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SOCIAL SCIENCES ANALYTICS CELL (CASS)

**PERCEPTIONS AROUND SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (SEA)
AND BARRIERS TO COMMUNITY-
BASED REPORTING
EQUATEUR PROVINCE, DRC**

UNDERSTANDING PERCEPTIONS AROUND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE (SEA) AMONG WOMEN TO DEVELOP COMMUNITY-BASED REPORTING MECHANISMS FOR SEA CASES

EQUATEUR PROVINCE, DRC

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CASS OPERATIONAL ANALYTICS APPROACH

The CASS seeks to conduct near real-time analyses which are specifically aimed to inform the development and adaptation of humanitarian programming. The methods seek to be light and flexible, seeking saturation and sufficient evidence to inform and support programme while not responding to full research criteria. The CASS approach has been used across the 2018-20 Eastern DRC Ebola outbreak to conduct 55 rapid analysis, resulting in 112 co-developed programme changes. Similarly, during the 2020 Equateur Ebola outbreak, the CASS conducted 12 rapid studies which resulted in 86 co-developed actions. The study presented in this report was a pilot, to test the CASS operational analytic approach to collect data to rapidly inform the development of PSEA reporting mechanisms, within the context of the 11th Ebola outbreak.

SCOPE, METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Using the CASS, operational analytics approach, the objective of this study was to provide evidence to support the development of appropriate, safe and usable community-based reporting mechanisms for sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) cases in Equateur Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The study sought to explore community understandings and perceptions around the concepts of SEA as well as barriers to reporting SEA cases through existing mechanisms within humanitarian organisations. This study was conducted at the request of the UNICEF Gender, Protection and Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) joint mission conducted in November 2020 in Mbandaka, the aim of this unique and operational approach was to **develop an action plan for the operationalisation of prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) strategies within UNICEF and partners. The results of the study are intended to be used to adapt and improve the proposed activities in this plan.**

The study was conducted in Mbandaka and Bikoro health zones in Equateur Province in December 2020. These zones were chosen due to their exposure to the 2020 Ebola Response: the bases of all humanitarian organisations and the Response Coordination were located in the city of Mbandaka; the city of Bikoro was the epicenter of the epidemic but relatively far from Mbandaka, less accessible and more rural.

The study was conducted in two successive and complementary phases:

- 1) Exploratory phase to establish how the words and concepts of “sexual exploitation and abuse” are understood by communities in the context of the humanitarian sector, and the perceptions of these situations:
 - 9 focus group discussions with women, young women, men, young men; and 15 interviews with women and young women
 - Mbandaka health zone
 - *Results used to inform development of phase 2 research tools



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2) Understanding the barriers preventing young women and women from reporting cases of SEA:

- Mbandaka and Bikoro health zones
- 24 individual interviews with women and young women per health zone: 48 in total
- Two separate guides designed to address the issues of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse separately (based on the results of the exploratory phase).

Interviewees were selected through convenience sampling by the research team.

Any report of sexual exploitation or abuse by aid workers during the 2020 Ebola response in Equateur Province that emerged during the interviews were referred to UNICEF.

Limitations of the study

- Studies investigating barriers to reporting mechanisms for children would require specialised teams trained in data collection with children as well as trained psychological support during such work (in case of reporting) specifically focused on children, this preliminarily and operational study has not included children at this time. If the operational recommendations agreed and actioned from this applied analytics approach are successful, similar participative methods with communities and researchers who are specifically trained on working with children in this area could be considered.

Men were not included in this first study at this time. The aim of the pilot approach to participative, and operational analyses aimed to first test not only the study, but the applicability and use of evidence among women. The methodology, if considered appropriate for men, should then be reviewed with researchers specialising in the sensitivities of research on SEA among men to adapt and develop as appropriate.

