



CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Policy Issuance and Revision Dates: This policy was published in December 2024. This policy will be reviewed and updated in December 2025 and updated every three years.

Applicability: This policy applies to all Africa Rural Internet and STEM Initiative - AFRISTEMI staff, board members, volunteers, consultants, partners, and anyone else working with or on behalf of AFRISTEMI.

Policy Ownership			
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1. Introduction

The Africa Rural Internet and STEM Initiative – AFRISTEMI is a start-up non-profit organization focused on bridging the digital divide and empowering rural communities in Ghana through quality STEM education and access to the Internet. We work primarily with young people, including children, in rural and underserved communities in Ghana.

Our programs include internet access, STEM clubs, teacher training, digital literacy training, coding, and robotics competitions. We recognize our responsibility to safeguard the well-being of all individuals, especially children, who engage with our organization. Creating a safe and nurturing environment is essential to our mission.

AFRISTEMI is committed to upholding the highest ethical standards and preventing child abuse, exploitation, and neglect. Our Child Safeguarding Policy outlines our dedication to these principles, aligning with international child protection standards and relevant national legislation including policies and regulations set by the Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection of Ghana. This policy emphasizes prevention, protection, and response to ensure the safety of all children in our programs.

In addition, we will ensure children's safety in recruiting our staff, volunteers, and interns by implementing robust procedures to vet all individuals involved in our organization. This commitment reinforces our focus on fostering a secure and supportive environment for every child we serve.

2. Scope of Application

This policy applies to all AFRISTEMI activities, programs, and interactions, regardless of location. It covers all individuals associated with AFRISTEMI, including:

- Staff (future staff including either full-time, part-time, or interns)

- Board members
- Volunteers
- Consultants
- Partners (organizations and individuals)
- Visitors to AFRISTEMI facilities

3. Guiding Principles and Commitments

AFRISTEMI's child safeguarding policy is guided by the following principles:

- **Paramountcy of the Child's Welfare:** The best interests of the child are our primary consideration in all actions and decisions.
- **Zero Tolerance:** AFRISTEMI has zero tolerance for any form of child abuse, exploitation, or neglect.
- **Prevention:** We are committed to preventing child harm through proactive measures, including staff training, risk assessments, and safe program design.
- **Confidentiality:** We will handle all reports of child safeguarding concerns with sensitivity and confidentiality, sharing information only on a need-to-know basis, while prioritizing the child's safety and legal obligations.
- **Accountability:** We are accountable for implementing this policy and for responding effectively to any child safeguarding concerns.
- **Collaboration:** We will work in partnership with families, communities, and relevant authorities to protect children.
- **Respect:** We will treat all children with dignity and respect, valuing their rights and perspectives.
- **Do No Harm:** We will ensure that our activities do not inadvertently cause harm to children.

- **Cultural Sensitivity:** We will be mindful of cultural contexts while upholding universal child protection principles.
- **Transparency:** We will be open and transparent about our safeguarding policies and procedures.
- **Continuous Improvement:** We will regularly review and update this policy and our safeguarding practices based on experience and best practices.

4. Safeguarding Measures

AFRISTEMI has implemented the following safeguarding measures:

- **Safe Recruitment:** We will be conducting thorough background checks, including police checks and reference checks, for all individuals and volunteers who will be working with children. Interviews include specific questions about child safeguarding, and we require candidates to demonstrate their understanding of child protection.
- **Training and Awareness:** All board members, volunteers, and relevant partners receive regular, mandatory training on this policy, child protection principles, reporting procedures, and recognizing signs of abuse. Training will cover different types of abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, neglect), online safety, and appropriate behavior.
- **Code of Conduct:** All individuals associated with AFRISTEMI must adhere to a Code of Conduct that outlines expected behavior, prohibits any form of child abuse or exploitation, and sets clear boundaries for interactions with children.
- **Risk Assessment:** We conduct risk assessments for all programs and activities involving children to identify and mitigate potential safeguarding risks. This includes considering the environment, the nature of the activities, and the level of supervision required.

