

# **GENDER BASED VIOLENCE POLICY**

# RDIS

Rural Development Inter-Diocesan Service  
A Holy Soul in a Healthy Body

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## **1. Introduction**

Gender Based Violence (GBV) exists in Rwanda as in many other societies around the world. Efforts are being made by Governments and NGOs to curb the crime in order to help the victims. This policy examines these efforts with particular reference to the Rural Development Inter-diocesan Service (RDIS). For the purpose of preventing and addressing cases of Gender based Violence whether as an act of workplace violence as it also occurs in any employee's personal life. RDIS requests each and every employer to provide a safe working environment and to strengthen support to any employee, male or female who is the victim of gender-based violence.

## **2. Definitions of key concepts**

Gender-based violence is a sensitive subject with numerous underlying factors and consequences. As such, understanding the subject is essential, particularly when leading an institution.

### ***a. Gender-based violence***

In various cultures, gender-based violence is seldom openly discussed so that it can drive the subject underground and further propagates many of the misconceptions surrounding it. Understanding GBV and its causal and contributing factors is of paramount importance when formulating its guidelines.

Gender-based violence (or GBV) is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of right.

Gender-based violence can be broadly defined into five categories: sexual violence (rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment), physical violence (hitting, slapping, beating), emotional violence (psychological and verbal abuse), economic violence (restriction of movement, denial of resources), and harmful traditional practices (early marriage, forced marriage or child marriage,

female genital mutilation, so-called “honor killings” and intimidation at work, in schools and elsewhere), commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking of girls and women as well<sup>1</sup>

Gender-based violence is a violation of universal human rights protected by international human rights conventions, including the right to security of person; the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; the right to freedom from cruelty or torture or degrading treatment; and the right to life. When it impacts at the workplace, it compromises the safety of both the victim and the victim’s co-workers and can result in lost productivity, increased health care costs and increased employee turnover.

In addition, accusation of abuse made against employees could have potential implications for their employment role and could break organizational and professional codes of conduct. To this end, the Rural Development Inter- Diocesan Service (RDIS) is committed to full compliance with all applicable laws governing Gender-based Violence, to providing a safe workplace in which employees feel comfortable and the victim has to benefit the support needed at work in order to address the violence in his/her own lives.

#### ***b. Employees***

In this case, employees apply to individuals employed on a permanent or temporary basis paid, all personnel of the RDIS including but not limited to, community facilitators, volunteers, interns, co- workers, contractors and other person related to this organization.

#### ***c. Abuser***

Abuser means a person who perpetrates Gender-based Violence.

## **2 Purpose**

The primary purpose of this policy is to enable RDIS; actors and communities to plan, establish, and coordinate a set of maximum multi sectorial interventions to prevent and respond to any violence during the early phase of an emergency. It also aims to inform and sensitive the RDIS community to the existence of GBV during emergencies, that is, a serious and life threatening protection issue, and offer concrete strategies for including GBV interventions. Therefore,

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<sup>1</sup> NATALIA KANEM, N. (March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2020). UNPD Report

application of this policy will ensure RDIS to demonstrate its commitment so that it may assist its staff who are/have been victims of gender-based violence at work.

### **3 Principles**

The policy provides the following principles to:

- Ensure confidential and sympathetic handling of situations arising from gender based violence,
- Raise awareness of GBV as a serious health and social issue, highlighting its hidden nature and the impact on those affected by it,
- Assist and support employees requesting help in addressing problems arising from gender-based violence,
- Ensure equal application to male and female employees throughout RDIS workplace
- Project a clear signal that the actions of employees who perpetrate abuse, within or outside work is unacceptable,
- Provide a framework for addressing the behaviour of a personnel who may be perpetrator of abuse and who may pose a risk to other employees within the context of their work
- Assist line managers to interpret and apply provisions within existing RDIS policies when responding to gender-based violence.
- The organization will undertake to raise awareness of gender-based violence, and put systems into place that will support and assist staffs who is victim,
- The organization will promote a zero tolerance attitude towards gender-based violence,
- RDIS will provide support to individuals through the provision of a safe working environment and provide information and contact numbers for internal and external support agencies,
- RDIS will provide training programs; including basic awareness raising which will be made available to all employees. A specifically developed Health Promoting training course is available for Managers which highlight the issues surrounding rape and adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse,

- Information material, designed to raise awareness of domestic abuse amongst people attending clinics will be made available in the form of strategically placed, easy to read leaflets and posters.

#### **4 Non-discriminatory and responsive policies to assist victims of gender based violence**

##### ***a. Non-discrimination and Non-retaliation***

Rural Development Inter- Diocesan Service shall not discriminate in hiring staffing or other terms and conditions of employment against any person based on his/her gender (i) for disclosing his or her status as a victim of Gender-based Violence, (ii) because such person is perceived as a victim of Gender based Violence, or (iii) because such person has submitted a complaint or disclosed concerns about Gender-based Violence to the Organization.

Rural Development Inter- Diocesan Service shall not react or take punitive employment actions against any employee for submitting a complaint pursuant to this policy, for disclosing his or her status as a Victim, or for acts of Gender-based Violence against such Employee that occur in or have an impact on the workplace. This Section shall not preclude the organization from taking adverse action against an Employee (i) who perpetrates Gender-based Violence (whether within or outside the workplace), or (ii) for performance-related concerns.

##### ***b. Leave and other workplace policies***

Rural Development Inter- Diocesan Service recognizes that employees may need time off to secure medical assistance, legal assistance, counselling or to attend to other matters related to the Gender-based Violence for themselves or for a Family Member, such as court proceedings, relocation or Safety Planning.