- To create an environment of trust between researcher and interviewee, no identifying information was collected by the team on the participants, except age range (18-25 years, 25+ years) and marital status. It is therefore not possible to correlate the answers given with socio-demographic characteristics (profession, level of education, social status, etc.).
- Due to access and time constraints, researchers stayed in Mbandaka and Bikoro (urban and peri-urban contexts), and were unable to collect data in areas where women may have raised additional or different barriers, exposing a broader range of issues.
- As many participants were not familiar with the theme of sexual exploitation (or sexual abuse in the context of the humanitarian sector), their understanding relied heavily on the researchers' ability to explain the concepts of SEA, which may leave space for bias in understanding of the concept of SEA



KEY FINDINGS

- The terms “sexual exploitation and abuse” have different meanings to different people and are not clearly understood by communities.
- Only one (01) woman of all those interviewed in the study was aware of the existence of community-based complaints mechanisms for SEA (this woman herself worked in a humanitarian organisation).
- Women see relationships with humanitarians (sexually exploitative relationships) as an economic opportunity. If they can benefit materially from the relationship, or if their family can benefit from it, they will not be inclined to report it. Only when promises from the aid worker are not kept, did women report feeling as if the situation was exploitative, and negative.
- Shame and stigmatisation of female survivors of sexual violence, (also, but to a lesser extent sexual exploitation), is the main reason why women refuse to report.
- Women in Mbandaka and Bikoro have little confidence in the Congolese judicial system, and by extension in mechanisms designed to punish perpetrators of SEA.
- Women feel powerless to demand justice from aid workers: they see the money and status of aid workers and believe that they will not be held accountable for their actions.

UNDERSTANDING OF SEA CONCEPTS: RESULTS OF THE EXPLORATORY PHASE

The term “sexual exploitation and abuse” in French was not understood (neither by the local research team nor by the individuals interviewed during the study) and had never been heard.

In French, “sexual abuse” was often understood as “excessive sexual relations” or “sexual debauchery” and was often associated with prostitution (observations in initial discussions with the local research team). In Lingala, the word used for “sexual abuse” is the same as for “sexual violence”, and the concepts synonymous.

The term “sexual exploitation” in French did not evoke a concrete situation for individuals, and for the majority had never been heard. In Lingala, the expression was translated as “to love a woman or a man with the promise of money or employment” [literal translation].

Without explanation by the research team, “sexual exploitation” was understood by respondents as:

- Prostitution
- Adultery
- Sexual slavery by war criminals (example cited of rebel armed group)
- A man who has many children with his wife and then cheats on her and abandons her
- Sexual relations outside marriage.



PERCEPTION OF SEA ACTS

Sexual exploitation by aid workers: an ambiguous perception

Almost all women interviewed were aware of situations of sexual exploitation involving humanitarian workers. However, for most, the relationship was not considered exploitative because the woman had given her consent and was receiving material benefits from the relationship. Women in these relationships apparently do not feel exploited or used.

Humanitarians are systematically perceived as having money and disposable wealth, and women feel that relationships with them may bring considerable benefit to them and their families. In several examples cited, a woman was able to pay for her siblings’ schooling because she was in a relationship with an aid worker. A woman who refused this type of relationship may be seen by others as missing an opportunity for herself and her family.

“If an aid worker loves me, he gives me money, he sleeps with me and I take care of the house for him. **Me and my family, we benefit from it, what’s wrong with that?**”

Young woman, interview in Bikoro

Sexual violence: a common situation for women

The concept of sexual violence was familiar to all women interviewed during the study, all of whom considered it a morally reprehensible crime.

According to interviewees, perpetrators of sexual violence fall into two groups: either men in positions of authority (doctors, pastors, etc.); or criminals and young men who are unemployed. Spouses, boyfriends, lovers, etc., were not cited as perpetrators of sexual violence. However, according to the [DRC Demographic and Health Survey 2013-2014](#), 51% of women aged between 15 and 49 nationally reported having been subjected to violence by their intimate partner at least once.

Sexual violence committed by humanitarians

Humanitarians were not considered potential perpetrators of sexual violence by most women interviewed¹. **They felt that no woman would refuse a relationship with an aid worker because he has money and influence that she may benefit from, and as a consequence, aid workers will never need to use force.**

“Besides, I can’t be raped by an aid worker, because **if an aid worker were to love me, I could not refuse, because he has a lot on money.**”

Young woman, interview in Mbandaka

1 Those who believed otherwise had personally seen aid workers committing acts of sexual violence.



Children as victims of SEA

Sexual exploitation: Children were not considered as possible victims of sexual exploitation, due to a perception that they lack understanding of the complexity of the situation, and would be unaware of the implications of pursuing a relationship in the hope of benefiting themselves or their family. This perception may contribute to challenges in reporting for children, if they are not considered during the design and development of reporting mechanisms. Adolescent girls in exploitative relationships (e.g. sex for money) were not perceived as children, by respondents (e.g. sex for money).

