

FROM **HARM**



TO



HOPE

WISE Community Feedback and Complaint Mechanisms GUIDELINES

Feedback, complaints and response mechanisms (CM)

1. Why are feedback, complaint and response mechanisms important for our accountability?

Most staff will have experiences of meeting people who are not fully happy with the work or behavior of WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) or partners in their community or region. Most of this feedback or complaint is received informally e.g., people approach staff who are visiting the community, or visit WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE)'s office in search of assistance or resolution to their problems or grievances. Even when WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) seeks feedback more formally during a participation or monitoring event, the responses received can often relate to a completely different topic. It is not unusual for staff monitoring a water and sanitation programme, for instance, to be approached about a food distribution programme taking place in the same community. It is also not unusual for staff of one agency to receive a complaint about another agency. Receiving feedback, suggestions and complaints about our work is normal, important and should be welcomed.

But what happens to these complaints? There are many positive examples of field staff immediately resolving issues whilst in the community, through conversation, sharing information or taking action on the spot. There are also many examples of more serious issues being conveyed back to the office and corrective action being taken. However, there are also many examples that show that staff, already overwhelmed with day-to-day emergency activities, find it difficult to manage the informal feedback and complaint they receive; complaints may not be prioritised, may be forgotten, or lost. A constant stream of visitors at the WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) field office interrupts work and can also add to the stress and frustrations of both staff and community members, who can be poorly dealt with or turned away. Tensions can arise when a complaint is received about a member of staff and it is not clear how this complaint will be dealt with and by whom.

In addition, the reality of humanitarian situations also means that sometimes vulnerable community members may find it difficult or impossible to complain through 'normal' participation or feedback opportunities, due to fear of retaliation or lack of trust.

What we aim for is a more **formalised system** of soliciting, receiving, processing and responding to the feedback and complaints we receive. Moreover, we aim to provide a **safe, non-threatening** and **easily accessible** mechanism that enables even **the most powerless** to make a suggestion or complaint. On the part of WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE), this requires us to address and respond to all complaints, and to be timely and transparent in our decisions and actions.

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The opportunity for communities (both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries) to provide WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) with their feedback and complaints, and in exchange to receive feedback or response from WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE), is an important part of being accountable. This also applies to other key stakeholders, such as our partners, or local authorities, and also to our staff.

A complaints mechanism is the newest and most visible part of an accountability system, and as a result can grab the attention of those keen to strengthen their accountability to disaster affected communities. However, accountability is about more than this. Having a complaints mechanism should not mean that we put less emphasis on our ongoing efforts to involve women, men, girls and boys from day one of our response.

Whilst a formalised mechanism is a relatively new concept, experience has already begun to show that it can have enormous benefit for both communities and for WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) staff. It can help to establish a relationship of trust between staff and communities and improve the impact of our response. It can help save time and money that would otherwise be wasted. It can help build a safer organisation and safer environment for our staff, and for our beneficiaries, especially the most vulnerable amongst them. On the other hand, setting up a mechanism that does not function well (for example if complaints are not followed up) may contribute to frustration and worsening relationships with communities and local stakeholders.



A feedback, complaints and response mechanism can, for example:

Help WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) to:

- Learn from beneficiaries, communities and other stakeholders and be responsive to their views, opinions and complaints, so improving the quality and impact of our work
- Contribute to the real time analysis of the impact of our work, including satisfaction of beneficiaries, and the extent to which the most vulnerable are being reached and their needs met
- Identify problems as early as possible – from the less serious to the most serious, such as:
 - Assistance not reaching the most vulnerable
 - Assistance not having the desired impact or having unintended negative impacts
 - Poor quality of relief items or hardware
 - Poor process (e.g., identification of beneficiaries, or participation)
 - Gaps in information provision
 - Security issues
 - Misuse of assistance by staff or communities (fraud or bias)
 - Poor behaviour or attitudes of staff
 - Sexual exploitation and abuse
- Protect the safety and dignity of those who make a complaint, as well as those who are complained about; and provide a non judicial but respectful means for addressing grievances, and the provision of redress where it is required
- Share information through the process of receiving and responding to feedback and complaints
- Support project and field staff to effectively manage feedback and complaints and to respond appropriately to less serious and more serious complaints, that can otherwise put certain staff under a great deal of stress
- Demonstrate our commitment to the rights of communities and our humility and commitment to achieving our goals

