



Link Community Development International Child Safeguarding Policy

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Approved By	Board of Trustees
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Policy introduction

Humanitarian and development efforts require a very clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities towards the care and protection of children. Link Community Development International (from here referred to as Link International), is committed to achieving the highest level of child safeguarding and protecting the rights and welfare of the children and young people with whom we come into contact. We affirm our belief in the right of **all children** to be protected from all forms of sexual, physical and emotional violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, in line with national child protection legislation and UN recommendations¹. It is the duty of all those who work with children and young people to prevent harm and abuse of every kind, and to report any abuse discovered or suspected. Link International acknowledges fully the duty to keep children safe in our programmes, ensure children are treated with dignity and respect and that all our safeguarding measures are embedded, accessible and communicated clearly to staff, partners, children and their communities, in languages they understand.

Child Safeguarding is the set of child-centred, business critical policies, procedures and practice that we employ to ensure that Link International itself is a child safe organisation. It is our method of:

- Ensuring that everyone associated with the organisation is **aware of, reports and responds** appropriately to issues of child abuse and the sexual exploitation of children.
- Prevention by ensuring that anyone who represents our organisation behaves appropriately towards children and do not abuse the position of trust that comes with being a member of the Link International family.
- Assessing and reducing the risks to children that are associated with all of our activities and across all departments. This includes applying safe recruitment, safer programming and health and safety approaches across all of our projects and offices.

We are committed to do everything within our control to make all of our activities safe for children.

General Principles

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

- All children have equal rights to protection from all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation.
- 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 children should be encouraged to fulfil their potential and inequalities should be challenged.

¹ 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; the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989 and the UN Secretary General's Bulletin: Special measures for the protection .

- All staff, trustees and third parties e.g. consultants, contractors, suppliers, sub-contractors have an individual and collective responsibility to support the care and protection of children.
- All staff, trustees and third parties e.g. consultants, contractors, suppliers, sub-contractors, have a responsibility to meet minimum standards of safeguarding for all child beneficiaries, in Link International programmes.
- This Child Safeguarding Policy should be considered alongside Link International’s Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct.

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 (unless it is formally agreed that a partner organisation enforces its own child 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 Child 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.

This policy is to be used when:

- A Link International staff member or representative is informed of, becomes aware of, or suspects any specific incident of abuse or exploitation of a child or children below the age of 18 years by a staff member, partner or representative of Link International; or
- A Link International staff member or representative is informed of a specific incident of abuse or exploitation within the community, by someone outside the organisation which constitutes locally a crime against a child or children below the age of 18 years where the abuse falls outside of programming activity.

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

2. Definition of terms

‘Bullying’ is behaviour that hurts someone else. It usually happens over a lengthy period of time and can harm a child both physically and emotionally. Bullying includes:

- verbal abuse, such as name calling
- non-verbal abuse, such as hand signs or glaring

- emotional abuse, such as threatening, intimidating or humiliating someone
- exclusion, such as ignoring or isolating someone
- undermining, by constant criticism or spreading rumours
- controlling or manipulating someone
- racial, sexual or homophobic bullying
- physical assaults, such as hitting and pushing
- making silent, hoax or abusive calls.

Bullying can happen anywhere – at school, at home or online. When bullying happens online it can involve social networks, games and mobile devices. Online bullying can also be known as cyberbullying.

‘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. An annex detailing how to recognize signs of child abuse is attached.

‘Child labour’ is work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It is work that:

- is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and
- interferes with their schooling by:
 - depriving them of the opportunity to attend school;
 - obliging them to leave school prematurely; or
 - requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.

If a young person, under the age of 18 is part of an apprenticeship scheme within the statutory law of the country and does not meet any of the above, this would not be considered by Link International as child labour. However, any contractor or sub-contractor must inform Link International of the name of any apprentice who will be directly involved with our work.

For Link International it is not acceptable for any staff or representatives to engage anyone under the age of 18 to work as domestic help in their place of work or at home.

