

## Sharing risk – a good practice example in the INGO sector

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### A case study of shared risk

#### **Background**

For many years Christian Blind Mission (CBM) and Sight Savers International (SSI) have supported local partners in Nigeria to implement development and humanitarian projects in the disability sector.

Owing to growing insecurity in Nigeria, one of our largest local partners called HANDS, approached us to discuss direct funding for the recruitment of a Security Officer. It was agreed that CBM & SSI would fund two Security and Safeguarding (S&SG) Officers for HANDS and each pay 50% of the expenses for three years.

CBM and SSI operations in Nigeria face a number of challenges. The security environment remains extremely complex, with a number of regions which are high risk due to civil unrest, kidnappings and banditry, and present potential threats to staff. The environment in Nigeria is also extremely changeable, with areas prone to unexpected risk increases in short periods as well as wider contextual changes. Effective Nigeria-based security management is vital to ensure the safety of staff and continuity of operations in this sensitive environment, so it was decided that a new approach of pooling resources and expertise to share the risk would be beneficial for all.

SSI and CBM operate in partnership through consortium arrangements in Nigeria, often with multiple organisations. This increases our programming reach and effectiveness, but also poses a number of specific challenges regarding security and risk management. Local partner organisations, such as HANDS, lead much of the practical project implementation at a field level. Although we ensure our projects are designed to try and maximise community acceptance, including when selecting local partners, this still means that the bulk of the remaining residual risk is faced by our local partners. Duty of care responsibilities in large consortium and partnership arrangements can also be ambiguous if not clarified at an early stage.

SSI and CBM's approaches to security management are evolving. In many cases, when selecting partners, we transfer risks to partners once we have made sure their standards are sufficient. In particularly challenging and hostile environments, this can leave a high level of residual risk which could be difficult to manage effectively without a dedicated security resource at the implementation level. For this reason, in Nigeria CBM and SSI decided to support HANDS with the recruitment of their security staff to improve the overall risk management of the project.

#### **Outcome and Benefits**

Recruitment of high-quality security staff can be difficult. Hiring managers with limited experience of the security industry means they may struggle to identify suitable candidates and the right skills and backgrounds which will make for a good security officer. For this reason SSI and CBM Nigeria based security staff supported the organisation with recruitment processes including assessing and interviewing candidates.

It is also key to ensure the staff are effectively supported by their employer HANDS, but that SSI and CBM also provide ongoing support. Nigeria-based security and safeguarding staff from CBM and SSI

are providing technical coaching and help with the development of Standard Operational Procedures for HANDS. The new officers were given a two-day, face-to-face induction at the CBM Country office in Abuja and during the first six months, the new staff received bi-weekly support and a monthly catch-up meeting. CBM, SSI and the local partner security officers are also running a multi-day workshop on security and safeguarding issues in the summer of 2022 to improve engagement and focus on professional development.

HANDS has also committed to support the two staff promote a culture where security risks are minimised and mitigated among HANDS staff and beneficiaries. Although closely supported by CBM and SSI security staff, HANDS management is now taking full responsibilities of the day-to-day work schedule and direct supervision of their security officers. We are already seeing a steady, gradual move in HANDS towards improving security risk mitigation into daily processes.

### **Wider Application and Challenges**

While this model has so far proven successful on this specific project in Nigeria, and is something we may consider in other areas or with other partners, there do remain a number of unknowns and potential challenges.

We were fortunate in this case to have a local INGO partner (HANDS) that was on-board and saw the value in the proposal. This active buy-in from the local partner has been crucial, as otherwise it would be difficult to insist on these recruitments from the outside and have much expectation of sustainable success. Full ownership of the security roles by the local partner is also key. Although we can assist with recruitment and technical support, we would need to be careful not to overstep our boundaries when “sharing risk” – for example by inadvertently making security management decisions for another organisation. This could pose a number of difficult legal/duty of care issues, as well as likely creating tension in the partner relationship.

