



LEARNING PAPER

Establishing Community and Faith-Based Approaches to Safeguarding in Emergency Contexts – Lessons Learned

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Funded by

Islamic Relief Canada

Acronyms**CO** – Country Office**CHAT** – Community Hope Action Teams**PSEAH** – Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment**SEAH** – Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment**SFP** – Safeguarding Focal Point

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Relief Worldwide is a faith-inspired humanitarian relief, development and advocacy organisation, working with the world's poorest and most vulnerable people. Since 1984, Islamic Relief has worked with over 40 countries globally, has served millions of people and has thousands of staff across the world¹. Since its establishment in 2015, the Programme Quality (PQ) department has recognised safeguarding, protection and inclusion as fundamental elements in the work of Islamic Relief. This has been exemplified through our adherence to internal policies relating to Safeguarding, Child Safeguarding, Gender Justice, Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEAH), as well as our active and ongoing efforts to pragmatically integrate safeguarding issues, as well as inclusion and protection, into humanitarian programming. The idea of safeguarding is to reinforce the humanitarian imperative to do no harm, by preventing sexual abuse and exploitation, as well as other forms of abuse and harassment. Arguably the most basic aspect to measuring success is the ability of an organisation to safeguard the communities it serves. PQ at Islamic Relief has made tremendous progress in developing approaches to safeguard against sexual exploitation and abuse, through supporting the implementation of safeguarding policies, capacity development, strengthening inclusive complaints mechanisms, improving and embedding organisational functions around safeguarding. However, it is our understanding that no safeguarding approach can be truly enduring without mainstreaming safeguarding into projects and adopting a community-based approach that builds upon existing mechanisms and engages with traditional powerholders, such as faith leaders, as well as the most excluded community members.

This Establishing Community and Faith-Based Approaches to Safeguarding in Humanitarian Contexts: Lessons Learned paper aims to advance understanding and practice through critical reflection on a project titled Establishing Community and Faith-Based approaches to Safeguarding in Humanitarian Contexts, funded by Islamic Relief Canada between 2022-2024. It specifically provides reflections from an event organised in Amman, Jordan between 20-22 May 2024, which drew on the experiences of seven countries (Malawi, Mali, South Sudan, Sudan, Bangladesh, the Philippines) out of the eight² that were targeted under this intervention. During the event, four countries (Kenya, Ethiopia, Jordan and Somalia) that were not targeted under the intervention were also present. This paper considers discussions between the Safeguarding Project Coordinator and the Safeguarding Focal Point (SFPs) from the seven target country offices (COs) during monthly meetings and community of practise meetings. It considers lessons, challenges and recommendations in order to serve as an inventory for learning and reflection for Islamic Relief staff, as well as the broader humanitarian and development sector.

¹ <https://www.islamic-relief.org.uk/savinglives>

² Islamic Relief Palestine was also targeted under the intervention but since the events of October 7 2023, most regular programming has been suspended due to the incredibly dangerous situation on the ground in Gaza.

³ According to the UNHCR, people at-risk are individuals who due to certain characteristics (such as disability, health conditions, gender, ethnic group) face heightened risks in humanitarian situations. The risks they face must be analysed against the threats they face, the vulnerabilities they face, as well as the capacities they have to mitigate these threats and vulnerabilities.

Project background

Across the world, people continue to face reality in its most repressive forms – death, starvation, hunger, neglect, injury and disease. Images of people escaping wars and disasters have become too familiar to us as they flash on our TV screens and are shared on our social media platforms. The unprecedented escalation in Gaza, the crisis in Sudan, the violence in Democratic Republic of Congo – these are all different crises, but they all share one thing in common: people in these contexts are becoming increasingly reliant on aid.

During humanitarian situations, opportunities for exploitation and abuse increase due to imbalances of power, and there are significant power imbalances between a community that is reliant on aid as well as aid workers, who are in control of lifesaving resources. We also know that violence against vulnerable people³ tends to increase during emergencies due to a breakdown in formal (judicial, legal and social) and informal services (community watch groups, women's support groups). Contexts characterised by conflict and disaster can result in fractured communities and chaos which amplify the risk of harm and abuse, and accordingly, undermine opportunities to detect and report abuse.

On a positive note, since 2018, there has been a growing social and political commitment to addressing safeguarding issues and tackling sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH) within humanitarian and development assistance, including within the workplace. In addition to recognising that SEAH has no place in the aid sector, there are also growing calls to end the normalisation, tolerance and minimisation of harm inflicted on those working within the humanitarian sector and the communities we serve. This commitment is reflected in international guidelines, standards and frameworks such as:

- the revised Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability, specifically CHS 4: People and communities access support that does not cause harm to people or the environment
- the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Minimum Operating Standards and Six Core Principles
- the 2023 The IASC Definition & Principles of a Victim/Survivor Centred Approach
- the 2019 OECD-DAC Recommendations on Ending SEAH
- various United Nations resolutions such as the UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/73/148: Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: sexual harassment, the newly developed
- common Approach to Protection Against Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (CAPSEAH) which aims to harmonise and capture key messages and principles from a variety of guidelines, documents and principles.

Each of these international standards and agreements reflects a growing anxiety in the international community that abuse within the aid sector remains prevalent, and there is a dearth of sufficient data to adequately corroborate the scale of the problem due to a multitude of social, cultural, physical and institutional barriers in reporting. They have also provided stimulus to non-governmental organisations to adopt more rights-based, inclusive and survivor-centred approaches to safeguarding. Furthermore, these documents have formulated a constellation of policies, guidelines, approaches and tools by various non-governmental organisations, as well as bilateral and multilateral organisations, all of which provide NGOs like Islamic Relief with an entry point for confronting issues related to safeguarding and SEAH.

There is a question, however, of how successfully agenda-setting has translated into effective and sustained change, with confusion and debate concerning the means by which safeguarding can successfully be systemised into programmes and across organisational functions. Yet, there is a growing desire to adopt more clearly articulated, principled, proactive, and survivor-centred measures to ensure a sustainable and effective PSEAH and safeguarding approach in our programmes.

Through mainstreaming safeguarding into humanitarian action, we can ensure that our activities respond to the risks and injustices facing the most marginalised communities – including men, women, boys and girls of all ages, as well as people with disabilities – by ensuring meaningful participation, safe and dignified access, and taking deliberate action to avoid negative effects and addressing systematic inequalities at an organisational level.

