

## Safeguarding and Beyond: One Year On

Report of a GADN Workshop

### 1. Introduction

The disclosures of sexual harassment and abuse by male staff, in INGOs and their partner organisations, of women staff, and the women and girls using the services that INGOs provide, in February and March 2018, brought into the public domain that women are not safe as staff or as beneficiaries/participants in the aid sector. These public disclosures precipitated some difficult conversations within and between INGOs and donors, and while there was agreement that women and girls should not be abused, as a general principle, there has been very much less agreement about what organisations can and should do to improve their practice.

In March 2018, the Gender and Development Network (GADN) brought together women's rights and gender equality staff in a workshop to begin to reflect on their experiences in organisations, to articulate their concerns about the ways organisations were responding, and to propose measures and recommendations to make the organisational response as robust as it could be. The report and recommendations from that workshop were informed by the perspectives and conversations of the women in the room, and background documents including: DFID's Safeguarding Summit statements; DFID's Strategic Vision for Gender Equality; feedback from the GADN Feminist Forum meeting; and discussions with women's rights experts inside and outside organisations in the global north and south.

One year on, following the DFID Safeguarding Summit, and the publication of Oxfam's 'Committed to Change, Protecting People' report<sup>i</sup>, the GADN brought practitioners together again, in May 2019, to reflect on the ways in which the conversations about safeguarding have evolved, the organisational processes and practices in these conversations, the current position of organisations, and what the priorities are in the coming months. The slides from the second workshop are compiled in the Annex to this report. These workshops focussed on two areas;

- 1) The ways in which taken-for-granted language has shaped and been shaped by organisational dynamics and priorities, and the changing political and conceptual spaces of the work
- 2) The organisational processes of change, of not changing, and of reshaping the work.

In many instances, there has been a lack of clarity or agreement about what the 'problem' is, and how it needs to be framed in order for there to be any significant change. It has been noticeable, for example, how rarely this has been recognised or articulated as a problem of gender, with most formal documents focussed on 'people'.<sup>ii</sup> The gendered nature of sexual exploitation and abuse has been visible in the main as a footnote or a side issue; the feminist work to bring gender to the centre is not complete, and the levels of resistance to recognising this in organisations have been

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<sup>i</sup> [https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/oxfam\\_ic\\_final\\_report-en.pdf](https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/oxfam_ic_final_report-en.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-summit-2018-hosts-outcome-summary>/<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/safeguarding-summit-2018>

sustained. The ways in which feminist analysis has been side-lined are complex and intersecting, reflecting the ways in which organisations function as much as the ways in which individuals understand the issues and use their understanding within their organisations. Overall, organisations appear to have absorbed, and in some instances, appropriated feminist language, without necessarily supporting feminists, or increasing the authority of women with gender expertise, and without necessarily changing the systems and structures that provides such conducive environments for abuse. One of the consequences of this has been the use of ‘feminist’ language without a full understanding of what this language means. Feminist analysis and input has also, in some organisations, been commodified, moving away from an ethic and underpinning analysis towards something that needs to be ‘added in’ to existing narratives, and ‘bought in’ from external consultants.

This too reflects the lack of understanding of and appropriation of feminist language, generating what these workshops named as ‘weasel words’ (words that do not mean in practice what they appear to mean on paper), and ‘smoke and mirrors’ in policy documents – the sense that while there appears to be change, the underlying issues have not, in reality, been addressed.

The narratives of ‘bad apples’ are still powerful, and the systems for reporting still reliant on both catastrophic incidents and on individual survivors reporting; there has been little shift towards systems of prevention and oversight being located as the responsibility of organisations and the reinforcement of systems built on criminal justice models of reports, investigations and action.

## 2. Strategic Inefficiency

*“Strategic inefficiency describes not just the slowness of an uptake but how that slowness is useful and purposeful. By using the term strategic I am suggesting that inefficiency is beneficial to an organisation whether or not it involves deliberation; inefficiency can be understood as a means of achieving an end. What is perceived to be beneficial to an organisation often evokes a ‘who,’ and the ‘who’ that is deemed beneficial might be the same ‘who’ that decides what is beneficial to an organisation. I want to suggest that inefficiency is beneficial insofar as it supports an already existing hierarchy.” Sara Ahmed<sup>iii</sup>*

Discussions within the workshops recognised the ways in which patriarchal systems of privilege are highly skilled at absorbing and reconfiguring some of the issues raised by feminist and women’s rights practitioners, without fundamentally changing the systems sustaining them. Not everyone involved is necessarily fully aware of how they are participating in these processes, and the ways in which they are contributing to patriarchal resistances.

