



**ASSESSMENT OF STRATEGIC PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE:
THE CASE OF ETHIOPIAN AGRICULTURAL
TRANSFORMATION AGENCY (ETHIOPIAN ATA)**

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**DEPARTMENT PUBLIC RELATIONS AND STRATEGY
COMMUNICATION**

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List of Acronyms

ATA	Agricultural Transformation agency
EIC	Ethiopian Investment Commission
FAO	World Food Program
GTP	Growth and Transformation Plan
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoTI	Ministry of Trade and Industry
PR	Public Relations

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to assess the strategic public relations practice of Agricultural Transformation Agency/ATA. ATA is founded to accelerate the Growth and Transformation Plan of Ethiopia. ATA envision that smallholder farmers are commercialized with greater incomes, inclusiveness, resilience, and sustainability in contributing to Ethiopia's achievement of middle-income country status. The role of communication/Public relations department is to lead the development and successful implementation of the communication strategy to reflect external engagement, internal communication and promoting the institution as well.

The student researcher targets to assess the strategic role and practice of public relations in Agricultural Transformation Agency. The researcher basically asks the role and practice of Communication department in ATA, the nature of organizational strategic communication plan, internal and external communication plan and driving public relations methods and theories in the public relation / communication department.

This study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to access relevant data's for the research. In-depth interviews, document analysis, web analysis, questionnaires were the research instruments that haven been used for this study. The collected data organized thematically and according to the research questions, but some data's are interpreted without following the research question structure.

This study has intensely indicates role and practice of public relations, basic gaps, issues regarding to the nature of organizational structure and theories and models of public relations. It gives some critical recommendations and professional concepts that would help the agency to improvise its public relations practice.

Chapter One

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Public relations is an important and integrated component of public strategy or service. The professional public relations activity will ensure the benefit to the citizens, for whom the strategies or services are meant for. The relation between the public and an organization determines the survival of an organization. This is the basic reason why public relation is important for an organization. Public relations is the distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its public; involves the preventing and solving problems or issues; helps organization to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion. Cutlip, Center and Broom define public relation as a management function that establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the public on whom its success or failure depends. Public relations is also defined as a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and co-operation between an organization and its publics; involves the dealing with problems or issues; helps organization to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of serving the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilise change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools (Alison, 2004).

The purpose of thesis will be assessing the role and practice of strategic public relations in Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency. The Agricultural Transformation Agenda was formally introduced in 2006 E.C. during the first Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP I) in order to provide a platform to address the most critical systemic bottlenecks constraining fulfilment of agriculture sector goals and targets identified by the government.

The agency was established in December 2010, the Council of Ministers in Ethiopia passed Regulation 198/2010 which established the Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) as the Secretariat of an Agricultural Transformation Council chaired by the Prime Minister. The agency is a time bound organization and with its time frame it has four life spam.

- PHASE 1: GTP 1 - INCEPTION
- PHASE 2: GTP 2 - IMPACT
- PHASE 3: GTP 3 - IMACT
- PHASE 4:- TRANSITION

1.2 Statement of the problem

According to ATA Agriculture is the back bone of Ethiopian economy which covers 46% of the national GDP and it employs 80% of the population; which makes the ATA the future of Ethiopian development. This sector will have a huge role on the success or failure of the Ethiopian Growth and Transformation Plane (GTP). On its theoretical level, the practice of public relations in any organization is considered as managerial function To effectively execute its managerial functions, the practice, needs to be part of a decision making process of an organization Public relations work also requires, among others, to have professional practitioners, financial and technological resources and clear plans of what to do and communicate. The major functions of public relations in organizations have similarities (Redi, 2009).

In practice, practitioners need to make sure that their work fits into their organization's general strategic goals and objectives or the relationship that their organizations would like to create with (Hendrix and Hayes, 2009:13-14). Because a public relations office could not have a separate goal to achieve other than an organization. Institutions like ATA also require to setup public relations office to communicate with their main internal target publics and external stakeholders. But having a public relations office or a public relation Directorate, which works the public relations task of ATA, alone may not mean that the tasks of public relations given to it would be accomplished or practiced properly. Because the structural place such an office has within an organization, the decision-making power it is endowed with, the resources (human, financial, technological, etc) deployed to it, may determine the practice. Public relations theorists such as L. Gruning, et, al., 2002, p. 206) have specifically strengthened this idea of empowerment. They argued that a good public relations practice in higher governmental sectors can be measured by the empowerment it gets and managerial communication role it assumes in responding to problems.

According to Hendrix and Hayes (2009) a public relations practice must follow a meticulously prepared plan of action, which of course goes in line with the overall goals of an organization. This action plan, as these scholars prefer to call it “Public Relations Process” has to contain at least four major procedures. These are; (1) a research-based detailed organizational analysis (including about the background of the organization, SWOT analysis, the target publics and stakeholders, the jobs/tasks sought to be performed), (2) objectives (the specific objectives desired to be achieved), (3) programming (that includes messages to be communicated, special events to be organized, channels of communication/media, and effectively communicating the program/action), (4) and finally, evaluation that includes the an ongoing monitoring of performances and the final assessment (Ibid, pp.18-42). Generally, the practice of public relations in a particular institution can be assessed in light of the integrated work of the above procedures, its relationships to other entities’ functions in the institution, and the communication models. Thus, conducting a communication assessment research on ATA will be important to identify the effectiveness of their communication work. Beside this communication is a very important to facilitate your plans and works so this research will enhance the level of the organization’s communication status.

1.3 Objective of the study

The general and specific objectives of the thesis are presented below.

1.3.1 General Objective

The main objective of this study is to assess the strategic role and practice of public relation in Agricultural Transformation Agency of Ethiopia.

1.3.2 Specific objective

Specific objectives of this study:

- Analyze strategic communications in order to achieve their plans and objectives
- Identify the role of public relations as a management function
- Explore the relation between ATA and media
- Identify the concept of public relations and their evaluation mechanism in the organization

1.4 Research Questions

This research is designed to answer the following questions

1. What are the major roles of the public relations department at ATA?
2. What is the strategic communication approach the organization practice?
3. What is the nature of relation between public relation department and the management?
4. What are your evaluation mechanisms?

1.5 Significance of the study

According to ATA Agriculture is the back bone of Ethiopian economy which covers 46% of the national GDP and it employs 80% of the population; which makes the ATA the future of Ethiopian development. This sector will have a huge role on the success or failure of the Ethiopian Growth and Transformation Plane (GTP). So conducting a communication assessment research on ATA will be important to identify the effectiveness of their communication work. Beside this communication is a very important to facilitate your plans and works so this research will enhance the level of the organization's communication status.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The major focus of this study was on the role and practice of strategic public relations at the Agricultural Transformation Agency. To discover how the department is practicing public relation. Mainly the researcher focused on the effectiveness of their website. This is because their website is their major tool to communicate with stakeholders. The second focus area of this study was the public relation department's strategic communication approach. This includes the organization's culture of practicing public relation, internal communication, the management perception about public relations and evaluation mechanism. In order to examine ATA'S public relation practice, external stakeholders were included and their opinion about ATA's public relation practice were included. To find relevant data and information the researcher used mixed approach.

1.7 Limitation of the study

There were some limitations in this study. The first one was, since the concept of public relation is new to the nation it was difficult to find local public relation materials to support the study. There are no available books or articles written by Ethiopian scholars which make the study dependent only on international public relation concepts. Time was the second biggest limitation that challenged the researcher to finish the study on time. The data's were expected to be collected from interview, questionnaire and document analysis. But the residents were not available on the time they were needed which limited the study to depend on available sources only.

1.8 Organization of the Paper

This study is organized with five chapters. The first chapter mainly provides introduction including background of the study and the organization, statement of the problem, research questions, general and specific objectives, significance, scope, limitation and organization of the study. Chapter two discusses review of literature related with the objective this research aimed to accomplish. The third chapter contains methodology, including sampling, data collection, analysis validity and reliability of the study. The data presentation and discussion in this study contained in the fourth chapter. The final chapter contains conclusion and recommendations.

