WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP
A Local Approach to Strengthening Safeguarding Systems
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the time and support of all the staff at Trócaire and partner organisations and the independent consultants who participated in the review for this report without their contributions the report would not have been possible.

Report writer: Emma Newbury (Newstone Global Consulting)
Reviewers: Margaret Rooney and Michael Solis

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ACRONYMS

AIDS Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
CAFOD Catholic Agency for Overseas Development
COVID-19 Coronavirus disease
CST CAFOD, SCIAF and Trócaire
CUC Comite de Unidad Campesina
DAC Development Assistance Committee
ECC SDCO Ethiopian Catholic Church Social and Development Commission
EU European Union
FSC Funder Safeguarding Collaborative
GBV Gender Based Violence
HIV Human Immunodeficiency Viruses
IASC Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICAI The Independent Commission for Aid Impact
ICVA International Council of Voluntary Agencies
INGO International Non-Governmental Organisation
LNGO Local Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PSEA Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SCIAF Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund
SEA Sexual exploitation and abuse
SEAH Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
UN United Nations
UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund
UK United Kingdom
WE-ACTION Women Empowerment – Action
WOFHRAD Women’s Forum for Human Rights in Democracy
‘Trócaire has worked in partnership with local organisations for nearly 50 years, and it is a core and defining aspect of who we are. In working together, Trócaire is committed to keeping the people and communities we work with safe from abuse and exploitation, regardless of whether this is caused by our actions or inactions. While we have minimum requirements for safeguarding for all partner organisations, we recognise that this is not enough. We continually seek to learn from our partners as to what works best to ensure safeguarding standards are implemented in a contextually relevant manner and that safeguarding truly becomes everyone’s responsibility. We have long recognised the growing capacity of local partners and actors and know that, ultimately, they are the drivers of sustainable change. Expanding local capacity on safeguarding can create greater opportunities for raising awareness and systems that respond to the needs of both communities and partners.’

_Caoimhe de Barra, CEO Trócaire_

‘I hope that this learning paper may provide some insights to other organisations who are working with local partners. Working together with partner organisations on safeguarding continues to be a journey of learning for all of us. Training and templates are not enough. Listening to one another and seeking what works for each partner, each programme type, and community is the key to moving forward. Often, additional support is needed to get an initial start on safeguarding, but finding that additional support can be difficult. Expanding local knowledge on safeguarding through locally available consultants and in-house focal persons helps create context sensitive mechanisms for keeping people safe from abuse and exploitation. I would like to thank everyone for their contributions towards this paper and for their ongoing commitment to safeguarding.’

_Margaret Rooney, Head of Safeguarding Trócaire_
Trócaire has been working with partner organisations for decades and as part of this partnership is committed to providing capacity strengthening. Safeguarding people from exploitation and abuse caused by its representatives, programmes, or activities remains a core commitment for Trócaire. As part of these pledges, Trócaire has been working to strengthen safeguarding capacity in the countries where it operates. During 2020-2021, Trócaire undertook a series of pilot initiatives to support partners in their safeguarding journeys by resourcing them with a local consultant, mentored by Trócaire.

While safeguarding emerged primarily among INGOs in the Global North, the principles and concepts are increasingly applied across local actors in the Global South. There is an increased understanding among Trócaire’s local partners of the importance of safeguarding, but several have struggled to find the time and resources to strengthen their internal safeguarding policies and systems. Further, as the concept of safeguarding is still consolidating, Trócaire and its partners identified the need to strengthen the local knowledge base in some of the country contexts where they work.

The initiative undertaken by Trócaire sought not only to support partners but to breach a significant gap due to the lack of local safeguarding specialists and locally owned expertise. This consultancy aimed at facilitating the process of revision or preparation of the partner organisations’ Safeguarding Policy, Code of Conduct, Safe Recruitment Processes, and complaints mechanisms for both sensitive and non-sensitive complaints. This involved not just policy review but also activities for raising awareness and implementation (or developing plans for the same). The process was tailored for each partner depending on where they were on their safeguarding journey.

This learning brief provides insights into safeguarding with partner organisations, reflecting on developments and challenges faced by the sector and Trócaire’s experiences. It specifically draws on reflections from partners, consultants, and staff in Trócaire country offices involved in the 2020/21 pilots, highlighting lessons learnt. The brief aims to share learning with specialists and civil society learning networks, and help inform future design and management of partner capacity strengthening on safeguarding.

**DEFINING SAFEGUARDING**

Primarily the definition for safeguarding is built on the principle of ‘do no harm’ relating to the prevention of abuse and exploitation. In the humanitarian and development sector there may also be a specific focus on ‘child safeguarding’ or ‘SEAH – Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment.’ Trócaire’s Safeguarding definition aims to bring together these elements, ensuring an integrated approach to both prevention and response.

**Trócaire’s Definition of Safeguarding**

Safeguarding is about protecting children and adults from harm within our programmes and activities. This includes the prevention of exploitation and abuse as well as any harm caused by our failure to take reasonable care.

In the broadest sense it is also about ensuring those who represent our organisation do not engage in behaviours that abuse or exploit others in any setting. It brings together child protection, PSEA, and sexual harassment against staff.
LOCATIONS OF THE PILOTS

ETHIOPIA

LOCAL CONSULTANT
Tagel Solomon is currently based in Ethiopia and working as a freelance consultant. Tagel has over twenty years of experience working in development and humanitarian contexts at the local, national, and international levels. He has a background in programme management, working in the fields of child protection, education, and HIV/AIDS.

