Malawi Violence Against Women and Girls Prevention and Response Programme

Technical Briefing Note: Safeguarding Knowledge Survey

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Introduction

This Technical Briefing Note provides a short introductory explanation to the Safeguarding Complaints Mechanism Knowledge Survey, designed and implemented by the Malawi Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Prevention and Response programme also known as the Tithetse Nkhanza (TN). The TN programme aimed to reduce the prevalence of violence against women and girls and support progress towards the full realisation of women and children's human rights in Malawi. The programme began in 2019 with funding from the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and was delivered by a consortium of Tetra Tech International Development, Social Development Direct and Plan International. The Safeguarding Knowledge Survey aimed to ascertain the extent to which programme participants were aware of, and knew how to use, the programme's Safeguarding Complaints Mechanism should they experience or suspect a breach of the programme's code of conduct. Building on learning that complaints and feedback mechanisms are not always well known or understood by those they were designed to serve,[1] TN sought to understand the extent to which mechanisms were known, in order to inform necessary programme adaptations.

> **Who is this paper for?**
> This briefing note is for development practitioners implementing programmes on gender-based violence response and related services and are seeking to integrate safeguarding as a fundamental aspect for ethical delivery of their programmes. The paper focuses on the implementation of the safeguarding complaints mechanism. Though the context of the survey is Southern Africa, the lessons and implications may be helpful globally.

This document begins with an overview of TN's safeguarding approach. This is followed by a description of the survey objectives, scope and implementation approach. The findings of the survey implemented in early 2021 are then presented, covering lessons learnt. The note concludes with next steps related to this activity.

Overview of the TN Safeguarding Approach

Safeguarding against sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH) is a fundamental aspect for the ethical delivery of all development programmes. TN defined safeguarding as taking all reasonable steps to safeguard the people the programme comes into contact with (including staff and the communities in which programmes are delivered) from SEAH. TN's safeguarding approach also extended to abuse that may be perpetrated by non-programme associates, as long as it was experienced because the victim participated in the programme. Maintaining high safeguarding standards was also consistent with TN's approach to risk mitigation and included duty of care to the programme's participants, staff, volunteers and downstream partners, consistent with FCDO requirements.

TN implemented its safeguarding approach as a core part of its programming through the following steps:

- Adopted the Tetra Tech Safeguarding Policy which ensures all staff, partners, subcontractors and consultants have absolute clarity on Tetra Tech's zero-tolerance approach to SEAH, and that they understand how incidents and allegations will be handled should they arise, including reporting to the relevant authorities and clients. Furthermore, adoption of the policy ensured that they had the standard safeguarding knowledge and skills that would enable them to take all reasonable steps to prevent SEAH from occurring, and to protect people from harm (especially participants, children, and vulnerable adults, such as survivors of violence or people with disabilities).

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[1] International Development Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2019-2021, Progress on tackling the sexual exploitation and abuse of aid beneficiaries, HC 605 para 18.

- Popularised the safeguarding policies and procedures amongst all of TN's community volunteers, other change agents and participants. This involved sharing safeguarding knowledge and information on reporting mechanisms during training sessions and community meetings.

- Invested in a number of complaints reporting mechanisms to promote reporting of and response to safeguarding cases, including:

  - Establishment of a Safeguarding Committee

  - Establishment of a toll-free phone line, which was promoted through posters for identified or anonymous reporting.

  - Orientation of all community level volunteers and direct programme participants on complaints mechanisms.

Overview of the Knowledge Survey

The knowledge survey was designed to assess the level of awareness of safeguarding complaints procedures and support structures among people participating in or impacted by TN.

Objectives

The study sought to assess participants' knowledge of:

- Forms of support available for someone who has experienced a safeguarding issue:

  a. As a result of participating in TN

  b. Perpetrated by TN staff, partners etc, including but not limited to response services.

- How to report a safeguarding issue experienced:

  a. As a result of participating in TN

  b. Perpetrated by TN staff, partners etc.

- Reasons cited for being comfortable or uncomfortable with specific complaints reporting mechanisms.

Scope and Sampling

The study was first implemented with individuals participating directly in TN activities, including *SASA!* community activists and facilitators, Champions of Change (CoC) facilitators, CoC out of school adolescent boys and girls, and parents of CoC adolescent boys and girls. These groups were selected for the first round of the survey as they could be easily contacted and reached with few additional resources. It was planned that future rounds of the survey would be conducted with community members not involved with the programme to explore the extent to which safeguarding knowledge was disseminated beyond direct programme participants. However, due to the unforeseen closure of the programme due to FCDO budget cuts, subsequent rounds of this survey could not be completed.

SASA! community activists and facilitators were sampled randomly, stratified by implementation district.

