

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Consultancy for Assessment of Social Protection Grievance Redress Mechanisms and Development of Harmonisation Blueprint

CONTRACT MODALITY	Individual Consultancy
DUTY STATION	Lusaka, Zambia & Home based
DURATION OF CONTRACT	5 months

Purpose of Assignment

The purpose of this consultancy is to support the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) to assess existing accountability and Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRMs) mechanisms across the social protection sector. The consultant will conduct a targeted sector-level mapping and scoping study of grievance redress and accountability arrangements across relevant social protection interventions and programmes. The study is expected to generate evidence required to understand the current institutional and operational arrangements, identify key strengths and gaps, determine feasible opportunities for consistency and institutional harmonization across programmes and institutions. To ensure synergy and build on existing evidence, the assignment will draw on the recent evaluation and other available evidence on harmonized GRM approach currently implemented under the Girls' Education and Women's Empowerment and Livelihoods (GEWEL II) Programme for reference. It will synthesize relevant design features, best practices, operational insights, and lessons learned to assess their applicability for broader adoption across the social protection sector.

Scope of Work

Background

The Government of the Republic of Zambia has made significant investments in strengthening the social protection system as a key mechanism for reducing poverty, vulnerability, inequality, and exclusion. The 2025 National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) provides the main policy guidance for the sector. Social protection programmes have expanded considerably, with interventions implemented by several ministries, agencies, and development partners. Some notable programmes include the Social Cash Transfer (SCT), Supporting Women's Livelihoods (SWL), Keeping Girls in School (KGS), Food Security Pack (FSP), Public Welfare Assistance Scheme (PWAS), and School Feeding among other interventions reaching increasing numbers of vulnerable households and individuals.

As social protection programmes continue to expand, ensuring accountability, transparency, and responsiveness has become increasingly important. Effective accountability and grievance mechanisms enable beneficiaries and community members to raise concerns, seek information, provide feedback, and report grievances relating to programme implementation. These mechanisms contribute to improved programme performance, citizen trust, and the protection of beneficiary rights.

As social protection programmes have expanded, several have established their own channels for beneficiaries and communities to raise concerns, submit complaints, and provide feedback. However, these systems have often evolved independently, resulting in varying standards, procedures, reporting arrangements, referral pathways, and levels of functionality. This fragmentation can create duplication, confuse beneficiaries, inefficiencies for frontline workers, limit coherence, and constrain Government's ability to monitor, respond to, and learn from grievances in a consistent manner.

In an effort to improve harmonization and coherence among different components in the GEWEL II programme, a harmonized GRM approach has been developed, streamlining complaint management and strengthening accountability. This model represents an important step toward greater integration within GEWEL II. To leverage this

progress Sector-wide, there is an opportunity to review the operational insights, inclusiveness, , and scalable features of this model to determine how its design considerations can be adapted within the broader national social protection context.

At the same time, broader reforms within the social protection sector, including the strengthening of case management systems, ongoing development of the National Social Registry (NSR), implementation of digital management information systems, and adoption of the 2025 National Social Protection Policy, create a favorable environment for strengthening and harmonizing accountability and grievance redress mechanisms.

To support these efforts, UNICEF seeks to undertake a sector-level scoping study of existing accountability and GRM systems across the social protection sector. Building on the progress made under GEWEL II, the study will generate evidence on current practices, identify strengths and gaps, assess opportunities for interoperability and integration, and inform the development of a harmonized approach that enhances access, accountability, responsiveness and citizen engagement across the sector.

Justification

As Zambia's social protection system continues to expand and evolve, harmonized, consistent, coherent and accessible grievance redress mechanisms are essential for building beneficiary trust, improving programme responsiveness, and strengthening sector accountability. Beneficiaries often interact with multiple programmes and service providers, yet grievance and feedback channels remain fragmented, resulting in inconsistent experiences and varied levels of responsiveness.

A sector-level mapping and synthesis exercise is therefore required to understand the current GRM landscape and identify feasible pathways for transitioning towards a more harmonized approach to GRM across social protection. The assessment will consolidate operational evidence and existing evidence to support government efforts to establish more coherent efficient, and inter-operable grievance management systems while reducing duplication and improving accountability.

Objectives

The overall objective of this consultancy is to generate evidence that could inform the development of a harmonized Grievance and Redress Mechanism for social protection.

