



## **Complaints Handling Procedures Sungi Development Foundation**

### **1. Policy Statement:**

Ensuring quality and accountability in its humanitarian, development and advocacy work are important parts of Sungi's commitments to its mission and vision. Receiving and handling complaints from the stakeholder are the key elements of improving accountability and to fulfill the commitments as a full member of Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP). To ensure this, Sungi will establish appropriate Complaints Handling Procedures (CHPs), to encourage feedback and complaints from all the stakeholders, particularly the beneficiaries and will ensure appropriate complaints handling, and reply for the complainant.

### **2. Introduction and background:**

The Policy Statement and Sungi's commitments through Humanitarian Accountability Framework (HAF), demands Sungi to develop and implement a comprehensive complaints handling mechanism. Sungi has been practicing complaints and grievances since its inception, which have been formalized and improved over a period of time through development and implementation of formal policies and procedures. Sungi has been practicing a comprehensive beneficiary accountability and complaints mechanism as an integral part of its social mobilization and community participation approach. Institutional level complaints of staff have been handled through "Sungi staff Service Rules", and grievance handling mechanism.

After becoming a HAP member, Sungi drafted Complaints Handling procedures in consultation with the beneficiaries and initiated its use in May 2009. This was developed and applied with the support of existing policies and procedures of the organization. The procedures have been critically reviewed and improved over the period, and revised in 2010. The complaints mechanism is an open document and is accessible to all stakeholders, and shall be communicated to the beneficiaries and other stakeholders through a clear and effective communication strategy.

The documents will be read and used in conjunction with Sungi's other relevant documents i.e. Sungi Staff Service Rules, Gender and Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy, Sungi Finance and Admin Procedures, Program Strategies and Operational Procedures etc.

### **3. Objectives of Complaints Handling Procedures:**

The purpose of Complaints Handling Procedures is to encourage complaints from the beneficiaries as well as other stakeholders including staff on Sungi's humanitarian, development and advocacy work, with a view to institutionalize a complaints handling mechanism in the organization for ensuring quality and accountability.

The complaints handling procedures will provide guidelines for dealing with complaints submitted or referred to Sungi Development Foundation concerning quality & accountability of humanitarian and development work from the beneficiaries and other stakeholders.

It will provide clear, logical and easily-understood procedures for submission, processing and handling complaints. It will guide to ensure that complaints are processed by a competent authority ensuring transparency, confidentiality and impartiality, and complaints or concerns are addressed objectively against a standard set of rules, commitments and values of Sungi.

The complaint mechanism will give stakeholders an access to safe means of voicing concerns on areas relevant and within the control of the Sungi as an organization. Among other organizational commitments, this will ensure Sungi's compliance to the HAP principles, particularly HAP Principle 6;



“members enable beneficiaries and staff to report complaints and seek redress safely” and benchmark 5, of the HAP 2007 standards.

#### **4. What is a Complaint?**

A complaint is an expression of discontent, regret, pain, criticism, resentment, grief, or faultfinding. For this document, a complaint is ***“an expression of dissatisfaction by the stakeholders about the standards of services provided by Sungi staff, its partners, or volunteers”***. This is an expression, feedback or criticism with the expectation of response, and with objective to improve the practices, change condition and to redress the complaint to satisfy the complainant.

A complaint must include the following but not limited to concerns about;

- the programme delivery,
- conduct and behavior of staff,
- failure of applying standard procedures, criteria and practices,
- failure in following the principles of empowered partnership,
- misuse of funds
- exclusion of the survivors from assistance

#### **5. What is not a Complaint?**

A general inquiry or request of information about Sungi’s programmes and work, a contractual dispute or a request to change contractual arrangement, a general statement about the work or concerns (which can be a useful feedback), a rumor, and opinion. The complaint requires solid grounds of evidence and direct experience.

Anonymous complaints, although not encouraged but these are welcome. These complaints will be judged on the basis of information and processed accordingly. These may be helpful to encourage beneficiaries to complain on sensitive issues, or where the complainant feels threatened.

#### **6. Who can lodge complaints?**

Any person from the partner community including men, women and children; representative of a household or an organization can give feedback and/or complain against staff, workers and volunteers of Sungi and partner organizations, in case if during the provision of humanitarian and/or development assistance, any of the above mentioned stakeholders (individuals and organizations) allegedly failed to apply and implement agreed standards, procedures and principles.

#### **7. What is not covered under these procedures?**

Sungi staff can complain through Sungi’s grievance mechanism and it will be dealt through Sungi Staff Service Rules, Gender and Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy and other policies and procedures. Human Resource department of Sungi will be handling such cases with support of Executive Director and concerned Directors.

The complaints procedures do not apply to complaints that are subject to current investigation by any regulatory body.

Complaints that do not have supporting evidence, and after initial investigation no evidence is found, the complaints will not be further investigated. Anonymous complaint will be registered, and a quick investigation will be carried out to find out the facts for further action.



## **8. The Complaints Handling Procedures**

Sungi will engage beneficiaries and other stakeholders to decide on specific ways of lodging complaints for each group and complaints lodging methods will be determined considering the socio-political, geographical, cultural, gender, educational, language and religious characteristics of the area. A set of tools have been developed and practiced by Sungi over a period of two decades of its existence to ensure accountability and quality through a participatory approach, which will be adopted and improved along with new complaints handling techniques.