The grooves of these processes are well-worn, well-rehearsed and rarely examined: presuming that women, in particular, are ‘emotional’ as a way of dismissing concerns, rather than interrogating what has led to these strong feelings; the default assumption that the systems, and ‘people’ (men) in them are essentially good and benign, and there only needs to be some tweaking; the attribution of a negative ‘agenda’ to feminists who are trying to change the conversation; the movement of language to gender-neutral; the ‘othering’ of presumed perpetrators as implicitly men who are not white, or not international staff; the push to close down public knowledge and force it into ‘private’ spaces again, and so on. Moreover, there is almost no recognition in this discourse of the intersectional nature of power and privilege and the roles that race and class play in who is doing what to whom.

As such, while organisational processes and dynamics over the last year have in some ways made progress and absorbed the kinds of analysis and language that feminists have to offer, they have at

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<sup>iii</sup> <https://feministkilljoys.com/2018/12/20/strategic-inefficiency/>

the same time reconfigured the previous kinds of discourses to continue to block systemic and transformative change. Exploring the ways in which organisations have repositioned issues so that there is the appearance of change while at the same time maintaining the intersecting dynamics of privilege, decision-making and gendered power helped the groups to get beyond the surface and investigate the underlying trajectories of change.

This report outlines the ways in which strategic inefficiency is driving the progression of change, the limits of what will be possible, and the ways in which feminist insight and practice continues to be side-lined as organisations remake their language and their presentation.

## Box 1: The Bricks in the Walls of Strategic Inefficiency

'we don't have the expertise' (and it is not a priority to get it)	Exclusion of internal organisational expertise	Starting from the beginning again in spite of expertise within the organisation
No systematic collaboration between HR/Programmes/Safeguarding teams and Gender expertise	Lots of words, no action	Limited capacity in safeguarding
Making the costs very high	Strategic lack of coordination	Obsession with growth
Strategic mediocrity – going for the lowest bar	Acting irrelevantly; focus on compliance rather than good practice	Multiple unhelpful processes
Talking about talking about talking	Endless busywork	Making it about 'us'
Determined avoidance of the power conversation	Taking control of drawing the lines and closing out conversations	Deflections
Multiple levels of sign-off; multiplying layers slow it down	'Yes, but'	Linearity of planning and strategy
		Endless trainings

### 3. Doing the work while we're doing the work

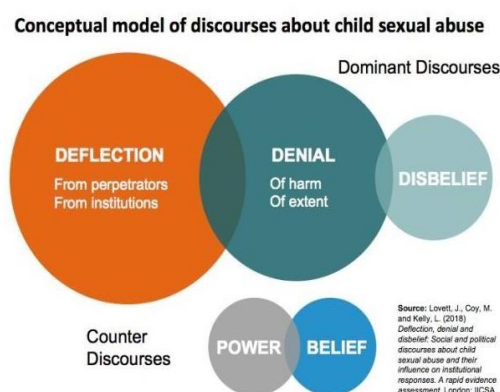
*"Being a diversity practitioner means you are in effect appointed by an employer to transform the employer. It is a difficult position. One practitioner described the job as a 'banging your head against the brick wall job'. Even if you are appointed by an institution to transform the institution, it*

*does not mean the institution is willing to be transformed. In fact, many practitioners encounter resistance to their work; diversity is work because of that resistance.” Sara Ahmed<sup>iv</sup>*

The original workshop noted that while there was an expectation in organisations that feminist women and women with expertise in GBV would step up and step in to respond to the massive increases in reporting as a result of the public conversations, they were not adequately resourced to pick up this work, and not given the authority or the respect to shape and influence the conversations and decisions. In many ways, the parallel process of this mirrored precisely the kinds of insights that feminists have generated over decades; women (with expertise) have been situated to provide the care, to clean up the mess, to do the internal organisational reproductive work, while men (without necessarily the expertise) continued to make decisions, allocate resources and determine policy. The replication of gender roles was noted as a continuation of the organisational dynamics that have created such a conducive context for abuse and such a powerful resistance to acting on women’s knowledge. While there is recognition that in some circumstances, the expertise of feminist women has been sought, it has been in very specific circumstances, and within very specific limits.