Chapter Two

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LIRATURE

2.1. Introduction

Definition of Public Relations

The purpose of research is to build theories to solve the problems that researchers face in a particular domain (Littlejohn, 1995). The core questions for every public relations researcher are how does public relations work and what does it do in, to, and for organizations, publics, or the public arena, in other words, society as a whole. The answers to these questions depend on the methodologies that the researcher uses. Public Relations has been defined by several scholars but the common denominator is that it is a planned and sustained effort by an organization to establish and sustain good will between the organization and its publics (both internal and external) upon which its success or failure depends. (M Cutlip, Allen H Centre and Glen Broom, 2000) defines PR as a management function that establishes mutually beneficial relationship between an organization and the public on whom its success or failure depends

2.2. Scope of public relations

According to (Jefkins, 2004:6) the purpose of professional PR is to create understanding. It is unlike advertising whose main aim is to generate awareness and sales or propaganda, whose aim is to suggest (in the true meaning of the word) that individual should believe. The way PR contribute to the work of an organization must be understood by considering what makes it different from other functions like advertising, marketing, public affair and the like. This shows PR covers different activates like marketing, advertising, consumer relation, and the like. But the involvement of PR in different activates like advertising, does not necessary mean that it is advertising work. But, it is beyond that, and wide concept. Public relation dose not only work varieties of activities but also works in different types of organizations. An organization whether they are big or small, profitable or non- profitable, governmental or nongovernmental, needs to have PR departments. Because public relations are a management function that help to achieve organizational objectives and organizational change.

Public relation practitioners communicate with all relevant internal and external publics to develop positive relation and to create consistency between organizational goals and societal expectations. According to the list of major job classification of PR specialists of Public Relation Society of America (PRSA), PR specialists work on writing, editing, placement of materials, promotion of events, speaking products, (photography, layout for print, production for broadcast and motion pictures.), program development and institutional advertisement. This shows PR practitioners should be well skilled and talented especial they need to have vast knowledge on the field of journalism and its Activities. The skill of the practitioners has great impact on the success of Public relations role. Public relations specialists work by having different positions in the department. (Baran, 2002:326), states the type of positions that are available in PR firm or department as; Executive; this is the chief executive officer who, sometimes with the staff sometimes alone, sets policy and serves as the spokesperson for operation. Account executive; each account have its own executive who provide a device to the client, define problems and situations assesses the need and demands of the clients publics, recommends communication plan or campaign and gathers the PR firms resources in support of client. Creative Specialists; these are writers, graphic designers, artists, video and audio producers and photographers. Anybody necessary to meet the communication needs of the client. Media Specialists; who are aware of requirement preference, limitations and strength of the various media used to serve the clients. They find the right media for clients' messages. He/she also put that large PR may also have firms like; research, government relation and financial relation.

2.3. Activities of Public Relation

Since the profession of public relation is multi-dimensional field, the practitioners of PR participate in different activities. In order to attract customers PR practitioners should rise the ability to persuade them through electronic and print media, before they start to persuade different publics, first of all they should well prepared how they persuade, what major public need and in what kind of programs with regardless to this one author states PR has its own origins in press agency. And today some people still think the term are synonyms, press agency consists of planning and staging events that will attract favorable attention to the institution, person idea or production and placing positive news items in the media about the client. Although easily press agents sometimes use proud and deception to achieve their goals, today's practitioners are more honest and professional. (Jefkin, 2002:200) In order to continue the site spar of the organization, the organization should be well known by different public. In this regard PR practitioner should be qualified to announce positive image of the organization. The positive image can be disseminated through different media. Therefore, the practitioners should have strong relationship with different media organizations. According to (Baran, 2002: 322-325) there are 14 interrelated PR services of PR identified by PRSA; publicity, communication, public affair, government relation, community relation, minority relation, financial PR, industry relation, press agency, promotion, issue management, propaganda and advertising. Within those services PR practitioners have activities of; creating relation with different media and getting media coverage for clients by Understanding various media, preparing and organizing materials for media organizations. Mentioning good relationship with professionals in the media, understand there dead line, and other restraints and earn their trust. Creating relation with customers and stoke holders in there line of business, with both competitors and suppers also with financial organizations like donors, banks investment firms and the likes. Communicate with target publics, government officials, leaders and the likes by, emphasizing on building a two-way-communication and social responsibility as well as good will. Similarly, (Theaker, 200 1:7) puts the activities of PR practitioners as, communicating with employees. Communicating with journalists, specialists, editors from local, national, international and trade media. Communicating with other organizations, like suppliers and retailers. Communicating with opinion formers like local and national politicians, monitoring economy environment.

Communicating with local community, and elected representatives. Analyses of situations, problems and solutions for further organizational goal. Monitoring political, social, economic and technological environment. Writing for different audience to high standards literacy, over viewing media processes, often using new technology. And organizations of complex events like exhibitions. This shows the work of PR is vast and complex activity which need knowledge and skill on different practices and filed like communication, finance, technology and the like.

2.4. Public Relations Role in Agricultural Sectors

From the definition and role of public relations we can tell that the main objective of PR is to establish and maintain a functional relationship between an organization and its publics for successful attainment of an organization's goals. According to (Joseph Othieno, 2009:7), The success of PR department is determined by its hierarchical placement on an organizations structure; for the department to play it counseling role it must be placed in close proximity to the top management. Although this brings in the challenges in collaborative working relationships with marketing, legal and advertising departments synergy can be developed if PR is carried our professionally.

Below is a brief explanation of the traditional functions of PR Agricultural Organizations

1. Publicity

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines publicity as an act or device designed to attract public interest; specifically: information with news value issued as a means of gaining public attention or support.

Publicity has been defined as the placement of newsworthy information in the mass media, without paying for it. This is normally done by having news worthy event/issue and inviting the mass media to cover it without buying the space in the mass media. When such events are paid for then they are called advertisements. (Ibid, pp.8).

Publicity can either be positive or negative, a good PR practitioner should strive to attain positive publicity since negative publicity hurts an organizations image.

2. Event management/Special Event

This refers to planned and staged special events to attract the public and mass media attention, normally with a main objective of creating a good image about the organization and thus getting positive publicity. Examples of such events include organizing a public event to announce your profits, new product, donation to a community etc. (Ibid, pp.11).

Debate exists as to whether this is legitimate or not considering PR principles and ethics.

3. Lobbying

Lobbying is the petitioning the government/policy makers to support legislation in the best interest of your organization. (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2000) defined lobbying as a function of public affairs that builds and maintains relations with government primarily for the purposes of influencing legislation and regulation. According to (Kati Tusinski, 2009) urges that lobbyists break down complicated issues and presents the most pertinent information to legislators.

4. Fundraising

This refers seeking personal and financial support for the organization to advance some worthy course. Corporate organization may raise funds through sell of shares while NGOs may use public campaigns to raise money to address some problem facing the society for example in cases of disasters. The success of such a campaign depends on the public goodwill which is normally build through good public relations.

5. Investor relations

Is a PR function that serves to establish and maintain beneficial relations between an organization and its investors through a two-way communication process? This functions requires close working relationship between the PR and Financial departments for harmony.

6. Counselling

This refers to the technical advice given to the top management of an organization of on various events in the environment and their impact on the image of an organization. For the PR to effectively carry out this function it must have pro-active and open systems approaches. Examples of changes in the environment that may affect how an organisation relates with its audiences include amendments to business laws, increase in taxes etc.

7. Media Relations

Media relations are a collective term for all the engagements an organization has with the mass media. The mass media plays an important role in informing the public and also in setting the agenda for the public. The PR must develop good working relations with the mass media for positive publicity. The PR department should have all the conducts of the media houses in their environment and understand their editorial policies. (Ibid, pp.13-14).

2.5. Writing for Website

Website offers public relations to write many opportunities, particularly in nurturing relationships directly with their host community rather than indirectly through the news media. Most organizations have their own websites. However, organizational public relations involve more than mere presence on the web, and public relations practitioners will be particularly careful about the difference and peculiarities of writing for the web. According to (Mengestu & Mohammed, 2015), Here are some guidelines for web based writing for public relations purpose:

1. Keep information to a single screen

Rather than a lengthy piece that the readers must scroll through it is better to seen a single screen.

