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The Gold Standard

A/R Guidelines
Input & Grievance Mechanism

Applicable for	A/R Requirements
Valid since	August 2013
Version	0.9
Author	The Gold Standard Foundation

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Purpose of the Mechanism

1. To maintain a transparent communication channel with local stakeholders throughout the crediting period of a project, in addition to the consultation conducted at the design stage (via two rounds of Local Stakeholder Consultation).

2. To address early in the crediting period, unforeseen issues that arise during the course of a project. Stakeholders can suggest improvements or modifications based on their direct experience with the project and their knowledge and understanding of local conditions.

3. To further increase the robustness of The Gold Standard through more active and continuous stakeholder involvement, thereby adding value to the existing system of stakeholder feedback and monitoring.

4. To increase mutual trust between the project developer and the local stakeholders, to the benefit of both parties.

Mandatory Input & Grievance Expression Methods

The project developer shall establish methods 1-3 (below) of *input & grievance* expression for each project. Method 4 (below) is optional and may be chosen in agreement with local stakeholders (as part of the LSC meeting). The project developer shall also demonstrate that they regularly monitor and respond to the comments that are made through each of the methods for continuous *input & grievance* expression.

Methods for continuous *input & grievance* expression
1. Continuous 'Input & Grievance Expression Process Book'
2. Telephone access
3. Internet and email access
4. Nominated Independent Mediator (NIM)

Comments received through any of the methods shall be documented using the table template below. This table is part of the 'Annual Reports' and thus part of every third-party audit and Gold Standard review.

Date	Comment	Action requested from project developer	Response from project developer	Person designated with responsibility by project developer	Issue resolved?
	Explanation of problem or comment.	What would the stakeholder like to see change/stay the same.	Explanation from the project of what they will do in response to the comment. This may be an explanation as to why the project is unable to respond/does not see the problem as necessary to address.	Identification of who will take responsibility for responding AND monitoring the issue.	This could be confirmation from the person who made the complaint, or the project.

Method 1 - Input & Grievance Expression Process Book

A comment book shall be made available on the project site or in the most appropriate, publicly accessible location (e.g. a local community centre, at the local council, a local library or school), so that local stakeholders can provide feedback on the project.

The book is important to allow for continuous inputs in regions with high literacy rates but which have minimal access to the internet. The location of the book shall be explained and discussed at the LSC meeting and then justified in the project documentation.

At a minimum, the book shall be formatted to include the five sections from the table template on page 2. If the project developer feels that additional columns are necessary then these can be included. The table shall be formatted to allow for stakeholders to make anonymous comments should they wish.

The project developer shall check the comments in the book on a regular basis and record responses. The project developer may record changes that are made to the project, acknowledge problems and explain their causes, or explain why the comment cannot be addressed by the project, or if it is irrelevant. Even where the desired outcome of the stakeholder cannot be achieved, the project developer shall use their response to show that they are respectful of the views of stakeholders and suggest alternative solutions or compromises wherever possible.

Pros	Cons
• Simple to use – does not require access to technology or associated costs for stakeholders • Cheap, efficient to manage • Simple to explain to stakeholders	• Assumes literacy (they are still able to communicate through other input mechanisms) • Requires small geographical spread of stakeholders (or possibly more than one book) • Potential loss/theft of the book (ensure that a secure place is chosen and daily checks are carried out) • Could result in complaints from individuals, but little space for constructive discussions with wider community (encourage discussing these complaints in the local governance meetings)

Method 2 - Telephone access

In regions where stakeholders may be spread over a large geographical area, telephone contact may be more practical than a physical book. The telephone contact details shall be explained and discussed at the LSC meeting and then justified in the project documentation.

The telephone number could be that of the project site office or another location. However, in countries where local or national calls, or calls to mobiles, have different pricing, the project developer shall try to offer the least expensive option and justify the choice. The contact details of The *Gold Standard Regional Manager*[1] located closest to the project shall also be provided for stakeholders.

