe et al, 2016, Gunda, 2017) Religious actors hold considerable moral power and authority in these countries, influencing social norms, beliefs and behaviours and holding roles in health and education. Theologies of inclusion need to be applied in practice if faith is not to remain ambivalent in ending violence against all children (Palm & Eyber 2019). LGBTIQ+ children remain a gap in most faith responses. If progress on SRHR for all is to be amplified (Starrs et al, 2018), religious resistance to CSE must be engaged and its positive spiritual capital nurtured.

3. Unpacking the Suitcase of Comprehensive Sexual Education

3.1. How do teachers understand CSE and its key focus areas and methodology

The teachers interviewed (henceforth 'the teachers') all see CSE as a vital, skills-based discipline tied to real life issues, learners' changing bodies, personal decisions and values and how to treat each other. It is often situated under the wider topic of Life Skills/Orientation (LS) also new in some countries. Many SADC countries have new CSE curricula that is being brought in while an old one is being phased out with some resistance seen, especially from religious groups. The new approach creates opportunities for conversation if the teacher is willing and equipped and focuses on relationships between students, and in society to explore problem solving, practical dilemmas, subjective choices and sexuality, not the biological basics of sex alone:

> *CSE contributes to, and involves equipping young people with knowledge, skills, and learnings... education preparation for their sexual lives and what CSE does to equip young people with the necessary information with sexual education so that they can be free from questions, abuse and exploitation, unintended pregnancy, STI's and HIV also (Teacher 1, Namibia).*

Specific focus areas mentioned by the teachers as part of CSE included: Sex, reproductive health, nutrition, blood donation, contraception, sexuality, sexual rights, HIV, STIs, puberty and bodily stages of life, becoming adults, healthy and abusive relationships, teenage pregnancy, intergenerational sex and GBV as well as wider lifeskills themes such as self-respect, identity, awareness, esteem and personal development, drugs, weapons, mental health as well as career advice. One teacher noted that *"these priority areas allow learners to learn about different issues now affecting their life and how to deal with that. What are the consequences of this issue and how to deal with it or what to do if they become victims"* (Teacher 1, Namibia).

The holistic development of the person was stressed here, to become a good citizen with good values and develop responsible ways of behaving. Rights and freedoms form part of this lifeskills subject and enable issues to intersect in ways they don't when some of the separate topics are covered under other disciplines:

> *Life skills is more about not looking at the other person as just being female but...human rights...to respect and see the other person as being important not just as a sexual object (Teacher 1, Malawi)*

Secondary school CSE curriculums covers a five year period and deepen over that time. It aspires to go beyond providing knowledge only to include character formation also. Its success is therefore to be partly measured in the behaviour change of learners and the creation of safe, inclusive spaces for education:

> *(W)e are speaking about HIV, puberty, healthy relationships and how to recognise toxic, or harmful ones...we are speaking about safe sex practices, contraception, abstinence...being an educator, and on moral grounds obviously we're going to preach abstinence first, and then protection methods, STI's... the last one that I was thinking of, and the one that lies very close to my heart is of inclusivity and creating safer space for all our children, all our educators at school. School should be a safe haven for everybody, and at the moment that is not what I can say. (Teacher 1, South Africa)*

Some teachers in South Africa and Malawi suggest that CSE is still failing to be comprehensive, even in its new forms as it was not all inclusive and left out important details around SOGIE identity. One teacher notes:

> *only certain elements are being discussed or covered. As a queer teacher body myself, I would know even better because there are many different layers to gender identity and sexual orientation or sexuality, and it is not as rigid and black and white as what the education system is currently trying to portray,...content is only referring to the historical cis-gender identity or heteronormative identity of male, female, there's absolutely nothing that even alludes to alternatives (Teacher 2, South Africa)*

Others from Namibia and Lesotho felt that sexual orientation was included adequately in their curriculums although some teachers may leave out these components in practice. One teacher saw LGBTI+ issues as being a specific focus in CSE for the future needing teachers to be equipped to engage learner questions:

> *Key areas are sexuality, sexual rights and gender-based discrimination. The focus now is on LGBTI people; they should be included in our understanding of gender so they feel more welcome in society. Learners should learn more about these identities to alleviate discrimination (Teacher 2, Lesotho)*

3.1.1. Understanding the difference between sex and sexuality

Teachers were asked about whether learners understand the difference between sex and sexuality. This was also a way to probe if and how teachers understood this distinction. Mixed results emerged. Some teachers highlighted that learners did know the difference, others that they were initially ignorant, confused the two or had received misinformation that they were the same. This distinction is also part of what is taught in the new CSE. Many saw it as helping educate students about this difference and that it was also a question they were tested on in exams. This shift from sex to sexuality was mentioned across teachers from Namibia, Lesotho and Malawi. A tendency was noted by learners and parents to see CSE as teaching about 'having sex' which then causes an anti-CSE backlash but the teachers insisted that CSE is about sexuality more broadly, ranging from a focus on SRH and being responsible decision makers around sexual and intimacy issues to wider life decisions where identity, empowerment, agency and self-understanding all emerged. Sexuality was itself seen as complex and as containing multiple components including sexual orientation:

(S)exuality has more to do with the feelings...when you are close to someone , the way you feel and this sexuality is more than sexual intercourse because the feeling comes first... sexuality it's just an umbrella because it has some components which are very important like sexual and reproductive health, sexual intimacy, sensuality, sexual identity . I have just forgot one because they are five. (Teacher 2, Malawi)

Sexual orientation is included as part of the CSE curriculum even in places where it is criminalised:

(S)tudents are able to understand minority sex(ualities) like homosexuality in other subjects like Social Studies or Life Skills. Their knowledge is becoming widened. They would be able to understand and explain very well. We have students with that orientation in their hostels. (Teacher 8, Malawi)

The teachers are typically able to make connections between SRH and themes of sex and sexuality. But many teachers still lean towards a binary notion of biological sex even in teaching the new curriculum. This is a concern if the new curriculum still works with strong binaries and even encourages some teachers to do so:

Sex is either one is male or female but when you go to the students the moment you talk about sex it is like you are talking about sexual intercourse. This is not in line with the definition of sex. Equating sex and sexuality is a challenge since students have a pre-conceived idea what sex is and what sexuality is. When you try to point out the differences between these two you hear funny answers from the students... Once the lesson is over, they are able to differentiate when you explain to them clearly (Teacher 1, Malawi)

Underlying binary assumptions may still essentialise discussions on biological sex and was critiqued strongly by one teacher as cis-gendered, needing carefully consideration in both training and resources development.

THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF CSE METHODOLOGY

Teachers pointed out that aspects of CSE are often included in other topics, especially biology, but lifeskills offers a more hands-on practical approach that focuses on students' real-life dilemmas and decisions. This methodological difference was seen as important. Words such as discussions, case studies, practical examples, listening to students, having dialogues and conversations, talking about things that trouble them and handling challenges were reoccurring phrases when asked why CSE was important. Agreement was seen that a CSE methodology ought to focus on equipping learners with practical skills now and for later life, help them manage the 'tough times' (transition from child to adult) and prepare them as good citizens. The subject was holistic, with sexuality and gender forming one important aspect of life skills that interrelate.

The need for teachers to create an open atmosphere in the classroom was stressed where all learners can feel comfortable to speak about what they don't understand and the role of the teacher is to fill in gaps rather than a top down didactic approach. This requires teachers to enable space for mutual honest discussions where they respond to questions that are driven by the learners who can be *"they are given more like a platform where they air out all those things which really confuse them"* (Teacher 1, Malawi).

Behaviour change of learners is seen by all teachers as an important desired result of lifeskills, including CSE, both in the present and in the future. This can be held in tension with seeing it as an academic subject to be learned and examined where some students still just rote learn information to pass exams. How CSE is perceived and measured can also create tensions especially if it is an optional subject and can be deprioritised by school, parents and learners as not oriented towards a career or job options. This can even mean it is voted out or not taken seriously. In some South African schools, teachers who do not have enough classes will be allocated to a lifeskills class with no preparation or training as it is seen as a 'filler' topic.

Creative methods of teaching are also needed to hold learners' attention. This was noted especially in South Africa where many learners enter the class already knowing things from the internet or social media – but also with concerning misinformation. This can also alter the power dynamics in classrooms for teachers who can feel that learners know more than them. But it offers possibilities for alternative creative pedagogies of dialogue that move away from traditional, didactic models to become more experiential and case study based. The age of the teachers can make a difference with young teachers often, but not always, seen as more creative and accessible, and older teachers as sometimes reluctant or even creating new taboos in the classroom by creating

intergenerational engagement on these topics in ways that are culturally disallowed. CSE is also intended to play a practical role in empowering learners to seek other services in ways that support their holistic development although there were mixed results regarding this reality (see Section 4):

> CSE also gives them information as to where they can go for certain advice, which clinics to use etc. That assists them with holistic developing as an individual and making good choices. I think that is one of their key focuses, is to allow children to make good and informed decisions (Teacher 3, South Africa)

3.2. Why does CSE matter?

Teachers across the regions insisted that CSE/LS was vital and should be equipping all young people to make informed choices about their bodies and how to conduct themselves. This is especially true in the light of high exposure through social media to these issues. They see CSE as an integral part of emotional and social development where children can ask questions that they are often not comfortable asking at home:

> (W)ithin the community that I'm serving, children don't really get enough information. Parents don't feel open to speak about certain things to their children... so that allows within the teaching and learning environment for children to be more informed, so it also contributes to them getting the correct information and not getting second hand information from individuals who might not have all the necessary info, and as teachers maybe we don't have all the answers, but we are linked to NGOs and other companies we can get in to explain certain things to the learners. (Teacher 3, South Africa)

Some teachers made links between the silence on issues of sex and sexuality seen in their schools and communities and

high rates of GBV in their contexts where female choices around sex are not respected:

> I think the CSE curriculum program enables learners now in school to learn about their health, well-being and dignity and sexual rights. Now with this understanding from CSE, learners will be able to make informed decisions about social life, sexual health and sexual preferences... because this content is provided it allows them to learn different aspects of life (Teacher 2, Namibia).

CSE is seen by the teachers as a place for correcting misinformation and enabling better choices to be made. They suggest it needs to be given a prominent position and not seen as less than other subjects:

> CSE is very important and should be an inclusive, all-encompassing content based on the policies of the Ministry of Education. It should also cater towards the inner being that capacitates the learner towards understanding themselves in the gender identity and sexual orientation spectrum. (Teacher 1, Lesotho)

3.3. Is CSE seen by teachers as relevant to their specific context

The teachers overwhelmingly insisted that CSE was highly relevant in their specific contexts and that often parents did not feel equipped or able to have these conversations in the home whilst youth were accessing significant information and often misinformation online and in other ways. One teacher from Namibia noted:

> I think that comprehensive sexual education is very important, due to the fact that if now, if we have to ignore it and say let's put it away, we should not discuss it with the kids and all that. Nowadays kids are exposed to everything. They have access to internet, access to magazines and they read different books. They watch TV, they watch videos on YouTube and all that. Now if they are not given now the necessary information to these kids, because now, what is at the internet, kids can talk to each other and they get the wrong information and end up in situations that they don't even know how to deal with this situations (Teacher 1, Namibia)

A number of specific reasons were given by the teachers for the relevance of CSE:

- CSE can help to correct learner misinformation, understand sexuality and inform learner choices.
- Children are curious and are often sexually exposed and will experiment if no spaces to discuss
- Parents don't want to talk about these issues with their children with large gap seen here
- Social taboos exist on these discussions so teachers in general don't talk about this unless equipped
- It is a practical topic related to real life challenges and the changes being experienced at this age
- Things change fast for new generations due to globalisation and they need to understand
- Lifeskills should be a compulsory subject and seen as a priority as it shapes all other subjects
- It equips students for later life as good citizens and for involvement in social development
- Enabled respectful but critical engagement with cultural and religious norms that they grow up with
- Helps avoid drop out by learners due to issues such as teenage pregnancy, drugs, initiation schools
- Nurtures the agency and confidence of learners in preparation for their sexual lives
- Not just about the negative aspects (STDs etc) but seeing sexuality as positive aspect of humanness
- Cultivates an awareness of diversity enabling teachers and students to understand each other better

it helps the students to know practical life. It is not just theories because everything done in Life Skills are things that students are going to encounter once they are done with their education. (Teacher 1, Malawi)

