

# THE PRACTICE OF GOVERNMENT PUBLIC RELATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AFFAIRS OFFICE

BY  
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This is to certify that the thesis is prepared by Shimelis Mulatu entitled "Government Public Relations: A Case Study of Ethiopian Government Communication Affairs Office" and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Journalism and Communication. It complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

<b>EBC</b>	ETHIOPIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION
<b>FDRE</b>	FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA
<b>GCAO</b>	GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AFFAIRS OFFICE
<b>Mol</b>	MINISTRY OF INFORMATION
<b>PR</b>	PUBLIC RELATIONS
<b>GPR</b>	GOVERNMENT PUBLIC RELATIONS
<b>MOFA</b>	MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to examine whether the PR and communication practices of the Ethiopian GCAO is responsive to the diverse information needs of the public. It attempts to explore the efforts and the overriding challenges the GCAO is facing to reach out and communicate with citizens in concomitant with the constitution's stipulated rights. Moreover, the study will be conducted based on the two way symmetric public relations model, where public relations departments give equal emphasis to the interest of the public as that of the institutions. In-depth interview and document analysis are tools used to conduct this study. With regard to in-depth interviews, six key informants were selected by the researcher in consultation with the organization being studied. The informants were selected by their assumed critical role to play in the Government Communication Affairs Office. Generally, as a qualitative research, data was gathered in the aforementioned tools and interpretive analysis was made. While collecting, analyzing and interpretation of the data, common procedures were observed. In the in-depth interviews, for example, consensual semi-structured interviews were recorded and additional notes were taken to strengthen them. The recorded interviews in turn were transcribed; thematic areas were translated into English by the researcher and narrated; the data were categorized into themes; and interpretive analysis was made afterwards. As to the document analysis, four useful documents supporting the research were reviewed all of which have to do with government public relations, media and communication practices either directly or indirectly related with GCAO and the country as well. This was purposely done to gain an insight into the environment in which the public relations practices are conducted in government organizations of which one is GCAO of Ethiopia.

The findings of this research have revealed two things. Firstly, they ascertained the existence of challenges in the Office which has kept perceptions about government public relations very distorted among the public. Second, despite achievements to transform government public relations, what has largely emerged is a change in form

rather than in content as compared with past public relations practices. Factors ranging from lack of transparency, poor understanding of PR role, and non recognition of PR as a management function are challenges identified. Additionally, political, economic and cultural conditions as well and poor information and communication infrastructures coupled with legal structures are other factors hampering the progress of government public relations practices.

Therefore, the researcher finally recommended GCAO to work in a professional and responsible manner and, for instance it should focus on education based assignments rather than appointing the well-connected to positions they do not merit. The process of “building a society enriched with information and actively participate in the country’s affairs” as a stated goal cannot be achieved without clearly defined policy and communication strategies as well.



## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Though it is not possible to find out when and where modern public relations have exactly begun in Ethiopia, there is a belief that it might have been in 1960s (Solomon, 1998: 20). Prior to this period, however, the beginning of newspapers that provided advertisement space for business organizations since 1900's coupled with the introduction of printing press, telecommunication and the rail way by Emperor Menilik II in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century paved for the development of mass media and communications in all aspects including the emergence of modern public relations (Mol, 2003).

As Solomon (2003) noted, the establishment of the ministry of Pen in 1940's paved the way for the introduction of public relations in government offices. The then information and propaganda section was organized within the Ministry of Pen (Mol, 2004). Moreover, the post World War II and the expulsion of the fascist Italian invading force brought a need to centrally coordinate the media organizations such as radio, TV and news agency. Accordingly those media organizations were made to be organized under the ministry of pen, which was later replaced by Ministry of Information and Tourism in 1950's.

As one public relations head at the final years of Emperor Haile Selassie had recalled the period in an interview he gave, he said the following:

The notion and practice of PR was developed during the 1960's ... until around 1974, a minimal consideration was given to PR. A study was made in the ministry where by the public relations Bureau was promoted to a public relations and information department ... the activities were routine reception, protocol, running the printing etc. System and strategy as to how to promote Ethiopia's real needs were unthinkable. There, of course, have been some publications... But they reflected the interest of the ruling feudal autocracy than that of the public at large (Solomon, 1998: 22).

What makes the 1960s quite different is, however, according to Solomon (1998:23), it was a period private public relations practice came in to existence. For example, Alem public relations consultancy firm, the first of its kind, was established by the likes of Sibhat Gebreigziabher and Dereje Deressa.

As time went by, the Ethiopian revolution arrived with military officers to the throne and embraced soviet model of socialism. Afterward, the Derg (1974-1991) officially had forbidden all political and democratic rights such as assembly, association, freedom of expression and private media unless and otherwise it was targeted to fight the “enemies of the revolution”.

The practice of public relations that started to take shape during the 1960’s came to pass away with the coming of the socialist, Marxist Leninist party to power. Those flourishing private public relations firms were shut down. The public relations head interviewed by Solomon Ali (2000) can be quoted here as saying:

After a couple of years with Mennen (A magazine named after the emperor’s wife), Sibhat ... teamed up with Dereje... Who had a talent for business, and they started a public relations firm. Dereje looked after the business side and Sibhat took care of the firm’s two publications:- Ethiopian mirror, a quarterly magazine taken over from Oscar Rampone, an Italian and subsidized by the ministry of information, and the Amharic edition of Mennen, a monthly magazine. The firm was closed after 7 years by order of the revolutionary government (Solomon, 1998: 13).

The media and the few government public relations units had fallen under a strict control and guidance of assigned military officers. As a result, the public relations and the media practice degenerated to the full fledged propaganda level. Solomon (1998: 24) has summarized the public relations practices of those Haile Selassie and Derg periods as follows.

*Firstly PR, which entered the Ethiopian scenario in 1960's, remained to be government tutelage: secondly, except for their differences of political philosophy, PR in both regimes were preoccupied in creating, preserving and promoting images of their respective rulers: and thirdly, communication models employed in the PR activities during this time falls under the press agency, propaganda and persuasion models, devoid of democratic substances (Solomon, 1998: 24).*

Government public relations in Ethiopia have been strengthened over the past eight years. The researcher of this work has not found any literature on the current status of the public relations in the private sector. Nevertheless, it is believed that a number of public relations firms and businesses have been established since the political ideology of the current Ethiopian government is not against such practices. Moreover, the constitution is an example of expression of interest that the government is keen to encourage people with skills and talents engage in the public relations and media business in order to have an information society.

With regard to government public relations, there are many occasions that the Ethiopian Government expresses its aspirations of developing a vibrant media. And it was heard numerous times that the role of public relations in informing the public through the media must be strong and sustainable. Furthermore, different policy statements and significant legal frameworks for the development of media and public relations came into being following the establishment of the federal democratic republic of Ethiopia of which the constitution is one worth mentioning.

