

ACCOUNTABILITY – RUBAYA, RWANDA

Save the Children is committed to making itself accountable to the children and communities it works with and for. A key element of this commitment is the need to establish Complaints Response Mechanisms (CRMs).

These are simple procedures which provide a safe and accessible avenue for any person affected by a Save the Children programme to provide feedback. They allow people to raise concerns or lodge complaints, and ensure that these are investigated and responded to in a timely and efficient manner.

Before Save the Children begins to work in any community, consultations and agreement with local stakeholders take place in order to establish and clarify which interventions and activities will take place. This includes local authorities, parents, community members and children.

Save the Children is supporting communities in the District of Rubaya in Rwanda to establish centres for Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) targeting children aged three to six. It is the parents' committee and local authorities who manage the day-to-day running of the centre while Save the Children's role is to provide technical support to parents' committees, training caregivers, providing sensitization to parents, helping communities to rehabilitate or construct centres with two or three classrooms, a kitchen, storage and latrines, and equipping them with child-friendly furniture and toys.

In November 2011 a focus group discussion with 33 community members (11 men, 22 women) was held in Rubaya to introduce the concept of accountability and provide examples of what complaint mechanisms have been adopted by other programmes. The aim is that community members decide what mechanisms fit their ECCD programme best.



Elisa and Charles provide examples of different methods of reporting from other countries' experience:

- **Suggestion box**
- **Mobile phone**
- **Quarterly meetings**
- **Email address**
- **One-to-one meeting**

People are respectful and raise their hands before talking, but the room is buzzing with ideas. Community members enter into a discussion of the pros and cons of the various methodologies. Will the method allow a response which is fast enough? Will local authorities be involved in the resolution of any issues? Will they be able to retain anonymity if they make a complaint? Is the reporting method feasible and affordable for even the poorest members of the community? Should there be more than one method for reporting?

Elisa (Education Programme Manager) and Charles (Education Programme Officer) from the Save the Children team facilitate the process, but the decisions are all made by the community.

After some 30 minutes of discussion the community moves to a vote. A member of the local authority runs through the list of suggested methodologies and people raise their hand if they are in favour of using it. Each person has two votes only.

Community members raise their hands to choose their preferred reporting mechanism; a member of the local authority facilitates the process.



The results show overwhelming support for two accountability methods: **mobile phone (32 votes)** and **a quarterly meeting (33 votes)**.

It is agreed that two telephone numbers will be given to the community for them to phone if they ever have an urgent complaint. The second method, of quarterly meetings, would allow for more extensive discussion, and would be used to resolve issues which were less pressing.

Save the Children believes passionately that accountability to the communities we work in is key. It ensures that commitments are taken seriously and responsibly, it places communities at the heart of all decisions, and it encourages them to feel empowered to use their voice - if anything goes wrong, they must feel able to demand that it be corrected.