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# EXTERNAL COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY

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<b>APPLICABILITY</b>	AOG World Relief Vietnam Team (Staff) Members, Volunteers, Visitors & Project Partners
<b>VERSION</b>	2
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## SECTION 1:

# EXTERNAL COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY

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## 1. PURPOSE & COMMITMENT

AOG World Relief Vietnam (hereon after referred to as AOGWR Vietnam) welcomes feedback and believes that being open to complaints and taking them seriously is important. We recognise that listening to and responding to feedback, concerns and complaints is integral to our commitment to achieving the high standards and ensures accountability to all stakeholders. We further recognise that receiving and responding to complaints results in the improvement of the quality of our work, enhancement of the trust and confidence of our stakeholders, and is generally aligned with our commitment to continuous betterment.

Anyone has the right to raise a complaint, have that complaint addressed in a timely manner and receive an accurate and thoughtful response. Every effort will be made to resolve the complaint in a satisfactory manner. The External Complaints Handling Policy outlines AOGWR Vietnam's responsibilities and response to feedback and complaints and the principles which underpin our approach.

## 2. SCOPE

This policy is intended to apply to an external complaint, regardless of who makes it.

*[Internal issues and grievances raised by team (staff) and volunteers/visitors are dealt with in discussion with management and in accordance with the policies and procedures outlined in the AOGWR Vietnam Team Handbook].*

This policy needs to be understood and used by all team (staff), our volunteers, our visitors, our partners, our contracted service providers and covers complaints made by those external to AOGWR Vietnam.

## 3. DEFINITIONS

**Complaint:** 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:** A person, organisation or its representative, making a complaint.

**Feedback:** The systems and process which enable an organisation to listen to their stakeholders and ascertain if agreed standards, requirements, expectations and needs are being met. Feedback is inclusive of suggestions, comments, opinions and complaints.

**Inquiry:** A request for information or an explanation.

**Beneficiary:** People directly engaged in a project or program, or benefiting from the activities and outcomes of a program or project.

#### 4. WHAT COMPLAINTS ARE CONSIDERED

AOGWR Vietnam will receive and respond to all complaints irrespective of who makes them or the nature or subject of the complaint.

Complaints do not include:

- A general enquiry about AOGWR Vietnam's work;
- A request for information;
- An initial request to amend donor records; and
- A request to unsubscribe or be removed from the database.

#### 5. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

AOGWR Vietnam's External Complaints Handling Policy is guided by the following principles:

**Visibility:** We will be proactive in providing clear and easily understandable information to our partners and stakeholders as to how and where to make a complaint or provide feedback (See '10. Publicising the Policy').

**Accessibility:** We will take measures to ensure that accessible and safe points of contact are made available for people to make complaints or provide feedback (See '10. Publicising the Policy').

**Responsiveness:** We will respond to complaints and feedback in a timely manner and according to the predetermined timeframes (See '6. Standards & Timeframes').

**Objectivity:** All complaints will be addressed in a fair, equitable and unbiased manner, based on the evidence submitted and uncovered throughout the complaints handling process. Making a complaint will in no way result in prejudice with respect to an individual's future participation in any programs or activities.

**Confidentiality:** All complaints and the complaints handling process will be kept strictly confidential.

**Accountability:** Accountability for decision making and action pertaining to complaints will be clearly established and communicated.

**Continual improvement:** AOGWR Vietnam is committed to ongoing improvement in all areas of the organisation's work, including our programs and organisational policies and procedures.

## 6. STANDARDS & TIMEFRAMES

AOGWR Vietnam's handling of complaints will meet the following minimum standards:

- All complaints will be acknowledged as soon as possible, ideally within five working days by the recipient.
- All complaints will receive a full response to their complaint giving the outcome as soon as possible and, as a rule, within thirty working days from receipt. If the matter is more complex and this timeframe proves impossible, the complainant will be notified of the likely timeframe for resolution.
- All complaints will be recorded on a Complaints Record Form.
- All complaints will be treated respectfully, whether it is felt the complaint is justified or not.

## 7. HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT

Complaints can be made orally or in person or by telephone, and in writing by email, letter or online via our website. When a complaint is made orally, AOGWR Vietnam personnel receiving the complaint will ensure the complaint is documented and contains all the information the complainant wishes to convey.

Complaints can be made by a complainant or by a friend or advocate acting on their behalf.

In the case of specific projects and programs, suggestion boxes may be utilised to accept feedback and complaints. This however does not prevent an individual from making a complaint or providing feedback through the other means described above.

Complaints made anonymously will be accepted as they can alert us to legitimate problems which can be resolved and lead to organizational improvements. It is not however always possible to provide a remedy to the individual in the event of an anonymous complaint.

