



Children Relief Service (CRS)

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CHILDREN RELIEF SERVICE COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Established: 11 May 2017

Organization: Children Relief Service (CRS)

Location: Dzaleka-Lilambwe, Dowa District, Malawi

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1. Introduction

Children Relief Service (CRS) works directly with children, young people, women, families, refugees, and host communities. Through our programmes, we often hear personal stories, take photographs, record activities, collect information, and share the experiences and achievements of the people we serve.

We understand that a photograph, name, personal story, or piece of information can affect a person's dignity, privacy, safety, and future.

For this reason, CRS is committed to communicating about children and vulnerable adults in ways that protect their rights, dignity, privacy, safety, and wellbeing.

Our communication should never cause harm to the people we are trying to support.

Whether we are communicating through our website, social media, reports, fundraising materials, photographs, videos, presentations, printed materials, or through the media, we will seek to ensure that people are represented honestly, respectfully, and safely.

2. About Children Relief Service

Children Relief Service (CRS) was founded on 11 May 2014 to respond to challenges affecting vulnerable children and communities.

Over the years, our work has grown to include child protection, education, food security and sustainable livelihoods, girls' empowerment, youth empowerment, and GBV prevention and response.

Our communication should reflect the same values that guide our programmes: dignity, respect, protection, accountability, participation, and community ownership.

3. CRS Mission

The mission of Children Relief Service (CRS) is:

To protect children's rights and empower vulnerable children, youth, women, and families through education, child protection, sustainable livelihoods, food security, and community-led development.

Our communications must support this mission and must never undermine the safety, dignity, or rights of the people we serve.

4. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that CRS:

- Protects children and vulnerable adults from harm through communication activities.
- Respects the dignity, privacy, rights, and choices of the people we serve.
- Uses photographs, videos, interviews, and personal stories responsibly.
- Obtains appropriate informed consent before collecting or publishing personal information.
- Avoids exposing individuals to stigma, discrimination, exploitation, retaliation, or other risks.
- Represents communities honestly and avoids exaggeration or misleading information.
- Promotes positive and respectful stories that recognize people's strengths, achievements, and resilience.

- Provides clear standards for staff, volunteers, partners, and others communicating on behalf of CRS.

5. Scope

This policy applies to:

- Board members.
- The Founder and Executive Director.
- CRS staff.
- Volunteers and interns.
- Consultants and contractors.
- Programme staff and community workers.
- Partners and representatives communicating on behalf of CRS.
- Photographers, videographers, journalists, and other media personnel working with CRS where applicable.

It applies to all CRS communications, including:

- Website content.
- Social media.
- Photographs.
- Videos.
- Interviews.
- Personal stories.
- Case studies.
- Reports and publications.
- Donor and fundraising materials.
- Presentations.
- News releases.
- Printed materials.

- Community communication activities.

6. Guiding Principles

6.1 Dignity and Respect

Every child and vulnerable adult should be treated as a person with dignity, rights, abilities, and hopes.

CRS will not intentionally use images, stories, language, or descriptions that humiliate, shame, exploit, stereotype, or degrade an individual.

We will avoid presenting people only as victims of poverty, displacement, hunger, violence, or other challenges.

Where appropriate, we will highlight people's abilities, resilience, participation, achievements, and aspirations.

6.2 Do No Harm

Before publishing a photograph, story, video, name, or other information, CRS will consider whether sharing it could place the individual or their family at risk.

If there is a reasonable possibility that communication could cause harm, CRS will not publish the material or will modify it to reduce the risk.

The need to raise awareness or funds will never be more important than the safety and wellbeing of a child or vulnerable adult.

6.3 Informed Consent

CRS will seek informed consent before collecting or publishing photographs, videos, interviews, personal stories, or identifiable personal information.

Consent should be given freely and without pressure.

The person providing consent should understand, as appropriate:

- What information or material is being collected.
- How it may be used.
- Where it may be published.
- Who may see it.

- That it may remain available online for an extended period.
- That they may ask CRS to stop using the material where reasonably possible.

For children, CRS will obtain appropriate consent from a parent or legal guardian and, where appropriate, seek the child's own agreement or willingness to participate in a manner suitable to their age and understanding.

Where a child is unable or unsafe to provide meaningful participation or consent, CRS will prioritize the child's best interests and protection.

For vulnerable adults who may have difficulty understanding or freely providing consent, CRS will take additional care to ensure that participation is genuinely voluntary and informed.

6.4 Privacy and Confidentiality

CRS will protect personal information that could expose a child or vulnerable adult to unnecessary risk.

