

Prevention of Sexual Harassment and
Exploitation at Workplace: Experiences of CARE
Sierra Leone



Prepared by
Vasuda Arora
Independent Consultant

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I. Introduction

Background

Sierra Leone is situated along the west coast of Africa. It is bounded on the northwest, north and northeast by the Republic of Guinea and by Liberia to the south and east, with 250 km of shared national boundary. A former British colony, Sierra Leone gained independence in 1961, as a parliamentary democracy. A diverse cultural heritage includes 16 principal tribes, and the two major religions are Islam and Christianity. The country is extremely tolerant of tribal and religious differences. Though rich in diamond, mineral and agricultural resources, development has been hindered by public corruption, and a brutal and destructive war that raged from 1991 to 2001. Until recently site of one of the largest UN peacekeeping missions in history, Sierra Leone is slowly recovering from the war, and actively pursuing reconstruction and development endeavours.

CARE has been working in Sierra Leone since October 1961 and has established a good relationship with Sierra Leone government and non-government institutions. It has also built up a great reputation with the general public for providing much needed assistance. CARE currently employs over 277 staff (see table 1 for detailed break-up). CARE has its headquarters in Freetown, 3 up-country offices in the towns of Bo, Makeni, and Kabala and projects spreading into the Districts of Moyamba, Kenema, Koinadugu, Bombali, Bo, Tonkolili, and other parts of the country's interior. There are 22 SMT members (10 in the HQ and 12 across the three sub-offices).

LOCATION	Male	Female	Total
Freetown Total	55	24	84
Bo Total	65	18	83
Makeni Total	33	5	38
Kabala Total	58	14	72
Country Office	211	61	277

Table 1

Addressing Sexual Harassment/ Exploitation at Workplace

CARE Sierra Leone's efforts to address Sexual Exploitation/Abuse at Workplace began in 2002 as a response to a report published by UNHCR and Save the Children-UK, indicating occurrence of sexual exploitation of refugee women and children by humanitarian agency workers in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea (all being neighbouring countries). Since then, CARE Sierra Leone has made significant progress in advancing work on prevention and response to sexual exploitation. They have succeeded in establishing the sexual harassment policy and creating awareness around it, amongst the staff as well as the project participants. Hence, it was felt that documenting CARE Sierra Leone's success story could serve as an inspiring model for those COs still struggling to move beyond developing and establishing policies and creating some level of staff awareness around the issue.

The CARE Sierra Leone program to advance work on sexual exploitation amongst project participants is called 'PRESHEP' (Prevention and Response to Sexual Harassment and Exploitation of Project Participants). Led by Saidu Amara; Change Training Co-coordinator and set up and supervised by Nick Webber (Country Director) and David Sombie (Deputy ACD) it comprised of Kadijah Koroma (Focal point person in Freetown) and one focal point person in each sub-office namely Konima Sheriff (Bo), Peter Karimu (Makeni) and Christiana Wilson (Kabala). Further, the work in communities was implemented by the designated field staff, already involved in advancing gender issues in their project activities. Their nomination was done in consultation with their respective supervisors and Project Managers/Unit Heads.

The work done in last three years broadly marks the first phase of CARE Sierra Leone's action plan to effectively prevent and respond to sexual harassment/exploitation of staff and program participants. This would be followed by next phase of implementation aimed at creating awareness amongst the partners.

II. Documentation Process

This report is a result of a week-long visit to CARE Sierra Leone (June 20-June 27, 2005) to document the completion of its first phase of work to address the issue of sexual harassment /exploitation in the workplace. The report presents the voices of various program stakeholders; their experiences, concerns and recommendations to capture the successes and challenges emerging out of the activities carried out in the country office in last three years.



