

## Child Protection Policy

### Objective

This policy outlines the commitment of Plustrust to uphold the rights of children. We believe all violations of child rights must be prevented, the protection accorded to any child who may have faced violence or discrimination, and all children must be provided with the opportunity to grow and develop to the best of their potential.

### Scope

The policy outlines for its Team members, Anchors and Fellows and all other collaborators,

- The commitment of the organisation to uphold international and national law and policy on child rights
- Ethical guidelines and code of conduct to be observed while working with and for children
- Prevention mechanisms devised within the organisation structure, project design, and implementation to ensure that all children are protected
- Response mechanism within the organisation to address a situation of child rights violation
- Mechanism of review for strengthening this policy and its implementation

### Legal and Policy Framework

Plustrust is committed to policies of the Indian Government on child protection and the building of a child-friendly society where all children have the right to food, vaccination, and medical care, early childhood care and development, good quality education, and a childhood free of violence. We are committed to upholding Indian laws against violations of child rights such as lack of access to education, child marriage, child sexual abuse, trafficking of children, child labour and to creating an accessible and fair juvenile justice system. We are also guided by international law and policy on the rights of the child and in alignment with the goals of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols.

### Definitions

Associates – shall mean all individuals who engage with the organisation through any work for the remuneration of any kind or otherwise. This shall include staff, field team members, consultants, other individuals sub-contracted to work in different roles in the organisation, interns, as well as volunteers

Child – shall mean any person below 18 years of age.

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Child Rights – shall include specific human rights accorded to children under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 and its Optional Protocols.

Child rights violation – shall include violation of rights of children through neglect, or physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, or exploitation resulting in or which has the potential to cause harm to the health, ability to survive, development, or dignity of a child.

Collaborators – shall mean all supporters, clients, partners, membership networks, suppliers, service providers and other individuals, groups, organisations or businesses who the organisation chooses to collaborate with to further its work.

Incidence Report – shall mean the report submitted as per this policy to the child Protection Committee in the unfortunate event that there is a child rights violation within the purview of this policy occurs.

Child Protection committee shall mean the committee of three members, consisting of the Managing trustee, a member of the advisory committee and one staff member, established to address and review internal complaints and recommend an appropriate response.

#### Ethical Guidelines

As an organisation that works towards enabling developmental impact, Plustrust engages with children through its fellowships for inclusive education and through other programs from time to time. This section outlines the general ethical guidelines and considerations that associates of the organisation will adhere to when working on assignments with children.

#### Consent

In all assignments requiring direct engagement with children informed consent of both the child as well as the parent/ guardian should be obtained which shall include information of the outcome of the project and its uses. Such consent shall be recorded in a child-friendly manner and confidentiality of the child and parent or guardian shall be respected.

Consent will be viewed as an ongoing process. Each child shall be made aware of their right to discontinue the interaction at any point. A child who has chosen not to participate shall not be forced, coerced, threatened or induced in any manner to re-join the process.

#### Participation

In assignments that demand the participation of children all associates shall strictly adhere to the code of conduct laid down in the policy. The design adopted in the assignment will ensure that the participation of children is,

- i. Not tokenistic.
- ii. Age appropriate and allows for the full participation of children involved without adopting a one-size fit all approach.
- iii. Guided and sought in a child-friendly manner and child participants are always treated as an equal.
- iv. Not coerced or forced to voice or express specific opinions and/or make observations.



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v. Conducted after a thorough risk assessment.

In cases where any risk to or trauma for children is perceived the design of the assignment shall be revised or adequate mitigation components incorporated.

Additionally, in the unlikely event that the engagement causes any form of distress to the child, the organisation will ensure that necessary support systems including counselling, health care, and rehabilitation facilities are provided. In cases where child rights violation is revealed during the engagement, the organisation shall take the necessary action as laid out in this policy to facilitate protection for the child.

