
Improving Service Delivery Through Improved Advocacy and Outreach

A Communication Strategy for the
Office of the Federal Ombudsman of Pakistan

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1. Introduction

Consistent and effective communication with stakeholders is a critical aspect of the functioning of any institution whose clients are as broad based as they are for the office of the Wafaqi Mohtasib (Federal Ombudsman). With the spectrum of stakeholders including the general public, public sector organisations and civil society, each with specific communication needs and demands; the challenge for developing a communication strategy that addresses the individual stakeholder needs while ensuring that the approach does not veer towards fragmentation, is difficult. This challenge is compounded by the fact that historically, the Ombudsman's office has been a relatively closed institution, with scarce little stakeholder interaction and only peripheral attention paid towards improving advocacy and outreach of its services

Recognising the need to keep pace with public expectations and as part of a process of repositioning itself as a more client centred institution, the Ombudsman's office has identified steps leading to its transformation as a more open institution, becoming more inclusive in its policy making and purposefully engaging with different stakeholders to enable third party perspectives to be imbibed in its work. These steps have been outlined in the Ombudsman's Annual Report 2006, which focus on making the Ombudsman's services more accessible and public friendly.

There is thus a need to develop sustainable relationships with key stakeholders and to clearly and consistently communicate the efforts being made and progress achieved in improving services. This form of systematic communication can not only serve to keep stakeholder informed but can help shape positive perceptions about the kind of clarity, commitment and resolve to innovate and improve services. In addition, the achievement of the institutional objectives requires stakeholder involvement and an

organized communication strategy can offer a framework for stakeholder and community involvement and enhanced public accountability. This communication strategy will also provide the Ombudsman with tools for policy dialogue with the Federal government agencies as well as with donor agencies, academia and media. Indeed, keeping stakeholders informed and maintaining an open communication channel with the various target audience, is both a necessary and a sufficient condition towards achieving objectives outlined by the Ombudsman's office for more effective services. Of course, some forms of this communication are mandatory under legislation or regulatory requirements (Annual Reports, Financial Statements), but effective communication that is not rooted in or limited to enforcement of regulatory dictates, often meets with long term success. With stakeholder expectation for better performance raised and public attention tending to focus ever more on the Ombudsman and the way it works, the need for an effective communication strategy is clearly evident..

This envisaged communication flow is predicated on two things: one, an awareness amongst the different audiences on the visions, the plans, the programs of the Ombudsman; two, an impetus, a building and sustenance of momentum with respect to the interaction, to ensure that Ombudsman's office always emerges a winner by developing a reservoir of goodwill through its performance. This proposal offers a strategy that addresses these two issues.

2. Objectives

The strategy has been developed with the intent to build the reputation of the Federal Ombudsman as a committed, dynamic, client-focused institution, striving for delivering better quality administrative justice services through use of appropriate advocacy and outreach instruments. More specifically, it proposes to:

- Further strengthen the credibility of the Federal Ombudsman by highlighting efforts being made to redress public grievances
- Reach out to stakeholders and solicit their active support in helping the Federal Ombudsman achieve its targets and objectives for improving services
- Identify key instruments and channels for regular, effective communication with target audiences
- Develop and communicate success stories, to the target audiences
- Consistently interact with stakeholders on performance of the Federal Ombudsman as well as on new initiatives undertaken

3. Issues and Opportunities

a. Addressing the Perception Deficit

Meeting stakeholder expectations and managing them is never an easy task and always one that requires careful thought and execution that goes beyond making policies and/or plans for providing great services. Historically, the Federal Ombudsman's institution has remained closeted and there has been scant attention paid to the issue of improving communication with external or internal audiences. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to note there is now a clear commitment to address this institutional deficiency; this strategy aims to provide a framework for translating that commitment into tangible actions.