Information was collected through several meetings and discussions with the following:

- Staff in Bo and Kabala sub-offices
- Members of SMT at Freetown
- A Project Manager in the Makeni sub-office
- GED point persons (one each) in Bo and Kabala sub-offices respectively
- Two of the GED taskforce members Project participants in selected communities across the three sub-offices.
- Project participants in selected communities across the three sub-offices. Meetings with project participants were held in the following nine villages:
 - i. Tiana Camp (Moyamba District in the South)
 - ii. Tobanda Camp (Kenema District in the East)
 - iii. Kornia (Kenema District in the East)
 - iv. Petifu Mayewa (Tonkolili District in the North)
 - v. Makinth (Tonkolili District in the North)
 - vi. Mayawlaw (Bombali District in the North)
 - vii. Koromasilaya (Koinadugu District in the North)
 - viii. Manah (Koinadudgu District in the North)
 - ix. Sambangba (Koinadugu District in the North)

Since the researcher was not familiar with Krio (the official language of Sierra Leone) or other languages spoken in Sierra Leone, Amara Saidu (Change Training Co-ordinator) volunteered to be the interpreter.

Limitations of Study

Reflecting back, one week is too short a time-period to capture the extensive work done in last three years. The visit had been planned in a way that required us to go to three villages in a day. Due to paucity of time it was not possible to hold separate discussions with men and women in a few villages. Surely this is a limitation. Also, being with CARE workers could not provide a completely neutral space for discussion on such a sensitive issue, considering it was a CARE's initiative we were talking about. Therefore, to some extent objectivity may have got lost both in terms of raising questions and the way program participants responded.

Also, even though advance appointments had been made and meeting confirmation received by CARE, meeting could not be held with staff of Talking Drums Studio, who collaborated with CARE for the translation of the CoC in local languages and making copies of the cassettes for CARE to relay it on radio and play it in communities.

III. Overview of Initiatives to address Sexual Harassment and Exploitation

What follows is an overview of activities carried out by CARE Sierra Leone, between February 2002 and June 2005, to address the issue of sexual harassment and exploitation of staff and program participants.

February 2002–August 2004

- Contextualizing the CARE USA policy on discrimination, harassment and exploitation to suit the country context in a participatory manner through input seeking workshops and draft policy reviews.
- Development of Code of Conduct (CoC) in collaboration with UNHCR and other NGOs. It lays out the standards of accountability to the community and beneficiaries for all humanitarian and development workers in Sierra Leone.
- Conducting orientation workshops on policy and CoC amongst staff. At the end of the workshops, all staff signed the policy, becoming obliged to adhere to it. CoC formed an integral part of the policy.
- Integration of RBA (Rights-Based Approach) to programming.
- Review of recruitment and contracting procedures to ensure gender balance. This led to a significant increase in female staff implementing programs in communities.
- Development of 'Guidelines to Prevent Commodity Losses and Malpractices at the End Use' and adoption of Fraudulency Policy.

Till this stage policy dissemination was restricted only to staff and did not extend to the project participants. Later, it was realized that to achieve success in any of the CARE Sierra Leone programs in terms of program ownership and sustainability, community participation was pertinent. Fear of sexual exploitation by staff as they work in the communities was one of the potential hurdles in achieving this. Therefore, in September 2004, the project named PRESHEP¹ (Prevention of Sexual Harassment and Exploitation of Project Participants) was initiated with support from CARE USA, to

¹ For detailed information on implementation design and planning of the first phase of PRESHEP program read the '*Final Project Implementation Report*', prepared by CARE Sierra Leone, which can be made available by Madhuri Narayanan (Senior GED Advisor) on request.

demonstrate CARE Sierra Leone's strong commitment to eradicating all forms of sexual exploitation of communities by its staff and partners.

Implementation of PRESHEP: Phase I (August 2004-June 2005)

The project was implemented in 283 host communities and 4 refugee camps hosting Liberian refugees. These 287 communities are mainly in the northern and southern parts of Sierra Leone, including 11 communities in the eastern province. An overview of activities carried out is given below:

- Translating the CoC into eight local languages and recording it on tapes. This translation and recording was done in collaboration with Talking Drums Studio-Search for Common Grounds (a reputed organization that has professional translators).
- Creating awareness amongst staff, on GED and sexual exploitation, CARE Sierra Leone policy on harassment and exploitation and the CoC. This was done through several awareness workshops and trainings held across all levels.
- Sharing the PRESHEP implementation plan with Program Managers and field staff.
- Holding initial discussions with communities about the CoC and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. During these meetings, two community SEA focal persons (a male and a female) were identified in each village and their monitoring and reporting roles were developed together in a participatory manner. These focal persons are called as called 'community monitors'.
- Broadcasting the recorded tapes in the languages appropriate for the community through selected community radio stations.
- Laminating and distributing several copies of the CoC for display in communities.
- Developing a pictorial aid in the form of a poster depicting a classic situation of sexual exploitation. This was designed by a professional health education artist, approved by the Ministry of Health and Sanitation. A draft poster was pre-tested in some communities before finalizing it.
- Familiarizing the staff with the developed training material and holding discussions around their expected contribution and involvement in carrying forward the activities to implement the project in communities.
- Holding awareness meetings in communities. This was done by staff in their respective communities, with the help of the poster, recorded tapes and the laminated CoC. Field staff also informed the community members about the fixed days and time-slots when the radio broadcast of the recorded tapes would happen.
- Nominating a focal person in each sub-office to co-ordinate the implementation of PRESHEP as a link between field staff and HQ.

Future Plans

- Review implementation of phase I of PRESHEP
- Expand Community knowledge base
- Create awareness amongst partners

IV. Voices of CARE Staff

A. Concerns and Recommendations

"Female staff and community members are likely to misuse the policy to malign male staff. How do we prevent this?"

"There are instances when women in the community willingly offer sexual services and may express interest in CARE staff. Would this constitute sexual exploitation?"

"Community members see CARE workers as potential husbands for their daughters. Such things are also being prohibited due to the policy which is really unfortunate"

"The current policy does not protect female staff against exploitation by powerful male community members."

- One apprehension regarding the policy amongst many male staff was its potential misuse by either the female staff or community members. While some staff said they had felt this way initially, when the policy was first introduced, there were some male staff who remain skeptical about the policy implications even now. A related concern was that the policy negatively affects interpersonal relations between male and female co-workers.
- Issue of consensual romantic and/or sexual relationship between CARE workers and community members was raised by a few male staff members as they did not view it as sexual exploitation and prohibition of such alliances was seen as an imposition they did not agree with.
- Discussing the role of appointed community monitors a few staff expressed apprehension that the community monitors may misuse the power they enjoyed. There was a likelihood of their teaming up with a corrupt CARE worker or a powerful community member and be a party to any form of exploitation. To prevent any such potential abuse of power, it was recommended to appoint community monitors for a specific time-period.
- A few female staff shared that there have been some uncomfortable situations where they have felt threatened in the presence of powerful men like paramount chief in the community. Possibility of female staff being harassed in the community is a reality and till now they have been dealing with such instances at an individual level. There is a strong need to address this issue in the policy.
- Responding to some of the concerns a few staff members reiterated the importance of reading and understanding the policy. They urged their colleagues to revisit the policy and seek clarifications to understand issues surrounding the raised concerns.

B. Challenges in Implementation

"How do we investigate into cases in the absence of any evidence? Who do we believe and what will be the action against the guilty?"

"At our level we have structures in place and we have created awareness amongst the project participants but the real challenge is investigation into these incidents. Are we prepared to deal with that?"

"In conservative Muslim communities it is difficult to talk about issues around sex and sexuality.

- While staff could create basic awareness around sexual exploitation and inform the communities of their rights, more clarity was required by some staff about the established investigation mechanisms. There were concerns about how a reported incident shall be investigated and by whom. There was also lack of information on possible outcomes of investigations.
- Other organizations give monetary allowance or other incentives to community members for taking the lead in doing such awareness work. CARE is one of the few organizations that does not provide such benefits. Therefore, there is an inevitable comparison by the community members selected for creating awareness on sexual exploitation. Field staff found it difficult to justify this difference in CARE approach. Staff felt that this issue, if left unaddressed, is likely to affect the motivation level of community monitors.
- It is a challenge to break the cultural silence around issues related to sex and sexuality in certain conservative communities. A staff member shared a remark made by a female community member to substantiate this concern, *"If I knew you will talk about sex I wouldn't have come. How can I sit with my mother-in-law and talk about such things?"*

V. Voices of Management: Concerns

"Women should not wait till things reach a saturation point and they have to make a complaint about sexual exploitation. They should just report at the first instance."