#### Confidentiality

In all matters concerning children, the work of the organisation will be carried out in a manner that is respectful of the child's privacy and confidentiality.

i. All reports of children shall be published wherever possible in a manner that individual children may not be identified, or their safety and security put at risk.

ii. In all cases where the child is a survivor of a crime, the identification details, photographs or any other information of the child including name, location, etc. shall not be revealed in any material that is disseminated by the organisation or its associates. The organisation shall further inform its collaborators of the legal requirement to adhere to this norm in such cases.

iii. Informed consent from a participant child and parents or guardians will include clear intimation of the level of confidentiality that the final product will observe.

iv. Where the organisation is mandated by law to break confidentiality as in the case of sexual offences against children the organisation shall provide best possible support to the child and parent or guardian to deal with their changed life situation.

v. In cases where associates or child safeguarding officer have reported a violation of child rights to the Childrights Safeguarding Committee, all associates involved shall observe the strictest confidence with respect to information of the case as mandated by law.

#### Code of Conduct with respect to Children

The code of conduct details appropriate behaviour expected of all persons who associate with this organisation with respect to children. All parties are to remember that the following is not an exhaustive list but a general guideline. All associates and collaborators will ensure that their personal and professional behaviour is aligned with the principles and ethics outlined in this policy.

#### For All Associates

All associates are expected to ensure that their actions always uphold the best interests of children.

All associates are expected to adhere to all relevant international, national and state laws and policies, always, with respect to children, as updated or revised from time to time . Associates are strongly advised to keep themselves informed of such changes.

All associates are always expected to interact with respect and dignity with all children without stigmatisation, humiliation or risk.



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No associate shall discriminate against a child based on gender, race, skin colour, language or any other factor not defined as a pre-requisite within the assignment.

All associates, during an engagement with children, should be at a visible and agreed upon place. Associates may not interact alone with a child in an enclosed room or private space unless the same is approved and monitored.

No associate shall meet, or invite, or take any child, whom they are associated with through assignments of the organisation, to any public or private space without informing and gaining approval from appropriate authorities within the organisation.

In case of a situation where without beyond reasonable doubt the safety of the child is at stake associates make take necessary action to address the situation. The organisation and where necessary law enforcement authorities must be informed of such action as soon as possible and definitely within 24 hours as per the norms laid down in this policy.

No associate shall talk, act, or show physical gestures in any manner that is inappropriate to a child. This includes but is not limited to engaging in corporal punishment, or emotional or physical abuse, or interaction of a sexual nature.

No associate shall hug, caress or touch a child unless it is necessary beyond a reasonable doubt in their engagement with children on an assignment of the organisation.

No associate shall provide any gifts, recommendations or any other benefit to any child participant from an assignment that is not pre-approved by appropriate authorities within the organisation.

Associates shall not employ a child under the age of 18 years for any work.

No associate shall develop any relationship with children that maybe considered abusive or exploitative

All interactions with children as a part of the organisation's assignments will be strictly governed by this policy and norms laid down in the plan specific to the assignment. All associates are expected to familiarise themselves with both.

For Management:

In addition to the code of conduct for the associates, the management of the organisation is committed to,

Ensure that all activities have been assessed in terms of the best interest of children, whether there is direct interaction with children or not.

Ensure that all associates are trained on this child protection policy and all interactions with children are conducted in a child-friendly.

Ensure that appropriate action as per this policy and legal requirements are taken in all cases of child rights violation.

Ensure that all engagements of the organisation with children are respectful of their privacy and dignity.



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Ensure that participation of children in any assignment shall not be tokenistic or demeaning to the child.

Facilitating adequate provision for food, drink, shelter and sanitary facilities in all assignments where children are the primary stakeholders. These shall be respectful of predictable regional, gender-based, and religious norms. Adequate first aid facilities and access to medical facilities shall be planned for.

Where interaction without a parent or guardian is required an appropriate number of chaperones shall be appointed so as to ensure that the children are accompanied at all times. This shall be in addition to the child safeguarding officer and can be persons from the organisation or their local networks.

The organisation shall actively attempt to update this policy as well as to conduct training and awareness on child rights for its associates in a periodic manner.

For Collaborators:

The organisation shall, in its assignments and operations, attempt to the best of its abilities to work with collaborators, who are respectful and committed to the rights of children. The organisation shall,

Inform all its collaborators of its commitment to upholding child rights and the principles laid down within this child protection policy.