Help the most vulnerable community members to:

- Safely voice a complaint or grievance about WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE)'s programming or staff, and to receive redress if required
- Influence the progress, quality and impact of a project in their community
- Hold WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) to account

1. Some definitions

**Feedback:**

People have a right to have their voices heard in judging our response to their emergency. Asking for the views of the affected population can help us understand the difference we are making during the course of the response, and not just at the end of a project, or when the crisis is over.

Complaint:

A complaint is a grievance made by an individual(s) who believes that a humanitarian agency has failed to meet a stated commitment. This commitment can relate to a programme or project plan, beneficiary selection, an activity schedule, a standard of technical performance, an organisational value, a legal requirement, or any other point. Less serious complaint may relate to poor quality or performance, more serious complaint to fraud, abusive behaviour or sexual exploitation.

Whilst a complaint in itself is negative (a grievance), making and complaint and seeking redress can be a positive process.

2. *How can we set up a formal and safe feedback, complaints and response mechanism?*

Although setting up a CM is challenging, it usually means building upon existing systems rather than setting up something entirely new. A CM is an important part of our **monitoring systems**, operating alongside other monitoring activities.

Communicating clearly to staff, communities and government institutions about why WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) has a complaints mechanism, what it is for and how it works is absolutely crucial to its success. As such information sharing about the complaint's mechanism needs to be integrated into the **communication strategies** of programmes and the emergency as a whole. (Link to communications sections/information sharing with communities)

To the extent possible, the CM should also build upon local structures and systems of addressing complaints and dealing with grievances in the community. In the eyes of the user, this will facilitate and strengthen the legitimacy of the mechanism. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind power dynamics to ensure that vulnerable groups are not excluded. In emergencies we can work in new communities with existing community institutions or representatives that are new to us, and who may not represent those they *claim* to represent. Using such institutions or leaders as the *only* channel for complaint can exclude the most marginalised and most powerless. It is also important to consider the possibility of complaint about the misconduct of community members themselves, or of the staff working in the community. Relying on these same (often powerful) people as channels for complaint can also prevent people from lodging legitimate grievances.

Given the differences from one operation to the next, one standard CM cannot be developed to fit all programme contexts.



As much as possible, the CM should be designed with future sustainability in mind. A future scenario may be to have the system managed by local government, and incorporating the work of all actors in the area, with communities understanding how these NGO and government systems work, and able to demand the accountability that is their right.

3. *Challenges, lessons learned and suggestions for good practice*

Complaint's procedures can be simple, although they need to be Women Initiative for Society Empowerment (WISE) fully planned and follow certain key principles. A badly designed or managed complaints procedure can be harmful. Here are 10 discussion points and suggestions for good practice to help establish a complaints mechanism

- That is **appropriate**
- That is **safe**
- That is **well understood**
- That **promotes transparency**
- That is **timely**
- That is **effective**
- That is **accessible to all**

(Link up to sections)

1. **Plan and budget** for a complaint's mechanism from the beginning of an emergency
2. Build **staff awareness and commitment** to a complaint's mechanism
3. Design a complaints mechanism made up of a **range of ways** people can complain
4. Design a complaints mechanism that can handle **extreme cases of fraud and abuse**
5. Be clear about the **scope** of the complaints mechanism and communicate this clearly
6. Develop a complaints mechanism **procedure document and always follow the established procedure**
7. Clearly **communicate** the complaints mechanism to all key stakeholders as part of overall information sharing systems
8. **Complete the feedback loop**: use the complaints data to improve overall performance and to provide feedback to communities (two-way communication and feedback)
9. Be clear on **roles and responsibilities** in managing complaints, and provide adequate training and support to staff
10. **Monitor** the complaints mechanism to verify that it is effective

1. *Plan and budget for a CM from the beginning of an emergency*

A CM is designed for the whole response and is adapted for different geographical areas and for the types of interventions in those areas. Ideally it is designed from the earliest stages of a response and continues sometime after WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) has exited from communities. Although many programmes will have been set up without a complaints mechanism, it is still better to set them up later than not at all.