Specifically, the consultant will:

- Map existing social protection interventions and their respective GRM systems, including institutional arrangements, procedures, and reporting/referral channels.
- Review the operational performance, accessibility, and inclusiveness of existing GRMs by leveraging available programme data, administrative reports, and stakeholder consultations.
- Synthesize lessons learned, good practices, and relevant design features of the GEWEL II harmonized GRM approach drawing on its recent evaluation, and other existing evidence.
- Identify concrete opportunities for harmonization of GRM systems across social protection programmes, agencies and institutions.
- Develop a blueprint for a scalable harmonized GRM model for the social protection sector.
- Develop recommendations, a phased operationalization roadmap, priority communication actions to support roll out of the harmonized model.

The findings of the study will equip the Government and development partners with evidence and practical guidance to strengthen accountability mechanisms and improve citizens' access to grievance and feedback services.

Scope of Work

The consultant will support a participatory and evidence-based process to assess existing accountability and GRM systems within the social protection sector and identify opportunities for harmonization and strengthening.

The assignment will begin with a strategic scoping and assessment of existing social protection interventions and their respective GRM systems, as well as a review of relevant policy documents, programme guidelines, operational manuals, assessment reports, and existing studies relating to grievance redress and accountability mechanisms across different Government ministries and agencies. The assignment will aim to understand how the respective accountability/grievance redress systems currently function across social protection interventions and how they interact with broader systems such as case management, management information systems, and social registries.

It is intended to generate necessary evidence for Government to determine an appropriate model and pathway for harmonising GRMs across social protection; it is not a comprehensive evaluation of every programme-level GRM. Reviews of programmes, institutions and systems will be proportionate to this purpose.

The consultant will engage national, provincial, district, and community-level stakeholders through a combination of interviews, focus group discussions, and technical consultations. These consultations will seek to understand how existing GRMs operate in practice, identify implementation challenges, document good practices, and gather stakeholder perspectives on opportunities for harmonization. Particular attention will be paid to the experiences of beneficiaries and frontline service providers, including barriers to accessing grievance and feedback mechanisms.

For this assignment, harmonisation shall mean achieving greater coherence, consistency and interoperability across social protection GRMs through appropriate common minimum standards, institutional and referral arrangements, and linkages between programme systems. The assignment will assess feasible options and recommend the appropriate degree and model of harmonisation, including which functions should be common, interoperable or remain programme specific.

Field consultations will be undertaken in a limited number of purposively selected case-study locations to validate and deepen the desk-based mapping. They are intended to generate qualitative operational insights and will not necessarily constitute nationally representative research. The inception report will propose the final sites for approval by MCDSS and UNICEF, within the travel ceiling in this TOR.

Assessment of linkages with Case Management, the National Social Registry, the Single Window and programme management information systems will be at institutional and functional level. The consultant will identify relevant functions, information flows, interoperability needs, dependencies and high-level data/security considerations. Detailed ICT architecture, software specifications, systems development, technical integration design and procurement specifications are outside scope.

Throughout the assignment, the consultant will work with MCDSS, GEWEL II partners, the UNJPSP participating agencies, and relevant government stakeholders to ensure ownership of the process and alignment with national priorities.

Tasks

The consultant will be responsible for leading an inclusive, evidence-based, and participatory assessment process that informs the development of a harmonized GRM blueprint and operational roadmap for the social protection sector.

1. Inception and Review of Existing Documentation

- Conduct a desk review of relevant materials, including the GEWEL II harmonized GRM model, tools, and the 2023 GEWEL II Harmonized GRM Impact Evaluation Study; scoping of existing GRM systems across social protection programmes and agencies, relevant policy frameworks (e.g., the National Social Protection Policy), and related system-strengthening initiatives (e.g., Single Window, Case Management, and the National Social Registry).

- Prepare an Inception Report outlining the methodology, workplan, consultation plan, document review framework, ethical/data protection approach, criteria for identifying purposely selected study districts and CWACs, and the proposed approach to the scoping study.

2. Mapping of Social Protection Interventions and Accountability Mechanisms

- Conduct a targeted sector-level mapping of existing GRM systems across social protection programmes and agencies, focusing on institutional arrangements, procedures, uptake channels, and referral and case-management linkages.
- Synthesize available evidence on the GEWEL II harmonized GRM approach and compare against the mapped landscape to document its institutional design features, strengths, and suitability for broader adoption. Examine key dimensions of the model, including:
 - Governance and accountability arrangements.
 - Operational functionality.
 - Accessibility and user experience.
 - Effectiveness of complaint resolution processes.
 - Integration with programme systems.
 - Data management and reporting.
 - Document strengths, lessons learned, areas requiring refinement, and considerations for wider sector adoption.
- Undertake a mapping of social protection interventions operating in the selected pilot districts, including at travel to a least two priority districts.
- Assess the disability-inclusiveness of existing GRM systems, including the accessibility of complaint channels, communication materials, procedures, feedback mechanisms, and referral pathways for persons with disabilities.
- Document key findings and preliminary recommendations to inform the Social Behavioral Change (SBC) strategy implementation to enhance GRM uptake.
- Identify opportunities for harmonization, interoperability, and alignment with related systems, including Case Management, the National Social Registry, and the Single Window model.

