

B.10 PROTECTION AND SAFEGUARDS FOR CHILDREN

1. Introduction

To achieve our objectives and mission it is important that Dakshin works with children and young people through our programmes and projects. Through environmental sustainability, community development and wellbeing, Dakshin has the opportunity to contribute to children's safe and secure futures. Working with children mandates that the organisation, its staff and persons working with Dakshin understand the legalities and concerns involved and adopt appropriate practices and sensitivity in working with children. This policy provides a summary of approaches that Dakshin will adopt keeping in mind the needs of children and their guaranteed rights to be safe and protected. This policy will be further developed as a separate stand-alone policy on the protection and safeguard of children, and shall replace the present policy and its clauses and provisions hereunder.

2. Definitions

This policy adopts the definition of a child as outlined in the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO), 2012 and Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (or JJ Act). Dakshin shall adopt the definitions of abuse and harm to children as outlined in the above laws.

3. Scope

This policy shall apply to all staff at Dakshin and is inclusive of consultants, affiliates, adjunct fellows, interns and volunteers. It also covers visitors, trainers and donors.

4. Implementation and oversight

- a. Dakshin adopts the following principles drawn from the prevailing jurisprudence and expertise on needs and rights of children:
 - i. All children have a right to a safe environment.
 - ii. All children have equal rights to respect, dignity, protection, and freedom from all forms of abuse and exploitation.
 - iii. Violation of the rights of children is never acceptable.
 - iv. All children have a right to express their opinion and take their own decisions in matters pertaining to their life.
 - v. All children have a right to privacy and confidentiality.

All Dakshin projects, activities and interventions that engage with children shall translate the above principles into practices of care.

- b. All staff working with children shall be sensitised to the above principles and provided exposure and mentorship by their seniors to better understand these concerns with regard to children.

- c. Dakshin will develop a stand-alone policy with respect to Child Protection and Safeguards, drawing inputs from experts and existing legal frameworks.
- d. All staff shall be provided access to a comprehensive Child Protection and Safeguards Policy which shall be uploaded on the Dakshin website. The comprehensive policy will contain checklists and do's and don'ts to be followed by Dakshin staff, based on best practices.
- e. All staff shall be encouraged to whistle-blow on any indications of practices related to the abuse of children, as per the provisions of the whistle-blower policy at Dakshin (see pg. 47).
- f. The Director will, in consultation with the SMC and BoT, set up a Child Protection Committee. Such a committee will consist of at least two women.
- g. For programmes that involve children, staff at Dakshin shall exercise due care and diligence to ensure verification of visitors and persons interacting with and in charge of children. This includes verification of wardens, coaches, trainers and administrative and programmatic staff engaged in or connected to such programmes.
- h. Any audio or video content developed or used by Dakshin staff shall be done with prior consent of the children and their legal guardians.
- i. Confidentiality and care to the privacy of the child shall be exercised in the use of their names, photographs and other personal information, especially on social media, websites and other internet spaces. For instance, names and faces of children shall remain undisclosed in reports, publications and websites, unless prior consent is taken from them and their legal guardians to do so as part of programmatic activities.

5. Grievances and complaints of abuse

- a. All allegations of abuse of children or any related grievance brought forward by a child or visitors or staff shall be made to the Child Protection Committee (CPC) which will treat the complainant and complaint with confidentiality and sensitivity in its disposal of the matter.
- b. The CPC shall respond to such complaints within 7 days and initiate investigations in consultation with the head of the CAW (refer whistle-blower policy on pg. 47).
- c. Depending on the severity of the complaint, the CPC shall take appropriate action within one month of the date of receipt of the complaint.
- d. This includes informing the police and other legally mandated government authorities (under the POCSO Act) if the CPC opines that a serious criminal offence has taken place.
- e. During the investigations, care shall be taken to ensure that the child remains protected and not exposed to the accused in any manner.
- f. Such care shall include and not be limited to providing immediate medical attention and counselling, and other reasonable support.
- g. The comprehensive Child Protection Policy shall outline the detailed steps to be taken for investigation of such complaints and processes inherent to its prevention, mitigation and redressal.