

# CONVERSATIONS WITH RC/HCs: BEST PRACTICE SERIES



## Somalia RC/HC Mark Bowden on Addressing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN Staff and Related Personnel

Mark Bowden is the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, UNDP Resident Representative and Designated Official for Somalia. Previously, he was Chief of Policy at OCHA and co-chair of the IASC Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises.

**BEST PRACTICE:** In order to advance protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), Mark Bowden hosted a learning event for senior managers within the Somalia UNCT and NGO partners on the issue in November 2008 in his residence. The learning session offered the opportunity for managers to review their management responsibility and discuss challenges to addressing PSEA within Somalia. RC/HC Bowden also supported training for PSEA focal points. He shares his expertise and insight about the successes and challenges of addressing sexual exploitation and abuse in Somalia, as well as around the world.

### *What is Bowden's role?*

Mark Bowden has been a **champion on PSEA** since the problem first came to notice in 2002. He believes that the participation of the RC/HC in addressing SEA in field operations is imperative. According to him, the RC/HC's leadership position enables him/her to influence agencies to institute measures to address SEA, including ensuring the existence of agency PSEA focal points, codes of conduct, internal reporting mechanisms as well as mechanisms for reporting by the beneficiary community. The RC/HC also has a special role to play in facilitating **PSEA-related coordination** mechanisms and encouraging widespread participation by the UN and NGO community, especially in the country's PSEA network.

### *Why a learning event for senior managers?*

RC/HC Bowden feels that the **involvement of senior managers** at the HQ and country levels is crucial to ensure that internal (within agencies) and external (within beneficiary communities) mechanisms are established to both prevent and respond to SEA. He acknowledges that training is a key component of ensuring commitment at the field level. However, in Somalia as in many other countries, training efforts have focused primarily on agency focal points and beneficiaries. HC/RC Bowden considers that training

of senior management is equally important as a foundation for ensuring inter-agency commitment and collaboration. To this learning end, he **hosted a pilot half-day "learning event"** in his home in Nairobi in November 2008 for senior managers of the Somalia UNCT and NGO partners. UNDP on behalf of the *ECHA/ECPS UN and NGO Task Force on PSEA* designed and facilitated the session with instrumental **assistance from the IASC GenCap Adviser**.

### *What were the outcomes?*

The session exposed senior managers to factual information on the occurrence and impact of SEA perpetrated by UN and related personnel as well as the framework within which the UN System tries to address this issue. The session provided **the UN and NGO managers a common baseline of knowledge** from which to discuss key challenges specific to the Somalia context and best practices. Following from the learning session, RC/HC Bowden will continue to work with Somalia's inter-agency PSEA network and with senior managers to ensure that prevention and response to SEA remains on the agenda of the Somalia UNCT and NGO partners.

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## *What other efforts are underway?*

The Somalia PSEA network, which for the previous six months had been supported by an IASC GenCap Adviser, recently participated in a focal point training organized with support from the ECHA/ECPS Task Force. The Network also has already begun **training national counterparts** at the field level to monitor and report SEA and has developed a 2009 plan of action that includes efforts to scale up its field-based work.

## *Where should we go from here: key priorities?*

Despite successes in improving efforts to address SEA in the last 15 or so years, Bowden acknowledges that much remains to be done in order that SEA is “seen as everyone’s problem” and not just a problem that happens “over there.” The importance of the RC/HC leading PSEA work is a main priority for him. Others include:

- **INVOLVEMENT OF SENIOR MANAGERS. CONTINUAL PARTNERSHIPS WITH NGOS.** NGOs have more on-the-ground presence, making it essential for UN agencies to ensure linkages with NGOs in efforts to address SEA. Bowden suggests that one way to encourage UN/NGO partnership on PSEA is to undertake peer reviews – where agencies evaluate each others’ capacity to address SEA – which in turn creates a forum for exchanging challenges, tools and best practices.
- **RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES.** Bowden notes that not enough has been done to develop screening methods for personnel; such a method, if standardized across hiring agencies, might significantly reduce exploitation by repeat offenders.
- **INCREASE IN CORE FUNDING FOR MAINSTREAMING PSEA PROGRAMMES.** Bowden acknowledges a lack of funding as an obstacle to implementation of PSEA activities at the country level. He suggests that a possible option is to cost-share PSEA programming by pooling funds within the UNCT, NGO community and donor agencies. He also suggests that a cadre of PSEA specialists be trained at the international level for deployment to the field in

order to offset some of the costs associated with scaling up PSEA activities in country.

## *How did RC/HC Mark Bowden begin to address SEA?*

As former Chief of Policy for OCHA and current RC/HC Somalia, Mark Bowden has a long history of supporting efforts to eliminate sexual exploitation and abuse by UN and NGO staff and related personnel.

At OCHA, he took the lead in an effort to **establish policy guidelines to address SEA**. He also co-chaired the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises, which was the first inter-agency body to **establish guiding principles for addressing SEA**. In 2005, the IASC Task Force transitioned oversight to the Executive Committees on Humanitarian Affairs and Peace and Security (ECHA/ECPS) United Nations and Non-governmental Organization Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

## *What are some of the key successes in addressing SEA?*

In addition to the seminal resources developed under his co-leadership of the IASC PSEA Task Force, Bowden sees much progress in recent years to expand efforts to address SEA in humanitarian and development settings:

- The significant **contributions of Conduct and Discipline Units**, Department of Field Support,
- Development of good practices, i.e. **training materials for agencies and beneficiaries**, reporting guidelines, complaints procedures,
- **UN Victim Assistance Strategy**.

Bowden has observed that these efforts have in many cases “moved organizations **toward a culture of greater transparency and accountability to beneficiaries**.”

*For more information about hosting a learning event in your office or other PSEA efforts, contact [seatf@un.org](mailto:seatf@un.org) or go to [www.un.org/pseatactaskforce](http://www.un.org/pseatactaskforce).*

*For more information on the Gender Standby Capacity Project contact [gencap@un.org](mailto:gencap@un.org)*