Humanitarian National CSOs Forum

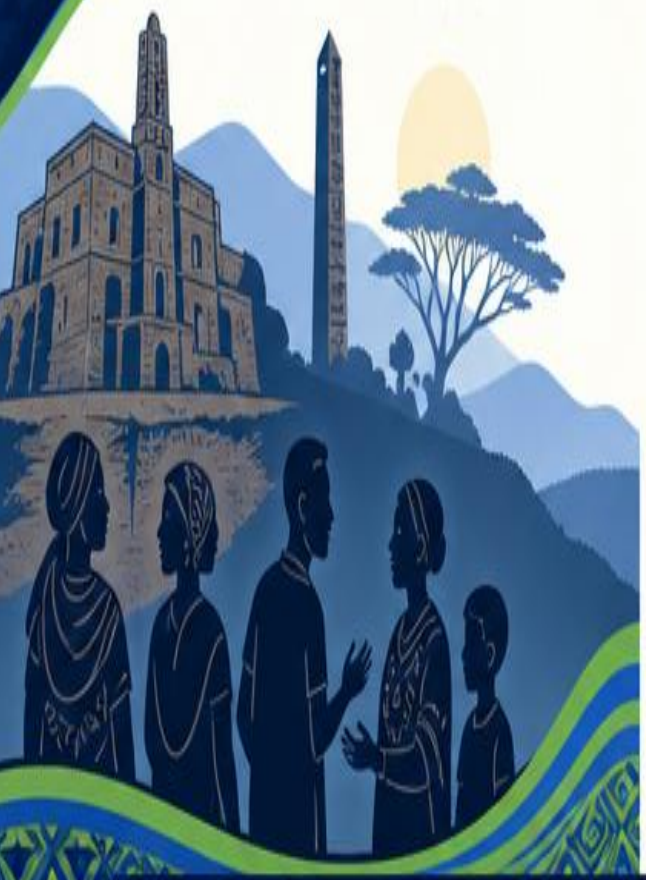
Locally Led Leadership

ETHIOPIAN

HUMANITARIAN NATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETIES FORUM

ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY

OUR COMMITMENT. YOUR RIGHTS. BETTER HUMANITARIAN ACTION.



PEOPLE CENTERED

INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION

TRANSPARENCY & HONESTY

RESPONSIVENESS & FEEDBACK

LEARNING & IMPROVEMENT

LOCAL LEADERSHIP. STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS. SUSTAINABLE IMPACT.

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Acronyms

EHNCF - Ethiopian Humanitarian National Civil Societies Forum

CFRM - Complaint, Feedback and Response Mechanism

CHS - Core Humanitarian Standards

CoC - Code of Conduct

HAP - Humanitarian Accountability Partnership

HR - Human Resource

INGOs - International Non-Governmental Organizations

MEAL - Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning

MEL - Monitoring Evaluation and Learning

NGOs - Non Governmental Organizations

EHNCSF Accountability Policy: Glossary of Terms

All terms below are defined within the specific context of the Ethiopian humanitarian landscape and the collective commitments of the Forum's member organizations.

1. ***Accountability*:-** An active commitment by EHNCSF member organizations to use their collective and individual power responsibly. This involves**:**

   - Taking account of: Listening to the priorities of the Ethiopian people.
   - Giving account to: Being transparent about decisions and resource allocation.
   - Being held to account by: Accepting the consequences when commitments to communities are not met.

2. ***Information Sharing*:-** The systematic and proactive provision of timely, relevant, and clear information to stakeholders. Within the Forum, this is viewed as the "right to know" for communities, ensuring they understand project goals, selection criteria, and their rights as beneficiaries of local humanitarian action**.**

3. ***Participation*:-** A fundamental principle of the Forum that involves empowering Ethiopian communities including women, children, and marginalized groups to take an active role in the decision-making processes that affect their lives and recovery. It moves beyond "consultation" toward meaningful "partnership."

4. ***Complaints and Feedback Mechanism (CFRM):-*** A set of clear, transparent, and unified procedures provided by member organizations. It offers communities a safe, accessible, and confidential means of voicing grievances or providing suggestions regarding any humanitarian intervention under the umbrella of the EHNCSF.

5. ***Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS):-*** The foundational Nine Commitments adopted by the EHNCSF to improve the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian

assistance in Ethiopia. The CHS serves as the Forum's primary yardstick for measuring accountability, placing the crisis-affected population at the absolute center of every intervention.

