

Safeguarding Policy

Most recently updated, reviewed and approved by Trustees on 11th Sept 2024

Next review due September 2025

Advantage Africa believes that the protection and welfare of all people, particularly those at highest risk such as children and vulnerable adults, should be paramount in all its policies, planning, procedures and practices.

This policy has been developed to comply with the following **principles**:

- Everybody has responsibility for safeguarding.
- We do no harm.
- We take a zero tolerance approach to safeguarding violations.
- The interests of children and vulnerable adults will be paramount.
- We act with integrity, transparency and accountability.

Advantage Africa also commits to meeting the six core principles relating to sexual exploitation and abuse outlined by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2018¹ and provided in Appendix 2.

1. Definition of Safeguarding

In the UK, 'safeguarding' means protecting people's health, wellbeing and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect. In the context of Advantage Africa's work this means, protecting people, especially children and at risk / vulnerable adults, from abuse or harm that arises from contact with our staff, representatives and associates or programme activities.

Safeguarding violations can include:

1.1 Physical abuse:

Causing harm to a child or vulnerable adult, either directly or indirectly (e.g. by causing illness). Possible indicators include:

- Obvious signs of injury;
- Injuries which are unusual or unexplained;
- Injuries, which while explained are frequent;
- Unexplained changes in behaviour, including aggressive or confrontational behaviour.

¹ Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment and Abuse of Aid Workers, Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), 31 May 2018

1.2 Emotional abuse:

Actions which have a negative impact on a child's emotional development, and are persistent. These may include bullying or mocking a child and the use of electronic devices and platforms such as mobile phones, computers, the internet and social media for activities such as sexting and online bullying. Possible indicators include:

- Difficulty in making friends;
- Non-comprehension of boundaries of acceptable behaviour;
- Unable to play in an age appropriate way.

1.3 Sexual abuse / Exploitation:

Any form of sexual contact between an adult and a child or vulnerable adult, regardless of whether the child knows what is happening or consents. Possible indicators include:

- Physical difficulties such as wetting or soiling;
- Extreme variations in behaviour;
- Sexualised language, behaviour or play;
- Indirect disclosure through play, drawing or written work.

Advantage Africa regards payment of any kind (i.e. money, goods, services, assistance or favours) for sex, sexual relations with beneficiaries and sexual harassment as exploitative and unacceptable behaviour that fall under point 5.9 of our Code of Conduct.

1.4 Neglect:

Wilful failure to provide for a child's needs (e.g. lack of food/clothing/shelter, failure to protect from harm, not providing medical treatment) where the means to do so exist. Possible indicators include:

- Lack of appropriate clothing;
- Poor hygiene;
- Persistent hunger or signs of malnutrition;
- Unexplained or frequent illness.