Despite the fact that some effort has been made by the Ombudsman recently to engage with stakeholders in different ways and to communicate the policies, initiatives and results of these efforts, there is always the possibility of the creation of a **perception deficit** between what the Ombudsman has done or plans to do and what the stakeholders' perception of these actions and results are. The only way in which the deficit can be managed is through sustained, relevant and credible communication with stakeholders. It is also important to note that since communication needs of stakeholders tend to vary, it would be imprudent to try and close the perception gap by focusing on a one-size-fits-all approach. While there may be opportunities for using common instruments and approaches, reliance on any single instrument for effective communication would be risky at best.

b. Mobilization of stakeholders

The process of improving the public grievance redress mechanisms needs to be an inclusive one. The Ombudsman not only needs to mobilize the agencies it deals with , but

also communities and stakeholders from the civil society, so as to create working partnerships allow stakeholders to contribute by playing specific roles and assuming defined responsibilities. This will be possible if the Ombudsman clearly identifies the agencies and communities as partners and not just as clients. Moreover, the federal agencies with which the Ombudsman works also need to be made part of the solution, rather than the problem, because the Ombudsman's effectiveness depends on the extent to which it can redress public grievances, which in turn is a function of the kind of relationship that the Ombudsman has with these agencies. At the moment, interaction with the agencies is either restricted to the investigation process or to the usual bureaucratic correspondence on implementation or administrative issues. Taking a cue from the vision presented in the Ombudsman's Annual Report 2006, which calls for a gradual repositioning of the Ombudsman to a role of an advisor to the agencies, so as to address the governance and systemic issues within those agencies, it is imperative that communication flows with agencies undergo a substantial change in terms of their content, nature and frequency.

c. Credibility of communication

There is a need to distinguish between communication and propaganda, so as to make communication credible. Perceptions differ most where facts are distorted or misrepresented and as a strategy, we should be ensuring that all communication on our plans, progress and problems should be upfront, factual and thus credible, and phased to avoid message overload.

d. Focus on Public Disclosure and Knowledge Management

The Ombudsman is an institution directly responsible for ensuring public accountability and transparency in government operations. It therefore becomes incumbent upon it to ensure that its own work sets the bar in this respect. Our communication strategy must focus on enhancing public disclosure and on strengthening public accountability mechanisms and systems. The enabling legal framework for the Ombudsman, the President's Order No.1 of 1983, defines some of its responsibilities, such as preparation and publication of annual and other reports.. At present, in terms of public disclosure, the only instrument in use is the Annual Report 2006, which, with the exception of 2006, has tended to be a compilation of statistics. In terms of financial disclosure, the record is poor as none of the annual reports provide any information about budgets and their use. Other than the annual report, the Ombudsman does not publish any report.

This strategy not only proposes to go beyond meeting these legal requirements but encourages enhanced disclosure through the current reporting instrument as well as widening the menu of instruments used. In essence, for the Ombudsman to be able to improve its stakeholder communication process, it needs to introduce Knowledge Management as a central feature of its work. The envisaged metamorphosis of the Ombudsman's office from a reactive to a pro-active oversight institution that addresses root causes of maladministration as opposed to remaining preoccupied with its symptoms can only be accomplished if there is adequate emphasis on research, training, learning and sharing of experiences and practices.

Furthermore, in terms of its role under the Freedom of Information Ordinance 2002 which requires the Ombudsman to protect and uphold the public's right to gain access to public information by ensuring unhindered and effectively assigns the Ombudsman the role of an

Information Commissioner, this paper would like to stress on the need to report on actions taken by the Ombudsman in this respect as an indicator of the status of openness in the governance of the federal agencies.

e. Presenting a unified institutional image

There are several ways in which an institutional image is developed, nurtured and leveraged to help achieve the institutional objectives. In all cases though, it is important that the image presented to the stakeholders is unified, reflecting common, shared goals, ideals and values at all tiers. This would include the physical work environment, the dress codes, and communication instruments such as visiting cards, letterheads and of course, websites and publications. At present, the Ombudsman's office seems to be presenting a different face at different tiers and environments. While the physical environment has been improved considerably at the head office, the regional offices may be projecting a different image; there is no standardized format for visiting cards; the logo appears dated; there are no official letterheads printed; all of these add up to present varying institutional images. In addition, the first point of contact with stakeholders is either through personal interface at the reception desk in the offices, on telephone, through official letters or through email. Whatever the mode, the first contact appears to be typically bureaucratic, terse and certainly not client-friendly. The offices continues to function like a typical government agency and the concept of relationship management is totally alien to staff. This is a serious issue and unless addressed upfront and innovatively, risks overwhelming all endeavors to improve service delivery through improving communication.