Nowadays, as the information the researcher obtained from GCAO, there are about six hundred public relations and communication practitioners in the federal government offices. The number of public relations and communication practitioners in the regional states is as twice as the above figure. And the public relations departments in all the government offices represent as a major information provider both to journalists and the public.

## 1.2 Problem Discussion

Government Communication Affairs Office is organized so as to facilitate coordination between individual communication services on the government level, the communication services of individual ministries and government offices. It provides an information and communication service to the government within a government or a government office, providing the public with comprehensive and prompt information about matters pertaining to the work of individual ministries and/or government offices and the government as a whole. The Office was established under the Council of Ministers Regulation No. 158/2008. Since then, public relations practices have been strengthened in government and public institutions.

The Office was established with a view to play a leading role in the government information and communication system in the country. In addition, the Office is meant to serve as the main source of government information acting as government spokesperson, record government statements and disseminate them through various means, and present the stand of the government on national and international issues (as has been stated on Article 5 of the founding of GCAO, Council of Ministers Regulation No. 158/2008, 2008).

The Office is, being directly accountable to the Prime Minister, also vested with the responsibility of setting directions for public relation activities of federal government offices and coordinates their executions. Accordingly, it does enhance the responsiveness of the government to the needs of the society through maintaining an efficient and effective communication and information system that serve government organs and the public as a whole. As observed on its website, Government Communication Affairs Office (2016), <http://www.gcao.gov.et/>, the Office repeatedly underlined that the role of public relations in informing the public through the media must be strong and sustainable to deepen the democratization process of the country.

The significant role of public relations and communications in the political process has been ubiquitous throughout history. From Ancient Greece and Rome to the American Revolution, scholars have documented the importance of public relations and communication in politics and democracy (Broom 2009; McKinnon, Tedesco, and Lauder 2001; Wilcox & Cameron 2007).

Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, and Agee (2005:361) also noted the necessity of government communications for two reasons- to inform citizens of the services available and the manner in which they may be used.

If democracy is to flourish and citizens are to make intelligent judgments about the policies and activities of their elected representatives, public information is crucial. Through information it is hoped that citizens will have the necessary information to participate fully in the formation of government policies. Democratic governance in general requires communication. How well a democracy functions is determined to a great extent by the knowledge of citizens and their access to facts, assessments of consequences, positions and arguments. Transparency, knowledge and dialogue help create understanding and legitimacy.

There are imminent challenges facing many developing countries governments in the world today in their struggle for economic and social development, however. In a bid to communicate with their constituents, governments experience challenges owing to mainly with transparency and credibility issues. It can therefore be concluded the challenge for government in the 21st century is to make citizens trust government agencies (Jing, Jin et al. 2010).

Any government has different bodies with different tasks. This is no exception to Ethiopia, too. Government public relations are also considered in Ethiopia, as government claims, as part of the democratic process. The Ethiopian government believes it helps citizens to feel that they are more involved in the policy-making

process and national consensus. Accordingly, many government organizations in Ethiopia have public relations departments attached purely with informational roles. Although, there is no national data about when public relations started in Ethiopia and how many practitioners are found currently in the country, the public relations working on government organizations are supposed to inform the public at large about the activities of their organization. The practitioners are supposed to tell the public the activities of the government body they represent in the best light. They are there to inform the public in such a way that it helps the decision makers. Hence, government public relations are a critical link between the government bodies and the citizens.

Nonetheless, there are various critics of Ethiopian government saying that most of the government public relations information is either 'manipulated or inaccurate'. Some even contend that public relations tend to hide information that could harm the reputation of the government'. People criticize PR practitioners as if they were mouthpieces promoting only organizational interest contrary to public interest. Whether or not that is the case, as it seems controversial, the researcher attempts to look at it from the practices as they are, how they are practiced in GCAO and from his personal observation in the profession for six years.

Historically, there have been four models of public relations used to define the variations in the way public relations are practiced. Grunig and Hunt (1984) generally defined the four models in their famous book as press agency/publicity, public information, two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical. They pointed out that the press agency/publicity and public information are both one-way models. Press agency seeks attention for the organization in almost any way possible and public information practitioners are journalists in residence who disseminate accurate, but usually only favorable, information about their organization. In the two-way asymmetrical model, practitioners conduct scientific research to determine how best to persuade publics to behave in the way their organizations wish. With the two-way

symmetrical model, practitioners bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitude and behaviors of both their organizations and publics through research and dialogue.

Similar to several prominent definitions of public relations in general, political public relations is also about efforts to influence and to establish, build and maintain beneficial relationships as well as reputations, and does not privilege one concept over the other. Political public relations includes all kinds of models of public relations, including the publicity model, the public information model, the two-way asymmetrical model and the two-way symmetrical model (Grunig, 1992). Our conceptualization of political public relations is thus non-normative and descriptive rather than prescriptive. Besides, it agrees with contingency theory that the preferred model of public relations depends on a host of factors and moves on a continuum ranging from total advocacy for an organization to total accommodation of a public (Cancel et al., 1997).

As outlined in the introduction part, although the importance of public relations in Ethiopia started to receive recognition in the late 19th century, the profession is yet in its infancy. Public relations endeavors of the government might have attempted to introduce and give detailed accounts of the various policies to the public in a disorganized manner.

From the point of view of the Ethiopian government, public relations has two fundamental national missions -- creating national consensus locally and building Ethiopia's image internationally. The national policy was established to create awareness locally about the benefits of unity in diversity and tolerance. The policy gives due emphasis to intensifying the development of democratic institutions. On the other hand, it also envisions to promoting the country's image externally to facilitate the development of investment, trade, and tourism -- sectors which are believed to speed up economic growth and diversify the economy. It also aspires for the country to have its rightful place in international politics.

Yet, adequate public relations activities have not been carried out to realize the above mentioned national goals. And hence, much remains to be done. The public relations activities carried out by the responsible government bodies and public media outlets have not brought about the expected result at the desired level.

There is much we do not know in regard to government public relations in Ethiopia if whether it has contributed for democratic building. Therefore, research needs to be done to find out the Ethiopian government PR policy and strategy. The PR activities will be studied based on the two way symmetric public relations model, where public relations departments should give equal emphasis to the interest of the public as that of the institutions. This also needs to be examined from the principle of the role of PR in a democracy.

It is also necessary to determine how PR is conducted in regard to foreign relations of the country.

### **1.3 Objective of the Study**

#### **General Objective**

The objective of the research is to describe how the Ethiopian Government Communication Affairs Office (GCAO) public relations looks like-communicates with the general public, foreign publics and the media.

#### **Specific Objective**

1. Finding out the major PR activities of the GCAO as a PR body.
2. Identifying the government's PR and media policy and strategies.
3. Examining and determining the PR activities in light of available PR models.
4. Determining if the GPR practices of GCAO is compatible in the context of democracy.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

In order to achieve the above mentioned research objectives and seek answers for the stated objectives, the study was guided by the following research questions:



RQn1. How are government PR activities carried out in the Office?

RQn2. What model of PR does the Office of Government Communication Affairs?

