

SEXUAL HARASSMENT, ABUSE AND
EXPLOITATION IN THE AID SECTOR



COWBOYS AND
CONQUERING KINGS

DANIELLE SPENCER

FOREWORD, KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report is based on an academic piece of research. The dissertation it is based on has been published and is available at the University of Sussex library. In 2016, the dissertation won an award for highest scoring Masters dissertation for that year. It has been through ethics review and was recommended for academic publishing.

The author has decided that academic publishing is not the way forward for this piece of work. The stories shared by those who were interviewed are too important to share via an academic journal which is unlikely to be read by a larger audience. Instead, this paper will summarise the findings of the results of the larger dissertation. The full dissertation is available from the author and can be requested by emailing the author, Danielle Spencer on sexualexploitationreport@gmail.com.

Finally, the decision to self-publish, as an independent individual, was taken to demonstrate that: **it isn't just one or two INGO's who have allowed the women and girls it serves and the women who work within it to be abused, it is the entire system which has not only accepted the situation as normal, but also has hidden the reality of this issue from the public, and from themselves, for decades.**

This paper uses the real stories of 29 aid workers from around the world to piece together the scale of the abuse within the sector. It also uses the authors own stories from her 10+ years in the sector. The 'boxes' which can be seen throughout this paper, are the author's own memories and experiences. I have kept the names of organisations and of informants confidential in accordance with their agreements on the use of this information.

This research finds that gender-based violence, perpetrated by humanitarian actors, is condoned, covered-up, and replicated throughout the entire aid sector. It will attempt to make sense of the abuse of power and privilege which has become a daily reality for women working in the sector, and for the women and girls it serves.

Finally, I recognise that in doing this I put myself on the line and risk repercussions to my career. I take this action together with, and as part of, a long line of women who have spoken out and tried to draw attention to the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse for decades. I am hopeful that in publishing this paper, I can contribute to long-lasting, systemic change. In the past, when there has been media interest on this issue, agencies have made small changes and once the media interest has died down, there has been a sense that things 'go back to business as usual'.¹ This cannot be allowed to happen again, things must change. It is time to say: "enough".

¹ Explored below

Key Findings

From 29 conversations, over 50 incidents of SEA were described as being perpetrated by civilian humanitarian aid workers. Many informants also discussed that they had witnessed many more incidents than disclosed during conversation. Furthermore, the majority of concrete incidents described were perpetrated by expatriates. Yet, in informant's accounts, national staff members were most likely to have punitive action taken against them, non-western expatriates were less likely to have action taken against and western staff members were least likely.

Use of commercial sex workers is so out in the open, that this author personally experienced visitors from headquarters being taken to a known commercial sex worker bar with members of the senior management team with no repercussion. Several informants discussed men in INGOs and UN agencies **picking up sex workers in their organisation's cars on a regular basis with no action taken against them.**^{2,3} This shows the overt disregard for SEA policy played out through expat humanitarian masculinities and humanitarian workers acceptance of it.

Other findings:

- Excuses are found for sexual exploitation and abuse to continue, for example '**that the agency would have difficulty in recruiting someone to replace the perpetrator**' and '**it was better that some women were raped in order to deliver aid to that location**';
- Men who are known perpetrators of sexual harassment and abuse '**were promoted and moved to humanitarian locations where they perpetrated again**';
- Women who reported being raped or sexual assaulted by a co-worker or colleague were **fired from their job**.

Analysis

Excuses, diversions and distractions

This paper explores the way in which SEA and sexual harassment policy is undermined, underfunded and overruled. Policy relating to women and girls is constantly and consistently undermined, ignored and **subverted** in the aid sector. Importantly, considering the timing of this publication, this report finds that **aid agencies only engage in efforts to 'mask over' the problem** and take action on sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment only when the media shines a spotlight on them. Without media attention the issue is deprioritised. Surface level work is undertaken – reports are written and then shelved, policies developed and never implemented – as a means to prove that action has been taken whilst not implementing anything of a practical nature: I call this **diversionary**

² Described by informant: 015, 018, 019

³ It is important to note here, that the UN definition of SEA has been criticised by some feminist authors, including Otto, for promoting sexual negativity and for not separating 'consensual sexual exchanges' from sexual activities involving violence or coercion.³ In a humanitarian context, however, the difference between commercial sex work as Western Feminists know it, and survival sex is extremely difficult to define. Furthermore, there is a clear need to understand power differentials within each sexual relationship. Given the logistical constraints of that, it is the perspective of this author that the use of commercial sex workers in humanitarian contexts by humanitarian actors should continue to be prohibited by SEA policy. The framing of SEA as a form of prostitution, may imply that survivors of this form of sexual violence have more agency than they actually have,³ and it is therefore important to distinguish between the hypothetical commercial sex work, where the worker has complete agency over their actions, and the reality of a humanitarian context.

action. Gender-related staff members, already often overworked, are tasked with rolling out SEA and/or sexual harassment policy – an impossible task, to **compartmentalise** the issue and set it up to fail. Loopholes in the system exist, like agencies refusing to take accountability for the actions of contractors, and policy is unfairly more lenient towards men from the global north than those from the global south – who are seen as **convenient perpetrators**.

The focus on conflict-related sexual violence in recent years has meant that the issue of sexual violence has been ‘othered’ and is seen as something that people from the global south engage in. The humanitarian system has been allowed to create its own smoke screen – receiving funding to end violence against women and girls, whilst allowing it to be perpetrated by their staff members.

Sexism, Racism, Power and Privilege

Sexism, racism, power and privilege are endemic in the aid sector (as in every sector). However, the harmful masculinities and the neo-colonial culture of the humanitarian system does result in an **atmosphere of impunity for perpetrators and an atmosphere of fear for those who would wish to expose them and their victims**. In humanitarian contexts, the paper finds that harmful masculinities play out in three ‘characters’: (1) Cowboys; (2) Conquering Kings; and (3) Head Quarters Privileged Man. ‘Cowboys’ enter into the humanitarian sector to rescue people from humanitarian disaster, but also see no issue with exchanging money or aid for sex and certainly do not see the links between this abuse of women and girls and the conflict-related sexual violence that takes place. They have no understanding of themselves as patriarchs, and even less understanding of informed consent. Conquering Kings are often older men in positions of power, who allow for younger ‘cowboys’ to act in the way that they do by not implementing policy and by committing acts of SEA and harassment themselves. Through this research, we heard of one Country Director of a large INGO which focuses on children, who was engaging in sexual exploitation of children and who married what we would consider in the UK to have been a child.

The work of the aid sector has resulted in great gains in women’s rights, but the system *has* to change. The sexism, racism and abuse that is permitted to continue are shameful. As with all institutions it replicates the social norms of the society it operates in. Given that 1 in 3 women will experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime,⁴ the fact that aid workers perpetrate violence against women should not be a shock to anyone. What is shocking, is that all aid agencies, everywhere condone it either explicitly or implicitly. This issue is not just one INGO or UN agency’s problem – it is all of us. It is all of our responsibility to end this and the challenge this culture of impunity, for the good of the women we serve and for each other. With a concerted effort we can change this system. Listed below are some recommendations to begin this process of change.

⁴ World Health Organisation (2018). *Violence Info – Sexual violence – Sexual Violence*. [online] Apps.who.int. Available at: <http://apps.who.int/violence-info> [Accessed 9 Feb. 2018].

Recommendations

Donors should:

- Appropriately fund INGOs and NGOs to support their prevention and response to SEA. Increase funding to support human resources work on SEA, sexual harassment and child safeguarding. Donors should recognize that in order to support safe and effective programming and increase action and accountability when SEA occurs, overhead funding needs to be increased.
- Understand that the *more* that SEA cases which are reported within NGOs the better – this shows a robust reporting mechanism is in place. However, this is not enough, reporting must be accompanied by investment in investigation capacity which protects whistleblowers, survivors of sexual violence and due process.
- Support the creation and running of an independent SEA interagency humanitarian reporting system with an attached independent investigation team. This independent body should enable reference checks on potential new hires to ensure employees proven to have committed SEA are not serially rehired within the industry.
- Work with, train and fund Women's Rights Organisations to deliver humanitarian assistance – localisation should not replicate patriarchy, but be a mechanism to break it.

