**Summary of GED Institutional Working Group Discussion**

**Gender and Security – January 2014**

In November 2013, we launched a discussion on the GED Institutional Working Group around gender and security. The questions we asked were as follows:

1. *What are the risks and vulnerabilities that women, men or third gender (CARE staff) face in terms of safety and security in your location (Country Office / Field-Sub Office)?  How do they differ?*
2. *What types of things do you do/does the organization already do to manage, mitigate or address the different safety and security risks and vulnerabilities that women, men or third gender CARE staff face? What ideas do you have about what else could be done?*
3. *What factors influence our ability to employ women, men or third gender CARE staff into remote postings; what factors influence their ability to stay in remote areas and how far is safety and security an issue?  What efforts are we making to address those factors that make it more difficult to attract women and men to these posts?*

Up to the end of January 2014, we received a total of 9 responses to these questions. This time, many of these responses represented the result of facilitated discussions within COs which were then summarized and forwarded by working group members. This was the case in CARE Austria, Papua New Guinea, Myanmar, Timor Leste, Rwanda and Bangladesh. Thanks to all who took time to facilitate the discussions and summarize them.

One notable omission from most submissions was any reference to third gender employees, one submission noted that ‘third gender’ was not socially acceptable in their context and noted that someone who transcends local gender norms would face significant security risks. It would be worth exploring this more deeply.

**Risks and vulnerabilities/Ability to Employ to the Field**

***Socio-cultural context:*** There is a strong sense that staff are often required to work in conservative locations where women face specific challenges associated with being a woman away from home. In general, when working on gender or women’s empowerment staff may face non-cooperation and threats if they challenge gender norms in communities particular in the initial period of the program.

This issue was also raised more broadly by one group who felt that women visitors to COs are affected by the cultural expectations of women’s behavior. Sometimes issues of gender equality are perceived to be ‘northern’ or ‘western’ issues. While the literature shows a very different picture, this often undermines discussions in some COs. For example if women are in a mostly male setting in a CO, they may feel doubly watched both as women and foreigners and this leads to a level of insecurity about appropriate behavior and a high consciousness of that. This creates vulnerability (and insecurity) on the part of the women visitor but also undermines her ability to do her job. Often, this sense of vulnerability is coupled with an acute sense of the power relations playing out in contexts of a history of colonialism or racism this can mean that Western visitors make extra efforts to be humble and adapt to the context of the country; this can create tension when the acceptable norm is that a woman not speak out and it can mean that visitors feel unsure how to point out gender inequality in CARE offices.

The political context also plays a role, in contexts where there are demonstration, political unrest or generalized insecurity, this can be challenging for all staff.

***Transport:*** Participants reported that transportation represents a risk to all staff, but particularly women. In remote areas there are limited transportation options for staff and this can pose problems and hinder mobility. Women often feel insecure and uncomfortable travelling alone and travelling on public transportation. Equally, the lack of transportation means that women who live away from their families are often put off because of the difficulty of frequent travelling home.

One group submission noted that due to socio-cultural norms in some contexts, CARE drivers (who are usually men) are less likely to pay attention to the requests of a female passenger and that this can present safety concerns for example around speeding. This group also felt that we should make more of an effort to employ women drivers because otherwise female staff are ‘always at the mercy of a man who may, or may not, have been trained on gender equality.’

Transport is also a risk because of accidents, the issue of motorbikes was particularly singled out. Some contributions pointed to the fact that women staff often feel particularly vulnerable riding along in challenging conditions (e.g. poor roads, long distances) and this is particularly difficult in contexts where riding a motorbike is not culturally acceptable for women. At the same time, another contributor pointed to the fact that often we buy smaller, less powerful motorbikes for women (based on gender norms about them being weak and delicate) and they do not work as well on the rough terrain.

***Communication:*** Communication networks can also be a challenge in remote areas, increasing vulnerability and rendering it difficult for men and women to send urgent messages. This may be a factor in women’s choice to take up such positions.

***Accommodation:*** Accommodation, particularly in remote areas can post specific challenges for women, since finding safe and suitable accommodation is a challenge. Equally, staff report that having outside washrooms or bathrooms with doors that do not lock can increase women’s vulnerability in remote areas. Staying overnight in very remote villages is particularly difficult for women. Finally one group felt that CARE assets and personal assets can be at greater risk of theft when staff stay away from their homes.

