

## CHILD-FRIENDLY COMPLAINT AND FEEDBACK MECHANISMS – TIP SHEET

Complaint and feedback mechanisms (CFMs) are an important part of accountability because they provide children, young people and communities with key information and the opportunity to share feedback. This leads to a more effective humanitarian response and contributes to the meaningful participation and empowerment of affected people. CFMs also play a critical role in Child Safeguarding and protecting children and young people from harm through the prevention of sexual exploitation and Abuse (PSEA).

Organizations need to adapt their information and feedback channels to suit girls and boys of all ages and diversities. They should be inclusive of children with special needs and employ measures to ensure safety and confidentiality during the feedback loop. Organizations are encouraged to promote the engagement and leadership of children and young people in designing and implementing feedback mechanisms.

### WHY CHILD-FRIENDLY CFMS ARE IMPORTANT

Experience shows that when CFMs are not intentionally designed with and for children and young people, they are often not utilized by them because:

- Children and young people are not adequately informed about feedback channels or accessing them
- Feedback channels are not in locations where children and young people live or access services
- Feedback channels are not inclusive of children and young people with low literacy levels or disabilities
- Children and young people think that their feedback is not treated confidentially, or they will not be believed or assisted by those receiving their complaint.

Child-friendly feedback mechanisms are an important accountability tool because they contribute to:

#### **Promoting dignity and empowerment of children, young people and communities**

CFMs enable children, young people and the wider community to voice their needs and priorities, influence program design, and provide advice on how humanitarian action can best support their dignity.

#### **Safeguarding children and young people and prevention from sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)**

Child-friendly CFMs can improve the awareness of children, young people and the wider community of their rights and the expected behaviour of humanitarian aid workers. Such mechanisms can also increase their capacity to identify potential safety risks, and enhance their knowledge on how to safely report safeguarding breaches and allegations of violence, abuse and exploitation.

#### **Prevention of fraud and corruption**

CFMs can act as a deterrent for the misuse of power and help identify and address fraud and corruption.

#### **Increased transparency**

A two-way dialogue between a humanitarian organization and affected populations, including children, can facilitate communication about existing problems, enhance efficiency of solutions, and build mutual trust.

## Quality and cost-effective programming

Through systematic feedback collection, children can bring a unique added value to identification of successful and unsuccessful actions, and make suggestions for improvement. This helps humanitarian action to be more effective, inclusive and informed. Ongoing learning can improve programming during the action.

## KEY ELEMENTS OF CHILD-FRIENDLY CFMS

Child Protection actors can support the development of child-friendly complaint and feedback mechanisms. These should be designed and implemented with the following considerations to ensure the ethical, meaningful and safe involvement of all children:

### Age appropriateness

CFMs should be adapted to the developmental (physical, psychological, social and emotional) capacities of children and young people, and promote meaningful participation in accordance with their evolving capacities. Organizations are encouraged to implement a variety of feedback channels to accommodate different developmental capacities. Children and young people need to be aware that feedback mechanisms exist and know how to use them. Information provision should be accessible and in child-friendly formats.

- *Example: Get children and young people to develop leaflets using simple language and illustrations to communicate key messages about the feedback mechanism to other children in their community.*

### Safety and confidentiality

CFMs should support children and young people to safely and confidentially provide feedback and report concerns without risking any harm or retaliation. Efforts must be made to develop their trust in the mechanisms by clearly explaining how the mechanisms work, how confidentiality is ensured, and how complainants can expect to hear about actions taken by the organization.

- *Example: Consult children on appropriate feedback channels to report concerns about staff misconduct. Make sure that feedback collection takes place in an environment where they feel comfortable and secure. They might like to nominate one of the female staff members as a safeguarding focal point.*

When designing a CFM, organizations need to identify who in the community children are most likely to trust. These intermediaries should be trained in how to receive feedback from children and young people and then be able to provide this feedback to the implementing agency.

- *Example: Ask children who they feel most comfortable reporting concerns to (teachers, community leaders, religious leaders etc.) and then provide basic training to these intermediaries on how to process and share the feedback.*

### Gender sensitivity

CFMs should promote equality between girls and boys and between women and men. Where gender inequalities exist, put measures in place to ensure access and participation for all.

- *Example: In a context where girls and women have limited access to public spaces and community dialogue, conduct consultations and specific feedback sessions (led by female facilitators) with groups of girls and women to hear their unique views and priorities.*

### Inclusion

CFMs should include girls and boys of different ages and backgrounds throughout the process. Ensure that there are enough accessible opportunities for everyone to participate, including younger children, children

with disabilities, children who speak different languages, and children from marginalized or vulnerable groups. Consider and respect children’s own time commitments (e.g. school, household responsibilities), and always treat children with respect and dignity.

