**Complaints Handling Policy**

**COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY**

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1. **Introduction**

The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) is the largest humanitarian organisation in Bangladesh dedicated to humanitarian acts and services. An auxiliary to the Government, the Society complements efforts to prevent and alleviate human suffering through interventions in disaster management, health and capacity building.

Voluntary in nature, BDRCS is part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the world's largest independent humanitarian network. The Movement is neutral and impartial, and provides protection and assistance to people affected by disasters and conflicts. Presently one of 189 National Societies, BDRCS functions and acts in accordance with the spirit of the RCRC Movement's fundamental principles.

1. **Purpose of Complaints Response Mechanism**

Ensuring that our stakeholders can hold us to account will improve the quality and effectiveness of our work. Handling feedback and complaints is an essential part of an organisation’s commitment to being liable to its stakeholders. It can offer to validate whether specified goals are being met and signal well-timed changes or decisions to remedy or mitigate potentials problems.

BDRCS strives to improve humanitarian interventions through placing communities it serves at the centre of its work. It is committed to learning, improving and encouraging the stakeholder it works with to comment on the progress and effectiveness of its interventions. This is achieved through establishing and implementing a Complaints Response Mechanism (CRM), one that is user-friendly, safe and accessible, for managing, responding to and monitoring complaints within programs. The CRM supports a culture of accountability within BDRCS by ensuring accessibility to complaints handling policy, procedures and systems in all sphere of its work.

This policy will set out the procedure for receiving, recording, and handling complaints. It will define what kinds of complaints can be received and what will be outside of the remit of BDRCS and who can complain. It will describe the steps of dealing with a complaint and the learning process to improve the system. BDRCS’s commitment to fairness and transparency of vulnerable people is central to the development of this policy, which is guided by the principles that will drive the implementation of the CRM.

It is hoped that most complaints or concerns related to the activities of BDRCS can and will be dealt informally by staff or volunteers at local level. However, it is understood that not all issues can be resolved in this manner. Thus a formal complaints mechanism is required for those occasions when an individual or a group wishes to make their complaint a matter of record and receive a formal response.

1. **Definition**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction. It is a specific grievance of anyone who has been negatively affected by any unacceptable service or actions by BDRCS or its staff, volunteers or any party directly involved in the delivery of our work. It is a concern that expects a response and solution. The scope or the types of complaints that will be addressed under this policy are described in the following section.

A feedback is a comment or concern that can be positive or negative but does not require a formal response. Feedback provides useful insights into how project activities are perceived or how they are implemented.

1. **Scope and limitations**

**Who can make a complaint under this policy**

Complaints can be made by any individual, group or community directly involved in the activities that are being carried out by BDRCS. Complaints can also be made by parties indirectly affected in the locations of BDRCS’s work, including the wider community, local leaders and government representatives.

**Types and Nature of Complaints**

A **valid complaint** has to be about an action for which BDRCS is responsible or is within our sphere of influence or control. Complaints can be categorised as:

* 1. **Non-sensitive complaints** could include the following (not an exhaustive list):
* A concern about the quality of programme delivery or implementation
* A concern about the decisions taken by BDRCS in relation to project implementation
* A concern on the implementation policy/advocacy aspects of the project
  1. **Sensitive complaints** could include the following (not an exhaustive list). These complaints will be treated with confidentiality and fast-tracked through the complaints handling procedures:
* Sexual exploitation and/or any type of abuse by a staff member or volunteer
* Fraud and/or corruption by a staff member or volunteer, such as involvement in bribery or misusing aid or funds
* Any action which constitutes a breach of BDRCS’s principles or code of conduct including staff behaviour

A complaint is not:

* A general query, request or **suggestion/feedback** about BDRCS’s work. This is also referred to as non-complaint relating to an action for which BDRCS is responsible or is within our sphere of influence.

**Invalid complaints** relate to issues outside the control of BDRCS. This can be referred to other agencies considered responsible, but BDRCS cannot accept responsibility for how the other institutions treat complaints. This could include the following (not an exhaustive list):

* A contractual or legal dispute
* An issue relating to the work of other humanitarian agencies
* An issue concerning criminal or illegal activities

BDRCS accepts anonymous complaints recognising that complaints may be legitimate and the complainant may have good reasons as to why they do not want to disclose their identity, although following up such complaints will be more difficult. All complaints, whether sensitive or non-sensitive will be handled in a confidential manner.