PARTNERS
Women Empowerment – Action (WE-Action) is a women’s rights organisation that works for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.
The Ethiopian Catholic Church Social and Development Commission (ECC SDCO) was founded in 1965. Its mandate is to initiate, promote, and coordinate the social and development ministries of the Universal Church in Ethiopia.
The Oromia Pastoralist Association (OPA) was created to facilitate the cross-border mobility of pastoralist tribes between Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya and is helping to address land disputes, resource conflicts, and the barriers these vulnerable groups face to coping with climate change.

GUATEMALA

LOCAL CONSULTANT
Ana María Álvarez Medrano de Verlinden is a Guatemalan Maya K’iche woman. She has decades of experience in working on community development projects, with a focus on women’s and Indigenous People’s rights. She worked for Trócaire for five years as a Programme Officer on the theme of Women’s Empowerment, and as part of her duties she supported partner organisations in developing safeguarding frameworks. Since 2021, she has been working as an independent consultant.

PARTNERS
Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC) was created in 1978 and is the first national organisation formed by peasants and Indigenous Peoples in Guatemala.
Neuvos Horizontes was founded in 1989 and works to support the human rights of women and their children experiencing GBV.
Caritas Pastoral Social Diocesis Del Quiche - was founded in 1983 to work with the agricultural population on issues of livelihoods.¹

¹ The two latter organisations were supported by another consultant who was not available to participate in the review.
NICARAGUA

LOCAL CONSULTANT

Beatriz Ruiz is based in Nicaragua and has worked as a consultant since 2016 in the region of Central America. She has over 20 years of experience and has a background in disaster risk reduction and protection. She had previously undertaken consultancies providing training and supporting the development of child protection policies.

PARTNERS

Cooperativa Agropecuaria Multisectorial Orfilia Vásquez R.L. is a cooperative of women and works to support improvements in women’s lives.

Movimiento Comunal Nicaraguense de Somoto works on promoting human rights.

Asociación para el Desarrollo Integral de la Mujer works on issues of women’s empowerment.

Octupan works on sustainable development in Estelí and Madriz.

Asociación Movimiento de Mujeres de Chinandega was founded in 1992 and is focused on gender equality.

SIERRA LEONE

LOCAL CONSULTANT

Sia Lajaku-Williams is a freelance consultant working in Sierra Leone. She has over 15 years of experience in community and youth development in Sierra Leone. She has worked for several INGOs, including up until mid-2021 as the Programmes and Donor Compliance Director at Street Child Sierra Leone. In this role, she was acting as Street Child’s Child Protection Lead and Safeguarding Focal Point in Sierra Leone.

PARTNERS

Cotton Tree Foundation was founded in 2000 and works on community development, covering the themes of education, women’s rights and sustainable livelihoods.

Women’s Forum For Human Rights in Democracy (WOFRHAD) was established in 2006 and focuses on issues of women’s and girls’ rights.
ZIMBABWE

LOCAL CONSULTANT

Bekezela Mapanda is based in Zimbabwe. Currently, she is the GBV Output Lead Consultant and In-Country Safeguarding Focal Point for Stopping Female Exploitation and Abuse. Bekezela worked with Trócaire from 2014-2019 first as the HIV Programme Officer and Women Empowerment Advisor and then as the Programme Manager, where she acted as the focal person on safeguarding.

PARTNERS

Caritas Bulawayo is the Caritas Zimbabwe Archdiocese of Bulawayo. Its developmental programmes focus on Zimbabwe’s drought-prone regions of Matabeleland North and South.

Zimbabwe Institute of Systemic Therapy (Connect) is a Zimbabwean welfare organisation founded in 1983 by psychologists and social workers to provide counselling to low income clients.

Union For Development of Apostolic and Zionist Churches in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA) is the umbrella organisation of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe. UDACIZA was formed to champion spiritual and socio-economic development of Apostolic members.
EMERGING DEVELOPMENTS AND TRENDS RELATING TO SAFEGUARDING IN IMPLEMENTING PARTNER ORGANISATIONS²

UNHCR/Save the Children study reports abuse and exploitation of refugees by aid workers in West Africa.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child clarifies that State parties are obligated to ensure that non-state actors operate in accordance with the provisions of the Convention. This creates indirect obligations on such actors.

The European Commission requires EU funded charities to explain their PSEA measures and includes a requirement to have safeguarding measures as a precondition for funding. (Robinson & Jerome, 2022, 11).

The first Child Safeguarding Standards were launched in 2002 by a coalition of relief and development charities that later became known as Keeping Children Safe.

The UN issues a bulletin outlining new measures for staff. It explicitly prohibits staff from committing acts of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and requires staff to report any suspicion of such abuse.

Organisations entering into “cooperative arrangements” with the UN must now also commit to the same standards.

The UN publishes a protocol on allegations of SEA involving implementing partners. This creates downstream obligations for NGO partners, as sub-contractors are subsumed in the definition of implementing partner. The UN must now carry out a screening process for implementing partners to assess their capacity to prevent or mitigate risks of SEA.

