



Institutional

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

For

The Child Rights Information & Documentation Centre (CRIDOC)

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1.0 Introduction

The Child Rights Information and Documentation Centre (CRIDOC) supports the rights of children and is committed to their safety and well-being. CRIDOC's staff members and those working with CRIDOC share a common responsibility and commitment to the awareness, prevention and reporting of and responding to child abuse in the course of their work.

CRIDOC's Child Protection Policy sets out common values, principles, and beliefs and describes the steps that will be taken to meet our commitment to protect children

2.0 Scope

This policy applies to all part-time, full-time, and casual CRIDOC employees, freelance and other experts, interns and volunteers (hereinafter: CRIDOC staff or staff) as well as associate firms and sub-contractors (hereinafter: partners) working with CRIDOC on the implementation of its projects and activities.

3.0 Definitions

3.1 Child

For the purpose of this policy, the definition of a child is "every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier". This is in accordance with Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (CRC).

3.2 Child abuse

We define child abuse as all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including commercial exploitation, sexual abuse while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

4.0 Principles and values

The following principles and values reflect CRIDOC's stance on child protection:

Zero tolerance of child abuse:

CRIDOC does not tolerate any form of child abuse, nor does it tolerate possession or access to any material that is abusive towards children. Guidance and training on child protection risk management is provided to CRIDOC staff. CRIDOC will not knowingly engage anyone who poses a direct risk to children.

Recognition of children's interests:

CRIDOC recognises that some children are at greater risk of abuse. Of particular vulnerability are children with disabilities, children without parental and alternative care, and children living on the street.

Sharing responsibility of child protection:

When working for projects and/or activities with partners that do not have a child protection policy, CRIDOC will ensure that they agree to adopt CRIDOC's Child Protection Policy and Child Protection Code of Conduct (Annex 1) for the duration of the project/activity.

5.0 Goal

To protect children from all forms of abuse in the course of our work

6.0 Purpose

The purpose of this Child Protection Policy is to:

- Provide a management strategy to prevent child abuse and protect children in the course of our work;
- Protect CRIDOC staff and partners from unfair practices and processes; and
- Provide CRIDOC staff and partners with clear guidelines on what to do in the case of suspected child abuse.

7.0 CRIDOC's commitment

CRIDOC's commitment to child protection will be guided by the following:

- Awareness:** We will ensure that all CRIDOC staff and partners as well as stakeholders involved in projects are aware of the problem of child abuse and the risks to children.
- Prevention:** We will ensure, through awareness and good practice, that CRIDOC staff and partners minimise the risks to children.
- Reporting:** We will ensure that CRIDOC staff and partners are clear on what steps to take where concerns arise regarding the safety of children.
- Responding:** We will ensure that action is taken to support and protect children where concerns of abuse arise.

Further to the above, CRIDOC will:

- Not permit a person to work with children if it has been identified that they pose an unacceptable risk to children's safety or well-being;
- Take all child abuse concerns raised seriously;
- Take positive steps to ensure the protection of children who are the subject of any concerns;
- Support children, CRIDOC staff or other adults who raise concerns or who are the subject of concerns;
- Act appropriately and effectively in instigating or cooperating with any subsequent process of investigation;
- Guide through the child protection process by the principle of 'best interests of the child';
- Listen to and take seriously the views and wishes of children; and
- Work in partnership with parents/carers and/or other professionals to ensure the protection of children.

8.0 General Procedures

The following general procedures will mainstream CRIDOC's Child Protection Policy and Child Protection Code of Conduct:

- Both Child Protection Policy and Code of Conduct are made an integral part of CRIDOC's quality management system and the legally binding instructions it contains.
- Contracts for persons newly employed by CRIDOC will contain a provision foreseeing their dismissal or transfer to other duties if they breach the Child Protection Code of Conduct.

