Global Safeguarding and Accountability Policy

I. Purpose and Scope

CorpsAfrica recognizes that its presence in rural communities can create an inherent power imbalance between staff, Volunteers, and Associated Personnel and the Youth and Children we serve. Our goal is to ensure we provide an environment and experience where the dignity of every individual is protected from the conduct of anyone representing the organization.

CorpsAfrica maintains a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, and child abuse. This policy establishes the non-negotiable standards of conduct required to safeguard the Children and Youth the organization serves.

These standards apply to all CorpsAfrica staff, Volunteers, and Associated Personnel both during and outside of working hours, including, but not limited to, consultants, contractors, partners, and Board Members.

II. Definitions

To ensure global compliance and clarity, CorpsAfrica adopts the following binding definitions:

- **Associated Personnel**: CorpsAfrica staff, Volunteers, and associated personnel, including, but not limited to, consultants, contractors, partners, and Board Members.
- **Child/Children**: Any person, or people, under the age of 18 years, regardless of the local age of majority or consent.
- **Sexual Abuse**: When a person uses a Child or Youth for sexual purposes without their consent. This includes, but is not limited to, sexual intercourse, fondling, incest, sodomy, exhibitionism, and the use of sexually provocative language or conduct.
- **Sexual Exploitation**: 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 the sexual exploitation of another.
- **Sexual Harassment**: Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that creates a hostile or offensive environment.
- **Child Abuse**: All forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of any person.
- **Volunteer(s):** Individuals formally recruited and trained by CorpsAfrica to live and serve in rural communities. Volunteers are required to uphold these standards as Associated Personnel and are protected by this policy from harm perpetrated by other Associated Personnel and third parties.

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- **Vulnerable Adult**: A person who is or may be in need of care by reason of mental or other disability, age, or illness, and who is unable to protect themselves against significant harm or exploitation.
- **Youth**: Any person above the age of 18 and under the age of 35 years.

III. Legal Framework

This policy is developed in accordance with international legislation and guidance that aims to protect people worldwide. CorpsAfrica adheres to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and all applicable child protection and labor laws in every country of operation.

IV. Guiding Principles

To ensure that our safeguarding practices are consistent and ethical, CorpsAfrica adheres to these six principles:

A. **Empowerment**: We support and encourage people to make their own decisions through informed consent.
B. **Prevention**: We prioritize proactive risk assessment and training over reactive measures.
C. **Proportionality**: Our response will be the least intrusive appropriate to the risk presented, ensuring that interventions respect the privacy and dignity of the individual. Confidentiality will be balanced with the individual's safety.
D. **Protection**: We provide support and representation for those in greatest need, ensuring that survivors have an advocate and a clear path to safety.
E. **Partnership**: We recognize that communities play a vital role in preventing, detecting, and reporting neglect and abuse.
F. **Accountability**: We maintain transparency in our safeguarding practices. We are accountable to our participants, our staff, and our partners for how we handle concerns and allegations.

V. Operational Conduct Standards

All Associated Personnel are strictly prohibited from engaging in behaviors that compromise the safety of participants and community members. Adherence to the following mandatory and restricted behaviors is required:

Associated Personnel MUST:

- Act as positive role models at all times, treating all Children, Youth, and community members with dignity, respect, and fairness, regardless of their gender, ability, religion, or ethnicity.
- Acknowledge the inherent power imbalance between personnel and participants, and actively maintain professional boundaries to ensure the power is never exploited.

- Intervene and challenge any attitude or behavior by colleagues, partners, or community members that contradicts this policy or demeans a Child or Vulnerable Adult.
- Ensure all one-on-one interactions with Children or Youth occur in open, public spaces or rooms where other trusted adults are visually present. If a private meeting is absolutely necessary for counseling or support, the door must remain open, and another adult must be informed of the meeting's location and duration.
- Actively consult with Children and Youth during program design to identify risks they perceive and co-create safety measures that work for them.
- Proactively inform Children and Youth of their rights, the expected behavior of staff, and exactly how to report concerns if they feel unsafe.
- Report any suspicion, concern, or allegation of abuse within 24 hours to the Safeguarding Focal Point, regardless of whether the perpetrator is a staff member, partner, or family member, with the assurance of confidentiality and protection from retaliation.
- Immediately disclose to CorpsAfrica if they are charged with or convicted of any criminal offense related to Children or violence, or if they become the subject of a safeguarding investigation.
- Cooperate fully and honestly with any internal or external investigation into safeguarding allegations.
- Obtain informed consent, written when possible, from the individual and guardians for Children before taking or sharing any photographs or stories.
- Ensure that all images and stories depict Children and Youth with dignity, are not sexually provocative, and do not put them at risk of identification or harm.

