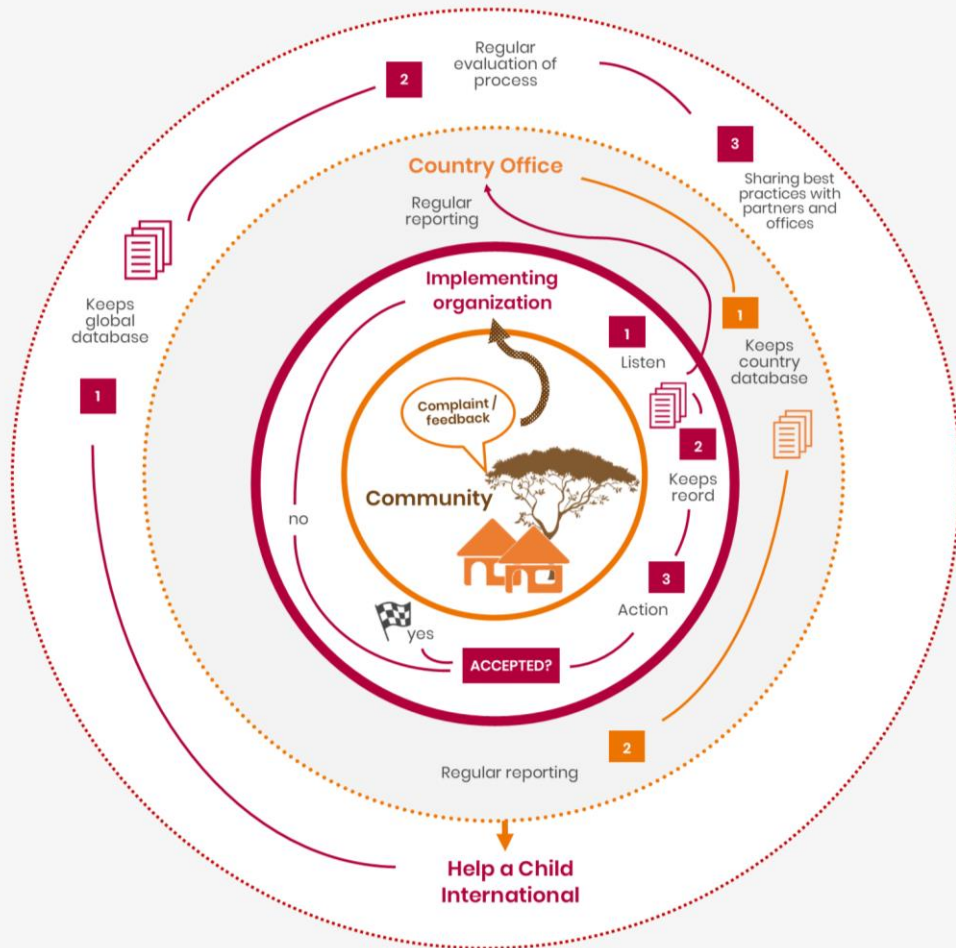**Community Based** Complaints & Feedback Mechanism

Core Humanitarian Standards Commitment 5:
Communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints.

Regular evaluation of process

Sharing best practices with partners and offices

Country Office

Regular reporting

Keeps global database

Keeps country database

Implementing organization

Listen

Complaint / feedback

Keeps reord

Community

no

Action

yes

ACCEPTED?

Regular reporting

Help a Child International

CBCFM Guidelines for Staff

Help a Child 2021

Introduction

These guidelines aim to support Help a Child (HaC) staff, as well as partner staff in establishing Community Based Complaints and Feedback Mechanisms (CBCFMs). Only if the community is fully involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of the mechanism, it qualifies as 'community based'. As Help a Child, we believe that only then will the system be effective, and therefore valuable to the community as well as to the Help a Child/Partner staff members to improve the quality of the projects.

This document is intended for all Help a Child and partner organization staff members that are involved in the implementation of disaster response and development projects, in all locations, at all times.