***Sexual vulnerability:*** One contribution mentioned the specific challenge that women face of ‘false friendship’ from men; another contribution added to this by stating that while most security risks applied equally to men and women, the case of sexual assault was different. Women are more vulnerable to this. This often means that women get warned more about mobility and their style of dress than men and additionally this restricts women’s movements in their free time. Often for women who visit a project alone, this means that they are confined to a hotel – they feel unable to go for a walk alone. Some women also report not feeling safe staying in a hotel in remote areas alone. In short, many of the contributions felt that women are more at risk of rape and sexual abuse without the protection of their family around them.

One group also raised the point that both men and women who are separated from their families are also at risk from alcoholism, poor diet and increased sexual risks due to have numerous partners.

***Family concerns:*** Often in remote locations, safe and secure child care can be a challenge for dependents; this means that often those working in these locations are separated from their families. Given prevailing gender norms, this is often more acceptable for men than for women.

Another contribution pointed to the potential that those (both men and women) who are separated from their families might be more prone to mismanage family income, lack time and therefore spend less time with spouses and children and helping out at home (which may have consequences on family cohesion); being based away from the family can also lead to overwork and stress.

**Strategies to Mitigate Security Risks and Vulnerabilities**

There were many efforts being made to manage and mitigate risk.

**Policies and procedures:** Most COs have security guidelines. It was noted that one group had not always received security briefing or information when visiting all COs. So their use is not consistent. At the same time, other groups noted that they have developed security policies and guidelines. They felt that there is a need for regular security risk assessments and updating of security guidelines. Some of the efforts that have taken place specifically include:

* The introduction of a Domestic Violence policy which states a zero-tolerance policy towards employing known perpetrators and outlines the type of support CARE can offer survivors.
* The creation of family friendly policies more broadly in the CO in recognition that women often face very high domestic workloads in comparison with men and may face conflict if they do not complete ‘their’ work at home. This includes maternity and paternity leave, family care leave, nursing leave, leave after spending multiple days travelling, support to relocation of babysitter, etc).
* Strong connections with local people (government and local people) to assist with information sharing that then feeds into security assessments.
* Transportation being provided to and from work along with weekend security transportation if needed.
* Women are discouraged from moving around after sunset alone
* During the day in remote locations, women are advised to travel in pairs or with 1-2 men staff or a security agent.
* Women staff who work late in a project area are encouraged to stay in the area and find accommodation in a hotel (and not travel home)
* Women are encouraged to wear the veil in conservative contexts
* In particularly insecure environments, women can access vehicles if deemed necessary for her security
* Staff who work far from their home are given a free Friday to travel home twice a month.
* Staff are enabled to work from home in times of political unrest and strikes
* Staff housing is provided in small towns and not remote villages in recognition of the relative security and adequacy of facilities in the towns. In one context, staff houses are single sex in recognition of prevailing gender norms that make it unacceptable for men and women to stay together.
* Field allowances are paid to enable staff to get secure accommodation in remotes areas and a percentage of transportation costs are reimbursed
* Field staff are provided with mobile phones to enable improved communication from remote areas.
* Staff toilets provide free condoms
* Staff houses are provided in recognition of the vulnerability of women staying alone in hotels. Women staff are particularly advised to stay in staff housing; staff are also advised to leave assets in the office when staying in remote areas.
* Women staff are given equivalent reimbursement of 2 seats on public transport to enable her to travel with a companion or travel in comfort and safety.
* Women staff are given the ability to select their housing, often choosing areas where she feels safe or sharing houses with other women.

**Training and awareness:** Many COs mentioned that they provide security orientation to all staff; others mentioned that women get training in the use of motorbikes and are supported to get their license. One contributor felt that providing self-defense courses for women would further enhance their security (covering psychological and physical aspects of self defense). This contributor also felt that in some cases it would make sense to work with local police forces in remote areas, since they may be able to provide improved security for staff.

Another contributor felt that having discussions and reflection on gender issues can help people become aware of the specific vulnerabilities and risks that women and men staff face. This may also allow for new approaches to addressing them. We have many examples of this type of approach in our programs; we should be using them in CARE.

One contributor felt that reflection was also needed around the issues of third gender (LGBTI people) and their equal rights and opportunities, since there is a lack of understanding and acceptance of them in CARE.

Another CO is considering offering training on gender equality and domestic violence to spouses and families of staff