



**HANDLE**

Hope Alert Network for Development and Local Empowerment



# Feedback and Complaints Policy and Procedure



Cover: HANDLE programme team in Uganda through the community engagement session with the host and refugee women and youth

PFCPP@HANDLE

Approved by:

  
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# Introduction

Hope Alert Network for Development and Local Empowerment (HANDLE) is a highly esteemed non-governmental organization (NGO), committed to the delivery of the programs that ensure a measurable quality of work and lasting impact for the people served. HANDLE envisions a post-conflict society where all individuals, regardless of sex, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, class, or status, are fully integrated into their communities, enjoy their rights, have equal access to services, engage in political leadership, control resources, and live free from violence. An open attitude to feedback and complaints on our work is paramount to HANDLE's ability to improve as an organization, to facilitate learning, and to break down donor - recipient power dynamics when working with others.

This policy demonstrates HANDLE's openness and responsiveness to any type of feedback including suggestions and complaints, in order to be accountable to all we work with and who may be affected by our work, most importantly people with disabilities and their communities as well as our partners. We want this policy to foster collaboration towards development outcomes that are owned by the people and communities we work with, and to give confidence and clarity on complaints handling.

This policy is the first version of "Feedback and Complaints Handling Position Paper" and aligns with HANDLE's:

- a) Programme Quality Framework supporting HANDLE's efforts to maintain and improve effective accountability to all stakeholders as stated in the related commitment: "Create awareness on and maintain a well-functioning, accessible feedback and complaints mechanism that is actively used by partners and communities, and review action taken in response to feedback and complaints received".
- b) Partnership Principles where we state under 'Mutual Accountability and Responsibility': "We recognize that we can always improve and therefore aim to create an environment which encourages partners and their stakeholders to give feedback and to clearly communicate their expectations and hopes. Providing feedback mechanisms for decision making, complaints and conflict resolution – including mechanisms for reporting serious incidents anonymously - is an important way to encourage this
- c) Safeguarding Policy where we state under 'Preventive Actions': "All partners and sub-partners should develop inclusive and child-friendly (if working with children) approaches to programming for all stakeholders. This includes development of feedback mechanisms that are child friendly (if working with children) and accessible."

# I


# Definition

**Feedback** is an opinion about HANDLE's development or humanitarian work which may be positive (a compliment), neutral (such as a suggestion for improvement), or negative (a complaint). Feedback is an instrument of accountability, because it enables a dialogue. Being accountable to the people we seek to assist requires that HANDLE takes into account their opinions, concerns, suggestions and complaints.

A **complaint** is feedback expressing dissatisfaction about the standards of service, systems and processes, actions or lack of action by HANDLE or its staff, volunteers or anybody directly involved in the delivery of our programme work. It is a criticism that expects a reply and would like things to be changed. Complaints could, for example, include a concern from someone we work with about the quality of programme delivery, concern from a member of the community where we implement our projects, poor compliance with our policies and procedures, or a concern about the behaviour of our staff, volunteers or contractors in correspondence with our Code of Conduct.

HANDLE's **Code of Conduct** defines behavior, which is ethical, legal, and consistent with the organization's Values, Mission and professional standards. It serves as reference and its breach can result in disciplinary action.

HANDLE's **Safeguarding Behaviour Code** as part of our Safeguarding Policy gives additional guidance. Safeguarding children and adults-at-risk, notably including those at risk of sexual exploitation or harassment, is a core policy commitment of HANDLE.



**Stakeholders:** this policy defines a feedback process which is open to all stakeholders impacted by HANDLE's programme work including HANDLE staff, partner staff, community members and target groups of HANDLE's works, and requires to be visible and known to all stakeholders.

HANDLE **programme work** encompasses all aspects related to project implementation including strategy, systems and processes, advocacy and technical advisory work as well as safeguarding including prevention of any sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment.

# 2

## Scope

HANDLE is committed to being fully accountable to persons with disabilities, their families and representative organizations, the wider communities or the sector or area we work in or other stakeholders that we impact with our work. HANDLE Programme Feedback and Complaints Policy applies for all feedback relating to HANDLE's programme work, and HANDLE supports feedback mechanisms with our partner organizations.

