

FIOM Rwanda Child Protection Policy

February 2012

Introduction

FIOM Rwandan is a non-governmental organisation based in Rwanda. FIOM Rwanda works to assist and provide a voice for at-risk youth, women and other vulnerable populations to ensure their social, economic and cultural well-being; and to provide hope and confidence to these groups by encouraging their active involvement in the development of Rwanda.

The majority of FIOM Rwanda's work is with vulnerable people – men, women, children, victims of abuse, orphans, the very poor or those suffering from HIV/AIDS. It is essential that the beneficiaries of FIOM Rwanda's activities have full trust and confidence in the organisation, and FIOM Rwanda's work is always in their best interests.

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This Child Protection Policy is a statement of intent that demonstrates a commitment to safeguard children from harm and makes clear to all what is required in relation to the protection of children. It helps to create a safe and positive environment for children and to show that the FIOM Rwanda takes seriously the duty of care it has towards the children it works with.
- 1.2. This policy provides three levels of protection:
 - First and foremost, it will offer complete protection for children and minimise the risk of abuse or exploitation
 - It will protect FIOM Rwanda staff by providing clear guidance regarding their behaviour and what to do if they suspect inappropriate behaviour around children on the part of others
 - It will protect FIOM Rwanda by making clear that the organisation is committed to safeguarding children

2. Principles for the protection of children

- 2.1. The FIOM Rwanda Child Protection Policy takes as its foundation a set of principles that are derived from the *UN Convention on the Rights of a Child*:
 - All children have equal rights to protection from abuse and exploitation
 - All children should be encouraged to fulfil their potential and inequalities should be challenged
 - Everybody has a responsibility to support the care and protection of children
 - FIOM Rwanda has a duty of care to children with whom they work
- 2.2. In the Rwandan context, this Child Protection Policy is also informed by the procedures and guidelines set forth by the Ministry of Gender Promotion and Family (MIGEPROF) in the document *National Integrated Child Right Policy*:

http://www.migeprof.gov.rw/IMG/pdf/INTEGRATED_CHILD_RIGHTS_POLICY-2.pdf

- Every child matters
- Every action by Government and non-government parties should be preceded by an assessment of its impact on children
- Children can and should participate in matters directly and indirectly affecting them
- Physical or sexual abuse, exploitation, torture, cruelty and corporal punishment against children is intolerable. Discrimination and stigmatisation against children based on their gender, socio-economic status, disability, HIV/AIDS status, etc. must be prevented. Children should be protected in their homes, be it with or without parents; in schools, in communities; in their place of work; in institutions; on the streets - wherever they may be.
- the government and those with a duty of care towards children must be accountable for protecting and promoting the rights of children.

2.3. FIOM Rwanda fully supports these principles.

2.4. The Government plans to put in place a national child protection system – a monitoring system that includes mechanisms for data management, formal reporting, referral and a child protection response. FIOM Rwanda will work with this system where appropriate.

3. The Child protection policy

3.1. The FIOM Rwanda Child Protection Policy has been approved by the Board and General Assembly of the organisation, and is part of the statutes governing the actions of FIOM Rwanda.

3.2. The welfare of the child is paramount. All children have the right to protection from abuse regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or beliefs.

3.3. The FIOM Rwanda Child Protection Policy applies to all staff and board members and anyone working on behalf of FIOM Rwanda. It also applies to community beneficiaries that have assumed local leadership roles in any of FIOM's activities.

3.4. This policy forms part of FIOM Rwanda's statutes of governance. It will be available on the website of FIOM Rwanda: <http://www.fiom.org>

Children and parents will be informed (for example, at the commencement of a project or set of activities) of the existence of the policy and how to raise a concern.

3.5. All concerns, allegations or complaints regarding child abuse will be taken seriously by FIOM Rwanda and responded to appropriately. This may involve referral to the MIGEPROF national child protection system.

- 3.6. This policy will be reviewed as a minimum every 3 years, or it will be adapted whenever there is a significant change in the organisation or in relevant legislation in Rwanda.

