

Malawi Violence Against Women and Girls Prevention and Response Programme

Establishment of Community Feedback and
Response Mechanism

June – September 2020

Introduction

This report details the processes adopted by the Tithetse Nkhanza (TN) Programme for setting up a community feedback and response mechanism (CFRM). TN is a six-year programme aimed at reducing the prevalence of VAWG and improving the justice system for women and girls living with violence. The programme is working at the national level and in three target districts to achieve the three main outcomes 1. Formal and informal justice services are accessible, responsive and accountable to women and children's need; 2. People in target areas are less tolerant of violence and are more supportive of survivors; 3. Individuals and local institutions use non-violent means to settle disputes and avoid harmful practices).

At district level, TN partnered with seven (7) Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) that support marginalised women and girls and those experiencing intersectional inequalities. 1. Catholic Commission for justice and peace: Mangochi diocese, 2. Catholic Commission for justice and peace: Karonga diocese, 3. Malawi Human Rights Resource Centre (MHRC), 4. Coalition for the Empowerment of Women and Girls (CEWAG), 5. Rights Advice Centre (RAC), 6. Youth Net and Counselling (YONECO) and 7. Foundation for Community Support Services (FOCUS). At community level, TN uses two main approaches to prevent violence against women and girls:

1. Champions of Change (CoC). CoC model is an approach that seeks to promote gender equality and social norm change in schools and communities through girls' empowerment and boys' engagement.
2. Start, Awareness, Support, Action (SASA). SASA is organized into four phases to influence community norms. It works on the principle that every person can do something to prevent violence against women in the community.

Tithetse Nkhanza recognises the right of partners, beneficiaries and community members to give feedback and seek response from the TN programme activities where they are engaged. The Community Feedback and Response Mechanism enables the project partners, beneficiaries and community members to provide feedback and seek responses in relation to activities as well as code of conduct of TN staff, subcontractors, external consultants, and anyone working on behalf of TN programme, in a manner that is safe, non-threatening and accessible. This will make sure that any person in the community – regardless of age, gender or ability – can contact TN and inform of any safeguarding issues coming in due to their engagement in the TN program and their interactions with TN staff.

Methodology

The Establishment of the Community Feedback and Response Mechanism took place during the COVID-19 pandemic period where TN management suspended the TN activities involving direct interactions between TN staff and the TN beneficiaries as a way of preventing and controlling the spread of COVID-19. It was therefore not possible to directly engage and consult the community level TN beneficiaries. As a result, TN district level implementing partners were engaged and consulted virtually to understand their point of view on what would be the most likely TN beneficiaries' preferences, and feasibility of different feedback channels based on the partners' prior interactions with the beneficiaries and knowledge of the context of the impact area.

Six TN partner Organisations were separately engaged in the virtual consultation processes 1. Catholic Commission for justice and peace: Mangochi diocese, 2. Catholic Commission for justice and peace: Karonga diocese, 3. Malawi Human Rights Resource Centre, 4. Coalition for the Empowerment of Women and Girls, 5. Rights Advice Centre, 6. Foundation for Community Support Services. Youth Net and Counselling was not available for the consultation processes. The engaged organisations' directors, project finance officers, project officers and administrative officers participated in the consultation processes. In addition to this, TN staff including the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) officer, the Grants Officer and the District Coordinators participated in this process. The consultations were coordinated and facilitated by the TN Safeguarding Officer.

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Limitations

TN direct beneficiaries were not directly engaged in the consultation processes following the suspension of the direct contact between TN staff and project beneficiaries necessary to limit the transmission of COVID-19. The outlined community feedback and response mechanism is not representing 100% preference of the TN beneficiaries at community level.

Way forward

The established CFRM will be put into practice where its effectiveness will be monitored. The CFRM will later be evaluated and updated following the systematic consultations processes that will be done with TN direct beneficiaries.

Safeguarding recap

A recap on safeguarding and TN commitments to safeguarding was done. The recap ensured that everyone is on the same page as far as TN approach to safeguarding is concerned and can therefore connect the relevance of having in place a safeguarding CFRM for the programme.

Findings

It was noted that, the preferred means of communication for safeguarding issues are again applicable for non-safeguarding concerns, where the TN beneficiaries would like to give a general feedback on TN programming. The preferred means of reporting safeguarding concerns include: *1. Use of phone calls; 2. Face to face; 3. Suggestion boxes; 4. Toll free lines.* The advantages, challenges and ways-out of each preferred means of the two-way communication have been outlined below.

