

## CHILD PROTECTION AND PREVENTION POLICY – AMAF-BENIN

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## **1. GENERAL POLICY STATEMENT**

Within AMAF-Benin, we believe in fundamental rights, freedom, dignity, and equality for all individuals, including children. Children can be extremely vulnerable, especially in situations of poverty, humanitarian crises, or conflict, and they deserve a higher level of protection. Moreover, the combination of various factors such as social class, gender, origin, sexual orientation, disability, or being displaced increases a child's vulnerability to abuse and exploitation.

As an organization focused on children, youth, and women, AMAF-Benin is in daily contact with children through its work. In the context of its interventions, AMAF-Benin commits to respecting children's rights and protecting them from any (deliberate or unintended) acts of violence and harm in all forms, including abuse and exploitation.

AMAF-Benin's policy is to create and maintain an institutional culture and operational frameworks that prevent and stop all actions and omissions, deliberate or accidental that expose children to any type of abuse. In order to create a safe environment for children, it is expected that all those associated with AMAF's work amplify the voices of children and, where appropriate, take measures to do so. Furthermore, these individuals are strictly prohibited from engaging in any activity that could result in abuse of any kind against children.

We take concrete steps to prevent child abusers from participating in any AMAF activities, and we will not tolerate any form of abuse against children. It is the responsibility of everyone working on behalf of AMAF-Benin to report any concerning situation, whether personal or reported to them, in accordance with this policy.

AMAF-Benin respects and is committed to strengthening the culture, traditions, and practices of the communities in which it operates. However, where cultural practices may harm children, we advocate for their elimination. AMAF-Benin's policy is to comply with legislation in all its areas of operation, whenever it is safe to do so. This includes national and international legislation regarding child welfare and protection. The requirements of this Child Protection and Prevention Policy complement all other legal obligations in force. Any violation of this policy will be treated as a serious offense and may result in disciplinary action up to dismissal and any other legal recourse.

## **2. SCOPE AND ELIGIBILITY**

This policy applies to all AMAF-Benin employees and all persons associated with AMAF's work, both during and outside normal working hours, including all individuals (facilitators) recruited within intervention communities or localities.

## **3. PURPOSE OF THE POLICY**

This policy affirms AMAF-Benin's commitment to protecting children from all harm and abuse, including sexual exploitation and abuse, physical abuse, emotional maltreatment, and neglect. The policy, together with the implementation guidelines and accompanying tools, has been developed to provide a practical guide aimed at preventing child abuse and strengthening child protection and prevention within AMAF-Benin's work.

It aims to create an open and attentive environment where concerns about child safety and welfare can be raised and addressed fairly and equitably, giving priority to the best interests of the child.

Maintaining a safe environment for children is the shared responsibility of everyone associated with AMAF-Benin's work, to ensure that this policy is implemented daily in the organization's culture and practices in the following areas:

**Prevention of child abuse:** Through awareness-raising, adoption of best practices, training, and safer recruitment methods, strive to minimize risks to children with whom we work or come into contact. All staff associated with AMAF-Benin's work are expected to adhere to the Code of Conduct regarding children.

**Child protection and prevention training:** Ensure that all those associated with AMAF-Benin's work are informed that they are required to comply with the policy.

**Reporting child abuse:** Ensure that all individuals associated with AMAF-Benin's work are aware of their specific reporting responsibilities, including mandatory reporting duties, actions to take, and whom to contact when there are child protection concerns. Everyone associated with AMAF-Benin is expected to report any suspected child abuse.

**Responding to child abuse:** Intervene to support and protect children when there are concerns about their welfare, support those who raise concerns, investigate, or cooperate for further investigation, and take corrective actions to prevent such acts from recurring.

This policy defines the guiding principles, approach, and standards to follow in different aspects of our work to ensure that AMAF-Benin is a safe organization for children.

#### **4. AMAF-BENIN PRINCIPLES ON CHILD PROTECTION AND PREVENTION**

AMAF-Benin's Child Protection and Prevention Policy and practices are guided by the following principles:

##### **A. Best interests of the child:**

In all decisions concerning children and when addressing a concern related to a child's safety or welfare, the best interests of the child are our primary consideration. AMAF believes that children have the right to actively participate in all areas affecting their lives, that they are capable of making choices and decisions, that they have the right to share the power held by adults, and that they can express themselves to influence others and outcomes.

Whenever possible, decisions concerning children and youth are made with their participation and in their best interests, fully considering the impact on them. Adults may sometimes need to make decisions for children to protect them from danger, but the child's best interest remains paramount. In the event of a policy violation causing harm, AMAF-Benin commits to listening to the child's wishes and responding accordingly. Confidentiality may be breached if, after risk analysis, it is necessary to protect the child from actual or potential harm.

