

**Community feedback and
complaints mechanisms:
early lessons from Tearfund's
experience**

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A synthesis of experiences across four emergency programmes

- **DR Congo:** South Kivu
- **Sudan:** West and South Darfur
- **South Sudan:** Upper Nile and Bahr el Ghazal
- **Afghanistan:** Kapisa, Kandahar, Jawzjan

Types of Feedback Received: DR Congo

- Complaints from community members who had not received seed they were due to be given. This led to the dismissal of the agronomist.
- Feedback that some beneficiaries had sold animals they had received that day in an animal fair. It resulted in a rethink of how the fairs were organized, given the challenges of transporting the animals back to their villages.
- Complaints that a community committee president did not treat project participants with respect.
- Request not to use concrete blocks for school construction as they are not long lasting – prefer burnt bricks

Types of Feedback Received: Darfur

- Requests for Tearfund to work in areas or to perform activities beyond its scope
- Complaint from one family that they had been marginalised by other families and not included in seed distribution
- Complaints regarding incentives and the discrepancies between what different groups are receiving for different activities.
- Complaints that committees were given money to pay technicians to dig latrine holes but instead kept the money for themselves and the beneficiaries had to dig their own holes.
- Feedback on staff members eg. staff using their position when it came to recruiting staff; disapproval of Tearfund staff evacuating; potential fraud by staff.

Types of Feedback Received: South Sudan

- Wanting to know why Tearfund is pulling out of the health sector in a location
- Complaint about lack of fencing around a Primary Health Care Unit and feeding centre
- Requests from youth for sports equipment
- Enquiries when a grinding mill will be repaired
- Request for help procuring office supplies for the Deputy Commissioner's office
- Appreciation for the work carried out in health and nutrition

Types of Feedback Received: Afghanistan

- Thanks for provision of biosand water filters
- Request for more training on use of biosand filters, for more health and hygiene training
- Request for construction of water reservoirs, schools, mosques, wells
- Request for biosand filters to be provided in schools
- Complaint from a doctor "before your distribution of biosand filters I had 20 -30 patients, all had stomach and diarrhoea problems from bad quality water. I have to leave this area because I lost my income"

Challenges faced in developing feedback and complaints mechanisms

Challenges with Communities

- Expectations are raised when asked for feedback, communities then feeling disappointed or ignored if no action is taken
- Majority of issues and requests have been beyond Tearfund's control but expectations are that Tearfund will address them
- In insecure locations, difficult for staff to visit regularly and follow up on feedback received, leading to disappointment
- A fear of losing assistance if they make complaints against staff
- Predominant verbal traditions and issues over confidentiality

Complaints about community leadership

- Traditional dispute resolution systems often work through the traditional leaders
- Difficulties experienced gathering feedback through general meetings as leaders are often generally in attendance

Challenges with Staff

- Staff attitudes and values being at the heart of an effective complaints and response mechanism
- Complaints interpreted to be a poor reflection of staff performance, not something to be welcomed
- A tendency to focus on the hardware elements, resulting in an over emphasis on for example sign-boards rather than the underlying principles
- Staff not always asking different groups in the community what are their preferred ways of complaining and feeding back?

Challenges with Staff

- A lack of support from the Senior Management/Project Leaders having a big impact on the effectiveness of the accountability systems
- Is it better to have a dedicated role or to “mainstream” responsibilities with all staff?
- A danger of a dedicated role being perceived by the rest of the team as the “Accountability Police”
- Many projects cover wide geographic areas, making it impossible for one role to get round to all the villages regularly enough

Recommendations for Improvement

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1. Develop comprehensive induction programmes for staff

- To include more detail and illustrations on the basics of accountability
- Attempt to address staff fears about the system
- Standardise refresher training with an injection of creativity and enthusiasm

2. Emphasise accountability within line management

- Line management to reinforce the importance of accountability systems alongside other priorities
- Introduce a checklist for managers to review levels of compliance
- Include in performance management and appraisals

3. Ensure adequate capacity to manage the feedback and complaints system

- Ensure roles and responsibilities are clear
- Ensure sufficient staff positions in place to support the mechanisms
- Develop the role of community reference groups

4. Ensure an equivalent feedback and complaints system exists for staff

- Matching the two commitments – to communities and to staff - and ensuring consistency

5. Ensure timely responses are provided to the feedback and complaints received

- The more responses are given, the more the system will be used
- Get the system in place from the start of the project
- Receiving no negative feedback does not mean the community is happy

6. Provide clarity on the scope of feedback and complaints

- Clarify that feedback is encouraged on public commitments (poor behaviour – conduct not followed, poor quality – standards not adhered to, poor delivery – objectives not met)
- Reinforce the fact that communities are free to give their honest opinions and that assistance will not be withheld as a result of negative feedback

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