² It is noted that this is a non-exhaustive list of developments.
Bond members publish a statement for change in the way that safeguarding is handled in the international development and humanitarian sector in relation to partner organisations.

The UN publishes a PSEA capacity assessment for implementing partners, removing the need for duplicative assessments by different UN entities and providing a standardised 5-year validity.

In February 2020, UNHCR partnered with ICVA to launch an interagency PSEA Community Outreach and Communication Fund. The Fund aims to support NGOs in community awareness-raising and prevention activities in relation to safeguarding.

The OECD DAC announces a recommendation on ending SEAH. This is adopted by all 30 members. It requires them to ensure systems are employed by implementing partners to address SEAH. It also commits the adherents to provide financial and human resources to ensure that implementing partners can uphold the standards.
UN entities and most INGOs and other donors have implemented due diligence processes for potential partners, which often include an assessment of safeguarding capacity. Many funders will not enter into a programme agreement without the implementing partner and, by extension, their local partner agencies meeting certain safeguarding requirements. This results in a situation where INGOs “are required by, and face pressure from, donors to immediately demonstrate that partner organisations already have sufficient safeguarding policies and systems in place” (Bond 2019).

Whilst the requirement to hold all contractors to the same standards aims to reduce risk and ensure accountability, in reality the literature shows that this has often led to a ‘tick-box’ approach to safeguarding with LNGOs developing policies to ensure compliance rather than as a tool to improve practice (Bond, 2019, FSC 2021, ICAI 2022). Studies have found that policy reviews as part of compliance largely provide very limited information about the implementation of safeguarding within the organisation (IDC 2018; Feather, Martin & Neville 2020; FSC 2021).

“Many initiatives in the NGO sector to date have focused on developing quick solutions to improve safeguarding practices... or to comply with international standards or donor requirements. As a result, partner-led initiatives have not played a significant role in resolving complex in-country safeguarding issues or tailoring safeguarding practice to local contexts... REMEDYING THIS REQUIRES ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL PARTNERS, BEYOND CHECKLISTS AND COMPLIANCE” (DFID, 2019, para. 59).

Additionally, the literature shows there has been limited space for the voice of local actors in the development of safeguarding frameworks and practices. Daoost and Dyvik (2021) critique the limited inclusion of local expertise and knowledge in the development of safeguarding principles, noting that local knowledge is often marginalised to the contextualisation of standards developed in the Global North.

The lack of local knowledge within the safeguarding approach and the linking of safeguarding to compliance compounds the power imbalance that exists within the funding relationship as it reduces equality between partners. The literature shows that local organisations can feel obligated to adopt recommendations on safeguarding made by their funders even if the measures appear to be unfeasible. This can lead to partners agreeing to unrealistic timescales to develop safeguarding practices and result in the use of templates or the adoption of the donor’s policy, which restricts ownership, reinforces the tick box approach, and reduces the likelihood of implementation (Bond 2019, FSC 2021).

All of this is exacerbated by a lack of funding for capacity support to partner organisations to ensure that policies are meaningful and well implemented. Very few donors are providing resources to support grantees to ensure compliance amongst implementing partners, let alone allocating funding to foster the development of a locally-led approach to safeguarding. This then leaves INGOs to use core funding to support safeguarding capacity and whilst “many agencies have supportive approaches and see it as their role to help build the PSEA capacity of their partners... they may...
have limited resources to meet the scale of the task” (Robinson & Jerome 2022 p3).

The current approach is fundamentally problematic because it runs counter to the aims of safeguarding and to the localisation commitments that the sector has set itself. As the literature shows, safeguarding has been approached from the angle of compliance rather than capacity strengthening. This has marginalised partners’ voices and simultaneously resulted in limited funding for safeguarding because it is seen as a prerequisite for funding.

In the last few years, the sector is now recognising the challenge in its approach to implementing safeguarding with partner organisations and identifying ways to improve practice. In 2019, the UK Bond and its members adopted a change statement “calling for a fundamental shift in mindset in the development and humanitarian sectors, with the goal of addressing immediate safeguarding challenges by ensuring partner organisations are valued as equal partners” (Bond 2019). This statement notes, among other things, the need for INGOs to fully commit to capacity strengthening programmes, particularly when local partners have not yet established expertise in safeguarding, and for donors to commit funding that allows bespoke, collaborative safeguarding approaches with partner organisations.

In 2021, the Funder Safeguarding Collaborative undertook research including a review of the literature and primary data collection with grantees to identify best practices in relation to safeguarding. The following emerged as important lessons.

Safeguarding requires time and resources and should be approached as an ongoing journey. For safeguarding to be implemented effectively, it needs to be internalised in the organisation’s culture and day-to-day practice. This requires time and incremental changes.

**FUNDING IS NEEDED FOR CRITICAL CHANGE**
Funding should not just cover the development of policies but extend to implementation.

**CAPACITY STRENGTHENING SUPPORT IS BEST WHEN TAILORED TO AN INDIVIDUAL ORGANISATION’S NEEDS**
Training and sharing of best practice are helpful, but tailored direct capacity support is likely to have a greater impact.

**SUPPORT SHOULD BE PROVIDED BY EXPERTS WHO UNDERSTAND THE OPERATING CONTEXT AND THE ORGANISATION’S THEMATIC AREA OF INTERVENTION**
It was found that whilst it can be challenging to find local experts, the “benefits of local expertise justify the additional time and effort involved” (Funder Safeguarding Collaborative 2021, 17).

