

# PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST: AN INTERNATIONAL SUMMIT TO TACKLE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE, AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT, IN THE INTERNATIONAL AID SECTOR

**Commitments proposed by UK private sector supply partners who work with DFID to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment in the international aid sector.**

## Background

It is the responsibility of all stakeholders operating in the international aid and development sectors to maintain a **working environment free of sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment**<sup>1</sup>. As private sector organisations, our programmes aim to have a positive impact on the lives of those we work with. However, in the work that we deliver there can be a power imbalance between personnel and the communities in which we operate. We have a responsibility to **protect from harm those that come into contact with our employees and programme personnel and we must be committed to do so.**

In a time when the sector is under increased scrutiny, **change is welcome**, and we must work together to take this issue **beyond mere compliance, policies and procedures. A cultural shift is required**, and we must drive this shift at all levels of our organisations by building capacity and committing resources to this matter. Private organisations in the aid and development sectors are committed to meeting or exceeding the minimum standards on safeguarding and will be held to account for consistently achieving those standards.

However, it is critical that private organisations work together and with other stakeholders – and **not just flow contractual responsibilities down the supply chain**. We must recognise the diversity of the sector and understand that organisations of different sizes can take these commitments to different levels. We must make room for working collaboratively and seek to **raise standards across the sector**, refraining from using safeguarding capabilities as a competitive advantage.

This document was prepared ahead of the DFID Summit (18 October 2018). **The following commitments have been suggested by the private sector representatives on the Summit Steering Group, following consultation with representation from DFID's top 30 suppliers, across the supply chain and other networks.** Some example actions have been included here to illustrate initiatives that might be taken under each commitment – **these are by no means exhaustive or mandatory.**

## Note on synergies between the different sector commitment documents:

As well as stating commitments for the private sector, where we hope that complementary commitments and actions are included in the other sector commitment documents<sup>2</sup> for the summit, we have included the following to signpost this:

e.g.  **DONOR** or  **NGO** or  **MULTILATERAL**

<sup>1</sup> Definitions are drawn from those set by the United Nations. See last page for more detail.

<sup>2</sup> Donors, NGOs, International Financial Institutions, Research organisations, UN, CDC

## **DFID Strategic Shift 1: Ensure support for survivors, victims and whistle-blowers, enhance accountability and transparency, strengthen reporting and tackle impunity.**

### **1.1. Survivor-led support**

**Suggested commitment:** Ensure that the support provided is in the best interests of the survivor, witness or whistle-blower and is followed through.



**Example actions:**

- a) *In addition to supporting survivors, ensure that witnesses and whistle-blowers are also supported and protected.*
- b) *Develop capacity within our programme design and implementation teams to consider available support in advance, working with client in-country staff to make the most of existing avenues of support.*
- c) *Plan and budget for proportionate safeguarding support in our programme proposals.*
- d) *Ensure that conversations about support with survivors, witnesses or whistle-blowers are undertaken by individuals with appropriate skills, experience and authority.*

### **1.2. Reporting mechanisms**

**Suggested commitment:** Invest in or identify appropriate and accessible reporting mechanisms across all of our operations.



**Example actions:**

- a) *Assess reporting requirements based on where we are working, the local legal framework, the communities that we will come into contact with and the nature of the programme we are responsible for (for example, location, language and technological barriers, etc.).*
- b) *Prioritise the highest risks, design appropriate and accessible reporting mechanisms based on the assessment above.*
- c) *Work with our clients and partners to ensure that reporting mechanisms are put in place and communicated throughout our operations (repeated rather than one-off).*
- d) *Work with local communities to make sure that there is a clear understanding of what constitutes unacceptable behaviour and how local communities can report such behaviour in confidence to our organisations.*
- e) *Build capacity so that our programme personnel look for opportunities to improve reporting mechanisms as our programmes evolve and conditions in the field change.*

### 1.3. Following up on reports

**Suggested commitment:** Follow up on reports in a timely, consistent, transparent and appropriate manner.



**Example actions:**

- a) *Talk to our supply chain partners and work together to build an understanding of what will be reported, how reports will be handled and how to get further guidance.*
- b) *Define how to handle reports and investigations in our organisations and share this information via our policies, procedure documentation and contracts. This would include what declarations to make to our clients and when.*
- c) *Seek to reassure those who might wish to make a report by being transparent about how we protect the confidentiality of those involved (survivors, witnesses, whistle-blowers, and individuals of concern).*
- d) *Build capacity and capability within our organisations to deal with the inevitable increase in reports as we improve reporting mechanisms and communications around how to report.*

### 1.4. External referral pathways

**Suggested commitment:** Research and communicate country- and context-specific external referral\* pathways for potential safeguarding referrals before they are required.