Sexual violence: Sexual violence against children was recognised as a concept and considered more serious than against adults. Child survivors of sexual violence are more frequently reported to legal authorities, as children are considered as innocent, thus lack the sense of stigma and shame that typically surrounds adult survivors. It is considered the parents' responsibility to file a complaint and to take care of the child (especially if medical care is required). Respondents also felt that the justice system is more effective and uncompromising in punishing perpetrators of sexual abuse towards children.

Furthermore, there is a perception that children would always tell their parents if they had been sexually abused. According to respondents, children would not feel the shame that adult survivors may feel. This perception may contribute to some adults not being aware of situations of violence affecting children in their household or community.

Male victims of sexual exploitation and abuse

Men were not perceived as potential victims of sexual exploitation or abuse. According to respondents, men could not be in a situation of sexual exploitation because they would not be influenced, nor could they be subjected to sexual violence given an ability to physically defend themselves. Only one woman (in Bikoro) during the study raised the possibility of a man or boy being sexually abused by another man.

Some women thought that men would feel even more ashamed than women to report a situation where they had been abused, as they would be perceived as weak; while others felt that a man could speak out more easily because his word is normally considered more legitimate than that of a woman.

PERCEPTIONS AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT REPORTING CASES OF SEA

What would women do if they were in a situation of sexual exploitation?

The majority said that they would tell no one, although some reported that they would tell someone close to them, like a friend or family member. Most often, women felt that when a relationship is clearly consensual, and a woman is benefiting (or has benefited) from it, they are not in a position to file a complaint.

Particularly in Bikoro, many of the women interviewed explained that if they were being sexual exploited by a humanitarian actor, they would seek an amicable resolution if the relationship ended. Some would approach the man directly, or his friends or colleagues, and others would ask their parents to conduct these negotiations.

"Yes, (...), I can tell my parents, and a friend close to the aid worker who exploited me. **Maybe his friend will talk to him and he will keep the promises he made me**"

Young woman, interview in Bikoro

What would women do if they were sexually abused?

- Most women said they would not confide in anyone. Younger women (18-25 years) would confide more in their family, and if they decided to take action and report the case, they would ask their parents to take care of the procedures.
- Several women said that they would seek medical care in case of physical injuries or to protect themselves from HIV.
- A few women would consider filing a complaint and going to the police. However, most did not trust the judicial system, which they see as highly corrupt. The cost of taking legal action was also considered prohibitive².
- Some women in Bikoro reported that they would seek an amicable resolution in cases of sexual violence (rarer than for cases of sexual exploitation), i.e., contacting the person or his relatives for compensation outside of any formal complaint system³.

"I won't go to the police, because here (...), we have a saying « basambaka na mutu ya mbongo te » **(it's impossible to go against someone who has a lot of money in a court of justice). So I won't tell the police because nothing will happen.**"

Woman, interview in Mbandaka

² See the [Joint Report for the Universal Periodic Review of the DRC Human Rights Council](#) developed by the Movement of Survivors of Rape and Sexual Violence in the DRC, the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation, the Panzi Foundation and the Foundation for the Right Livelihood Award in 2018 and the [report produced in 2017 also in advance of the Universal Periodic Review of the DRC Human Rights Council](#) by the organisation TRIAL International.

³ See the [Joint Report for the Universal Periodic Review of the DRC Human Rights Council](#) (see above) : "This form of justice reinforces the feeling of impunity of the aggressors, and has no impact on mentalities."

Knowledge of reporting mechanisms in humanitarian organisations

Almost all respondents were unaware of any mechanisms for reporting sexual exploitation or abuse within humanitarian organisations, and most thought that they did not exist.



