



**AfricaRice**  
Rice science at the service of Africa  
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# **Sexual harassment in the workplace Policy**

**April 2017**

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## Introduction

AfricaRice Center is committed to ensuring a working environment free of sexual harassment and supportive to the dignity of every individual working for/with the Institution. To this effect, the Center applies a zero tolerance principle towards any kind of sexual abuse or harassment in the workplace.

Guided by this principle, the Center has developed a policy on sexual harassment in the workplace whose purpose is to ensure that all individual working for/with AfricaRice are treated with respect and dignity and are aware of their roles and responsibilities.

### 1. Definitions and forms of sexual harassment

Sexual harassment<sup>1</sup> is defined as a sex-based behavior or conduct that is unwelcome and offensive to its recipient.

The workplace refers to any location in which any individual working for AfricaRice are engaged in AfricaRice business activities necessary to perform their assignments.

Sexual harassment generally takes two forms in the workplace:

- (a) When an employment benefit or condition such as a salary rise, a promotion or a contract renewal or extension is made conditional on accepting a sexual favor;
- (b) When sex-based behavior or conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance by creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or sexually offensive work environment.

Sexual harassment reflects a variety of conduct categorized as physical, verbal and non-verbal. Conducts that qualifies as sexual harassment:

<b>Physical conduct</b>	Unnecessary close proximity Unsolicited physical contact such as touching, pinching. Job related threats or rewards to solicit sexual favors Physical violence related to sexual harassment
<b>Verbal conduct</b>	Sexually oriented and offensive comments or remarks on a staff member's physical appearance, private life and sexual orientation Unsolicited sexual advances Insult based on the sex of staff member
<b>Non-verbal conduct</b>	Whistling Sexually-suggestive gestures Display of sexually explicit or suggestive materials

Sexual harassment may occur between people of opposite sex or same sex and it is not the preserve of one sex. Both males and females can be either victims or offenders.

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<sup>1</sup> Definition of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

## **2. Scope**

This policy applies to all individual working at AfricaRice including but not limited to interns, consultants and staff members. It also includes contractors, donors, board members visiting AfricaRice offices.

Consequently, this policy covers all complaints of sexual harassment taking place within the organization premises.

This policy does not apply in cases where an AfricaRice staff member files a complaint against a non-AfricaRice employee outside of the workplace.

An exemplary conduct is expected of all AfricaRice employees both within and outside the Institution whose reputation can be tarnished by inappropriate behavior of its employees.

## **3. General guiding principles**

AfricaRice, its Board of Trustees and Management are committed to providing a working environment which will enable staff members to reach their highest level of performance individually and as a team for the well-being of the Institution. AfricaRice maintains a zero tolerance policy towards any kind of abuse and harassment in the work place.

The Center, at all time, aims to be a good employer and is dedicated in preventing to all forms of harassment, discrimination or favoritism based on ethnic origin, nationality, race, gender, age, sexual orientation or religion.

Working in a multi-cultural environment, staff members are expected to behave with tolerance and respect for diversity. They have the obligation to not condone or engage in behavior which will constitute sexual harassment.

The violation of these principles may lead to corrective or disciplinary measures.

## **4. Roles and responsibilities**

It is required of all employees to conduct in a manner that will foster and preserve AfricaRice's highest standards and professional image. They are expected to treat other employees, as well as other persons with whom they come into contact on AfricaRice business with courtesy, respect, gender equality and cultural sensitivity.

Staff members are responsible for familiarizing themselves with this policy and procedures and the related provisions including the AfricaRice Code of conduct, the Staff Manuals (IRS and GSS) and the Grievance Policy and Procedures. It is the duty of all employees to prevent sexual harassment by discouraging inappropriate conduct and by reporting incidents, as per this policy.

Division Directors are especially responsible for promoting the ethical values of AfricaRice in the prevention and prohibition of sexual harassment in the work place for an environment free of all forms of sexual harassment.

The Human Resources Services have the responsibility to remind to all individuals hired by AfricaRice that they have the obligation to follow its Code of conduct and adhere to policies and procedures aimed to ensuring a safe and positive work environment.