We are experiencing high drop-out rates, and there are numerous reasons for this. Many of our learners feel ashamed of whom they are but teaching CSE boosts their confidence and has a direct link to reduction in dropout rates. CSE makes learners aware of their sexual reproductive health rights and are therefore less likely to be abused or forced into arranged marriages. (Teacher 1, Namibia)

FROM ABSTINENCE TO COMPREHENSIVENESS

"For many years we were just educated on abstinence… Whenever we start a conversation on sex, we say – abstinence, abstinence, A-B-C, on moral grounds. But learning about sex and STI's and so on, where do you get that information if you don't get it from school…But, when you learn about sex through inaccurate rumours, you go to your friends who hear from peers, and they bombard you with information that is different from the ones that your mom tells you, that the little monkeys in the mountain, they chopped off your tail, and things like that. So that was my own upbringing. So how prepared are our young kids nowadays? For me, I was only taught about abstinence, stay away from boys. And the only education that we even still provide to our kids, we don't address all their questions and their fears. And you know kids, they are curious, they are going to find out… Then there's also the scaring tactics. You tell the children all the don'ts, but you don't tell them the do's. Like contraception, let alone showing them how to fix a condom. We need discussions with parents and involve them in the education of their children because there's also a big stumbling block. As adolescents develop sexually, society's attitudes, as well as the family, plays a major role, also cultural, traditional norms, in how they perceive their sexuality after puberty. We can, through CSE, break down this mysticism of puberty and sex into what can be beneficial to us, a beneficial learning experience. I think of what I missed out, and how I can now better the lives of others. Sexuality will remain a major part of our lives…. in relation to sexual violence and inter-partner violence I think it's crucial we teach our young people about sex, about sexual reproduction. Teachers should restructure this curriculum. We know what we can teach and how we can teach it, find innovative methods and prepare our learners to make informed decisions, healthy choices, and promote gender equality (Teacher 1, South Africa)

3.4. How is CSE being received by various stakeholders

While CSE may create reluctance and shyness at first for some learners as it tackles social taboos, most become positive, open up and benefit from its real-life focus, and engaging approach to address life realities and peer pressure. Teachers from all four countries confirmed this general experience of positive reception:

> It has received a warm welcome. Some learners were ashamed to express themselves in front of others, but now they are well-informed and confident... (when) my learners are confused and receive CSE with mixed feelings. I make sure to make my content well-articulated and comprehensive for the learner. I teach from simple to complex; from known to unknown (Teacher 1, Lesotho)

> In the classroom situation leaners are always so happy they have the interest to learn more especially with these issues dealing with real life situation in terms of growing up, teaching them how they grow from childhood to adult hood that interest them even more (Teacher 7, Malawi)

> (C)omprehensive sexual education is received very well by the vast majority of learners because they are in high school. So teenagers are naturally very inquisitive, especially when it comes to their gender identity and sexual orientation and sex. they receive it very well, but they only get to receive it as well and positively as how well or positively it is communicated to them. (Teacher 2, South Africa)

> They are crazy about it! They even remind me when I forget! They love the subject. When the subject is instilled in them, they become more responsible and the results are visible (Teacher 2, Lesotho)

However, the topic of homosexuality can create a backlash in the classroom especially for religious learners and teachers need to be equipped to use these as teachable moments to start to normalise diversity:

> (F)or example I had a member of Jehovah Witness this other year, this one told me openly saying that "Madam I am not comfortable talking about these issues about having sex, homosexuality because in my church they don't allow that" (Teacher 5, Malawi).

Parents often receive CSE with some concern and even initial protest from some but many also want someone to do this and often have a sense of relief once they understand. Some worry that their children will be spoiled or corrupted. This needs to be handled sensitively and be explained carefully to parents:

> (P)arents are very cautious, and don't want their children to be exposed to certain things which the CSE touches on, e.g. sexual orientation, they don't want to talk about certain topics...in our communities we have certain topics that is seen as taboo. But I have engaged with some of our parents and some are very open-minded because they also realise that it's topics that they wouldn't want to touch on. Not all parents feel comfortable talking about menstruation to their children, so doing it here in the classroom also assists a parent at home with more open discussion. So here I have a presentation with them, and then I will do a PowerPoint with the parents to engage them on what we are discussing. (C SA)

Teachers note that it is not seen as a serious subject by learners and some even drop it. Teachers often have to add lifeskills into their already busy teaching schedule and the topic can be even split up between teachers. CSE can disrupt traditional classroom dynamics and require dialogue approaches. Some teachers welcome this while others do not feel equipped. However, all the teachers interviewed were very positive.

Schools vary in their response to CSE and school leadership matters. Some prioritise other subjects with lifeskills added to existing teacher workloads creating resentment. Reception of CSE is also shaped by attitudes of school leadership. Faith schools in particular can react badly as was seen in Malawi and can even perceive the topic as not relevant. Religious and cultural beliefs affect teachers also shaped by this reality:

> (T)here are a lot of teachers that are stuck in a rut, with this old archaic belief systems, and change is very difficult. You don't manage change very easily, people are resistant to change, they are reluctant to change, and so we find ourselves in a community, from where I sit, that is still adhering to these old, rigid, stereotype behaviour, you know, it's a taboo, you don't speak about sex, you can't even say the word, and we need to change these harmful societal values (Teacher 1, South Africa)

3.5. Challenges, resistance or backlash around CSE

Specific challenges, resistance and backlash were highlighted by the teachers across all regions and were not confined to only one group. Learners, teacher schools, parents and wider communities all had examples of showing resistance in different ways. Many of these may have been vocal, but minority, voices that should not take away from the many positive responses to CSE that have also been documented in all these groups.

Some learners can fail to take the subject of lifeskills or CSE seriously and don't see it as a real academic subject or as something connected to their wider social responsibility to act differently. Some feel that class is just about chatting or think they know more than the teacher does. Some students also see it in the same way as other subjects, as about passing exams not about formation, and in this respect it can be dismissed as a 'useless' subject as learners do not feel it equips them for jobs. Some learners struggle with the self-knowledge aspects which is hard for them and they just want to copy others. Specific resistance is often encountered from religious learners who don't want to attend the class. Other learners can feel that it is culturally taboo for an older person to teach young people on these topics or for this to take place in mixed gender classes where girls can feel uncomfortable to speak up in the presence of boys. SOGIE learners can also stay quiet in these spaces for fear of social backlash or even of being expelled in some cases:

I'm teaching at a faith-based school where topics we have had in Life Skills are not fully accepted by believers...we teach students from different backgrounds where others are Christians, some terms found in Life Skills, they will not feel comfortable. When you're teaching a particular topic about sex and sexuality you would find out that people, they are not comfortable in this class, especially when you're mentioning the names of sexual parts. So as a school not all the students accept this subject that's why you will find out that students that take Life Skills they are small in number compared to other subjects because they think you discuss issues concerning sexuality. So as per culture, we haven't reached the point that we can discuss these issues comfortably (Teacher 4, Malawi)

Some teachers can also resist lifeskills as it causes logistical challenges with their other duties. Only a few have been trained and some feel that the materials are too explicit. Many teachers do not feel properly equipped and need strategies and support to make lessons more interesting. There are also too few learning materials for this topic and often only teachers have books and not learners. Some teachers see the subject as a joke which is not even assessed or a 'tick box' exercise. Teachers still encounter a number of blocks:

there's a moral block, because it seems to be difficult for educators to deliver CSE because of this belief, the religion, the society that we are living in, teaching in. ...I fight with my Principal constantly because when they draw up the timetable, they're trying to put a slot for your subjects, they will look at subjects which they regard as key, languages, maths and science...Then, when it gets to L.O my Principal said '"No man, any Dick, Tom and Harry can take this subject." So, say for instance you have to work thirty six periods and you only working thirty one, they will say "Okay, fill S up with six periods for L.O." not even asking whether S is equipped, or trained. So you'll find many teachers at a school teaching L.O., and some, they refuse to engage, they don't want to read, to empower themselves, because they feel this was just added to their workload for them to get to the required amount of periods. So you can understand the unwillingness to cooperate. Although I am of the opinion that every teacher in a classroom should be a L.O teacher because it teaches us life skills there is that attitude which doesn't favour the implementation of CSE. So we need to take that in account...We need specialists; people to understand what they are doing (Teacher 1, South Africa)

This points to a failure by many schools currently to take CSE seriously and support it. Some schools especially faith ones ay even remove it from the schedule to prioritise other subjects such as science that lead to careers or jobs or push back against it as not relevant for a Christian school which sees a conflict between CSE and religion. Some schools make it optional or even keep it in the curriculum for show only.

Significant public resistance by parents to CSE was seen in South Africa and to a lesser extent in Namibia where parents petitioned against CSE often based on misinformation from conservative religious sources, concerned with explicit images and issues asking, are you teaching children to masturbate or encouraging early sexual activity etc and some parents withdraw their children from class as a teacher from Lesotho notes, *It is sometimes a challenge as parents protest the teaching of CSE by claiming that it is not in the syllabus and makes their children spoiled. Some parents withdraw them from the class (Teacher 2, Lesotho)*

However, in Malawi, many parents want their children to get lifeskills information. In general, the teachers note that many parents are not open so if they take children out of school, they rarely teach them at home. In one instance parents of LGBTIQ children were chased away from school by other parents to get rid of them when they tried to support the introduction of CSE showing that a platform of inclusion is not there.

Conservative religious communities also play a role in mobilising resistance against CSE, especially when it is seen as in conflict with specific faith dogmas (as explored further

in section 3). In general, many religious communities see sexuality education as a 'no-no' at faith schools especially and view it as the responsibility of parents at home. As a result, parents with religious views misinterpret and resist the introduction of CSE.

> As far as inclusivity is concerned, there's still major challenges. We're living in this homophobic society and our learners from the LGBTI community most are still severely discriminated and frowned upon. I don't think the correct platform is there to address this yet, especially not in my school. Religious values make it taboo to speak about sex (Teacher 1, South Africa)

As a result of the challenge and resistance seen, there is a need to engage all stakeholders to explain CSE and to equip all those teaching it to better understand its value. Despite these challenges, many of the teachers interviewed also initially held some of these beliefs and were able to change. Taboos on sexuality discussions mean that teachers and parents are concerned about encouraging immorality and may need reassurance:

> (W)ith C's school, they had a workshop for parents taking them through the CSE. So my suggestion would be, especially in this time of the year when there's enrolment for new grade eight students, and of students who are new in the school, one, it would help having an information leaflet stapled with the school's application form. That way parents, as they're perusing the application form, would read this leaflet that explains that this is what CSE is, what it educates, the outcomes, and this is what would be required from the parent in terms of support. (IAM schools worker 1, South Africa)

3.6. Do teachers feel properly equipped to deliver CSE in their context

Varied responses emerged with the majority feeling that as individual teachers they were trying to do a good job but had to take the initiative. All felt that more needed to be done in this area and that many were not equipped with knowledge or skills. Education departments at the top must do more to enable filter down:

> (L)istening to teachers, this is a huge challenge. I don't think our teachers are at a point where they feel that they have been adequately trained, they are not really at ease with it yet. Apart from a mindset change needed for both teachers and parents, the Department must invest in training of the educators on CSE...we have workshops, but I always ask the question "What happens after, how do we roll out that information to those actually in the classroom having to deal with that?" A lot of educators in the system are old and belong to the old school of thought. There is a change – the millennials/young educators, I find there's a willingness for them to implement, they understand our line of thinking. [and are] also saying that it's time to change, but they lack the training, they still need training. Then there's also issues with the older ones who believe in culture and religion and says "No, it's taboo. We can't talk to children about sex and sexuality, let alone demonstrating contraceptive methods such as fixing a condom. I saw in one of the books that a teacher could use a banana. Can you imagine what the response of the teacher going to be? Teachers must be trained to change first the mindset, so they have an understanding of what CSE is. (Teacher 1, South Africa)

Some felt their specialist subject at university had equipped them in part (e.g. gender or social studies) while others felt their life experience (e.g. as a queer person) also equipped them. But most said they have not had any CSE formal tertiary training and merely had a short workshop but requested more frequent follow ups:

> I think what they do to give some proper workshops on CSE I think is the way of equipping the Life Skills teachers to have intensive knowledge in terms of sexual education. Then the manuals that were provided have extensive knowledge on each part of sexual education. I think is should not be done once per year, but it should be done more frequently. (Teacher 1, Namibia)

Resources were flagged as a key concern with many countries giving examples of having very limited resources (in Lesotho the teacher had only 10 books for 80 learners) or having materials for teachers only and nothing for learners. New, interactive resources on these issues were needed:

> (W)hen it comes to resources they need to maybe create a little pack with all the relevant resources, like videos, our children is more technically minded, right. We only have a textbook, and from the textbook you as a teacher now need to develop your own other resources. If they could maybe provide video clips, some more interactive programmes for our children because most of them are really into this whole technical and media, using social media and things. (Teacher 3, South Africa)

Some teachers mentioned the value of a teacher peer support network or active MoE support coordinator for schools, speaking about how Whatsapp groups could help them get advice when facing challenges. Some felt the CSE curriculum reinforced binary stereotypes that they disagreed with. Others felt that it was too explicit. Lifeskills teachers often did not have a classroom and it sometimes lacked exam guidelines.