"How do we deal with cases of women harassing men by the way they dress, wearing revealing clothes. Isn't that harassment?"

"When a woman makes a complaint it is taken for granted that she is saying the truth. This is not always true. We need to address these issues."

"It is easy to investigate into cases where the perpetrator has a past history of abuse. What about cases where there is little evidence or no witnesses?"

SMT members reiterated the need for awareness work in communities in order to prevent sexual exploitation. However, there were many reservations about policy implementation regarding cases of sexual exploitation between CARE staff. As can be seen from the quotes above, there were concerns about misuse of policy by female staff, questions about investigation procedures and apprehensions that males may be on the receiving end. Myths about sexual exploitation prevailed in the minds of some of the SMT members.

VI. Voices of Project Participants

A. Concerns and Recommendations

"Poverty forces young women to sleep with men to earn money"

"There are many cases of rape or teenage pregnancy within the community."

"Sub-office is very far from here and we do not have the money to travel all the way there to report incidents."

- ☑ Community members expressed the need for more sustained livelihood opportunities in order to address the problem of sexual exploitation of women. This concern was consistent among community members across all refugee camps visited. They viewed poverty as the root cause of women's vulnerability to sexual exploitation. They cited examples of how due to limited employment opportunities and extreme poverty, women resort to offering sexual services in order to meet their survival needs.
- ☑ In most villages concerns were raised around prevention of early sexual activities between teenaged boys and girls and its consequences in terms of unwanted pregnancy. In some villages youth were educated or advised by the elders about consequences of such activities. However, a need was expressed to find other ways of preventing early sexual activities.
- ☑ There were concerns regarding timely reporting of incidents that require travelling to the sub-office. Project participants shared that it would be difficult to cover long distances to make complaints due to lack of money or adequate transportation system.
- ☑ In few villages community members wanted to know expected outcomes of investigation if the accused was found guilty. They wished to gain more clarity on how the investigation shall take place and what kind of punishment would be given to the guilty. When asked for their opinion about the kind of punishment they wanted for the accused, they suggested termination or/and imprisonment.



B. Challenges in Implementation faced by Community Monitors

"We give information about the poster and CoC and tell them we will maintain confidentiality and assure them that proper investigation shall be done if a case is reported to us."

"We sensitize parents and encourage them to send children to school to avoid early marriage. We explain consequences of premarital sexual activities and give information on HIV/AIDS to youth to address the problem of teenage pregnancies."

"There are situations in which due to poverty women voluntarily offer sexual services or parents ask their teenaged daughters to "look attractive and sexy" and provide sexual services to NGO workers in exchange of monetary or other benefits."

- In a few villages the community monitors and members of the Women Action Group shared that it was a challenge to prevent sexual exploitation in situations where the women willingly offered sexual services in exchange for money. They did not consider this as exploitation. They complained only when deserted by the men in question.
- In almost all villages community monitors shared that it was difficult for them to conduct awareness workshops in a sustained manner. While a few expressed the need for T-shirts, caps and umbrellas to work more efficiently, some asked for monetary incentives.

VII. Summary of Findings

A. Achievements

"With different NGOs coming here, there were cases of harassment, HIV/AIDS and trafficking. There has been decrease in cases of sexual exploitation in last two years due to awareness around issues related to human rights and HIV/AIDS. There was darkness but with CARE's arrival there is enlightenment".

"Earlier husbands were uncomfortable and suspicious about NGO workers working or talking with their wives, but now they no longer fear their wives would have a sexual relationship with the NGO workers."

"With this information we are more aware about our rights and feel secure about safety of our women in the presence of CARE staff and other NGO workers."

"A teacher accused of sexually abusing a 13 years old girl was terminated once found guilty by the investigation team, set up with the help of the CARE field staff."

"The office knows they did not send the CARE staff in their communities to harass their wives so anyone found doing so would be strictly dealt with."

"If my husband and chief refuse to take the matter (incident of sexual exploitation) further, there is lack of money or means to go to the sub-office alone, I would note the bike no. of the perpetrator and give it to his supervisor whenever he visits the village."