- All CRIDOC subsidiaries will be required to adopt a child protection policy that meets the standards of CRIDOC's own policy in this matter.
- Any agreement between CRIDOC and partners concerning services directly to children will require assurance that appropriate child protection policies and procedures are in place.
- A copy of the child protection policy will be posted on the CRIDOC website.
- All project offices will display contact details for reporting possible child abuse and CRIDOC staff will have contact details for reporting.
- A reporting procedure is put in place to investigate and deal with possible child abuse

9.0 Guidelines for reporting suspected or actual abuse of children

9.1 Reporting Principles

Reporting suspected or actual child abuse is mandatory for all staff, volunteers, consultants, partners and sub-contractors.

No CRIDOC staff or partner will prejudice their own position or standing with CRIDOC by responsibly reporting someone who they believe is breaking the Child Protection Code of Conduct.

Responsible reporting also means that any person making a report should bear in mind that all concerns are allegations until they have been investigated. For this reason, it is important for anyone raising a concern to follow the specific reporting guidelines set out below. In particular, confidentiality is expected within the reporting chain.

9.2 Reporting Procedures

All staff should normally discuss their concerns with their immediate senior manager, be it a Project Manager or a Head of Department.

Any information provided will be handled with strict confidentiality and we will only take action if breaches of the Child Protection Code of Conduct can be proven conclusively.

Discussions held with a senior manager should focus on:

- Evidence that the Child Protection Code of Conduct has been broken;
- The identified risks to the child/children;
- Measures to safeguarding children and minimise risk; and
- Action/next steps
- Whether, and at what stage, the issue should be reported to external bodies
- Appropriate response, e.g. disciplinary process or urgent action if children are judged to be at risk.

9.3 Specific Reporting Guidelines

Any concerns, allegations or disclosures must be recorded in writing, signed and dated, and communicated as soon as possible to CRIDOC's Management.

Records should be detailed and precise, focusing on what was said or observed, who was present and what happened. Speculation and interpretation should be clearly distinguished from reporting.

Any concern, disclosure or allegation is alleged rather than proven at this point. All such records should be treated as extremely confidential. They should be passed only to the persons specified in these specific reporting guidelines. It is the responsibility of each individual in possession of the information to maintain confidentiality.

However, confidentiality cannot always be guaranteed. It must be made clear that following the steps in this policy is an obligation. Explanations should be given about the possible outcomes that could result from information being reported.

In certain instances, there will be the obligation for CRIDOC and its staff to report concerns to the appropriate external bodies. This will usually occur as a consequence of the reporting procedure. However, if urgent action is required in order to protect children then it may be prior to the reporting procedure.

9.4 Responding to concerns

In order to protect children it may be necessary to take immediate action to ensure that the Child Protection Code of Conduct is not broken again and/or that further abuse cannot take place.

The best interests of the child and the desire to secure the best outcomes for the child should always govern decisions regarding what action should be taken in response to concerns.

From the date of this policy, all new CRIDOC staff and contractors will have a provision in their employment agreements for dismissal or transfer to other duties if he/she breaches the Child Protection Code of Conduct.

CRIDOC's Managing Director in consultation with the senior manager concerned, will ultimately decide what sanctions will be taken against breaches.

Some concerns may be so serious that they would have to be reported to local authorities and police. In these circumstances, based on local guidelines, CRIDOC will assess on a case-by-case basis what steps to take. If the concerns are reported to local authorities, CRIDOC staff will assist the authorities wherever possible but may also need to make arrangements, possibly through the appropriate diplomatic representation, to seek representation for the person who has had allegations made against them.

10.0 Legislation

When handling child abuse complaints, CRIDOC will take into account the relevant legislation in Malawi (including the Child Care, Protection and Justice Act, No. 22 of 2010) in which the alleged incident took place.

11.0 Training

CRIDOC is committed to educating staff and others on the Child Protection Policy, how to reduce risks and create child safe environments. As part of its child protection training, CRIDOC will:

- Provide comprehensive written documents on CRIDOC's Child Protection Policy to all new staff/partners;
- Incorporate extensive information on the institution's Child Protection Policy in the briefing procedures for new staff;
- Provide child protection training for staff assigned in projects where they will work directly with children.