Provide for its collaborators, wherever required information and guidance on child protection, legal requirements with respect to child rights and child-friendly research methods

The organisation shall follow the norms laid down in this policy in case of any child rights violation by any collaborator.

#### Media and Communications

Plustrust is committed to ensuring that these are respectful of the rights of children. Care will be taken regarding creating the content on children and the use of content with respect to children. Pornographic material or sexual material with respect to children if found will be immediately reported to the child safeguarding officer :

#### Prevention Strategies

Plustrust will take adequate measures within its recruitment, training, and programme design and implementation procedures to prevent violation of child rights to the best of its abilities.

#### Reporting mechanism:

i. If an incident of child rights violation occurs within the office or at a project site in relation to an associate, or otherwise in relation to an associate,



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a. Any other associate who is aware of or informed of the incident must immediately report the same to the child safeguarding officer or if the nature of the project does not require such officer, to the project in charge.

b. Such child safeguarding officer or project in charge must immediately remove the concerned associate from any interaction with children through the organisation.

c. Such child safeguarding officer or project in charge must write up an Incidence Report of the incident within 24 hours from the reporting and submit the same to the Child Safety Committee

ii. If an incident of child rights violation occurs within the office or at a project site in relation to any other person,

a. Any associate who is aware of, or informed of, the incident must immediately report the same to the child safeguarding officer or the project in charge.

b. The child safeguarding officer or project in charge must assess the situation and if possible, act to facilitate the removal of said person from any interaction with children in association with the organisation.

c. Such child safeguarding officer or project in charge is required to inform the local authority, parent or guardian of the child or any other person in charge at the location who will be able to facilitate response to the incident.

d. Such child safeguarding officer or project in charge must write up an Incidence Report of the incident within 24 hours from the reporting and submit to the Child Safety Committee.

4 The Childrights Protection Committee is to be established under this Policy of Development and it is also referred to as 'the Committee' within this policy.

iii. In the event that an associate is made aware of an incidence of a child rights violation by any other person even if such incident is not in relation to the work of the organisation, the associate may report the incident by way of writing to the Committee for guidance, support or action.

iv. In the event that an associate is made aware of a complaint of child rights violation and is unable to, or does not want to inform the project in charge or child safeguarding officer, the associate must inform the Committee directly via email or post or phone call followed by a written complaint.

v. Any associate may write to the Committee enquiring about the progress of their complaint after a period of 4 weeks from when the complaint was placed.

vi. Associates may take reasonable action to mitigate imminent risk to the life or safety or health of a child. Such action should be clearly explained in the Incidence Report submitted to the Committee.

vii. In a case of child rights violation where there is no imminent risk to the life or safety or health of a child, associates may not take any action in response to the incident other than mandated responses within the child protection policy without instruction from the Committee.

viii. In the case of criminal activity against a child, all associates are encouraged to follow due process of law and report the incident to law enforcement agencies. In such cases, details of such First Information Report must be included in the Incidence Report to the Committee. The associate may



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also seek the support of the child safeguarding officer or Committee to approach the law enforcement agencies.

ix. In addition to processes set for the point viii of this sub section stated above, all associates are mandated by law, under Section 19 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 to report any instance of a sexual offence against a child as defined under relevant sections of the said Act to the local law enforcement authorities. Plustrust is committed to providing support to any associate who wishes to lodge a complaint of this nature with the law enforcement agency. Plustrust is required to mandatorily report any instance of non- reporting by an associate, of offences under the said Act, to the local law enforcement authority as under Section 21 sub section (2) of the said Act.