It is through this conviction that the Establishing Community and Faith-based Approaches to Safeguarding Mechanisms in Humanitarian Contexts project⁴ was conceived and implemented with funding from Islamic Relief Canada between 2022-2024. Under the project, we placed a strong emphasis on capacity building and community engagement around our safeguarding mechanisms through awareness raising and active participation in promoting our safeguarding approach which demonstrates the real, practical achievements of the project, as well as the following:

- A **Community of Practice** made up of eight of the target countries was set up to facilitate learning, cooperation and sharing of resources. Bi-monthly meetings became a forum to discuss progress with project outcomes, challenges faced and accomplishments. An example is the discussion and agreement that key safeguarding messages that should be short, concise and suitable for use in a number of different contexts such as distribution items, leaflets, display boards and banners. This space also facilitated a space for country offices (COs) to share learning and practice with each other and discuss how to tackle any challenges experienced over the course of the project implementation.
- A key component of the project was to **raise community awareness** so that community members were confident of their rights and entitlements as well as of the expected conduct of Islamic Relief staff and the means to complain, should they need to.
- **Technical support from the project co-ordinator** was provided which included regular one-to-one meetings, enabling a trusting working relationship to develop. SFPs could confidentially share concerns, ask for clarification on safeguarding matters and receive coaching on specific areas such as staff training, integrating clauses into vendor contracts, supporting the development of community hope action teams (CHATs) and discussing safeguarding as it applies in different working contexts.
- Another objective of the project was to target a particular project to support countries in ensuring safeguarding is firmly integrated into the **risk assessment**.
- **CHATs** were established across six COs made up of trusted community champions and faith leaders with the aim of developing a participatory approach that embeds a safeguarding structure at the local level to ensure longer term sustainability and ownership. The CHATs were designed to support Islamic Relief in deploying messages around safeguarding in an inclusive manner and ensure that the message reaches those most at-risk. The CHATs also received trainings on safeguarding from Islamic Relief.
- A **child safeguarding training** package was developed which included four modules on different types of abuses, intersectionality and safeguarding people at-risk, the survivor-centred approach, and inclusive reporting mechanisms. This training package was subsequently rolled out to all COs within Islamic Relief to ensure that learning was not limited to target COs only.
- Support and **capacity building** from headquarters to COs meant that they were able to cascade learning and training to all staff within their field offices. All offices trained up to 70 per cent of staff across their countries. The impact of capacity building cannot be overstated; all countries have trained staff across their respective COs to ensure that staff within all departments are sensitised on the safeguarding mechanism, their responsibility to report and also how to mitigate the risk of safeguarding violations in programme design.
- One objective was to review the **risk assessment** of a specific project in order to identify elements that present the potential for sexual abuse and exploitation and try to identify possible entry points for strengthening preventative measures and appropriate response strategies.
- **Focus group discussions (FGD)** were carried out with at-risk communities, including people with disabilities, to understand some of the barriers they face in accessing reporting mechanisms, providing valuable information to the Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) and Safeguarding team. As a result of these FGD, the COs have been able to document some of the unique intersectional barriers facing communities, such as women and children with disabilities. This learning is essential for both programmes and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) staff as it will ensure that some of the documented barriers will be considered in the project design of future programmes.

⁴ This project will be referred to as 'the IR Canada-funded safeguarding project' for the purposes of brevity in this paper

Why fund a stand-alone intervention on safeguarding and PSEAH?

Many organisations are quick to express intolerance of safeguarding violations and a commitment to addressing them. These messages are conveyed by leadership and management, as well as SFPs. Organisations indicate, often at senior levels, that the institution is focused on ensuring that conditions in which sexual harassment does not occur prevail. This is vital, as clear and consistent leadership messages pave the way for meaningful practice, but this alone is not sufficient.

One challenge with upholding a sustainable and well-funded safeguarding structure is that it is assumed that safeguarding and PSEAH will naturally be interwoven into projects. However, through experience and consultations with different COs, Islamic Relief recognises that there is a need to provide more focused technical support to countries, to help further strengthen their capacities and knowledge around safeguarding and PSEAH.

Indeed, policies and procedures are a necessary foundation for prevention and response to safeguarding, however, they are not sufficient in addressing the issues around safeguarding and demonstrating the wide-spread behavioural and cultural change. This means that continuous reinforcement is necessary, including embedding safeguarding through various organisational functions, finding entry points whereby we can reflect safeguarding through routine programme activities such as risk assessments, capacity building, and engagement with communities and particularly faith leaders – all of which requires a deliberate strategy. Moreover, embedding policies and practically applying procedures must be driven by leadership, donors and trustees.

Methodology

This lessons learned exercise was undertaken through desk research, assessment of monitoring and learning logs, meetings with the SFPs and specifically, through feedback and discussions during a learning workshop organised in Amman, Jordan between 20-22 May 2024, with seven target countries in attendance (Mali, Malawi, South Sudan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Yemen, Sudan) as well as four additional countries which were targeted under a previous safeguarding intervention⁵ (Somalia, Ethiopia, Jordan and Kenya). The SFP from Sudan attended online as she was unable to acquire a visa to travel to Jordan and the SFP from Gaza was unable to travel or attend the workshop due to the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

During the workshop, in addition to country-specific discussions, the Safeguarding Project Coordinator and the SFPs collectively identified the following themes to frame the learning approach, all of which formulated important elements of reflection during the project:

- establishing CHATs
- instilling organisational change towards improved safeguarding
- safeguarding People At-Risk
- safer programming
- inclusive reporting mechanisms

The learning from these themes will be unravelled in this paper through an exploration of the broader lessons in these areas, as well as country-specific lessons, followed by recommendations.

Limitations and exclusions

The learning brief is not a systematic evaluation of the project deliverables funded by Islamic Relief Canada, but is intended to give a general overview of some of the experiences, lessons and challenges following discussions with the target COs during the learning event in Amman, Jordan. It should also be noted that Islamic Relief Palestine was a target CO, but due to unrest in the region following the events of 7 October 2023, the project was suspended in Gaza and therefore the SFP was unable to provide reflections and share experiences.

⁵ Between 2019 and 2021, IR Canada sponsored a project titled "Sustainable and Inclusive Approaches to Safeguarding Mechanisms in Emergency Contexts." This initiative targeted five countries: Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Jordan, and Afghanistan. Of these five countries, representatives from four attended the Jordan 2024 workshop. The workshop provided a platform for exchanging lessons learned and engaging in reflective discussions based on their experiences of implementing a similar safeguarding project.