Complaints can be submitted to the Advisory Board via the following contact details:

**Email:** [advisory@aogwr.org](mailto:advisory@aogwr.org)

**Phone:** +84 236 351 9692

**Post:** 79 – 83 3 Thang 2, Hai Chau District, Da Nang City, Vietnam

Complaints can also be submitted to a field worker, strategic partner, or another ACCI employee where the complainant has access to or contact with those personnel, particularly with respect to field-based complainants.

## 8. HOW COMPLAINTS ARE HANDLED

AOGWR Vietnam is committed to ensuring the External Complaints Handling Policy is publicly accessible via the AOGWR Vietnam website. AOGWR Vietnam will work with in-country partners to ensure awareness of the policy, including their role in handling complaints and raising concerns with AOGWR Vietnam about any of our programs and/or behaviours of our team (staff).

For all complaints we will:

- Seek from the complainant the outcome/s they are expecting.
- Make an initial assessment of the severity of the complaint and the urgency of action.
- Clearly explain to the complainant the course of action that will follow dependant on:
  - if the complaint is out of our jurisdiction;
  - if we may exercise a discretion not to investigate;
  - if preliminary enquiries need to be made, or further consideration needs to be given;
  - or
  - if the complaint is to be investigated.
- We will ensure that a complainant is not required to express their complaint to a person implicated in their complaint or that a person implicated in a complaint is involved in any way with the handling of that complaint.
- We will not create false expectations, but assure the complainant that the complaint will receive full attention.
- Give an estimated timeframe or, if that is not possible, a date by which we will contact them again.
- Check whether the complainant is satisfied with the proposed action and, if not, advise them of alternatives.
- Ensure that the complaint is appropriately acknowledged.
- Follow up where necessary, and monitor whether the complainant is satisfied;
- We will register all complaints (see section 1, item 6).

In addition to this, when we take an oral complaint we will:

- Identify ourselves, listen, record details, and determine what the complainant wants;
- Confirm that we have understood and received the details; and
- Show empathy for the complainant, but not attempt to take sides, lay blame, or become defensive;

A document detailing the External Complaints Handling Procedure from start to finish is available and can be found at the conclusion of this policy.

## 9. EDUCATION & TRAINING

AOGWR Vietnam's External Complaints Handling Policy and Procedures are distributed to all team (staff), volunteers, contractors, and partners upon their commencement with the organisation. Updated versions are provided to all stakeholders upon approval. Induction training, which includes the External Complaints Handling Policy and Procedures is provided for all stakeholders listed above. Personnel involved in implementing the complaints handling procedures are fully trained in all aspects of implementation.

## 10. PUBLICISING THE POLICY

AOGWR Vietnam's External Complaints Handling Policy clearly communicates the value we place on receiving and responding to complaints and it is easily accessible and available for download on our website. It is also communicated in partnership agreements and in our AOGWR Team (Staff) Member Handbook.

We ensure that making a complaint is as easy as possible. Complaints can be made both verbally or in writing by email, telephone, in person or through other means necessary to ensure inclusivity for people with disabilities or to overcome language barriers. We will endeavor to assist a complainant to put their complaint in writing or write down a complaint provided to us orally as factually and faithfully as possible.

## 11. REPORTING, MONITORING & REVIEW OF POLICY

As part of our commitment to effective complaints handling and to ongoing improvement, AOGWR Vietnam will ensure that we:

- Monitor the effectiveness of our compliant handling procedures on an ongoing basis and appropriately update our policy and procedures based on organisational learning and and/or updated notions of best practice with regard to complaints handling practices;
- Review the policy every three (3) years, managed by the Advisory Board and in consultation with relevant team (staff) and stakeholders; and
- Provide ongoing staff training and retraining regarding our complaints handling policy and procedures.

## 12. RESPONSIBILITY & AUTHORITY

PERSON	RESPONSIBLE FOR
AOGWR Vietnam Team (Staff) Member	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Directly receiving, registering and responding to minor complaints. Referring major complaints to the Management Team.</li> <li>2. Ensuring visibility and accessibility to this policy and the complaints mechanisms in all communications and via other relevant platforms.</li> </ol>
AOGWR Vietnam Management Team	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Directly receiving, registering and responding to minor complaints. Referring major complaints to the Advisory Board.</li> <li>2. Ensuring visibility and accessibility to this policy and the complaints mechanisms in all communications and via other relevant platforms.</li> <li>3. Ensuring team (staff) members, volunteers, visitors, and partners have sufficient awareness and capacity to implement this policy.</li> <li>4. Ensuring programs meet the expectations outlined in this policy.</li> </ol>
AOGWR Vietnam Advisory Board	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ensuring relevant team (staff) receive appropriate training in implementing this policy.</li> <li>2. Receiving major complaints, either by referral or directly. Implementing the required investigation and resolving the complaint according to this policy.</li> <li>3. Referring any complaints on to relevant external bodies in Vietnam and also Australia if appropriate.</li> <li>4. Ensuring all complaints are resolved appropriately and resolutions are communicated to the appropriate people.</li> <li>5. Identifying and resolving any systemic issues underlying complaints.</li> <li>6. Informing ACC International Relief (ACCIR), our governing body, of major complaints under investigation and their resolutions.</li> <li>7. Ensuring learning is incorporated into policy review, amendment, and adaptation with respect to organisational practices.</li> </ol>
ACC International Relief	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Holding the Advisory Board accountable for implementing the policy.</li> <li>2. Involvement in major investigations where requested by the Advisory Board.</li> </ol>