The project developer shall ensure that the phone is answered by someone (or has an answer phone message) in a language(s) appropriate to the stakeholders of the project.

Calls received shall be logged and recorded in the same way as in the book, with the date, comment, action requested and project developer response recorded for each call. As with all of the methods, stakeholders are not required to give their personal details when they wish to make a comment.

Pros	Cons
• Simple to use • Simple to explain to stakeholders • Inexpensive to run if the project developer uses the same phone line as the project/office rather than setting up a separate phone line • Greater anonymity for stakeholders • Overcomes illiteracy issues • Better where stakeholders may be spread over a larger area or have geographical barriers to access the project site/book/mediator	• Stakeholder incurs the cost of a phone call • Provides fewer channels for discussion with wider community as complaints are individualized (encourage discussions on these also in the local governance meetings)

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[1] Link to The Gold Standard Regional Managers

Method 3 - Internet access

In regions with widespread internet access an email address or comments section on a website established by the project developer could be the easiest way of receiving input from stakeholders. The email and website details shall be explained and discussed at the LSC meeting and then justified in the project documentation.

The email address of The *Gold Standard Regional Manager* located closest to the project shall also be provided for stakeholders to contact. On a website, the information of the project and mechanism for providing comments shall be presented in a straightforward manner, showing the same information as in the table template on page 2. The information shall be in the language(s) most appropriate for local stakeholders and it shall allow for comments to be made anonymously.

Emails or website comments received shall be logged and recorded in the same way as in the book, with the date, comment, action requested and project response recorded for each message. As with all of the methods, stakeholders are not required to give their personal details when they wish to make a comment.

Pros	Cons
• Simple to use • Simple to explain to stakeholders • Useful where stakeholders are be spread over a larger area or have geographical barriers to access the project site/book/mediator • Managing an email address or website section for comments is inexpensive for project developer.	• Assumes literacy • Assumes internet connection, and access to the internet for all groups of stakeholders • May entail some costs for the project developer to set up, if a website is used • Provides fewer channels for discussion with wider community as complaints are individualised (discuss in the local governance meetings) • Potential lower level of anonymity than telephone calls/comment book.

Method 4 - Nominated Independent Mediator (Optional)

The selection of a Nominated Independent Mediator (NIM) by the project developer may be the best approach for projects in regions with low literacy rates and/or little access to telephone and internet connections. The NIM shall be someone that local stakeholders can access easily, trust to represent their views, and who is in contact with the project developer. The selected NIM shall be discussed at the LSC meeting and agreed by and with the local stakeholders.

Contacts between the NIM and the local stakeholders shall be communicated to, and recorded by, the project developer using the table template from page 2. This shall include the date of contact, all of the issues that have been discussed and any information or responses that were provided to the NIM in response to the stakeholders.

The NIM shall be willing to be contacted by the auditor or The Gold Standard Secretariat to confirm their role and the comments they have received.

Pros	Cons
• Simple to explain to stakeholders • Can work within (and uphold) local customs for managing disputes • Potentially provides a third party to mediate relationships • Overcomes literacy issues • Potentially allows for community engagement and discussion of issues	• The mediator may be biased towards/against the project and not give objective feedback (can be discussed in the local governance meetings and a request can be made to change the mediator if they are found to be prejudiced) • May not be approachable for stakeholders, or not to all groups (as above can be resolved in local governance meetings) • May require remuneration to take the role seriously

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Examples of stakeholder inputs

