

Better Cotton Safeguarding Policy and Procedures

Title:	Better Cotton Code of Conduct	Version:	1.0
Department:	HR	Date:	01/22
Approver:		P No:	
Process:			
Owner:			

FINAL - SUBJECT TO COUNCIL APPROVAL

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Section 1: Safeguarding Policy

Objective and Policy Statement

The Better Cotton Safeguarding Policy lays out Better Cotton's commitments to keeping the people and communities that we work with safe from harm that may be caused by coming into contact with Better Cotton. This includes potential harm arising from:

- The conduct of staff or personnel associated with Better Cotton
- The design and implementation of Better Cotton's programmes.

Better Cotton has a **zero-tolerance approach** to any attitudes or behaviours that put children or adults at risk of harm. Safeguarding incidents are acts of gross misconduct and are grounds for disciplinary action up to and including, dismissal and referral to relevant authorities for criminal prosecution.

Safeguarding Definition

The specific areas of harm covered by the Better Cotton Safeguarding Policy are:

Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse

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

Sexual exploitation means any actual or attempted abuse of a position of power or trust for sexual purposes.

Purchasing sex, whether on or off duty, by Better Cotton staff, interns or affiliates is prohibited in any circumstances where a Better Cotton team member could be seen to be representing Better Cotton in a community, on work trips, in any circumstances where sex work is not protected by labour laws, and where there is any possibility that purchasing sex might be considered engaging in abusive or exploitative conduct

Bullying and Harassment

Harassment is unwanted behaviour that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment for that person.

Bullying may be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, or an abuse of power in ways intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.

Forced Labour and Other Egregious Labour Rights Violations

Violations of the ILO fundamental principles and rights at work taking place at farm level, including forced labour and child labour are considered and assessed by the Better Cotton Standard and the associated Assurance function. Better Cotton has standard operating procedures in place for when such cases are

detected. In some instances, a labour violation incident may also constitute a safeguarding incident. The most appropriate method of investigation and response will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Scope of Policy

The Better Cotton Safeguarding Policy covers any person that comes into contact with persons associated with Better Cotton including:

- Staff members or interns contracted by Better Cotton.
- Anyone engaged with work or visits related to Better Cotton, including but not limited to consultants, volunteers, contractors, agency workers, council members, , journalists and celebrities.
- Programme or strategic partners, organisations subcontracted by programme or strategic partners to conduct work on behalf of Better Cotton or any other organisations carrying out work on behalf of Better Cotton.
- Farmers or farm workers affiliated with Better Cotton.

Of particular concern are the following at risk groups:

Children

Better Cotton defines a child as any person under the age of 18 in line with the definition in the United Nations Covenant on the Rights of the Child.

At Risk Adults

Any person who is, or may be, in need of care by reason of mental or other disability, age or illness, and who may be unable to take care of him or herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.

At risk adults can also be members of marginalised groups including but not limited to ethnic minorities, people of scheduled tribes or castes, women and girls, LGBTQ+ groups, refugees or internally displaced populations who are at increased risk of exploitation within the countries where they reside.

Anyone who can be Exploited Through an Imbalance of Power

Particularly anyone who directly receives or hopes to receive funding or services from the Better Cotton GIF, Better Cotton or its partners.

Limitations of the Policy

The Better Cotton Safeguarding Policy does not cover:

- Safeguarding concerns in the wider community not perpetrated by persons associated with Better Cotton.
- Damage to the environment. This is covered under the Better Cotton Whistleblowing Policy.
- Fraud or financial misconduct, including withheld wages which are covered under the Better Cotton Fraud Prevention and Detection Policy, the Better Cotton Grievance Procedures and the Better Cotton Whistleblowing Policy.
- Incidents of discrimination in the Better Cotton workplace based on protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. These are covered under the Better Cotton Equal Opportunity, Anti-discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy.

Please refer to the policies below for incidents not covered under the safeguarding policy:

Better Cotton Whistleblowing Policy
Better Cotton Anti-Corruption Policy
Better Cotton Fraud Prevention and Detection Policy
Better Cotton Workplace HIV Policy
Better Cotton Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
Better Cotton Employee Grievance Procedure

Section 2: Prevention

Safe Recruitment

A key focus of the Better Cotton Safeguarding Policy is ensuring safe recruitment practises that help to avoid hiring any persons that may present a safeguarding risk. To this end, the following processes form an essential part of the recruitment process for all staff, interns and affiliates:

References

Two reference letters from previous employers and/or academic supervisors are required before work with Better Cotton can begin. An explicit safeguarding question is included in all reference requests for new staff, consultants, contractors and interns.

