



# **WHISTLE BLOWING POLICY**

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# WHISTLE BLOWING POLICY

## 1.0 Background

1.1 African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) is committed to ensuring the highest possible ethical and professional standards of openness, probity and accountability in delivering the services it provides. This policy demonstrates AERC's commitment to recognize and take action in respect of malpractices, illegal acts or omissions by its employees, or ex-employees, AERC network members, stakeholders and/or customers, who have concerns about any aspect of the Consortium's activities to voice their concerns.

1.2 AERC seeks to maintain the highest standards in its day-to-day running and management. AERC endeavours to comply with the local laws, organizational by-laws and to maintain the highest standards of personal and organizational ethics regarding:

- Programme activities
- Administrative, procurement and finance processes;
- Dealings with partners, network members, consultants, job applicants;
- Treatment of staff;
- Individual personal assessments.

1.3 It is the responsibility of all staff to report such matters that might compromise this objective as soon as they become aware of it.

1.4 In line with AERC commitment to open communication, this policy aims to provide an avenue for employees, network members, other stakeholders and customers to raise concerns and reassurance that they will be protected from reprisals or victimization.

1.5 The policy applies to all the AERC's employees, contractors, suppliers, service providers under contract with the AERC, network members, and other stakeholders. This policy is in addition to the AERC's code of conduct, grievance procedures and other AERC policies and procedures in place.

## 2.0 Definition and Scope of Whistle Blowing

2.1 Whistle blowing is the act of reporting any suspected wrongdoing within an organization to person of authority internally or externally. Whistle blowing is also known as “making a disclosure in the public interest”.

2.2 AERC staff are encouraged to report concerns or complaints regarding the conduct of Directors, Managers, other staff or stakeholders that they feel:-

- Is against AERC’s policies, procedures and established standards and code of conduct;
- Is improper unlawful or unethical;
- Will result in a waste of the organization’s resources;
- Poses a risk to AERC’s reputation;
- Represents unethical behaviour;
- Is abuse of power or authority or office;
- Bribery;
- Fraudulent payments;
- Is unfair discrimination;
- Is a threat or victimization;
- Represents a conflict of interest;
- Affects the working environment within AERC;
- Causes favouritism or unfair treatment of some staff members;
- Showing undue favor over a contractual matter or to a job applicant, where evidence may be concealed or destroyed;
- Failure to comply with any law or applicable AERC policies, procedures and guidelines relating to procurement among others;
- Concealment of any of the above.

## 3.0 Purpose

3.1 This policy is designed to:

- a) Support the Consortium’s core values of integrity, professionalism, transparency, accountability, one team and excellence.
- b) Ensure employees can raise concerns without fear of suffering retribution.
- c) Provide a transparent and confidential process for dealing with concerns.
  - d) To minimize the organization's exposure to the damage that can occur when internal mechanisms are circumvented.

## 4.0 Principles

4.1 This policy is guided by five key principles:

- a) All concerns raised will be treated fairly and properly;
- b) The Consortium will not tolerate any form of harassment or victimization or anyone raising a genuine concern;
- c) Any individual making a disclosure will retain his/her anonymity unless he/she agrees otherwise;
- d) The Consortium will ensure that any individual raising a concern is aware of who is handling the matter;
- e) The Consortium will ensure that no one is at risk of suffering some form of retaliation as a result of raising a concern. The organization will not however, extend this assurance to someone that maliciously raises a matter that is known to be untrue.

4.2 Whoever receives the information has a duty to:

- a) Consider the matter carefully and undertake an investigation: the information must always be filtered off rumours.
- b) Understand the difficult position a member of staff may be in.
- c) Seek appropriate advice.
- d) Take appropriate action to resolve the concern or refer it to an appropriate person.

## 5.0 Anonymity and Confidentiality

- a) All matters raised by concerned employees will be treated with utmost confidentiality.
- b) All correspondences entered into the whistleblowing process is absolutely confidential whether a person making the disclosure wishes to remain anonymous or not.
- c) The substance of the investigation including the identities of the parties to it will remain confidential and may not disclose with the consent of the complainant.

## 6.0 Anonymous Allegations

6.1 All complaints must be as accurate and contain as much information as possible to allow for proper assessment. This would include identity of the person/persons involved in the suspected corrupt practice, a detailed outline of the suspected corrupt practice, names of any other persons/witnesses involved, time, date and place where the incident took place; and details of what was said in the conversation/copies of any documents or probable evidence.