3. Stakeholder Consultations and Assessment of Existing GRMs

- Conduct key informant interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders, including:
 - National Government officials.
 - Provincial and district officers.
 - Community Welfare Assistance Committees (CWACs).
 - Beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries.
 - Community leaders.
 - Implementing partners and civil society organizations.
- Assess existing GRM systems to determine:
 - Awareness and utilization of GRMs.
 - Accessibility and inclusiveness.
 - Complaint management processes.
 - Referral and escalation pathways.
 - Timeliness of grievance resolution.
 - Monitoring and reporting systems.
 - Resource and capacity
- Document stakeholder perspectives, operational challenges, and opportunities for strengthening and harmonizing accountability and GRM systems.

4. Development of a Harmonized GRM Blueprint and Roadmap

Based on the mapping, consultations, review of existing evidence and assessment, the consultant will produce a comparative synthesis of relevant findings against the 2023 GEWEL II Impact Evaluation, analyze similarities, inclusiveness, differences, and assess feasible harmonization options for GRM systems and accountability mechanisms across social protection. The proposed blueprint will set out institutional, operational, policy, and technical/digital requirements for potential scale-up and implementation.

- Facilitate stakeholder validation and technical discussions.

- Develop a draft Harmonized GRM Blueprint that defines:
 - Common principles and standards.
 - Institutional roles and responsibilities.
 - Complaint handling procedures.
 - Referral pathways.
 - Monitoring and reporting requirements.
 - Capacity-strengthening requirements.
 - A phased implementation and scale-up roadmap.
- Present findings and recommendations during a national validation workshop and incorporate stakeholder feedback into the draft blueprint.

5. Finalization and Dissemination

- Refine and finalize the harmonized GRM blueprint and implementation roadmap based on feedback received during technical reviews and validation processes.
- Produce final reports, knowledge products, and presentation materials.

The following final deliverables will be submitted for this assignment:

1. Inception Report with clear methodology on how the assignment will be undertaken
2. Final Mapping and Assessment Report.
3. Data collection and field report
4. Draft Harmonized GRM Blueprint.
5. Validation Workshop Report.
6. Final Harmonization GRM Blueprint, final assignment report including a slide deck presentation containing key findings and recommendations summary of the blueprint for dissemination

Ethics, Data Protection, Confidentiality and Safeguarding

The consultant shall apply informed consent, confidentiality, data minimisation and do-no-harm principles throughout data collection and analysis. Personally identifiable complaint information will not be reproduced in study outputs. Working files containing personal or sensitive information shall be access-controlled, stored securely, shared only with authorised persons, and deleted or handed over securely at the end of the assignment in accordance with UNICEF and Government requirements. Findings will be anonymised or aggregated.

If a consultation results in disclosure of safeguarding, violence, exploitation, abuse, fraud/corruption or another serious grievance, the consultant shall not investigate the allegation. The consultant shall follow the agreed confidential referral/escalation protocol established at inception with MCDSS and UNICEF.

The consultation design shall be disability-inclusive and provide reasonable and accessible means of participation.

Finalization and Dissemination

- Refine and finalize the harmonized GRM blueprint and implementation roadmap based on feedback received during technical reviews and validation processes.
- Produce final reports, knowledge products, and presentation materials.

The following final deliverables will be submitted for this assignment:

Deliverable	Minimum content / acceptance criteria
1. Inception Report	Approved methodology and workplan; document-review framework; consultation/sample and site-selection approach; field tools; ethics/data-protection and referral protocol; clear scope boundaries.
2. Mapping and Assessment Report	Sector-level GRM inventory/typology; institutional roles; channels/workflows; referral/escalation; accessibility/inclusion; data/reporting; functional system linkages; GEWEL II evidence synthesis; gaps/good practices; harmonisation options and implications.
3. Fieldwork Package	Final data-collection tools; agreed case-study coverage; concise fieldwork report summarising respondents/categories, implementation, limitations, anonymised findings and operational observations.

