2023 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Case Title:

Tracking Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse BPR

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Organization:

USAID M/MPBP

USAID staff in Nigeria sign on to pledge their commitment to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse in an AAPSM event. Credit: AAPSM and USAID/Nigeria

Summary:

M/MPBP executed a Pause and Reflect activity to improve the Agency's system for tracking allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). The Action Alliance for Preventing Sexual Misconduct (AAPSM) was the executive sponsor for this activity and sought a business process review (BPR) of the Agency's policies in order to respond to the Administrator's call to action on preventing SEA. This activity relied heavily on internal and external collaboration to develop recommendations for improvement, in addition to "as-is" and "to-be" process maps. The BPR Team presented nine recommendations on how the Agency can improve its SEA response, case management, investigation, and action on allegations. To facilitate leadership decision-making, M/MPBP presented recommendations with their expected degree of complexity and cost. Agency leadership accepted all nine recommendations. Significant impacts of the SEA BPR included the creation of a Safeguarding Unit and a more centralized system to track allegations. The BPR enabled the Agency to fulfill its publicly declared commitment to addressing SEA. The SEA BPR is an example of using CLA that has implications for both internal operations and programming.

1. **WHAT: What is the general context in which the case takes place? What organizational or development challenge(s) or opportunities prompted you to collaborate, learn, and/or adapt?**

Administrator Mark Green established the Action Alliance for Preventing Sexual Misconduct (AAPSM) in 2018 in light of demonstrated problems with sexual misconduct in the international development and humanitarian assistance sector. USAID and other donor organizations made signed commitments to seriously address cases of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) against beneficiaries. AAPSM is mandated to improve the Agency's approach to preventing SEA. In order to achieve this mandate, AAPSM sought to improve the process of tracking and addressing SEA complaints at a systems-level. This required more USAID guidelines on how to process complaints of sexual misconduct, and how to manage complaints in the field or concerning implementing partners. The original process was very decentralized, with knowledge gaps on how the Agency tracked and responded to cases. Cases were either sent to the Office of Inspector General, responded to in an ad hoc manner, or, at worst, left to sit in individual inboxes. AAPSM wanted to take action, and recognized the need for a structured approach to data collection and a set of recommendations to improve the Agency's accountability system. There were varying views on how to respond to the situation across the Agency, so AAPSM needed an independent analysis. The M/MPBP Business Process Review Team (BPR Team) conducted the Tracking Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse BPR (SEA BPR) in 2019-2020 to facilitate a data-driven approach to preventing sexual misconduct. The BPR provided an evidence base for solutions the Agency could enact, and posed a business case for these investments.

2. **What two CLA Sub-Components are most clearly reflected in your case?**

Pause & Reflect

Decision-Making

3. **HOW: What steps did you take to apply CLA approaches to address the challenge or opportunity described above?**

M Bureau released the BPR methodology in June 2019 to provide the Agency with a systematic approach to improving processes by using research methods to more effectively and efficiently achieve results. The Agency's Performance Improvement Officer oversees the use of this methodology as a tool to promote continuous learning and improvement. The methodology enables an operating unit to conduct a pause-and-reflect activity to improve their management and operations, and to create a technical evidence base for change. The USAID approach for BPRs consists of four phases: diagnosis, optimization, implementation, and assessment. M/MPBP's BPR Team conducted the first two BPR phases by identifying stakeholder needs, conducting a desk review of current SEA policies, interviewing key stakeholders, facilitating a process map workshop, conducting synthesis and analysis, and drafting the report and recommendations.

The BPR team engaged with internal and external stakeholders through key informant interviews and focus group meeting with a combined 35 individuals from Washington, the field, and external parties. Selected interviewees included senior leaders from USAID's regional and technical bureaus, AAPSM working group members, and Contracting Officer/Agreement Officers (CO/AOs). The BPR Team spoke with other donor organizations and government ministries to benchmark USAID's processes against those of similar organizations. Through these conversations, the BPR Team recognized the importance of adding Countering Trafficking in Persons (CTIP) and child safeguarding to the scope of the BPR, because of the similar barriers to tracking allegations and connection to the preventing SEA network. Furthermore, these stakeholders saw the utility in the BPR for their own areas of expertise, and so were willing to collaborate. They have been collaborators with AAPSM ever since. USAID's implementing partners were very interested in collaborating in this process because they were eager for a solution, and did not want to recirculate bad actors.