**CAPACITY SUPPORT SHOULD BE STRENGTHS-BASED, VALUING EXISTING GOOD PRACTICE**
Valuing the existing knowledge, systems, and expertise in the organisation as a starting point was found to increase organisational ownership of resulting safeguarding frameworks. It was also found that this can, in some contexts, lead to peer-to-peer support and reduce the need for external experts.

**ENGAGING ALL LEVELS OF THE ORGANISATION IN SAFEGUARDING IS IMPORTANT**
Safeguarding needs to be seen as the responsibility of everyone in the organisation. It is therefore important to include both staff and senior management in the development of policies and procedures.
Trócaire’s Safeguarding Journey

2006-2012
Trócaire develops a child safeguarding policy. This is updated in 2010 to reflect best practice in Ireland and globally.

2013-2015
The policy is transformed into a Safeguarding Programme Participants Policy including both children and adults. The policy is piloted in Kenya, India, and DRC.

2016
The 2016 Programme Participants Safeguarding Policy commits Trócaire to look at ways to support its partners to safeguard programme participants.
A suite of guidance materials for Trócaire staff and partner organisations is developed.
Safeguarding Focal Persons are identified in each country office. A training programme for focal persons is developed based on Trócaire resources.

2017
A clause is updated in partner grant agreements for partners to confirm commitment to safeguarding and agree plans for policy development and implementation where appropriate systems were not in place.
Trócaire’s Head of Safeguarding provides safeguarding support and workshops for partners. Safeguarding focal persons also deliver training.
The first annual safeguarding audit of Trócaire Country Offices’ safeguarding implementation is conducted in November 2017. It highlights the need to support partners.
**2018**

Support on policy review and guidance for individual partners commences. Partner Safeguarding Assessment and Actions Forms are completed for or by partners and actions plans developed.

The work commenced in 2017 continues. Trócaire’s Head of Safeguarding visits eight countries and gives two-day training to 87 partners. This is in addition to training delivered by Safeguarding Focal Persons.

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**2019**

With the support of Irish Aid funding, partner organisations in five countries are supported through country visits from Trócaire staff in Headquarters and the provision of small grants for policy development and communication materials.

Safeguarding training and policy support continues. Trócaire commits to supporting a minimum of two partners per country each year with capacity strengthening.

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**2020-2021**

Trócaire pilots a model on “Strengthening Local Capacity” in 2020/21. This involves working with local consultants who support partner organisations to strengthen their safeguarding and associated systems.

UNICEF provides funding for a local PSEA/Safeguarding Specialist in Myanmar to support identified local partners.

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LESSONS LEARNT ALONG THE JOURNEY

1. The work does not stop with the sign-off of policies. In fact, this is just the beginning.

2. Trócaire needs to maintain good safeguarding standards if it is also going to support partners to strengthen their own standards.

3. It is not possible for partners to have everything in place immediately. This is a journey for both Trócaire and its partner organisations.

4. There is a need to work closely with partners to support capacity strengthening and implementation of safeguarding and associated policies.

5. Given the number of partners and limited resources for this work, it was not possible to support all at the same time.

6. Having the senior leadership of partner organisations attend workshops proved critical for partners’ organisational commitment and policy development.

7. The 2019 pilot found a need for longer-term accompaniment with partners to deepen their understanding and implementation of safeguarding advances.
The 2020/21 pilot model was specifically designed to respond to the following challenges:

### Challenges

#### Balancing accountability and localisation commitments
Trócaire is committed to the localisation agenda and is working to shift the power more profoundly to partner organisations. Whilst Trócaire is accountable to uphold all those that it works with to its standards and commitments on safeguarding, the approach to supporting partner organisations to uphold these values must be considerate of the voice and needs of partners and communities.

#### Focal Points lack time
In their work to monitor safeguarding in partner organisations, Trócaire Safeguarding Focal Points often identify the need for in-depth capacity strengthening to support partners to effectively implement action plans but lack the time and resources to provide this. Further, given that focal points are also acting in other roles (such as Programme Managers or Officers) they have limited time and resources to dedicate to providing this support.

### Solutions

#### Tailored support
Provide partners with tailored accompaniment and capacity strengthening support on safeguarding that responds to the needs of the organisation.

#### An extra pair of hands
Given the workload of the Trócaire country team, it can be more effective to engage a consultant to take on this role. Two to three partners were selected based on their need/interest to be supported for a set period by a local consultant.
Limited resources
Whilst safeguarding experts (often internationals) may be needed for investigations, as this requires a high level of experience, the lack of financial resources and high demand for their services makes it difficult to contract them to support capacity strengthening of partners around safeguarding.

Insufficient consultants
Trócaire identified a gap in local safeguarding specialists in operating contexts. Whilst there were consultants with some relevant experience (for example having backgrounds in areas such as gender and protection), finding dedicated safeguarding specialists had proved to be a challenge.

Invest in local responses
Create a pool of local consultants with expertise in working with partners and knowledge of safeguarding who can provide support to guide partners.

