

Communications Policy Manual

COMS 3.2

Complaints Handling Policy

Applicable to Asian Aid Organisation Ltd and its associated entities

Approved Date 03/07/2018

Reviewed Date 14/02/2020

Date of Board Endorsement 18/03/2020

Review Annually and as required

Scope This policy is part of the Asian Aid Organisation Policy Framework and is included within the Communications Policy Manual

Document Reference # Coms 3.2 Complaints Handling Policy Vs 3.0

Policy Administrator Human Resources Manager

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline the means by which Asian Aid manages complaints relating to its operations. It seeks to make clear the mechanisms available for making a complaint, how they will be handled and resolved.

We are committed to achieving the highest standard we can in every area of our work and to continuous improvement. This applies especially to delivery of services, seeking donations and accountability to stakeholders generally. We are committed to working according to or above the standard required by the Code of Conduct of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID). Receiving concerns and complaints is one of the most important avenues for learning what we need to do to improve our work.

This policy will be reviewed annually, and as required.

2. Scope of this policy

This policy is intended to apply to any complaint, regardless of who makes it. It applies to the handling of complaints from program partners and people we work with and for (to deliver Asian Aid's programs) including staff, partners, volunteers or any person directly involved in the delivery of our programs.

Anonymous complaints can be made, however complaints lodged in this manner may limit our capacity to investigate them. Complaints may relate to, but are not restricted to:

- Concern about the behaviour of staff, volunteers, Board members, suppliers, partners or others acting on Asian Aid's behalf
- Criticism about a fundraising campaign or action
- Concern over inappropriate use of funding
- Any breach of the ACFID Code of Conduct
- Organisational practices, policies or procedures
- Complaints about Asian Aid supported development programs and/or operations of partners

3. Guiding principles

Asian Aid has adopted the following principles for our complaints handling policy and procedures.

Principle 1: Visibility

We ensure through our publications and online presence that we value receiving concerns and complaints in all relevant communications. We advise a copy of this policy may be obtained and we provide clear information on how complaints may be made.

Principle 2: Accessibility

We will ensure that our complaint handling process is as accessible as we can practically make it to all complainants. Complaints can be made by telephone, in writing or by email to the head office in Australia.

Principle 3: Responsiveness

We will respond to complaints in a timely manner. We will acknowledge the receipt of the complaint by phone call, mail or email, within 5 working days and will endeavour to reach resolution to the complaint within 30 days.

Principle 4: Objectivity

We will address all complaints in an equitable, fair and unbiased manner using evidence submitted by both the complainant and our personnel through the complaint handling process. When a complaint is made about the actions of an Asian Aid employee, volunteer or program partner staff member, that person will not be involved, other than to provide information, in the investigation process.

Principle 5: Charges

Access to the complaint handling process is free of charge to complainants.

Principle 6: Confidentiality

We will observe strict confidentiality in complaint handling.

Principle 7: Consumer/client-focused approach

The interests of our consumers/clients are foremost in our approach to complaint handling.

Principle 8: Accountability

We will ensure that accountability for and reporting on the actions and decisions with respect to complaint handling is clearly established.

Principle 9: Continual improvement

Continual improvement of the complaint handling process and the quality of services is one of our permanent objectives (refer to section 11).

4. Definitions

- **Complaint-** means an expression of dissatisfaction made to an organisation, related to its products or services, or the complaint handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.
- **Complainant-** means a person, organisation or its representative, making a complaint.
- **Inquiry-** means a request for information or an explanation.
- **Feedback-** means opinions, comments, suggestions and expressions of interest in the products or the complaint handling process
- **Stakeholder or interested party-** means a person or group having an interest in the performance or success of the organization

5. Educating the organisation and training personnel

Our Complaints Handling Policy is distributed to all our paid staff, volunteers, partners, contracted service providers and all others acting on our behalf at induction. We require all those who may be involved in any way with a complaint to formally signify their commitment to this policy. The policy is also available for all staff on a nominated share drive.