**Recording, Monitoring and Reporting Complaints**

BDRCS registers and monitors all complaints and records results of such complaints in an IT interface. It has restricted staff access and supports complaints being logged on receipt, actions tracked and outcomes recorded. The interface has a reporting function that enables project team to monitor the type of complaints received, the procedures followed and from where the complaint originates. Reports are generated and distributed by respective project managers regularly to senior management of BDRCS under relevant departments for information and action. The generated data from the complaints interface will assist in identifying the possible weaknesses in assessing, planning, implementation, monitoring or evaluation.

**Learning from Complaints**

BDRCS aims to adapt and evolve in response to all feedback received. Complaints are used as feedback to the programmes to identify any issues that needs to be addressed in programme delivery or ways of working. This encourages learning and continuous improvement in BDRCS’ humanitarian works.

1. **Key Principles of Complaints Handling**

To ensure that a complaints system is effective, trusted and used, depends on the following key principles:

**Confidentiality.** To create an environment in which people are more likely to raise concerns, trust the mechanism and feel confident that there will not be reprisal or retaliation if they use it, confidential processes need to be ensured. Confidentiality helps to ensure safety and protection for those making and those affected by a complaint. This is achieved by restricting those that have access to sensitive information.

**Accessibility.** It is essential that the mechanism can be accessed by as many people as possible within any stakeholder group, especially those who are often excluded ot are most marginalised. Where the risk of exclusion is high, special consideration must be given to safe mechanisms that do not require literacy. We are committed to making communication with us as easy as possible for the complainants.

**Transparency.** Users must be clearly informed how they can access the CRM and the various procedures that follow once they do so. It is important that the purpose and function of the mechanism is transparent.

**Participation.** A successful and effective system will only be achieved if it is developed in a highly participatory way with representatives from all stakeholders and if it is fully integrated into program activities. People, or user groups, need to be involved in each stage of the processes from design to implementation and review.

**Contextualisation and appropriateness.** Any process to develop a system must be localised in order that it is appropriate to the local context, be in keeping with local governance structures and fit within the specific nature of the program being implemented.

**Safety and non-retaliation.** It is the right of all stakeholders to complain. The safety and protection of the complainant, witnesses, subject of complaint and staff is paramount. To ensure that people are protected and safe when wanting to complaint or raise concern, the potential risks to different users need to be carefully considered and incorporated into the CRM design. All necessary precautions must be considered before proceeding to deal with a complaint. Any attempt of retaliation against a complainant is considered gross misconduct and immediate disciplinary action should be taken against such behaviour.

1. **BDRCS’s Principles of Complaint Resolution**

If, following an investigation, a complaint is found to be valid against BDRCS, it is envisaged that the appropriate response will fall into one of three Resolution types:

• **Resolution #1 – Practice change:** An acknowledgement of the validity of the complaint, a

demonstrable change of BDRCS practice in the future, and reassurance to the complainant that there is a change in practice.

• **Resolution #2 – Making good:** Repairing/replacing the damage or omission i.e. ‘making

good’ to the complainant(s).

• **Resolution #3 - Restitution:** Providing restitution to the complainant(s) when the ‘loss’ or

‘damage’ is such that it cannot be made good.

1. **Management and Responsibility**

All staff have a responsibility to constantly remind stakeholders of our policy and that we are all available to receive complaints/feedback at any time. It is this ongoing promotion of this policy that will operationalise it and integrate it into our ways of working.

BDRCS senior management has ultimate responsibility for the CRM and may be involved in the Appeals process. For complaints concerning staff, the immediate manager of the program will usually be involved in the process but for sensitive issues, it might be necessary to rely on senior management or HR. Most non-sensitive complaints can be directly managed and handled by staff closest to the situation. However, in case of a sensitive issue, support from senior or specifically designated staff may be required. It is important to consider that people, especially community members, may not be comfortable complaining directly to staff they work with every day and it might be more suitable to them to complain to someone more removed or senior within the programme / organisation.

Programme Managers at respective BDRCS District Units and headquarters have the responsibility for developing and implementing CRM. For designing the CRM, BDRCS Beneficiary Communication focal will provide necessary support and guidance. Programme managers are primarily responsible for localising, implementing and monitoring CRM within each community. Dedicated time should be provisioned to design the CRM and adequate training of staff, support, tools and resources should be ensured to effectively operate the complaints mechanism.

1. **Policy Implementation & Review**

This policy is acknowledged by the BDRCS Management and will be reviewed after every three years. This policy will be informed and opened to all stakeholders since the inception of a project. The policy will be oriented to staff and volunteers during the induction trainings. A Bangla version of this policy will be preserved by all BDRCS Units. This policy will be the integral part of all operational manual, such as human resource manual, and will be available in the BDRCS website.

**Authority**

This policy will be duly signed and authorised by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_