Strengthen local capacity
Provide guidance and support to the consultants through informal mentoring by Trócaire’s Head of Safeguarding, building on their existing relevant experience.
### The Approach of the Pilots

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| **Support Provided to Local Consultants by Trócaire** | | | | | | | |
| Initial project outline meeting with the local consultant, Trócaire country staff, and Head of Safeguarding | Mid-point review meeting with local consultant and Head of Safeguarding to discuss partner’s next steps | Reflection between Trócaire and local consultant to discuss learning and partner safeguarding action plans | |
| Sharing of Trócaire templates and tools with the local consultant | | Feedback forms sent to partners and consultant on process | |

| **Extra Support Provided on Request** | | | | | | | |
| Local consultants receive or witness training on safeguarding delivered by Trócaire’s Head of Safeguarding | Meeting to discuss partner assessment and next steps | Trócaire’s Head of Safeguarding responds to queries from local consultants as policies and processes are developed | Closing meeting with consultant, partners, Trócaire country staff, and Head of Safeguarding |
THE CONSULTANTS AND THEIR APPROACH TO SUPPORTING PARTNERS

Bekezela Mapanda was familiar with both the context and the specific partner organisations. Bekezela had previously been the Programme Manager in the Trócaire Zimbabwe office, and in this role she was the Safeguarding Focal Point. As a focal point, she had received training and support from the Head of Safeguarding and had undertaken assessments of partners using the Trócaire monitoring tool. Bekezela was interested in carrying out the assignment as she sees the value of safeguarding to all organisations and had experienced firsthand the need for partner organisations to have greater practical support in this area. Bekezela also noted that as a consultant it was easier to have freer conversations with partners, as it reduced the power imbalance of being seen as a funder. The partners also felt that it was beneficial to have a consultant who knew their organisations and local context. They felt that there was a long enough period between Bekezela working with Trócaire and becoming an independent consultant, so her engagement with them in her new capacity felt different.

Bekezela is still working as a consultant and plans to continue doing so for the foreseeable future.

Sia Lajaku-Williams provided capacity strengthening support to two organisations in Sierra Leone in 2021, Cotton Tree Foundation and Women’s Forum for Human Rights and Democracy (WOFHRAD). This was her first assignment as a consultant, but she has worked in the sector for many years and until mid-2021 she was working as the Programmes Director at Street Child. Sia had received training from Street Child on safeguarding and had been acting as the organisation’s Safeguarding Focal Point. She found the experience of consulting to be very rewarding and has been working as a freelance consultant ever since, despite being approached to apply for permanent positions. Sia likes the freedom and flexibility that consulting provides and plans to continue working in this way. Sia was able to bring real-life examples from her experience of working in development programmes to this safeguarding assignment, drawing on these cases to help the partners contextualise the meaning and importance of safeguarding in their work. This was considered to have been very beneficial by the partners. Cotton Tree Foundation staff reported that the training Sia and her associate George provided helped them “as individuals and family members to understand their responsibility towards others, for example how to act as a husband or co-worker.”

All the consultants had a background in working in the humanitarian/development sector with many years of experience

This was the first consultancy for 3 out of the 5 consultants

100% are still working as consultants

2 of the consultants had formally been employed with Trócaire

3 of the consultants had previously been Safeguarding Focal Points in INGOs
Overall the pilot model worked and was well received. All of the partner organisations interviewed for this learning brief were very positive about the support that they had received. This type of dedicated support for safeguarding had not been provided by any of their other donors or INGO partners and was very welcomed. Partners were able to advance in their safeguarding journeys. Safeguarding is a journey that requires time, resources, and dedicated efforts. The specific advancement of the organisation varied due to many factors, including the complexity of the organisational structure, the size of the NGO, the number of staff able to dedicate time to safeguarding, and the availability of funds to dedicate to the process. However, they all felt that the consultant support had significantly boosted their skills, knowledge, and systems.

**Accompaniment was considered much more effective than training**

On the job support provided through this model was particularly valued by the Safeguarding Focal Points in the partner organisations. Training provided by INGOs and other donors was perceived to be important by all the partners and was often regarded as a necessary first step to introducing the concept of safeguarding. However, the on-the-job practical support was perceived to have allowed partners to make the transition from theory to practice more quickly and with greater impact.

“No other donor has really helped us this way, which I think on job technical assistance is what we need as an organisation to build capacities, so I think it is very helpful” (Focal Point, We Action, Ethiopia). All partners interviewed for this report felt that if they had just received financial resources to improve safeguarding in their organisations, they would not have advanced as quickly or to the same extent as they had with the local consultants.

Focal points were nearly always assigned to their role, and generally, this responsibility is on top of an existing portfolio of work. Therefore, they often did not have a background in safeguarding and were very grateful for the support provided by the local consultants who were able to assist them in improving policies and developing implementation plans.

At Cotton Tree Foundation in Sierra Leone, Musu Sawo Koroma, the Safeguarding Focal Point was assigned to be the point of contact, with the consultants Sia Lajaku-Williams and George Quaker. She participated in the workshops run by them and accompanied them when they went to discuss the community needs around complaints mechanisms. She found it challenging as it was a new topic for her. Previously she had been working in the education department, and noted that she had to learn a lot but she loved the topic and wanted to rise to the challenge.

