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| Global catastrophic risks mitigated | Risk multipliers managed | Implementation timeframe |
| Unknown risks | Conflict or political violence | Medium |
| | Institutions that lack inclusivity or accountability | |

Accountability for sexual exploitation and abuse in UN peacekeeping

The UN needs to take action on accountability for peacekeeping sexual exploitation and abuse by improving the quality of investigations, holding perpetrators to account, providing adequate redress to victims, and preventing further abuses.

DETAILS

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WIDER IMPLICATIONS

Enhancing inclusivity and accountability in national and global governance

Bringing more stakeholders to the table—from civil society, the humanitarian industry, and from host communities and local organisations, this proposal advances a more inclusive approach to tackling SEA. SEA is not confined to peacekeeping, it affects every country in the world—building and strengthening such diverse networks of stakeholders can help to address the scourge of this problem more widely. It is important to always be aware of the connection between SEA and other forms and degrees of violence, especially sexual violence, gender-based violence and violence against women in public, private, and in countries in and out of conflict. These networks can play an important role in apply pressure to the UN as a global governance institution—by setting high standards and demonstrating best practice.

Conversing effect in increasing poverty and inequality

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Reducing conflict and political violence

Peacekeeping is one of the most important tools of global governance, yet its effectiveness in overseeing the transition out of conflict towards some sustainable peace is threatened by a lack of trust between host communities and international interveners. SEA threatens that trust, and by default risks threatening the effectiveness of missions. The 2015 Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peacekeeping operations emphasised the importance of engagement with host communities for the success of missions. Engagement is understood as more than consent for interventions, and more than consultations with local people—it indicates that host populations are seen as partners in the work of missions. Such engagement is especially critical to protection strategies, where missions can better understand and respond to the experiences and threats to host populations. In this sense, host populations should not be understood solely as victims or those to be saved by interveners, but active partners in pursuit of peace. This indicates a need to take a people-centred approach to peacekeeping, which is rooted in promotion of the empowerment of ‘the peace-kept’. Combatting SEA is vital to the promotion of this empowerment. The ideas in this proposal advocate for civil society, especially the aid industry and the UN to work together to address SEA. Working together to address SEA—among those whose personnel perpetrate and among affected communities, especially victims, takes an important step forward in cultivating the kind of partnerships necessary to improve the effectiveness of missions more widely.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Implementation strategy

Prevention of SEA relies on an understanding of accountability through three inter-related and interconnected dimensions: accountability of perpetrators, accountability to victims and survivors, and accountability of institutions for putting in place measures to prevent abuses. All three dimensions should be mutually addressed.

Holding perpetrators to account:

Member states need to develop clear and consistent mechanisms for holding perpetrators to account, these should take a criminal justice approach to cases involving sexual violence. Member States need to show a willingness to prosecute. Investigations need to be neutral, transparent and independent. Substantiated cases not resulting in prosecution/disciplinary action should be reviewed. The quality of investigations needs to improved, especially with

regard to a human-rights based approach to protection of victims.

Short Term: CSOs, especially the aid industry, can implement coordinated measures as described above for themselves. Self-regulation of the aid industry needs to stop, and they should work towards setting a global standard for holding perpetrators to account. This standard can be leveraged to apply political pressure to member states and other institutions falling short in accountability. Donors can play a role in encouraging this transition.

Accounting to victims:

In addition to improving investigative processes, member states need to agree on/develop clear and consistent mechanisms for providing redress to victims. Prosecution alone will not remedy the harm done to victims and short and medium-term emergency care and victim assistance should not constitute redress. Victims need to be consulted in terms of forms of redress, and resources need to be sustainably allocated to redress mechanisms. All victims with substantiated cases should have access to suitable redress through formal mechanisms.

Short-medium term: CSOs can assist through enhancing coordination among locally available services and organisations working with and on behalf of victims. They can also work to disseminate anonymised stories of victims' experiences with redress/assistance to apply political pressure to member states. Donors can play a role in sustainability of these organisations and networks. A one-stop shop for victims to report allegations, receive assistance pursue redress can help move this forward.

Accountability of institutions for prevention:

The UN needs to work to address the root causes of SEA. They should enhance the quality of personnel serving in missions, and make sure the appropriate people, know-how, political will and normative goals are reinforced among deployed personnel. Vetting and relevant training of personnel needs to improve and expand. Member states whose troops, police and civilian staff demonstrate best practice should contribute more personnel to missions. MOU agreements need to be transparent, and oversight and support should be provided to pursue all aims above through an independent office. Missions need to address the trust deficit between interveners and the host population by expanding and improving coordination and communication among all stakeholders.