To familiarise them with this policy Asian Aid runs induction programs for our governing board members and all relevant personnel. Personnel directly involved in handling complaints are fully trained in all aspects of this policy and its implementation. We take special care to train our field personnel to encourage, receive and handle complaints taking account of language issues and cultural sensitivities.

Training and/or communication will also be provided via face-to-face meetings and internal, written communication following an update or change to the policy.

6. Publicising the policy

We make clear the value we place on receiving concerns and complaints in all relevant communications. Through the 'Contact Us' tab on our company website, there are clear instructions on how to submit a complaint and a link to our Complaints Handling Policy. We ensure that making a complaint is as easy as possible. We will take complaints orally in person, over the phone and by any written means. We will do our best to assist a complainant to put their complaint in writing or to write it down ourselves as faithfully as we can. All relevant communications (i.e. website, newsletters, annual report, partnership agreements, staff policies) explain this and explain our procedures for handling complaints including:

- where or to whom complaints can be made
- information to be provided by the complainant
- the process for handling complaints
- time periods associated with various stages in the process
- the complainant's options for remedy, including external means
- how the complainant can obtain feedback on the status of the complaint

In addition to the general reviews of our complaint handling specified in section 11 of this policy, we will monitor how effectively we are publicising our complaints handling policy on a continuing basis and make necessary improvements in its communication.

As an expectation included in our partnership agreements, we will support our program partners to ensure care is taken in facilitating complaints from our program beneficiaries, including children and marginalised groups (refer to the Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures for details on submitting and managing complaints from child beneficiaries). This may include the use of oral or pictorial means of communication where literacy is a constraint.

7. Complaints handling procedure

Our complaints procedure outlines the process by which a complaint can be made, the process for assessing and managing it as well as ways to escalate those where a resolution has not been reached.

This process has been outlined in a procedural flowchart included in Annex 2.

8. Making and receiving a complaint

We are able to receive complaints orally in person or by telephone and in writing by post, email or online via our website. Where complaints are made orally we will ensure our write up of the complaint contains all the information the complainant wishes to provide. Complaints may be made by a friend or advocate of the complainant on their behalf. Complaints can be made, verbally, in writing or in person via the following channels:

- Directly: by speaking with any Asian Aid staff member
- Phone: by calling our Supporter Services team on +61 2 6586 4250
- Email: contact@asianaid.org.au
- Letter/feedback form (head office): mailed to Asian Aid Organisation, PO Box 333, Wauchope NSW 2446

Asian Aid views its accountability to our program beneficiaries (marginalised communities in our program locations) in the context of partnership with the local organisation(s) we support to work in those communities. For this reason, complaints processes for use by beneficiaries of our program locations will be developed by

Asian Aid's partner organisations. Asian Aid will support the development of such processes and will seek to ensure that they adhere to the principles outlined in this policy while recognising the autonomy of each agency.

Complaints received from program beneficiaries directly to Asian Aid's head office will be referred to the Director of the relevant partner office. Serious complaints of misconduct will be made to the designated authority and managed in accordance with Asian Aid's relevant policies (i.e. Code of Conduct, Child Safeguarding Policy, Whistleblower Policy, etc.) as well as relevant legislation.

9. Who can receive a complaint?

Any of Asian Aid's staff can receive a complaint. However once received, complaints must be submitted to identified personnel trained on handling complaints. When taking a verbal complaint, they must clarify the person's concerns and document the details on the Client Complaint Form (Annex 1). Complaints from children require a different approach and procedural steps for this process are outlined in Asian Aid Child Safeguarding Procedures document.

Should a complainant wish to remain anonymous, the complaint can still be taken however it may limit the effectiveness of the investigation / resolution. After taking the complaint, the recipient should advise the complainant of the next steps which are outlined in the Complaints Handling Procedural Flowchart included in Annex 2.

These will generally involve:

- Escalation to the relevant manager for investigation and determination; and
- Communicating the process / proposed outcome to the complainant within an agreed timeframe.