Humanitarian agencies should:

- Acknowledge the humanitarian system itself is patriarchal and therefore systemically perpetrates and excuses violence against women and girls. Commit to changing norms and practices to empower women, change cultural norms to promote gender equality and safety for all.
- Do not fire women who disclose sexual violence, exploitation and abuse either perpetrated against them or others. This perpetuates a climate of fear and intimidation.
- Adequately fund sexual exploitation and abuse reporting mechanisms, training and investigations. Take all reports seriously.
- Increase the size of your GBV and/or gender team. Do not expect one or two people to be able to do everything on GBV, Gender and on SEA. Invest in GBV, Gender Equality and Prevention and Response to SEA teams and programming.
- Create SEA policies. Many agencies simply do not have these in place yet. But don't stop there, policies are not an end in themselves.
- Investigate SEA appropriately, report to the police in country if it is a crime, and fire the perpetrator if proven to be guilty.
- All 'loop-holes' in the system must be closed – including loop-holes regarding taking responsibility for contractor's actions.
- Don't assume that white men are not perpetrators of GBV. GBV and gender inequality are universal.
- Stop deprioritizing issues relating to women and girls – there is never a 'greater good', SEA and harassment are not acceptable and it is never acceptable to knowingly continue to put women and girls at risk in order to meet indicators, or deliver humanitarian assistance. Women count when we consider 'do no harm'.

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PART 1: INTRODUCTION

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA), as defined by the UN Secretary-General's Bulletin (2003),^{5 6} has been reported to have been perpetrated in conflict and environmental-disaster affected contexts since the 1960s.⁷ However it wasn't until public attention was drawn to the issue in the early 1990s⁸ that the UN developed policies which prohibit this behaviour for members of staff in UN agencies, all NGOs or any other agency in receipt of UN funding.^{9 10}

The acronym SEA is most commonly used within the humanitarian system in relation to UN peacekeepers despite reports that civilian humanitarian actors are more likely to perpetrate SEA in some contexts.¹¹ Yet, the exploration of civilian humanitarian actors as perpetrators continues to be a critical gap in the current literature. Recently, in the wake of the #MeToo movement, there has been increased media interest in sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment in a number of sectors: the media, politics and now in International Development and Humanitarian Action with the #aidtoo movement that has seen brave women in the aid sector step forward.

Reports of SEA and sexual harassment in the aid sector in the past (and academic literature) has largely focused on UN Peacekeepers as the perpetrators or violence and has gone into great detail about the violence that they have perpetrated.^{12 13} This: (1) promotes a focus on the hyper-masculine, militarised culture within peacekeeping missions;¹⁴ (2) invokes 'colonial stereotypes and colonial gaze'¹⁵ through the limited exploration of peacekeeper perpetrators from non-western nations; (3) encourages voyeurism and "a tendency in making visible the 'horror' of it all."¹⁶ It also contributes to our thinking

⁵ United Nations Secretariat, (2003). *Secretary-General's Bulletin*. (9 Oct 2003, ST/SGB/2003/13). Available at: <http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=ST/SGB/2003/13> [Accessed 29 Aug 2016].

⁶ "The term "sexual exploitation" means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. Similarly, the term "sexual abuse" means the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions." United Nations Secretariat, 2003.

⁷ M. Kanetake (2012). UN Zero Tolerance Policy's Whereabouts: On the Discordance between Politics and Law on the Internal-External Divide. *The Amsterdam LF*, 44(4), pp.51 - 61.

⁸ D. Otto (2007). Chapter 11. Making sense of zero tolerance policies in peacekeeping sexual economies. In: V. Munro and C. Stychin, ed., *Sexuality and the law*, 1st ed. Abingdon: Routledge-Cavendish, pp.259 – 282, p.261.

⁹ United Nations Secretariat, 2003.

¹⁰ For a more detailed overview of the history and background of SEA, please see Appendix 1 & 2.

¹¹ S. Martin (2005). *Must boys be boys?*. 1st ed. [ebook] Refugees International. Available at: http://www.childtrafficking.com/Docs/refugees_int_05_boys_0708.pdf [Accessed 24 May 2016].

¹² Consortium on Gender, Security, and Human Rights, (2010). *Masculinities and Peacekeeping Literature Review*. 1st ed. [ebook] Consortium on Gender, Security, and Human Rights. Available at: http://genderandsecurity.org/sites/default/files/masculinities_and_peacekeeping_literature_review_0.pdf [Accessed 24 May 2016].

¹³ See for example: Martin, 2005; K. Grady (2010). Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN Peacekeepers: A Threat to Impartiality. *International Peacekeeping*, 17(2), pp.215-228; P. Higate and M. Henry (2010). Space, Performance and Everyday Security in the Peacekeeping Context. *International Peacekeeping*, 17(1), pp.32-48.

¹⁴ Consortium on Gender, Security, and Human Rights, 2010.

¹⁵ M. Henry (2013). Ten Reasons Not To Write Your Master's Policy paper on Sexual Violence in War. [Blog] *The Disorder of Things*. Available at: <https://thedisorderofthings.com/2013/06/04/ten-reasons-not-to-write-your-masters-policy-paper-on-sexual-violence-in-war/> [Accessed 5 Aug. 2016].

¹⁶ Ibid.

of SEA in isolation rather than situating it as a form of Violence Against Women and Girls, within its structural and systemic causes.

The available literature is also limited in scope to exploring women and girls from crisis affected communities as survivors. This supports the conceptualisation of the 'Third World Woman' as an oppressed subject¹⁷ and again isolates SEA from the broader continuum of Violence Against Women and Girls and gender-subordination.

The sexual exploitation and abuse of humanitarian workers, based on the performance of gender and racial hierarchies, is also a much under explored area. Through the primary research conducted for this paper, it became apparent that SEA perpetrated against crisis affected communities was inextricably linked to the gendered and racialized oppression and violence perpetrated by humanitarian actors against other humanitarian actors. In recent months there have been numerous media reports on the issue of SEA and humanitarian actors as survivors.¹⁸

¹⁷ C. Mohanty (1988). Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses. *Feminist Review*, (30), p.61.

¹⁸ S. Hayden (2016). Petition urges U.N. to protect aid workers in conflict zones. *Thomson Reuters Foundation News*. [online] Available at: <http://news.trust.org/item/20160819141452-50ujo> [Accessed 29 Aug. 2016].

PART 2: EXCUSES, DIVERSIONS AND DISTRACTIONS

Within this section, humanitarian policies on SEA and their implementation are explored. Within the humanitarian sector, SEA policies were described by Informants as being ‘weak’ and ‘only on paper’. Policies are largely based on the points raised in the Secretary-General’s Bulletin.¹⁹ However, some reported that there were no policies in place at all. Other organisations had policies which abdicated responsibility for acts of SEA, with one informant quoting a policy from one adult focused NGO which stated: *“This NGO does not want to assume this role of moral guidance or prescribing to it’s staff what’s morally wrong or right.”*²⁰ The lack of appropriate policy explicitly communicates to staff that the organisation will not judge them – or punish them - for engaging in SEA.

In this section of this report, we explore the way that, even when policies are in place regarding SEA and sexual harassment and abuse of aid workers, they are not implemented. We reveal that way in which women’s and girls’ safety, security and bodily integrity are undermined.

Subverting Policy

In Box 1, I describe SEA and gender-related policies being subverted during a workshop to train humanitarian workers in an organisation’s approach to emergency response. The organisation described, has a standard SEA policy and is a well-known gender in emergencies actor.

