



Feedback and Complaint Mechanisms (FCM) are an essential component of transparent and accountable humanitarian response. Action Against Hunger provides formal feedback channels in the majority of its country programs. To document good practices and lessons learned, a qualitative study was undertaken focused on the FCMs in use by Action Against Hunger in Pakistan and Uganda.

Various factors were found to enable or inhibit use of the FCM. To ensure a robust FCM system, adequate sensitization of program staff is essential to dispel misconceptions and encourage them to raise awareness of the feedback channels within communities. Other recommendations include offering multiple channels and providing for the security and anonymity of those reporting into the system.



Background on Feedback and Complaint Mechanisms

Feedback and Complaint Mechanisms (also referred to as Feedback Mechanisms or Complaints and Response Mechanisms) are a crucial component of monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning in humanitarian projects. These structures allow affected populations to formally voice concerns about the humanitarian services they receive and ensure that these concerns are systematically addressed to improve program quality.

Complaint mechanisms can vary in the modalities used to receive complaints, methods used to record and monitor complaints, approaches in investigating complaints, and other aspects of complaint handling and management.

Action Against Hunger employs FCMs across its country programs. Some of the main objectives include: providing stakeholders with confidential, neutral lines of communication to share feedback or complaints; uncovering and addressing cases of corruption/fraud; upholding beneficiaries' rights and entitlements within the context of humanitarian service; and improving programs in response to FCM users' feedback/complaints.

Two examples are presented in this case study to show how Action Against Hunger's missions in Pakistan and Uganda utilize FCM systems to access and resolve stakeholders' concerns.

This case study has two goals:

- 1) Examine Action Against Hunger Uganda's and Action Against Hunger Pakistan's successes and challenges in setting up FCM systems in their respective programs.
- 2) Develop recommendations for how to create effective FCM systems based on the lessons learned from the two examples.

Many themes emerged from the interviews that show what factors enable or inhibit the establishment of an effective FCM system. The table (Figure 1) below outlines these emerging themes as "enablers" and "inhibitors" and further categorizes them based on the scale at which they operate (organizational, community/environmental, and individual/household). These themes will be discussed in greater depth.

Figure 1. Emerging Themes

	Enablers	Inhibitors
Organizational Level	Consistent sensitization of program staff and beneficiaries	Lack of resources (staff, funding, time, etc.)
	Seeking guidance from more experienced organizations	Staff Suspensions of FCM
	Monitoring FCM effectiveness and usage	Limited Technical Capacity
	Well-trained Staff	
	FCM "champion" or leader	
Community/Environmental Level	Transparency	
	Reliable telecommunication networks	Social pressure (gatekeepers)
	Trust/Familiarity with Action Against Hunger	Restricting Female Access to FCM
Individual/Household Level		Security risks
	Literacy	Complacency or Shyness
	Familiarity with telephones	Illiteracy
		Little exposure to using telephones

Comparing Pakistan's and Uganda's FCM Systems

Example I: Pakistan's FCM System

Contextual Background

Action Against Hunger began implementing multi-sectoral projects in Pakistan in 2005. Today, the organization operates in the Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) provinces, providing a range of services from building latrines to offering conditional cash grants to the internally displaced.

In 2012, Action Against Hunger Pakistan founded the Program Quality & Accountability (PQA) unit to independently monitor and evaluate program activities based on international humanitarian standards like HAP and SPHERE.

The PQA unit led efforts in designing Action Against Hunger Pakistan's FCM system and sensitizing program staff and local communities on the purpose, structure, and importance of the system. While the Pakistan mission has successfully established effective FCM systems at multiple field sites, it continues to encounter challenges.