10. Investigating a complaint

To conduct an investigation the person handling the complaint will:

- Establish the facts and gather the relevant information, and if necessary and/or practicable, interview those involved. Once the investigation is completed, the person handling the complaint will recommend a course of action to the Senior Management Team (SMT).
- If the outcome of the investigation is that there should be action taken in relation to an employee, then the appropriate disciplinary and other organisational policies and procedures will be followed (refer to the Complaints Handling Procedural Flowchart in Annex 2).

11. Continuous improvement

This policy applies to all employees and volunteers linked to Asian Aid, all of whom are familiarised with it. Those with particular relevant responsibilities are trained in its application. Complaints and feedback form a valuable part of Asian Aid's continuous improvement process. Where complaints and their subsequent investigations identify the need for systemic or procedural improvements, the recommendations will be referred to the relevant manager to investigate / implement as required.

The process will include:

- Assess and report on whether the existing system / procedure is adequate;
- If it could be improved, make recommendations and implement;
- Provide feedback to the Senior Management Team / relevant manager responsible for handling the complaint so they can inform the complainant; and
- Implement changes once approved.

12. Responsibilities

The primary personnel responsible for receiving and resolving complaints are the Supporter Services team. Following that, the first point of escalation for the complaint(s) is to the Relationships Manager, who is responsible for:

- Initial assessment of complaints and identifying those which can be dealt with informally and those which are clear, serious, or complex complaints to be addressed according to the complaints handling procedure;
- Ensuring complaints are referred to the appropriate organisational area, are resolved and that follow up actions have taken place; and
- Maintaining the Complaints Log.

The Relationships Manager may choose to refer complaints to the Senior Management Team to be resolved, or directly through to the CEO. If further assistance is required from the CEO, complaints are then referred to the Chair of the Board.

13. Timeframes

We will acknowledge written complaints within 5 days. We will acknowledge oral complaints immediately. We will aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible and within 30 days unless there are exceptional circumstances.

If a complaint is not resolved within 30 days we will inform the complainant of progress and keep them informed of progress every two weeks.

14. Closing out and escalation of complaints

A complaint cannot be closed until the complainant has been informed about steps taken to address the complaint and is satisfied that it has been addressed appropriately.

As per section 12, where a complainant is unhappy with the response or its implementation, the complaint must be escalated. In the first instance this should be to the Senior Management Team. If the complaint involves a member of this team, or has failed to have been resolved by this team, it should be escalated to the CEO. From the CEO it should be escalated to the Chair of the Board.

Serious complaints of misconduct will be made to the designated authority and managed in accordance with Asian Aid's relevant policies (Code of Conduct, Child Safeguarding Policy, Performance Counselling and Disciplinary Policy etc.) as well as all relevant legislation.

Annex I

AAO Client Complaint Form



AAO Client Complaint Form

We are sorry that one of our actions or processes has been less than acceptable for you. Thank you for letting us know about it.

At Asian Aid we believe that there is no such thing as a "Bad Complaint". We take every complaint seriously and will endeavour to use the complaint as a spring board for improvement.

We guarantee that we will respond to your complaint within 5 working days and do our very best to have a full resolution to the issue with in 30 days.

1. Your details

Title (Mr, Mrs, etc)	Family name (surname)	Given names	
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
Street Address	Suburb	Postcode	
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
Home Phone	Business Phone	Mobile Phone	
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
Email	What method of contact works best for you?		
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		