Musu describes that the practical experience of accompanying Sia and George to the communities gave her confidence when replicating this in other communities. “They really exposed me. We went to the field, and they said, Musu, you take over. It was a challenge, but I enjoyed it as I learnt a lot. It was a very great experience. I was [then] able to explain the importance and what safeguarding means. It was a highly welcome thing that we have to embrace” (Focal point Cotton Tree Foundation, Sierra Leone). The Programme Manager at Cotton Tree Foundation even commented that Musu’s passion was so strong for this topic and that she had learnt so much that he thought it would be beneficial for her to cascade the learning to other organisations.
No one size approach fits all. The use of local consultants supported a tailored response to safeguarding

One interesting lesson that emerged is the model supported a flexible and tailored approach. Often if an organisation is to conduct this kind of work, there is a tendency to rely on standard templates and approaches, even if they are then tailored to the context. This is partly to reduce costs and ensure quality at scale; however, good safeguarding practices need to be based on the organisation’s way of working and structure.

As noted earlier, one of the challenges that the sector has faced in supporting safeguarding in local NGOs is that it has often been perceived as a compliance issue and thus there has been a tendency for organisations to want to tick the box as quickly and easily as possible. This has resulted in standardised templates being used for safeguarding policies, which are then not fit for purpose or implemented.

Local NGOs are not a homogeneous group and have very different organisational structures, and safeguarding systems must respond to these. Depending on the size and the type of organisation, the development and implementation of safeguarding policies can vary dramatically. The consultants had to use an individualised approach to strengthen policies and systems in each of the partner organisations.

Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC) is a social movement representing a diversity of communities, associations, unions, and cooperatives in Guatemala. Unlike many traditional NGOs, it does not have a board of directors or trustees. It is structured through committees from the community to the national level representing the members of CUC. Organisational level decisions are made through the National Committee, the Political Council, and the General Assembly.

The safeguarding policy, Code of Conduct, and implementation plan developed by CUC with the support of the local consultant Ana María Álvarez de Verlinden has to be approved by the Political Council. The Political Council will review the documents relating to safeguarding and over the course of two to three days read and debate each clause until there is a decision about its approval. Without the endorsement of the Political Council, the policy cannot be applied. Therefore, it is very important that the draft policy represents the approach of CUC.

Trócaire had previously shared templates and documents on safeguarding, but the team at CUC felt these did not specifically represent their context and organisational structure, as the documents often referred to beneficiaries and staff. This does not represent the way CUC is organised, as they are structured through committees made up of members. With the support of Ana María through a participatory process involving workshops and feedback on many drafts over a few months, they believe they have a Code of Conduct and policy document that adequately respect their structure.
Safeguarding needs to be supported across the organisation

An important part of the partner’s journey with safeguarding has been reaching an understanding that developing safeguarding systems is partly about communicating what the organisation stands for. It lays out the expected behaviour of all of those involved in the organisation and the standards of the NGO.

One of the most important shifts reported by the partners was that after the consultancies, safeguarding is now seen as the responsibility of everyone in the organisation, which requires it to be absorbed into all layers of the organisation. One interviewee reported that before the support of the consultant, there was a perception that safeguarding was only the responsibility of the field staff, as they primarily interact with communities. After the consultancy, this understanding had shifted with staff realising that they too were protected and everyone, including the managers and board, is responsible for upholding the standards of behaviour in the organisation.

One of the collateral results of this has been a shift in the organisational culture in some of the partner organisations. Several partners noted that there was a greater feeling of equality between staff members. This was attributed to various factors, including having a Code of Conduct that clearly states acceptable behaviours. In one organisation, it was reported that this helped managers understand they are accountable to their staff, and everyone must be treated with the same level of respect whether they are a junior or senior member of the team. In another organisation, gender relations were reported to have improved as junior female staff felt they could raise complaints if they experienced any sexist behaviour.

Connect is a Zimbabwean welfare organisation founded in 1983 by psychologists and social workers to provide counselling to low-income clients.

Using the Bond UK’s *Developing and Modelling a Positive Safeguarding Culture: A Tool for Leaders*, senior management of Connect were guided by the local consultant, Bekezela Mapanda, through a process of critical reflection on their organisational safeguarding culture. The tool encourages critical reflection of six key areas: Accountability; Policies and Processes; Do No Harm/Safer Programming; Survivor-centred Approach; Awareness-Raising; and Safer Recruitment and HR Processes. Each section is broken down into behaviours that support a positive safeguarding culture and includes questions for guided discussion and actions to consider. By working through these areas, senior management were able to reflect on how they were conducting their roles in embedding safeguarding within their institutions.

Now two members of the board are acting as Safeguarding Focal Points, and safeguarding is a standing agenda item at board meetings. The organisation has also scheduled a training for the board on safeguarding to ensure they have the knowledge to effectively monitor the progress of safeguarding in the organisation.

Local consultants with lived experience of the context and culture can help break down potential barriers

For safeguarding to become embedded in an organisation, it is necessary for it to transition from an activity being done as a donor compliance requirement to something that is important to strengthening the organisation both internally and in its work with communities. As one partner put it, the organisation needs to be willing and feel the necessity, so they are doing it not because Trócaire (or any donor) is asking but because it is needed to address issues faced in their context.
The partners interviewed noted that having a consultant who understands the local context was very important to help with this transition. The local consultants were able to use terminology and examples that resonated with partner staff. Additionally, when working to identify risks or discuss acceptable behaviours for their Code of Conduct, the consultants were able to use examples of situations that occur within the cultural context. This was particularly valued by the partners as it helped them easily see how their work and their actions connect to the concepts of safeguarding.