The creation of the "as-is" and "to-be" process maps supported AAPSM's decision-making. The BPR Team created a process map to look at how allegations were reported to the Agency, and at how the Agency responded. During a process map workshop, the BPR Team facilitated a conversation with stakeholders to validate the process flow-chart, and to develop ideas on how to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the process. After the workshop, the BPR Team diagrammed the "to-be" process that would drive the Agency's response and continuous improvement. Prior to the workshop, stakeholders did not know how valuable the final process map would be, but they have continued to use it after the BPR.

The SEA BPR facilitated decision-making for CO/AOs and AAPSM. Prior to the SEA BPR, when staff in the field received SEA allegations, they did not feel fully knowledgeable of whom they should report to, nor of what resources were available. Working on the business architecture around case management allowed staff to more easily make decisions and take action. AAPSM was able to use the BPR report and recommendations to present the need for improving processes around SEA allegations in an analytical format. This allowed AAPSM to get buy-in among stakeholders, so that leadership could make decisions. AAPSM engaged the Deputy Administrator, M Bureau Deputy Assistant Administrator, and General Counsel to ensure that USAID could accept and commit to resourcing the recommendations. This is clearly demonstrated in the decision to move from a decentralized to a centralized approach to tracking SEA allegations and Agency learning on preventing SEA in the new Safeguarding Unit.

4. RESULTS: Choose one of the following questions to answer.

We know you may have answers in mind for both questions; However please choose one to highlight as part of this case story

B. ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

The BPR Team presented nine recommendations on how the Agency can improve its SEA response, case management, investigation, and action on allegations. These were presented with their expected degree of complexity and cost, and Agency leadership accepted all nine recommendations.

The creation of a Safeguarding Unit within the M Bureau was the BPR recommendation that would need the most significant resources, and that would demonstrate an Agency commitment to preventing and tracking SEA. M/MPBP created and staffed new positions in its Compliance Division to follow through on this recommendation. That division has now been renamed as the Responsibility, Safeguarding, and Compliance (RSC) Division to better reflect its expanded safeguarding work streams. The SEA BPR set up a foundation for what this unit could do, but allowed the flexibility needed to adapt to changing Agency needs and resources. Since safeguarding has been incorporated into its mandate, the RSC has worked on new award requirements that impact not only SEA, but also a range of other issues. The RSC collaborates with internal and external stakeholders on safeguarding matters, coordinates on the creation and issuance of policies and guidance, manages and tracks allegations of safeguarding violations, responds to specific instances of misconduct, and builds capacity and awareness through training and outreach.

The SEA BPR enabled the Agency to fulfill its public declarations of its dedication to addressing SEA. At the Safeguarding Summit 2018, USAID was a signatory to 22 safeguarding commitments made by international donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Among these was a commitment to “review, and if necessary, strengthen core oversight and management systems for tackling sexual exploitation and abuse.” To fulfill the Agency’s external commitments, the AAPSM sought to build the Agency’s internal capacity and knowledge to respond to SEA allegations efficiently, effectively, and in a robust manner.

5. **ENABLING CONDITIONS: How have enabling conditions - resources (time/money/staff), organizational culture, or business/work processes - influenced your results? How would you advise others to navigate any challenges you may have faced?**

Ahead of the SEA BPR, there were process and culture components that enabled the success of the exercise. M Bureau had the knowledge management and institutional memory needed to be able to execute a BPR. The BPR methodology is under the purview of the Agency's Performance Improvement Officer, and is one tool of many to promote continuous learning and improvement. There was an openness and an interest among Agency leadership to look at difficult issues and address them forthrightly. They recognized that to fulfill its commitments to implementing partners, USAID needs to be able to take action to prevent and track allegations of SEA. Not only was preventing SEA a key priority for Agency leadership, but also something staff called for from a grassroots level. This collaboration and co-creation was critical because it led to co-ownership and increased adoption to the point where some of the recommendations were implemented before the BPR could be formally approved.

The BPR Team and AAPSM faced hurdles in developing and executing recommendations. In general, change management is needed for BPRs and their recommended improvements. In this case, the BPR Team and AAPSM needed to overcome stakeholder resistance to change. Some stakeholders were protective of their portfolios, and did not want to push outside of their previous equities. One way to overcome this challenge was to lean on internal and external collaboration so that stakeholders could take ownership of the recommendations. The BPR also allowed staff to take into account what's best for the Agency, rather than silo issue areas.