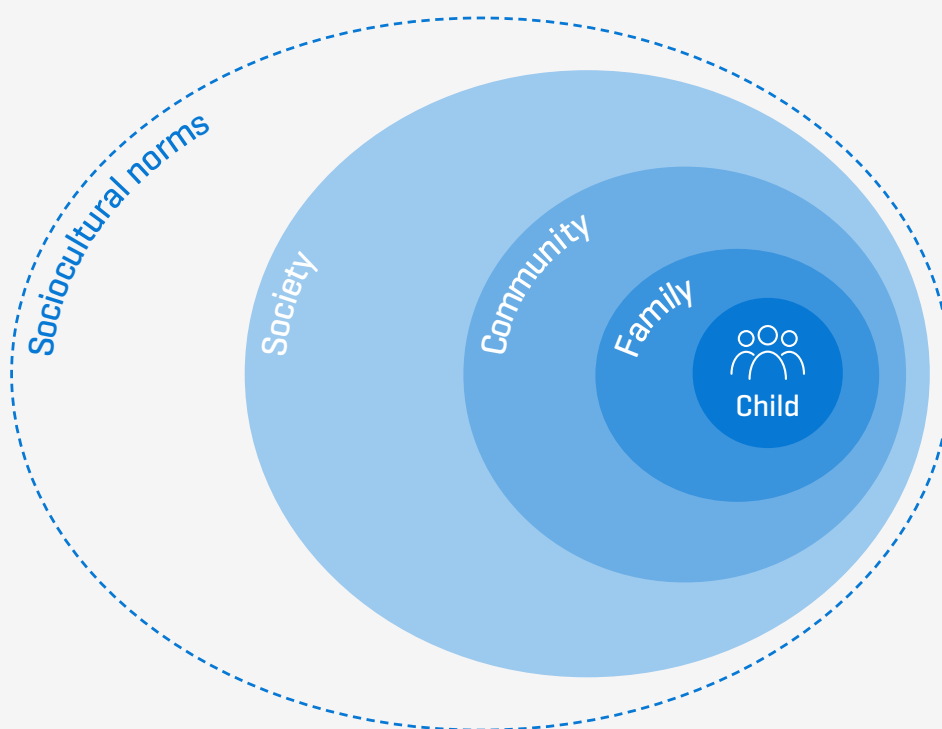
KEY LEARNINGS

Establishing Community Hope Action Teams (CHATs)

The concept of a CHAT is derived from World Vision’s Channels of Hope methodology. This methodology, originally created by World Vision⁶ and subsequently adapted by Islamic Relief for a Muslim context, aims to empower communities to involve faith leaders and other influential individuals in promoting the wellbeing of at-risk populations through insights from religious texts, including Christian scriptures and Islamic sources like the Hadith and Qur’an. The primary objective is to address and change harmful attitudes related to children and gender by understanding and tackling the root causes of these issues, influencing norms, values, and practices.

A CHAT typically comprises of four to eight community members who support our safeguarding efforts. If an existing group can fulfil this role, there is no need to create a new CHAT. The team should include a diverse mix of men and women, adults and youth, and ideally individuals with expertise in gender and child protection, such as healthcare professionals, social workers, or police officers. The individuals selected from the communities are not affiliated to any groups and often chosen based on their accessibility and trust within the community. The rationale behind forming CHATs is the recognition that communities are often best positioned to lead their own protection and safeguarding efforts. Communities have a deep understanding of their unique dynamics, cultural norms, social structures, and potential vulnerabilities. This localised knowledge is crucial for identifying risks and developing context-sensitive interventions. When communities are actively engaged in safeguarding and protection initiatives, it fosters ownership and motivates members to take proactive measures to protect themselves and others from harm.

Islamic Relief Philippines approach to establishing CHATs aimed to adopt a more systemic approach rooted in the Socio-Ecological Model. This model recognises that an individual’s wellbeing and development is influenced by a multitude of factors within societies, communities and families. As such, a failure to protect an individual from abuse is grounded in a social and institutional context that allows misconduct to occur, rather than because of the weakness of one individual. Individuals are embedded with families, families are embedded with communities and communities are embedded with a broader society, all of which can either positively influence the protection outcomes of an individual or expose the individual to more risk.



The Socio-Ecological Model⁷

⁶ <https://www.wvi.org/faith-and-development/channels-hope>

⁷ The Socio-Ecological Model, Alliance on Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Retrieved 27/06/2024: https://alliancecpa.org/en/CPMS_home

In order to address the different interconnected levels of influence within the target community, **Islamic Relief Philippines** conducted training of trainers sessions with local non-governmental organisation partners, local government unit officials, Barangay⁸ officials, school heads, and religious leaders. The trained participants then conducted safeguarding rollouts at the community level reaching 300 community members (112 females and 188 males) under the Strengthening Livelihood and Climate Resilience for Ligawasan Marsh Communities in Mindanao (LMARSH) project funded by Islamic Relief Canada. These trainings subsequently led to the establishment of CHATs. During these workshops, faith leaders were invited to speak on faith and safeguarding, recognising that faith-related communication resonates more effectively with the community.

Innovative approaches – Islamic Relief Philippines

A training of trainers was organised in collaboration with various stakeholders at a sub-national level and community-level, including the gender focal point of the local government unit, the Philippines National Women's Desk of the local police force, 11 school heads, Arabic/Islamic teachers, and the local council. After the participants were trained, the knowledge was cascaded down to the village level. Following this training, selected members joined the CHAT, which also included specialists in child protection, school heads, faith leaders, and the Council of Elders.



The safeguarding focal point with CHAT participants

For **Islamic Relief Malawi**, the CHAT groups were composed of influential leaders whose opinions are highly respected and believed by the community, allowing them to act as potential 'gatekeepers' to the community. In addition to community leaders, Islamic Relief Malawi also collaborated with police, social welfare, and legal institutions, which play a significant role in child protection and safeguarding efforts. The SFP from Islamic Relief Malawi stated that core to their approach of establishing CHATs was working with learning centres and educational environments/schools as teachers are central to the daily lives of children. They spend a significant portion of their day with teachers, making them ideal candidates for identifying and addressing safeguarding issues promptly. Schools also often serve as community hubs, making them effective points for disseminating information and raising awareness about child safeguarding issues among children, parents, and the wider community.

A key lesson from **Islamic Relief South Sudan's** approach to establishing CHAT's was that faith leaders are central to any community-level work. Rather than treating safeguarding and protection as contemporary concerns, working with faith leaders in South Sudan allowed the space to contextualise and translate the language around safeguarding in a way that was more receptive to the community. Although there is no clearly articulated methodology on a 'faith-sensitive' approach to establishing CHAT's, involving community and faith leaders in the design of visual material, as well as in formulating the language used during awareness raising sessions could help safeguarding messages and interventions to align with local beliefs, practices, and languages, making them more relevant and impactful.

Promising practises – Islamic Relief Ethiopia

Islamic Relief Ethiopia established CHATs during the 2020-2021 Sustainable Approaches to Safeguarding Mechanisms project funded by Islamic Relief Canada and has since expanded these efforts, with 11 CHATs currently operational. Under a UNICEF project, the organisation has also been involved in producing visibility materials to enhance awareness and outreach.

⁸ A small territorial and administrative district forming the most local level of government.

Despite these positive lessons and experiences, the COs also revealed many challenges in establishing and working with CHATs. One of the key challenges according to all of the COs was the constraints in terms of financial, material, and human resources, impacting their ability to implement safeguarding initiatives effectively. According to **Islamic Relief Sudan**, since December 2023 when the conflict in Sudan spread to Gedaref State and the humanitarian situation deteriorated even more severely, it has been very difficult to motivate communities to work in a collaborative manner with no material or financial incentive.

