dóchas

Dóchas Safeguarding Task Group (STG)

Exploring Technical Areas Of Safeguarding

An Overview of Key Insights and Learnings from STG Discussions

November 2021

Dóchas

Dóchas, The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations, was founded in 1993 and comprises of 57 member organisations working on development programmes and projects across 104 countries.   Dóchas strives to enhance Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) capacity to remain at the fore of Ireland's efforts to tackle global injustice. Dóchas is also aligned to a range of international representative organisations[1], ensuring to build alliances and relationships across the world to raise the voice of Dóchas members at a European and wider scale.

In Ireland, through its various working groups, task groups, consultations, and research, Dóchas facilitates member collaboration and coordination, leading to shared practice, policies, and standards of excellence to:

- strengthen learning,
- influence political and public domains,
- and increase collective action by Irish International NGOs.

One of Dóchas' key task groups is the Safeguarding Task Group (STG). Established in 2018, The STG was set up to strengthen practice in relation to protecting people from exploitation, abuse, and harassment (including sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment) because of behaviours of those who work for or represent NGO organisations, programmes and/or activities.

The STG

The STG is comprised of Dóchas members who have come together to network, learn, and share safeguarding (SG) resources and expertise. As a task group, the STG has been operating as an 'inward facing' group, founded on the principle of nurturing a safe space where initial conversations and ideas can develop and flourish in a respectful and cooperative manner. This allows insights and creative ideas to emerge through mutual trust amongst group members. However, the STG is currently at the point where it is transitioning to a working group, where it can begin to implement 'outward facing' activities with a focus on influencing the wider sector and key stakeholders though advocacy and lobbying.

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[1] Home - CONCORD (concordeurope.org), Forus (forus-international.org), International Council of Voluntary Agencies (icvanetwork.org)

Nonetheless, from its inception in 2018, the STG has made substantial progress, employing specific strategies to implement activities aligned to key aims. It is apparent that the STG has been working towards contributing to a range of wider goals. These include:

- Increased SG Knowledge and Trust Established between STG members
- A Culture of SG Established and Collaborations Deepened
- Strengthened SG Practice and Policy

Appendix A presents a visual representation of the key strategies, aims, and activities implemented by the STG to contribute to their goals to date.

Whilst working towards its goals, the STG hosted several external and internal group discussions to explore key technical areas to help support members improve and strengthen overall SG. Technical areas of SG can be defined as the implementing practices and procedures to ensure SG policies are developed, actioned, and monitored. External group discussions focussed on safe recruitment and an expert presentation on the Misconduct Disclosure Scheme[2]. The technical areas addressed as internal group discussions included:

- Adaptive Strategies for SG Implementation and Monitoring
- A Survivor Centred Approach
- Supporting Partners
- The Translatability of SG Terminology
- The SG Journey

This paper presents an overview of each of the above technical areas addressed during internal discussions, alongside key points raised, and suggestions for improved practice. Finally, wider recommendations for the STG to consider as next steps will be offered.

Technical Areas of Discussion

1) <u>Adaptive Strategies for SG Implementation and Monitoring</u>

The STG recognised that during a crisis, such as COVID-19, communities' vulnerability and risk levels are increased. Individuals and families can lose their livelihoods, possessions, and connections to traditional social security structures, and this increases their risk and exposure to potential exploitation and abuse. The STG therefore hosted a discussion to explore adaptive strategies to employ alternative approaches to oversee the implementation and monitoring of SG during COVID-19.

