

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Grievance redress mechanism (GRM)

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*FAO is a specialized agency of the United Nations that supports governments and partners to design the right policies and programmes to end hunger, promote food security and promote sustainable agriculture for millions of people around the world. With 193 Member Nations, one Member Organization, and two Associate Members, FAO works in over 130 countries worldwide.¹ FAO's **Framework for Environmental and Social Management (FESM)** includes provisions for the establishment of grievance channels, known as grievance mechanisms or grievance redress mechanism (GRM), which are project or decentralized office based and intend to deal with grievances that may be solved at the closest level to the project as possible² The FESM also provides compliance review as part of an Independent Accountability Mechanism (IAM) to review grievances that cannot be, or were not, resolved at the project or decentralized office levels.*

STANDARDS AND SAFEGUARDS

The FESM outlines FAO's environmental and social requirements to prevent unintended harm from its projects. The FESM promotes a human rights-based approach, inclusive participation and access to grievance mechanisms. The FESM is built on guiding principles, two operational pillars, and nine environmental and social standards, covering risk assessment and management, stakeholder engagement, biodiversity, pollution, climate and disaster screening, decent work, community health and safety, gender, **land tenure**, Indigenous Peoples and cultural heritage.

LAND TENURE

Land tenure rights - including access, use, management, exclusion, transfer, duration and enforcement - and related grievances, are explicitly addressed within the scope of the FESM. The **FAO Environmental and Social Standards (ESS)** address land tenure and land rights primarily through **ESS 7 on Land Tenure, Displacement and Resettlement** and **ESS 8 on Indigenous Peoples**.

ESS 7 requires that projects avoid adverse impacts from land acquisition or restrictions on land use wherever possible. Eviction and displacement are to be avoided, and where they cannot be avoided, they may only be carried out lawfully, under exceptional circumstances, and in a manner consistent with international human rights standards. The ESS 7 standard recognizes formal, informal and customary tenure rights, including those of Indigenous Peoples, and requires that measures affecting tenure be consistent with the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries

¹ FAO. n.d. About us. <https://www.fao.org/about/about-fao/en/>

² FAO. 2022. Framework for Environmental and Social Management. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb9870en>

and Forests (VGGT).³ Where displacement is unavoidable, resettlement must be designed as a development process, providing secure tenure at resettlement sites together with adequate housing, services, and infrastructure.

ESS 7 further requires that resettlement action plans be developed with the participation of affected persons and designed to restore or improve livelihoods and living standards. Compensation is to be provided at full replacement cost or, where feasible, through land-based resettlement and livelihood restoration. Persons without formal titles but with legitimate tenure claims are also entitled to such measures. Affected individuals must have access to judicial or administrative remedies, legal advice, and grievance redress mechanisms covering all aspects of planning, compensation, relocation, and livelihood restoration.

ESS 8 recognizes the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples to the lands, territories and resources that they traditionally own, use, or occupy. It requires that projects avoid actions that may weaken these rights and may support the legal recognition of customary tenure systems. The standard further requires the application of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) before any activity that may affect Indigenous lands or resources, ensuring full participation of Indigenous Peoples in decision-making processes. Projects must respect Indigenous cultural values and development priorities and deliver benefits in culturally appropriate and gender-sensitive ways.

Both ESS 7 and ESS 8 include provisions for compensation measures in cases of adverse impacts. These measures include compensation for lost assets, land-based resettlement or equivalent alternatives, restoration of livelihoods, and grievance mechanisms that are accessible and culturally appropriate throughout the project cycle. Together with the VGGT, these standards provide the framework through which FAO safeguards land tenure and land rights in its operations.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND GRIEVANCE ECOSYSTEM

(1) Grievances at project/decentralized level (GRMs)

Project-level grievance redress mechanisms are the first point of entry, designed to be accessible, culturally appropriate, and transparent. These mechanisms are established during project inception and communicated to stakeholders through inception workshops and outreach materials, with clear guidance on how grievances can be submitted (e.g. verbally or in writing, anonymously if needed), timelines for acknowledgment and for proposing resolutions.

Outreach

Information shall be widely shared with stakeholders in applicable languages and through different channels, with systems to receive and respond accordingly. The responsibility for conducting outreach and information activities for beneficiaries on how to raise grievances at the decentralized level or bring them to OIG failing that, lies with the decentralized offices /project teams.

Filing a grievance

Any person, group, or duly designated representative of a person or group, who considers themselves adversely affected by a FAO project, may file a grievance at the closest appropriate level, i.e. project-

³ FAO. 2022. Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the context of National Food Security. <https://www.fao.org/4/i2801e/i2801e.pdf>

level grievance focal point, project staff, or designated grievance channels (such as in-person submission, email, or online platforms)⁴. Should the stakeholder not receive an acknowledgement of receipt within an indicative timeframe of 7 days, he/she may forward the matter to the relevant decentralized office, whether at country level or regional level. If a grievance cannot be resolved through consultations and measures at either of the aforementioned levels, or if the stakeholder has not received an acknowledgement of receipt from the decentralized office within 7 days upon escalation of the matter, the grievance can then be submitted to [OIG](#) for compliance review, provided it concerns alleged non-compliance with FAO's Framework for Environmental and Social Management (FESM).⁵

(2) Requesting a compliance review by the Office of the Inspector General

Grievances are initially handled at the project level, escalated - if needed - to the decentralized office, and only then, if unresolved, may they proceed to OIG.