In addition to constraints related to resources and capacities, a significant challenge cited by **Islamic Relief Yemen** was the severe hindrance to community engagement on safeguarding and issues of sexual abuse and exploitation by local authorities and government officials. This resistance arises from the perception that topics related to gender, child protection, and safeguarding represent Western ideological impositions. The SFP reported that discussions on these topics within community settings are often fraught with fear and reluctance, particularly because any form of community gathering necessitates prior approval from authorities. Because of these risks, the SFP in Yemen was unable to establish CHATs as doing so could represent a security risk to Islamic Relief staff. However, the SFP noted that attempts have been made to deliver awareness raising messages on safeguarding through pre-existing committees using different words to explain PSEAH. For example, 'sexual abuse and exploitation' could be substituted with 'physical harm or coercion of any nature'. In addition, it was noted that the formation of CHAT groups could be fraught with many challenges including the possibility of reinforcing power dynamics within the CHAT group. As such, the onus is on Islamic Relief offices to ensure power is evenly distributed within the CHAT and that all members feel empowered to voice concerns or participate. Furthermore, it was noted that different cultures may have varying attitudes towards what constitutes acceptable or inappropriate behaviour and that it was essential to ensure that all members of the CHAT had a uniform understanding of what constitutes a violation under Islamic Relief's safeguarding framework. In some cultures, traditional leaders involved in CHATs may also be involved in traditional resolution mechanisms that contradict the policies of Islamic Relief, for example, forcing a survivor of abuse to marry the perpetrator. As such, Islamic Relief needs to adopt a collaborative approach with faith and community leaders to raise awareness on the harmful effects of forced or early forced marriage.

The 'faith' element in CHATs

The project, titled *Establishing Community and Faith-Based Approaches to Safeguarding and PSEAH in Emergency Contexts* aimed to integrate CHATs that include faith leaders. By leveraging the influence of these leaders, the project aimed to enhance outreach and effectively address linguistic and cultural barriers, as well as achieve more impactful engagement by tapping into the faith-based resources of individuals and communities. Discussions with Islamic Relief colleagues around faith and safeguarding centred on what we mean by a faith approach and whether there is a clearly articulated, uniform methodology on a 'faith sensitive' approach. Indeed, the experiences of some of the COs demonstrated that engagement with faith or faith leaders can vary across contexts and cultures.

The 'faith' element varied across different contexts, from simply including faith leaders in the CHATs because of their influence, to working with faith leaders to develop visibility material which could be used to promote gender justice, safeguarding and protection in communities. **Islamic Relief Philippines** gave the example of a poster developed under a previous intervention which referenced various Quranic verses that indicate fair treatment of women, the importance of acquiring consent and gender justice, in order to promote safeguarding during awareness raising sessions and CHAT workshops.

Islamic Relief Malawi's SFP set up 'interfaith' CHAT groups. Malawi's communities are composed of various religious groups, primarily Christians and Muslims. Interfaith CHATs reflect this diversity, ensuring that safeguarding efforts are inclusive and representative of the entire community. By involving leaders from multiple faiths, interfaith CHATs can enhance their credibility and trust within the community and also enable a unified approach to safeguarding, in which Christian and Muslim leaders can jointly advocate for the protection of children and vulnerable individuals.

Islamic Relief Mali's SFP worked with faith leaders in CHATs to promote awareness around safeguarding generally, as well as gender justice and child protection.

Engaging with faith leaders in Mali – a case study

Bourama, an imam from Ouelessebouyou, Mali, is a dedicated religious leader deeply committed to his community. He recently participated in Child Safeguarding training delivered by Islamic Relief Mali on 5 May 2023 under the Islamic Relief Canada-funded project.

“The child safeguarding training provided by Islamic Relief equipped me with essential knowledge, tools, and strategies to protect children from harm, abuse, and exploitation. Through interactive sessions, case studies, and practical exercises, I gained a deeper understanding of child rights, signs of abuse, reporting mechanisms, and preventive measures. I actively engaged in discussions, shared my insights, and collaborated with fellow participants to develop action plans tailored to our respective communities.”



Imam Bourama delivering a sermon

The impact of this training on the community has been profound and far-reaching. As a respected Imam, Bourama has used his newfound knowledge and skills to raise awareness about child protection among community members, fellow religious leaders, and parents. He has integrated child safeguarding principles into his sermons, emphasising Islamic teachings on compassion, justice, and the sanctity of children's rights.

Overall, it was agreed that while safeguarding or protection are contemporary terms, they reflect ideas that religious teachings have espoused. There are examples within the Islamic faith of faith leaders developing general principles from religious texts that include the protection of children and women.

INSTILLING ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE TOWARDS IMPROVED SAFEGUARDING

The safeguarding project was based on the premise that culture is not learned in a conscious manner, but internalised through a process of socialisation and, as such, embedding safeguarding throughout various organisational functions, capacity building, engagement with communities and particularly faith leaders is a long-term process. This also means that the working culture of the office needs to become 'safeguarding-aware' through the implementation of safeguarding practises in their daily routines, decision-making and projects. This project viewed safeguarding as a complex journey of internal cultural change, characterised by reflecting on strategic orientation, operating procedures and leadership attitudes.

As such, COs engaged in the training of staff, volunteers, CHATs and partners on safeguarding, improving recruitment practises through background checks and ensuring interview questions included questions around SEAH and safeguarding, awareness raising with communities, including a safeguarding component in inductions, and ensuring safeguarding-related risks were embedded in the risk matrix of projects. Arguably, the funds from this project allowed the COs to put safeguarding policies into practise.

Organisational culture and leadership are the cornerstones of a successful safeguarding and PSEAH approach. It requires strengthening individual knowledge, skills, and experience as well as developing organisational capacity around strategic

orientation, policies, operating procedures, and leadership. As such, ensuring that an organisation's culture and leadership is conducive to safeguarding is not just about ensuring policies are in place, but also about encouraging feedback and learning, actively modelling and championing safer practises and always upholding a survivor-centred approach. It is not enough to be motivated by donor requirements or compliance processes – the changes required to achieve the mainstreaming of safeguarding and PSEAH require an appreciation of the root causes of power inequalities and a commitment to uphold safeguarding practises in everyday life.

However, translating these policies into actionable measures presents significant challenges, particularly in contexts characterised by different leadership approaches and unique contextual challenges.

Capacity-building and awareness-raising among staff

According to **Islamic Relief Philippines**, the current approach within Islamic Relief focuses on raising awareness on safeguarding policies within communities but puts less emphasis on explaining the safeguarding policies to staff within field offices and this results in confusion on around what constitutes a safeguarding violation. On a positive note, all countries reported that staff inductions include references to safeguarding. It is important that Islamic Relief's commitment to safeguarding is conveyed in inductions, which are premised on a sound understanding of the

values and ideologies that underpin safer programming practises and appropriate/inappropriate behaviours between staff and communities, by providing new employees with the necessary critical consciousness regarding the importance of gender justice, disability inclusion, child protection, as well as Islamic Relief's commitment to safeguarding and PSEAH.