Feedback has to be about an activity for which HANDLE is responsible or is within our sphere of influence. However, the Feedback and Complaints Policy creates no independent legal obligations and no legal recourse in any court against a decision or activity taken by HANDLE.

Feedback and complaints are not:

- general queries about HANDLE's work;
- requests for information;
- requests for additional budget;
- contractual disputes;
- requests to amend records, postpone deadlines, transfer funds or goods.

The scope of this policy does not cover feedback to individual HANDLE Member Associations from donors or supporters on their domestic practices.

# 3

## Purpose

By maintaining a trusted and responsive feedback and complaints system, HANDLE seeks to integrate continuous learning and improvement into our organizational striving for excellence. This policy reflects HANDLE's value of professionalism and represents an important point of contact between our stakeholders and organizational operations. The main purpose of this policy is to

- 1.** Comply with accountability and rights:
  - a) internal or external requirements and standards;
  - b) peoples' rights to have their voices heard; and
  - c) for HANDLE to be held to account by communities, partners and any other actor we collaborate with on the promises we make.
- 2.** Foster empowerment: the feedback mechanism as a way of empowering the communities we serve through participation and dialogue.
- 3.** Create trust and transparency by listening and being responsive.
- 4.** Serve prevention of abuse as people gain confidence and trust to report.
- 5.** Enable early warning: help identify risks and issues that can be remedied at an early stage.
- 6.** Support monitoring and evaluation: feedback as a way of improving programme quality through addressing concerns and issues raised by all relevant stakeholders.



# 4

## Working with Partners

In support to our commitment to accountability, HANDLE accelerates efforts to ensure awareness amongst all stakeholders on the existence of our confidential global programme feedback/complaints mechanism. In HANDLE supported projects regular information is provided on its existence and all partner staff should be made aware.

As outlined in HANDLE's Partnership Principles effective partnership also involves recognizing that power imbalances exist, and we seek to demonstrate and encourage in our partners the attitudes and styles of working to change this dynamic. In this context, active listening and respectful but honest and timely communication plays a key role in demonstrating our commitment to genuine partnership, ownership, mutual accountability and learning.

It is important to clarify mutual expectations, purpose of partnership, standards and compliance requirements at an early stage. HANDLE encourages the use of our programme feedback mechanism for positive, negative or neutral feedback (compliments, complaints, or suggestions for improvement). Thereby, we hope to grow trust and respect as well as a culture of joint learning.

We likewise expect and actively support our partners to have (or be in the process of developing) their own feedback and complaints system adapted to the local culture which enables them to deal appropriately with feedback received from community members and target groups regarding work supported by HANDLE. Such accessible and contextualized feedback mechanisms and their set up need to be agreed on during participatory and inclusive project planning processes and laid down in the "Project Plan".

# 5

## HANDLE's Six Principles for Handling of Feedback and Complaints



**Timeliness**



**Confidentiality**



**Mutual respect**



**Participation & Accessibility**



**Commitment to learning**



**Resources**

## 1. Timeliness

While HANDLE aims to respond to all feedback, complaints need to be attended within three (3) working days upon receipt. This response includes seeking to make contact with the complainant, to acknowledge receipt and inform on the follow-up.

HANDLE aims to resolve all complaints within one (1) month of receipt. If a complaint cannot be resolved within this timeframe, the complainant will be kept informed monthly about the progress made to date and when they can expect to receive further updates.

## 2. Confidentiality

HANDLE understands that confidentiality is essential to the viability of any feedback system.

For complaints, the complainant's identity will be kept confidential to any organization or individual outside of the investigation team. The details of the complaint will only be shared on a need to know basis. HANDLE will ensure the complainant details (specifically any identifying information) are securely filed and only accessible to the trained HANDLE personnel handling feedback.

The complainant details will be used to make contact with the complainant to gather further information or update on the progress of feedback.