They require resources to set up and maintain. Complaints mechanisms should be planned and budgeted from the beginning of an emergency response (link to 'resourcing accountability' section) and built into project budgets.

Although a separate complaints mechanism is not required for each individual project, it must be seen as part of the core work of project teams, and not as something that is parallel to be carried out by dedicated accountability staff only (link roles and responsibilities section)

The challenges of setting up a CM for an emergency response will be much easier if emergency preparedness has addressed this issue and if CM is already a part of WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE)'s organizational make up (e.g., including its practice within long term programming).

Budget flexibility is needed in order to respond fully to some of the suggestions raised by beneficiaries. Set aside funds to help address complaints e.g., eligible beneficiaries who have been left off distribution lists. Budget flexibility by donors and by WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) is needed to help respond to suggestions raised by beneficiaries.

2. Build staff awareness and commitment to a complaints mechanism

Staff commitment to manage and use a complaints mechanism is a critical factor for its success. Team discussions and awareness raising materials can be used to build staff understanding and appreciation of the importance of complaints. Issues to highlight to staff include:

- The rights of disaster affected communities
- WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE)'s organizational commitment to manage complaints
- The benefits and challenges of a complaint's mechanism

A complaints mechanism however always risks being seen as a threat by staff. In WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) Somalia, fear amongst staff that the newly established complaints mechanism would threaten their jobs was an obstacle that needed to be overcome. This was eventually overcome through clear communication with staff about the complaint's mechanism, reassurance that a complaint received did not mean that staff would lose their jobs learning by doing, and a gradual acceptance that the complaints mechanism actually improved their relations in communities, and the quality of our work.

3. Design an appropriate complaints mechanism made up of a range of ways people can channel their complaint

Community members need to be able to submit complaints in ways that suit them and that takes power dynamics, cultural, geographical, and protection and safety issues into account. Women, men, children,



the elderly, the non literate, people living with chronic illness, people with disabilities, communities located in remote areas all need to be able to submit complaints with relative ease and confidence. A range of measures may therefore be required to ensure that the mechanism is accessible to all groups, including the most vulnerable and socially excluded.

Staff can be a good source of knowledge about what methods could be appropriate in the context. Ask staff to anticipate the most common types of complaints and consider whether an information campaign could pre-empt and reduce these.

Consulting with community members and other stakeholders on appropriate methods is also important and should be carried out whenever possible. Involving other actors (partners, government and communities) can also safeguard against excluded actors feeling threatened, and possibly undermining the process. Secondly it can help the agency to consider ways of handling complaints that already exist within existing national and local institutions and at the community level.

Although the process of designing and setting up a complaints mechanism can be as important as the system itself, setting up a system for the first time in an emergency may require a balance between inclusiveness and more directive action. They made sure they explained clearly the purpose of the CM (e.g., to solicit feedback and complaint about WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE)) and used this and as an opportunity for learning and dialogue with others.

Before consulting beneficiaries, staff should agree the local language terminology to be used and consider any context-specific sensitivities (e.g., when consulting communities where traditional leaders expect to be the sole channel of complaint, or when working in areas where security forces may be suspicious). During the consultation process, beneficiaries and their representatives should be provided with clear information regarding the purpose and rationale for complaints handling.

Methods used in recent emergencies include staffed telephone number, dedicated visiting hours in WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) offices and other location, post-boxes in strategic places in district centres, villages and WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) field offices, email service and village complaints and compliments book. In isolated communities, WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) and communities must be creative in finding ways to communicate, and direct contact and focus group discussion for the purpose of soliciting opinions, concerns and complaint with vulnerable groups may be a necessary solution.

Is it necessary to use the word 'complaint'? There is often concern about promoting a 'culture of complaining' by using the word complaint (as opposed to feedback or suggestions). In some contexts, it can also be culturally inappropriate, or simply can be difficult to translate. However, it is good to take stock of this and challenge any assumptions. Welcoming complaints, as well as suggestions to help



WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) improve its work, makes it clear that the agency is willing to provide redress when justified, and is a demonstration of humility in the face of our commitment to meet our principles and our goals.