Overall, the STG recommended that key aspects for the COVID-19 context involve:

- Reviewing all SG policies to ensure compatibility with the COVID-19 context
- Developing and implementing an emergency SG risk assessment alongside partners
- Ensuring field staff have full awareness of the changing context and subsequent SG risks
- Identifying if country referral pathways remain operational

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[2] [Misconduct Disclosure Scheme — SCHR](#)

In relation to monitoring SG across partners and programmes, the STG discussed distance monitoring as an adaptive strategy. Traditional monitoring involves staff from NGO Headquarters visiting partners and programmes to undertake a monitoring exercise. However, since COVID-19 has imposed travel restrictions, the paradigm for monitoring has been transitioning towards NGOs supporting the facilitation of local in-country monitoring. In this respect, the STG raised the following points:

- It is important to develop an NGO distance monitoring approach which allows those with the greatest proximity to the projects to design and implement the monitoring and evaluation
- Distance monitoring can incorporate all elements of a traditional monitoring visit, including document reviews, virtual conversations with project beneficiaries and participants, and key informant interviews through the virtual space
- NGOs should support the implementation of distance monitoring through financial investment and building capacity across partners and field staff
- The design of distance monitoring templates should be developed in collaboration with partners
- Guidance and tools for field staff should be developed to assist them with implementing monitoring aspects
- NGOs should consider exploring peer partner monitoring as a model of practice. However, some partners might not welcome this approach, but where there is openness, NGOs should consider developing and implementing

2) A Survivor Centred Approach

A survivor centred approach is one where the wellbeing and the wishes of the survivor of an incident are put at the centre of all actions taken. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Ensuring the safety and security of the survivor, any dependents, witnesses, or whistle-blower
- Assurance that issues will be handled in confidence
- Ensuring the survivor's wishes (self-determination) and best interests are considered when making decisions at each stage of the investigation
- Ensuring the survivor is treated with dignity and respect
- Ensuring a timely response at each stage of the investigation
- Providing support for the survivor and/or witnesses through safety and security, medical and psychosocial, referral to legal assistance, and reintegration support

The STG collectively explored the overall concept of a survivor centred approach, and the challenges and opportunities for a rigorous approach to its implementation. The STG recognised that implementing a survivor centred approach requires a specialised skill set and understanding of how to facilitate the survivor through appropriate referral pathways, psychosocial care, medical assistance, and protection assistance. It was also recognised that supporting partners and communities to strengthen community-based whistle blowing structures and support services is a fundamental element of building a survivor centred approach.

The STG highlighted the following key points for informing good practice:

- Contracting SG expertise with specialisms in trauma to inform overall survivor centred policies and practices
- Continuing to access such expertise across all programme stages from development to implementation to evaluation
- To increase understanding of a survivor centred approach, NGOs should invest in ongoing training for field staff, partners, and relevant stakeholders
- Through programming, NGOs should support the strengthening of community-based mechanisms to facilitate reporting, case management and referral pathways
- NGOs should ensure adequate resourcing and capacity is identified at the programme development stage

3) <u>Supporting Partners</u>

The STG hosted a discussion session to explore practices and procedures for supporting local grassroot partners to implement SG. Key challenges were identified such as:

- Limited resourcing to support partners
- Inadequate time to develop policies in collaboration with partners
- Limited in-country SG expertise and training opportunities
- Limited capacity to manage complaints and cases in-country

Despite these challenges, the STG highlighted the substantial progress that their respective NGOs are already making, including the significant learning and knowledge they have cumulated through collaborating closely with partners and communities. For example, progress and learning have included:

- Working alongside partners to develop training materials, SG awareness raising posters and SG monitoring tools
- Learning from partners and communities about their already existing SG practices, and how these can inform the development of policies and implementation

Nonetheless, to improve overall practice, the STG highlighted the importance of the following points:

- Conducting partner capacity and risk assessments at the beginning of each programme, and ensuring to invest in building identified capacity needs
- Supporting partners to identify and mitigate against SG risks
- Liaising closely with partner Boards and senior management to ensure full commitment to SG
- Supporting partners to develop complaint policies and mechanisms, and assessing if each partner has the capacity and knowledge to implement their own SG investigation cases
- Ensuring partner proposal templates have a clear section which focusses on SG across their respective organisation and proposed project
- Ensuring partner grant agreements clearly articulate what needs to be in place in relation to SG and relevant codes of conduct
- Identifying and training local consultants who can support partners towards good SG practice through ongoing training
- Developing toolkits to monitor partner progress from baseline to end line

