



Children Relief Service (CRS)

Dzaleka Dowa, P.O Box 16 Dowa, Malawi

COMPLAINTS, FEEDBACK & WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Organization: Children Relief Service (CRS)

Location: Dzaleka-Lilambwe, Dowa District, Malawi

Email: info@childrenreliefmalawi.org

Phone/WhatsApp: +265 993 73 45 42

Website: childrenreliefmalawi.org

1. POLICY STATEMENT

Children Relief Service (CRS) is committed to being an accountable, transparent, responsive, and learning organisation that listens to the people and communities it serves.

CRS recognises that children, youth, women, families, community members, staff, volunteers, partners, donors, and other stakeholders have the right to raise questions, provide feedback, make complaints, or report concerns about CRS programmes, services, staff, volunteers, representatives, partners, or operations.

CRS will provide safe, accessible, confidential, and appropriate channels through which concerns can be raised without fear of retaliation.

CRS will take complaints and reports seriously, assess them fairly and promptly, protect individuals from harm, maintain appropriate confidentiality, and take reasonable action to address substantiated concerns.

CRS will also use feedback and complaints as an opportunity to improve the quality, effectiveness, safety, and accountability of its work.

2. PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

The purpose of this Policy is to establish a clear and accessible framework for:

- a) receiving complaints, feedback, concerns, and suggestions;
- b) receiving and responding to whistleblowing reports;
- c) ensuring that complaints are handled fairly, respectfully, and appropriately;
- d) protecting complainants, whistleblowers, children, survivors, staff, volunteers, and other persons involved in a complaint;
- e) preventing retaliation against people who raise concerns in good faith;
- f) ensuring serious safeguarding, GBV, PSEA, fraud, corruption, and misconduct concerns are referred through appropriate procedures;
- g) promoting organisational learning and continuous improvement; and
- h) strengthening accountability between CRS and the communities and stakeholders it serves.

3. SCOPE

This Policy applies to:

- a) the Board of Directors;
- b) the Executive Director and management;
- c) employees and consultants;
- d) volunteers and interns;
- e) programme staff and community-based workers;
- f) representatives and persons acting on behalf of CRS;
- g) partners and contractors where applicable; and
- h) any person who interacts with or is affected by CRS programmes or activities.

The Policy applies to complaints and concerns relating to CRS activities, programmes, services, staff, volunteers, representatives, resources, conduct, decision-making, or other organisational matters.

4. DEFINITIONS

Complaint means an expression of dissatisfaction or concern regarding a CRS programme, service, action, decision, staff member, volunteer, representative, or other aspect of CRS operations.

Feedback means information, comments, suggestions, observations, or opinions provided to CRS to help improve its programmes, services, communication, or operations.

Whistleblowing means reporting suspected wrongdoing, misconduct, fraud, corruption, abuse of power, serious breaches of policy, unlawful conduct, serious risks, or other matters that may affect CRS, its people, resources, or the communities it serves.

Complainant means a person who makes or submits a complaint.

Whistleblower means a person who reports a concern or suspected wrongdoing in good faith.

Retaliation means any adverse action, threat, intimidation, discrimination, harassment, punishment, exclusion, or other negative treatment because a person has raised a concern or participated in a review or investigation.

Safeguarding concern means a concern involving possible harm, abuse, exploitation, neglect, violence, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, or other safeguarding risks involving children or vulnerable people.

5. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

CRS will manage complaints and feedback according to the following principles:

5.1 Accessibility

People should be able to raise concerns through channels that are practical, understandable, and accessible to them.

CRS will seek to ensure that language, literacy, disability, age, gender, location, or other barriers do not prevent people from providing feedback or reporting concerns.

5.2 Safety

The safety and wellbeing of complainants, whistleblowers, children, survivors, staff, volunteers, and other affected persons will be prioritised.

5.3 Confidentiality

Information will be handled confidentially and shared only with persons who need the information for legitimate purposes, subject to safeguarding, legal, operational, or investigative requirements.

5.4 Non-Retaliation

CRS prohibits retaliation against any person who raises a concern or participates honestly in a complaint review or investigation.

5.5 Fairness and Impartiality

Complaints will be considered objectively and without predetermined conclusions. Where a person has a conflict of interest, they should not be responsible for handling the matter.

5.6 Respect and Dignity

Everyone involved in a complaint will be treated with respect, dignity, and fairness.