RQn3. What are the PR strategies employed by the GCAO for both the internal and external public and how effective they are.

RQn4. What are the media relations policies and practices of the GCAO with regard to local and international media?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

- ✓ The research is expected to indicate the problems in the practice of public relations and the communication gaps between citizens and the government.
- ✓ It shows what functions the government communicators and public relations officers perform and the way they interact with their publics, and the quality of communication of utmost importance.
- ✓ The research is also hoped to spot major PR challenges that the GCAO currently facing while reaching out a wide range of publics so that it will contribute to future policy formulation.
- ✓ In a nutshell, the research will make recommendation based on the findings which will essentially be an input for understanding the public relations profession and its future in the Ethiopian context. Therefore, it is hoped to aspire researchers to the field and contribute in a great deal for future PR and communication policy.

### **1.7 Scope of the Study**

The scope of the study in terms of subject/theme is limited to critically assess the public relations and communication practices of the Ethiopian Government Communication Affairs Office and its subordinate departments under its supervision. GCAO was selected for the study because it is an institution that takes charge the public relation activities of all the federal government offices and coordinates their executions. The

study therefore is limited to a single case that may or may not be representative of general public relations practice in the country.

### **1.8 Limitation of the Study**

A lack of data on the field of government public relations exists, more specifically on the Ethiopian part. Availability of published reference materials was the major challenge on the part of the researcher. Another limitation encountered in this study includes an extreme delay and fear of respondents conducting interviews with the researcher as they have assumed they would be biased so that their organization becomes uncovered.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Under this section, different scholars' writings and research findings in the field of government public relations are discussed. In addition, historical background of government public relations will be presented.

#### **2.1 Meaning and Definition of Government Public Relations**

It has long been recognized that information will be a potentially powerful policy instrument through which the government may seek to shape and influence behavior, not only through paid for publicity (in the form of advertising, direct marketing and other professionally developed publicity campaigns) but also through more routine administrative channels, such as policy guidelines and announcements, information circulars and other forms of explanatory material.

Most public relations theorists, however, have not constructed separate theories of public relations for government (Cutlip et al., 1985:183). In this thesis, the researcher opted to utilize Grunig models of public relations for government public relations, and the principles are more or less the same for other types of organization be government or corporate. While the general objectives of strategic communication of public relations might not vary across governments and countries, the institutional setting of political public relations, the media system and the political system environment of its practice - and therefore the meaning of public relations in general might be quite different.

Defining government communication or government public relations is therefore not as simple as one might think as mentioned above. A lack of consensus exists in the scholarly literature regarding definitions of political public relations. For example, simplistic views of government public relations may only emphasize news management and media relations as core aspects of this field. Defining it poses a number of challenges of which one reason is that of settling what kinds of institutions count as

governmental in the diverse settings of politics (Sanders, 2011). Furthermore, the multilayered and organizationally diverse nature of government communication is a crucial factor in the complexity of understanding government communication needs, goals and resources. Chandler (2000) argues that the subject 'government public relations' is difficult to frame because "the boundaries of what is public and private are never clear cut - they fade into one another because both sectors are necessarily closely entangled in the complex network of relationships that form a social system"

Yet, as Canel & Sanders (2011) explain government communication refers to the aims, role and practice of communication and public relations implemented by executive politicians and officials of public institutions in the service of a political rationale, and that are themselves constituted on the basis of the people's indirect or direct consent and are charged to enact their will.

Puddington (2009) also asserts the same fact that government is necessarily meant public. He mentions that there are two principles in any political society. First, there is always a public institutional setting even in the most authoritarian regimes; second, again regardless of the political realities, it is almost always claimed that government is constituted on the basis of the people's direct or indirect consent and charged to enact governors will.

Against this backdrop, government public relations, more or less similar to several prominent definitions of public relations in general, is defined as the management process by which an organization or individual actor for governmental or political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011:8)

Government public relations are a critical link between the government bodies and the citizens. L'Etang (2002) provides a succinct definition of the profession.

A specialized skill and service, an intellectual and practical training, a high degree of professional autonomy, a fiduciary relationship with the client, a sense of collective responsibility to the profession as a whole, an embargo on some methods of attracting business and an occupational organization testing competence, regulating standards and discipline (p.50).

From this definition, it is possible to discern that, public relations as a whole should have ethics. Public relations is just one of many strategies that the government can utilize to increase policy dialogue with citizens whose needs must be met. Therefore, the researcher of this study has taken up this definition to be used throughout the work.

## **2.2 Historical Development of Public Relations**

According to J. Grunig and Hunt (1984), the 18th century American Revolution in the United States was “one of the most important products of public relations-like activities in history” (p. 17). Cutlip et al. (2000) also confirms that the temporary patterns of public relations practices were shaped by innovations in mobilizing public opinion” (p. 103) that formed part of Revolutionary War propaganda campaigns. Isaacson (2003), noted that Benjamin Franklin performed dual roles as a diplomat (ambassador to France) and as a journalist and public relations practitioner (writer, printer, and newspaper publisher) in support of the revolution. Thus, Franklin and the American Revolution serve as early examples of how persuasive power can be generated by integrating public relations and diplomacy.

Different writers have mentioned at least two major early founders and contributors of modern public relations. Ivy Lee was one of the great contributors to the emergence of modern public relations. In 1914, in Ludlow, Colorado, a bloody massacre was happened between Colorado militiamen and company guards because of evicted miners and their families. It was at that crisis time Ivy Lee who was a journalist by profession was called for help. Lee had tried his level best to help in the effort of managing the crisis. Lee who started his public relations Job in such a manner went on

to contribute significantly to the creation of modern public relations practice and accordingly came to be considered as one of the fathers of modern public relations (Seitel, 2011: 54; Baines et al, 2004: 2-3).

Later the 1920s saw the books “Crystallizing Public Opinion” and “Propaganda” that Edward Bernays, the father of public relations, wrote in order to mold public opinion and influence the public in line with specific views. Edward L. Bernays, sought to achieve public relations goals through the spread of cultural ideas about art, science, and social programs that would appeal to the mutual interests of organizations and their publics (Brummett, 2000).

### **2.3 History of Government Public Relations**

Government public relations has much in common with general theory on public relations, but that it in contrast to many established definitions of public relations is non-normative and descriptive and more inclusive as it includes communication as well as action and relationships as well as reputations.

Although public relations strategies and tactics were first established by political actors, in political contexts, and used for political purposes, the bulk of public relations theory and research still focuses on corporate settings, (Cutlip, 1995; Lamme & Russell, 2010). Nonetheless, there are so many evidences that demonstrate the practice of government public relations is as old as politics and society itself (Martinelli, Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011). Many contemporary political public relations strategies and tactics such as relationship management, reputation management, rhetoric, and persuasion have had ancient roots in political public relations as they claim.

To make the long story short, government public relations is the type of communication function that deals with the interaction of the citizenry with the government, with governmental regulators, and the legislative (elected and appointed) and regulatory arms of government.