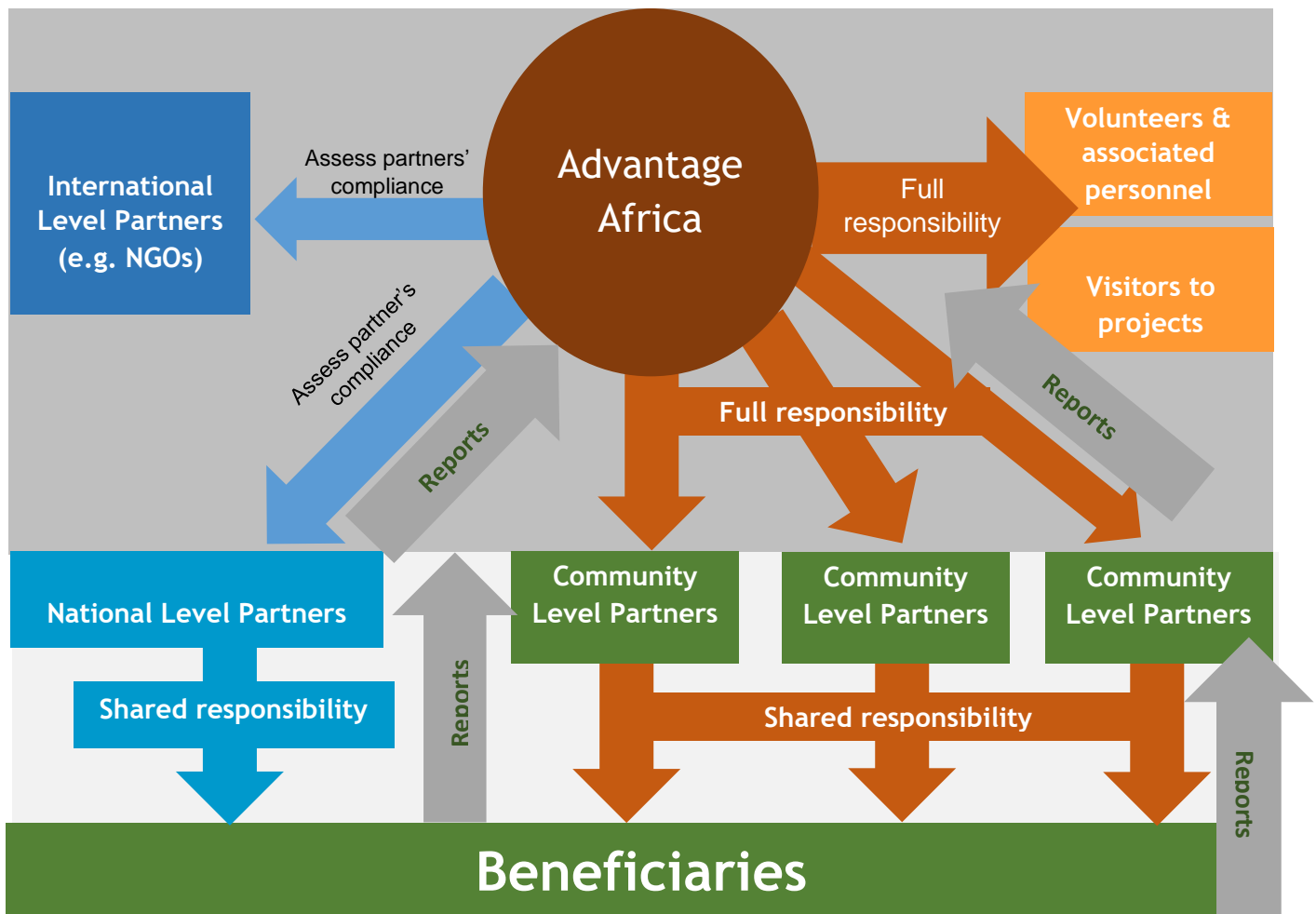
2. Scope and Chain of Responsibility

The nature of Advantage Africa's work and partnerships means that our responsibility for safeguarding starts with our own staff, volunteers and associates, but shared responsibility² also extends to our partners and our/their beneficiaries. The scope of our responsibilities is illustrated in the diagram on page 3. We take full responsibility for safeguarding within our own organisation, and take shared responsibility with our operational national and community level partners in country for their staff and volunteers and downstream beneficiaries. This chain of responsibility conforms to the theory of 'following the money'. That is to say that our safeguarding responsibilities

² The meaning of "Shared Responsibility" in this policy is as follows: Advantage Africa takes an interest in the safeguarding of all beneficiaries of our in-country partner organisations. Advantage Africa supports the partners in establishing and developing their own safeguarding policies and supports partners in deciding on actions when incidents occur. Partners are responsible for handling all safeguarding incidence involving their beneficiaries, for recording these and for reporting to Advantage Africa when necessary.

follow the funds, including core funds and any other in-kind support dispersed from Advantage Africa and we will follow up any safeguarding violation within any of our partners' projects.

Peer level partner organisations (such as other INGOs) should be responsible for their own safeguarding compliance, but Advantage Africa will perform due diligence/compliance checks to ensure that this is the case.



3. Prevention Procedures

Advantage Africa commits to implementing the following procedures in order to reduce the potential risk of the occurrence of a safeguarding incident. We record all these activities outlined below in our Safeguarding Register.

3.1. Recruitment

We take actions during recruitment of staff and volunteers, including trustees, to ensure those candidates' values and behaviours align with Advantage Africa's safeguarding standards. In accordance with our Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy our recruitment procedures include a criminal background check on staff and volunteer candidates. Interviews include specific questions concerning safeguarding that draw out people's attitudes and values in relation to the protection of children and vulnerable adults. We also require references from previous employers and others who have knowledge of the candidate's suitability for the role with regard to safeguarding issues.

We incorporate safeguarding principles into employment contracts and make use of probationary periods of employment before confirming personnel in post.

Visitors to projects are also expected to meet the highest safeguarding standards in accordance with our 'Guidelines for Visitors to Projects'. These include criminal background checks and safeguarding training where necessary.

3.2. Staff Training

All Advantage Africa staff are given safeguarding training within 3 months of recruitment, and refresher training annually led by the Safeguarding Officer. Volunteers and associates who will be directly working with children or vulnerable adults, or community level partners are also trained. Advantage Africa undertakes to build the capacity of our partners with regard to safeguarding and provides training and refresher training, especially during overseas visits by Advantage Africa staff.

