Grievance redress mechanisms (GRMs) are an important component of beneficiary operations management. By giving people the capacity to provide feedback to program administrators, a GRM provides beneficiaries and the general public with a voice in the program's administration and its performance management. Grievances can be related to unclear program guidelines, lack of program awareness resulting from insufficient outreach, potential inclusion and exclusion errors, an unsatisfactory package of benefits and services, problems with the payment of benefits or the provision of services, mistreatment by frontline workers, and the GRM itself.

It is essential that all stakeholders understand how grievances will be collected and resolved. Here is a quick rundown of the what, why, who, where, and how of GRMs:

- **WHAT?** GRM refers to a system by which queries, suggestions, positive feedback, and concerns about a program are responded to, problems with implementation are resolved, and complaints are addressed efficiently and effectively.

- **WHY?** A GRM supports more effective institutions for social protection programs by establishing and strengthening systems for constructive sharing of information, citizens' feedback, and complaint resolution. It harnesses stronger state-client interaction and increases stakeholder involvement in a program.

- **WHO?** A well-designed and well-implemented GRM serves a program's beneficiaries, potential beneficiaries, nonbeneficiaries, and the general public, who may want to know about the program, may be affected by it, or may benefit from it.
• **WHERE?** A well-designed and well-implemented GRM is accessible through different types and locations of uptake channels.

• **HOW?** A well-designed and well-implemented GRM usually consists of six steps to collect and address grievances. Those steps are: Uptake, sorting and processing; acknowledging and following up; verifying, investigating, and acting; monitoring and evaluation; and providing feedback.

An effective GRM provides a continuous, constructive feedback loop between people and institutions or program administrators. While grievances arise along all phases of the delivery chain, their redress is part of the beneficiary operations management stage and can feed back into earlier stages. The decisions taken in resolving grievances can feed back into the assessment and enrollment stages, as well as into the recurring implementation cycle for benefits and services.

### GRIEVANCES ALONG THE DELIVERY CHAIN

#### Assessment Stage

In the **outreach** phase, many grievances may simply be requests for information about the program. Grievances may arise because of poor outreach mechanisms, inadequate outreach modalities, or poorly designed communication strategies. Grievances at the **intake and registration phase** may arise from errors in beneficiary data, exclusion from the registration process, lack of knowledge, long waits at the registration office, long distances to the registration office, lack of intake and registration staff who speak the local language, and lack of assistance for individuals with disabilities. Grievances at the **assessment of needs and conditions phase** may arise from lack of understanding of assessment results, errors in the results, or issues with the implementation of the process.

#### Enrollment Stage

Grievances at the **eligibility and enrollment phase** may arise from incorrect decisions about eligibility, such as inclusion or exclusion errors, difficulty completing the actions required for enrollment, or a missed opportunity to enroll. Grievances at the **benefits and service package phase** might occur if there is an error in the determination of the benefits and services to be provided, including miscalculation of the benefit amount. In the **notification and onboarding phase**, grievances may be filed if the program administration fails to notify registrants about their acceptance or rejection for the program. These may also arise because onboarding is of poor quality, such as lack of clear information on program rules and beneficiaries’ rights and responsibilities.

#### Provision Stage

Grievances in the **payment of benefits phase** may arise from missed or delayed payments, payment errors, or the amount of distance or other challenges that must be overcome to reach payment points, including out-of-pocket expenses incurred for transportation, insurance, and other needs (for example, meals, for labor-intensive operations). For a cash transfer program, technical grievances relating to payment cards and automated teller or mobile money systems and failures in authentication of IDs at the point of benefits or service provision may also arise at this phase. Grievances related to the **provision of services** might be caused by delays and mishaps in the service, long waits, poor standards, lack of availability of a service, and mismatched services.
**Beneficiary Operations Management Stage**

Grievances related to **beneficiary data management** occur when the beneficiary data are incorrect or need to be revised or updated. Grievances related to compliance with conditionalities can occur if beneficiaries face penalties, delays, or cancellation of services and benefits due to administrative errors or incorrect capturing and processing of compliance data by the institutions responsible for compliance monitoring. There may also be grievances about the **grievance redress mechanism** itself—if the process is lengthy, time-consuming, unclear, or not easily accessible, or if officials responsible for GRM appear to show poor behavior, discrimination, nepotism, fraud, or corruption. Finally, grievances in the **exit decisions**, notifications, and case outcomes phase can be related to unclear processes and decision-making rules about exits, lack of or improper notification of exit decisions, or case resolutions. Those grievances can take the form of a complaint about the processes or appeal of an exit decision.

