

# Community Complaints Fact Sheet

“Accountability Is Everyone’s Business”

Progressive humanitarian agencies are aware of the benefits to be derived from effectively managing the complaints that will inevitably be made by communities no matter how well those organizations may be run.

Properly handled, complaints can improve the quality of our programs, restore trust and confidence and identify and rectifying problems quickly and efficiently. Badly handled, complaints can be an expensive exercise that reflects poorly on World Vision LTRT and generally decrease the effectiveness of our programs.

## Why Manage Complaints?

**They’re inevitable.** Every agency that works with people will receive complaints and feedback. That fact cannot be avoided. It has to be managed and seen as a positive way to improve.

**It’s about accountability:** People we work with have a right to complain about, and receive a response for decisions or actions that affect them. In doing so, the community holds World Vision LTRT accountable for actions and decisions. This is an important principal of what we do. Handling community feedback is an opportunity to show communities that our program is accountable to them. Complaints are an essential part of an accountable program. Any agency that claims to be accountable for its actions must take complaints seriously.

**There are benefits to be gained:** Good complaints management is an integral part of quality programming and provides tangible benefits for World Vision LTRT, staff and in particular the communities we work with.

**What is a complaint:** A complaint is a grievance made when a beneficiary believes World Vision LTRT has failed to meet a commitment. That commitment can be related to a program plan, beneficiary criteria, an activity schedule, a standard technical performance, an organizational value, a legal requirement or staff misconduct.

## So what are the benefits of a complaints system?

Effective community complaints management systems:

- Improve the quality of our programs, by providing information about the experiences of Communities and beneficiaries
- Restore trust and confidence
- Identify areas that need improvement
- Enable poor decisions to be rectified quickly and efficiently
- Promote a culture of transparency and accountability
- Prevent complaints from escalating, a situation that can be resource intensive and lead to adverse outcomes
- Reduce stress of staff by providing training and support to help deal with community problems and a structured approach to resolving problems

## What not to do when receiving a complaint



- Become defensive
- Argue with the person
- Be dismissive
- Blame others
- Make assumptions without knowing the facts
- Make promises you can't keep
- Ignore the problem

## What to do when receiving a complaint



- Listen
- Empathize with the person
- Repeat/ your understanding of the situation

For more information on humanitarian accountability and community complaints handling check out *The Good Enough Guide To Impact Measurement & Accountability*. For a free copy go to [www.oxfam.org.uk/publications](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/publications)

## The 5 Elements

In 2007 World Vision Sri Lanka Tsunami Response Team developed and implemented a community complaints system for certification of its program by the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP-I). It is based on **5 elements**. Those elements are:

- 1. Visibility and access**—mechanisms and strategies are put in place to provide beneficiary communities with readily available information on where and how to complain, how the complaint will be managed as well as reasonable assistance to make a complaint by staff.
- 2. Responsiveness**—mechanisms and strategies are in place to: ensure staff know the complaints system and how it works, complaints were responded to in a ‘timely manner’, time frames were used and complaints monitored and participants advised of progress.
- 3. Assessment & Action**—complaints are assessed and action taken based on fairness and objectively.
- 4. Feedback**—is provided to complainants in a timely manner regarding outcomes and as well as review mechanisms, and internally within World Vision LTRT potential system improvements are identified and acted upon.
- 5. Monitoring Effectiveness**—of the community complaints and feedback system is done regularly and a community complaints officer track complaint statistic and identifies trends.

## INFORMATION FOR WORLD VISION LTRT SRI LANKA

This Fact Sheet forms part of a series designed to inform and educate staff on community complaints handling.

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