Depending on the circumstances, CRS may avoid publishing:

- Full names.
- Exact locations.
- Home addresses.
- Telephone numbers.
- School or classroom details.
- Identifying information about family members.
- Information about protection cases.
- Details of abuse, exploitation, or other sensitive experiences.

Sensitive information will only be shared when there is a legitimate and appropriate reason to do so and when the necessary safeguards are in place.

6.5 Honest and Accurate Representation

CRS will communicate truthfully about its programmes, achievements, challenges, and the people we serve.

We will not:

- Invent or exaggerate stories.
- Change a person's story to make it more emotional.
- Mislead donors or the public.
- Present assistance as having a greater impact than it actually has.
- Use a person's situation in a way that creates a false impression.

Stories and photographs should reflect the reality of CRS work and the dignity of the people involved.

7. Photography and Video

Photographs and videos are an important way for CRS to show communities what we are doing and to share the achievements of the people we work with.

However, photographs and videos must always be taken and used responsibly.

CRS will:

- Obtain appropriate consent before taking and publishing identifiable images.
- Explain the intended use of photographs or videos where appropriate.
- Avoid photographing or filming children in situations that could expose them to harm or humiliation.
- Avoid images of children or vulnerable adults who are undressed, injured, distressed, or otherwise exposed in ways that compromise their dignity.
- Avoid images that reveal sensitive protection information.
- Use photographs that show people in safe, respectful, and dignified settings.
- Store photographs and videos responsibly.

Staff and volunteers should not use CRS programme photographs for personal purposes without authorization.

8. Personal Stories and Interviews

Personal stories can help people understand the realities faced by communities and the importance of CRS programmes.

However, sharing someone's story can also make them vulnerable.

When collecting a personal story, CRS will:

- Explain why the story is being collected.
- Give the individual an opportunity to decide whether they want to participate.
- Avoid pressuring anyone to share painful or sensitive experiences.
- Avoid unnecessary details about trauma, abuse, violence, or other sensitive experiences.
- Respect a person's decision not to participate.
- Avoid changing the meaning of someone's words.
- Protect identifying information where disclosure could create risk.

A child or vulnerable adult should never be pressured to tell a personal story simply because it may help fundraising or public awareness.

9. Children and Sensitive Protection Cases

CRS will exercise particular care when communicating about:

- Child abuse.
- Sexual exploitation or abuse.
- Gender-based violence.
- Child marriage.
- Teenage pregnancy.
- Family separation.
- Displacement.
- Trafficking.
- Neglect.
- Other protection concerns.

Information that could identify a survivor or place them at further risk should not be published.

CRS will avoid sensational language and will not use a person's trauma as a fundraising tool.

When communicating about difficult situations, the focus should be on dignity, protection, solutions, resilience, and the importance of support.

10. Communication About Teen Mothers and Young Parents

CRS works with young mothers and other young people who may face significant social and economic challenges.

Communication about teen mothers should never shame, blame, or stigmatize them.

CRS will seek to communicate their experiences with dignity and emphasize that becoming a young parent does not mean that a person's future, education, skills, or dreams have ended.

Where appropriate, CRS may highlight vocational training, education, counseling, parenting support, resilience, skills development, and pathways toward self-reliance.

Personal details that could expose a young mother or her child to stigma, discrimination, or other harm must be protected.

11. Social Media and Online Communication

CRS recognizes that social media helps us communicate with communities, supporters, donors, partners, and the wider public.

All CRS social media content must follow this policy.

CRS staff and volunteers shall:

- Protect the privacy and dignity of children and vulnerable adults.
- Obtain appropriate consent before publishing identifiable images or stories.
- Avoid posting sensitive personal information.
- Avoid publishing content that could expose a person to online harassment, bullying, exploitation, or stigma.

- Monitor comments and interactions on CRS platforms where practicable.
- Remove or report harmful, abusive, exploitative, or inappropriate content.
- Avoid engaging in arguments or discussions that expose vulnerable individuals to further risk.

Staff and volunteers must not post CRS programme photographs or confidential information on personal social media accounts without authorization.

12. Website, Reports, and Donor Communications

CRS communications to donors, partners, government authorities, supporters, and the public must be accurate and respectful.

When using photographs, stories, or beneficiary information in proposals, reports, websites, newsletters, fundraising materials, or presentations, CRS will consider:

- Consent.
- Safety.
- Privacy.
- Dignity.
- Accuracy.
- The potential long-term impact of publication.

CRS will not use a person's story or image in a way that is misleading or inconsistent with the purpose for which consent was provided.

13. Media Engagement

When CRS works with journalists, photographers, broadcasters, or other media organizations, CRS will seek to ensure that ethical standards for children and vulnerable adults are respected.

Where appropriate, CRS representatives will:

- Explain safeguarding expectations to media personnel.