Date	Comment	Action requested from project developer	Response from project	Person designated with responsibility by project developer	Issue resolved?
2 April 2013	The construction vehicles that drive to the site make lots of noise, and beep their horns to access the site.	Please make less noise on the roads around the site and at the site entrance, as there are houses nearby.	Drivers have been asked to be respectful of the neighbours as they drive near the site, and turn off their engines when they are waiting to enter. They have also been asked to telephone the site office to gain entry to the site, instead of beeping their horns. May 2013.	Mr. Kajura, Head of Site Transport	Internal monitoring suggests that drivers now call instead of using their horns to gain entry to the site. Mr Kajura has spoken to project neighbours, and they agree that noise levels from the site have reduced. June 2013.
3 April 2013	There is now less land to graze our cattle because the area around the turbines has a fence.	Access to more land for grazing the animals.	For safety reasons, some areas have to be restricted so that there are no accidents. However, we will hold a meeting with local people to explain which areas are dangerous and therefore restricted, but use a map and discuss with local people to see if there are other areas of the site that can be used for grazing animals. May 2013.	Ms. Mandela, Site Manager.	Project community meeting held 30th May 2013. Map produced and copies distributed to local people to indicate which areas are accessible. Explained the dangers of high voltages for the animals to show why access to some land had been restricted. Community members agreed, but have asked for an animal passage to be made to access the western area of the site. This will be done with new fencing in August 2013.

Local Stakeholder Consultation (LSC) Meeting

At the LSC meeting, the methods of input shall be explained and discussed to ensure that local stakeholders agree that the details of the selected methods will be the most appropriate e.g. the location of the book is accessible and secure, local stakeholders agree that the mediator is someone that they can approach and trust to represent their comments to the project without prejudice, the website is in appropriate language(s) and will be easy for local stakeholders to use etc.

The *LSC Report* shall document any comments, criticisms or improvements that were made to the continuous *input & grievance* expression methods discussed at the LSC meeting.

Recommended Best Practice for Continuous Input & Grievance Expression from Stakeholders (local governance meetings)

The Gold Standard Foundation recommends that, where practical, project developers have regular meetings to invite local stakeholders to give their feedback on the project, ensure that the project goals are understood and investigate if there are any improvements that could be made. These could be in the form of:

- Annual project open days to allow local stakeholders to visit the site and see the project
- A meeting (e.g. coincide with training and repairs, or at the same time as auditor *field visits*) that includes general information about the project, education about climate change and carbon offsetting, etc.

These regular meetings can be very useful for projects as they allow project developers to hear the views of local stakeholders (including employees) and, as they allow for greater communication and understanding, can improve relations between the project and the local community. If regular meetings are planned, they shall be mentioned at both rounds of the LSC and advertised in accordance with The Gold Standard requirements.

Checklist for Auditors

As part of the Initial Certification, the contracted auditor shall check whether the approved/selected methods of continuous *input & grievance* from the *LSC Report* or other consultations have been implemented on site and discussed in the project documentation.

The continuous *input & grievance* log (the template table on page 2) is part of the project documentation that the auditor shall use to audit the project.

The auditor shall check:
1. That the project developer has responded in a reasonable manner to comments that have been raised.
2. That the responses are adequate, timely and appropriate to address the problem or comments raised.
3. That any issues the auditor considers serious are taken up as a Forward Action Request (FAR) for the project as part of the certification to ensure further monitoring of the issue.

The auditor shall make use of the comments when in discussions with local stakeholders as part of the *field visits*. The comments can provide useful starting points for conversations with the local stakeholders. If there are comments from a stakeholder that has chosen not to remain anonymous, the auditor can request to speak to this individual if they think an issue is of serious concern for the project.

Where the auditor has doubts about the activities of the project, or the comments raised relate to a serious problem, the auditor shall:
1. Confirm that the actions, as per the response from the project developer, recorded in the table have taken place.
2. Confirm that stakeholders accept the results.
3. Consider using a Forward Action Request (FAR) to ensure further monitoring of the issue.

If no comments have been made through the *input & grievance* mechanisms, the auditor shall record this information as part of their report. When engaging with local stakeholders they shall inquire whether stakeholders are aware of the continuous *input & grievance* mechanisms, whether there are any problems, concerns or comments about the project, and encourage the stakeholders and the project developer to use the continuous *input & grievance* mechanisms.

History of this document

Version	Date	Nature of revision
0.9	August 2013	Initial publication