Policy subversion takes place through an interaction with a white, western, male colleague who is facilitating the training. The training session on gender in emergencies is cut down to one hour over the course of a week-long training – despite the organisation’s focus on this as an area of expertise. Further, a request to include SEA on the training schedule was ignored – despite the majority of participants having never been trained in SEA prevention or response; and, a more senior female manager remained silent and complicit in this policy subversion. In just one example interaction, the entire mandate of the organisation and its SEA policy were disregarded in front of an audience of humanitarian actors about to return to multiple country programs. This message of disregard is communicated to many others, through the facilitator publically renouncing gender-related and SEA policy, thus reinforcing patriarchal dominance at multiple levels and reducing or dismissing the challenge that the policies pose to it.²¹

Informants repeatedly explained that women and girls are only of interest to humanitarian agencies when they symbolise financial gain. This theory is supported in the story above by the facilitator allowing just enough training in gender sensitive programming as to support humanitarians in their proposal development – and therefore gain access to funding.

¹⁹ See Appendix 2.

²⁰ Informant-015, generalist humanitarian worker, male.

²¹ Longwe, 1997, p. 150.

Box 1: Subverting Policy

In my experience in the humanitarian field, SEA has never been something which has been talked about at length. All of the organisations I have worked with have had some sort of policy, but in terms of implementing, they have all been lacking. It has often fallen to me, as a gender and gender-based violence technical advisor, to work on individual cases as they came up – whether I had specialist training in this area at the time or not. It was seen as ‘gender stuff’ by colleagues – short-hand for anything which was vaguely or directly related to women and which they therefore did not wish to engage in, with few exceptions.

Whilst working in one organization, I was asked to join a training of the NGO’s humanitarian personnel. These trainings took place once a year. The trainings were full-days, from 9am – 6pm. All participants stayed together in a hotel location to facilitate team-building and were drawn from across the world. Many had worked for the organization for years, all were professionals who had at least a few years of experience as humanitarian actors, whether in this particular organization or not. I was asked to facilitate the gender in emergencies aspect of the training and sent the materials to be able to do so. The training was due to last for two hours. I was asked to condense this into one hour. Once I delivered the training, I asked the main facilitator for feedback. In the training hall, within earshot of the participants, this older man from North America, who facilitated this training each year, paused, held my gaze and said that he felt that although the training was good, maybe the gender in emergencies section would need to be shortened the following year. He said that this had taken too much time, and gesturing to a wall of flipcharts filled with themes to explore written in marker pen, said that there was simply too much to get through in the week. He then said “you don’t really need to think about gender until the emergency response is over anyway.” The head of emergency response globally stood next to us both - a white, North American woman in mid-career. She could not meet my eye. She did not say anything. I was taken aback. The organization I worked for was renowned for its work with women and girls and gender in emergencies, and positioned itself with donors and in communication and advocacy materials as a gender transformative organization. I stated that I disagreed. He then explained to me - a senior level gender advisor - what gender in emergencies was and how it was not needed in an emergency response. Still, the woman did not say anything. The participants heard this conversation. The conversation acted as a means to undermine the small amount of time we had spent to train humanitarian professionals, working for an organization whose focus was supposedly women and girls, in the importance of ensuring at minimum a gender sensitive response. A chance which some of them might not get again.

As SEA prevention and response is something I consider important for humanitarian’s to learn about, I had suggested prior to my arrival at the hotel, that I give a training on this as well. I had prepared materials on this previously and would be able to give at least a short presentation on the organisation’s policy and on the UN secretary general’s bulletin. This, at least, would provide a set of clear parameters that the participants would be able to adhere to in humanitarian response work. I asked repeatedly to do this and talked to the facilitator and organiser about this at length. I was told that there was no time. When discussing accountability in humanitarian action, the topic of SEA did not come up. In frustration, I asked the group of participants how many of them had worked directly with beneficiaries of humanitarian aid in the past six months. The majority of the group raised their hands. I then asked the group if any of them, at any time, had been trained in sexual exploitation and abuse – what it was, the policies of the organisation, the reporting mechanisms. Three hands were raised in a room of over thirty people. There was tension in the room. Then a young, Somali man raised his hand and asked me “What is sexual abuse and exploitation?”. There was a small ripple of laughter in the room and it became clear that many participants had the same question. I explained what sexual exploitation and abuse was. I also said I would be happy to hold an after-hours training on it and if people were interested in learning, that they should let me know and I would organise it. Nobody approached me about it.

Later, whilst on our break, the female senior manager, who could not previously meet my eye, talked briefly to me about SEA. She said it was difficult to implement the policy. I remember thinking at the time, that training our staff in it might be a good place to start.

When the implementation of policies which relate to finances and policies relating to SEA are compared, it becomes apparent that **money matters more** than the safety and security of women and girls in the humanitarian system. This is demonstrated in 'Box 2: Money Matters More'.

Here, a male expatriate colleague is knowingly allowed to continue to: abuse female staff members; undermine female staff member's work; sexually harass female co-workers; *and* commit SEA. He was later fired for breach of financial policy, whilst the abuse of women was ignored.

Multiple informants²² shared similar experiences. Informant-011 shared her experience of **working with a western, male, Country Director of a child-focused INGO, in his late sixties. He had married a girl under the age of 18 in one field location and brought her to other humanitarian postings. He would have sex with local girls from the beneficiary population and when visiting field locations would visit sex workers, with reports that some were also underage. A number of people in the organization complained, but the Country Director continued to work for the organization with no disciplinary action taking place.** Feedback from headquarters staff members on the matter were described as being dismissive and would excuse the Country Director's behaviour. He was later fired – but **not** because of his blatant sexual exploitation and abuse of women and girls, but rather for abusing the organisation's finances.

The evaporation of policy relating to gender and SEA within the humanitarian system, cannot simply be explained by claims of weak hierarchy. As shown above, repercussions for breaking policies are minimal at best. Further, financial policy is implemented with regular financial audits taking place throughout humanitarian organisations. This requires resources. However, nearly all informants reported that when resources are requested for SEA policy implementation, appropriate levels were rarely forthcoming. Lack of resource provision subverts SEA policy within the humanitarian system and perpetuates the very structures of inequalities it claims to seek to demolish.

²² Described by informant: 001, 002, 011.

Box 2: Money Matters More

Whilst working for an organisation in South Sudan, my supervisor was replaced not long after I took a new position. This new supervisor was a man from Southern Africa in his 40s. On a couple of occasions this man attempted to take a close female colleague of mine on a date. This colleague was in a more junior position to him in the hierarchy of the organisation. She did not wish to date him and following that, his attitude towards her changed, as did his attitude towards me and the national GBV programme I was supervising. The programming I supervised brought in a substantial amount of funding, was well thought of by other humanitarian agencies and the South Sudanese Government, and we acted as co-leads of the national UN coordination structure on the issue of GBV as well. Despite this, this man made several attempts to undermine the programme, including not submitting completed proposals to agencies.

Further, this man, over a period of two months, systematically attempted to undermine the female Country Director. He lived with her in the senior management guest house, and would often accuse her of 'being like his mother', of 'always following his movements' and of 'being jealous if she thought he was with women'. This man regularly went to night clubs where there were known prostitutes – in contravention of SEA policy.

After a couple of months of this behaviour, this man moved into the guest house for general expats, where I resided at the time. When two members of my team came to the capital, they each spent large amounts of time with this man and stayed in his room. This man had promised each of them my position in exchange for sex.

Despite the Country Director being aware of all of the above, the man was not fired on these grounds. He was eventually fired for theft of thousands of dollars. The investigation into the theft was swift and the man was immediately removed from his position.

Selective Attention and Compartmentalisation

Further evidence of the way in which policy subversion is implemented can be seen in the increased action and interest on the issue of SEA within organisations when a media story breaks on the issue.

“...there’s a bit of a frantic activity and if an agency has a bit of an emergency taking place, it’s a bit of an incentive to take things forward a step, but I don’t necessarily see that momentum continue.[...] We’re always talking about risk, but if we don’t address it, it exposes the organisation to risk - financial, reputational, political. If nothing will get them moving, risk surely will.”²³

Reputational risk is clearly a motivational factor influencing when organisations focus on SEA and when they do not. Incidents are dealt with on an individual basis, if the organization deems them to be severe enough, and if there is a potential risk to reputation and funding.²⁴ In between the

²³ Informant-027, humanitarian generalist, male.

²⁴ Described by informants: 009, 010, 013, 015, 017, 027, 028, 029.

organisation's selective attention, it falls to those within the system who are concerned about the issue to move things forward in addition to their full-time job.

