

Discussion paper

D4 - Child protection policy

“The implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is for Terre des hommes as a children’s aid agency an integral part of its own activities. Terre des hommes thus undertakes to be alert to any form of violation of children’s rights in its own working context too, particularly the mistreatment of children. (...) Children are exposed to the danger of mistreatment in many different ways. The mistreatment of a child is to be understood as all that harms the child directly or indirectly or reduces his/her opportunities of developing healthily and safely into an adult. Mistreatment can take the form of physical and mental brutality, neglect and sexual and emotional exploitation.”

**From the Preamble to the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children
(approved by the German *terre des hommes* FdH AGM in 2004)**

Background

(1) When the sexual exploitation of girls and boys in Europe first became an issue, the discussion focused for the first few years on **sexual violenceabus** in or around the family. From the end of the 1980s, terre des hommes and its partners concentrated on sexual exploitation in connection with tourism. Since the mid-90s there have been increasing revelations of sexual abuse cases of children in institutions set up to protect children and their rights. These cases are so serious because the mostly paedosexual perpetrators systematically abused a large number of girls and boys over a period of years under the “protection“ of such institutions. Today the media report nationally and internationally on sexual exploitation in institutions like schools, churches, youth affairs offices, sports clubs, day centres and child welfare organisations.

(2) For terre des hommes as a children’s aid agency, it is a particularly important goal to implement the protection of girls and boys as a principle of its own work to protect children’s rights within the organisation. That is why the first terre des hommes Code of Conduct was developed, adopted by the German annual general meeting (AGM) in 2000. This Code of Conduct was further elaborated and approved in this new form by the AGM in 2004.

(3) The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children does not only have a regulatory effect on terre des hommes, a child welfare organisation concerned for development policy. It also sends a signal to its members and the outside world. Terre des hommes works conscientiously and does its best to protect children. Besides enhancing the general image of terre des hommes, the existence of the Code of Conduct means that potential offenders can immediately recognise that they are taking a high risk of running into alert staff and volunteers in the organisation.

Creating safe places for children

(4) For terre des hommes in Germany the first thing to do was to open the debate on a code of conduct by proposing that coworkers undertake a voluntary commitment. The crucial impetus for this idea came from the national theme group against the sexual exploitation of children, in cooperation with the management and the board. The project “A safer space for children“ was born.

(5) The project aims to give as much protection as possible to boys and girls who come into contact with terre des hommes. The project covers the deceitful strategies of perpetrators possibly seeking to join terre des hommes as volunteers or staff-members. The project is process-oriented, and focused on the volunteer members in the early years of its implementation. It also includes information and education initiatives for the employees in the head office. The next step will be implementing the “Safer space for children” process at the level of coordination offices and terre des hommes partners.

Implementation

(6) The volunteer members of terre des hommes have signed a declaration of agreement with the code. In the head office in Osnabrück the management and works council have concluded an agreement applying to all staff.

(7) Individual project partners have concerned themselves with improving child protection in their own institutions through their own educational approach or other forms of action.

(8) The terre des hommes project partners are involved via regional networks. In Bolivia national and international children’s rights organisations took the initiative in 2002 by adopting a general code of conduct with passages about preventing violence.

(9) At the Southeast Asia partner platform the following options were discussed (without a vote):

- selection of ‘model projects’ (limited number per country, supported by terre des hommes in implementation), serving as multiplier projects.
- Regional seminars with partners and coordinators who support the realisation of ‘safer space’ for children at the national level

Education and support

(10) Following the AGM decision, terre des hommes started support programmes involving education and training for its volunteers and staff. Apart from these thorough briefings, additional training modules are organised and conducted for selected contact persons from the organisation (national AGs, board and staff) with speakers from professional organisations. The guide for contact persons (first contact) was developed as a result of these training sessions. The indications given to guides for all terre des homes volunteers are being evaluated and improved.

(11) In the case of initial suspicion, terre des hommes is of course available to mediate in a nearby counselling centre, which will provide professional support in clearing up the possible “case“, accompany a potential victim and/or provide supervision for the group, or refer the victim for supervision elsewhere.

Participation of children and adolescents

(12) An indispensable part of this policy is getting children to participate in planning and deciding on processes involving themselves. These processes involve the introduction, conducting, monitoring and finally also the regular review of measures taken against violence in institutions and organisations. The more transparent and open the process is, the greater the chance of success, particularly regarding prevention.

Child protection and abuse prevention must always be the prime concern!

(13) The actual participation of children and adolescents in all decisions affecting them is an important step towards a change in the distribution of power and thereby to preventing violence. The Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Yokohama in 2001 was a landmark event. From the experience of individual organisations we have been very aware since then of how important it is to involve children in monitoring action themselves. For example, some changes that were well-meant by adults and intended to protect girls and boys, were tried out in a counselling centre and, after the first trial, categorically rejected by the young persons concerned, because they felt them to be counter-productive. The adults and young people then planned other protective measures together. In the power divide between adults and minors, expectations and reality called for clarification processes allowing and assisting the children and adolescents to exercise competence in their own concerns.

Feedback from the regions

(14 new) The questions and suggestions from the regions give important indications of thematic priorities in the ongoing regional work on implementing the child rights approach to protection from sexual violence in projects and programmes.

What remains to be done?

(15 former 18) No-one should be under any illusion. Codes of conduct and accompanying activities and procedures can minimise the risk of abuse and violence against girls and boys, but it can never exclude them. The numerous offender strategies must never be under-estimated. Closed power and communication structures in organisations favour the success of potential offenders. Frankly raising and discussing such matters, clear attitudes and rules help to prevent direct attacks and may even serve as 'deterrents', as offenders see little chance of succeeding with their strategies.

(16 former 14) Finally, it is in the interest of organisations to develop standards for their own work. The experience gained by Terre des hommes shows the key role of support measures, process accompaniment, evaluation and continual training programmes. This way child protection policy can be filled with life and become reality.

The further steps preparatory process for the 2006 DC

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- See para (9)
- Devising programmes to implement the Code of Conduct in Terre des hommes programme work, including training. The precondition for that is evaluating previous activities by project partners to protect children in their own organisation~~Devising programmes to implement the Code of Conduct in Terre des hommes programme work, including training~~
- A further discussion at the project partner platforms for 2006/2007 with the goal of identifying two project partners for each country. They will receive regional in-service training through terre des hommes. (Two partners per country makes sense because that will guarantee mutual support and exchange). The two partners will function as multipliers for other terre des hommes project partners wanting to start the work. They will take on the implementation of child protection policy in the country and region, to an extent to be determined. terre des hommes will offer further regional training and possibly necessary funding for this, for up to three years.
- Children and young people will be involved in a participatory process.
- A monitoring process and independent evaluation will be established to safeguard the implementation process.
- Best practice examples will be provided in order to enable mutual learning in all project regions.
- Terre des hommes will include an additional article on child protection in its project criteria.
- Regular training programmes and refresher courses for volunteers will be elaborated in cooperation with the Theme Group against sexual exploitation of children. Setting up a transparent, open communication structure will be promoted at regional conferences and annual general meetings, and through visits to volunteer action groups or written information.
- Competence centres for staff will be established in cooperation with the management in the German head office, and in the regional and country offices~~Ex.~~ In addition, there will be regular information events and written briefings.

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