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**THE GRM FRAMEWORK**

The framework for an effective GRM comprises a set of principles, institutional structures, rules, procedures, and processes through which queries, complaints, and appeals about a social protection program are resolved.

**Principles of GRM**

It is important that social protection programs adhere to international standards and principles when collecting and resolving grievances. Programs must have GRMs to remedy mistakes when implementers and decision makers become aware of them, as well as to correct the processes and systems that do not provide the quality of service promised. The following principles and attributes should normally apply to a well-functioning GRM: **independence, accessibility and inclusivity, confidentiality, responsiveness, effectiveness and continuous improvement**. GRM principles are not prescriptive, but rather a set of generally accepted practices that are recommended for social protection programs to design effective GRMs.

**Process of GRM**

Most GRMs go through similar steps. Although there might be a slight variation from system to system, most GRMs have six main steps: **uptake; sort and process; acknowledge and follow up; verify, investigate and act; monitor and evaluate; and provide feedback.**

- **Uptake**: Refers to the methods by which grievances are collected. An effective GRM should have multiple uptake locations (at the community, village, district, provincial or regional, and national levels) as well as multiple channels (such as mail, email, phone, SMS text, website, or complaint box).

- **Sort and process**: This step is important because different types of grievances require different follow-up actions. For instance, some grievances require a simple explanation or sharing of program information, while others may require an investigation and thorough follow-up.
• **Acknowledge and follow up:** This step involves clear communication to the complainant that the grievance has been received and informs them about the expected timeline for resolution and follow-up activities.

• **Investigate and act:** This step requires gathering information about the grievance to determine its validity and take appropriate actions to resolve it.

• **Monitoring and evaluation:** Monitoring refers to the process of tracking grievances and assessing the extent to which progress is being made to resolve them. Evaluation involves analyzing grievance data to inform the program management so that it can make changes in processes and procedures to minimize similar grievances in future.

• **Provide feedback:** Last step in the GRM is to provide feedback by informing complainants and the general public about the results of investigations and the actions taken. This step involves clear communication of the results of the investigations and relevant actions taken by the program to complainants to close the feedback loop.

### Institutional Arrangements for GRMs

It is critical to conduct an assessment of any country systems and existing practices for grievance resolution, including informal mechanisms, to determine possible institutional arrangements when designing a GRM. The institutional arrangements for the implementation of a GRM differ from one country to another. There are two basic types of GRMs for social protection programs: in-house GRMs at the ministry, program, or project level and outsourced GRMs.

| IN-HOUSE GRMS | Many social protection programs establish and strengthen a GRM at the line ministry or program and project levels as part of the ministry and program’s administrative functions, and within the mandate and the scope of the programs. These are in-house GRMs. Examples of in-house GRMs include the GRM of the Philippines’s 4Ps, the GRM of Egypt’s cash transfer program Takaful and Karama. |
| OUTSOURCED GRMS | Other GRMs involve independent institutions and outsource key grievance collection and resolution functions on behalf of the program. The independent institution model includes the ombudsman offices in Ethiopia, Uganda (called “Inspectorate of Government”), and Rwanda, and the Anti-Corruption Commission in Sierra Leone’s cash transfer program. |

One needs to pay close attention to the institutional and legal mandates of institutions that are responsible for grievance resolution, the existing grievance collection and resolution practices, including informal practices, and institutions’ local presence, because social protection programs tend to cover vast geographical areas.
There are several key common components for a successful GRM, including outreach and communications, uptake channels, a process for grievance resolution, information systems, performance, and institutional capacity.

**Outreach and Communications**

*Outreach and communications are key components for a GRM.* Effective outreach and communication are needed to inform people where to go, how to access the system, and how to file a grievance. People must not only understand how to access and use the GRM system, but also feel encouraged to file grievances as needed.