## 2.4 Objectives of Government Public Relations

Government public relations are increasingly strategic, meaning they must meet the stated goals of the organization, which means the goals of the government. Alike the term government communication, one can simply understand the word government public relations as communication activities of the government body which are aimed at informing the public, encouraging dialogue, reaching consensus, and acquiring support for the implementation of the government's policies.

According to Lee (2008), there are also reasons why government has *to* engage in public relations. These are the democratic requirements of government management, closely tied to the *public* in public administration. A second cluster of benefits from public relations are optional. They help an agency do its core mission more effectively and, sometimes, less expensively. These are the pragmatic uses of public relations, focusing on the *administration* in public administration. Third, the most controversial category is the political use of public relations intended to advance the agency's autonomy and power.

First, public administrators recognize that some aspects of public relations are forced upon their agencies by dint of being in the public sector. As Young (2007) states, communication is the basic prerequisite for democracy. That means the communication obligations of a government manager include responding to inquiries from the news media, reporting to the electorate on agency activities, and generally being responsive to the public. These are not luxuries in the context of democratic governance. Rather, they are obligations that can't be ignored, even if and when a politician denounces them as self-serving and wasteful propaganda. Yet, in a democracy, public administrators must engage in certain activities that are expected as the *sine qua non* of government. For example, government managers must respond to inquiries from the news media, whether the particular issue would put the agency in a good light or a bad one. Similarly, given the central role of public opinion in a democracy, public administrators

have a duty to report to the citizenry on the work of the agency. Again, these are part of the rubric of public relations. Hence, when focusing on these purposes, public relations is integral to public administration, not ancillary to it, as Lee argues. Therefore, by using a threefold typology mentioned above, he split the different purposes of government public relations into the following in such a way that they fit together:

I. Mandatory: Democratic purposes of government public relations

1. Media relations

2. Public reporting

3a. Responsiveness to the public (as citizens)

II. Optional: Pragmatic purposes of government public relations

3b. Responsiveness to the public (as customers and clients)

4. Increasing the utilization of services and products (Public outreach)

5. Public education and public service campaigns (Public outreach)

6. Seeking voluntary public compliance with laws and regulations (Public outreach)

7. Using the public as the eyes and ears of an agency (Public outreach)

III. Dangerous, but powerful: Political purposes of government public relations

8. Increasing public support

What more, the principle of both communication and public relations dictates also government public relations should involve informing the public and being informed by the public—a legitimate and important two-way conversation. Furthermore, public relations has a responsibility to create a public opinion environment that is friendly to the government's policies or actions whether that is deserved or not.

## **2.5 Nature and Function of Government Public Relations**

Today, it is not uncommon for an organization to have public relations department. Public relations practices are imminent in virtually every industry, government, and nonprofit organization even in individual to individual relationships. Government



public relations is similarly growing as well. A number of countries have developed complex government public relations and communication systems though without the concomitant implementation of civil liberties and political freedoms found in many electoral democracies (Freedom House, 2009).

Public relations relationship with society is complex, at the same time positive and negative. Some consider public relations in general spin and some others a conduit, a facilitator, and a manager of communication, conducting research, defining problems, and creating meaning by fostering communication among many groups in society.

There are also many other definitions of public relations which raise an ethical dimension. Cutlip and Center state,

Public relations is the planned effort to influence opinion through good character and responsible performance, based upon mutually satisfactory two-way communication. (Cutlip and Center, 1978).

This definition gives another insight of public relations, namely that the communication is not one-way. Public relations practitioners will not only communicate to the public, but must also listen to the feedback from the public.

The researcher of this study doesn't hope to resolve these definitional and ideological challenges here but not either importance for the issues being considered.

Either way, the public relations function is prevalent and growing; the fragmentation of media and growth of multiple message sources means that public relations is on the rise while traditional forms of mass communication (such as newspapers) are on the decline.

Government public relations could be considered the idealized version of public diplomacy, at least in the domestic context in democracy, because the government is

identifying and clarifying arguments with constituents so they can make their own judgments. Ideally, government public relations is used with honesty and sincerity because, as an "ideology factory," several competing ideas must be addressed by the government and constituents alike (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010, p. 60).

## **2.6 The Role of Government Public Relations in Democracy**

Public relations has been lauded by advocates and advanced as an essential feature of a healthy democracy and part of a free market place for the exchange of ideas. Such views recur across a spectrum of public relations theory, from the Grunigian paradigm of ethical public relations illustrated through two-way symmetry in public communication (Grunig and Hunt 1984), to a collaborative symmetrical relationship where 'communicators keep their eye on a broad professional perspective of balancing private and public interests' (Grunig 2000: 34).

Despite differing views both supportive and critical on its credibility, many scholars agree that government public relations can be viewed as a socially-responsible practice. Of course, it is important to examine how a particular government views certain political variables, such as the roles of civil servants or democracy (if any). Doing so will give hints to how a country's government views government public relations. Gelders & Ihlen (2010) for example argues that government public relations is supposed to promote cultural values citing as an example that when a country hosts the Olympics or other high-profile event for the world to see.

Serving different interests by helping them articulate their views and be seen and heard in the political debate, public relations plays a crucial role for democracy. As informing citizens are the cornerstones of a democracy, and keeping stakeholders and publics informed has been a cornerstone of public relations for half a century as Kent, Harrison, & Taylor (2006) noted. Government public relations can therefore make people feel as part of a democratic process, giving anyone a genuine voice, so that it increases genuine

participation. Public relations professionals should therefore push for more inclusiveness, more transparency, more stakeholder input, more public input, more lectures, and more physical and virtual spaces where people can come and talk about ideas and issues.

In the early 80s scholars began to maintain that the growth of government and the media have come to a point which would change the nature of the political process. As (Orren, 1986) pointed out, the public relations taking over some of the vital functions of political parties and moving into the center of the political system adapts the practices of politics and government and serves as links between the government and citizens.

In a public that is heavily influenced by media of all different types, government public relations works to identify, revise and clarify governmental arguments in the face of media scrutiny (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010, p. 61; Signitzer & Wamser, 2005, p. 457). In general, since government public relations uses many of the same tactics as journalism (time-sensitive written pieces, broadcast media and a digital presence, and others), government public relations is effective at spurring public debate on stories written by journalists. With a transparent media environment, this subsequently enhances the democratic exchange of ideas, as well as accountability (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010, p. 61). When national unity is increased, the global stage is opened to show other countries as a model government public relations effort. This subsequently can increase public and cultural diplomacy in the form of soft power (Mead, 2004, p. 48; Mearsheimer, 2001, pp. 60-61; Nye, 2004, pp. 256-257; White, L'Etang & Moss, 2009, p. 396).

A prominent German sociologist, Klaus Merten, described why public relations is crucial for the operation of contemporary communication systems. He wrote: "Public relations is a strategy for using communication processes to generate desired effects by constructing desired realities."

Although, Merten's thought of 'desired effects by constructing desired realities' is in direct conflict with the underlying principle that democracy relies on a relatively free

communication structure, which provides information and methods of discussing issues to its citizens, it acknowledges that it facilitates the process of information sharing.