3.3 Partnerships

When developing new partnerships with community organisations in Africa we include safeguarding issues in our investigations into the values, suitability and compatibility of potential new partners. In addition to our own interviews and observations, we also use recommendations, references and local official background checks where they exist.

Advantage Africa assists partners to nurture organisational cultures which promote good practice in prevention and responding to safeguarding incidents. We assist partners to develop and implement their own safeguarding policies, and to integrate safeguarding issues within their monitoring and reporting procedures. Suitable vocabulary and examples are used to support understanding across varying cultures.

3.4. Safe Organisational Culture and Integration

In accordance with the principle of all staff and Trustees having responsibility for safeguarding, we nurture an organisational culture which protects against risk, and promotes a safe and trusting atmosphere in which clear reporting procedures exist and are known by personnel. We mitigate against the risks of safeguarding violations by integrating good practice into all our ways of working, including project design and fundraising activities. We follow safer working practices which reduce the risk of incidents, such as avoiding one-to-one scenarios with children of vulnerable adults, and protecting their identity and privacy by obtaining consent to use photographs and changing their names where appropriate.

3.5. Risk Management

We maintain an organisational Risk Register which includes a safeguarding category and is reviewed by staff and trustees at least three times a year. We assess risks within our project and programme design and implementation from a safeguarding perspective.

4. Response Procedures

Advantage Africa will take seriously and follow up all safeguarding reports and concerns according to policy and procedure, and legal and statutory obligations.

4.1. Reported Incidents

4.1.1 All complaints or incidents should be reported to Advantage Africa's designated Safeguarding Officer (or the Director if the complaint involves the Safeguarding Officer). The designated Safeguarding Trustee should also be informed.

4.1.2 The details of the incident / complaint will be recorded in detail in writing on the Safeguarding Register and kept confidential and secure. We will store all reports in a central folder from across all projects, and this will be checked periodically by the Safeguarding Trustee.

4.1.3 Advantage Africa will put the welfare of the complainant first and offer them appropriate support. In the case of injury, medical attention will be the first priority. Decisions regarding the nature of the support will be led by the survivor. An investigation into the complaint will be started immediately and documented securely and in detail on the Safeguarding Register. If the complaint includes accusations of a criminal act, the police will be informed, whilst as far as possible, protecting the complainant's confidentiality. Any staff accused of a safeguarding violation will be dealt with in a timely manner and according to our disciplinary procedure for serious misconduct, including their suspension if appropriate. Other staff and associated personnel will only be informed of the incident / investigation on a need-to-know basis.

4.1.4 If the initial investigations suggest that a serious safeguarding violation has taken place, any relevant partners and donors will be informed. The Charity Commission will be informed of any violations that constitute 'Serious Incidents' in line with their guidance.

4.1.5 If the complaint is against a partner organisation, Advantage Africa will ensure that they implement their response procedures effectively and that survivors of harm are appropriately supported. Should the partner fail to respond as required, the partnership with Advantage Africa will be reconsidered and may result in termination.

4.1.6 Advantage Africa will keep a detailed record of safeguarding issues raised and how they were dealt with through our response procedures on its Safeguarding Register.

4.2. Witnessed Incidents

In some cases safeguarding incidents that do not involve Advantage Africa staff or associates, or partner staff may be reported or witnessed, such as in the course of a partner's community development work. In these cases action should be taken and such incidents should never be ignored. The actions described above for 'reported incidents' should be applied unless another local agency, such as the local police are dealing with the incident. Even if local authorities are involved, Advantage Africa and their partners should monitor the situation and intervene to hold duty bearers to account if necessary. We will take into account the local context where reporting to authorities might cause further harm.

4.3. Whistleblowing

Advantage Africa and their partners cultivate safe, transparent and trusting organisational cultures where staff and associated personnel feel confident to report any concerns. This Safeguarding Policy is implemented in conjunction with our Whistleblowing Policy. As part of their safeguarding training staff and associated personnel will be familiarised with the Whistleblowing Policy which includes reporting procedures and confidentiality safeguards. Whistleblowers will be taken seriously, and will be aware of their protection against reprisals.

5. Code of Conduct

To fulfil the rights outlined above, all Advantage Africa staff, representatives and volunteers (including Trustees) should:

- 5.1 Treat people with respect and a positive attitude.
- 5.2 Recognise everyone as individuals in their own right, with individual needs.
- 5.3 Work in a spirit of cooperation, respect and mutual trust.
- 5.4 Value and take seriously others views and opinions.
- 5.5 Help to develop all individuals' inherent potential, capacities and capabilities.
- 5.6 Strive to understand the context in which others live.
- 5.7 Involve others in decision-making whenever possible.
- 5.8 Never, under any circumstances, engage in actions or behaviour that is abusive, exploitative or constitutes harassment, or condone such actions or behaviour.

