



The Sphere Project



CHURCH WORLD SERVICE
Pakistan / Afghanistan



HAP Humanitarian
Accountability
Partnership

Outputs of Lessons Learned
Event Organized by CWS-P/A
in January 2011

GOOD PRACTICES: COMPLAINTS HANDLING

Challenges and Issues

During emergency phase and humanitarian response, probability exists for misuse of power that may lead to 'secondary disasters'. Misuse of power could be due to cultural differences, political affiliations, or staff incompetency. Disaster survivors may feel powerless and ignorant of the work carried out by numerous organizations. There are various challenges in implementing CRM.

Changing bad practices to good practices of emergency response takes time and requires adequate resources. Implementation of policy and improvement of procedures consumes time and energy. Initially a complaint may not be substantiated with evidence and, therefore, may miss the attention of CRM. Continuous commitment from senior management to ensure successful implementation of CRM is yet another challenge. Complaint boxes are not always an effective medium of sending complaints. Often complaints are received against new staff rather than old staff who are more familiar with the organization and local context. Nature of complaints varies including malicious complaints.

What worked well?

Sungi established a complaints response mechanism to deal with potential community dissatisfaction and disappointment but more importantly to build a long-term relationship with the community. The formation of village committees with consent of the disaster affected community remained a good practice. Their role through-out the project cycle; handling general complaints or forwarding them was highly beneficial. The project implementation committee and community project audit committee is good practice in development projects to balance power between community and implementing organization. Accountability forums held to share project progress and answering the queries from the community was also helpful in managing the community's expectations. Clear CRM policy and procedures helped to sort out complaints in an effective manner.

CRM is effective when all other HAP benchmarks such as information sharing and participation are taken into consideration.

Lessons Learned

- Accountability committees comprised of community members are helpful in promoting accountability towards disaster survivors
- Complainant has low power; empowering him/her to complain is a positive step.
- Decentralization of complaint handling based on its seriousness helps to solve serious complaints in less time.
- Safety and security of staff needs to be factored when implementing a CRM.
- CRM should be designed based on the context and effectiveness; other mediums like phone, post, exit surveys, and help desks could serve better than complaint boxes.
- Be specific with the complaints receiving time to manage the influx of complaints.
- Female staff play an important role in getting complaints from women in community.
- Complaints against staff, if not addressed promptly, may affect staff morale.

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