12) Establishing a safe complaints mechanism for SEA concerns

Why safe complaints mechanisms are important

Many people who have experienced SEA do not report violations for a range of reasons, including a fear of reprisal or stigma against those who have experienced or reported SEA; lack of information about what type of concerns should be reported and how to safely report them; or absence of trusted law enforcement and/or professional assistance for healing, recovery and justice. This is why it is so important to put in place complaints mechanisms which are safe and accessible so that organizations can address cases of SEA before they escalate.[18]

It is crucial that the process for reporting and responding to SEA concerns is community-based. Such an approach should comprise trusted channels through which members of an affected community may safely report complaints and seek help. Doing so will help the community identify, define and take action to protect those who are vulnerable.

Actions

Get management and staff buy-in and support: The IFRC has developed a tool which includes guidance for establishing a complaints mechanism as part of the **Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) toolkit**. If a mechanism already exists within your National Society, but is not robust enough to receive complaints related to SEA, follow the guidance within the **CEA toolkit** and review the **IASC Best Practice Guide on Inter-Agency Community-Based Complaints Mechanisms**.

Learn from and about the community: What are the most appropriate channels that different parts of a community can use to share a SEA concern? Does this vary with those groups most vulnerable to SEA? Are there any barriers to people using the mechanism? How can we include those who are at risk of being excluded?

> **If a complaints and feedback mechanism is already established** it is important to check with people of all genders, ages and abilities (focusing on groups most vulnerable to SEA), if they understand how to report SEA concerns and that they feel safe to do so. It may be worth considering alternative channels for community members to report SEA concerns, for example by collaborating with **trusted individuals and organizations** in the community to facilitate reporting.

18   CEA guide, p.9 **https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/01/CEA-GUIDE-2401-High-Resolution-1.pdf**

What is a 'sensitive' complaint?
- Abuse, including child abuse
- Child protection concerns
- Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)
- Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)

Plan the mechanism according to community preferences: Identify the contact points for SEA concerns, for example PSEA focal points, trusted individuals in the community, or community-based organizations. Establish who can access the mechanism, where and when, considering safe access for vulnerable groups towards SEA. Decide how you will inform the community about this mechanism[19], including awareness raising about SEA and other 'sensitive' complaints.

Raise awareness with community members[20]: Ensure communications are tailored for the different groups that are most vulnerable. Communications should cover expected standards of behavior; rights of community members; and how to report a concern. It is important that community members understand what a SEA concern is.