MUAST

MARONDERA UNIVERSITY
OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

SAFEGUARDING POLICY

POLICY NO.SP/23/26

MUAST

MARONDERA UNIVERSITY
OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

TITLE	MARONDERA UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY SAFEGUARDING POLICY
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1.0 PREAMBLE

Marondera University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (MUAST) is a modern and unique institution of higher learning established through an Act of parliament [Chapter 25:29]. The University is driven by the vision to be a leading global center of excellence in the provision of technology driven sustainable green agricultural solutions". Underpinned by its unique core values: Excellence, Diversity, Innovation, Ethics, Ubuntu, Integrity and Sustainability; the University aims at producing globally acceptable and competent graduates grounded in agricultural, entrepreneurial and technological skills through excellence in teaching, research and extension services, innovation and industrialization. The Safeguarding Policy recognises that the protection, dignity, wellbeing, and safety of all students, staff, researchers, contractors, visitors, and surrounding communities are fundamental to the achievement of the University's mandate and sustainable development goals.

This policy therefore provides a comprehensive framework for safeguarding prevention, reporting, response, protection, and accountability within the governance, administration, operations, and institutional practices of the University. The policy ensures that MUAST adheres to anti-corruption circulars, policies and measures as directed to the attention of the University by other agencies of the State. The policy shall also abide by growth, prosperity and inclusive development to the country in prompting good governance buttressed by transparency, accountability, integrity and rule of law. This policy also acknowledges the responsibility to lead by example in the fight against corruption and to ethically render services with integrity.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this Policy:

2.1 **Abuse:** Abuse includes physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, verbal, financial, digital, or institutional mistreatment.

2.2 **Bullying:** Bullying includes repeated physical, verbal, social, psychological, or cyber behavior intended to intimidate, humiliate, or harm another person.

2.3 **Child:** A child refers to any person below the age of eighteen (18) years.

2.4 **Child Protection:** Child protection refers to specific measures aimed at preventing and responding to violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation, and harm affecting children.

2.5 **Neglect:** Neglect refers to the failure to provide appropriate care, supervision, protection, or support.

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2.6 **Safeguarding:** Safeguarding refers to the measures, systems, and actions designed to protect individuals from abuse, neglect, exploitation, violence, harassment, discrimination, and any form of harm.

2.7 **Sexual Exploitation and Abuse:** Sexual exploitation and abuse refer to actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, trust, or power for sexual purposes.

2.8 **Vulnerable Adult:** A vulnerable adult refers to a person aged eighteen (18) years or older who may be unable to protect themselves from harm, abuse, exploitation, or neglect due to disability, illness, mental condition, social vulnerability, or other circumstances.

3.0 POLICY STATEMENT

MUAST is committed to providing a safe, secure, inclusive, and respectful learning and working environment for all students, staff, visitors, contractors, researchers, and community stakeholders. The University recognises its duty of care to protect children, young persons, vulnerable adults, and all members of the University community from abuse, exploitation, neglect, harassment, discrimination, violence, and all forms of harm. As a public institution of higher learning engaged in teaching, research, outreach, innovation, agricultural extension, industrial attachment, fieldwork, and community engagement, MUAST acknowledges that staff and students may interact with children and vulnerable persons during educational activities, research programmes, agricultural demonstrations, internships, sporting activities, outreach programmes, and community-based projects. This Policy establishes the principles, standards, procedures, and responsibilities required to safeguard all persons associated with the University and to ensure compliance with all applicable legal frameworks.

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this Policy are to:

4.1 Create a safe and supportive institutional environment.

4.2 Ensure zero tolerance for abuse and exploitation.

4.3 Safeguard the welfare and rights of children and vulnerable persons.

4.4 Promote awareness and training on safeguarding responsibilities.

4.5 Establish confidential and accessible reporting mechanisms.

4.6 Ensure accountability and appropriate disciplinary procedures.

4.7 Integrate safeguarding principles into University operations, programmes, and partnerships.

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5.0 PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

The purpose of this Policy is to:

5.1 Promote a culture of safeguarding, protection, dignity, respect, and accountability within the University.

5.2 Prevent abuse, exploitation, neglect, harassment, bullying, discrimination, and violence.

5.3 Protect children and vulnerable adults who engage with the University.

5.4 Establish clear reporting and response procedures for safeguarding concerns.

5.5 Define the responsibilities of staff, students, contractors, volunteers, and University authorities.

5.6 Ensure timely intervention, support, referral, and disciplinary action where safeguarding concerns arise.

5.7 Strengthen ethical conduct during teaching, research, fieldwork, outreach, and student activities.

5.8 Ensure compliance with legal and professional safeguarding obligations.

6.0 SCOPE

This policy shall apply to all University premises, research stations, farms, laboratories, student residences, outreach centres, fieldwork sites, online platforms, sporting facilities, transport systems, and any environment where University-related activities occur.

