THE GOLD STANDARD CONTINUOUS INPUT & GRIEVANCE MECHANISM

1. Purpose of the Mechanism:

1.1 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 Local Stakeholder Consultation and Stakeholder Feedback Round) and during operation as required by the sustainable development monitoring plan.

1.2 Unforeseen issues that arise during the course of a project can be addressed early in the crediting period, and stakeholders can suggest improvements or modifications based on their direct experience with the project and their knowledge and understanding of local conditions.

1.3 To further increase the robustness of the standard through more active and continuous stakeholder involvement, thereby adding value to the existing system of stakeholder feedback and monitoring.

1.4 To increase mutual trust between the project owner and the local stakeholders for the benefit of both parties.

2. Mandatory Continuous Input & Grievance Expression Methods:

Project Participants (PP) must establish methods 1-3 (below) of continuous input & grievance expression for each of their projects. Method 4 (below) is optional and may be chosen in agreement with local stakeholders (as part of the LSC meeting). PPs must 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

- *Continuous Input/Grievance Expression Process Book*
- *Telephone access*
- *Internet/email access*
- *Nominated Independent Mediator*

Comments received through any of the methods must be documented using the table template below. This table must be provided to the DOE/Objective Observer at the time of verification and to The Gold Standard Secretariat at the time of request for issuance.

2.1 Table Template

Date	Comment	Action requested from PP	Response from PP	Person designated with responsibility by PP	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.*

2.2 Continuous Input & Grievance Expression Process Book

A comment book must 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 must be explained and discussed at the Local Stakeholder Consultation (LSC) meeting, and then justified in the project documentation.

At a minimum, the book must be formatted to include the five sections in the Table Template under 2.1. If PPs feel that additional columns to those in the Template are necessary then these can be included. The Table must be formatted to allow for stakeholders to make anonymous comments should they wish.

PPs must check the comments in the book on a regular basis, and record responses. PP 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 PP must 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 – see section 3)

2.3 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 must 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 PP must try to offer the least expensive option and justify their choice. The contact details of the regional Gold Standard office must also be provided for stakeholders to contact.

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

Calls received must be logged and recorded in the same way as in the book, with the date, comment, action requested and project 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 PP uses the same phone line as the project/office rather than setting up a separate phone line	- 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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- 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	

2.4 Internet access

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

The email address of The Gold Standard's regional manager must also be provided for stakeholders to contact. On a website, the project information and mechanism for providing comments must be presented in a straightforward manner, showing the same information as in the Table Template under 2.1. The information must be in the language(s) most appropriate for local stakeholders and it must allow for comments to be made anonymously.

Emails or website comments received must 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 PP.	- Assumes literacy - Assumes internet connection, and access to the internet for all groups of stakeholders - May entail some costs for the PP 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.

2.5 Nominated Independent Mediator (Optional)

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

Contacts between the mediator and the local stakeholders must be communicated to and recorded by the PP using the Table Template under 2.1. This must 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 stakeholder's. The NIM must be willing to be contacted by the DOE during verification and The Gold Standard Secretariat during registration or issuance reviews 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

Example of stakeholder inputs (sample cases):

Date	Comment	Action requested from project	Response from project	Person designated with responsibility by project	Issue resolved?
2 Feb 2011	*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.* *March 2011.*	*Mr. Jones, Head of Site Transport*	*Internal monitoring suggests that drivers now call instead of using their horns to gain entry to the site. Mr Jones has spoken to project neighbours, and they agree that noise levels from the site have reduced. April 2011.*
3 Feb 2011	*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.* *March 2011.*	*Ms. Smith, Site Manager.*	*Project community meeting held 30ᵗʰ March 2011. 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 June 2011.*

3. Local Stakeholder Consultation Meeting

At the Local Stakeholder Consultation Meeting, the methods of input must 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 Local Stakeholder Consultation Report must 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, PPs 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 DOE verification site visits) that included 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 PPs to hear the views of local stakeholders (including employees) and can improve relations between the project and the local community as they allow for greater communication and understanding.

If regular meetings are planned, they must be mentioned at the Local Stakeholder Consultation and Feedback Round and advertised in accordance with The Gold Standard rules.

4. Guidelines for DOEs

As part of the validation, the contracted DOE 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 GS passport. In addition, for retroactive projects the DOE shall check that appropriate means were used by the PP to reach out to relevant stakeholders and seek their feedback on the continuous input & grievance expression methods.

The continuous input & grievance log (the Template Table under 2.1) is part of the project documentation that the DOE during verification must use to audit the project.

The DOE must check:

- That the PPs have responded in a reasonable manner to comments that have been raised;
- That the responses are adequate, timely and appropriate for addressing the problem or comments raised; and
- That any issues the DOE considers serious are taken up as a Forward Action Request for the project as part of the validation or verification to ensure further monitoring of the issue.

The DOE must make use of the comments when in discussions with local stakeholders as part of the site 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 DOE can request to speak to this individual if they think an issue is of serious concern for the project. Where the DOE has doubts about the activities of the project, or the comments raised relate to a serious problem, the DOE must:

- Confirm that the actions as per the response from the PP recorded in the table have taken place;
- Confirm that stakeholders accept the results; and
- Consider using a Forward Action Request to ensure further monitoring of the issue.

If a project informs the DOE that no comments have been made through the continuous input & grievance mechanisms, the DOE must record this information as part of their report. When engaging with local stakeholders they must 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 PPs to make use of the continuous input & grievance mechanisms.

5. Changes in project documentation:

LSC Report:

Section B.1.i.

Add to agenda:

- Discussion of continuous input/grievance expression method selection

Section C.3.i and ii.

Add to minutes:

- Outcomes of discussion of continuous input/grievance expression method selection, agreement or modifications suggested by local stakeholders

Section E

New Section E.2

Include the following table:

	Method chosen (include all known details e.g. location of book, phone number, identity of mediator etc)	Justification
Continuous Input / Grievance Expression Process Book		
Telephone access		
Internet/email access		
Nominated Independent Mediator (optional)		

Project Passport:

Section E.3 (to be filled for both regular and retroactive projects)

Include the following table:

	Method chosen (include all known details e.g. location of book, phone number, identity of mediator etc)	Justification
Continuous Input & Grievance Expression Process Book		
Telephone access		
Internet/email access		
Nominated Independent Mediator (optional)		

Sustainability Monitoring Plan

All issues identified through any of the methods shall be monitored for the rest of the crediting period. The identified issue and the corresponding mitigation measure must be added to a revised project Passport.

6. Guidelines for the implementation of this mechanism for retroactive projects

In the context of a retroactive project, where the PP cannot seek stakeholder inputs on the continuous input & grievance expression methods elaborated in section 2 at the design phase of the project (e.g. because there is no LSC), it is the PP's responsibility to collect, via other means, the stakeholder feedback and implement the appropriate methods based on the feedback received. The stakeholders' feedback can be collected through live consultations, telephonic discussions, electronic mode, etc. as deemed necessary to reach out the relevant stakeholders. During these consultation meetings, the methods must be explained and discussed to ensure that local stakeholders agree that the details of the selected methods will be the most appropriate. The guidelines for consultations as elaborated in section 2.2 to 2.5 above are applicable.

Section E.2 of the Passport must document any comments made, criticisms or improvements expressed by the stakeholders to the continuous input & grievance expression methods discussed during the consultations.