## **2.7 Public Relations in Government Organizations**

The social environment forms a complex field of forces, in which organizations depend on many parties each with their own objectives and interests (Vos and Schoemaker, 2011). Organizations aim at acquiring legitimacy for their activities, and therefore need to be willing to participate in dialogue with stakeholders and be held accountable for the decision they would make (Vos, Schoemaker and Luoma-aho, 2013).

Public relations service interventions are the desired course of actions planned the organization to achieve public relations goals. According to Banik (2002:35) the need for public relations service interventions in government is required to achieve the organizational goals. He summarizes into the following:

- ✓ To support the structure and strategic mission, vision and goals of the organization.
- ✓ To prepare to respond to the increasing problem faced by the organization both internally and externally;
- ✓ To help build a desirable image of the organization by suitable PR strategies and actions.

As Banik explained in his book of effective public relations in public and private sector (Banik, 2002:40-46), the public relations management has to enlist the perception and support of its workers to realize its objectives winning confidences and trusts of its share holders, clients and suppliers and the public at large thereby full filling its internal and external obligations.

## **2.8 Internal Publics of Public Relations**

Employees are called internal public of an organization. They are important because they participate in the operation, production and formulation of ideas which leads to achievement of organizational objectives. Hence communication between management and employees is of great importance. An organizational internal image and morale of the work force depend a great deal on the flow of information through internal communications. Organizations which refuse to communicate with their internal constituent and take them for granted, fail to effectively handle the flow communication and on many occasions are compelled to face undesirable consequence (Banik, 2004:40-41). The success of activities of an organization is determined by its internal communication i.e. communication within an organization. This can be achieved by developing channels of internal communication to make the members aware of the message to be developed at any given time. It also insures proper working of the different elements of PR. Failure will end in PR disasters and electoral failures. Lack of co-ordination, planning and professionalism will damage the image and success of the organization.

## **2.9 External Publics of Public Relations**

As the name implies, external public relations is concerned with people outside the organization since necessary to communicate with deferent groups of people, the external target population has to be defined. It is also very important to carefully identify the public group in order to reach them effectively otherwise it may be difficult to achieve the desired objectives.

Generally, governmental organizations have normally the following groups of people external to the organizations. These are customers, government, shareholders and opinion leaders on the other hand, private sector companies being owned by individual or shareholders, mass media, community at large, civic and government bodies, financial institutions, citizen's action group and public at large.

What this suggests is that an important public in public sector or government organization is the government itself. A government public relation has two facets, first being public relations for the government (as an organization) and second, public relations with the government as the target group. Public relations service for the government involve mobilizing public support for government, to build relation with government and also keeping the community, the public and above all the government on the organizational side or favor.

## **2.10 Government Public Relations Tools**

Government public relations are not only about communication and involve a wider group of stakeholders such as lobby groups, think tanks, and party donors, civil servants and the general public as well. Furthermore, they have also many other functions to achieve their goals so that they employ public relations tools.

Public relations tools implemented by the government public relations departments serve as to have two-way communications with the target audiences or customers. Based on the very nature of activities and different target group, various tools can be used (Banik, 2004:76).

A variety of tools can be employed to communicate the public. Government public relations via communication is carried out in many forms, including press releases, media interviews, and speeches. The contributions via action also occur in many forms, such as counseling management to alter organizational policy, forming partnerships with interest groups, or holding special events. This is consistent with perspectives on public relations stressing its relationship management function (Broom, Casey, and Ritchey 2000; Ferguson 1984; Ki and Hon 2006; Ledingham 2003; Ledingham and Bruning 1998). Thus, while it can be argued that government public relations can be thought of as a type of strategic communication, it is important to underscore that political public relations is not only about communication but also action.

- 1) **The press release:** one of the most important publics is the press. To be used by press, information must be factual true and of interest to the medium as well as to its audience.
  
- 2) **Media relations:** Public relations as a standalone term evokes media relations practices that are common in the business world (L'Etang, 2009, p. 608; Signitzer & Wamswer, pp. 435-436). One of the most important publics for organizations is the press. Media and public relations have strong ties as a result. We can say without media public relations won't exist.

Media relation is one of the larger functions of public relations in politics or government, perhaps the most well-known domain concerning its influence is in news management. News management is one practical solution for governments to strategically communicate their messages and use the media to further their political and policy goals. Government public relations efforts focus on engaging journalists and news outlets in order to engender media coverage regarding topics of key priority to the government organizations they represent or to convey their point of view on governmental matters affecting their organization. In its simplest form, this may involve the dissemination of news releases or it may involve more complex activities such as holding special news conferences or producing video footage to assist journalists in developing stories. Website, newsletter, organizational bulletins, leaflets and so on can also help to reaching the public and influence.

- 3) **Special events:** In addition to traditional communication activities of information dissemination and exchange, another major domain of government public relations lies in event planning, management, and execution. A range of activities and events are used to support political public relations efforts. Among the most prominent are debates, speeches, news conferences, party conventions, and town

hall meetings when it comes to supporting campaigning and governance. Other types might include fund raising and dinners.

Political speeches, though clearly a communication activity, also can be viewed as events. They are used both for campaigning and garnering public support for government programs and projects. The planning and execution of speeches are complex, but offer a germane tool for reaching large groups in a mediated or unmediated setting. Research suggests that speeches can be effective for agenda-setting, increasing political knowledge, and stimulating support for a cause, policy, or candidate (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2011) during elections.

The inclusion of event planning, management, and execution in government public relations is also consistent with the relationship cultivation and management approach championed by Ledingham (2011), who argues that the field involves more than just messaging.

- 4) **Crisis Management and Crisis Communication:** While crisis management and communication is essential for all organizations, the natures of crises differ between political and other settings. Political and corporate crisis managers also face different constraints on crisis communication and criteria for judging what constitutes success in crisis management (Coombs, 2011). One key difference is that in government or politics, both opponents and the media might have an interest in manufacturing perceptions that a crisis is at hand and that some political actor or organization is responsible for the crisis.

Another important difference in crisis communication in the corporate and political spheres is that fiscal forces are less influential with regard to political crises. This may influence crisis response strategies, and for example lead to a greater use of an apology response when communicating with affected citizens and stakeholders. In general, according Burnett (1998), crisis may produce gains



as well as losses (p.477). Organizational crises may also be turned into opportunities (Smith et al.,1996).

## **2.11 International Public Relations**

In an increasingly-globalized world, public relations has proven to be a valuable practice to understand, respect and engage in business relationships with other countries. Hence, government public relations activities are not confined to one's country territory only, it goes beyond. Approximately 160 foreign governments have US public relations consultants or lobbyists representing them in communicating with the US media, policymakers, and the public (David L. Paletz, & Diana Owen & Timothy E. Cook, 2012). The supposed American public relations firms, Paletz, Owen & Cook claim, instruct their clients on how to deal with the media, arrange meetings for them with journalists, set up editorial briefings, pitch stories to reporters and editors, and try to create newsworthy events. These tactics usually succeed in increasing and improving the countries' news coverage and images.

