



ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN IN SELF
EMPLOYMENT (WISE)

**COMPLAINTS HANDLING
SYSTEM**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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1. Introduction

WISE gives due importance for complaints/grievances of both target community members as well as staff. Therefore, beyond policies, rules or procedures, efforts are exerted to build an organizational culture that promotes and ensures that every office applies an open-door policy. This policy is aimed to give target community (including their families) and staff members opportunity for exercising freedom for expressing their opinions, raising their concerns, ensuring quick redressal to their complaints or grievances on matters related to their relationships with the Organization and Union of WISE SACCOs. Every officer is required to ensure that her/his office is always open for aggrieved target community members or staff and s/he should attend to cases immediately.

In addition to the open-door culture, the Organization maintains and implements laws, policies, rules, regulations and standard operating procedures for describing rights and obligations of target community members as well as employees including volunteers. The following sections describe the Organization's Complaints Handling system, with reference to relevant documents for details. The system is applicable in both WISE, Meleket Training Service and the Union of WISE SACCOs.

This document was produced in consultation with representatives of staff and target members.

2. Definition of Compliant

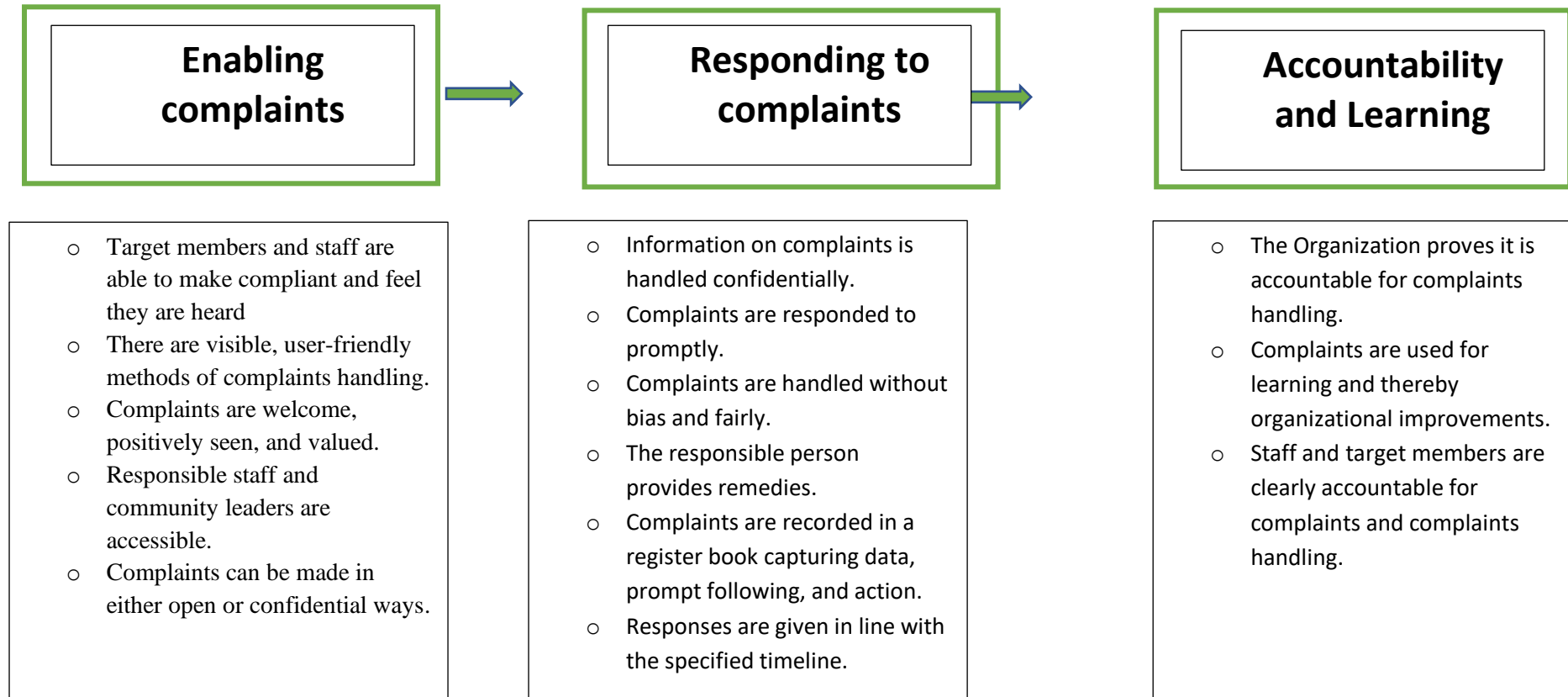
A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction related to unsatisfactory services, dermal of rights, actions of staff or leader, and the like, where a response or resolution is expected or legally required. Complaints may be categorized as sensitive and insensitive depending on the gravity of the cases. (See section 6)