5.7 Timeliness

CRS will seek to acknowledge and address complaints within reasonable timeframes, recognising that complex matters may require additional time.

5.8 Accountability

CRS will take appropriate action when concerns are substantiated and will use feedback to strengthen its programmes and systems.

6. TYPES OF COMPLAINTS AND CONCERNS

Complaints may include, but are not limited to:

- a) poor quality or inadequate programme services;
- b) inappropriate staff or volunteer behaviour;
- c) discrimination or exclusion;
- d) misuse of organisational resources;
- e) fraud or corruption;
- f) conflicts of interest;
- g) abuse of authority or power;
- h) safeguarding concerns;
- i) sexual exploitation or abuse;
- j) gender-based violence concerns;

- k) breaches of confidentiality or data protection;
- l) unethical communication or use of images and stories;
- m) unfair treatment;
- n) failure to follow CRS policies or procedures;
- o) concerns about programme decisions;
- p) concerns regarding partners or representatives acting on behalf of CRS; and
- q) any other matter that a person reasonably believes should be brought to CRS's attention.

7. FEEDBACK

CRS welcomes both positive and negative feedback.

Feedback may be used to:

- a) improve programme quality;
- b) identify gaps in services;
- c) understand community priorities;
- d) improve communication;
- e) identify unintended risks or consequences;
- f) strengthen staff and volunteer performance;
- g) improve organisational policies and procedures; and
- h) inform future programme planning.

Not all feedback requires a formal investigation. CRS will determine the appropriate response based on the nature and seriousness of the information received.

8. REPORTING CHANNELS

CRS will provide appropriate channels through which concerns may be raised.

These may include:

- a) speaking directly with a CRS staff member or programme representative;
- b) contacting CRS management;
- c) contacting the Executive Director;
- d) contacting an appropriate Board representative;
- e) written complaints;
- f) email or other official communication channels;
- g) community feedback mechanisms;
- h) suggestion or feedback mechanisms established within programmes; and
- i) other safe channels established by CRS.

Where possible, CRS will communicate available reporting channels clearly to programme participants, communities, staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders.

A person should not be required to report a concern to an individual who is the subject of that concern.

9. ANONYMOUS REPORTING

CRS will accept anonymous complaints and whistleblowing reports where practicable. Anonymous reporting may limit CRS's ability to seek clarification, provide updates, or conduct a complete investigation. Nevertheless, anonymous information will be assessed and acted upon where appropriate.

10. RECEIVING COMPLAINTS

Any CRS representative who receives a complaint or serious concern must treat it respectfully and take reasonable steps to ensure that the matter reaches the appropriate person or mechanism.

A person receiving a complaint should:

- a) listen respectfully;
- b) avoid blaming or judging the complainant;
- c) avoid making promises that cannot be kept;
- d) protect confidentiality;
- e) record relevant information appropriately;
- f) immediately escalate serious safeguarding or protection concerns through the appropriate CRS procedure; and
- g) avoid investigating matters beyond their authority or competence.

11. SAFEGUARDING AND SERIOUS CONCERNS

Complaints involving possible child abuse, exploitation, sexual exploitation or abuse, GBV, trafficking, serious violence, or other immediate protection risks must be handled as safeguarding or protection matters.

Such concerns must be referred promptly through the relevant CRS safeguarding, PSEA, GBV, or other applicable procedures.

The person receiving the report must prioritise immediate safety and avoid actions that could place the affected person at additional risk.

CRS will respect the rights, dignity, privacy, and wishes of survivors and affected persons while following applicable safeguarding procedures and requirements.

12. WHISTLEBLOWING

Whistleblowing may concern suspected:

- a) fraud;
- b) corruption;
- c) theft or misuse of CRS resources;
- d) serious financial misconduct;
- e) abuse of power;
- f) serious policy violations;
- g) safeguarding violations;
- h) sexual exploitation or abuse;
- i) serious conflicts of interest;

- j) deliberate concealment of wrongdoing;
- k) serious risks to beneficiaries, staff, volunteers, or communities;
- l) serious unethical conduct; or
- m) other serious wrongdoing.

Whistleblowing should be made in good faith.

A person does not need to prove wrongdoing before raising a concern. However, knowingly making false or malicious allegations may constitute misconduct.