In South Africa, there is a push for CSE but often accompanied by a lack of training. A problematic history of Christian National Education here shapes a religious backlash on this

issue. The main teachers who have been trained by the MoE to date are lifeskills teachers while it was suggested that all teachers at the school need to be trained and that the online training which was provided last year may not be enough One teacher notes *"they only focus on lifeskills teachers not on all the teachers, (they) are only one or two at the school while learners could be a lot, I do not think the information is sufficient." (Teacher 4, South Africa)*

It is important to think about when training happens so that teachers can attend. Teachers note that a good support person for school to the MoE makes a big difference. There was also a concern that much training and curriculum currently being delivered still has a heteronormative bias and needs to be further reassessed:

(T)hose individuals need to be ready by the time that they come to us. If not, then they have to find the knowledgeable, skilled people who are ready to come in, facilitate those workshops and training to make everybody ready. But they don't provide that then it is still, to the greatest extent, focused on cis-gender, heteronormative conventions. (Teacher 2, South Africa)

A gap is seen between what should be happening and what often takes place in practice at grassroots levels:

As much as the Government is talking about CSE, teachers are not teaching it in school at all, so teachers also need to go back to the drawing board...there are teachers who are expected to stand in for an L.O teacher that didn't come through... and then you end up teaching the wrong things, or not teaching it at all. teachers need to have short courses in what is comprehensive. Maybe their understanding of what they think CSE is will change, and then that will then influence how and when and if they teach it within the classroom. (IAM schools worker 1, South Africa)

Some promising trends are emerging however. In Namibia for example, they ran a workshop where the life skills teachers met with regional facilitators to go through different topics in life skills which are very sensitive topics, so they sat down to discuss how to present sensitive topics in ways that are survivor sensitive due to the reality that kids go through bad things in life and that presentations on topics such as rape may create triggers and flash backs for these kids and how to handle different topics. In Lesotho, pressure is placed on the very few designated CSE teachers currently and there is a sense that the MoE has not done enough to date. Teachers insist that "CSE should be mandatory for all teachers. It should not just be my subject it should be OUR subject. CSE helps students a lot and therefore benefits all teachers" (TM L). In Malawi, teachers felt their training did assist them to teach the basics. But there were mixed experiences:

In my case. I was helped by the teacher trainers like my lecturers they helped me so much that I am fully equipped to teach life skills, its only that at this school they don't want us to teach this subject but otherwise as for me as a teacher I like the subject and sometimes I feel like what if they re-introduce the subject at this school and also make it a compulsory subject (Teacher 5, Malawi)

Overall, there seems to be little formal University level training on CSE which is a concerning gap. A lack of formal training especially on the new curriculum was noted and some did not feel well equipped. This could be a role that local NGOs can play to better support teachers and lesson delivery within the schools:

I wasn't prepared I was not trained, I was just told to start teaching. I had to train myself. The owner of the subject couldn't do anything so I had to take a role...I specialized in the languages (but now I teach life skills) A person is supposed to be told and then have to decide that am I going to do this and then it's a series, that can be training of course maybe by just one of the teachers so one can be trained that way and not have them self-trained by themselves... I had to source them(resources) myself from Google, libraries, from other people and teachers (Teacher 3, Malawi)

Improvements have been seen in the shift from old to new CSE curricula in all the countries. But whether this is systematically translated into practice for learners remains less clear. Lessons remain cis gendered and often also optional. The subject does not always have one designated teacher or classroom. The teachers note that it is important to make the CSE curriculum contextual and not just copy from elsewhere and to use creative methodologies. Sustained collaboration with other NGOs was seen as a great help:

I feel that more training for teachers needs to be done to get them to a more comfortable stage, also currently schools are searching for their own NGOs. I would call people that I know to come out and speak to my learners, but if the (Education) Department could provide us (schools) with a list of NGOs who would willingly come and assist to discuss certain topics with our learners... that would also assist when it comes to certain topics and implementations of the CSE. (Teacher 3, South Africa)

I haven't attended any training on teaching Life Skills. I have been here since 2012. I was posted because of Geography and Social Studies. But when I came, I was told that social studies is only offered to students at the open school, now here we have Life Skills. So they gave me the syllabus and was asked if I would be comfortable to teach Life Skills. Some of the stuff was not difficult to deliver. Then I accepted the challenge as I could not refuse since some of the stuff was quite familiar. Life Skills needs someone who is free-minded since there are somethings which you would not feel comfortable to talk about in public. If you hide something from a student curiosity creeps in among the students. Experience has taught me that students have a particular liking for teachers who are free and who are able to explain everything without shying away. If you are not open with your students, they don't enjoy your lesson. I am very comfortable teaching Life Skills. Since I came here I have told administration that Life Skills is the simplest subject that a student can pass because it encompasses all things that a student does at home, school, hostels everywhere. Skills like time management, planning for future are found in Life Skills. If you send a student away from your classes and he/she misses that lesson it becomes a challenge for the student to catch up. I am very comfortable teaching Life Skills and I wouldn't complain even if I am posted to another school. Since whatever happens in their societies affects them, they can relate to Life Skills. (Teacher 1, Malawi)

3.7. What impact is CSE having?

CSE impact was explored in relation to two areas: 1) student agency and 2) school policy and practices. Student voice/agency/development was identified by teachers as being developed in CSE thorough:

- Improved self-awareness and an ability to distinguish between sex and sexuality as a result
- A rights-based approach to others offering a new angle on content delivered in other subjects
- A safe space where vulnerable learners can ask for confidential help/counselling and get referrals
- Connections made to real life challenges and dilemmas to assist learners in decision making
- Behaviour change has been seen as a result in learners and in their interactions
- Improved confidence and assertiveness by learners and also reduced bullying and harassment
- Creation of a platform for learners to better understand and appreciate each other's SOGIE diversity

It is leading to reform in my school because after we have taught CSE, we see behavioural change in rural students. We see behavioural change, have observed them. When I started teaching there were a lot of dropouts for girls because of early marriages or teenage pregnancies, for girls and initiation school enrolments for boys. We have less drop outs now 10 % instead of 60% prior to the introduction of CSE...They know to wait until after taking exams. They are more responsible. (Teacher 2, Lesotho)

On the part of reproductive health, it has been observed that students especially girls who are not knowledgeable about reproductive health we have seen some of them falling pregnant. With the coming in of the topics of reproductive health they are able to know how to do family planning or access contraceptive methods and this knowledge comes from Life Skills (Teacher 8, Malawi)

I experienced a lot of changes when CSE was introduced in the schools, because most of the young people were uninformed, or have not enough information and skills as to their sexuality hence some of them left with HIV and have fallen into unintended pregnancy, because of the lack of understanding of their sexuality. By offering this type of education to the learners, I really observe changes in schools, even unintended pregnancies are decreased. And I talk about my school specifically." (Teacher 1, Namibia)

However, one negative impact noted is that CSE can lead to increased bullying due to what learners disclose:

(O)ur learners are still very divided, in terms of comprehensive sexual education. ..And in classrooms, it definitely does create bullying and victimisation, but the ones who are victimising certain kind of pupils would also not do it in the presence of certain educators, they know where and when to pick their targets. But it does still manifest often. But we also have,..our success stories in terms of how we see how certain learners completely pivot, or change, in their views and in their way of thinking and behaviour towards learners who are different from them, that is also there. (Teacher 2, South Africa)

In relation to school policies and practices, CSE has often played a contributing role in change. Specific examples were given regarding bathrooms, hairstyles, dress codes, teenage pregnancy and bullying policies. Many schools are taking a stronger diversity focus with everyone to be included as embedded in the policies:

(B)raids was an issue, girls having to wear plaits and things, and we changed our whole code of conduct, to get our children to be more comfortable in their own bodies, and also more expressive as to who they are. I think that really assisted the learners a lot because they could feel comfortable and free around the school. At the end of the day, they spend most of their time here, so to me as a teacher it's important this becomes their safe space, and they could be themselves. So as the head of Life Orientation for the past few years I really try to get the learners to a stage where they respect one another in their differences, and it really is working at our school. It takes time to get everyone to understand, but eventually it becomes part of the school culture. (Teacher 3, South Africa)

However, leadership buy in at all levels of the educational system is key and this varies significantly from school to school with some progress made but still a long way to go for many. CSE needs to be seen as not just about the classroom but as also related to whole of school questions about diversity and safe spaces:

(D)iversity is being different. Acceptance is a change, a mindset thing. I'm quite sure CSE can contribute to it, because it creates that...you sit within a class, in the first term I had fifty-five learners, and there is a variety from different cultures, religion. So, just by talking about this, it can create or minimize that feeling of "I don't fit, I don't belong." This acceptance and diversity with CSE can contribute to make sure we include everybody, that nobody's excluded. (Teacher 4, South Africa)

Teachers themselves have learnt and grown also as a result of CSE and many have become activists and counsellors within their specific schools with their experiences leading them to commit to inclusive education and offer students a different education to the one their received. CSE helps schools to think differently about values and morals and to make connections between human rights principles, inclusive education, and safe spaces and issues of sexuality and homophobia outside the classroom too:

(I)t starts within the LO class where we implement certain values and morals within them and disciplines within the school as well...through CSE classroom interaction learners develop that culture – like we don't have a lot of bullying at school because that's one of the topics we discuss at the start of every year, so we try and have a safe space for our learners. That for us is very important. they learn from classroom how to also go about outside the class (Teacher 3, South Africa)

However, most teachers admitted that CSE was limited to change wider school policies at a macro level. Somme noted that gender binaries remained embedded in many school activities such as sports and that religious schools are particularly tricky with lifeskills often sidelined. However important issues such as school expulsions for SOGIE or pregnancy are starting to change as seen in new MoE policies at government level with which schools have to comply. A porous relationship also exists between the wider community and the school and religion and culture have an impact on what mindsets students bring into the school. It is important that these can be discussed respectfully but critically if an inclusive, safe space is to be created.

4. The role of religion and faith in CSE

Most teachers felt that religion and faith (terms which they all used interchangeably) should be playing a role in CSE. However, some also felt uncomfortable or unqualified to speak as they felt it was a very sensitive subject. One teacher talked about wearing 'two caps' as a leader in her own local church but also as a teacher committed to CSE. The teachers were often people of faith and believed that CSE and faith needed to connect. However, all noted that it was currently problematic in their contexts. Religion formed a cross cutting part of learners, teachers and parents' socialisation and therefore CSE could not be removed from these lived realities. Some of the teachers were responsible for teaching both lifeskills and religious studies in their schools so had to find ways to hold them together. Others had to find ways to respond sensitively to learner discomfort but without ending the conversation as one gay male lifeskills teacher highlighted:

Faith and religion does have an impact and a role that it plays, especially in your classroom, you see certain learners, in what they bring – we all grow up in our own values, beliefs and morals that you are being taught at home, in church or whichever other religion. So, it has an impact on bringing the message across in the classroom. I am one of those teachers that would always tell my children if you feel uncomfortable about a certain topic I would excuse you for that period of time. ...But then I realised that this is the only space where they really get to discuss some things which they don't easily feel like discussing at home. So maybe religious ministers should also be brought together to also get to understand what CSE's all about, and not just having us as teachers playing our role and

there's no connection with ministers and religion and faith etc. I think that's something that the Department should look at, because ultimately faith and religion does play a role in our upbringing so it has an impact on what and how we receive information. It does play a fundamental role, it's important for the two to link. (Teacher 3, South Africa)

Teachers in government schools expressed some nervousness about involving religion formally in CSE, while those in faith schools lived with the reality that religion was already an explicitly part of the school picture. Many agreed that while religion was important and should be playing a positive role in inclusive sexuality education, in reality it was currently often having a negative effect. Many agreed that religion would need critique, deconstruction and rehabilitation before it could play a positive role in CSE. Currently it typically plays a limiting, silencing and exclusionary role on certain key topics (especially regarding issues such as SOGIE, contraception and abortion) and can at times even refuse to let LBGTIQ+ people inside churches.