Moreover, although it is widely acknowledged that training on safeguarding and PSEAH needs to be part of a country-wide strategy, this may not always be the case for various reasons, for example, a lack of time to attend trainings. As such, training is frequently undertaken by only a handful of staff. However, training only a selection of staff may be inadequate in order to successfully and effectively mainstream safeguarding, particularly if a lack of coherence or overall strategy with which safeguarding can be framed already exists. Perhaps a relevant solution would be to provide more long-term support, such as a modular approach to training, as opposed to one-off trainings for a selection of staff.

Generic trainings may actually be counterproductive

Discussions with COs also included reflections on the actual nature of trainings. According to Islamic Relief colleagues, trainings that are centred on compliance, and lack nuance and real-life scenarios can actually be counterproductive. Generic trainings often fail to engage participants meaningfully. They may focus too much on policy and compliance without addressing the real-life contexts and behaviours that contribute to harassment and safeguarding issues. This can result in participants not taking the training seriously or not understanding how it applies to their daily interactions. To be effective, trainings on safeguarding should be tailored to promote behavioural change. This involves engaging participants in discussions about the root causes of harassment and gender inequality, challenging harmful norms and behaviours, and equipping them with practical skills to create a safer and more respectful environment.

Promising practises – Islamic Relief Bangladesh

According to Islamic Relief Bangladesh, the project provided essential funding and dedicated time, significantly enhancing their focus on safeguarding. Previously, safeguarding was only allotted 30 minutes or less during routine awareness-raising sessions in communities and staff training. The implementation of stand-alone initiatives, such as day-long trainings, proved to be highly effective in addressing safeguarding comprehensively.

Moreover, the project facilitated valuable cross-learning opportunities. For instance, the knowledge exchange enabled Bangladesh to gain insights from Yemen's experiences through the Community of Practise meetings, fostering a more robust and informed approach to safeguarding across different contexts. This collaborative learning not only enriched the safeguarding practices but also promoted a culture of continuous improvement and shared expertise within the organisation.

Field level focal points

According to **Islamic Relief Mali**, it is important to appoint focal persons per project site to act as champions and to meaningfully influence projects that impact the communities we work with. **Islamic Relief Mali** currently has three SFPs whereas **Islamic Relief Ethiopia** has eight SFPs who speak eight different languages. In Yemen, there is currently only one SFP and due to ongoing security concerns and travel restrictions, it is challenging to ensure that the SFP can be accessible to various offices for training and awareness-raising on safeguarding.

As a result of logistical challenges between project sites and the main CO where most SFPs are based, this approach should be considered mandatory to foster a truly localised and sustained approach to protection and inclusion, particularly in contexts characterised by frequent crises. Field level staff may have a better understanding of nuanced challenges and risks.

Staff recruitment processes

All Islamic Relief colleagues stated that the recruitment process in their offices now includes comprehensive safeguarding questions for all roles, ensuring a thorough vetting process. Including safeguarding questions underscores the organisation's commitment to protecting the rights and wellbeing of those it serves. It sets a clear expectation that all staff members are responsible for upholding these values.

Limited staff capacity

It is typical for an organisation to assign any tasks relating to safeguarding, as well as other technical areas such as gender, disability inclusion and child protection, to specific staff members, such as SFPs within the context of Islamic Relief. However, considerations should be made about whether it is possible to redistribute tasks so that the capacity to undertake safeguarding work can become a key criterion for all existing and new staff. For example, the SFP can work with the Programmes team in ensuring the design of projects considers safeguarding risks and mitigation measures. Mainstreaming safeguarding should not be seen as an objective of its own, to be undertaken by one appointed person, but it should be seen as an integral part of the management of a high-quality programme by all projects staff.

Adaptation of policies

For **Islamic Relief Mali**, it was recognised that staff members often do not read entire policies. To address this, the approach was refined to translate and adapt key sections of the policy into French, encouraging staff to read these concise, relevant portions. This method has proven to be more effective than attempting to convey the entire policy at once.

Diversity in the workforce

It is a matter of logic to not only promote gender equality and disability inclusion in an organisation's delivery of services to the communities we work with, but to also promote gender equality and disability inclusion internally through ensuring a diverse workforce. According to Islamic Relief colleagues, greater diversity in the workplace could operate as a protective factor to greater accountability. A Department for International Development (DFID) learning study from 2018⁹ found that since

⁹ Department for International Development (2018), Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment in the international aid sector: victim and survivor voices: main findings from a DFID-led listening exercise, Retrieved 12/06/2024: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sexual-exploitation-abuse-and-harassment-in-the-aid-sector-victim-and-survivor-voices-listening-exercise/sexual-exploitation-abuse-and-harassment-in-the-aid-sector-victim-and-survivor-voices-listening-exercise#:~:text=A%20targeted%20listening%20exercise%20was, and%20longer%20term%20policy%20thinking.> DFID is now known as the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)

power imbalances within the workforce are also 'gendered', a senior management workforce that is dominated by men can foster an environment where staff are reluctant to report, whereas a workforce that includes women in senior positions can contribute to an environment that is less discriminatory and more inclusive.

Culture and leadership in COs

Discussions with the COs around workplace culture mainly centred on context-specific values beliefs and attitudes which are ubiquitous and could help or hinder the reporting of safeguarding concerns. These values and beliefs permeate every aspect of life, often unconsciously, making it challenging to identify and address violations. When discrimination is implicit and ingrained in everyday life, it can be difficult to perceive, articulate, and confront. Certain values and beliefs are naturally reflected in workplace environments and can contribute to silence and acquiescence or victim-blaming attitudes.

Leadership in many humanitarian contexts may adhere strictly to traditional values and norms, resulting in resistance to safeguarding policies perceived as foreign or intrusive. Some leadership styles may favour hierarchical decision-making, thereby limiting the involvement and input of local staff and communities in shaping safeguarding practices. In order to instil

cultural and behavioural change that is conducive to safeguarding, discussions with COs centred on how to name and challenge inequality. According to one CO, for example, an office can communicate its stance on inequality in numerous ways that shape its culture. A genuinely committed environment will feature diverse leadership and management teams, inclusive of women, young people, individuals with disabilities, and other groups typically underrepresented at senior level. On the other hand, some cultures can construct leaders as immune to question or consequences and in workplace environments characterised by short-term contracts and lack of job security, this can contribute to a lack of reporting and perceived impunity.

For Islamic Relief, this means that we need to scale up our approaches through continued efforts on mainstreaming safeguarding and PSEAH into various organisational functions, strengthening work around mainstreaming safeguarding practically into existing programmes, and particularly strengthening our approach to engagement with faith leaders and communities. There is also a greater need for senior management to maintain an environment that prevents safeguarding and SEAH concerns and reflect safeguarding in key decision-making processes. COs specifically mentioned the importance of targeting managers for training on safeguarding as this could subsequently enable a 'speak up' culture which is closely linked to management support.