4. The Opportunities

Clearly, the aforementioned perception deficit needs to be filled—or the possibility of it widening, arrested. By highlighting specific positive attributes of the Ombudsman’s policies and actions, identifying success stories and communicating with the target audience on a regular, organized basis, and by reaching out to the target audiences through different media, this is achievable.

The ability to clearly identify the communication needs of various stakeholders is critical to the success of this strategy. Information needs of the employees are different from that of the clients as are the objectives of communicating with each of them. The communication must therefore be tailored to what the stakeholders want to learn or be informed about. This in turn is predicated on the construction of a sharp demographic and psychographic profile of the target audiences.

Moreover, there is a need to leverage ongoing community engagement and communication initiatives and to establish partnerships towards attaining the goal of improving service delivery through improving communication with stakeholders. Partnerships with the various agencies and organizations, both public and private, can benefit from available means of communication and public platforms, highlighting the services offered by the Ombudsman and creating more awareness about the role of the institution as a means of public grievance redress.

Lastly, as has been highlighted earlier, the Ombudsman must institutionalize knowledge management as an integral function, promoting and incentivising sharing of information, best practice, facilitating interaction with stakeholders and examining trends and systemic issues in maladministration through regular research and its dissemination.

5. The Process

In order to achieve the stated objectives, a six stage process is proposed, involving:

- Identification and segmentation of audiences
- Developing an effective mix of communication instruments and media
- Preparation of appropriate content
- Mobilizing stakeholders and creating capacity for implementation
- Designing mechanisms for supervision and evaluation

6. Target Audience

The target audience for Ombudsman would broadly cover two categories: external audiences and internal audiences. Each of these segments would require communication messages, approaches, instruments and channels that are sharply aligned with their respective information and communication needs :

Primary Audiences

1. The general public
2. Federal Government Agencies
3. Civil society, including private sector organizations and CBOs
4. Employees

Secondary Audiences

1. Media
2. Elected representatives
3. International donor partners

7. Instruments and media

A number of instruments and different media would be used to communicate with different stakeholders:

External Audiences

Communication with external audiences would be executed through the following instruments:

- a. **Annual, Bi-Annual, Quarterly and Thematic Reports** that comply with legal provisions contained in the President's Order No.1 of 1983. These reports will form the principle instruments for public disclosure of agencies working on the social sector. These reports should be placed on the Ombudsman's website, in addition to being made available in CD-ROM or hard copy format.

*Frequency: Periodic Format: Hardcopy and Online Responsibility: Research & Analysis Wing, ,
Director (PR)*

- b. **Ombudsman's Newsletter** that portrays—and builds on the existing image of--- the Ombudsman's office as a responsive, responsible institution that has remained at the forefront of providing better service provision. Success stories would be highlighted. These could be developed in online and offline formats and in Urdu, regional languages and English and distributed to both internal and external audiences.

Frequency: Quarterly, bi-annual Format: Hardcopy and Online Responsibility: SFO, Director (PR)

- c. **Performance and Thematic Fact Sheets and Updates** for general awareness on different aspects of the working of the Ombudsman's office, highlighting progress achieved. These could be prepared by the head office in partnership with the regional offices.

Frequency: Periodic Format: Hardcopy/Online Responsibility: Research & Analysis Wing, SFO, Director (PR)

- d. **Introducing customer relationship management**

As noted earlier, there is an absence of the notion of customer relations within the Ombudsman's office. An overview of experiences in other public sector agencies leads to the conclusion that it would be unrealistic to expect a transformation of the current group of employees in to becoming more client-friendly, even over a medium term timeframe, so deeply immersed are they in bureaucratic trappings. Indeed, it is proposed that the Ombudsman may seriously consider either outsourcing its front-office functions such as management of reception areas and handling of telephone calls (please refer the proposal elsewhere in this paper, to establish a Call Centre), or to hire young, dynamic Customer Relations Officers at the head office, Lahore, Karachi and Peshawar offices to begin with and phasing in others as per need.

