

Complaints Policy

1. Purpose

In line with its values, Tearfund Australia (hereafter referred to as ‘Tearfund’, ‘our’/‘we’/‘us’ or ‘the organisation’) is committed to working in an effective, transparent and accountable manner. In a continuous effort to achieve the highest standards, we strive to meet the expectations of:

- our own organisation (i.e. Tearfund values, specifically relationships and accountability in this context)
- our supporters/donors
- our Partners and the communities they work within
- the general public

We believe our stakeholders have a right to have their complaints taken seriously and addressed in a professional and timely manner. Therefore our Complaints Policy, as regards our activities, will show the importance we place on listening and responding to stakeholder concerns and complaints. Receiving and dealing with complaints offers an opportunity to restore damaged or broken relationships and improve new and existing ones. Complaints can be an important source to identify and address issues of justice and contribute to continuous improvement. Additionally, we recognise that we have a responsibility to work with our Partners to ensure they also develop safe and effective complaints mechanisms that are accessible to all people, especially those who are vulnerable.

This policy should be read with reference to the specific definitions in clause 7.

2. Scope

Subject to section 2.1 below, this policy applies to complaints made by a person or organisation about any aspect of Tearfund Australia’s operation. All complaints will be handled in an equitable, fair and unbiased manner. Tearfund will work to ensure that the process is as accessible as possible to all complainants.

2.1. Complaint Referral

Where a complaint falls outside of the scope of this policy (e.g. complaints against an employee of another organisation or government department) the complainant will be redirected to the relevant organisation or Tearfund may refer their complaint on to the relevant authority if redirection is not possible.

2.2. Complaints Relating to the Actions or Activities of Tearfund Partners

Tearfund views its accountability to project or program participants and their associated communities (i.e. people involved in Tearfund-supported projects) as taking place in the context of partnership with the local Partner organisation. For this reason, complaints processes for use by project participants and community members will be developed and managed by Tearfund’s Partner organisations. Tearfund will support the development of such processes and seek to ensure that they adhere to the principles outlined in this policy while recognising the autonomy of each agency.

3. How to Give Feedback or Lodge a Complaint

Tearfund refers to different categories to determine the appropriate response for feedback or complaints received:

3.1. Operational Feedback and Complaints

Operational feedback can be positive or negative and refers to opinions, comments, suggestions and expressions of interest in the products or processes of Tearfund which could relate to performance improvement, a product, Partners and programs, fundraising approaches or marketing campaigns.

Operational complaints refers to expressions of dissatisfaction or concern regarding Tearfund Australia as an organisation, its actions, people, products or services.

Operational Feedback and complaints may be provided in a number of ways:

- Use the [contact us](#) link on the tearfund.org.au website.
- Email us at info@tearfund.org.au or feedback@tearfund.org.au
- Call us on 1800 244 986 (9am-5pm AEST Monday-Friday)
- Contact a Tearfund staff member (by phone, email or speak with them in person)

Tearfund will also endeavour to respond to enquiries or expressions of dissatisfaction raised through other channels such as social media.

3.2. Sensitive Complaints

Sensitive complaints may include, but are not limited to, concern around behaviour of employees, misconduct, alleged breaches of Tearfund's Code of Conduct or other policy breaches or matters that could affect Tearfund's reputation or public perception of Tearfund, or alleged breaches of the ACFID Code of Conduct. If suspected wrongdoing or misconduct is identified by, or brought to the attention of, an employee, volunteer or Board member it will be treated as a sensitive complaint.

A sensitive complaint may be made in any of the ways outlined in 3.1, or by email to us at complaints@tearfund.org.au

Examples of what is not a sensitive complaint for the purposes of this policy:

- General query about Tearfund's work
- Request for information
- Contractual dispute
- Request to amend personal records, for example, to correct an address, or cancel a donation
- Request to unsubscribe from regular Tearfund communication, i.e. campaign newsletter or email
- Differing opinions expressed about Tearfund's theological position, views, values, or advocacy communications

Assisted Complaints

Tearfund aims to ensure that making a complaint is as easy as possible. Where support is needed, Tearfund People will assist complainants to put their complaint in writing. Complaints can be made by a friend or advocate of the complainant on their behalf.

