

# **Social Development Foundation (SDF)**

## **Grievance Redress Policy**

August 2012

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## **A. Introduction**

With the vision to eradicate poverty through sustainable development and women empowerment, Social Development Foundation (SDF) helped improve the lives and livelihoods of over 6 million poor people in its working areas and could break the intergenerational cycle of inequity and poverty. The organization has completed more than 15 years of its development efforts among the outreach through self-governed community institutions—the Social Investment Program Project (SIPP). SDF-supported initiatives took a targeted approach, prioritizing those most in need (the poor and extreme poor, women and vulnerable communities) and gained increased stature at community development and in finding its niche intervention and adjustments.

Born in 2000 as an autonomous and “not for profit” organization by the Government of Bangladesh, it was registered under the Companies Act-1994 on July 28, 2001. Since its inception, SDF has grown to become one of the most successful organizations in Bangladesh in poverty alleviation. SDF enriches and sustains the lives and livelihoods of Bangladesh’s excluded hardcore poor and poor through an integrated program of empowerment, capacity building, finance and social investment.

The recent initiatives of SDF at redefining its mission and strategic approaches enabled it to make a significant progress. Concurrently it has been navigating prosperity and catalyzing efforts towards establishing strong and equitable society. In July 2015 the “Nuton Jibon Livelihood Improvement Project (NJLIP)” has been launched with a budget of US \$ 220 million for a time span of six years. SDF envisions working with about 8.5 million households categorized as poor and hard core poor with a goal to reduce poverty and to improve their livelihood.

In order to ensure its effective support and deep penetration into the society, SDF has established 4 tiers of decentralized managements at National, Regional, District and Cluster levels. SDF is working closely with the community to synchronize the learning in facilitating them to development.

## **B. Rationale**

1. SDF possesses firm determination to create and maintain a congenial atmosphere at all levels of its operations, and to have a properly governed, gender sensitive, fully impartial and staff friendly management system. SDF is also committed to ensure equal opportunity for its staff members and its beneficiaries at large. Despite all efforts of SDF, it is not unlikely to be created reasons of discontentment either in its staff or in any direct beneficiary.
2. In order to redress such grievances, SDF has constituted Grievance Redress Committee at its National, Regional and District offices in conformity with the Section 12 HR Manual and Policy. The Grievance Redress Policy has been prepared according to the SDF Office Order issued on 04 September, 2012 (Memo: SDF/HR/Grievance/2012/881).

### **C. Definition of Grievance**

1. Grievance is a cause or source of grief or hardship or burden or distress arising out of anything connected with the employment or services of SDF that any team member or direct beneficiary believes unfair, unjust or inequitable, in the context of the work environment that may be of various types such as:
  - 1.1 Those related to terms of service and benefits and their interpretations. Examples under this category would be issues related to leave, working beyond normal hours, workload etc.;
  - 1.2 Those related to the work environment. Examples under this category would be issues related to cleanliness of premises, space for functioning, furniture etc;
  - 1.3 Those relating to interpersonal relationships, discipline and conduct of colleagues;
  - 1.4 Those related to the Sexual Harassment;
  - 1.5 Misconduct of staff with primary beneficiary or community people that refer to any expression or proposal of unethical relationship, harassment or misbehavior.

### **D. Grievance Redress Committees**

1. SDF has constituted five-member Grievance Redress Committees at its national office as well as at all regional and district level offices comprising of appropriate staff members. The committees will be the legitimate bodies of SDF management for handling grievances and be termed as “National/Regional/District Grievance Redress Committee”. The management of SDF will ensure inclusion of at least one appropriate female staff (subject to availability) to each of the committees. Formations of committees will be as follows:
  - 1.1 National Grievance Redress Committee (NGRC) will comprise following staff members:

Director (Operations)	Convener
Director (HR and Admin)	Member Secretary
Director (Governance)	Member
Director (Finance)	Member
An appropriate employee	Member (preferably female representative)
  - 1.2 Regional Director (RD) and District Manager (DM) will be the conveners of Regional and District Grievance Redress Committees (RGRC and DGRC) respectively. Regional Manager (MEL and Governance) and District Officer (MEL and Governance) will be the Member Secretaries of RGRC and DGRC respectively. The respective RD will co-opt other appropriate members including female staffs in consultation with the MD.
2. In case of absentia of Director (Operations), the MD of SDF will carry out the responsibilities of the Convener of the National Committee. For other positions, the MD will assign appropriate persons accordingly. No member will be included to the committee against his/her will.

## **E. Responsibilities of the Committee**

1. The Grievance Redress Committees will report to the line management with a copy to MD of SDF and recommend measures for resolving grievances and conflicts, and for maintaining overall congenial atmosphere in the organizational proceedings.
2. Handle cases of grievances of the staff members and direct beneficiaries.
3. Analyze and recommend measures to improve inter-personal relationship among staff members and in supervisory relationships and to uphold team spirit as a whole.
4. Analyze and recommend measures for creating gender friendly environment and to preserve gender parity in the organizational framework.
5. Coordinate with other committees (National-Region-District) regarding staff grievances and other similar issues.
6. Hold quarterly meeting and submit report to line management with a copy to MD.