4) The Translatability of SG Terminology

Recognising the importance of good intercultural and cross-lingual communication, the STG was keen to explore the translatability of SG terminology. Together, STG members discussed how to ensure effective translations into local languages in countries of operation, and how NGOs can work collaboratively with field staff, partners, and communities to learn how to best address linguistic and cultural challenges. Members highlighted that SG terminology does not translate easily into local languages, and it largely includes text with long sentences, complex syntax, and jargon. Thus, this presents a risk that SG policies, practices and procedures could get 'lost in translation', with divergent interpretations and understandings emerging between NGOs, partners, communities, and field staff. The STG therefore agreed that it is essential that a process is facilitated for field staff, partners, and communities to work alongside the NGO so that all parties can establish a fuller, deeper, and more nuanced appreciation of SG, leading to mutual understanding of how it can be translated, implemented, and monitored.

The STG highlighted the following key points for NGOs to consider as important elements for an overall facilitated process:

- At the outset, NGOs should consider reviewing all SG policies and materials, and translating these into plain English text, with possible support through Translators Without Borders[3]
- NGOs should conduct a language needs assessment for countries of operation and their respective field staff and implementation communities
- NGOs should develop a two-way relationship with field staff, partners and communities which enables them to influence and contribute to the wording of policies, and to inform how to best implement these in the communities and areas where they operate
- NGOs, should consider providing translation and interpretation training for field staff, with a focus on SG messages, humanitarian concepts, translation ethics and cultural challenges during the translation and interpreting process
- NGOs should seek legal advice to grasp the complexities of the countries they are operating in, and the implications for SG
- NGOs and donors should prioritise budget lines for translating and interpreting SG policies and procedures into local languages

5) The SG Journey

The STG dedicated a discussion session to explore an SG case study[4] developed by the NGO GOAL. The case study focused on GOAL's approach to integrating SG across its organisational structures, systems, and practices on a global scale. THE STG was keen to learn from GOAL's approach which it considered to be comprehensive and a model of good practice. Overall, GOAL's case study outlines its approach to ensuring:

- Senior Management Commitment and Buy-In

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[3] Translators without Borders
[4] Launching the GOAL Global Safeguarding Case Study - InterAction   Microsoft Word - Goal Global Case Study-final approved by GOAL - JD approved by KM (interaction.org)

- Integrating SG Throughout GOAL
- Working with Partners
- Community Awareness Raising
- Other Key SG Actions

To guarantee senior management buy in, GOAL ensures that:

- The SG advisor has direct and regular contact with key members of the senior management team
- Country Directors prioritise SG, and are accountable to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
- Board Members are educated and regularly updated on SG

To integrate SG throughout GOAL, the organisation ensures that:

- All GOAL Staff receive a SG induction and undergo SG training
- Technical experts and leads receive context-specific training
- Department Heads play a key role in developing SG action plans

In working with partners, GOAL ensures that:

- Partners are risk assessed for SG, and their structures and policies are reviewed to identify necessary capacity building
- Partners are supported to strengthen SG systems and budget is allocated
- A partnership agreement is established with all partners
- Partners are supported to understand roles, responsibilities, and steps for reporting incidents
- Progress is monitored, and guidance and support are offered when needed

With regards to community awareness raising, GOAL ensures that everyone working with communities is trained, including targeted community stakeholders and volunteers connected to programmes who can raise SG awareness across communities. In this sense, GOAL strives to integrate SG across its overall programming activities.

Other GOAL SG actions include:

- The implementation of GOAL's Community Feedback Mechanism (CFM) which is designed in collaboration with community leaders, members, and programme participants, and adapted for the local context
- The implementation of a unique investigation model to respond to complaints received through the CFM and other organisational complaints mechanisms. At Headquarters, the investigation team consists of former members of An Garda Siochana, the Irish Police Force.   Country Offices have investigation teams made up from either compliance officers, SG focal points or internal auditors. When a complaint is received in country, the investigation team develops a plan, and investigates with support, advice, and oversight from the team at Headquarters

A key learning for GOAL has been that in order to progress, adequate resourcing is needed for SG, ensuring all technical areas of SG are identified, budgeted and funded.

