Progress and Next Steps
Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in humanitarian response

Monday 20 June, 13:15 – 14:45 EDT
Conference Room 1, UN HQ, New York | Zoom
Video recording | Apple, Google, SoundCloud podcast

Sponsors and Organizers:

Background and objectives of event
Over a decade has passed since the first IASC global review of Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) by UN, NGO, IOM and IFRC personnel. Since then, significant investments have been made and, with another review published this year, this event examined what progress has been made on ensuring communities affected by crisis are protected from sexual exploitation and abuse, and where challenges remain. The panel explored how PSEA interacts with #AidToo as well as humanitarians’ commitments to localization and accountability to affected populations. The panelists shared experiences from their own organisations, and what lessons can be shared with the humanitarian community. The event drew on articles from the Humanitarian Practice Network’s Humanitarian Exchange magazine on PSEA and sexual Harassment, including the review of humanitarian efforts on PSEA, supporting and capitalizing on the potential role of local and national NGOs in DRC, to ask what shifts and approaches in humanitarian practice and policy are needed to better protect affected communities from harm.

The objective of this side-event was to reflect on the progress and challenges with approaches to PSEAH, as well as taking a critical look at how the humanitarian community has responded to sexual exploitation and abuse of affected communities in order to adapt, take action and shift the way we work moving forward.

Panel Members:
- Sorcha O’Callaghan – Director, Humanitarian Policy Group at ODI (moderator)
- Wendy Cue – Senior Coordinator PSEA, IASC Secretariat, OCHA
- Thérèse Mema Mapenzi – Director, Centre Olame Bukavu
- Anne-Marie Connor – Special Advisor to the IASC Champion on PSEAH, SCHR/ World Vision International
- Katie Wepplo, Child Protection Specialist and technical lead on PSEA, UNICEF
Main points raised by each panelist:

- **Wendy Cue**: Progress since the first IASC review including how far we have come on key priorities and the challenges that remain. The collective IASC vision and strategy and how this addresses some of these challenges through key commitments. Commitments include promoting a survivor-centered approach, and shifting organizational culture to reduce misconduct and ensure there is more dedicated capacity for PSEA in the field.

- **Anne-Marie Connor**: 2002 IASC Championship priorities include a sustained culture shift in the humanitarian sector, specifically ensuring the sector evidences zero tolerance on inaction through proactive detection and survivor-centered approaches.

- **Thérèse Mema Mapenzi**: Providing sustainable and regular training on PSEA policies for both local and national organisations needs to be a priority, as well as supporting actors to make these policies a reality and put the survivors at the center. Long-term funding and contracts are also needed to ensure that survivors have access to the support and systems they need.

- **Katie Wepplo**: UNICEF’s recent scale-up of PSEA provided lessons including 1) investing in reporting systems centered around women and children strengthens trust, 2) holistic and survivor-centered approach is critical, 3) robust internal systems have to go hand-in-hand with programming on child protection and gender-based violence and 4) no single agency can do this work alone, so working in partnership with a range of actors, including governments, is key.

Key messages of the side event:

- PSEA is an integral part of effective humanitarian action.
- PSEA requires engagement from the outset of a response and is a responsibility of all humanitarian actors.
- The focus has been on compliance; humanitarian actors have not done enough to listen to the people affected by sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment on what they want to see – that is, what will make them feel safe to report, what information they need from us to do so, how we can best ensure survivor-centered prevention and response.
- SEA is not intractable – we can and have made progress – but this requires a long-term investment in establishing and strengthening systems to prevent and respond to SEA, both within our organizations and through our work with affected populations. If we do this right, the impact for women and children, and our overall effectiveness as humanitarians, will be significant. This is a shift we need to make together.
- Gender and age sensitive approaches are important for ensuring both inclusion of all those affected by SEA as well as challenging and transforming social norms.
- We need to strengthen the evidence base for what works, taking a whole-of-system approach. Capacity development of local actors is critical. Governments also have commitments on PSEA. We need to find a way to work better together.
Main points raised during the discussion with participants:

- The culture shifts that need to happen in the humanitarian sector require a sustained focus. Leaders must regularly and repeatedly reinforce messaging from the top that an organization/agency has zero tolerance for any form of sexual misconduct, and actions of leadership should reinforce that position. Organisations must also promote awareness among leaders that increased reporting is a positive sign of progress and proof that systems are working. Leaders must also emphasize the need to report unconfirmed information.

- Implementation of policies and programming to address SEA must be adapted to the context in order to consider root causes of SEA – for example, in DRC, these activities have included emphasizing positive masculinity – but this requires long-term approaches. Cooperation between international and local organisations is needed in order to develop good strategies that are context-specific. Examples were given from Lebanon.

- Implementing PSEA requires sustained investment and resources, particularly for local and national actors who play a key role in implementation in rural or remote areas. Long-term, sustained financial support and core funding is needed for local and national actors to implement policies and combine PSEA with programmatic work.

- Information about PSEA does not adequately reach affected populations or humanitarian staff based outside national headquarters and regional hubs. Many people also do not know about existing reporting mechanisms or cannot access them due to language barriers. Tailored communication that accounts for people's preferred languages and formats and avoids jargon will ensure that people receive key messages and can share reports back to organisations.

- Organisations should be aware that survivors face severe real or perceived risks to reporting, including further abuse and pressure or violence from community members who feel that they risk losing access to aid. Organisations should engage communities to make sure everyone understands their right to humanitarian support.

- Gender norms and women's economic status means that in some contexts, survivors may not consider these types of relationships with humanitarian staff to be abuse, especially if reporting would greatly increase their financial precarity. Organisations should consider the role of livelihoods programming in PSEA prevention.

Outcomes of the side event:

- Sustained commitment is needed to effectively detect, prevent and respond appropriately to SEA. Collective action by all partners will be needed to achieve commitments articulated in the IASC strategy.

- Collective efforts are needed to improve accountability. Moving forward, humanitarians must (1) assume that, even with safeguards in place, SEA will continue to happen; (2) assume that underreporting exists; and (3) implement vigorous and proactive prevention and detection. These three actions will be key to establishing a culture of zero tolerance to inaction. Changing
culture is not an easy task but, guided by the experience of victims and survivors and affected people, it’s one we need to rise to.

- It is essential that all actors proactively involve women and girls in decision-making and program design. Humanitarian actors should consult and collaborate with communities to identify and mitigate risks, to guarantee survivor-centered approaches and to enhance access to safe reporting mechanisms.
- Crucially, a culture shift is needed across the humanitarian sector to ensure a policy of zero tolerance for any form SEAH as well as for inaction is implemented at all levels and in all aspects of humanitarian response.