Within each country office, partner organization and eventually in each project it needs to be decided who is best placed to establish the CBCFM mechanism, and thus the feedback channels. This will depend on your context and staff capacity, but it could be that the Country Program Directors are ultimately responsible but will delegate this task to their programme staff or MEAL staff. It would be advised that directors take the initiative to reflect on the feedback and complaints, at least bi-annually. A simple format has been created which can be used to show who is responsible for the different channels in each location (Annex 3).

We do understand that at first, it might be uncomfortable or difficult to ask for feedback and be open to receive complaints as this might seem like criticism on your work, or your personal performance. However, this is not the aim of setting up a Complaints and Feedback Mechanism, as we welcome complaints and feedback and want to address the issues to improve the quality of our work and be fully accountable to our beneficiaries. This is also in accordance to the Core Humanitarian Standard, especially commitment 5: 'Communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints'. Your role in this process is very important and highly appreciated.

1. The inner circle;

This is where our CBCFM start: the inner circle highlights that community members are enabled to hand-in a complaint or give their feedback on the project. It is therefore very important that community members (including children) have access to systems and mechanisms that allow them to easily raise their concerns which meet their (diverse) needs in terms of expressing themselves. This is why we developed so-called "Guidelines for Community Consultations" that will help our (partner) staff in gaining the right information, relevant for setting up complaints and feedback mechanisms that are in line with the local context. Enabling community members with access to systems and mechanisms that meet their needs for expressing themselves, is a requirement to involve the same community members in the design, the implementation and the decision-making processes of the program. As a child-focused organization, it is of utmost importance to ensure that our feedback mechanisms are child-friendly. This means that children have to be included in the design of the mechanisms so that they can share their preferences and ensure that the channels are accessible to them. Children who are illiterate also need to be given a voice, as well as children with disabilities and children who are marginalized in any other way.

During the community consultations, it is also prudent to already do some expectations management, and explain what will be covered with the Complaint and Feedback Mechanisms, and what not. The table below will give you some assistance in creating the right expectations on the ground.

Question	Answer
What kind of feedback and complaints can be shared?	Feedback and complaints from beneficiaries related to HaC project implementation as well as staff conduct towards beneficiaries (this includes partner staff, community facilitators and anyone who is involved in the project on behalf of HaC)
To whom are the feedback channels accessible?	To all beneficiaries, as well as other community members who want to share feedback.
Which issues are **not** covered by the CBCFM?	More general complaints or issues in the

	community, e.g. misbehavior of community members, domestic violence, or complaints about other organizations working in the same area. These complaints will be referred to the relevant organization, or person(s).
How do I report integrity issues that are related to my colleagues/other staff members?	HaC also developed an Integrity Policy, which deals with integrity issues related to our staff or partner-staff (Annex 4, <u>Feedback, Complaints, and Whistle Blowing Procedure)</u>. Any breach of code of conduct can be reported to the Integrity Focal Point or Integrity Coordinator.

Proactive and Reactive Channels

Notwithstanding the input given by the community members, it is always advisable to set up both proactive and reactive feedback channels in a project area. The combination of both proactive and reactive feedback channels gives us the chance to have a broad perspective on the views and opinions of the community, and to reach out to those that do not reach out themselves, while also providing an opportunity for community members to reach out to us.

Channels	Examples	Strengths	Weaknesses
Proactive feedback channels are mechanisms through which HaC is actively soliciting feedback from community members. This means that we choose the community members and stakeholders to whom we want to ask questions and that we control the questions we are asking and timing of when the information is collected.	A survey, a focus group discussion, an individual interview, community meetings, etc.	The strength of proactive channels is that the information we are collecting is more actionable, nuanced and easier to interpret.	The weakness is that the information we are collecting is limited to the questions we are asking (issues that HaC is already interested in). We may miss broader trends and other important issues. Proactive channels also don't provide a channel for communicating with HaC and asking questions or lodging complaints.

| Reactive feedback channels are mechanisms that HaC provide to its beneficiaries and other stakeholders to communicate with us – at the time and subject they choose. | Suggestions boxes, hotlines, email addresses, office walk-in, etc. | The strength is that clients can raise concerns as they arise about whatever concerns them, at a time which they choose | The weakness is that it is often seen only as a complaints mechanism. Systematically recording feedback and ensuring that we are providing a response also requires time, resources and a good data management system and referral pathways. |

Below a list of several proactive and reactive channels can be found. Depending on the input gained through the community consultations, and based on several other factors such as available time and resources as well as access to communities and technology, a decision can be made on which channels are most preferred. This decision always need to be made in consultation with the community members.