### **8.1. Time Frame for Redressing a Complaint**

All complaints received from beneficiaries have to be recorded properly by registering them in Complaints Register in all designated office/s. The complainant will be informed immediately, through phone, letter, or email about the receipt of the complaint.

The complaint must be addressed with-in fifteen days after its receipt, and in case, where more time is required due to complex nature of complaint, the duration of addressing complaint shall not be more than four weeks. In extraordinary conditions the complaint handling may take more time, which shall be specifically endorsed by a Director/Executive Director while informing the complainant.

### **8.2. Process for Lodging Complaints**

A complaint shall be lodged in writing to the head of each humanitarian and field office against the staff, workers and volunteers of that office, but if the complaint is against the in-charge of that office it shall be lodged with the immediate supervisor in the regional or head office. It can also be sent directly to HAP Focal Person in Head Office, Director/s or to the Executive Director.

Sungi encourages complaints to be sent in written form but a telephonic complaint can be entertained if sufficient verifiable information is provided and complainant agrees to provide all relevant information and evidence during the process of investigation.

The Complainant shall provide his/her address; phone number; CNIC number and wherever possible the email address. Sungi will ensure keeping all such information confidential, and it will not be shared with public without the consent of the complainant. The information however, will be open to the complaint handling committees and other involved in investigation process.

A complainant can send written complaints through post to the given address, directly handover in the office, or drop it in the complaints handling boxes.

The complainant shall enclose required evidence with the written complaint and give sufficient information, so that the complaint can be approved for processing. Documentary evidence, if any, shall be included with complaint but it can be provided afterwards and it shall be written clearly in the application.

Sungi shall establish a complaint hotline in head office and where possible in field offices, by designating a telephone number. A clear timing for registering complaints will be communicated to the beneficiaries and stakeholders.

As a best practice the methods of lodging complaints shall be decided in consultation with the beneficiaries and it shall be clearly communicated to all stakeholders. Accountability Information Boards (AIBs) shall be developed to provide complaints procedures and other information and displayed in appropriate places. Other Information Education Accountability and Communication (IEAC) Materials, shall be developed and used for ensuring accountability communication.

In brief the complaints shall be lodged through one or more of the following methods;



- Community Accountability Committee established at various levels i.e. village, UC and various levels of working area
- Humanitarian Quality Management Committee (HQMC)
- Dropping written complaints to the Complaints Boxes in the working area and offices
- Complaint telephone number/s to be assigned specifically to accept complaints – complaints hot line
- Written complaint to the designated persons through post

### **8.3. Complaint Addressing Committees**

During the Humanitarian Assistance, Sungi works through establishing Humanitarian Quality Management Committees (HQMCs) or Relief Committees. These committees are engaged in need assessment, providing relief assistance and ensuring accountability. Sungi works through village committees and supra-village committees at UC, tehsil and district level while implementing its development programmes. One of the main functions of these committees is to ensure quality and accountability. Sungi establishes accountability committees and audit committees depending upon the nature and duration of the programmes, to ensure accountability and to encourage feedback and complaints from the beneficiaries. At the organizational level, Sungi works through organizational complaints and grievance handling committees. Following is the institutional framework for handling complaints.

#### **8.3.1 Community Accountability Committee (CAC):**

Sungi shall develop accountability committees at village and UC level which will be responsible to ensure accountability in programmes implemented by Sungi and its partner organizations. The partner organizations will be encouraged to establish CACs and complaints mechanism for their own organizations.

The role of Community Accountability Committees (CAC) is to listen, document, facilitate discussions and address complaints of the beneficiaries and other community members.

Members of the CAC will be nominated by beneficiaries themselves. There shall be CACs for men and women and in joint CAC both and equal men and women representation shall be ensured. Following shall be the member composition:

- Two members of the local committee i.e. HQMC/VC/ACC, who are beneficiaries
- One or two persons from the village or local community who are not direct beneficiaries
- The committee will be headed by a local community member (one of the members selected by other members)
- Sungi's Designated staff – facilitator

The complainant will lodge the complaint through the designated person or any other member of the CAC through verbal or written method. The CAC will evaluate, investigate address the complaint, and report back to the complainant and to Sungi's designated field office. This committee will be responsible to handle issues of exclusion, problems in assessment and provision of relief items. In case of the complicated or sensitive complaints, the CAC will forward complaint to designated person/committee of Sungi. The complaints against staff shall be forwarded to the Sungi.

#### **8.3.2 Organizational Accountability Committees (OACs)**

Organizational Accountability Committees shall be formed at all operational levels in the organization. There will be an accountability committee in each field/zonal/regional/project office responsible to hear and address the complaints of the beneficiaries, and other stakeholders. The committee in each office will be comprised of the office manager/unit in-charge and two more nominated staff members by the concerned Director/ED.

In the head office, organizational accountability committee will be constituted and approved by Executive Director to ensure humanitarian and programme accountability and quality in the



organization which shall be convened by relevant Director. The committee will be responsible to ensure HAP principles, practices in the organization.