6. *Downward Accountability*:- The specific focus of this policy, referring to the accountability of Forum members to the people they seek to assist. It balances the "upward" accountability traditionally required by international donors with a "community-first" approach.

7. *Localized Humanitarian Action:-* The commitment of the EHNCSF to ensure that humanitarian responses are led by national actors who are most accountable to their own citizens, leveraging local knowledge, cultural sensitivity, and long-term presence.

- **Forum Vision Alignment:** "By defining these terms collectively, the EHNCSF establishes a common language of integrity, ensuring that every member speaks with one voice when promising dignity and respect to the Ethiopian people."



1. Rationale for Accountability

The EHNCSF recognizes that an accountable and participatory approach across all member organizations is vital for the credibility and effectiveness of the local humanitarian sector. This approach provides several key advantages:

- Deeper Insight: Provides a better understanding of the specific needs of the Ethiopian people we seek to assist.
- Community Trust: Leads to improved relationships with and greater acceptance by local communities.
- Integrity and Efficiency: Reduces the risk of fraud or the inefficient use of humanitarian funds.
- Protection from Harm: Minimizes risks to beneficiaries that could be caused by staff misconduct or poorly designed interventions.
- Donor Confidence: Demonstrates to donors that Ethiopian civil societies are capable of delivering high-quality, accountable program design and implementation.

2. Understanding Accountability

The EHNCSF defines accountability as an active commitment by its members to use power responsibly. This includes:

- Core Concepts: Answerability, liability, and the expectation of transparent account-giving.
- Assumption of Responsibility: Acknowledging responsibility for all actions, decisions, and policies related to humanitarian implementation.
- Downward Accountability: While upward accountability to donors is mandatory, the forum prioritizes downward accountability—respecting the needs, concerns, and capacities of the target groups we serve.

2.1. Methods of Accountability to Beneficiaries

Member organizations should hold themselves accountable by:

- Implementing and informing staff of a strict Code of Conduct.
- Consistently informing communities about project details and staff behavior expectations.
- Ensuring active participation at every stage of the project cycle.

- Adhering to the Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS).
- Establishing safe and accessible Feedback and Complaint Mechanisms (CFRM).

3. Information Sharing Standards

Information sharing ensures that beneficiaries and stakeholders have access to timely, relevant, and clear data about humanitarian activities.

➢ What Information Must Be Shared?

- Project Origins: How the project was developed and who was involved.
- Operational Details: The project's aim, activities, timeline, and geographic area.
- Beneficiary Selection: The number of beneficiaries and the specific targeting criteria.
- Mechanism Awareness: Clear information on the CFRM, including how to lodge complaints and the location of visible contact channels like hotlines.

➢ How Information Should Be Shared

To remain culturally and contextually appropriate in Ethiopia, information must be:

- Provided in the local language.
- Adapted to the specific education and knowledge levels of the community.
- Shared repeatedly through multiple channels, such as community meetings, posters, and field visits.
- Provided in at least one written form (e.g., brochure or poster) to ensure basic project and CFRM info is accessible.

4. Community Participation

The forum views participation as a fundamental right where communities are empowered to take part in decisions affecting their lives.

4.1. Types of Meaningful Participation

- Consultative: Seeking community views to increase understanding, specifically during project design and evaluation.
- Collaborative: Partnering with community members to implement projects, such as school-based clubs.
- Community-Led: Empowering local adults and children to lead their own initiatives, with EHNCSF members acting as facilitators.

4.2. The Importance of Inclusion

Quality participation leverages local skills and knowledge, ensuring that projects are not misaligned with priority needs. It helps prevent the reinforcement of existing power dynamics that might only favor dominant voices.

5. Feedback and Complaint Mechanisms

Every member project must include a safe, transparent, and confidential system for voicing complaints.

- Prevention and Protection: A robust CFRM acts as a deterrent for staff misconduct and allows the organization to systematically improve project quality.
- Corrective Action: It ensures that mistakes are identified and that beneficiaries have a platform to question actions, thereby increasing transparency and trust.

5.1. EHNCSF Complaints, Feedback, and Response Mechanism (CFRM)

5.1.1. Definition and Purpose

A Complaints, Feedback, and Response Mechanism (CFRM) is a formal set of transparent procedures designed to provide Ethiopian communities with safe, confidential, and accessible means to voice concerns.