BARRIERS TO REPORTING SEA THROUGH HUMANITARIAN COMPLAINT MECHANISMS

1. Shame⁴

The fear of stigmatisation and being shamed by others were highlighted as the main reasons why women would not report cases of sexual violence, and to a lesser extent cases sexual exploitation, through formal reporting mechanisms within humanitarian organisations.

By denouncing any sexual violence or exploitation a woman may have suffered, there is a fear that their “dignified” reputation may be tarnished, through questioning her purity or fidelity. This may impact the possibility of marriage (for single women), or result in divorce (for married women). Rumours, gossip, community opinion and the opinion of relatives play a major role in the stigmatisation of women who have experienced SEA.

«I don't want to lose my dignity as a married woman...my husband will also lose his dignity...if we go to the community, everyone will point at us: “this is the lady who was raped, and this is the husband of the lady who was raped”...it is shameful for us in our home.»

Woman, interview in Mbandaka

2. Lack of trust in the justice system

Women felt that reporting a case of sexual exploitation or violence is ineffective as perpetrators will never be punished⁵. All women considered the Congolese judicial system to be corrupt. This resulted in limited confidence that local institutions, including humanitarian organisations, would take transparent and fair action on these issues.

At the same time, particularly in cases of sexual violence, women explained that, in their view, complaints are or should be made through the Congolese judicial system. For some, there was no alternative. For others, humanitarian complaint mechanisms were considered merely as a parallel or duplication of the Congolese judicial system.

⁴ See the [article by Evelynne Josse](#), “Ils sont venus avec deux fusils”: les conséquences des violences sexuelles sur la santé mentale des femmes victimes dans les contextes de conflit armé” (They came with two guns: the consequences of sexual violence on the mental health of women victims in the context of armed conflict), ICRC, International Review of the Red Cross, Vol. 92, French edition 2010, pp. 105-124, in particular the sections on “Consequences for society” (p. 2), and on “Community rejection and the disqualification of unmarried women from marriage eligibility” (p. 4)

⁵ See [TRIAL International's 2017 report](#) on impunity for SGBV crimes in the DRC.

3. Knowledge, language barriers and power dynamics

Women did not believe that reporting mechanism within humanitarian organisations existed, and therefore felt that it would be impossible to make complaints directly towards the organisation.

“If an aid worker rapes me, I could try to go to his boss to tell him, but I won’t be able to because **I’ll be scared of him, he has money and I don’t even speak French. In what language will I accuse him?**”

Woman, interview in Mbandaka

Some of them cited a language barrier as an obstacle to making complaints.

In addition to language, clear power dynamics further influence a woman’s decision to report:

- **The humanitarian has the power: money, status, knowledge** (he speaks French);
- **The woman feels powerless against him:** she does not speak French; she is afraid of him⁶.

⁶ According to the 2018 MICS report, 32 % of women over 15 years old are illiterate in Equateur Province.



4. For sexual exploitation: the relationship is not considered exploitative because it is a choice, from which the woman may also benefit

In the case of sexual exploitation several respondents highlighted situations in which a woman was not coerced and that they made a choice freely to enter into a relationship, judging for themselves the advantages and disadvantages.

According to respondents, although a woman is aware of the exploitative nature of a relationship with an aid worker, she may nevertheless decide to accept it. This is because of the benefits she hopes to gain, which she may not have the opportunity to obtain elsewhere.

“**It’s not violence, why report it? It’s an agreement.**”

Young woman, interview in Bikoro

When asked “If your friend was offered a job in an NGO in exchange for sex, what would you do?”, **none of the women answered that they would report this situation (0%)**. They explained that this was a private matter for their friend, and that getting a job was a positive step that she would not want to take away from her.

5. For sexual violence cases : fear of retaliation

About 10% of the women interviewed mentioned that the fear of retaliation from the accused or his family could deter women from reporting. They seemed primarily worried about violent reprisals against them, while other potential repercussions (e.g. loss of a job, or deprived access to certain services) were not mentioned.