3. Purpose of Complaints Handling System

The benefit of a compliant handling system includes the following:

- Resolving issues raised by target members and staff who are dissatisfied with the way they are treated in their relationship with staff or leaders of their SACCOs. in a timely fair manner.
- Improving quality service delivery and thereby building the image and reputation of the Organization.
- Building confidence and empowerment of staff or target members.
- Building or improving accountability of the organization.

4. Our Complaints Handling System



5. Key Principles of Our Complaints Handling System

- a) Target Members and Staff Focused
WISE is committed to effective complaint handling. This is demonstrated by a clear system, openness to feedback, and seeking appropriate resolution of complaints of target members as well as staff.
- b) Accessibility
Complainants are easily able to make their complaints. Information is easily accessible.
- c) Visibility
Target members, staff and others can get information from different sources on how, when, where to make their complaints.
- d) Responsiveness
Complaints are acknowledged promptly, and addressed in a timely manner.
- e) Fairness
Complaints are addressed in a fair and objective manner
- f) Confidentiality
Information is kept confidential.
- g) Remedy
Staff/Leaders should provide an appropriate remedy in time.
- h) Appeal
Complainants should be informed of appeal procedures.
- i) Accountability
Staff/Leaders of target members are accountable for complaints and this is clearly stated in their TOR.
- j) Continuous Improvement
The Organization takes complaints as a source for continual improvements.

6. Steps in Handling Complaints

All complaints should be recorded by those who receive complaints from either staff or target members. The following general guidelines should be followed in addressing and recording complaints from staff or target members.

- i. If the complaint is presented in writing, the responsible staff should address the complaint and respond in writing in accordance with the proper mechanism. The staff should respect timeline indicated in this document and also record it in the Complaint Register Book.
- ii. If the complaint is presented verbally, the responsible staff:
 - Should listen to the complainant carefully, with patience and a positive attitude.
 - Tell the person that s/he has the right to be heard
 - Explain that the information will be kept confidential.

- Provide information on rules and regulations of the organization related to the rights and obligations of staff /target members.
- Explain procedures of complaints handling, e.g., steps, responsibility mechanisms, and documents.
- Record information received in the complaint register. This should include
 - Date the complaint presented and reference number.
 - Name, age, sex, address, telephone number of the complainant.
 - Gist of the complaint: what happened, when, where, and who was involved.
 - Evidence of supporting document.
- Read what is recorded and get consent from the presenter.
- Explain the next steps to be taken.
- Give an appointment for a reply or tell her/him that s/he will receive a phone call in a specified period of time.

