CODE OF ETHICS FOR SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE COMMUNICATION

Global Alliance for Social and Behaviour Change

BUILDING INFORMED AND ENGAGED SOCIETIES

Preamble

The diverse field of social and behaviour change (SBC) draws together behaviour change, community engagement, design and communication practitioners from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society groups, multilateral organizations, private foundations, academia, and governmental bodies. While the work these practitioners undertake varies in scope and theoretical underpinning, the practitioners are linked in a dynamic professional community constituted by shared norms, values, and ideals. These norms, values, and ideals are not always made explicit, however. Codes of ethics are one means of making these underpinnings explicit, thereby furthering ethical reflection, decision-making, and action by SBC practitioners as individuals and within organizations.

The Global Alliance for Social and Behaviour Change (Global Alliance) is a coalition of organizations that are united by a common commitment to building informed and engaged societies, amplifying the voices of those most affected by development, and empowering them with knowledge to influence decisions and improve their lives. The Global Alliance aims to advance the quality and reach of SBC work to these ends.

To enhance the ethical conduct of SBC work, the Global Alliance has produced an SBC code of ethics, which is a set of guidelines intended to promote ethical practice among its members and throughout the broader SBC field.

The development of this code has been influenced by contributions from practitioners around the world, including those in the Global South, with input from both Global Alliance members and others outside it. The code could benefit from further input from the full range of stakeholders in SBC work, e.g., donors, participants/beneficiaries (individuals and communities), civil society groups, partnership organizations, and governmental bodies.

Once in use, the code will be subject to revision and refinement through periodic review, using insights gained from the field of practice. It is intended to be a living document: a focal point for discussions and research helping to encourage development of SBC as a community of shared ethical values.

Statement of SBC
Ethical Values

The specific ethical principles comprising the code are framed by an overarching set of three key values. These include an emphasis on the importance of citizen agency and autonomy, a respect for diversity and culture, and a commitment to participation through the process of dialogue.

The Agency of Individuals and Communities

The field of SBC values the moral autonomy of individuals and communities, who are to be treated as the chief agents in making decisions regarding their own welfare. The autonomy of individuals is not to be sacrificed for the good of any larger community to which they might belong. The autonomy of communities is not to be sacrificed for the good of encompassing regions or states in which a community may reside. The autonomy of individuals is not to be sacrificed even for their own good, as this may be interpreted by others.

Respect for Diversity

SBC work takes place across diverse social and cultural settings spanning the globe. It is imperative that the value frameworks predominating across these settings be considered in SBC planning and conduct. All cultural value frameworks deserve dignity, understanding, and respect. The relativity of cultural values need not be taken as final justification for any and all actions. However, locally ascribed values should be thematized and addressed in decision-making processes and during ongoing interactions.

Participation through Dialogue

For SBC practitioners, dialogue is a chief means through which audiences and participants can enact agency and protect their autonomy, because the aims that communities might value can only be determined through collective dialogue. Through dialogue, the dynamics of cultural difference can be expressed, and bridges built. Dialogue is the medium, ultimately, in which ethical values themselves are produced, articulated, and embraced.

SBC Ethical Principles

Professionalism

- We acknowledge duties to our stakeholders (participants, communities, clients, funders).
- We articulate clear, strategic goals that are designed to be effective.
- We have the capacity and capability to complete our work.
- We design and implement evidence-based programmes.
- We act with integrity.

Conflict of Interest

- We seek to avoid all conflicts of interest.
- When a conflict is unavoidable, we disclose the conflict to, and seek consent from, all affected parties.

Communication and Dialogue

- We seek input from participants/beneficiaries.
- We encourage two-way dialogue and active listening.
- We aim to act on and incorporate local expressions of preference, working in partnership with local entities.
- We seek voluntary and informed consent from participants/beneficiaries before engaging in work.
- In community dialogues, we aim to work through existing community structures and platforms, and aim not to bypass existing accountability structures.

Accountability

- We are transparent with our participants/beneficiaries.
- We protect personal information.
- We are honest and truthful.
- We are trustworthy.

Avoid Doing Harm

- We intend to "Do No Harm" in the course of our work.
- We actively consider the potential for unintended negative consequences of our (in)actions.

Research Ethics

- We seek ethical clearance before engaging in any research from our home countries and the countries and communities where we practice.
- We ensure that those who opt to participate have provided genuinely informed consent.
- We strive to keep participant/beneficiary data confidential unless permission to disclose has been granted.
- We disclose our research aims, methods, and results to participants/beneficiaries.
- We make every effort to involve participants/beneficiaries in local research.
- We disclose funding sources for our work.

Respect for Diversity and Culture

- We respect cultural, religious, ethnic, age, gender, sexual orientation, and ability diversity, as well as diversity with regard to race and socioeconomic status.
- We respect the dignity of individuals, groups, and communities.
- We respect local knowledge.

SBC Ethical Principles

Underserved Populations

- We respect the needs of underserved and excluded groups, including but not limited to children, people of differing abilities, the elderly, and racial, ethnic, and gender-based groups.
- These populations are the most deserving of considered assistance, but are often the least likely to be given priority in assistance protocols.
- We endeavour to prioritize the needs of underserved communities, and to be sensitive to the specific communication needs inherent in dialoguing with them
- We take into consideration the social ecological environments that often contribute to social and behavioral problems.

Sustainable Change

- We analyse and understand the social and economic resources needed for change.
- We analyse and understand the need for post-project/intervention support.
- We promote environmental sustainability and stewardship.
- We contribute to systemic change.
- We consider advocacy for underserved groups to be a legitimate part of SBC work.

Participation

- We cooperate and collaborate with local community platforms, NGOs, service providers, and community organisations.
- We promote the empowerment of participants/beneficiaries.
- We promote individual and group autonomy.
- We discourage attempts to manipulate or change behavior without full discussion and participation with affected communities.

Fairness and Human Rights

- We promote the interest of justice in all we do.
- We refuse to participate in or support practices that violate human rights.
- We promote equality in our interactions.

Application

The code is intended to represent a dynamic process, signifying field-wide collective reflection, rather than a static set of rules. Serving as a call for conversation among individuals, organisations, and communities, this code is not accompanied by enforcement mechanisms.

The code can be used within the SBC community as an ongoing prompt for collective action on the ethical challenges accompanying SBC work. This action can take place through ethical practice, research projects, publications, webinars, professional trainings, and academic forums, as well other means for sharing and analysing ethical issues.

The code can also serve as a set of guidelines for organisations. It can be used to examine an organisation's published ethical standards or to encourage development of such standards. It can be employed to guide ethical conduct in the field, encouraging dialogue with intended participants/beneficiaries.

Finally, the code is intended to signify the privilege that should be accorded underserved communities, those least likely to possess the power to represent their own interests, a privilege that can flexibly be enacted at least in part through dialogue. For each individual community-based project in which the code is invoked it should be discussed, and adapted when appropriate, in a co-creative process with intended participants/beneficiaries.