MOTIVES FOR REPORTING SEA THROUGH HUMANITARIAN COMPLAINT MECHANISMS

1. Expectation of material benefit

If confronted with situations of sexual exploitation or abuse, most women explained that they would be encouraged to report if they could benefit materially or financially⁷. According to them, compensation from the humanitarian organisation may take several forms: money; a job; fulfilment of promises not kept by the humanitarian worker involved in the relationship; material and financial support for the woman in case of physical consequences.

2. Physical consequences

If a woman is visibly, physically injured (involving bleeding), or suffers long-lasting physical consequences (not improving on their own over time), she is reportedly more likely to complain to the organisation (and seek medical care) to which the perpetrator belongs.

“I will decide to talk about it **if I have injuries in the vagina or pains**, I will go to the hospital to get treatment and **get tested (just in case) the man had HIV** and I got infected.”

Woman, interview in Mbandaka

3. Seeing actions taken against perpetrators

Women say that if they were aware of actions taken against perpetrators of SEA, it would encourage them to file complaints with humanitarian organisations.

4. In the case of exploitation: broken promises and lies

Exploitative relationships were not fundamentally considered negative. The incentive to report may come, according to the women, from a disappointment or unfulfilled promise (money, job, benefits, marriage, etc.) in the relationship and the expectation of compensation through the complaint.

5. In the case of sexual violence: female solidarity and mutual support

In cases of sexual violence, several women cited the protection of other women as a reason to report. The concept of mutual aid between women is interesting to explore further, as social networks created and reinforced in this way may be useful in other types of humanitarian intervention, particularly in the public health field.

⁷ On the importance of reparations in the justice process, see the [Joint Report for the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council of the DRC](#) (already cited).

CONCLUSIONS

- ▶ **Perceptions of cases of sexual exploitation are different from those of sexual violence.** However, most women would not report either situation (neither to the police nor to a humanitarian organisation if the perpetrator was an aid worker).
- ▶ **Women are unlikely to report sexually exploitative relationships with aid workers** because they often do **not consider the relationship to be exploitative**, and because they expect to benefit from the relationship. Aid workers are also consistently perceived as having a lot of money.
- ▶ The women interviewed did **not believe that sexual violence by aid workers was a reality**, because they could not imagine a woman refusing a relationship with an aid worker, **so he would not need to use force**.
- ▶ Of all the interviewees, **only (01) one woman, working in a humanitarian organisation herself, was aware of the existence of community reporting mechanisms** set up by humanitarian organisations, and knew that these organisations have codes of conduct regarding SEA for their employees.
- ▶ **Shame and fear of stigmatisation of survivors is the main barrier to reporting** sexual abuse (but also sexual exploitation), regardless of who the perpetrator is.
- ▶ **The idea of reporting sexual exploitation or abuse by a humanitarian only makes sense to women** if they can get material or financial compensation. This might encourage women to report, however, some may be willing to use informal channels (such as approaching the perpetrator or his family directly) to obtain this compensation (the way in which they obtain it was not considered important).
- ▶ The **young women** interviewed explained that they **would often rely on their parents to take action** if they were confronted with a situation of sexual exploitation or abuse (both for accessing medical care and formal/ informal reporting).
- ▶ **Additional specific studies should be considered**, to understand particularities (language, how to discuss and realities within communities) of GBV and SEA among boys and men.

USE OF DATA

The CASS and the UNICEF Gender specialist conducted a joint mission in Mbandaka in February 2021 with the aim of co-developing recommendations with local actors based on the results of the study. These recommendations were intended to guide PSEA strategies to be implemented by the UNICEF Mbandaka office, and particularly the component concerning community reporting of acts of SEA.

Several meetings were organised with different actors in Mbandaka (see table below).

