



SUPPORTING
SURVIVORS

Collaborating with the ODA community to support survivors of SEAH

S2S Malawi Learning Product

April 2023

Introduction

This Learning Product shares practice-based reflections on engaging with members of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) Community toward improved support to survivors of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harrassment (SEAH) perpetrated by representatives of ODA organisations. Reflections are derived from 5-months of delivering the Supporting Survivors of SEAH Programme (S2S) programme in Malawi, and through responses to a short online survey provided by senior managers and Protection against SEAH (PSEAH) Technical Leads within agencies.

The Learning Product seeks to share reflections on

- the current situation relating to collaobration amongst ODA actors in Malawi to better respond to SEAH,
- the current situation relating to the support provided to survivors of SEAH in Malawi,
- reflections on the factors that may affect the prioritization of, and collaboration for, SEAH cases between ODA actors in Malawi,
- and possible efforts to improve collaboration and support to survivors of SEAH in Malawi.

S2S Programme

The S2S programme is an 18-month, FCDO UK-funded programme that seeks to build on lessons learned relating to the Survivor Support Fund (SSF) delivered under the Tithetse Nkhanza¹ programme, and pivot the focus toward the inclusion of survivors of SEAH perpetrated by an ODA actor, or harm triggered by the actions of an ODA actor. The programme is being delivered by Social Development Direct in partnership with three Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) operating in the two districts. Lilongwe Urban Women's Foundation (LUWF) and Women and Girls with Disabilities Rights (WAG – Disability Rights) work in Lilongwe, whilst Karonga Women's Forum (KWF) serves Karonga district. Implementation began in full in November 2023.

The programme seeks to deliver best practice for supporting survivors of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and SEAH², using survivor-centered approaches to address a range of financial and social barriers to survivor help-seeking. The Survivor Support Fund is the primary intervention being delivered through the S2S programme, through which

¹ See <https://intdev.tetrachteurope.com/projects/tithetse-nkhanza-malawi/>, accessed on 1st March 2023

² For clarification on the differences and overlaps between Gender Based Violence (GBV) and SEAH, please see here: https://safeguardingsupporthub.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/RSH_BiteSize_Understanding%20SEAH%20and%20GBV_final.pdf

survivors are able to seek support from community-based WROs, who are well-reputed and trusted, and who have the funds, skills and experience to support survivors to make decisions about their situation and implement their case management plan. The WROs accompany survivors journeying through the referral pathway and ODA actors' complaints mechanisms.

The S2S programme sits within a portfolio of Safeguarding response mechanisms delivered by the UK FCDO Safeguarding unit, which aim to focus on the needs and wishes of survivors of SEAH perpetrated by aid actors. The project works with various stakeholders including the Ministry of Gender, ODA actors and frontline providers of VAWG and SEAH response (police, judiciary, hospitals).

Methodology

The findings presented herein are derived from reflections by the S2S team on engagement with the ODA community in Malawi over 5-months of implementation, as well as quantitative and qualitative responses to a short online survey that was disseminated amongst the ODA community in March 2023, targeting both senior leadership and PSEAH Technical Leads.

Reflections on engagement | The S2S programme was initially launched by the Minister of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW) at the British High Commission Residence on 4th November 2022. The launch was attended by representatives of government ministries, UN agencies, INGOs and national CSOs.

Following the launch, a total of 9 individual meetings were held with institutions within the following groups:

- NGOs
- Representatives of the UN Resident Coordinators Office and other UN agencies
- INGOs, including the INGO Network Forum Leads

Follow up correspondence was made with all organisations to establish deeper partnership.

Online Survey | Two online surveys were administered for anonymous participation; one to Senior Leadership of ODA agencies, and one to the PSEAH Technical Leads of ODA agencies (available in Annex 1). The survey was distributed using Kobo Toolbox³ to individuals known to the S2S team, with a request to forward onto other relevant colleagues. The deadline for

³ Available here: <https://www.kobotoolbox.org/>

completing the survey was extended and a reminder email was sent 2 days before the deadline to increase response rates.

A total of 12 respondents completed the online survey, characterised as presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Online survey respondents

Survey Type	Organisation Type	Number of respondents	Percent
Senior Leadership	UN Agency/ Resident Coordinators Office	4	33%
	INGO	3	25%
	NGO	1	8%
PSEAH Technical Leads	UN Agency/ Resident Coordinators Office	3	25%
	INGO	1	8%
Total		12	

Data gathered through these approaches was analysed in MS Excel.