The *New York Times* revealed that, in an article "Worried Saudis Pay Millions to Improve Image in the U.S.," published by Christopher Marquis (August 29, 2002) the Saudi "government has spent millions of dollars on well-connected lobbyists and national television advertisements since 9-11 in a drive to improve its image among Americans." because of fifteen of the nineteen terrorists involved with the attacks on 9/11 were Saudi Arabian. *New York Times*, accessed March 23, 2017

<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/29/world/worried-saudis-pay-millions-to-improve-image-in-the-us.html>.

Mass media have a powerful influence on organizational activities in general and public relations in particular. It does play a powerful role in influencing how individual countries are perceived globally. The findings by Larson and Rivenburgh (1991), who studied the television coverage of the opening ceremony of the Seoul Olympics by the British Broadcasting Corporation, the United States' National Broadcasting

Corporation, and Australia's TEN network, demonstrated a large majority of developing countries received no mention at all during those telecasts, whereas a few developed countries received very positive and extended coverage. The finding of such study is of particular relevance to international public relations practitioners who are often called on by developing countries to change the way they are perceived by the public of developed nations.

Kunczik (1993) also noted the use of the media by nations for public relations purposes. He studied the news and advertisements of developing countries in German media and remarked: "since most people's scope of experience is naturally very limited, and their knowledge of complex social processes in other countries comes mainly from the mass media, there is always the danger that, due to the process of news selection, there are differences between 'real reality' and 'media reality'" (p. 1). Therefore, he argued many developing countries view fighting negative media stereotyping as a losing battle, one that they often choose not to wage primarily due to a lack of resources. But other developing nations recognize the need to be heard in the developed world as part of their public diplomacy because they desperately need foreign aid from developed countries and loans from world bodies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank, which requires support from key developed countries such as the United States. Because of the powerful effects that the media have in shaping public opinion nationally and internationally, public relations professionals have given primacy to media relations. To conduct effective media relations, international public relations practitioners needed to understand the nature of media environment in a particular country.

Efforts of public diplomacy by foreign nations and their governments can also be viewed as a part of political public relations given their objectives to engage citizens of other countries and shape policymaking. A study by Kioussis and Wu (2008) revealed

the public relations efforts by foreign nations are linked to favorable outcomes in media coverage and public opinion in order to reduce the impact of negative information.

Molleda (2011) underscores the role of transnational corporations and stresses that there must be balance among the organization's interests, home country's interests, and host country's interests when attempting to influence political processes and decisions in other countries. Therefore, foreign nations are not the only groups employing political public relations in an international setting as he claims.

Meanwhile, there are also arguments who say the public relations and the lobbying make their fortunes by burnishing the images of African dictators and advancing their undemocratic interests against those of their own countries. For example, Washington Post in its article of August 26, 2010, entitled with "Poor nations investing in D.C. lobbyists" revealed the authoritarian regime of the Congo Republic had spent 9 million US dollars within five years to deal with its problem of image in the West, more particularly the US.

With regard to Ethiopia, Mariana Walker Guevara in her 22 May 2007 article, "Allegiance Rewarded-Ethiopia reaps U.S. aid by enlisting in war on terror and hiring influential lobbyists" wrote about the Ethiopian government and who is providing it the diplomatic and political shield as it violated international law and commits international crimes in Ethiopia and Somalia. She wrote:

*"...Mandatory lobbying disclosure records filled with the Department of Justice show that from April to August 2006, DLA, Piper lobbyists talked on the phone and met numerous times with the staffs of the House International Relations Committee; Rep. Mike Honda (D-Calif.), chairman of the Congressional Ethiopia and Ethiopian American Caucus, the congressional affairs section of the Department of State; and Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.), a member of the Congressional Black Caucus and*

*2008 presidential candidate...The bill never made it to the House floor. The Bureau of African Affairs at the State Department objected to the bill as being "too punitive" and getting in the way of U.S. foreign policy, according to a source with knowledge of the negotiations surrounding the bill. "They did everything they could do to sabotage it," the source said. A State Department spokesman, Steve Lauterbach, told the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) that the bill was "prescriptive" and "limiting" on how foreign aid to Ethiopia should be spent..."*

Under the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) individuals who engage in lobbying on behalf of foreign entities are required to register with the US government and file semi-annual reports on their activities. FARA records showed that Ethiopia had spent \$2.3 million securing the services of three firms, including DLA Piper, to defend its access to U.S. money and managed a bill called "HR-5680-Ethiopia Freedom, Democracy and Human Rights Advancement Act of 2006" to stop before it made to the US House.

## **2.12 Theoretical Framework**

The study is to be carried out within the theoretical framework of James Grunig and Todd Hunt's Four Models of Public Relations.

James Grunig and Todd Hunt published the Four Models of Public Relations as part of their book *Managing Public Relations*. The Four Models of Public Relations are famously known because they stepped the public relations profession up and up to now serve as baseline to sever public relations away from propaganda and persuasion. Grunig and Hunt explained they chose the term 'models' to describe four types of public relations that have evolved through history.

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The following table shows that how these models differs the kinds of public relations as the purpose and nature of communication differs. The models will be used to interpret the Government PR activities as being any one of the four.

	Models	Type of Communication	Characteristics
1.	Press agent or publicity	One-way communication	Uses persuasion and manipulation to influence audiences to behave as the organization desires.
2.	Public information model	One way communication	Uses press releases and other one-way communication techniques to distribute organizational information. The public relations practitioner is often referred to as the in-house journalist.
3.	Two way asymmetrical model	Two way communication (imbalanced)	Uses persuasion and manipulation to influence audiences to behave as the organization desires. Does not use research to find out how stakeholders feel about the organization.
4.	Two way symmetrical model	Two way communication	Uses communication to negotiate with the public, resolve conflict and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organization and its stakeholders

### **James Grunig and Todd Hunt's Four Models of Public Relations (1984)**

The models should be seen as abstractions. Grunig and Hunt (1984) argued, although public relations was developed as a persuasive communication function, not all of these models are persuasive. Thus, these different models indicate how the different

characteristics and purposes contribute to the kinds of public relations. Moreover, the models demonstrate the historical development of the practices, and the period when such communication were introduced into the public relations profession. A glimpse look at the above table can be summarized as follows:

**a) The press agent/publicity model:** seek attention for their organization in almost any way possible. Here the public relations serves a propaganda function. In this model practitioners spread the faith of the organization involved, often through incomplete, distorted, or half-true information.

**b) Public-information model:** The purpose here is the dissemination of information, and not with a persuasive intent. The public relations person functions essentially as a journalist in residence, whose job it is to report objectively information about his organization to the public, but usually only favorable information as Grunig (2001) says.

