

“Someone to complain to”: Enhancing Global Accountability in Preventing and Responding to Sexual Exploitation

Children & women continue to be sexually exploited by those meant to protect them. Sexual abuse, exploitation and violence are a daily reality for many boys, girls and women living in conflict and disaster settings. While sexual violence is a social problem in most communities, it increases dramatically when disrupted, displaced communities become reliant on external help. Sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers is a predictable result when aid organizations fail to be accountable to the people they serve.

In May and June 2008 **Save the Children** UK and **The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership** (HAP) highlighted the gross violations of trust and responsibility by humanitarian workers and peacekeepers. Their reports published the findings of consultations with 636 children and adults living in humanitarian crises in six locations around the globe. The reports noted that despite efforts of humanitarian agencies to date, sexual exploitation and abuse of children and women by humanitarian workers continues at alarming levels. Women and children said that aid agencies make complaining about the most basic concerns, such as clean water, so difficult that people affected by sexual exploitation and abuse feel unable to complain about more egregious violations because they are confused, fearful, and do not trust agencies.

Communities, particularly children, are not told that sexual exploitation and abuse are unacceptable and often have no idea how to report it. When they do, they feel their complaints are not taken seriously, not kept confidential and not investigated. Participants from one refugee camp even claimed that sexual exploitation and abuse is so common that it is considered ‘normal’.

Together, the reports made four **key recommendations** to address this complaints deficit:

1. Set up a **global inspectorate project** to monitor and evaluate the efforts of agencies to tackle this abuse and to champion more effective responses.
2. Require agencies to **embed a prevention and response mechanism** in their accountability framework.
3. Create **an environment of trust** and partnership between staff and disaster survivors by putting in place **effective local complaints systems** to enable people to report abuses and making beneficiaries aware of who to turn to and how to complain.
4. Governments, donors and others in the international community must strengthen national child protection systems to **tackle the root causes of abuse**.

“One evening we encountered a couple of humanitarian men, they called us over and showed us their penises. They offered us 100 Haitian gourdes (\$2.80) and some chocolate if we would suck them. I said no, but some of the girls did it and got the money”

A 15-year-old girl from Haiti as part of consultations for Save the Children’s report, *No One to turn to*

When in need, dignity /morality falls by the side. You’re given a favor so you’re ashamed to say no. So you go along with it. Not willingly but blinded by your problems.”

A woman in Kakuma camp, Kenya, consulted as part of HAP’s *To complain or not complain: still the question*

The international humanitarian community has responded with concern and support expressing political and institutional commitments to tackle this problem. However, priorities have shifted and the extent to which agencies hold themselves accountable to the communities they work with in terms of protection from sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers varies from acceptable to negligent. Unless staff and agencies know exactly what is required of them and are held accountable for their actions, or inaction, the problem will continue.

Save the Children and HAP: a collaborative partnership for change

By consulting with children and communities receiving humanitarian aid, **Save the Children** and **HAP** have identified how complaints and response system on sexual exploitation and abuse can be improved. This Global Inspectorate Project is a new approach to addressing a long-standing problem. **Save the Children** will contribute their experience as a lead protection agency to this process¹ and **HAP** offers independent expertise and leadership on accountability to disaster survivors².

Vision

Create a Global Inspectorate for preventing sexual exploitation and abuse that builds on an existing tested humanitarian accountability and quality management system (the HAP 2007 Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management), and provides accessible expert support to all agencies. In doing so, ensure children and women who are abused by humanitarian staff will have someone to turn to, someone to complain to, knowing that abuse will not be tolerated and will be acted upon.

Project Aim:

- To increase accountability of humanitarian workers to children and vulnerable people.
- To enable beneficiaries of humanitarian aid to complain and strengthen agencies' ability to respond.

Project Objectives:

1. Consult with communities, agencies and other relevant stakeholders to build consensus on what constitutes good practice and develop verifiable indicators through which agencies and HAP are able to measure, validate and improve their prevention of and response to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by staff. These indicators will be included in the improved HAP Standard.
2. Increase the number of agencies that report externally on number and type of complaints and how they address allegations of sexual abuse.
3. Improve agency complaints handling and response systems and promote the use of HAP's Complaints Advisory Service to address under-complaining.

¹ Save the Children currently has a multi faceted approach to allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation, which ensures that we are accountable to our beneficiaries. This best practice, combined with our research and global advocacy around under-reporting and accountability mean that Save the Children, as a HAP member is well qualified to advise HAP and champion the need for this Inspectorate within the international humanitarian community.

