



## CODE OF ETHICS FOR MEMBER ORGANISATIONS OF RCSP

This code of ethics was developed by the Civil society organisations for the Civil society organisation in Rwanda. It is signed between the Rwanda civil society platform and its members, umbrella organisations. Similarly, the umbrella organisations will sign this code of ethics with their members.

**Kigali, 25-03-2022**

## **DECLARATION**

By signing this agreement, I commit my organisation to upholding LTA principles, good governance standards and practices as defined in this code of ethics.

## **1 PREAMBLE**

The need to practise good conduct in carrying out the role and functions of the civil society organisations in Rwanda is very crucial. The Rwanda Civil Society Platform (RCSP) initiates this LTA Code of Ethics (hereinafter also referred to as The Code) for the guidance of all RCSP members. The Code of Ethics is aimed at fostering good relations between the RCSP and its member umbrellas, between umbrellas and member organisations and between organisations themselves. The code will also foster good relationships between CSOs and the constituencies they serve and ensuring that all activities implemented by CSOs are responsive and conducive to the attainment of a high level of respect among practitioners, beneficiaries, donors, partners and government.

This affirms the responsibility of Civil Society Organisations to serve the collective interests of the people all around the country and to uphold and defend their freedoms, social justice and human rights. As practitioners and development actors, we are required to exercise good faith, judgment in implementing our programs and cultivating relationships with various partners we interact with.

Recognising that since no Code of Ethics can anticipate every situation, personal integrity and honour should guide every decision and action carried out by leaders in the name of the civil society organisations in Rwanda. The success of this Code in maintaining high standards of professionalism among every CSO signatory shall ensure that leaders, members and employees are adequately acquainted with the values, principles, standards and commitments of the LTA Code and guided by them.

## **2 PURPOSE**

In the last few decades, CSOs have played a prominent role in influencing local, national and regional policy-formulation. They have, in certain instances, taken over roles and duties that traditionally belong to the government and have demanded high standards of transparency and accountability from key partners.

CSOs have become key players in the democracy movement in several countries. In Rwanda, CSOs played a key role in various domains that greatly contributed to the social and economic transformation of the country both at national and local levels.

Within the aim of enhancing civil society capacity, trust and influence, the RCSP with its affiliated member umbrellas, commonly as one voice, calls for the strengthening of legitimacy, transparency, accountability, credibility and acceptability of their members and partners. It is therefore imperative for the CSOs wishing to engage with the RCSP and Umbrellas to set out clear standards of accountability, credibility and transparency.

The purpose of this code of ethics, which would mandatorily apply to all CSOs seeking accreditation with the RCSP and Umbrella Organisations, is to lay down a set of standards, core values, guiding principles and commitments which every member of RCSP must adhere to in order to set gold standards for CSOs in Rwanda.

The Code would also be recommended for wider usage as a voluntary standard of self-control and good governance by CSOs in Rwanda, as well as provide benchmarks to use for the self-control and evaluation. It will contribute to the good image and reputation, trust, excellence and sustainability of CSOs.

### 3 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

- 3.1. **Civil society organisation** refers to the arena, outside of the family, the state, and the market, which is created by individual and collective actions, organisations and institutions to advance shared interests<sup>1</sup>.
- 3.2. **Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)** is a private, not for profit, organisation, autonomous and independent of all actors such as government, donors and businesses and which is aimed at promoting sustainable cultural, economic, intellectual, and social development of specific interests of target groups. The umbrella term NGO includes charities, associations, foundations, geographic or interest-based community and advocacy groups operating as an association of persons or as an artificial legal entity.
- 3.3. **Governing Principles** mean the principles that are articulated which govern a NGO's governance and administrative structure as well as how it conducts its relationship with various stakeholders.
- 3.4. **Code of ethics** refers to a document that sets out an organisation's ethical guidelines and best practices to follow for honesty, integrity, and professionalism.
- 3.5. **Legitimacy** refers to perceptions by key stakeholders that the existence, activities and impacts of CSOs are justifiable and appropriate in terms of central social values and institutions. It is the right to be and do something in society, a sense that an organisation is lawful, admissible, and justified in its chosen course of action.
- 3.6. **Transparency** refers to the “openness of processes, procedures and values of CSOs; the proactive public disclosure and dissemination of information that should be in the public domain. Transparent procedures include open meetings, financial disclosure statements, clear board elections and governance procedures, access to information on budgetary review, audits” etc.
- 3.7. **Accountability** is about being open and sharing information about your responsibility responding to what you do, how you do it and why you do it the way you do: answerability, responsibility, liability. For a CSO to be accountable, it needs to be transparent about what it is doing, what it is planning to do and how it is performing in relation to the mandate and goals it has set itself.
- 3.8. **Sustainability** refers to the ability of something, of an organisation to maintain or "sustain" itself over time.