## SECTION 2:

### EXTERNAL COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCEDURES

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#### 1. INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF COMPLAINT

The team (staff) member handling the complaint will conduct an initial assessment to determine how a complaint should be managed and whether it is of a serious nature, by considering whether one or more of these criteria apply:

- Severity;
- Health (including mental health) and safety implications;
- Financial implications for the complainant or others;
- Complexity, including whether there is more than one issue raised in the complaint and whether each needs to be separately addressed;
- Jurisdiction - multiple jurisdictions or requires reporting to an external body;
- Impact on the individual, public and organisation;
- Potential to escalate;
- Systemic implications;
- The need for, and possibility of immediate action; and
- Whether or not anyone else needs to be consulted in making an assessment.

Based on this initial assessment, the complaint will be classified as either an:

- a. **Inquiry:** A complaint that is based on a simple misunderstanding or insufficient information, that can be resolved by the provision of information that immediately satisfies the complainant, will be recorded as an inquiry, with the complainant becoming an inquirer.
- b. **Minor complaint:** A complaint that is not considered to be serious in its nature will be recorded as a minor complaint. Where appropriate, endeavour to resolve minor complaints immediately by correcting misunderstanding or providing missing information, then ensuring that the complainant is completely satisfied with the information and or resolution provided.
- c. **Major complaint** - A complaint that is assessed as being serious in its nature will be recorded as a major complaint and escalated to the Advisory Board.

#### 2. HOW COMPLAINTS ARE INVESTIGATED

All major complaint investigations require the oversight of the Advisory Board.

We will make every reasonable effort to investigate all the relevant circumstances and information surrounding all complaints. The level of investigation will be commensurate with the nature of the complaint including the level of supporting evidence or information provided by the complainant.

Where required, we will consult and take advice from other relevant external, regulatory or enforcement bodies in planning and carrying out an investigation.

Where the complaint falls under the jurisdiction of an external body, it may be either appropriate or mandatory for AOGWR Vietnam to report or cooperate with that external body or for the investigation to be conducted by that external body. This includes, but is not limited to:

- ACC International Relief office as our governing body;
- State or Federal Police in Australia pertaining to criminal matters of Australian team (staff);
- District or Provincial Police in Vietnam pertaining to other criminal matters;
- Other Vietnam regulatory bodies.

### 3. RESPONDING TO & CLOSING A COMPLAINT

The team (staff) member handling the complaint will normally make the decision on a minor complaint. A decision on major complaint will be made by the Advisory Board or may be referred up to ACCIR.

We will communicate our decision on a complaint as soon as is practical. Our communication will be in writing in the appropriate language by email and/or post, with a CC to the relevant governing body. However, where appropriate such as in the case of a complaint being made by a local community member, we will also communicate our decision orally and again in the appropriate language.

We will encourage the complainant to respond and advise whether or not they are satisfied with our decision. In our decision we will advise that if a complainant is not satisfied, we will be prepared to consider any additional information they may provide and to review our decision.

### 4. OUTCOMES OF COMPLAINTS

Based on the decision made in regards to the complaint, we will ensure that all relevant personnel are informed of the outcomes of complaints and the implications for our services, goods, procedures and processes. In addition to this, it may be appropriate to:

- Take further remedial action, including changes to the way in which we operate and improve or undertake further training of team (staff);
- Counsel or discipline team (staff) or volunteers;
- Review or terminate agreements; and/or
- Undertake further reporting to external regulatory bodies or enforcement authorities.

## 5. DISPUTES

The complaint will be referred by the member of team (staff) handling the complaint to a more senior colleague or to the respective board/team for review if the complainant disputes any of the following:

- Our assessment that a complaint should not be investigated;
- The decision on their complaint; or
- The outcome of their complaint.

If such a dispute is unresolvable and relates to:

- ACCI Missions & Relief field workers or 'employees', we will refer the complaint to the ACCI Missions & Relief Office;
- AOGWR Vietnam team (staff), we will refer the complainant to the appropriate DOLISA and/or SCEDFA Office in Vietnam.