CODE OF GOOD CONDUCT FOR CARIBBEAN NGOs

Preamble

Conscious of the need to practice good ethics at all times in carrying out the role of the non-governmental sector, the Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC) is adopting this Code of Good Conduct for the guidance of all members and staff of Non Governmental Organisations throughout CARICOM and the wider Caribbean region. The Code of Good Conduct is concerned with the internal governance of NGOs; relations among NGOs at local, national, regional and international levels; NGO relations with beneficiary communities, donor partners, and government; NGO relations with labour, private sector, media, and the general public.

Social development activists must serve the collective interests of the people of the region affirming and defending their freedom and their human right to a reasonable quality of life. Activists are required to exercise good judgement in implementing their programmes and in cultivating relations with various partners. The Code is aimed therefore at fostering good relations between NGOs and the societies that they serve and at ensuring that all NGO activities are conducive to the attainment of a high level of respect among activists, beneficiaries, donors and partners. Since no Code of Ethics can anticipate every situation, personal integrity and honour should guide every decision and action carried out in the name of the non-governmental sector. The success of the Code in maintaining high standards of behaviour among NGO activists is guaranteed in so far as each person subscribes to the principles enshrined in the Code and is committed to upholding them particularly in trying circumstances.

Upholding the Code

Members of CPDC are expected to adopt and sign the Code of Good Conduct for NGOs at each General Meeting and may indicate in their promotional materials that they subscribe to the Code. Members of the CPDC are the primary agents through which adherence to the Code of Good Conduct will be promoted among NGOs. Each member of CPDC is charged with upholding the Code and with assisting other NGOs to adopt and maintain the Code.

Where persuasion fails they are also charged with the responsibility of bringing to the attention of the NGO/Government Commission breaches of the Code. In the event of a complaint being brought against an organisation under the terms of the Code signatories to the Code shall co-operate with the NGO/Government Commission to achieve reconciliation and maintain the integrity of the Code.

The Code of Good Conduct is an integral part of the legislation recognising NGOs as Social Partners in Development and providing for their registration and general operations in CARICOM countries. Legal enforcement of the Code of Good Conduct is within the authority of the NGO/Government Commission provided for in the NGO Act. The Code assumes the values and principles of the CARICOM Charter for Civil Society and is offered as a civil society pledge of good faith in the positive engagement between policy makers and activist in the interest of sustainable human development in the Caribbean. *In the pursuit of excellence in all areas of operations within the development sector NGOs shall observe the following good practices.*

Internal governance

- be voluntary, independent and non-partisan in nature.
- NGOs shall: conform activities to their stated institutional purposes;
- avoid involvement in any wrong doing in any of their activities and shall take prompt and firm corrective action in instances of wrong doing;
- seek conciliatory solutions to conflicts with third parties;
- be vigilant against and discourage any conflict of interest between members of the Board of Directors and the affairs of the organisation;
- encourage Board members to give the best service as Directors by rationalizing their various community commitments;
- maintain good relations between Board and members, and within the membership;
- afford continuous opportunity for members to participate in the management of their organization;
- require all members to contribute actively to organizational growth.

Staff

- promote gender and minority equity in recruitment, training and professional advancement of staff;
- subject to the preceding clause NGOs shall seek to offer equal employment opportunity and refrain from the practice of discrimination on the basis of age, class, gender, geographic location, mental or physical ability, race, religion, etc.
- endeavour to recruit staff that combine professional competence with a commitment to service;
- ensure that any allegation of misconduct on the part of anyone associated with the organisation will be dealt with impartially.
- A member of the Board of Directors may not be recruited into the staff of the organisation neither can a Board member resign in order to take up paid appointment with the NGO;

Finances

- NGOs should exercise thrift in the management of finances and adhere to all accounting rules and procedures that will minimize the possibility of financial impropriety;
- Contributions shall be used as promised or implied in the fundraising appeal and as specified in the contribution agreement;
- NGOs should exercise integrity in accepting funds and refuse donations from companies whose practices are opposed to the goals of sustainable development.

Relations with Target Groups

- NGOs shall foster meaningful popular participation in identification of community needs and design of programmes;
- NGOs shall assist those at risk without any discrimination;
- NGOs shall give priority to strengthening the capacity of vulnerable groups to achieve autonomy and self-reliance.

Communications to the Public

- Fundraising shall be truthful and high-pressure tactics in soliciting donations should not be used;
- Communications shall be respectful of people in every sense and messages shall portray people as equal partners in development actions;

- Organisational activities shall be conducive to public trust in the NGO sector.

Relations with CBOs and NGOs at local, national and regional levels

- NGOs shall treat each other and all other civil society organisations with respect for their areas of focus, expertise, and diversity of approaches.
- NGOs shall share information on programmes and objectives as requested;
- NGOs shall cooperate and collaborate with other NGOs and CBOs in the implementation of programmes to the benefit of target groups and the wider society where possible;
- NGOs shall strive for the autonomy and protection of the rights of civil society organisations;
- NGOs shall express solidarity with campaigns and actions of other organisations where these are consistent with the NGO's institutional purpose;
- NGOs shall act in concert to promote the growth and effectiveness of the sector.

Relations with International NGOs and Donor Partners

- NGOs shall strive to have their agendas set by members and target communities and shall impress this policy on donor partners and international NGOs;
- NGOs shall work on global issues of concern to the NGOs in concert with donor partners and international NGOs on a basis that does not compromise the integrity of the NGO;
- NGOs shall subject its collaboration with international NGOs and donor partners to the scrutiny and evaluation of its members;
- NGOs and Donor Partners should strive for modes of collaboration aimed at achieving the sustainability of the NGO sector and minimising their dependence on external funding.

Relations with Government

- Within the framework of the CARICOM Charter for Civil Society NGOs shall seek partnership with governments based on their record of service to various marginalised communities.
- NGOs shall seek to dialogue and cooperate with Government agencies towards the attainment of sustainable human development.
- NGOs will avoid any actions or programmes that may infer an intention to compete with, upstage, or replace their Governments, state agencies and departments.
- NGOs will maintain a position of political neutrality in their operations and respect the office of all duly elected governments in keeping with the democratic traditions of the region.

Relations with Labour, Private Sector and Media

- NGOs shall respect the special roles of Trade Unions and the Private Sector in the pursuit of national and regional development;
- NGOs shall respect the media as both a stakeholder group and as a channel of communication;
- NGOs shall explore all opportunities for cooperation and strive for optional developmental partnerships with the media, private sector and trade unions, being guided by the values and principles of this Code of Good Conduct.