

Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture & Natural Resource Management (WOCAN)



Complaints, Disputes and Appeals Process

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1. Introduction

A complaints resolution mechanism for the impartial handling of procedural complaints is in place. Interested parties have access to the complaints resolution mechanism by contacting WOCAN staff to initiate the process. Contact information is available on the WOCAN and W+ websites.

The W+ Program Guide specifies that all correspondence and related efforts to resolve complaints, as well as any decisions taken, their justification and any consequential program changes, shall be systematically documented.

The specific language in the W+ Program Guide regarding Resolving Complaints is as follows:

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure fast and appropriate handling of disputes, complaints and appeals related to the W+ Standard (W+) that are communicated by a project developer, a project coordinator, a member of a project host community or other interested parties.

Any such interested party may register a complaint or dispute to WOCAN and may, if they feel it necessary, appeal any decision to the WOCAN Board of Directors.

3. Complaints, Disputes and Appeals Procedures

3.1. General Description

All disputes, complaints, and appeals, as well as disposition of the same, will be logged in a database or document of record by the Certification Manager, or by whomever the Certification Manager delegates the responsibility.

3.2. Complaints

Complaints may be registered with WOCAN by any interested party (project developer, verifier, host community member, broker, buyer, seller, etc.) Examples of possible complaints include concerns about the completion of certification requirements, issues with the certification process, misuse of the certification marks, or misleading marketing related to certification.

3.2.1. Initial Response to Complaints

Documented or clearly expressed verbal complaints specific to WOCAN shall be handled as follows:

- The complaint shall be promptly referred to the Certification Manager.
- The complaint, including specific details about the issue(s) of concern will be logged in a document of record to ensure tracking and closure of issues
- The Certification Manager shall appoint and inform a Designated Person who has no direct activity related to the issue to administer actions to resolve the issue.



3.2.2. Logging and Acknowledgement of Complaints

The Designated Person shall:

- Determine whether the complaint refers to a new, completed or ongoing project.
- Acknowledge receipt of the complaint; provide information about the complaint handling process, and the persons engaged in the complaint process.
- Document all correspondence and progress in the document of record (complaints log) including dates and any relevant information.
- Evaluate whether the complaint is valid and if resolution of the complaint falls within WOCAN's scope and authority to address.
- Coordinate an initial response to the complaint within five working days of the receipt of a complaint.
- Have an overall understanding of the complaints received, perform root cause analysis, and if needed, propose corrective actions and check on the implementation of corrective actions.

3.2.3. Investigating and Responding to Complaints

The Designated Person has the responsibility for pursuing a complaint to its conclusion and shall:

- Organize an analysis of the complaint and decide if an immediate or corrective action is needed, taking into account other complaints received.
- Inform relevant persons.
- Plan or outline the actions decided.
- Record activities.
- Prepare and deliver a response to the complaining party. The Certification Manager and the Designated Person shall agree upon the response.
- If the complaining party does not accept the W+ 's response, she/he shall be advised of the appeals procedure if the matter is related to the W+ 's actions or decisions regarding the assessment process.
- Information related to the handling of complaints shall be kept confidential.

3.3. Disputes

Disputes may be registered with WOCAN by a Certification Applicant or Verifier. Examples of disputes include a disagreement regarding the interpretation of a certification requirement or a disagreement regarding a verification outcome.

Disputes received by WOCAN shall be handled as follows:



- WOCAN staff will report the dispute to the Certification Manager. The Certification Manager will evaluate the dispute.
- If the dispute relates to non-fulfillment of a clear requirement, the dispute shall not be considered a dispute.
- If the dispute relates to the interpretation of a requirement, the Certification Manager shall appoint a Designated Person and the dispute shall be forwarded to this person.
- If the dispute concerns a party that has no contract with W+, it should be evaluated whether the dispute is valid.
- The Designated Person will try to resolve matters effectively through consultation with the disputing party and will prepare a response to that party or other parties involved in the dispute, including potential actions to close the matter. The response is communicated to all parties involved in the dispute by the Certification Manager.
- The Designated Person establishes a log listing the status and relevant information concerning disputes.
- If the disputing party does not accept WOCAN's response, she/he shall be advised of the appeals procedure if the matter is related to WOCAN's actions or decisions regarding the review, assessment or verification process.

3.4.Appeals

Appeals may be registered with WOCAN by any interested party with a valid complaint. Examples of appeals include an appeal of certification outcome, and other disputes that could not be resolved as indicated above.

Appeals received by the WOCAN shall be handled as follows:

- a. The Certification Manager shall appoint and inform the Designated Person without delay.
- b. The Designated Person is responsible for the registration, monitoring and the coordination of a formal, written response.
- c. The Designated Person will inform the appellant of receipt of the appeal, the appeal handling process, and the persons engaged in the appeal process.
- d. All WOCAN personnel involved in the appeal process shall ensure that no discriminatory action occurs to the appellant as a result of the appeal.
- e. The appellant shall be informed of the right to:
 - Formally present its case.
 - Take the appeal to the WOCAN Board of Directors if the appellant fails to accept the decision of the W+ representative.

If appealed, the following applies:

- Any member of the WOCAN Board of Directors with a conflict of interest in the appeal (e.g., a competitor in the marketplace) must recuse himself or herself from active voting in the Appeal case.



- The decision reached by the WOCAN Board of Directors shall be communicated to the appellant in writing by someone not previously involved in the subject of the appeal and will be final.
- If the appeal has the potential to lead to legal or financial consequences for WOCAN, then legal staff shall be notified as soon as possible.
- The appellant will be provided reports and a formal notice of the outcome of the appeal.

Information related to the handling of appeals shall be kept confidential.

3.5. Corrective Action

The Designated Person, in consultation with the management of the W+, shall review the outcome of all complaints, disputes, and appeals on an annual basis and, where appropriate, initiate action to prevent repetition and achieve improvements in the delivery of services.