4. Draft Harmonized GRM Blueprint and Roadmap	Recommended harmonisation model and rationale; common minimum standards; governance/roles; workflows; sensitive-grievance referrals; accessibility/inclusion; monitoring/reporting; functional data/system requirements; phased roadmap including future technical design and pilot/testing.
5. Validation Package	Validation presentation; record of key feedback/decisions; comments matrix showing disposition of substantive feedback. No separate “final report” is required at this stage.
6. Final Package	Final approved Blueprint and Roadmap; concise final assignment report summarising approach, evidence, consultations, key decisions, limitations and recommendations; dissemination slide deck.

Acceptance: A deliverable is accepted when it addresses the minimum content above, is internally consistent and evidence-based, incorporates/responds to consolidated comments from MCDSS and UNICEF, protects confidentiality, and is submitted in an editable format suitable for Government use. Consolidated comments should normally be provided for each draft to support efficient revision.

Work Assignments Overview	Deliverables/Outputs	Delivery deadline to complete the deliverable
Inception report setting out detailed workplan, methodology, consultation approach, and document-review framework	Inception Report	10 December 2026
Comprehensive mapping and assessment of existing GRM landscape across social protection programmes, analysing operational arrangements, inter-operability requirements and benchmarking to the GEWEL 2 harmonized model	Final mapping and assessment report	8 January 2027
Complete fieldwork, package including data collection tools	Data collection tools and fieldwork report	19 February 2027
Zero draft of harmonized blueprint, synthesizing primary data and desk review findings defining common standards, harmonized complaint handling procedures, referral pathways, and a scale-up roadmap.	Draft Harmonized blueprint	19 March 2027
Validation workshop materials; consolidated stakeholder feedback; revised harmonized blueprint reflecting agreed comments and decisions.	Validation presentation and final report	7 April 2027
Final Harmonization GRM blueprint consolidating stakeholder feedback and recommendations and final	Final Blueprint, final report and slide deck for disseminations	30 April 2027

assignment report summarizing the approach, consultations, key decisions, revisions undertaken and recommendations.		
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Payment Schedule:

Payment will be made on submission and acceptance of deliverables. UNICEF reserves the right to withhold payment in case the deliverables submitted are not up to the required standard or in case of delays in submitting the deliverables on the part of the consultant.

Important Notes

- Individuals engaged under a consultancy or individual contract will not be considered “staff members” under the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations and UNICEF’s policies and procedures and will not be entitled to benefits provided therein (such as leave entitlements and medical insurance coverage). Their conditions of service will be governed by their contract and the General Conditions of Contracts for the Services of Consultants and Individual Contractors. Consultants and individual contractors are responsible for determining their tax liabilities and for the payment of any taxes and/or duties, in accordance with local or other applicable laws.
- Contracts are conditional upon the selected candidate's willingness to comply with any current or future vaccination requirements that may be established by UNICEF, where applicable. Failure to comply with applicable vaccination requirements, where required and without an approved medical exemption by UNICEF, may result in the withdrawal of the consultancy offer or termination of the contract in accordance with the General Terms and Conditions of Contract.
- UNICEF offers reasonable accommodation for consultants with disabilities. This may include, for example, accessible software, travel assistance for missions or personal attendants. We encourage you to disclose your disability during your application in case you need reasonable accommodation during the selection process and afterwards in your assignment.

QUALIFICATIONS / SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE / EXPERIENCE/ COMPETENCIES (CORE/TECHNICAL/FUNCTIONAL) / LANGUAGE SKILLS REQUIRED FOR THE ASSIGNMENT

Minimum requirements:

- **Education:**
 - Master's degree in social policy, public policy, development studies, social development, economics, public administration or related field;
 - Additional certification in social behaviour change communication would be an advantage
- **Work Experience:**
 - At least 7 years of relevant professional experience in policy review, social protection including development operational manuals, guidelines or institutional frameworks.
 - Proven experience in designing, evaluating, or managing accountability, and Grievance Redress/ Complaints Feedback and Response Mechanism is required.

- Demonstrated experience working with government institutions and stakeholders, particularly consultative and co-development work.
 - **Language Requirements:** English
 - **Knowledge/Expertise/Skills:**
 - Strong knowledge of social protection delivery systems and a deep understanding of beneficiary/client seeking behaviours related to community feedback and response.
 - Familiarity with Zambia's policy and institutional environment, particularly Grievance Redress Mechanisms within national social protection programming.
 - Proven experience facilitating multi-stakeholder consultations and validation processes
 - Demonstrated experience in producing excellent written, analytical, communication reports-writing skills evidenced by sample of previous work in English
 - **Desirable:** Experience working in Sub-Saharan Africa, preferably in Zambia or similar contexts
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