

AIM-Progress Grievance Mechanism Roll-out project

Executive summary



Effective grievance mechanisms are an important way for workers to safely and transparently raise concerns with their employer about their rights and working conditions. This is an executive summary of a learning paper discussing the AIM-Progress Grievance Mechanism Roll Out project, a project that helped suppliers improve their grievance mechanisms, in line with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. It summarises early signs of success, lessons learned, and recommendations.



Developed by
Oxfam Business
Advisory Service



The project was commissioned by the AIM-Progress Grievance Mechanism Working Group and implemented by the Oxfam Business Advisory Service (OBAS).

“ The grievance mechanism roll-out project was very helpful for our plant; we will implement this in our other plants.

Supplier company in India ”

Key messages

Suppliers need to shift their mindsets to engage more actively with workers – this is key to establishing successful grievance mechanisms. Each company that engaged their workers in this project reported gaining value from their input.

An atmosphere of positivity and productivity was reported at some companies in the project – once workers’ suggestions and views were listened to and acted upon, and once they got more involved in operating and governing grievance mechanisms.

Suppliers need a range of support to set up, monitor and sustain grievance mechanisms. This includes strong support from brands to suppliers throughout the implementation process; access to dedicated tools and resources; robust monitoring and reporting of mechanisms’ effectiveness and compliance; and feedback platforms or joint regional initiatives for long-term support.

Roll-out project background

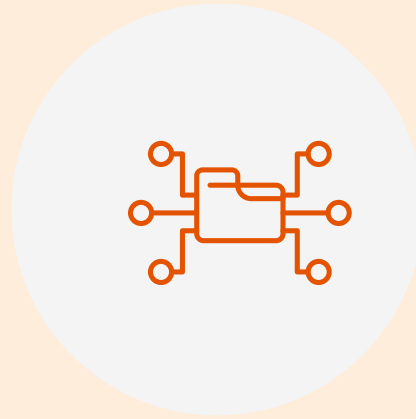
In early 2023, Oxfam Business Advisory Service, Reckitt, and AIM-Progress collaborated to roll out a site-level grievance mechanism toolkit for **19 tier-one suppliers** of **three AIM-Progress members**, with the suppliers based in **15 countries**.

REGION	# OF SUPPLIERS PER COUNTRY
Africa and the Middle East	2 Egypt 2 Türkiye 1 South Africa 1 United Arab Emirates
Americas	2 Brazil 1 Mexico
Asia	2 China 1 Pakistan 1 India
Australia	1 Australia
Europa	1 Denmark 1 Iceland 1 Latvia 1 Lithuania 1 Poland
Total: 5 Regions	19 suppliers in 15 countries

The project used two tools:



Grievance mechanism toolkit – developed by Oxfam Business Advisory Service with Reckitt (a member of AIM-Progress) in 2022, after piloting in India, Pakistan, China and the UK. The toolkit has practical steps for companies when designing and implementing effective operational (site-level) grievance mechanisms. The aim is for mechanisms to meet effectiveness criteria defined by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs).



A self-assessment tool – developed as part of the project to support participating companies to use the toolkit by helping them assess their maturity level against good practice and using a traffic light system to easily highlight areas that require more attention. The tool has direct links to the relevant sections within the grievance mechanism toolkit for guidance on those areas.

The use of these two tools helped AIM-Progress participating members to practically implement some of the commitment and actions outlines in the Grievance Mechanism Maturity Framework & Guidance – an open source resource developed previously by AIM-Progress to help their fast-moving consumer group members and others improve the development and effectiveness of grievance mechanisms in their operations and supply chains.

According to the **UNGP effectiveness criteria**,^[1] a grievance mechanism is effective when it is: legitimate, accessible, predictable, equitable, transparent, rights-compatible, a source of learning for the company, and based on engagement and dialogue

[1] As defined by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in relation to grievance mechanisms.



Implementing the roll-out project

Oxfam Business Advisory Service implemented the roll-out project in five phases: introductory webinars; creation of an action plan, with a dedicated self-assessment tool for suppliers; two drop-in sessions with suppliers; tailored recommendations for each supplier's mechanism; follow-up at six months.

Key performance indicators were used to assess the short-term progress of the project:

- How did suppliers overcome challenges and meaningfully engage with workers in designing and implementing a grievance mechanism?
- How far did the grievance mechanism at each supplier's site meet UNGP effectiveness criteria on access, scope, governance, process, appeal and escalation, tracking and monitoring?