For the EHNCSF, the CFRM is not just a box-ticking exercise; it is a **safety net** that ensures our collective humanitarian power is used responsibly. It allows the Forum and its members to:

- Identify gaps in program quality.
- Detect misconduct or breaches of the Code of Conduct.
- Empower stakeholders by giving them a voice in the aid they receive.

5.1.2. Why the CFRM is Essential for the Forum

Even with the best intentions, local civil societies are not exempt from operational errors or human rights risks. The benefits of a robust CFRM for EHNCSF members include:

- Dignity: Ensuring beneficiaries are heard and responded to, rather than ignored.
- Deterrence: Knowing a complaint system exists discourages corruption, theft, and abuse by staff or partners.
- Early Warning: Identifying small issues (e.g., targeting errors) before they escalate into community-wide conflict.
- Efficiency: Improving cost-efficiency by identifying and correcting "inclusion and exclusion errors" in beneficiary selection.

5.1.3. Categorizing Input: Complaints vs. Feedback

It is vital for Forum members to distinguish between types of community input to ensure the correct response speed and specialized handling.

i. Feedback

A statement of opinion (positive or negative) shared for information.

- *Example:* "The distribution site was too far for elderly residents."
- *Action:* Shared with the program team to improve future planning.

ii. Complaints

A formal expression of dissatisfaction where the complainant believes the organization has failed to meet a commitment or has caused harm.

- *Example:* "A staff member asked for money in exchange for including me on the beneficiary list."
- *Action:* Requires a formal investigation and a mandatory response.

5.1.4. Sensitive vs. Non-Sensitive Complaints

The EHNCSF classifies complaints into two streams to ensure maximum protection for survivors and whistleblowers.

Feature	Non-Sensitive Complaints	Sensitive Complaints
Focus	Program quality, targeting criteria, staff rudeness, or delays.	Fraud, corruption, sexual exploitation, abuse (PSEA), or child safeguarding violations.
Handling	Managed by Project/Field-level teams and MEAL officers.	Referred immediately to the **Head Office/Forum Steering Committee** and legal experts.
Risk	Low risk to safety; primarily operational.	High risk; requires strict confidentiality to protect the complainant from retaliation.
Reporting	Reported in quarterly summaries.	Reported immediately (within 24-48 hours) to leadership.

6. Standard for Accessibility

To be effective in the Ethiopian context, EHNCSF members must ensure their CFRM has multiple entry points tailored to the community, such as:

1. Toll-free hotlines (in local languages).
2. Suggestion boxes (placed in secure, private locations).
3. Community Help Desks (during distribution events).
4. Community Committees (trained in referral pathways).

6.1. The Ten-Step Setup Process

The EHNCSF requires members to follow these steps to ensure a functional mechanism:

1. Consult with the community on their preferred communication channels.
2. Define roles and appoint a dedicated CFRM focal person.
3. Train staff on receiving and referring complaints with empathy and confidentiality.
4. Promote the mechanism using local languages and visual aids.
5. Establish a secure database for recording and tracking complaints.
6. Verify/Investigate the claims following standard operating procedures.
7. Provide a response to the complainant within the designated timeline.
8. Refer sensitive cases to specialized protection or legal actors.

9. Analyze trends to improve future programming.
10. Report back to the community on how their feedback changed the project.

- **Forum Value Alignment:** Accountability is not just about identifying what went wrong; it is about the humility to listen and the integrity to change.

7. EHNCSF Operational Standards for CFRM

7.1. Accessible Entry Points (Mechanism Selection)

The EHNCSF requires that member organizations do not impose a "one-size-fits-all" system. Instead, they must consult local communities to select the most culturally appropriate and accessible entry points.

Recommended Mechanisms for the Ethiopian Context:

- Suggestion Boxes: Placed in secure, accessible locations (e.g., community centers, water points).
- Complaints Registration Logbooks: Maintained at project sites by designated focal points.
- Complaints Desks: Staffed booths during distribution or community events to provide immediate face-to-face assistance.
- Telephone Hotlines: Toll-free numbers provided in local languages (Amharic, Afaan Oromoo, Tigrinya, Somali, etc.).
- 'Open House' Meetings: Regular community forums specifically designed to solicit feedback.
- Community Engagement Committees: Respected local leaders or representatives trained to receive and relay concerns to the Forum member.

7.2. Who Can Lodge a Complaint?

The Forum's commitment to "leave no one behind" means the mechanism is open to:

- Direct Beneficiaries: People receiving aid from a Forum-member project.
- Non-Beneficiaries: Community members in the area who may feel excluded or impacted.