Annex 1 - Code of Conduct

While implementing its projects and activities, CRIDOC staff and partners will:

- treat children with respect regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status;
- Not use language or behaviour towards children that is inappropriate, harassing, abusive, sexually provocative, demeaning or culturally inappropriate;
- Not engage children in any form of sexual activity or acts, including paying for sexual services or acts where, under the law(s) applicable to the child, the child is below the age of consent or the act(s) are an offence under relevant laws;
- Wherever possible, ensure that another adult is present when working in the proximity of children;
- Not invite unaccompanied children into my home without the permission of their parent/guardian, unless they are at immediate risk of injury or in physical danger;
- Not sleep close to unsupervised children unless absolutely necessary, in which case I must obtain my supervisor's permission, and ensure that another adult is present if possible;
- use any computers, mobile phones, or video and digital cameras appropriately, and never exploit or harass children or access child pornography through any medium (see also 'Use of children's images for work-related purposes');
- Refrain from physical punishment or discipline of children
- Refrain from hiring children for domestic or other labour which is inappropriate given their age or developmental stage, which interferes with their time available for education and recreational activities, or which places them at significant risk of injury
- Comply with all relevant local legislation, including labour laws in relation to child labour; and
- Immediately report concerns or allegations of child abuse in accordance with appropriate procedures.

Use of children's images for work-related purposes

When photographing or filming a child for work-related purposes, CRIDOC staff and partners must:

- Before photographing or filming a child, assess and endeavour to comply with local traditions or restrictions for reproducing personal images;
- Before photographing or filming a child, obtain consent from the child or a parent or guardian of the child. As part of this I must explain how the photograph or film will be used;
- Ensure photographs, films, videos and DVDs present children in a dignified and respectful manner and not in a vulnerable or submissive manner. Children should be adequately clothed and not in poses that could be seen as sexually suggestive;
- Ensure images are honest representations of the context and the facts; and
- Ensure file labels do not reveal identifying information about a child when sending images electronically.

CRIDOC staff and partners will use common sense to avoid actions or behaviours that could be construed as child abuse, and will report any suspected cases of child abuse to CRIDOC when implementing the institution's projects and activities.

Annex 2 – Forms of Child Abuse

Information Sheet – Forms of Child Abuse

Child abuse can occur in a variety of forms, be it physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect or bullying.

Physical abuse

“Physical abuse occurs when a person purposefully injures or threatens to injure a child or young person. This may take the form of slapping, punching, shaking, kicking, burning, shoving or grabbing. The injury may take the form of bruises, cuts, burns, or fractures” (Child Wise, 2008).

Emotional abuse

“Emotional abuse is a persistent attack on a child or young person’s self esteem. It can take the form of name-calling, threatening, ridiculing, intimidating the child or young person” (Child Wise, 2008). A child may also be subject to emotional trauma or abuse if they are forced to, or inadvertently become a witness to domestic violence. Where this occurs deliberately it is a form of abuse.

Neglect

“Neglect is the failure to provide the child with the basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, shelter and supervision to the extent that the child’s health and development are at risk” (Child Wise, 2008).

Sexual abuse

“Sexual abuse is the actual or likely sexual exploitation of a child. Sexual abuse includes rape, incest and all forms of sexual activity involving children, including exposing children to, or taking, pornographic photographs” or other media/materials (Child Wise, 2008).

Child sexual abuse damages children physically, emotionally and behaviourally. Its initial effects and long-term consequences impact on the individual, on their family and on the community.

Initial effects of child sexual abuse may include:

- Medical problems such as sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy and physical injury;
- Emotional problems such as guilt, anger, hostility, anxiety, fear, shame, lowered self esteem;
- Behavioural problems such as aggression, delinquency, nightmares, phobias, eating and sleeping disorders; and
- School problems and truancy.

