Complaints and feedback mechanisms are tools for obtaining information about WFP’s work from the people we serve.

A complaint is an official statement by an individual or organisation that expresses dissatisfaction or concern about an aspect of WFP’s work. Responses should be provided to the individual or organisation that submitted the complaint.

Feedback is a positive or negative comment, suggestion or viewpoint that does not require providing a response to the individual or organisation that submitted the feedback. All feedback should, however, be recorded, analysed and used to inform WFP programmes and operations.

All WFP complaints and feedback mechanisms should be gender-sensitive – accessible and responsive to diverse women, men, girls and boys, their organisations and their representatives.

Core Reasons for Establishing and Operating Complaints and Feedback Mechanisms

- **Accountability** – of WFP to the women, men, girls and boys who are directly involved in, or indirectly affected by, any of our programmes and operations.
- **Ownership** – by the diverse WFP stakeholders.
- **Transparency** – as a means of demonstrating accountability and of fostering ownership.
- **Quality programming** – programming that is efficient, effective and empowering for women, men, girls and boys.

Complaints and feedback mechanisms are one element of the rights-based approach to development, which is grounded in the principles of accountability, transparency, equality and non-discrimination. WFP applies the rights-based approach to its work because it is fundamental to achieving a world of zero hunger for all women, men, girls and boys.

For beneficiaries, complaints and feedback mechanisms:

- provide a means for asking questions and obtaining information about WFP’s programmes
- give them an opportunity to influence WFP’s programmes, including ensuring that WFP’s programmes are accountable as beneficiaries are able to report mistakes and wrongdoings
- promote community empowerment and participation

For WFP, complaints and feedback mechanisms:

- are sources of information that improve understanding of
  a) the contexts in which WFP works
  b) the complexities and diversity of local communities
  c) the needs, interests and priorities of the different groups within a local population
  d) the extent to which a programme is addressing the particular needs, interests and priorities of women, men, girls and boys;
- are one way of engaging and building trust with the women, men, girls and boys WFP serves
- support early detection of problems, like fraud, corruption and misconduct
- can support programme monitoring
- provide a means of detecting if a WFP programme is overlooking gender issues, such as the unpaid domestic and care work done by women, risks for violence or socio-cultural norms that restrict women’s and girls’ mobility, or participation in public spaces.
WHEN & WHERE

Complaints and feedback mechanisms should exist wherever WFP is present and encompass all of WFP’s work in each area of operation (e.g. country, project). Complaints and feedback mechanisms should exist for the entire duration of a WFP programme or operation. They are tools from which information can be obtained to inform planning, design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning.

A key consideration in the “when and where” of a complaints and feedback mechanism is accessibility. It is important that complaints and feedback mechanisms are accessible to all women, men, girls and boys.

This means taking into consideration and addressing:

- **Safety** – is it safe for women, men, girls and boys to visit a helpdesk, to participate in a community consultation, to be in a particular public space or to be interviewed by a man? Is it safe for individuals of minority groups (cultural, ethnic, religious, sexuality, caste etc.) to access a complaints and feedback mechanism?
- **Communication** – what means of communication do women have access to? Men? Girls? Boys? What are the literacy levels of women, men, girls and boys? Do the complaints and feedback mechanisms ensure access to persons with physical, visual, auditory and intellectual disabilities?
- **Socio-cultural norms and practices** – are there any beliefs, customs or institutions that limit women’s and girls’, or men’s and boys’:
  - a) mobility? Are women, men, girls and boys able to safely and freely to travel outside of the home?
  - b) participation in public forums? (Consider paid and unpaid work; caring responsibilities; restrictions on women and men participating in the same community consultation.)
  - c) sharing opinions and ideas in the presence of others? For example, are women free to voice their concerns about a WFP Programme when men are around? Can a woman be interviewed by a man?
- **Weather / climate** – does, for example, temperature, snow, flood, wind, landslides or other elements of the natural environment prevent access?

WHO

Who manages a Complaints & Feedback Mechanism?

A complaints and feedback mechanism can be managed by:

- WFP
- a partner organisation (with oversight by WFP)
- jointly by WFP and a partner organisation

Who can submit Complaints & Feedback?

Anyone who has an interest in, is involved in, or is directly or indirectly affected by WFP’s work, such as:

- individual beneficiaries – women, men, girls and boys without distinction
- members of affected populations who are not direct beneficiaries
- community leaders
- representatives
- service providers
- partner organisations
- government officials

HOW
1. Consultation

In order to select, design and develop a complaints and feedback mechanism, it is important to:

a) consult with programme stakeholders – direct beneficiaries (ensuring inclusion of women, men, girls and boys from different community groups and dis/abilities), cooperating partners, government officials, service providers – to identify preferences, literacy levels, accessibility issues, safety concerns etc.

b) consult with other humanitarian and development actors – NGOs, UN Agencies, government offices – to identify any existing, or plans to develop complaints and feedback mechanisms (and so coordinate, rather than duplicate)

c) list the specific purpose of each mechanism

d) list the types of complaints that are likely to be received and how they will be handled

e) list the target groups

f) list the resources required to maintain the complaints and feedback mechanism for the duration of a WFP programme or operation. Consider staff, training, communications materials, telecommunications access (telephone, internet), computers, databases.

g) determine, and put in writing, the roles and responsibilities for WFP staff – and partners as applicable – in managing the complaints and feedback mechanism, including collecting, recording, analysing and responding to complaints and feedback.

