



POVERTY REDUCTION FORUM TRUST

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

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1.0.INTRODUCTION

1.1.Policy Statement

As a development organisation committed to the reduction of poverty, the Poverty Reduction Forum Trust (PRFT), works with various institutions, communities and families, as such children are an integral part to its endeavours to bringing about holistic transformation. This Child Protection Policy and together with the Child Safeguarding Policy emanates from PRFT's overarching commitment to protecting all those, especially boys and girls, who in certain contexts are vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and harm during PRFT's implementation of its programme and project activities. Like any other organization that sometimes, but not always, comes into contact with children, PRFT has a moral and legal obligation to protect them while recognising the legal guidelines governing child protection in each jurisdiction in which PRFT works.

In line with Article 19, of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, PRFT is committed to child protection and achieving the highest level of children's protection, by taking appropriate action, to protect children from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse. PRFT is also committed to promoting the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children (AERWC), which builds on the same basic principles as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, but highlights issues of special importance in the African context. PRFT subscribes to and advocates for the effective implementation of the Africa Union Agenda 2040's aspirations for the African child¹, namely; the establishment of an effective child-friendly national legislative, policy and institutional framework in all Member States (Zimbabwe); Every child's birth and other vital statistics are registered; Every child survives and has a healthy childhood; Every child grows up well-nourished and with access to the basic necessities of life; Every child benefits fully from quality education; Children benefit from a child-sensitive criminal system; Every child is free from the impact of armed conflicts and other disasters or emergency situations; and that African children's views matter. PRFT is committed to working towards the achievement of these aspirations, though the attainment of such standards is largely influenced by factors beyond its control.

PRFT believes that child protection is everyone's responsibility, thus everyone who works with PRFT also shares the responsibility of protecting the children participating in its events and activities. Consequently, PRFT developed this Child Protection Policy, to ensure that PRFT promotes the best child protection practices and upholds child protection in its community work in Zimbabwe. This policy, therefore, complements and augments PRFT's general Safeguarding policy. PRFT will endeavour to bring all issues pertaining to children safeguarding into the open and deal with them appropriately.

1.2.Child Protection Standards

Child Protection is part of PRFT safeguarding policy guided by the following three PRFT core values:

Dignity: The organisation views the world through lens of personal dignity and confront poverty as an affront to dignity at personal, family, community and national level.

¹ See details on https://au.int/sites/default/files/newsevents/agendas/africas_agenda_for_children-english.pdf

Accountability: The organisation is committed to regularly evaluating the impact of its actions, reflecting on progress, adjusting, improving and fostering accountability.

Commitment: The organisation's work is driven by a strong commitment towards attaining the vision while operating with integrity.

Through these values there is a clear acknowledgement in PRFT that children's rights are as important as other human rights. Child abuse is not acceptable. Children should therefore be protected from all forms of abuse and exploitation regardless of their sex, gender, age, religion, social background, disability and other variables not mentioned here.

In line with its core values, PRFT commits to protect children from abuse through the following:




- (a) *Prevention* by putting in place measures that minimize risk and create a safe working environment.
- (b) *Awareness raising and education* of both PRFT representatives, third parties and beneficiary communities.
- (c) *Responding to allegations*, suspicions and complaints.
- (d) *Working with other stakeholders* to investigate, seek support and advice on reported incidents.
- (e) *Involving children* through allowing them to air their views, concerns, and letting their voice be heard in matters that concern them.

1.3.Purpose

Like the generic safeguarding policy document, this PRFT child protection policy does not seek to replace existing PRFT policies, but rather to primarily prevent the occurrence of child abuse in the implementation of PRFT activities. The purpose of this policy is thus to bring to the open and deal appropriately with child abuse cases. Secondly, the policy seeks to acknowledge that as an organization, PRFT is aware of child abuse and is taking measures to create an environment where staff and children are empowered to feel safe, speak out and are listened to. Without a child protection policy, chances are that the organization can be brought to disrepute through false accusations and fabricated cases. The presence of a policy document gives confidence to government, donors and other key stakeholders that with PRFT, children are safe and protected. The safety and welfare of children is of paramount importance to PRFT.