The local consultant, Sia Lajaku-Williams, in Sierra Leone and her colleague George Quaker noted that it was important to begin by shifting the perception that safeguarding was just a donor requirement needed to secure funding. The consultants do this by triggering conversations that demonstrate the practical importance of safeguarding to an organisation. Sia used examples of situations she had encountered in her many years of experience to show how safeguarding is for everyone and can be a benefit to staff, not just community members, to protect them from certain behaviours. This was reported to have resonated with the partner organisations.

The experiential approach allowed Sia and George to help staff think about safeguarding beyond the theory and as part of the lived experience in the Sierra Leonean context. At the board level, she was able to use the example of a board member in another organisation who requested their relative be recruited to demonstrate the need for safe recruitment practices and the board’s role in upholding these.

Learn from what is already there and how to embed safeguarding in existing systems

To help partners meet compliance requirements, INGOs, including Trócaire, have often shared resources and templates with partner agencies. Whilst templates and guidelines are helpful, they have been largely developed in the Global North and may not reflect the working environment in the specific country context. However, as partner organisations are constrained by time and resources, they may opt to adopt a pre-made template rather than building on their existing knowledge and systems, resulting in a patchwork of policies. One of the lessons learnt from the pilots is that it is important to value the knowledge and experience of the partners on safeguarding issues, even if they do not use specific terminology. This is important for two reasons:

1. Local partners should have the space and opportunity to understand and value the importance of safeguarding to them as an organisation. This requires them to be able to translate the concept into their daily experiences.

2. A lot of knowledge and experience already exists but may not be fully translated into a comprehensive system that is appropriately documented. Ownership of a safeguarding framework is more likely to occur if it is embedded in this knowledge and experience.

It was also important to support partners to translate these templates and guidelines to their own context.
Tagel Solomon, a consultant from Ethiopia, reflected on this when discussing the participatory process for the revision of the Ethiopian Catholic Church Social and Development Commission’s (ECC SDCO) safeguarding policy.

The organisation had a variety of different policies, which covered areas of safeguarding but did not address the subject in a holistic manner. For example, ECC SDCO had a Child Protection Policy but nothing to specifically address safeguarding in relation to vulnerable adults. Tagel asked the team to draft a comprehensive safeguarding policy, applicable to both adults and children. They started by compiling relevant documents from the wider Caritas Internationalis network but struggled at first to adapt them to their organisation. Tagel reviewed the draft and then through workshops, he started by asking the staff to reflect on their vision and where this understanding was drawn from. This reflection allowed the staff to discuss Catholic Social Teaching and its application to safeguarding in the Ethiopian context. They built on their existing systems and what others have done but were able to contextualise it to their own needs.

**Safeguarding is a journey and for successful implementation, ongoing resources and accompaniment are needed**

Safeguarding is never ‘done.’ It is an evolving journey that requires reflection and learning to ensure systems are able to respond to gaps as well as changes in the context and organisation. Having the support of the local consultants was appreciated by all the partner organisations interviewed, and they all felt they had advanced on this journey. However, the model should not be seen as a panacea; there is a need to provide ongoing accompaniment to partners. All partners developed action plans for the implementation of safeguarding policies with the consultants. However, they all reported lacking the resources to effectively carry out these plans. Some also reported not yet having the knowledge to advance with areas of safeguarding that were not addressed in the consultancy, for example in developing complaints mechanisms through participatory community engagement.

Despite the lack of resources, partners have found ways to advance their plans, for example, by combining an introduction on safeguarding for communities with other activities already budgeted for. However, they feel this light touch approach is insufficient. Some partners have approached their donors for funding to complete their action plans, and others are including safeguarding lines in new funding proposals. Whilst the pilot was able to achieve a significant amount with very limited funding (around 5,000 Euros were allocated per partner), ongoing support is needed to ensure partners are able to complete their action plans.

As Trócaire has safeguarding focal people in each country where it works, the ultimate success of this model will require them to provide ongoing support to partners, both financial and technical, for the period of the action plan.
In Ethiopia, Trócaire is working with partners in collaboration with CAFOD and SCIAF in a structure called CST. In 2019, CST supported eight partners to strengthen their knowledge and skills on safeguarding. A local partner, WE-ACTION, participated in a training organised by CST for partners’ senior management. As a result, WE-ACTION implemented a number of measures, including sharing information about the organisation with communities. WE-ACTION also identified the need for extra support to revise their policies relating to safeguarding. In 2021, WE-ACTION was one of the partners supported by the consultant, Tagel Solomon. WE-ACTION now has comprehensive safeguarding policies that cover both adults, children, women, and men. The policy framework also contains Codes of Conduct for staff and representatives (including consultants, contractors, partners, visitors, suppliers, etc.). The consultancy was unable to reach the step of developing a comprehensive complaints mechanism, and this has been identified as an area for further accompaniment. Whilst the interviewee noted that Tagel, even outside of his contract, was still in contact with them and had responded to questions and sent resources, they are struggling with the development of complaints mechanisms, as they require additional knowledge in this area.