2. Details of what your complaint is about

<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>

3. Your suggestions on how this issue should be resolved

<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>

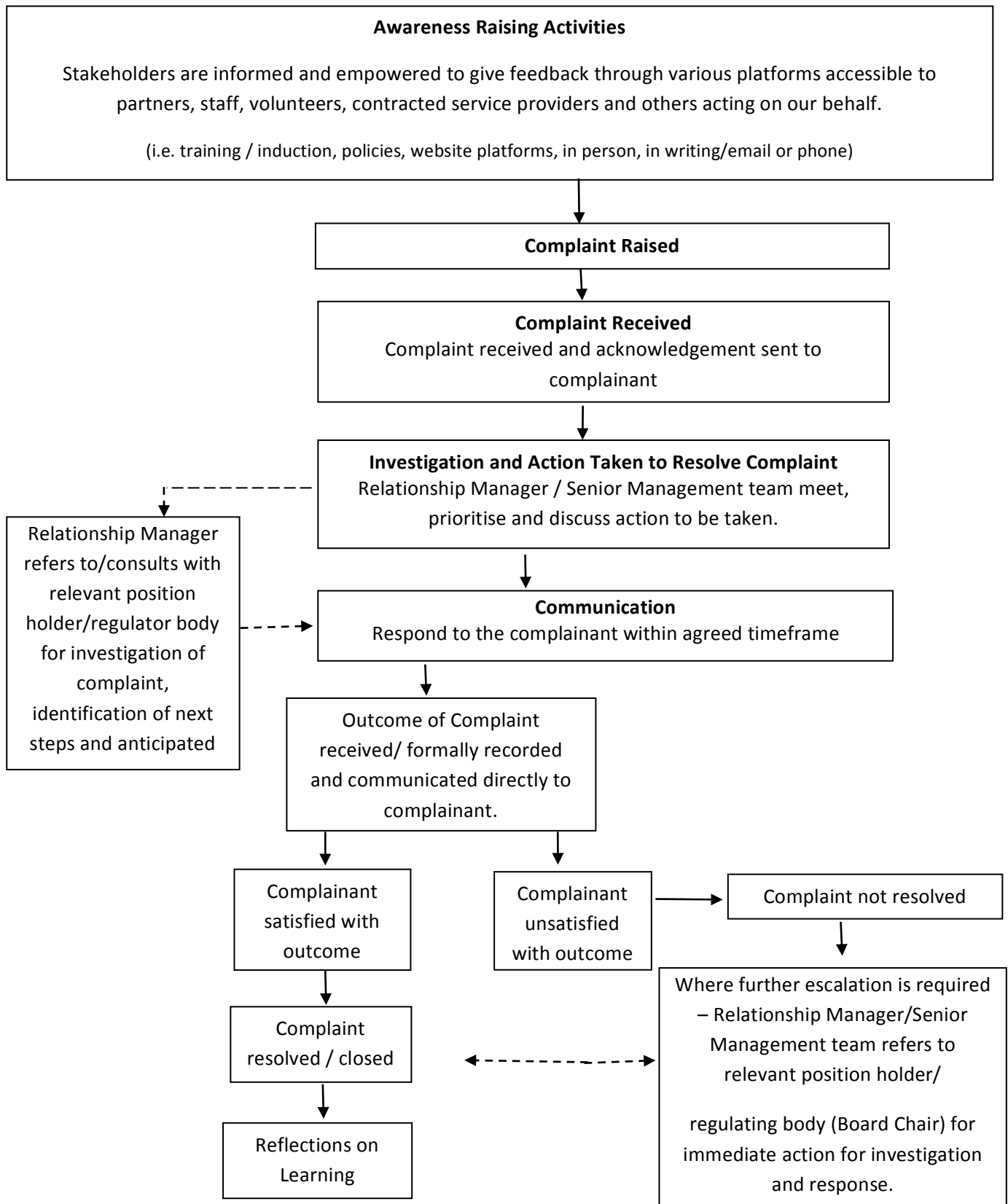
Office use only:

Received by:	<input type="text"/>		
Signature:	<input type="text"/>		
Date Received	<input type="text"/>	Investigation assigned to:	<input type="text"/>
Immediate action taken:	<input type="text"/>		
	<input type="text"/>		
Further comments:	<input type="text"/>		
	<input type="text"/>		
Resolution:	<input type="text"/>		
	<input type="text"/>		
Client notified:	Y/N	<input type="text"/>	Contact Date: <input type="text"/>

Annex 2

Complaints Handling Procedure Flow Chart

Below is an illustration of how stakeholder complaints/feedback are received and addressed through internal processes at Asian Aid.



Note to this chart: the 'relevant position holder' may vary depending on the action / or escalation point required to resolve complaint in a timely manner. The 'regulating body' may include but not limited to program partners, in-country external review body etc.