While deciding on the channels, please take into account that children will be less proactive themselves and need to be approached and engaged in such a way that they feel comfortable and safe sharing their feedback and complaints. Mostly, this means that they need to be familiar with the staff that works in the project and know that they can trust them and share anything related to the project as well as the conduct of our staff. It is important that children are also aware of the channels to raise sensitive complaints related to sexual and gender based violence in order to ensure child safeguarding. Children could also report to the reactive channels through a trusted individual/representative, a so-called proxy.

Category	Channels[1]
Proactive channels	Survey
	FGD
	Individual interview
	Community meeting
	Local radio
Reactive channels	Suggestion boxes

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[1] This list is not exhaustive, feel free to add any additional channels that are relevant to the context.

	Hotlines (toll-free if possible)
	SMS lines
	Office walk-in hours
	Social media
	Community representative / proxy
	HAC / Partner staff

2. The second circle
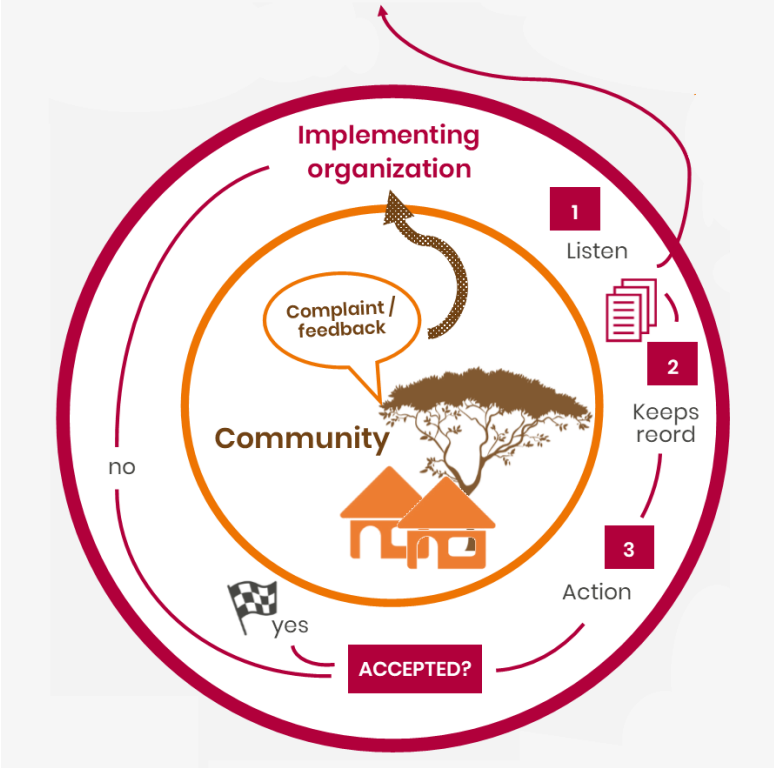
The second circle is about HaC or the implementing partner organization dealing with the complaints. As you can see in the visual, there are three key-steps in this cycle; listen, keeps record, and action. Let's elaborate on each of these steps below.

Listen: First and foremost, it is important that you "listen" carefully and attentively to the complainant, whether this is an adult, or a child. All feedback and complaints should be taken seriously, regardless of the age, gender, ability and ethnicity of the person. You should make sure that you understand the issue, as it is perceived by (one of) the community members. Confidentiality is crucial as the CBCFM should be a safe space to share concerns, with trust that this information will only be used to resolve the issue, and will only be shared when necessary and with consent.

Keeps record: The reasons to keep record of the feedback and complaints is to ensure that all is well registered so that it can be followed up and you have all the details of the person so that you can also close the loop when the issue is resolved. As an organization, it also gives you information about what can be improved in your programming in order to increase the quality and what needs to be changed to serve our beneficiaries in the best possible way. While keeping record, it is important to keep in mind that all that is shared should be kept confidential and will only be recorded and shared when the person gives permission to do so.

