

# Conducting an SEA Risk Assessment for a Programme

All community-facing programmes pose risks to beneficiaries and this includes sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). Therefore, an SEA risk assessment must be conducted in the design phase of any programme which focuses both on the people running the programme and the programme itself. This case study provides an insight into the approach taken by one of our RCRC National Societies.

## Background

Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRCS) set out to conduct a risk assessment to address issues around SEA during the design of its disaster management programme.

The programme targeted twelve communities and would build the capacity of branches of the NRCS. The communities are urban, semi-urban and rural. The programme was due to commence in 2020 but the Covid-19 pandemic delayed its start until 2021. Funded by the British Red Cross, this was the first programme of its kind run by the National Society and it is expected to end in 2024.

The programme was a pilot for strengthening PSEA as part of an integrated approach to community engagement and accountability (CEA) and protection, gender and inclusion (PGI). A team of eight focal points, including four PSEA and four CEA focal points, were designated at headquarters and in three branches to help ensure the programme is safe and inclusive.

## Steps taken

The SEA risk assessment was integrated as part of an existing vulnerability and capacity assessment, with the involvement of the IFRC. The assessment was led by the local branches of NRCS with support from headquarters and with additional assistance from the British Red Cross. First, the British Red Cross PSEA Adviser led a training on assessment of risks in relation to the programme. During the training, potential risks were compiled by members of the local branches and community resilience teams. Then, during the community assessment, they were shared with the community for their input.

A clear understanding of background information such as local laws and trends in sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) within affected communities is a requirement for a risk assessment process and NRCS considered these in its deliberations. The PSEA focal points (female lawyers selected from the programme communities) conducted a legal analysis and, together with the CEA focal points, research was undertaken on SGBV risks in the affected communities. It helped them to design the questions, reflecting the information that had been gathered, and they were then put to the community.

The community assessment was led by a male and female member of the NRCS. These individuals were trained in prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) and they were able to use the insights they had gained as part of their work on risk mitigation.

All the risks were listed together in a table and divided into: vulnerable group, risks, action, who is involved? And, when and how will this be monitored? The format of the risk assessment was shared by the British Red Cross. The community consultation took two days to complete, however, the initial stages of the risk assessment were spread over three months as each branch had to complete them and contend with competing priorities at the time.

This exercise revealed a hidden risk, namely that NRCS volunteers in the field are sometimes harassed by the community. A mitigating action is to have all volunteers working in pairs to help reduce the likelihood of them being harassed while also reducing the risk of SEA (including sexual harassment) of community members by volunteers.

As there is a risk that NRCS staff members or volunteers can harass or commit acts of SEA against a community member, another mitigating action is to create channels for community members to safely report concerns.

### Successes and challenges

The main success of this process was gaining a better understanding of SGBV within communities and learning about the specific culture of each community. The main challenge was getting community members to engage and share their concerns as part of the risk assessment. It was also difficult to communicate to the community the potential SEA risks to people with disabilities.

### Key learning

NRCS's top tips for carrying out an SEA risk assessment is to start with a clearly defined outline of what they want to achieve and have a guideline of questions when approaching the community.

Another helpful tip is to 'work backwards', which in this instance means starting with what the risk assessment should look like at the end of the process and then identify what needs to be in place to achieve it.

For NRCS, if a risk assessment had not been conducted, not all risks will have been identified, increasing the likelihood of incidents of SEA. Overall, an SEA risk assessment, whether carried out alone or as part of a larger risk assessment, is critical to creating safer programmes.