2. “chunk” the text

Web-based writing is more understandable when the text is chunked. That is, when it is presented in short paragraph. If longer paragraphs are necessary, break them in to several shorter sections.

3. Use visual elements

It is important to display in a user friendly way. Consider frequent use of bullets, indents, italics, boldface, underlines and colored text. And be generous on the use of headlines, subheads and titles.

4. Simple, legible text

Keep the type simple, preferably a serif font with both capital and lowercase letters. Use black or dark lettering on white or light background. Avoid texts that are moving, blinking or zooming.

5. Keep the background simple

It's not important to keep many fancy graphics or designs on web pages. Because it will be difficult to distinguish backgrounds from texts.

6. Keep photos and artworks simple

If the web page have several photographs its recommendable to link them to the web page rather than placing on the page. This will allow readers to view what they wish to see.

7. Include interactive features

Building an internal searching engine and link email or other contact for the organization can make the website attractive for visitors and effective for its purpose.

2.6. Public Relations and Research

Research in PR involves is the systematic collection of information to describe and understand PR events among the public groups in relation to the operational environment with a goal of informing the decision making process and subsequent effective actions. Research lays the foundation for effective PR, as it makes it possible for the practitioner apply the pro-active and not reactive approach. (Berger, A 2000). Through research one is able to collect statistical data which can be used in generating some vital information on the various audience groups opinion towards a given issue in the environment. Public opinions are an example of a public relation exercise that utilizes research in arriving at a descriptive conclusion about audience parameters. According to (Machamara J, 2009) both qualitative and quantitative research techniques can be used in isolation or together depending on the issue at hand and ones understanding of their applicability.

Below is a tabulation of some stages in carrying out a PR exercise where research may be applied.

Stage	Research method(s)	Remarks
Situational analysis Define the problem/opportunity	Content analysis, KAP surveys, observation can also be used as method of collecting primary data, interviews and sampling techniques will be employed at this stage.	SWOT analysis at this stage relies on research facts from reports. Observation may be used to identify the problem. Internal and external factors must be considered. problem statements may be developed at this time and research tools like questionnaires can be used, Focused Group Discussions
Strategy Formulation - Planning and programming	Data analysis using various scientific procedures aided by computer programme	Data collected is analyzed and the PR circumstance clearly understood and upon this a strategy can be formulated

Communicate/implementation	Implementation of the findings (implementation matrix may be developed)	
Evaluation	Employs research to evaluate the impact of the communicated actions	Statistical techniques can be used to carry out the evaluation

Why research is important

- Research enables evidence based interventions
- Improves the chances of attaining set objectives
- Reduces costs considering that such Public R activities are expensive excesses

2.7. Corporate communication in agricultural institutions

Corporate Communication

A **corporation** is an institution run on clearly defined principles upon which its objectives are based. Corporate communication? Refers to all the communication activities undertaken by a corporate organization.

The PR department is in charge of all the corporate communications in an organization. It plans and executes all the aspects of corporate communications. To achieve this thorough understanding of the corporation's goals and strategies by the PR Department is of utmost importance and it must take the lead in this process and educate the institution staff on this. The PR Department must maximize the public good will when setting the goals and strategies. (Treadwell, 2000).

The success of the organization depends on the set goals and strategies, the goals direct the firm to its destination and the strategies tell the organization how and when to get to its destination.

It is upon the PR Department to build a corporate image and identity among its publics. PR helps the organization to understand the impact of its goals and strategies to the external and internal

publics, for this to be achieved PR department through research must have a clear understanding the external public's decisions that influence the organization.

According to (Trucker & Derelino, 1999) Below are the four stages of the decision making process of the external publics, According to Aubrey Fisher which a PR practitioner must know if he/she is to play a role in setting the agenda.

1. **Orientation** - First encounter with a group or an event
2. **Conflict** - Disagreement arise between groups or over an event
3. **Emergence** – Opinions are formed and debated
4. **Reinforcement** - An agreement is arrived at and consensus sought

Corporate Identity- Refers to the sum total of all the ways an organization chooses to identify itself to its publics. The PR Department must start with articulating its values.

Corporate design refers to how an organization wishes to look like, corporate colour – green for agriculture, purple for clarity, green –care for environment.

Branding aims at creating of familiarity among the publics, normally done through sponsorship activities, they yield a public image.

Images is the perception of the organization by its publics, how they view or think about the organization. There are several types of images that an organization can have based on the organization's or the public's perception.

Corporate Image

Corporate image is the sum total image of the organization over a period of time as indicated by its history and performance.

Wish Image - This is the desired image of the organization, what it striving to achieve.

Mirror Image - This is the image that insiders believe that the outsiders have of the organization

Current Image - This is the image that is held by the outsiders

Multiple Images - This are the different images held by the different publics as the same time.

Image is maintained through consistent and effective communication campaigns targeting the various publics/audiences. (Treadwell, 2000).

2.8. Public Relations Theories and Models for Agricultural sector

2.8.1. Models and Approaches to Public Relations

Although there were ancient public relations—as far in the past as ancient Greece—modern-day public relations in the United States began with a group of revolutionaries mounting a public relations campaign to turn public opinion in favor of independence from England and King George. The revolutionaries effectively used words and actions to mount a successful activist campaign leading to the Revolutionary War. Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*, published in 1776, gave rise to the sentiment that England’s governance under King George III was unjust. The subsequent *Declaration of Independence* and outward acts of protest were largely influenced by the rhetorical arguments found in Paine’s pamphlet, which has been called the most influential tract of the American Revolution. Slogans, such as *Don’t Tread on Me*, and use of printed materials, such as Colonial newspapers, were key message tactics used to sway opinion in favor of a revolution and a war for independence. Following the independence, *The Federalist Papers* were used to ratify the United States Constitution. These 85 essays were, according to the assessment of Grunig and Hunt, exemplary forms of effective public relations. (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

These founding fathers of the United States used public relations to build the public consensus necessary for a budding nation to form a new kind of government and establish the human rights necessary for the nation to survive.

The historical development of the field showed four distinct models of public relations, as identified by Grunig and Hunt. With this brief background in the history of public relations, you likely know enough about the models now to begin employing each in your public relations management. All are still in use in public relations practice today, and these terms are used in the academic literature and in public relations management. The one-way models are not based on social scientific research but on a simple dissemination of information. The two-way models are

based on research, which is what makes them the two-way management model. In order of their development, the models are as follows:

- **Press agency.** One-way (information) dissemination focusing on publicity for persuasion/attention.
- **Public information.** One-way (information) dissemination providing information.
- **Two-way asymmetrical.** Two-way (research), which is imbalanced in favor of persuading publics to support the organizations' interests.
- **Two-way symmetrical.** Two-way (research), which is more balanced in terms of creating mutual understanding; moving equilibrium.

Due to the *mixed-motives* inherent in the public relations process, public relations professionals will most likely use a combination of these models in public relations management. These models suggest an overall philosophy of public relations, while situations require different approaches. Therefore, it is also useful to have public relations strategies that reflect a contingency of varying approaches, as discussed later in this volume.