Limitations

- **Limited sample** | Data was gathered from a limited sample of organisations that are known to the S2S programme, and so is not generalisable to the whole ODA community in Malawi, or beyond Malawi.
- **Respondent bias** | Though efforts were made to reassure survey respondents that their answers would be anonymous, it is possible that respondents demonstrated unconscious social desirability bias when completing the online survey.

Findings

Current situation in Malawi

Collaboration amongst ODA Actors regarding PSEAH

All organisations who met with the S2S team expressed interest in the Survivor Support Fund (SSF) initiative in the S2S programme, and willingness to collaborate with the WROs on specific SEAH cases should a survivor report through the S2S programme.

In some cases, questions were raised relating to the legitimacy of the WROs to engage with survivors of SEAH perpetrated by an agency not engaged in the S2S programme. Some participants questioned if the initiative may be perceived as a ‘witch-hunt’ against ODA organisations, and concern of the proximity of WROs to investigations which are considered

confidential and internal. Where the S2S representatives highlighted the ambition of the ODA sector to collaborate to tackle SEAH, including inter-agency referral of cases, and a commitment to survivor centredness, these concerns appeared outwardly to be addressed.

Despite initial positive engagement, however, further follow up with agencies after the initial meetings resulted in **no organisation** sharing accessible and appropriate reporting mechanisms, which could be used to create a reporting directory for use by the WROs.

Toward the end of March 2023, the MoGCDSW launched the PSEAH Network under the Gender and Protection Sub-Cluster at National and District levels. A subsequent learning product will review any change in collaborative efforts that may be attributed to the launch of this network.

Reports and referrals of SEAH cases to S2S

BOX 1 | THREE CASES RELATED TO VAWG TRIGGERED, OR PERPETRATED BY, GOVERNMENT OF MALAWI

- One woman experienced physical Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) as her husband wanted to misuse agricultural coupons that were provided her by the Government of Malawi, which she did not consent to.
- One woman experienced physical IPV as her husband wanted to sell food coupons that were provided her by the Government of Malawi, which she did not consent to.
- One woman was employed as a cleaner in a government school. Her contract was terminated during COVID but she had not received payment due to her. The WRO supported her to submit a complaint through the Labour Office, and the school collaborated with making payment.

To date, of 216 survivors of VAWG who have received support from the S2S programme, none of these cases are related to SEAH by the ODA community.

Three cases relate to VAWG that was triggered by initiatives delivered by, or related to harassment within, the Government of Malawi, exemplified in Box 1. However, given the S2S focus of SEAH and harm triggered by the ODA community specifically, these cases have been categorised as general VAWG.

There have been no referrals from ODA actors to the S2S programme, though the programme has been made aware of cases that could potentially be related to SEAH, as outlined in Box 2. These cases have not been directly referred to the SSF, however, and so the full details are not available.

Investigations

Investigation practices were not discussed in detail during meetings with ODA actors.

Over 80% of respondents to the online survey noted that investigations are typically led by a specialist team, though most respondents noted that the composition of the investigative team would be determined by the nature of the case. Respondents within UN agencies and INGOs typically referred to Ethics Committees or Safeguarding Committees sitting in Head Quarters offices, whilst smaller organisations noted that the investigation would be overseen by senior leadership.

All respondents but one (who represented a smaller NGO) noted that investigative teams were qualified in undertaking SEAH investigations, but when asked for details, the range of responses suggest a lack of standardisation in this regard. Some respondents referred to specific training in conducting investigations, one of whom noted the CHS Alliance training certificate, whilst others referred to generalised PSEA training and others were not aware of the specific qualifications held.

Responses were also varied relating to the role of senior leadership and PSEAH Technical Leads in following up on the progress of the investigation. Some respondents noted that they simply 'wait for the report', whilst others noted a more proactive approach to collaborate and monitor progress. Only one respondent noted the need to ensure that the survivor is protected from retaliation during the investigation, and one respondent noted a role in updating the survivor on progress.

When asked to comment on the barriers to effective investigations, PSEAH Technical Leads typically referred to biases by both investigators and senior management. One respondent stated:

'Biases. The biases could be from Snr management or investigators. There is also a high demand of evidence by management to prove a safeguarding incident occurred. This may be difficult to find as most cases I have dealt with the evidence is mostly circumstantial.'