Anonymous Complaints

Tearfund recognises that in some circumstances complainants may wish to remain anonymous. Such complaints can alert us to problems that need fixing and therefore Tearfund will receive them, though it may not be possible to propose a remedy to the situation, to the complainant.

3.3. Whistleblowing

Defined as "*where a member of staff, volunteer, contractor or Partner reports suspected wrong-doing, including suspicion of fraud, misuse of resources, neglect of duties or a risk to health and safety.*"

This includes where the complaint is regarding an alleged breach of the ACFID Code of Conduct.

Please refer to Tearfund's Whistleblowing policy for this process.

3.4. Safeguarding of Children or Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Concerns

If the complaint relates to a child-safeguarding matter (such as concerns relating to the safety or wellbeing of a child, including exploitation and abuse allegations, the possession of child exploitation

material or other concerns of this nature) then please use the reporting form attached to our Safeguarding Children Policy and related guidelines.

If the complaint relates to the sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment (SEAH) of an adult, then please use the reporting form attached to our Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Policy and related guidelines.

3.5. Grievances

Grievances relate to an internal situation whereby an employee wishes to make a complaint or allegation that they have been treated unfairly within the work environment. See Tearfund's Grievance Policy for more information on grievances.

4. How Feedback and Complaints are Handled

Tearfund uses a triage system for escalating sensitive and serious complaints to ensure that complaints are classified, prioritised and appropriately managed within the organisation. Tearfund employees are trained in how to handle feedback and complaints.

4.1. Operational Feedback and Complaints

Positive Feedback

Positive feedback is recorded and provided to the relevant department to incorporate in future planning.

Negative Feedback, Complaints and Sensitive Complaints

Negative feedback is recorded, reviewed and responded to by a Tearfund staff member, acted on and considered for continuous improvement. If on review, the matter is identified as a Sensitive Complaint, it will be escalated and dealt with as part of the complaint process.

When a Tearfund person receives a verbal complaint, they will:

- identify themselves, listen, record details and determine what action or response the complainant expects;
- confirm the information received;
- remain impartial and not attempt to take sides or lay blame; and
- discuss it with the relevant head of the applicable department who will take it up with the People and Culture Director if it is a Sensitive Complaint or if they are unable to resolve the matter themselves. If appropriate, an investigator will be appointed.

For all complaints Tearfund will:

- seek to understand what outcome the complainant is expecting;
- make an initial assessment of the severity of the complaint and its urgency;
- determine, based on the initial assessment, whether a formal investigation is required;
- clearly explain to the complainant what will happen next; and
- give an estimated timeframe for a response to the complaint or, if that is not possible, a date by which Tearfund will contact them again.

Tearfund will ensure that complainants don't have to make their complaint to anyone implicated in the complaint itself and that any Tearfund person implicated in a complaint is not involved in its handling in any way.

4.2. Confidentiality, Recording and Reporting of Complaints

Tearfund will ensure that operational feedback and complaints are reported, recorded and confidentiality maintained as appropriate. For these complaints, to the extent possible, the complainant and/or respondent's identity will be kept confidential and only disclosed to those who need to know in order to respond.

4.3. Complaint Investigation within Tearfund Australia

Tearfund will allocate the complaint to a suitable person who will make every reasonable effort to investigate all of the relevant circumstances and information surrounding the complaint. The investigator will conduct a procedurally fair investigation where natural justice applies. The level of investigation will be determined by the seriousness of the allegation by giving consideration to the following:

- Does immediate action need to be taken?
- What is the severity—i.e. does it relate to the breach of any law, ACFID Code of Conduct, Tearfund policy, and/or health and safety implications?
- Is there enough information to investigate?
- What are the financial implications for the complainant and/or others?
- What is the impact on the individual, the public and the organisation?
- What is the potential for the situation to escalate or any systemic implications?

Investigation reports will be presented to the appropriate Tearfund Person for follow-up.

Complaints related to the safeguarding of children or sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment will be handled by the Safeguarding Committee under the relevant Tearfund Safeguarding Children or Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment policies. Complaints relating to fraud, whistleblowing and bullying/harassment will also be dealt with under the relevant Tearfund policies.

