

# VEDIC Society

(Voluntary Education Development and Integrated Cultural Society)

## Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Policy



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## About VEDIC Society

VEDIC Society initiated its social development endeavours in the year 1990. The impetus behind it was the movement against the displacement of poor people due to the construction of the Auranga Dam that caused submergence of several villages. While this movement was going on, a group of like-minded people came up with the idea to set up an organisation, dedicated to address different issues of sustainable development of area and its populace. In 1991, it got the registered as society and established its office at Ranki Khurd in Palamu district. The office later shifted to Tumbagara in 1995 and finally to Latehar in 2001.

Since the inception, this society has been relentlessly working for and with the people towards achieving its much-cherished goal of holistic development of the downtrodden people of the society. Though Latehar district and its adjacent districts are extremely affected by the extremist activities that pose severe threat to the process of development, this organisation always nurtures its indomitable will of being thrived as a catalyst in bringing positive socio-economic changes in the lives of the poor people, especially women, children, and people of backward classes and of indigenous tribal communities.

VEDIC Society is at present working in two of the most backward districts of Jharkhand from its headquarters at Latehar and an extension office at Tumbagara. The present operational area covers **Latehar** and **Palamu** districts. The organisation addresses the following thematic areas:

- Basic Education
- Community Health
- Livelihood – Agriculture and Natural Resource Management
- Child Rights and Development
- Women Rights and Development
- Governance and People's Participation

In the context of the socio-political situation that prevails in its operational area, the core of VEDIC Society's target and its major beneficiaries are formed with the most vulnerable tribal population and people from backward classes. In its entire endeavour, special emphasis has been given on the women, children, and the rural marginal farmers.

### **Vision**

Creation of adjusted and vibrant self-governed society, where people of all communities live with dignity in peace and harmony.

### **Mission**

To make the society free from exploitation and discrimination by empowering people belonging to the tribal communities and underprivileged section of the society, especially children, adolescents, and women by ensuring their rights and promoting inclusive development.

**Objectives**

- To ensure equal opportunity to growth for all irrespective caste, creed, and gender
- To improve the status of children and women, especially of the tribal and backward communities in respect of their rights and entitlement
- To create conducive environment for effective and quality basic and primary education
- To generate community awareness towards health and facilitate the health service providers with quality training inputs for improving overall rural health status
- To ensure steady progress in generating livelihood opportunities for the people of economically weak section of the society by organizing them under CBOs and SHGs, and by providing skill development training
- To conserve the natural resources and promote efficient management thereon to mitigate environmental degradation and to enhance livelihood opportunities
- To empower marginalized people and women, especially of the tribal and backward communities by assisting them in leadership development and awareness building towards increased participation in rural self-governance
- To collaborate with the government departments and other development agencies to make convergence of all development programmes in an integrated manner for sustainable holistic development

## 1. Introduction

Women are subjugated in family, society, and workplace. The most common tool to ensure this subjugation since time immemorial is sexual exploitation of women and girls. As an organisation working especially for children, adolescents, and women by ensuring their rights and promoting inclusive development, VEDIC Society has zero tolerance towards sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). This policy details out VEDIC Society's commitment to protect women and girls from SEA and is targeted at all of its employees and related personnel, including but not limited to governing body members, chief functionary, consultants, contractors, and visitors to the organisation's premises and working area.

## 2. Objectives

- To promulgate policy of zero tolerance against SEA for all VEDIC Society employees and related personnel
- To ensure that roles, responsibilities and expected standards of conduct in relation to SEA are known within VEDIC Society
- To create and maintain a safe environment, free from SEA, by taking appropriate measures for this purpose, internally and in the communities where VEDIC Society operates, through robust prevention and response work

## 3. Definitions

**Sexual exploitation** refers to 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.

**Sexual abuse** refers to an actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.

**Sexual activity** with children (persons under the age of 18) is prohibited regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally. Not knowing or mistaking the age of a child is not a defence.

## 4. What Constitutes SEA

Sexual exploitation and abuse include such unwelcome sexually determined behaviour (whether directly or by implication) as:

- Physical contact and advances;
- A demand or request for sexual favours;
- Sexually coloured remarks;
- Showing pornography;
- Unwelcome sexual advances involving verbal, non-verbal, or physical conduct such as sexually coloured remarks, jokes, letters, phone calls, e-mail, gestures,

showing of pornography, lurid stares, physical contact or molestation, stalking, sounds, display of pictures, signs, verbal or non-verbal communication which offends the individuals' sensibilities and affect her/his performance;

- Eve teasing, innuendos and taunts, physical confinement against one's will and likely to intrude upon one's privacy;
- Act or conduct by a person in authority which creates the environment at workplace hostile or intimidating to a person belonging to the other sex;
- Conduct of such an act at work place or outside in relation to an employee or vice versa during the course of employment; and
- Any unwelcome gesture by an employee having sexual overtones.

Sexual harassment is emotionally abusive and creates an unhealthy, unproductive atmosphere at the workplace. Sexual harassment cases can be classified into two categories:

In **quid pro quo** (meaning this for that) form of harassment, a person or authority, usually the superior of the victim, demands sexual favours for getting or keeping a job benefit and threatens to fire the employee if the conditions are not met.