Criminal Background Checks

A criminal background check is requested for any role that has direct contact with at risk groups including children, vulnerable adults or anyone that can be exploited through an imbalance of power with Better Cotton.

For staff resident in a country where criminal background checks are unavailable or have limited value, Better Cotton will instead request three reference letters.

Job Adverts and Interviews

Better Cotton's zero tolerance approach to safeguarding incidents is included in all job adverts. A question about safeguarding is included during the interview process for any role that has direct contact with at risk groups.

Code of Conduct

All staff and affiliates, including consultants, contractors and interns must read and sign the Better Cotton Code of Conduct prior to starting work with Better Cotton. The Code of Conduct lays out the behaviours expected of all personnel associated with Better Cotton.

Breaches of the Code of Conduct will result in disciplinary action, up to, and including, dismissal and referral to relevant authorities for criminal prosecution.

Contracts

Better Cotton's zero tolerance approach to safeguarding incidents is included in all contracts for staff, affiliates, consultants and contractors.

Training

During the onboarding process all staff and affiliates will undertake online safeguarding training. The Safeguarding Lead on the Council and Safeguarding Focal Points must in addition attend more extensive in-person safeguarding training.

Annual refresher training will be provided to all team members on an ongoing basis.

Better Cotton Safeguarding Roles and Responsibilities

Safeguarding Lead on the Better Cotton Council

The Safeguarding Lead on the Better Cotton Council is appointed for a maximum term limit of 8 years and is responsible for ensuring systems of accountability throughout Better Cotton, including maintaining overall responsibility for ensuring that safeguarding incidents are managed in an appropriate, timely, effective and considerate way, and that organisational change occurs where required.

Safeguarding Incident Monitoring Group

The Better Cotton Safeguarding Incident Monitoring group is comprised of a maximum of 4 team members across HR, Safeguarding and the Safeguarding Lead on the Better Cotton Council. All members of the group must have received specialised training in Safeguarding.

The group is responsible for monitoring the safeguarding@bettercotton.org inbox. In the event of a safeguarding incident, the incident monitoring group will, where possible, meet within 48 hours of receiving the incident report to decide on next steps.

Safeguarding Manager

The Better Cotton Safeguarding Manager is responsible for improving safeguarding processes within Better Cotton and its partner organisations. The Better Cotton Safeguarding Manager may also lead or act as co-investigator on investigations related to Better Cotton or its partners.

All incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse, violent or physical conduct, incidents involving children or involving senior management will be investigated by an external, expert investigator, with assistance from the Safeguarding Manager as appropriate.

Safeguarding Focal Points

Safeguarding focal points are individuals throughout Better Cotton who have received training on how to receive a safeguarding incident or concern from a survivor or concerned person. When made aware of a safeguarding concern, a Safeguarding Focal Point is responsible for completing a Safeguarding Incident Report form and submitting the completed form to the safeguarding@bettercotton.org inbox.

In the event of an investigation, Safeguarding Focal Points may be required to support with the investigation or survivor support processes.

All Team Members

Creating a culture of awareness and accountability is a vital component of effectively minimising the risk of safeguarding incidents occurring, as well as appropriately managing safeguarding incidents when they arise.

- All team members must understand the concept of safeguarding, the resources available for identifying and reporting it and other essential components of preventing and responding effectively to safeguarding incidents.
- All team members must understand Better Cotton's zero tolerance approach to safeguarding incidents and the severe consequences resulting from involvement in a safeguarding incident.
- All team members are obligated to report any potential incident or concern that they witness, are made aware of, or suspect within 24 hours. Intentionally not reporting a safeguarding incident is considered an act of gross misconduct and will result in disciplinary procedures.

Other Organisational Processes

Risk Assessments

Risk assessments are essential for adequately assessing the risks of harm occurring through Better Cotton's people and activities. They are also essential when conducting an investigation in order to, as accurately as possible, assess the risk of harm to all parties involved in an investigation, including through revenge actions, or gender biased local laws.

