

EDITORIAL

Those of you who are keen readers of the Investigator (and we hope there are a few!), may recall that the last issue promised to tell you about BSO's current research project – the Beneficiary Based Consultation. This issue makes good on that promise.

In the first section, “The Beneficiary Based Consultation – Your questions answered”, we describe the ‘what, where, when, how and who’ of the Consultation. To summarise quickly here, it is a study into the effectiveness of agencies’ prevention and response mechanisms from the perspective of beneficiaries. It will be conducted in three locations by an independent consultant with help from a number of agencies and many individual beneficiaries.

For the ‘why’, we have reprinted a plenary address to ANPPCAN's First International Conference in Africa on Child Sexual Abuse. As we say there, the Beneficiary Based Consultation is not *just* about demonstrating the utility of consultative and participatory methodologies in applied humanitarian research. And it is more than an “advocacy tool” to persuade stakeholders in humanitarian action to reconsider how they prioritise strategies to prevent and respond to the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse. The most important argument for conducting the Beneficiary Based Consultation is that beneficiaries are the only qualified arbiters of our performance: we will only know how effective we have been in preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse if beneficiaries actually feel safer as a result of our efforts. And the only way to know... is to ask. ■

FEATURE ARTICLE

The Beneficiary Based Consultation – Your questions answered

Q: What is the Beneficiary Based Consultation?

A perceptions study, the Consultation will consider the extent to which beneficiaries in four locations feel safer as a result of steps taken by NGOs to implement the IASC's six core principles and the ten commitments in the “*Statement of Commitment on Eliminating Sexual Abuse and Exploitation by UN and non-UN Personnel*”. It will also examine the extent to which beneficiaries feel that NGOs have included and consulted them to develop their complaints handling systems.

Q: What the Beneficiary Based Consultation is not

The Consultation is not about ‘naming or shaming’ organisations and will not attempt to elicit information about specific SEA cases. If specific cases are brought to our attention, we will make sure that the complainant is aware of the existing complaints handling systems. If no systems are available, we may offer to report the complaint using HAP's reporting procedures. In either case, we will offer to help the complainant bring their complaint to the relevant organisation.

Q: Who is conducting the Beneficiary Based Consultation?

BSO at HAP has hired an independent consultant, Ms Kirsti (Kiko) Lattu, to conduct the field visits and write the report. A local research assistant, host

organisations and translators will assist Ms Lattu in each location.

Q: How is the Consultation being conducted?

Obviously enough, the methodology for this study is ‘consultative’ and ‘beneficiary focused’. This means that our primary source of data will be information given to us by beneficiaries through group and one-on-one discussions, transect walks, observation, random visits to homes and targeted interviews. We will try to involve residents who do not usually participate in decision-making and will seek input from the participating communities in finalising the preliminary results and report.

Q: How does the Consultation relate to the Tally Sheet?

The Beneficiary Based Consultation will be conducted alongside a survey of organisations. Using a questionnaire (the ‘Tally Sheet’), we are attempting to ascertain the baseline of current organisational policies and activities addressed at this form of misconduct by staff. The Tally Sheet complements the Consultation by telling us how beneficiary and organizational perceptions compare.

Q: Where is the Consultation being conducted?

The Consultation is being conducted along the Thai-Burma border, in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, and in the Omatako / Osiri refugee camp in Namibia. Sadly, a field visit to the Masehra district of Pakistan was cancelled for security reasons.

Q: When is the Consultation being conducted?

The first field mission to Thailand was conducted in August 2007 and the final visit to Namibia will be complete by December 2007. The results will then be analysed and the results released in a report by March 2008.

Q: What will happen to the results?

From December 2007 to February 2008, our consultant will consolidate and analyse the results from the field visits. Her preliminary findings will then be shared with beneficiaries and BSO staff for feedback. After that, a final report comparing results across the three countries will be reviewed by a reference group and released publicly. We expect that the report will provide useful and new information for NGOs on how to improve their efforts to prevent and respond to SEA. Host organisations will also receive a brief overview of country-specific issues raised about local SEA mechanisms. ■

FEATURE ARTICLE

Partnerships for prevention Plenary Address to the First International Conference in Africa on Child Abuse African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Sexual Abuse and Neglect

Nairobi, Kenya,
25 September 2007

Radha Ivory, Humanitarian
Accountability Partnership

Our discussions over the last day-and-a-half have covered many difficult issues associated with the sexual abuse of children, not least, the reality that children are most likely to be abused by trusted adults and in trusted situations. One situation of familiarity and trust that hasn't been

mentioned so far is the potential for abuse in our organisations, that is, by members of our staff against beneficiaries of our assistance. And so it is that this presentation, "Partnerships for Prevention", considers the issue of sexual abuse and exploitation of children by NGO workers, particularly in situations of war and disaster.