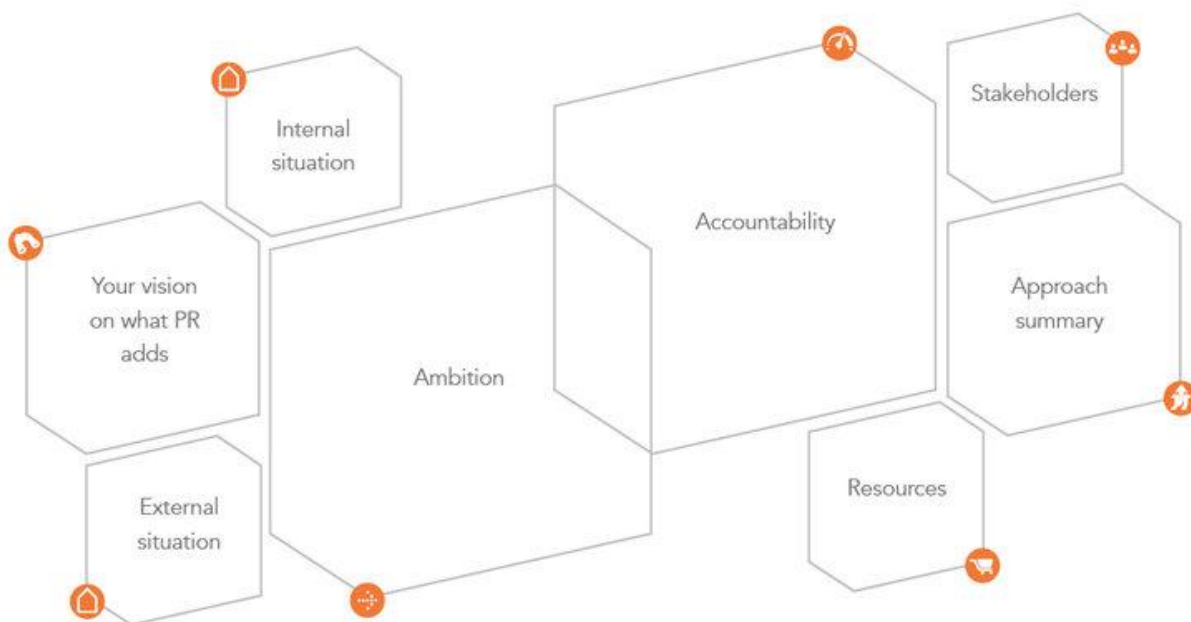
2.8.2. Social Theory

A theory is a prediction of how events and actions are related. For example, *pr reporter* described as a failure a federally funded message campaign to frighten kids off drugs. Research showed that kids who reported seeing the ads were using marijuana even more than those who had not seen the ads. What caused this waste of \$180 million a year? One expert said, "Scaring kids doesn't work. When people try pot for the first time, they wonder what the big deal is. Then, they don't believe the other stuff. The ads are not realistic." This opinion reflects a great deal of theory on the use of fear appeals. Fear appeals theory predicts that there will be little change with an overreliance on fear appeals that threaten physical harm. More persuasive are balanced arguments with incentives for changing behavior. We call this prediction a theory. (Cottle, 2003). Strategic communication

Strategy is a prominent compass for a plan. According to (Betteke van Ruler and Frank Körver, 2016) a good public relation and communication management strategy need to have seven requirements,

1. Clear vision on communications and its added value to the mission of the organization
2. Focus on internal and external context as building blocks for constructing ambitions
3. No smart objectives but inspiring ambitions based on clear choices
4. Explicit accountability that suits the ambition
5. Clear choices in every building block, as hypotheses for the future
6. Compact to fit on one page
7. Adjustable at any time to respond to situational dynamics

Based on this requirement they developed a new strategic communication frame. This model consists of eight interdependent building blocks. (Ibid, pp.3-4).



Ambition

There is a huge discussion on concepts like goals, targets, and ambitions. In this context we use the concept of ambition to mean “a strong desire (Oxford Dictionary) and pose two questions to define one’s ambition: What are the basic communication values needed for this specific strategy? And what do you want to achieve?

Building block: Vision

John Naisbitt is said to have articulated once: “Strategic planning is worthless, unless there is first a strategic vision”. Ambition is influenced by a person’s own perception of his/her profession and its added value. That is why we also ask the following questions: In what way

can communication add value to organizational strategic choices and what is the role of the communication professional in this respect? And what signifies my profession and which trends in my profession are relevant to us?

Building block: Internal situation

It is impossible to define and value the importance to us of phenomena in the outside world unless you know what is happening inside the organization. That is why it is important to consider: What is going on in our organization, what are the strategic decisions in the board and in other management fields, and what is the “style of the house”, e.g. how do we communicate with each other and how do we encounter the outside world?

: External situation

It is typical for communication professionals to be aware of the external situation, of what is going on in the outside world and of public opinions, although we prefer to talk about social moods these days. That is not new at all. Nassim Taleb, however, warns not to look for confirmation of what you already know but to look for the unexpected. We agree and suggest the following questions: What are relevant trends and developments in society? And What are relevant issues and what is the social mood around these?

Building block: Accountability

Good ambitions inspire and make clear what you want to achieve, but without accountability your ambitions are day dreams. Accountability forces you to make clear what your exact responsibilities are regarding your ambitions and how you measure progress e.g. what your KPIs are. That is why we suggest the following questions: What is your responsibility exactly and in what way? And how do you show that you are on track?

Building block: Stakeholders

In corporate communication we are used to seeing stakeholders as those who have a stake in our Organization and as our “target groups” to reach with our communications (see a.o. Michell, Agle & Wood, 1996). We define stakeholders slightly different by: those groups or persons who have a stake in our ambition. We suggest two questions: Who are our enablers, and who are our partners? Savage et al. (2011) warn that with partnerships you need to invest in the relationship and find a common ambition. Building block: Resources A very important part of the strategy concerns resources. Resources is about being equipped to do the job. It is about budget, budget allocation and about competences. We suggest two questions:

What competences do you need to realize your ambition, and 2) How much budget is required and how will this budget be allocated? These questions are not only important to allocate resources (operational, managerial activities), but also to make wise decisions concerning talent development, cost cutting, etc. (strategic decisions).

Building block: Approach

Approach is about translating all strategic decisions – done in the former building blocks – into operational activities. This is “the proof of the pudding”. All decisions in the former buildings block need to come together in the approach. We propose two key questions: 1) What do you want to achieve with which key constituency and how, and 2) Which activities should have top priority and what does that mean for the communications calendar?

Making the right choices

The Strategic Communication Frame facilitates the communication professional to forcefully and efficiently make the right choices and it provides a clear picture of the communication strategy in one page. The Frame does not prescribe what one should do or which strategy is best. It just sets up and enables practitioners to select the best choices for the best strategy.

The Strategic Communication Frame is basically a balancing act of a realistic but limited set of questions and challenging answers that, when executed conscientiously, delivers a comprehensive but nevertheless crystal clear strategy at a glance (a one-pager). By putting superfluous details aside and concentrating on the essentials, the model has easily proven to be an instant eye-opener for clients and other stakeholders.

Chapter Three

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The key purpose of this research is to identify how public relations are practiced in governmental sectors specifically in Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency. According to Kothari, 2004 there are two basic research approaches, qualitative approach and quantitative approach. The researcher used mixed approach in this study.

3.1.1. Qualitative methods

Qualitative methods are descriptive and interpretive. Researchers collect data that provides descriptions of behaviors or event in naturalistic setting. The data are collected in the real world rather than workshop. Qualitative researches are not trying to generalize their result beyond the sample they have studied. Their results only apply to the sample they studied. In order to generate findings that transform raw data into new knowledge, qualitative researchers engage in several activities that demand high analytical skill (Diribsa, 2018). Researchers then interpret what the data mean. Different researchers can derive different interpretation from the same data. That is why qualitative methods are considered subjective; the data are open to multiple interpretations and all can be correct. Regarding to this method the researcher will collect data through in-depth interview, document and web analysis and personal observation.

3.1.2. Quantitative Method

A quantitative research is objective and reduces data to number. These numbers are then analyzed by using accepted statistical principles and statistical tests. Quantitative measurements require the application of statistics; and before choosing a statistical technique, knowledge about the scale of measurement is prerequisite (Diribsa, 2018).

To gather relevant available data's the researcher uses both qualitative and some features of quantitative approaches. Regarding to the qualitative approach; According to Dsulliva (2003:279); qualitative research seeks to uncover audience interpretation and observation via in-depth interview and discussion with individual or small group. To identify stakeholders opinion concerning to ATA's public relations practice I used questionnaire which focused on the effectiveness of the ATA' website.

3.2. Subject and sampling techniques

The nature of this study is assessing the strategic roles and practices of public relation at ATA. Concerning to this purpose the researcher uses the following research sampling techniques. For the purpose of this study, the public relation and some selected stakeholders are my target subject. The subjects are public relations director, PR manager, practitioners and stakeholders from Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Trade and Industry, USAID World food program and Ethiopian investment commission. They are selected through purposive sampling because relevant information and documents for the research can be accessed from these areas.

