



MARY WARD INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA EXTERNAL COMPLAINTS POLICY

1.1 Introduction

Mary Ward International Australia (MWIA) is committed to addressing issues of concern and/or complaints raised by staff, volunteers, project partners, direct or indirect beneficiaries of MWIA projects/activities and any other persons or parties. MWIA recognises the importance and value of listening to and responding to concerns and complaints, and is committed to achieving the highest standard in every area of work.

MWIA encourages complainants to undertake a formal complaints resolution process without concern or retribution, direct or indirect discrimination. MWIA will hold paramount the principle of fairness and will undertake a full investigation into all complaints. At all stages of the complaints resolutions process, MWIA will treat complainants respectfully, courteously and sensitively, with due recognition of cultural or other barriers that may impact a complainant's access to justice. MWIA will ensure complainants are provided with the opportunity to be heard and that they have an understanding of the MWIA complaints resolution process for project beneficiaries overseas and in Australia, MWIA will work with project partners to facilitate this understanding. Complainants will also be notified of their right to utilise a support person, advocate and/or interpreter.

MWIA will ensure systems are in place and resources available to handle and respond to all complaints. MWIA will endeavor to manage complaints received in a timely, fair and confidential (where legislative requirements allow) manner.

1.2 Policy Objectives

To ensure that all persons affiliated with MWIA, including staff, project partners, beneficiaries, stakeholders and any other person or parties have a clear and specified avenue through which complaints can be made. MWIA places value on receiving concerns and complaints as an important way of learning and improving on its delivery of aid and development programmes.

1.3 Policy Scope

This policy is intended to apply to any complaint, regardless of who makes it. MWIA will accept complaints related to MWIA staff, volunteers, directors and anyone else working on the organisation's behalf. Complaints may be made by project partners, direct or indirect beneficiaries of MWIA projects and/or activities, community stakeholders, and any other persons or parties. A complaint may also be made by MWIA staff, volunteers or directors.

Anonymous complaints can be made, but MWIA's ability to investigate them may be limited because of this.

1.4 Definitions/Terminology

- A **complaint** refers to a formal expression of dissatisfaction or concern. For the purpose of this document, a complaint may be related to (but is not limited to):
 - Projects and/or activities funded or delivered by MWIA
 - Staff, volunteers or directors of MWIA
- **Complainant** refers to a person, organisation or its representative, making a complaint.
- An **inquiry** will refer to 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

2.1 Procedure

MWIA is committed to ensuring that all complaints are heard and responded to. MWIA is committed to continually improving and building on the aid and development programmes and activities that it funds or is associated with, and values the feedback of interested parties through complaints.

- 2.1.1 To ensure complaints are managed quickly and effectively, all complaints are directed to the Executive Officer. Where a complaint is made about the Executive Officer, this will be directed to the Chairman of the MWIA Board of Directors.
- 2.1.2 MWIA will receive complaints in writing, orally in person or by telephone, by post, email or online via the MWIA website. Where a verbal statement is made, appropriate notes will be taken and the complainant will be required to sign the document.
- 2.1.3 For all complaints, MWIA will seek from the complainant the outcome/s they are expecting and make an initial assessment of the complaint. MWIA will not create false expectations, but will assure the complainant that the complaint will receive full attention. An estimated timeframe will be given to the complainant.
- 2.1.4 A complaint may be lodged anonymously however MWIA's ability to investigate such complaints is limited.
- 2.1.5 All complainants will be advised of their right to have a support person, friend, advocate and/or interpreter present when lodging a complaint. This person may or may not have a prior connection with MWIA.
- 2.1.6 Project beneficiaries and other stakeholders will be made aware of their right to lodge a complaint through MWIA's project partners. MWIA is committed to working with project partners to develop culturally meaningful and contextually relevant mechanisms for explaining this complaints policy.
- 2.1.7 Some of MWIA's existing project partners have a complaints policy in place. MWIA will encourage and assist all project partners to develop their own complaints policies in the local language.
- 2.1.8 The Executive Officer is will take immediate action on a complaint whenever possible.
- 2.1.9 When the Executive Officer is unable to take immediate action, he/she will ensure a timely resolution of the complaint received. This resolution is to occur within 7 days of the initial complaint receipt.

- 2.1.10 Where a complaint relates to the abuse or alleged abuse of a child, the Executive Officer is compelled to take action under the *MWIA Child Protection Policy*.
- 2.1.11 At all times, it is the responsibility of the Executive Officer (or the Chairman of the MWIA Board of Directors, if acting on behalf of the EO) to ensure the timely response and resolution of complaints received.
- 2.1.12 A complainant is permitted at any time to withdraw a complaint except when action needs to be taken in relation to a breach of specific legislative requirements and/or abuse or alleged abuse of a child.
- 2.1.13 The Executive Officer is compelled to report all complaints to the MWIA Board of Directors, including outcomes.
- 2.1.14 Outcomes of complaints are reviewed by a select panel of the MWIA Board.
- 2.1.15 MWIA will observe strict confidentiality in complaints handling. All complaints will be registered and stored securely by the Executive Officer.
- 2.1.16 If complainants remain discontented with the outcome of the complaints process, they are to be advised of the appropriate external channels to lodge their complaint and the appropriate external advocacy body. Where complaints are lodged by persons or parties overseas, MWIA will work with its project partners in the local community in providing this advice.
- 2.1.17 MWIA is a signatory to the *Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) Code of Conduct*. Complaints alleging breaches of the ACFID Code of Conduct can be made to the ACFID Code of Conduct Committee via the ACFID website:
www.acfid.asn.au/code-of-conduct/complaints

2.2 Links to other Policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with the *MWIA Child Protection Policy*.

2.3 Monitoring & Review of Policy

MWIA will undertake a review of this policy in accordance with the MWIA Policy Review Process or sooner if required. This audit will be undertaken by the Executive Officer and reviewed by the MWIA Board or Directors.

Responsible Person	Date Created	Scheduled Review date
MWIA Board	27/03/14	02/05/16
Contact	Version	Status
Kirstin Del Beato (Programs Manager)	1.3	For approval
Authorisation name	Authorisation signature	Date of authorisation
Kathryn Greiner (Chair)		