- Internal Staff: Staff members identifying internal misconduct or safety risks.
- External Stakeholders: Local leaders, government representatives, and supply chain partners (contractors/suppliers).

8. Formal Recording and Categorization

To ensure integrity and the ability to analyze sector-wide trends, all complaints must be recorded in a standardized database. The EHNCSF adopts the following **Response Timeline Matrix**:

Category	Type of Feedback / Complaint	Max Response Time
Category 1	Request for Information: Inquiries about project aims or timelines.	Up to 2 weeks
Category 2	Request for Assistance: Direct requests for aid or service.	Up to 3 months
Category 3	Minor Dissatisfaction: Issues like missing kit items or lack of follow-up.	Up to 30 days
Category 4	Major Dissatisfaction: Poor quality items, selection errors, or safety risks.	Up to 45 days
Category 5	Breaches of Code of Conduct / Safeguarding: Fraud, corruption, sexual exploitation, or physical abuse.	Up to 2 months (referral to HQ/Legal)

9. The Response Protocol

A response is only valid if it addresses the root cause of the complaint and is communicated back to the complainant.

- Clarification: Correcting misunderstandings regarding project activities.
- Program Adaptation: Adjusting targeting or implementation based on valid community feedback.
- Disciplinary/Legal Action: Taking HR or legal steps in cases of staff misconduct or law violations.
- Transparent Rejection: Providing a clear, evidence-based explanation if a request cannot be met.

- Protection against Malice: The Forum reserves the right to address intentional false allegations that aim to harm staff or the organization.

10. Benchmarks for Excellence (Features of a Good CFRM)

For an EHNCSF member to be considered compliant with this policy, their mechanism must exhibit these features:

1. Community-Designed: The community helped choose the channels.
2. Welcoming: People feel safe and encouraged to speak up without fear of retaliation.
3. Independent: Investigations are handled by staff not directly involved in the project being complained about.
4. Time-Bound: Every complainant receives a response within the maximum timeframes listed above.
5. Learning-Oriented: Data from the CFRM is used during quarterly reviews to improve the Forum's collective humanitarian response.

- Forum Mission Alignment: Through these mechanisms, the EHNCSF moves beyond providing aid to providing justice and dignity, ensuring that the voices of the most vulnerable are the primary drivers of our humanitarian action.

11.EHNCSF Accountability Governance & Minimum Standards

The EHNCSF operates on a dual-layer accountability model. Responsibility is shared between the Member Organizations (Implementing Partners) and the Forum Secretariat/Steering Committee. This ensures that while individual NGOs manage their local contexts, the Forum maintains a high, unified standard across the Ethiopian humanitarian landscape.

11.1. Member Organization Level (Project & NGO HQ)

Each member organization of the EHNCSF is responsible for operationalizing accountability within their specific projects.

- Localized Information Sharing: Proactively informing communities about the project's specific aims, donor, and selection criteria in the appropriate local language.
- Active Participation: Creating space for community members to influence project design, implementation, and monitoring.
- Operational CFRM: Establishing at least two safe entry points (e.g., a hotline and a suggestion box) at every project site.
- First-Line Response: Handling Category 1–3 complaints (information requests and minor dissatisfaction) directly at the field level.
- Referral & Upward Reporting: Ensuring that all Category 5 (sensitive) complaints are immediately escalated to the NGO's senior leadership and, where appropriate, the Forum Secretariat.

11.2. EHNCSF Forum Level (Secretariat & Steering Committee)

The Forum acts as the oversight and support body to ensure no member falls below the national humanitarian standard.

- Standards & Guidelines: Developing and updating the minimum standards for accountability and CFRM that all Ethiopian National CSOs must follow.
- Capacity Building: Providing training, toolkits, and technical support to member organizations to improve their internal accountability systems.
- High-Level Oversight: Handling complaints that involve potential systemic failures within the Forum or serious allegations against member leadership.
- Sector Learning: Analyzing anonymized data from all members to identify trends (e.g., recurring issues in specific regions) and advocating for sector-wide improvements.
- Quality Assurance: Monitoring member compliance with these standards to maintain the collective credibility of the Ethiopian humanitarian sector.
- Sensitive Case Management: Providing a neutral "Secondary Referral Path" for sensitive complaints (such as PSEA or major fraud) if a complainant feels they cannot trust the individual NGO's internal process.