However, there are other ways in which the Ombudsman can introduce better relationship management practices immediately, including introducing ease of contact and access to information; using polite language in all communication but especially for letters sent to complainants; publishing a Complaints Directory which guides complainants on who to approach in which agency; and use of Auto Responders on emails.

- e. **Participation /Sponsorship of Community Events, Awareness Programs and Competitions** to mobilize communities at various levels to raise stakeholder awareness of issues in administrative justice services development and in identifying innovative solutions for improving service delivery. In addition, competitions could be organized at various levels, taking the form of poster design, essay, and innovative project incubator competitions related to access to justice, freedom of information, public grievance redress and making the Ombudsman's services more effective and efficient.

Frequency: Demand based Format: Offline/online Responsibility: Regional Heads, SFO, Director (PR), Director Coordination

- f. **Media Briefings and press releases** to keep the media abreast of the Ombudsman's efforts in public grievance redress and to provide insight and information to specific activities being undertaken by the Ombudsman.

Frequency: Need based Format: Offline and online Responsibility: Director (PR)

- g. **Radio and TV Programs** to create awareness about social services being offered and how stakeholders can support or participate in efforts to achieve Institutional objectives, through talk shows and call-in shows in Urdu, local languages and regional languages, targeted to specific audiences through selection of channels.

Frequency: Varied Format: Varied Responsibility: Director (PR)

- h. **Ombudsman's Website and Blog** to act as a vehicle for public disclosure on program activities and a web-based information centre for all administrative justice services that the Ombudsman provides. A Mohtasib's Blog will also form part of this interactive website.

- i. **Call Centre** to provide a dial-in service for general public to register complaints and get information about procedures related to gaining access to Ombudsman's services. With a 0800 number which will provide the public free access to the Call Centre, this project can be developed and operated as a public-private initiative.

Responsibility: SFO

- j. **Print and Electronic media advertising** These advertisements will be in English, Urdu, and regional languages to ensure wide outreach of the message. The advertisements would be a mix of institutional, sector issues and covering a range of issues such as what public grievance redress mechanisms are, how the Ombudsman is helping redress grievances or how it can help resolve them, what is the role of stakeholders, what progress has been achieved so far and what next steps are being undertaken.

Frequency: Need based Format: print/ tv ads Responsibility: SFO

- k. **Workshops/Seminars/Conferences** to reach out to stakeholders on specific policy issues and/or share findings of surveys, reports and analysis. These forums will also be used to solicit feedback from the stakeholders.

Frequency: Need based Format: varied Responsibility : DG (A), Director Coordination

- l. **Publication of Regional Office Reports** to enable awareness amongst communities and general public on the efficiency and effectiveness of the regional offices

Frequency: Annual Format: Online & Offline reports Responsibility: Regional Office heads

- m. **Targeted research and analysis** to either track progress on governance indicators or on processes, approaches and models being employed to provide better services

Frequency: Demand based Format: reports, surveys, studies Responsibility: Research & Analysis Wing

- n. **Community Oversight Forums & Processes** Develop an organized process through which civil society is empowered to monitor our service delivery. This could be in the form of funding Participatory Service Delivery Reviews, third party validation of our programs and projects, leveraging existing community-led forums to promote, debate and comment on our services, preparing and publishing Citizens Report Cards

Frequency: Demand based Format: Forums, reports, surveys Responsibility: SFO, Director (PR)

- o. **Organize Open Kutcheries/Meetings** every quarter, in which general public would be invited to participate and air their views, share experience or knowledge of functioning of the federal agencies in their area, register complaints etc. These Kutcheries would be presided by the regional office heads. Prior notice of the Kutcheries would be given and as a general rule, a particular date (such as the first Monday of a month), time (1000-1200 hours) and venue (Zila/Tehsil Council Hall) would be selected and wide publicity given about the kutcheries through TV, Radio and press, as well as displaying notices outside Government offices.