We were also fortunate to trial this approach in Nigeria. As a large country with a number of significant security challenges, the Nigerian security industry is thriving and there was no shortage of potential candidates. In other contexts, the pool of appropriate professionals to recruit from for a local NGO security role may be significantly more limited. In contexts like this, recruiting directly from junior and mid-ranking roles in the local security forces may be the main recruitment pool – but this poses its own challenges in terms of community acceptance, NGO profiles and commitments to neutrality. There are also questions about sustainability, and whether security officers can be induced to stay for a long period at a local NGO, instead of using it as a stepping stone to a security position at an international organisation instead.

The investment of time and resource from our own security teams may also be a significant factor. Although a positive experience so far in this case (partly due to SSI and CBM’s own investment in Nigeria based security staff), the investment required to closely support and mentor a new security professional, in an organisation that has not had a security position before, should not be underestimated. This is particularly the case in countries where SSI and CBM do not have dedicated, in-country staff. It may be difficult to provide the appropriate level of mentoring and relationship building to a local NGO security officer (who is likely to be fairly new to the INGO security field) from a global or regional level.

### **Conclusion**

In the short term, CBM & SSI will closely monitor the pros and cons of funding S&SG positions in HANDS to see whether a real change in mindset can be observed towards security and safeguarding. In the long-term HANDS will need to be able to stand alone in areas of security and safeguarding and add the cost for such positions into its own annual budget. This transition is a potential future challenge, and so over coming years clear proof of value for money and concrete benefits will be identified and recorded. CBM and SSI will also need to consider our positions in terms of contracts and partnership agreements, and what standards we expect a local partner to meet. While this is taking shape, CBM & SSI remain willing to provide technical support, coaching and training where needed. If this concept works well, our agencies will consider such investments in other strategic partners as well.

Quote from Bright Ekweremadu, CBM Country Director, Nigeria

*“Nigeria has become a very volatile place with rising insecurity in recent times. Most INGOs working in the northern part of Nigeria now have Security Officers who help staff in assessing security situation and providing the much needed guidance to staff on an ongoing basis - particularly those who travel out of base often to project sites.*

*Health and Development Support Programme (HANDS) is the biggest CBM and SSI partner in Nigeria with operations across most of the northeastern states (the epicenter of insecurity in Nigeria). The partnership and decision by CBM and SSI to invest and provide support to hire and retain Security and Safeguarding Officers resident and working directly with HANDS came at the most appropriate time, when Nigeria is facing a myriad of security challenges, and in particular in the northeast states of Yobe and Jigawa which are among the states where HANDS has long standing and ongoing operations which are funded by CBM and SSI.*

*The need to have dedicated Security and Safeguarding staff cannot be over emphasized to enable the partner to effectively and efficiently monitor and manage security and safeguarding developments for the safety of the staff and beneficiaries of the programmes. From inception, HANDS was expected to take full responsibility of managing the day-to-day activities of the position; notwithstanding, the CBM Nigeria Country office through its Regional S&SG Advisor, took active part in the recruitment process, and thereafter, provided a 2-day full induction to the two S&SG officers at the CBM country office in Abuja.*

*On an ongoing basis, the CBM Nigeria country office through the Regional S&SG Adviser has been providing the necessary support in capacity building of the S&SG Officers for HANDS in the last 6 months since their assumption of office. It is our hope that our support to the S&SG Officers will diminish from the current “handholding” support to usual supervisory and support assistance in the coming months.”*

Changing focus – a new perspective of partner risk within CBM

Previously CBM was merely investing in the security and safeguarding of its own staff. Our own offices and vehicles needed to be protected. Staff had to be trained. Security management plans were to be developed. The majority of time and investments went into our own infrastructure and preparedness.

CBM staff do travel occasionally in insecure areas but in reality, the brunt of security risks is faced by our partner staff. They are far larger in number and are constantly on the move in communities plagued by conflict, insurgency, crime and other challenges. Very often our partners have a high risk

tolerance. They are used to taking risks and do not want to run the risk of losing a funding opportunity by emphasizing risks that may hinder project implementation.