## **B. Zero tolerance for abuse and exploitation of children:**

AMAF-Benin adopts a zero-tolerance approach to child abuse and exploitation. This is demonstrated through sustained prevention and intervention actions, supporting survivors, and holding perpetrators accountable. AMAF-Benin ensures that all those associated with our work have access to information on how to report problems or allegations of child exploitation, abuse, or other violations of this policy, and AMAF-Benin commits to taking immediate action following reports of any alleged violation.

AMAF-Benin does not knowingly employ anyone who may come into direct or indirect contact with children or intervene with communities if they pose a risk to child safety or welfare.

## **C. Shared responsibility:**

AMAF-Benin believes that child protection and prevention are a shared responsibility. The success of implementing child protection and prevention measures depends on several requirements for all persons associated with our interventions: having access to this policy and guidelines to apply best practices, knowing and understanding their responsibilities, and committing to uphold child protection and prevention principles.

AMAF-Benin ensures that all individuals working on behalf of the organization with children and vulnerable populations receive training in child protection and prevention, delivered regularly. Individuals with specific responsibilities receive additional role-based training. AMAF-Benin also ensures that all beneficiaries of our work adopt appropriate child protection and prevention measures to meet the minimum standards set out in this policy.

## **D. Risk management approach:**

AMAF-Benin has a duty of care to provide children with a protective environment across all operations and activities. AMAF acts deliberately and proactively to identify, monitor, and mitigate risks to child protection and prevention during operations assessment, whether ours or our partners', to prevent the risk of a child being abused, exploited, or harmed.

Adopting a risk management approach does not diminish AMAF's zero-tolerance approach in cases of policy violations. Child protection and prevention must be considered during the planning and implementation of programs, projects, or activities.

## **E. Accountability and transparency:**

AMAF-Benin will continue to strengthen its child protection and prevention systems to ensure accountability to children, their families, and the communities in which we operate. Specific child protection and prevention roles and responsibilities are delegated to staff to implement concrete institutional practices ensuring children's safety across programs, operations, and activities.

AMAF ensures a child-safe organizational culture, transparent regarding protection issues within AMAF, compliant with privacy regulations, and within legal frameworks—a culture where any concerns or issues regarding child protection, prevention, or malpractice can be raised and discussed.

#### **F. Confidentiality:**

AMAF-Benin is committed to maintaining confidentiality when sharing sensitive information concerning reported incidents affecting child protection and prevention. Identifiable information is shared only after carefully considering the safety of the child, witnesses, or the individual under complaint, or to protect the integrity of an investigation.

#### **G. Commitment to best practices:**

AMAF-Benin is committed to establishing and maintaining a safe organizational culture where all individuals assisted by AMAF-Benin and all staff feel empowered to demand non-discriminatory and respectful behavior toward each other, where misconduct is deemed unacceptable, and where there is no abuse of power.

Child protection in AMAF's work is everyone's responsibility and must be integrated into all aspects of our work. All AMAF-Benin employees are expected to commit to best practices. AMAF-Benin is open to feedback, learning, and continuous improvement to ensure that child protection and prevention are central to our actions.

### **5. MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR CHILD SAFEGUARDING**

These are the minimum standards to be followed for the implementation of AMAF-Benin's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. These minimum standards apply to all AMAF-Benin operations, programs, and projects.

Ensure that all persons associated with our work adhere to the standards of conduct outlined in **Chapter 9, "Contact with Children,"** when working with or in contact with children.

Ensure that child-safe recruitment and selection procedures are in place and followed in accordance with organizational requirements.

Ensure that all persons associated with our interventions have the necessary knowledge, skills, and awareness to keep children safe through adequate training. This should cover emerging issues such as online safety, domestic violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, unaccompanied minors, sexual exploitation and trafficking of children, ethnicity, racism, and extremism, depending on the context.

Ensure that clearly documented reporting procedures, appropriate to the context and accessible to children, are in place to address concerns, suspicions, or allegations of child exploitation and abuse, as well as violations of AMAF's Child Protection Policy, while taking into account national legislation and referral systems.

Identify and appoint AMAF staff with clearly defined responsibilities to coordinate/lead child safeguarding actions (including incident management and reporting) within the organization.

Adopt effective risk management practices regarding child safeguarding, identifying hazards to children in their interactions with AMAF. This includes conducting a risk assessment analyzing risks to child safeguarding linked to AMAF operations and programs and measures taken to mitigate them.

Ensure that AMAF-Benin's minimum child safeguarding standards are communicated to implementing partner organizations and integrated into their policies and procedures.

Ensure that the communities and populations with whom we work are informed in advance of AMAF's minimum child safeguarding standards and the procedures for reporting any concerns related to child safeguarding.

