

# **AUSTRALIAN SALESIAN MISSION OVERSEAS AID FUND (ASMOAF)**

## **COMPLAINTS AND COMPLAINT HANDLING POLICY**

ASMOAF is committed to providing quality services to its donors and recognises the value of complaints as an important tool in monitoring and improving our stakeholder's satisfaction with the work we do.

### **Purpose**

ASMOAF aims to provide a quality service. If an issue arises and any stakeholder is not happy or we have not met their expectations, then a process is in place to deal with this in an appropriate manner.

Our policy is to deal with all complaints in a professional and timely manner. ASMOAF will work with the complainant to establish a resolution that is fair to all parties and accurately reflects all its relevant codes and guidelines.

### **Scope**

This policy applies to all stakeholders – donors, partners and local people regardless of their gender, status or background and without prejudice to their future participation in ASMOAF programs.

### **Authorisation**

**Br Michael Lynch**  
**Director**  
**Australian Salesian Mission Overseas Aid Fund**

## **1. Introduction – The value of complaints and our commitment to good complaint handling**

ASMOAF recognises the importance and value of listening and responding to concerns and complaints. We are committed to achieving the highest standard we can in every area of our work and to continuous improvement. This applies especially to delivery of services, seeking donations and accountability to stakeholders generally.

We are committed to working according to or above the standard required by the Code of Conduct of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID). Receiving concerns and complaints is one of the most important ways of learning what we need to do to improve our work.

This policy applies to and is implemented by all our people - employees and volunteers – and they are familiarised with it. Those with particular relevant responsibilities are trained in its application.

We make clear the value we place on receiving concerns and complaints in all relevant communications. We advise how a copy of this policy may be obtained and we provide clear information on how complaints may be made.

## **2. Guiding principles - Guiding principles for Our Policy**

We have adopted the following principles for our complaint policy and procedures.

### ***Visibility***

- We will clearly publicise information about how and where to complain.

### ***Accessibility***

- We will ensure that our complaint handling process is as accessible as we can practically make it to all complainants.

### ***Responsiveness***

- We will respond to all complaints.

### ***Objectivity***

- We will address all complaints in an equitable, fair and unbiased manner using evidence submitted by both the complainant and our personnel through the complaint handling process.

### ***Charges***

- Access to the complaint handling process is free of charge to complainants.

### ***Confidentiality***

- We will observe strict confidentiality in complaint handling.

### ***Consumer/client-focused approach***

- The interests of our clients are foremost in our approach to complaint handling.

### ***Accountability***

- We will ensure that accountability for and reporting on the actions and decisions with respect to complaint handling is clearly established.

### ***Continual improvement***

- Continual improvement of the complaint handling process and the quality of services is one of our permanent objectives.

To this end we will—

- maintain data collection on complaints for the purpose of identifying trends;
- keep abreast of best practices (both locally and overseas) regarding complaint handling;
- foster a client-focused approach;
- undertake specific training of staff to foster better complaint handling practices;
- encourage innovation in complaint handling development.

## ***3. Definitions***

### ***Definitions we use:***

**Complaint** means an expression of dissatisfaction made to an organisation, related to its products or services, or the complaint handling process itself, where a response or resolution is explicitly or implicitly expected.

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

**Inquiry** means a request for information or an explanation.

**Feedback** means opinions, comments, suggestions and expressions of interest in the products or the complaint handling process.

**Stakeholder or interested party** means a person or group having an interest in the performance or success of the organisation.

## ***4. Scope of the policy***

### ***Scope of Our policy***

This Policy is intended to apply to any complaint, regardless of who makes it. We will accept complaints relating to our paid staff, our volunteers, our partners and anyone else acting on our behalf.

A complaint may be made by a person to whom we deliver services or goods or who is affected by our services or goods, a partner, a local organisation with which we work, our staff, volunteers, donors or a member of the public.

Anonymous complaints can be made, but obviously our ability to investigate them may be limited because of this.

## **5. Educating the organisation on the complaint policy and training relevant personnel**

### **Educating our organisation on our complaint policy and training relevant personnel**

Our Complaints Policy has been distributed to all our paid staff, our volunteers, our partners and all others acting on our behalf.

Staff who implement the policy discuss its applicability and issues related to it at our staff meetings.

## **6. Publicising the Policy**

We make clear the value we place on receiving concerns and complaints in all relevant communications.

Our website opening page has a prominent tab with the word complaint linking to this policy and information on how to make a complaint.

Where literacy is a constraint we encourage our partners to orally invite expressions of concern and complaint. We encourage them to take care to give this invitation in a way that is culturally appropriate recognising that in some cultures people require greater encouragement to make a complaint.

We will encourage our partners to take special care to facilitate complaints from vulnerable populations including children and marginalised groups. If required we encourage them to make use of pictorial means of communication.

We ensure that making a complaint to us is as easy as possible. We will take complaints orally in person, over the telephone and by any written means. We encourage our partners to do their very best to assist a complainant to put their complaint in writing or to write it down themselves.

All relevant communications explain that we have a complaints process and provide links to our website where the complaints policy is located. Our partners are encouraged to promote their processes similarly.

Our partners are required to abide by our complaints handling policy and this is included in their SWA.

## **7. Where and How Complaints may be made**

### ***Complaints are made to:***

The Director  
ASMOAF  
Salesian Province Centre  
PO Box 264  
ASCOT VALE Vic 3032  
Tel/ 03 93776060  
email: [salmiss@salesians.org.au](mailto:salmiss@salesians.org.au)  
and also via website: [www.salesians.org.au/missions](http://www.salesians.org.au/missions)

We are able to receive complaints orally in person or by telephone and in writing by post, email or online via our website. Where complaints are made orally we will ensure our write up of the complaint contains all the information the complainant wishes to provide.