3.3. Methods of Data Collection

In this research I used three methods of data collection. According to Hilde Van (2002:59) 'The main methodological tool for qualitative research are; in-depth interview, discussion, questionnaires, semiotic analyses of documents.

3.3.1. In-Depth Interview

(Diribsa, 2018) says interview provides a very different data from observation. They allow researchers to capture the perspective of the participants. Interview is important when interpersonal contact is important and when opportunists for follow-up of interesting opinion are desirable. When trust increased between the researcher and the participant possibly interest and involvement of interviewee's also rises (Kothari, 2004). In this research four individuals were selected from the management bodies including the public relations department director and public relation manager.

3.3.2. Analysis of Document

The second tool was analyzing of appropriate document like organizational newsletters, official Websites and social media pages brochures, organizational magazines and other published materials and understanding of content.

The materials I have used as primary written sources “primary sources are original documents as well as contemporary recorded or recorded in close proximity to some extent.” Hilde (2002:90). the documents are both publish and unpublished.

3.4. Methods of Data Analysis

The data are collected through interview; document and observation were analyzed first, by

Translating the transcribing all information’s taken from the interview and documents, from

Amharic language in to English. Then the qualitative data’s were analyzed by using narration and description. “For qualitative data analyzing there is a reliance on interpretation and analysis of what people do or say without making heavy use of measurement or numerical analysis.” Hilde (2002:59). I also use thematic coding to organize my data by separating the ideas depending on their theme. The data’s collected from the questionnaires are analyzed by SPSS version 20.

Chapter Four

4. Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to assess the role and practice of strategic public relations in Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency. Based on the data collected from in depth interview, observation and document analyzing, and questionnaire from stakeholders, this chapter deals with the general over view of communication department office structure in ATA, objective of the public relations department, the role of the office, public communication, the offices strategic plane and evaluation methods, stakeholders opinion about ATA's public relation practice and generally their public relation practice and obstacles that hinder the public relation activity of the agency were analyzed thematically.

In this study, about five in depth interviews were conducted with the communication department employees. Except the communication director all of the interviewees are not a communication expert and their educational background is not communication. Bothe the director and the communication manager are MA degree holders and all of the experts are BA degree holders. Besides the interview 60 questionnaires were distributed to the selected four external stakeholders. 47 of them were returned. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are discussed below.

4.1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

4.1.1. Organization

Fifteen questionnaires were distributed for each organization and 31.9% of the respondents are from the ministry of Agriculture, 25.5% are from Ethiopian Investment Commission, 21.3% are from World Food Program and the rest 17% of the respondents are from Ministry of Trade and Investment. Two respondents didn't give a response for this question.

	Frequency	Percent
invalid	1	2.1
FAO	11	23.4
EIC	12	25.5
MOA	15	31.9
MOTI	8	17.0
Total	47	100.0

Table 1: **Organization**

4.1.2. Education level

From all the respondents 51.1% of them are BA degree holders, 27.7% are MA/MSc Degree holders, 4.3% of them are PhD holders and 10.6% of them replied other which are diploma, level for and certificate.

	Frequency	Percent
Invalid	2	4.3
1	1	2.1
BA	24	51.1
MA	13	27.7
PhD	2	4.3
Others	5	10.6
Total	47	100.0

Table 2 Education Level

4.1.3. Profession

All the questionnaires were distributed for the stakeholder's communication/public relations department and related departments, but the bigger number is 59.6% which no from the communication profession and 31.9% of them re communication /public relations professionals.

	Frequency	Percent
Invalid	4	8.5
PR/Communication	15	31.9
Other	28	59.6
Total	47	100.0

Table 3 Profession

4.2. Organizational Structure of ATA

The communication department is directly accountable for the CEO office which a part of senior management team and accountable for the CEO directly. The communication department structure looks like the following diagram.

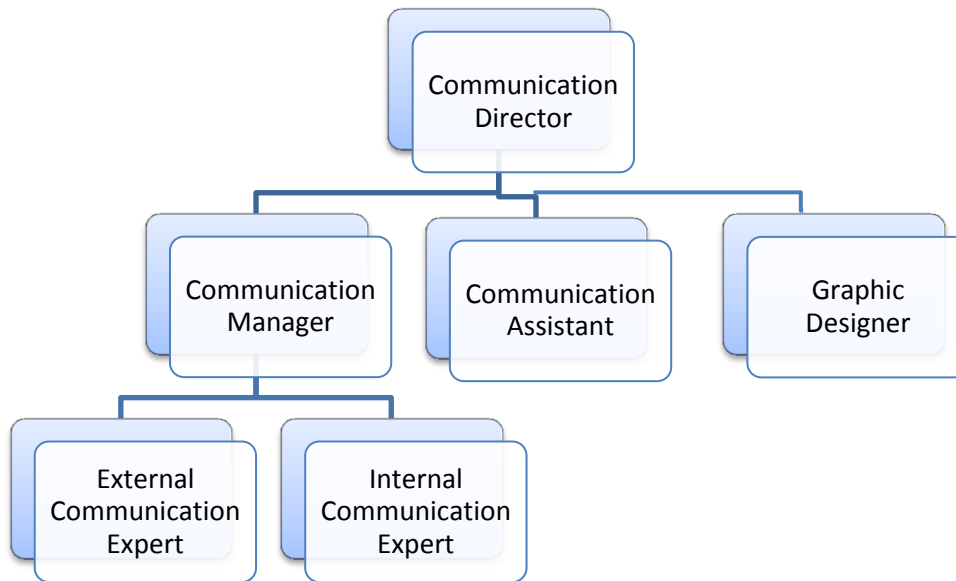


Figure 1

The current employees in the available positions are: the director, one communication assistant, the communication manager, one external communication director, one internal communication expert and one graphics designer. According to the Communication department Director Mr. Mikiyas Sisay, The department has already prescribed job descriptions that aimed at supporting the effort of the organization in achieving its bigger vision of transforming the Ethiopian agriculture sector, working on organizational relation with its internal and external stakeholders and gathering people's opinions about the organization and giving information about ATA to the media and stakeholders. The communication department is under a supportive pillar to ATA.

4.3. Objective of the Public Relations Department

The researcher discovered the following objectives of communication department from document review from the senior management side.

- Lead the development and successful implementation of the ATA Communications Strategy to reflect external engagement, internal communications, branding, and project support needs
- Inspire and lead a communications effort by effectively planning, prioritizing, and providing development opportunities
- Maintain a regular and strategic media presence, including facilitation of events for major projects and partners, interviews with the CEO and other senior leaders/experts, speeches and news articles, and enhancement of website and social media
- production of key publications, including annual reports for the ATA and the Transformation Agenda, quarterly newsletters, press releases, and project briefs
- Collaborate with the Partnerships and Government Relations teams to engage key stakeholders and partners for joint publicity and communications initiatives
- Collaborate with the Senior Management Team in communicating organizational strategy and priorities
- Collaborate with Project Team Leaders to develop annual communications plans for all ATA projects and provide technical advice on procurement of creative and marketing vendors
- Build the communications capacity and awareness of the strategic role of communications with ATA teams through targeted training and mentoring
- Ensure the quality, consistency, timeliness and professionalism of all ATA communications materials, through brand manuals, communications toolkits, and team trainings
- deliver, evaluate and report on communications activities and identify new communications approaches and opportunities

Based on the interview with the communication director and external public relations manager, the following are summarized objectives of the communication department.

- To introduce international standard public communication practice
- To create an organizational role model public relations practice
- Placing ATA in its right place which is best organization in communication.
- Promote ATA's work based on facts.
- Help ATA to achieve its goals.

These goals are designed based on the commencement of the director and the specified directions and plans from the senior management team to promote the communication work in the organization. The communication department goals are linked with the organization's general plan. According to the director the perception of the management bodies about communication/public relations is not reasonable and the fact that communication is a supportive pillar in the organization is one indicator for it. The directions and plans of ATA's communication department is a readymade and the department's role is implementing those given plans and directions.