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<sup>1</sup> Definition by the World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS) through its project “*the Civil Society Index (CSI)*”  
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## **4 CIVIL SOCIETIES' CORE VALUES ATTACHED TO LTA**

The values of the CSOs, as concepts, can be synonymous with “principles” and it means the guidelines or the borders of values within which CSOs operate, and to which they must adhere. Such values are critical measures of civil society’s legitimacy, and form the foundation on which work is performed and which determines CSOs’ behaviours. For the implementation of this particular code, as CSOs signatories we share the following core-values:

### **4.1 WE LIVE AND WORK BY COMPASSION**

This core-value is universal and it is the essence for the reason of being of our organisations. It entails our commitment to speak for our members, beneficiaries, and for the voiceless in search of their empowerment and dignity or provide direct support to vulnerable people, groups and communities in need. The birth and rise of our CSOs are built on a commitment to create a society and a world that is fit for all people, many of them with the least power and consideration through putting into action the values of empathy and humanitarian commitment<sup>2</sup>. Compassion remains a signature value for our existence and active role in the society more than ever.

### **4.2 WE ARE AUTONOMOUS**

We are free to focus on any topic of common or public interests without limitation. We are governed by our own laws, which define our vision, mission, goals, strategies, internal policies, internal and democratically decision-making bodies elected by ourselves, and management rules. Our CSOs may take part in public discussions but should keep our stand bound by mandatory codes of ethics written into our founding documents, Rwandan laws and international and universal principles of Civil Society. We agree on the centrality of autonomy as a CSO characteristic, and this is usually referred to as the freedom and independence of civil organisations to set our own agenda without the direct intervention or dictation from external forces, especially the state and/or donors.

### **4.3 WE ARE GUIDED BY VOLUNTARISM SPIRIT**

Our CSOs vary from small membership organisations, informal, semi-formal, registered or not mainly engaged in self-help activities, to large and medium scale organisations engaged in all sorts of service delivery, sustainable development and advocacy activities. Accordingly, we exhibit differences in our style of organisation, internal democracy, and level of membership participation. Our programmes, which reach the most vulnerable people and communities, would not be possible without the kindness, unselfish caring, expertise and passion of our members and leaders.

### **4.4 WE BELIEVE IN PLURALISM, DIVERSITY AND COMPLEMENTARITY**

The notion of plurality indicates us not only the large number and types of associations and organisations occupying the sphere we belong in, but also the diversity of interest objectives, organisational forms and capacities we have. We are not a uniform and homogeneous group of institutes. On the contrary, we are institutions with a myriad of particular interests, which have an institutional form or an institutional expression. We believe in diversity and work in complementarity between ourselves and in partnerships with other actors whom we share the same goals.

#### **4.5 WE ARE NON-PARTISAN**

We are primarily expected to speak for the voiceless for policy change, inclusion, positive impact and sustainable development. Therefore, CSOs need not align to any political ideology in order to meet the universal non-partisan core value as civil society organisations. This position would hold the CSOs to only siding with the truth and rights for the people, the mandate of the CSO and the core values the organisation intends to exhibit. However, it is known that this behaviour may be seen as a sign of a lack of vibrancy of CSOs or of their limited capacity or willingness to engage in the public sphere.

#### **4.6 WE ARE NON-VIOLENT**

Although we influence policy change and advocate for the cause of the people, our approaches and strategies of actions abide by the high levels of non-violence, peace and tolerance. We strive to create and use non-violence approaches in our work, change mind-set within the communities as well as promoting tolerant nature of seeking a consensus and peace on a wide range of issues at all levels and between all parties. We encourage solving disputes and conflicts in mutual and peaceful ways.