Communications

How people are portrayed in communications materials, including image gathering and use, can cause harm or offence if they propagate negative stereotypes or depict people in any way other than with authenticity, dignity and respect. It is essential that the Better Cotton Ethical Image Gathering Policy, Better Cotton Policy on Communicating Data and Better Cotton Language Policy are followed for any Better Cotton communications.

Partner Organisations

Due Diligence

Programme Partners are required to adhere to a safeguarding policy and reporting framework approved by Better Cotton. This will be checked during the Due Diligence process prior to signing a partnership agreement with a potential programme partner. Where a programme partner does not already have safeguarding policies and processes in place, Better Cotton will support them in achieving these over a specified timeline as a condition of contract. A safeguarding clause is included in all contracts and partnership agreements with Programme Partners.

Reporting Lines

If a safeguarding incident occurs at a partner organisation, or is reported to a programme partner concerning another organisation or person affiliated with Better Cotton, this must be reported within 24 hours to Better Cotton by submitting details of the concern to safeguarding@bettercotton.org. A member of the Better Cotton Safeguarding Incident Monitoring Team will respond wherever possible within 48 hours of receiving the report.

Programme partners are responsible for investigating safeguarding incidents occurring within their organisations except where there is a conflict of interest, or concern that the incident will not be adequately investigated. In these instances, Better Cotton will advise on the best course of action to take on a case-by-case basis.

Section 3: Safeguarding Incidents

Raising a Concern

All Better Cotton staff, volunteers and affiliates are obligated to report any potential safeguarding incident that they witness, are made aware of, or suspect within 24 hours. Failure to do so will be considered gross misconduct and will result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

As long as the person raising a concern does so in good faith, you only need to genuinely believe that there is an issue before making a disclosure. If under investigation the disclosure is found to be unsubstantiated, the person who raised the concern will still be protected under the Better Cotton Whistleblowing Policy.

If the person making the disclosure does so in bad faith, with malicious or vexatious reasons, then they will not be protected under the Whistleblowing Policy and their complaint may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal without notice.

Receiving a Report

Survivors of exploitation or abuse often do not report incidents through established reporting mechanisms. Reports may be received through various channels:

- Formal written reports submitted through Better Cotton grievance mechanisms
- Informally via text, social media etc
- Via community-based complaints mechanisms
- Disclosures made directly to staff members
- Concerns or reports about others raised to staff members
- Rumours or gossip

Safeguarding reports are most frequently made in person to junior staff members as they are considered most approachable. It is therefore essential that all Better Cotton team members are trained in how to receive and submit a safeguarding incident report.

The following dos and don'ts must always be followed when receiving a report.

Do	Don't
Listen	Become defensive
Empathise with the person	Argue with the person
Ask who, when, where, what but not why	Be dismissive
Repeat/check your understanding of the situation	Blame others
Ask the person's permission to pass on the information to the Safeguarding Incident Monitoring Group	Make assumptions without knowing the facts
Tell the person what will happen next in the reporting process	Make promises you can't keep
	Ignore the problem
	Try to investigate yourself
	Tell colleagues outside of the Safeguarding Incident Monitoring Group

Reporting Process

Each Country Office at Better Cotton is required to have a Safeguarding Focal Point to receive safeguarding reports. An up-to-date list of Better Cotton Safeguarding Focal Points can be found in the safeguarding section of the Better Cotton website.

Safeguarding Focal Points are responsible for completing a safeguarding incident report detailing the safeguarding concern, and escalating this to the safeguarding@bettercotton.org inbox where it will be reviewed by the Safeguarding Incident Monitoring team.

If there are any concerns that the Safeguarding Focal Point is implicated in the incident, or may not act objectively, then it is advised to submit a safeguarding incident directly to the safeguarding@bettercotton.org inbox or to another person within Better Cotton with a safeguarding role.

The Safeguarding Focal Point or person submitting a report should document the following information, using the Better Cotton Safeguarding Incident Report Form:

- Name of person making report
- Name(s) of alleged survivor(s) of safeguarding incident(s) if different from above
- Name(s) of alleged perpetrator(s)
- Description of incident(s)
- Date(s), time(s) and location(s) of incident(s)

The person receiving the report should then email this to safeguarding@bettercotton.org within 24 hours.

