

## Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Emergencies

### Notes from InterAction Forum

The rapid scale-up and ever-changing nature of an emergency response can make it difficult to put adequate sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) prevention measures in place. However, lessons from past and ongoing emergencies demonstrate why it is so critical to do so. In this roundtable discussion, individuals with diverse perspectives shared critical SEA prevention and response measures in emergency settings. The panelists discussed preventing sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) in past and ongoing emergencies,

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Power imbalances increase when there is a catastrophe as humanitarian workers deploy and could use their power over the affected communities.

#### How do we ensure that our staff is not causing harm?

1. Ensure to have a PSEA focal point
2. Create PSEA risk assessments
3. Engage with the community. Consider:
  - a. The culture taboos
  - b. The best channels for reporting mechanisms
4. Collaborate with others as we all have a responsibility to prevent SEA

#### Why is it important to implement PSEA strategies from the very beginning of the emergency?

1. People are very vulnerable, there are power imbalances, and a lot of people are mobilized
2. The tone from the beginning sets the precedent. It is not a one-time thing. Build on what you are doing as you move forward
3. It is not just about having a policy. Make sure your staff understands why it is important and have someone to answer questions people may have
4. You need to train the host families

## Lessons learned

It is important to consider pace, priority and responsibility

**Pace** – We need to act quickly

**Priority** – When we are scaling up response, we need to be careful it PSEA does not slip to the end of the list

**Responsibility** – All the responsibility falls on focal points and they are not able to prevent SEA by themselves

## Community engagement

- Community engagement is extremely important (collaborate with women's groups, faith leaders, youth groups, etc.)
- Create your complaint mechanisms with the community. Mechanisms that are comprehensive and easy to use. Make sure local people with disabilities are on the table. Consider asking the following questions:
  - o Who is not here?
  - o Who is not represented?
  - o How do we make this information available for all? For example, children do not understand complaint mechanisms.

## Awareness-raising

- All information should be translated into the local language

## Response

Create strategies now so that you are ready when something happens.

- Have robust investigations in place
- Confidentiality in reporting
- Risk management in place
- Make sure program participants are safeguarded
- Budget for a PSEA response
- Engage with local protection actors, then you will know who is equipped in the community

## **If there is no reporting, something is wrong!**

Let's look at where we see underreporting. For example, World Vision US did a study to see where there is underreporting and then sent an investigator to ask people what they were seeing and what was happening in their communities. This action could help improve your reporting mechanisms.

## **Investigations**

- Overshare with survivors the outcomes of an investigation to help them get agency. Future survivors will not report as they will not trust you if you do not share the outcomes.
- Investigations should be independent

## **Leadership**

What should be done by leaders to prioritize PSEA?

1. Talk about it – Cast a vision and value. Engage all the staff and keep it as the center. Have safeguarding weeks.
2. Budget for it. Create a paid position responsible for it and train them
3. Create accountability upwards, downwards and outwards:
  - o upwards to your board,
  - o downwards to your staff (add it to job functions),
  - o outwards: share and be more transparent. For example, publish the number of cases and the outcomes.

## **Last recommendations**

- Set the tone from day 1
- Be prepared
- Create guidelines
- Build into budgets
- Dedicate a focal point
- Coordinate with peers as soon as possible
- Make sure the roles are well-defined