DATE	ORGANISATIONS	OBJECTIVES
25/02/2021	UNICEF Mbandaka field office	Presenting the study results
25/02/2021	Representatives of women associations in Mbandaka · AMEF : Action des mamans pour l'épanouissement · MND : Maman na Nzela ya développement · FSF : Femmes sans Frontières ; · ONG TOKOLA ELONGO ; · AFPEQ : Association des femmes Pygmées de l'Equateur · RENAFER : Réseau National des Femmes Rurales	Co-development of recommendations
26/02/2021	PSEA Network (Oxfam, DIVI Genre, ABEF, PNSR, CARITAS)	Co-development of recommendations
27/02/2021	NGO ABEF (specialised in care for VGB survivors)	Meeting
01/03/2021	Representatives of UN Agencies (WHO, UNFPA, FAO)	Presenting the study results
02/03/2021	Provincial Red-Cross Volunteers	Co-development of recommendations
02/03/2021	Representatives of UNICEF NGOs partners: ADSSE, AGIS, PAPV	Co-development of recommendations

The results of the study were presented to 10 women’s organisations in the city of Mbandaka by the local CASS Equateur team, and their recommendations documented.

At the end of the presentation of the results of the CASS study, local actors, particularly the women’s associations, formulated concrete recommendations based on their experience and knowledge of the context, concerning the types of community reporting mechanisms that would be most appropriate for women. They also identified awareness raising and information for women and communities as an essential component of an SEA prevention and control programme. Recommendations around the most effective types of message and communication channels for transmitting information to women were co-developed.

THEME	RECOMMENDATIONS CO-DEVELOPED	SOURCE OF THE RECOMMENDATION
Implementing community-based complaints mechanisms on SEA	Women from communities as focal points to report SEA alerts	Representatives of women associations in Mbandaka as well as all other organisations
	Inform women about the sanctions taken against the humanitarian worker if he or she is found guilty, to encourage them to report cases and combat the feeling of impunity	PSEA Network
	Strengthening of women’s associations in Equateur and the coordination of associations (platform) to give them the capacity and resources to carry out their activities for women	Representatives of women associations in Mbandaka
Care for SEA/GBV survivors	Strengthen systems of care for SEA/GBV survivors	PSEA Network and Representatives of women associations in Mbandaka
	Provide vocational training (apprenticeship type) for the economic reintegration of SEA/GBV survivors	Representatives of women associations in Mbandaka
Awareness raising and information for women	Inform women of their rights	Representatives of women associations in Mbandaka as well as all other organisations.
	Inform women about possible legal options (especially to combat out-of-court settlements)	PSEA Network
	Inform women about what SEA is and the existence of reporting mechanisms	PSEA Network and Representatives of women associations in Mbandaka
	Address the stigmatisation of SEA/GBV survivors with community awareness campaigns	PSEA Network and Representatives of women associations in Mbandaka
	Use local languages	PSEA Network and Representatives of women associations in Mbandaka
	Use the following communication channels to reach women: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Messages and series on community radios• In antenatal and postnatal consultations• Through women’s associations	Representatives of women associations in Mbandaka
	Use mobile theatre groups and songs to reach women in remote areas	Red-Cross Volunteers
	Deliver messages in places where women already go as part of their daily activities (water points, churches in the morning), so as not to add to their workload	PSEA Network

These recommendations served as the basis for the development of the PSEA action plan for the Mbandaka office, comprising part of UNICEF DRC’s national strategy to combat SEA. The community reporting component of the action plan will be implemented through two projects in partnership with ABEF and Oxfam. The strategy chosen for the Equateur Province is summarised in the concept note dated 03 March 2021, **Women’s leadership at the heart of prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA)** (see below).