Complaints may be made by a friend or advocate of the complainant on their behalf. Where appropriate, for some projects/programmes our partners may establish complaint committees involving representatives from partner organisations and members of communities they are serving.

Where appropriate our partners may utilise complaint/suggestion boxes. We recognise that in some circumstances complainants may wish to remain anonymous. Because such complaints can alert us to problems that need fixing we will accept them though clearly it may not be possible to provide a remedy to an individual.

## **8. How complaints are handled**

We subscribe to the principle of subsidiarity – complaints should be resolved at the level at which they are made (i.e. in country with the partners delivering the program). Where this cannot occur they will be elevated to the next level.

When we take an oral complaint we will:

- Identify ourselves, listen, record details, and determine what the client wants;
- Confirm that we have understood and received the details;
- Show empathy for the client, but not attempt to take sides, lay blame, or become defensive;

For all complaints we will:

- Seek from the client the outcome/s they are expecting;
- Make an initial assessment of the severity of the complaint and the urgency of action
- Clearly explain to the client the course of action that will follow:
  - if the complaint is out of our jurisdiction;
  - if we may exercise a discretion not to investigate;
  - if preliminary enquiries need to be made, or further consideration needs to be given: or
  - if the complaint is to be investigated.
- We will not create false expectations, but assure the client that the complaint will receive full attention;
- Give an estimated timeframe or, if that is not possible, a date by which we will contact them again;
- Check whether the client is satisfied with the proposed action and, if not, advise them of alternatives.
- Ensure that the complaint is appropriately acknowledged;
- Follow up where necessary, and monitor whether the client is satisfied.
- We will register all complaints (see section 15)

We will ensure that a person implicated in a complaint is not involved in any way with the handling of that complaint.

To determine how a complaint should be managed, we will assess it in terms of the following criteria:

- a) severity;
- b) health (including mental health) and safety implications;
- c) financial implications for the complainant or others
- c) complexity;
- d) impact on the individual, public and organisation;
- e) potential to escalate; and
- f) the need for, and possibility of immediate action.

If we assess the complaint as significant in terms of one or more of these criteria we will classify the complaint accordingly.

## **9. Inquiries, minor complaints and jurisdiction**

ASMOAF staff will endeavour to deal immediately with inquiries and minor complaints which are made orally by telephone or in person that is during the initial phone call or meeting. However, as far as possible, we will ensure that the inquirer or complainant is completely satisfied with the information and or resolution provided.

On receipt of a complaint we will also attempt to determine expeditiously whether investigation is required or not depending on jurisdictional questions and whether the complaint is ill conceived.

If the complainant disputes an assessment that a complaint should not be investigated, the member of staff handling the complaint will refer it to the Director for review. If such a dispute is unresolvable we will refer the complainant to Code Committee of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID).

## **10. How complaints are investigated**

### ***How we will investigate complaints***

We will make every reasonable effort to investigate all the relevant circumstances and information surrounding a complaint. The level of investigation will be commensurate with the seriousness and frequency of the complaint.

Complaints raised at the local level will be ideally resolved at the local level by responsible persons at that level.

## **11. Timeframes**

### ***Our timeframes***

- We will acknowledge written complaints within 5 days.
- We will acknowledge oral complaints immediately.
- We will aim to resolve complaints as quickly as possible and within 30 days unless there are exceptional circumstances. If a complaint is not resolved within 30 days we will inform the complainant of progress and keep them informed of progress every two weeks.

## **12. Responding to and closing a complaint**

### ***How ASMOAF will respond to and close a complaint***

Our Director will normally make the decision on a complaint that has required investigation (that is not a minor complaint). Decisions on serious complaints may be referred to our Governing Board.

We will communicate our decision on a complaint as soon as is practical. Our communication will be in writing by email and/or post.

In the case of a complaint being made by a local community member (in the field) and elevated to our office, our partners will also communicate our decision orally and again in the appropriate language.

We will encourage the complainant to respond and advise whether or not they are satisfied with our decision. In our decision we will advise that if a complainant is not satisfied we will be prepared to consider any additional information they may provide and to review our decision.

In all cases we will advise that the complaint may be referred to the Code Committee of ACFID. We will provide all necessary information for referral to the Code Committee and offer to assist in referral.

Our partners will be encouraged to adopt these principles and practices in their own complaints handling.

## **13. Outcomes of complaints**

### ***How we will learn from complaints***

We will ensure that all relevant personnel are informed of the outcomes of complaints and the implications for our procedures and processes.

We will take all required remedial action. We will be prepared to change the way in which we operate and improve or undertake further training of staff. Where needed we will counsel or discipline staff or volunteers.

Where appropriate we will consult and take advice from ACFID and/or other relevant regulatory/enforcement authorities.

## **14. Confidentiality**

We will not reveal a complainant's name or personal details to anyone in or outside our organisation other than staff involved in handling the complaint without obtaining the complainant's permission.

***15. Recording complaint data***

We will register all complaints and record the following data: date received, nature of the complaint and outcome.

***16. Reporting about complaints***

All complaints will be reported at our Governing Board meetings.

***17. Continuous improvement in complaint handling***

On a continuing basis we will monitor the effectiveness of our complaint handling and make improvements as appropriate.