What is safeguarding?

Safeguarding promotes the safety and welfare of people involved in the delivery or receipt of humanitarian aid and development assistance, protecting them from harm, including all forms of exploitation, abuse and harassment.

Why is safeguarding important?

International development and humanitarian assistance involves working with the most vulnerable and marginalised people, so it is critical that the highest standard of work is carried out and no harm is done. This includes harm, abuse or exploitation which is intended as well as harm which may be more opportunistic. All are enabled through weak systems, a lack of clear safeguarding policies and procedures, unhealthy safeguarding organisational cultures and unequal power dynamics. Strong safeguarding systems are essential so that the risk of harm to the most vulnerable and susceptible to abuse, harm or exploitation – those who we particularly seek to reach in our work – is minimised as far as possible.

"Safeguarding is an issue which is of paramount importance to all organisations involved in providing support and help to the most vulnerable members of our communities. That is the case whether that support is in Scotland or directed overseas."

Ben Macpherson MSP, Minister for Europe, Migration and International Development, The Scottish Government[1]

Safeguarding must be prioritised by all international development actors, whether implementing organisations, governments, donors or communities. This requires high standards of safeguarding practice and development of a healthy safeguarding culture within organisations.

Striving to ensure that the most vulnerable are safe will maintain the integrity of the international development sector and public faith in the benefits of aid and humanitarian assistance.

What does safeguarding involve?

Robust safeguarding policy and practice covers three key areas or dimensions and is based on six fundamental principles.

Dimensions of safeguarding

- **Mitigation** of the risk of safeguarding incidents – through clear, owned and understood safeguarding and connected policies, rigorous vetting and recruitment procedures, detailed risk assessments and ongoing training and orientations for all representatives of an organisation.
- Clear and robust **reporting** procedures, which are fully understood by all representatives of an organisation.

- ◎ **Investigation** processes which are transparent, fair, thorough and clearly articulated in an organisation's safeguarding and related policy documentation.

Principles of safeguarding

- ◎ **Empowerment**: People should be supported and encouraged to make their own decisions and informed consent.
- ◎ **Prevention**: It is crucial to assess safeguarding risks and minimise the opportunity for any harm to occur.
- ◎ **Proportionality**: In dealing with safeguarding incidents, the response should be appropriately based on the specific incident, taking all facts into account, and least intrusive.
- ◎ **Protection**: Support, protection and representation should be in place for those in greatest need.
- ◎ **Partnership**: Safeguarding should be owned across an organisation, its partners and all stakeholders. Thus, practice and solutions are consistently understood and applied, the risk of incidents is minimsed and responses are appropriate and effective. Communities have a part to play in preventing, detecting and reporting neglect and abuse.
- ◎ **Accountability**: Accountability and transparency are essential for safeguarding policy and practice to be effective. Reporting and investigation should be well documented and responsibility and roles clearly set out.

Safer for All: safeguarding dimensions and principles

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Safeguarding policy and practice built on these dimensions and principles will encourage and nurture the development of a culture where safeguarding is at the heart of all areas of work. This particularly means that all those with whom an organisation works, as well as those working in international development, are empowered to speak up and raise concerns, and challenge unhealthy safeguarding attitudes and practice. To develop a healthy safeguarding culture inevitably takes time and involves changing social attitudes and mindsets across all contexts, as well as emphasising that each individual must take responsibility and commit to building healthy safeguarding practice across all actions.

What does it mean for you and your organisation?

Organisations must comply with international and national standards of good practice. Safeguarding compliance has been strengthened by many donors. The Scottish Government has provided guidance and amended international development grant conditions to emphasise the requirement for robust safeguarding policies to be in place[2]. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) has produced "Enhanced Due Diligence"[3] to ensure that the requirement for organisations to have robust safeguarding policies and procedures in place is clearly set out.

All organisations should strive for the highest standards of practice across all areas of safeguarding rather than settling for the minimum standard in order to be legally and contractually compliant. It is clear that where an organisation's safeguarding policies, practice and procedures are stronger, the likelihood of incidents is mitigated, reporting and investigations are more likely to result in fair outcomes and an organisation is more like to have a healthy safeguarding culture.

The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) is the independent regulator and registrar for Scottish charities, including community groups, religious charities, schools, universities, grant-giving charities and major care providers. OSCR provides guidance on charity trustee duties. OSCR seeks to minimise the likelihood of problems by providing safeguarding guidance and advice to charities[4]. Where there have been issues, OSCR aims to minimise the impact to the charity, as well as to the charity sector. This includes reporting any serious event (a Notifiable Event) to OSCR which threatens to have a significant impact on the charity or its assets[5].

There is individual as well as organisational responsibility and this applies to all persons representing or acting on behalf of an organisation. This means, firstly, that that every individual should take responsibility to ensure that their own actions and behaviour do not harm others, and in particular do not place any child or vulnerable adult at risk of harm or exploitation. Secondly, it means that an individual must report any safeguarding concerns according to the organisational procedures as soon as possible. Therefore, each individual must be familiar with safeguarding policy, reporting procedures and what to do in the event of serious and urgent concerns. Safeguarding policy and procedures must be accompanied by orientation and ongoing training.

What support is available for you and your organisation?

These increased requirements and responsibilities bring about the need to ensure that there is a shared understanding of, commitment to and capacity within organisations to be safe and healthy for beneficiaries, employees and all representatives. A mapping exercise and research survey were carried out by the Scottish Government and Scotland's International Development Alliance (The Alliance) to provide an overview and understanding of safeguarding capacity and needs in June 2018[6]. This provided the basis for the development of support for organisations in safeguarding policies, practice and capacity in order to go beyond compliance, and towards a gold standard of safeguarding.

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Resources

The Alliance's "*Safer for All*" package of resources[7] supports organisations to strengthen their safeguarding policies, procedures and practice. It comprises references, resources, tools, templates, examples and training modules and is accompanied by a structured programme of capacity development, workshops and training.

The "*Safer for All*" package is designed to complement the growing bank of resources and support available, which are signposted in the online package. These include:

- ✓ **BOND -** has a variety of resources and tools and regular training courses[8].

- ✓ **DFID –** among the pledges and commitments to transform safeguarding practice, DFID has a number of initiatives underway. These include the establishment of a Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub in 2019. This will provide guidance, training and support on safeguarding to smaller charities. DFID has also produced a 'Study of Safeguarding' training options which has useful information and signposts a number of training providers and resources[9].

- ✓ **CHS Alliance** – The Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS) Alliance has a variety of resources and in particular a roster of approved trainers and specialists in the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)[10].

If you are a Scotland based organisation working in international development and you would like to know more about safeguarding support please contact The Alliance. For more information or questions regarding support please contact the Effectiveness & Learning team via email philippa@intdevalliance.scot.

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