The STG recognised GOAL's thorough approach to SG, and the extent to which the organisation is working diligently to embed SG activities across Board, senior leadership, staff, and community levels. In considering GOAL's approach, the STG highlighted the importance of:

- Senior leadership commitment to SG, including a commitment to resourcing all technical elements
- CEO oversight of SG, particularly in relation to supporting Country Directors and promoting SG across the Board
- Integrating SG across NGO programming activities, so that it becomes embedded as a key element
- In depth SG induction activities and ongoing training, including available training online
- Establishing a CFM as key to engaging communities

Furthermore, the STG emphasised the importance of the overall resourcing of SG across all organisational and programme implementation levels. To implement SG with the required diligence, it is essential to ensure adequate budgeting and capacity, and therefore the STG highlighted that it is paramount to explore this in detail with NGO senior management teams and potential donors.

Conclusion

The overall content from this paper suggests that the STG has made significant progress in relation to coming together to network and share ideas, expertise, and resources. The technical complexities of implementing SG have been considered and explored. Importantly, the STG has created a safe space for members to develop trust to openly discuss challenges and opportunities relevant to implementing good practice. It is intended that this paper will assist the STG in deciding its next steps. Recommended steps for the STG to consider include the following:

- Agree key outputs to begin to influence the wider sector and increase donor investment in SG through possible advocacy and lobbying. This would support the STG's intention to move from a Dóchas 'inward facing' task group to an 'outward facing' working group
- Dig deeper into exploring and understanding the implementation of a survivor centred approach highlighting the required levels of internal and external expertise
- Dig deeper into the area of distance monitoring and implementation, showcasing models of practice from a range of NGOs
- Utilise the virtual space to diversify the STG through inviting programme and field staff to participate

Finally, it is the intention that this paper will profile the extent to which the STG is a safe space and valuable resource for offering collaborative support to Dóchas members, as they work collectively towards the ongoing development of policies, practices, and procedures for implementing effective SG.

Appendix a

Visual Representation of the key Strategies, Aims and Activities implemented by the STG

Goals	Increased SG Knowledge & Trust Established between Dóchas members	A Culture of SG Established & Collaborations Deepened	Strengthened SG Practice & Policy
Year	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**
Key Aims	• To build trust amongst and STG members to explore SG challenges and share experiences • To increase SG knowledge, skills and confidence amongst the STG and Dóchas members • To contribute to building an SG culture amongst Dóchas members	• To strengthen technical expertise amongst STG members • To begin to consider possibilities to influence wider SG policy and strategy across the sector	
Key Activities	• 2 CEO events to inform development of the Dóchas SG Code (see footnote 5) • Launch of a Dóchas online SG portal for sharing of member policies, practices and guidelines • Dissemination of SG capacity survey for Dóchas members • Exploring practice in relation to implementing a Survivor Centred Approach to SG (seminar to Dóchas members)	• Training needs assessment exercise for STG members, followed by peer led discussions on SG technical areas • An SG good practice seminar presented to the STG by the Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence[5] • A seminar and discussion presented by The Misconduct Disclosure Scheme[6] to the STG and wider Dóchas members	• Ongoing peer led discussions on SG technical areas for STG members
Key Strategies	• Establish relationships and share experiences and learning with STG members • Promote Dialogue, and share knowledge, policies, procedures and systems between STG and wider Dóchas members • Build overall knowledge and understanding of SG across the STG, and increase knowledge of recognised national and international SG policies		

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[5] Beyond Fear | The Work, Learnings & Resources of the Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence (gbv.ie)
[6] Misconduct Disclosure Scheme — SCHR