*\*external referrals being where reported sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment is not related to programme activities or programme personnel. Referrals are made to appropriate actors to take forward.*

**Example actions:**

- a) *Work with clients and partners to identify external referral pathways (for example, local NGOs) during programme start-up and inception, building a shared network of referral actors, and a better picture of the support that is available.*
- b) *Build capacity within our programme design teams to plan, seek advice on and design fit-for-purpose external referral pathways that can be supported and monitored on a programme.*

**DFID Strategic Shift 2: Incentivise cultural change through strong leadership, organisational accountability and better human resource processes.**

#### 2.1 Make sure prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment is regularly discussed in line with minimum standards

**Suggested commitment:** Ensure prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment is regularly discussed at all levels of an organisation in line with the minimum standards referenced in Strategic Shift #3.

**Example actions:**

- a) *Appoint a board or senior management team member responsible for safeguarding.*
- b) *Appoint a safeguarding lead responsible for implementation of the processes and procedures (this may be the same as the board member mentioned above or another).*
- c) *Build capacity so that all our people lead by example and train our employees and programme personnel. This will ensure that staff understand what behaviour is unacceptable, and how to make and respond to a report.*
- d) *Institutionalise regular internal discussions around safeguarding – challenges, successes, numbers of cases or other KPIs, and anonymised cases.*

## **2.2 Keep prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment as a priority for the sector**

**Suggested commitment:** Contribute to continuous improvement, knowledge sharing, and engage in collaboration activities that seek to keep preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment as a priority for the sector.

**Example actions:**

- a) *Adopt a structured approach to the planning, management, monitoring and review of safeguarding measures, including self-audit.*
- b) *Talk to our programme and operational teams to learn about what works and what does not, seeking to continuously improve our approach to safeguarding.*
- c) *Invest in activities that periodically review safeguarding measures and take corrective action where these are found to be no longer adequate.*
- d) *Share knowledge and experience of success and failures with peers, partners and clients. In particular, this must happen between field operations and head offices.*
- e) *Meet as a sector to review these commitments and progress made.*

## **2.3 Engage with donors regarding a potential standard approach to reference checks and vetting**

**Suggested commitment:** Engage with donors and peers on potential improved approaches to reference checks, self-declaration and vetting, recognising the legal risks present.

 **DONOR**  **NGO**  **MULTILATERALS**

**Example actions:**

- a) *Explore the legal implications of proposals regarding referencing and vetting with donors, NGO sector, etc.*
- b) *Discuss what can be done as vetting for potential employees or programme personnel.*
- c) *Discuss what is proportionate in different cases e.g. job descriptions or terms of reference might require specific vetting that reflects the potential risks; justification for vetting should be clearly spelt out in terms of reference by donors.*

### DFID Strategic Shift 3: Adopt minimum standards and ensure we and our partners meet them.

*[note: based on Inter-agency Standing Committee<sup>3</sup> Minimum Operating Standards on PSEA<sup>4</sup> and/or the PSEA elements of The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability<sup>5</sup>]*

#### 3.1 Policies and procedures

**Suggested commitment:** Adopt and clearly document minimum standards that all programme teams and partners commit to uphold to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment; support and encourage reporting around sexual exploitation and abuse, and sexual harassment and ensure appropriate corporate response to reports when they are made.



**Example actions:**

- a) *Seek advice on minimum standards for policies and procedures and adapt existing standards to cover non-humanitarian operations.*
- b) *Develop, implement and monitor policies, core principles and procedures for safeguarding that reflect the minimum standards.*
- c) *Communicate with all relevant parties, including partners, to ensure understanding of their role in effectively implementing the safeguarding procedures on our programmes.*
- d) *Ensure that all related policies work together – ethics, safeguarding, whistle-blowing, recruitment, IT, anti-harassment and bullying, anti-slavery, disciplinary, grievance, equity/diversity/inclusion, etc.*

#### 3.2 Safeguarding risk mitigation

**Suggested commitment:** Incorporate safeguarding risk mitigation into all areas of our operations - from the board level to the field.



**Example actions:**

- a) *Build capacity within our teams so that safeguarding risks are fully understood and considered throughout all our areas of operation.*
- b) *Where appropriate, develop tools to help our programme teams consider safeguarding risks and share these with partners.*
- c) *Have early conversations with partners about safeguarding risks, appropriate mitigation measures to incorporate into programme design and how best to ensure that these measures are prioritised during implementation and monitored throughout the programme life cycle.*

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<sup>3</sup> <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/accountability-affected-populations-including-protection-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/content-1>

<sup>4</sup> [Prevention against sexual exploitation and abuse.](#)

<sup>5</sup> <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/files/files/Core%20Humanitarian%20Standard%20-%20English.pdf>

- d) *Agree on appropriate mitigation strategies for each risk identified, being clear about responsibilities and expectations with partners and ensure these are implemented and monitored.*
- e) *Talk frankly to and negotiate with our clients and partners when we are not satisfied that safeguarding provisions have been designed into programme approaches, timelines or budgets.*
- f) *Work with key (internal) decision makers so that potentially challenging commercial decisions about opportunities to pursue take into account our ability to mitigate safeguarding risks.*

### 3.3 Share experience and knowledge

**Suggested commitment:** Work with clients and partners to share experience and knowledge of implementing minimum standards, to improve future programmes.