Ensure that procedures, protocols, and processes are in place and applied ethically regarding the collection, storage, and use of children's stories, interviews, photos, videos, and images, including data protection protocols to avoid putting children at risk.

Ensure that AMAF's Child Protection Policy and Social Media Policy provide for the safe use of information and communication technologies (ICT) such as the Internet, social media, and digital photography to avoid putting children at risk.

## **6. RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CHILD SAFEGUARDING**

Creating a safe working environment within AMAF-Benin is everyone's responsibility. Failure to respond to concerning situations or disclosures of child abuse and exploitation is unacceptable.

AMAF-Benin managers, ultimately the Executive Management team, are accountable for this policy and its implementation. Managers must ensure that this policy is known to the people they supervise. It is their general responsibility to identify those working specifically with children and ensure they receive appropriate child safeguarding training according to their roles. Managers themselves must remain vigilant regarding child safeguarding, prioritize sensitization for their teams (including volunteers), contractors, partners, and program/project communities, and allocate the necessary budget to achieve this. The Board of Directors must support the implementation of this policy.

The Board of Directors must prioritize and establish systems to create and maintain a safe working environment. This means beneficiaries and those working on behalf of AMAF-Benin know expected behaviors, how to make complaints, and that AMAF will respond appropriately. Program/project teams should consult partners, community members, and beneficiaries to ensure these mechanisms are easy to use and culturally appropriate. The Board must also ensure that good practices for child safeguarding, including risk assessments and mitigation measures, are observed.

The Executive Director is responsible for enforcing this policy within their team.

Everyone associated with AMAF-Benin must report any suspected or actual child abuse, exploitation, or other behavior violating this policy. Reports can be made without disclosing case details if given confidentially. Failure to report suspected misconduct related to a child constitutes a policy breach and may result in disciplinary action for employees and termination of association for non-employees.

AMAF-Benin should collaborate with Child Protection Structures/Services to provide training and capacity building for employees and project implementation partners regarding child safeguarding.

Any personnel subject to a complaint must immediately inform their superior and provide a detailed written and signed account of the situation. Individuals accused will be treated respectfully, and all complaints will be handled confidentially.

The Board of AMAF-Benin must review and update this policy annually, considering legislative and institutional changes, and assume overall responsibility for AMAF-Benin's child safeguarding actions.

## **7. BREACHES OF THE CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY**

Breaches of this policy will not be tolerated and may result in disciplinary measures up to dismissal.

AMAF-Benin will take action against anyone, whether or not a complaint is filed, who retaliates (including harassment, intimidation, unfair disciplinary action, or victimization) against complainants, survivors, or witnesses. Employees committing such acts may face disciplinary measures up to dismissal, and non-employees may have their relationship with AMAF-Benin terminated.

Intentionally making false allegations will result in disciplinary action, including dismissal for employees or termination of association for non-employees.

## **8. SUPPORT FOR CHILD VICTIMS OF HARM**

Any child who is harmed, abused, or exploited will receive support from AMAF-Benin, regardless of any formal internal procedures (such as internal investigations). Support may include psychosocial counseling, access to AMAF employee assistance programs (if available), or other appropriate support. Children and their parents choose whether to receive the offered support. AMAF-Benin will strive to provide support sensitive to the child's needs and seek it elsewhere if necessary.

## **9. CONTACT WITH CHILDREN**

All persons associated with AMAF-Benin must:

- Conduct themselves in line with AMAF-Benin values and the Child Protection Policy;
- Treat all children with respect, regardless of ethnicity, skin color, gender (including gender-diverse children), language, religion, opinions, nationality, social background, property, disability, sexual orientation, or other considerations;
- Immediately disclose any allegations, convictions, or consequences related to child exploitation or abuse, including customary law offenses, that occurred before or during collaboration with AMAF-Benin;
- Use AMAF-Bénin training sessions to understand the different forms of child abuse;
- Never use inappropriate, harassing, abusive, sexually provocative, humiliating, or culturally inappropriate language or behavior toward a child;