## **5 PRINCIPLES AND ASPIRATIONAL COMMITMENTS**

### **5.1 GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

We commit to:

1. Translate the governance principles described in this code of ethics into our internal policies, rules and regulations.
2. Maintain the principles of legitimacy, transparency, accountability, fairness, equity, social justice and non-discrimination.
3. Promote good and participatory governance, monitoring and evaluation, ethical fundraising and autonomy in decision-making.
4. Respect, maintain and promote human rights, universal freedoms and gender equality.
5. Be responsive to the needs of members, communities and stakeholders, practice and evidence-based advocacy, provide high quality service, encourage professional development and construct positive relationships, partnerships and networks on the basis of solidarity, confidentiality and information exchange.
6. Exercise a responsive management approach to the environmental sustainability and the eco-system in all activities of our organisations.

### **5.2 OUR ASPIRATIONAL COMMITMENTS**

#### **5.2.1 Good governance**

**We shall/will:**

- Be guided by principles of equity and inclusion, participation, transparency and accountability to promote good governance within RCSP Members, umbrellas and member organisations.
- Be governed fairly and responsibly by an independent, active and informed governing body.
- Possess documents that clearly define our mission, vision, general goals, programs and governance structure.
- Establish and periodically review a governance framework suitable for fulfilling our mandate. The framework shall include an appropriate governance structure and operations, relationship between the staff and the governing body, and decision-making processes.
- Review and approve the organisational annual budget, significant policies, key financial decisions, plans and programmes through which independent governing bodies of each organisation will take the leading role.
- Adopt a policy preventing and effectively managing conflict of interest situations.
- Adopt policies prohibiting any form of discrimination and promoting gender equality and participation of disadvantaged groups at all levels of our organisations.

### **5.2.2 Legitimate and responsive organisation**

#### **We shall/will:**

- Comply with legal and regulatory requirements, such as aligning with the state registration guidelines by following national policies, laws and code that fairly and appropriately define CSO activity (legal legitimacy).
- Be grounded in widely-held social values, norms and standards. We shall be assessed as meeting norms for performance and responsiveness by doing the good work, as implementing desired structures and processes by representing and voicing for our constituents and members (Normative Legitimacy).
- Create conditions that meet stakeholders' interests and implement projects with specific outputs and impact to them. In addition to service delivery, we shall conduct advocacy interventions to challenge roots causes and structural barriers to inclusion, equity and sustainable development for all (Pragmatic Legitimacy).
- Set goals and implement programmes, projects and activities that are widely seen as appropriate, proper, and “making sense and promote change” to our members, constituencies, communities, stakeholders and the larger society (Cognitive Legitimacy).

### **5.2.3 Organisational Integrity and Credibility**

#### **We shall/will:**

- Conduct affairs of our organisations with integrity, trust and transparency. The organisations shall make full, open, and accurate disclosure of relevant information concerning goals, programs, finances, activities, results, effectiveness and governance to the public.
- Comply with applicable laws and regulations of Rwanda
- Be fair, impartial and properly manage shared resources, and will not abuse the given rights and position.
- Allow no advertising or imposition of political parties, groups, attitude, or attempts of political influence on others. Political discontent must not interfere with our work.
- Be independent in our work and cooperate with the state institutions, donors and other entities based on the principle of equality, in accordance with our statutory goals.

### **5.2.4 Tolerance, diversity and inclusion**

#### **We shall/will:**

- Refrain from any form of discrimination on the basis of age, class, gender, sexual orientation, minority, geographic location, race, religion or disability in all programs, leadership and staff positions, by keeping with the Human Rights Based Approach articulated in the principles of this Code.
- Make sure we are aware that the seeds of intolerance and exclusion are fear and ignorance. Tolerance is mutual respect through mutual understanding. We shall promote tolerance, and inclusion by respecting and appreciating the culture of others and their ideas and behaviours different from ours.

