

# Nurturing Progress:

## South Sudan's Journey Towards Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Policy Development and Implementation

The Republic of South Sudan, the world's youngest nation, achieved independence in 2011. Just two years later, in 2013 the South Sudan Red Cross joined the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement as its 189th member.

In 2018 the Code of Conduct for staff and the code of conduct for volunteers was adopted with a clear stance on PSEA. In November 2019, the South Sudan Red Cross began the process to develop a Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Policy; this initiative was led by its protection programme.

The PSEA Policy received formal approval from SSRC Governing Board in early 2022 and in 2023 the first draft of the Standard Operating Procedures on the response to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse was developed and is awaiting formal approval.



### Policy development

Early in 2019, a workshop with senior management was organized by the SSRC and facilitated by its Protection Manager, Grace Tabu, the Netherlands Red Cross, and the Canadian RC SGBV/Protection delegate, Stella Munyi. It was the first opportunity to plant the seeds of a holistic approach to PSEA, and to demonstrate to leadership the value of progressing on PSEA.

In November 2019, South Sudan Red Cross enlisted the expertise of a local consultant with a legal background to craft the policy, with funding support from the Netherlands Red Cross. The collaboration between the consultant and the South Sudan Red Cross and Protection Delegate was pivotal. A meticulous review of existing documents and extensive consultations with stakeholders led to the first draft of the policy in early 2020.

This draft was shared with SSRC leadership, and after incorporating feedback, a second draft emerged. It was then presented to supporting National Societies within the country and the IFRC for further input. By March 2020, the policy was finalized and subsequently approved by the Governing Board of South Sudan Red Cross in early 2022.

## Responding to SEA allegations: A holistic approach



*Response to SEA training for SSRC Governing board, Senior Management team and Managers*



*Session with Volunteers and Staff in Terekeka Branch*



*Session on SGBV/PSEA to staff and volunteers at Kuajok Branch*

In February 2023 at a workshop focusing on the different phases of the response to SEA allegations jointly facilitated by the NLRC and the Protection Coordinator of SSRC, senior management and some of the Governance Board members were trained on the NLRC approach to safeguarding, also the core standards developed by IFRC in its draft safeguarding self-assessment tool. During the workshop the different IFRC safeguarding standards were discussed, and one of the main outcomes was the need to have a standard protocol on how to respond to allegations of SEA when they are received.

The steps of the process were then identified: the need to have trained investigators who could undertake the response in the most professional way; ensuring the survivor centred approach is adhered to; and the need for support to the victim/survivor, was highlighted. A detailed document titled *Standard Operating Procedures on SEA* emerged from this workshop and is awaiting approval from SSRC Governing Board.

Following subsequent PSEA policy awareness sessions with volunteers and staff, based on feedback received from participants “*Questions and Answer*” (Q & A) sheet was also developed. This valuable resource will provide clarity and guidance to all staff and volunteers of South Sudan Red Cross on SEA concerns.

## Key successes

### High level support within SSRC

The unwavering support from senior management and governance has been a cornerstone to the successful development, roll-out, and implementation of the PSEA Policy. Every stakeholder recognized the importance of addressing sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and lent their full support to the policy development process.

### Wide and varied consultative process

The policy development process was enriched by wide input received from different SSRC staff and volunteers across the country, as well as external stakeholders from the government and traditional local leaders. This was useful in understanding social and cultural dynamics across the diverse country.

## **Key personnel in place**

The creation of a protection unit at SSRC in 2021 and the appointment of a PSEA focal point played a vital role in establishing a reporting mechanism. The PSEA focal point is a critical link in the reporting mechanism as outlined in the standard operating procedures.

## **Development of supporting documents and procedures**

The standard operating procedures on responding to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse are quite comprehensive and the reporting mechanism makes room for survivors to use more than one channel to report such allegations. Efforts have been put in place to ensure all staff and volunteers in remote locations are familiar with the inter-agency referral pathways, as well as how to handle sensitive cases recorded through feedback and complaint mechanisms.

## **Key challenges**

### **Social norms might increase the risks of SEA**

The prevalent culture and customary law in South Sudan pose a significant challenge to prevent and response to SEA. The low social status of women, stigma toward any form of SGBV, and high rate of child marriage is contributing factors that increase the risk of SEA.

### **Budgetary constraints may hamper the effectiveness of the PSEA approach**

To ensure routine PSEA training and awareness raising sessions for staff and volunteers, as well facilitate timely investigations and support for victims/survivors of SEA, flexible funding and procedures are essential. However, these are often lacking due to programmatic or yearly budget limitations and donor constraints.

### **Online investigation training is difficult to attend**

The availability of online Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) Alliance certified training modules, endorsed by IFRC for investigator training, poses challenges where unreliable internet connections may deter participation. Additionally, the costs associated with advanced levels of training and the time commitment can present significant barriers.

## **Next steps**

### **Ensure the Policy is fully implemented**

Ensuring full implementation of the Policy necessitates transitioning from a mere document to a fully integrated approach to PSEA across all projects, training, and activities of SSRC. Developing a comprehensive rollout plan will be essential for determining next steps.

### **In-person training to have qualified internal investigators**

One important next step is to have trained investigators within the National Society who are able to respond according to a survivor centred approach. Without trained investigators, trust issues may arise when complainants realize there is a capable gap for handling their concerns.

### **Advocacy**

Advocating for changes in the legal system, particularly regarding customary law that encourages impunity for perpetrators of any type of SGBV, is essential to prevention efforts. This would ideally be done through the South Sudan PSEA interagency group.

### **Welfare of survivors**

Allocating funds for reparations, such as supporting survivors with costs associated with healthcare, psychosocial support, lost work, child-care, and investigations, is essential for a survivor-centred approach. This can help encourage survivors to report, despite the deterrent effects of prevailing customary laws.

### **Conclusion**

South Sudan's journey towards implementing a PSEA policy is a testament to the resilience and dedication of its people. It highlights the importance of collaboration, adaptability, and a steadfast commitment to addressing the critical issue of sexual exploitation and abuse, illustrating how the policy development is the starting point and not the end, and that there is a long journey towards the objective of a holistic and solid approach to safeguarding.

### **Contact information**

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