**c) Two-way asymmetric model:** Practitioners conduct scientific research to determine how best to persuade publics to behave in the way their organizations wish. With the two-way symmetrical model, practitioners bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitude and behaviors of both their organizations and publics through research and dialogue. This model is a bit complicated and compared to the two models discussed above. The idea of two ways communication was introduced as a result of looking for a feedback for information disseminated that began to be considered as part of the communication process. However, the purpose of seeking feedback wasn't to change position that has been seized by an organization, instead the feedback was to be used to introduce another form of persuasion so that the audience would accept the interest of the organization (Seitel, 2011: 81-82).

**d) Two-way symmetric model:** In this model practitioners serve as mediators between organizations and their publics. Their goal is mutual understanding between organizations and their publics.

J. Grunig pointed out public relations is asymmetrical by nature. Persuasion is still relevant in the symmetrical model. Public relations professionals sometimes persuade the public and other times they must persuade senior management. He was the first to point out that most organizations practice a combination of the four models (J. Grunig, 2001). Sometimes one model will be more effective than another. The knowledge of the practitioners (which models they know how to use) and shared understanding with senior management were the two strongest predictors of models practiced.

Grunig (1992) also noted that government public relations include all kinds of models of public relations, including the publicity model, the public information model, the two-way asymmetrical model and the two-way symmetrical model. Thus, our conceptualization of political public relations is non-normative and descriptive rather than prescriptive, and agrees with contingency theory that the preferred model of public relations depends on a host of factors and moves on a continuum ranging from total advocacy for an organization to total accommodation of a public (Cancel et al., 1997).

## **2.13 Differentiating Government Public Relations from Propaganda**

Differentiating between government public relations and propaganda is no easy because not all propaganda is considered negative.

In general, academics have preferred to use the term persuasion, as opposed to propaganda (L'Etang, 2002, pp. 47-48). To complicate matters even more, people will confuse the terms because they unwittingly combine public relations, advertising, marketing and even public information (L'Etang, 2009, p. 611). There are general criteria that should be taken into account, including the goals of the organizations, which

method of communication it prefers to use, as well as the types of targeted audiences (Signitzer & Wamser, 2005, pp. 449-457).

Anyway, all governments engage in self-promotion and propaganda to influence public opinion and achieve a measure of thought control either overtly (in authoritarian regimes,) and/or subtly (in western democracies). Nevertheless, what distinguishes propaganda from government public relations is that it promotes private interest contrary to the general welfare, is not compatible with honest journalism.

L'Etang (2002) describes propaganda distinctively as one that discounts ethics in favor of spinning "truth" as one-sided. He also noted that propaganda might not even use training, as it could simply rely on the most-convenient message and thus completely discount ethics during message transmission.

From the above definition, it is possible to discern that, public relations as a whole should have ethics. Government public relations can therefore be considered as rational persuasion in the form of news, and views and entertainment or the structures, processes by which interacting parts operate through an exchange of information and transmission of meaning. In other words, it is the kind of communication between an organization and its members- in this case GCAO as an entity and the general public as members that made it up.

It is also possible to discern public relations from propaganda by looking at each from the lens of three approaches- the realist, rationalist and revolutionist, according to L'Etang (2009) and Signitzer & Wamser (2005). While realism approach implies that ethics is discounted in favor of pressuring actors to get their message out as quickly as possible, the rationalist approach believes that building relationships in an international society is best attained through mutual truthfulness and promise-keeping. Respect and truth are the cornerstone of ethics in this approach, Signitzer & Wamser, 2005, pp. 455-456. The third, the nationalist approach differs from the two mentioned above in that it



advocates neither PR nor propaganda may be necessary because people can take care of their own affairs.

Yet, Signitzer & Wamser (2005) warned that such an approach might see the government as an obstacle which implies that a government could use either public relations or propaganda to pursue their communication needs with the public.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter illustrates what kind of research methods and procedures that the researcher followed to answer the research questions and attain the research objectives.

#### **Methodology**

The study is a mixed methods strategy. Thus, it employed a questionnaire, interviews and PR document analysis pertinent to the Government Communication Affairs Office. And it will be conducted based on the two way symmetric public relations model, where public relations departments give equal emphasis to the interest of the public as that of the institutions.

The data was generated through interview questionnaires, document analysis and personal observation to supplement, complement, validate and triangulate data to be obtained. Thus, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews assuming that the technique would help to get information that is not restricted or limited to the experience of the researcher. It is also believed that the technique would make things easier to ask follow-up questions that other methods like questionnaire do not cater for. Accordingly, informants were selected in the target institution using in consultation with the GCAO minister's office aide based on their level of responsibility rested upon. Depending on the size of the informants, the researcher designed simple alphabetical letters such as a, b, c, d etc to each respondent selected in order to ensure anonymity

and confidentiality. This was done in order to avoid ethical issues related to collecting information from respondents.

### **3.2 Qualitative Research Methodology**

Qualitative research favors a flexible questioning approach (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003: 111). Although a basic set of questions prepared, the researcher can change questions or ask follow-up questions at any time. As Miller and Brewer (2003:192) describe, methodology connotes a set of rules and procedures to guide research and against which its claims can be evaluated.

This method is selected due to its suitability to the nature of data to be gathered and the flexibility it provides as a social research. As Creswell (2007: 37) notes in his definition of qualitative research:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. [...] The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem and it extends the literature or signals a call for action.

As we see from the above definition, Creswell emphasizes that qualitative research is based on a process which starts from theoretical assumptions and evolves into calling action to problems using its own procedures. What is more in this research method, according to the definition, is that participants' voices are included in the report and the researcher is not a bystander. In order for a qualitative research to achieve its objectives, there are four primary data collection methods it relies on (Marshall & Rossman, 1999: 97). They put the four data collection methods as follows:

Qualitative researchers typically rely on four methods for gathering information: (a) participating in the setting, (b) observing directly, (c) interviewing in depth, and (d) analyzing documents and material culture.

Therefore, as the research topic deals with the practice of government public relations in GCAO, special emphasis is given to explaining what the practice looks like and the challenges that encounter while practicing public relations. In order to achieve this purpose, the researcher has tried to indicate what the global professional public relations standard seems to be and then followed comparing that standard to the existing practice in GCAO. After doing so, challenges that encounter the practice of government public relations as well as the practitioners were examined.

In its attempt to shed lights on our understanding of how government public relations works in the GCAO, different interview questioners were prepared and key informants were selected both by the researcher and the organization being studied. The informants are selected by their assumed critical role to play in the Office.

Public relations department heads and practitioners were selected and interviewed to give their reflections on how public relations is practiced in their respective Office. The information that was obtained through the interview has also helped to find out what challenges existed in the practice of public relations and also in practicing it as a practitioner. Moreover, documents such as regulations, guidelines, strategies and the likes that are aimed at regulating the practice of public relations were examined.

However, among the four methods outlined above, this research uses in-depth interview and document analysis for they are appropriate to answer the research questions. The following two sections discuss these methods.