2. Design Complaints and Feedback Mechanisms

Options

Based on your preparations, select the appropriate complaints and feedback mechanisms. In order to ensure access to all stakeholders, you will probably need more than one mechanism.

**Hotline**

Definition: A hotline is a telephone number or email address through which beneficiaries / stakeholders can contact WFP.

WFP can also use the hotline to actively seek complaints and feedback by making a telephone call or sending an email; informing the beneficiaries / stakeholders of the purpose of the contact and asking a pre-determined set of questions.

If a hotline cannot be staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week:

- consider accessibility issues when determining the times and days when the hotline will be staffed;
- ensure that individuals who call a telephone number can leave a message;
- set a maximum time period in which a complaints and feedback will be recorded and addressed.

For telephone numbers, ensure that there is no cost involved in calling the hotline. This may require requesting callers to provide their telephone numbers, requesting them to hang up and then calling them back.

**Complaints & Feedback Box**

Definition: A physical, weather and tamper-proof box, with a slit through which individuals can submit a piece of paper containing feedback or a complaint. As well as the box, paper and pencils should always be available next to the box.
Instructions (in words and images) should be placed next to the box listing the steps in how to make a complaint or provide feedback, including clearly indicating that individuals can use words or drawings to share their message.

**Complaints & Feedback Desk**
Definition: A physical desk, in a safe and accessible location, where a beneficiary / stakeholder can submit a complaint or feedback in-person.

**Social Media**
WFP beneficiaries / stakeholders can complain about, or provide feedback on, a WFP Programme, through social media platforms, like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. If WFP, or a partner, manages a social media site, it is important to (a) inform users that complaints and feedback submitted through the social media site will not be confidential, and (b) alert them of the confidential mechanisms.

### Developing Complaints & Feedback Mechanisms

Once you know why and what, construct your complaints and feedback mechanism.

**This may involve:**
- assigning staff, with clear terms of reference
- drafting, consulting on and finalising Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)
- specifying a clear process
- creating a secure database

#### Confidentiality
Confidentiality is a key consideration when developing a complaints and feedback mechanism.

Confidentiality should be guaranteed at each stage of the complaints and feedback process:
- submitting a complaint or feedback
- recording the complaint or feedback
- reporting feedback
- utilising feedback
- responding to complaints

**Complaints and feedback and should be stored in a secure database.**
- Access to data should be limited to staff directly involved in handling complaints and feedback.
- Data should be stored in a protected manner (e.g. locks on drawers or rooms, password protection).
- There should be a written policy on confidentiality.

All complaints and feedback received containing personal data should be processed in accordance with WFP’s guidance on privacy and personal data protection. Before recording complaints, complainants should be informed about procedures for handling their complaint and asked to provide their consent for official processing. The collection of personal data should be limited to the minimum required to process the complaint. Data should be used only for the purposes of ensuring that the complaint is resolved. Collated statistical data may be used and shared more broadly to inform and improve programming.

All personal data must be stored and processed in a way that ensures confidentiality and limits access to the data to only those staff directly involved in processing the complaint. This includes putting in place procedures for who has access to the data and ensuring that both paper and electronic data are stored safely; for example, by ensuring that drawers and rooms are locked and electronic files are password protected.

### 3. Awareness-Raising about the Complaints and Feedback Mechanisms
Inform beneficiaries and other stakeholders about the complaints and feedback mechanisms that you have developed; and continue informing them until the programme or operation concludes and WFP withdraws.

Use the information gathered from the preparatory consultations to use different means of conveying information so that you reach all women, men, girls and boys who are directly involved in or affected by the WFP programme or operation.

**Communication channels:**
- posters
- leaflets
- local newspapers
- website
- radio
- community meetings
- SMS / text messages (or Twitter)

**Key Information to Convey**
- Purposes of the complaints and feedback mechanism.
- How to provide make a complaint and provide feedback.
- The right of all beneficiaries and other stakeholders to provide feedback and submit complaints, as well as receive timely responses to complaints submitted.
- Examples of types of issues that beneficiaries and other stakeholders can provide feedback, or complain, about (which is anything related to WFP’s programmes and operations).
- Confidentiality.
- What WFP does when it receives feedback or a complaint, including recording and storing, directly responding and referring to other agencies.
- WFP Code of Conduct

### 4. Record, Take Action & Respond

**For each complaint and feedback received:**
- enter the information into the database
- verify the information provided
- take action
- document lessons learned

#### Record

**Key Information to Record**
- date
- location
- WFP (or non-WFP) project, operation etc.
- complaint channel
- name (optional – if the individual is agreeable)
- contact details (optional – if the individual is agreeable)
- sex
- age
- disability (hearing, sight, physical, intellectual)
- language
- consent for the information provided to be used by WFP (respecting confidentiality)
- issue / problem
- description of the issue / problem
- priority (the urgency with which a response is needed – “high”, “medium” and “low”)
- name, function of the staff member receiving the feedback or complaint
It is important that the details of complaints and feedback are consistently recorded because this helps with analysis and thus the use of the information provided.