Phone calls

This means of communication is very fast, direct, trusted and confidential

Challenges faced with the use of phone as a method of a two-way communication mechanism

- ✓ Not everyone owns a phone
- ✓ Not having airtime/credit to make a call especially members from the CVSUs. The CoC facilitators currently do receive airtime to be used in the project related activities which they can as well use to give feedback.
- ✓ Poor network connectivity. Some areas in Karonga District have poor network coverage and they use Tanzanian network.
- ✓ The use of the phone calls brings in a critical challenge on the part of the staff recording the incident. The staff taking note/recording and incident cannot read the body language of the reporter especially when it is the survivor reporting on their own. This therefore limits the ability to do a rapid risk assessment and provide urgent attention to the survivor.
- ✓ It takes confidence or courage from the direct beneficiaries (CoC facilitators, Women Rights organization staff members, members of community victim support units) to come forward and report. The beneficiaries are pre-occupied with the idea that the suspected perpetrators who get reported (project staff) will be directly suspended and will be unable to access food after being reported. In addition to this, the beneficiaries feel like they will be suspended from participating in the TN program activities once a staff member is aware of who is the beneficiary that made the report.

Ways out

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- ✓ There is need of ensuring that beneficiaries are aware of what safeguarding is all about and the expected u from the CCJP staff and everyone working on behalf of TN project. The awareness should as well lift out the preconceived mind and the feeling of guilt if beneficiaries have reported TN staff. Through this awareness beneficiaries should not be afraid of being suspended from participating in TN programme activities following their safeguarding report.
- ✓ TN staff, Partner staff as well as TN associates need to make urgent follow ups on the reported case to check on the survivor and do the rapid assessment that will ensure provision of the urgent support to the survivor.
- ✓ Not everyone owns a phone, but everyone has access to a phone. Those beneficiaries who do not have phones can easily access a phone through relatives and friends if they do make calls on serious matters affecting them and whenever they are shouting out for a help. Once beneficiaries are fully aware that safeguarding cases are serious and they need to report them, then reports will be coming through.

Recommendations

There is need of linking up with the Survivor Support Funds' manager and lobby for airtime refund to the community members/ beneficiaries who have called and reported a safeguarding incident. This will take out the challenge of not having airtime that could have made it hard for the beneficiaries to report.

Face to face

This is trusted and confidential. The officer recording the complaint will have the advantage of understanding the case better through observation of the complaint's body language. In addition to this, the officer will be able to provide urgent support (such as medical and psychosocial support) to the survivor based on the initial risk assessment done.

Challenges faced with the face to face as a method of a two-way communication mechanism

- ✓ The long distance that both direct and indirect beneficiaries need to travel to and from the TN offices to report/give feedback on a given subject. This ends up limiting beneficiaries from reporting / providing their feedback.
- ✓ In the current context, there is the risk of exposing both the beneficiaries and TN staff members/associates to COVID-19.
- ✓ Unavailability of TN staff members/associates in the office. TN staff members are currently working mostly from home. There are chances that the beneficiaries would travel to TN offices aiming to provide their feedback to a specific staff member they feel comfortable with, but they will not find this person in the office on that day. This will end up discouraging reports coming from beneficiaries as they will be frustrated for wasting time and energy travelling to the office.
- ✓ Lack of trust on the end of survivors that they will be supported at the office. Survivors might think that the office will side with their staff (alleged perpetrator). In some cases, the survivor or the one reporting might be attend to by the alleged perpetrator which will make it hard to express themselves. This could also potentially result in them being suspended from the TN programme activities.
- ✓ Difficulty expressing themselves in an office environment as this may feel more intimidating.

Ways out

- ✓ Recognising community level structures and TN associates (SASA community activists, CoC community facilitators, and community local leaders) as points where safeguarding cases can be reported to in a community. This will reduce the distance that community members have to travel.
- ✓ Community sensitisation on COVID-19 prevention and control measures and the need to observe all the stipulated measures that the Government of Malawi have put into place to contain the spread of COVID-19.

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- ✓ Ensuring that partner level staff are oriented in safeguarding and can refer safeguarding cases to organisation level safeguarding offices as well as the TN District Coordinators.
- ✓ Ensuring that a safe space at the office or community set up have been provided for the reporter/survivor during case disclosure. This will ensure that the survivor or the reporter feels comfortable expressing themselves.
- ✓ Community awareness campaigns on what is safeguarding and how safeguarding cases are handled in the TN programme.

The suggestion boxes

Suggestion boxes should be included and made accessible for adults and young people. The location needs to be private and accessible to all (including persons with disability).

Challenges

- ✓ It takes a long time for institution staff to open and access the complaints posted in a suggestion box.
- ✓ They are not confidential especially when they are located in a place that do not provide privacy.
- ✓ The perpetrator can do everything at their end to dismiss the suggestion box if he has knowledge of a complaint connected to their conduct being submitted through the suggestion box.
- ✓ The illiteracy levels of the beneficiaries will limit their ability to write and post their complaints in the suggestion box.
- ✓ Community members do not have the willingness to use a suggestion box and this has been a learning from other projects and other institutions that used a suggestion box as a way of getting feedback from the targeted community members. As they tried to do so they realised that suggestion boxes were not utilised by the targeted community members.
- ✓ The cost of establishing a network of suggestion box is high comparing to its effectiveness.

Ways out

- ✓ Allocating a TN staff to be checking and getting complaints posted in the suggestion box on weekly basis and providing feedback or following up with the complainant within a week will make sure that safeguarding issues are attended to within a short period of time.
- ✓ The suggestion boxes need to be in a safe space that provides privacy and ensures confidentiality.
- ✓ Community awareness on the use of suggestion boxes as a way of reporting safeguarding cases or any other feedback on TN programme.