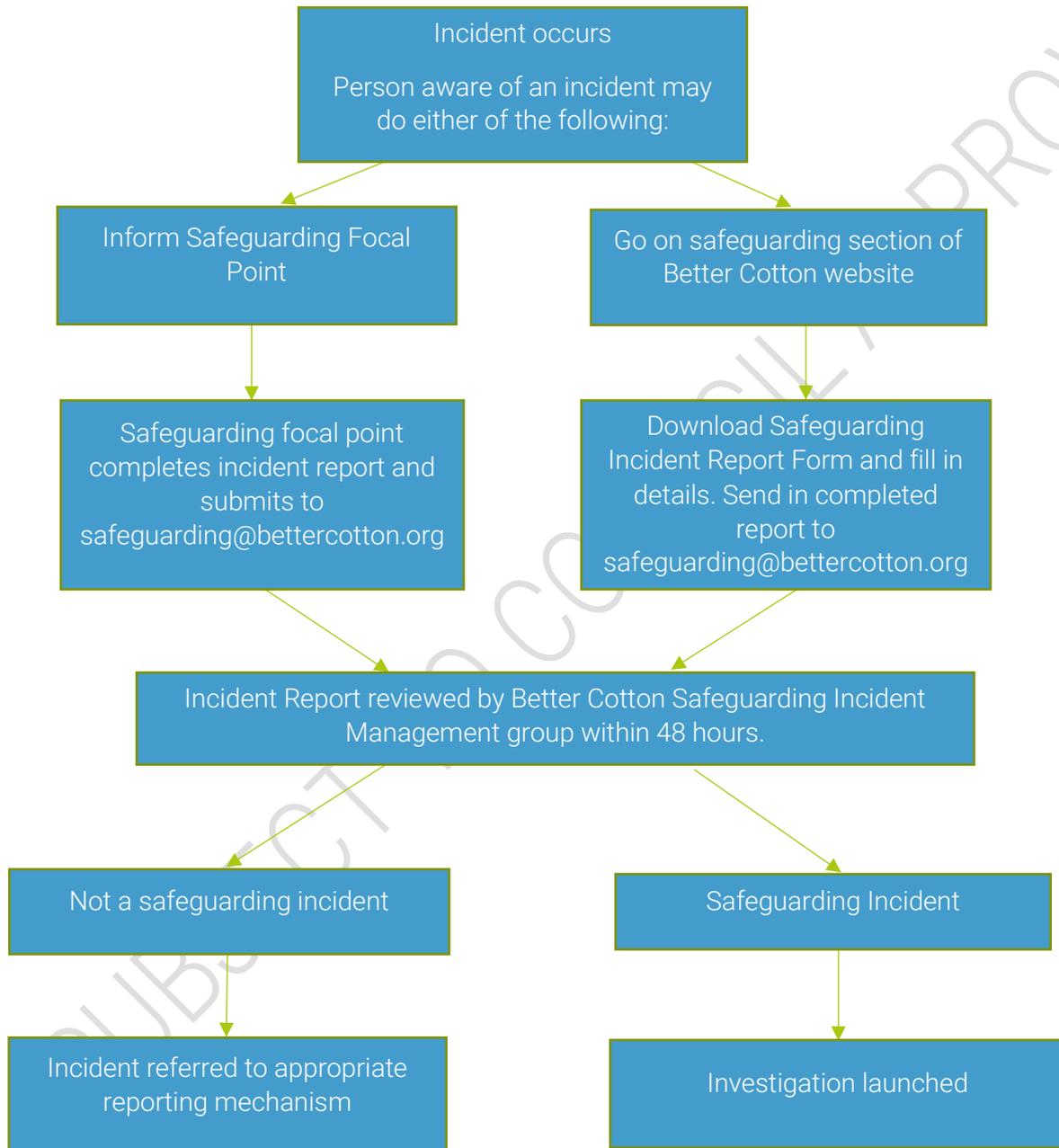
After submitting a safeguarding incident report you will need to step back. To ensure confidentiality you will only be told a minimum of information following the submission of an incident report. Do not inform others of your suspicions or try to investigate further yourself. This can hinder an investigation and cause distress to survivors or persons unfairly accused.