## 7.0 Untrue Allegations

- 7.1 Reports made in bad faith i.e. without any basis, with the aim of victimizing someone or disrupting the operations of the Consortium will not be tolerated.
- 7.2 Disciplinary action will be taken against employees who make allegations frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain.

## 8.0 Whistle Blowing Procedure

### 8.1 Raising a Concern Internally

When you have a complaint, an issue or concern to raise, you may utilize the following channels:

Report to your immediate supervisor:

- a) If the discussions with the immediate supervisor are fruitful the case shall be investigated and resolved forthwith
- b) If the discussion with the immediate supervisor are not fruitful OR if inappropriate OR highly confidential you may report using channels in 8.1 (d) of this policy
- c) The staff member shall submit an envelope marked “Whistle Blowing” and hand deliver the envelope to the person one wishes to report or to send it by post. If the employee wishes to discuss the matter orally, he or she should indicate this in the submission and include a telephone number at which he or she might be contacted.

### 8.2 Role of the Designated Officer

- a) The Executive Director shall appoint a Designated Officer (DO). With support from the Senior Management Team (SMT) the DO is responsible for investigating reported complaints and allegations concerning violations which pose a significant risk to the compliance, efficiency, effectiveness and credibility of AERC and, at their discretion, shall advise the Executive Director for follow-up actions to be taken in order to resolve the complaints and allegations.
- b) If the concerns relate to any one of the SMT members, the concerned member will step aside and allow the other SMT members to conduct the investigations and make recommendations to the Executive Director.
- c) In case of any International staff, the Chair of the Board will be notified of the concern and any action taken or recommended.

- d) Should the concern relate to the Executive Director, the other SMT members could carry out the investigations and report the matter to the Chair of the Board or send the concerns to the Chair of the Board who would then decide who and how the concern will be addressed.
- e) The Designated Officer shall take timely action to review the information provided. An initial assessment shall be carried out to determine if there are sufficient grounds to initiate a full investigation. If urgent action is required this may be taken before the investigation is started.
- f) Where breaches are confirmed to have occurred, action will be taken to correct the failure and avoid similar events in the future as well as address the alleged perpetrator's misconduct in accordance with the HR policies and procedures.
- g) The investigations shall be carried out in the strictest confidence and any persons involved in the investigation shall be required to keep the information strictly confidential. Breaches in this regard will be treated as serious violations and subject to disciplinary action.

## **9.0 Possible outcomes after reporting a concern**

- 9.1 The following actions may be taken after investigation of the concern:
- a) Disciplinary action (including dismissal) against the wrong doer dependent on the results of the investigation; or
  - b) Disciplinary action (including dismissal) against the whistle-blower if the claim is found to be malicious or otherwise in bad faith; or
  - c) No action if the allegation proves unfounded.
- 9.2 If the whistle blower has any personal interest in the matter, s/he must make this clear at the time the alleged misconduct is reported. It should be noted that if the whistle blower is involved in the matter, reporting the matter will not exclude him/her from any disciplinary action taken.

## 10.0 Retaliation

The AERC will respect the confidentiality and identity of staff that make such reports in good faith and ensure that the information should never be revealed to the affected party and to stem any form of retaliation against them.

- a) Retaliation means any direct or indirect detrimental action recommended, threatened, or taken because an individual engaged in an activity protected by the present policy. When established, retaliation is by itself misconduct.
- b) An employee who harasses or retaliates against someone who has reported a violation in good faith is subject to disciplinary measures.
- c) On the other hand, reports made in bad faith, i.e. without any basis, with the aim of victimizing someone or disrupting the operations of the Consortium will not be tolerated and could lead to disciplinary action.
- d) The alleged perpetrators will be afforded an opportunity to represent their argument before any action or recommendation is made. It is therefore imperative that staff members making allegations about other staff members/managers/directors also maintain confidentiality regarding the issues raised until the investigations are complete.
- e) Should the staff member raising the matter still feel either victimized or disadvantaged or that appropriate action was not taken following the report and subsequent investigation by the SMT, the staff member may report the matter to the Chair of the Board.

## 11.0 Review of the Policy

- a) This procedure takes effect upon approval by the AERRC Board.
- b) The procedure is subject monitoring and shall be reviewed every two year