- *Example: Conduct community consultations with children from different groups in a safe space where they feel comfortable expressing their views. Ensure communication is accessible e.g. in different languages for those that require it, in braille for those that are visually impaired.*

**Child participation**

CFMs should promote the meaningful participation of children and young people in designing and implementing feedback mechanisms. Participation can be an empowering activity but consulting with children helps to ensure that feedback mechanisms are tailored to their needs and capacities. Participation should always be informative, voluntary, respectful, relevant, inclusive, safe, and transparent.

*Example: Train youth reporters to report on issues affecting children. Get them to collect feedback on children’s information needs and satisfaction with the humanitarian response.*

**SETTING-UP CHILD-FRIENDLY FEEDBACK MECHANISMS**

**Phase 1. Designing a child-friendly feedback mechanism**

During the design phase an organization should analyze the operational context, select child-friendly feedback channels, and identify the resources required for implementation. Participation of children, young people and the wider community is crucial during this phase: the more involved they are in designing the feedback mechanism, the more likely it will be child-friendly, meaningful, and accessible to everyone.

Forming a feedback task team	Form a team to lead the design of a CFM and include representatives from the following areas: Child Protection, MEAL, Programs, Communications, Human Resources, Operations (including logistics and IT), and Senior Management.
Analyzing the context	Examine capacities such as existing feedback mechanisms, available human resources, technological and financial resources. Assess operational risks and constraints e.g. access to affected people, and avoid duplicative systems.
Defining the scope of the feedback mechanism	A CFM should have a clear purpose and scope that defines what types of feedback it will collect and respond to.
Selecting child-friendly feedback channels	Selecting child-friendly feedback channels should take place in consultation with children and young people. Understand what works for them.
Designing the feedback loop	The feedback loop is made up of four steps: 1. Listening to children, young people and communities, 2. Categorizing feedback, 3. Responding to feedback, 4. Closing the feedback loop.
Planning resources	A good child-friendly feedback mechanism is supported by adequate staffing, materials, technology and financial resources.
Developing a CFM implementation plan	Establish clear linkages between the CFM and existing Monitoring and Evaluation work. Identify opportunities to combine M&E and feedback collection efforts to optimize data collection and prevent duplication.
Building staff capacity	Competent staff are an essential part of effective feedback mechanisms so regularly provide training sessions, including training on child participation, and ensure staff skills meet requirements.

Informing children, young people and their communities	Inform communities and children of all diversities about the system and how it works. The better informed everyone is about a feedback mechanism, the more likely they will use it.
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Selecting child-friendly feedback channels should always take place in consultation with children and young people. It is important to understand what works for children of different ages and abilities as these may be different to the preferences of adults. Although this varies between contexts, evaluations have shown that children and young people generally prefer to provide feedback in the following ways:

- Interactive and child-friendly face to face meetings - Children can provide feedback during group meetings such school class meetings (out-of-school children can also be invited to these).
- Peers - Older children and young people prefer to collect feedback among themselves and report collectively or via a group representative.
- Safeguarding focal point - Sensitive concerns are commonly reported to a trusted staff member who acts as safeguarding focal point.
- Writing - Individually or in groups, children write their feedback or suggestions in the form of a note, letter or proposal. Be mindful of literacy levels if using suggestion boxes.
- Technology (phone helpline, SMS, email, mobile app) - These methods are increasingly used by children and young people with access to phones and might be appropriate in certain contexts.

**Phase 2. Implementing the feedback loop**

A Child-friendly feedback loop is made up of four steps:

1. Listening to children, young people and communities	Collecting and acknowledging feedback through selected channels and engagement with children, young people and communities.
2. Categorizing feedback	Recording and categorizing feedback or complaints, disaggregating children’s feedback, validating feedback where required.
3. Responding to feedback	Taking appropriate actions to address feedback and complaints, including children’s feedback.
4. Closing the feedback loop	Informing the child feedback provider about the action taken to address their feedback and asking them whether they are satisfied with these actions, in a way that children of all diversities can understand.

**Phase 3. Learning from feedback**

The final phase of setting up a child-friendly feedback mechanism is learning from the feedback in order to inform and improve programs. Regular monitoring of the CFM is key to identifying any challenges, risks and gaps, and addressing those in a timely and appropriate manner.

Monitoring the feedback mechanism	The CFM should be flexible and adaptable to the context. Regularly monitor all aspects of the mechanism and more frequently if required.
Using feedback for organizational learning	The information generated by a CFM provides important data that can be used to learn from past risks and mistakes and to improve programs.

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