- PSEAH Technical Lead Respondent

BOX 2: CASE STUDY

One set of cases the S2S team was made aware related to a complaint made to a UN agency regarding the removal of 12 vulnerable women from a beneficiary list. After requesting that the women be reinstated, an investigation ensued which was pending for 4 months without updates being provided to the women, following which only 3 women were reinstated. No information was provided to the remaining 9 women as to the decision not to reinstate them.

One senior leadership respondent referred to their personal belief that investigations should operate on the principal of 'presumed innocence until the case is concluded', seemingly suggesting that the burden of proof should lie on survivors reporting cases of SEAH.

Whilst respondents made general references to 'survivor-centred support' through their responses to the online survey, the specificities of this were not detailed by respondents. No reference was made to issues relating to risk assessments throughout the investigation, informed consent of survivors, or support persons or accompaniers. It should be noted, however, that the survey did not specifically ask about these issues.

Support offered to survivors of SEAH

Despite online survey respondents and meeting participants noting that they were committed to survivor centredness, confidentiality and protection from retaliation, the S2S team has found limited evidence that survivors are offered adequate support when reporting cases of SEAH. The case study provided in Box 2 exemplifies the types of stories that the S2S team has been made aware of. This reflection, however, should be understood with reference to the limited number of SEAH cases the team has engaged with to date.

Online survey respondents generally stated that organisational policies provide for support to survivors, including the provision of counselling and other services as needed, protection from retaliation, and confidentiality, though no respondents noted the requirement to update survivors on the progress of their case. PSEAH Technical Leads further noted the lack of resources and time to provide the support outlined in policies. One INGO respondent, however, noted that substantial support is offered, as per the above, and funded by the Country Office's unrestricted budget.

Factors influencing the collaboration of PSEAH efforts amongst ODA actors

The general sense from meetings with agencies to discuss PSEAH, and the role the S2S programme could offer to ODA organisations in supporting survivors, is one of trepidation on behalf of ODA organisations, as noted above.

Willingness to collaborate

Though online survey respondents generally expressed willingness to collaborate with other ODA actors in relation to PSEAH, and to share incident information with donors, as demonstrated in **Table 2**, there was divergence in detailed responses provided in this regard. Some senior leader respondents noted that reports would only be shared once the full investigation was completed, that no information relating to the identity of the perpetrator would be shared, and reports would only be shared if the donor requires it. PSEAH Technical

Leads typically discussed sharing information as in line with their personal values in shared learning and transparency.

Table 2: Responses to comfort levels of sharing information relating to PSEAH

Question	Respondents	Average Score
On a scale of 1 – 5, how comfortable are you to share non-personally identifying or case-specific information with other organisations in Malawi about your organisation’s work on SEAH prevention and response. 1 = not comfortable at all 5 = very comfortable	Senior Leadership	3.9
	PSEAH Technical Lead	4.2
On a scale of 1 – 5, how comfortable are you to share information with your donors about incidences of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment carried out by your staff, volunteers or associates. 1 = not comfortable at all 5 = very comfortable	Senior Leadership	4.3

Prioritisation of PSEAH

Whilst Senior Leader respondents typically noted that their responsibilities included representation of their organisations to government and oversight of strategic plans, only one respondent within this group referenced the responsibility toward ‘Do No Harm’ and the compliance with Safeguarding and Protection standards.

Given the fast-paced and often unpredictable nature of the role of senior leaders within ODA organisations, the online survey sought to explore how senior leaders prioritised their responsibilities, and whether approaches to prioritisation may have an impact on the support provided to survivors of SEAH.

Figure 1 presents the factors noted by respondents that inform the prioritisation of their deliverables.