7.0 REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS

7.1 Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act, 2013.

7.2 The Labour Act [Chapter 28:01].

7.3 The Children's Act [Chapter 5:06].

7.4 The Education Act [Chapter 25:04].

7.5 Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act [Chapter 9:23].

7.6 Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy for Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions.

7.7 Domestic Violence Act [Chapter 5:16].

7.8 Disabled Persons Act [Chapter 17:01].

7.9 Cyber and Data Protection Act [Chapter 12:07].

7.10 Zimbabwe National Gender Policy (2025).

7.11 Public Service Commission Sexual Harassment Policy.

7.12 SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.

7.13 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

7.14 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

7.15 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

7.16 Marondera University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology Act [Chapter 25:29].

7.17 Marondera University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology Whistleblower Policy.

7.18 Marondera University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology Student Charter.

8.0 BACKGROUND

MUAST is committed to creating and maintaining a safe, inclusive, respectful, and secure environment for all students, staff, interns, researchers, contractors, visitors, and communities engaged with the University. The University recognises that safeguarding is a shared responsibility and therefore adopts proactive prevention and responsive intervention strategies to protect individuals from abuse, exploitation, harassment, neglect, discrimination, bullying, gender-based violence, and any other form of harm.

9.0 PREVENTION STRATEGIES

MUAST shall conduct regular safeguarding awareness and sensitisation programmes for students, staff members, contractors, researchers, and visitors. These programmes shall focus on:

9.1 Awareness and Sensitisation

MUAST shall promote safeguarding awareness and sensitisation by ensuring that all students, staff members, contractors, researchers, and stakeholders understand safeguarding principles and their respective responsibilities.

9.2 Capacity Building and Training

Marondera University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology shall provide continuous safeguarding training and capacity-building programmes for employees, management, student leaders, security personnel, lecturers, supervisors, researchers, counsellors, and other relevant stakeholders.

9.3 Safe Recruitment and Screening

MUAST shall implement safe recruitment and screening practices aimed at minimising safeguarding risks within the University environment.

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9.4 Safe Learning and Working Environment

The University shall establish and maintain a safe, inclusive, and supportive learning and working environment that upholds dignity, equality, and respect for all persons. MUAST shall adopt a zero-tolerance approach towards abuse, exploitation, harassment, bullying, discrimination, and all forms of violence, while strengthening security systems and safeguarding reporting mechanisms, as provided for in the MUAST Gender Policy.

9.5 Partner, Contractor, and Affiliate Obligations

9.5.1 All contractors, consultants, service providers, volunteers, implementing partners, collaborating institutions, affiliates, and other third parties engaged by or working with MUAST shall comply with the University's safeguarding standards, policies, procedures, and codes of conduct.

9.5.2 The University shall, where appropriate, incorporate safeguarding obligations and compliance requirements into contracts, memoranda of understanding, partnership agreements, service agreements, and other institutional engagements.

9.5.3 Any partner, contractor, or affiliate found to have violated safeguarding obligations may be subjected to disciplinary or corrective measures, including termination of contracts, partnerships, or engagements, and referral to relevant authorities where applicable.

9.6 Safeguarding in Research, Outreach, and Fieldwork

9.6.1 MUAST shall integrate safeguarding principles into all research, industrial attachment, agricultural fieldwork, innovation hubs, outreach programmes, and community engagement activities undertaken by the University.

9.6.2 Staff members, researchers, students, contractors, and affiliates participating in research, industrial attachment, agricultural fieldwork, outreach programmes, farm activities, innovation programmes, community engagement activities, or other off-campus University-related activities shall undertake documented safeguarding risk assessments prior to the commencement of such activities.

9.6.3 The safeguarding risk assessments shall identify potential safeguarding risks, vulnerable groups, supervision arrangements, reporting mechanisms, accommodation and transport

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considerations, digital safeguarding concerns, and appropriate mitigation measures to ensure the safety, dignity, wellbeing, and protection of all participants.