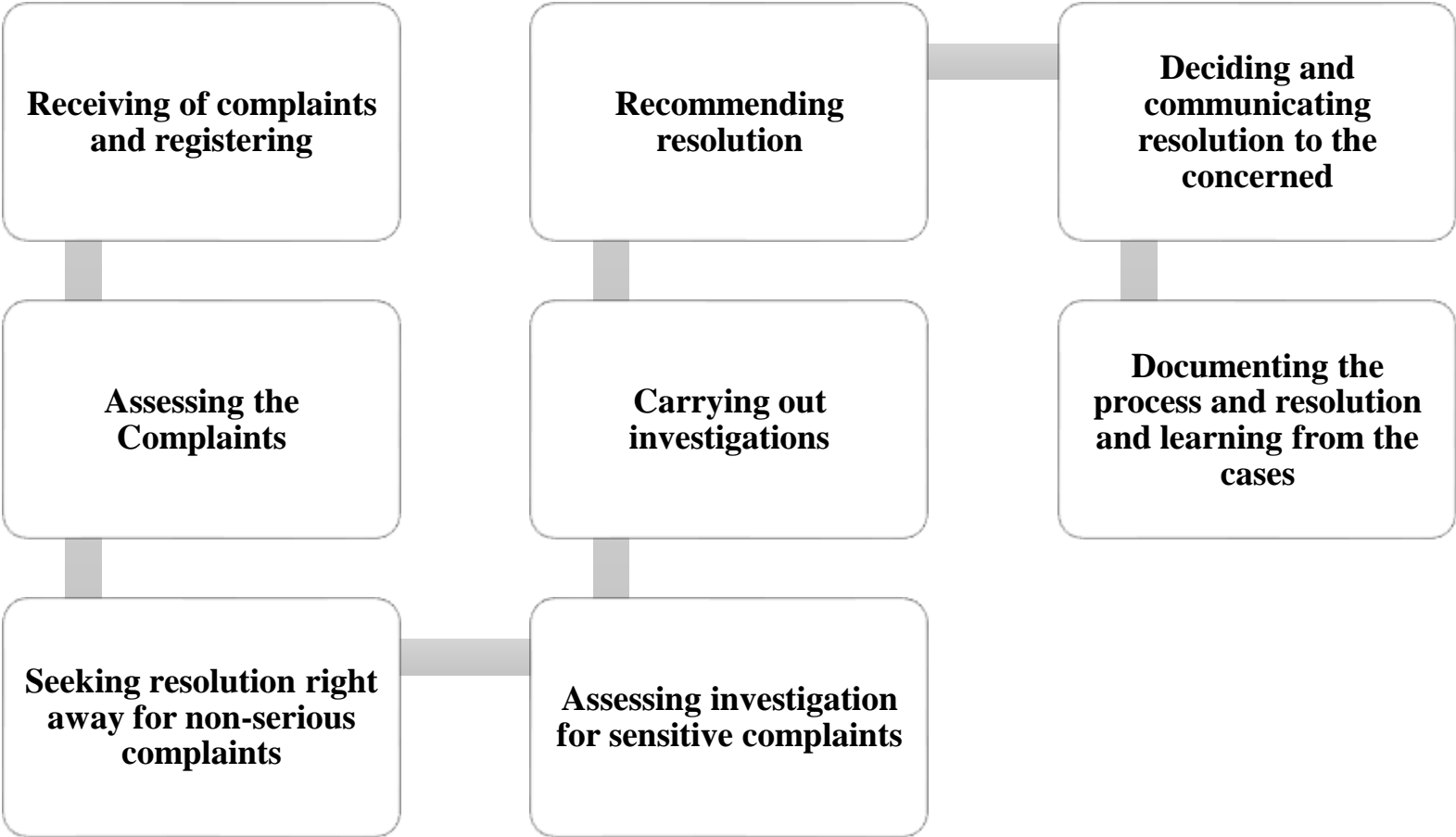
iii. Addressing Sensitive Complaints

- Sensitive complaints include the following
 - Sexual harassment or rape
 - Abuse of authority
 - Beating
 - Defaming or insulting a target member publicly
 - Stealing money from target members

Insensitive complaints include

- Delaying service delivery
- Insulting staff
- If the complaint is a sensitive one, it may need a panel to investigate the case. Therefore, the Director/Union Manager will assign a panel of investigation in writing.
- The panel should make reference to rules and regulations, e.g., the HR Policy, procedures and Complaints Handling System of WISE.
- The panel should complete its investigation and present its recommendation to the Director of WISE/Union Manager.
- The Director of WISE/Union Manager will give their decision within a period of 24 hours unless the case requires further steps.
- The final decision is communicated to the concerned in writing within the specified timeframe.

iv. Compliant Investigation and Resolution Process



7. Complaints Handling Mechanisms for Community Target Members

7.1 The Cooperative Societies Proclamation

The Cooperative Societies Proclamation No. 985/2016 issued by the government of Ethiopia for the formation and regulation of cooperatives in the country provides Article 25 and Articles 61-67 in relation to the rights and duties of members as well as complaints handling procedures. In accordance with the Proclamation, cooperatives develop their bylaws that govern their operations, members handling and other matters. Cases that cannot be resolved by the Mediation Sub-committees are handled by elected conciliators. Again if the cases could not be resolved by the conciliators, they can be forwarded to arbitrators who conduct their hearing and fulfill their duties in accordance with the Civil Procedure Code. The final stage for presenting grievances is the Regular Courts.

7.2 Bylaws of Cooperatives

Each Saving and Credit Cooperative (SACCO) formed by WISE have bylaws approved by their respective General Assemblies. The bylaws contain several articles of which is the election and duties of the Mediation Sub Committee (Article No. 23). The Committee is charged for handling complaints or conflicts between the cooperative and its members in an amicable manner. If the Committee fails to resolve the case, the above (2.1) steps can be pursued.

