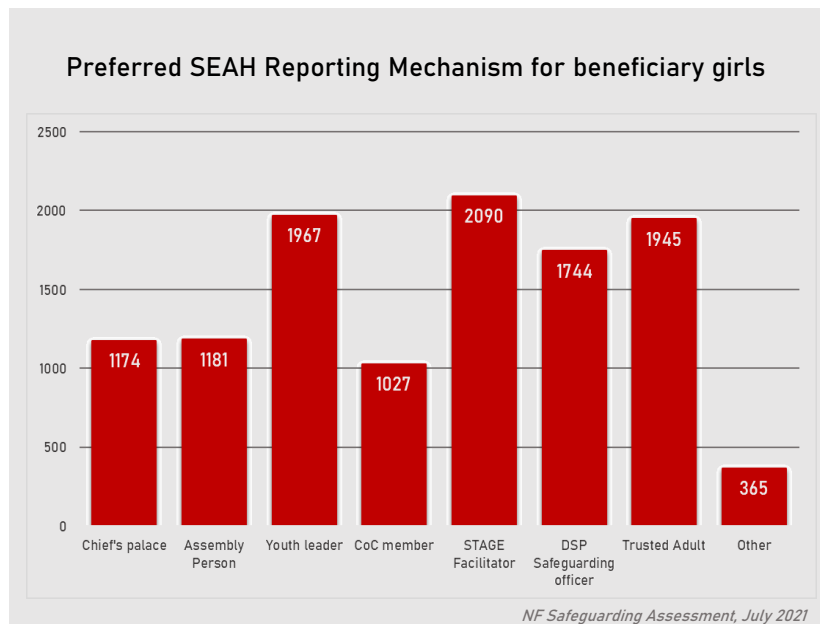




SAFEGUARDING – STAGE HELPLINE

As part of creating a safe, empowering environment for girls to learn, STAGE has established channels to report any form of abuse. To complement community-based reporting mechanisms, STAGE set up a national Helpline. But, how is this perceived by the girls themselves and what are the lessons learned? This brief provides an overview.

A recent study assessed the knowledge of the girls about community-based reporting and support mechanisms and their experience with the Safeguarding Helpline. During the anonymous study, 95% of the girls reported that they were aware of the Helpline, whilst 5%, 162 girls, indicated that they had made use of it and received feedback. Girls who knew about the Helpline mostly were made aware through the behavioural change posters in their communities. In 98% of the communities, such posters were visible to the girls.



The nationwide helpline provides an alternative to the community-based reporting mechanisms (CBRM) that have been established in the project. STAGE has trained various community members and has set up a Community Oversight Committee (CoC) and trained a Facilitator and Safeguarding Officer to which girls and boys can report any abuse. Additionally, through life skills education, the girls were encouraged to identify a trusted adult to whom they could go with their concerns. As can be seen in the chart above, many girls prefer to report abuse to either the Facilitator, CoC member, Safeguarding officer or trusted adult. Nevertheless, more traditional reporting mechanisms, such as the Village Chief and Assembly Person are also still preferred by many. For STAGE, this meant that we needed to train these groups as well in how to prevent, report and support survivors of abuse. Despite all this, the need remains to have an external mechanism in place which girls can call without fear of reprisal or unwanted exposure.



Figure 1 – One of the operators of the helpline



Voices from the field

It is not only girls who experience abuse who call the helpline. A large number of calls come from girls, facilitators and others who want to know more about STAGE. They ask about the various support interventions offered through the programme. A Facilitator from Kpandai says;

"I had received the STAGE Helpline Toll-free number 0800 12 12 12 from my Supervisor. I wanted more information on how the Center works. All my questions were answered satisfactorily".

Similar calls related to COVID-19 allowed WEI staff to provide accurate information about the cause and ways of preventing the spread of the disease. When helpline operators learn of new community needs, WEI is able to quickly liaise with a partner NGO in the region to provide the needed follow up.



Through our programming, we invest a lot of community animation and capacity building to prevent sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. This ranges from behavioural change campaigns to safe vetting of all staff and volunteers involved. STAGE has developed child and vulnerable adult safeguarding policies and a case management framework. The framework outlines the steps that WEI and subcontractors will follow when alleged abuse is being reported. Detailed information about this framework can be obtained [here](#).

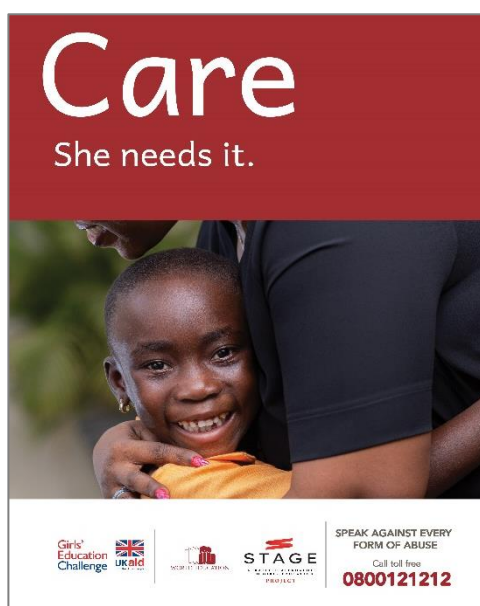


Figure 2 – Poster to promote positive parenting and awareness about the STAGE Helpline

STAGE is currently advocating for the uptake of safe vetting of community-based CBE and vocational training personnel as well as the installation of community-based reporting mechanisms outside of the project. Using lessons learned from our Helpline intervention, we aim to discuss with partners how to strengthen referral mechanisms to support survivors of abuse. Regular referral mapping and quality assurance of the services provided by state and non-state actors is needed. Additionally, the national Helpline needs to have access to this information and make use of referrals to regions in which the caller lives. In our experience, it is often this localized approach that benefits the caller. Specialists in the region possess the language, cultural knowledge and understanding of community structures that are needed to ensure that all girls and boys are effectively supported.

This brief is part of a Strategic Approaches to Girls' Education Best Practice series.

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