The Safeguarding Incident Monitoring team will meet, where possible, within 48 hours of receiving a safeguarding incident to evaluate the information and open an investigation if it is considered that a safeguarding incident may have occurred.

Due to the sensitive nature of safeguarding concerns, confidentiality must be maintained during all stages of the reporting process, and information shared on a limited 'need to know' basis only. This includes sharing with senior management who might otherwise be appraised of a serious incident.

If the reporting staff member is not satisfied that the organisation is appropriately addressing the report, they have a right to escalate the report, either up the management line, to the Council or to an external statutory body. The staff member will be protected under the Better Cotton Whistleblowing Policy against any negative repercussions as a result of their report, as long as the report was made in good faith. Reports made in bad faith are considered acts of gross misconduct and will lead to disciplinary processes up to and including dismissal.

Reporting Process Flow Chart



Investigations

Once a safeguarding incident has been confirmed, the Safeguarding Incident Monitoring group will decide whether the incident can be investigated internally, or whether an external investigator is required. This will depend on the severity or scale of the incident. The investigation team must include an expert external investigator for any incidents of sexual exploitation or abuse, incidents involving children or incidents involving senior management at Better Cotton, including Council members.

Once an investigation is opened a Safeguarding Investigations Manager may be appointed from within the HR team. The role of the Safeguarding Investigations Manager is to support the investigators to conduct their investigations. This can include arranging interviews, supervising timelines, travel and payments.

The anonymised findings from the investigators will be submitted to a representative from HR, a member of the Executive Group and the Safeguarding Lead on the Better Cotton Council to make a decision on the outcomes of the investigation, including disciplinary procedures and referral to relevant authorities where appropriate.

Confidentiality must be maintained throughout the process. Those involved in the safeguarding incident will be informed of the outcome of the investigation but will not be kept up to date during the course of the investigation. Better Cotton aims to make a decision within one month of a report being made, although depending on the circumstances this timeframe may increase.

If there is a serious concern reported with potential for on-going risk during the investigation, the subject of complaint should be removed from the situation while the investigation is pending which can involve providing exceptional annual leave.

Investigation Process

The purpose of an investigation is to:

- Determine if a staff member or other person associated with Better Cotton has breached Better Cotton's policies
- Protect individuals from being abused or exploited
- Highlight any organisational failings
- Identify aspects of programme delivery or performance that increase risks of abuse or exploitation by staff
- Make recommendations for appropriate response and organisational change where appropriate.

At all times the safety of everyone- the survivor, the subject of complaint and anyone else involved in the case must be the top priority.



Survivor Centred Approach

The Better Cotton Safeguarding Policy seeks to empower survivors by exploring the options available to them, without imposing ideas or opinions on the most appropriate course of action.

It is important not to force a course of action on a survivor. Some people may wish to report an incident to the police, others may not want to. It is important to respect their decisions.

In some countries, reporting safeguarding incidents to police or other authorities may cause serious repercussions for the survivor, including imprisonment and risk to life. It is essential that a thorough risk assessment is conducted to ascertain the true risks of conducting a safeguarding investigation or reporting an incident to the authorities for all parties involved.

Reporting safeguarding incidents may pose administrative, financial, logistical and emotional challenges to survivors. Better Cotton owes a duty of care to survivors that includes helping them to access services which can include:

- Medical support
- Psycho-social support
- Transportation to appointments
- Compassionate leave
- Accompaniment to police meetings and payment of a police report
- Translation services
- Childcare during appointments occurring as a consequence of a safeguarding incident
- Signposting to other services as required

Survivor support guidelines are created in each country where a safeguarding incident related to Better Cotton could occur, in order to facilitate signposting to local support mechanisms. Survivor support should be made available to survivors where appropriate both during and after the investigation.

Reporting to Donors and Regulatory Bodies

Many institutional donors and private funders have additional safeguarding reporting requirements. It is the responsibility of the Safeguarding Manager and Fundraising Director to ensure that safeguarding reporting requirements are met for all grants and contracts awarded to Better Cotton in the event of a safeguarding incident.

Learning

After an incident it is essential to undergo learning and improvement processes in order to avoid similar incidents occurring in the future.