Medium term: CSOs can aid by implementing these measures suggested for themselves. By setting a clear standard and evidence of best practice they can apply political pressure to member states to do the same. Donors can play a role in this by improving sustainability of these reforms.

Political will exists to realise this proposal

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What if political will does not exist yet

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Realisation by implementing or making adjustments to current roadmaps

The UN has already put nearly twenty years of effort in policy, technical and administrative changes meant to address the problem—but there efforts are just not enough. Security Council Resolution 2272 has made headway in naming and shaming member states whose troops are implicated in widespread SEA. The UN's 2008 Comprehensive

Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of SEA advanced the idea that support should be made to victims and that coordination with services available in the host country should be involved in such processes. The Task forces on SEA indicate accounting to affected populations as essential. The Secretary-General's 2017 report on a victim-centred strategy for SEA encourages a human-rights based approach to victims. The Trust Fund and victim assistance mapping indicate work towards improving the quality of assistance to victims, and the UN's assistance in processing paternity claims suggests compensation is a possibility. The 2005 Zeid report and the 2015 High-Level Panel on Peace Operations emphasised the need to provide redress and compensation to victims. Lastly, vetting and training have received attention in DPKO. Dating back 15 years, existing agreements, reports and recommendations have already said most elements of this proposal. These are not entirely new ideas, and recent work suggests political will is increasing on most of these elements.

Decision makers and implementers

The decisions makers are those institutions who are implicated in sexual exploitation and abuse--the UN and the aid industry. They will also play a key role in implementation, alongside other CSOs who are working with or on behalf of victims.

Holding perpetrators to account and providing redress to victims are the two areas that seem to have the least political will--and in their absence prevention is not likely. CSOs working in a peacekeeping context can cultivate political will by setting the standards for best practice themselves. If they are able to demonstrate significant progress in all three dimensions of accountability described in this proposal, they and global publics can use this information to apply political pressure to member states. It will be harder for member states to renege on duties and commitments where clear standards of best practice demonstrate success in addressing SEA. Civil Society more widely, especially the research community in collaboration with CSOs, can work to document best and worst practice to use to apply such political pressure.

Addressing the trust deficit between interveners and the host population will also be a challenge, as the separation between the two has largely been institutionalised in the name of the physical security of troops and to prevent them from perpetrating SEA. The logics of such separation are certainly subject to critique among practitioners and researchers, as this is largely seen as problematic for the success of peacekeeping mandates. This is where CSOs operating in peacekeeping contexts can play a role--most of them are already working closely with host populations. They can develop best practice, share this information widely, and use it to apply pressure to states.

Why is this a long term proposal

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MITIGATING RISKS

Mitigating unknown risks

SEA is a hugely challenging problem for the UN, for peacekeeping, and for the aid industry. It is also an especially difficult problem for how the UN relates to civil society. Peacekeeping a site of global governance incorporates actors from the UN, the aid industry, other humanitarian actors who are meant to 'do' good. While many of them do, a minority corrode this trust when they perpetrate SEA. This trust is further corroded by the failure of institutions to take steps to hold perpetrators to account, account to victims and implement robust prevention measures. If the UN and aid industry stand for abusing those they are meant to serve, then the message to host communities and wider global publics on what the UN and aid industry stand for, as humanitarian actors, is quite dire. It is already difficult for these actors to tackle current pressing challenges, but the absence of strong narrative on the value and purpose of the UN will make it all the more difficult to respond to future unknown risks.

Addressing SEA adequately would indicate that the international system has made significant headway in some of its biggest challenges, including declining support for multilateralism; the promotion of international standards, rights and concepts of justice; the sustainability and effectiveness of international interventions, and orienting itself towards civil society as partners in pursuit of the UN's core goals and aspirations. Civil society has immense value and potential for the work of the UN—their knowledge, expertise, experience and innovation can be critical to mitigating risks to peacekeeping. SEA action can constitute a rallying point for cooperation between the UN, the aid industry, host populations and civil society more widely. Such coordination can also help shape a positive message for the UN as multilateral institution of global governance. If diverse stakeholders from the UN, aid industry and wider civil society can coalesce around SEA action, they may be able to work together elsewhere. To make the system work, we need to tackle SEA.