Grievance, Complaint and Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................... 2
2. Who can complain? ................................................................................................. 2
3. Types of grievances/complaints/disputes ............................................................... 3
4. Policies for addressing grievances and complaint redressal .............................. 5
5. How to submit a complaint .................................................................................. 6
6. Grievances and complaint management system ................................................. 7
1. Introduction

CottonConnect has strong grievance, dispute and complaint resolution mechanisms. CottonConnect’s grievance management process aims at providing a transparent, efficient and impartial process and mediation to address grievances, with respect for sensitive information. The grievance/complaint/dispute is addressed and resolved with the management committee and leadership team of respective countries.

CottonConnect encourages its stakeholders, before invoking the grievance management process, to seek an amicable settlement to any grievance/complaint/dispute directly with the person, parties and organization whose action or decision is the subject of the grievance. In the course of this attempt at informal resolution, the complainant can seek support from the CottonConnect leadership team. If no satisfactory settlement can be agreed between the parties, the complainant may formally file a grievance.

2. Who can complain?

CottonConnect encourages all stakeholders to speak up and raise their voices against any issues or challenges. The grievance management process covers the following stakeholders who can speak up and lodge their grievances as and when needed.

a. CottonConnect team
b. Farmers
c. Local partners and teams
d. Customers
e. Other stakeholders
3. Types of grievances/complaints/disputes

The following grievances/complaints/disputes are covered by CottonConnect’s grievance management process in order to provide an equal opportunity, safe and ethical work practice.

a.1. CottonConnect team
   a. Complaint related to POSH (Prevention of sexual harassment of women at the workplace)
   b. Conflict of interest
   c. Misbehaviour and racism at the workplace
   d. Any type of discrimination at the workplace
   e. Complaint under anti-bribery and corruption
   f. Complaint under safeguarding

Grievances arising from employment may include but are not limited to:

- pay and working conditions
- terms of employment and workplace rules
- disagreements with co-workers
- allegations of unfair treatment at work

CottonConnect has a Whistleblowing procedure to enable employees to report any concerns about the organisation.

a.2. Farmers

   a. Issue related to farmers’ training information
   b. Misbehaviour of team members from CottonConnect or local partner
   c. Any misleading information provided to farmers apart from the project
   d. Conflict of interest in business and financial-related
   e. Complaint under safeguarding
a.3. **Local partners and its team**
   a. Complaint related to POSH (Prevention of sexual harassment of women at the workplace)
   b. Minimum wage and salary issue
   c. Any HR-related issues
   d. Child labour and forced labour
   e. Any misbehaviour of team members
   f. Complain under safeguarding

a.4. **Customers**
   a. Business and misleading information
   b. Misbehaviour of CottonConnect team
   c. Complaint related to POSH (Prevention of sexual harassment of women at the workplace)
   d. Complaint under safeguarding
   e. Any kind of financial misappropriation

a.5. **Other stakeholders (third party and vendor)**
   a. Any financial misappropriation
   b. The demand for bribes (under Anti-bribery and Corruption policy)
   c. Any demand of gift and favours
   d. Complaint related to POSH
   e. Complaint related to Health, Safety and Security
4. Policies for addressing grievances and complaint redressal

CottonConnect aims to maintain a work environment free from causes of grievances or complaints, and has a clear position regarding safeguarding and the prevention of sexual harassment of any kind.

For CottonConnect, safeguarding means protecting people’s health, wellbeing and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect. Safeguarding describes the broader preventive and precautionary approach to planning and procedures that are necessary to be in place to protect children, women and vulnerable adults.

CottonConnect has a policy and procedure in place to ensure its staff, operations and programmes do not harm children and vulnerable adults, including women, associated with CottonConnect, in any way. It includes protection from any form of exploitation, bullying, harassment, health or safety hazard as it applies to people CottonConnect works within farming communities.

CottonConnect is committed to providing equal employment opportunities to its employees, i.e. no discrimination based on age, race, colour, religion, national origin or gender. All employees are required to maintain a work environment which is free from any kind of harassment. CottonConnect has procedures in place to ensure that any incident of sexual harassment is dealt with appropriately, sensitively and expeditiously.

To support its global position, CottonConnect has the following in-country policies as per specific country laws. Each policy includes a detailed methodology on where and how to complain. Committees are in place for POSH, and all employees are informed about them. All complaints are taken very seriously and investigated thoroughly to reach a just conclusion.

- Prevention of sexual harassment of women at the workplace (POSH) – India
- Safeguarding policy – India, Pakistan, Bangladesh

CottonConnect also has the following global policies.

- Anti-Bribery and Corruption Policy (ABC)
4.1. **Speak Up initiative**: CottonConnect encourages employees and external associated partners to make efforts to inform about any issue or challenge that they face or see around and be a part of CottonConnect’s Speak Up initiative so that it can be addressed collectively. Complainants are encouraged to write to

[highlighted_text]grievancesandcomplaints@cottonconnect.org\[highlighted_text]

or

[highlighted_text]safeguarding@cottonconnect.org\[highlighted_text]

5. **How to submit a complaint**

Complainants can submit grievances/complaints with the help of multiple channels. All the channels for complaint are accessible for all the parties:

5.1. **CottonConnect website**: Under the ‘Get in touch’ page of the CottonConnect website there is an option for raising a grievance under the dropdown menu, and the [highlighted_text]grievancesandcomplaints@cottonconnect.org\[highlighted_text] email address. This open and accessible for all.

5.2. **Direct email**: Complaints can be lodged by directly sending an email to [highlighted_text]info@cottonconnect.org\[highlighted_text] and [highlighted_text]grievancesandcomplaints@cottonconnect.org\[highlighted_text].

5.3. **Letter/courier**: Complainants can lodge complaints by sending a letter to the respective country address, mentioned on CottonConnect website and address mentioned on the educational brochure.

5.4. **Written complaint to the leadership team**: The complainant can lodge complaints in writing with the leadership team.
6. **Grievances and complaint management system**

CottonConnect has developed effective systems for addressing and resolving any grievances, complaints or disputes. The grievance resolution process will follow local policies and applicable country laws. An overview of the process is outlined below.

6.1. **Lodgement and assessment of the grievance**

a. Grievances should be put in writing and submitted to CottonConnect through one of the multiple channels or through a direct contact such as a manager.

b. The written grievance should set out the nature of the complaint, including any relevant facts, dates, and names of individuals involved so that it can be investigated.

c. CottonConnect will arrange a grievance meeting, as soon as possible after receiving the grievance. The complainant should make every effort to attend.

d. If the complainant cannot attend at the time specified, they should advise as soon as possible to enable an alternative time to be agreed within reason.

e. CottonConnect may adjourn the meeting, if needed, to carry out further investigations, after which the meeting will usually be reconvened.

f. CottonConnect will write to the complainant as soon as possible after the last grievance meeting to confirm the decision and notify of any further action intended to be taken to resolve the grievance. The complainant will also be advised of their right of appeal.
6.2. Appeal of the decision on grievance and complaint

a. If the grievance has not been resolved to the complainant’s satisfaction, they may appeal in writing, stating the full grounds of appeal, at the earliest opportunity after receiving the decision.

b. CottonConnect will hold an appeal meeting as soon as possible after receiving the appeal.

c. CottonConnect will confirm the final decision in writing, as soon as possible after the appeal hearing. There is no further right of appeal.