‘Child safeguarding’ is the responsibility of organisations to make sure their staff, operations and programmes do no harm to children or expose them to abuse or exploitation.

‘Child sexual exploitation’ is a type of sexual abuse. Young people in exploitative situations and relationships receive things such as gifts, money, drugs, alcohol, status or affection in exchange for taking part in sexual activities. Young people may be tricked into believing they're in a loving, consensual relationship. They often trust their abuser and don't understand that they're being abused. They may depend on their abuser or be too scared to tell anyone what's happening. They might be invited to parties and given drugs and alcohol before being sexually exploited. They can also be groomed and exploited online. Some children and young people are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Child sexual exploitation can involve violent, humiliating and degrading sexual assaults and involve multiple perpetrators.

'Child trafficking' is child abuse. It involves recruiting and moving children who are then exploited. Many children are trafficked into the UK from overseas, but children can also be trafficked from one part of the UK to another. Children are trafficked for:

- child sexual exploitation
- benefit fraud
- forced marriage
- domestic servitude such as cleaning, childcare, cooking
- forced labour in factories or agriculture
- criminal exploitation such as cannabis cultivation, pickpocketing, begging, transporting, drugs, selling pirated DVDs and bag theft.

'Emotional abuse' is persistent and, over time, it severely damages a child's emotional health and development. It involves:

- humiliating, putting down or constantly criticising a child
- shouting at or threatening a child or calling them names
- mocking a child or making them perform degrading acts
- constantly blaming or scapegoating a child for things which are not their fault
- trying to control a child's life and not recognising their individuality
- not allowing them to have friends or develop socially
- pushing a child too hard or not recognising their limitations
- manipulating a child
- exposing a child to distressing events or interactions such as drug taking, heavy drinking or domestic abuse
- persistently ignoring them
- being cold and emotionally unavailable during interactions with a child
- never saying anything kind, positive or encouraging to a child and failing to praise their achievements and successes.

'Female genital mutilation' (FGM) is the partial or total removal of external female genitalia for non-medical reasons. It's also known as female circumcision or cutting. Religious, social or cultural reasons are sometimes given for FGM. However, FGM is child abuse. It's dangerous and a criminal offence. There are no medical reasons to carry out FGM. It doesn't enhance fertility and it doesn't make childbirth safer. It's used to control female sexuality and can cause severe and long-lasting damage to physical and emotional health.

'Neglect' is persistently failing to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs usually resulting in serious damage to their health and development. Neglect may involve a parent's or carer's failure to:

- provide adequate food, clothing or shelter
- supervise a child (including leaving them with unsuitable carers) or keep them safe from harm or danger
- make sure the child receives appropriate health and/or dental care
- make sure the child receives a suitable education
- meet the child's basic emotional needs – parents may ignore their children when they are distressed or even when they are happy or excited. This is known as emotional neglect.

‘Physical abuse’ is the non-accidental use of physical force that deliberately or inadvertently causes a risk of/ or actual injury to a child. This may include hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing non-accidental physical harm to a child. Physical harm can also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness or temporary, permanent injury or disability of a child.

‘Sexual abuse’ is forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities. It doesn’t necessarily involve violence and the child may not be aware that what is happening is abuse. Child sexual abuse can involve contact abuse and/or non-contact abuse. Contact abuse happens when the abuser makes physical contact with the child.

‘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.

‘Sexual harassment’ is unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, which has the purpose, or effect of violating the dignity of a person and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Such conduct may take place on a single occasion or on several occasions. Sexual harassment may take the form of unwelcome physical, verbal or nonverbal conduct, which may include, but is not limited to, the following: (a) Unwanted physical contact, ranging from touching to sexual assault and rape. (b) Verbal forms of sexual harassment including unwelcome innuendoes, suggestions and hints, sexual advances, comments with sexual overtones, sex related jokes or insults or unwelcome graphic comments about a person’s body made in their presence or directed toward them, unwelcome and inappropriate enquiries about a person’s sex life, and sexual orientation, directed at a person or group of persons. (c) Non-verbal forms of sexual harassment including unwelcome gestures, whistling, indecent exposure, or the unwelcome display of sexually explicit pictures or objects. (d) Unwelcome messages of a sexual nature that are sent via email, SMS, skype, voice messages and other electronic means, whether using SCI IT/devices or personal mobiles/equipment. (e) Sexual harassment that is linked to recruitment/employment opportunities, promotion, training or development opportunities, and the offer of salary increments or other employee benefits in exchange for sexual favours.

