



FAQ: RESPONDING TO GOVERNMENT ARGUMENTS AGAINST CSE

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For Ministry of Education and Health officials enabling CSE policy legitimacy

This FAQ responds to the arguments most often raised inside government against CSE. This opposition could arise from other ministries or parliamentary committees. Each answer is written for an **internal** government audience and points to the framework or process that supports it. Each answer should be supplemented by each national ministry with specific legislation or policy as this FAQ does not seek to set out the policy landscape for Malawi, Uganda and Ethiopia comprehensively but rather give a general guide on the most difficult questions facing government officials regarding CSE.

01  This is a foreign, Western agenda being imposed on our sovereign policy space.

This type of question may appear in different forms but will most likely centre around “sovereignty” concerns with the contention that CSE is not a locally produced concept.

Start by explaining that while CSE might seem like a foreign concept. These topics have been taught by parents and communities for decades. Uganda’s own [National Sexuality Education Framework](#) acknowledges the role played by parents and relatives in the past while also stating that “there is a need to equip young people with appropriate knowledge, attitudes, values and skills to help safeguard their lives”.

It may also be useful to substitute the term “CSE” with any of the below local adaptations:

Malawi	“Life Skills Education” at primary level; “HIV Education” or “Sexual and Reproductive Health Education” at secondary level.
Uganda	“Sexuality Education” is taught as part of “Life Education”.
Ethiopia	“Sexual education” “AIDS education” or “life-skills education”.

Evidence base

Much of the technical content contained within CSE is set out in [UNESCO's International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education](#), a standard shaped through extensive engagement with other UN bodies including UNAIDS, UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO. Applying an internationally accepted standard is an exercise of sovereignty, that aligns with international commitments made by Uganda, Malawi and Ethiopia. The national implementation of a CSE curriculum, while it should meet the technical guidance provided, is still a decision to be taken by national ministries and local authorities, bearing in mind cultural and religious traditions.

What this requires from government

A clear public position that the adoption and adaptation of CSE is a national policy choice grounded in evidence gathered locally, not an externally dictated mandate which has already existed for decades in various forms.

02



The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and or other ministries do not agree on how to approach this.

This question might point to capacity constraints or an underlying political struggle. At its root, is a genuine and common coordination gap. International instruments such as the World Health Organisation's [Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents \(AA-HA!\) guidance](#) as well as the [ESA Commitment](#) envisage collaboration between different ministries, particularly that of health and education. The AA-HA! states that co-ordination across government ministries is a vital part of improving adolescent health and wellbeing priorities while the ESA brings together both education and health sectors to collaborate and strengthen sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Both Ministries of health and education have a vital role to play in ensuring that accurate and age appropriate CSE is taught in schools. A [Whole School Approach Guide](#) makes a related, practical point that the Ministry of Education is entitled to a full understanding of CSE lesson content so that it can raise concerns constructively, and involve government staff directly in teacher training which would assist with building their awareness and support before a disagreement becomes public.

While it may be difficult to reach consensus on how to approach CSE implementation, a safer starting point may be to agree on why there is a need for such a programme.

For example, according to the Whole School Approach Guide mentioned above, one senior officer in the district of Education in Uganda stated:



Yes, we are grateful for the programme, as there are so many disadvantages in this district like early pregnancies, early marriages and domestic violence. We get back very, very nice reports from schools, about fewer pregnancies, and better attendance of girls, they have been empowered now, they are supported and make their reusable pads.

Therefore, seek to find common ground on issues that may be less contentious in order to build trust and move forward from a place of mutual respect and towards a certain goal to eliminate these types of challenges facing the youth.

What this requires from government

A joint working arrangement which may include a memorandum of understanding or joint task team between the relevant ministries, with agreed, distinct roles, and direct Ministry involvement in teacher training rather than approval from a distance. The Ministry of Education should still lead the implementation of the CSE curriculum but the health Ministry should feel as if it has an active role to play in seeing it succeed.

03



This will provoke religious and cultural backlash we cannot manage or afford politically.

The Stakeholder Engagement Toolkit is clear that religion and culture play a vital role in Ugandan, Malawian and Ethiopian society. In Ethiopia, religious leaders are seen as the “face” of the opposition and have large credibility since culture and religion intertwine in daily life while in Malawi, religious and traditional leaders play vital roles in establishing and maintaining norms and cultural values within their societies. These types of findings, supported by YPAR reports, indicate that it is imperative that religious and cultural leaders are included in consultations before policy is implemented, not afterwards. Backlash from these groups is often a symptom of leaders and communities feeling as if they were ignored during policy formulation more than disagreement with the content itself. YPAR findings indicate that “cultural and religious leaders reported limited engagement during CSE policy formulation and rollout, contributing to misunderstandings and resistance at community level.” Therefore, policy drafters should always try to include community and cultural actors at early participatory stages of policy drafting on CSE.

What this requires from government

Early investment in developing partnerships between prominent cultural and religious groups before curriculum content is finalised or announced.

04



Our existing curriculum already covers this adequately.

While YPAR research across Malawi, Uganda and Ethiopia show that there is a high level of exposure to CSE content for youth and adolescents, findings reveal important gaps in the content and depth of CSE delivered to young people. For example, participants in Ethiopia noted that sexuality-related content is mainly provided through Biology classes, where the emphasis is on scientific facts, such as physical and biological changes during puberty and not on other aspects of sexuality education, such as relationships and consent. This finding is mirrored in Uganda where youth reported not receiving coverage of skills based content including decision-making, negotiation and condom use.

In addition, location has been seen to affect how existing curricula is taught and to whom. YPAR finds show that in Malawi, exposure to CSE was not uniform as young people in rural areas reported fewer opportunities to access sexuality education due to limited outreach activities, shortages of trained teachers, and irregular engagement by health workers or development practitioners.

These gaps require urgent attention and indicate that existing Life Skills, HIV, or AIDS education curricula are insufficient to address the needs of youth and adolescents. A good starting point would be to conduct a thorough gap analysis against the UNESCO the International technical guidance on sexuality education.

What this requires from government

A structured curriculum review against the International technical guidance on sexuality education before deciding how to adapt existing curricula.

05



This entangles us in international debates on gender and sexual diversity that are politically sensitive here.

At its core, CSE is about teaching youth about bodily autonomy, consent, protection from abuse, healthy relationships, and accurate health information for every child in the classroom. These issues are separate from, and do not require adopting, any particular international position on contested political debates. The International technical guidance on sexuality education is explicitly designed to be adapted to national and local context. Where a specific lesson or resource is contested, the practical response is to review that specific material against the technical standard, rather than treat the whole curriculum as inseparable from the debate.

What this requires from government

A clear internal position distinguishing the non-negotiable technical and or safety content from context-specific framing decisions that remain open to local adaptation.