Associated Personnel MUST NEVER:

- Engage in any form of sexual activity with a Child, regardless of local age of consent.
- Exchange money, gifts, employment, goods, or services for sex or sexual favors.
- Be alone with a Child behind closed doors.
- Engage in prolonged hugging, tickling, or having Children sit on laps.
- Touch a Child in any area that a bathing suit would cover.
- Perform personal hygiene tasks for a Child (e.g., bathing) that they can do for themselves.
- Use any form of physical discipline, restraint, or corporal punishment.
- Engage in emotional abuse, including shaming, humiliating, belittling, or favoring one Child over others.

The above list of mandatory and restricted behaviors is neither exhaustive nor exclusive, and CorpsAfrica will consider all related actions and behaviors that may compromise the rights and protection of Children and Youth.

Violation of these standards will result in immediate disciplinary action, up to and including termination with cause and referral to local authorities.

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VI. Implementation and Accountability Framework

Safeguarding is a shared organizational responsibility. To ensure this policy moves from theory to practice, accountability is delegated across four operational pillars:

Safe People: Ensure that all persons representing the organization are vetted, trained, and held to the highest standards.

- Unified Vetting: All Associated Personnel (including staff, Volunteers, and partners) must undergo rigorous vetting, including background checks and reference verification, prior to engagement.
- Contractual Conditionality: Employment and service contracts are conditional upon acknowledging this policy, our shared commitments, and signing the code of conduct.
- Accountability: Adherence to safeguarding standards is a mandatory condition of engagement and shall be assessed via KPIs for staff or regular compliance reviews for partners.

Safe Programming and Operations: Mitigate risks within physical and digital environments through standardized safety protocols.

- Safe Design: Activities must be designed to minimize isolation, maximize community visibility, and ensure safe access for vulnerable groups.
- Site ID Checklist: No deployment to a community occurs until the checklist is formally signed and filed.
- Contextual Analysis: Offices must conduct assessments to determine how local cultural or gender dynamics may impact the risk of harm to participants.
- Safe Digital Footprint: All stories and images of children must be gathered with informed consent and documented in writing whenever possible. Content must protect the dignity of the individual and not expose them to digital risks.

Safe Governance & Resourcing: Establish strategic oversight and ensure the financial sustainability of safeguarding efforts.

- Board Oversight: The Board of Directors provides strategic oversight of safeguarding risks and shall undergo periodic training and receive regular updates on safeguarding incidents to ensure effective governance.
- Annual Action Plan: The organization shall develop and resource an Annual Safeguarding Plan of Action to address gaps and emerging risks.
- Budgetary Commitment: Specific annual funding will be allocated for capacity building, survivor-centered support services (medical, legal, psychosocial), and independent investigation mechanisms.
- Policy Review: This policy will be reviewed every two years or upon significant legislative changes to ensure ongoing relevance.

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Safe Response & Monitoring: Provide clear reporting pathways, survivor care, and organizational accountability.

- Mandatory Reporting: All personnel are required to report any suspected or actual safeguarding breach immediately through designated confidential channels.
- Response Principles: All responses will be survivor-centered, prioritizing the rights, needs, and wishes of the victim (including medical, legal, and psychosocial support).
- Donor Transparency: We commit to advising relevant donors of significant safeguarding incidents in accordance with grant agreements.
- Whistleblower Protection: Any individual reporting a concern in good faith will be protected from any form of retaliation.

VII. Reporting Safeguarding Concerns

CorpsAfrica ensures that safe, appropriate, and accessible reporting mechanisms are available to all Associated Personnel and the communities we serve.

- Volunteers and staff who have a safeguarding complaint or concern must report it immediately to their Country Director (CD), who serves as the primary Safeguarding Focal Point. If the concern involves the CD, the report must be escalated directly to the Regional Director or the Chief Operating Officer (COO).
- CorpsAfrica maintains a secure, confidential inbox for reporting safeguarding concerns: safeguarding@corpsafrica.org. This inbox is managed exclusively by the Regional Directors and the COO.
    - If the concern involves a Regional Director or the COO, please report the concern directly to the CEO, Liz Fanning, at lfanning@corpsafrica.org.
- Response Commitment: We commit to responding to all inquiries or reports received within 72 hours.

VIII. Statement of Commitment

CorpsAfrica was founded on the belief that those we serve deserve our utmost respect and protection. We commit to a zero-tolerance culture that provides an environment where the dignity of every Child, Youth, and community member is shielded from harm, and where survivors are heard, supported, and empowered. We hold ourselves, our leaders, and our partners to these standards to ensure that CorpsAfrica remains a safe and trusted catalyst for change.

CorpsAfrica is committed to a zero-tolerance culture that protects the dignity of every community member from harm. We hold our leaders, staff, and partners to these non-negotiable standards, ensuring that our presence in every community remains a source of safety and empowerment.

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