Complaints handling when working through partners

When working through humanitarian partners, special consideration is required. The complaints mechanism needs to enable beneficiaries to complain to both the humanitarian partner and to WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) itself; as well as to enable the partner agency to complain to WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) about its own concerns. Consultation with partners is therefore crucial.

A complaints mechanism for staff

A complaints mechanism should also be in place to deal with staff complaints, which may also require a separate channel for complaint.

4. Design a complaints mechanism that can handle extreme cases of fraud and abuse

Complaints mechanisms need to be designed to handle extreme cases of abuse. Although less frequent, extremely sensitive complaints about fraud, theft, violence, intimidation and sexual exploitation and abuse need to be handled by WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE).

All allegations of staff misconduct received from external stakeholders or other staff (also referred to as whistle blowing) must be investigated according to the official investigation procedures of WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE). WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) is required to have formal investigation procedures that adhere to the principles of confidentiality, independence and respect and that meet legal standards. The CM needs to provide clear assurances that sensitive complaints can be submitted through different channels (e.g., straight to the Human Resources Director or a nominated person) and that they will be treated separately and confidentially.

Know WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE)'s procedures for dealing with serious complaints against staff (link to PSEA chapter). Building Safer Organisations also provides guidelines on receiving and investigating allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation by humanitarian workers and details of the investigation process (link to PSEA chapter)

The idea is that trust in the system, and its confidentiality, will keep the number of anonymous complaints to a minimum as these will be much harder to investigate. However, anonymous complaints may still be received and the imperative to investigate serious complaints, such as sexual abuse of a project participant by a particular staff member, will present challenges. We need to keep learning about how to deal with such situations.



In the case of allegations of illegal activities, agencies may need to take legal advice, and in many cases may need to launch an investigation which may make the complainant reluctant to be exposed. Referral processes will also need to be in place.

5. Be clear about the scope of the complaints mechanism and communicate this clearly

There should be limits to the type of complaints solicited. WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) can only adequately deal with complaints that are within our realm of authority and complaints should only be encouraged about activities and functions which WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) is claiming responsibility for. Communities should have the right to complain about anything linked to WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) and partner's activities and how we are measuring up to our own commitments, policies and standards e.g., humanitarian plans, accountability, quality of delivery of assistance, behaviour of staff. What type of complaints WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) is soliciting should be communicated clearly?

If complaints are submitted that WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) cannot deal with, we need to notify the complainant why this is the case, and provide referral where appropriate. Where national or international law has been broken a clear referral system should be in place.

Consider developing joint mechanisms with other agencies on the basis that joining forces with can reduce costs per agency, increase overall response performance, and also raise the level of mutual transparency and trust to new levels. Often there are several agencies operating in the same geographical area. Also, it can often be the case that beneficiaries respond to open channels for about their problem, and are not so concerned with the issue of who their problem is directed towards)

6. Develop a complaints mechanism procedure document and always follow the established procedure

The complaints mechanism needs to be well documented. This can help describe the established process, and help ensure it is well understood.

No complaint should be ignored and WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) should always follow its own procedures strictly (including confidentiality when requested). Keeping to procedure will help build trust in both the system and in WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE). On the other hand, an unreliable system may mean people do not use it, and overall trust may be undermined. The formal nature of the mechanism will help to

Establishing a realistic timeframe is important, and a maximum timeframe for following up and resolving valid complaints must be met. What we aim for is a timely process that can help WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) become a more responsive agency. Early on in an emergency response,



timeliness is also necessary to ensure the most vulnerable can meet their most urgent needs e.g., verifying and correcting beneficiary lists to ensure the most vulnerable are not left outside of the response.

In some cases, the issue may not have been solved within the established deadline, in those cases WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) staff must return to the complainant and provide information about the status of the complaint and agree upon a new timeframe.

All issues outside of the control or responsibility of the agency should be explained in the procedures document, and the document must be clear on the steps to be followed if this is the case. All complaints should be dealt with sensitively and confidentially. The safety and protection of both those submitting complaints and those handling them is paramount.