Namibia and Lesotho were generally positive about the role of faith but insisted it must defer to progressive government policies on CSE. Malawi had a focus on faith schools where religion plays a strong role. South Africa is experiencing a religious backlash to CSE, due in part to a legacy of Christian National Education. The formal engagement of faith here, whilst real in the lives of teachers and learners, is treated with caution.

4.1. Exploring the negative roles of religion in CSE

Religion was raised by teachers across all four countries as currently causing challenges, and often playing a negative or backlash role in relation to CSE. This negative influence was seen to emerge across six key areas:

4.1.1. Creating Barriers to CSE for religious students (including fears of breaking taboos)

Teachers pointed to a minority of learners across all four regions who experienced significant discomfort in attending CSE due to seeing it as in conflict with, or disrespectful to, their faith beliefs across multiple traditions. Beliefs that even talking about sex outside the marriage context is taboo and sinful emerged in a number of the contexts and can lead to a refusal to attend, participate or drop out by religious learners:

Yes, sometimes we might have some learners here who might have felt like their faith has been discredited if we talk of abortion or mentioning some parts of the human body, they are irritated sometimes, though not many, but am sure sometimes they are just because of faith, you know in this faith they have their beliefs that ....they take you as a sinner. (Teacher 7, Malawi)

Teachers handle this resistance in different ways in their classroom with some taking a pragmatic route to tell students to just learn for the sake of passing exams rather than to engage the issues more deeply. Resistance often centres around 'hot button' topics such as homosexuality, contraception and abortion, especially when students enter the classroom with strong pre-existing beliefs on these topics that can lead to exclusionary attitudes and behaviours especially with respect to SOGIE minorities. Contraception is an issue for Catholic learners and blood donation (part of lifeskills) was an issue for Jehovah's Witnesses:

> *Religion has a major impact coz we facing challenges in delivering certain content in Life Skills because of beliefs that students have prior to coming here. Normally religion discourages or treat the minorities as outcasts. Students have that knowledge so letting them understand becomes difficult since they have been indoctrinated. These religious organizations need to understand human rights which are universal. They should know that the world cannot be made same having the same orientation They need to come in and accept these minority groups so that when these students come to school, they take in that these minority groups need to enjoy their rights (Teacher 8, Malawi)*

These beliefs can mean students are afraid to discuss issues, remaining quiet or non participatory. Some seek to find ways to drop the topic entirely or to avoid particular aspects perceived to be in conflict with their belief systems. If the country MoE is supporting CSE this resistance is often less likely:

> *(F)aith and religion have a significant role to play because difference in beliefs among learners may impact their reception of some CSE topics. Yhere has not been that much push back from students in my experience as the students are strongly encouraged to learn CSE (Teacher 1, Lesotho)*

Religious beliefs can act as a barrier to some students' willingness to learn and these internalised fears by students need to be taken seriously and engaged with respectfully. Relgious taboos around sex and sexuality are often entangled with cultural taboos and can be exacerbated by the inter-generational engagement between teachers and learners, married and unmarried persons which is often in itself a taboo in parts of Africa, especially when teachers are viewed as an extension of the parental relationship creating more fear:

> *(W)hen facilitating conversations around human sexuality and the influence of church as an institution or organised religion, the students are scared to voice their opinions as they take teachers to be an extension of their parents and are therefore not free to speak. (Teacher 2, Lesotho)*

4.1.2. Parental Complaints on CSE tied to religion

Teachers across a number of schools noted that parental concern or complaints had been received around CSE, especially from religious parents. In some situations, workshops were then done by the school to explain the topic to parents and this resistance often diminished, especially if teachers felt well equipped to explain the value of CSE. But in some contexts, such as South Africa, a strong backlash has mobilised many religious parents against CSE, circulating misinformation on social media and creating a moral panic that needs a specific strategy to dispel. One teacher in South Africa noted that religion shapes this resistance:

> *I would now want to make an example of a Muslim parent who maybe had a problem with the content that is being shared, so that – it was mostly religious views from people and how they perceive things, until they really get to understand what we are teaching (Teacher 3, South Africa)*

4.1.3. Policing of CSE by Schools

Some state schools appear to still have a strong link to faith and these often place limits on what can be taught and can make some topics off limits e.g. SOGIE issues or insist that all teaching must be aligned with church dogma. Some themes are allowed e.g. GBV or child protection while others are banned. This places teachers in a tricky situation, even if they are willing. Being observed while teaching by superiors can place unacceptable pressures on both teachers and learners:

> *(T)his is a mission secondary school and most of the times, you will find out the reverends will come to supervise you as you are teaching, it becomes difficult when you are tackling subjects that talk of sex and sexuality. Such kind of subjects as Christian and also when you're being supervised by the leader of the church, the students will not be able to open up even you as a teacher to say if I mention this they will say you are teaching abusive languages to your student, So yes those are some of the challenges we face and I have ever encountered a lot in the course of teaching this subject. As a Christian also, as a believer you also say should I mention this, you say ok because our school is only composed of the boys then sometimes you are free but if it was a school composed of boys and girls, you are tongue tightened that you can't mention some of these things (Teacher 4, Malawi)*

The exclusion of aspects of the curriculum is concerning and means that in some schools, teachers do not or cannot mention some topics despite it being in the curriculum so it is not taught in practice as they see the area of SOGIE for example as a specific battle within the church. Some suggest this is a reason why it may be risky for churches to have a formal role in CSE as they may dismantle or contest its rights-based approach.

CSE teachers also need support in unpacking their own upbringing and learning how to use the curriculum as they are also shaped by religious views, as well as facing pressure from churches, schools, parents and learners due to the religious connection of contraception with moral promiscuity and sex outside marriage:

> I am a Catholic by birth but the only time that I was taught about sexuality and reproductive health was only on the wedding day; otherwise in all spheres the church is rigid. When you talk about these things it is as if you are big sinners yet the Bible says the same in certain verses. (Teacher 1, Malawi)

Most teachers pointed to being committed to live out their religious beliefs in ways that could be a witness to the students as ambassadors of an inclusive faith. This went beyond the classroom alone:

> it is actually your life, your life as a believer... your life becomes that book that they read. And if people read resistance, hatred, denial, rejection, bitterness, resentment, if those are the kind of things judgement, crucifixion, chastisement. If those are the kind of things that people read from your life as a believer, then they don't want to have anything to do with your religion or faith, or your God, because you become the ambassador of that religion or that faith. (Teacher 2, South Africa)

Some teachers also spoke about how they had to journey away from their own upbringing in order to be equipped to teach CSE well and how religion had shaped their experiences. One teacher shared:

> You know, I was a really naïve person before I became the gender convener, and I think it was in 2006 when we were trained in Johannesburg and the facilitator asked "Who of you don't know how to fix a condom?" Up went my hand, and everybody laughed. They said "What? You don't know how to fix a condom?" And here's the religion part, I said "Well I'm married, I don't have to fix a condom. I'm in a stable relationship," you know, I'm not going to cheat on my man....And you know, the facilitator actually brought this gadget that looks like a penis, it's made of silicon or whatever. ...I could feel my cheeks turning red and hot. I had to demonstrate, and if I felt like that, I mean now many years down the line, I don't even know if it's going to be easier for me, because in the environment where I'm teaching I can tell you they are going to tell me I'm upsetting that class. (Teacher 1, South Africa)

4.1.4. Wider faith institution silence or backlash

A number of issues within CSE were often the subject of disapproval or expected silence by faith institutions (churches, mosques etc). These influence in practice the way in which these issues were taught with the danger of reinscribing conservative attitudes within the classroom around gender norms or dress codes to please the school parents or religious community. Wider taboos around discussing sex and sexuality are beginning to change but still impacts teachers and learners in practice with religion typically seen as an internalised limiting factor due to its moralisation of sexual topics especially:

> religion limits some things, you just don't go around talking about sexuality, think of it before you do and think well, maybe now that some pastors talk about sex freely in church but then still there are some religions where you do that and its wrong, people will say how can he do that? how can he say that out loud so there are some things that actually the church would say 'these things you can't say it out loud, the things that cannot be loudly in public' and that affects when you are teaching it affects the whole process because there are some things you say and be like what kind of person is she how can she say that out loud because we are brought up thinking you just don't say some things out loud because you got the truth and its wrong to get talking and stuff so yes, it limits how you express yourself , how you explain the content to the students. (Mal 3)

Teachers are often placed in the difficult position of 'wearing two hats' – as faith believers themselves who do not want to be excluded from faith communities but also as those committed to teach comprehensively about sex and sexuality. Issues such as SOGIE can become divisive and risky for them and they need support to address. A schoolteacher in South Africa highlights that in her school, and community, faith is still viewed from a fundamentalist perspective. She described an incident at her church where she is the organist, and where the priest resigned in response to the news that Archbishop Desmond Tutu's daughter who is a priest had married her same sex partner... He stood on the pulpit and said "I refuse to preach in a church which sanctions this marriage." The danger of the church splitting placed her in a difficult position as some went with the priest, but others like her stayed, She admits that "I don't have the answers, but I definitely feel that we need to start viewing religion, faith and the church's role in all of this in a totally different way" (Teacher 1 South Africa). Similar issues also emerged in Malawi where the church is vocal on SOGIE issues:

The church sometimes is in the forefront condemning those in same sex marriages. They always say these people are grave sinners and this brings about issues of discrimination and prejudice. Sometimes the church does not come out to explain to the people how the marginalized came into being. They are just as human as everyone else. Because people just get to think that these people just woke up one day to become bisexual and homosexual. In the end people just judge them unfairly. As a community, members normally take in whatever the church says. If the church is leads in condemning the marginalized then all people will follow suit. If the sermon is male chauvinistic then the whole community will do likewise. The church divides the community in many ways. Even when pastors and other church leaders begin to give roles depending one's gender it is promoting discrimination. It is only Life Skills which can deal with these problems even if in some schools Life Skills is being removed or being discouraged. In the end learners only subscribe to church teaching only which is very dangerous. (Teacher 1, Malawi)

A second example around abortion was given by a teacher in Malawi who insists that the church is not creating room to talk about issues of sexuality anywhere expect in marriage counselling. They insist that what is required from the church is a platform for civic education to avoid the church infringing other people's rights and that the church and school that must work in collaboration. They note poignantly, *"right now parliament will be discussing the abortion bill and the church has already come out to condemn the practice. Should a person be allowed to die because she has been denied her right to terminate a pregnancy? No this should not happen"* (Teacher 1, Malawi)

4.1.5. Conflicting information being received by learners

As a result of this contestation, learners often experience confusion with conflicting messages received from home, school and faith communities. According to many of the teachers interviewed, these three pillars should work in harmony to give the same messages but currently they rarely do. But another teacher points out that religion cannot just be flexible as God is involved and people's principles cannot just be compromised showing that more work needs to be done around engaging core principles:

(T)he problem is that when he or she goes back home it's when he's going to meet this belief so there is a conflict. So let me give an example when we tell them please use these contraceptives, you talk of a girl child and when she goes there to the church and the church says no we don't use, so there is a conflict so remember we are dealing with an adolescent so when I go to church they say no to this, when I go to school they say yes to this (Teacher 3, Malawi)

On some issues the teachings between all three are seen to agree (e.g. polygamy), but in others, they are seen to conflict (contraception). Two dangers emerge here, that conflicting information will be left out by teachers or, that any conflicting information will be amended or moralised by schools to fit in with existing faith views. This creates dilemmas for learners who feel they are being forced to choose between their religion or CSE and requires parties to work together to review so learners are not faced with these conflicts.

