

# PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (PSEA)

## *PSEA in the context of Multi-Sector Needs Assessments (MSNAs): A training module for assessment teams and enumerators*

GUIDANCE NOTE | MAY 2020

### ABOUT THIS TRAINING

REACH, with support from the UK Department for International Development (DFID), has produced a training module to assist humanitarian actors in implementing PSEA principles and standards during inter-agency coordinated or joint needs assessments designed to inform the Humanitarian Programme Cycle, such as MSNAs. This module was developed in line with the [Grand Bargain Principles for Coordinated Needs Assessment Ethos](#) and accompanies a separate module on Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP).

The production of this training module also addresses core minimum standards outlined in the [Global Public Policy Institute \(GPPi\) methodology](#), developed to assess the quality of coordinated multi-sector needs assessments. Specifically, GPPi Criteria 11 requires that “Strategies are in place to prevent and address sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse during the assessment process (this can include for example policies, guidance, briefings, trainings or complaints mechanisms).”

This one-hour training module is designed for enumerators and assessment teams. The complete package of materials includes this guidance note and presentation slides with embedded facilitator notes. Its overall aim is to equip participants with the practical knowledge and skills required to fulfil their responsibility for creating and maintaining an environment that prevents sexual exploitation and abuse, for upholding internationally agreed standards on PSEA, and for implementing their organization’s code of conduct.

In practice, this means:

- Understanding what constitutes sexual exploitation and abuse;
- Recognizing what should be reported as suspected or alleged SEA, and how to report;
- Knowing what to do if disclosures do arise in the context of your work and who to contact to make a referral, so that the person in question gets the support they need from a trained and qualified specialist.

Development of the module was informed by an extensive review of relevant literature and standards, as well as ten key informant (KI) interviews with Impact/ REACH staff, including both national and international country-based staff in Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda, and headquarters in Switzerland.

### Adapting and Contextualizing the Training Module

Sexual abuse and exploitation are universal, affecting all human societies. There are certain minimum standards and core competencies with regards to PSEA that we expect all enumerators and assessment teams conducting MSNAs to uphold, and these elements of the training module should not be modified (definition of PSEA, IASC 6 Core Principles). However, contexts vary widely.

Reporting, complaints and access to justice -- as well as the barriers around them -- need to be understood in relation to local contexts, cultural and community standards as well as international standards. Country Teams and facilitators are therefore encouraged to include examples and case studies from their own settings.

PSEA is a sensitive and emotive topic, and it’s important for facilitators to be aware of the cultural norms and values in the context where the training is taking place, as well as the group dynamics between participants. Before any discussion

of case studies, state (and re-state, at regular intervals) ground rules: the case studies are strictly professional and hypothetical. **Under no circumstances should participants mention names or real-life examples.**

## What an MSNA Can and Cannot Address in the Context of PSEA

*MSNAs are not the way to gather data on the incidence and prevalence of aid workers' misconduct, especially with regards to sexual exploitation and abuse. However, in practice, disclosures arise and referrals need to be made, so assessment teams and enumerators need to know what to do.*

MSNAs are a relatively resource-light way to get a broad representation of how a large number of people feel about a humanitarian response. They can provide important data to support Accountability to Affected Populations, particularly:

- For informing the design and adaptation of AAP mechanisms e.g. data to highlight information needs and preferences among the affected population, and support the design of targeted communications;
- For informing the design and use of effective complaints and feedback mechanisms.

However, large scale household-level data collection is not the best way to monitor the incidence and prevalence of particularly sensitive and illegal issues, such as sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers. An MSNA certainly does not replace a functioning complaints and feedback mechanism or a referral system. It is extremely unlikely that an MSNA will give an accurate picture of levels of aid workers' misconduct, especially regarding PSEA. Three reasons for this:

1. The nature of an MSNA. Affected people are describing their needs, and commenting on aid they have received. This establishes a benefactor – recipient power dynamic from the outset, and is not conducive to open feedback or complaints, much less alleged sexual exploitation or abuse. Further, it is important to understand the local norms and cultural context in which the MSNA is being conducted: some cultures may be more familiar with a transactional relationship between service providers and beneficiaries, and people may feel more comfortable giving negative feedback. Others may perceive complaining as ungrateful and as indicative of a lack of respect for others' generosity.
2. The lack of confidentiality associated with household-level data collection. In most communities, households respond to surveys together, and responses are often channeled through a senior family member. Affected people are unlikely to openly discuss barriers to reporting or allege misconduct in the presence of other family members, especially men or elders.
3. Children do not usually respond to household surveys on behalf of the family. The MSNA is therefore unlikely to include all of their input. Further, when data is collected per family unit, it does not include information on children living outside households (depending on the context, this may include street children or children in institutions).

Data obtained through other means -- a functioning complaints and feedback mechanism, but also administrative records, qualitative studies and unstructured interviews -- can provide a more accurate picture of levels of misconduct among aid workers involving SEA.

## Equipping Assessment Teams and Enumerators with the Necessary Tools

It is important to equip assessment teams and enumerators with the knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibility to create and maintain an environment that prevents sexual exploitation and abuse. On completing the training, participants should understand that they are not expected to have the skills or training required to investigate or interview victims or survivors of SEA, and that it isn't their job.

However, assessment teams and enumerators – along with all humanitarian workers – have a responsibility to report any concerns or suspicions regarding SEA, and if disclosures do arise in the context of their work, then they need some straightforward advice to help them know what to do and who to contact. Participants should understand their obligation to report alleged, witnessed or suspected sexual abuse or exploitation. Failure to do so represents a breach of the IASC PSEA Core Principles and their agency's Code of Conduct (which is expected to be aligned with the IASC PSEA Core Principles).

As members of assessment teams or enumerators, participants have a right to be given the appropriate information regarding referral pathways and complaints mechanisms. These will vary from context to context, but it is essential that participants are equipped with the information you need to fulfil their AAP obligations. Facilitators should prepare further information regarding referral pathways and complaints mechanisms ahead of the training, and should be able to direct participants towards necessary resources.

## Further Reading

- **“No Excuse for Abuse”: Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Action.** <https://www.interaction.org/blog/no-excuse-for-abuse/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48MCG22FqrE>
- **IASC Six Core Principles Relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.** <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/inter-agency-standing-committee/iasc-six-core-principles-relating-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse>
- **Your agency's internal Code of Conduct, policies regarding PSEA, and referral mechanisms**