

## Collaboration and innovation – developing a joint complaint and response mechanism in Haiti

In July 2010 three agencies, World Vision, Save the Children and Lutheran World Federation, with the support of HAP, initiated a process of developing a Joint Complaint and Response Mechanism (JCRM) to be piloted in a camp where the three agencies were working. Over the course of two months the agencies worked together to develop key tools, seek input from the camp committee and residents, and reach the point where the JCRM could be rolled out.

Days before the JCRM was to be launched the land owners announced a sudden eviction notice, given residents one month to leave the site. While the roll out of the JCRM was then suspended in the chosen camp, the agencies are planning to adapt and apply the process, tools, learning to other camps where they are working. The process and tools developed are shared here to inspire and support other agencies interested in working together to set up a Joint Complaints and Response Mechanism.



Community meeting as part of the process of developing the joint complaints and response mechanism.

### i) Why listen to complaints<sup>1</sup>?

One of the key features of humanitarian accountability is the deliberate effort to listen and respond to complaints raised by beneficiaries, and others living in the same area, about the quality of services delivered by aid agencies, and staff and volunteer behavior (including allegations of corruption, misconduct and sexual abuse and exploitation). Agencies who have implemented mechanisms to receive and respond to complaint have reported: early identification of programmatic problems, detection of fraud, better staff retention, and saving of money, among other impacts. Ultimately strengthening accountability, and approaches to complaints handling as part of this, is geared towards improving quality, relevance and effectiveness of programmes.

### ii) What is a Joint Complaints and Response Mechanism (JCRM)?

A JCRM provides a number of channels through which beneficiaries and community members can complain about the activities of two or more NGOs. From the perspective of beneficiaries and community members a JCRM is considered more 'user-friendly', compared to each NGO setting up independent mechanisms. By working together in setting up a JCRM participating agencies are aiming to increase beneficiary satisfaction and improve ways of working in the camp.

### iii) Key features of the LWF, Save the Children and World Vision JCRM

- Complaints could be submitted via three channels: a complaints box; via the camp committee who would capture them in a log book; or via agency staff visiting the camp.
- Complaints would be collected from the box and the committee logbook once per week by representatives from each agency.

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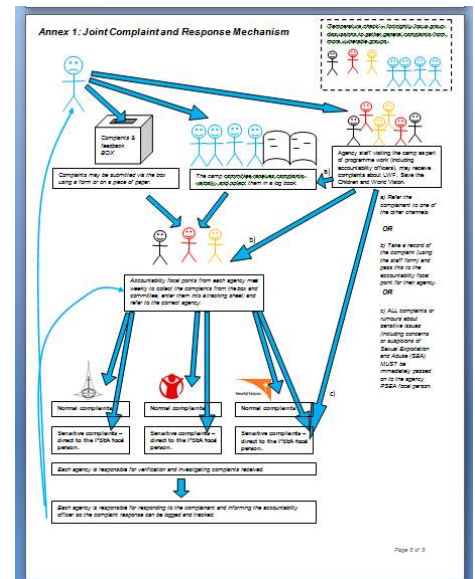
<sup>1</sup> Complaints, as opposed to feedback, are formal expression of dissatisfaction. For aid agencies complaints may be about the NGO's activities (such as the quality of services, or selection of beneficiaries), and the behaviour of staff/volunteers (including behaviour such as sexual exploitation and abuse). A complaint always requires a response where as feedback does not.

- Once collected and logged, complaints would be forwarded to the appropriate person in each agency for processing so that a response could be given. Sensitive complaints linked to staff behaviour would be forwarded directly to the agency PSEA focal person.
- There was a commitment to provide at least some level of response to complaints within 10 days.
- In addition one focus group discussion per two weeks was planned with more vulnerable groups in the camp as a ‘temperature-check’ as to how agencies were working in the camp, and if the JCRM was accessible for them.

#### iv) Key tools developed

As part of the JCRM key tools were developed, including:

- **JCRM procedures** – outlining:
  - The types of complaints the JCRM was designed to receive and from who.
  - How complaints could be submitted and how they would be referred to the relevant agencies (including how more sensitive complaints would be referred).
  - Key contact people in each agency for processing ‘normal’ and ‘sensitive’ complaints
  - Roles and responsibilities of participating agencies, plus a formal agreement for each to sign.
- **Tools for communicating key messages** about the JCRM to camp residents, camp committee and relevant agency staff (including training agendas).
- **Relevant forms for staff and beneficiaries**, as well as committee log book and complaints tracking template.



These tools are available for others to use (double click on the icon):



A) Joint CRM procedure - LWF SAV



B) JCRM Tools EXAMPLEs Sept 2010.



