Mangrove Foundation of India

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MANGROVE FOUNDATION OF INDIA

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ETHICS POLICY

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1. PURPOSE

The Mangrove Foundation of India (MFI) is committed to conducting all its activities with integrity, transparency, accountability, fairness and respect for people and the environment.

MFI's work involves environmental conservation, mangrove and wetland restoration, biodiversity protection, sustainable livelihoods, community development, education, research and collaboration with government institutions, academic organisations, NGOs, donors, CSR partners and local communities.

This Ethics Policy establishes the principles that guide MFI's decisions and activities and ensures that the organisation's work is carried out in a manner consistent with its mission, values and applicable laws.

The objectives of this Policy are to:

- Promote ethical and responsible decision-making.
- Maintain public and stakeholder trust.
- Protect the rights and dignity of communities and individuals.
- Promote transparency and accountability.
- Prevent fraud, corruption and conflicts of interest.
- Ensure responsible stewardship of funds and resources.
- Promote environmental and social responsibility.
- Encourage openness and reporting of ethical concerns.
- Protect MFI's credibility and reputation.

2. SCOPE

This Policy applies to:

- Trustees and governing body members.
- Employees.
- Project staff.
- Consultants and advisors.
- Interns and fellows.
- Volunteers.
- Community facilitators.
- Contractors and service providers.
- Representatives acting on behalf of MFI.
- Relevant partner organisations and project personnel, where applicable.

All persons covered by this Policy are expected to uphold its principles while performing activities for or representing MFI.

3. ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

MFI shall conduct its activities according to the following fundamental principles.

3.1 Integrity

MFI shall act honestly and ethically and shall not knowingly misrepresent information, activities, outcomes or financial matters.

3.2 Transparency

MFI shall communicate relevant information accurately and maintain appropriate records of decisions, activities and use of resources.

3.3 Accountability

MFI shall accept responsibility for its actions and decisions and maintain appropriate oversight of programmes, finances and organisational resources.

3.4 Respect and Dignity

Every individual shall be treated fairly, respectfully and with dignity.

3.5 Non-Discrimination

MFI shall promote equal and inclusive participation and shall not tolerate unlawful discrimination.

3.6 Community Participation

MFI shall seek meaningful participation of communities in programmes affecting their environment, livelihoods and wellbeing.

3.7 Environmental Stewardship

MFI shall seek to protect ecosystems, biodiversity and natural resources and minimise avoidable environmental harm.

3.8 Responsible Use of Resources

Financial, physical, environmental, human and informational resources shall be used responsibly and for legitimate organisational purposes.

3.9 Independence and Impartiality

MFI shall make organisational decisions based on its mission, evidence, applicable requirements and legitimate organisational interests rather than improper personal influence.

4. ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING

MFI personnel should consider the following questions before making a significant decision:

1. Is the decision lawful?
2. Is it consistent with MFI's mission and values?
3. Is it fair to the people and communities affected?
4. Does it protect human dignity and safety?
5. Does it protect the environment?
6. Is the decision transparent and properly documented?
7. Would the decision withstand reasonable public scrutiny?
8. Does the decision create a conflict of interest?
9. Does it protect MFI's resources and reputation?
10. Would I be comfortable explaining this decision to the Board, community, donor or public?

Where there is uncertainty, the matter should be referred to an appropriate supervisor or authorised MFI authority before proceeding.

5. ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

MFI's trustees, management and senior personnel shall lead by example.

Leadership shall:

- Demonstrate honesty and integrity.
- Promote a respectful organisational culture.
- Encourage responsible reporting of concerns.
- Avoid conflicts of interest.
- Ensure appropriate oversight of organisational resources.
- Avoid misuse of authority.
- Address credible ethical concerns promptly.
- Support fair and transparent decision-making.

Leaders must not encourage employees or partners to compromise ethical standards to meet financial, programme or organisational targets.

6. COMMUNITY ETHICS

MFI recognises local communities as important stakeholders and partners in conservation and sustainable development.