4.4. The Role and practice of public relation Department

The communication department director Mr. Mikiyas said the communication department has two general public relations roles, which are telling information and gathering information about ATA.

“ we give valid information to the public about ATA to advocate our organization. In the other hand we try to collect the public’s opinion about ATA. What are the media and stakeholder are thinking about ATA? Is our concern ATA is a strategy and delivery oriented organization. Its purpose is to help the Growth and Transformation plan in the agriculture sector. Based on this mission the communication department is responsible on ATA’s communication strategy to reflect external engagement, internal communication and branding. ”.

According to the director their ways of communication determined based on Internal and external community. ATA’s major stakeholders are the Ethiopian farmers and organization which works on the agriculture sector. This gives the department a role to work directly with stakeholders on highly visible initiatives. For the external community their communication channels are the discussed below.

4.4.1. External Communication

Social media

Regarding to social media the organization has a Facebook account, Official Twitter account and LinkedIn Account. Mr. Dagmawi Zeleke, internal communication expert said those social Medias have their own selected target audiences. LinkedIn is specifically for professionals and business related organizations. Twitter is for government officials, Embassies, donors, research organization and NGOs etc. The general public and some Medias would use Facebook. The researcher checked their official twitter account has **2672** followers till June 2018. Their face book account also has **4730** followers but there are many accounts by ATA’s name and the organization is working on verification.

According to the external communication expert Himanot Seifu, the social media channels are updated with information's from ATA and stakeholders every day. The communication has its own way of releasing information on the social media in the case of information reliability and sensitivity. The communication manager and both the communication experts have access to the social media administration but they can't post unverified information personally. The department's strategy for social media administration is a proactive mechanism which is preventing problems before they even existed. Regarding to the social media there is only one incident happened in Facebook. The case was ATA's communication department received a letter from the Ministry of Agriculture about the lifting up of tax in imported agricultural equipment. The department releases the information and posted the picture in the Facebook account.

Dagmawi Zeleke, internal communication expert said.

"We post the letter with some descriptions on our Facebook page and the Ministry of Agriculture communication department complained about releasing the information before they do and we remove the letter but kept the information because by the time the news was addressed thousands. This is the only case I remember in my awareness."

In the social media analysis the researcher observed information's are released frequently on the social media channels with short and attractive feature. According to the internal communication expert the office has a plan to advance the social media and the budget they requested got approved by the senior management.

Annual Report

To address ATA's stakeholders with reports and new researches the organization published a quarterly and yearly annual report. Currently the organization is working on digitalizing the office and its publications. Most of the reports are available on the website, ATA's intranet and in hardcopy form. According to the public relation manager the report is produced by the communication department and produced in international level quality because the target audience of this annual report is international NGOs, international donors and stakeholders.

Free Hotline

The communication director mentioned ATA have a free hotline for the farmers to call directly and accesses any information regarding to agro-business. 8028 is the hotline number and in the past five years 5 million customers called. These farmers called totally 36 million times. The hotline operates in Amharic, Tigrigna, Oromifa, Wolayita and sidamo languages. ATA has planned to maximize the number of languages in the service.

Website

The researcher gives deep emphasis for the website and its content. According to the director and the communication manager the website is administrate under the communication department by an excellent web designers and experts. The website contained background information about the organization, about the mission and vision of the ATA regarding to the Growth and Transformation Plan, ATA's projects, annual reports, news, team profile, employee's list, agricultural related information etc. This indicates the future ATA's communication is based on the website and other current digital communication technologies. The director said that almost all of their publications are published in their website and some in the organization's magazine like the annual report.

The communication team confirmed that the website is their number one communication channel with their stake holders. According to the external communication expert the organization is planning on shifting their communication system to a digitalized system and most publications are provided throughout the website. During web analysis the researcher accessed the quarterly annual report of the organization and researches on the website. To crosscheck the effectiveness of ATA's communication mechanism the researcher distributed questionnaire to four selected (by the interviewed communication team members) and asked their opinion.

The first questions were what is your usual communication system with ATA?

	Frequency	Percent
Invalid	7	14.9
Website	5	10.6
Email	15	31.9
Meetings	19	40.4
others	1	2.1

Table 4 which communication system usually you use to communicate ATA

40 percent of the respondents said their usual communication way is meetings, 31.9 % of them email and 10.6% of respondents said website. Out of 47 respondents only five of them are replied website. This indicates ATA’s website is not that much of a common communication way at this time.

The next question for the respondents was whether they are familiar with ATA’s website.

Answer	Frequency	Percent
invalid	1	2.1
Yes	21	44.7
No	21	44.7
Not sure	4	8.5

Table 5 Are you familiar with the website?

Respondents who are familiar with ATA’s website are 44.7% and respondents whom responded no are 44.7% too. 8.5% of the respondents are not sure. This implies half of the respondents are not aware of ATA’s website and missing information from it

The word “simple and Attractive” is a very common and important expression for a well-organized websites. A website need to have simple background, simple legible texts, simple art works. According to Mr. Mikiyas Sisay, the office’s major communication tool is the website

and the department hired talented and qualified graphic designer and directly accountable for the director himself. The researcher try's to ask selected stakeholder respondents about the graphics of the website and thy give the following response about the website graphics.

	Frequency	Percent
invalid	21	44.7
Very good	11	23.4
Good	14	29.8
Bad	1	2.1
Total	47	100.0

Table 6 Evaluation of graphics

The highest number of respondent replied the graphics design I good which is 29.8 %. 23.4 % of the respondents answered very good. Only one respondent said the graphic is bad. According to referred website design and graphics guidelines ATA's website has contented most criteria.

The researcher absorbs from the interview with the communication director and the internal communication expert that all important information is available in the website. According to Mr. Mikiyas there are two kind of information posted in the website. In a news feed form which is posted ever time with new announcement or information and annual report in a specific time. The availability of information on the website was the other question and the respondent answered in the following.

	Frequency	Percent
Invalid	17	36.2
Greatly sufficient	7	14.9
Sufficient	16	34.0
Tolerable	4	8.5
V. deficient	3	6.4
Total	47	100.0

Table 7 Availability of Information

From all the respondents 34% of them said sufficient and 14.9% said greatly sufficient. 8.5 % of them believed the availability of information is tolerable. The rest 6.4% replied very deficient. This indicates most of the respondents are satisfied with the availability of information in the website. From all the respondents only three of them replied the information on the website is deficient.

information satisfaction		
	Frequency	Percent
Invalid	17	36.2
Very. satisfied	2	4.3
Satisfied	14	29.8
Fairly Satisfied	11	23.4
Unsatisfied	3	6.4
Total	47	100.0

Table 8 information satisfaction

The researcher asked their level of information satisfaction from ATA through the website and 29.8% of them responses satisfied and 23.4% said fairly satisfied. But most of the residents (36.2%) skip this question.

According to the communication manager ATA is working on a national development issue and the agency is working mutually with other agriculture sector organizations.

“We are working with many external stakeholders and we have a good communication relation with them. We exchange knowledge, experience, information, skills and others important researches. There is no communication platform with agricultural organizations and governmental institutions but the communication two-way and we are working on improving our relation with them ”

Unlike the opinion of the communication manager 40.4% respondents replied NO for the question “Is there any possible way to give your feedbacks to the organization?”. 27.7% of them are not sure if there is a way to give feedback for ATA

	Frequency	Percent
Invalid	12	25.5
Yes	3	6.4
No	19	40.4
Not Sure	13	27.7
Total	47	100.0

Table 9 Accesses to give feedback

4.4.2. Internal communication

ATA have 348 employees all over its branches in the country. The largest numbers of employees are here in Addis Ababa head quarter office. According to the communication director everyone in the office is expected to have sufficient information about their organization. This makes the communication department to be responsible on facilitating communication ways for them. The internal communication expert Dagmawi Zeleke mentioned:

“ATA gives high priority to its internal communication. It believes to achieve the organizations goal will be achieved when there is common understanding towards ATA and well communication among stuffs is essential. Filling gaps and strengthening relationship internally is one duty of the communication department. To make communication smooth healthy among staffs the communication department is working intensely by developing and facilitating different communication alternatives within the organization. These communications methods are modern with the time. ”

The expert further explained, the communication department is using all its effort on creating a better and conducive work environment for employees by facilitating availability of updated information from the internal and external community with an accessible communication ways.