4.1.6. Exclusive interpretations of faith and sacred texts

Religion and Scripture were seen across all contexts as still primarily being interpreted through a literalist or fundamentalist lens. This approach is seen by the teachers to be detrimental especially to the voices of those who are marginalised because of their SOGIE status and in urgent need of creative reinterpretation:

I think sometimes we interpret the Bible – again we take something, or some parts of the Bible and we use it to suit our own needs. In this age of COVID-19 especially I feel that the voice of the minority is not heard, not as much as I would love it to be heard. (Teacher 1, South Africa)

However most of the teachers interviewed were people of Christian faith and insisted that exclusion of minorities of any kind was not at the heart of their faith and that a philosophy of self-acceptance and love needed to be nurtured within faith in order for the misuse of religion to be disrupted:

(T)hat is why so many LGBTIQA+ bodies are lost in this world in relation to religion and faith, because what they have read about religion and faith through the lives of other people have made them know that "This is not something that I want to believe in, I would rather go a different direction, because the very people whom I expected in this religion to embrace and accept and love me are the very same people who reject and deny and judge me." And therefore our people are walking around with broken hearts in this world, just trying to keep a smile on their faces. (Teacher 2, South Africa)

The teachers highlight a need for change within the systems of religion and faith on these issues and not just an ignoring of their current negative impact. These feel that the time is ripe for a change on these taboos and that exposure to new knowledge and understanding can help teachers, parents and learners to change saying "*certain topics will be taboo to certain religions, but I think we are at a stage where people should learn to be more open and just for getting new knowledge and understanding (Teacher 3, South Africa)*

Some teachers themselves make a clear distinction between the inclusive core values of their faith and their founders and the way in which religious doctrines have been manipulated by people within those systems who have indoctrinated new generations. They insist that it is not the faith itself that should be 'blamed' but its misuse. They suggest that children themselves have not developed these religious views on their own but have been brainwashed by more powerful adults in ways that can and need to be urgently changed. Christianity within Africa has often been linked to nationalist or colonial ideologies or patriarchal cultural norms from which the teachers argue it needs urgent decontamination before it can play a positive role or else a concern is that religion will remain a barrier to constructive dialogue around spirituality and sexuality:

> (T)hey justify those ideologies on the Bible, and what the position and the role of a man is, and what the position and the role of a female is. And that's exactly what it is, male, female, there's nothing else in between. In order for us to truly move forward, we first have to separate the two. We first have to educate everybody in terms of sexuality, comprehensive sexual education, and the, once everybody has understood…. then we can use religion and faith as a measure, or a tool, of upliftment for the soul, the spirit and the emotional wellbeing of our people. (Teacher 2, South Africa)

Some teachers insist that all CSE teachers must be able to step away from their personal beliefs and be 'neutral' in the classroom to show a commitment to rights and give the right messages. However, others suggest that this veneer of tolerance may itself be dangerous. At a wider level, multi sectoral engagement is required if the system within which i teachers work is to create collaboration rather than generating polarized resistance around CSE. CSE has disruptive potential to challenge existing systems and this tension must be maintained where CSE is accepted, but not merely driven by, existing conservative stakeholders.

4.2. Exploring the positive possibilities of religion on CSE

Despite concerns with the negative role of religion, teachers insist that religion cannot be avoided, and that faith and religion has the potential to play positive roles. Issues around diversity tackled by CSE are also identified as there in the churches as realities, such as SOGIE members and unwanted pregnancies and can provide a basis for working together. Teachers note that religion has a commitment to protect victims and the most vulnerable and that shared concerns around child protection and GBV can form a basis for collaboration, as well as critical engagement with religion and culture as systems which shape wider social norms and cannot be ignored. Religion is the primary frame of reference in their contexts for discussion of ethical values as critical components of lifeskills dialogues. Six themes emerged to connect religion and CSE.

4.2.1. Positive theological themes for inclusive CSE:

Four theological motifs came up from the teachers from within their faith traditions that they felt could support CSE including the inclusion of SOGIE minorities from a religious standpoint. First, the notion of *equality* where all are equal and equally accepted and important before God:

> (I)n the church they talk of equality, they say we are all equal before God even some chapters in the New Testament talk that there is no Jew or Gentile, we are all equal before God. So from that side you can bring those chapters and encourage people to see one another as equally important. (Teacher 7, Malawi)

Second, the theme of *all humans as created in the Image of God* so no one is to be excluded or left out and for this to be concretely applied in CSE as a radical corrective to beliefs that some can be excluded:

> (W)hen it comes to faith and religion. We were taught we should love one another. Love your neighbours as you love yourself, do to others what you want to be done to you. We are all equals when it comes to God. We are made in God's image. Now if we have to put that together with CSE….we have to think about that, because now if I discriminate the next person because of their sexual orientation or what… then I have to think about what my bible taught me. I should love myself, treat the person the way you want to be treated, then the negativity, we have to get away from it. We have to marry what religion is teaching us and comprehensive sexual education. (Teacher 1, Namibia)

Third, the strong faith imperative *not to judge* but instead to show compassion and inclusive love in practical ways when confronted by different people rather than to bash them over the head with a Bible:

> Now I cannot talk on behalf of others but to me, I believe in God but I cannot go out there and judge a kid in my class because he or she is homosexual and treat him or her different from the others, because kids will be there and ask you, miss... a girl asking you is it wrong for me to date another girl and you as a teacher how do you answer that. Now if your religion is telling you that homosexual is wrong and you are a teacher and all those kids are looking at you to answer that. So you have to be very careful when it's come to this and learn to put your religion aside, because the moment you come in with the bible now, you are conflicting yourself and what you have been teaching the kid. (Teacher 1, Namibia)

Fourth, a faith imperative to avoid bias or discrimination but to love justice and model fairness, seen in the golden role of "do unto others" as lived out within sexual and gender diversity in particular:

> (A)t the end of the day, religion is teaching us that, ok, we should love one another because we are all equal in the eyes of God. We should respect, ok what you do to others or you must do to others what you want others to do to you. That should guide us now when it comes to this...religion can also have a positive impact like now when it comes to homosexuality then if it teaches the kids that. ..ok even though we are different. We have different sexual orientation, (we must) respect love each other the way God see us because God does not see that you, if you are homosexual you are not my child, homosexual or not, we are all equal...when it comes to God. At the end of the day we should not judge others because they seem different and we all get that education from religion, bible...that respect and teaching from religion can help us in a positive way to implement (Teacher 1, Namibia)

Teachers insist that if at the heart of all faith is the message that it is not acceptable to discriminate then and religion can offer positive values that promote youth wellbeing. This core message can form the bedrock of collaboration with the CSE agenda. If religion and CSE both insist on diversity, and no discrimination, there is a shared possibility to go beyond merely tolerance towards the full embrace of sexual and gender diversity.

4.2.2. Reinterpreting sacred texts and traditions

A number of teachers in different contexts highlighted the importance of reading Scriptures in ways that build up a person and help others to understand themselves better. Guidance from teachers and faith leaders is therefore urgently needed around interpreting what the Scripture says in a way that can eliminate bias and not reinforce it as part of a faith-based commitment to do no harm:

> There so many stories in the Bible or in the Koran which talk against being biased ...the church or the religion, more especially the religious readers when they are spreading their stories to their members they should refer to in the holy scripture where they talk of the bad part of being biased. I said we always have leaders here and the church leaders who come to share message to student. Their messages should include the bad part of being biased (Teacher 4, Malawi)

This issue came up as a strategy to engage learners who often quote Scripture in class and require the teacher to be equipped guide this conversation in a productive CSE-oriented way and to speak to lived realities today (MR L) in ways that can assist them to critique inherited harmful beliefs. One teacher who taught both lifeskills and religious studies noted this reality of adaptive interpretations as in line with her tradition by saying, "*some content being taught in religion can be changed so that we can teach learners about the reality. For example, Moses parting the Red Sea is not our lived reality. So religion can be compatible with CSE if religious studies are updated to reflect our lived realities today*" (Teacher 3, Lesotho)

4.2.3. Faith in action through intersectional inclusion

Intersectional inclusion in practice was highlighted by some teachers as essential. People of faith cannot claim to be inclusive in some areas (e.g. disability) but refuse to be inclusive around sexual orientation. Identities are linked and training in inclusive education can equip teachers to model this to learners:

> For you to be a life skills teacher you need to be inclusive across all aspects of life. You cannot be inclusive in one and the other treat it in a different way, you have to be inclusive in all aspects. Maybe it is easier for me, because in my final year I specialized in inclusive education. because when we are talking about inclusive, most of the people focus on like kids with disability should attend mainstream school ...that's how they understand inclusive. But when you talk about inclusive...how do you include sexuality, different sexual orientations different back grounds, race and all that. You have to include all aspects of life when it comes to inclusive. (Teacher 1, Namibia)

Building on a commitment to inclusion, teachers can then use religion to create a sense of belonging and to refute ideas that some people are to be excluded or left out of any spaces, whether it is school or church. Fellowship with all brothers and sisters can create an enabling environment for SOGIE acceptance:

> (R)eligion plays a major role because some churches can exclude certain people, not allowing them within the church building, and they human beings, they also have desires, a need, they also have to say Thank You to the Heavenly Father, or for whatever denomination they belong to. So it can contribute, if the churches allow, and people reach out with those people because that will also minimize sometimes where individuals take their lives because they feel they fit nowhere. But within a church they can create that atmosphere, because a church is basically to create that sense of "I belong," of having fellowship with my fellow brother and sister, and it's okay to be different, and accept me for who I am, not trying to be the image that you want me to be" (Teacher 4 South Africa)

Churches can then take a leading practical role in promoting CSE as part of the formation of good citizens and see it as on the same level as other subjects, rather than encouraging students to drop it.

4.2.4. The creation of safe spaces to learn

Teachers point out that churches often take some responsibility for human sexuality training as they have historically been places where young people go for pre-marriage preparation. CSE can be an earlier addition to this process which churches or faith institutions have played to talk about transitioning from childhood to adulthood. They need to take a wider lens based on the real life challenges of society today. Instead of perpetuating silences around sex and sexuality, churches can find ways to harmonise religion and discuss the realities of growing up. Acknowledging that they don't only deal with the spiritual side of a person but also the body and mind can lead to a more holistic mission that supports families and creates safe spaces for all:

> It teaches them things that they are afraid to talk about with their parents and helps them to express themselves to us more so than they do with their parents. It helps them harmonise their differences in religions and ways of growing up in relation to CSE. (Teacher 2, Lesotho)

4.2.5. The role of NGOs in capacity building faith institutions

While the above offer possibilities, teachers insisted that this was not currently a reality. For change to come, capacity building faith organisations is essential, and that NGOs have a role to play here:

> NGOs have a huge role to sensitize church leaders on human sexuality. The NGOs should train them that these issues should be talked openly to their members. They should spread it in schools because students will be able to know that this is what we have learnt at church and we are also learning it in school. But if the church could be restrictive to say 'no don't learn this', it becomes difficult for students to accept the content of particular topics. So, the church leaders and the church members should be sensitized on some topics which they feel they cannot keep open. (Teacher 4, Malawi)

Engaging theologically with religious doctrines by using a faith-based approach was seen as essential if exclusion of minorities is to change in practice since religious leaders have strong social influence:

> Since religion is about doctrine, I think there is need for NGO's which advocating the rights for minorities to start with religious leaders by equipping them with right information and knowledge because in Malawi religious leaders are treated as a special group. So, if a religious leader says something members would follow. NGO's need to engage religious leaders because these leaders are custodians of our children in school. When this knowledge in imparted in church these students understand the rights of minorities and their acceptance may not be a problem. (Teacher 8, Malawi)

The focus of this engagement can be around creating platforms such as small groups for discussion and support where conversation can take place involving congregational members not just leaders:

> There should be more discussions within churches around CSE, and I don't think that they have enough programmes where they do it within that platform. I feel that needs to be done to avoid unnecessary discrimination and prejudice that people are experiencing, because still within faith groups people do not really feel comfortable being themselves and accepting who they are because of judgements that they experience. (Teacher 3, South Africa)

Lessons can be learned from processes that have helped faith communities engage with GBV to create visibility of the issue (via posters etc), engage with youth spaces as well as offer safe spaces for parents also to share their experiences facilitated by experienced people. This can help reshape the taboos that lead to misunderstanding and support parents to better understand the reasons to build a three legged stool that holistic education is based on; church, school and parents with the church taking a role in the educating task:

> churches have youth structures, and if the youth leadership speaks to CSE it will help cement the conversations they have in class...those youth spaces tend to be where students are more free in sharing and engaging, it would help them learn more in those spaces, as opposed to limited hours at school. So it is important to have churches that link what is being taught at school and play that supportive role to the parent and the child. (IAM Schools worker 2, South Africa)

> people within the church community they don't understand, because they're thinking about "What are you teaching my kid? This is a taboo subject, we don't talk about these things, so where do you come from?". So, it is good where they can arrange sessions within the church where we come out and speak about it so that they can also have a better understanding why we think it plays a major role within the curriculum. Its about the person not about having sex (Teacher 4, South Africa)

4.2.6. Churches can change and become champions

Some positive change is beginning to be seen on religious taboos on discussing sex and sexuality. But it needs to be accelerated. Support from outside has helped as a teacher from Malawi notes:

> There is a great change, in the past it was a taboo to see teachers mentioning some parts of the body of a boy or girl, it was a like you are sinning somewhere. But now people are changing helping us to say no, we have to do a, b, c or d so that our learners should be aware of their bodies. (Mal 7)

The overriding influence of religion in places such as Malawi meant that teachers feel the church has an essential role to play in people being willing to open up on sexual subjects and can take a champion role:

> Everyone is religious. Church is there to advance the truth so if human sexuality is not discussed in church but outside it does not mean it does not affect people. Church must be part of it as such society would open up as it comes from church because we are affiliated to church as we believe what church teaches in terms of doctrines. Church must be the champion in this case (Mal 6)

The issue of homosexuality is specifically named as an area where the church must change and move to acceptance as a witness to the truth that children in schools will then see and respond to. In this way lifeskills and religion can have a symbiotic relationship where lifeskills can encourage 'coming out' and a sense of their dignity and rights, and the church can support and affirm, not undermine, this process:

> With the role religion is supposed to do the church must start accepting them and obviously the children we are teaching upon seeing the homosexuals being accepted in church, even in school it will not be a problem. Life Skills has an impact for them to be seen to be coming out and their fellow students know them. I believe they must have a knowledge that even if I belong to this orientation I still have to exist and to be here to get an education just like any other student. The subject is helping very much as they are able understand their rights as minority groups and interact because if they had no knowledge through Life Skills this other student would not have come back (Mal 8)

The teachers pointed to the role of the church in the holistic human development of individuals and society. Its commitment to morals, values, good behaviour, education, unity and peace can form common goals between CSE and religion where "when we talk of religion we talk of morals and behaviour which is what CSE is already doing" (Teacher 3, Lesotho). Teachers point to core principles at the heart of their faith such as values of love, kindness, acceptance, embrace, long-suffering, humility, peace and harmony as urgently needed if people are to live in harmony with one another and bring God into the equation. However, some note that many current spiritual leaders do not possess these fruits of the spirit themselves and therefore fail to live it out within society but instead keep people in bondage because of their personal beliefs and ideologies. Reaching these faith leaders with a message of unconditional acceptance remains an urgent task:

> I believe that religion does have an extremely imperative role that it plays and can make a lot of impact. But it starts with the believers, and with what believers believe in, and not trying to change people for who they have been created to be, but just to embrace, accept, love and appreciate them, and show kindness and humanity towards them only for who they are, and not our preconceived notions of what we think they should be, or what they can be after we have converted them into what we believe they should be, but to allow them to be who they are. (Teacher 2, South Africa)

This change is already being modelled by the mainly Christian CSE teachers interviewed for this study who insist that building a safe and inclusive environment also needs to go beyond the classroom.

5. SRH support and referrals (including SOGIE support)

5.1. Learners access to support and referral services

Referral systems for support on SRH and other sexuality issues were seen by most of the teachers to be inadequate although this also varied from school to school. If there was a health centre or a hospital nearby this made a difference. Teachers from Namibia were most positive about having a functioning referral system that was age appropriate while in Lesotho, Malawi and South Africa, it appeared to shift considerably depending on factors such the rural or urban location of the school and agency of the teachers.

> In my opinion, there are age-appropriate referral systems at our school. Connection of school or community matters pertaining to the prevention of HIV/AIDS and unintended pregnancies are referred to health care providers. A list of SHR providers and contact details and locations is available at our school therefore proper and age-appropriate referrals are made... If you're having a situation like these, you should call regional office (who) will direct you to the right person you should, maybe consult the hospital for the social worker to come in or maybe the regional co-ordinator will come in first from there they will see what step to take. (Teacher 1, Namibia)

One issue raised was that there was often a focus on people or organisations coming into the schools to do talks, more than a structured, planned, and consistent learner-centred referral system outward that responds to identified learner needs. Many of these systems also depend on how much work the individual teacher has done to develop the systems and their availability and trust as a point person for the youth:

> (I)mmediately when I have a kid here, that has something to do with that, I refer them to the clinic, make sure they are there, and also touch base, and ask how far – If only the child will give permission to share that, then they will do so. But what I do is I just pick up my phone and just ask 'are you guys okay, how far is that" and what, what, what. So that is what we do, we refer, we ask, and the Department decides what is the importance of the referral, and our clinic, we ask them to come out if need be. But we do touch base with them. (Teacher 4, South Africa)

In South Africa, some of the teachers were not aware of SRH services in their area and said that it was left to the parents and the services that were available in learners home areas. Others felt that they had set up a clearer formal process that they now followed that linked students with SHR services where the students know where the clinic is and its quite close to the school, Some teachers knew that students were actually going to the clinic and receiving assistance while others knew that taboos and stigma still prevented access:

> There is also a nearby health centre which frequently pays us visits to teach learners about sexuality education. The centres also have adolescent corners and continually engage the principal in their CSE corner. There are full time health workers in my nearby health centre. They stress the importance of CSE and this makes them effective because my learners enjoy the sessions. (Teacher 1, Lesotho)

At these schools the process enabled students to know where they can get assistance if they are looking for various services as well as school educators knowing the clinic and where it is situated. Other promising opportunities were identified such as anti-AIDS clubs in schools that could become a hub for wider sexuality issues, an informal network of teachers who support each other and can talk to regional support persons also and the value of peer to peer programs and peer counselling in schools to provide extra support:

> at school this is what we have, if the child comes to you and speak to you in confidence, you ask them because sometimes you don't have all the answers, "Is it okay if we can refer you to a peer counsellor," and then we refer to the peer counsellor, and then the peer counsellor will have a session or two. And the child is at school, so it is very easy for the child to go to the peer counsellor because she has a little class here at our school, and only then when she feels like whatever they've been discussing or talking, it's very serious she would refer it to the Principal, and the Principal will get the Department involved, depending on the issue at hand. Also, if the child gives us permission, where we call the parents, so the parents also have an opportunity to come to school. (Teacher 4, South Africa)

A referral process and access to other services for learners was seen as being an important but often neglected part of the 'comprehensive' nature of CSE and of making the issues visible and taking mental health seriously also. Referrals are currently often dependent on the initiative of particular teachers and are not structured processes and this is seen by teachers as a gap in what they can do and a heavy responsibility:

> (I)t really helps when NGOs come to the school, because then it helps her build up a database of where to refer students if they need certain assistance. But there's that big gap, she can only reach them if they come to the school..., there isn't something that is a set process, it's just up to the teacher to discern, as to say "Okay, do I need the clinic now? I will refer you to go to the clinic," and then hoping that the clinic is an environment supportive of youth (IAM school worker 1, South Africa)

Provision of a wide list of service providers available to schools to know what is there and to make it visible was often currently lacking as well as linkages of age-appropriate service providers into the CSE program:

I feel there's not enough-service providers linked to this programme. I do get in people at times to come and speak to them, like I'm using the YMCA group to come and do HIV testing, to talk to them and how to use a condom etc. Then there's the Man-Up programme that comes and speask to our boys about circumcision, etc. But it's not really age appropriate, because they try and deal with everyone at the same time,... The CSE is age appropriate, but I feel that the Department needs to link us up with more service providers for those types of interaction for learners (Teacher 3, South Africa)

A counselling role was often played by LIfeskills teachers especially in relation to teenage pregnancy. In the Namibian context, for example MoE guidelines have changed on this issue and pregnant girls now remain in school. This has created a formal process and teachers can accompany the child to access SRH services.

Some challenges noted are that even when there is a health clinic, learners in faith affiliated schools such as Malawi are reluctant to use it, due to fear of being seen and religious related stigma around issues such as contraception which can also mean they avoid the SRH talks done by NGOs. Rural students in particular are often very shy. Rhe organisations that come in may also bring their own agendas tied to wider development issues of the girl child, abstinence training or child protection – and may not always focus on school needs. Another challenge noted was the lack of staff at government level to respond if issues are referred:

No, I am sitting in that office where children come. I have not. We report, it's a long lengthy process, not necessarily addressing specific issues. Like the one that you refer to the Department where you say "I need help, you need to send in these people". They don't have enough people to be dealing with this. We have been advocating for social workers to be at our schools for quite some time. We need somebody there to be able to assist our teachers. We cannot always answer the questions. Even myself who's compassionate, I'm also still learning. (Teacher 1, South Africa)

Lack of visibility and resource constraints at school level can also mitigate against a consistent learner centred approach for all of the most vulnerable students for adolescent health and school workers note that work is still needed to ensure that schools have the resources and linkages to the services that are there. Making issues like bullying, gender-based violence, visible is an important first step as part of the comprehensive component of life orientation. As a result, learners can see there's a number for mental health, a shelter that they can go to or a safe room or teacher available for them. Whilst overall some schools appeared to have better referral processes than others, specific support for leaners of minority sexual orientation and gender identity was a consistent concern for all the teachers.

TEACHERS SPEAK OUT

I will speak about my experience. I feel there is still a lot of discrimination and homophobia. Bullying, stereotyping taking place especially at high schools. One of the kids at my school who happens to be gay and came out talked to me in confidence, and this poor guy was really bullied. There was no assistance whatsoever coming from management or the teachers. He would just come to me and say "You know what miss, this is what is happening". We had an incident where the other boys – because toilets and bathrooms are a problem at school – so they didn't cater for him to use a different bathroom. And so he would actually risk his health not going to the bathroom for the whole day. Which I did not feel comfortable about at all. But one day when he just could not help himself there were boys in the bathroom, and they pushed his head down the toilet, flushed the toilet. To me, it still hurts up to this day because I feel that I did not do enough to protect this boy. Obviously, we reported it. The child left the school, he took a long time to have the courage to come back, and even then there was the stigma coming even from educators, to such an extent that management asked me whether the child could do his exam in my office, because nobody was willing to take him in their class, because he at that time had an STI. To make matters worse you had to see the attitude of adults. Because they thought I was the only one who would be comfortable some told me 'you must fumigate...You must put plastics on your chair...take cardboards. Can you imagine a child doing the exam under such conditions. My heart is still breaking for my boy, who left the school just after that. I don't know where he is today. That was only grade 9, he was very young. (Teacher 1, South Africa)

5.2. SOGIE learner support

Many teachers expressed concerns that not enough is being done to connect class learning with supportive social practices for vulnerable learners within school settings. This is particularly true for SOGIE learners, but it can also be true for girls who can feel marginalised because of their gender. This needs inclusion for SOGIE to be understood intersectionally. Six challenges were identified by teachers around SOGIE learners:

1. **Fear and unsafety for SOGIE learners** who can get expelled (Malawi) – especially in faith schools. This means some teachers 'counsel' learners to change their behaviours. School rules in some faith spaces can still allow or even require learners to be expelled or involve the parents to try and change the child:

   (W)e haven't had any expulsion but have had some who have been cautioned and counselled through parents. Parents would be shocked as something abnormal. Parents would always want their wards to change...as it is regarded as a problem. (Teacher 6, Malawi)

2. **Stigmatisation, stereotyping and bullying by peers** takes place for many reasons but SOGIE orientation is one that was named as often noticed but is not always pro-actively addressed.