## **F. Jurisdiction of the Committee**

1. The NGRC will be the apex body to resolve discontent or grievance of a staff or a direct beneficiary. The NGRC will report to and be accountable to the Managing Director (MD) of SDF. However, the NGRC may not be obliged to provide any information it obtained from a source on a condition of anonymity except for MD.
2. The RGRC will report to the MD with a copy to NGRC. It will provide all information along with sources in writing and pertinent evidences. The MD may refer any case to NGRC for further inquiry or the RGRC may request the MD for such further proceedings based on the merit of the grievance.
3. The DGRC will report to the respective RD with a copy to NGRC. It will provide all information along with sources in writing and pertinent evidences regarding a ruling or its verdict to resolve a grievance.
4. The NGRC/ RGRC/ DGRC may commission a committee for inquiry with appropriate incumbents as per lodgment of a grievance and may instruct the committee to submit report before it after conducting inquiry within a given timeframe.
5. The NGRC/ RGRC/ DGRC may summon a staff member (if required) under its jurisdiction or a direct beneficiary to appear before it to explain his/her grievance or for further information or to cross examine. The commission will issue formal letter or e-mail, whichever convenient, and will inform over telephone/ mobile at least 7 (seven) days prior to a hearing.
6. The RGRC/ DGRC shall be authorized to handle grievances only if both the parties of a grievance fall under its administrative/ program jurisdiction, otherwise it will send the grievance to its upward committee for further proceedings.
7. If required, the committee may summon a staff member of its jurisdiction for cross examination or deposition related to a grievance lodged. In such case, the committee will issue a formal notice of seven days with a copy to its immediate superior office and

the supervisor of the staff. And subsequently inform the person over phone or through fax/email (whichever is convenient).

8. If a staff member is summoned by a committee for any case related to a grievance, it will be considered as an office order and thus shall not be ignored. However, date of hearing may be fixed in consultation with the immediate supervisor in order to avoid hindrance of regular works.

### **G. Code of Conduct for the Committee**

1. The committee members shall:
  - 1.1 Remain honest, sincere and impartial to the both parties of a grievance;
  - 1.2 Refrain from taking any sort of unjust benefit from/ privilege of the situation;
  - 1.3 Not to provide/ show any biasness to any party of the grievance due to personal relationship, or any such;
  - 1.4 Ensure that no deprivation has been made due to sex and professional status of any party of the grievance;
  - 1.5 Not disclose any thing deemed confidential in relation to the grievance;
  - 1.6 Ensure that all necessary inquiry has been taken place before delivering any verdict to a grievance;
  - 1.7 Ensure that each grievance has been dealt with due gravity.

### **H. Procedure of lodging a grievance**

1. When a person (not more than one person), a staff or a direct beneficiary, is aggrieved because of any sort of act or conduct of his/her colleague, or of a regulation/ policy/ practice of SDF, which is in line with the definition of grievance detailed in the **Section C**, may lodge a grievance in writing/ email/ fax (whichever convenient) stating his/ her full name, designation, reason for grievance, any staff member or regulation/ policy/ practice of SDF related to his/ her grievance, remedial action he/ she expects should be described explicitly including full postal address and contact phone number either in Bangla or English on a plain sheet of paper. A direct beneficiary shall include his/ her PIP code, village name and cluster number. It is imperative that an aggrieved person will lodge his/her grievances in writing. However, SDF will not ignore the grievances of the persons if informed verbally mentioning his/her grievances. All records of grievances will be preserved.
2. An aggrieved person will generally apply to the concerned Grievance Redress Committee. In case of grievance due to the person/s lying with the committee, or if the aggrieved person is suspicious of getting proper remedial action from the committee, he/she may lodge his/her application to the immediate superior committee.
3. If a grievance is lodged without proper description, the Committee may contact the aggrieved person for providing required information within 7 (seven) days. If the aggrieved person fails to provide the committee with necessary information, the Committee may dismiss/ dispose the lodgment on a ground of incomplete lodgment. However, the aggrieved person shall not be restricted from lodging another grievance in future.

4. If the aggrieved person is a staff, he/ she should lodge the grievance to the committee as per supervisory jurisdiction. If the aggrieved person is a direct beneficiary, he/ she shall lodge his/ her grievance to the concerned DGRC.
5. When a grievance is lodged by a staff member, the Committee shall record in a register and shall provide him/ her with an acknowledgement slip including the record number in the register within 1 (one) working day.
6. When a grievance is lodged by a direct beneficiary, the Committee shall record in a register followed by a cross-checking about his/her status in reference to his/ her PIP and other information within 1 (one) working day. If the lodgment found valid, the Committee shall record and shall provide the person with an acknowledgement slip within 1 (one) working day. Otherwise the Committee shall inform the person and dismiss the lodgment on the ground of not in conformity.
7. After receiving a valid grievance the Convener shall within 07 (seven) days call a meeting of the Committee to discuss the issue.
8. The Committee will discuss and find out modality to assess and analyze the situation (whether to commission an inquiry etc.), consult with line management and recommend measures to the line management with a copy to MD.
9. The Committee shall provide the aggrieved person with a note of conclusion stating explicitly what measures it has recommended to redress his/ her grievance or the reason of dismissal.

#### **I. Timeline**

A valid lodgment shall be addressed within 30 (thirty) working days from the date of lodging the grievance.

#### **J. Appeal**

1. If an aggrieved person is not satisfied with the verdict of the Committee, he/she may appeal to the next superior Committee in black and white within 10 (ten) working days of the verdict/ ruling explaining clearly why he/she is not satisfied with the verdict/ ruling.
2. If an appeal is lodged, the appeal authority shall resolve/ dismiss/ recommend measures to the MD within 15 (fifteen) working days.
3. The appeal authority shall provide the aggrieved person with verdict in writing.
4. Verdict of the appeal authority will be considered as final.

#### **K. Protection of the Whistle Blower**

Under no circumstances, a person who lodged an application due to his/her grievances, be it rejected or accepted, will fall under any sort of harassment by any party in any form. In such case, it will be treated as offense and the aggrieved person may lodge another application.