12.EHNCSF Minimum Standards for Accountability

To remain a member in good standing with the Forum, organizations must meet these four benchmarks:

- Visibility: The EHNCSF logo and the organization's CFRM contact details must be clearly visible at all distribution points and project offices.
- Confidentiality: All complaints must be stored in a secure, password-protected database (Excel or specialized software) with access restricted to authorized focal points.
- Timeliness: Members must adhere to the Forum's response timelines (e.g., 2 weeks for info requests, 2 months for complex investigations).
- Feedback Loop: No complaint is considered "closed" until a response has been delivered to the complainant and their satisfaction (or receipt of the response) has been recorded.

- **Forum Vision Alignment:** Our collective strength lies in our transparency. By holding ourselves and each other to these high standards, the EHNCSF ensures that Ethiopian-led humanitarian action remains the most trusted and effective force for our people.

12.1. EHNCSF Referral Pathways and Minimum Standards

12.1.1. The Referral Matrix: Welcoming & Escalating Complaints

To maintain professionalism and safety, Forum members must follow this structured referral process.

Level	Activity	Referral Required?	Handled By
Field/Project Level	Collection and registration of all initial input.	No	Field Focal Point / Community Committee
Sensitive Cases	Allegations of abuse, fraud, or serious Code of Conduct breaches.	**Yes** (Immediate)	Refer to NGO Head Office & Forum Secretariat
Non-Project Related	Complaints regarding other agencies or local government issues.	**Yes** (External)	Referral to the relevant agency (Police, Gov, etc.)

Operational Issues	Targeting errors, distribution delays, or information requests.	No	Field Office (Project Manager/MEAL)

13. The CAST Principles: Our Operational Core

Every CFRM established by an EHNCSF member must be designed and evaluated against the CAST framework:

- C – Confidentiality: Protecting the identity of the complainant at every stage.
- A – Accessibility: Ensuring the elderly, children, and people with disabilities can use the system.
- S – Safety: Guaranteeing no retaliation or harm comes to those who speak up.
- T – Transparency: Keeping the community informed about how the process works and what the results are.

13.1. Implementation Minimum Standards

- **Design & Entry Points**

- Co-Design: Mechanisms must be designed *with* the community. Members must ask: "How would you prefer to tell us if something is wrong?"
- The "Double Channel" Rule: Every project must provide at least two entry points, one of which must allow for anonymity (e.g., a locked suggestion box).
- The "Jump" Option: Beneficiaries must always be given the contact details for the NGO's Head Office or the Forum Secretariat to "jump" the project level if they feel the local staff are the ones involved in the misconduct.
- **Staff Visibility & Identification**

- To facilitate accountability, staff and volunteers must be identifiable. At distributions or field visits, staff should wear organization vests/T-shirts and, where safe, a name tag or unique ID number.
- **Data Protection & Response**

- Acknowledgement: If a complaint is not anonymous, the complainant must receive an immediate acknowledgement (oral or a paper slip) stating when they can expect a full response.

- Privacy: Complaint databases must be password-protected. Only the designated "Accountability Focal Point" should have access to identifying details.
- Objectivity: Investigations should ideally include a staff member not directly involved in the project to ensure an unbiased outcome.

14. Reporting & Learning (Sector-Wide)

The EHNCSF uses accountability data to strengthen the entire Ethiopian humanitarian sector:

- 24-Hour Rule: Sensitive complaints (PSEA or major fraud) must be reported to the NGO's senior management within 24 hours.
- Quarterly Summaries: Members submit anonymized summaries of complaint types and resolution rates to the Forum's Information Management desk.
- Closing the Loop: A case is only "closed" once the complainant is informed of the outcome. If the community is affected as a whole, a general (non-identifying) announcement should be made regarding the changes implemented.

15.EHNCSF Annexes: Standardized Templates

To ensure consistency across all members, the following templates are adopted as the Forum standard:

- Annex A: Standard Complaint Registration Form (Capturing: Date, Detail, Category, and Channel).
- Annex B: Community Committee Receipt (A simplified form for use by local leaders during distributions).
- Annex C: Information Sharing & Participation Plan (A planning tool to track if "Accountability as a Process" is actually happening in the project cycle).

➢ Forum Values Final Statement

The EHNCSF believes that an organization that listens is an organization that leads. By adhering to these standards, we fulfill our mission to serve the Ethiopian people with the highest levels of integrity, respect, and professionalism.