Champions of Change participants were drawn from three randomly selected locations covering TN's three implementation districts (Lilongwe, Karonga and Mangochi). Within each location, CoC participants were selected randomly, stratified by participant group.

The survey was administered in March 2021. Data was collected by trained independent data collectors via phone where possible, and in person where telephone interviews were not feasible. This approach was selected to reduce the cost of data collection and minimise the risk of COVID-19 exposure and transmission. In-person data collection followed all

COVID-19 safety protocols, including virtual training of data collectors, provision of masks and hand sanitisers for all face-to-face interviews for both data collectors and respondents. For both remote and in-person data collection, data was uploaded using COSMOS data collection software on a mobile device, which allowed for ongoing data quality checks.

The survey was implemented in all TN implementation areas, covering a total of 206 respondents from the selected participant groups (106F/100M). Of these participants, 59 identified as having a disability. The sample distribution alongside the total study population and proportion of the population sampled is provided below:

Participant group	Sampled	Total	% sampled
SASA! community activists and facilitators	88	241	36.5%
CoC out of School youth	45	128	35.1%
CoC parents	44	84	52.3%
CoC facilitators and mentors	29	60	48.3%

Additional stages of the survey were expected to cover a wider range of individuals, including individuals living in TN implementation locations who were not directly engaged in programme activities but who had come into contact with TN staff and associates.

Survey Findings

Safeguarding related to participants in TN activities

71.4% of respondents knew about the support available for someone who may experience SEAH as a result of their participation in TN activities. This included 75.0% of males, 67.0% of females and 57.1% among people with disabilities.

However, only 34.0% of respondents mentioned a method of reporting a safeguarding concern. Those who did cited the TN Complaints Committee, toll-free number on the posters and contacting TN staff/partners. This compared to 48.4% of respondents who mentioned that they would report to the chief in their community if they experienced abuse, violence or exploitation following their participation in TN activities.

On average, 74.3% of respondents said they knew about support available in their community for people who experienced SEAH. This was made up of 79.0% of males, 69.8% of females, and 67.8% among people with disabilities.

Safeguarding related to TN staff or partners

Overall, 66.0% of the respondents said they would use the TN constituted complaints reporting mechanisms. Among these, the toll-free number established by TN was the most commonly mentioned complaints reporting mechanism for reporting SEAH involving TN staff or partners.

There was a clear distinction between the choice of reporting mechanism for SEAH as a result of participation in programme activities compared to reporting SEAH perpetrated by TN staff/partners. For SEAH experienced as a result of beneficiary participation, more informal reporting mechanisms were mentioned, with 45.0% saying they would report to chiefs. For SEAH perpetrated by TN staff/partners, less informal complaints reporting mechanisms were mentioned with only 19.0% saying they would report to chiefs.

Comfort with the complaints reporting mechanism

On average, 81.6% of respondents felt comfortable using the TN complaints reporting mechanisms with more females (84.0%) feeling comfortable than males (79.0%). The three most cited reasons for their comfort were ease of use (47.0%), confidentiality (31.0%), and that they are managed by people/organisations the respondents trusted (22.0%).

Limitations

This survey encountered the following limitations:

- The sample size for CoC youth and parents was drawn from one out of the three schools in each location where the CoC intervention was being implemented. In this regard, the survey could not measure safeguarding knowledge levels among out of school youths from the other schools.

- Phase 1 only interviewed identifiable programme participants, so did not reflect levels of knowledge held by the wider community who may come into contact with TN.

Implications and Lessons Learnt

- People with disabilities have increased risk of experiencing VAWG, and other forms of violence, but had the lowest levels of knowledge of TN's safeguarding mechanisms. This suggests a need for additional outreach to build knowledge of these mechanisms among this group, as well as consideration on the best means of engaging them.

- Participants' preferences highlighted the importance of reporting mechanisms that are easy to use and confidential, particularly when they are reporting against staff/partners of an implementing agency. Steps should be taken to make the existing mechanisms easier to use, and ensure communities are aware of processes in place to maintain confidentiality.

- Further research may be required to understand participants' preferences for informal reporting mechanisms to address safeguarding issues resulting from their participation in programme activities, including an investigation as to whether participants are aware that such issues can be reported to TN. Research may also seek to better understand how such mechanisms can be supported to engage with TN safeguarding protocols, particularly given a preference among many informal actors to handle cases within the informal system only.

Next Steps

Due to significant FCDO budget cuts, the TN programme was unfortunately closed prematurely in mid-2021. Were TN to continue, the following actions were planned to build on the findings from the first round of the survey:

- Disseminate the survey findings to staff and implementing partners.

- Working with staff and partners, jointly identify required programme adaptations to improve participant knowledge of and comfort with safeguarding and complaints procedures.

- Roll out the survey with additional community members in TN implementation locations, taking into account varying degrees of exposure to and contact with TN.