² HAP is the leading global accountability assurance scheme for humanitarian agencies and their principles of accountability are directed towards making humanitarian action accountable to its beneficiaries. The HAP 2007 Standard incorporates these principles and provides a best practice guide for humanitarian agencies. HAP assists its 31 members and non-member agencies to embed these principles within their accountability mechanisms. HAP conducts field and headquarter based audits to verify that agencies are meeting their accountability commitments and implementing complaint handling processes. So far over 500 humanitarian staff have benefited from HAP's training programme, Building Safer Organisations, which trains staff how best to investigate complaints as well as design and implement safe, accessible, confidential and transparent complaints handling processes.

Activities:

1. **Gain consensus** among agencies on the elements of a Global Inspectorate.
 - **Hold a stakeholder consultation** to gain consensus and understanding for the Global Inspectorate project. This will be a critical part of the consultation to ensure buy-in from agencies and disaster survivors.
 - **Publish a meeting report** with the details of the agreed Global Inspectorate project.

2. **Review the current quality and accountability standard so that it explicitly refers to prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse³** and develop indicators against which compliance verification can be conducted.
 - **Form and manage a steering committee and technical working group** that will contribute to the development of the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation and abuse indicators and the review of the 2007 HAP Standard. The formation of these two groups will secure wide consultation with interested agencies, communities and other key stakeholders.
 - **Develop draft indicators for the improved HAP Standard.** The development process will include at least:
 - 3-4 field consultations at locations in different regions;
 - 2 working group meetings;
 - ongoing discussions with a wider reference group, including survivors and technical experts.
 - **Develop a Guide to the improved HAP standard,** with new methodology for beneficiary consultations and revised complaints investigation guidelines.

3. **Manage the Global Inspectorate**
 - **Increase awareness of the Standard** and how agencies and beneficiaries can complain.
 - **Encourage individual agencies to publicly report on an annual basis how they address sexual exploitation and abuse complaints by their staff.** This activity will be ongoing through the project. The emphasis will not be on statistics but the process through which agencies ensure their systems were ready to deal with allegations.
 - **Pilot the draft Standard by conducting at least 1 inter-agency audit.** This will test the effectiveness of the draft in helping beneficiaries and agencies deal with complaints. The audit findings will inform the draft Standard before it is presented to the HAP Board for adoption.
 - **Run 2-3 audits.** The auditor will conduct 2-3 Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse audits in a humanitarian setting for a single agency, an inter-agency project on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse or a partnership between agencies. As the audit process includes consultations with beneficiaries, staff and other

³ Preventing sexual exploitation and abuse is implicitly part of the current HAP Standard, the review will ensure its explicit mention. All auditor guidelines, good practice guides and tools will be reviewed to include the changes. Member agencies, whether they work in protection or water and sanitation, will have to focus on their accountability in relation to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse in future.

stakeholders, this will provide a voice to the communities and concrete feedback on agency action to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse.

- **Respond to more complaints.** Acting as a destination for allegations received from the field and agencies for action, the Inspectorate will assist with complaints.
- **Enhance global learning and accountability of under-complaining**
- **Adopt and launch the HAP 2010 Quality and Accountability Standard** where prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse is explicit in the compliance verification process.
- **Revise and launch the second edition of the Investigation Guidelines** on receiving and investigating allegations of exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers.
- **Conduct a follow-up study** on disaster survivors' perceptions of agencies efforts to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse by their aid workers.
- **Publish and disseminate the Standard widely.** The Standard will act as reference point against which we can evaluate levels of protection and response to sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers. It will contain requirements that are measurable, affordable, feasible and practical.

Key Indicators

- Agreement on the ToR for the Inspectorate project
- Appointment of the Inspectorate project auditor in 2010
- Completion of 2-3 audits against the Standard by January 2011
- Published report each year

Timeline

January 2009 – January 2011

Partners

Pending the approval of the HAP Board and General Assembly, HAP will host and manage the Inspectorate project⁴ in collaboration with Save the Children UK

Budget:

2009: Partially funded, funding gap CHF50, 000 (£28,000)

2010: Partially funded, still to raise CHF150, 000 (£84,000)

2011: Partially funded, still to raise CHF200, 000

⁴ The host of the Global Accountability Platform will be finalized after the Initial Consultation workshop and pending approval of the HAP Board and General Assembly.