Once you have permission to register the complaint or feedback, and after understanding the matter, you can fill in the Feedback Form which includes details of the complainant (only if

complainant agrees), and a brief description of the complaint. After filling in the Feedback Form, the complaint is handled by the responsible staff.

Action: When the complaint or feedback has been registered, it is good to review and see if action is needed. For instance, if the complaint is from someone who would like to know why he or she is not included in the project, or did not receive relief items, you need to check if the person is eligible, and meets the selection criteria, or if there is a certain reason why the person is not included. Another example may be that the person complains about the conduct of one of the staff members, if there is a serious allegation and this is a breach of code of conduct, you have to notify the integrity focal point and an investigation may have to be initiated.

The follow up on the complaint or feedback will also be recorded in the form, such as any action taken, and the number of days it took before the complaint has been resolved.

(suggestions on how to respond to the complaint or feedback, can be found below (table response categories, page 9)

Close the loop: After taking action as a way of dealing with the complaint, it is always important to go back to the community member and tell them about your way of dealing with the complaint or feedback; closing the loop. It is then important to hear from the community member whether they accept the solution proposed by the (partner) staff or not. In case they agree, the issue is resolved. In case the solution is not accepted, you are supposed to further investigate why people are not satisfied, and check whether this is something that needs to be addressed. In some cases, another solution is maybe more appropriate, while in other cases it needs to be acknowledged that not every complaint can be solved. However, it is still important to pay attention to these complaints, while using the opportunity to explain our way of working to the complainant.

Feedback Categories

In order to know how to respond, it is good to categorize each complaint. Below you can find an overview of the six categories that can apply to the feedback or complaint. These categories are also used in the reporting format.

Category	Description	Explanation
1	Request for Information	Information request from a community member about the type of services or aid available at HaC, the location or timing of specific service or activity, questions about targeting criteria, etc.

2	Request for Assistance	Request to be included into one of the HaC service provision programmes.
3	Minor Programmatic Complaint	Complaint about aid entitlement, which is perceived to be late or missing, timing or location of services, attitude or timeliness of HaC staff.
4	Major Programmatic Complaint	Complaint about lack of access to aid or service distribution or service location, exclusion of a minority or vulnerable group, extortion of aid by a third party, refusal by HaC staff to listen or acknowledge a complaint or inability of a client to reach the feedback channels.
5	Breach of HaC Integrity Policy	Allegations of child abuse, sexual exploitation, demand by a staff for payment to receive support, theft or fraud committed by a member of HaC staff, or threat received from staff.
6	General feedback/other	Anything that does not fit in the above-mentioned categories; opinions, compliments, comments, ideas, suggestions, expectation and spam.

Breach of Help a Child Integrity Policy (Category 5)

Most issues within category 1-4 can be resolved by the implementing organization. In case of a 'Breach of HaC Integrity Policy' (category 5), such as allegations of child abuse, sexual exploitation, or fraud and corruption, **immediate** follow up from someone that is preferably not directly involved in the implementation of the project and is not the subject of the complaint is needed. This means, amongst others, that the '**Integrity Focal Point**' of HaC in-country (primary Focal point) must be informed immediately. In most cases this is the Country Program Director (CPD). In case it is too sensitive to inform the local Integrity Focal Point, because the person may somehow be associated with the case or is for any other reason not fully trusted, there is a possibility to inform the **global Integrity Coordinator** (secondary Focal point). Partner organizations also appointed an Integrity Focal Point, but in case there is a reason why the issue cannot be reported to this person, the partner staff may go to the HaC Integrity Focal Point.

In case there is no HaC office in-country, the Global Integrity Focal Point can be contacted by sending an email to integrity@helpachild.org or call +31 (0)38 468 08 69. This is strictly confidential, and complainants can be ensured they will be protected from retaliation. More

information with regard to handling sensitive complaints can be found in the [Help a Child Integrity Policy, especially **Annex 4**](#).

Response Categories

The response to the feedback or complaint can also be prioritized and categorized. The priority can be either **low, medium, high**, or **critical**. The response categories are listed below. These are also included in the Feedback and Complaints Database.