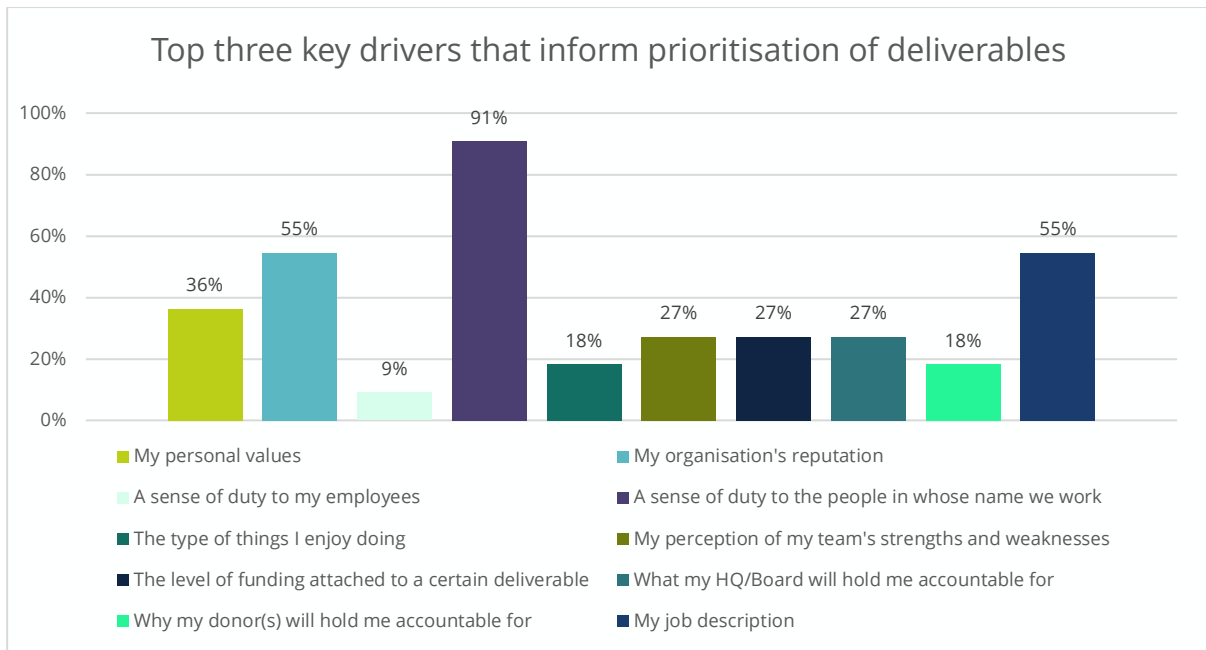


Figure 1: Factors that inform prioritisation of deliverables by Senior Leads of ODA organisations

Almost all respondents noted that they were driven by a sense of duty to the people in whose name they work, which may offer opportunities to leverage this sense of duty toward survivors of SEAH. ‘My job description’ and ‘my organisation’s reputation’ were noted as key drivers by just over half of the participants, whilst other drivers were less commonly selected. Respondents further noted that emerging needs, opportunities and emergencies often influenced their process of prioritisation.

Conclusions

Survivor-centredness may require the expansion of the boundaries of SEAH | Though the ODA sector can only take responsibility for its own programmes and communications, and the conduct of its own staff, volunteers and associates, survivors of SEAH perpetrated by, or harm triggered by any actor, will not differentiate their experience based on the institution involved. For example, survivors of IPV triggered by government initiatives should be afforded the same support to those whose experiences are related to the conduct of ODA organisations. The ODA sector should consider taking a wider view of institutional power and the harm experienced by vulnerable groups when aiming to prioritise the needs and wishes of survivors, particularly in the context of Malawi, where the national budget is heavily donor supported.

Limited ownership of responsibility toward survivors of SEAH | The findings suggest that there is limited ownership of responsibility toward survivors of SEAH. Senior Leaders typically did not reference their responsibilities toward PSEAH or ‘Do No Harm’ as part of their key

role, and this group tended to be of the view that there are specialised teams dedicated to undertaking investigations and supporting survivors of SEAH meaning that these processes do not require their personal oversight. PSEAH Technical Leads generally noted a lack of resources and support to respond to survivors' needs and wishes.

Creating a dialogue relating to where responsibility toward survivors lies and highlighting the role of senior leaders of ODA organisations in these processes, may be effective in generating clarity in this regard.

Sense of duty as a possible lever to increase prioritisation of survivors of SEAH | Senior Leaders' sense of duty toward the people in whose name they work may be an effective lever to increase their perceived responsibilities toward PSEAH generally, and toward survivors of SEAH specifically. Though the majority of respondents noted that this is a key factor influencing the prioritisation of their work, issues such as the lack of ownership of responsibility noted above, suggest that there is limited understanding of vulnerability to SEAH, and the various risks different groups face. Transformative approaches to shift senior leadership attitudes toward PSEAH and survivors of SEAH could highlight the duty held toward the most vulnerable groups, who are more vulnerable to SEAH or harm triggered by the actions of ODA agencies.

Annexes

Annex 1 | Senior Leadership Survey Tool



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Annex 2 | PSEAH Technical Leads Survey Tool



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