In contrast to these very real risks, preparedness was usually rather low at partner level. Thorough Security Risk Assessments were rarely done. Many local partner staff had never received travel security training. Partner management had very limited to none, written security management plans let alone had they ever partaken in a crisis management training. Remote location communication gear, first aid equipment, grab bags etc were generally not available. Incidents and near-misses were often not reported and no lessons learned were implemented. Many of our partners employ people with disabilities amongst their staff. From experience we know that staff with a disability are at an increased risk if they and their team are untrained and unprepared from a security perspective.

This was deemed an unacceptable contrast and gap. Partner staff were facing real risks of serious injury or even loss of life or kidnap without appropriate, thought-through mitigation measures being in place. These unmitigated risks do not only threaten the wellbeing of partner staff but also hinder reaching project objectives, and supporting persons with disabilities in some of the poorest communities of the world. Security incidents lead to sudden, unexpected, high costs, delays and potentially damaging media exposure. Lacking attention for security acceptance strategies hinder the ability of partner staff to freely move in project areas.

Since three years CBM is changing tactics in the field of security and safeguarding. We no longer accept to merely transfer security risks to partners but seek to share risks where feasible. CBM does this through the following measures:

- Field based CBM S&SG Advisors are available to assist and advice partners and promote disability inclusive security risk management.
- CBM S&SG trainings slots are opened up for partner staff.
- Where required, our own S&SG trainers implement (disability inclusive) security tasks with/for partners instead of relying merely on external providers with an off-the-shelf security product.
- It is now mandatory to consider S&SG risks during the development of all projects in high and extreme risk areas.
- Participatory Security / Safeguarding Risk Assessments are regularly planned as part of a project design phase.
- Project budgets must include a section on S&SG with tangible items linked to identified security risks. A percentage of funding is recommended for different levels of risk.
- Security and first aid trainings and investments are usually planned in the early phases of a project to ensure they benefit staff during the full project duration.
- All CBM partners are urged to nominate dedicated staff as security & safeguarding focal persons.
- Partners are required to report all security incidents to CBM so that we can help assess future risks and help fine-tune existing measures in view of what happened.
- We seek to help partners to reach Minimum Operational Security / Safeguarding Standards.

All in all, we see a growing partnership equality through this new approach. Partners now more openly discuss risks without firstly fearing it may risk their chances of acquiring funding. Security risks are assessed at the beginning of a project and less unexpected 'patchwork solutions' must be found to mitigate sudden risks. Partner staff see that their donor cares about them and is invested in helping the organisation manage risk and reduce avoidable incidents.

CBM and partner staff, who often travel together on field trips, now have comparable standards in training, equipment and procedures. This leads to fewer misunderstandings, unnecessary risks taken and less risk to jeopardize a carefully built acceptance strategy. Targets and deadlines are set in view of prevalent, contextual security risks and – where sudden changes occur – deliverables are rediscussed in view of keeping staff safe and meeting realistic objectives.

CBM in turn seeks a dialogue with its own institutional donors urging them to allow us to include S&SG activities and expenses into our proposals. In this manner we hope to promote a strategic dialogue about risk sharing and the necessity to extend a degree of duty of care to the wellbeing of partner staff. We cannot carry the duty of care for a partner but we can help share the risk!

#### Sightsavers Approach to Risk Management with partners

SSI has spent recent years growing our own internal capacity and refining our own approaches and processes. We have to date adopted a fairly conventional approach to risk transfer and duty of care with partners, with the HANDS experience one of our first main steps into tackling issues of risk management with partners. Our priorities to date have focused on ensuring appropriate risk assessment, budgeting, minimum operating standards and reporting requirements. We have also been working to instil the value of incident reporting and open communication about security issues.