9.7 Student Support and Participation

9.7.1 The University shall promote active student participation in safeguarding initiatives through student representative structures, peer education programmes, wellness clubs, and awareness campaigns aimed at fostering a culture of safety and responsibility.

9.7.2 MUAST shall ensure that students have access to confidential and accessible reporting channels and that victims and survivors of safeguarding violations receive appropriate support services, including counselling and referral assistance.

9.7.3 2.5.3 The University shall also ensure that student grievances are managed fairly, promptly, and confidentially in accordance with institutional procedures.

10.0 INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

10.1 Reporting Mechanisms

10.1.1 MUAST shall establish clear, accessible, confidential, and responsive safeguarding reporting mechanisms to enable timely reporting and effective management of safeguarding concerns.

10.1.2 Reports may be submitted through Heads of Departments, Student Affairs Office, Human Resources Office, Security Services, designated Safeguarding Officers, or anonymous reporting platforms where applicable without fear of retaliation or victimisation.

10.1.3 The University shall encourage all members of the University community to report safeguarding concerns promptly in order to ensure appropriate intervention and protection of affected individuals

10.2 Protection Against Retaliation and Victimisation

10.2.1 MUAST shall protect complainants, victims, survivors, witnesses, whistleblowers, and any person reporting safeguarding concerns in good faith from retaliation, intimidation, harassment, discrimination, victimisation, or any other adverse treatment arising from the reporting of safeguarding matters.

10.2.2 The University shall ensure that all safeguarding concerns are handled confidentially, fairly, sensitively, and professionally, and

that appropriate protection measures are implemented where necessary to safeguard affected individuals.

10.2.3 False, malicious, or intentionally misleading allegations made in bad faith may, however, be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with University procedures and applicable laws.

10.3 Immediate Response and Protection Measures

Where safeguarding concerns are raised, the University shall take immediate and appropriate measures to protect affected individuals from further harm and to ensure their wellbeing and safety.

10.4 Investigation and Case Management

All safeguarding allegations and complaints shall be handled promptly, fairly, impartially, and confidentially in accordance with University procedures and applicable laws.

10.5 Referral and Collaboration

Where necessary, MUAST shall collaborate with relevant stakeholders and authorities, including the Zimbabwe Republic Police, social welfare and child protection services, health institutions, legal service providers, community leaders, and relevant government departments to ensure effective management of safeguarding cases.

10.6 Disciplinary Measures

Any staff member, student, contractor, volunteer, or affiliate found to have violated safeguarding standards shall be subjected to disciplinary action in accordance with University regulations and applicable laws.

11.0 INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND GOVERNANCE

11.1 Institutional Arrangements

11.1.1 MUAST commits to establishing and maintaining robust safeguarding governance arrangements that ensure the protection, dignity, welfare, safety, and wellbeing of all persons interacting with the institution.

11.1.2 Safeguarding shall constitute a core institutional responsibility embedded within the University's governance, administration, academic functions, research activities, student affairs, outreach programmes, innovation hubs, agricultural extension services, industrial attachment programmes, and community engagement initiatives.

11.1.3 The University acknowledges that safeguarding is not merely a compliance obligation but an institutional value that promotes

ethical conduct, accountability, integrity, inclusion, professionalism, and human rights protection.

11.2 Governance

11.2.1 The University Council shall exercise overall oversight responsibility for safeguarding governance and institutional accountability and ensure that safeguarding remains integrated into institutional strategic planning, risk management frameworks, and governance processes.

11.2.2 The Vice Chancellor, University Management, and Heads of Departments shall bear primary responsibility for the implementation and enforcement of this Policy within their respective areas of authority and mainstream into procedures, processes, frameworks, systems, agreements, student welfare and academic operations.

11.2.3 MUAST shall establish designated safeguarding structures, committees, focal persons, or Safeguarding Officers responsible for coordinating safeguarding implementation and compliance within the institution.

11.2.4 All staff members, students, researchers, volunteers, contractors, consultants, affiliates, service providers, and persons acting on behalf of the University shall have an individual and collective responsibility to uphold safeguarding standards and principles.

11.2.5 The University shall further integrate safeguarding risk management into all institutional operations and activities. Safeguarding risk assessments shall form part of project approvals, research ethics processes, partnership engagements, student activities, and off-campus programmes in order to ensure the protection of vulnerable persons and minimise institutional safeguarding risks.

11.2.6 MUAST shall continue to promote a culture of accountability, transparency, integrity, non-discrimination, inclusion, and respect for human dignity within the University.