PRFT has a duty to protect children that comes into contact with its work or representatives. PRFT challenges all forms of poverty, inequalities and abuses that hinder children from realizing their full potential. The policy will ensure that the organization contracts suitable and best possible staff or third parties to work with children. It is hoped that through this policy and its required standards of operation, unsuitable candidates are deterred from applying or getting recruited in the organization. The policy also clarifies PRFT response to, and management of child abuse.

This policy has three specific objectives:

-  Keeping children safe from child abuse.
-  Ensuring high standards of behaviour from our staff and representatives and thereby free the organization from the risk of shielding perpetrators of child abuse.
-  Protection of the reputation of PRFT through ensuring a clear operating environment free from false accusations and allegations.

1.4.Scope

PRFT does not usually work directly with children but there are some programmes and project activities where interaction with children is considered obligatory and unavoidable. PRFT research, advocacy, and work with organizations such as UNICEF and partnership with child-related line ministries such as the Ministry of Health and Child Care on initiatives such as educational campaigns and child friendly budgets require that staff and representatives of PRFT be trained and acquainted with the PRFT child protection policy, code of conduct, and relevant procedures.

This Child Protection Policy applies to all PRFT representatives (staff, board, consultants, interns, and service providers), who should in dealing with children conduct themselves in courtesy, respect and integrity, in a way that does not bring the organization into disrepute. This kind of behaviour should be demonstrated at all times and at all places- at work, outside work, and while on leave. PRFT representatives are expected to treat all children with respect, to actively prevent all forms of harassment, abuse, and exploitation, and to ensure our programs do no harm to the communities in which we work. PRFT is committed to work only with organizations/entities—partners, suppliers and service providers, including consultants—who are equally committed to the dignity of children and equally vigilant about preventing and addressing child abuse and exploitation.

1.5.Defining Child Abuse and Related Terminology

Within this policy the following definitions will apply:

Child: PRFT considers a child or young person to be under the age of 18 years.

Child Abuse: Child abuse is the improper use or treatment of a child causing harm, damage, offence or distress. This can be emotional, physical or sexual.

Emotional abuse where harm is done by persistent or severe emotional ill treatment or rejection, such as degrading punishment, threats and not giving care and affection, resulting in adverse effects on behaviour and emotional developments of a child.

Physical abuse or physical injury, such as evidence of hitting, kicking, pinching or shaking where there is definite knowledge or reasonable suspicion that the injury was inflicted knowingly and was not prevented. This includes the use of physical force.

Sexual abuse occurs if a child is forced or manipulated to take part in any kind of sexual activity. This includes actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions. All sexual activity with a child is considered sexual abuse.

Sexual activity: Sexual activity that may occur between an individual and a child under the age of 18, even though it may be consenting or the individual was unaware of the youth's age is not acceptable in any circumstance, irrespective of the age of consent

Neglect refers to the persistent failure to meet a child's physical and /or psychological needs. It can be defined in terms of an omission, where the child suffers significant harm or impairment of development by being deprived of food, clothing, warmth, hygiene, intellectual stimulation, supervision and safety, attachment to and affection from adults, and the failure to access appropriate medical care or treatment

2.0. PREVENTION

Further to guidelines laid out in the PRFT safeguarding policy, a number of child protection procedures were put in place to create a children-safe working environment through appropriate staff recruitment and induction, trainings on child safeguarding issues, laying out clear procedures and processes to be followed in handling allegations, complaints and suspicions regarding child protection, and ensuring that all partnerships and collaborations in the course of carrying out PRFT work are compliant to child protection. Some of the preventive measures are discussed here below:

2.1. Recruitment and Induction

PRFT will ensure that all prospective employees and service providers (consultants, interns, volunteers) and other third parties are acquainted with its child protection policy. The following are some of the ways this will be carried out:

- (a) All *job vacancies and other work opportunities/service provision* to PRFT will include reference to child protection policy and screening.
- (b) The interview panel will reinforce the need to be *committed to uphold the child protection policy* and procedures in place.
- (c) All staff and individuals being hired to provide services to PRFT (which may include consultancy, internship, voluntary work and others) will undergo *a thorough and standardized contracting process* to check on the prospective candidates' suitability to work with children, their past records of working with children, which include background checks, especially checking if they have any unacceptable behaviour towards children, child abuse or criminal records.
- (d) *Police clearance*: Prior to assuming duty at PRFT, new staff members will be required to obtain a Zimbabwe Republic Police clearance certificate. This will notify PRFT whether they have any criminal convictions or pending prosecutions.
- (e) PRFT will check on prospective staff or third parties *use of information and technology (IT) especially social media*. This is done to ensure that those hired by PRFT are able to listen to and respect children's rights. This is irrespective of whether they will have direct or indirect contact with children in the execution of their duties.
- (f) PRFT will ensure that all those hired by PRFT are made aware of PRFT's child protection policy, procedures and reporting channels. A declaration form to acknowledge the completion of this process must be signed together with the contract or memorandum of Agreement. [see annex A]

2.2. Policy Reviews and Trainings

This Child Protection policy together with related policy documents will be updated once in every two years. Accordingly, staff trainings and refresher courses on child protection and appropriate behaviour will be conducted once in every two years.

- (a) PRFT management is expected to demonstrate leadership in child protection and act as role models. PRFT will ensure that the Executive Director, the Human Resources Manager and the Board Chairperson are provided *adequate training to manage allegations and suspicions of child abuse* within the organization.
- (b) PRFT will also provide *learning and awareness opportunities for children* to understand child protection issues. This will include relevant orientation of getting children to know how to protect themselves, what behaviour they should expect from PRFT staff and representatives, to know when and whom to speak to when they feel they have been abused.

- (c) Child protection issues will be incorporated in all internal and external mid-term reviews/ end of program/projects evaluations as well as organizational evaluations.
- (d) PRFT will ensure that all donors, supporters, partners, service providers of PRFT work and the media are *aware of the existence of its child protection policy*. Some of the ways of doing this includes, but not limited to:
 - (i) Displaying of child protection policy commitment statement in our offices and other public spaces
 - (ii) Posting of the child protection policy on our website
 - (iii) Training our community programme participants on child protection policy issues.
- (e) PRFT will set aside a *budget annually* to ensure that this child protection policy is implemented.

2.3. Communication and Awareness Raising

2.2.1. *Acquaintance with Child Protection Policy and Procedures*

Within two months of assuming duty in the organization, all PRFT staff should be trained by the Executive Director and/or Human Resources Manager on how to handle child protection incidents- the reporting procedure, processes, where to get advice, support and where to refer matters in cases of child abuse. Deliberate efforts, actions and activities will be conducted aiming at ensuring that children that PRFT staff come in contact with when discharging their duties are aware of how to protect themselves, the existing policies and procedures within PRFT.

2.2.2. *Special Sessions for staff working directly with children.* There will be specialized briefings for staff dealing with communications/press briefings and those that are deployed to work on specific children related assignments.

2.2.3. *Information sharing:*

(a) PRFT will share its child protection knowledge with communities and other stakeholders it works with.

(b) *Continuous staff refresher courses* on the child protection policy is done at quarterly staff review meetings.

2.4. Child Protection obligations:

Any staff member, or representative/third party (consultant, interns, volunteers, programme participant, contracted person and service provider, or a child) who becomes aware of an incident or an allegation of child abuse has a mandatory duty to report this immediately. A reporting form may be used –[see Annex B]. The reporting form covers key issues that should be included in a complete child abuse incident report.