Figure 2. Pakistan's FCM Process

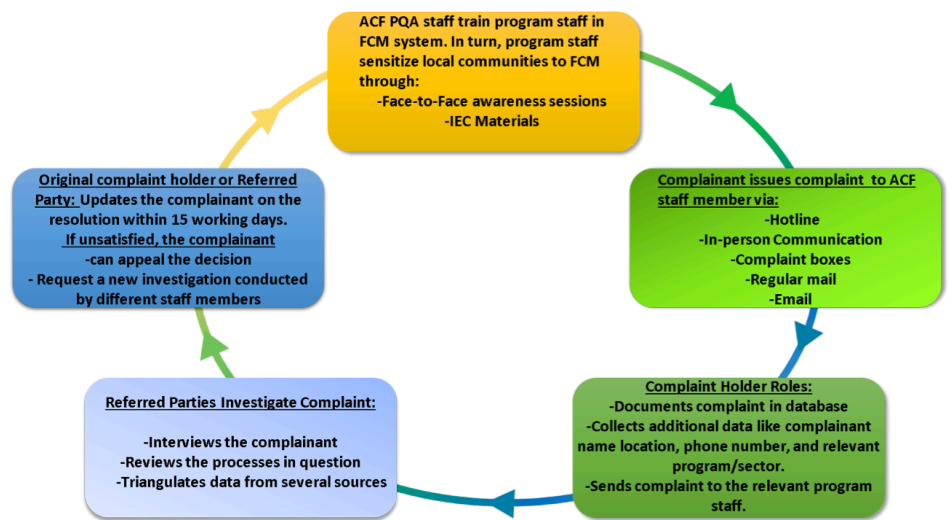




Figure 3. Pakistan's FCM Features

Complaint Categorization	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Category 1: Staff misconduct or sexual exploitation and abuse ➤ Category 2: Discontent over goods and services ➤ Category 3: Discontent over partner's goods and services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Category 4: Non-selection of beneficiary or project area for assistance ➤ Category 5: Other feedback and suggestions
Gender-Disaggregated Usage	
 ≈ 20% of FCM users	 ≈ 80% of FCM users
FCM Modalities Available	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Hotline ➤ In-person Communication ➤ Complaint Boxes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Regular Mail ➤ Email
Sensitization Methods	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Face-to-Face Awareness sessions ➤ Disseminate Information Through IEC Materials 	



Example II: Uganda's FCM System

Contextual Background

The Action Against Hunger Uganda mission was established in 1995 to combat issues surrounding nutrition, food security, water & sanitation, and economic self-sufficiency. The Uganda mission also provides support to women facing gender-based violence (GBV), offering cash grants and work opportunities to empower Ugandan women to take ownership of household financial decision-making.

To bolster the quality of these programs and address issues of fraud and corruption, Action Against Hunger Uganda has gradually incorporated FCM into its various operations since 2009. Currently, FCM is operating in the Amuru, Adjumani, and Kiryandongo regions. Action Against Hunger Uganda also plans to expand FCM to the Kaabong district in Karamoja for its food security cash-for-work project.

Figure 4. Uganda's FCM Process

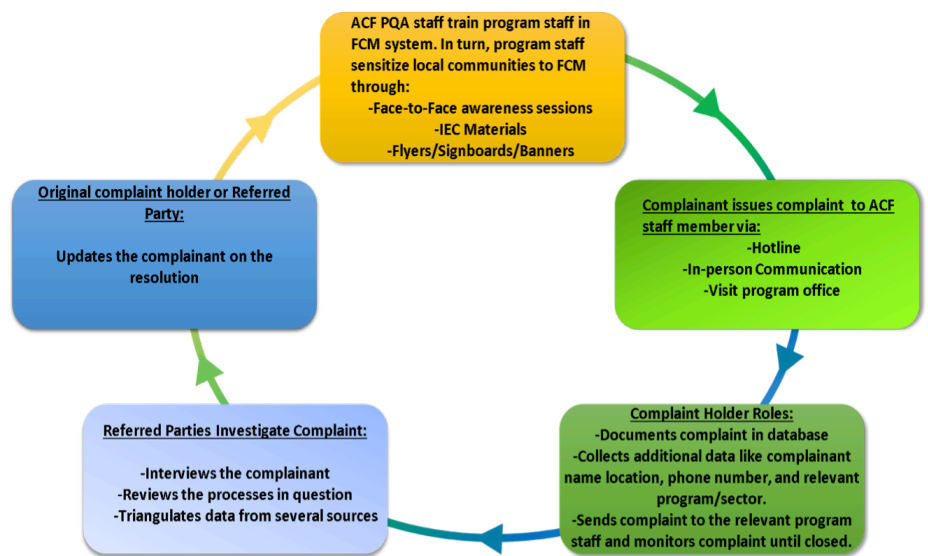


Figure 5. Uganda's FCM Features

Complaint Categorization	
➤ Major Complaints: Severe, image-damaging complaints E.g.: Fraud, SEA, assault	➤ Minor Complaints: Less severe complaints E.g.: Delays
Gender-Disaggregated Usage	
♀ ≈ 75% of FCM users	♂ ≈ 25% of FCM users
FCM Modalities Available	
➤ Hotline ➤ In-person Communication	➤ Visiting program office
Sensitization Methods	
➤ Face-to-Face Awareness sessions ➤ Disseminate Information Through IEC Materials ➤ Publicly displayed flyers, signboards, and banners	



FCM System Benefits

Pakistan's FCM System

Action Against Hunger Pakistan's complaint mechanism has played a crucial role in improving program quality. Below are two examples:

- **Exposing and remedying cash grant fraud:**

One informant describes how the hotline became a tool for beneficiaries to expose cash grant fraud.