MFI personnel shall:

- Respect local knowledge, culture and traditions.
- Engage communities in a respectful and participatory manner.
- Avoid exploiting economic or social vulnerabilities.
- Communicate programme objectives honestly.
- Avoid making false promises.
- Seek appropriate consent for participation, photographs, interviews and collection of personal information.
- Ensure that benefits and opportunities are communicated fairly.
- Take reasonable steps to avoid causing unintended harm to communities.

Community participation shall not be manipulated to create the appearance of consent where meaningful participation has not occurred.

7. ETHICAL TREATMENT OF CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE PERSONS

Where MFI programmes involve children or vulnerable persons, the organisation shall place their safety, dignity and wellbeing at the forefront.

MFI shall not tolerate:

- Abuse.
- Exploitation.

- Sexual misconduct.
- Physical or emotional harm.
- Humiliation.
- Coercion.
- Discriminatory treatment.
- Improper use of personal information or images.

Any safeguarding concern shall be reported through the appropriate MFI mechanism and dealt with in accordance with applicable law and safeguarding procedures.

8. HUMAN RIGHTS AND DIGNITY

MFI recognises the importance of respecting fundamental human dignity in its programmes and operations.

MFI personnel and partners should:

- Treat individuals fairly.
- Respect privacy.
- Avoid degrading treatment.
- Respect freedom from harassment and intimidation.
- Consider the interests of vulnerable groups.
- Avoid actions that unnecessarily threaten livelihoods, safety or dignity.

Where programmes may have significant effects on communities, appropriate consultation and risk assessment should be undertaken.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Environmental responsibility is central to MFI's mission.

MFI shall seek to ensure that its environmental activities are guided by sound ecological principles.

This includes:

- Protecting biodiversity.
- Supporting ecological restoration.
- Promoting sustainable resource use.
- Avoiding unnecessary damage to natural habitats.
- Considering long-term ecological impacts.
- Using appropriate technical and scientific knowledge.
- Respecting relevant environmental laws and permissions.
- Considering local ecological conditions before restoration or plantation activities.
- Monitoring significant environmental risks where appropriate.

MFI shall avoid presenting environmental claims that cannot reasonably be supported by available evidence.

10. SCIENTIFIC AND RESEARCH ETHICS

Where MFI undertakes or supports research, surveys, biodiversity studies, environmental monitoring or academic collaboration, it shall promote responsible research practices.

Personnel shall:

- Maintain accurate records.
- Avoid fabrication or falsification of data.
- Clearly distinguish facts, observations and interpretations.
- Properly acknowledge contributors and partner institutions.
- Respect research permissions and applicable regulations.
- Protect confidential information.
- Respect community knowledge and participation.
- Avoid plagiarism and inappropriate use of another person's work.

Research findings should be communicated accurately and without deliberate exaggeration.

11. FINANCIAL ETHICS

MFI shall maintain high standards of financial integrity.

All financial activities shall be conducted honestly and transparently.

MFI personnel shall not:

- Misappropriate funds.
- Falsify accounts.
- Submit fraudulent expense claims.
- Create false invoices.
- Divert project funds.
- Conceal material financial information.
- Use donor or organisational funds for unauthorised personal purposes.
- Accept improper financial benefits.

Financial records shall be maintained accurately and made available for authorised review and audit.

12. FUNDRAISING AND DONOR ETHICS

MFI shall conduct fundraising activities honestly and responsibly.

Fundraising communications shall:

- Accurately describe MFI's work.
- Avoid misleading claims.
- Avoid fabricated beneficiary stories or project results.
- Avoid inappropriate or exploitative images.
- Clearly represent the intended purpose of restricted funds where applicable.
- Respect donor confidentiality.
- Avoid promises that MFI cannot reasonably fulfil.

Donor interests shall not override MFI's mission, ethical obligations, applicable law or the legitimate interests of communities.

13. DONOR AND CSR PARTNERSHIPS

MFI may receive support from donors, CSR programmes, foundations, institutions and other legitimate sources.

MFI shall seek partnerships that are consistent with its mission, values and legal obligations.

