



# Safeguarding Policy

## Link Community Development International

### Policy introduction

Link Community Development International (from herein referred to as Link International) believes that a child, vulnerable adult or person at risk should never experience abuse of any kind. We have a zero-tolerance approach to any harm to or exploitation of a child or vulnerable adult by any of our staff, representatives or partners. We also have a responsibility to work in a way that promotes the welfare of all, including Link International's own staff and partners that protects them from harm.

Our safeguarding policy demonstrates accountability to beneficiaries, staff and all partners; an organisational culture that tackles power imbalances and gender inequality; and rigorous, anonymous and safe reporting and complaints mechanisms.

We affirm our belief in the right of all, including children and vulnerable adults, to be protected from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence, in line with UN recommendations<sup>1</sup> and national child protection legislation. We recognise our duty of care to keep everyone safe in our interventions as much as our mandate allows and recognise it is our responsibility to ensure that all are treated with dignity and respect.

### General Principles

Link International's Safeguarding Policy is based on the following set of principles:

- Everyone has equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation, including children and adults at risk.
- The welfare of children and other beneficiaries is the paramount consideration in all aspects of Link International's work.
- Anyone acting on behalf of Link International understands that everyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity, culture, age, religion, socio-economic background, sexual orientation or ability, has equal rights to protection, including children and adults at risk.
- All staff, trustees and third parties e.g. consultants, contractors, suppliers, sub-contractors, have a responsibility to at least meet minimum standards of protection for all programme beneficiaries including children and vulnerable adults, in Link International programmes, as well as towards each other.
- This Safeguarding Policy should be considered alongside other relevant policies and procedures in Link International's Employee Handbook including Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection, Whistle blowing, Harassment (which includes sexual harassment and bullying), Procurement, Recruitment and Selection, Data Protection and the Media and Communications.

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to national legislation and action plans on Child Protection in Link International's countries of operation, including The Children Act (1989) in the UK; the Child Care Protection and Justice Act (2010) in Malawi; the National Social Protection Strategy 2007 (NSPS) and The Children's Act of 1998 (Act 560) in Ghana; The National Strategic Programme Plan of Interventions for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (NSPPI-2) and The Children's Act in Uganda; and the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989; Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007

## 1. Scope of the policy

The Policy applies to all staff, whether international or national, full time, part time, volunteers and trustees, and to those engaged on short-term contracts e.g. consultants, researchers, sub-contractors and suppliers of Link International. The policy also applies to staff and representatives of partner agencies and any other individuals, groups or organisations who have a formal/ contractual relationship with Link International that involves any contact with children or vulnerable adults (unless it is formally agreed that a partner organisation enforces its own safeguarding policy).

Donors, journalists, celebrities, politicians and other people who visit any of Link International's programmes or offices must be made aware that this Safeguarding Policy applies to them. Link International expects that all those above, when representing Link International, must act in accordance with this policy in both their professional and personal lives during and outside of working hours.

The annexes must also be read, understood and adhered to. These include the reporting mechanism, the Media and Communication Policy, consent forms and reporting templates.

## 2. Definition of terms

**'Child'** is anyone under the age of 18 years old.

**'Child Abuse'** consists of anything which individuals, institutions or processes do or fail to do which directly or indirectly harms children or damages their prospect of safe and healthy development into adulthood. The main categories of abuse are defined by WHO as Physical Abuse, Emotional Abuse, Neglect and Negligent treatment, sexual abuse and exploitation.

**'Child Protection'** refers to the actions we take when we have specific concerns that a particular child is at risk of significant harm

**'Vulnerable Adult'** or **'Adult at Risk'** refers to a person 18 years or over who is, or may be, unable to take care of themselves against harm or exploitation, whether due to age, physical or mental disability or otherwise. It should also be acknowledged that other factors such as unequal power dynamics, poverty and gender amongst others, can also make a person more vulnerable.

**'Safeguarding'** is the responsibility of organisations to make sure their staff, operations and programmes do no harm to children and vulnerable adults or expose them to abuse or exploitation. Best practice states we should think about how we safeguard everyone in our organisation at all times, including protecting staff from inappropriate behaviour such as bullying and harassment.

**'Sexual Exploitation'** means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from sexual exploitation or another.

## 3. Safe recruitment and selection of personnel and partners

Link International applies robust safe recruitment approaches when recruiting and selecting staff, volunteers, trustees and partners. A zero-tolerance safeguarding commitment is in all job descriptions and full background checks are carried out on all prospective staff.

Link International has a robust Recruitment and Selection Policy which aligns with this Safeguarding Policy.

For organisations selected to work in partnership with Link International;

- They will be requested to have a Safeguarding Policy and Child Protection Policy in place that are rigorous and appropriate, and aligned with Link International's commitment and expectations towards safeguarding.