- **Safe Programming:** We design and implement programs that prioritize child safety and well-being. This includes appropriate supervision ratios, safe environments, age-appropriate activities, and clear guidelines for interaction with children.
- **Online Safety:** We provide guidance and training on online safety to protect children from online risks, including cyberbullying, exploitation, and inappropriate content. We have policies in place regarding the use of technology and social media.
- **Communication and Reporting:** We establish clear communication channels for children, families, and staff to report any safeguarding concerns. We ensure that reporting procedures are accessible, understood, and child-friendly. We will provide information about how to report concerns in multiple formats and languages, where appropriate.
- **Confidentiality and Information Sharing:** We have clear procedures for handling confidential information related to child safeguarding concerns, balancing the need to protect children with the rights of individuals involved.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** We will regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of our child safeguarding measures and make necessary adjustments. This includes reviewing incident reports, conducting audits, and seeking feedback from staff, children, and families.

5. Reporting Process and Procedures

AFRISTEMI has established clear and accessible reporting procedures for child safeguarding concerns:

- **Reporting:** Any person who suspects or witnesses child abuse or neglect must report it immediately to the designated Child Protection Officer Alhassan Haruna or, in their absence, to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). Reports can also be made through online forms, anonymous reporting, and suggestion boxes. Children will be

informed of multiple reporting avenues and encouraged to use whichever they feel most comfortable with.

- **Confidentiality:** All reports will be treated confidentially. Information will only be shared with those who need to know to ensure the child's safety and well-being and to comply with legal requirements.
- **Assessment:** The CPO/DSL will assess the report, considering the information provided and the immediate safety of the child.
- **Investigation:** If necessary, an investigation will be conducted in a timely and thorough manner, respecting the rights of all involved. This may involve interviewing the child, the alleged perpetrator, witnesses, and gathering other relevant information. Investigations will be conducted by trained individuals.
- **Referral:** If the investigation confirms child abuse or neglect, or if there is reasonable cause to believe a child is at risk, the matter will be reported to the appropriate child protection authorities, including law enforcement, if necessary, in accordance with legal obligations.
- **Support:** AFRISTEMI will provide support to the child and their family throughout the reporting and investigation process, including access to counseling, legal assistance, and other services. Support will also be offered to staff members involved in reporting or investigations.
- **Documentation:** All reports, assessments, investigations, and actions taken will be documented and kept securely and confidentially, in accordance with data protection regulations.

6. Definitions of Key Terms

- **Child:** A person under the age of 18 years.
- **Child Abuse:** Any physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological maltreatment, neglect, or exploitation of a child.
- **Child Exploitation:** The use of a child for another person's advantage, including sexual exploitation, forced labor, and trafficking.
- **Child Neglect:** The failure to provide a child with the basic necessities of life, including food, shelter, clothing, medical care, education, and supervision.
- **Safeguarding:** Actions taken to protect children from harm and promote their well-being.
- **Grooming:** Behaviors used by a perpetrator to build trust with a child and/or their family to facilitate abuse.
- **Disclosure:** A child's communication about their experience of abuse.
- **Bullying:** Repeated and intentional actions or words by an individual or group that cause harm to another person who feels powerless to respond.
- **Cyberbullying:** Bullying that takes place using electronic technology.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Child Protection Officer (CPO):** Alhassan Haruna is responsible for overseeing the implementation of this policy, receiving and assessing reports of child safeguarding concerns, coordinating investigations and referrals, and providing training and support to staff.
- **Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs):** These are trained staff members who support the CPO in managing child safeguarding cases, provide guidance to other staff, and act as a point of contact for reporting concerns.

- **All Staff:** All staff members have a responsibility to be aware of this policy, to report any child safeguarding concerns, to create a safe environment for children, and to adhere to the Code of Conduct.
- **Board Members:** The Board is responsible for ensuring that AFRISTEMI has a robust child safeguarding policy, that it is being implemented effectively, and that resources are allocated to support child safeguarding activities.
- **Parents/Guardians:** Parents/Guardians play a vital role in safeguarding their children and are encouraged to communicate any concerns to AFRISTEMI.

8. Implementation and Review

This policy will be disseminated to all staff, board members, volunteers, partners, and families. Training on the policy will be provided to all relevant individuals upon induction and regularly thereafter.