In case a complainant wishes to file a complaint anonymously there is the possibility to use the Whistle-blowing System for providing complaints or feedback on programme work (see Annex II).

### 3. Mutual respect

All feedback is to be addressed in an equitable, objective and unbiased manner. Everyone who makes a complaint to HANDLE will be treated with courtesy and respect. In return, HANDLE expects people who lodge a complaint to communicate their concerns fairly and appropriately. Where complainants harass staff, behave abusively, or unreasonably pursue complaints, HANDLE reserves the right to withdraw or modify its complaints process and not to investigate feedback that it judges as unfounded or frivolous.

### 4. Participation & Accessibility

HANDLE is committed to promoting equal access and participation of all women, men, girls and boys with disabilities in the countries in which we work. It is HANDLE's responsibility, in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to ensure and promote accessibility based on the Principles of Universal Design in all spheres of our work. Participation of the target group and their community during project planning and implementation will ensure that we jointly create, implement and support the development of feedback and complaints mechanisms which are made available to all stakeholders considering location, gender, age, ethnicity, disability and language. Reasonable accommodation will facilitate access and use at the community level.

## 5. Commitment to learning

HANDLE will log and monitor all feedback that meets HANDLE's definitions as outlined in this policy. Acknowledging that learning outcomes are derived from both positive and negative experiences, both positive and negative forms of feedback (including complaints) will be incorporated into HANDLE's procedures for monitoring feedback. The outcomes will be reported and analysed to assist in the identification of systemic and recurring problems and inform improvements to service delivery.

## 6. Resources

HANDLE is committed to allocating resources to ensure HANDLE management, staff, volunteers and partners are aware of HANDLE's commitment to receiving, responding to and learning from feedback. HANDLE resources are also allocated for the training of specific staff to respond to feedback, lead effective case management and provide appropriate follow up to feedback and complaints received. Staff trained accordingly will form a complaints committee who will manage any investigation that might be needed and jointly take decisions and find a resolution.

Our partners are supported at reasonable levels through our joint project plans for the set-up of accessible and culturally adapted feedback system by their own organizations.

# 6

## Providing Feedback to HANDLE

HANDLE prioritize feedback and complaints from its stakeholders for quality delivery of services and programs

**Feedback including compliments, suggestions or complaints can be sent to:**

**E-mail:** [feedback@handle-southsudan.org](mailto:feedback@handle-southsudan.org)

**Or a letter to:**

**HANDLE**  
**Programme Support Attn:**  
**Feedback and Complaint**  
**Manager**



Anyone who wishes to provide feedback or lodge a complaint is requested to indicate his/her full name, relationship to HANDLE and contact information. If you want to provide a complaint, please include as much information as possible (who, where, when, what). We do not recommend to send anonymous complaints, because it makes it more difficult for HANDLE to assess the case, to find an effective resolution and record it. In case a complainant wants to send concerns anonymously, please consider using HANDLE's Whistle-blower System as outlined in Annex II.

Complaints should be provided within three months of the relevant incident. In exceptional circumstances HANDLE may be able to respond to a complaint that refers to a matter that occurred more than three months ago, but it will likely make it more difficult to resolve the complaint satisfactorily.

For further information on the internal process for handling the feedback or complaint please refer to Annex I.

Details of how this Policy works alongside other HANDLE feedback and reporting mechanisms can be found in Annex II.

# 7

## Dealing with Informal Feedback in HANDLE

HANDLE strongly encourages that informal comments and concerns about HANDLE's work are raised with our staff or partner organisations as close to the activity as possible. This allows for immediate response and responders know the context.

***All HANDLE staff are expected to actively encourage feedback and complaints and log it on behalf of any stakeholder from the community, our target groups, the staff of our partner organization or from any Disabled People Organization (DPO) or other (international) organization in the countries where we work.***

Any material feedback received in this form that requires further follow up can be logged officially using the mechanisms outlined in this policy. Alternatively, any of the complementary mechanisms can be used as appropriate (see Annex II for details).