**Staff must be trained in how to:**
- use active listening techniques
- be sensitive to socio-cultural factors that influence how individuals communicate and act
- how to record complaints and feedback
- how to respond to issues (adhering to the Standard Operating Procedures)
- provide safe, appropriate support and referral information to anyone who discloses protection, including GBV, concerns

### Prioritise

Complaints and feedback can be ranked ‘high’, ‘medium’ and ‘low’ to indicate the urgency with which a response is required.

‘High’ priority complaints and feedback are those that relate to issues that involve serious and immediate risk to the safety and wellbeing of staff, beneficiaries and other stakeholders:
- serious misconduct by WFP staff or partners, such as abuse, coercion, harassment and exploitation of any kind
- misuse of WFP resources, such as fraud, corruption and theft
- security incidents or harm being experienced by a beneficiary / stakeholder, such as physical harassment or sexual violence
- food that is not fit for consumption

‘Medium’ and ‘low’ priority complaints and feedback may relate to implementation issues which may negatively impact on WFP delivering on its objectives if not addressed, but for which immediate responses are not required.

### Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

WFP has zero tolerance for any act of sexual exploitation and abuse. WFP defines sexual exploitation is “any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.”

WFP defines sexual abuse as “the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.”

**Any observation, report or suspicion of sexual exploitation and abuse must be reported to:**
- the designated PSEA (Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse) Focal Point, or alternate; or
- the Office of Inspections and Investigations (OIGI)
  - Food SAT: 1301 3663
  - Direct: +39 06 6513 3663
  - Confidential Fax: +39 06 6513 2063
  - Hotline at: hotline@wfp.org

Any SEA allegation received through a WFP complaints and feedback mechanism will be referred to the PSEA Focal Point for action.

More information is provided in the Executive Director’s Circular OED2014/020, “Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse”.
Respond to complaints within the established timeframe
The designated staff member should ensure that complaints are investigated and appropriate actions taken in the interests of beneficiaries, stakeholders and WFP. Promptly report back to the complainant about the investigation and the actions taken; including for complaints that could not be resolved.

Produce regular (e.g. monthly) reports summarising the key information about the complaints and feedback received and suggestions for improving (a) the complaints and feedback mechanisms, and (b) WFP’s programmes and operations. Share the report internally in WFP and externally with beneficiaries and other stakeholders.

Use the information obtained from the complaints and feedback to:
• improve the complaints and feedback mechanisms, such as expanding coverage to groups that report difficulties submitting complaints
• revise existing programmes and operations
• inform the design of new programmes and operations
• complement monitoring data
• inform programme evaluations

Refer
Where complaint or a feedback is about an issue that WFP is not authorised or qualified to address, or has delegated responsibility to another entity, the information should be referred to the appropriate body for follow-up.

For example, WFP often collaborates with other members of the humanitarian Protection Cluster in establishing safe, confidential and effective procedures for addressing reports of gender-based violence.

Complaints and feedback that do not relate to WFP’s work, should be referred to the applicable organisation.

Complaints & Feedback Mechanism Checklist
Complaints & Feedback Mechanisms Checklist

**STEPS**

1. Prepare – consult, know the purposes, list the resources, specify roles and responsibilities
2. Choose and construct – hotline, box, desk, social media, community consultations, interviews
3. Inform beneficiaries / stakeholders about the complaints and feedback mechanisms
4. Record and respond – document and ensure that appropriate action is taken

**CHECK**

- Are the complaints and feedback mechanisms accessible to all women, men, girls and boys – of all ages, dis/abilities, ethnicities, castes etc.?  
  
  *Remember:* Ensure that all women, men, girls and boys are safe when using a complaints and feedback mechanism.

  Use different types of complaints and feedback mechanisms address differences in literacy, language (including sign and braille), mobility (childcare, socio-cultural norms, transportation), ability to be or speak in public forums, weather and climate, cost etc.

- Are measures in place to protect confidentiality?

- Are multiple communication channels being used to inform women, men, girls and boys about the complaints and feedback mechanisms?

- Are roles, responsibilities and procedures clearly stated, communicated and accessible to all persons involved in managing the complaints and feedback mechanisms?

- Are procedures in place to use the information provided by the complaints and feedback to strengthen WFP’s programmes and operations, and so better meet the needs, interests and priorities of the diverse women, men, girls and boys that WFP serves?