SAFEGUARDING PEOPLE AT RISK

Central to every safeguarding violation lies an individual situated at a developmental and chronological juncture, with diverse social identities shaped by their surroundings. The combination of factors that heighten risk, such as gender, disability, age, chronic illness, displacement, significantly influences their vulnerability, risk and opportunity to report any violation. Attaining a comprehensive understanding among staff and communities regarding the consequences of committing safeguarding violations necessitates a nuanced exploration of gender equality, social norms, power dynamics, and concepts of masculinity, beyond mere prohibitive measures. This approach not only clarifies the boundaries of acceptable behaviour but also conveys a decisive stance on intolerance of such violations, making it an effective starting point for institutional change.

Key definitions

People at risk: According to the UNHCR, people at risk are individuals who, due to certain circumstances (for example, displacement) or characteristics (gender, chronic illness), may face heightened barriers which prevent them from being able access services or prevent them from enjoying their full human rights.

Intersectionality: The theory of intersectionality purports that identities such as gender and disability are not separate, homogenous categories. Indeed, intra-group differences must be considered as social categories. For example, gender may interact with other identities, such as ethnicity, to produce distinctive forms of exclusion and marginalisation. Indeed, intersections of groups with certain privileges can also result in favourable outcomes for people who historically yield more power, such as men.

In order to unpack this approach further, a 'Power Walk' exercise was conducted in order to foster a discussion of what we mean by safeguarding people at risk, intersectionality and power inequalities. During the discussion, the following lessons were highlighted:

Flattening out power imbalances

Several studies investigating sexual violence committed by peacekeepers and aid workers attribute SEAH¹⁰, in part, to power imbalances between aid workers and populations. Indeed, exploitation of power by aid workers, who control the distribution and allocation of resources in exchange for sexual services from girls and young women, has been extensively documented in numerous countries. According to **Islamic Relief South Sudan**, in the South Sudanese context, there is a sense of patriarchal entitlement which can contribute to unequal power dynamics and is a significant underpinning for sexual abuse and exploitation, as well as other safeguarding violations. As such, it was recommended that awareness raising sessions with communities on safeguarding also touch upon harmful gender norms and not just explaining our policies.

¹⁰ UNHCR, Save the Children (2002), SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND EXPLOITATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF REFUGEE CHILDREN IN LIBERIA, GUINEA AND SIERRA LEONE, Retrieved 13/06/2024: <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/commons-committees/international-development/2002-Report-of-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-Save-the-Children.pdf>

Promoting gender balance within the workplace

According to Islamic Relief colleagues, it is crucial to promote gender equality and disability inclusion internally through recruitment processes. A lack of gender balance was cited as a potential risk factor, specifically for sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as in humanitarian settings where, if men are in more senior positions, they may be inclined to overlook behaviour which is considered traditionally masculine and therefore, harmless.

Work with leadership

Leadership plays a critical role in driving the organisational change necessary to eradicate the systemic inequalities that underpin sexual harassment. Sexual harassment can target individuals of any demographic, but is typically carved around existing inequalities, including sex and gender, race and indigenous status, disability, immigration status, age, and sexual orientation. Addressing these intersecting factors is essential in creating an inclusive and equitable environment. As such, leaders such as Country Directors and Head of Programmes should model ethical behaviour and demonstrate a zero-tolerance approach to harmful gender norms and ideas.

Cultural barriers

CO staff discussed whether existing power relations and cultural barriers could be a challenge in promoting safeguarding among people at risk. It was mentioned that due consideration should be given to the fact that in some contexts such as Yemen, conducting awareness raising sessions on safeguarding, PSEAH and gender justice may be perceived as Western-imposed thinking, which could result in harmful consequences for participants and staff.

Islamic Relief Yemen may not be in a position to advocate against the ideological underpinnings of culturally-mandated gender roles when promoting its safeguarding policies. This does not mean, however, that advocating for gender justice should not remain a priority. It is important to explore creative and sensitive ways to tackle inequalities within communities. It is therefore crucial for Islamic Relief to work in coordination with community leaders and engage with other relevant stakeholders to minimise 'unintended negative consequences'.

Capacity building on safeguarding people at risk

According to Islamic Relief colleagues, safeguarding training, rather than merely explaining the safeguarding policy and reporting procedures, could involve examining how societal norms, expectations, and power dynamics influence the perpetration and reporting of abuse. Training could also address gender stereotypes, unequal power relations, and the impact of traditional masculinity which may contribute to the normalisation of abusive behaviours. In some situations, men and boys may be unaware of the daily risks women and girls face and the active role they can play in the protection and safeguarding of at-risk communities and groups. As such, it is important that trainings are designed to address this.

It's also essential to explore how gender intersects with other identities, such as disability, and how this intersectionality can compound vulnerabilities and barriers to accessing support services.

Similarly, integrating disability perspectives into safeguarding trainings requires understanding the unique challenges faced by

individuals with disabilities in identifying, reporting, and seeking assistance for abuse. This includes addressing communication barriers, limited access to support services, and the heightened risk of abuse faced by people with disabilities.

Safer programming

Reports from victims/survivors are often viewed as the primary catalyst for action, rather than recognising that, given the hundreds of thousands of workers globally and the significant power differentials between them and the populations they serve, abuse is an anticipated risk. SEAH should not be treated as an occasional issue, but must be systematically integrated into the design of our interventions. Safer programming is based on the recognition that humanitarian operations occur in high-risk environments. By proactively managing both actual and potential risks, we can enhance the efficiency and safety of our efforts. Conducting a comprehensive risk assessment that considers different scenarios and possible consequences of our intervention or presence on the ground is a key cornerstone to a successful approach to safer programming. The analysis and collected data from a risk assessment is intentionally premised on the assumption that results from the analysis will lead to a more informed and sensitive intervention that mitigates these risks. During the learning workshop, discussions around safer programming were centred on what we can do to ensure safeguarding considerations are more explicit, not only at an organisational level, but also at a programmatic level.

Promising practises – Islamic Relief Malawi

Islamic Relief Malawi has established a comprehensive safeguarding framework that includes a dedicated Protection and Inclusion (P&I) coordinator and an SFP. Safeguarding protocols are integrated into all aspects of operations, including the incorporation of safeguarding questions in interviews and continuous orientation sessions for staff and volunteers. Additionally, all projects are designed with specific protection and safeguarding outcomes.

Awareness-raising sessions are conducted in collaboration with both Christian and Muslim faith leaders through the establishment of CHATs, leveraging their influence and trust within the community. In Malawi, faith leaders are perceived as more trustworthy than village heads, making their involvement crucial for effective safeguarding initiatives. This approach ensures that safeguarding measures are not only implemented but also embraced by the community, thereby enhancing their overall impact and sustainability.