Returning to the original model for conceptualising conducive contexts, (see below) groups reviewed the kinds of dynamics they are still seeing in their organisations and the ways in which the internal dynamics of gendered power have and have not changed.

## Conducive Contexts for Abuse<sup>v</sup>



## Denial

- Leadership not taking ownership of safeguarding
- Concerns reported but minimised and dismissed as ‘acceptable’ or ‘normal’ behaviour
- Minimising intent; emphasis on intent over outcome increases depending on status/power
- Fear of reporting – donor requirements
- Internal organisational deflection and denial
- “Safeguarding is not a gender issue”
- This is just how men are
- We don’t have any reports; we can’t act if survivors don’t report
- Plausible denial claimed through naming of ‘defamatory’ statements – makes space to deny

<sup>iv</sup> Ahmed, S (2017) ‘Living a Feminist Life’ <https://feministkilljoys.com/2017/11/10/complaint-as-diversity-work/>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.iicsa.org.uk/key-documents/3848/view/Social%20and%20political%20discourses%20about%20child%20sexual%20abuse%20and%20their%20>

## Deflection

- Using the criminal justice model means there are limited outcomes; burdens of ‘proof’ are very high
- “it’s cultural/ harmless; may be a particular issue in national/ country offices and teams”
- Comforting ‘dominant’ groups
- Focus on individuals and not systems
- “they didn’t mean it”
- Gender vs child safeguarding
- Just get the policies in place
- “we’re not as bad as...”
- Toxic behaviours; “give me an example of that”
- “We are cause-driven” – enables a denial of the wrongs that can be done and the harms that can be caused
- Public visibility and distancing from individuals who are “inappropriate”
- Talk about individuals and not about the institutional nature of the problem
- “loss of the perpetrator”; individual focus takes us away from institutions and organisations
- Grains of truth in all and therefore a push to protect the organisation
- Loyalty and identity with organisations means push to protect the organisation and to locate issue within individuals who are not ‘like us’

## Disbelief

- Due to seniority, men do not believe policies or definitions apply to them
- Intent vs impact
- All went into our own spaces to ‘protect’
- We are good people
- Good people do bad things – still looking for ‘monsters’
- Shame at our power – as progressive people we don’t believe we can know or be the perpetrators
- Balance of power dynamics; men from the global South protected in different ways to men from the global North, but they are all protected
- Still not collecting or using strong information – weak information means harder to act
- Still not sharing information constructively; see it as competing with other organisations for reputations, so the incentive is to hide and cover up.

The counter-discourses, of belief and power, have gained some traction in the last year, although it was also noted that this has decreased as the public visibility and attention has decreased.

The concerns about public shaming and potential reputational damage were powerful motivators of change in the months following the initial revelations, and since the DFID Summit, the Charities Commission Report and subsequent changes to reporting guidelines, there has been a slowing of momentum to change. The lasting changes have been more operational than transformative; who is responsible for reporting to donors and the Charities Commission, what kind of information must be shared, how is this documented? While there have been more resources allocated to Safeguarding teams and to HR for working with these issues, and for responding to the increase in reports, these investments have been much more focussed on response than on prevention. This has enabled the use of ‘weasel-word’ language, and the promotion of ‘survivor-led’ responses, while at the same time obscuring the limited changes to the gendered systems of power, along with race inequalities and post-colonial dynamics, that create the conducive context for abuse in systemic ways.

In addition, the discussions noted the ways in which a focus on research, technology and international systems have deflected attention from the everyday, routine abuses that have the most impact on staff and on those engaging with programmes. Much of the abuses that have on-

going impact are not the kinds of issues that would be referred to Interpol, for example, although building these systems is a priority for DFID.