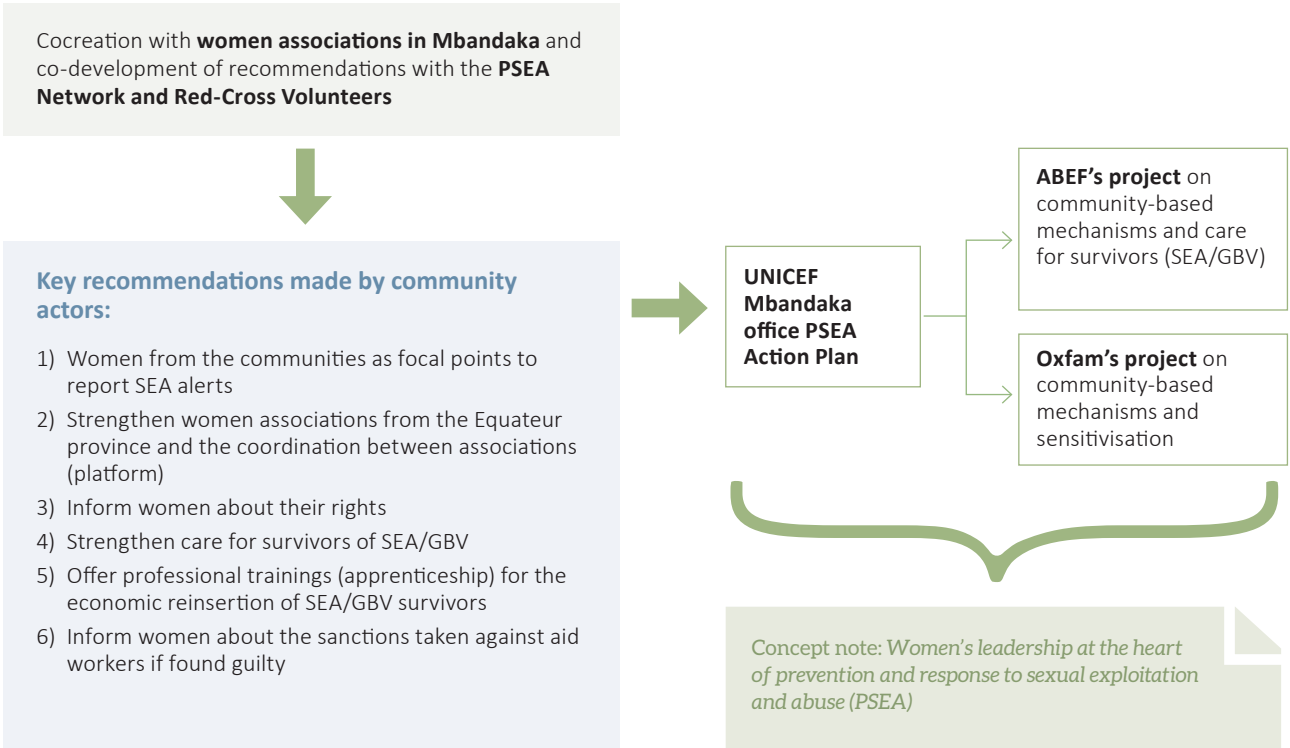
“The main objective of the project is to prevent and respond to SEA through the promotion of women’s empowerment and the establishment of safe and responsive community-based complaint and alert mechanisms based on the leadership of women’s organisations.

This will be achieved through the implementation of the following strategic components:

1. Strengthen a network of women leaders in Equateur at all levels;
2. Establish community-based complaints and alerts mechanisms based on the leadership of women’s organisations in all health areas of Equateur province and in refugees host communities and camps;
3. Co-develop a communication strategy with women’s leadership organisations;
4. Reduce the risk of SEA through the promotion of women’s economic empowerment.

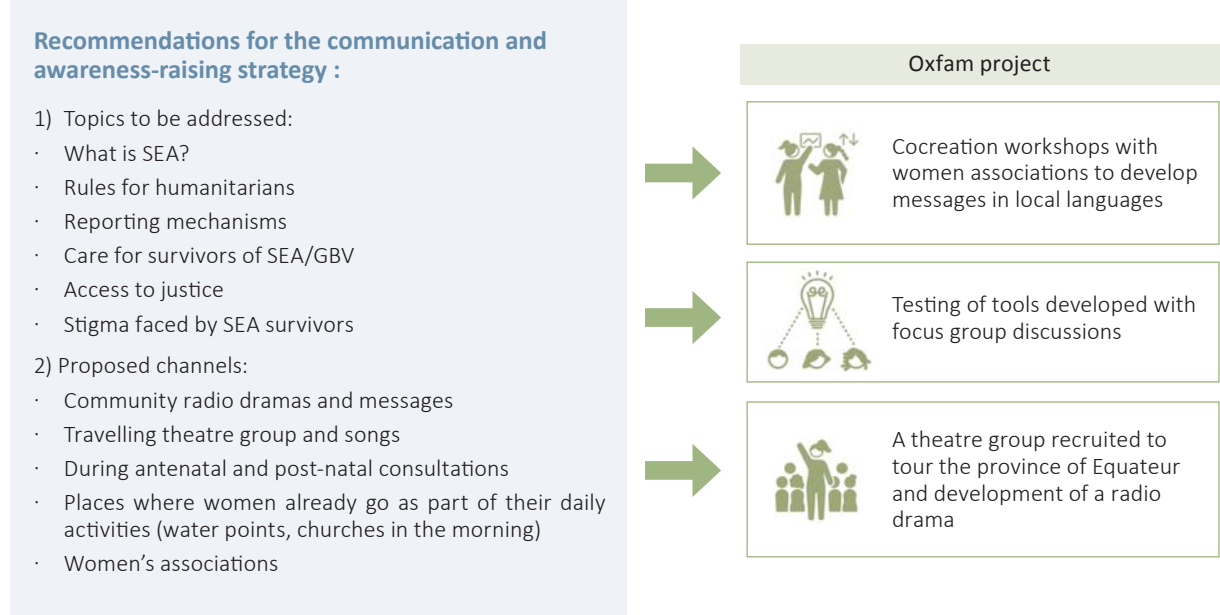
Source : UNICEF concept note dated 03 March 2021, *Women’s leadership at the heart of prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA)*