- Partnership agreements between Link International and partners will show clearly that all safeguarding issues must be reported immediately and within 24 hours to the International Programme Director of Link International.
- A clear Code of Conduct will be shared and adhered to by all partner personnel, sub-contractors, and other representatives.

#### **4. Code of Conduct and Professional Behaviour**

Anyone acting on behalf of Link International will adhere to standards of behaviour laid out in this Code of Conduct, as well as other relevant policies. The Senior Management Team of Link International is responsible for ensuring that all those relevant sign the Safeguarding Policy which includes acceptance of this Code of Conduct.

The Code of Conduct provides clear guidance on the expectations of staff, volunteers and representatives in promoting Link International's values and principles and protecting its reputation.

When representing Link International, this Code of Conduct covers behaviour in and outside of working hours.

Link International representatives **MUST ALWAYS:**

- Work actively to protect all by complying with Link Community Development's Safeguarding and Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection policy and procedures.
- Uphold and adhere to all other Link International policies and procedures.
- Respect the basic rights of others by acting fairly, honestly and tactfully, and by treating all with dignity and respect.
- Maintain high standards of personal and professional conduct, including acting appropriately around the Link Community Development logo such as on our vehicles.
- Protect the safety and well-being of themselves and others.
- Protect the organisation's assets and resources.
- Report any matter that breaks the standards contained in this Code of Conduct.

Link International representatives **MUST NEVER:**

- Abuse, exploit or develop physical or sexual relationships with anyone under the age of 18. Sexual relations are prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief regarding age is not a defence.
- Have sexual relationships with any adult beneficiaries, since they are based inherently on unequal power dynamics, undermine the credibility and integrity of Link Community Development and are strongly discouraged.
- Use computers or other electronic devices to view, download, distribute or create indecent or inappropriate images.
- Distribute gifts or financial support to any child or beneficiary. All support must go through official channels via Link Community Development or a partner.
- Take photographs or recordings using personal devices. Staff may, if cleared with your line manager, and if images or recordings are uploaded to a Link computer and then deleted from your device within 48 hours.

- Engage in social media relationships or post or share images or recordings on personal social media channels.
- Drink alcohol or use any other substances in a way that adversely affects your ability to do your job or affects the reputation of the organisation.
- Accept bribes or significant gifts from governments, beneficiaries, donors, suppliers or others, which have been offered as a result of your employment.
- Be in possession of, nor profit from the sale of, illegal goods or substances.
- Behave in a way which threatens the security of yourself or others.

Any staff found to be in contravention of any of the above will be subject to Link International's disciplinary procedures as detailed in the Employee Handbook. Consultants and contractors failing to adhere to this code will lead to termination of contracts or agreements. Other visitors, such as trustees or funders, will be reported to the appropriate authorities.

## **5. Education and training**

The Senior Management team of Link International will ensure that opportunities are available, including via online, to staff, volunteers including trustees and others as appropriate, to develop and maintain the necessary skills and understanding in safeguarding. This will include:

- An induction process that includes training on acceptable and unacceptable sharing of information and general communication about children and vulnerable adults, reporting and reaction protocol, and ramifications of misconduct. This will ensure a common understanding of safeguarding and protection issues, standards of practice, and the organisational implications of these. Induction will take place within one month of a new recruit's start date.
- Safeguarding is included in six-monthly and annual staff appraisals to ensure staff knowledge and skills can be assessed to identify appropriate education and training.
- Ensuring that the Code of Conduct and safeguarding reporting mechanism is prominently displayed in all Link offices and is easily accessible via the website.
- All training will include Data Protection, Harassment (bullying, sexual abuse), Whistle blowing and the Disciplinary and Grievance Policies and procedures which are detailed in the Employee Handbook.
- Link International will ensure each Link partner office (in Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Rwanda and Uganda) aligns their own safeguarding training to meet the expectations of Link International.
- When visiting Link International's projects and partners' projects, all visitors, including Link International staff, will be given a pre-departure briefing on safeguarding, and general safety and security. This will outline key risks, issues to be aware of, expectations of visitor behaviour, rules around taking photographs and distributing gifts, and what to do if a visitor witnesses or suspects any safeguarding issue. All visitors will also be given a Code of Conduct which they must read and sign before the visit begins.

Link International and partners will conduct safer programming where possible. This will be dependent on available resourcing and should include:

- A risk assessment and health and safety mechanisms.
- Integration of safeguarding into project design with secure funding.

- Project work on safeguarding in schools and communities.
- Unsafe or poor practice being followed up.
- Support to victims of sexual exploitation or abuse with referral pathways identified and signposted.
- Support to Link staff according to Employee Handbook procedures.