In HANDLE any feedback received which may constitute a suspicion or evidence of a safeguarding or criminal incident is taken seriously and will be reported and investigated through established procedures. Under no circumstance should an individual undertake an incident investigation outside of the formal HANDLE mechanisms.



# 8

## Governance and Accountability

### **Governance and management policy implementation actions:**

1. HANDLE will integrate feedback and complaints handling mechanisms into relevant core programming processes.
2. Regional Hub Directors and Country Directors will ensure local implementation of the provisions of this policy in the following ways:
  - a. Ensure that all staff, representatives and partners are informed about this policy and their responsibility to take in feedback and complaints from all stakeholders.
  - b. Provide information on HANDLE's Feedback and Complaints mechanism in HANDLE offices
  - c. Support partners to develop and apply contextualized feedback/ complaints mechanisms, ideally in relation to and aligned with safeguarding mechanisms and staff competencies.

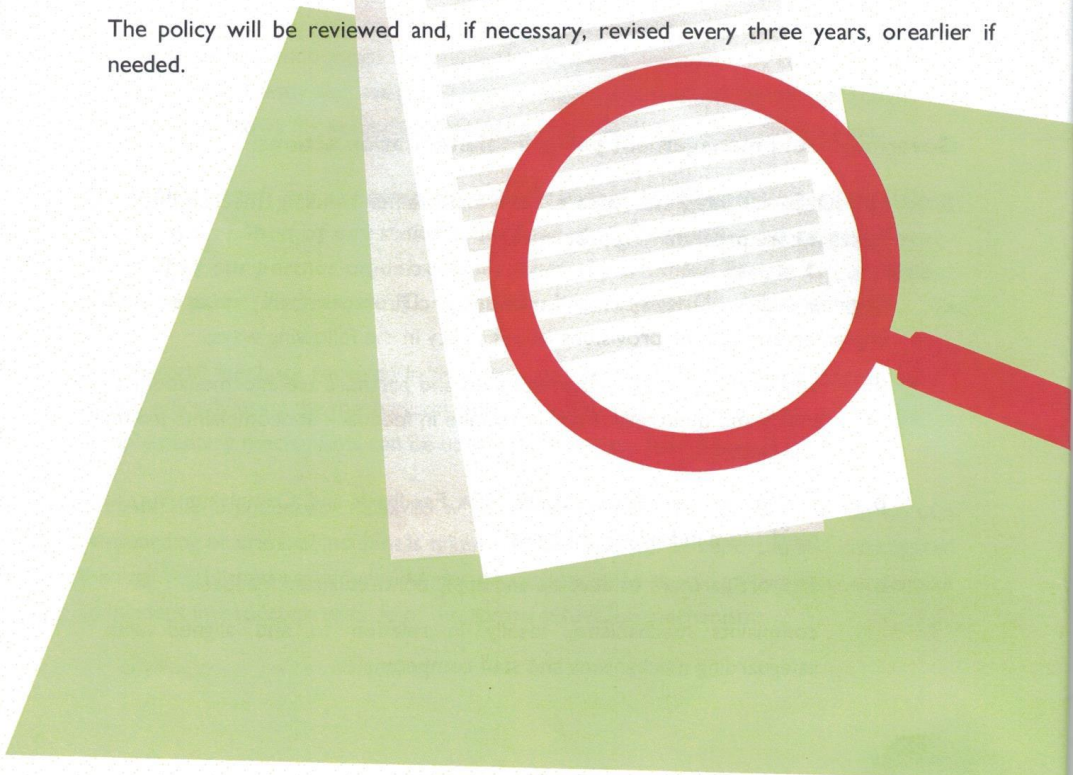


**Monitoring and review of Policy:**

The Feedback and Complaints Policy is based on HANDLE frameworks, lessons learnt and consultations with staff and partners.

The implementation of the policy will be monitored through standard tools and processes related to capacity assessment of partners and HANDLE offices.

The policy will be reviewed and, if necessary, revised every three years, or earlier if needed.