Recommendations

The rolling out of suggestion boxes should be in stages/phases (where a district and an impact area will be selected) to act as a practical learning point on the effectiveness of this means of communication.

Toll-Free Number

- ✓ This will allow TN beneficiaries to provide feedback on TN programme and report safeguarding incidents without being charged for the call or text.
- ✓ It will provide TN beneficiaries a free and convenient way to contact TN office.

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- ✓ It offers an opportunity for TN beneficiaries to report safeguarding issues anonymously to officers who are not known to them or by district level TN officers including the partner organisation staff and associates. This means of communication is therefore trusted, confidential and accessible by the TN beneficiaries.

Challenges

The cost of implementation is higher. This requires an arrangement in place with local airtime service providers.

Recommendations

- ✓ There is need to check with the airtime service provides on the practical costs associated with this arrangement and explore on how to cut down the costs.
- ✓ There is need to explore on the safeguarding budgets if it can accommodate the cost accompanied by this mode of communication

Means of communication for simple issues (non-safeguarding concerns)

WhatsApp's groups created at Area Development Committee (ADC) level.

Advantage

- ✓ It's a fast mean of communication
- ✓ It's cheaper comparing to sending short messages

Challenges

- ✓ Not everyone owns a phone that can support WhatsApp.
- ✓ Lack of internet bundle by community members which limits internet connectivity and accessibility to information shared through WhatsApp.
- ✓ Some community members (such as the elderly, women and men, boys and girls who are illiterate) do not know how to operate WhatsApp and access the shared information.
- ✓ Persons with disability (for example, a person with visual impairment) find it hard to read texts on WhatsApp.
- ✓ Poor internet due to topography in some areas of Karonga District.
- ✓ It's difficult to cross-check and confirm whether a shared message has reached all the targeted community members.
- ✓ Posting/sharing of irrelevant messages contrary to the purpose of the group which end up frustrating other members who eventually leave the group..
- ✓ Delayed forwarding of information by the ADC WhatsApp group administrators to the ADC WhatsApp group members which ends up delaying the information.

Phone tree

This is a network of boys and girls in SASA and Champions of change network organised in such a way that they can quickly and easily spread VAWG prevention and response information as well as COVID-19 prevention and control

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information measures. A project officer at partner organisation level calls one community volunteer (CoC facilitator or SASA community activist) who then passes the information to other youths whom he/she directly engages in a given location. They normally use texts/short messages to ensure that almost all youths in a targeted impact area are on board for it only requires one to have a simple or basic phone

Advantage

- ✓ The partner organisations do communicate quickly about the planned or cancelled CoC or SASA activities.

Challenges

- ✓ This requires airtime to be able to send the short messages to the next boy or girl in a network
- ✓ The sender is not sure whether the short message sent was successfully delivered
- ✓ Not every targeted boy and girl in an impact area owns a phone. In some cases, young people use phones that belong to their relatives (Brothers, Aunt, uncles and parents) which makes it difficult to get the information as quickly as possible.

Recommendation

There is need to review the established phone tree at partner organisation level. This includes cross-checking on how the system is working and who is engaged at what stage and in which location.

Use of community radio stations

TN has engaged community radios in the three targeted impact areas to facilitate the spread of information on VAWG prevention and response as well as on COVID-19 prevention and response. The engaged TN partners are therefore able to communicate information to the intended TN beneficiaries through the radio.

Advantages

- ✓ It is fast and trusted by the intended beneficiaries in a community.
- ✓ The use of the locally spoken language makes it easy for every target beneficiary to understand the information.
- ✓ The community members are engaged through the call-in session where they do give their feedback and ask questions and seek clarifications when needed.

Disadvantages

- ✓ The coverage of the engaged community radio stations does go beyond the targeted TN impact area. This is reflecting through the call-in sessions where most of the community members are not from the targeted impact areas.
- ✓ Not all the targeted community members own a radio. This therefore means that, some targeted community members do miss the information

Community level structures where beneficiaries would feel comfortable reporting safeguarding and any feedback on TN programming.

- ✓ Community local leaders
- ✓ Religious leaders
- ✓ Primary school head teachers (When schools are running)

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- ✓ SASA community activist.
- ✓ Mother groups
- ✓ VDCs
- ✓ Police

Recommendation

There is a need of having a brief safeguarding orientation to the (Community local leaders, Religious leaders and Primary school matrons, patrons and Head teachers) on safeguarding and stressing the need to report safeguarding cases that have been report on their end to TN safeguarding focal point person

Conclusion

The consultations processes revealed that the use of phones where a toll-free number is in place is most appreciated. A toll-free number will allow TN beneficiaries to report safeguarding concerns without being charged for the call or text. It will also offer an opportunity for TN beneficiaries to report concerns anonymously, if they wish to do so. Overall, a toll-free number provides a trusted, confidential and accessible means of communication for TN beneficiaries.