13. PROTECTION AGAINST RETALIATION

CRS prohibits retaliation against a person who:

- a) makes a complaint in good faith;
- b) raises a whistleblowing concern;
- c) provides information during a review or investigation;
- d) supports another person to raise a concern; or
- e) otherwise participates honestly in the complaints process.

Retaliation may itself constitute misconduct and may result in disciplinary or other appropriate action.

14. REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT

CRS will assess complaints and reports to determine:

- a) the nature of the concern;
- b) the level of risk;
- c) whether immediate protective action is required;
- d) whether the matter falls under another CRS policy;
- e) who should manage the matter;
- f) whether further information is required; and
- g) whether an investigation or other response is appropriate.

15. INVESTIGATION

Where an investigation is required, CRS will seek to ensure that it is:

- a) fair;
- b) impartial;
- c) proportionate;
- d) appropriately documented;
- e) confidential; and
- f) conducted by persons with suitable authority and competence.

Investigations will not be conducted by individuals who have a personal interest or conflict of interest in the matter.

16. RESPONSE AND CORRECTIVE ACTION

Where a complaint or concern is substantiated, CRS may take appropriate corrective action. Depending on the matter, action may include:

- a) improving a programme or service;
- b) providing an appropriate remedy;
- c) strengthening procedures;
- d) additional training;
- e) management action;
- f) disciplinary action;
- g) referral to an appropriate authority where required;
- h) recovery of organisational resources;
- i) strengthening safeguarding measures; or
- j) other appropriate action.

17. COMMUNICATION WITH COMPLAINANTS

Where the complainant's identity and contact information are available and it is safe and appropriate to do so, CRS will provide appropriate acknowledgement and, where possible, information about the outcome or status of the complaint.

CRS may not be able to disclose confidential information about disciplinary action, personnel matters, survivors, witnesses, or other protected information.

18. RECORD KEEPING

CRS will maintain appropriate records of complaints, feedback, whistleblowing reports, actions taken, and lessons identified.

Records must be stored securely and handled in accordance with the CRS Privacy Policy and Data Protection & Confidentiality Policy.

Access to complaint records will be restricted to authorised persons.

19. DATA PROTECTION AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Personal and sensitive information obtained through complaints and whistleblowing processes will be protected.

CRS will collect, use, store, and share such information only for legitimate purposes and in accordance with applicable CRS policies and requirements.

20. FALSE OR MALICIOUS REPORTS

CRS recognises that a person may raise a concern that cannot ultimately be substantiated.

A complaint will not be considered false merely because it is not proven.

However, knowingly making malicious, deliberately false, or intentionally misleading allegations may constitute misconduct and may be addressed under applicable CRS procedures.

21. RESPONSIBILITIES

Board of Directors

The Board provides oversight of organisational accountability and ensures that serious concerns involving senior leadership can be appropriately escalated.

Executive Director

The Executive Director is responsible for ensuring implementation of this Policy and ensuring that complaints and whistleblowing concerns are handled appropriately.

Management and Programme Staff

Management and programme staff are responsible for ensuring that feedback and complaints are received respectfully, recorded appropriately, and referred when necessary.

Staff and Volunteers

All staff and volunteers have a responsibility to report serious concerns and cooperate honestly with appropriate reviews or investigations.

All Stakeholders

Everyone interacting with CRS is encouraged to provide constructive feedback and raise concerns when they believe something is unsafe, unfair, unethical, inappropriate, or inconsistent with CRS values.

22. TRAINING AND AWARENESS

CRS will seek to ensure that relevant staff, volunteers, and representatives understand:

- a) the purpose of this Policy;
- b) available reporting mechanisms;
- c) confidentiality requirements;
- d) non-retaliation principles;
- e) safeguarding referral responsibilities; and
- f) their responsibilities when receiving complaints.

23. MONITORING AND ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

CRS will periodically review complaints and feedback trends to identify systemic issues, programme gaps, risks, and opportunities for improvement.

Complaint information used for organisational learning will be handled in a manner that protects confidentiality and personal information.

24. POLICY REVIEW

This Policy will be reviewed periodically and may be updated when necessary to reflect organisational learning, changes in programmes, applicable requirements, or emerging risks.

25. APPROVAL

Organisation: Children Relief Service (CRS)

Policy: Complaints, Feedback & Whistleblowing Policy

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