Category	Response	Explanation
1	Apologize	Acknowledgment of a fault or error, expression of a regret.
2	Corrective decision/action	Making change in a programmatic decision or action (e.g. inclusion of a community member into a programme, changing the time or location for service delivery).
3	Provide an explanation	Providing additional information for a decision or an action taken by HaC.
4	External referral	Request that is outside the scope or power of influence of HaC but that falls under the mandate of another organisation for which we have a point of contact.
5	Provide goods/services	Providing goods or services that were not received by the community member.
6	Provide information	Answer a question or a request for information.
7	Change policy	Change of rule or guidelines.
8	Drop the request/complaint	Request or complaint that is out of the scope or power of influence of HaC and for which we have no point of contact in another organisations that would have the mandate to respond (no referral possible). Community members should still be informed, when possible, that we are unable to handle their request or to refer it to anyone.
9	Other	Any other type of response – please specify.

3. The third circle

We discussed that in the second circle, the implementing organization keeps record of all the incoming feedback and complaints. The data on the feedback forms will be entered in the [feedback & complaints database](#). These records will feed into the country feedback and

complaints database. This means that the country office is updated on a bi-annual basis by the implementing organization on the complaints and feedback they received, and also includes the data from their own implementation.
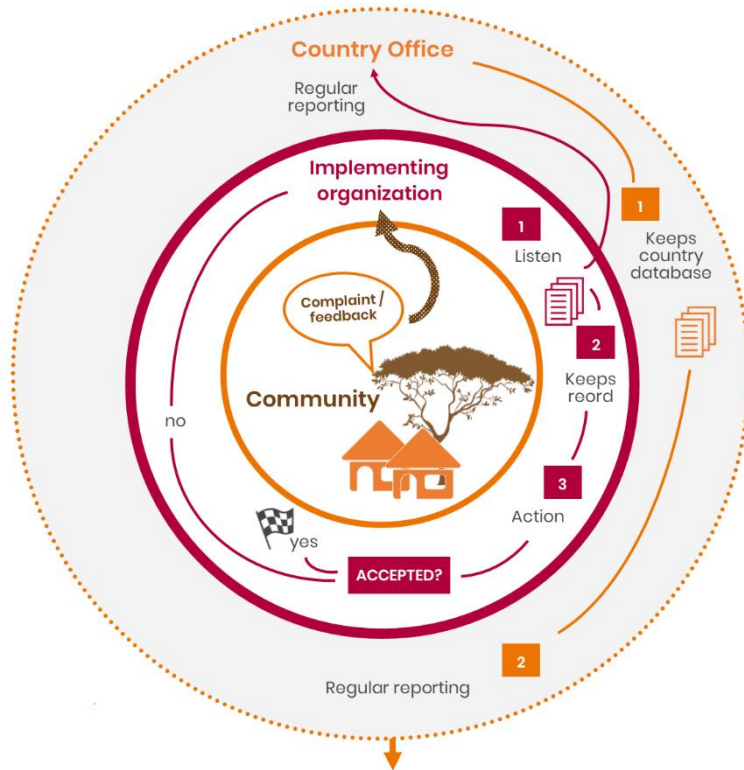
The country office keeps a national database with the complaints received in the different communities and by the different implementing organizations (in case there is more than one), which can be used for different (reflective) purposes in programme design or partner meetings for example. The database can be used for different purposes:

1) analyzing trends in topics people are complaining about,

2) identifying which feedback and complaints mechanisms result in more feedback and complaints than others do,

3) guiding your own staff and partner staff in the way they are dealing with complaints, and

4) advising for alternative ways in dealing with complaints, in case gaps or limitations are discovered in the register.

Lastly, country offices share their country database with Help A Child international on a bi-annual basis as an annex to the (Bi) Annual Report; which brings us to the outer ring.