**Example actions:**

- a) *Support organisations that are looking to establish or improve their safeguarding internal standards by sharing advice, documentation and guidance/reference materials.*
- b) *Discuss challenges with peers, partners and clients, sharing knowledge and building capacity.*
- c) *Work with supply chain partners that are not equipped to provide adequate safeguarding measures within our programmes, to ensure that any gaps are filled.*
- d) *Discuss with partners what works and what does not when putting in place reporting mechanisms, with a view to moving towards standard reporting mechanisms and facilitating collaboration between organisations.*

**DFID Strategic Shift 4: Strengthen organisational capacity and capability across the international aid sector, including building the capability of implementing partners to meet the minimum standards.**

### 4.1 Having the right resources available

**Suggested commitment:** Ensure our organisations can rely on people with the appropriate skill set to execute safeguarding measures across our organisations (these may be in-house or external resources).

**Example actions:**

- a) *Review the skills requirement against those that are available in-house and either invest in building internal capacity or build networks with external expertise that can be called on as required.*
- b) *As our organisations evolve, periodically review the resources available.*
- c) *Analyse gaps in safeguarding resources when making decisions about commercial opportunities.*
- d) *Put in place proportionate safeguarding measures, bearing in mind the risks, available resources and the size of the organisation.*

## 4.2 Effective communication and training

**Suggested commitment:** Consider the communication and training challenge across our organisations and in our supply chains in order to implement a programme of communication and training that effectively supports relevant safeguarding policies and procedures.

**Example actions:**

- a) *Plan, implement and monitor communications around safeguarding prevention, reporting and response (as per policy and procedures).*
- b) *Design or procure appropriate and accessible training that is repeated periodically. Training must look at all aspects of the safeguarding framework (prevention, reporting and response).*
- c) *Build the capacity and confidence of our programme personnel so that, if they receive reports, they are equipped to handle them respectfully and professionally, according to a defined procedure.*
- d) *Collaborate with and support our supply chains in implementing a training programme appropriate to the safeguarding risks present.*

## 4.3 Clear statement on what is unacceptable behaviour

**Suggested commitment:** Articulate a clear narrative of what would constitute an abusive relationship and ensure this is communicated successfully, no matter who the audience is.

**Example actions:**

- a) *Deliver clear communications and training to different stakeholders on unacceptable behaviour and commit resources to repeat the training and/or communications as required.*
- b) *Be explicit about unacceptable behaviour and state that this applies both when employees and programme personnel are 'off duty' and when they undertake activities as part of their role.*
- c) *Be explicit about what our organisations consider to be serious misconduct and how we will respond.*
- d) *Consider ways to provide for two-way communication, making sure that policymakers and the designers of procedures and training are able to hear back from intended audiences across the organisation and at the programme level.*

### Next Steps

Each organisation should take appropriate and relevant actions to ensure effective implementation of the commitments that support the strategic shifts, factoring in relevant local, national, regional and international legislation and structures as needed.

Recognising that the example actions may not be relevant or appropriate for all organisations, it is up to each of us to decide which measures are the most urgent and how we will communicate progress to our stakeholders.

In six months to support commitments 2.2 and 3.3, it will be helpful to reconvene as a group of organisations to discuss steps taken, lessons, and challenges. Please contact British Expertise or the Centre for Development Results for more information and/or to join the discussion.

## Key Definitions

**Sexual Exploitation**, as defined by Secretary-General's bulletin [ST/SGB/2003/13](#), constitutes any actual or attempted abuse by UN personnel of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes, including profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. It is a broad term, but it includes transactional sex, solicitation of transactional sex and exploitative relationships.

**Sexual Abuse** as defined by Secretary-General's bulletin [ST/SGB/2003/13](#): means the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

All sexual activity with children (as defined under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as any person under the age of 18) is considered to be sexual abuse, regardless of the age of majority or consent locally. Mistaken belief in the age of a child is not a defence.

“Sexual abuse” is a broad term, which includes a number of acts including “sexual assault” for example, (rape, attempted rape, forcing someone to perform oral sex / touching) “sexual offence” and “sexual offence against a child”.

**Sexual Harassment:** is defined as any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

The definition of sexual harassment does not require a link to the work environment. Sexual harassment may be perpetrated against beneficiaries, community members, citizens, as well as staff, personnel, etc.