Concerns were also raised about the idea of 'aid passports'; while again these appear to offer a mechanism for accountability and diligence in recruiting, the reality is more operationally complex. These do not, necessarily, have the capacity to cover all the national staff and volunteers involved in aid work, and the logistical needs around keeping them updated and compliant may be unworkable. Perhaps most importantly, these mechanisms can only work if perpetrators have been reported, investigated and the complaint has been upheld. While the systems for these rely on catastrophic incidents, reports by individual survivors and investigations modelled on criminal justice systems, it is highly unlikely that a passporting system could or would act as a mechanism of preventing perpetrators moving between organisations. As such, this appears to be a proposal that is intended more for surface public reassurance than any desire for real change.

In terms of the counter-discourses, the year has seen more willingness to consider some of the issues underpinning the conducive context, and a shift in the space available for feminist analysis and inputs. These spaces have not garnered as much centrality in the processes of change as might have been hoped, but nevertheless, have enabled some of women's 'private' conversations and knowledge to claim weight in the public dialogue.

## Belief

- "This is about 'us', can't always be 'them' or 'other'"
- Mandatory attendance in training
- Frame it as making our work better
- Greater belief that it is an issue and that it is also a process
- Scared – bringing self-reflection – and fear from this
- Need a "culture survey"
- "The way to solve the problem is to change"
- We have to push as hard as we can; less change across the board but deeper change
- Reporting needs to go up before it goes down

## Power

- Risk is often placed on one person/ safeguarding focal point who is often junior and female
- Panel discussions that look at power dynamics in relationships
- Need to look closely at how everyone contributes to the creation of organisational culture and environment
- Dedicated days to workshop power, privilege, bias for CEOs and senior management
- Tick-box policy (foundations to consciousness)
- Forum to discuss policy/procedure (cross-section of organisation)
- Reclaiming 'victimhood'
- "suspicion is ok to report"
- Bystander training
- "Do we really know best?" Space to be critical in our organisations
- We have a moment of leverage and we need to use it
- Some shifts in power – results in fear by power and resistance
- We are not doing good at the fundamental level
- Looking at power through gender lens helps to look at structures of power
- We know perpetrators calibrate to the level they can get away with
- Need a focus on prevention and not on response
- Cross-sectoral collaboration – need to be pushing at the same time

## 4. Individual/Institutional Tensions

The tensions between individuals and institutions continue, reinforced and grounded in language that appears to be moving towards more progressive positions but is reality reinforcing organisational and institutional deflection of responsibility. Common language appearing includes;

### Survivor-led

This appears to be feminist language of empowerment and appears too to be creating policy and spaces where survivors have some control over what happens to them and the processes in response to their complaints. While this is a laudable aim, and while there may be good intentions behind it, there is a risk, well-known to feminists and those with expertise in Gender Based Violence (GBV) or Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) work, of organisations abdicating responsibility and effectively abandoning a survivor to try to advocate for herself through systems that she does not understand, in circumstances where the risks to her are enormous and on-going.

'Survivor-led' at an individual level is an intolerable burden to place on someone who has already been abused and who is still confronting power hierarchies, at the risk of losing their access to aid, to services or to programmes, and these risks increase with the fragility of the context. This is particularly pernicious when it becomes the mechanism through which organisations fail to take appropriate action, and has the potential to become another way of victim/ survivor- blaming. Using 'survivor-led' to mean organisations will only take the actions that survivors specifically ask them to take is a denial of institutional power and an abdication of the responsibility to act in the interests of survivors. It is a disingenuous mechanism of denying power inequalities and creating blocks and walls for survivors seeking redress.

'Survivor-led' at the institutional level has more potential for ethical and safe responses. If organisations are building systems and processes that are responsive to survivor needs, and which are grounded in feminist models of support and advocacy with survivors. However, doing this effectively means embracing feminist practitioner analysis and expertise, and fully resourcing the positions and teams that would support it. In this sense, 'survivor-led' would mean learning from the practice models of GBV services and supporting substantive systems and skills reform at country and HQ levels. The core feminist principles of 'survivor-led' work does not involve waiting for survivors to say what they would like to happen and then starting a response; working with survivors to determine with them what is safest for them, and in their best interests, is an intensive and demanding role, reliant on a deep understanding of risk, specialist communication skills and a strong familiarity with criminal justice systems, health systems and communities.