4. The outer circle

The fourth and outer circle illustrates that Help a Child International wants to be informed about the complaints received in the community, not only when these complaints are serious and very severe, but also the minor complaints should be reported to Help a Child International for our (internal) learning purposes. As we continuously want to improve our programmes, it is important for Help a Child to have an overall picture of all the complaints received from the community. We believe that in this way, we can learn from experiences, and adjust our programmes if necessary. Therefore, the country databases will feed in a global

databases that is managed by HaC's PMEAL coordinator, and will be analyzed and reflected upon in a bi-annual basis (either through written updates or reflection meetings).

Simultaneously, it is equally important for Help a Child to check the relevance of the complaints and feedback mechanism and the overall process. Therefore, it is the role of Help a Child International to evaluate the Complaints and Feedback processes and to support learning in the different countries from complaints and feedback received.

Finally, the register with the complaints will also support the headquarter in observing how country offices are dealing with the complaints from the field, and maybe offer some advice on how to take up their duty with regards to the Complaints and Feedback Mechanism.
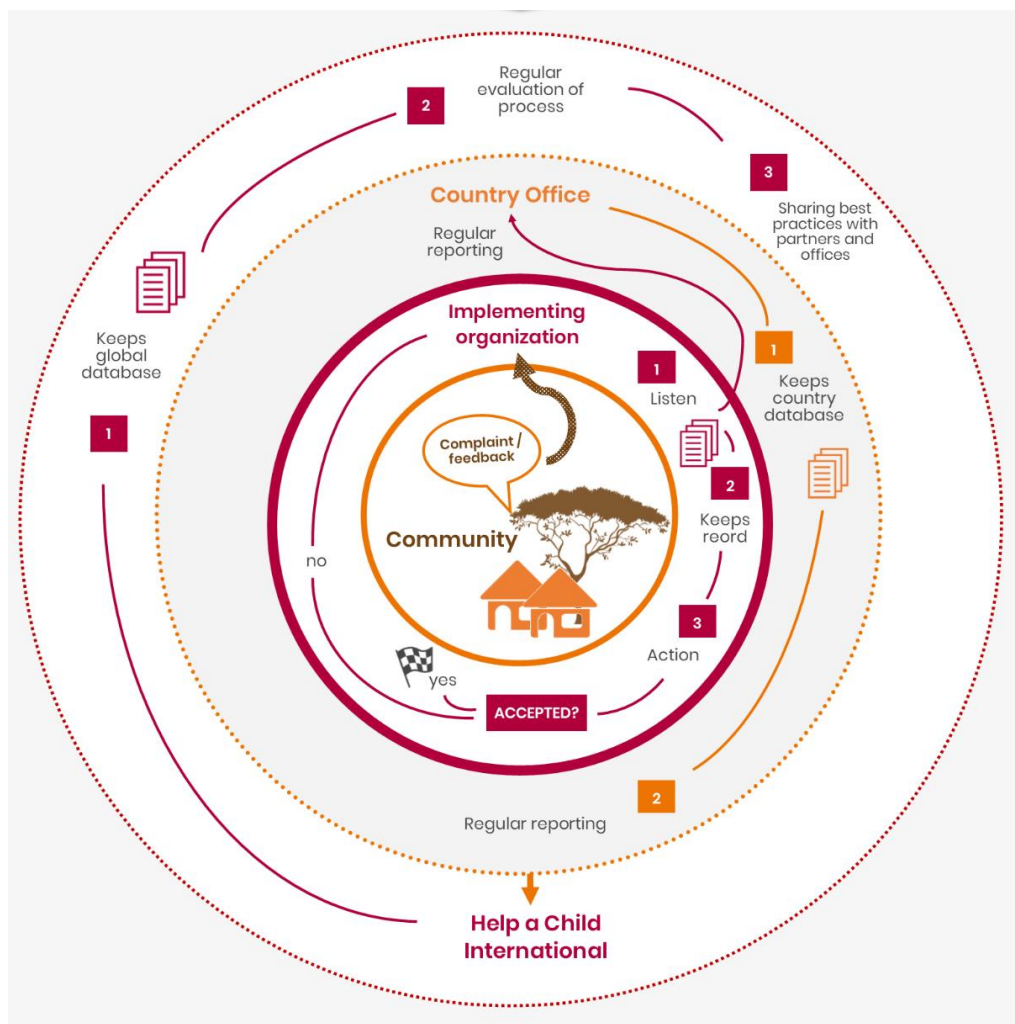
ANNEX 1 - Guidelines Community Consultations

