

LUTHERAN DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

1. Purpose of the Policy

The Lutheran Development Services is committed to promoting staff and clientele satisfaction by encouraging feedback including complaints from both the staff and the communities served. This policy is an expression of the LDS commitment to resolving complaints received, recognizing the rights of complainants to have their complaints dealt with fairly, effectively and efficiently. LDS `s complaints handling procedures recognize the need to be equitable, objective and unbiased to both the complainant and the organization or personnel against who the complaint is made.

LDS ensures that all persons who may be the first point of receipt of complaints are made aware of complaints-handling procedures, and of their roles, responsibilities and authority in respect of complaints.

2. Objectives

LDS complaints handling procedures have been developed to:

- Provide effective, efficient, equitable and accessible complaints handling procedures.
- Provide LDS with a clear framework for handling complaints in accordance with its legal obligations.
- Recognize, enhance and protect the interests of LDS, staff and communities served as well as managing their needs and expectations.
- Identify, through analysis, evaluation and review of complaints, opportunities to improve on the quality of LDS`s products and services as well as the complaints handling process.
- Increase the level of staff and clientele satisfaction with the delivery of quality programmes and services and enhance LDS`s relationship with its stakeholders.
- Provide information to staff and stakeholders on LDS`s complaints handling procedures.

3. Complaints Handling Procedures

The procedure provides for making and receiving complaints that will be officially acknowledged and investigated with the determination communicated to the complainant. In the event of an impasse or remedies not acceptable to the complainant avenues for review or appeal are also provided through the same feedback mechanism. The complaints handling procedure entails five key steps as follows:

- I. Receipt and recording of the complaint.
- II. Acknowledgement of complaint and providing a response confirming receipt of complaint within two working days.
- III. Assessing and investigating the issue.
LDS shall evaluate the gravity of the issue raised and establish its impact or implications on stakeholders as well as determine whether it is within its sphere of control which will enable it to come up with a determination.
- IV. Communicate outcome and decision to the complainant as well as providing options for redress or review.
- V. Closing of complaint.

Once a resolution acceptable to all parties has been arrived at, the record is filed and kept for future reference.

4. Detailed Complaints Handling Steps

(i) Receipt and recording of a complaint.

All complaints that are brought to the attention of the LDS are recorded complete with supporting information. The complaint is assigned a unique identifier to the complaint file usually to protect the complainant depending on the severity and import of the complaint. This will naturally mean that handling of the complaint will remain confidential throughout the handling process.

The record of the complaint will document the following:

- The contact information of the person making a complaint for purposes of connection.
- Issues raised by the person making a complaint and the outcome/s they want or expect.
- Any other relevant and admissible evidence based on the complaint.
- Any additional support the person making a complaint requires.

(ii) Assessing and investigating a complaint.

The LDS shall evaluate the gravity of the issue raised and establish its impact or implications on stakeholders as well as determine whether it is within its sphere of control which will enable it to come up with a determination. For purposes of shared responsibility and transparency the LDS shall cause a committee to look at the complaint.

(iii) Communicating outcomes.

After acknowledging receipt of the complaint, the LDS will confirm whether the issue/s raised in the complaint is/are within its control. It will also consider the outcome/s sought by the person making a complaint and, where there is more than one issue raised, determine whether each issue needs to be separately addressed. In determining how a complaint will be managed, the LDS will consider:

- How serious, complicated or urgent the complaint is
- Whether the complaint raises concerns about people's health and safety
- How the person making the complaint is being affected
- The risks involved if resolution of the complaint is delayed, and
- Whether a resolution requires the involvement of other organizations.

(iv) Addressing the complaint.

After assessing the complaint, the LDS will consider how to manage it. In managing complaints the LDS will carry out the following modalities:

- Give the person making a complaint information or an explanation
- Gather information on how we work, person or area that the complaint is about, or
- Investigate the allegations made in the complaint.

The organization will endeavor to keep the person making the complaint up to date on progress particularly if there are any delays. The LDS will also communicate the outcome of the complaint using the most appropriate medium which the complainant has access to.

(v) Resolving and closing a complaint.

Following consideration of the complaint and any investigation into the issues raised, the LDS will contact the person making the complaint and advise them:

- the outcome of the complaint and any action taken
- the reason/s for the decision taken
- The remedy or resolution/s that have been proposed or put in place.
- Options for review that may be available to the complainant, such as an internal review, external review or appeal.

If in the course of investigation, any adverse findings about a particular individual the LDS shall observe the privacy of a complainant as applied in the privacy obligations under the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* and any applicable exemptions in or made pursuant to that Act, before sharing findings with the person making the complaint or any other interested parties. It is at this stage that a complaint is put on record for future reference and closed.

(vi) Alternative avenues for dealing with complaints from communities.

Similarly in dealing with communities it has been noted that they prefer other ways of complaints handling. The LDS has taken cognizance of that and implemented a system where project staff contact details are resident with communities starting with leaders, government departments and individual project members. LDS also has project participants contact details. During interaction it has always been observed that communities were more comfortable complaining through traditional leaders such as kraal heads rather than complaining directly to LDS. In the past, LDS used suggestion boxes in other programs but these did not get any buy in from communities as they were seldom used. As part of growing staff, the LDS will encourage staff first to resolve issues at their levels depending on the severity of issues as this helps them to be proactive. LDS also has a complaints handling desk in all its projects manned by members selected by and from the community. Complaints coming from communities are therefore mainly through their leadership, the complaints desk and or direct calls to LDS.

5. Monitoring of the complaint response mechanism

The LDS will continually monitor its complaints response mechanism in order to:

- ensure its effectiveness in responding to and resolving complaints, and
- Identify and correct deficiencies in the operation of the mechanism.
- Monitoring may include the use of audits, complaint satisfaction surveys and online listening tools and alerts.

6. Continuous improvement

The LDS is committed to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of its complaint response mechanism. To this end, it shall:

- Support the making and appropriate resolution of complaints
- Implement best practices in complaint handling
- Recognize and reward exemplary complaint handling by staff
- Regularly review the complaints response mechanism and complaint data, and
- Implement appropriate system changes arising out of our analysis of complaints data and continual monitoring of the mechanism.