3. **Lack of openness** also means the voices and actions of SOGIE learners can go underground and their needs remain hidden with no way to justify talking or services even if teachers knows it exists:

   currently we are lacking their openness. I can't say that as a teacher that we have the following students who have this particular type of orientation. For them to come in the open is problem. As teachers we cannot act in vain. We have to act where we have the numbers. I cited an example of two boys; one of them is gone forever while the other one is back... but for them to come out in the open so that we can assist them it becomes a problem (Teacher 8, Malawi)

4. **Leadership matters** but is rarely seen in schools which do not want to address root causes:

   (I)t's like we are just scratching the surface not digging deeper into the main issues. On the ground these people are marginalized yet things are not changing. There are misconceptions regarding the marginalized. It depends on leaders to chart the way forward on how to deal with such problems. Some teachers or schools which have rigid attitudes do not want to associate with the marginalized yet there are others who are more liberal and would accommodate them (Teacher 1, Malawi)

5. **Stigmatisation by wider school** of SOGIE learners even if some teachers are supportive:

   I would help him because I know people are different, but I think as a school he wouldn't get necessary help he needs, he will be judged, that will be the main thing, he will be insulted, people would assume stuff but I feel like he will be doing a lot if he come forward definitely so personally I would help him but I don't think as a school we would help him I doubt. (Teacher 3, Malawi)

   (A) parent whose ward was discovered to be homosexual decided to withdraw the child because of lack of acceptance among the students but teachers accepted (Teacher 8, Malawi)

6. **Gaps between class learning and wider social practice** by teachers and learners. This may relate to the actual LS teacher or to other teachers at the school with whom they interact:

   (A) teacher can teach sexuality, explain and write it on the board but if a student comes and be like well teacher after you taught that I was thinking that I have to tell you I have been going through this, that the same teacher will say 'what? No don't tell me that its wrong' because, there is no much awareness I don't know how much awareness needs to be out there but I feel like it's a choice that people make, people just choose that well I have to accept even what the way they are or well I don't feel I have to accept so well awareness need to be there.(Teacher 3, Malawi)

This gap can even lead to LGBTIQ+ dropout and suicidal thoughts often due to the systematic bullying and harassment by other peers and even by teachers who even laugh at them constantly:

What is sad is that I've seen many LGBTIQ plus learners drop out of school, and as a educator, it is worrying... some of the learners told me that they are suicidal, and that is hurting. The learners get sick, they are stigmatised, harassed, bullied. They have become a laughing stock. In my own school, for about five years in a row, the head boy was gay, the head girl was a lesbian... and remember, the head boy and the head girl is elected by the educators, not by the learners. So, they normally look at clever kids, those that can articulate, and stand up and address. They come and they do their speech so when they introduce the head boy, you find educators, sitting next to me, saying "Oh you mean the head girl", right, and then that other one is also "Oh you mean the head boy". So, when these

kids would come to class and bring a message you can imagine the reaction of the kids. They were like "Ha, here's the head girl coming." Even though these kids were leaders in their school they were not given the respect that they deserved. That to me is a problem because they emerged as leaders, and were good, but they were not respected, and that was very hurtful. (Teacher 1, South Africa)

Many teachers spoke about the need to embrace and celebrate learner diversity in all its forms. There was concern was expressed about LGBTIQ+ students merely being 'tolerated in the system:

They don't feel supported or safe, they don't feel embraced. They feel like they've been tolerated. I believe in embrace, because if I have to tolerate something or someone, that tolerance span only goes so far, and then I get to the end of my tether, because that is what tolerance is... Embrace is perpetual because I accept you with all your flaws for who you are (Teacher 2, South Africa)

However, six promising trends were also identified by teachers in this area and included:

1. **An open-door policy by CSE/LS teachers.** While learners might find a one or two teachers who they would confide in, they are in the minority and most teachers are not yet seen as trusted, safe and supportive by pupils. However, examples were shared of teachers, both straight and queer, who have created open door policies for support:

   Having an open-door policy, she never closes her door, she always ensures that she's the last person to leave the classroom, so – And she has a bench in her class, so should students want to talk about anything they can come through, sit down on this bench, have a conversation. She's big around student consent, "Would you be fine that I pursue the following with regards to interventions," so she really tries (IAM school worker 1, South Africa)

2. **Increased visibility of LGBTIQ+ teachers in the school.** Some students are seen as not comfortable having these kinds of conversations with their lifeskills teachers, but instead turn to other or LGBTIQ teachers who offer a safe space within themselves:

   Like myself, I'm a gay teacher. Starting off in teaching, it was difficult for me but eventually children started to respect me for who I am, and people would now look at me and ask "How do you manage at a high school being openly gay," etc', but going through CSE with them, they see someone that is part of the community, a teacher that's gay and how he lives his life (Teacher 3, South Africa)

3. **Intentional creation of safe spaces for learners.** To create safe victim friendly spaces, teachers note that children need to not feel blamed or silenced. Often girls will open up more than boys. Innovative modes of communication such as art or drama can help (see box to right).

LESOTHO SCHOOLS ACT FOR CHANGE

Nurturing a vision of schools as Safe Inclusive Spaces is possible if stakeholders work together with teachers. One school in Lesotho was singled out as the best in their district for creating a safe space for learners. The LO teacher there has an educational background in gender and sexuality which equipped him to begin to create a transformed environment not only in his classroom but also reaching out across the whole of the school to its leadership and out to parents. He says," *We create safe and inclusive space for minorities in our school.... Yes. Our diversity in our cultures and communities can make us accepting of others... Yes such students are supported, but there is a long way to go. The support is there but will improve with time as more teachers attend workshops. My principal is always encouraging male learners to talk about male-related stuff. The females are also asked to do the same...The teachers have a positive attitude towards CSE. The principal is also heavily involved in learner's reception of the program. There is unity in the school system...a learner feels secure to express themselves with teachers something they could not express at home. The school also provides a car and a teacher to visit the child's home to mediate. The school is being transformed as a safe space for everyone (Teacher 1, Lesotho)*

4. **Visibility of LGBTIQ+ learners in school (Including in leadership roles)**

    I've seen change within our area, within our school premise...like the one child (who is LGBTIQ) is now our head boy. They just get that role of confident people, and they take care of learners out there, and they help us creating this atmosphere where we can tell the children "It's okay," you know, and there is somebody, they became peer counsellors. They are there to assist. (Teacher 4, South Africa)

5. **Increasing accountability for homophobic bullying** (see box to right)

6. **Changes in LBGTQ+ learner confidence and shifts in peer behaviour.** Seeming small issues such as dress codes, hair codes and bathrooms in some schools are helping and are also starting to shift away from binaries only as learners begin to speak up and speak together:

    I would say that they were a bit difficult in the beginning. Like I said you first need to really get the children to understand that one is born that way, all those lessons that you need to do, that you don't choose to be different etc. So after a few lessons, and a few programmes, you could also see that those learners that are part of the LGBTI community, that they also felt more comfortable to express themselves. Like for example schools also have learners conform to wearing certain uniforms, right? At our school we allow our learners to wear what they feel comfortable in. (Teacher 3, South Africa)

TACKLING BULLYING IN NAMIBIA

Now the kids come, they are grade 8. At first, they go through bullying, name calling and sometimes (LGBTIQ+) kids come with all that energy and now you see these kid is going down, like or isolated or they keep to themselves but you know this kid was active when they came. So the first two months, they start to shy away, not active anymore even their academic performance is affected when they go back... to the class or even at the hostel...they're being discriminated because of their sexual orientation but at the end of the day now, as time goes on I think the others get used to it and start to accept others. I see one boy in her class, I think he was bullied because others think he's homosexual. So now I think that when we tackled that topic.. in grade 8 we have that topic of sexual orientation. So we talk about it. This year, that boy when he come back, he's on fire. He speak out! Because even the bullying...ok it was addressed at the principal, parents were called in...because bullying is a serious case; your parents have to be called in. Talked about and all that, you get your warning and all that ... So what I teach kids is that they should never ever think that...whatever happened to them... is their fault... when it comes to voicing out, I also teach the kids that sometimes you are having a problem but if you don't talk out the next person will not know. So they must always speak free. My office is... if they can't talk to their parents or the next teacher... they are always free to talk to me about anything... boys are not that open but they come here and sit down at that chair and they just open up, talk...and some of the things that you think a boy won't talk about no.. ...but they are very open...they come too... I tell them if you can't speak you write a letter... you just slide it under my door...then you just indicate it's who-who. Then you talk...Because some kids they are not good at talking...then you write your statement...what you are feeling, what is going on. And some of them can also draw what they are going through.. Then you check...ok this picture is showing this and this...and you can detect...ok this kid is going through this... so if...we have those ones that can talk...those ones they can come and you speak with them...you have those ones that cannot talk, you write...or you do the drawing.(Teacher 1, Namibia)

Schools are on a journey towards accepting diversity. Most teachers interviewed stress that there is still a lot of work to be done, they insist that there's light at the end of the tunnel. They need passionate, skilled people to help schools move towards an inclusive space for all learners and to accelerate change:

> So at our school there are a few that (are SOGIE learners) but I told them "So it's okay, it makes you unique. Just imagine how would the world have been if we all look the same, if we all liked the same whatever. Yes, we are different because what if we had to wear every day the same clothes, we look the same. So, it's you are individual, you are unique, so it's okay to be different." Here and there you will get somebody that laughed. It just indicates to us that there is still a gap, and how can we make sure that we close that gap... So we must get teachers that are vibrant, hip and happening...I mean come down to their level but don't forget who you are, but just come up with a different approach, sometimes you teach in the same way over and over, but the world is changing, it is for us to do that mind shift. "This is not about me, this is about the future generation." (Teacher 4, South Africa)

However, while promising trends are identified by the teachers in the face of the many challenge that face SOGIE learners in schools, they all point to the limited role that CSE can play on its own in changing school practices. It can make some difference but a 'whole of school' approach is critical to embed inclusion fully:

> I'm not sure about the leading to a policy and practice reform in the schools because it's basically the mindset that needs to be changed about people, and sometimes people are so used to doing the same thing over in the same manner, so it's sometimes difficult for them to change because there can be resistance to change. But I'm quite sure that it can be done. And the people would know that – because it's not about us, it's all about our learners. So we need to create that atmosphere for our kids, really now to make sure that we are there for them, it's not about us. (Teacher 4, South Africa).

Teachers pointed to the three pillars of school, home and community as needing to come together and coordinate in a 'whole of community' approach to prevent conflicting responses being made to children.

> the parents and communities have to be educated, along with the child. You cannot send Sipho out of the informal settlement to go to an upmarket suburban school, but Gogo in the informal settlement remains ignorant, uneducated and does not have access to knowledge. Sipho has to go back from the suburban school to the informal settlement, to Gogo, and there's going to be a world of difference. So there has to be an intertwined communication between that school, the learner, and the parent/guardian, to make sure that the child gets the optimal educational opportunity. It would be pointless if the school is going to expose the child to X, Y and Z, but once the child goes home, the child is yet again put into a box where there's only A, B and C. (Teacher 2, South Africa)

Three recommendations for improvement that emerged were:

1. A directory of SRH services available to teachers but also visible and accessible to learners in all schools,

2. Early interventions with vulnerable learners with prevention better than cure and

3. wider spaces for conversations to shape the whole school:

> you don't wait until this kid who's been bullied is losing their life, but if the child had started seeing signs, and there's a number that they can call and someone they can talk to, you've cut the situation in the bud and saved this child either from committing suicide (IAM school worker, South Africa)

6. Concluding Discussion

This report has focused on insights across three main areas to reflect on the question: *How does religion and faith impact the implementation (teaching and learning) of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) at high schools? Are learners referred to appropriate Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) services where necessary?*

Findings suggest that according to the teachers, religion is often currently having a negative impact on CSE, especially for SOGIE learners but that it could play a positive role. This offers an opportunity on which to build.

Section 3 focused on the value and importance of CSE, prioritised within SADC member states in recent years. Its value was reinforced by all the teachers across all four regions. However, they all noted resistance to CSE from a range of groups, often fuelled by religious beliefs. Since CSE tackles taboos, this is to be expected, but how initial resistance is managed can prevent it from turning into a sustained backlash. One important insight is the need for an intersectional approach to inclusion and diversity which connects gender-based violence, child protection and the needs of SOGIE learners. New CSE curriculums in these countries have a focus on the multiple components of sexuality, tying this to learner agency, voice, and responsibility. This is in line with literature on CSE but teachers need more training and support to accompany their own journey of change.