"If a female staff faces harassment from the town chief or any other powerful member of the community, elders of the community shall intervene and ensure that such behaviour is prevented. If the behaviour still doesn't stop we would depose the town chief however influential and powerful he may be"

- ☑ Silence around the issue of sexual exploitation has been broken as people talked about it openly. In some villages it was heartening to see women talk about their rights and the need to speak out against sexual exploitation, even in the presence of men.

- ☑ Project participants have faith in the systems established by CARE to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation. Community members shared instances wherein they were fooled by the 'white men' NGO workers and robbed off their money. However, they trust CARE because of their constant and sustained presence and good work.
- ☑ There is a general feeling of empowerment amongst the project participants with this new information. There is an increase in confidence about dealing with such incidents if they occur and a general sense of psychological safety.
- ☑ An unintended achievement is that in some villages program participants are using the awareness around sexual exploitation to address and deal with the within community cases of sexual exploitation and issues like unwanted pregnancies and early sexual activities amongst teenaged boys and girls. Similarly, they are confident about using this information to deal with any probable sexual exploitation cases involving other NGO workers.
- ☑ The community shared that the way CARE has taken on the responsibility of ensuring its staff does not exploit the community members in any way, they would also ensure CARE staff's safety.
- ☑ The community members could not articulate the contents of the CoC correctly and adequately and it may have to be played and discussed more. However, what is important is that they had a broad understanding about the information being disseminated through posters, cassette and the laminated CoC as a way of saying that sexual exploitation of community members by CARE workers is prohibited and shall not be tolerated.

Responding to Sexual Harassment: A Success Story

In December 2002, a female staff made a complaint of sexual harassment against a senior male staff. A team was established as per the sexual harassment/exploitation policy to investigate these allegations. The investigation team that was appointed by the Country Director was comprised of the Human Resources Administrator and a CARE Consultant. The accused was first informed verbally of the allegation followed by an official letter of inquiry from the then Country Director.

Key informant discussions were held with at least 17 people (five male and twelve female). Three of them were those mentioned in the complainant's letter and others were selected by the team based on what was learned in these rolling interviews and partly selected completely at random. Both the complainant and the defendant were interviewed. It was done with the utmost confidentiality that it deserved.

An inquiry report was submitted to the Country Director with detailed findings of discussions held with key informants. This was followed by an interview with the accused in February 2003. This was done as a follow-up to his reply to a letter of inquiry sent to him (dated December 7, 2002 and February 12th 2003) into the allegations of sexual harassment & exploitation.

During this interview, he denied all allegations that he made unwelcome (persistent) sexual suggestive remarks, touched the complainant in a sexual way and offered assistance. He claimed that it was a conspiracy to get rid of him because he is perceived as a stooge of management. However, after further questioning the accused was not able to provide specific and convincing information to support his conspiracy claim.

Given the seniority level of the accused, the organization's reliance on his good judgment and integrity, and the leadership role he was playing, his failure to handle questions directly and specifically was very disappointing and disconcerting. That brought into question his transparency and honesty. The accused relied on his relationship with the CD and others and his past performance as the main judge of his integrity, which did not provide the needed specifics to refute the many statements from staff, supporting the sexual harassment allegations.

A legal Advisor was consulted before making a final decision. Subsequently the accused was asked to resign after being given severance pay and any other money due him by the organization.

B. Points for reflection

Some quotes from the community members;

"Rape is an attack on family honour"

"Rape is a problem because of the way women dress"

"If they (women) refuse sexual advances and look at the man in a furious way, he will back off, but often women encourage such sexual advances. Rape occurs only in very few cases where force is used by the man."