“...we don't have a cohesive policy. How that translates to the field is honestly unclear, honestly we've no fucking clue what's going on [...] and things are already happening in the field and who knows how they are being reported. So what we've finally gotten is support for a task force [...] to ensure that the country offices know that this policy exists, set up some sort of investigation committee at the field level.”²⁵

Informant-028 has been so concerned about the lack of implementation of SEA policy within her organisation that she felt obligated to set up a task force on the issue to move that policy forward. This is in addition to her already highly demanding job. Many other gender and GBV advisors reported that they had either volunteered their services or that their organisation had added SEA to their responsibilities.²⁶ Further, in Informant-028's experience, we also see 'compartmentalisation'²⁷ - the creation of new posts and departments with a specific mandate to work on the gender-related policy issue (in this case SEA) allowing responsibility to be removed from senior leadership and shifted onto the new department/working group/focal point. The responsibility to implement the policy is no longer shared and the weight of implementation of a policy on global programming falls onto the shoulders of one person or a small, poorly resourced department. Informant-028's description is of what this author would describe as **hyper-compartmentalisation** as it takes the form of a working group led by other Gender Advisors and people who are concerned about the issue within the organisation, rather than being mandated with any power. This means that the group will have to essentially work as activists within their own organisation in their spare time on an issue which is encapsulated in an official policy of the humanitarian system.

From this author's perspective hyper-compartmentalisation and other forms of policy subversion of SEA has resulted in a situation where those in the field don't know what SEA is (see Box 1 for an example), and those in positions of power do not know either: “And the Head of Programme Quality [a very senior position in Headquarters] at NGO2, said “What is SEA?”²⁸

It should be noted that some informants described achievements in SEA response, discussing programmes they had delivered in certain contexts to tackle the issue. Some had worked well (but had never been replicated). Some discussed times when policies had been implemented - perpetrators investigated and subsequently removed from the organisation. The few achievements described by informants were either implemented by an individual with a specific interest in SEA, or where the result of a compartmentalisation which had been successful for a limited time, in a limited location, and/or on a particular investigation/incident.

²⁵ Informant-028, gender advisor, female.

²⁶ Described by informant: 003, 007, 012, 013, 014, 029.

²⁷ Longwe, 1997, p. 154.

²⁸ Informant-001, GBV advisor, female.

Diversionsary Action

The humanitarian system also engages in ‘procedures for diversionsary action’²⁹ as a strategy which ensures SEA policy evaporates. Here, SEA may be reported, but the action suggested or taken to address the issue is intentionally weak, but sufficient to placate anyone who may raise the perpetration of SEA as an issue.

Box 3: Diversionsary Action

In a camp in Jordan, close to the Syrian border, I facilitated a focus group discussion with women who had just arrived from Southern Syria. In that room, on a hot afternoon, kids played outside. A ball hit corrugated iron sheeting. The bang made everyone in the room panic. Eyes wide. Hyper-vigilant. The focus group was primarily held to contribute to a gender analysis I was putting together for the Jordan country office, to help to ensure that the programming delivered met the needs of women and girls from the South. During the discussion one woman started to sob uncontrollably. The woman explained that the local councils in Southern Syria were receiving and then with-holding bread, blankets and other basic provisions provided by INGOs and UN agencies, to force women and girls into having sex in exchange for the aid which they were entitled to. I comforted the crying woman and asked the rest of the room if they knew about this happening. One woman said ‘everybody knows this’ and all ten women agreed.

This was my last day in Jordan and I needed to make a report in person to the Assistant Country Director and the Project Coordinator. I organised to meet them in the office on my return. When I told them about what had been disclosed in the focus group, they asked me to submit a written report, which I did prior to my departure that evening. The male, Assistant Country Director and the female Project Coordinator were both in their 30s and both appeared to take the matter seriously. Within a month they had stopped working through local councils where they could, but in certain locations they continued to work through these councils. It was either that or stop delivering aid.

Around the same time, another organisation had produced a report referencing the widespread SEA of women and girls by local councils in Southern Syria. The Assistant Country Director encouraged the UN to do something about local councils and reported SEA. There was a decision taken to undertake in a research study on the issue and there were discussions around the set-up of a task force on SEA – despite the disclosures in the focus discussion groups’ and two separate INGO reports on the matter, the UN required further evidence. The Terms of Reference for the research study took months to put together. I left that organisation a year ago, but through my networks I know that the research has still not taken place, there are still no reporting mechanisms in place in Southern Syria and agencies are still delivering aid through local councils.

Within ‘Box 3: Diversionsary Action’ we see the way in which a report about widespread SEA perpetrated against beneficiaries is handled. The INGO, in this example, stopped working through perpetrators. However, the UN’s response in this instance was to suggest a study be conducted and a task-force set-up. A year and a half later, neither action has been implemented. Yet by stating that they will happen, the UN put in place measures which allow it to respond to questions on SEA in this

²⁹ Longwe, 1997, p. 154.

context and allows for the UN to appear to be taking action - when actually nothing is happening at all.

In response to the widespread¹ sexual abuse (of mainly adolescent girls), in 2002 an Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force¹ was set up to address the issue of prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA). They found that there was an absence of common codes of conduct to govern the behaviour of humanitarian staff and a lack of accountability mechanisms to enable disclosures of SEA to be addressed. The Task Force developed a plan of action which all IASC agencies agreed to implement. As we have seen so far in this research, however, agencies are not implementing those policies effectively. Diversionary Action may therefore take place at the global level, just as much as at the local level of the humanitarian system.

Set-up to Fail - Impunity, Loopholes, Racism and Complex Categories

SEA policies are constructed by the humanitarian system. There is therefore little-to-no discussion of power or gender-subordination within these policies as it would challenge it as a Regime of Inequality. Policy sanctioned impunity for perpetrators, racism within policy, unaddressed loopholes and the complexity of the definition of SEA itself were all discussed by informants as ways in which SEA policy is set-up to fail.

Loopholes and Impunity

There are a number of known 'loopholes' in SEA policy which go unaddressed by agencies. For example, UN contractors are paid by organisations to deliver services or programming (as normal staff members are), but are not covered under the SEA policy (or other policies). The UN has abdicated their responsibility for contractors' actions and safety.

Megan Nobert³⁰ was working for a UN agency in South Sudan, when she was raped by a contractor. The perpetrator could not be held accountable for his actions by the organisation, as he was not covered under policy. In addition, the legal system in South Sudan does not work to support survivors of GBV – as is the situation in many of the countries humanitarian's work. Rule of law in most emergencies breaks down to such an extent that legal prosecution is impossible. Even where it was possible, cultural norms may make reporting dangerous for survivors. Those who wish to commit acts of SEA need only become a UN contractor in a place of humanitarian action and weak rule of law, to have complete and utter impunity.

A large number of incidents of SEA, perpetrated by official organisation civilian personnel, were discussed by informants.³¹ In all cases which involved an expatriate humanitarian worker as perpetrator, no criminal prosecution was described. Some perpetrators were fired for SEA, but this was reported to be extremely rare by informants and this author has never seen this occur. Reference

³⁰ Megan Nobert agreed that her identity be used within this research.

³¹ Described by informant: 001, 002, 003, 007, 008, 010, 011, 012, 013, 015, 017, 018, 019, 020, 022, 024, 025, 026, 027, 028.

checks by agencies are not thorough. This author has only had a criminal background check completed when working for an INGO based in the UK. One informant discussed that she informally told other agencies to 'black list' a known perpetrator, another informant disclosed that her agency had shared information on informants in West Africa with other agencies, but these do not represent normal practice. Informants reported that perpetrators: had kept their job; been moved to a different location within the same organisation; *and* had been promoted by the organisation in order to remove them from the context (one informant reported that a perpetrator had been moved out of one country office, to a country office which was well known to have a high prevalence of SEA perpetration). This was of course *if* an investigation was completed at all or action was taken against guilty parties. Policy on investigations often prevent reports from being made altogether:

“My boss, the head of programmes and I had taken it to one of the heads of protection for the refugee response and basically she asked for names and tent numbers. When we asked what would happen to that information, she said that she would give that to the staff in the field site to investigate with and we were obviously uncomfortable with that because those were the people accused of being involved [...] So we ended up not giving them that information and trying to manage protection the best we could [...] eventually those survivors stopped reporting to us, because there was nothing that we could do.”³²

The focus on investigation over believing a survivor described above, is a theme which was also repeated by a number of informants,³³ and promotes a culture of disbelief - with survivors interviewed and forced to relive their experiences repeatedly. The account above highlights also that the investigation process leaves survivors vulnerable to identification. This can result in retribution by perpetrators, or other acts of GBV taking place perpetrated by friends, family or community members.³⁴ It can also exacerbate the psychological and social impact of sexual exploitation and abuse.