According to the communication manager, the department created possible ways for employees to describe their feedbacks and opinion in a professional way. He said the department creates a two-way internal communication environment in the organizations. Concerning a communication between the senior management and the communication department except the

director all the interviewees replied there is no conducive environment to create a communication line between them. The relationship is giving and taking orders. Beside this the internal communication is well organized and supported with digital technologies.

Based on the interviews with the communication department team office has the following inter-organizational communication methods.

1. ATA hub/intranet

This hub is a package of all information's about the organization from the beginning to now. This hub is under the communication department control. The hub contains the following subjects.

- General information about ATA
- News
- Training manuals
- Performance review
- Human resource manual
- Work related interesting links

2. Inter office email/memo

According to the director Mr. Mikiyas, the inter office email is purposed to create information exchanging tool for work purpose. The communication directorate sends information through email for stuffs every week. This email communication helps the employees to have a recorded evidence about their work exchanged, given information. This minimize conflict among employees about miscommunication.

3. Drop box

Drop box is where employees give comment or suggestions for the organization

4. Address book of employees

4.5. Media relations

According to the communication Assistant Alemenesh Gudeta, ATA have a media data base. This media data base helps the organization to have an enhanced relationship with the media. The communication manager also mentioned, ATA get many interview request from the media and journalists and the office facilitate interviews by itself for target/selected medias. Likewise all the interviewees said their relation with the media is not much strong,

According to the communication director,

“Some external /governmental bodies are not happy to see ATA glorified by Media. They give direction for ATA to minimize its communication with Media and to stop promoting itself because they believed ATA is well promoted and it’s not necessary to promote itself anymore. Their reason behind all this was they thought their work was undermined by ATA. This made ATA to go low profile and focus on organizational principles ATA declined many media requests for interview or programs but now the communication department is trying to change this trend.”

Even though the media relation is not much as expected the communication department creates a media platform and developing relationship with the media. The office organized a press conference every quarter. According to the communication manager the communication department held three press conferences in the first quarter of this year.

Targeted medias by the office are the listed below.

News Papers

- Fortune
- Adiss Zemen
- Ethiopian Herald
- Reporter
- Capital
- Ethiopian Business Review

Broadcast Media

- Ethiopian Broadcast Corporation
- Fana Broadcasting Corporate
- EBS TV
- ARTS TV
- Walta Information Center

4.6. Strategic Communications

The Ethiopian Agricultural Transformation Agency stated the following statement as its general focus area of work on its website the communication department is also practicing its communication work based on the following statement.

“The agency focuses on two primary national approaches to catalyze agricultural transformation. First, we support the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Resources (MoALR), its affiliate institutions, and other partners to identify and address systemic bottlenecks within an Agricultural Transformation Agenda. Second, we support Regional Governments to accelerate development of high-priority commodity value chains in clearly defined geographic clusters, through the Agricultural Commercialization Clusters (ACC) Initiative. Our major activities include conducting strategic and analytical studies, providing technical implementation support, coordinating platforms to better integrate partners and projects, and designing and directly leading a number of implementation projects. Our headquarters are in Addis Ababa, and we have regional offices in Amhara, Oromia, SNNP, and Tigray regional offices, allowing us to work closely with a wide range of public, private and development sector partners across the country.

Based on the stated statement ATA designed a strategic plan to achieve its mission and vision. This strategic plan shared to every department based on their task and responsibility and they developed their own strategic plan for their department. But according to the communication director Mikiyas Sisay, the communication department has no communication plan, he mentioned,

“A strategy is a compass to your plan, a strategy is a guideline of an organization’s work plan. The biggest challenge I’ve faced in ATA was the perception of management team about communication work. They think communication is an easy job which can be operated by anyone and its task is facilitating events or media relation. In ATA communication is not a part of management and has no vote in any decisions made in the senior management. The communication department is busy on routine tasks. Personally I designed a strategic communication plan for the office and got acceptance by the senior management and we’re

looking forward for the implementation. Until then our communication strategy is simple giving and taking information from internal and external stakeholders. We are operating with people from different professional background and they are not ready to learn and change. This makes everything difficult to change communication. ”

There was no available recorded strategic communication plan to analyze documents. The office have annual plan drafted from the agency’s annual plan. According to the communication manager he is not sure about the submitted strategic communication plan by the communication director. He mentioned that the communication department is working based on the annual plan.

The internal and external communication experts said they are working by the yearly annual plan but they think there is a strategic communication plan but they are not certain about it because they never get the chance to accesses it. Beside the strategic communication plan the researcher asked all the interviewees what models the theories being used in the communication department. Expect the communication director Mikiyas Sisay all of them are not familiar with communication theories or models. Their educational background is not communication or related.

According to Ato Mikiyas Sissay

“The agency is not interested to invest in the communication department. The role of the communication department in the agency is not professional based. The reason might be the lack of professional development of communication in national level. The communication department is running by a traditional way of communication management. There is no theory or models practiced by the agency. If we need to categorized the agencies communication practice to a theory or method we may be able to say its two-way asymmetrical communication system. We can’t say the communication between ATA and stakeholders is balanced. There is a gap of information exchange between us and them. Regarding to internal communication its two-way symmetrical and the communication is balanced and internal stakeholders have the accesses to give feedbacks or opinion in organizational matters ”

The director also mentioned that he is trying to make improvements in the department by mentoring the team. He said,

“There are some chances of training for the communication department team but is not satisfactory. The trainings are very short term and it may add some knowledge and skill but that cannot be enough to make a big difference in their personal or professional life. ”

According to the communication manager ATA is working under low profile which means indirectly the agency is not interested in promoting itself. And this affect the communication department to improve bother the employees capacity and the organizations performance. He said the reason behind this is many governmental institutions were criticizing ATA for outshining and direct order came from higher government officials for ATA to work in shadows. This reasons bind the communication department not to show its capacity.

4.7. Stakeholders opinion

The last two questions for stakeholder were ‘How do you evaluate the communication of ATA’s Public Relations department with your organization?’ and additional comments regarding to their communication relation with ATA. For the first question the respondents give the following response.

	Frequenc y	Percent
Invalid	10	21.3
Effectiv e	11	23.4
poor	18	38.3
V. Poor	8	17.0
Total	47	100.0

Table 10 ATA’s PR evaluation

38.3% of the respondents evaluated ATA’s pubic relation team communication with their organization poor, 17% of them believed very poor. The rest 23.4% said effective.

The last question was an open ended question for stakeholders to give their comment and feedback concerning the ATA communication with their organization. Their responses deliberated by their organization

FAO

- We don’t have a communication platform with ATA. There is a communication gap to be filled
- The relation is not focused on strategic and systematic way
- We have no organized relationship regarding to communication. ATA should take the initiative to improve organizational relation.
- Should reach to wider public through media, schools, universities and professional organization
- Very minimal communication with FAO
- I didn’t know ATA has a public relations department. They are not visible.

- Information in the communication product like acknowledging the information sources and sometimes on a data of ATA is not clear, moreover the information on the communication materials are more donor driven instead of focus in the mandated areas.
- Telephone and e-mail, its effective
- We participate in meetings with ATA on national issues and communication strategy documents

MOA

- They are confined in their office only. They are not well aware of the communication role in publicizing what successes they have and they are not collaborating with MoA. Public relations is to disseminate information to address the large public.
- Poor communication with MoA
- Regarding to ATA's way of communication is very poor because everyone doesn't attend similar meetings, trainings and workshops. This made the way of communication very poor due to partial meetings.
- ATA public relations office should establish strong relationship and regular meetings for other means of communication.
- With the ministry's PR directorate currently it's weak.
- ATA's up-to-dated information shall be delivered to MoA's PR office to be posted on the official websites, Facebook and visuals of MoA.
- As a public relations expert I haven't seen any formal relation on communication system with ATA.
- I don't know ATA's PR department the agency must work with MoA closely.
- ATA was founded under the ministry of agriculture but when it became self-regulating institution its communication with MoA weakened. Since both institutions are working on the agricultural sector the relation should be improvised.
- The PR department is not communicating with MoA PR experts. It's only in meetings. There is no support, trainings or input assist. Totally no relation with MoA
- Website, e-mail and Facebook are our communication way to give feedbacks but its not enough either effective. So a better communication platform is essential.

