Mission East (MEED) Annual Complaints Handling Report - 2023

Background

Mission East (MEED) is committed to being accountable to the affected populations we assist – the beneficiaries and communities where we operate. MEED is an organization that welcomes complaints and feedback on what we do and how we do it, constantly striving to improve our work. Beneficiary Complaints Mechanisms (BCM) allow us to improve our programmes and respond swiftly to feedback. They are crucial for preventing and detecting fraud, corruption, sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse, as well as other code of conduct breaches. We aim to maintain a well-defined and accessible complaints mechanism, while fostering an organizational culture where complaints are welcomed and addressed fairly and in a timely manner. Beneficiary complaints mechanisms are set up in each of the countries where Mission East operates, as well as at headquarters level. We also require our local partner NGOs to set up *on-a-par* complaint's mechanisms and feedback on jointly implemented projects.

Objectives of the report:

This report is intended to provide a transparent overview of complaints handling at Mission East, as part of our strategy of being accountable to local populations and our donors. It follows from the Mission East commitment to accountability to affected populations and the Core Humanitarian Standards. The report provides an overview of the complaints received, followed by the actions taken and changes adopted in response to the complaints, both for serious/sensitive complaints and standard complaints. There follows a description of the state of Mission East's complaints mechanism, the complaints channels available in each country, and the development of our complaint's mechanisms in 2023 and planned developments for 2024.

State of the beneficiary complaints mechanisms

In all Mission East country offices and in most partner NGOs, mechanisms to receive and respond to complaints have been well-established following consultations with communities. Where partner NGOs do not yet have the capacity to handle complaints and feedback, Mission East takes care of this. Complaints are received, logged, and responded to. If necessary, corrective actions are taken, which may include improvement or change of policies. Responses are always provided to complainants.

As our operating modalities in the various countries regularly changes, we adapt our complaints mechanisms accordingly. Although our aim is to have formalized and documented mechanisms in place, we also rely on more informal mechanisms in case community members are not comfortable with the formalized process or when a formalized process is simply not existing (yet).

Most of the 2023 complaints are 'standard complaints' about non-sensitive matters typically concerning the implementation of activities, decisions taken or organisational policy. Serious or sensitives complaints could be complaints about corruption, fraud, sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, other abuse of authority, gross misconduct, or malpractice. Due to the serious nature of such complaints and the potential allegations against staff that they represent, such

complaints will need confidential handling and the involvement of senior staff at HQ. Our partner organisations are responsible to inform Mission East immediately when a serious complaint has been raised. Depending on their specific requirements and thresholds, donors will be informed about complaints we received. Furthermore, as this reporting is made publicly available all, including donors, have access to our complaints reporting.

Complaints can be raised in various ways depending on the local situation and in consultation with the community. The following channels are used:

	HQ	Afghanistan	Tajikistan	Iraq*	Nepal*	Lebanon*	Syria*	Armenia*	Nigeria*
Phone line	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
sms (text messages)	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓
website form	✓			✓					
phone app (whatsapp, messenger, viber etc.)	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
through focal points in communities					✓		✓	✓	✓
through focal points on safeguarding	✓				✓			✓	
face-to-face meetings	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
e-mail	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓	
box in communities		✓			✓			✓	
box in Mission East or partners' office			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
referrals from partners					✓				

* partner led programmes only

Overview of Complaints received in 2023

	HQ**	Afghanistan	Tajikistan	Iraq*	Nepal*	Lebanon*	Syria* / ***	Armenia*	Nigeria*	Total
Serious complaints (e.g, alleged fraud or breach of Code of Conduct)	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	**3**
Standard complaints (operational complaints, quality of services, beneficiary selection, etc.)	0	5	2	3	17	0	11	2	0	**40**
Total	**2**	**6**	**2**	**3**	**17**	**0**	**11**	**2**	**0**	**43**

* Partner led programs only

** HQ indicates complaints which have been received via HQ channels, however the complaints were all related to MEED field locations.

*** For our Syria earthquake response, we worked together with our partner SARC on a cash distribution intervention which was funded by multiple donors. Complaints mechanisms were in placed and a total of 7,811 responses were received for SARC's total intervention. As this was a multi donor funded project none of the feedback could directly be linked to Mission East, hence we have not included details of responses in this report.