The survivor often receives no access to health care or other standard GBV response programming - as policies do not require organisations to support survivors of SEA perpetrated by their employees. Some survivors of SEA from the beneficiary population may receive GBV response services if they enter into the system themselves and if they have access to an NGO they feel comfortable with that engages in GBV response programming. Informants who were survivors of SEA, reported that they had had to administer their own health response and no other support was forthcoming. Megan, for example, is still attempting to persuade UNICEF to pay for medical expenses associated with her rape.

In addition, a number of informants also discussed their own hesitance to report suspected SEA because they felt as though they didn't have enough proof to report. The perpetrator is assumed to

³² Informant-019, GBV advisor, female.

³³ Described by informant: 001, 002, 003, 007, 008, 009, 011, 013, 014, 019, 024, 026, 028, 029.

³⁴ Humanitarian Practice Network at the Overseas Development Initiative, (2014). Special feature Gender-based violence in emergencies. *Humanitarian Exchange*, [online] (60), p.16. Available at: [http://www.ifrc.org/docs/IDRL/HE_60_web_1%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.ifrc.org/docs/IDRL/HE_60_web_1%20(1).pdf) [Accessed 29 Aug. 2016].

be innocent unless their perpetration of SEA is so blatant that there are multiple witnesses. Ironically, over the past few years there has been a global push by donors, State, INGOs and the UN to end the impunity which perpetrators of conflict related sexual violence operate.³⁵ Yet, within the humanitarian architecture itself, the impunity with which perpetrators operate remains unaddressed.

Complex Definitions and Racist Policy

As described in ‘Subverting Policy’, many within the humanitarian system are unable to define SEA, and are unaware of its existence - as both a policy and an action. During conversations, many humanitarian generalists conflated SEA with conflict related sexual violence perpetrated by armed actors or broader GBV in humanitarian contexts (perpetrated by and against the local population).³⁶ GBV and Gender Advisors were more likely to be able to define SEA, but definitions were often personal. They also expressed confusion in the way in which SEA had been separated from GBV. The separation of the definition of SEA and broader GBV, promote the concept of humanitarian perpetrators as non-Western men – a theme further explored in ‘Convenient Perpetrators’.

Policies expressly forbid relationships with the beneficiary population. In my experience, INGO’s SEA policies have included everybody in the beneficiary population. This means that national staff members can’t date, marry or have sex with anyone not working with an INGO as a national staff member. There is a lack of nuance here which causes staff to view the policy itself as offensive and absurd, and subsequently to ignore it.

The confusion around the definition of SEA and how this relates to broader GBV, and the lack of nuance (to the point of racism) in the language of the policies themselves, undermines the ability of the policy to be implemented effectively. The policies are set up to fail.

The Greater Good

This section has so far explored the way in which SEA policy is subverted, and the way in which policies themselves uphold the perpetration of SEA. Within the final sub-section of the chapter, the use of other humanitarian policies/principles to justify passive disciplinary action is explored.

‘Box 4: The Greater Good’ provides an example of an organisation’s decision to continue to implement through partner organisations who they knew to be perpetrating SEA. The ‘humanitarian imperative’³⁷ was used in order to ‘void’ the concept of ‘do no harm’³⁸ and SEA policy. This meant that they

³⁵ See for example: United Kingdom Foreign & Commonwealth Office, (2014). *International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict*. 1st ed. [ebook] London. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/319054/PSVI_protocol_web.pdf [Accessed 18 May 2016].

³⁶ Prior to discussion of the subject matter and definitions being provided by the researcher.

³⁷ See for definition: The Sphere Project, (2016). *The Sphere Handbook. The Humanitarian Charter*. [online] Spherehandbook.org. Available at: <http://www.spherehandbook.org/en/the-humanitarian-charter/> [Accessed 29 Aug. 2016].

³⁸ See for further details: The Sphere Project, (2016). *The Sphere Handbook | Protection Principle 1: Avoid exposing people to further harm as a result of your actions*. [online] Spherehandbook.org. Available at:

knowingly contributed to the sexual exploitation and abuse of women and girls in that context - for 'The Greater Good'. This belittles the lived experience of the women and girls who go through this abuse. The behaviour of the white, middle-class, Western men who took this decision, favoured a dispassionate and logical choice - the masculine choice - to continue delivering aid, knowing that it would be used as a means to sexually exploit and abuse women and girls. The policy of the organisation on SEA is again subverted during this masculine performance. Policy and values evaporate as women and girls' social death was knowingly implemented.

Other informants discussed incidents where 'The Greater Good' was applied to individual perpetrators, with organisations allowing them to continue to perpetrate because they would be too difficult to replace and their dismissal would cause issues in programme deliver.

<http://www.spherehandbook.org/en/protection-principle-1-avoid-exposing-people-to-further-harm-as-a-result-of-your-actions/> [Accessed 29 Aug. 2016].

Box 4: The Greater Good

In a room in a capital city, around 20 people sit down to discuss the regional strategy for the organisation's response to a recent humanitarian catastrophe. Access to the war zone is limited, and the organisation is working through partners across the borders of three neighbouring countries. There have been recent reports of sexual exploitation and abuse taking place in the country with local partner agencies and local councils as perpetrators. I inform the room of these recent findings. The regional strategy states that we will work through partners and through local councils in order to ensure aid reaches beneficiaries. I use the humanitarian principle of 'do no harm' to persuade the group that we should not do this, especially as access is so poor that monitoring distribution of aid is not feasible. We need to think of another way. I am one of around 5 women in the room. 2 women are national staff members, who have specialised in development (not emergency response), 1 woman is French and from HQ (and has never worked in the field), and other woman is a mid-career communications specialist from Canada, who is based in the regional office. I am the most vocal woman. All of the men in the room are white, mid-career and are in management or HQ positions.

A middle-aged, Western, white man states that the humanitarian imperative over-rides the principle of do no harm. Many other middle-aged, white, Western men in the room agree. I continue to negotiate on this issue, I do not consider the issue closed. After a short time, I am told by the middle-aged, white, Western facilitator of the workshop (who is also the regional humanitarian coordinator for this organisation), that I shouldn't take this so personally and that I am my own worst enemy. My response is to explain what is being said in explicit terms:

'So we are saying that the rape or sexual exploitation of a few women and girls is ok as long as we can deliver aid to many?'

He is shocked, and takes this personally, he says this is not the case. Yet, the regional response continued to operate through local councils and in my view discounted the rape, sexual exploitation and abuse of women and girls on a reportedly large scale, as it was for the 'greater good'. Only one Country Office stopped working with the councils (as I had influence with this office and those in charge of the decision held similar views to me). The rest of the regional response continued to work through the local councils and partner agencies, because, without asking the women and girls who had experienced this abuse, they decided that some of them should make a sacrifice in order for blankets, food and hygiene materials to make their way to the community, for the indicators in their project to be ticked off in a timely manner, for them get on with business as usual.

Part 3: SEXISM, RACISM, POWER AND PRIVILEGE

In Part 2, the policy paper outlines the performance of the humanitarian system as a 'Regime of Inequality' through organisational mechanisms – such as policy. However, the regime requires humanitarian actors to support it. Individuals within the humanitarian system reinforce and replicate power and abuse. The way in which individuals engage in a system of inequality is demonstrated in this section.