For setting up a Community Based Complaints and Feedback Mechanism

Help a Child aims to align its work more and more towards the Core Humanitarian Standards. One aspect in aligning our work towards the CHS is setting up Community Based Complaints and Feedback Mechanism (CBCFM), something that is yet lacking in the organization. In setting up these CBCFM, Help a Child invites her partners in organizing for meaningful community consultations, as community members are best situated to inform on the CBCFM. In support of these community consultations, these guidelines are developed and meant to give guidance in the initial discussions with community members on the design of the CBCFM.

'Community members are best-situated to inform on the Community Based Complaints and Feedback Mechanisms '

Community Consultations - why to consult?

As said, Help a Child wants community members to make use of the Community Based Complaints and Feedback Mechanism, and therefore the CBCFM needs to be in line with the needs of the community members. Hence, the main aim of the community consultations is to get clarity on the needs of community members with regards to the CBCFM. Specific topics on which you want to get insight are the following:

- The most appropriate complaint intake channel; which types of complaint mechanism will be appropriate in this specific context.
- The location of physical reporting channels
- Local perceptions on complaining in general, and on complaining to "outsiders" (is complaining seen as appropriate? Is there any fear for retaliation? Etc.)
- The types of complaints community members might want to report
- The type of feedback they want to give
- How the community wants to be informed, and what information they want to receive (e.g. how to structure awareness-raising events).
- How to enable/support children to complain and give feedback

Community Consultations – whom to consult?

Help a Child desires to develop CBCFMs that will be used by the community members that are served in the different countries. Each CBCFM will be context-specific, as to ensure that the community members in the specific contexts will be able to make use of the CBCFM. Therefore, in each country, Help a Child supports the country offices and their partners to conduct community consultations in order to gain clear insights for setting up these CBCFMs. It is important that the community consultations are held with and are attended by the different community groups that make up the general community. Groups that can be thought of are:

- Adults; both men and women
- Youth; both young men and young women
- Children (think of the different age categories)
- Elderly
- People living with disabilities
- Other vulnerable groups of people; widows, single-headed households, child-headed households, etc.

Depending on the context, it might be advisable to have separate community consultations for both genders and the different age-groups of people, in order to enable people to speak out in front of each other.

As the projects of Help a Child place children at the center, it is very important to arrange community consultations that are specifically meant for children[2], as to ensure that the CBCFM is in line with their needs and expectations on how they wish to give feedback and hand in their complaints.

Community Consultations – what to ask?

Below a list with possible question, specified per thematic area, is presented that can be useful in the community consultations. It is not necessary to ask all these questions one-by-one, but the questions should be seen as guiding questions, or probing areas, that will help in getting the information necessary for each thematic area. It is important that all thematic areas receive proper attention in the consultations, as all are equally important in setting up a proper and relevant CBCFM.

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[2] Further instructions for consultations with children will follow soon. For now, more information can already be found here:
Interagency Study on Child Friendly Feedback Mechanisms
Plan – Child Friendly Feedback Mechanisms
CRS – Guidance on Accountability to Children

While conducting the community consultations, it is important that at least one of the staff is occupied with taking notes of the points mentioned by the community members. The other staff is guiding the discussions, in a language the community members are acquainted with.

Thematic Area	Guiding Questions
Community Information Needs *(aim is understanding how the community wants to be informed about the CBCFM once it is there)*	• What information is the community receiving now? • What kind of information would they like to receive? • What are the community's priority information needs? In general and in relation to the work of Help a Child? • How often would they like to receive information from Help a Child? • How would they like to receive it? • Do information needs differ for different groups? For example, women, men, those with disabilities, young people, the elderly.
Community Information Sources *(aim: how do we need to approach different community members, when we want to inform them about the CBCFM, update them on a specific complaint)*	• Where do people get their information? Which sources are trusted the most? • Does everyone get their information from the same place or is it different for men, women or vulnerable groups? • Do people own TVs, radios, or mobile phones? Are these expensive to own and run? Is there electricity? • Which radio/TV stations or newspapers are popular? • What time do people listen to the radio? • Are there noticeboards and do people use them? • Do people encounter issues in accessing information? What are the obstacles in accessing information? • Are community meetings held? How often? Do people attend these meetings? For which purpose do they attend? To receive information, or to share information? • How do people feel most comfortable asking questions? • Generally, can people read or write in this community and in what language?
Transparent Communication from Help a Child *(aim: to get a general impression on how they perceive communication and information from Help a Child)*	• Do you receive regular information on Help a Child's activities? • Is the information you receive from Help a Child useful? • Is the information you receive from Help a Child easy for everybody to understand? • Do you know when Help a Child's activities will end? • Is beneficiary feedback regularly collected throughout a project by Help a Child? How often is ideal? • How do they gather this information, and how would you like to share it?