Participatory risk assessments

According to **Islamic Relief Bangladesh**, when conducting needs assessments, we routinely rely on the opinions and knowledge of those closest to the ground. Why would we approach the risk assessments in different ways? Including communities in our conversations about how to prevent their exposure to violations, particularly national staff and those who may be more marginalised, allows for richer and more comprehensive risk assessments. It is simply good practice to ask those who may be impacted by risk for their thoughts on how best to prevent or mitigate it.

Budgeting for Safer programming

Many COs reflected on the challenge of budgeting for safeguarding projects. Specifically, adding a largely undefined safeguarding line item has in some instances been difficult to justify to finance teams due to its broad and unspecified nature. However, it is important to consistently emphasise that safeguarding approaches with budgetary implications are about ensuring we are being proactive in mitigating safeguarding related risks, which should not be seen as an 'added luxury' or dependent on timing and resources.

Indicators for Safer programming

Project log-frames that are consistently anchored to safeguarding-related outcomes could have a tremendous impact on outcomes for marginalised groups. Identifying indicators would require project staff to articulate specific changes that are envisaged for a particular project. As such, working closely with MEAL colleagues to identify clear indicators to measure progress on mainstreaming safeguarding, as well as protection and inclusion is crucial to upholding accountability and improving performance. This approach may also enhance ownership and sustainability of safeguarding-related outcomes more widely among project staff and beyond protection and inclusion focal points. An example of an indicator could be: "By the end of the year, 200 community members, of which 15 per cent are persons with disabilities, will have received safeguarding awareness training and demonstrated an understanding of their right to report any concerns, as measured by post-training surveys."

'Designing' out opportunities for abuse

Islamic Relief Bangladesh gave an example of how, as part of a UNICEF Education project, a PSEAH focal point was recruited. Their sole responsibility is to oversee and implement safeguarding measures in the design of the intervention. For example, by ensuring a robust analysis of safeguarding risks is conducted before programmes are designed and implemented to ensure they do no harm and aim to reduce risks wherever possible. By recruiting a PSEAH focal point for a specific project, **Islamic Relief Bangladesh** is demonstrating the importance of allocating resources and capacities to ensure a safe and effective approach to programming that prioritises the safety and dignity of all stakeholders.

INCLUSIVE REPORTING MECHANISMS

The effectiveness of a safeguarding mechanism is fundamentally contingent on an organisation's reporting system. However, there is no universal formula for designing a mechanism that is safe, confidential, transparent, and accessible. The factors that enable people to report abuse in one context may not be effective in another. This variation is due to the differing barriers present in each environment, which are influenced by the nature of the humanitarian crisis, the specific vulnerabilities of the population, and local social norms, including gender norms.

The primary objective of a reporting mechanism is to facilitate the safe, effective, and culturally appropriate reporting of concerns. Therefore, it is crucial to consider practical concerns such as local culture, language, and literacy levels to enhance the mechanism's effectiveness. Experience has shown that low numbers of reported safeguarding concerns involving at-risk populations do not necessarily indicate the absence of safeguarding violations. Instead, it suggests that staff or community members may be unaware of, or disincentivised to, report such concerns. Additionally, it may indicate that the reporting mechanisms are inaccessible or inappropriate, allowing the abuse of vulnerable individuals to persist unnoticed.

During the workshop, discussions were held with Islamic Relief colleagues on the barriers that exist in their environment in relation to the existing reporting mechanisms:

Formal versus informal

It was highlighted that while formal mechanisms, such as telephone lines, complaints boxes, email and SMS are accessible to some people, they may exclude members of the community who either experience disabilities or have low levels of literacy. Other barriers could include a lack of access to technology or network coverage, as well as cultural barriers that restrict people from being able to comfortably voice concerns. Furthermore, children are often excluded from traditional mechanisms due to the design of the mechanisms not being child friendly. It was also noted that formal mechanisms, particularly telephone, SMS or email are usually more accessible to staff working within Islamic Relief, than to wider populations because of issues related to accessibility.

Colleagues identified the need for survivors to be able to report confidentially and in person to a trusted member of the community. This is because in many communities, verbal reporting is valued for its personal and respectful nature. At the same time, verbal reporting may widen the number of people aware of a concern or a violation and therefore, lessen our control over adhering to the principle of confidentiality. We also need to consider the fact that community leaders may be involved in perpetuating the attitudes that condone SEAH and/or stigmatise SEAH survivors. As such, there appears to be mixed feelings about the effectiveness of both formal mechanisms (complaints boxes, telephone lines) and informal mechanisms (appointing community based focal points). It was recognised that it can be overwhelming to catalogue all these barriers and impossible to ensure that a mechanism is 100 per cent effective to reporting while also ensuring there are as many reporting options as possible, both formal and informal, available in each context.

Leveraging existing structures

According to **Islamic Relief South Sudan**, reporting through existing community-based structures or ones set up via projects, such as women's safe spaces or kitchen gardening initiatives, can be very effective as survivors will have built up trust with an individual in those spaces. A reporting mechanism set up in an existing safe space could be more comfortable to potential survivors as they are already familiar with the environment and not distinguishable from other members of the safe space. During training sessions or meetings in these spaces, an Islamic Relief staff member could remind participants of their right to report any concerns and explain the available channels.

According to **Islamic Relief Malawi**, the need for reporting mechanisms to be specifically geared towards children and young people is widely acknowledged. Schools are places where children spend a significant amount of their time, providing a natural environment for observing and detecting any signs of abuse or neglect. Schools provide an opportunity for continuous monitoring of children's wellbeing, enabling ongoing support and follow up. As such, on 30 June 2023, **Islamic Relief Malawi** trained schools in Namasimba and Chikwankhuna on safeguarding and the reporting procedure under the Islamic Relief Canada-funded project on safeguarding.

However, it is important to note that this approach may be rendered harmful if it is the existing structure that is implicated in the violation.

Move away from treating safeguarding and SEAH as a 'women and girls' issue

Although it is important to acknowledge the gendered underpinnings of violations, such as sexual exploitation and abuse, this can reinforce the stereotype that only women are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation and inadvertently deter men and boys from reporting incidents. As such, when explaining the safeguarding policy and reporting procedure during staff and community trainings, it is also important to highlight the importance of safeguarding men and boys by including case studies and scenarios involving male victims to raise awareness and reduce stigma.