A **hostile work environment** arises when a co-worker or supervisor creates a work environment through verbal or physical conduct that interferes with another co-worker's job performance or creates the workplace atmosphere which is intimidating, hostile, offensive or humiliating and experienced as an attack on personal dignity.

## 5. VEDIC Society's Commitment on PSEA

VEDIC Society shall create and maintain an environment that is safe and free from SEA. It shall take appropriate measures for this purpose in the communities where it operates, through a robust PSEA framework, including prevention and response measures. This PSEA policy affirms VEDIC Society's commitment to the protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse<sup>1</sup> and to achieve full, ongoing implementation of the Inter Agency Standing Committee (ISAC)'s Six Core Principles related to SEA:

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 regarding 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. Any sexual relationship between those providing humanitarian assistance and protection and a person benefitting from such humanitarian assistance and protection that involves improper use of rank or position is prohibited. Such relationships undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work.

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<sup>1</sup> UN Secretary General's Bulletin on Special Measures (ST/SGB/2003/13)

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, he or she 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 code of conduct. Managers at all levels have particular responsibilities to support and develop systems which maintain this environment.”

## **6. PSEA Framework**

### **Prevention**

Following the old adage that prevention is better than cure, VEDIC Society checks, as far as possible, background of all prospective job candidates in accordance with established screening procedures that includes reference checks. Induction training of the staff includes a module of PSEA so as to convey message among the people joining the organisation that the organisation has zero tolerance on SEA.

Refresher training for all employees and related personnel on the SEA policy and procedures are held once a year.

### **Complaint Process**

Whether or not such an incident of SEA constitutes an offence under law and a breach of the employment rules, an appropriate complaint mechanism in the form of “Complaints Committee” has been created in VEDIC Society for time-bound redressal of the complaint made by the complainant. The organisation ensures that any complainant does not suffer adverse job consequences as a result of any complaint being made.

#### 1. Complaints Committee

VEDIC Society has formed a Complaints Committee for redressal of SEA incidents and for ensuring time bound treatment and resolution of such complaints. The Complaints Committee will be responsible for:

- Investigating every formal written complaint of harassment
- Taking appropriate remedial measures to respond to any substantiated allegations of harassment
- Discouraging and preventing any harassment at workplace.

#### 2. Procedures for Resolution, Settlement of Acts of SEA

The organisation is committed to providing a supportive environment for resolution of concerns of SEA.

### 3. Informal Resolution Options

When an incident of SEA occurs, the victim can communicate her/his disapproval and objections immediately to the perpetrator and request the perpetrator to desist from such conduct in the future.

If the act does not stop or if the victim is not comfortable with addressing the perpetrator directly, she/ he can bring the concern to the attention of the Complaints Committee for redressal of grievances. The Complaints Committee will thereafter provide advice or extend support as requested and will do the needful to resolve the matter.

Depending on the gravity of the situation, the Complaints Committee may decide on either of the following actions:

- Formal written apology
- Suspension from services without pay
- Transfer
- Withholding promotion
- Termination
- Police complaint, if necessary

### 4. Confidentiality

VEDIC Society understands that it is difficult for the victim to come forward with a complaint of SEA and recognises the victim's interest in keeping the matter confidential. To protect the interests of the victim, the accused person and others who may report incidents of SEA, confidentiality will be maintained throughout any investigatory process to the extent practicable and appropriate under the circumstances.

It is advisable that the victim keeps a record of incident, that is, date, place, possible witness and file a complaint as soon as possible. All records of complaints, including contents of meetings, results of investigations and other relevant material will be kept confidential by the organisation except where disclosure is required under disciplinary or other remedial processes.

### 5. Protection to Complainant/Victim

The organisation is committed to ensuring that no employee who brings forward an SEA concern is subject to any form of reprisal. Any reprisal will be subject to disciplinary action. The organisation will ensure that victim or witnesses are not victimised or discriminated against while dealing with complaints of SEA. However, anyone who abuses the procedure will be subject to disciplinary action.

### 6. Complaints Made with a Malicious Intent

This policy has been evolved as a tool to ensure that in the interest of justice and fair play, our employees have a forum to approach in the event of instances of SEA.



However, if on investigation it is revealed that the complaint was made with a malicious intent and with the motive of maligning the individual concerned/tarnishing his/her image in the organisation and to settle personal/professional scores, strict action will be taken against the complainant.

The committee may also take suo moto action, if any incident of SEA is brought to its attention, without any formal complaint being made in this regard.

#### 7. Responsibility of Employees Regarding SEA

All employees of the VEDIC Society have a personal responsibility to ensure that their behaviour is not contrary to this policy. This policy is deemed to be a part of the terms of employment of every VEDIC Society employee. All employees are encouraged to reinforce the maintenance of a work environment free from SEA.

## 7. Adoption and Amendment

This PSEA policy is being adopted at a meeting of the Governing Board of VEDIC Society held on .... It has come into force immediately. It will be reviewed at the end of every three years from the date of its implementation, and suitably amended if necessary.

**PSEA policy is as per the applicable laws of the country including The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 as well as any other related applicable law for the time being in force in the country.**