A complaints mechanism document should contain at least the following basic information:

No	Checklist for complaints mechanism procedure document	y/n
1	Statement of <u>purpose</u> and <u>organisational commitment</u> to handling complaints, including the rights of beneficiaries, and disaster affected populations to make a complaint	
2	Statement of <u>parameters</u> and limitations of the procedure <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Definition of what makes a valid complaint Criteria to help clearly identify between different types of complaint (e.g. serious and less serious complaints) Explain that only complaints about activities or decisions within the control of the agency can be handled 	
3	Statement of <u>referral</u> to explain what will be done with complaints received that fall outside of the agency's control	
4	Statement of <u>confidentiality</u> wherever requested by complainant. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Assurances of confidentiality and non retaliation (particularly for complaints relating to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse given the social stigma associated with this and the very real danger that women/children reporting such abuse could face from perpetrators, and from their own families and communities) 	
5	Explanation of <u>methods</u> for submission of complaints <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Methods that will be used Details on how the complaint will submitted and registered 	
6	Explanation of <u>steps</u> to be followed once the complaint is submitted and the <u>timeframe</u>	



	for processing the complaint <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Analysis of complaints received b. Investigation c. Identification of appropriate remedial action to be taken, including informing complainant of reasons why no action will be taken d. Implementation and monitoring of remedial action 	
7	Explanation of <u>roles and responsibilities</u> of staff (HQ and field based) in implementing the procedure. This should include explanation of how decisions are made for <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Less serious complaint b. Serious complaints 	
8	Identification of <u>resources</u> that will be required	
9	Explanation of <u>mechanisms</u> for monitoring the functioning and effectiveness of the complaints handling, and for making sure data received informs future decision making	

Complaints handling when working through partners

When working through partners, the procedure needs to be documented, accessible and understandable to partners, and needs to include, *in addition to the above*:

- The right of beneficiaries to complain directly to the agency instead of going through the humanitarian partner [contact details of the agency should be given on all information material concerning the complaints-handling procedures
- Commitment of the humanitarian partner and agency to give a response
- Commitment to refer complaints that the humanitarian partner and agency are unable to handle
- Outlines the process by which the humanitarian partner can complain to the agency and vice versa

Recording complaints

Develop a standard feedback and complaints form and provide clear guidance to staff on how to use it and when it needs to be used. This will help ensure each complaint is recorded in a consistently clear manner so that the complaint can be processed, and is not accidentally misrepresented as it is moved through the different steps of the complaints procedure. It will also help to categorise the type and cause of the complaint.

Monitor and provide support and training to those charged with recording verbal complaints on behalf of complainants (e.g., when receiving complaints over the phone). A complaint may also need to be translated, and be aware that here there is scope for misrepresentation.

The following information might be required in the form:



- Name and address of complainant
- Date
- Description about complaint
- Suggestions for follow up
- Recommendations for who needs to follow up
- Room to record steps taken to follow up the complaint and final results

To help identify what has gone wrong, help the complainant to clarify exactly what they are dissatisfied with as this will aid a prompt response process. Some prompts to help clarify the situation include:

- Was it the way you were treated?
- Was it a decision that was taken?
- Were the items distributed defective?
- Can you define exactly what went wrong?

Help the complainant to think through what solution they would like to see occur. Asking the complainant to suggest a corrective action is a constructive way of rebuilding relationships and acknowledging your willingness to hear their point of view. For example:

- Do they want replacement of defective items distributed?
- Do they want recognition of poor treatment and an apology?
- Does an investigation need to be started?
- What would they recommend as a way to avoid this happening in the future?

The complainant should be given acknowledgement that the complaint has been received. Design an appropriate acknowledgement system. A reference number can be used, a receipt notes or copy of the complaint form signed by the agency.

Investigating and addressing complaints

Any WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) staff member who receives a complaint should have clear guidelines for how to bring the complaint into the WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) system e.g., how to refer community members to the right place for lodging a complaint, or how to record a complaint on their behalf.