Tearfund commits to providing appropriate assistance and referrals to victims/survivors (e.g. protection, medical, counselling, social, legal and financial assistance, or referrals to such services) in relation to complaints within the scope of this policy.

4.4. Complaint Escalation

At any time a complainant may request that a more senior staff member or Board member deal with their complaint.

If the complaint is about the actions of senior staff, a complainant may submit their complaint directly to the Board if the complainant feels the Chief Executive Officer hasn't addressed their concern. Issues relating to the conduct of the Chief Executive Officer will be overseen by the Tearfund Australia Board. Complaints of this nature can be directed to chair@tearfund.org.au. Where complaints are received from Members of Tearfund Australia, the Board will be routinely informed.

If a complainant believes there has been a breach of the ACFID Code of Conduct, they have the option to make their complaint directly to the ACFID Code of Conduct Committee ([refer to ACFID's website](#)).

Serious complaints that have reporting requirements attached and/or are of a criminal nature will be reported to the relevant civil authority. Further detail is provided in the relevant policies.

4.5. Review and Analysis of Feedback and Complaints

The implementation of the policy will be monitored by a Complaints and Learning Committee consisting of representatives from the Australian Program, International Program and the Finance and Administration Departments. The monitoring and recommendations of the committee will be reported to Tearfund's Leadership Team quarterly to ensure organisational gaps and learnings are identified and addressed. Sensitive complaints will be reported to the Tearfund Leadership Team via the People & Culture or Program team reporting mechanisms. The Board receives regular reports on complaints.

4.6. Timeframes for Responding to Complaints

Where appropriate, Tearfund will communicate expected complaint handling timelines and process and provide the outcome in writing as soon as practical. Where appropriate, such as in the case of a complaint from a community member in the field, Tearfund's Partner will also communicate decisions verbally in the local language.

While individual circumstances will determine the timeframe for communication, in most situations complainants can expect prompt acknowledgement of a complaint (i.e. within 5 working days), an initial review within two to three weeks, with further timelines for full investigation and determination to be communicated to the complainant at the conclusion of the initial review. We aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible, and within 30 days, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Where there are extenuating circumstances that mean it will not be possible to meet the timeframes set out, the complainant will be advised of an estimated revised timeline for a response as soon as possible after this becomes known.

4.7. Learning from Complaints

Tearfund values complaints and seeks to learn and improve as a result of them. To that end, complaints are collected in a Complaints and Learning Report and reviewed regularly for insights by Tearfund's Complaints and Learning committee (quarterly), Leadership Team (quarterly) and Board (annually). Appropriate responses will be compiled and implemented.

Complaints that relate to our implementing Partners' work are assessed in a review of Partner relationships managed through International Program Team processes.

Serious complaints are examined for causal factors to strengthen processes and prevent reoccurrence.

5. Implementation of this Policy

Tearfund's Complaints Policy is distributed to staff and volunteers are briefed on the policy. We require all those who may be involved with a complaint in any way, to be committed to the principles outlined in this policy. Staff directly involved in complaint handling are fully trained in the implementation of this policy. Tearfund's field staff are also trained to support Partners to encourage, receive and handle complaints taking account of language issues and cultural sensitivities.

6. Related References

ACFID Code of Conduct
Bullying and Harassment Policy
Grievance Policy and Grievance Resolution Guidelines
Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Policy and Guidelines
Safeguarding Children Policy and Guidelines
Whistleblower Policy

7. Definitions

ACFID: Australian Council of International Development

Complainant: means a person, organisation or its representative, making a complaint.

Complaint: refers to an expression of dissatisfaction or concern regarding Tearfund as an organisation, or a Tearfund person, where a response or resolution may be explicitly or implicitly expected.

Investigator: means a Tearfund Australia staff member, volunteer, external consultant/party formally asked to investigate a complaint.

Member: means an individual admitted to membership of Tearfund Australia in accordance with its Constitution.

Tearfund Australia: In this document 'Tearfund', 'the organisation', 'we', 'us' or 'our' means Tearfund Australia.

Tearfund Partners: refers to any organisations who are supported by Tearfund to implement community development programs.

Tearfund People (or Tearfund Person): refers to all Tearfund staff, volunteers, consultants, exposure visit participants, Fieldworkers and some specific contractors.