"There were some beneficiaries in Bannu... and they don't receive their cash grants. So we went on a field visit and we certainly received a call on the accountability hotline. And those beneficiaries, they were tribal and they shared with us 'we don't receive our trenches' and they were very poor, they were living in the camps... So I checked with the program teams and then I came again to the beneficiaries and probe and all the information I have took and finally, we...find that those beneficiaries were fakely registered by the village committee member."

- **Uncovering Contractor Fraud in WASH sector:**

The FCM has also helped in identifying and addressing contractor fraud regarding hand pumps.

"There were many cases in the WASH sector, we have improved the quality of the hand pumps. Like sometimes, the community told us that the contractors are installing the hand pumps but they are using a material which is not according to our system or according to our PQs so I think it brought a lot of improvement in our programs."

Uganda's FCM System

In the case of Action Against Hunger Uganda, FCM has also proven beneficial for both staff and beneficiaries:

- **Mediating instances of staff misconduct:**

FCM assisted Action Against Hunger Uganda in learning about the misconduct of a particular staff member and intervening in the situation before conflict erupted.

"We had a staff also who forgot of their role and engaged into a sexual relationship with a community member. It's against our policy that you go and engage in the same community where you are working, so that become... a big issue and because close community members were planning to burn him. So, it was sort of a life threatening so...we had to do arbitration. We had to move him immediately to save his life."

- **Obtaining vital information in real-time:**

Beneficiaries also use FCM to provide Action Against Hunger staff with first-hand information on emerging security risks.

"Like, we had some land wrangles, very heated in the areas of Amuru. Land wrangles, they were struggling and you know who - it's the own community who rang and said 'You people, don't plan to come our side. We are cutting - people are cutting each other here.'"

Effective Feedback and Complaint Mechanisms - Enablers

Informants from Action Against Hunger Uganda and Action Against Hunger Pakistan reported that the following practices enables the establishment of an effective FCM system:

- **Seeking Guidance from more experienced organizations:**

Action Against Hunger Pakistan consulted other organizations who had already established FCM systems and learned valuable lessons from their own experiences. One informant, who was directly involved in establishing Pakistan's FCM system, discussed how helpful this consultation was.

- **Sensitization:** Informants from both missions discussed the importance of the sensitization process in empowering both local communities and Action Against Hunger staff to use the FCM system. Each mission uses several channels to sensitize stakeholders to the feedback mechanism.

- **Monitoring FCM Effectiveness:** Informants explained how monitoring the FCM system allows them to identify strengths and weaknesses of their FCM systems.

- **Well-trained Staff:** The quality of the FCM system is inextricably dependent on how well trained Action Against Hunger staff are on implementing and responding to the system. Qualities like understanding and abiding by FCM guidelines, preserving complainants' confidentiality, and practicing overall professionalism were considered valuable assets for both missions.

- **Transparency/Trust Building:** In interviews, informants discussed the importance of being transparent about beneficiaries' rights, the purpose and funding of programs, and challenges in meeting beneficiary needs. Informants also explained how FCM can also build trust between Action Against Hunger and the community.

- **FCM Champion or Leader:** In Uganda, one informant mentioned the importance of championing the FCM system to encourage management buy-in and commitment to using the system as effectively as possible.

Effective Feedback Complaint and Mechanisms - Inhibitors

Informants identified the following themes as barriers to establishing an effective FCM system:

- **Limited Resources:** Informants consistently cited how limited resources (financial, human, etc.) prevented them from using the FCM system to its fullest potential.

- **Staff Suspicions of FCM System:** In both Pakistan and Uganda, the PQA unit faced resistance from program staff when introducing the FCM system. However, one informant argues that involving program staff in the conversation early can clear up their misconceptions about FCM.

- **Hotline Challenges:** The hotline is the most commonly used modality in Action Against Hunger Uganda's FCM system; nearly 90% of complaints are received by it. However, some issues in the hotline system include network coverage, accommodating Uganda's many local languages, and beneficiaries' unfamiliarity with phones.

- **Improving female access to FCM:** In Pakistan, conservative gender dynamics in some regions hamper female access to the FCM system. Currently, female beneficiaries usually communicate complaints through male family members. Action Against Hunger Pakistan is trying to strengthen this weakness by hiring more female staff to interact with female beneficiaries.

- **Social pressure from Community Gatekeepers:** Action Against Hunger Pakistan often relies on local leaders (village community members) to register the community for projects. One informant discussed how these leaders may potentially coerce beneficiaries to silence their complaints, particularly complaints revealing fraud and corruption.

- **Security Risks:** Informants described how the onset of conflict restricts Action Against Hunger's access to the field and poses unique difficulties for implementing the FCM.

Recommendations

The following recommendations for establishing feedback mechanisms draw on the experiences of Action Against Hunger staff in Pakistan and Uganda:

1. Consult colleagues and peer organizations:

Many organizations have experience setting up their own feedback and complaint systems and have learned what works and does not work.

