What is safeguarding?

RSH Nigeria Hub animation transcript

All communities experience violence and abuse, within families or the wider community. When a civil society organisation arrives to work with a community, the organisation itself can exacerbate existing patterns of harm and abuse or indeed bring new forms of harm. Abuse and harm caused by civil society organisations can be categorised as neglect, physical or emotional harm or sexual abuse, or can come in the form of harassment.

Harm and abuse caused by the organisation typically includes:

- Abuse perpetrated by staff or people contracted by the organisation
- Programmes or services, which may exacerbate existing, or cause new, harm within families or communities, for example tensions may be caused if it is not clear why certain members of the community are receiving goods or services whilst others are not
- Communications and media, which can bring new and unwanted attention to the community or to individuals within the community, particularly when a story about an individual shares their personal details, or stories reinforce negative stereotypes.

Sexual harassment, or other forms of harassment, within the workplace that is experienced by staff or volunteers is now also considered within the scope and definition of safeguarding.

To protect people from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment and other harm and abuse caused by civil society organisations, many organisations are putting in place measures to prevent and respond to these abuses. Some organisations refer to these measures as protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment, or PSEAH. Others refer to the measures as safeguarding.

Safeguarding measures concentrate on three core areas: prevention, reporting and response.

Prevention activities include:

- Creating safe workplaces through fostering an organisational culture which promotes diversity and challenges inequality
- ensuring that there are policies, procedures and a code of conduct in place.
- Making sure that references are received for all successful candidates during recruitment, and
- making sure that all staff know what sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment is and that they behave appropriately at all times.
- And finally, preventing abuses by CSO programmes or communications which means working closely with community members to make those programmes safe and give consent for communication activities.

Reporting

Reporting makes sure that all organisations have a system so that staff and anyone who interacts with the organisation can report an abuse or a suspicion in a safe and confidential way. It is important to have various means to make a report so that people of different ages, genders, nationalities and abilities can do so. Phone lines, in-person helpdesk discussions and emails are some examples.

Organisations also have a duty of care to receive reports that concern harm and abuse within families or communities that are not caused by the organisation. However, the response to these differs from the response taken when it is the organisation involved in the abuse.

Response

Response means making sure that all reports are handled in a way that is appropriate, confidential and in line with procedures. Where immediate support is needed for the survivor, for example urgent medical care, links to nearby social services should be made and independent investigations should be conducted where necessary.

Cases or concerns which relate to harm and abuse within families and communities, must be referred to community organisations, support services or authorities where it safe to do so.

Safeguarding communities and staff within the organisation helps to ensure that the organisation delivers good quality work and creates a workplace which is productive and enables everyone to reach their full potential.

To watch the animation "What is safeguarding?", click here.