

# CONVERSATIONS WITH RC/HCs: BEST PRACTICE SERIES



## Liberia RC/HC/DSRSG Jordan Ryan on Addressing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN Staff and Related Personnel

Jordan Ryan was appointed Deputy Special Representative for Recovery and Good Governance for Liberia in January 2006. He is also the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator. Mr. Ryan has had a long and distinguished career with the United Nations, most recently serving as the Resident Coordinator and the UNDP Resident Representative in Vietnam.

**BEST PRACTICE:** The Liberia UN Country Team under the leadership of Mr. Ryan realized that in order to strengthen the UN and NGO system-wide programme to address sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) a full-time dedicated coordinator under the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator would be needed. In June 2006, the UN Country Team (UNCT) pooled funds to hire a full-time expert on protection from SEA. In an interview in June 2008, Mr. Ryan explained this approach, as well as the successes and challenges that he has experienced in addressing sexual exploitation and abuse in Liberia.

### *How did he begin to address SEA?*

When Jordan Ryan came to Liberia, sexual exploitation and abuse was an issue from his first day on the job. There were cases of SEA, the issue had the attention of the mission and the media and the Secretary-General's Bulletin on SEA (ST/SGB/2003/13) was in force.

Ryan understood immediately that the issue **required his leadership and coordination**. Given that SEA can arise in any part of the UN presence in the country, from humanitarian to peacekeeping to development, he thought, his unique position of being **able to coordinate all parts of the UN** was essential. Not only did the Secretary-General's message of zero tolerance apply to all, but communities see the UN flag rather than agencies' flags, thereby requiring that the United Nations work in a coordinated manner. NGOs should also be included as affected communities do not always know the difference between UN and NGO workers.

SEA was especially serious given that *"the frontline of humanitarian assistance was still very much out there and, while the vast majority of UN staff was doing good work, all that could be eclipsed, eroded, erased by one incident of SEA."*

So he established a post of **Coordination Officer on Protection from SEA (PSEA) for the UN Country**

**Team** at an L-3 level and created two new bodies: a "Focal Point Network" and an "In-Country Network" on PSEA.

### *Why a PSEA Coordination Officer?*

In light of the always competing needs for funding, one may wonder whether it was necessary to establish a dedicated post on PSEA. Ryan noted that, **"we wanted consistent results in dealing with PSEA"** and it was clear that we were not going to get there just by dumping it on someone. If you are going to be serious about something, you ought to be serious about it."

Ryan also highlighted the importance of placing the post **in the RC/HC's office**. **"We needed someone who wasn't an agency person** hounding all the other agencies. So we lifted it up to the RC/HC level. This gave me a direct line to ensure that everyone working in the country was doing something on it. It also enabled me to use any resources that UNMIL might have to support the UNCT."

So, on behalf of the RC/HC, the Coordination Officer brings together UN agencies and NGOs to implement and oversee implementation of the Secretary-General's Bulletin and zero-tolerance policy. The Coordination Officer works very closely with the mission (UNMIL), whose PSEA efforts are led by its Conduct and Discipline Unit.

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## *How did Ryan fund the post?*

"No UN agency has a budget line [for this]," he explained. "It's the typical UN thing that we are **told to do something but are not given the money to do it.**" Instead, he mobilized resources - pooled funds from within the UNCT and obtained direct donor funding. UNHCR and WFP were the major contributors (as well as some others), given the number of people they had in the field. They viewed themselves as being quite vulnerable to SEA.

However, UNHCR and WFP are now winding down their programmes and therefore, Jordan noted, it is not likely that this funding will continue at the same level. He is now looking to alternatives – such as UN Volunteers (UNVs) and national staff – to try to reduce the overall cost and to improve the ability of national authorities to remain engaged.

## *What coordination mechanisms are needed for PSEA?*

Ryan formed two bodies, one for internal UN efforts and the other for the efforts of the larger aid community. The **Focal Point Network** contains representation from every UN agency and works to facilitate implementation of the aspects of the Secretary-General's Bulletin that are **internal to the United Nations**. The Network meets regularly and addresses awareness raising for staff, SEA allegations, incorporation of SEA-related language into contracts, training of PSEA focal points and more. It also establishes PSEA indicators and measures the progress of each agency against them.

The **In-Country Network (ICN)**, on the other hand, includes a larger community – UN agencies and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and enjoys government participation at the working group level. It addresses SEA by personnel working not only for the United Nations and its partners, but also for INGOs as well as other humanitarian assistance workers. Chaired by Ryan, the **ICN is the primary coordination and oversight body concerning PSEA in the country**. It has three working groups – awareness, coordination and monitoring and reporting – to ensure prevention and response activities. The awareness working group,

for example, undertook a substantial national awareness-raising campaign.

The Coordination Officer acts as secretariat to both bodies and chairs the ICN working groups.

## *What are the successes and lessons learned?*

Ryan counts as a success the linkages that have been created between the UNCT and the UN mission. There is now a great deal of information sharing and joint training on PSEA between UNMIL and the UNCT Coordination Officer. "Often," he notes, **"the mission has real capacity to do training and that has led to a greater consistency of training of UN staff and implementing partners.** Those of us who are lucky to have a mission to work with [can] bring the mission talents together with the country team."

Ryan also finds it important to have **a process that is flexible enough to adapt to the changing situation**. For example, one of the working groups of the In-Country Network has been subsumed under a government group – the National GBV Taskforce, which is chaired by the Ministry of Gender and Development – thereby lifting the issue of SEA to a national concern. It was the government, in fact, that spearheaded the launch of the national SEA awareness-raising campaign.

Finally, he noted that PSEA is tied to women's empowerment and gender equality. It cannot be addressed alone in a vacuum. **"We thought it needed special attention,"** but SEA links in many ways to the broader gender equality agenda.

*UPDATE: Subsequent to this interview, a United Nations Volunteer was hired to serve as the PSEA Coordination Officer for Liberia. Selection of a UNV assisted to reduce the cost of the post.*

*For more information on the Liberia model and for PSEA tools, contact [seatf@un.org](mailto:seatf@un.org) or go to [www.un.org/pseataskforce/tools.shtml](http://www.un.org/pseataskforce/tools.shtml)*

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