Details of serious complaints received in 2023

Country & Theme of complaint	Findings	Outcome / Action taken / Lesson learnt
HQ		
Allegations of power abuse and fraud against MEED staff member in field office	Complaint not upheld	An external investigation was conducted which concluded the allegations could not be substantiated.
Allegation of sexual harassment by a donor staff member.	Referral Made	Concerns with raised with donor, who conducted an external investigation.
Afghanistan		
Community complained that agreements made between them and MEED implementing partner were not honoured. Community claims that it was agreed that local partner would reimburse the community for the costs of raw materials the community provided to construct a cold storage facility for vegetables. However the MEED implementing partner didn't make the reimbursements.	Complaint not upheld	No written agreement was made between the community and the MEED implementing partner which led to confusion and misunderstanding of what was agreed between both parties. Investigation of MEED local partner proved that there was no fraud committed in the construction of the cold storage facility. MEED implementing partner had asked the community to contribute according the implementation plan, which then created confusion whether this would be reimbursed by the MEED implementing partner later on. MEED was able to mediate between the community and our implementing partner and both sides acknowledged that there was no ill-intend on both sides and that better communication could have avoided this misunderstanding.

Details of standard complaints received in 2023

Country & Theme of complaint	Findings	Outcome / Action taken / Lesson learnt
Afghanistan		
Community member questioned whether the location of the community water tap was correctly choosen	Complaint not upheld	Investigation concluded that community water tap was located in accordance with SPHERE standards. This has been explained to community member.
Complainant claimed that local authorities had collected funds from beneficiaries which they received as part of a MEED cash distribution. Collected funds were supposedly used for the construction of a community mosque.	Complaint not upheld	An investigation concluded that this collection had not taken place.
Complainant claims that cash distribution did not reach the most vulnerable but was instead channeled to other people based on guidance from the local authority.	Complaint not upheld	An investigation concluded that the intervention reached the most vulnerable based on a proper need assessment.
Complainant claims entitlement to MEED support as he was part of the need assessment surevey MEED carried out.	Complaint not upheld	The intervention was focussed on the people in most need. Complainant did not fall in that category, hence was not selected for the intervention.
Complainant claimed that local authorities had pressured MEED beneficaries who had received financial aid for payments.	Complaint not upheld	An investigation concluded that no payments were made to local authorities by beneficiaries.
Tajikistan		
Complainant asked why he was not considered for a household construction intervention.	Complaint not upheld	Complainant didn't meet the selection criteria and this was satisfactorily explained the the complainant.
Complainant received construction materials (cement blocks) in different sizes than was planned for.	Complaint upheld	Correct cement blocks were provided and we put measures in place to make sure that contractors provide beneficaries according to plan.
Iraq		
People who have not been selected for a business grant intervention question why they didn't qualify	Complaint not upheld	Business grant intervention was greatly oversubscribed so only a few of the applications could be granted. In addition some of the business ideas were not feasible within the limits of the business grant offered.
Nepal		
Complainant suggested that data which is used by local partner is not reliable, instead local partner should do its own data collection.	Complaint upheld	Suggestion will be taken on board in next data collection process.
Members of women group complained a lack of technical support / visibiliy from technical field staff.	Complaint upheld	Due to a delays in recruitment less fieldwork has been done than planned. However this will be recovered soon as new staff have been recruited.
Members of women farmers group requested indivdiual input support rather than receiving this as a group.	Complaint not upheld	Project budget wouldn't allow for individual distribution so the most optimal solution is chosen which is provision to each group.
Government official asked to involved in recruitment process local partner.	Complaint not upheld	Request was refused as we can't allow external interference in the recruitment process.
Beneficiary complained about a lack of group discussions while receiving training.	Complaint not upheld	Project team explained that group discussions are planned in later stages of the project intervention.
Members of a farmer group asked to include more people in the group so more people can benefit from the interventions.	Complaint not upheld	We are bound by a certain budget so increasing the number of beneficaries is not possible. However we encouraged the members to shar their learnings with outsiders.
Community leaders asked to consider other members of the community for an intervention.	Complaint not upheld	Selection of beneficaries is done based on certain criteria and for good reasons.
Beneficiary asked for a monitoring visit so ME and local partner could see project progress and success.	Complaint upheld	Monitoring team promised to visit the beneficary during next visit.
Head of teachers union want the union to be involved in upcoming education workshops.	Complaint upheld	Teachers union has been invited for the workshops.
Beneficiary feared being removed from beneficiary list for house rehabilitation due to interference by government.	Complaint not upheld	We confirmed that person remained on the beneficiary list and that selection of beneficiaries is only done by the project team without interference from government.
Delay of delivery of irrigation materials to beneficiaries	Complaints upheld	Project experienced delays in the procurement process which will be resolved as soon as possible.
Community member complained not being included as beneficiary in project intervention.	Complaints not upheld	Project team explained that community member did not meet the selection criteria and hence was excluded from project intervention.
Complainants didn't receive certain disaster prevention materials but claimed eligibility for it.	Complaints not upheld	Project team confirmed complainants didn't meet selection criteria and hence were not eligible to receive disaster prevention materials.
Syria		
Benificiary hadn't received case management support although she was selected for the intervention.	Complaint upheld	Partner followed up and beneficiary received case management support. Partner further improved coordination of their activities to avoid beneficiaries are not reached or forgotten.
Beneficiary didn't receive support as another community member faked her identity and received the support instead.	Complaint upheld	Support was provided to eligible beneficiary and additional pre-distribution checks are included in the future.
Beneficiary received a sewing machine as part of a small business project which showed technical issues.	Complaint upheld	Supplier of machine has followed up with beneficiary to resolve the issue.
Beneficiary could not receive cash disbursement as there was a discrepancy between the beneficiary name and his/her ID.	Complaints upheld	Individual issues were resolved promptly and additional procedures are implemented to assure accuracy of inserted data.
Armenia		
Beneficiaries complain about the indoor temperature of rehab facilities during winter.	Complaints upheld	Heating infastructure has been upgraded and improvements are made to insulation.