### Survivor-centred

This too is using the language of empowerment, and the language developed by feminists in their work with survivors. It too runs the risk of being appropriated and used in ways that abdicate organisational responsibility, and which reinforce the systemic inequalities of power. One of the less edifying consequences of this framing, and the appropriation of this language by those without a solid feminist analysis, is 'consultation' with survivors. The continued search for survivors to participate in educating decision-makers through the repeated recounting of their experiences is a mechanism of harm, stripping of dignity, and contra to all feminist principles of action. There is no healing or recovery value in telling a traumatic story over and over again in the hopes of increasing

the understanding of those responsible for generating policy and allocating resources. The process is extractive, potentially re-traumatising, and not in the interests of survivors. The claim that this will benefit abstract 'other survivors' is not a good enough reason to be expecting that survivors will participate in these kinds of consultations.

For organisations, these processes can become performative ways in which to publicly demonstrate that there has been a change in the way survivors are allowed to be visible, and to speak. However, while these are individual survivors, and the women participating in the consultations are not making decisions, or allocating resources, there is limited connection with a feminist-defined 'survivor-centred'.

Within this frame of reference, there are also unspoken and unacknowledged expectations of what a 'good' survivor look and sounds like; there is a recoil from women who are angry, women who are understood as demanding and women who are not compliant. These expectations intersect with racist stereotypes in ways that reinforce the abuse of women of colour; the 'angry Black woman' trope is one that is silently present in many conversations. The reinforcement of standards of victimhood is also not in the interests of survivors, whose emotional responses are likely to be complex, changing, and grounded in the trauma of their experience, and the secondary trauma of reporting. The refusal to hear women's anger, or to expect survivors to be demanding, reinforces the power of organisations to determine who will be supported and who will not.

Organisations and institutions who are not using the existing feminist data, research and knowledge to inform their practice, and over-riding this with a demand for survivor consultation are not working in the interests of survivors. They are still putting responsibility back onto individuals, and failing to acknowledge and be accountable for their own power and authority.

## **Response-focused**

While the attention to response is welcome, not least as the recognition that some of the public outrage related to how difficult it is for a survivor to report, there is also a recognition that in many ways, this in itself is a deflection.

The language of 'survivor-led' and 'survivor-centred' can for some organisations and institutions become the public front of caring language, signalling an intent to act compassionately and thoughtfully to change the systems that have been so devastating to survivors. This focus can also become the screen through which focus on perpetrators and on prevention are made invisible.

While there have been changes in how organisations respond, and most notably in terms of the resources allocated to case work in response, the overall picture is more uneven and less reliable. There has been a welcome increase in updated policies and procedures, more training for focal points and more focal points in offices. There has also been a shift in understanding of what constitutes a 'concern' to be reported and acted on, and a recognition of the complexities of decision-making through response and investigation. All these changes are important and there is hope that they will be sustained.

At the same time, there are concerns that these responses have been driven by compliance and by the need to be seen to be acting, rather than by any deep commitment to change. In addition, there



is an organisational reluctance to name the issues, admit to mistakes and to learn from these. There is also a recognition that risk management and responsibility for response has in some instances been pushed to partners and there is uneven commitment to supporting them and resourcing them to carry that risk. Outsourcing the issue may remove the sense of culpability from organisations, and pre-empt future reputational issues, but it does little to improve or change the conducive context, and less to providing adequate responses to survivors.

Lastly, discussions noted that the unbalanced attention to response and to survivors has become a mechanism through which perpetrators have become invisible in the discourse. There has been a reworking of the language so that sexual abuse and exploitation are things that 'happen' to women and girls, and are not things that a person perpetrates. The centrality of language around 'survivor-centred' and 'survivor-led' means that the focus is pulled away from the location of the unsafety, the power inequalities that underpin it, and how the conducive context is created.

There may be value in bringing a focus back to 'perpetrator-centred' analysis and thinking; encouraging organisations to use what we know about perpetrators - their behaviours, the ways in which they calibrate their abuse and how they manipulate and groom in their environments - to drive the spaces we create and the ways in which we work. Feminist data, research and analysis, as well as practice-based evidence, provides a strong base from which to work, using a focus on perpetrators as a way to make their spaces to act considerably smaller and less easy to navigate, with a focus on institutional practices over individual behaviours and responsibilities.