‘Vulnerable community’ is any community in which Link International is operating.

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 robust background checks are carried out on all prospective staff, including cross-checking references.

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

Organisations selected to work in partnership with Link International such as partners, contractors and suppliers, must have in place or adhere to Link International’s Child Safeguarding policy and procedures and commitment and expectation towards safeguarding, including training and awareness of their staff.

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

- They will be expected to apply safer recruitment principles and practices, including carrying out reference and relevant background and police checks according to what is available in-country
- 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, 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 Child Safeguarding Policy and general Safeguarding Policy which include 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 staff, representatives and third parties MUST ALWAYS:

- Avoid inappropriate physical contact with a child (based on local norms of behaviour).
- Avoid working alone with children and must plan work so that at least two adults are present. As far as possible, be visible whilst working with children.
- Ensure that language is moderated; refrain for adult comments that may cause discomfort.
- Listen to what children are saying and respond accordingly. Respect the views of children, being careful to listen, show respect and build their confidence by encouraging them to share their opinions and concerns (encouraging their peers to do the same).
- Ensure all interaction is safe, appropriate, child-friendly and sensitive to the child's feelings. Stop any disagreements between children from escalating.
- Ensure a culture of openness exists to enable any issues or concerns to be raised and discussed and encourage children to feedback on their experiences of any contact with staff, associates and visitors.
- Be aware of situations which may present a risk and manage these by planning and organising beforehand.
- Be vigilant that a child may have been harmed, or is at risk of harm, either through sexual, emotional or physical abuse, neglect or exploitation, including trafficking.
- Report any child safeguarding concerns immediately as per this Child Safeguarding Policy. And be familiar with procedures for reporting concerns.
- All suspected or actual child safeguarding incidents are to be reported. There is no threshold for reporting a child safeguarding concern as described in this policy. Any concern, however minor, must be reported.

- Uphold and adhere to all Link International policies and procedures including the Media and Communications Policy in respect to photographing children and using social media, the IT Usage Policy, and general Safeguarding Policy.
- Report any matter that breaks the standards contained in this Code of Conduct.

Link International staff, representatives and third parties 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.
- Use language, make suggestions or offer advice that is inappropriate, offensive or abusive.
- Have a child with whom you are working stay overnight at personal accommodation.
- Do things for a child of a personal nature that they can do for themselves.
- Condone or participate in behaviour of a child that is illegal, unsafe or abusive.
- Act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children or otherwise perpetrate any form of emotional abuse, discriminate against, show differential treatment, or favour particular children to the exclusion of others.
- Allow allegations made by a child or concerns expressed by others about their welfare to go unrecorded or not acted upon.
- 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.

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. Failure to adhere to this policy or any other Link International policy and procedures will lead to termination of contracts or agreements. Other visitors, such as trustees or funders, will be reported to the appropriate authorities.

5. Online Safeguarding

Link International believes that online safety is an essential part of child safeguarding. Link international will do everything in its control to enable internet filtering and evaluate other online safety mechanisms periodically to ensure that this policy and any linked policies are consistently applied. We will do this by identifying approaches to educate and raise awareness of online safety throughout our programs; enable staff to work safely and responsibly; to role model positive behaviour online; and to manage professional standards and practice when using technology.