If the complaint is serious, then it needs to be dealt with separately through the established channel and brought to the attention of the nominated person (e.g., Country Director, Human Resources Director). Complaints however should be processed by someone who has suitable qualities and is **trained** and **supported** to deal with them. They should be confident in directing complaints through the right channels, and judging the sensitivity of complaints. Even less serious complaints demand greater or lesser degrees of sensitivity or a more objective view. In WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) the Accountability Officers were responsible for directing complaints received in their field location and were supported by a senior Accountability Coordinator in this role.



If the complaint is less serious, then, as a general rule, it should be solved as locally as possible, by bringing the issue to the attention of the relevant person at the field level, such as the Field Office Team Leader, or the relevant Project manager. If it cannot be resolved at this level, it needs to be elevated to Programme Leaders, or Emergency Team Leader, and then to Executive Director.

In WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) Women Initiative for Society Empowerment (WISE), the weekly Field Office management meeting brought together the Field Office Team Leader, Project Managers and Accountability staff. This regular progress reporting and decision-making forum is used to raise issues and complaints from the community and to determine the necessary actions and by whom. In some cases, it was decided that further investigation was required before action could be taken. In other cases, the issue was referred to more senior management at WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE)'s head office (link to example flow diagram for WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE))

Where appropriate, local government, community leaders and other stakeholders should be involved in the investigation and resolution of complaints. It is important to make sure each complainant receives a response and appropriate action, and that similar complaints receive a similar response.

The complainant should receive a response that comprises a clear answer and explanation (even if no action will be taken) as well as an indication that the complaint has gone through an established process. People need to know they have been heard and answered. Experience has shown that in most cases, even when no action is taken, receiving a clear explanation satisfies the complainant. In other instances, people are left unhappy with the result, and ideally the mechanism should have an appeal system that users are able to access and follow up. Here the complainant should acknowledge that they have understood the answer, and know that if they do not accept it, they can complain again.

7. Clearly communicate the complaints mechanism to all key stakeholders as part of overall information sharing systems

It is vital that communities and staff can access and understand the complaints mechanism. Particular effort is needed to communicate these to marginalised groups. In Somalia, all project field staff spent ten minutes explaining information about WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) and the complaints mechanism as a key part of any activity in the community or district. Information about the complaints mechanism and key WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) contact details were included as a part of all publications and information to communities (link to information section, which includes examples of communicating about complaints mechanism).

Only if people know about the mechanism can they access it. Only if people understand how, it works will they be able to judge the risks to the safety, and make a choice about whether to trust it and use it.



Complaints mechanisms should be developed alongside good quality information systems, and mechanisms for participation and feedback. A complaints mechanism should never stand alone. Often complaints may arise because of lack of information. Also lack of participation and feedback can result in programmes that are not satisfactory to beneficiaries. Furthermore, many complaints received will be relevant to many people, and so can be answered publicly through the agency's information or participation mechanisms for example.

Complaints data should be used to inform programme management and to guide or revise the general information provided to beneficiaries. Information systems for beneficiaries and complaints mechanisms are linked, as often it is a lack of information that leads to a complaint.

In WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE), the free telephone line presented an important moment to have conversations and to offer information to those that used the service. Some specifically rang asking for information, for others it was a case of sharing more information about the complaint's mechanisms itself, or sharing information relevant to the complaint (to explain for example why WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) is working in one particular geographical area, or to explain eligibility criteria).

8. Complete the feedback loop: use the complaints data to improve overall performance and to provide feedback to communities (two-way communication and feedback)

Senior management's role in maintaining oversight of the complaints processes needs to be clearly identified.

Complaints data and analysis of trends should be regularly analysed and used to inform the decision making of senior management. Addressing complaints might involve changing policies and systems, changing strategy, changing attitudes and behaviors, etc. This can be a part of a regular meeting of senior staff, or a regular meeting of a senior task force established for this purpose.

