

PREVENTING SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE POLICY



Al-Aghsan Foundation for Agriculture and Environment Development

PSEA Policy

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I. PURPOSE

1. This policy (i) clarifies what is meant in Aghsan Foundation when referring to a victim-centred approach, (ii) confirms the Foundation's commitment to apply a victim-centred approach in all (suspected) instances of sexual misconduct (sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment and (iii) spells out which entities are involved in and responsible for operationalizing a victim-centred approach in their work on sexual misconduct.

II. SCOPE

2. This policy binds the Aghsan Foundation entities (see para. 12) and personnel ^[1] responsible for responding to sexual misconduct. The policy benefits persons of concern to Aghsan Foundation who are victims of sexual exploitation and abuse and Aghsan Foundation personnel who are victims of sexual harassment.
3. Compliance with this policy is mandatory.

III. RATIONALE

4. Sexual exploitation and abuse represent a grave breach of trust and of the right to safety, security and dignity of others, who are often persons of concern to the Aghsan Foundation. Sexual harassment undermines the right of personnel to be safe and treated with dignity and respect in the workplace and in connection with work.
5. The Aghsan Foundation are committed to take all necessary action to prevent sexual misconduct. Within these efforts, the Aghsan Foundation are committed to putting the protection, rights and dignity of victims at the forefront of all efforts to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse, ensuring that victims' voices are heard. Similarly, in the context of preventing and responding to sexual harassment, the head of the Aghsan Foundation have expressed a firm commitment to strengthen victim-centred prevention and response efforts. Against the background of this acknowledgement that victims' voices need to inform prevention and response systems and efforts, different Aghsan Foundation departments taking steps to implement a victim-centred approach to prevention and response of sexual misconduct.
6. Through robust internal systems, the Aghsan Foundation strives to provide a diligent, appropriate and sensitive response to all incidents of sexual misconduct, placing victims at the centre of the organization's actions.
7. There are many reasons why, in addition to a coherent organizational approach, tailored, specialized support is required for victims of sexual misconduct, including:
 - a) Sexual misconduct is known to lead to high levels of social stigma and ostracization, which is less pronounced for other forms of misconduct. In addition, societal and culturally sanctioned ideas about gender and sex can exacerbate the risks. victims face,

¹ For the purpose of this policy, the term personnel encompasses Aghsan Foundation staff members, affiliate workforce, interns, as well as volunteers.

including security risks. These could include, for example, so-called “honour-related crimes”, specific criminal charges and/or punishments.

- b) Sexual misconduct is known to lead to more adverse health outcomes, often in relation to mental health, including the effects of triggering previous traumatic experiences.
- c) Victims of sexual misconduct are less likely to talk about their experiences than victims of other types of misconduct, due to the feelings of shame and guilt associated with the sexual element of the harassment, exploitation and/or abuse. This means that they usually have less family or community support and are more isolated than victims of other types of misconduct, who can often speak more openly about their experiences.
- d) Sexual misconduct perpetrators generally target vulnerable individuals. In addition to struggling with “why me” questions and self-blame, the victim can also face issues of credibility; perpetrators usually pick victims who are isolated or vulnerable for other reasons, because they are more likely to be dismissed as not credible.

IV. DEFINITION

- 8. A victim-centred approach is defined in different ways by different actors in different contexts, some emphasizing a rights-based approach and others more focusing on the victims’ needs and organizational obligations towards victims.
- 9. The Aghsan Foundation uses the following definition:

“ In the context of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment, a victim-centred approach is a way of engaging with victim(s) that prioritizes listening to the victim(s), avoids re-traumatization, and systematically focuses on their safety, rights, well-being, expressed needs and choices, thereby giving back as much control to victim(s) as feasible and ensuring the empathetic and sensitive delivery of services and accompaniment in a non-judgmental manner.”

V. KEY PRINCIPLES

- 10. In engaging with a victim of sexual misconduct, personnel of the Aghsan Foundation involved in the response to sexual misconduct are expected to be appropriately trained, and to respect key principles of a victim-centred approach, in close coordination with other entities involved. Entities should incorporate how they will ensure respect for the principles of a victim-centred approach, articulated below, in Standard Operating Procedures or other internal guidance.
- 11. At the Aghsan Foundation, the following are the key principles of a victim-centred approach:
 - a) Well-being, protection and security first: assistance provided to victims adheres to the principle of “do no harm” and is provided in a manner which seeks to uphold their rights, dignity and well-being. This may entail the implementation of security measures to protect against retaliation, re-victimization and re-traumatization.

- b) Assistance and support are offered to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse or sexual harassment, irrespective of whether the victim initiates or cooperates with an investigation or any other accountability or resolution procedure. Accompaniment for sexual harassment victims is offered through an opt-out model.
- c) Non-discrimination: in the context of this policy, non-discrimination means that every victim, irrespective of race, skin colour, sexual orientation, gender identity, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, health or other status, or any other characteristic, is entitled to the most appropriate response in accordance with the definition of a victim-centred approach.
- d) End-to-end, holistic approach: a victim-centred approach and key principles of a victim-centred approach apply to all engagement with victims, organization-wide, from the moment when Aghsan Foundation is made aware of a sexual misconduct disclosure, report, incident or situation. Where Aghsan Foundation is providing services to a victim following a disclosure of sexual misconduct, Aghsan Foundation will continue to provide these services as long as appropriate and feasible in accordance with its mandate and policies. Depending on the specific circumstances, services may be provided beyond the conclusion of an investigative or disciplinary process.
- e) Give (back) a measure of control, to the extent feasible: the victim has as much control as feasible over sharing of their personally identifiable information and over any actions in the context of assistance, support, processes and procedures. In limited circumstances, Aghsan Foundation entities may need to take steps which the victim has not requested, does not agree with or do not meet the victim's expectations. When this occurs, the reasons for the course of action are explained to the victim as clearly and as early as possible.
- f) Confidentiality and informed consent: the meaning and scope of these concepts are clarified to the victim in the context of relevant processes or actions as early as possible throughout all process steps and preferably before the victim shares details.

VI. MONITORING AND COMPLIANCE

12. Without prejudice to the necessary confidentiality and mandate of the relevant Aghsan Foundation departments,

- The PSEA officer shall have the overall responsibility to guide, advise and report on the implementation and operationalization of a victim-centred approach in response to sexual misconduct, and thus of this policy.
- The Psychosocial Case Management Officer, working closely with the PSEA officer, is specifically responsible for guiding, advising and reporting on the implementation and operationalization of the Aghsan Foundation's victim-centred approach by relevant entities in the context of sexual harassment.
- The project manager, working closely with the PSEA officer, is specifically responsible for guiding and supporting field-based colleagues on the operationalization of Aghsan Foundation's victim-centred approach in the context of sexual exploitation and/or abuse.

VII. DATES

13. This policy is effective on 01 December 2020. It will be reviewed and updated regularly to reflect major evolutions in Aghsan Foundation practices. The next scheduled review shall be conducted no later than 01 December 2025 [5 years after date of entry-into-force].

VIII. CONTACT

14. The contact for this policy is the PSEA officer, who can be contacted at: psea@aghsa.org.

IX. HISTORY

15. This is the first approved version of this policy.