A large illustration of a magnifying glass with a red handle and frame, positioned over a white document with horizontal lines representing text. The document is set against a light green background that resembles a landscape or a field. The magnifying glass is focused on the center of the document, symbolizing scrutiny or review.

# Annex I: Feedback Handling Procedure

## Stage 1: Receiving the complaint

- 1) Activity or behaviour related to HANDLE programme prompts feedback
  - The feedback may come from an internal or external stakeholder e.g. HANDLE staff, volunteer, partner, community member.
  - Feedback may be positive or negative.
- 2) The individual may provide feedback through the appropriate feedback mechanism from the list provided in Section 5, or the feedback is provided to a HANDLE staff member (in verbal or written form).
  - Safeguarding concerns are handled in alignment with the HANDLE Safeguarding Policy.
  - Confidential/anonymous feedback submitted through the whistle-blowing mechanism will be handled in line with the HANDLE Whistle-blowing Policy.
  - All other feedback will be dealt with in line with the following procedure.
  - Informal or verbal feedback is submitted to the Programme Feedback and Complaints Mechanism at [feedback@handle-southsudan.org](mailto:feedback@handle-southsudan.org).

## Stage 2: Acknowledging, assessing and investigating

- 3) The feedback is categorised as positive or negative.
  - Positive feedback is recorded and shared with the appropriate HANDLE team members for learning purposes. The provider of feedback will receive an acknowledgement of receipt.
  - Negative feedback (i.e. complaints) will follow the below procedure (steps 4-7).
- 4) The responsible staff confirms to complainant that the complaint has been registered within 3 working days and requests further information as required. The staff member will verify the complaint is indeed related to HANDLE/partners' activity. Identify complaint (where, what, etc.).

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5) The complaints committee (trained responsible staff and senior members of staff) will discuss the case and undertake an investigation as necessary, applying appropriate case management.

- Confidentiality of the complainant will be maintained, and stakeholders only involved on a need to know basis. If necessary, external investigators may be used to support interviews and fact finding.

### Stage 3: Resolving the complaint

6) If the complaint is deemed to be legitimate, a solution will be found (in agreement with the complainant, if appropriate).

- If the complaint is deemed to be unfounded or not solved in a satisfactory way, the complainant will be informed, including the possibility of appeal.
- Until the complaint is closed, the complainant will be kept updated monthly.

### Stage 4: Documenting and learning

7) The details of the complaint and documentation of the handling process are recorded in the HANDLE feedback register. The complaints register will be used to inform organization-wide learning processes. A report with anonymized information and learnings will be produced annually and submitted to Executive Management.

## Annex 2: Overview of available HANDLE feedback and complaints mechanisms

Apart from HANDLE's Programme Feedback and Complaints Mechanism there are a number of complaints and feedback entry points available for different purposes. They include mechanisms where incidents of abuse can be reported. The table below summarizes the range of mechanisms available to both external and internal stakeholders.

### Programme Feedback and Complaints Mechanism

Available for concerns, complaints, compliments or suggestions about the nature or quality of programme delivery, poor compliance with our policies, systems, processes and procedures, HANDLE's lack of action, or concern the behaviour of HANDLE staff, volunteers or contractors. This system is not anonymous about, but all complaints are treated as highly confidential.

Contact: [feedback@handle-southsudan.org](mailto:feedback@handle-southsudan.org)

or send a regular letter to:

**HANDLE**

**Programme Support**

**Attn: Feedback Manager**

For whom: External and internal: Open to anyone affected by HANDLE's work, including partner organizations and target group/community

## Whistle-blower System

A protected area on our international website allows everybody to anonymously report irregularities, risks, safeguarding incidents or violation of HANDLE's Code of Conduct by completing a structured report format.

For whom: External and internal: Open to anyone affected by HANDLE's work, including partner organizations and target group/community

## Safeguarding Incidents

(suspected, witnessed or disclosed to you) can be reported through the following mechanisms:

- To the safeguarding focal person in HANDLE's local office via phone, email, text, skype, face-to-face. If the safeguarding focal person is not available, report to either the Country Director or Regional Hub Director.