## 5. Prevention

*"Violence is redirected toward those who do not participate in violence, or those who try to challenge violence. Each time you say **no**, you have to be prepared for an increase in the intensity of the violence. And then: if you make a formal complaint about sexism or sexual harassment, if you transform **no** into testimony, that violence is amped up even more. A complaint is treated as damaging the reputation of individuals as well as organizations. When you become the cause of damage, they cause you damage. This is why we need to assemble a feminist support system to enable us to proceed; saying **no** requires having places to go. And this is what we mean when we ask for safe spaces: spaces in which the violence we are trying to redress is not directed right back at us. It is because it is not safe for many to say **no** that we need safe spaces." Sara Ahmed<sup>vi</sup>*

The focus on response, and on individual survivors, has meant that there has been less attention given to the kinds of contextual safeguarding outlined as a recommendation in the initial response paper. Prevention remains overwhelmingly framed within a context of codes of conduct, training and HR, rather than a gendered power analysis of context, with the recognition that this is the source of the unsafety. This is unsurprising in a landscape of marginalising the existing feminist expertise in organisations and resisting naming the core of the issue. An increase in safeguarding experts and focal points may act as a kind of prevention through their presence and through the legitimisation of conversations; however, without a commitment to contextual safeguarding, organisational action is still contingent on catastrophic incidents and a survivor report.

Questions also emerged about thresholds of unacceptable behaviour and the ways in which it can be minimised, alongside uncertainty about the kinds of 'evidence' that is necessary to make a report. While the increase in discussion, and greater understanding of the issue is welcome in

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<sup>vi</sup> <https://feministkilljoys.com/2017/11/10/complaint-as-diversity-work/>

organisations, without significant change in the ways that concerns are invited and documented, it is extremely difficult to reinforce preventative efforts.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

- **Complaints to be used as signals**

Understanding complaints as signs and as ways into understanding better the kinds of contexts that enable abuse would be a helpful way to use existing data and to bring a kind of contextual safeguarding lens to whole organisations. The documentation of complaints could become a core of organisational practice to indicate areas for attention, areas of weakness, and areas of best practice.

- **Complaints to be used as learning**

Using complaints as a keyhole into a wider understanding of both programming assessment and design as well as organisational systems and processes would allow meaningful learning and the potential for change. If organisations can move beyond documenting complaints for compliance and for donor reporting, there is the potential for a safer approach, and a challenge to the power inequalities beyond this moment of visibility.

- **Greater transparency and senior leadership accountability**

Regular internal reporting, regular surveys and on-going attention to the power relationships within organisations needs to become part of routine organisational processes and shared with staff groups for review and recommendations. Internal groups need to be in a position to hold organisations to account, and to push for implementation of the recommendations.

- **Continued advocacy and representation of feminist expertise in organisations**

Feminist women and GBV experts need to sustain cross-organisational advocacy and claim to expertise; there needs to be a continued pushback against the dynamic of marginalising feminist expertise inside organisations and the buying-in of external consultancies. While there needs to be recognition of the demands on feminist women in addition to their existing roles and responsibilities, there must not, simultaneously, be the downgrading of their voice and influence on organisational policy and practice.

Similarly, there needs to be sustained collective attention to the organisational resistance to 'feminist' at the same time as the language is appropriated and used to legitimate policies and practices that may or may not be aligned with feminist theory, analysis and praxis. This attention needs to come through shared network-wide advocacy to mitigate against the potential for women in organisations to be further marginalised.

- **Systematic and protected safe spaces**

While the entrenched inequalities and hierarchies are sustained and reproduced in organisations, it is critical to ensure that there are safe spaces not only for reporting and for discussing concerns, but also for the on-going conversations about how organisations are changing and responding.