Any breach of this code has the potential for harm and undermines the credibility and integrity of Advantage Africa's work and the international development community. Breaches will be regarded as acts of misconduct and immediately invoke our disciplinary procedure.

6. Governance and Accountability

This policy is made available to all staff, associates and partners and on Advantage Africa's website. It is freely provided on request, for example to donors and operational partners.

6.1. Review

The policy will be reviewed and relevance checked by staff and signed off by trustees as necessary, always following a serious incident and at least once a year. The Advantage Africa Annual Report will have a 'Safeguarding' section which will summarise annual improvements made in our safeguarding policy and processes, and any other relevant updates.

Current designated safeguarding officer – Rob Aley, Programme Manager, Advantage Africa
Current designated safeguarding Trustee lead – Pratima Dattani

6.2. Other Associated Advantage Africa Policies & Procedures

Whistleblowing Policy
Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures
Equal opportunities and Diversity Policy
Guidelines for Visitors to Projects
Trustees' Code of Conduct
Trustees' Risk Register

Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

Beneficiary of Assistance

Someone who directly receives goods or services from Advantage Africa and its partners' programme. Note that misuse of power can also apply to the wider community that Advantage Africa serves, and also can include exploitation by giving the perception of being in a position of power.

Child

A person below the age of 18, regardless of the age of majority/consent in the country concerned. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (signed by all countries except the USA and Somalia) states that a child is under 18.

Harm

Psychological, physical and any other infringement of an individual's rights.

Psychological harm

Emotional or psychological abuse, including (but not limited to) humiliating and degrading treatment such as bad name calling, constant criticism, belittling, persistent shaming, solitary confinement and isolation.

Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

The term used by the humanitarian and development community to refer to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse of affected populations by staff or associated personnel. The term derives from the United Nations Secretary General's Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13).

Safeguarding

In the UK, safeguarding means protecting peoples' health, wellbeing and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect

In our sector, we understand it to mean protecting people, including children and at risk adults, from harm that arises from coming into contact with our staff or programmes.

Safeguarding means taking all reasonable steps to prevent harm, particularly sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment from occurring; to protect people, especially vulnerable adults and children, from that harm; and to respond appropriately when harm does occur. It pays specific attention to preventing and responding to harm from any potential, actual or attempted abuse of power, trust, or vulnerability, especially for sexual purposes.

Advantage Africa's values determine that we take these steps and shape our culture accordingly. Safeguarding applies consistently and without exception across our programmes, partners and staff. It requires proactively identifying, preventing and guarding against all risks of harm, exploitation and abuse and having mature, accountable and transparent systems for response, reporting and learning when risks materialise. Those systems must be survivor-centred and also protect those accused until proven guilty.

Safeguarding puts beneficiaries and affected persons at the centre of all we do.

Sexual abuse

The term 'sexual abuse' means the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

Sexual exploitation

The term 'sexual exploitation' means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. This definition includes human trafficking and modern slavery.

Survivor

The person who has been abused or exploited. The term 'survivor' is often used in preference to 'victim' as it implies strength, resilience and the capacity to survive, however it is the individual's choice how they wish to identify themselves.

Vulnerable adult

Sometimes also referred to as 'at risk adult'. A person who is or may be in need of care by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness; and who is or may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation. The nature of Advantage Africa's work means that almost all our adult beneficiaries meet this description.

Appendix 2:
IASC Six Core Principles
Relating to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

1. Sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers constitute acts of gross misconduct and are therefore grounds for termination of employment.
2. Sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Mistaken belief in the age of a child is not a defence.
3. Exchange of money, employment, goods or services for sex, including sexual favours or other forms of humiliating, degrading or exploitative behaviour is prohibited. This includes exchange of assistance that is due to beneficiaries.
4. Sexual relationships between humanitarian workers and beneficiaries are strongly discouraged since they are based on inherently unequal power dynamics. Such relationships undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work.
5. Where a humanitarian worker develops concerns or suspicions regarding sexual abuse or exploitation by a fellow worker, whether in the same agency or not, s/he must report such concerns via established agency reporting mechanisms.
6. Humanitarian workers are obliged to create and maintain an environment which prevents sexual exploitation and abuse and promotes the implementation of their codes of conduct. Managers at all levels have particular responsibility to support and develop systems which maintain this environment.