### **5.2.5 Effective financial, resources management and fundraising**

#### **We shall/will:**

- Acquire resources in ways that are in line with our values, mission, independence and goals.
- Conduct our finances in such a way as to ensure appropriate use of funds and accountability to donors, members, government and the public. We shall operate according to our documented financial policies and procedures.
- Publish the financial information on regular basis in an appropriate and easy way to read and make it available to all interested parties, our members, constituencies, donors and movements.
- Use the donations the way it is pledged in the application for grants, as the donor intended. When funds are collected from the public for a specific purpose, our organisations must clearly state their intentions in the case of surplus of raised funds.
- Use the resources for the causes they were provided for, and in ways that maximise impact towards long-term positive change. Our donors will have easy access to information about the use of their donations.
- Acquire funds with respect and promotion of locally driven knowledge.
- The RCSP Executive Office, Umbrellas Offices will not act as competitors to any member organisation in the resource mobilization and fundraising efforts. Where possible, RCSP (Executive Office) and Umbrellas Executive offices shall be a partner of their member organisations in fundraising activities.

### **5.2.6 Open, Transparent and Accountable Organisations**

#### **We shall/will:**

- Share and publish information on who we are what we do, and impacts of our work.
- Share information in a timely and accurate manner.
- Provide opportunities and complaints mechanisms for members and other people to question our work and engage in constructive dialogue to reach a shared understanding where possible.
- Be open and responsible in the work with institutions of the public sector, community partners, donors and all stakeholders.
- Make all of our work reports (final and progress), as well as financial
- Be open and share information with our constituents, beneficiaries and clients who use our services and to members who expect representation (Downward accountability).
- Create and maintain cooperation with our peers, partners and allies in programs, projects and advocacy interventions for more synergy, impact and sustainability (Outward accountability).
- Be open, honest and respectful to members, internal bodies, staff and volunteers who invest their talents and time in our CSO activities (Inward accountability).

### **5.2.7 Fair and Respectful Partnerships**

#### **We shall/will:**

- Create and encourage strategic partnerships between RCSP, umbrellas and member organisations, and other partners whom we share the same goals.
- Share our data, resources and knowledge, and take important decisions collectively.
- Regularly communicate in order to ensure equal representation of all partners, and that no organisation speaks in the name of another.
- Collaborate with different kinds of organisations to achieve maximum impact on shared goals.
- Provide assistance to other organisations, when appropriate, in order to empower them and improve performance in future work.
- Not negate the work of the organisations, or file false or incorrect statements to other organisations.
- Timely react to the differences in the opinion among organisations by strengthening healthy partnership

### **5.2.8 People-Centred Organisations**

#### **We shall/will:**

- Foster meaningful participation of beneficiaries in identification of community needs and design of programs;
- Closely work with our members, beneficiaries and communities in the pursuit of a just and humane society.
- Ensure that relationships with beneficiaries should be based on mutual trust, openness and respect for their autonomy and independence.

### **5.2.9 Well-Handled Human Resources**

#### **We shall/will:**

- Have clear, well-defined, written policies and procedures related to the employees, and ensure that the policies protect the diversity and right of each individual.
- Provide employees and volunteers with job descriptions and duties that detail the organisation's expectations. Compensations and benefits will be clearly described and communicated.
- Invest in the staff and volunteers to develop their full potential in achieving our shared goals.
- Involve people at all levels of our organisation in the planning and decision making, and will encourage leadership.

### **5.2.10 Responsible Policy Advocacy**

#### **We shall/will:**

- Make sure that our advocacy is based on principles and evidence, and is informed by affected people.
- We will conduct advocacy initiatives in the spirit of partnership and joint responsibility.

## **5.3 STRENGTHENING GOOD AND LASTING RELATIONSHIPS**

### **5.3.1 Our relations with other CSOs at local, national and regional levels.**

#### **We shall/will:**

- Treat each other and all other civil society organisations with respect to their areas of focus, expertise, and diversity of approaches.
- Be encouraged to share information on programs and objectives where possible;
- Seek to cooperate and collaborate with other NGOs and CBOs in the implementation of programs to the benefit of target groups and the wider society where possible;
- Seek to develop partnerships with the aim of minimizing duplication and maximizing efficient use of resources
- Strive for the autonomy and protection of the rights of civil society organisations;
- Be encouraged to express solidarity with campaigns and actions of other organisations where these are consistent with the NGO's institutional purpose;
- Act in concert and synergy to promote the growth and effectiveness of the sector.