**Uptake Channels**

*There are many uptake channels, both traditional and emerging.* Program administrators need to establish grievance uptake locations in areas where poor and marginalized people live to reach the “first mile.” The following are some traditional channels used in grievance redress mechanisms: social worker and community agents, complaint boxes, complaints and appeals registries or books, call centers, mobile unit, and community grievances committees.

**Emerging Channels: Technologies in Grievance Redress Mechanisms**

There are several challenges in using traditional methods for GRMs, including cost, institutional capacity, labor-intensive processes, and resource constraints. Those challenges have led to the emergence of new, improved GRM channels that leverage new technologies. Some of the most common emerging channels are as follows:

- **Mobile solutions for GRM:** Mobile cell phones have proved to be remarkable instruments for improving inclusion, transparency, and accountability. In Sierra Leone, an interactive GRM with an automated toll-free, SMS-based (text) mechanism is currently being implemented. To access the system, the user sends an SMS to 161 and the system interacts with the user to help submit a report. The main advantages of this system are that the interaction is automated and thus no operator is needed; it is free for the user; it reaches a wider user base; and it improves inclusiveness. A human-centered adaptation for GRM via telephone, using voice-based messaging to help illiterate populations document their grievances, is currently being designed.

- **Social media communication channels and feedback mechanisms:** Social media feedback mechanisms and interactive feedback involve direct two-way communication with individuals and are good for resolving specific issues. The use of social media or private messaging apps can help channel complaints and facilitate interactive feedback from beneficiaries and the population in general.

- **Natural language processing:** Chatbots and virtual assistants. Natural language processing (NLP), in combination with artificial intelligence, can help create a new generation of GRM tools by addressing recurring queries.
**Process of Grievance Resolution**

A clear step-by-step process and procedure for grievance collection and resolution is a key to effective GRM. Effective resolution processes include the following:

- **Articulating the processes:** All staff involved in grievance resolution need to have the same understanding of how to collect, document, and resolve grievances. Grievance resolution flowcharts for each category of grievance are effective tools to visualize and streamline the grievance resolution processes.

- **Roles and responsibilities:** Each step in the process should clearly define which department at which level is going to be responsible for the action. This helps define who will need particular types of access to the grievance management system.

- **Resolution time frame:** Some grievances (such as information requests) can be resolved on the spot, while others (such as potential inclusion/exclusion errors or staff performance) could take longer to resolve and require procedures to address them. Programs may have different time frames for resolving each complaint category because the administrative procedures and length of investigation may vary. Each of the resolution processes should have a designated time frame for action.

**Information Systems**

GRM’s information system can be as simple as a logbook or as sophisticated as a dedicated information management system. Given the complexity and scale of the social protection programs, it is highly recommended that programs invest in a GRM module within the program’s information system (as did Egypt) or as an independent system that speaks to the program information system (as does the Philippines’s 4Ps Unified Information and Communication System–Client Relationship Management). The common features of effective GRM information systems are real-time data collection, automated response, consolidated data repository, internal interface dashboard, external interface dashboard, rapid custom reporting, multiple languages, and data protection.

**Performance of GRM Systems**

Tracking the performance of GRMs is a critical step to their success, whether they are program-specific, multiprogram or in-country. Tracking and assessing the extent to which grievances are received, processed, and resolved includes regular analysis of the frequency, patterns, and causes of grievance; strategies and processes used for grievance resolution; and their effectiveness. Some of the performance indicators are:

- Number of complaints collected.
- Number and percentage of complaints resolved within the stipulated time frame.
- Number and percentage of complainants satisfied with complaint handling process.
- Number and percentage of complainants satisfied with action(s) taken.
Institutional capacity can play a significant role in the effectiveness of a GRM. Social protection programs require dedicated, trained staff. A shortage of frontline workers might affect certain phases of the delivery chain, including the management of grievances. Some programs adapt to this challenge by taking advantage of existing public systems outside the social protection institutions, contracting with an external firm, or simplifying the GRM's design. Other factors that affect institutional capacity are the program budget and political will. Regular reporting of GRM data may provide an incentive for program staff to take grievance management seriously. Integration of the GRM training module in program training can be an effective way to increase awareness of the importance of grievance resolution. Raising awareness of GRM is useful not only for beneficiaries and clients, but also for program staff.