2023 Observations and Key Developments

- We updated our website with better access to raise complaints and whistleblowing.
- In this report we have not included information on our Ukraine and Myanmar programmes. Although we have built capacities and prepared for future programming, we didn't work with communities itself in 2023, hence we didn't set up complaints mechanisms.
- As in previous years, we can see that our BCM mechanisms are more widely used for providing feedback from the communities to our partners and Mission East. This wider feedback which are not necessarily complaints usually include: requests for additional support, questions about selection criteria for a certain intervention, and suggestions for new projects. In this report we mostly include complaints, while still recognizing the importance of BCM mechanisms for different types of feedback.
- We regularly receive genuine requests for support which we are not able to fulfil. This can be due to budget limitations or lack of mandate for additional interventions. We always aim to refer these requests to other organisations or actors as much as possible but are not always able to. We experience in some cases a lack of organisations which are able and willing to take on referrals, hence people we refer to other organisations and actors might not always be helped.
- We still observe that the size of the programme doesn't always correlate with the number of complaints. We are operating in different (cultural) contexts and environments where in some cases complaining is perceived ungrateful or will backfire. This might explain why there is a difference between the various country programmes.
- In 2023 we worked with 21 partner organisations. We require all our partners to establish a complaints mechanism in cases where they don't exist yet. We provide help and support in establishing and supporting these were needed.
- In 2023 Mission East was subject to a Review and Capacity Assessment initiated by our main donor DANIDA. The review team looked at the complaint mechanisms in our Tajikistan and Nepal country programmes and they concluded that procedures for handling of complaints was generally good[1].

[1] Review and Capacity Assessment of Mission East - Emergency and Development, October 2023, HN Consultants

- Q4 2023 was the start of our CHS Audit which was concluded in Q1 2024 with a report[2] which included the following comments:

Commitment	Feedback in Report
4: Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation and feedback	• Communities indicate that Mission East and partners listen to them, are responsive to their feedback and provide explanation for what they can and cannot support.
5: Complaints are welcomed and addressed	• Communities are generally aware of complaint mechanisms including contact numbers for Mission East and partner staff as well as other mechanisms to complain. • Communities are not always aware of the distinction between general feedback, programme-related complaints and sensitive or serious complaints (e.g. concerns related to CoC violations, SEAH, fraud and corruption), nonetheless they expressed confidence to use available channels and to raise serious concerns should they arise.

Key complaint mechanism actions planned for 2024

1. We will run sessions with Mission East staff and our partners to discuss experiences and learnings which will strengthen our BCM mechanisms. We will especially look at countries where we received none or a minimal number of complaints. If required, we will run specific trainings for either Misson East staff or our partners.
2. Mission East will continue to update BCM guidelines taking into account feedback from Mission East teams, partners, communities, donors and the independent audits.
3. The focus of the BCM development in 2024 will be on integrating feedback from the CHS audit and look into improving communication to communities. This might include new guidelines for community communication.
4. Mission East will continue to monitor the status of the BCM in all countries of operations and with partners. All partner organizations will be included in our yearly stock taking of complaints.

[2] Summary version of report can be found on: https://hqai.contentfiles.net/media/audit_reports/1_ME_RA_Summary_2024-03-22.pdf