7.3 Orientation Fliers to Members

WISE and the Union of WISE SACCOs have produced a flier to inform members about their rights and responsibilities as well as different procedures of their cooperatives. The document clearly describes procedures for complaints handling within the cooperatives and beyond as per the Cooperative Societies Proclamation.

7.4 Suggestion Boxes

The Organization has placed suggestion boxes in its premises with a clear sign for community members coming to the premises for training or to seek resolve to personal or cooperative issues. Target members who do not wish to bring their issues openly to officers have this opportunity of writing their issues and putting them in the suggestion boxes. The boxes are checked by responsible officers at least once a month and brought to the attention of the Director of WISE and/or Manager of the Union.

7.5 Leaders Meetings

Aggrieved members have the option of tabling their complaints at their SACCO Leaders monthly meetings. This is usually done in writing. The Chairperson of the SACCO has the obligation to present complaints to the committee which deliberates and provides responses to the aggrieved. Minutes of the deliberations are kept by the Committee and replies are given either verbally or in writing directly or through the

assigned staff. Urgent cases can, through the Facilitators of the SACCOs, be brought to the attention of the respective Chairperson of the SACCO, Director of WISE or Manager of the Union. (Ref. Bylaws of SACCOs)

7.6 Union Board

Target Members with complaints on the Secretariat of the Union or that could not be resolved by the SACCO leaders can present their cases to the Union Board, which holds its meetings monthly. One of the responsibilities of the Board is to address complaints of member SACCOs as well as their individual members.

7.7 Safeguarding Policy

Most of the target women of WISE have children that they bring to the working place; staff meet the children when they visit their working or living places when they do business development services or follow-up the performance of the mothers or deliver messages; children come to WISE's premises for a number of reasons such as to use the library, to deliver a message, to work during the summer season, etc. Therefore, to ensure that the right relationship exists between our staff and the target members but particularly with their children and to create a safe environment for children and women so as to prevent physical, sexual or emotional abuse, a Safeguarding Policy was developed in 2014. The policy statement relates to the relationship our staff have with the children as well as of the target members themselves in such a way to build, earn and warrant their trust and also ensure the good image of our organization. The policy will help to minimize the risk of harm to children in the programme. Indirectly, it will create awareness of child protection to the family members of the children, particularly to the mothers. The document indicates the redressal system for any complaints that may arise by children themselves or their mothers/custodians.

7.8 Human Resource (HR) Policy and Procedures

The HR Policy and Procedures of both WISE and the Union describe the rights and obligations of employees, code of conduct of employees as well as disciplinary measures particularly in matters relating to their relationship and performance related to target members. Complaints presented on employees are addressed in accordance with pertinent articles in the HR Policy and Procedures manuals.

7.9 Civil Societies

As a member of the network organization for charities, CCRDA, since 1999, WISE has signed the Code of Conduct and is committed to abide by it. The document is available in both Amharic and English and copies are found in the Resource Center. Target members can solicit information from staff on how they can use this mechanism for their complaints. The aim of the signing the Code is to make signatories accountable for their actions and decisions to all stakeholders including the beneficiaries they serve.

7.10 General Assembly Forums

Target community members can present complaints at the cooperatives' General Assembly Forums. Elected leaders are expected to address the complaints promptly.

8. Complaints Handling Mechanisms for Staff Members

8.1 Human Resource Policy and Procedures Manual

The HR Policy and Procedures manuals of both WISE and the WISE SACCOs Union present entitlements, obligations, procedures for implementation, procedures for grievance handling by the organizations, etc. New employees are informed of their rights and obligations as well as procedures during their orientation and induction period. Access to the manual is available in different ways including the data center, supervisors' offices, Director's office and Finance office.

8.2 Suggestion Boxes

The Organization has placed suggestion boxes in its premises with a clear sign for staff who do not wish to bring their complaints/grievances or suggestions openly. Such staff members can put in the suggestion boxes their complaints or suggestions. The boxes are checked by responsible officers at least once a month and brought to the attention of the Director of WISE and/or Manager of the Union.

9. Confidentiality and Protection

The principle of confidentiality needs to be made clear to all WISE staff, and community members who handle complaints. The protection of the complainant from intimidation or abuse of any form as far as Feedback and complaints records should be treated to safeguard sensitive information is within the control of the people to whom the complaint is made should be ensured. Moreover, complaints register books and other papers related to cases should be kept in locked drawers/cabinets.