### **4.3.2. Our relations with our donors and international partners**

#### **We shall/will:**

- Ensure adequate consultations among the sector members on key issues in order to ensure fair representation of the NGO sector's views.
- Strive to have their agendas set by members and target communities and shall impress this policy on donor partners and international NGOs;
- Work on global issues of concern in concert and synergy with donor partners and international NGOs on a basis that does not compromise the integrity of the NGO;
- Subject its collaboration with international NGOs and donor partners to the scrutiny and evaluation of its members;
- Strive to ensure that modes of collaboration with donor partners reflect the best practices of good partnership, ensuring respect for autonomy, independence and diversity of approaches
- Ensure that NGO representation in national, regional and international fora will always be based on an organisation's primary mandate and program focus.
- Insist that NGO representatives to international fora have an obligation to report back to the NGO community on the outcomes of their mission.

### **5.3.2 Our relations with Government, regulator**

#### **We shall:**

- Seek fair and respectful partnerships with Government based on the processes outlined in the NGO laws in adherence to the principles outlined in this Code of Ethics.
- Ensure that Government partnerships shall be undertaken on the basis of mutual respect for the independence, autonomy and diversity of approaches and priorities of all partners.
- Participate where appropriate in dialogue and cooperation with different Government agencies at national and local level towards the attainment of sustainable human development.

- Collaborate and engage government agencies in the search of lasting solutions to issues affecting communities that are aligned to our mission, goals and programs.

### **5.3.2. Our relations with the Private Sector, Media and Political Parties**

#### **We shall/will:**

- Be as neutral and professional as possible.
- Respect the special roles of the Private Sector in the pursuit of local and national development.
- Respect the media as both a stakeholder group and as a channel of communication.
- Note the important role and contribution of political parties in promoting democratic traditions of our members, constituents, communities and our country.
- Explore all opportunities for cooperation and strive for optimal developmental partnerships with the media, private sector and political parties, being guided by the values and principles of this Code of Ethics.

### **5.3.3. Our relations with members, constituency and beneficiaries**

#### **We shall/will:**

- Improve our interactions and relations with our members and beneficiaries to collect their views, concerns
- Regularly analyse concerns and need of our members and beneficiaries
- Plan our interventions that respond to the needs and priorities of our members and beneficiaries.
- Establish mechanisms and communication systems that strengthen and help to keep regular interactions between our organisations and our members, constituents and beneficiaries.
- Conduct regular satisfaction surveys to get feedback from our members, constituents and beneficiaries.

## **6. GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT, MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE CODE**

- 6.1. At national level, RCSP will establish an LTA Committee at national level of 6 people (1 President, 1 Vice-President, 1 Secretary, Three Advisors) elected from the umbrellas and by umbrellas.
- 6.2. At intermediate level, Umbrellas and Networks, all activities regarding LTA will be managed and monitored by existing internal audit committees. Where it is necessary, the committees may be reinforced and responsibilities extended.
- 6.3. At lower level, every individual member organisation will establish an Internal LTA Committee of 3 people (1 President 1 Secretary and 1 Advisor) democratically elected by the General Assembly for a period of 3 years.
- 6.4. The LTA committee at every level shall oversee the implementation of LTA principles and management of the Code.
- 6.5. The LTA National Committee and Audit Committees at umbrellas level shall be responsible for creating awareness of the principles among members and other stakeholders; ensuring the mainstreaming of this Code in all CSOs operations and functions.
- 6.6. The LTA National Committee and audit Committees at umbrellas and member organisations level will monitor and evaluate the implementation process; facilitate the management conflict resolutions; receive and hear complaints from members, beneficiaries, employees, partners and other stakeholders in relation to the LTA principles and the Code, and thereafter advise and recommend corrective actions to be taken by the concerned CSO itself.
- 6.7. Elected committees at all levels will operate in a freely, open and transparent manner and their reports will internally be shared with the concerned CSO and where necessary in the General Assemblies.
- 6.8. These Committees will propose amendments and any revisions to the Code at every level. However, the 2/3 members of the General Assembly of RCSP will decide on the proposed amendments (in every 3-5 Years).