The complaints will be received in head office and registered by a nominated staff member, i.e. Executive Secretary. A complaint handling committee will be formed by the concerned relevant director to address each complaint. The constitution of the committee shall be decided on the basis of the availability of staff, relevancy and other characteristics including skills and experience.

The relevant person, against whom the complaint is made, should not be part of the committee. During the investigation of complaint the confidentiality will be ensured.

#### **8.4 Key Steps in Complaints Handling**

The beneficiaries and other community members are encouraged to register complaint against Sungi staff, Partner HQMC/VC/Organization, workers or Volunteers engaged in Sungi supported programme and any other stakeholders of the programme at any stage of project implementation. The complaint can also be lodged even after the completion of the project or programme intervention. If the CAC does not exist or it turned non-functional the complaint shall be submitted to Organizational Accountability Committees/designated Offices/staff.

Following are the key steps in complaints handling:

**Step 1: Writing/Developing a Complaint:** The complainant shall lodge a complaint preferably through a written note, but other means can also be used. It shall include all the needed information and it shall include, brief description on the incidence including the names of those involved, venue of the incidence, and other information.

The complainant/s can write complaints on plain paper and they can also use standard format provided by Sungi for this purpose. If the complaint is to be lodged verbally, the complainant shall collect all relevant information and evidences before lodging the complaint, so that s/he could provide sufficient information to be recorded by concerned Sungi staff or a CAC member at the time of receiving the complaint.

**Step 2: Lodging the Complaint:** The complainant/s can send their complaints directly to a Community Accountability Committee (CAC) member. S/he can drop the written complaint in the complaints boxes in their respective villages/locality/office. The complainant can also request CAC members or any other person to write a complaint on his/her behalf, but s/he shall own it through signing the documents or putting their thumb impression. The complaints can be lodged by group of people, and they have to provide their complete personal information and sign the complaint documents.

Complaints can be made on the designated telephone numbers – complaints hotlines – which shall be clearly communicated through accountability information boards, direct communication and other IEAC materials. Complaints can be lodged through email and other means including Sungi website while providing the complainants complete identity information.

The complainant can lodge a complaint directly to organizational complaint committees/office incharge, in case they don't trust or doubt the CAC's credibility.

CACs and OACs shall appoint a member who will open the complaints boxes every day, to see if there is a complaint by community members.

**Step 3: Registering the Complaint:** All complaints whether verbal, written or even electronic should be filed and documented in a complaint register. The register shall be kept by the committee and documents shall also be filed. Confidentiality shall be ensured.



**Step 4: Processing the Complaint:** CAC will meet and discuss the complaint and decide on the complaint within seven days. The CAC can decide to handover the complaint to the Sungi field office or any higher level organizational accountability committee.

Once the complaint is received by the OAC, it shall be registered and submitted to the office in-charge/head of the committee. The office in-charge shall review the complaint carefully and call the committee meeting immediately. S/he shall also keep his/her supervisor in loop during the process. A specific committee to investigate the complaint shall be immediately formed by the concerned director in head office by involving accountability committee members and other staff, considering the nature of the complaint. All relevant organizational policies and procedures will be used in case any staff member is found guilty and Sungi Human Resource section will provide support in this regard.

**Step 5: Decision Making:** The assigned committees will process the complaints and decide on following:

- The problem/issue to be solved and if possible the affected shall be benefited
- Quick actions taken to address the problems and to ensure quality and accountability in the humanitarian assistance or in other programme interventions
- Recommend measures to punish the indicted staff member, to be approved by concerned director and ED
- Forward the complaint for higher level committee if needed
- Brief report on the outcome to the directors/ED shall be submitted for reference and record.
- Keep all the evidences and documents for future reference. These shall be handed over to head office and kept with Executive Secretary, along with complaints register.
- Staff involvement in serious violations will be dealt according to Staff Service Rules, as approved by ED. However, the committee shall recommend punishment and rewards for staff. HR shall facilitate such cases.

**Step 6: Reporting and Follow-up:** The complainant shall be informed about the decision of the complaint. The decision shall be entered in complaints register for future reference. An electronic record could also be maintained.

If a complaint is wrong and the complainant does not provide evidence, the person shall be informed in writing, and a message of displeasure shall be communicated to the complainant. In case a complaint launched by Sungi staff is found to be baseless, s/he shall be warned and a punishment can be decided as per staff service rules. However, in case of the anonymous complaint this will not be needed.

A summary of the complaints handled during the year shall be reported in annual institutional reports. It shall be shared with management team in each management committee meeting.

## **8.5 Appeal**

If a complainant is not satisfied with the decision s/he can file an appeal to the higher level committee or to the directors and ED of Sungi. The complainant will have to accept the final decision against the appeal and it will be the final decision and complaint will be closed.

## **9 Related Document:**

Sungi Code of Conduct, Gender and Anti-sexual Harassment Policy, Sungi Humanitarian Manual, Sungi Staff Service Rules, Sungi Communication Policy, Alliance Against Sexual Harassment at Work Place (AASHA) Code of Conduct