Take a more proactive approach

In the same way that Islamic Relief raises awareness and provides information internally to its staff, a key component to improving our safeguarding approach is to conduct outreach and sensitisation with local communities. Based on discussions with Islamic Relief colleagues during the workshop, as well as experience from field visits, it was routinely highlighted that Islamic Relief staff need to adopt a more proactive approach to engaging with the community on complaints mechanisms. For example, regularly holding focus group discussions (FGDs) where community members who are typically marginalised due to characteristics such as age, gender and disability, in order to raise their awareness of the complaints mechanism and safeguarding. FGDs also a structured and safe environment. FGD with communities could prompt the kind of dialogue and reflection that raises doubts about existing mechanisms and create opportunities to learn more.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the implementation of the Islamic Relief Canada-funded safeguarding project, the learning workshops and individual discussions with SFPs, it became clear that there is a lack of a consistent methodology on how to implement an effective, community-based safeguarding mechanism because of the issues highlighted in the various themes in this paper. Despite this, a number of key insights emerged from which we can propose the following recommendations:

Organisational leadership is key

Leaders set an example by adhering to safeguarding standards and exhibiting behaviours that reflect Islamic Relief's values. Their actions send a powerful message about the importance of safeguarding. Where there is leadership buy-in, there is more likely to be an allocation of necessary resources, including funding, personnel, and time, to develop and maintain robust safeguarding mechanisms.

Develop a criterion for assessing organisational change

The absence of a criterion for what defines an effective approach to addressing safeguarding and SEAH limits the ability to compare and evaluate the effectiveness of the work undertaken to improve Islamic Relief's approach to safeguarding under the Islamic Relief Canada-funded safeguarding project. For many non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the simple implementation of safeguarding-related measures, such as producing policies and delivering an annual staff training, is often considered a marker of success in and of itself, without also requiring tangible evidence that these measures are producing meaningful change. An assessment on the effectiveness of safeguarding across Islamic Relief could look at the understanding of managers on SEAH issues and their implications, staff awareness on the gendered underpinnings of safeguarding and SEAH issues, surveys exploring both staff and community confidence in the reporting mechanism and whether the organisation possesses a general 'speak-up' culture, promoting diversity within the workforce and particularly in more senior positions.

Creative community out-reach

Developing a child-friendly and inclusive reporting mechanism requires careful consideration of participation and age-appropriateness to ensure that community members of different ages and literacy levels can access the reporting mechanism and understand any information provided by Islamic Relief offices on it. Factors which could contribute to effective community outreach could include clear, simple communication spoken verbally and in written modalities, the use of tools such as suggestion boxes with visual cues, simple questionnaires with smiley face scales, the use of picture charts, emojis, and colouring activities to help young children express their feelings and experiences, the use of stories and characters to which children can relate to facilitate discussions about their experiences. **Islamic Relief Sudan** gave an example of using theatre/drama in Gedaref to raise awareness on safeguarding among community members.

Contextually relevant CHAT groups

Each CO had a unique experience with establishing CHAT groups. For example, **Islamic Relief Sudan** simply built on an existing protection committee whereas **Islamic Relief Philippines** adopted

a train-the-trainer approach which eventually led to hundreds of people participating in the CHAT group, with the core group built into it. As such, it is recognised that establishing a CHAT on safeguarding in humanitarian action is a dynamic process that requires careful planning, community engagement, and continuous adaptation. Some general guidance on establishing CHATs could include:

- Choose a diverse group of four to eight members, including men, women, youth, and individuals with disabilities in a project location.
- Conduct an initial training session to equip members with the necessary knowledge and skills around safeguarding. Training should be interactive, utilise case studies and practical exercises.
- Ensure continuous capacity building through regular refresher workshops and meetings.

Move away from 'tick-box' trainings

Staff and community trainings need to move away from simply providing information to also addressing social norms to shift harmful gendered norms which may fuel SEAH and other safeguarding violations. Safeguarding trainings could adopt learning methods from Gender-Based Violence, and Child Protection trainings, as well as games, exercises and other participatory techniques. Trainings also need to be a continuous effort, not a one-off annual event considering staff turnover and the fact that not all staff will be available for one training event.

Participatory risk assessments

In order to ensure that safeguarding is effectively mainstreamed into projects and programmes, safeguarding risks and mitigation measures need to be accounted for. Beyond just recognising the risk of sexual abuse and exploitation, CO-level staff need to consider different scenarios and possible consequences of our interventions using the existing risk matrix. It is also crucial to involve community members and staff in the risk assessment process to gain diverse perspectives and ensure all potential risks are considered. Safeguarding measures can also be incorporated into log-frames via indicators, such as "Number of children in the project location made aware of safeguarding policies and reporting procedures."

Faith-based approaches

Although it was recognised that there is no consensus on what a 'faith-based' approach looks like, the benefit of engaging with faith in humanitarian contexts and particularly in relation to promoting safeguarding and PSEAH cannot be over-stated. For secular organisations, safeguarding violations constitute a violation of the organisation's policies, but for communities adhering to a particular faith, as well as staff adhering to a particular faith, a safeguarding violation also goes against faith-based values, adding another dimension to the accountability. It would be useful to link Islamic Relief's five values (excellence, sincerity, social justice, compassion and custodianship) more explicitly to safeguarding and to also draw upon Islamic scriptures, such as Quranic teachings and Hadiths, that advocate for the rights and protection of vulnerable individuals, including women, children, and marginalised groups.

CONCLUSION

The lessons from this paper are drawn from discussions that took place with seven countries under the Islamic Relief Canada-funded project on Establishing Community and Faith-Based approaches to Safeguarding in Emergency Contexts, as well as four countries outside of the project. The paper also considers reflections from discussions held individually with the SFPs during individual meetings and during monthly Community of Practise meetings.

This learning paper is not intended to serve as a comprehensive documentation of all activities undertaken under the project. Instead, it provides a general overview of the lessons learned from implementing safeguarding activities more broadly, as well as under the project. Some of the lessons include:

- Faith leaders play a pivotal role in many communities and their engagement in safeguarding activities is crucial. They can leverage their influence to promote safeguarding practices, support vulnerable individuals, and foster a culture of protection and trust within the community.
- The importance of continuous and contextualised training that is focused on behavioural change, rather than merely compliance to ensure that all stakeholders remain informed about the latest safeguarding procedures.
- A strong organisational culture that prioritises safeguarding, supported by committed leadership, is essential. Leaders must actively promote and model safeguarding values, creating an environment where everyone understands their role in protecting vulnerable individuals.
- Adequate funding and sufficient time are critical for the successful implementation of safeguarding activities. Financial resources enable the procurement of necessary materials, training programs, and support systems, while adequate time ensures thorough training, planning, and execution.
- Developing and maintaining inclusive reporting mechanisms encourages all community members to report concerns without fear of retribution. These mechanisms should be accessible, confidential, and trusted by the community, ensuring that issues are promptly and effectively addressed.

Through the implementation of the project, the value of funding a stand-alone intervention also became extremely evident. A dedicated safeguarding intervention ensured that sufficient attention and resources are allocated to addressing safeguarding activities. Additionally, having a separate safeguarding initiative allowed for clear accountability and easier monitoring of safeguarding specific activities. It provided a distinct framework for evaluating the effectiveness of safeguarding measures, identifying gaps, and making necessary improvements without the interference of other project goals and activities. It also helped to build a strong organisational culture around safeguarding by signalling a serious commitment to safeguarding issues, fostering an environment where safeguarding is prioritised.



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