2.4.1. *Publications and website:* Out of respect for the dignity and privacy of children, PRFT will ensure that its publications and website do not carry degrading images of children.

2.4.2. *Informed consent:* PRFT will ensure that children's rights are respected and the concept of informed consent regarding what information and images related to children will be published by media is done with the children's consent.

2.4.3 *Whistle Blowing*

The PRFT whistle blowing facility is meant to curb child abuse by PRFT staff, representatives or service providers. PRFT board and staff will inform those that come into contact with PRFT work about this facility. All parties with concerns or complains are encouraged to contact one of the following; the Board Chair, the Executive Director or the Human Resources Manager.

2.4.4. The PRFT whistle blowing facility is administered by the Board Chair, who will sanitize all reports to ensure that they exclude names of the informants, and any other information that may put the whistle blower at risk. The PRFT Safeguarding Committee shall evaluate the report and institute a preliminary inquiry within seven working days of receipt of the report. If the report is inadmissible due to lack of sufficient information and evidence the whistle blower will be informed accordingly. If admissible, further investigations are instituted and appropriate disciplinary action is taken and the whistle blower will be informed accordingly.

3.0. DUTY TO REPORT

The organization's flow chart for reporting cases of child abuse internally and externally with names and contacts of responsible persons will for transparency and accountability purposes be shared or displayed for ease reference by staff and victims or relatives of victims of child abuse.

3.1. Staff Members

Staff members who have a complaint or concern relating to child abuse should report it immediately to their line manager, the Human Resources Manager or the Executive Director (the safeguarding focal person). If the staff member, for whatever reason, does not feel comfortable reporting to any of the three aforementioned they may report directly to the Board Chairperson.

3.2. Abused Children

Any child or person who have a complaint or concern relating child abuse by a member of the PRFT staff or representatives should file their complaints directly to the Executive Director or Board Chairperson. This can be done by either writing or phoning. Reporting procedures will include contact details of the Board Chairperson and Executive Director.

3.3. Safeguarding Committee

PRFT has a safeguarding committee of 4 persons, which works together with the Safeguarding Focal Person and Board Chairperson. Other members of the committee are the deputy Board Chairperson and the Board Member responsible for Legal advice. The committee will from time to time incorporate the Human Resources Manager, other individuals and institutions depending on the nature of the child safeguarding matter at hand and the need for thorough investigations that may require specialized assistance.

3.4. Investigation of Reported Cases

PRFT retains the right to suspend the alleged staff member (s) during the investigation of a child protection incident. All reports and information will be handled with strict confidentiality to protect the identity of those concerned, implicated, the informer or the victim(s).

3.5. Ramifications for Misconduct:

Any violation of the code of conduct will result in disciplinary action, legal action or dismissal depending on the gravity of the issues under consideration.

3.5.1. If an employee or representative is dismissed on the grounds of an approved case of child abuse, PRFT will inform him/her, disclose this to prospective employers or refuse to offer recommendations, depending with the nature of the case.

3.5.2. If a partner organization/service provider is proved to be engaging in activities that contradict the child protection policy of PRFT, appropriate action will be taken, which may include the termination of partnership or service agreement.

4.0. CODE OF CONDUCT

PRFT expects its staff and representatives to adhere to its Code of Conduct and all of its related policies and procedures in carrying out its assignments and activities. The code of conduct, which outlines appropriate standards of behaviour that must be adhered to by PRFT employees and representatives, is part of this Child Protection policy. All employees are expected to understand, sign and abide by the outlined acceptable behaviour, which includes keeping children safe from abuse. The code of conduct is applied both within and outside working hours. Those that represent PRFT should be properly informed of procedures to report and manage incidents that occur in their execution of duty.