Our security function at SSI has now expanded, and with some increasing stability post-COVID, one of our key priorities in 2022 and 2023 is to improve how we manage our risks with partners. We are aiming to adopt a similar position to CBM in our next steps – focusing increasingly on training, capacity building, providing practical guidance we can offer to new partners, and improving our donor communications on security budgeting.

#### Quote from CHRISTOPHER S. OGOSHI, HANDS Programme Director

*“With support from CBM and Sightsavers over the course of several years, HANDS carries out its implementation of health intervention activities such as Mass Drug Administration (MDA) for Neglected Tropical Diseases namely, Onchocerciasis, Lymphatic Filariasis, Schistosomiasis and Soil Transmitted Helminths (STH) and Trachoma Trichiasis (TT) surgeries in the supported states of Yobe, Jigawa, Bauchi, Kano, Benue, Plateau and the Federal Capital Territory. These activities are implemented in regions that are prone to high-risk insecurity incidents, and these incidents are potentially increasing in frequency, intensity and scope. So it became necessary to engage the services of expert security personnel whose responsibilities are dedicated to security and safeguarding.*

*Two dedicated professionals were recruited in October 2021 as a result, and started work in November 2021, after being given practical and technical support from CBM and Sightsavers. HANDS provided internal orientation and training, followed by Security and Safeguarding training sessions offered by CBM and Sightsavers. These trainings provided soft-landing for the new officers, equipping them to carry out their duties professionally.*

#### **BENEFITS**

*Since the new security officers commenced work there has been improvement in security awareness within HANDS. The procedures for travel, vehicle safety, security communication and clearance has been fine-tuned to align with the existing HANDS security policy. Periodic risk assessment is being done and shared with HANDS management for effective planning. Security profiling of work areas is being done to identify safe zones and routes to improve safe programme implementation. Use of quick communication media enable effective interaction between security officers and travelling personnel. And the security feedback system is being improved. Safeguarding trainings are being conducted*

*inclusive of lower cadre staff to promote awareness and safe work ethics, in the field and offices. Safeguarding/security signages are prepared and strategically posted for public sighting. Feedback and/or reporting of incidents is regularly encouraged and mechanism for such is made clear, and the mindset of the management and staff in general is responsive to the positive changes. Development is underway for a comprehensive security and safeguarding risk register. We believe such document will enable officers to quickly recognize security/safeguarding risks involved in programme activities and properly plan for appropriate mitigation.*

#### APPRECIATION

*At this time, HANDS management is happy with the presence of the new security officers and there is positive impact from their efforts. We believe that with the passing of time, further positive developments will be recorded as we strive to maintain standard practice in all areas of safe programme implementation. The board and management of HANDS is very grateful to CBM and Sightsavers for supporting this initiative. The presence and input of the security officers is adding value toward better project planning and raising the consciousness of safety, security and safeguarding at various levels of the programme activities.”*

#### **Quote from Sunday Isiyaku, Sightsavers Nigeria Country Director**

*“Sightsavers works closely with partners including national NGOs like HANDS. This partnership has allowed us to develop local partners for programme delivery and it has been very successful. We have a duty of care to staff and beneficiaries and take our responsibility to ensure programmes are delivered devoid of any security treats very seriously. It is vital that we provide adequate support when we transfer the delivery of programmes to partners, especially if they work in insecure or conflict-prone areas. If the partners do not have the structure and expertise in security, Sightsavers and CBM - in the case of HANDS - offer to support them. We help them put in place security measures that would allow them to reduce their exposure to security risk while undertaking the work we have contracted them to do. This includes supporting them to put in place security protocols for their work, training them on security audit and supporting the recruitment of a Security Officer to ensure compliance to the protocols and by extension reducing our exposure to risk.*

*This has been a very practical experience of how national NGOs can be supported to ensure security consciences and awareness and taking on the responsibility towards ensuring safe delivery of our programmes. HANDS have attested to the usefulness of the role and I believe this is a role they will continue to support even after the end of Sightsavers supporting them.”*