6. Awareness 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 to safeguard children. This will include:

- An induction process that includes training on acceptable and unacceptable sharing of information and general communication about children, reporting and reaction protocol, and ramifications of misconduct. This will ensure a common understanding of child 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.
- Child 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 UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, the Code of Conduct and Child Safeguarding reporting mechanism is prominently displayed in all Link offices and is easily accessible via the website.
- Where possible, practical guidance will be provided via a resource bank on child safeguarding to assist staff and Link representatives, including Trustees, in overcoming obstacles that may confront them in tackling child safeguarding issues in their work. This will include a document on how to recognise signs of abuse (annexed here), access to online training including the NSPCC and Keeping Children Safe, and regular training opportunities.
- All training will include general Child Safeguarding, Data Protection, Harassment (bullying, sexual abuse), Code of Conduct, 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 child safeguarding training, policies and procedures 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 child 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 be given a Code of Conduct, this Child Safeguarding Policy and the general Safeguarding Policy which they must read and sign before the visit begins.

Link International and partners will apply safer programming approaches throughout the project cycle from design to close out. This will be dependent on available resourcing and should include:

- A risk assessment to ensure all interventions are designed through a child safety lens, to identify, prevent and manage risks, including that children are adequately supervised and protected during project activities.
- Integration of child safeguarding into project design with secure funding.
- Project work on child safeguarding in schools and communities e.g. promotion of a child-friendly school environment for *all* children, guidance on positive discipline procedures and on how to avoid reinforcing beliefs and practises which are harmful to children.
- Unsafe or poor practice is identified and responded to.
- Support to survivors of all forms of abuse including sexual exploitation or abuse, with referral pathways identified and signposted.
- Support to Link staff according to Employee Handbook procedures.

The purpose of any training, including induction, is that all staff and representatives have:

- A basic understanding of the issues of abuse and exploitation
- A basic understanding of the impact of abuse and exploitation on children
- Knowledge of the safeguarding challenges facing this organisation
- Knowledge of the standards of behaviour expected from Link International representatives in their professional and personal life as outlined within this Child Safeguarding Policy and the general Safeguarding Policy.
- Knowledge of responsibilities associated with this Policy and Code of Conduct
- Knowledge of the Whistleblowing Policy
- Knowledge of how to report concerns and how to respond appropriately
- Understanding of the risks associated with our activities
- Acting in the best interests of the child and putting the child first.

7. Management responsibilities

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

- Permanent appointment of a suitably-trained designated person with a clearly defined role responsible for implementing the Child Safeguarding Policy to ensure a clear understanding among all representatives of the organisation of all relevant issues relating to child 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 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 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 Child 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.

8. Reporting

Link International will be proactive in creating a safe culture that enables children and their guardians to report any incidences, or suspicion of incidences, that breach this Child Safeguarding Policy. The reporting mechanism is clearly laid out in Annex 2. Reporting and case management templates are shown in Annexes 3 and 4. Media consent forms and the Media and Communications Policy are in Annexes 5 and 6. In brief:

- An incident, or suspicion of an incident, **MUST** be reported to Link International immediately or within 24 hours.
- Staff, children and guardians must be able to raise concerns, confidentially if necessary, about practice, unacceptable behaviour or actual/ potential abuse by staff or Link representatives.
- Link International will provide the mechanisms, training and guidance for reporting. Link International will follow up with all partners to ensure appropriate action has been taken.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Any incidences will be publicly shared at Link International's AGM and in our Annual Report.

9. Research with children

Any research Link International conducts with children 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.

10. 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. Also see Link International's Human anti-trafficking policy (June 2017).

11. Ramifications of Misconduct

Link International takes child 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.

12. 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 Child Safeguarding policy and other policies and procedures linked to it.

Declaration

I _____ fully understand and agree to abide by Link International's Child Safeguarding Policy, attached annexes and Code of Conduct. I understand that any breaches of the Code of Conduct, the general Safeguarding Policy and this Child 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. Code of Conduct
2. Reporting mechanism
3. Reporting template
4. Case management system
5. Consent form for photography and filming
6. Media and Comms policy
7. List of resources to develop staff and partners understanding on Safeguarding and Child and Vulnerable Adult Protection
8. How to recognise signs of abuse