Before entering significant partnerships, MFI should consider:

- The legitimacy and reputation of the proposed partner.
- The purpose and conditions of funding.
- Potential conflicts of interest.
- Environmental and social risks.
- Reputational risks.
- Legal and regulatory requirements.
- Whether the partnership could compromise MFI's independence or credibility.

MFI may decline funding or partnerships where the source, conditions or proposed activities are inconsistent with the organisation's ethical principles or applicable requirements.

14. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

MFI personnel must disclose actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest.

A conflict may arise where an individual's personal, family, financial or professional interests could influence, or appear to influence, an organisational decision.

Examples include:

- Procurement involving a relative's business.
- Hiring a person with whom the decision-maker has an undisclosed personal relationship.
- Receiving benefits from a contractor.
- Using MFI information for personal advantage.
- Participating in a decision involving a personal financial interest.

A person with a material conflict may be required to withdraw from the relevant decision.

15. ANTI-BRIBERY AND ANTI-CORRUPTION ETHICS

MFI has zero tolerance for bribery and corruption.

No person acting on behalf of MFI may:

- Offer or accept a bribe.
- Make an improper payment.
- Request an unofficial payment for personal benefit.
- Manipulate a procurement or recruitment process.
- Misuse organisational authority.

- Facilitate fraudulent transactions.
- Conceal corruption or financial misconduct.

Any suspected bribery or corruption shall be reported promptly.

16. GIFTS, HOSPITALITY AND BENEFITS

Gifts, hospitality or other benefits may create an actual or perceived obligation.

MFI personnel shall therefore exercise appropriate caution.

Benefits should not be accepted or provided where they:

- Influence a decision.
- Create an expectation of preferential treatment.
- Are excessive or inappropriate.
- Are provided in exchange for an organisational benefit.
- Are unlawful.

Cash or cash-equivalent personal benefits associated with an organisational decision must not be accepted.

17. PROCUREMENT ETHICS

MFI shall seek to conduct procurement fairly and transparently.

Procurement decisions should consider appropriate factors including:

- Quality.
- Cost.
- Suitability.
- Reliability.
- Technical requirements.
- Supplier capacity.
- Compliance with applicable requirements.

Personnel involved in procurement must disclose relevant conflicts of interest and must not manipulate procurement processes for personal benefit.

18. FAIR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

MFI is committed to an ethical workplace.

Employment-related decisions should be based on legitimate factors including:

- Qualifications.
- Experience.
- Competence.
- Role requirements.
- Performance.
- Organisational needs.

MFI shall seek to maintain a workplace free from:

- Harassment.
- Bullying.
- Discrimination.
- Retaliation.
- Abuse of authority.
- Sexual harassment.

MFI shall comply with applicable Indian employment and workplace laws.

19. PREVENTION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

MFI is committed to maintaining a workplace free from sexual harassment.

Where applicable, MFI shall maintain appropriate mechanisms under the Prevention of Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013 (POSH Act).

Employees and other relevant persons should be provided appropriate information regarding:

- Prohibited conduct.
- Complaint mechanisms.
- Internal Committee requirements, where applicable.
- Confidentiality.
- Protection against retaliation.

Complaints shall be handled in accordance with applicable law and MFI's POSH procedures.

20. DATA PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

MFI shall respect the privacy and confidentiality of information obtained through its activities.

Personal and sensitive information should only be collected, used, stored and shared for legitimate purposes.

Personnel shall:

- Protect personal information.
- Limit access to authorised persons.
- Avoid unnecessary disclosure.
- Secure physical and digital records.
- Follow applicable data protection requirements.

21. ETHICS IN COMMUNICATION

MFI shall communicate truthfully and responsibly.

Public reports, websites, social media, fundraising materials and other communications should:

- Be accurate.
- Avoid deliberate exaggeration.
- Clearly distinguish verified results from future objectives.

- Protect beneficiary dignity.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Avoid misleading photographs or descriptions.
- Correct significant factual errors where appropriate.

MFI shall not knowingly publish false information to obtain funding, public support or other organisational benefits.