Snapshot of roll-out project results at 16 months

PROJECTS	DETAILS
15 suppliers	Showed shift in mindset of management to engage with and listen to workers
15 suppliers	Involved workers actively in design and implementation of the mechanism
11 suppliers established... 4 suppliers planned...	Robust, effective grievance mechanisms
10 suppliers established... 3 suppliers planned...	Monitoring systems at site level to identify trends and systemic issues
9 suppliers	Are seeing grievances being raised and addressed with good levels of satisfaction



Lessons learned from the roll-out project

Effective grievance mechanisms cannot be achieved through a one-size-fits-all solution. Rather, a process is needed with key ingredients, as outlined in the [Grievance Mechanism Toolkit](#). The suppliers followed this process, applying it to their contexts to overcome challenges.



Suppliers' mindsets change when they witness positive impacts at first-hand after implementing best practices to strengthen grievance mechanisms.

Challenges met during the process included clarifying the meaning of the word 'grievance', then ensuring that understanding was used to define the scope of the grievance mechanism.

Signs of success were that managers at 15 companies engaged more actively with workers and listened to their ideas. Each supplier that engaged their workers in this process reported gaining value from their input.

“None of the workers spoke in the first month of the meetings. We had to make an effort and gain their trust; now we get good responses.

Supplier company in India”

Actively involving workers in the grievance mechanism increases their trust in the system and enhances overall accountability.

It was challenging to get suppliers to involve workers in the operation and governance of grievance mechanisms. Oxfam Business Advisory Service urged suppliers to try holding workers' elections of grievance officers, appointing spokespeople, setting up committees, or engaging with trade unions where present.

Results included: workers got more involved, and their trust in the mechanism grew at **nine suppliers**, where communication and awareness initiatives also improved. Workers saw their suggested improvements acted upon, contributing to an atmosphere of positivity and productivity, also at nine suppliers. A supplier in India had specific representatives for contracted workers to ensure inclusivity and alleviate workers' fears about raising concerns.

Robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms are needed to track the impact of grievance mechanisms, to ensure continuous effectiveness, and to comply with legislation such as EU regulations.

Challenges included keeping workers informed about the functioning of the grievance mechanism and understanding how to use data to strengthen the grievance mechanism.

Early successes include **10 suppliers** that established monitoring systems at the site level to identify trends and systemic issues, while **three** plan to do so. Analysis of grievance tracker data at one supplier site helped them to see that they needed better communication and awareness-raising to enable workers to feel comfortable about using grievance mechanisms.

Implications and recommendations



Common challenges, bespoke solutions.

Suppliers encounter similar challenges across countries and sectors but they need solutions tailored to their contexts and needs, including resources, guidance, and support.



Long-term or ongoing support for suppliers.

This may help suppliers to sustain grievance mechanisms. Creating platforms where suppliers can get advice or guidance is one method. Running joint initiatives for suppliers at regional or sectoral levels is another approach.



Supplier senior management must back the process.

To embed a new work culture centred around worker engagement and dialogue, senior management must support and engage in changes to adjust mindsets towards incorporating workers' perspectives.



Suppliers need tools that are adaptable to context.

Equipping suppliers with tools such as the grievance mechanism toolkit and the self-assessment tool has proved to be a good starting point for establishing grievance mechanisms.

Strong support from brands can galvanise progress.

Support could involve financial assistance, guidance and collaboration throughout the process to implement grievance mechanisms, providing remedies when necessary. Capacity of relevant personnel (e.g., global sourcing and sustainability teams) within brands should also be strengthened.



A more positive way ahead

Based on Oxfam Business Advisory Service's experience, suppliers that took part in the roll-out project are likely to experience these long-term positive impacts at their workplaces:

Increased visibility over issues and areas of concern for workers



Reduced turnover and absenteeism



Improved productivity



Ability to provide remedies and implement changes and systemic solutions, resulting in a more motivated workforce



[Grievance mechanism toolkit](#)

[Grievance Mechanism Maturity Framework & Guidance](#)

[UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#)



**USEFUL
LINKS**

About the project partners

Developed by
Oxfam Business
Advisory Service



Oxfam Business Advisory Service – helps businesses to improve their impact in global supply chains by providing practical guidance and advice on human rights issues. Oxfam Business Advisory Service brings Oxfam’s decades of research and advocacy work on human and labour rights to companies through tailored advice, guidance and support with implementation, helping businesses to lead as global citizens and build more resilient and sustainable supply chains. We provide expertise across all elements of business and human rights and can help businesses across the human rights due diligence cycle and beyond.

Whether for a particular project or as part of an ongoing human rights journey, we act as a critical friend, asking questions that get to the heart of complex issues, placing workers at the centre of the work we do to overcome poverty, respect human rights and empower women.

AIM-Progress – a global initiative of fast-moving consumer goods manufacturers and their suppliers, joining forces to drive positive change in their supply chains. AIM-Progress works in a pre-competitive environment with 45+ members from a diverse set of international brands and suppliers linked through the commonality of their supply chains. Its mission is to positively impact people’s lives and ensure respect for human rights while delivering value to members and their supply chains.