Convenient Perpetrators

Many informants began to discuss SEA as being perpetrated by peacekeepers prior to focusing on civilian humanitarian workers during conversation. This is in line with bias in academic research which

has framed SEA as an extension of the ‘militarised masculinity’ line of enquiry in the field of conflict related sexual violence. However, **from 29 conversations, over 50 incidents of SEA were described as being perpetrated by civilian humanitarian aid workers. Many informants also discussed that they had witnessed many more incidents than disclosed during conversation. Furthermore, the majority of concrete incidents described were perpetrated by expatriates. Yet, in informant’s accounts, national staff members were most likely to have punitive action taken against them, non-western expatriates were less likely to have action taken against and western staff members were least likely.**

During conversation, several informants explored the theme of the non-Western man as perpetrator. Some concluded that there was a direct correlation between the increase in the number of non-Western men involved in humanitarian action and the levels of SEA perpetration.³⁹ They theorised that this was due to non-western nation’s track record on women’s rights. This description groups all non-Western men together as perpetrators of GBV/SEA and assumes that western men in the field are less likely to be perpetrators – something which the descriptions of incidents by informants themselves and research refutes. Furthermore, with this assumption, the rates of sexual violence in Western nations appears to be forgotten with “more than half of ‘developed’ countries report[ing] a lifetime prevalence of at least 20%.”⁴⁰ **The assumption that western humanitarian workers are less likely to be perpetrators is therefore an expression of gender and racial hierarchy, transposed into the humanitarian system and manifested in the actions of humanitarian workers. It further empowers western perpetrators to commit acts of SEA in the knowledge that they are less likely to be suspects.**

Informant-025 worked in an NGO which discovered SEA was being perpetrated by French peacekeeping troops in Central African Republic. When reported to French forces, they refused to believe the accusations or to take action. French members of her team in management positions, refused to believe the multiple, widespread accusations. This resulted in serious delays (of around 2-years) in formal investigations taking place. The African Union were also informed that their troops were perpetrating SEA, and they immediately investigated and responded. This demonstrates that **perpetrators are investigated only when it is convenient for the organisation to do so and when the individual fits a constructed concept driven by racial and gender hierarchies.** This intersects with the concept of Diversionary Action – as the action taken against non-western perpetrators, can be utilised by the humanitarian system to show active disciplinary measures are being taken – when in fact they are ad hoc and unevenly applied.

Humanitarian Masculinity in the Field - Cowboys and Conquering Kings

“You could recognise this stereotypical [...] macho guys and I could also see, and I’m having

³⁹ Described by informant: 001, 002, 007, 024, 025, 026, 027.

⁴⁰ United Nations, (2016). *The World’s Women 2015 - Chapter 6 Summary*. 1st ed. [ebook] New York: United Nations. Available at: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/Ch6_VaW_info.pdf [Accessed 24 Aug. 2016]. P. 2.

a specific colleague in mind, a guy who was very passionate about GBV and what the ‘bastard rebels’ were doing. I could see him very easily in a party getting all smooth and flirty with every female national or international staff that was passing around him. So there is a very clear distinction, even psychologically speaking, it’s something that, you know, it’s this distinction between other’s and us and yeah [...] the bad guys and good guys, and the good guys would never do this. They would, say, be playful with a woman, but this is part of the game it doesn’t mean anything.”⁴¹

The dualistic thinking of the ‘humanitarian expat man in the field’ can be seen in the quote above. Informant-015’s colleague distinguishes conflict related sexual violence from his own sexist behaviour towards women. As Informant-015 describes it, there is a difference between the ‘good guys and the bad guys’. Informant-013 expands on this, explaining that with humanitarian’s viewing themselves as good guys, or saviours, it becomes difficult to accept SEA is occurring. The construction of humanitarian expat masculinity in the field as ‘the good guy’ is in itself, a sub-conscious Diversionary Action and stands in stark contrast to the construction of the Convenient Perpetrator.

The construction of masculinity in the field was described by some informants as being in line with the media portrayal of the ‘cowboy’.⁴² To the Western-mind’s eye, this conjures an image of a hyper-masculine white man, ‘saving’ a township from harm – often from an ‘uncivilised’, non-Western population. This metaphor is one which is well-known and used regularly by humanitarians, with one informant explaining that a particular context was described as the ‘wild west’.⁴³

Informants described working in humanitarian contexts as a time of intense work combined with parties, abuse of alcohol and drugs (027) with ‘hubs’ in the country where ‘debauched’ activity would take place. This included the presence and use of a commercial sex workers.⁴⁴ Several informants, after reflection during our conversation, realised that they had become so comfortable in seeing expatriate humanitarian men with commercial sex workers, or with women and girls from the local population, that they had stopped seeing this as SEA altogether.⁴⁵ **Use of commercial sex workers is so out in the open, that this author personally experienced visitors from headquarters being taken to a known commercial sex worker bar with members of the senior management team with no repercussion.** Several informants discussed men in INGOs and UN agencies picking up sex workers in their organisation’s cars on a regular basis with no action taken against them.^{46 47} This shows the overt

⁴¹ Informant-015, humanitarian generalist, male

⁴² Described by informant: 001, 020, 024, 027, 028

⁴³ Informant-001, GBV advisor, female

⁴⁴ Informant-001, GBV advisor, female

⁴⁵ Described by informant: 002, 006, 009, 010, 012, 013, 015

⁴⁶ Described by informant: 015, 018, 019

⁴⁷ It is important to note here, that the UN definition of SEA has been criticised by some feminist authors, including Otto, for promoting sexual negativity and for not separating ‘consensual sexual exchanges’ from sexual activities involving violence or coercion.⁴⁷ In a humanitarian context, however, the difference between commercial sex work as Western Feminists know it, and survival sex is extremely difficult to define. Furthermore, there is a clear need to understand power differentials within each sexual relationship. Given the logistical constraints of that, it is the perspective of this author that the use of commercial sex workers in humanitarian contexts by humanitarian actors should continue to be prohibited by SEA policy. The framing of SEA as a form of prostitution, may imply that survivors of this form of sexual

disregard for SEA policy played out through expat humanitarian masculinities and in humanitarian workers acceptance of it.

As mentioned above, Informants described a marked difference in the way that cases were handled against perpetrators along racial lines. This is indicative of the way in which the hegemonic masculinity of ‘humanitarian expat man in the field’ is played out in racial and gender hierarchies and the construction of a **neo-colonial distinction between western expatriates, non-Western expatriates and national staff/beneficiaries**. Although the vast majority of reported incidents involved women and girls as survivors, one man discussed being sexually harassed in the field. This man was a national staff member at the time and the harasser was a white, expatriate, female manager. This exemplifies the way in which racial and gendered hierarchies intersect within the humanitarian system. Further, Informants described that perpetrators of SEA displayed feelings of superiority and entitlement over those they abused – directly related to racial and gender hierarchies.⁴⁸ These neo-colonial overtones are overt in the following description of expatriate men in senior positions in the field: **“I think going abroad is just a way of making them bigger kings than they are already in their home countries and the organisational culture just confirms them on their little throne.”**⁴⁹

The metaphor used here, of men on their thrones, invokes a sense of the power imbued within humanitarian work to men in mid-level managerial positions in the field. The expansion of their ‘kingdom’ relates to the neo-colonial agenda of ‘civilising’, or to exploring and conquering the ‘wild west’, ‘penetrating’ the frontier with their masculinity as well as any women and girls they choose to along the way.⁵⁰ The hedonistic lifestyle above comes into play as well here in the form of male bonding, as the cowboys and conquering kings in humanitarian contexts do not wish to implicate their “drinking buddies” in SEA investigations – often blocking investigations from taking place, either actively or implicitly.⁵¹

Sexism and Violence in the System

“There are a couple of UN peacekeeping bases where IDPs go, and often UN peacekeepers will have access to additional water supplies and will use that access to resources for exchange of sexual favours - either from beneficiaries or sometimes, from humanitarian workers, whose organisations have failed to bring adequate basic supplies to keep them equipped with meeting their basic needs.”⁵²

violence have more agency than they actually have,⁴⁷ and it is therefore important to distinguish between the hypothetical commercial sex work, where the worker has complete agency over their actions, and the reality of a humanitarian context.