As some of you may know, this issue gained international prominence with the so-called West Africa scandal of 2001/2. In Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, numerous allegations against humanitarian workers and peacekeepers shocked the international community and prompted a major re-evaluation of organisational approaches and attitudes to this form of abuse. Since then, there have been similar reports from other locations as diverse as East Timor, Nepal and Sudan, seeming to confirm that abuses are not a geographical problem but the result of extreme discrepancies in power present in relief situations everywhere.

Nonetheless, we find ourselves time and time again talking of "West Africa" as if the possibility of large-scale abuse were an issue of the past or at least geographically limited. As we will see, this assumption, what I call the "West African legacy", has impacted on our work at Building Safer Organisations partnering with individuals and agencies to improve beneficiaries' access to reporting mechanisms and dignified, safe and confidential investigations.

The West Africa 'story'

So let us turn to the West African 'story'. It begins in 2001, when consultants to UNHCR and Save the Children UK conducted a participatory assessment of the impact of conflict on children in the Mano River states. They found extensive sexual exploitation of refugee girls between 13 and 18 in all three locations, with agency workers among the primary exploiters. In fact, these workers commonly used the very humanitarian assistance intended to help girls as tools of exploitation, extorting sexual "services" for small amounts of money, food stuff, plastic sheeting, education, and the like.

When the consultants' report finally came to light in 2002, it unleashed an international furor. It seemed that the UN had been slow to respond and that there were sizable holes in the systems needed to protect women and children from misuses of power. It is perhaps indicative of this that, despite the large number of cases reported to the consultants, no agency had actually received a complaint.

The high-level Inter-Agency task force comprising UN agencies and NGOs looked at such underlying structural issues. The Task Force found, amongst other things, an absence of common codes of conduct governing the individual behaviour of humanitarian workers, and a lack of systems for ensuring accountability of organisations and individual workers to beneficiaries. Accordingly they set forth six "core principles" of behaviour for humanitarian staff (including prohibitions on sexual activity with children) and recommended the establishment of mechanisms for reporting and investigating complaints, the co-ordination of awareness-raising for beneficiary communities and enhanced beneficiary participation in decision-making. These principles and recommendations have been the bedrock of international action on effective prevention and response systems ever since.

NGO initiatives

The impact of the West African scandal did not stop with mass awareness raising or high-level policy collaborations. In different locations, it sparked important partnerships to implement these principles and recommendations in the field.

Here in Kenya, the International Rescue Committee, CARE International and FilmAid International together with UNHCR, formed a consortium to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse by agency workers in the Kenyan refugee camps. The Consortium's achievements include a joint Code of Conduct, an innovative campaign to raise awareness using film and a Memorandum of Understanding on standard investigation and response procedures.

In 2003, a similar UN-NGO partnership at headquarters initiated our project, Building Safer Organisations, to build the capacity of NGOs to receive and respond to complaints safely, confidentially and effectively. The following year, 2004, we began training NGO staff around the world on the 'how to' of investigating complaints and implementing complaints mechanisms in partnership with communities.

The Investigation learning programme was extremely successful in building skills, changing attitudes and generating enthusiasm for reform. However, many graduate investigators reported challenges implementing what they had learned in the field; they diagnosed a lack of understanding from management and a feeling of isolation from other like-minded individuals. Our response was to build partnerships with managers through a tailored workshop and to build partnerships with field-based agencies through regional networks of concerned staff in different agencies. In this way, we hoped to provide continued momentum for change and moral support for the change agents.

The results of our efforts are instructive. The management workshops did succeed in convincing managers that sexual exploitation and abuse by staff could be a problem on their watch. They also generated considerable enthusiasm for on-going co-operation as part of regional networks. Still, with some exceptions, the momentum dissipated once managers were back in their offices and so the networks were also slow to get off the ground.

Our question was why. Though there are many possible explanations, our sense from workshops, meetings and even a high level meeting on abuse, was that **senior management was not persuaded that sexual abuse and exploitation is an ongoing and universal problem, a strategic risk requiring further strategic solutions, implementation, not just on-paper reforms.**

Testing and addressing this assumption through research and advocacy thus became the focus of our project in this, its third phase.

Beneficiary Based Consultation

So it is that a primary focus of Building Safer Organisations at present is The Beneficiary Based Consultation, a research project to determine how beneficiaries perceive agencies' efforts to implement the key findings of the Inter-Agency Task Force and how these perceptions compare to NGOs' own self-appraisals. It is a three-step process.

First, through consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, we are surveying NGOs to find a baseline of current prevention and response capacities around the world. Second, we are carrying out a perception study with beneficiaries, asking recipients of humanitarian assistance in Thailand, Kenya and a third location whether they feel safer as a result of NGO efforts to prevent and respond to abuse. Third, we are comparing these two sets of perceptions to see where beneficiary and organisational views meet and diverge.