Frequency: Bi- Monthly

Format: Meetings

Responsibility: regional offices

- p. **Raise District and Tehsil Referral Service Volunteer Corps** in conjunction with the National Volunteer Movement and the NCHD, to both assist the Ombudsman in service delivery (collection or record of complaints) and in oversight (reporting on action by agencies on our recommendations)

Frequency: Demand based

Format: Forums, Meetings, Reports

Responsibility: SFO

- q. **Create Linkages with Private sector under CSR Framework** to identify ways in which the corporate sector operating in Pakistan can play a role in improving the outreach of the Ombudsman's services as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility activities and programs. The issue is to identify the right partners and targeting of companies, both local and multinational, who can contribute to the Ombudsman's aim to improve its advocacy and outreach. -. Partnerships can take various forms including funding of research; development and dissemination of knowledge products; This could take the form of working with communities to

improve social sector infrastructure, management, communication method or providing voluntary/honorary technical input thru corporate volunteerism

Frequency: Demand based Format: Forums/Meetings/Reports Responsibility: SFO

- r. **Ombudsman's Community Radio/FM Channel:** to benefit from the liberal policy of the Government to deepen and widen community and outreach to different stakeholders, a Community Radio/FM Channel could be launched, in conjunction with other Ombudsman in the country, enabling provision of news, guidelines, a platform for discussions, Q&A sessions, Live Call in shows, create a forum for voicing of public opinion, feedback on services, grievance redressal and public accountability. Added advantage is that this dedicated radio communication service can be multilingual and its operational and managerial model can be developed with a view to involve civil society as well as the commercial, for-profit sector, either under co-branded, whole or partial co-production basis, or outsourced management and/or content development.

Frequency: Demand based Format: Radio Channel Responsibility: SFO, Director (PR)

- s. **Design a new logo and use standardized formats for business cards and email addresses** to project a unified institutional image that is in line with the initiatives being taken to transform the Ombudsman's office into a dynamic, people-centric institution.
- t. **Identification of Focal Persons and Designated Officers in every federal agency** to ensure ease of coordination, assistance in implementation of findings,

facilitation in resolving outstanding issues and provision of information to the public under the Freedom of Information Ordinance 2002.

- u. **Establishing a Ombudsman’s Policy Dialogue Forum** comprising all Ombudsmen in Pakistan, as well as other institutions related to public accountability and governance oversight, which can be convened on a bi-annual basis, to discuss policy issues of common interest and sharing of information and experiences.
- v. **Quarterly meetings with Agencies** which can be used to convey progress on investigations related to those agencies, identify and resolve problems and discuss ways in which the investigations or implementation of findings can be improved.

Internal Audience

Most of the instruments identified above will also be relevant for the internal audiences.

However, there are some other instruments which can be used to communicate with this segment:

- Quarterly meetings with all offices to enable mutual sharing of information and discussion on progress, issues and status of implementation of various activities and initiatives.
- Publishing of a Monthly newsletter for electronic distribution which would contain data on institutional performance, acknowledge star performers, provide information on events, meetings in offices and provide summaries of important findings and President’s decision as well as guidance notes
- Organizing Orientation Sessions on community interaction and social mobilization techniques, models, approaches to sensitize Ombudsman staff towards becoming more transparent and responsive in their functions and operations
- Preparation and dissemination of Guides and Best Practice notes to Ombudsman staff on how to engage with stakeholders and regional and international examples of successful initiatives in advocacy and outreach

10. Resources for Stakeholder Mobilization

As outlined earlier, there is a need to mobilize stakeholders and to enter into various modes of partnership that would enable all stakeholders to effectively play a role in achieving the objectives. Some of the ways in which this can be achieved have been indicated in the list of the communication instruments above. However, it must be pointed out that investments to build the capacities of stakeholders would need to be made and the Ombudsman will either have to allocate funds from its own budget for this purpose or identify a sponsor for the proposed activities. One immediate and obvious source appears to be the Access to Justice Program TA funds, but other multilateral agencies that focus on governance and accountability, such as the World Bank, which would help identify capacity gaps and propose investments in specific areas to address outstanding issues.

11. Monitoring & Evaluation

To ensure effective implementation of this communication strategy, it is proposed that the Ombudsman include this communication strategy as a component of the overall M&E framework developed for the institution. This will ensure that due importance is attached to communication aspects as being a vital part of the overall program framework and will allow senior management to gauge the effectiveness of the instruments being used and the strategy being followed.