To be eligible to file a request for compliance review to OIG, requestors should first attempt to resolve their concerns through grievance or conflict resolution mechanisms at the project or decentralized office level. OIG functions as a mechanism of last resort. Alternatively, requestors must demonstrate a valid reason—such as reasonable concerns for their safety or fear of retaliation—for not engaging with management at project or decentralized office level.⁶

Requests for compliance reviews can be submitted to OIG by mail, email, telephone, in person or through the web form of the FAO Hotline. They should detail the incident(s), including what happened, when, where, how often, who was involved, and include the requestor's name and contact details. While anonymous requests for compliance reviews are not accepted as OIG must be able to contact the requestor(s) bringing the matter forward to determine whether their claim is admissible; the requestor's identity will be kept confidential upon request.⁷

In the context of a compliance review, the person or group bringing forward the grievance and relevant FAO staff engage in the process. Other stakeholders may also apply to participate in the process, provided that they are directly affected by the issues raised in the Request or that they demonstrate an ability to assist in determining if FAO is in compliance with its ES obligations (whether on a factual, scientific or legal basis) may be admitted to participate. Applicants will be informed of the decision on their request to participate within 15 days after the application deadline.⁸

ADMISSIBILITY

The following will be deemed inadmissible for compliance review:

(a) matters that neither implicitly nor explicitly raise issues of potential non-compliance with the FAO's ES obligations;

⁴ If there is a valid, demonstrated reason—such as reasonable concerns for their safety or fear of retaliation—for not engaging with management at project or decentralized office level, the grievance can be exceptionally submitted to OIG (see paragraph “Requesting a compliance review by the Office of the Inspector General” and footnote 6).

⁵ Or the Environmental and Social Management Guidelines (ESMG, in force from 2015 to 2022) which is only applicable to incidents up until the implementation of the FESM in 2022.

⁶ Paragraph 79. FAO. 2022. *Framework for Environmental and Social Management*. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb9870en>

⁷ Paragraph 16. Guidelines. FAO. 2015. Compliance Reviews Following Complaints Related to the Organization's Environmental and Social Standards. Guidelines. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/bitstreams/c45fd717-8e9e-4051-b771-e14b9623c38b/download>

⁸ Paragraph 27. Guidelines. FAO. 2015. Compliance Reviews Following Complaints Related to the Organization's Environmental and Social Standards. Guidelines. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/bitstreams/c45fd717-8e9e-4051-b771-e14b9623c38b/download>

(b) matters relating to projects that are not supported by FAO or for which FAO's support has ended and its role can no longer reasonably be considered a cause of the concerns raised. However, a grievance will be admissible when, even after FAO's support has ended, the effects can fairly and reasonably be traced to FAO's involvement, and where a compliance review by OIG is likely to support resolution of concerns of communities, provide institutional learning, or prevent future mistakes and abuses;

(c) matters that raise the same issue(s) with respect to the same project for which OIG has already conducted a review, unless significant new information is available or there has been a significant change in circumstances.

(d) allegations of fraud, corruption, of incidents of SEA or other types of misconduct by members of FAO personnel, vendors, service providers, or operational partners.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESS

OIG has been entrusted with the mandate to independently conduct compliance reviews of the grievances that cannot be, or were not, resolved at the project or decentralized office levels as part of the Organization's Independent Accountability Mechanism ('IAM').⁹

Upon receipt, OIG conducts a preliminary eligibility review in consultation with relevant technical units. Requests for compliance review deemed ineligible are dismissed with an explanation. Eligible requests are published—with identifying details withheld upon request.

Once a request for compliance review is deemed eligible, OIG initiates an **assessment**. This may involve interviews, site visits, document reviews and other investigative steps. Following the assessment, OIG prepares a draft compliance review report outlining the procedural steps taken, any factual findings regarding the non-compliance with the FESM or the ESMG, any instances of non-compliance with the FESM (or the ESMG) and recommendations to bring FAO into compliance with the FESM or the ESMG.

The draft report is shared with all participants, who are given 20 days to submit written comments. After reviewing these inputs, OIG finalizes the report and submits it to the FAO Director-General, or delegated authority, who makes the final decision on the Organization's response. The final report is shared with all parties, unless confidentiality has been requested.¹⁰

There is no appeals process, and compliance reviews do not create legally enforceable rights. If OIG determines that serious, irreversible harm may occur, it can recommend interim measures to the Director-General, such as suspending project activities or funding, to ensure compliance with FAO's environmental and social standards. OIG will consult affected people where possible.¹¹

The OIG strives to ensure that stakeholders are kept informed of what is being done to address their concerns throughout the compliance review process.

¹⁰ Paragraphs 15-33 Guidelines. FAO. 2015. Compliance Reviews Following Complaints Related to the Organization's Environmental and Social Standards. Guidelines. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/bitstreams/c45fd717-8e9e-4051-b771-e14b9623c38b/download>

¹¹ Paragraph 27. Guidelines. FAO. 2015. Compliance Reviews Following Complaints Related to the Organization's Environmental and Social Standards. Guidelines. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/bitstreams/c45fd717-8e9e-4051-b771-e14b9623c38b/download>