- Avoid exposing sensitive personal information.
- Obtain appropriate consent.
- Avoid allowing children to be interviewed alone in circumstances that may compromise their safety.
- Consider whether media coverage could expose individuals to stigma or other harm.

CRS may decline media requests where the proposed coverage presents an unacceptable risk to a child or vulnerable adult.

14. Crisis and Emergency Communication

During emergencies, conflicts, disasters, disease outbreaks, displacement, or other crises, CRS recognizes that communication may be particularly important.

However, the urgency of communication does not remove the responsibility to protect people.

During a crisis, CRS will:

- Put the safety and wellbeing of affected people first.
- Avoid publishing information that could expose people to danger.
- Avoid identifying children or vulnerable adults where identification creates risk.
- Avoid sharing unverified information.
- Communicate facts responsibly and clearly.
- Avoid sensational images or descriptions.
- Coordinate with relevant authorities or partners where appropriate.

15. Use of Personal Information

Personal information collected through CRS programmes should only be accessed and used by authorized individuals for legitimate organizational purposes.

Staff and volunteers must not share confidential participant information with unauthorized persons.

Information should be stored and handled securely, taking into account applicable legal and organizational requirements.

16. Consent Records

Where written consent is required, CRS should maintain appropriate records showing that consent was obtained.

Consent records should be stored securely and should be accessible only to authorized personnel.

Where consent is withdrawn, CRS will consider reasonable steps to stop future use of the material, taking into account where and how the material has already been distributed or published.

17. Responsibilities of Staff and Volunteers

All CRS staff and volunteers have a responsibility to protect children and vulnerable adults when communicating about or with them.

They must:

- Follow this policy.
- Follow CRS safeguarding procedures.
- Obtain appropriate authorization before collecting or publishing sensitive material.
- Report concerns about unsafe communication.
- Protect confidential information.
- Respect a person's decision not to participate.
- Never use CRS communication activities for personal benefit.

Managers are responsible for ensuring that staff and volunteers understand these requirements.

18. Training and Awareness

CRS will seek to provide appropriate guidance and training to staff and volunteers on:

- Child safeguarding.

- Ethical communication.
- Informed consent.
- Photography and video.
- Privacy and confidentiality.
- Social media safety.
- Responsible storytelling.
- Protection of vulnerable adults.

New staff and volunteers involved in communication activities should receive appropriate orientation.

19. Reporting Concerns and Breaches

Any person who becomes aware of a communication practice that may place a child or vulnerable adult at risk should report the concern through the appropriate CRS safeguarding or management channel.

Examples include:

- Unauthorized use of a child's photograph.
- Publication of confidential information.
- Sharing a survivor's identity.
- Manipulation or fabrication of a personal story.
- Posting harmful or exploitative content.
- Taking photographs without appropriate permission.
- Using CRS participant information for personal purposes.

CRS will take reported concerns seriously and will respond according to applicable safeguarding and organizational procedures.

20. Compliance and Enforcement

All CRS staff, volunteers, representatives, and relevant partners are expected to comply with this policy.

Violations may result in appropriate action depending on the seriousness of the matter, including:

- Guidance or additional training.
- Formal warning.
- Removal of unauthorized content.
- Suspension from relevant activities.
- Disciplinary action.
- Termination of employment or volunteer engagement.
- Contractual action.
- Referral to appropriate authorities where required.

Where a breach involves a safeguarding concern, CRS will follow its applicable safeguarding procedures.

21. Policy Review

This policy shall be reviewed periodically and at least annually where practicable, or whenever significant changes occur in CRS programmes, safeguarding standards, legal requirements, or communication practices.

Any substantive amendment shall be approved through the appropriate CRS governance process.

22. Conclusion

Communication is an important part of CRS work. It helps us tell communities about available opportunities, share lessons, recognize achievements, build partnerships, and explain why support for vulnerable communities matters.

But communication must never come at the expense of the safety, dignity, privacy, or rights of the people we serve.

At CRS, we believe that children and vulnerable adults are not simply subjects of stories. They are people with rights, voices, abilities, dreams, and futures.

We therefore commit to communicating with and about them in ways that respect their dignity, protect their safety, and recognize their strengths.

Protecting people must always come before promoting a story.

23. Approval and Signatures

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Policy: Communications Policy: Children and Vulnerable Adults

Version: 1.0

Effective Date: _____

Approved By: CRS Board of Directors

Date Approved: _____

Next Review Date: _____

Founder & Executive Director

Name: Roger Tiemuka Shamavu

Position: Founder & Executive Director

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Board Chair / Authorized Board Representative

Name: _____

Position: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Document Control

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