

Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRM)

# Frequently Asked Questions

Dispute Resolution  
& Prevention



THE WORLD BANK

## What is a grievance? How is it different from a dispute?

A grievance is an expression of concern or complaint voiced by any person who feels they have been or will be negatively impacted by someone else's activities. It often marks the beginning of a dispute between them.

An example of a grievance would be a woman who believes the walls of her house have cracked due to the construction of a new road and complains to the road-building company demanding that it is repaired. If the company does not pay attention to her complaint or belittles it, a dispute will arise and may escalate depending on various additional circumstances.

## What is a Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM)?

A Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) is a locally based, formalized way to accept, assess, and resolve community feedback or complaints.<sup>1</sup> It should offer an accessible point for complaints to be received and a predictable process and timeline for communities to obtain a response. Its fairness and effectiveness will determine its credibility with users. A GRM can take the form of a simple Excel spreadsheet to a more complicated web-based system that collects data from SMS, phone, and other uptake channels.

In the previous example, the road-building company may have one of its staff members visit the communities once a week at a date and time agreed with them and document any concerns their members may have. He should give community members a written acknowledgement describing the complaints that have been received and describing the process that will be followed to provide a response. For those community members with literacy problems, the company's staff person should read the acknowledgement to them. If the community does not feel satisfied with the company's response, they should come to an agreement on an appeals process (e.g. Community mediation) to have the problem solved.

*For a more detailed explanation, see the How-to Note "Feedback Matters: Designing Effective Grievance Redress Mech-*

*anisms for Bank-Financed Projects. Part 1: The Theory of Grievance Redress".*

## When should a GRM be set up?

The use of a GRM in a World Bank-supported project is mandatory when OP 4.10 and 4.12 are triggered. P4R requires an assessment of the client's grievance redress systems. There is a growing body of evidence that suggests a GRM could add value in a broader range of development projects, outside of those required by the Bank's own policies. Projects with large numbers of beneficiaries or affected persons, geographically-dispersed projects, and technically difficult projects (for example, those involving land management) are three examples.

In the previous example, the project may have not triggered OP 4.10 or OP 4.12 but the road-building company may have still chosen to set up a simple GRM to detect and address grievances before they escalate into more serious disputes.

## Where my project takes place, grievances get solved informally. Why do we need a GRM?

Solving disputes on the spot is encouraged. If culturally appropriate, informality should remain the rule. The key for Bank staff is to ensure informal systems include a written record of how many complaints have been received, how they have been addressed, how many have been resolved to the satisfaction of the complainants, and how long resolution has taken, among other facts. This may require some training and a minimal budget to put in place. Adequately evaluated, these data should help the client and the Bank introduce changes in the project to reduce dispute-related risks and to learn for future similar projects.

<sup>1</sup> CAO Advisory Note "A Guide to Designing and Implementing Grievance Mechanisms for Development Projects."

### How can I tell when grievances should be addressed internally or through an independent mechanism?

Commonly, most cases will have to do with individual concerns, requests for information, and complaints about project operations. These situations are usually solved directly between project staff and the complainant. At times, complainants are not satisfied with the options provided by the implementing agency or do not trust their case will be properly handled. For these cases, a GRM should offer the possibility of resorting to an independent and credible body, which can issue a binding judgment or facilitate a dialogue to find a solution. Bank staff can play an important role in ensuring the project's implementing agency has a formal link to any independent grievance bodies, either via an MoU or some other written agreement that allows claimants the opportunity to appeal.

### My client is skeptical. What do I do?

It is human nature to be a bit wary of proactively seeking out complaints. Some suggestions for starting the discussion with a skeptical client include:

- Use data and examples from GRMs in similar projects and/or elsewhere in the country;
- Emphasize operational benefits: the GRM as an opportunity to reduce costs and speed implementation;
- Use neutral terminology: “feedback” versus “grievance” or “complaints;”
- Appeal to your client's self-interest: Does the minister want to be viewed as delivering results to their citizens? Does he/she need to demonstrate good results to their President/PM?
- Introduce the concept only after gaining the client's trust in other areas;
- Be realistic. If there is ultimately no ownership from the client, a GRM based in the implementing agency will not work.

### Does a GRM take the form of an enforcement mechanism making decisions or more of a collaborative process?

Usually, a GRM provides a space to resolve community concerns in a collaborative way. For those concerns that cannot be resolved directly between the client and the complainant, an appeals process is usually offered. In some parts of the world, it is preferred that the case is decided by a retired judge whose call will be binding for both parties. In other places, mediation is more commonly favored.

### Should the GRM be managed by the client or by a third party?

It is recommended that the GRM is managed by the client. Outsourcing grievance handling will slow the process of integrating any lessons learned into project design and implementation. However, the decision to locate a GRM within the implementing agency should be based on an ex-ante discussion with the client about that agency's effectiveness at managing complaints. The World Bank's Dispute Resolution & Prevention team ([furl: disputeresolution](http://www.worldbank.org/furl:disputeresolution)) has produced a short list of suggested questions to discuss with the client in order to make this assessment in an informed manner. Space for appeals should also be provided to resolve outstanding complaints and oversee the GRM's performance. This third party can be an existing office (such as the local Ombudsman) or an *ad hoc* Committee formed for the purpose of the project.

### What will a GRM do for me if the community is challenging the project itself?

If communities are opposing the project before it has even begun implementation, a GRM cannot make up for lack of broad community support that should have been secured during project design and consultation. If such support

existed at the beginning and opposition arises half way through project implementation, a proper GRM should have been able to provide early signs of community concern. If it did, but little or no attention was paid to them, it is likely that community members will not find the GRM credible or effective and there is not much it can do for the project at that point.

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### **How is a GRM different from other project feedback mechanisms (community scorecards, user surveys)?**

There is likely some overlap. A GRM is a reactive process that responds to a concern voiced by a community mem-

ber at any given moment. Other feedback mechanisms proactively seek to understand the community's view of the project. OPCS and SDV have prepared a How-To note "How, When and Why to Use Demand-Side Governance Approaches in Projects" that helpfully clarifies different social accountability tools.

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### **Where can I get further information or support in implementing a GRM?**

Contact the Dispute Resolution & Prevention team in OPCS (url: [disputeresolution.org](http://disputeresolution.org); Email: [disputeresolution@worldbank.org](mailto:disputeresolution@worldbank.org)) or the Social Development Specialist on the project.