"If we report an incident of sexual exploitation to our husbands, they may accuse us of having an affair with the CARE worker or of provoking him. So we would rather report it to an elder"

- In all villages visited, project participants maintained that sexual exploitation by CARE workers had never occurred and was not even a possibility. However, men and women made references to having experienced some level of insecurity, threat perception or fear around potential harassment by NGO workers. Given the inherent power inequality between CARE workers and project participants, and the fact that interviews were conducted in the presence of CARE staff, it cannot be assumed that all community members feel absolutely safe and empowered still. Hence, there is a need to consistently demonstrate CARE's commitment to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, through actions and discussions.
- Sexual exploitation is mainly understood in terms of rape in almost all communities. Though there were a few references to 'breast touching' and 'persistent requests for sex from men', most of the discussions and shared examples of sexual exploitation within community revolved around rape cases. This perception is likely to prevent other forms of sexual harassment, exploitation and/or abuse to be taken seriously in terms of reporting and seeking redress.
- Discussion on sexual exploitation and likelihood of its occurrence was expressed more openly in refugee camps than in host communities. Men and Women frankly cited examples of men 'lending' their wives/companions for sexual services or women themselves agreeing to do so for monetary gains. While it is a positive sign that people are ready to talk about it, the challenge is to educate and empower communities to see how this constituted sexual exploitation. In order to prevent such occurrences in future it is important to understand and address the underlying causes of sexual exploitation of this kind where apparently there is 'consent' but in reality it may not be the case.
- In a few villages people were resistant to talk about sexual exploitation by CARE workers or other NGO workers. Since they did not view it as a possibility they were closed about discussion on even hypothetical cases. When asked about any other problems faced by women or sources of conflict in the community they spoke about wife-beating, *palaver* (adultery), polygamy and rape. A brief discussion around these forms of gender-based violence revealed that men were clearly the bosses and women had little say in any kind of decision-making. This points to the importance of linking sexual exploitation work to other forms of gender-based violence. Until larger issues of gender discrimination, poor status of women and gender inequality are addressed it is difficult to empower women to report cases of sexual exploitation by CARE workers.
- Myths around rape were reflected in comments made by community members about why rape happens and women's responsibility in protecting themselves by watching their behaviour and dress. These mindsets are deep-rooted and have a direct impact on how men respond to cases of sexual exploitation. Therefore, continued efforts need to be made by field staff to challenge and break these myths.
- There is no defined reporting mechanism in the minds of the community members. Different people cited different options like; telling the husband, an elder in the community, the chairlady, the town chief, a member of Women Action Group, going to the sub-office, informing the field staff and so on. It is important to streamline the reporting process in a way that ensures all incidents are reported immediately and taken up for adequate investigation by the person who is informed.

VIII. Lessons Learnt

- ☑ Role of supportive leadership and detailed planning and design is crucial in effective implementation of such work. A step-wise approach as employed by CARE Sierra Leone, of sensitizing staff first and then creating awareness amongst project participants has been effective and more likely to have a long-lasting impact.
- ☑ Use of creative and innovative strategies like role-plays enhances communication around such sensitive topics and helps break the silence around it. Translation of the CoC in local languages was a painstaking but worthwhile effort ensuring greater and more effective outreach. It is hugely welcomed and deeply appreciated by the project participants and facilitates the process of empowerment.
- ☑ Project participants' level of understanding, extent of clarity about the CoC and confidence in the established systems is largely dependent on how aware, convinced and committed the field workers doing the trainings are.
- ☑ The problem of sexual exploitation cannot be separated from other forms of gender-based violence and/or gender discrimination such as wife-beating, practice of bride-price, child-marriage, polygamy, child abuse, et. al that exist within communities. These need to be addressed simultaneously in order to fully empower women and ensure effective prevention of sexual exploitation.
- ☑ Mindsets and stereotypes like, *"women invite sexual harassment by dressing provocatively"* or *"women shall misuse the policy and use it against men"*, are difficult to change, but not impossible. These are also used as an excuse to justify unwanted sexual behaviour. Frequent and sustained dialogue with all stakeholders is required to challenge this kind of thinking.
- ☑ Capacity building of staff needs to be an integral part of any program that aims to break the silence and address issues such as sexual exploitation. Field staff holds periodic discussions with the community members to address their concerns and ensure creation of a safe space for reporting of any incidents of sexual exploitation.
- ☑ Involvement and active participation of community members in creating awareness is integral to the success of such initiatives. Community monitors are effectively using role-plays to create awareness in the community. In one of the villages a role-play was presented depicting an incident of sexual exploitation, how it is reported to CARE staff by some of the community members and how the accused worker is terminated from CARE on being found guilty after investigation.
- ☑ Integration of the Rights Based Approach (RBA) in programming, holding periodic discussions and creating awareness around issues related to human rights, maternal and child health, HIV/AIDS and so on, helped create an environment conducive for discussing sensitive issues related to sex and sexual exploitation. Consequently, both project participants as well as field staff could easily overcome their hesitation, resistance and awkwardness common to discussing sex and sexuality related topics in such communities. In communities where these issues hadn't been discussed were found to be reserved and uncomfortable talking about such issues in a large meeting.