WE-ACTION attended training facilitated Trócaire’s Head of Safeguarding in April 2022. This is an ongoing journey, with complaint mechanisms being the most significant next step.

The process requires careful planning and should not be rushed

The first pilots undertaken in 2020 were conducted over the span of just over a month. This put a lot of pressure on the partners.

_It was a good process because all the staff were involved...we managed to have products that perhaps under other conditions or by doing the process ourselves we could not have. [However] the process was too fast, one month or two given for the final products. Little time to have a final document (Focal Point, El Pastoral, Guatemala)._ 

Subsequently, the consultancy period was extended to six months.

The main feedback from partners, across the pilot countries, on ways to enhance the model was to improve planning to ensure the organisation has sufficient time to dedicate to the process.
There are other models that could provide this level of accompaniment and support for partner organisations. For example, Trócaire received funding from UNICEF to facilitate the capacity strengthening of four of UNICEF’s partner organisations in Myanmar around safeguarding. Trócaire hired a staff member who joined in November 2021 and supported the partners until the end of the project in July 2022.

The staff member, Pann Ei, provided similar support to that of the local consultants discussed in this report. However, she did this as a staff member rather than an external consultant. She has been directly supported by the Head of Safeguarding to build her technical expertise on safeguarding, having had more experience on the side of partner engagement.

In an interview with Pann Ei, the main lesson that has emerged from her work is the need for tailored flexible capacity strengthening support that responds to the specific ways of working and structure of the organisation. This requires time, patience, and engagement with the whole partner organisation. The four partner organisations are all relatively large and complex, requiring flexible and tailor-made support to ensure safeguarding is implemented at an organisational level. For example, one of the organisations is made up of twenty separate associations. To respond to the different safeguarding needs and risks of the various associations, it has taken a few months and many conversations to develop a systematic approach to embedding safeguarding in such a diverse organisation. It has now been agreed that two of the associations will develop one joint action plan on safeguarding implementation as a pilot to later be rolled out more widely across the associations. Pann Ei facilitated a three-day workshop to collectively draft the joint action plan.

Trócaire is also exploring variations of the pilot model in contexts where it is proving difficult to find local consultants. In one such context Trócaire has identified a partner organisation with strong experience in safeguarding that will act in the role of local consultant to support other partner agencies.
Safeguarding implementation cannot be rushed and requires a consultative model that responds to this.

The consultants worked with the partners over a few months, during a relatively intense period with frequent meetings and workshops to support the development of a comprehensive safeguarding framework. This appears to have been a successful approach, although this requires careful planning to be accomplished successfully. However, the implementation of these policies requires a longer period where the engagement with a consultant would be much more periodic. In future models, it is recommended that the consultancy has two parts: an initial phase where there is a push to advance safeguarding, as outlined in the current approach, and a second part to support the implementation of the action plan. This second stage, which may require six months to a year, would only need occasional ‘check in’ moments with the consultant but would ensure there is ongoing support if issues arise.

Funding for safeguarding should be part of all institutional funding agreements.

Partners have been struggling to fund the implementation of their safeguarding policies, especially in raising awareness of safeguarding mechanisms with communities, as they lack funding. Partners have been working to ‘tack-on’ safeguarding to existing planned (and budgeted for) activities but note that this is not sufficient for the communities to have accurate knowledge and input into complaints mechanisms. Whilst some donors do provide a percentage of the budget to capacity strengthening of the organisation, they rarely provide funds for the implementation of safeguarding.

A successful safeguarding policy must be regularly shared with stakeholders, so people are aware of their rights and responsibilities. This requires time and resources. However, most local NGOs lack access to core funding, so project budgets must include resources for safeguarding, otherwise it cannot be properly prioritised.

If the sector wants to truly protect people from exploitation and abuse, there must be funding to back commitments on safeguarding. Just as a grantee is contractually obliged to have strong safeguarding systems or commit to improving them, the funder should financially support the upholding of these systems.

The support to partners provided in the Strengthening Local Capacity pilots cost around 3,000-5,000 Euros per partner. Possible additional funding for intensive support on complaints mechanisms and community engagement could cost a further 5,000 Euros. Overall, this is a small percentage of the average project grant.

Coordination and planning is needed with other agencies to ensure that duplication of support does not occur.

Capacity strengthening is one of the focus areas in commitments to localisation, and many INGOs and funders are providing this to partner organisations. However, there is a need for greater coordination to ensure that such support is well planned and part of an overall strategy. Some partners with multiple INGO donors reported having attended various training workshops on safeguarding run by the
different agencies. Such duplication is an inefficient use of resources and time. There is a need for greater coordination between agencies when providing safeguarding support to local partners.

Advocacy with donors is needed to ensure partner agencies are given time and a voice in the development of their safeguarding systems

Good implementation of safeguarding systems requires buy-in from the organisation, time, and resources. If the sector is truly committed to have quality systems that stop exploitation and abuse, there must be greater flexibility in supporting partners to develop such systems. Accountability does not mean the transfer of responsibility, and a different approach is needed to realign perceptions on safeguarding. Additionally, due diligence should consider evidence of practice that may not be articulated in policy. It is recommended that Trócaire and other agencies engage with donors to develop new approaches that respond to the lessons learnt from this pilot.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