C) Reference - Setting up agency an

#### v) Steps taken in designing and setting up the JCRM

i) **Meetings with agency representatives** to establish agency commitment, develop the mechanism, decide on action points. In total five 2-hour meetings were held during the development process, which were key to moving forward.

ii) **Tools developed** – each agency took the lead on developing different material and sharing with all for comments and input.

iii) **Camp committee meeting** to introduce the concept and plans, and seek input. Based on this it was discovered that:

- The committee already had a system called ‘open-mic’ every weekend for camp residents to raise concerns, which were responded to or forwarded to relevant agency.
- The committee wanted to support the JCRM, and their involvement as part of this was critical to the success of the JCRM. They felt the community would support the JCRM as it provided another channel for people to raise complaints with the agencies.
- The duration should between the receipt of a complaint and the answer should be as short as possible, but based on experience they were concerned that NGOs would not be able to respond in 10 days.

iv) Community meeting to introduce the concept and seek their input. Consultations done previously in the camp and in other locations on the need for and preferred means for raising complaints were also used during the design. Based on this it was discovered that:

- a) The community unanimously opposed the suggestion of giving the complaints form to the committee for distribution – instead these should be kept by the WV clinic, CLO space, and mothers' club group.
- b) They also emphasized that they did not want the camp committee to be in charge of the suggestion box.

v) Relevant staff and committee member training was designed and planned to ensure good understanding of the CRM, their role as part of this and to answer questions they may have.

vi) Launch – with community sensitisation using agency mobilisers (planned only).

vii) One month review – to identify learning with staff, address challenges from the first month, review with different groups in the camp if they felt the JCRM was accessible for them, and if they felt they would use it to raise more sensitive complaints (planned only).

## vi) Key learning on the process of working together to set up the JCRM

Key: ☀ = learning on what worked well → = learning on how to improve the process

### Coordination and collaboration

- ☀ This worked surprisingly well, largely due to good leadership from HAP and the strong willingness and commitment from staff and agencies involved.
- ☀ It was very helpful having action plans after each meeting, and the distribution of tasks among staff from each agency helped move things forward. Someone taking the lead in documenting the action points, and pushing each agency for completion of tasks, helped with this.
- ☀ The development of structured joint procedures outlining clear roles and responsibilities and agreements was extremely helpful.
- ☀ It was felt that by working together the agencies were able to develop a more systematic and formal mechanism, compared with if agencies had been developing individual complaints handling approach.
- ☀ Through working together staff gained a better understanding of the other NGO partners, including details about the agency and what activities they were doing in the same camp.

### Timing

- The time needed to develop and implement a JCRM should not be underestimated. From the initial meeting, to being ready for implementation the process took just under 2 months – slightly longer than expected. However, given the process was started from scratch, with numerous tools to develop and issues to think through; and some staff involved had multiple roles, not just accountability, the process could have taken much longer.
- While timelines were discussed, it may have helped to plan all the details more thoroughly from the start, ensuring a stronger, comprehensive timeline was adhered to.

## **Preparation and assessment**

- It might have been beneficial to do a quick assessment of World Vision's existing complaints mechanism in the site – to understand some of the existing challenges, and obstacles to complaining and responding.
- While consultations had been done previously in this camp on complaints, doing some kind of mapping or rapid assessment (via a few focus group discussions) in the camps at the very beginning could provide valuable information. For example to understand the types of problems being experienced and any issues, sensitive or otherwise, in the camp. This could help NGOs understand the types of complaints that may be raised and help prepare responses or define limitations to responses ahead of time. In addition to help thinking on what we can realistically promise beneficiaries in terms of a response.
- Consider identifying any grassroots groups who may already be working in the camp and receiving complaints. They could be trained and incorporated into the mechanism.

## **Engaging with different groups as part of the development**

- ☀ Consultation with beneficiaries directly (in addition to via the committee), is vital to implementing a complaints mechanism and other activities. Staff should not be afraid to let community members voice their complaints as part of this.
- While an agenda and key messages were identified for the community meeting, using different techniques for engaging people as part of this meeting could have helped the community members better understand key messages.
- During the community meeting it was observed that women took more of a lead and raised issues, where as there was general lack of interest during the meeting from a section of men. Specific ways of engaging men and youth may need to be identified.
- During the community consultation the views of children were not captured. A child-friendly complaints mechanism should be developed, by consulting with children, and identifying and training community focal points or committees who can receive complaints directly from children.
- The community meeting highlighted that beneficiaries have more confidence in the NGOs than camp committees. As part of programming NGOs should help committees understand how they can do a better job in the camp and build unity between committee and community.

## **Staff engagement and resourcing**

- ☀ During the development the same staff were involved throughout, allowing each meeting to build on previous discussions. This was helped by the fact that two out of the three agencies had dedicated accountability staff. Taking forward such initiatives is more of a challenge time-wise for staff who have other responsibilities other than accountability.
- ☀ When piloting new initiatives staff also have approaches they want to trial, that need to be considered and reflected in the complaints handling approach in addition to community preferences.

## **Information sharing**

- Increased basic information sharing is needed from agencies to camp communities about the agency, and their projects, is the basis against which camp residents will be able to hold them to account. Stronger existing information sharing would reduce the number of activities needed as part of the JCRM roll out, and is likely to reduce the number of complaints that are linked to a lack of information.

## Senior management involvement

→ One agency reflected that it would have helped for them to have had discussion earlier on to inform and involve senior management – to gain support and to speed up the signing of joint procedures/agreement process. This would also have helped with closer involvement and coordination with program management from the beginning, which requires a message from senior management in support of the initiative.

## vii) Using the learning

Agencies wishing to use this learning may choose to develop a JCRM 'from scratch' with other interested agencies working in the same areas, or, alternatively, expand existing agency specific CRMs so they can receive, refer and respond to complaints from two or more agencies.

It should be noted that while the procedures and tools can be used as a basis, they will need to be adapted based on agency structure/capacity and consultation with beneficiaries. In particular the methods for receiving and processing complaints are likely to differ.

## viii) For more information, or a copy of tools, contact

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- Alex Joseph (Save the Children) - [ajoseph@savechildren.org](mailto:ajoseph@savechildren.org)
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*September 2010, Haiti – post-earthquake response*