⁴⁸ Described by informant: 008, 011, 017, 018, 028.

⁴⁹ Informant-008, GBV advisor, female.

⁵⁰ A. McClintock (1995). *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*. London: Routledge, pp.21-74.

⁵¹ Informant-008, GBV advisor, female.

⁵² Informant-017, GBV advisor, female.

The lack of care for female humanitarian worker's safety shown in the quote above, is indicative of the way in which this issue is treated throughout the system. In 2016, there were reports that UN Peacekeepers were aware of the rape of female aid workers taking place near-by a UN Peacekeeping base in South Sudan – yet, did nothing to protect the survivors.⁵³ Within the next box the author provides an example of the everyday attitudes towards female safety and security.

'Box 5: Female Humanitarian's (Lack of) Security' provides an example of the way in which female workers security and safety is discounted by their male colleagues, and the constant barriers to safety and security faced. The example provided in this story is mundane in comparison to other female humanitarian's accounts.

One informant was raped whilst working for one of the world's leading women and girls focused humanitarian agencies. Despite working as a GBV advisor in this organisation, the informant decided not to disclose in country, because her expat male manager had displayed antipathy towards GBV survivors in the past including survivor blaming predilections. Another informant, explained that she had been sexually harassed by a colleague and had not reported it because she was working she did not feel safe to and people in the humanitarian agency would not have believed her.

The majority of female informants spoken with had experienced some form of GBV perpetrated by male humanitarian staff in the field,⁵⁴ many more humanitarians knew of other female humanitarian staff who had been through this as well.⁵⁵ In a recent online survey of humanitarian workers: 85% of respondents stated that they know a fellow humanitarian worker who is a survivor of sexual violence⁵⁶ perpetrated in the field; 40% had witnessed an attack; 66% were survivors themselves, and 24% were attacked more than once.⁵⁷ As this is a self-reporting survey, there is an inherent bias associated with the results, but this is the first data to be released of its kind and is indicative of the scale of the problem of SEA perpetrated against humanitarian workers.

⁵³ Associated Press in Nairobi, (2016). UN peacekeepers in South Sudan 'ignored rape and assault of aid workers'. *The Guardian*. [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/15/south-sudan-aid-worker-rape-attack-United-Nations-UN> [Accessed 20 Aug. 2016].

⁵⁴ Sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape were disclosed by informant: 003, 018, 010, 024, 012.

⁵⁵ Described by: 001, 003, 006, 008, 010, 012, 015, 019, 024, 027, 028.

⁵⁶ Report the Abuse categorised 'sexual violence' as including: unwanted touching; attempted assault; unwanted comments; rape; sexual assault. 8% of respondents listed their incident type as 'other'.

⁵⁷ Reporttheabuse.org. (2016). *Report The Abuse*. [online] Available at: <https://reporttheabuse.org> [Accessed 20 Aug. 2016].

Box 5: Female Humanitarian's (lack of) Security

In 2015, I was in a capital city for a workshop. I had come to the capital from a different field location. When I was in the field, I asked if I might be able to take the mobile phone to the capital to ensure that I had a means of communication. Many staff from that field location were visiting the capital at the same time and attending the same meeting, and I would be able to give the phone back to one of them to return the phone to the field. I was told that I was not allowed to take the phone with me, for administrative reasons. When I arrived at the hotel in the late afternoon, I discovered that the hotel chosen for staff to stay in did not serve food. I hadn't eaten all day, so I was faced with the choice of either going without food until the morning, or venturing outside to find something quickly. I chose to go outside. This context was not 'dangerous' in the humanitarian sense and the capital city was a European tourist destination. When I went outside, after walking for a couple of minutes, I realised that I was getting strange looks from men. I realised soon that the hotel was situated in a notorious place of work for commercial sex workers. I found somewhere, bought food and walked quickly back to the hotel. I was outside for about ten minutes. On the way back, a local man in his 50's curbed me and tried to get me to get into his car. When I said 'no', he followed me for some time, turning into roads as I tried to get away from him. Eventually, I walked down a one-way street, waiting for him to turn down this street and turned back on myself, so that he was unable to follow. Given that I was without a phone, I was shaken, but had no ability to call in.

When I got back to the hotel, a man in the lobby asked the man at reception 'how much is this one?' in reference to me. The hotel, being in a red-light district, was also a place of work for commercial sex workers.

When I told the security advisor, his first response was to tell me that I was stupid for going out on my own at dusk. He didn't ask me how I was. He then sent out an email letting all women know that they shouldn't go out on their own and implied in the email that I had been stupid to do so. From my perspective, I was forced to leave the hotel to get some food, I did so whilst it was still light outside, and had the hotel and the location of it been checked properly – women wouldn't have been in any danger walking on their own for 5-10 minutes anyway. From my perspective, women's safety had not been considered and the security advisor was using shaming and blame as a tactic (as so many often do to survivors of all forms of GBV). I complained to his supervisor. The male, middle-aged, western supervisor said he wasn't able to do anything, but was sympathetic. The male, middle-aged, western security advisor gave a security briefing the following day. The only information directed towards women given, was not to go out at night and to not wear short-skirts. No information was given about the location of the hotel or what was happening at the hotel. The security advisor became more and more confrontational with me and expected that I should apologise for making a complaint. This same security advisor refused to support me later in the year to ensure that all offices in the field had post-rape treatment facilities. After I sent several emails on the matter, which were not replied to, he eventually got back to me. He noted that if rape of staff happened, that they could go to the hospital and that it would be too much trouble to train people in the office. I replied with an offer to train security staff in what they would need to do, and to procure the medicine needed to prevent HIV and sexually transmitted infection contraction, and emergency contraceptive. I also informed him that many of the hospitals and health centres in our area of operation do not provide this service. He refused to respond to this email for months, eventually replying that there would need to be an assessment of hospitals and health centres in field locations before any action could take place. This assessment never happened.

Informants reported that they, or survivors they know, were fired following disclosing rape, sexual assault or harassment. Similarly, whistle-blowers are attacked publically or fired.⁵⁸ One informant reported that when she had tried to report a case of sexual harassment perpetrated against her, she physically couldn't – office doors were locked whilst posters with messaging encouraging the reporting of SEA were on the walls next to them. After days of trying to report in person and online, eventually they gave up.⁵⁹ The examples above are merely indicative of the stories told by the informants for this research, but they do beg the rhetorical question: **if a woman of privilege, working on gender-related issues is unable to report abuse occurring – then what chance does an adolescent girl in a humanitarian affected community have?**

The Mundane Reality of Sexism

All female informants apart from one, reported that they had been treated differently to men. Many reported that they had experienced different forms of misogynistic behaviour (apart from SEA), including (but not limited to): gender-related harassment, undermining, lack of ability to rise into higher hierarchical positions, being talked over, and being asked to do menial gendered tasks. In addition, many of the female informants who were GBV and Gender Advisors discussed feeling that they were treated differently from other personnel. Some discussed feeling that other's treated them as though they were a 'pain in the ass' and that they were 'hated' within their organisation,⁶⁰ some were advised by others within organisations not to become a gender specialist, as it was so well known that the opportunity for career progression would be limited.⁶¹ Throughout the personal stories within this policy paper there is also an insight into the treatment of GBV and Gender Advisors (and female humanitarians) undergo. This treatment, and the ability to see gender and racial hierarchies performed, influence female humanitarian workers to leave:

“The degree to which I would be treated differently corresponds to how vocal I would be, right? How vocal I would be about issues, and if I would be open in framing those issues as feminist issues. So for sure, I was treated differently, perceived differently.

“[...] [SEA Policy] made me feel a) a little crazy and incredibly frustrated and it made me feel quite ineffective as well [...]there is still this refusal to really take on the idea that women and girls are treated differently, they are devalued, they are seen as property and that drives a lot of bad shit that happens to them, and it is our responsibility as aid workers to factor that into our work, there was always a lot of push back to that.”⁶²

Informant-029 recently left an organisation and referenced her treatment as a main reason for leaving. GBV and gender advisors in particular referenced the inequalities within the system and the

⁵⁸ S. Laville (2015). UN aid worker suspended for leaking report on child abuse by French troops. *The Guardian*. [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/29/un-aid-worker-suspended-leaking-report-child-abuse-french-troops-car> [Accessed 26 Aug. 2016].

