



BEST PRACTICES: INFORMATION & COMPLAINTS HANDLING CENTRES (ICHCs)

Challenges and Issues

Disasters have become a regular part of the lives of many Pakistanis. During disasters civil society organizations (CSOs) and the Government assist the affected population through various means and ways of response. However, inherently there is lack of established mechanisms for the people to raise their voices and seek guidance on resolving issues which might arise during emergency relief or development projects. Communities are largely unaware of their right to complaint and the right to information.

The 2010 floods devastated a large part of Pakistan and affected the lives of approximately 20 million people. The provinces of KPK and Sindh were among the most severely affected. Communities were at risk of not receiving relief support in timely manner, however, did not have mechanisms to raise their concerns or complaints. Complaints response mechanism is one of the effective ways of raising the accountability level towards the affected population.

What worked well?

CWS-P/A in partnership with Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) implemented the project on ICHCs to assist communities in receiving their complaints and referring them on their behalf to the relevant authorities. This was the first project of its nature in four worst affected districts of Swat, Nowshera of KPK province and Thatta & Shahdadkot of Sindh province. The ICHCs were initiated for a period of fourteen months. At the Union Council level the issues of the communities were addressed through the existing structure of committed volunteers of HRCP.

Total Complaints Received & Referred	18,420
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A defined guideline for the ICHC staff and communities was prepared in consultation with them which they adhered to. This helped to better achieve the objective of the project. The ICHCs staff members joined several cluster and other coordination meetings to inform the various organizations working in the area about this initiative. The coordination meeting was a platform to share the information about ongoing and the closed projects and this information was shared with the communities. Other relevant information shared included information regarding WATAN cards and Benazir Income Support Program (BISP). The sharing of lists of affected people with organizations working in the area also proved useful in addressing their needs through current and upcoming projects.

Lessons Learned

- Independent ICHC at district level is key to ensure transparent and accountable assistance to the affected people.
- Commitment from the ICHCs staff, Government line departments and I/NGOs is critical to ensure redress of complaints.
- Location of the ICHCs should be decided while keeping in view its easy access to the community as well as the Government. It plays an important role in having better access to community and improved coordination with departments.
- An online system for storing complaints of respective ICHC helps in efficient registering and tracking of complaints while keeping in view the trends and patterns of complaints.
- A context specific strategy for each district level ICHC strengthens its functionality.
- External/internal review and monitoring visits of ICHCs ensures corrective actions are taken to improve implementation of ICHCs.
- Mass-communication mediums like radio awareness programs and IEC material allows reaching-out to wider audience.