Long-term consequences may include:

- Sexual dysfunction (such as flashbacks, difficulty in arousal, avoidance of, or phobic reactions to sexual intimacy);
- Promiscuity;
- Prostitution;
- Discomfort in intimate relationships;
- Isolation;
- Marital problems;
- Low self esteem;
- Depression; and
- Mental health problems;

Annex 3 – Recognising the signs

Information Sheet – Recognising the signs

Who is most likely to abuse a child?

- Someone who is known to the child.
- Someone who the child trusts.
- Someone who the family trusts, i.e. not a stranger.
- Someone who has access to the child.
- Someone who has themselves experienced abuse as a child. (Abel and Osborne 1988)

How to recognise abuse

Listed below are a number of indicators of abuse; however, they may vary by cultural and economic context. It should be noted that this list is not exhaustive but is a guideline to help establish whether some form of child abuse or exploitation has taken place.

Emotional signs of abuse:

- Sudden under achievement or lack of concentration;
- Inappropriate relationships with peers and/or adults;
- Changes or regression in mood or behaviour, particularly where a child withdraws or becomes clinging;
- Depression or extreme anxiety;
- Nervousness, frozen watchfulness;
- Obsessions or phobias;
- Persistent tiredness;
- Running away/stealing/lying.

Indicators of possible physical abuse:

- Any injury inconsistent with explanation given to them;
- Injuries to the body in places not normally exposed to falls, rough games, etc;
- Reluctance to change for, or participate in, games;
- Repeated urinary infections or unexplained tummy pains;
- Bruises, bites, burns, fracture, etc, which do not have a reasonable explanation;
- Infections and/or symptoms of sexually transmitted diseases;
- General bruises, scratches or other injuries not consistent with accidental injury.

Indicators of possible sexual abuse:

- Any allegations made by a child concerning abuse;
- Excessive preoccupation with sexual matters and detailed knowledge of adult sexual behaviour, or engaging in age in-appropriate sexual play;
- Sexually provocative or seductive with adults;
- Sudden changes in mood or behaviour;
- Open displays of sexuality;
- Lack of trust in familiar adults; fear of strangers;
- General bruises, scratches or other injuries not consistent with accidental injury;
- Acting-out behaviour – aggression, lying, stealing, unexplained running away, drug and alcohol abuse, suicide attempts.

Indicators of possible neglect:

- Frequent lateness or non-attendance at school;
- Inadequate care.

How child sex offenders choose and “groom” children.

Child sexual abuse is different from other forms of abuse that children may experience in that it is usually premeditated. Sexual offending is not a random act; it is frequently carefully thought out and well planned. Offenders will take time to groom their victim. This appears to have two elements: choosing a victim that appeals to the offender, and picking someone the offender believes he/she can safely victimise.

What follows is a process called “grooming”. This process means that the offender will manipulate people and situations in order to gain and maintain access to their victim/s. Some sex offenders work alone; others operate in a network.

Grooming is an insidious process; it is a dual process of:

- a) Building a trusting relationship with the child and his/her carers; and
- b) Isolating the child in order to abuse them.

Grooming occurs before the sex offence in order to access the child and after the offence in order to:

- a) Maintain access to the child; and
- b) Ensure the child’s silence, and the carer/adults continued trust.

Why don’t children tell?

Sex offenders frequently justify their behaviour long after the fact by saying that the victim didn’t say no. The assumption that children will resist the abuse, preferably violently, is based both on ignorance about the power relationship between adults and children and an underestimation of the skilfulness of offenders.

A number of barriers to children speaking out and revealing abuse have been identified.

Children do not speak out because they:

- Are scared;
- Think they are to blame;
- Think they are strange in some way;
- Do not want the abuser to get into trouble;
- Feel embarrassed;
- Feel guilty;
- Feel alone.