⁵⁹ Informant-003, gender advisor, female.

⁶⁰ Informant-008, GBV advisor, female.

⁶¹ Informant-088, gender advisor, female.

⁶² Informant-029, GBV advisor, female.

treatment of women as a reason that they had doubts about working in the humanitarian system or as reasons they departed from organisations or the sector (permanently or briefly).

The impact of SEA on Gender-related Programming

All GBV and Gender Advisors discussed a lack of trust in the community and the way in which SEA, in all its forms, undermined the ability to implement programming – particularly that which was intended to be gender transformative. Furthermore, advisors talked about the self-evident hypocrisy of men implementing humanitarian programming abusing their female counterparts and women and girls in the community, whilst the organisation's they belonged to attempted to prevent men in the crisis affected communities from committing violence against women and girls. SEA therefore can be described as a subversion of GBV programming policy.

The Arrogance of Privilege at Headquarters

Just as there is a form of hegemonic masculinity in the field, there is also a different form of hegemonic masculinity in headquarters. The man described in 'Box 6: The Arrogance of Privilege' is: unaware of his privilege; arrogant enough to implement an investigation with no training; and unappreciative of the racial and gender hierarchies present in the humanitarian system and the way in which they are performed. His contemporaries are all very similar, as are those immediately below him in the hierarchy. They are more likely to be men, but can also be women.

According to some informants, women in positions of power are more likely to be overtly anti-women/girls programming and anti-SEA work than men,⁶³ with women in positions of power blocking reports of SEA from being taken seriously.⁶⁴ Most of the high-ranking women described in interviews were Western, or else were born into privileged families outside of the West. These women are in the minority to men in positions of power, yet they follow patterns of behaviour elaborated on in research reviewing the behaviour of powerful women in hyper-masculine organisations - performing roles typically identified with that culture's hegemonic masculinity.⁶⁵ They are able to undermine gender, GBV and SEA work in a more explicit way than male colleagues in headquarters are able to. The head of an organisation has to be seen to be sensitive to the issues of women and girls (to the extent that this sensitivity does not lead to a change of the system. These privileged women become willing tools of the humanitarian system as a Regime of Inequality.

The policies and organisational mechanisms discussed in Part 2 are created, reflected, reinforced and replicated by headquarters level personnel. Ultimately they decide what is and is not for The Greater Good. They decide if SEA is to be taken seriously or not (in policy and practice), and they allow for - and create - the cowboys and conquering kings of the field – some of whom eventually make it to

⁶³ Informant-001, GBV advisor, female; Informant-008, GBV advisor, female.

⁶⁴ Informant-011, humanitarian generalist, female.

⁶⁵ A. Koenig, A. Eagly, A. Mitchell and T. Ristikari (2011). Are leader stereotypes masculine? A meta-analysis of three research paradigms. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137(4), pp.616-642.

headquarters themselves. The loopholes continue, perpetrators are provided with impunity, women's safety and security are given no credence. As with every theme discussed in this policy paper, the 'arrogance of privilege' is born from the humanitarian system as a Regime of Inequality and is a result of it – it is both cause and effect.

Box 6: The Arrogance of Privilege

I was in the field when I received an email from headquarters. It detailed, to over a hundred staff members, the rape of a teenage girl who was a student in a school the organisation was supporting, by a teacher in the organisation's employ. It provided identifying information of the girl and the teacher. This email was sent by the CEO of the organisation. This white man in his 40s, had not worked on programming before, having always worked in advocacy and policy. He had been advised by the similarly inexperienced HR manager to send the email to all staff, in order to let them know that the matter was being taken care of. The HR manager, a British woman in her early 50s, had asked me previously to work with her on improving the organisation's response to SEA, but when I tried to find a time to meet, she was always busy, or I was – as the only Gender Advisor in the organisation who had an understanding of SEA. I had provided training to staff members a few months earlier on SEA, but no members of senior management had attended and no members of HR had attended either. Had they joined the training, they would have known that the confidentiality of the survivor is paramount, that an investigation should be conducted quietly whilst not endangering the survivor or alleged perpetrator and a response was required for the survivor in areas of health, psychosocial, legal and safety. The Country Office did not have a plan in place, they had not been trained on what to do should a complaint be made.

The CEO, a man with no training, no understanding of SEA or GBV, and no experience in the field, decided that he should fly to the country office to investigate the claim himself. More emails came from the field, one of which disclosed the results of the HIV test the staff of the organisation had advised the girl to take following the rape.

No one asked for advice from the one person in the organisation who would have been able to offer support – me. I was overlooked as this white man went to save this girl in a country in Africa and wanted the whole organisation to know that he was doing it – without the slightest thought of the girls' safety. He perpetrated another form of violence in doing this – a violence perpetrated through privilege. He overlooked my years of training, assumed that he could conduct this investigation with no training whatsoever, and in doing so put the girl at risk – perhaps he thought that the girl would not be in danger. Perhaps he didn't think of the girl's needs at all.

I was not able to confront the CEO about this – I was too junior. But my supervisor spoke to members of the senior management team. He explained the issues with the way in which the investigation and the girls' privacy and safety were mishandled. Not a single member of the senior management team was willing to listen to this and if the situation were to happen again, it would be likely that a similar situation would take place.

Part 5: CONCLUSION

Whilst the humanitarian system presents itself as a site of resistance, gender and racial hierarchies are performed through the system and through humanitarian actors' actions. Together, they work to create an endless cycle, with sexual violence produced in order to sustain it.

The way in which policies relating to SEA are (not) implemented in humanitarian agencies demonstrates the way in which the humanitarian system acts as a Regime of Inequality. Subversion tactics usually used for gender-related policies were found to be used to the extreme for SEA policies. Hyper-compartmentalisation and diversionary action were shown to be employed as tactics of subversion, with reports (and other actions) promised, but failing to be actioned. Policies were also created in order to fail. The very definition of SEA within organisational policy separates it from broader understandings of GBV and the racist overtones of SEA policy discourse allow for the policies to be undermined. Loopholes and impunity continue and a focus on proof places survivors in danger and dissuades disclosure. In crisis affected communities, there is a lack of legal redress for perpetrators, and humanitarian organisation's poor implementation of policy was shown to not only provide impunity for perpetrators, but to also keep perpetrators employed. In some cases perpetrators were promoted to a position of higher authority in an organisation in a different country – placing them into a position of higher pay, higher authority and higher power - providing them with even more power to abuse.

Humanitarian agencies were also shown to knowingly allow for the perpetration of SEA for 'the greater good' – so that humanitarian operations could continue. Decisions were shown to be taken by agencies that the rape of women, justified in order for aid to be delivered and for their indicators to be met.

The conceptualisation of perpetrators as non-Western men and of survivors as non-Western women, further supports the impunity of certain perpetrators, continues colonial concepts and separates SEA from being situated within structural and systemic gender-based violence. Examples were used of blocks put in place to investigating incidents of SEA because perpetrators did not fit into the construction of the non-western man as perpetrator, because western humanitarian's were unwilling to accept that western colleagues could perpetrate.

Analogies depicting humanitarian expatriate men in the field as 'cowboys and conquering kings' were used to describe the performance of different masculinities. These men perpetrate SEA, but also the construction of their masculinity contributes to the continuation of the Regime of Inequality, through a neo-colonial racial hierarchy and the performance of gender-subordination. Just as these issues play out in the field, so they also play out at headquarters level with privilege playing a part in the perpetuation of the cycle of abuse. Masculine performances, violence, domination and oppression lead to feminists leaving organisations/the system, which further contributes to the continuation of the cycle. Further, the undermining of gender-based violence programming in crisis affected communities, through the hypocrisy of a humanitarian organisation which allows for SEA to take place

whilst attempting to convince a community not to perpetrate GBV, and trying to convince survivors to report, contributes to the global Regime of Inequality.

Each part of this analysis is interconnected. This is shown in Illustration 1.

Illustration