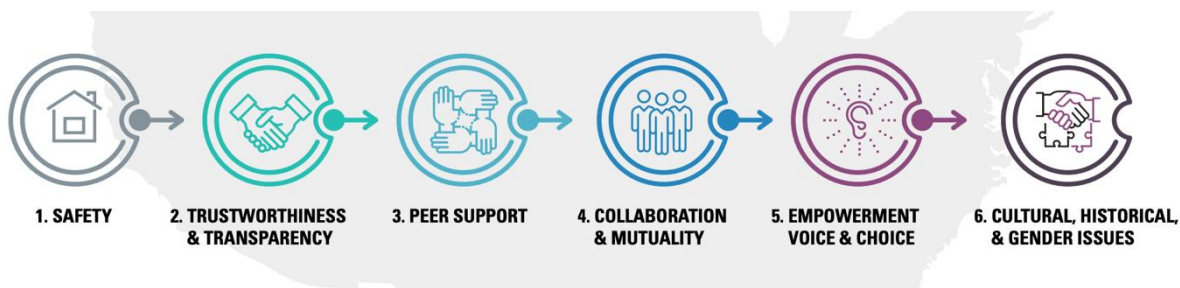
While mandatory reporting within organisations is a well-intentioned attempt to ensure that bystanders act on the information they have, whether this is their own observation or information shared by others, it is essential to recognise that reporting is a process, not an event, and that there are multiple layers to a 'report' or a complaint. Survivors may need time and space to talk through the implications of making a complaint before they formally act, and there must be space and

support to do this. Equally, space for women to share their private knowledge and to build their sense of safety before they make their knowledge public is critical in enabling the disclosure of valuable information.

In practice this means recognising that the process of reporting concerns is messy, uneven, and not predictable. It is also shaped by power and the intersections of powerlessness, position in an organisational hierarchy and situatedness within the inequalities of race, sexuality, nationality and class as well as gender. Safe spaces must be contextual, must be responsive to the sensitivities and hierarchies of specific places, and must be tightly confidential. Mandatory reporting needs to be designed in such a way that it allows for the processes of disclosure; this is well-known in feminist practice and there are models readily available.

All practice should work from a perspective of being trauma-informed.

### CDC 6 Guiding Principles to a Trauma-Informed Approach<sup>vii</sup>



Safety, in this model, includes physical, emotional and relational safety, and concerns itself with 'safe to' as well as 'safe from'. Time and autonomy are key in building safety and trust, as well as a commitment to confidentiality and to dignity. All policies should be reviewed against the trauma-informed models as a mechanism of quality control and sustaining standards.

Safety does not mean making women and girls into 'victims' and rescuing them; quality safe spaces are those developed in response to the recognition of the impact of gender - and other - inequalities, and a commitment to mechanisms to counter the impacts of these, including the isolation of those who are structurally disadvantaged. These safe spaces may also be spaces where gender and safeguarding practitioners can come together for secure reflection, support and learning; these may be remote and long-distance connections when offices or teams are small and confidentiality is not possible to sustain.

The limits of safety within an organisation need to be fully delineated and articulated; in line with feminist and trauma-informed best practice, organisations must not promise or suggest a confidentiality or security that they are not in a position to deliver. It is unlikely that organisations can provide a fully secure space since there are institutional requirements to be met, and external compliances that are non-negotiable. They should, therefore, be explicit about the limits of what is possible and transparent in managing the boundaries; this too helps to build safety and trust since staff and beneficiaries are then able to make their own decisions about how to proceed in their own best interests.

<sup>vii</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/infographics/6\\_principles\\_trauma\\_info.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/infographics/6_principles_trauma_info.htm)

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## Acknowledgements

This briefing was written by Heather Cole.

The Gender and Development Network (GADN) brings together expert NGOs, consultants, academics and individuals committed to working on gender, development and women's rights issues. Our vision is of a world where social justice and gender equality prevail and where all women and girls are able to realise their rights free from discrimination. Our goal is to ensure that international development policy and practice promotes gender equality and women's and girls' rights.

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## Annex – Slides from the workshop

### Doing the work while we're doing the work

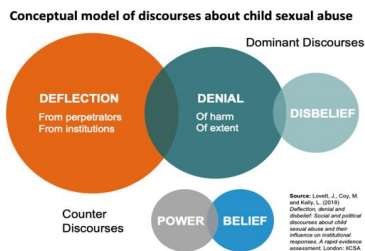
“Being a diversity practitioner means you are in effect appointed by an employer to transform the employer. It is a difficult position. One practitioner described the job as a “banging your head against the brick wall job.” Even if you are appointed by an institution to transform the institution, it does not mean the institution is willing to be transformed. In fact, many practitioners encounter resistance to their work; diversity is work because of that resistance.”