12.0 DATA PROTECTION AND IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

12.1 MUAST acknowledges that safeguarding processes often involve the collection, storage, processing, sharing, and management of sensitive personal information relating to victims, survivors, complainants, witnesses, alleged perpetrators, staff members, students, children,

vulnerable adults, and other affected persons. The University therefore recognises the importance of confidentiality, privacy, information security, and responsible data management in safeguarding implementation.

12.2 MUAST shall collect and process safeguarding-related personal information lawfully, fairly, transparently, and only for legitimate safeguarding purposes in accordance with the Cyber and Data Protection Act, institutional policies, and applicable legal frameworks governing privacy and personal data protection.

12.3 Safeguarding information shall only be accessed by authorised personnel with legitimate institutional responsibilities relating to safeguarding management, investigations, disciplinary proceedings, counselling, referrals, legal compliance, or victim protection. All persons handling safeguarding information shall be required to observe strict confidentiality obligations and professional ethical standards. Unauthorised disclosure, misuse, alteration, or dissemination of confidential safeguarding information shall constitute serious misconduct and may result in disciplinary action, civil liability, or criminal prosecution where applicable.

12.4 The University may disclose safeguarding-related information to law enforcement agencies, courts, social welfare authorities, child protection agencies, healthcare institutions, regulatory bodies, or other competent authorities where disclosure is required by law, necessary to prevent harm, necessary to protect life and safety, required for investigations, or necessary for the provision of support services and referrals.

12.5 MUAST shall implement appropriate administrative, organisational, and technical safeguards to secure safeguarding-related information and records and ensure restricted access controls, secure filing systems, password-protected databases, encrypted digital storage systems, cybersecurity protocols, secure communication channels, and controlled information-sharing procedures.

12.6 The University shall ensure that safeguarding records are securely maintained and retained in accordance with institutional records management procedures and applicable legal requirements and disposed of confidentially once retention periods expire or where disposal is authorised by law and institutional procedures.

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13.0 EQUALITY, INCLUSION AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

13.1 MUAST is committed to promoting equality, diversity, inclusion, and non-discrimination within all safeguarding processes, institutional programmes, and University-related activities.

13.2 The University further recognises the rights and needs of persons with disabilities, children, vulnerable adults, and other at-risk groups. MUAST shall therefore take reasonable measures to ensure accessibility, inclusion, participation, accommodation, and protection for all persons interacting with the institution.

14.0 POLICY INTERPRETATION

14.1 Any question relating to the interpretation, implementation, enforcement, or application of this Policy shall be referred to the Registrar's Office in consultation with Legal Services and relevant University authorities. The interpretation of this Policy shall be guided by the Constitution of Zimbabwe, applicable legislation, institutional policies, principles of natural justice, human rights standards, and international safeguarding best practices.

14.2 MUAST shall ensure effective dissemination and implementation of this Policy throughout the institution. The Policy shall be communicated through induction programmes, awareness campaigns, workshops, digital platforms, training sessions, policy manuals, student orientation programmes, and institutional communication channels.

15.0 EFFECTIVE DATE AND REVIEW

This Policy shall become effective upon approval by the University Council and shall remain binding upon all members of the University community and persons engaged in University-related activities. The Policy shall be reviewed periodically, or whenever necessary, in order to ensure continued relevance, legal compliance, institutional effectiveness, and alignment with emerging safeguarding standards and national, regional, and international best practices.

16.0 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Registrar's Office at MUAST shall regularly collect feedback from students, staff, management, community partners, and other relevant stakeholders to continuously strengthen and improve safeguarding programmes, policies, procedures, and intervention mechanisms within the University. The feedback obtained shall be used to assess the effectiveness, accessibility, inclusivity, and

responsiveness of safeguarding measures and to ensure that they adequately address emerging safeguarding risks, challenges, and the evolving needs and wellbeing of the University community and society at large.

17.0 COMPLIANCE

17.1 This policy is informed by the relevant Standard Operating Procedures and Guidelines.

17.2 Failure to comply with the policy is an act of misconduct which is subject to disciplinary action.

18.0 REVIEW OF POLICY

18.1 This policy shall be reviewed after 4 years from the date of approval.

Recommended: ..... Date: 04/06/2026
(Chairperson of Vice Chancellor's Executive Committee)

Recommended: ..... Date: 05/06/2026
(Chairperson of Senate)

Approved: ..... Date: .....
(Chairperson of Council)