Data can be tracked using a simple Tracking Form in order to record key data, for example

- No of complaints received
- Status of these complaints (e.g., no still to be addressed or completed)
- Types of complaint received
- Data on complainant e.g., location, gender, age
- Method used to lodge complaint e.g., email, phone, suggestions box, direct contact etc
- Summary of corrective actions taken
- Time taken to resolve complaints



Accountability data, including complaints data, need to be incorporating into overall monitoring reporting on project progress and impacts. Key issues should be reported on a regular basis to senior management, bringing to their attention the satisfaction, views, concerns, feedback and complaints of communities.

In order to promote overall transparency, make reports reader friendly and share them as much as possible with all staff. Provide key complaints data in a public place e.g., on the website (WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) website). Feedback to communities on complaints and overall progress should be part of WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE)'s overall information sharing to communities.

Ensure that archives are maintained to enable a particular complaint, investigation and progress in taking remedial action to be tracked. These files need to be confidential and accessed only by those authorised to do so. Where utmost confidentiality is requested, ensure the complainant cannot be traced.

9. Be clear on roles and responsibilities in managing complaints, and provide adequate training and support to staff

Clear roles and responsibilities need to demonstrate that overall responsibility rests with senior and project management. Appoint field-based Accountability Officers to promote project accountability. Experience to date has shown that the single most effective action had been to create dedicated roles as part of project teams. Project teams must be supported and trained.

(Somewhere we need to provide generic TOR for accountability office i.e., M&E plus – and Accountability Coordinator??)

Appoint an Accountability Coordinator (this person could be an existing M&E coordinator) to support project teams and to act as a focal point and ambassador of community views with senior management

If necessary, appoint additional office-based staff to support the management of a formal complaint's mechanism, for example, is a post required to staff a telephone line?

Critical to the success of the CM requires is support from senior leadership, Lead Member and WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) members in their provision of funding and technical support.

10. Monitor the complaints mechanism to verify that it is effective

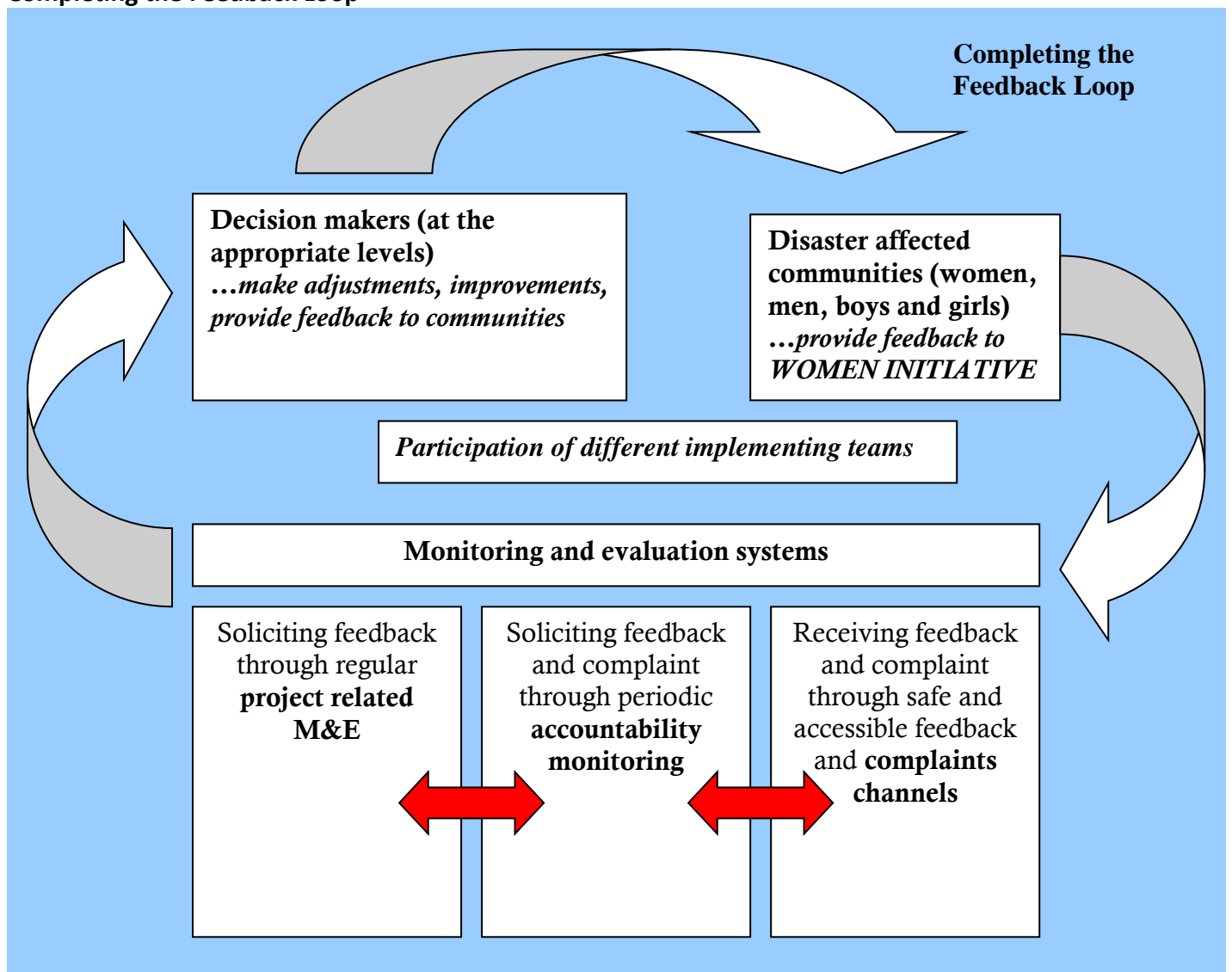
One of the main fears of many practitioners when thinking about setting up a complaint's mechanism is that they will be inundated with complaints which they are unable to address because they concern issues outside the agency's remit or responsibility. In practice, the more common problem is the under utilisation of complaints mechanism. A small number of complaints does not automatically mean there aren't any.