Step one – the organisational survey – is extremely valuable because it requires agencies to holistically assess their prevention and response capacities and to self-identify weaknesses and strengths. It also allows us to see where there is greatest potential for co-operation, along the lines of the PSEA consortium here in Kenya.

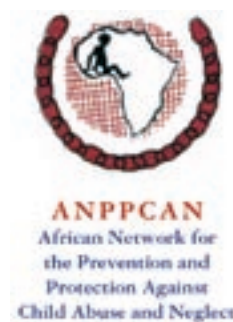
However, by itself the organisational survey would not provide a convincing argument for the effectiveness or otherwise of efforts to date. **For we can only be confident in our efforts, when beneficiaries feel less likely to be abused, when they feel more empowered to make complaints and when they think they are more likely to receive a dignified, safe and confidential response.** So, step two, our international consultation with beneficiaries, is key.

Conclusion

When it comes to working with partners – individual and organisational – BSO has found that the legacy of West Africa to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the 'shock' of the scandal launched the problem of abuse by humanitarians as an 'international issue' and propelled major international players to work together to take important policy decisions. It also led to initiatives to increase implementation of policies at the field level, such as PSEA Kenya and BSO. On the other hand, the assumption that abuse is no longer a strategic, structural problem has made it more difficult for us to transform support from individual workers and managers into further and deeper organisational change.

But what would make such 'further and deeper organisational change' possible? Well, for a start, it includes recognising that beneficiaries – their perceptions and feelings of safety – have to be at the centre of our approach. So much is clear from our commitment to the Beneficiary Based Consultation. Beyond that, it requires adopting a mindset of accountability within organisations, one that values our beneficiaries as the arbiters of our success (or failure) be it in relation to programming decisions, service delivery or anything else. Only by making beneficiaries our strategic partners, can we ensure that the *response* to sexual exploitation and abuse does not end with West Africa. ■

This conference was organised by ANPPCAN.



Recommendations and main highlights will soon be available at:
<http://www.anppcan.org/> or
<http://www.dgroups.org/groups/bsoworkshop>

To login, use your email address as your username and your first name – lower case – as your password.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

NOVEMBER 2007 – JANUARY 2008

Amman, Jordan

Follow-up workshop* 13–15 November 2007

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Follow-up workshop* 19–21 November 2007

Washington (DC), USA

Follow-up workshop* 9–11 January 2008

* Attendance by invitation only

Sneak-peak: Events in 2008

BSO's calendar in 2008 promises to be just as full as it was in the previous three years of project. BSO will conduct 12 workshops in 2008 including, for the first time, a new workshop on general complaints handling in humanitarian crisis. In addition, BSO will continue to train investigators and managers involved in responding to complaints of sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers.

Moreover, throughout 2008, BSO will continue to work with agencies in the Middle East, Asia, East Africa and the United States to develop Regional Networks on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse. Once established these networks will support in-house investigators and investigation managers. They will also hold at least two events in 2008. The events will be organised by request from network participants. So if you are interested in shaping the regional agenda, make sure to speak up now!

You can contact us regarding the workshop schedule and the networks by emailing secretariat@hapinternational.org or visiting our website: www.hapinternational.org ■

BSO Newslines

News stories on child abuse in philanthropic situations figured prominently during October and November. Are there lessons for our work on preventing sexual abuse and exploitation in NGOs through accountability? Join the BSO discussion forum: BSO-workshop at <http://www.dgroups.org/groups/bsoworkshop>.

Chad: Smuggled or saved?

Reports that representatives of a French charity attempted to remove 103 children from Chad to France, have sparked a furious debate over the children's rights and NGO accountability. According to reports, the charity, "Zoe's Ark", claims it did not want to kidnap the children but merely rescue them from starvation in Sudan's Darfur province; they

claim their actions were permitted by international law. Critics, however, say that the workers had no authority to take the children to France and no means of showing that the children were war-orphans.

South Africa / United States: West Africa moves South – The scandal in Oprah's school

Less than a year after its star-studded opening, Oprah Winfrey's multi-million dollar school for disadvantaged girls in South Africa is facing allegations of child abuse. A dormitory matron is accused of assault, indecent assault and soliciting under-aged girls to perform indecent acts; she has been released on bail and will reappear in court in December. According to Reuters, Oprah has responded by "cleaning house", removing dorm

parents and the head mistress and acknowledging the failure of the school's child protection systems. Ms Winfrey, herself a survivor of abuse, said the students who reported the allegations showed exactly the kind of leadership she was hoping to foster at the school.

This is not the school's first brush with controversy: in March this year, parents complained about restrictions on visits, phone calls and email contact, comparing them to rules in prisons.

See the reports:

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L02606326.htm>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7067374.stm>

<http://www.reuters.com/article/peopleNews/idUSL0510385520071105>



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