The organization will make every reasonable effort to assist an Employee in maintaining employment when the Employee is experiencing or has experienced Gender-based Violence or is assisting a Family Member who has experienced Gender-based Violence.

The organization will work to provide reasonable and flexible leave options when an Employee, or a child, spouse, parent or parent-in-law of an Employee is a victim of Gender-based Violence.

The organization will make every reasonable effort to first provide paid leave before requiring an Employee to utilize unpaid leave.

When the need for time off is foreseeable, an employee must provide reasonable advance notice to the Organization unless advance notice is not feasible. To request for leave, an Employee should contact the Organization's Domestic Violence designated or other designated authority.

## **5 Consequences**

Survivors/victims of GBV are at high risk of severe and long-lasting health problems, including death from injuries or suicide. Unfavorable health consequences can include unwanted pregnancy, unsafe self-induced abortion, infanticide, and sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS. Further to that, psychological trauma, as well as social stigma and rejection, is also common. Most people tend to blame the victim in cases of sexual violence which increases psychological harm. The exact nature and brutality of physical and emotional trauma differ greatly among survivors/victims; not all available response services will be wanted or needed by all victims.

Therefore, response to GBV in this case by RDIS will be including a set of available services to reduce the harmful consequences and prevent further injury and harm to the victims.

Rural Development Inter- Diocesan Service recognizes that Victims may experience temporary difficulties fulfilling job responsibilities. If the organization becomes aware that an Employee's work performance or conduct has been negatively affected by Gender-based Violence, the organization will offer support to the Victim and cooperate with the Victim to address the issues and challenges which may include the development of a Safety Plan. The organization will make all reasonable efforts to consider all aspects of the Victim's situation in evaluating performance issues which may result from the Victim's experience with Gender-based Violence. If reasonable attempts to resolve the Victim's performance-related issues are unsuccessful, the organization may take action as identified in the established human resources procedures of the organization.

## **6 Claims related to abuse perpetrated within or outside of the workplace of RDIS**

### ***a. Allegations of abuse within the workplace***

Employees who are perpetrating abuse might use workplace resources such as transport, telephone, or e-mail to threaten, harass or abuse current/ex-partners or others. Their behaviour might also include, stalking, physical assault, sexual violence or sexual harassment.

This conduct could be dangerous for those who are being abused and could bring the organization into discredit. In such circumstances, an investigation may be required and where appropriate action may need to be taken to minimize the potential for employees to use their position or work resources to perpetrate abuse. This may include a change of duties or withdrawing access to certain computer programs. In more serious cases, this could result in suspension from duty while an investigation is conducted.

***b. Allegations of abuse outside of the workplace***

Employees may be perpetrating various forms of gender-based violence outside of the workplace. For example, domestic abuse, physical or sexual abuse of children, downloading child pornography, sexual violence, involvement in honour based violence, or stalking. As far as this conduct is concerned, it could constitute a criminal offence, many of these examples would most likely involve criminal proceedings. However, whether or not criminal charges are involved, or there is a conviction, this behaviour may in some cases lead to disciplinary proceedings against an employee because of its employment implications. Perpetrating these forms of abuse could also be breach of conduct to organization (and professional codes of conduct) and potentially bring RDIS into disrepute especially if an allegation of abuse was not acted upon and allowed to continue.

## **7 Victimization**

Employees should not suffer from unfair treatment as a result of making accusations (or supporting others to do so) that another employee is perpetrating abuse. Where there is clear evidence that an employee has been victimized, this will be viewed as a serious employee conduct issue and will be investigated using the Employees Code of Conduct.

## **8 Confidentiality**

Information related to an Employee being a Victim, should be kept confidentially to the extent permissible by law and organizational policy. Such information should be kept in a confidential and separate file from the Employee's personnel file. This information should not be divulged without the consent of the Victim unless the Organization reasonably determines that maintaining the Victim's confidentiality puts the Victim or other Employees at risk of physical

harm, and this is required by law, and also deemed to enforce a Protection Order or a Safety Plan, as well as it is necessary for the administration of the Organization.

The information should be released to other individuals or departments which need-to-know basis, in order to protect the safety of the Victim or others, and with advance notice being given to the Victim whenever possible.

## 9 Disclosure

Information about abuse may be brought to highlight the following ways:

An employee may directly disclose abuse voluntarily or when asked by RDIS Executive Secretary, colleagues or a Board member. Therefore, the Board of Directors (BoD) might receive allegations of abuse from a range of sources. These include but not limited to colleagues, beneficiaries, local leaders, church leaders, partners, ex-partners or others who are not RDIS employees and anonymous letters.

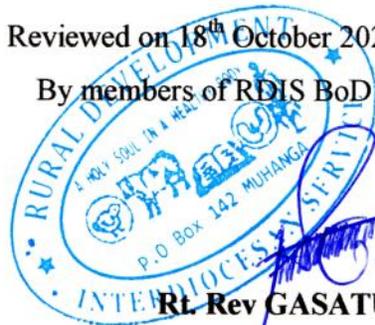
## 10 Conclusion

Prevention of Gender Based Violence in RDIS Settings strengthens local capacity in order to prevent and respond to GBV and increasing access to protection services for its staff both women and men. This policy aims at ensuring RDIS to demonstrate its commitment to assist their staffs who have been victims of gender-based violence that may occur at the workplace or outside of RDIS.

Reviewed on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2020

By members of RDIS BoD

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