(Sara Ahmed; feminist killjoys 2017)

### Starting points; what do we know?

- We know that the nexus of gender inequality, resource power and racism makes abuse inevitable and endemic in humanitarian and development aid – in communities, in programmes, in country offices, in headquarters
- We know that this is not new, or a secret; this has been women’s ‘private’ knowledge for decades
- We know that there is resistance in organisations to real engagement with a feminist analysis of gendered power as the foundation of substantive change
- We know that policies, codes of conduct, training, and systems exist and that they are not used, not usable, and not useful in the current shape of organisations
- We know that while there is some acceptance of gendered language, those using it do not necessarily or always know what it means
- We know that there is ambivalence within organisations about the role of feminists and women’s rights activists in the organisation
- We know that organisations work from a position of ‘safe from’ and not from a position of ‘safe to’

### Conducive Contexts for Abuse



## Individual/ Institutional

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- **Survivor-led**; using the language of empowerment but actually putting all the responsibility onto an individual, and abdicating requirement for organisations to have functioning systems.
- **Survivor-centred**; still using the language of empowerment but also still putting the responsibility back to individuals. Demand for 'survivors' for 'consultation', which becomes a kind of damage in itself.
- **Response-focussed**; the perpetrators disappear in the discourse, and we are not using what we know about perpetrators to inform and shape the spaces we work in. The appealing language of 'survivor-centred' and 'survivor-led' means we are not focussing on where the unsafety is coming from and how it is created.

We are still focussed on individuals and not on systems, both in relation to survivors and in relation to perpetrators

## What has changed?

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### 1) Structures and language

### 2) "Prevention"

### 3) "Response"

## What has changed?

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### 1) Responsibility and accountability

### 2) Personal and political

### 3) Collectivity, solidarity and representation

## Strategic Inefficiency

Strategic inefficiency describes not just the slowness of an uptake but how that slowness is useful and purposeful.

“By using the term *strategic* I am suggesting that inefficiency is *beneficial* to an organisation whether or not it involves deliberation; inefficiency can be understood as a *means* of achieving an end. What is perceived to be beneficial to an organisation often evokes a “who,” and the “who” that is deemed beneficial might be the same “who” that decides what is beneficial to an organisation. I want to suggest that inefficiency is beneficial insofar as it supports an already existing hierarchy.”

Sara Ahmed

Where do we need to sustain our  
advocacy?

## Survivor-centred/ Survivor-led

GADNETWORK  
30<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2019

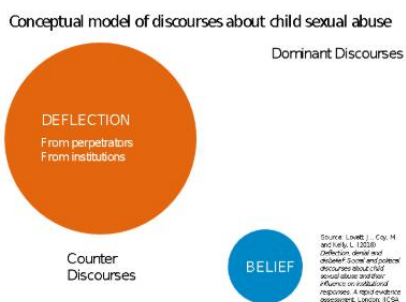
## Safe Spaces

Violence is redirected toward those who do not participate in violence, or those who try to challenge violence. Each time you say **no**, you have to be prepared for an increase in the intensity of the violence. And then: if you make a formal complaint about sexism or sexual harassment, if you transform **no** into testimony, that violence is amped up even more. A complaint is treated as damaging the reputation of individuals as well as organizations. When you become the cause of damage, they cause you damage.

This is why we need to assemble a feminist support system to enable us to proceed; saying **no** requires having places to go. And this is what we mean when we ask for safe spaces: spaces in which the violence we are trying to redress is not directed right back at us. It is because it is not safe for many to say **no** that we need safe spaces.

(Sara Ahmed 2017)

## Conducive Contexts for Abuse



## Individual / Institutional

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## Trauma-informed practice



CDC and National Center for Trauma-Informed Care

## What could safety look like?

“spaces in which the violence we are trying to redress is not directed right back at us. It is because it is not safe for many to say *no* that we need safe spaces.”

- what is a ‘safe space’ in an organisation?  
physically, emotionally, relationally
- what might safety look like in a process?
- what are the core conditions of safety and what are the boundaries of that in organisations?