## **6. Management responsibilities**

Link International's management structure ensures implementation of the Safeguarding Policy including:

- Permanent appointment of a suitably-trained designated person with a clearly defined role responsible for implementing the safeguarding policy to ensure a clear understanding among all representatives of the organisation of all relevant issues relating to safeguarding.
- Sharing of the reporting mechanism ensuring it is understood by all Link International representatives. Where possible, Link International will refer to helpful agencies any staff who require support after being involved in a safeguarding incident.
- Ensuring the storage and access to personal information on children and vulnerable adults is limited to those who need to know to ensure respect for their right to confidentiality and privacy, and to protect them from those who may use information for harmful purposes. The Senior Management Team will ensure that data protection induction and training takes place for all acting on behalf of Link International staff and that records are kept in line with General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679 (as per company policy on Data Protection) as well as relevant national legislation.
- Incorporating child and vulnerable adult safeguarding into regular internal and external programmes, project and organisational evaluations and assessments, office procedures and manuals to ensure internal monitoring against targets, and external transparency and objectivity.
- Overall responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the safeguarding policy lies with Link International's Board of Trustees to ensure due importance is afforded to this area. A standing position on the Board will be a Safeguarding Champion.
- Accountability - The Link International CEO has overall responsibility for creating the managerial environment and culture which enables and facilitates the implementation of all aspects of this policy, and other related policies such as the Whistle blowing and Harassment policies and procedures. The CEO also holds overall responsibility for developing and implementing local procedures and for delegating responsibility to key posts including the Senior Management Team.

## **7. Reporting**

Link International will be proactive in creating a safe culture that enables beneficiaries, including children, staff and others to report any incidences, or suspicion of incidences, that breach this Safeguarding policy. The reporting mechanism is clearly laid out in Annex 1. Reporting and case management templates are shown in Annexes 2 and 3. Media consent forms and the Media and Comms policy are in Annexes 4 and 5. In brief:

- An incident, or suspicion of an incident, MUST be reported to Link International immediately or within 24 hours.
- Link International will provide the mechanisms, training and guidance for reporting. Link International will follow up with partners to ensure appropriate action has been taken.

- Link International will report any incidences to the donor, Charity Commission (for England and Wales) and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR).
- Any reports will be confidential.
- Anyone that reports a concern regarding a colleague in good faith or a beneficiary reporting a link representative, will be protected under Link International's Whistle blowing procedure, as detailed in the Employee Handbook.
- Link International Senior Management will provide appropriate support to staff and others affected by safeguarding issues raised to reduce the stressful impact of the situation.
- If an incident occurs in a school or learning environment, the incident will be reported to the headteacher, the relevant local educational authority and the focal person in the relevant Link office, and if a crime has been committed, to the police.
- Any incidences will be publically shared at Link International's AGM and in our Annual Report.

## **8. Research with children**

Any research Link International conducts with children and vulnerable adults will ordinarily be undertaken on school sites and as a result the existing school management structures will be in place to ensure that adults are always present during interviews. If for any reason Link International receives a mandate to conduct research outside of the school site, then additional safeguarding measures will be implemented.

## **9. Child labour**

Link International acknowledges that in the course of their work, representatives may encounter children engaged in labour activities which do not accord with the minimum age standards expressed in the International Labour Organisation's Fundamental Principles on Rights at Work (1998). Link International is opposed to such practices and prohibits the use of child labour within its own business and in that of its suppliers and contractors. However, consistent with its charitable aims and policy priorities, at this stage Link International does not actively engage in any governmental lobbying on this issue.

## **10. Ramifications of Misconduct**

Link International takes safeguarding seriously and will implement this policy rigorously across the organisation. In the event that anyone acting on behalf of Link International violates any aspect of this policy, appropriate action will be taken.

Child abuse is a 'gross misconduct' as listed in the Employee Handbook and will result in summary dismissal.

Abuse or suspicion of abuse not reported or a false allegation made, will be dealt with according to Link International's disciplinary procedures detailed in the Employee Handbook. Grievance procedures are also detailed in the Employee Handbook.

## **11. Policy monitoring and review**

This policy will be reviewed every two years by Link International's Senior Management Team and Board of Trustees. Anyone acting on behalf of Link International will be asked to read and sign that they have understood this policy. Whenever the policy is revised, all must re-sign.

Link International receives advice from its legal advisor and HR consultants on the formulation, enforcement and revision of the Safeguarding policy and other policies and procedures linked to it.

**Declaration**

I \_\_\_\_\_ fully understand and agree to abide by Link International's Safeguarding Policy, attached annexes and Code of Conduct. I understand that any breaches of the Code of Conduct and this Safeguarding Policy will be reported to the International Programme Director of Link International and appropriate action will be taken in accordance with the relevant policies and procedures.

I have read the attached policy and all the annexes.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**List of annexes:**

1. Reporting mechanism
2. Reporting Template
3. Case management system
4. Consent form for photography and filming
5. Media and Comms policy
6. List of resources to develop staff and partners understanding on Safeguarding and Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection