

# **Cultural Orientation**

## **For**

# **Staff in Community World Service Asia**

## Welcome to Community World Service Asia

Community World Service Asia is a non-governmental organization which implements humanitarian and development activities in Asia. We aim to address factors that set people apart by celebrating inclusiveness, shared values, diversity, and interdependence. Marginalized communities are assisted irrespective of race, faith, color, sex, economic status, or political opinion. Respecting the right to choose how to live, we work with marginalized communities in order for them to overcome inequality and lead dignified, peaceful, and resilient lives.

Our focus areas include: disaster management; education; health; livelihoods; peace and governance; water, sanitation, and the environment; and quality and accountability. We are actively engaged in self-implementation, implementation through partners, and the provision of capacity building at the local and regional levels.

What follows is a brief outline of some of the key concerns we ask you to be mindful of when visiting/ working for Community World Service Asia; particularly while visiting our field locations and the communities in which we conduct our work.

Comparatively speaking Pakistan and Afghanistan might be more culturally conservative countries than your place of departure. Here, observance of basic codes, etiquettes and courtesies is not just a matter of pleasantries – our work and relationship with our partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries depend on our sensitivity to local custom and compliance with existent norms. Please bear in mind that all visitors and staff of Community World Service Asia are likely to be construed as ambassadors of our ethos and value system. In culturally conservative areas, such as the Khyber Pakhtoon Khwah (KPK), our engagements and relationships with the communities are directly affected by how we are seen to conduct ourselves in dealing with local conventions.

We therefore ask you to spend a few moments familiarising yourself with the following points. They are meant to increase your safety and comfort. If you have any further questions, our colleagues will be happy to assist you.

### **Gender:**

Local and tribal customs tend to observe various degrees of gender segregation. Please refrain from shaking hands across genders unless it is initiated by your counterpart – this holds true both inside and outside the office. Some communities are not used to shaking hands even within the same gender and it is considered offensive. Public displays of physical contact between genders are not considered appropriate. Similarly, photography or video recordings without prior consent – whether of males,

females or families – should be completely avoided. Please confer with local field staff for specific guidelines for your location.

### **Attire:**

Gender segregation not only implies certain restrictions on conduct and behaviour between genders but also on the mode and nature of dress. For men, we recommend loose-fitting clothes. Half-sleeved shirts are acceptable; however, shorts or pirate pants should be avoided. Head-covering, such as a cap or a hat, may be practical in preventing heat-stroke or sunburn whilst in the field. One should avoid potentially offensive images or symbols on one's clothing.

For women, we recommend loose-fitting clothes covering from wrists to ankles, without exposure. Clothes should not be transparent. A shawl is recommended in field locations covering properly. Trousers are preferable to skirts, but must be accompanied with long tops reaching the thighs, e.g. such as the local *Kurta* or *Shalwar Kameez*.

We do not recommend wearing jewellery to field locations and men are asked to remove piercings or the like. A pair of solid walking/trekking shoes is preferable to sandals as field work involves travel, sometimes by foot, in diverse terrain. Please inquire concerning weather conditions before your visit.

### **Religious Customs:**

The most important restriction in connection with local religious customs is the prohibition on drinking, eating, smoking or e.g. chewing gum during the month of Ramadan and foreigners are not exempted from this. If required, Community World Service Asia staff will be helpful in arranging food and beverages for you under private forms, but please remember that some local staff may also be observing the fast, which extends from sun down to sun set. It is not advised to enter/ touch places of worship or approach worshipping congregations without their consent. Observe silence if you pass by a communal prayer. Religious leaders and clergy are subject to great reverence and can often be the determining factor behind a successful or failed reputation in and relationship with a local community. Accordingly, please refrain from public display of religious symbols etc.

Local laws forbid enjoying alcohol and pork. Restaurants and hotels will not serve beer, wine or liquor. Consumption of alcohol is not allowed.

### **Interaction:**

High-context cultures tend to emphasise the observance of outer etiquette and you are asked to be mindful of how you carry yourself; failure to afford due attention to a presentable appearance and courteous conduct will not let

you enjoy a meaningful interaction with beneficiaries, communities or authorities. In this connection we ask you to note that swearing or casual slang is not well-regarded. Offensive or overly sarcastic conversation – especially across genders – is seen to be unacceptable, as is behaviour which in a culturally conservative environment may be interpreted as lewd or flirtatious.

If you are in the field please do not stray from the path or instructions of Community World Service Asia staff. Not all families' welcome curious visitors and the sense of space and intimacy is bound to be larger than other cultures and places; with backyards or fields extending far beyond places of dwelling. Failure to comply with instructions of staff may jeopardise your safety and incur great costs for Community World Service Asia.

### **Transport:**

Community World Service Asia uses marked and unmarked vehicles depending upon the security environment. You are asked to always comply with instructions of staff, when entering or leaving the vehicle. Please also note that we have Right-hand driving in Pakistan and Left-hand driving in Afghanistan. It is advisable that while leaving Office one should not linger around in the parking area or outside office premises so as to avoid undue attention. In some instances, we may be accompanied by police escorts, which is first and foremost a precautionary measure to ensure flow through traffic and not necessary a reflection on the security environment. Passengers, particularly female, are expected to sit in the back of the vehicle.

When driving in the field, you will be driving long, at high altitude and sometimes under poor road conditions with risks of sliding and delay. Please bear in mind that you will not be able to avail toilet facilities in between destinations and some trips may take as long as 4 hours one way. If you are prone to motion-sickness or have fear of heights, you may want to reconsider visiting field locations. In Islamabad, the traffic situation is relatively safe and orderly. In cases of collision etc. you are asked to remain calm and follow the instructions of driver, staff or your local liaison officer.

Please observe punctuality and avoid incurring delays when visiting the field or attending meetings. Itineraries have to be negotiated with several actors and a delay in one location may spell inconvenience in another. Whilst driving, avoid littering out of the windows and whilst driving through settlements, please ensure that you are properly covered inside the car.

### **Miscellaneous:**

You are asked to be vigilant at all times. Do not go out unaccompanied, especially not if you are female. For security reasons you are asked to refrain from displaying expensive items, watches, phones etc. in public.

Places of accommodation, guesthouses or hotels, are checked by Community World Service Asia and offer the best available lodging facilities in the area. Still, facilities are likely to be very basic.

Around the guesthouses or staff houses of Community World Service Asia, you are expected to observe the same etiquettes as mentioned above.

Food and drink at the office and guesthouse/staff house facilities is safe, but you are asked to avoid drinking tap water at all times. Bottled mineral water is available in shops and restaurants. Community World Service Asia staff will be able to recommend reputed establishments where dining is safe.

If you are travelling with your spouse, please recall that public displays of affection – including innocent hugs, pecks or holding hands – may be a violation of local custom.