Fear of complaining and lack of knowledge about the mechanisms will be one of the most important issues to overcome.

On a periodic basis, monitoring of the complaint’s mechanism needs to be conducted to ensure the procedures are followed and are effective and to recommend adjustments

Completing the Feedback Loop





Annex - Example guideline for recording a complaint

As general procedure the complaints should be received and registered in the following manner:

- Identify yourself as WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) staff, you name, and role in the project
- Attend each complaint with a positive attitude
- Listen to what the person is saying
- Explain that the information they give will be treated confidentially
- Inform the person that they have the right to be heard, and offer additional information if they request it, or if you consider it necessary. Explain the types of complaint WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) can deal with and the types they can't deal with.
- Identify yourself with what the person is saying, but without assuming responsibility
- Complete the complaints form, and confirm with the person the details that you have registered on the format. The form must allow the following to be clearly identified
 - ✓ Date of making the complaint
 - ✓ Name, age and gender of complainant
 - ✓ Name of village
 - ✓ Description of the complaint/problem: what is the problem? When did it happen? Where did it happen? Who was involved? Any other information or evidence?
- Repeat what you have recorded back to the complainant and verify your understanding of the situation. Revise if necessary.
- Offer a solution for the situation if it is appropriate or feasible
- Verify that the person complaining understands the following steps in the complaints handling process.
- Indicate to the person that their complaint will be delivered to the attending WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) staff and they will receive a x within a maximum of x days.
- Indicate to the person the reference number of their complaint.
- End with a positive attitude
- Thank the person for their trust and time
- Inform him or her about the procedure for follow-up from WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE)'s side, and check they understand

Each person who records complaints must be prepared in the following manner:

- Can communicate basic information about WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE) and WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE)'s project in a confident and consistent manner
- Knows WOMEN INITIATIVE FOR SOCIETY EMPOWERMENT (WISE)'s organizational structure, and the general roles and responsibilities of each staff member in their geographical area of operation

FROM **HARM**



TO



HOPE

- Has available a need-to-know checklist of key information (office address and contact details, areas of operation, project objectives and activities, organisations with whom we work, name of others, including authorities with whom we are coordinating)
- Can describe the complaints mechanism
- Trained to record complaints
- Has a positive attitude towards complaints as an opportunity for learning

APPROVED BY

ABDIHAKIM ABDI HIRSI

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SIGNATURE.....

DATE.....