2. Engage program staff during project design:

Program staff may be resistant to establishing FCM because they view it as an attempt to police or spy on their work. By bringing these staff members into the conversation about project design and FCM early, it is possible to dispel these misconceptions, build organizational buy-in for the FCM, and allow all staff to take ownership of the system.

3. Invest time and energy into sensitization:

Sensitizing stakeholders to the existence of the complaint system is the first step in promoting its use. Organizing sensitization sessions with community members, printing FCM information on IEC material, and displaying public signboards about the FCM system are a few ways to sensitize stakeholders and empower them to voice their concerns and needs.

4. Build several modalities into FCM systems:

Both missions used more than one modality to access stakeholders' feedback. When complainants do not have phones or do not have the literacy to use complaint boxes or mail, they can rely on face-to-face communication to submit their complaints. Having several channels ensures that FCM users can choose the method that best fits their circumstances and comfort.

5. Maintain confidentiality: Depending on the context, FCM users may incur substantial risks by using the complaint mechanism. Designing the FCM system and training FCM implementers to minimize these risks are crucial for safeguarding users. Keeping hotline management independent from program implementation and establishing referral pathways that ensure neutral staff investigate the complaint are several strategies for maintaining confidentiality.

6. Monitor FCM usage: Monitoring FCM usage is essential for evaluating how well it is being implemented, how well certain components of the system work, and disparities in the population's access to the system.

7. Use feedback to improve the program:

There is no reason to solicit feedback if it will not be used to improve program services. For example, beneficiary feedback was instrumental in informing Action Against Hunger Pakistan that female sanitation pits were not a culturally appropriate service to provide. Ignoring these complaints could have jeopardized the community's trust in Action Against Hunger. By listening to beneficiaries' concerns and then applying them to strengthen program design, both the target population and Action Against Hunger benefits.



Contact Details and Further Reading

Jennifer Majer
M&E Officer, Action Against Hunger
jmajer@actionagainsthunger.org

To learn more about Action Against Hunger's programs in Pakistan and Uganda, please visit our website at www.actionagainsthunger.org.

This case study was authored by Stacy Christopher.

Acknowledgments

Action Against Hunger would like to express its appreciation to the PQA staff in Pakistan and Uganda for their valuable contributions to this case study. Special thank you to Shahzad Ajmal (PQA Coordinator, Pakistan) and Lawrence Okello (PQA Coordinator, Uganda) for facilitating the interviews.

The views expressed in this document are the responsibility of Action Against Hunger and should not be taken, in any way, to reflect the official opinion of its partners and donors.

January 2017



تجویز / شکایت جي حل لاءِ طریقڪار

اي سي ايف (ACF) غير سرڪاري ۽ غير منافع بخش بين الاقوامي ادارو آهي، جيڪو دنيا جي 40 کان وڌيڪ ملڪن ۾ بڻ ۽ بدحالي جي خاتمي لاءِ خدمتون سرانجام ڏئي رهيو آهي. اداري جي مکيه ڪمن ۾، متوازن غذا جي فراهمي، ضرورت زندگي لاءِ ذريعي معاش جي بحالي ۽ صحت صفائي جي بهتري شامل آهن.

- اي سي ايف، ڪنهن به ذات، مذهب، نسل ۽ سياسي وابستگي کان بالاتر رهي، صرف ضرورتن ۽ ڏتوئل انسانيت جي خدمت ۾ مصروف آهي
 - اداري طرفان تمام امداد مفت ڏني ويندي آهي
 - اي سي ايف، جي پروگرام مان فائدي وٺڻ واري جي چونڊ شفاف طريقي سان ڪئي ويندي آهي
- اداري جي ڪم کي بهتر بنائڻ لاءِ ڪا به صلاح، معلومات يا شڪايت هيٺين طريقن سان پهچائي سگهجي ٿي:

ڳوٺ ۾ هي ڊيو اي سي ايف جي سماجي نمائندن سان گڏ هوندو آهي، يا وري ڳوٺ جي مکيه جڳهه تي لڳل هوندو آهي		شڪايتي ڊيو ذريعي
0302-322 2131		فون ذريعي
ديگر سونو تعلقو ۽ ضلعو بدين، ويجهو ڊي سي هائوس گولڙچي روڊ بدين		خط ذريعي
feedback.pk@acf-international.org		اي ميل ذريعي
اي سي ايف جي ڪنهن به نمائندي سان		زباني طرح

شڪايت ڪرڻ واري جو نالو ۽ ٻي معلومات راز ۾ رکي ويندي ۽ ف لڳايل مسئلي جي نتيجي ۾ حل لاءِ استعمال ڪئي ويندي