- Meeting and email communication is commonly used. Besides ATA has focal person in various directorate under the ministry assigned as bridges for daily activities and update information flow
- Personal contacts and emails are the only ways we can give feedbacks for ATA. .

EIC

- We communicate through email about some work related things. Its effective because EIC and ATA works on research projects etc.
- Our interaction with ATA s either phone call or email.
- We have a case by case relationship that I know of with ATA, whenever we have agricultural/agro-processing investors facing administrative challenges. ATA approaches EIC on their behalf. We are also working with them closely on the development of food and beverage, a joint effort with EIC.
-
- I believe their PR is good but they can do a bit more and try to update their posts and make it up-to-date.
- Relationship with EIC should more reactive approach (whenever active case arrives) to a proactive and pre-established /regular information sharing. It serves both well if EIC in the loop on all regular updates/data sets
- ATA has more advanced website than many governmental institutions, lesson sharing/support to other governmental institutions should be encouraged.

MoTI

- ATA is a very young organization; it needs to promote its aim, mission, and vision with different media.
- ATA's communication give priority for international organizations not local ones regarding to providing relevant information for farmers and agricultural experts and receiving feedbacks from end users of ATA's services.

Chapter Five

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The communication department structure is organized and classified with basic role and responsibilities in the organizational structure the communication department is responsible directly to the CEO office which is a directorate and accountable for the CEO. The communication department is not a part of senior management team. It has no vote or say in any organizational decisions. The department is serving as a supportive pillar for the organization. The major objective of the communication department is to lead the development successful implementation of ATA communication strategy to reflect external engagement, internal communication, branding and project support needs. The other objective of the communication department is to introduce international standard public relations/communication practice in Ethiopia

ATA is under a supportive pillar in the organization and it's not a part of management team. The director is answerable for the CEO office directorate. The role of the communication department to assist the agency in a supportive role. The office has no instinctive role in any management decision. Lobbying one of the major role of a pubic relation in policy or decisions making situation, But in the case of ATA the communication department have no role in lobbying or have no say in organizational decisions.

Regarding to internal communication ATA is well organized. The inter office relation is strong and supervised by the communication department frequently. The agency has different ways of internal communication mechanisms. The communication department gives huge attention for internal communication and working on maximizing different ways of internal communication. Some of the internal communication tools are ATA hub/intranet, interoffice email/memo, and drop box are the major internal communication tools. The ATA hub/intranet and other inter organizational communications are managed by the communication department.

Regarding to external communication with stakeholders, the research found the following ATA's external communication ways and the role of the department. The major roles of the communication department are publication of annual reports and other publications, producing quarterly newsletters, facilitating and organizing press releases, project briefing and introducing for the host internal and external community, organizing joint publicity, communication initiatives, managing ATA's website and organizing events are the major role and responsibility of the communication department.

Based on the information from the ATA communication department the stakeholder relationship is centered on the website and they confirmed ATA's website is number one communication tool with stakeholders from agriculture sector. But the data collected from selected stakeholders shows only 10.6% of them believe the website is the major communication channel with ATA. The communication between ATA and its external stakeholders is poor and the majority respondents believe there is no possible way to communicate with ATA. This makes the communication between them one-way by some means.

Regarding to community relation the agency is working with some particular communities. ATA have more than 25 projects. These projects are targeted to change the lives of the farmers. There are workshops for targeted public groups focused on introducing modern agriculture system and exchanging experiences between farmers and experts. Ethio-SIS is one big project done by the agency to give relevant information about soils nature in Ethiopia. This project is a result of deep soil studies in Ethiopia, after the soil study the agency provides the research for farmers and concerned governmental sectors. This information can be accessed by individuals or organizations who are working in the agriculture sector.

ATA is trying to develop its communication way. To make the communication modernized the agency is focusing on developing the website. In the website the communication department uploads agricultural researches, reports, agricultural information etc. the website also contained general information about the agency itself and its purpose and verified achievements. The agency usually uses publicity, press release, press conference, annual report, website, social media and news release are some of the ATA's communication tools. The research sought how they are using these tools and most of their works are effective and done professionally.

The strange thing this research found is ATA's media relation. Unlike some other organizations ATA is not looking for media attention to promote the organization. But the Media are requesting to work with ATA and most of them are declined by the agency. The communication department invites some Media in their press release and press conferences. For some Media the communication department sends newsletters. ATA's media is too poor and the interview with the communication team indicates the agency is not interested to change the nature of its media relation.

Regarding to strategic communication plan for the organization and crisis communication plan, the researcher couldn't access any of them. But based on the interviews the communication department submitted a strategic communication plan and got an approval by the senior managements but the communication director have a doubt on its implementation. Concerning crisis communication plan they confirmed there is a crisis communication plan but it's classified and not accessible.

In the communication department the evaluation mechanism is performance based. Planning is 100% mandatory and the communication work is evaluated by key performance indicator (KPI). Detailed communication works like managing the social medias are evaluated based on the number of followers, likes, and shares their pages get. Generally the communication performance is evaluated by the organizations work evaluation standards.

Generally, this study found the public relations practice in two ways; the first one is its internal communication and external relation with its host community. The internal communication is moderated and ATA can be an example for other Ethiopian governmental institutions. The internal communication tools are technology wise and operating effectively. The media relation of ATA is not healthy. The communication department admitted that their relation with the media is bound only on the willingness of the agency. If any media needs to make a program the agency is not willing most of the times. Regarding external communication ATA have poor relation with stakeholders. The communication department believed that their website is functioning effectively regarding to stakeholder communication but most of the stakeholders are not familiar with the website. Most importantly ATA's communication department is not a part of management.

5.2. Recommendations

The student researcher gives the following recommendation based on the findings from the study and they are the perceptions of the researcher and interrelated with some literatures.

At first, the basic thing that the agency should understand is public relations/communication is a part of management. The communication department/directorate is in a supportive pillar for the agency and managed by another directorate when it's a directorate itself. A public relation department should have a visible managerial role in the organization. This will help the department to performance effectively. The perception of the senior management team about PR communication is very low. The communication department needs to work on changing their understanding.

The second area for recommendation is ATA's external communication. Somehow the agencies have good communication methods with external stakeholders, but it's not effective as they think it is. Most respondents of the questionnaire believe ATA is an isolated organization with no interest to improve the relation. The website is also outstanding regarding to a website quality but it's not being accessed by the stakeholders. ATA need to make a good environment of communication among between them. The communication tools used by ATA are being shifted to a digitalized way. The publications and annual reports are not available in a hardcopy. But all of them are uploaded in the website. The website is well organized and administered by professionals. This situation creates a gap of communication among them because ATA is not promoting its website for stakeholders and target communities. Some of the respondents are not familiar with the existence of the website or the public relation department itself.

The third recommendation area is a strategic communication plan and crisis communication plan. The agency have organizational strategic plan. This plan also included the communication departments plan. The strategic communication plan is designed by other department's professionals, and its focusing on routine tasks of communication.

The agency should give more responsibility and chance to develop their strategic communication pan. Regarding to crisis communication, all the interviewees admitted that there is no crisis communication plan. This will left the agency at a very risk full position when the time comes.

The need for crisis communication plan is to prevent crisis before they even happen and to manage it smoothly when it happened.

ATA's media relation is not strategic and professional based. The agency is building a bad reputation in media houses. This might cost a lot in the future. Creating a healthy media platform is mandatory for the organization

Finally the student researcher recommended the communication department should give an emphasis working on changing the management bodies perception about public relations and should work hard to convince them to make the department in a management team. ATA have to practice public relations professionally and to do this giving a chance for public relations or communication professional in the market will help the agency to be effective in its internal and external communication.

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