#### Childrights Protection Committee

The Committee shall consist of 3 members, Lalitha Iyer ,Managing Trustee, Girish Mahale, Advisor and Priyanshi Sharma, Manager . Ms Priyansho Sharma shall be the Childrights Safeguarding Officer

##### i. Review Process:

The Committee shall on receipt of a complaint or an Incidence Report or identification of a violation of child rights initiate a complaint review process.

a. In case the complaint is received against an associate,

- The Committee shall issue a memo notifying the associate of the complaint and towards removing them from interaction with children until the end of the review process.
- Based on the severity of the offence the services of the associate maybe immediately suspended on recommendation of the Committee.
- The Committee shall attempt wherever possible to access information directly from the child or witnesses. However, such action shall be taken after duly considering ethical aspects including but not limited to its effect on the child, informed consent of parent or guardian and child, access to the child etc. Where necessary a minimum of one member of the committee who shall be a woman may arrange to visit the child at a location comfortable to the child. In case such a member of the committee is the same person as the child safeguarding officer, the organisation may nominate another person who is a woman from the core team or the management of the organisation.
- The Committee shall follow norms of reviewing a complaint as is including but not limited to providing the accused associate with a chance to represent their case, using external assistance in the form of special advisor or children's counsellor wherever necessary, or handing over the review process to an external agency to ensure due process is followed and avoid conflict of interest.

b. In case the complaint against the associate is of a criminal offence against a child, in addition to actions stated in sub-section 'a' of this section,

- The Committee shall take appropriate action to file a First Information Report with the appropriate law enforcement agency.
- The Committee shall inform the Management of organisation of the incident who shall, in turn, take appropriate action against the associate.



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c. In case the complaint is received against an associate of a collaborator, the Committee will file a written report with the reporting authority responsible for such associate. The Committee shall also notify the collaborator of the organisation's commitment to report criminal offences against children and follow due process.

d. Where the complaint is received against another child, the Committee may,

- After due consideration and review, work with the project in charge or child safeguarding officer to identify and create appropriate reformation system. The assistance of experts or collaborations with existing resolution mechanisms may be relied upon for appropriate response.
- In case the complaint is of a criminal nature a FIR may be lodged with the Juvenile Police Officer at the law enforcement agency.

ii. Procedure:

a. The Committee shall maintain a record of all processes with respect to all complaints received.

b. The Committee shall produce a report of the review process and a final recommendation to the management for action as soon as possible but not later than four weeks. Where a recommendation is not finalised within the stipulated time frame, reasons for the same shall be recorded in writing.

c. The Committee may on request from the complainant, after four weeks from filing such complaint, apprise them of the progress of the complaint as well as final recommendation to the Management.

d. The Committee may take internal disciplinary action against the child safeguarding officer or project in charge or any other person from the management of the organisation if it finds that such person intentionally withheld information of any form of child rights violation. Exceptions to this may be, cases, where the person alleged to have committed the violation, is a person in a position of authority and it may be allowed within reason that the officer duty-bound to report maybe under duress. In cases of a sexual offence against a child, this shall extend to any associate who had knowledge of but withheld such knowledge of the incident and shall require the Committee to follow due process as per law.

iii. Assistance to the Child:

a. Irrespective of the progress of the review process, the Committee shall make an assessment within the first week of receipt of the complaint if assistance needs to be provided to the child against whom the violation is alleged to have been committed.

b. Assistance provided or facilitated may include but not limited to,

- basic necessities such as food, shelter or clothing
- advanced facilities like access to education or counselling services
- assistance to file a First Information Report
- legal counsel or aid

c. The Committee shall take special care to ensure that such assistance recommended will not be in conflict of interest.





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Timelines within this section: Procedure	Time frame
An associate reporting an incident of child rights violation	As soon as possible but within 24 hours
Removing an associate or where possible any other person, accused of child rights violation from engaging with children	As soon as the project in charge or child safeguarding officer is made aware of the complaint
Submitting Incidence Report by child safeguarding officer or project in charge	Within 24 hours of knowledge of the incident
Reporting of criminal activity against a child	Report as soon as possible to the law enforcement agency and within 24 hours to the Childrights Safeguarding Committee
Completion of review by the Childrights Safeguarding Committee	Within 4 weeks of receiving the first complaint
Request for update on a complaint from the Childrights Safeguarding Committee by the complainant	After 4 weeks from receiving the first complaint
Assessment on aid to be provided to the child against whose right may have been violated	Within 1 week of receipt of the complaint.