Process of how data is used to inform programmes



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Co-development of recommendations about communication aspects and actions taken accordingly



“The main innovation of the project is that SEA is treated as a form of structural violence due mainly to the exacerbation of asymmetrical power relations between men and women in situations of extreme vulnerability. Women are not seen as mere “beneficiaries” or “recipients” but as full protagonists and actors of the intervention.

The involvement and active participation of women’s organisations is guaranteed at all levels and in each stage of the project, from the identification of their needs and the production of data (CASS studies), priority actions to the concrete implementation of all components.

The strategy of the project is designed around the strengthening and structuring of the network of women’s organisations in Equateur province at all levels. The women’s organisations that are members of the network will play a central role in responding to cases of SEA, particularly in setting up community complaint/alert mechanisms that are safe and appropriate to the needs of survivors and in developing a communication and awareness-raising strategy adapted to the local context.

Finally, in terms of sustainability and risk mitigation, the project foresees the development of income generating activities in order to stimulate women’s empowerment processes which aims at durably reducing the risks of SEA.”

Source : UNICEF concept note dated 03 March 2021, *Women’s leadership at the heart of prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA)*



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Collaborating with Translators without Borders (TWB)



**TRANSLATORS
WITHOUT BORDERS**

Recommendations have been developed by Translators Without Borders (TWB) in cooperation with CASS. The aim is to strengthen community-based reporting mechanisms and ensure that survivors can access mechanisms and support without language and communication

barriers. TWB supports partners and advocates for services and mechanisms in the communities’ preferred languages, channels and formats.

Recommendations on SEA and language:

1. Collect language data on preferred languages, formats and channels of communication during multi-sectoral needs assessments and regular data collection.
2. Examine sensitive terminology and how it is used and understood by the community. Understand how terms are understood in different demographic groups.
3. Staff recruitment should reflect the diverse language needs of the communities they serve.
4. Use local languages for all oral and written risk communications about sexual exploitation and abuse prevention to ensure that people understand the key messages.
5. Develop information materials in plain language and with reference to local understanding of concepts. Avoid technical jargon and words that are not commonly used.
6. Test the content, format and channels with communities to ensure that it is accurate, appropriate and addresses the main concerns of communities.
7. Create reporting mechanisms that are accessible to those who speak marginalised languages or are less literate. Break down usage by language to see who is being excluded. Ensure that people can give feedback or report SEA in the language they are most comfortable with and know.
8. Ensure that investigation and survivor support services are available in the appropriate language for the survivor.

UNICEF DRC

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The CASS is an operational analytics unit providing real-time evidence to better inform and respond to public health emergencies. The CASS uses an integrated analytical approach to explain trends observed in epidemiological, programmatic, and other data sources, and highlight potential impacts of outbreaks and emergency responses on community health, protection and socio-economic security. The CASS brings together different actors and data sources to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of epidemics and public health outcomes in support of the Ministry of Health, national and international actors to facilitate operational decision-making.

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