## **7. AWARDS, and INCENTIVES**

- 6.1. The LTA implementation framework, as a standalone document, provides LTA check lists that will serve as a basis and reference of indicators and practices to implement, monitor, evaluate, and comply with the provisions of the Code.
- 6.2. From the agreed check list, the LTA National Committee and the Internal LTA Committees, will assess and decide on members who successful complied with the provisions set in the Code and who will receive awards and/or incentives. Similarly, they will also identify, critically assess and report on members who failed to comply and sanctions to infringe.
- 6.3. Awards and incentives will vary from symbolic, monetary, granting materials equipment, and recognition.
- 6.4. Sanctions will be gradually and vary from, advising through verbal and written notification for change, temporary suspension, exclusion from RCSP or Umbrella.

## **7. COMPLAINTS MECHANISMS AND PROCEDURES**

Every Organisation will establish complaint and feedback mechanisms allowing members, staff, and beneficiaries to report any issue related to the implementation of LTA principles and the provision of this Code.

## **8. UPHOLDING THE CODE**

- 8.1. Enforcement of the Code as a self-regulation mechanism is within the authority of the RCSP and umbrellas. The Code affirms the Civil Society values and LTA principles and is offered as a civil society pledge of good faith in the positive engagement in the interest of CSOs image and sustainability. In that pursuit of trust, excellence and sustainability in all areas of operations within the development sector, CSOs shall observe the stated good practices.
- 8.2. This Code is applicable to all members and prospective members of RCSP and affiliated Umbrellas; any organisation seeking to benefit from what the Code offers and any other CSO willing to sign on.
- 8.3. RCSP, umbrellas and member organisations who act for and/or on the behalf of the signatories are expected to adopt, sign this Code at RCSP General Assembly.
- 8.4. These Signatories will be the primary agents through which adherence to the Code will be promoted among other CSOs.

## **9. RESPONSIBILITIES OF SIGNATORIES**

**As Signatories to the Code, WE shall:**

- 9.1. Monitor and evaluate the ways in which the Code impacts leaders and peoples' behaviours and organisational culture. Specifically, our leaders shall monitor how our organisations conduct business in light of the requirements of LTA principles and the Code particularly trust, excellence and sustainability of CSOs in Rwanda.
- 9.2. Individually and collectively be responsible for implementation, self-control, monitoring ourselves and our performance in relation to the requirements of LTA principles and the code of ethics.
- 9.3. Ensure that monitoring and evaluation of the compliance to LTA principles and the Code is shared between our General Assembly, Board of Directors, all governing bodies, Executive teams, and other interested stakeholders.
- 9.4. Be charged with the responsibility of bringing to the attention of the Umbrellas and RCSP breaches of the Code. In the event of a complaint being brought against any organisation under the terms of this code, signatories to the Code shall co-operate with the LTA National Committee and Internal LTA Committees at umbrellas level, to conduct further investigation, provide needed advice, achieve reconciliation and solidarity and maintain compliance and the integrity of the Code.

## **10. AMENDMENTS TO THE CODE**

- 10.1. Amendments to the Code shall be finalized with the approval of two thirds of the signatory organisations attending the session of the General Assembly of the RCSP.
- 10.2. Proposed amendments should be submitted to the RCSP six (6) months prior to this event to facilitate review, circulation and discussion.

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## **11. AGREEMENT**

We recognize that our organisation must be transparent and accountable to our members, communities, government, donors, stakeholders and the entire society. We pledge to strictly observe and abide by the terms, values and provisions of the Code of Ethics.

We recognise the need for periodic peer evaluation of the implementation of this code of ethics. We pledge to receive with high considerations the support, advice and recommendations from the RCSP and the umbrella organisation and we commit make necessary changes in our institution following the recommendations that may accrue from the evaluation of the implementation of this code of ethics.

**NAME OF THE ORGANISATION      RCSP**

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**NAME OF OFFICIAL  
SIGNATORY**

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