TOP TIP: A whole-of-community approach by schools can help manage resistance and educate parents

Section 4 focused on the role of religion and faith in CSE. Teachers show that religion is currently playing a concerning number of negative roles by shaping fear, resistance and backlash to many aspects of CSE across learners, parents, schools and in faith institutions. They suggest that on a practical level this causes dilemmas for learners who face conflicting advice. What surfaced as lying beneath these patterns are exclusive interpretations of religion and its sacred texts and traditions that are internalised and passed on. These have a cross cutting effect on the community to maintain taboos and limit CSE for the next generation. However, CSE teachers also insist that religion can be reimagined in positive inclusive ways. They often embody this possibility and offered six theological motifs that could help with this shift. This harnesses religions' unique spiritual capital to reinterpret sacred texts in inclusive, loving intersectional ways to offer safe spaces where all can belong. NGOs can work to build the capacity of churches and other faith institutions to become champions for change as part of their faith identity. Faith plays an influential role in all four contexts in this report. They are a key actor in health and educational services. A values based approach can work alongside CSE (not against it) to develop young people's decision making capacity, voice, agency and sense

of belonging. But, for faith institutions to become practical allies, a theological task remains. Research shows that spiritual capital (Palm & Eyber 2019) can be used to promote or to resist violence against children (especially SOGIE learners) but requires dialogue around deep rooted beliefs often entangled with cultural taboos. Only if this is taken seriously can they move from resistors to champions for inclusive change.

TOP TIP: Engaging religious beliefs is key as they lie at the heart of much resistance. Religion can be engaged in positive ways but resources and expertise are needed here to help equip teachers and schools.

Section 5 explored whether learners are appropriately referred to services. This depends strongly on the individual teacher and is rarely institutionalised. Where there is a system the focus appears to be on teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS and the specific needs of SOGI learners often remain invisible or unmet. Visibility of queer teachers or learners in schools can provide informal support to SOGIE learners but to date, schools often remain unsafe spaces vulnerable learners with the need to accelerate change in practice.

TOP TIP: Schools can become hubs for referral processes that are learner centred and enable youth friendly access but this requires going beyond the classroom to reshape schools as safe places of belonging for all.

Teachers reinforce what literature around LGBTIQ+ bodies and faith has already shown, namely that faith is still being misused to underpin LGBTIQ+ exclusion and violence (Palm 2019, West et al, 2016) but also that some religious attitudes are beginning to shift (Gunda 2017). Some promising theological approaches are increasing the visibility and leadership of queer Christians as well as developing positive affirming theologies (Palm 2019, West et al 2016, Hadebe 2016). However, urgent attention needs to be directed into translating this progressive theological work within Southern Africa into local communities and schools and developing accessible and age appropriate resources and trainings.

TOP TIP: NGOs like IAM can play an important faith informed role to disrupt entrenched negative beliefs that do harm and offer positive alternatives.

With such a relatively small sample, it is hard to generalise about similarities and differences across the regions from this data set alone, However, two issues need to be considered in relation to SOGIE issues within SCE. First, whether same sex practice are criminalised or not, where the laws in Malawi for example are very different to those in South Africa and this shapes wider policies, safety around visibility and access to services. Second, whether there is strong faith-based

involvement in education – either through a legacy of faith-based schools (Malawi) or a history of Christian education (South Africa). Namibia and Lesotho appear to have had stronger top down enforcement of CSE reducing backlash. As a result, it was noticeable that Malawi teachers spoke less about SOGIE issues in the interviews and more about lifeskills than teachers from elsewhere.

Findings from this data can contribute to the growing evidence base around the important roles of CSE in tackling gender based and sexual violence by ensuring that SOGIE dimensions of this issue are not made invisible or left behind as well as the reality that across these African countries religion cannot be ignored in relation to CSE as it plays a cross cutting role across leaders parents, teachers and wider school leadership. They can also contribute programmatically towards IAM's journey around how to facilitate meaningful intentional conversations on these issues within schools where CSE is taught. If religion and faith are to becomes resources and not roadblocks for dialogue around and within CSE, they need to or facilitating processes. Religion and faith need to be included in any understanding of "comprehensive" teaching and learning. Unless this happens, it is likely that much religion and faith may continue to be misused as a weapon to engender hate, reinforce stigmatisation around sex more widely and the othering of learners who fall outside of binary definitions of "normality" or "accepted sexuality". Teachers interviewed, most of whom are people of faith themselves, showcase the possibilities for change that can take place within the education system if teachers are equipped to engage with these aspects. However, without this engagement, many other teachers may continue to silence, exclude or even refuse to teach these aspects of CSE regardless of whether it exists in the curriculum and even if teachers are supportive, such as the ones interviewed for this report, their options are limited due to wider resistance from other teachers, schools leadership and parents .

Four perceived trends noticed were; 1) that queer teacher visibility in the schools helped significantly to raise this issue with learners and offer a safe space to SOGIE learners, 2) a rural/urban divide often existed with regard to access to youth friendly and confidential services. 3) that some schools were still influenced by faith despite officially being state schools on CSE, and 4) the importance of careful selection and training of CSE teachers to identify those who can hold an open safe dialogue space within the classroom. Two concerns noted are the current lack of interactive age appropriate resources for learners and teachers around CSE, the tendency to see it as on optional subject which students can just choose not to attend and finally the danger of a reinforcement of a binary model of sexuality and gender remaining. The importance of a whole of school approach with buy in – especially from leadership and the wider ministry of education is critical in supporting this transition in practice and in managing community concerns.

This research also generates some new questions. What is CSE intended to achieve, and therefore how is it best evaluated? Methodology matters here and needs more attention. How can the SRH needs of a range of vulnerable learners be met across the wider school setting including an intersectional approach to SOGIE learners that complements other important issues of concern. And finally, how can religion begin to play a values-orientated part in this education ask, becoming a resource and not a roadblock in accelerating CSE change, insisting on inclusive education for all as a core value and helping to turn policy into practice. As one of the teachers interviewed has put it, "*the church and faith and religion definitely has to play its part...those are the three legs that education is based on: the church, school and parents. Those three must work together*".

"the church and faith and religion definitely has to play its part... those are the three legs that education is based on: the church, school and parents. Those three must work together".

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8. Selected Appendices

8.1. Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

1. How would you describe your understanding of CSE as a high school teacher? What contributed towards this understanding with regards to knowledge, content and priority areas of CSE?

2. In your opinion, what are the key focus or priority areas of CSE and how do these contribute to the holistic development of your learners?

3. Can you explain the relevance of CSE in the context of teaching and learning in this country? What contributes towards this opinion?

4. In your experience, how is CSE received by the learners at your school? How would you describe the impact learner's parents or their community have in the way learners engage with CSE?

5. Can you share what your experience was to the perceived resistance, challenges or push-back with regards to the implementation and teaching of CSE in the school more broadly, and in the classroom specifically?

6. What do you think are the readiness and capacity of teachers in implementing CSE? Can you share what your experience is regarding technical and specialist support from the Department of Education, subject advisors or the development of appropriate resources and teaching aids within the implemented curriculum? (Further probing: What more could be done? Any recommendations based on your realities?)

7. In your experience, do you believe religion or faith has a role to play in the CSE curriculum? How would you describe this role and what, in your opinion, is the contribution religion can make to the teaching and learning of CSE? (Is religion viewed from a fundamentalist lens or from a more inclusive perspective?).

8. Given that many schools operate in a secular society, how would you describe the manner in which religion or faith can be used as a tool to enhance and not a barrier to stifle dialogue or deep conversations around human sexuality? (Further probing: What are your observations, when facilitating conversations in the classroom around human sexuality and the influence of the church as an institution or organised religion? In teaching CSE, is there a distinction between the understanding of religion as opposed to faith?).

9. How would you articulate the uptake and the insights from the learner in their response to CSE? In your opinion, have you experienced a difference in the understanding of learner's understanding of sex as opposed to sexuality?

10. In your understanding and experience, are there relevant age-appropriate referral systems for learners to SRH services at your school? In your opinion how effective is this process and do you believe this referral system is adequate?

11. Please describe your understanding of the building of personal agency and voice for learners as part of an effective CSE curriculum. In your experience, is this a priority and have you observed learners resisting bullying and victimisation in the school environment through their own actions and practice as taught through CSE? (Do you believe that there is a direct correlation between personal agency and the teaching and learning of CSE?).

12. Do you think CSE is leading to policy and practice reform in schools? How have you observed the change? What are the changes? How has it made schools safer and more inclusive for learners?

13. In your experience, are learners marginalised because of their sexual and gender identity or expression supported through a holistic and comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of human sexuality?

14. Please describe how faith/religion can positively contribute to the reduction of bias, discrimination and prejudice? In your experience, can CSE contribute towards the appreciation of diversity and acceptance of difference in the school?
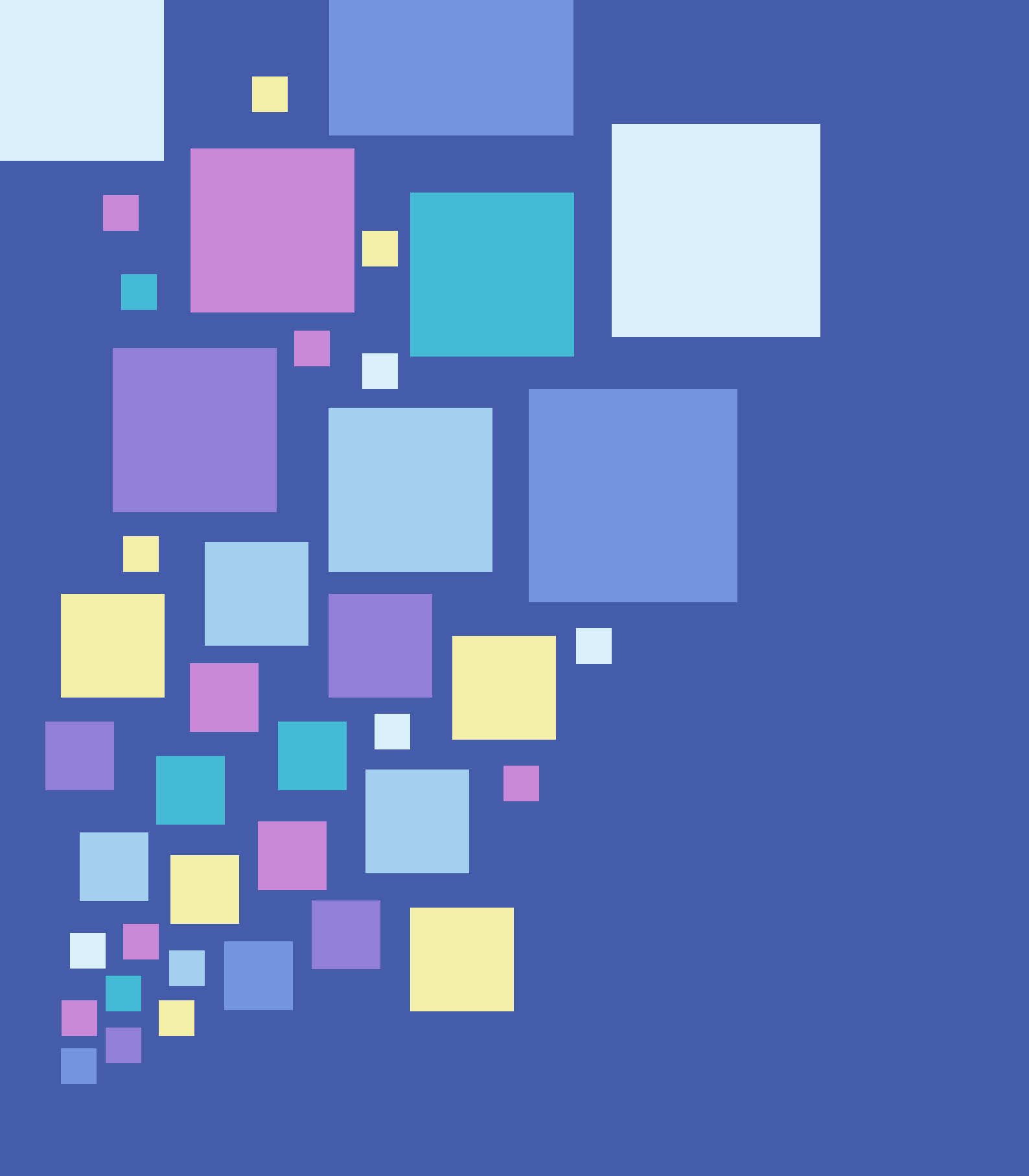
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SCHOOL'S OUT

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