Inclusion and Diversity *(aim: understanding issues of vulnerability, to make sure that the CBCFM is inclusive and approachable for all community members)*	• Who are the vulnerable groups in this community? • Who makes the decisions in the community and are women and vulnerable groups included? • How much freedom do women have in the community to speak out, attend meetings, and get involved in projects? • Is information shared within the community and families? • Does everyone have equal access to information – if not, what are the barriers?
Participation *(aim: understanding issues of participation, to make sure that the CBCFM is inclusive and approachable for all community members)*	• Can you tell about the work of Help a Child in this community? • Does Help a Child consult you about the needs and priorities before a project starts? Does Help a Child ask your opinion and include you in programme decisions? • Is everyone in your community; including women, the elderly or the vulnerable, able to share their opinions on Help a Child's activities? • If not, how can they improve in this?
Handling Complaints and Feedback *(aim: understanding the desires of the community on how the actual CBCFM should look like)*	• Do you think you have a right to complain about Help a Child's activities? • Do you know how to complain or give feedback? • What is your preferred way to give confidential feedback to Help a Child? • Where would you want the complaint and feedback system to be located? • What types of complaints do people in your community want to report? • What are some of the local perceptions of complaining generally and to "outsiders", sexual abuse matters generally, to another sex, etc.? • How do you want to be informed?

Next Steps

After the community consultations, the staff involved in the consultations needs to write a report, that includes the main findings per thematic area. This report, together with the raw data / notes from the community consultations, should form the basis for the discussions within Help a Child International and Help a Child's country office, for further developing the CBCFM.

ANNEX 2 – Feedback Form

For staff to record feedback or complaints of community members which are included in HaC projects. All information should be dealt with in a confidential manner.

Region:		Site/Location:	
Date:		Project:	
Name of staff recording feedback:		Organisation:	
Name of community member*:		Gender of complainant:	
Feedback channel: *(phone, community meeting, etc)*		Means of contact to provide response:	

Short description of the feedback/complaint:			

X	Please tick the relevant category:	X	Response:
	1. Request for Information		1. Apologize
	2. Request for Assistance		2. Corrective decision/action
	3. Minor Programmatic Complaint		3. Provide an explanation
	4. Major Programmatic Complaint		4. External referral
	5. Breach of HaC Integrity Policy		5. Provide goods/services
	6. General feedback/other:		6. Provide information
			7. Change policy
			8. Drop the request/complaint
			9. Other

Which action has been undertaken? *(please provide a short description)*		
Response provided to complainant?	YES – NO	Please explain how:
Is the complainant satisfied?	YES – NO	Please explain why:
Is the issue resolved?	YES – NO	If not, please explain:
Date when the issue was closed:		Nr of days until resolved:

ANNEX 3 - Community Based Complaint and Feedback Mechanisms

Overview of Channels and Responsibilities

Country: Kies een item.

Date: Klik of tik om een datum in te voeren.

Programme staff responsible: Klik of tik om tekst in te voeren.

Implementing Organization	Location	Project	Pro-active Channel(s)	Re-active Channel(s)	Responsible person(s)

List of channels

Proactive Channels	Reactive Channels
Survey	Suggestion boxes
FGD	Hotlines (toll-free if possible)
Individual interview	SMS lines
Community meeting	Office walk-in hours
Local radio	Social media
	Community representative / proxy
	HAC / Partner staff