4. Procedure for addressing child protection issues

- 4.1. The Legal Representative of Fiom Rwanda is responsible for ensuring that these procedures are followed, and that the principles of child protection outlined in this document are adhered to. If the Legal Representative is unavailable, or involved in any issues of concern relating to child protection, then their responsibility with regard these procedures will pass to a members of the Board of Fiom Rwanda.
- 4.2. The procedures outlined in this policy are to be followed in response to any of the circumstances set out below:
- a child who says either they or another child is/are being abused
 - allegations of abuse against a member of staff or other person
 - concerns about a child's welfare where there is no specific disclosure/allegation
- 4.3. Where these circumstances arise they are to be formally recorded by the Legal Representative in a secure and confidential manner.
- 4.4. The Legal Representative will support all children, staff or other adults who raise concerns or who are the subject of concerns.
- 4.5. When concerns are raised, the Legal Representative will have a duty to investigate these concerns. This may include interviewing the affected child or children, any staff member implicated in the issue, other staff who may be able to provide further information, or local beneficiaries/citizens who may be able to provide further information. These interviews and the whole investigation must be confidential. The investigation will seek to determine whether Fiom Rwanda's Code of Conduct has been broken.
- 4.6. The guiding principle of the investigation will be '*the best interests of the child*'. The views and wishes of children will be listened to and taken seriously. Account will be taken of the vulnerabilities of children, for example disabled children who are at increased risk of abuse, or the very young who are dependent on adults or older children.
- 4.7. Following the investigation, the Legal Representative will take all appropriate steps to ensure the protection of the children who are the subject of concerns. Where the Code of Conduct has been broken, this may result in disciplinary procedures against the staff concerned. If it is appropriate, the concerns will also be passed to the MIGEPROF national child protection system.
- 4.8. Where concerns have been raised that children are being abused in the local community, the Legal Representative will discuss these concerns with the local authorities and MIGEPROF if appropriate. As part of its activities in local communities, all Fiom Rwanda staff will seek to educate beneficiaries about the importance and principles of child

protection, and will take all possible steps to ensure the protection of children and reduce any behaviour that may lead to child abuse.

5. The prevention of child abuse

- 5.1. Strong recruitment procedures will help minimise the possibility of child abuse occurring. FIOM Rwanda's selection and vetting process will seek two appropriate references and evidence of identity. Potential staff will be required to complete a self-declaration form about any previous convictions or concerns relating to child abuse.
- 5.2. All FIOM Rwanda staff will sign and abide by the Code of Conduct.
- 5.3. The induction of new staff will involve a briefing on child protection issues and the FIOM Rwanda Child Protection Policy, while existing staff will receive training on the policy.
- 5.4. Where FIOM Rwanda's activities directly involve children, consideration will be given to child protection issues during the planning and implementation of these activities.

6. Code of conduct

- 6.1. All FIOM Rwanda staff and anyone else to whom this policy applies must sign up to and abide by this Code of Conduct. The underlying principle of this Code is that FIOM Rwanda staff should avoid actions or behaviour which could be viewed as potentially abusive.
- 6.2. Staff must be aware that breaking the Code of Conduct may lead to disciplinary procedures.
- 6.3. Staff and others must never:
 - hit or otherwise physically assault or physically abuse children
 - develop physical/sexual relationships with children
 - develop relationships with children which could in any way be deemed exploitative or abusive
 - act in ways that may be abusive or may place a child at risk of abuse
 - use language, make suggestions or offer advice which is inappropriate, offensive or abusive
 - behave physically in a manner which is inappropriate or sexually provocative
 - sleep in the same bed as a child with whom they are working
 - do things for children of a personal nature that they can do for themselves
 - act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children, or otherwise perpetrate any form of emotional abuse
 - discriminate against, show differential treatment, or favour particular children to the exclusion of others.
- 6.4. It is important for all staff and others in contact with children to:
 - be aware of situations which may present risks and manage these
 - plan and organise work to minimise risks
 - ensure that a culture of openness exists to enable any concerns to be raised

- ensure that a sense of accountability exists between staff so that potentially abusive behaviour does not go unchallenged
- empower children - discuss with them their rights, what is acceptable and unacceptable, and what they can do if there is a problem.