- Never engage in sexual activity with children, including transactional sex or paying for sexual services with anyone under 18 (or under the age of consent if the adult is over 18);
- Never engage in any form of child abuse, whether physical, emotional, neglect, sexual predation, harassment, exploitation, online, or otherwise;
- Never engage in domestic violence, including but not limited to female genital mutilation, child marriage, trafficking, and child labor;
- Ensure, when possible, that another adult is present during activities with children;
- Not sleep near children without supervision unless absolutely necessary, and in that case, immediately notify a superior and ensure another adult is present, except for one's own children or when acting as a guardian;
- Not visit a child's home alone or invite an unaccompanied child to one's home unless there is immediate danger;
- Comply with all applicable laws, including child labor legislation;
- Not use corporal punishment or degrading treatment;
- Not consume alcohol or illicit drugs when working with children;
- Not favor or discriminate against any child;
- Not seek contact or spend time with children linked to AMAF-Benin outside programs times;
- Not abuse one's position to withhold professional assistance, or offer favors, gifts, or payments to obtain sexual advantage from a child;
- Not engage in unnecessary or culturally inappropriate physical contact with children;
- Not employ children in hazardous or inappropriate work;
- Not perform intimate tasks for children involved in programs, such as bathing or dressing;
- Not exploit or harass children via ICT, nor access child sexual abuse material;
- Not tolerate or participate in illegal, dangerous, or abusive behavior;
- Immediately report any child safety concerns or breaches of the Child Protection Policy;
- Consult management regarding potential breaches of this policy;
- Act professionally, empathetically, and compassionately toward children;
- Ensure consent, dignity, and privacy in photographing or filming children, or using their stories, including for promotion, fundraising, or development education.

## **10. REPORTING AND OBLIGATIONS**

### ***10.1. Public Reporting***

AMAF-Benin's website must provide information for the public and partners on how to report concerns or complaints, including contact details (email and phone). Reporting mechanisms must also be visible in offices and intervention communities. Partners and collaborators should establish similar reporting procedures.

### ***10.2. Child-Friendly Reporting***

Children rarely disclose abuse or violence. By providing trusted adults and a safe environment, children are more likely to report abuse or danger. Child-friendly mechanisms should be integrated into AMAF-Benin's operations and activities to enhance child safety. Guidance notes and toolkits will be developed to provide detailed best practices.

### ***10.3. How to Report***

Anyone, including beneficiaries, witnessing or experiencing misconduct may report verbally or in writing to the Board or management team, using email or phone. Employees may also report to their supervisor or a management team member. Reports are free from retaliation.

### ***10.4. Standard Reporting Procedures***

Standard reporting procedures outline the process from suspicion/accusation of misconduct, through management, follow-up, and communication to external stakeholders, including donors. These procedures ensure survivor safety, confidentiality, investigation integrity, and compliance with donor obligations and national data protection laws.

### ***10.5. Duty to Report***

AMAF-Benin does not expect associated persons to be child safeguarding experts or have proof before reporting. Everyone must report any knowledge or suspicion of incidents affecting children and must not gather evidence, speak to colleagues or the child, or investigate themselves.

### ***10.6. Confidentiality, Safety, and Wellbeing***

AMAF-Benin ensures confidentiality, safety, and wellbeing of all involved, including reporters and the accused. Rights are respected throughout investigations and disciplinary procedures. Breaches of confidentiality may result in dismissal or termination of association and may constitute a legal offense.

## ANNEX: DEFINITIONS

**-Child:** Anyone under 18 years, per the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**-Children's Rights:** The right to life, survival, and development, including physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and cultural development.

**-Child Safeguarding and Protection:** Policies, procedures, and practices to prevent harm, abuse, or exploitation of children in contact with AMAF-Benin. Responsibility lies with all staff.

**-Child Protection:** Prevention and response to significant harm, abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children. Programs aim to protect children across all thematic areas.

**-Child Abuse:** Abuse of children's rights, including physical, psychological, sexual abuse, neglect, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, abduction, and child trafficking.

**-Physical Abuse:** Deliberate injury or threat of injury to a child, including cultural practices causing harm.

**-Neglect:** Persistent failure to provide necessary care, endangering a child's health and development.

**-Emotional Abuse:** Persistent undermining of a child's self-esteem through insults, threats, ridicule, humiliation, intimidation, or isolation.

**-Sexual Abuse:** Use of a child for sexual gratification, including contact and non-contact activities, online exploitation, or photography.

**-Domestic Violence:** Recurrent verbal, physical, sexual, or emotional violence witnessed by a child within the household.

**-Commercial Sexual Exploitation:** Sexual abuse for financial gain or in-kind payments.

**-Digital Sexual Exploitation:** Use of ICT to sexually exploit children, produce, share, or access abusive content.

**-Child Marriage:** Formal or informal union under 18 years old.

**-Grooming:** Behavior aimed at establishing a relationship with a child to facilitate sexual exploitation.

**-Sexual Abuse via Digital Means:** Sending messages with sexual intent to someone believed under 18.

**-Child Labor:** Work that deprives children of childhood, education, or development, and may be harmful physically, mentally, or socially.

**-Child Trafficking:** Recruitment, transportation, or harboring of a child for exploitation, including abuse of power.

**-Children in Military Use:** Children involved in or exposed to military activities, including as soldiers or human shields.

**-Contact with Children:** Activities or positions involving direct (including online) or indirect interaction with children.

**-Working with Children:** Engaging in activities where contact with children is expected, including volunteering.