10. Responding Time to Complaints

Response to complainants should be given within a maximum of two weeks of receiving the complaint regardless of whether or not a decision has been reached. The responsible is accountable for timely response to complaints.

- If a complaint is upheld, the complainant should be informed immediately on the action that has been taken. However, in some limited cases e.g., sexual misconduct allegations, it can be important that the complainant is not told what action has been taken for the sake of confidentiality.
- If a complaint is not upheld, the complainant must be informed of this, the reason

why and her/his right to formal appeal by taking the complaint to the next level of management or court.

If a decision has not been reached within the committed timeframe, the complainant will be provided with a progress report and an indication of a likely date of conclusion.

11. Civil Society Code of Conduct

As a member of the network organization for charities, CCRDA, since 1999, WISE has signed the Code of Conduct and is committed to abide by it. The document is available in both Amharic and English and copies are found in the Resource Center. The document provides for the purpose, guiding principles and enforcement of the Code. The aim of the signing the Code is to make signatories accountable for their actions and decisions to all stakeholders including their staff members. Staff are informed of the responsibility of the Organization in respecting the principles of the Code and this mechanism for forwarding complaints to the Ethics Panel of the CCRDA.

At present, the network or networks of civil society organizations, Ethiopia Civil Society Organization Council (ECSOC) has produced one code of conduct document which aligns with the CCRDA's, this recent document is available in English and all member CSOs are expected to use it.

11.1. Orientation and Induction

A short description of key entitlements and obligations as well as procedures is handed over to newly-recruited employees during their orientation and induction sessions. Employees are given orientation and induction by immediate and higher supervisors before they commence their duties and responsibilities. A copy of the Staff Code of Conduct is also issued to new employees along with letters of employment and job descriptions.

11.2. Safeguarding, Gender, Workplace Safety, and Health Policies and Procedures

These policies are produced by the Organization to ensure that staff enjoy their rights and are also accountable for their duties and responsibilities. The policies describe what are expected of the staff and the Organization as well as implementation mechanisms. As the documents describe the rights and obligations of staff, they also explain ways of raising complaints to the concerned in case of violation.

11.3. The Labour Proclamation

The country's Labour Proclamation no. 377/2003 provides for the protection of the rights of employees. Issues not addressed in the Organization's HR Policies and Procedures are dealt with in line with provisions of the country's Labour Law, Articles 12-13, 136-143. Aggrieved employees can take their cases up to Labour Courts at different levels of the justice structure.

11.4. Regular Meeting Forums

Staff can present their complaints openly at Staff Meetings, Management Meetings and/or Department Staff Meetings. Responsible officers are expected to address the complaints promptly.

12. Relevant Documents for Complaints Handling Mechanisms

The following documents are relevant for both target community members and staff members for pursuing their complaints appropriately.

- a) HR Policies and Procedures Manuals, WISE, Union
- b) Labour Proclamation, No. 377/2003
- c) Cooperative Proclamation, No. 985/2016
- d) SACCOs Bylaws
- e) CSO Code of Conduct
- f) WISE Employees' Code of Conduct
- g) Organizational Manual, WISE
- h) Safeguarding Policy, WISE
- i) Gender Policy, WISE
- j) Workplace Safety and Health Policy, WISE
- k) Staff Orientation and Induction Paper, WISE
- l) SACCO Members Orientation Flier, WISE, Union
- m) Leadership Training Manual for SACCO Leaders

13. Responsible Structures for Complaints Handling

- a) Immediate Supervisors
- b) Manager, Union
- c) Director, WISE
- d) Mediation Sub-committees of SACCOs
- e) Union's Board
- f) WISE's Board
- g) Ad hoc Discipline and Grievance Committee, WISE, Union
- h) Annual General Assembly Forums of SACCOs
- i) Staff Meeting Forums of WISE and Union
- j) Monthly SACCO Leaders Forum
- k) Management Meetings Forum

- l) Government Cooperative Societies Structures
- m) Labour Courts
- n) Civil Courts

14. Locations of Relevant Documents

- i) Director's Office
- ii) Supervisors' Offices
- iii) Data Center
- iv) Resource Center/Library
- v) Training Department
- vi) ID Department
- vii) Internet for Proclamations

15. Further Information

Any community target or staff member can solicit information on complaints and their handling methods from the Director of the Organization.

This document will be translated into Amharic for ease of understanding by all concerned and reviewed as needed.