



Revised Jan. 2018

AFRICA HUMANITARIAN ACTION CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

Introduction

Child abuse is a global problem that affects both boys and girls. It has existed since the beginning of time and is deeply rooted in cultural, economic and social practices. Children are abused physically, sexually, emotionally and through neglect. Children are forced to endure the most hazardous forms of child labour including sweat shops and prostitution. In some countries boys are kidnapped and forced into armed conflict as soldiers. In many countries children experience severe corporal punishment in schools. Children living in poverty are more at risk of child abuse and exploitation.

Whilst most child abuse occurs within families and communities, children also experience abuse and exploitation in organisations which provide them with support and services. Experience has found that physical, emotional abuse and neglect in child focused organisations and institutions are less systematic and usually unplanned. It is usually the result of poor conditions, bad work practices and negligent management.

However, child sexual abuse in organisations is often planned and premeditated. Child sex offenders target organisations working with children. They will seek work in organisations inadequate recruitment practices and supervision that provide an environment where their abuse may go undetected. They also seek work in countries with inadequate child protection laws and law enforcement as well as countries where children and their families are vulnerable to exploitation.

The objective of this policy is to ensure that Africa Humanitarian Action (AHA) takes all possible steps to ensure the protection of children against all forms of child abuse. This policy gives an overview of the responsibilities of each AHA employee, volunteer, and sub-contractor.

Policy Statement

AHA considers child abuse unacceptable in all circumstances and takes its duty of care seriously and will aim at all times to provide the safest possible programmes and environments for children. This will be achieved by identifying and managing risks that may lead to harm.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) provides a foundation for AHA's Child Protection Policy applicable in all its humanitarian and development operations. All AHA employees, volunteers and sub-contractors have the responsibility to protect children "...from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse".

AHA is committed to ensuring that all possible and necessary steps are taken to realise the rights of children and to actively safeguard all children that we work with from harm.

We take seriously our responsibility to promote child safe practices and protect children from harm, abuse, neglect and exploitation in any form. We will take positive action to prevent child abusers becoming involved in AHA in any way and take stringent measures against any AHA Staff and/or Associate who abuses a child. Our decisions and actions in response to child protection concerns will be guided by the principle of 'the best interests of the child'.

Adherence to this policy is a mandatory requirement for all AHA staff, volunteers and sub-contractors.

Purpose

This policy will demonstrate AHA's commitment to protect children from harm and abuse. It has been developed to provide a practical guide to prevent child abuse as a result of AHA's work. It aims to create an open and aware environment where concerns for the safety and wellbeing of a child can be raised and managed in a fair and just manner, which protects the rights of all.

Guiding Principles

- AHA believes that all children have a right to be safe at all times and we have an obligation to provide child safe and child friendly environments and programs;
- All children have equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation regardless of their gender, race, religious or political beliefs, age, physical or mental health, sexual orientation, family and social background and culture, economic status or criminal background;
- As part of the international humanitarian aid community, AHA has a duty of care to all children that we work with;

- All decisions regarding the welfare and protection of children are made based on the best interests of the child.

Scope of Policy

This policy applies to:

1. AHA staff;
2. AHA Associates – these include board members, volunteers, interns, consultants and contractors, suppliers, supporters (including donors, sponsors, advocates, ambassadors). Also the staff and representatives of partner organisations and government agencies with whom AHA has a formal working relationship, and anyone who has been brought into contact with children while working for or with AHA;
3. AHA visitors – these include people such as journalists, media, researchers, celebrities etc. who may come in contact with children through AHA are also bound by this policy.

Definitions

Child: A child means every human being below the age of eighteen years. National law and guidance or local customs may be based on different definitions/notions of age of childhood/adulthood, but the standard for AHA is that children should receive equal protection as far as possible, regardless of local age limits.

Child Protection: Child Protection within the scope of this policy is defined as the responsibilities, measures and activities that AHA undertakes to safeguard children from both intentional and unintentional harm.

Child Abuse: Child Abuse is defined as all forms of physical abuse, emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse and exploitation, neglect or negligent treatment, commercial or other exploitation of a child and includes any actions that results in actual or potential harm to a child.

Child abuse may be a deliberate act or it may be failing to act to prevent harm. Child abuse consists of anything which individuals, institutions or processes do or fail to do, intentionally or unintentionally which harms a child or damages their prospect of safe and healthy development into adulthood.

Risk identification and management

AHA recognises that, by the nature of its work, it could potentially be targeted by those wanting to exploit or harm children and that there are a number of potential risks to children in the delivery of our programmes. We understand that the effects of abuse on children are both devastating and long term. AHA will not permit a

person to work with children if they pose an unacceptable risk to children's safety or wellbeing. Therefore we undertake the following preventative measures:

- Proactively assessing and managing risks to children in our programmes (and in the communities in which we work) to reduce the risk of harm;
- Proactively assessing and managing risks to children in our sponsorship, marketing and communications, information, systems and technology (IST) and human resource (HR) operations;
- Implementing new preventative measures when gaps are identified.

As an organization, AHA is to always be aware, vigilant and uncompromising when implementing our Child Protection Policy. Staff and others should continually be aware of risks, and be actively minimising opportunities and situations where children can be harmed.

It is the responsibility of the Director - through department heads – to ensure that all AHA Staff in their area of responsibility are aware of, sign onto and agree to abide by the AHA Code of Conduct, the AHA Accountability to Affected Populations Framework, this policy, and applicable local procedures.

AHA staff, Associates and Visitors shall:

- Sign onto and agree to abide by this policy;
- Sign the AHA Code of Conduct and the AHA Accountability to Affected Populations Framework;
- Report any child abuse and protection concerns;
- Respond to a child who may have been abused or exploited in accordance with applicable local office procedures;
- Cooperate fully and confidentially in any investigation of concerns or allegations;
- Contribute to an environment where children are respected and encouraged to discuss their concerns and rights.

Reporting

It is mandatory for all AHA staff and associates to report concerns or allegations of child abuse that relate to a Senior Manager in charge.

AHA considers the abuse and exploitation of children to be completely unacceptable. We will take all concerns and reports of child abuse seriously and investigate and act on these reports immediately, with the highest priority.

An allegation of child abuse is a serious issue. In following this policy and local procedures, it is essential that all parties maintain confidentiality. Sharing of information, which could identify a child, an alleged perpetrator or the informant/reporter could put them at harm so should be done so strictly on a

'need to know' basis. Unless abuse has actually been proved to have occurred, one must always refer to "alleged abuse".

If an employee raises a legitimate concern about suspected child abuse, which proves to be unfounded on investigation, no action will be taken against the employee.

Any employee who makes false and malicious accusations, however, will face disciplinary action. AHA will take appropriate legal or other action against other AHA affiliates who makes false and malicious accusations of child abuse.

Review of policy

This policy will be reviewed every three years. The Head of Programmes will manage the review, and staff will be consulted in this process.

I declare that I have clearly understood and shall respect AHA's Child Protection Policy set out above. I also understand that AHA retains the authority to terminate my employment contract in case I perform contrary to this declaration.

Signature

Date Place