## **5. Preventive measures**

All staff shall be informed of AfricaRice's zero tolerance principle towards sexual harassment. It is AfricaRice duty to put in place preventive measures to ensure an effective work environment free of sexual harassment. These measures aim to protect our staff and avoid the exposure to sexual harassment.

The preventive measures are as follows:

- (a) AfricaRice periodically conducts awareness sessions on sexual harassment for all staff in the workplace.
- (b) Relevant policy and procedures are given to everyone as soon as they are introduced and guidance will be provided when needed.
- (c) Employees occupying positions of responsibility are required to maintain open channels of communication with their staff who wish to express their concerns in good faith and without fear of adverse consequences.

Staff members and other individuals working for AfricaRice may consult the Human Resources Services for guidance or advice on questions which could give rise to instances of sexual harassment.

## **6. Reporting and dealing with complaints**

Sexual harassment accusations shall be treated with sensitivity and confidentiality. A staff member who believes that he/she is victim of sexual harassment (complainant) by another staff member or individual working for AfricaRice is encouraged to address the issue as early as possible after the situation has occurred. The complainant should follow the general steps as laid in the Grievance Policy and Procedures. He/she may attempt to resolve the situation informally or file directly a formal complaint with the Human Resource Services.

A formal complaint will be assessed and/or investigated by a specific grievance panel composed of the Head of Human Resources Services, the Internal Audit Manager and the Head of the Legal Unit to reach an equitable solution to the situation.

However, regardless of the process chosen by the complainant, all sexual harassment reports should be handled with an extreme sensitivity and confidentiality to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

### **6.1 Brief assessment of the formal complaint**

Once the formal complaint is submitted, the grievance panel will do a brief assessment of the complaint. This assessment is done in order to clarify the allegations of the complainant, ensure that evidences are available and submitted, and discuss with the complainant the benefits of considering an informal process, if it has been skipped.

If the grievance panel concludes that the complaint is credible and merits a comprehensive review, the alleged offender will be notified of the details of the complaint. The alleged offender will be invited to respond to these allegations within ten (10) working days. The response shall include any explanations, relevant materials and/or names of witnesses who might be able to assist in a possible investigation.

The grievance panel will conclude whether the complaint is unfounded or needs to be investigated, based on the response of the alleged offender and the materials submitted by both parties.

### **6.2 Temporary measures**

The Head of Human Resources Services may decide to apply temporary measures in order to facilitate the investigation and ease the tensions between the complainant and the alleged offender. For instance, consider a physical or hierarchical separation of the alleged offender and the complainant, or a special leave for one of the parties involved.

### **6.3 Investigation**

The investigation will be conducted by the grievance panel (Head of HR, IA and LU) who will inquire into the matter and provide a full written report together with any relevant materials and/or witnesses testimonies. The investigation should be conducted as quickly as possible while allowing for all relevant information and evidence to be gathered. A timescale for this will be agreed.

The outcome of the investigation will be communicated to the Director General with the following possible actions:

- (a) Where the grievance panel concludes that there is not enough evidence to support allegations of sexual harassment, they shall close the case and inform the complainant and the alleged offender through a memo of that closure and share a summary of the findings and conclusions of his/her investigation;
- (b) Where the grievance panel concludes that evidence is sufficient to support allegations of sexual harassment, the panel shall handle the investigation file and the relevant evidence to the Head of Human Resources Services for further action (managerial or disciplinary).

If at any stage in the process, it appears that the allegations of sexual harassment were unfounded and based on malicious intent, the Head of Human Resources Services will recommend to the Director General disciplinary or other appropriate action against the complainant.

The complainant and the alleged offender have the right to appeal within ten (10) working days if they are dissatisfied with the conclusion of the investigation. The grounds of appeal shall meet the provisions of the Grievance Policy and Procedures.

## **7. Monitoring**

The Head of Human Resources will provide a confidential annual report to the Director General and the BoT's audit committee, which will include an overview of all preventive measures taken to ensure a work environment free of sexual harassment which protects our employees from prohibited behavior, and corrective measures, as well as any assessments relating to such measures and/or activities.

This policy is effective from its date of issuance.