- ☑ Engaging field staff in holding awareness discussions on the issue of sexual exploitation amongst community members has manifold benefits rather than getting it done by an HQ staff or a consultant. The rapport field staff share with the community members is far greater, leading to better understanding of the community context. Moreover, familiarity with field staff makes it easier for program participants to share their views and pose questions more comfortably.

IX. Recommendations

A few observations and suggestions listed below might be useful to CARE Sierra Leone as they review their implementation process and plan ahead. It may also serve as a guide to COs planning similar initiatives, in terms of being better prepared to meet certain challenges:

- ☑ To enhance understanding about various aspects of sexual exploitation, issues of power inequality, gender-based violence and patriarchy need to be integrated into future awareness-raising discussions. It needs to be understood that while poverty may seem to compel a woman to resort to offering sexual services to powerful men (be it NGO workers or community members) it is not an underlying cause of sexual exploitation.
- ☑ To ensure a more effective implementation of the 'PRESHEP' program, it is essential to hold periodic discussions with field staff; to discuss challenges faced by them, appreciate their efforts and include them in the planning of future steps.
- ☑ For effective implementation of the policy there is a strong need to address certain stereotypical perceptions amongst staff like, *'women provoke sexual harassment by the way they dress and behave'* or apprehensions like *'female staff and project participants could misuse the policy to malign male staff and CARE staff respectively'*. This needs to be done through follow-up workshops and informal discussions as some of these are too deep-rooted to alter in just one workshop.
- ☑ To promote a holistic understanding about sexual exploitation, trainings and discussions should also include mental health aspects of sexual exploitation.
- ☑ To avoid non-adherence to the policy on account of cultural differences it is important to discuss any apparent differences between the policy contents and cultural norms. As an SMT member shared, *"Age at which children get sexually active is 10-13 years. We need to contextualize our work within this reality. There are cultural differences we cannot overlook."* Similarly, practices like polygamy, child marriage maybe a norm in a community but is viewed as human rights violation as per international standard. More discussions are required to adequately deal with this challenge.
- ☑ To encourage community members to report incidents of sexual exploitation and ensure speedy and adequate response to reported incidents, reporting procedures, investigation mechanisms and penalty related issues need to be discussed and clarified at length amongst staff, details included in the policy and subsequently explained to the community.
- ☑ To promote greater accountability towards adherence to the policy and ensure effective and sustained implementation of anti-sexual harassment/exploitation work monitoring and evaluation mechanisms need to be clarified and articulated.

X. Conclusion

CARE Sierra Leone is an encouraging example of how the prevalent problem of sexual exploitation can be effectively addressed and prevented through concerted efforts. It was heartening to see how the carefully thought out and well-planned implementation strategy actually translated into action.

Once the next stage of implementation of PRESHEP commences, it will be important to simultaneously consolidate and strengthen the work accomplished in the first phase. To ensure its sustained progress it would be useful to conduct follow-up workshops and review meetings. CARE Sierra Leone shall require and benefit from support given by global CARE in terms of resources, technical expertise, sharing of best practices in other CARE Country Offices or International NGOs.

It is a big task to implement the project in all CARE operational communities. It therefore required supportive leadership and committed staff to champion the process. For CARE Sierra Leone to continue this work in communities and with program implementing partners, as the next target, additional resources; both human and financial, need to be set aside.

The real achievement of the program can be assessed only if program participants continue to have the faith and confidence they expressed during the visit and actually report incidents if they do occur. The challenge is to continue efforts towards prevention of any such incidents and be able to adequately respond to any reported cases of sexual harassment or exploitation.