22. USE OF BENEFICIARY IMAGES AND STORIES

Beneficiary photographs, videos and personal stories shall be handled with dignity and appropriate consent.

MFI personnel should avoid:

- Sensationalising poverty or vulnerability.
- Publishing unnecessary personal information.
- Using children's images without appropriate safeguards and consent.
- Presenting individuals in humiliating ways.
- Using fabricated or misleading stories.

Communications should focus on dignity, agency, participation and accurate representation.

23. RESPONSIBLE PARTNERSHIPS

MFI shall seek to maintain professional and ethical relationships with:

- Government agencies.
- Universities.
- NGOs.
- CSR partners.
- Donors.
- Community organisations.
- Technical experts.
- Suppliers and contractors.

Partners are expected to respect applicable laws and ethical standards relevant to their engagement with MFI.

Where serious ethical concerns arise concerning a partner, MFI may review, suspend or terminate the relationship as appropriate.

24. POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL INDEPENDENCE

MFI shall maintain appropriate institutional independence in carrying out its charitable and environmental objectives.

Organisational resources shall not be used for unauthorised political campaigning or personal political activities.

MFI shall engage with government institutions and public authorities professionally and transparently while maintaining its organisational integrity.

25. WHISTLEBLOWING AND SPEAKING UP

MFI encourages employees, volunteers, trustees, community members, partners and other stakeholders to raise genuine ethical concerns.

Concerns may include:

- Fraud.
- Corruption.
- Financial misconduct.
- Abuse or exploitation.
- Safeguarding violations.
- Harassment.
- Serious conflicts of interest.
- Environmental misconduct.
- Misuse of organisational resources.
- Falsification of records or data.
- Serious violations of organisational policies.

MFI shall seek to provide appropriate channels through which concerns can be raised safely.

26. NON-RETALIATION

No person should suffer retaliation for raising a genuine concern in good faith or participating honestly in an investigation.

Retaliation may include:

- Threats.
- Intimidation.
- Unfair disciplinary action.
- Unjustified exclusion.
- Harassment.
- Discrimination.
- Other adverse treatment intended to punish a person for raising a concern.

Retaliation may constitute a separate ethical violation.

27. HANDLING ETHICAL CONCERNS

When an ethical concern is raised, MFI should:

11. Record the concern appropriately.
12. Assess the nature and seriousness of the issue.
13. Protect confidentiality to the extent reasonably possible.
14. Identify any immediate safety or safeguarding risks.
15. Conduct an appropriate review or investigation.

16. Provide relevant individuals an opportunity to respond where appropriate.
17. Take corrective action where necessary.
18. Refer matters to competent authorities where required by law.
19. Maintain appropriate records of the process and outcome.

28. FALSE OR MALICIOUS REPORTS

MFI encourages good-faith reporting and will not discourage legitimate concerns.

However, knowingly making false allegations, deliberately providing fabricated evidence or making malicious reports may itself constitute misconduct.

This provision shall not be used to discourage individuals from raising genuine concerns where they are uncertain whether misconduct has occurred.

29. RESPONSIBLE USE OF TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITAL TOOLS

MFI personnel shall use digital systems, electronic communications and emerging technologies responsibly.

They shall:

- Protect passwords and access credentials.
- Protect confidential information.
- Avoid unauthorised access to systems.
- Verify information before sharing it publicly.
- Avoid uploading confidential or personal information to unauthorised services.
- Respect intellectual property.
- Use artificial intelligence and digital tools responsibly where permitted by MFI.

AI-generated or digitally altered content should not be presented as authentic evidence, photographs or field results when doing so could mislead stakeholders.

30. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

MFI shall respect intellectual property rights.

Personnel shall not knowingly:

- Copy protected material without appropriate permission.
- Claim another person's work as their own.
- Misuse photographs, research, reports or educational materials.
- Use third-party intellectual property outside authorised terms.

MFI's own intellectual property, including reports, training materials, photographs, databases, branding and research outputs, shall also be appropriately protected.

31. ETHICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CLAIMS

MFI shall strive to ensure that environmental claims are evid