The following Child Protection issues are important as part of the code of conduct for staff and representatives to observe:

4.1. All staff are expected to *work actively to the best interest of children*, respecting their physical and mental integrity, especially in events that require them to be mixed with adults.

4.2. Engage communities and children in such a way that they feel *secure and safe* to register their complaints, suspicions or allegations with PRFT.

4.3. *Exercise caution* when working with children, avoid situations that may upset or traumatize them or simply refrain from behaviour that is likely to cause abuse and neglect of children.

4.4. Use *Information technology* in a responsible and accountable manner. Avoid surfing pornography sites at work and exposing children to such.

4.5. Abuse may be current, recent or historical. There are *no time constraints for reporting* and taking action within each procedure.

4.6. *Never encourage* a child to do *something harmful* to himself/herself

4.7. The use of threats or *physical discipline/assaults* to a child is not permissible.

4.8. Inappropriate comments on *a child's religious beliefs* is not allowed.

4.9. The use of *sexually provocative language or images* when working with children is not allowed

4.10. *Confidentiality*: Confidential information that may come to one's attention during the course of service with PRFT should not be disclosed to third parties. All PRFT representatives should not make public statements or publish material prejudicial to the interest of PRFT or its partners. Overall, a sense of mutual trust should underlie work in which PRFT and yourself engage together.

5.0. ANNEXES

ANNEX A: CHILD PROTECTION POLICY DISCLAIMER FOR THIRD PARTIES

(This disclaimer should be completed and signed by volunteers, consultants and anyone working with or assisting PRFT who are carrying out activities that directly involve working with children).

Name: _____ **Tel Number:** _____

Address: _____

Event Location: _____ **Event Date:** _____

I certify that nothing in my personal or professional background precludes me from working with children. I confirm that I have read, understand and agree to accept and abide by PRFT's Code of Behaviour when assisting PRFT staff to carry out the above event for the assigned duration.

Signed: _____ Signed: _____ Volunteer / Consultant /
Assistant

On behalf of PRFT

Date: _____ Date: _____

Received by HR: _____ Date: _____

ANNEX B: CHILD PROTECTION REPORTING FORM

This reporting form should ONLY be used when you suspect or have heard or witnessed a child abuse case within the context of PRFT.

1. **Report on Staff members** [This must be reported to the Human Resources Manager or the Executive Director. In cases where the two aforementioned are implicated, or for other reasons, staff can directly report to the Board Chairperson- not using this form]
2. **Report on those outside PRFT** staff, and representatives and activities outside PRFT coordination should be discussed as a way of consultation with the PRFT Director. That is, child protection issues that arise within partner organizations, community beneficiaries and families that works with PRFT.

1. Name of person Reporting
2. Date of Reporting
3. Your Job title.....
4. Your Relationship to the Child.....
5. Your Contact Details.....
6. First Name & Surname of the Child
7. Age of the Child.....
8. Gender of the Child
9. Address and contact of the child.....
10. Full names of Child's Guardian.....
11. Contact details of the Child's Guardian.....
12. How you came to know about the incident/abuse (Tick the most applicable)
 - A. Direct Observation
 - B. Suspicion
 - C. Told by another Person
 - D. Other

13. Detailed description of the incident/ alleged abuse:

.....

.....

.....

14. Name of alleged perpetrator

15. Job title of the alleged perpetrator

16. Relationship of alleged perpetrator to the Child

.....

17. Date of the incident/ alleged Abuse

18. Location of the incident/ alleged Abuse.....

19. Who else was involved in the incident/ alleged Abuse

.....

.....

.....

20. Nature of the incident /alleged abuse as explained by the Child

21. Your observation of the child (visible marks, injuries, etc)

.....

.....

.....

22. PRFT Persons Informed

(i) Full names, Position and contact Numbers

.....
.....

(ii) Full names, Position and contact Numbers

.....
.....

23. A. Contact with Police (Tick the applicable) Yes No
 B. Full names, Position and contact Numbers

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