

Child Protection Policy

Child Protection Policy



NGO FORUM
FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

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Foreword

Children are the greatest asset of a country. All children have the right to be protected from violence, exploitation and abuse, and enjoy their regular rights. Upholding the commitment to improve the status of children of the country, Bangladesh has signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and many other related treaties and conventions. The country has also developed National Plan of Action for Children. But still it is not possible for the government to ensure child protection through ensuring child rights, if every government and non governmental organizations who works for children does not incorporate child protection issues into their organizational values and programmes. It is also necessary to ensure all the organizations working with the children to have a policy that will show zero tolerance regarding child abuse by its staff.

The Child Protection Policy of NGO Forum provides a framework for providing facilities and services to the children regarding safe WatSan, hygiene, health care and environmental rights. It is also formulated for managing and reducing risks of child abuse by persons engaged in organizational activities and shown zero tolerance to the guilty party.

I would like to thank all the concerned individuals, who have given their opinion, suggestions and efforts to develop the Policy. I hope this Policy will help NGO Forum to contribute in promotion of child protection in its working areas. I strongly believe that all the staff of NGO Forum and its PNGOs will work with an intention to ensure betterment of the children and create a child-friendly working environment within the organization in line with this Policy.

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Rational for NGO Forum's Child Protection Policy

Children are unable to protect themselves and demand their rights by their own. They are even too young to understand the meaning of human rights. Being fully depended on the society to be protected from any type of physical, mental neglect and violence including sexual abuse, have turned them to be the most vulnerable inhabitant of the society. It is the duty of the government and in turn, all concerned to ensure that children of a country are protected. In Bangladesh, major portion of population are children, 46% of whom are poor. Despite of signing in different international treaties and conventions and adopting National Plan of Action for Children to ensure child rights, children from all socio-economic backgrounds, across all ages, religions and cultures are still not free from suffering from violence, exploitation and abuse everyday in the country.

NGO Forum is a national networking and service delivery organization in the arena of WatSan, health and environment dedicated to contribute to the improvement of Public Health situation, especially for the poor, marginalized and excluded segment of the society of Bangladesh. From its long experience, the organization has found that children of the country are deprived of any activity or initiative designed to protect them from any form of harm particularly arising from neglect or child abuse regarding the improvement of Public Health situation. Though some policies and initiatives are taken by the government, but these are very few in number and not enough to give full protection to the children and ensuring child rights. In Bangladesh early marriage is considered as a big concern regarding the health and security of female children. It is observed that because of lack of water, sanitation facilities and proper hygiene practices young girl children are suffering from different type of diseases. As they get married in the early age, in pregnancy period the mother and the child have to face life risk. In most of the cases, they give birth to children with malnutrition who remain infected with different diseases throughout its childhood. On the contrary, children with disability of the country are living in most deprivation. There is no specific policy for them. Very few initiatives are taken to ensure their safe access to WatSan, health and hygiene facilities. They are always in health risk and are most vulnerable to the risk of being abused.

Currently Bangladesh is facing a big anxiety named climate change. As because of climate change and drastic environmental degradation natural disasters like cyclone, tidal surge, and massive flood are occurring frequently. Consequently, number of children without paternal care or in family separation in emergency is increasing. As a result child abuse especially gender based violence in emergency is rising. In most of the cases physical and mental harassments happens in the cyclone/flood shelters or in other open places where people take shelter during emergency. And the distressing part is, most of the incidents take place while defecating or bathing in an unsecured place. In urban areas, children are working in hazardous situation without any water, sanitation, health and hygiene facilities. There they are also facing risk of physical and mental abuse. Children living in street and slums are deprived of any type of WatSan and hygiene facilities. Awareness level regarding health is zero here. They are suffering from different water-borne diseases and growing-up as unhealthy citizen of the country. Issues like environmental pollution, lack of proper waste management facilities, declining of ground water level, etc are turning the situation more critical and unliveable in near future. Unfortunately there are some people who are taking the advantage of the vulnerability of these children while working with them.

Being an adaptive learning and rights-based organization, NGO Forum is committed to contribute in the promotion of Public Health and sound environment for the children of the country. The organization is dedicated to provide facilities and services to them in safe WatSan, hygiene, health care and environmental issues through ensuring protection while working for them. Keeping this focus the organization has developed a Child Protection Policy to ensure justice for children, providing them with psychosocial support & well-being and prevent mental and sexual violence against children while working in the sector.

NGO Forum – The Organization

Being launched as the UN-brainchild in 1982, NGO Forum has been involved as the apex networking and service delivery body of NGOs, CBOs and private sector operators in the WatSan sector of Bangladesh. The creation of the Forum was under the burning demand of the time regarding the crisis of water, sanitation and hygiene. Over the years it has been contributing to the improvement of Public Health situation by reducing mortality and morbidity, and conserving sound environment. Since 2011, the Forum has been renamed & recognized as the *NGO Forum for Public Health* and maintaining a perfect balance among its programme components like WaSH, health, environment, rights & governance, etc based on its pioneer role in the Public Health sector, extensive network with diversified partners and its experience in the hard-to-reach & unserved hydrogeological locations of the country in adaptation to climate change.

Vision

Everyone is living quality life in a healthy society

Mission Statement

NGO Forum is a national networking and service delivery organization engaged to promote WaSH, health, governance and climate resilience to contribute to the improvement of public health situation, especially for the poor and hard-to-reach segments of the society.

Being a rights-based organization, NGO Forum utilizes its proven experiences of working as development partner with all concerned government bodies, LGIs and duty bearers, NGOs, CBOs, private sector, civil society, media, national and international agencies, development partners and other stakeholders.

With a competent and decentralized work-force, and strong network, NGO Forum strives to bring an enabling environment by complementing the implementation of all relevant national policies.

Goals

- Contributing to poverty alleviation focusing on social inclusion.
- Ensuring access to safe and sustainable water, environmental sanitation and health care services and facilities.
- Promoting sustainable environment in adaptation to climate change focusing on disaster risk reduction.

Core Values

- Concern for the women, children, poor and hard-to-reach
- People's rights & human dignity
- Gender & equality
- Social inclusion & safety net
- Humanitarian responsiveness
- Green environment
- Good governance
- Networking & partnership

The Child Protection Policy

Vision

Safer communities in sound environment where children are protected from physical, mental neglect and violence including sexual abuse irrespective of race, social background, age, gender, skin colour, disability, religion or beliefs.

Goals

- Contributing to poverty alleviation focusing on reducing child morbidity and mortality rate by ensuring children's access to safe water, environmental sanitation and health care services and facilities.
- Ensuring Children's voice in matters which affect them and giving their views due attention in accordance with their age and maturity with special support for children of hard-to-reach areas in this regard.
- Reducing risk of child abuse associated with accessing to safe WatSan, sound environment and health care services and facilities especially in the hard-to-reach and excluded areas and in disaster period.
- Providing children and young people with appropriate safety and protection whilst in the care of NGO Forum & its PNGOs.
- Allowing all staff /volunteers to be informed and confident to respond to specific child protection issues.

Scope

The policy applies to:

- NGO Forum and its PNGOs as organization.
- NGO Forum staff and all the personnel (paid and unpaid, including all volunteers) of PNGOs as individual.
- The policy implies to all programmes and interventions including humanitarian, development and training activities implemented by NGO Forum and its partner NGOs for normal period as well as during emergencies.
- The Policy will be in effect especially during the emergencies following an extended time period until emergency period if over and normal situation returns.

Guiding Principles

Laws of the **Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)** are considered as NGO Forum's guiding principals:

Non-Discrimination

- Rights are to be enjoyed by all children, irrespective of "... race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status." (Article 2).

- "...a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation..." (Article 23).

Best Interests of the Child

- In all actions, "... the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration." (Article 3).

Survival and Development

- All children has "...the inherent right to life." And state bodies will "...ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child." (Article 6).

Participation

- All children have a right to express views on matters affecting them. (Article 12).
- "The children shall have the right to freedom of expression" (Article 13)

Safeguard

- Measures should be taken "...to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse..." (Article 19).
- Initiatives should be taken "...to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse." (Article 34)

Defining Child Abuse & Child Protection

A child is defined as every human being under the age of 18 years (Ref: UNCRC).

Child protection

An activity or initiative designed to protect children from any form of harm particularly arising from neglect or child abuse.

Child abuse

All forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse. Child abuse generally falls into four categories.

- **Neglect:** Neglect 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, medical care or attachment to and affection from adults. The threshold of significant harm is reached when the child's needs are neglected to the extent that their well-being and/or development are severely affected.

- **Mental/Emotional Abuse:** Actual or likely severe adverse effect on the emotional and behavioural development of a child caused but persistent or severe emotional ill treatment or rejection. May involve conveying to the child that they are worthless, unloved or inadequate and cause children to feel frightened, in danger and corrupted.

- **Physical Abuse:** Actual or likely physical injury to a child, or failure to prevent physical injury, or suffering, to a child, including deliberate hitting, beating, shaking, throwing, burning, drowning, suffocating or poisoning.

- **Sexual Abuse:** Sexual abuse occurs when a child is used by another person for their gratification or sexual arousal, or for that of others.

Child protection issues

NGO Forum and its PNGOs organizationally and individually will deal with the following child protection issues:

- Child labour
- Child marriage
- Children without paternal care
- Children with disability
- Family separation in emergency
- Gender-based violence in emergency
- Justice for children
- Psycho-social support & well-being
- Sexual violence against children

Commitment to Protect Children

To ensure child protection, the organization is committed in two ways:

- **Organizational Commitment** (NGO Forum & PNGOs)
- **Individual Commitment** (staff & PNGO personnel).

Organizational Commitment

- Protecting children with/for whom we work.
- When working through partners, they have a responsibility to meet minimum standards of protection for children in their programmes.
- Working in child-friendly approach. Considering issues like health and security of children while installing WatSan technologies.
- Innovating child-friendly WatSan technologies and giving special consideration to physically disabled and excluded children in this regard.
- Promoting latrine facilities for girl children in the educational institutions.
- Giving physical security of children priority while installing latrine or bathing facilities in cyclone/ flood shelter or other post disaster period shelters.
- Ensuring special post emergency period WatSan, hygiene and health care facilities for the children without paternal care or in separation with family.
- Educating school children on WatSan, health & environment related issues & encouraging them to disseminate the messages among their family & friends.
- Working intensively to prevent water-borne diseases since children become major victim of that.
- Ensuring special awareness programme & treatment facilities for children with Arsenicosis.
- Raising awareness against issues like early marriage, child labour, and gender-based violence in emergency period etc. as these are deeply related with health.

- Not promoting child labour in hardware installation activities. Ensuring that the PNGOs are also not using child labour.
- Not taking or publishing any photograph of a child without his or her permission.

What NGO Forum will do

NGO Forum will meet its commitment to protect children from any form of harm particularly arising from neglect or child abuse through the following means:

Awareness

NGO Forum will ensure that all projects and organizational activities are proceeding by child friendly approach. Also all staff and others are aware of the risks to children specifically about problem of child abuse.

Prevention

NGO Forum will give priority to safety of child in all organizational initiatives and activities. Also through awareness and good practice it will ensure that staff and others minimise the risks to children.

Reporting

NGO Forum will ensure that staff and other concerned are aware about what steps to be taken while concerns arise regarding the safety of children.

Responding

NGO Forum will ensure that action is taken to support and protect children where concerns arise regarding possible abuse.

Individual Commitment

The following dos and don'ts will help clarification of what to do or not to do in individual level and generally raise awareness and help protect oneself of those staff who directly work with children. If anyone has any particular concerns he or she must follow them up with their line manager or a designated person.

It is important for all staff and others in contact with children to-

- treat everyone with respect
- plan activities involving more than one person, or at least which are within sight and hearing of others
- keep in areas with plenty of witnesses
- keep colleagues informed - where you are, with whom, for what purpose
- avoid physical contact where possible
- avoid being in a room alone with a child and if it is unavoidable ensure the child is between you and the door. Use rooms with windows
- ask for further guidance on anything you are unclear about
- feel confident to challenge any behaviour of colleagues that could compromise them

- report any inappropriate behaviour of colleagues to your concerned manager or directly to Child Protection Supervisors
- help create a protective ethos and culture within your working environment and the services the organization provide
- discuss any support or training needs with your manager
- remember you cannot promise confidentiality
- act as if you are always being filmed

Staff and others must never-

- put yourself into a situation that could be misinterpreted or a place that can not be seen
- permit abusive activities
- play overly physical contact games
- have any inappropriate physical or verbal contact with others
- jump to conclusions about others without checking out the facts
- allow yourself to be drawn in to any attention seeking behaviour such as tantrums or crushes
- exaggerate or trivialise child abuse issues
- show favouritism to any individual
- make suggestive remarks or gestures
- lock doors
- encourage or participate in any avoidable out of work situations with children you work with
- establish a relationship with children out of the work situation

What NGO Forum will do to prevent child abuse

Following initiatives will be taken to prevent child abuse:

Child Protection Supervisor

Two child protection supervisors (one male & one female) will be selected for two years from Central Office of NGO Forum under the guidance of Executive Director. One or both of them can be altered before the validity expired (for example, if he/she is supposed to resign, impeached, having mental erosion/disorder, transferred or accused or died, etc) through an official order by the higher management of the organization. The existing supervisor will go on with his/her duties until a new supervisor take over the position. They will be provided with responsibilities of:

- Monitoring the overall activities and take actions to thrust proper implementation, development and dissemination of child protection policy in central & regional level.
- Receiving allegation from central & regional offices
- Investigating, analysing and report writing
- Informing the central management committee about any allegation
- Ensuring punishment of the alleged person
- keeping the following records related to any child protection issue
- Assessing the overall progress of child protection activities

Reporting

It is compulsory for all parties involved in NGO Forum activities, directly or indirectly, to report to the Child Protection Supervisors if there any allegation has been made or any suspicious attitude is shown in accordance with the child behavioural protocols. It can be done through

written form or verbal or telephonic reporting. After any allegation is reported, within 36 hours both supervisors will visit the spot, talk to related persons including the alleged person and the victim. After analysing the circumstances they will make a report.

Reporting medium/tools

- All mediums where privacy is well maintained can be used as reporting tools
- Details of visibility, hearing or suspicions should be described in the report
- Detail explanation on the mode and type of abuse or exploitation

Responding

After analysing the whole incident, if the allegation against any staff is proven Child Protection Supervisors will call an emergency meeting of the NGO Forum Senior Management Team. There the Senior Management Team will ensure the following issues:

- Either the primary investigation on the allegation has been done appropriately or not;
- Either maximum of child interest has been considered or not
- Either the alleged person is informed or not
- Either discriminative attitude is avoided in the policy implementation or not
- Either the child is in a safe place or not
- Either the endeavour has been taken for the safety of victim child and other children after the occurrence of abuse

If the NGO Forum Senior Management Team becomes agreed that the investigation is done properly and the accusation is proven, then they will take-

- Necessary action against the alleged person as per the rule of the organization;
- Necessary action against the alleged person as per the state's child protection law.

If any missing issues are found in the report, the two Supervisors will be given more time as per requirement to go for farther investigation.

Record Keeping

The Child Protection Supervisors will keep the following records related to any child protection issue in a locked filing cabinet. The HR/Admin chief, the Coordinators and the Executive Director are the only officers who have access to these records:

- Any complaints about the safety and welfare of children/young people while working with the NGO Forum
- Any disclosures, concerns or allegations of child abuse
- The follow-up to any complaints, disclosure, concerns or allegations
- Any bullying complaints related to the NGO Forum work with children/young people and the follow up action

Confidentiality

In matters of child abuse, an employee/volunteer should never promise to keep secret, any information which is divulges. It should be explained to the young person that this information cannot be kept secret but only those who need to know, will be told.

It is essential in reporting any case of alleged/suspected abuse that the principle of confidentiality applies. The information should only be shared on a 'need to know' basis and the number of people that need to be informed should be kept to a minimum

Child Protection Policy Review

The Child Protection Policy will be reviewed after every two year. All NGO Forum staff, volunteers and interns shall be briefed accordingly on all and any changes to the Policy and adherence to the policy shall be strictly enforced.

Expected Outcomes of the Child Protection Policy

- All NGO Forum staff will abide by the policy
- All partners will abide by the policy
- All staff and volunteers will have access to a copy of the child protection policy
- Recruitment procedures will include checks on suitability for working with young people
- Induction will include briefing on child protection issues
- Systems will be established by every member to investigate possible abuse once reported and to deal with it