### **3.3 Data Collection Procedure and Tools**

The data source for this research came from three areas. The first source of data in this regard was collected from the Government Communication Affairs Office. In- depth interview with public relations practitioners of Government Communication Affairs Office (GCAO) was employed with an aim of finding out their reflections on matters related to this research. First, interview questioners were prepared and sent to the professionals via email. This was done as per their recommendation to ease the interview process and let them prepare for latter face to face interview. Those selected informants took their share of questions claiming that some of the questions did not fall under their specific job or department in which they belonged.

Furthermore, documents written on public relations are analyzed and the findings are presented. Here the emphasis is on finding out the procedures, principles and strategies that are aimed at establishing and developing the practice of public relations. Besides, the documents at national level, public relations tools and strategies at the institutional level are also analyzed.

There are about 12 directorates in the GCAO and two special offices under the Office all of which are accountable to the Office Head, in the rank of Minister. 13 interrelated interview questions were drawn from the research questions prepared under which the researcher grouped them into three. This approach served to build on respondents' proper understanding of the public relations practices and to further investigate unseen factors hampering the profession. Accordingly, questions in the first group are categorized under the status of the profession and the general characteristics of the public relations activities in the Office. The second and third group questions fall under GCAO and the media relationship. Thirdly, crisis management and communication was addressed as the time this study has been conducted the country was undergoing under state emergency.

### **3.3.1 In-depth interviews**

In-depth interview is a qualitative research tool used in providing ample opportunities to grasp the research elements' internal feelings, perspectives, interpretations, knowledge, opinions and life experiences (Ezzy, 2002; Stokes, 2003; Mack, N. et al 2005; Boyce, C. & Neale, P. 2006; Jensen, 2002;).

N. et al (2005: 29) put how useful the tool could be both to the researched and the researcher alike:

In-depth interviews are one of the most common qualitative methods. One reason for their popularity is that they are very effective in giving a human face to research problems. In addition, conducting and participating in interviews can be a rewarding experience for participants and interviewers alike. For participants [...] in-depth interviews offer the opportunity to express themselves in a way ordinary life rarely affords them. [...] interviewers engaged in in-depth interviews are offered the privilege of having people who are virtually strangers entrust them with a glimpse into their personal lives.

In-depth interviews are more detailed; and as Wimmer and Dominick (2003: 127) argued, when compared to traditional survey methods, intensive in-depth interviews provide more accurate responses on sensitive issues. If they are intensive and well performed, they provide detailed background about the reasons why respondents give specific answers. It elaborates data concerning respondents' opinions, values, motivations, recollections, experiences, and feelings.

In spite of being an effective tool to gather qualitative data, in-depth interview has a disadvantage as well. The disadvantages are, it is prone to bias, consumes time to analyze, information could be distorted through recall error, selective perceptions, desire to please interviewer and people do not always say what they think, or mean what they say (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Boyce, C. & Neale, P. 2006; Jensen, 2002).

As previously indicated, the aim of this study is to find out how the Ethiopian Government Communication Affairs Office (GCAO) conducts its PR activities and communicates with its stakeholders and the general public as a whole. Therefore, interviewing the PR practitioners and communicators was found to be the best method to achieve this.

In the research, structured in-depth interview was used as a main tool to gather data from key informants lived experience concerning the government public relations activities in their office. Having this in mind, therefore, six participants representing the Office one way or the other have been included to grasp their takes on the issue under investigation. The participants of the research include 2 team leaders, 2 senior public relations, communication and media expert and two other department heads. And the interview was conducted in the month of April, 2017 and the researcher took him to conduct the interview with each of the informants not lesser than two hours.

### **3.3.2 Document Analysis**

Even though in-depth interview has been used as a main tool to gather data from research participants, to consolidate the data gathered with the in-depth interview, document analysis was conducted to corroborate the findings. To that end, documents related to government public relations, mass media and other pertinent materials supporting the research were analyzed. These include Government communication Affairs Office Establishment Council of Ministers Regulation 158/2008, Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation 590/2008, Issues of Establishing Democratic System in Ethiopia, and Federal Government Offices Public Relations Bodies Working Procedure.

To define what documents are, Flick (2009: 255- 256) says the following citing Prior (2003: 2) as follows:

If we are to get to grips with the nature of documents then we have to move away from a consideration of them as stable, static and pre-defined artifacts. Instead we must consider them in terms of fields, frames and networks of action. In fact, the status of things as "documents" depends precisely on the ways which such objects are integrated into fields of action, and documents can only be defined in terms of such fields.

As it has been the case with the in-depth interview, this tool, too, has its own drawbacks and strengths. The strengths include it is relatively inexpensive; it provides a behind-the-scenes look at a program that may not be directly observable; it may bring up issues not noted by other means; it is good source of background information; and it supports data gathered in interviews or observations. The drawbacks are bias due to selective survival of information; information may be incomplete or inaccurate; time consuming to collect, review, and analyze many documents; and information may be inapplicable, disorganized, unavailable, or out of date (Flick, 2009; Creswell, 2012; Creswell 2013).

### **3.4 Data analysis procedures**

Unlike quantitative approaches, which tend to wait until all the numbers are in before the analysis begins, data analysis in qualitative studies is done early in the collection process and continues throughout the project (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003: 111).

Qualitative researchers use an inductive method: Data are collected relevant to some topic and are grouped into appropriate and meaningful categories; explanations emerge from the data themselves (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003: 111).

Against this background, the PR activities of the government are one of the three major thematic categories that this study would discuss; the PR and media relations is another issue that was dealt in the study in relation with policy documents, proclamation and regulations that the government issued to develop the sector.

As the research is qualitative one, the data analyzed were explained in the form of narration. And the researcher preferred to employ a simple code system (symbols/signs) for responses he gathered from key informants, to keep ethical standard of the research, therefore, their personal names were intentionally declined for the reason that they may feel insecure.

The researcher carefully prepared structured probing questions in the form of a discussion guide and approached each of the interviewees friendly until they gave him at least the right possible answer which they thought for. By conducting interviews to examine opinions, attitudes, and overall assessment of the practices, he collected the data and compared and contrasted the similarities and differences of the responses to find out the nature of the PR practices in the GCAO.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATAPRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter deals with data presentation and analysis. As the research deals with the government public relations in the Government Communication Affairs of Ethiopia (GCAO), the issue was approached in two perspectives. One is related to the gathering and analysis of views of practitioners who are managers and experts in the Office. The other is dealt with the existing documents that were meant to establish and develop public relations in government offices. The researcher has chosen the data presentation and the analysis go parallel and followed combination of analysis for both types of data collection, i.e., in-depth interview and document analysis, to form some sort of convergence.

#### **4.2 Interview Part**

**A/ How are government PR activities carried out in the Office?**



GCAO's vision, as was stated on the website ([www.gcao.eth.com](http://www.gcao.eth.com)), repeatedly echoed in the media day and night, portrayed in billboards in the city of Addis Ababa and many other big towns, officially articulated in a number of its publications, was 'attaining a public reached consensus and a country having pretty good image in 2017 E.C.'. More or less, the Ethiopian government has also envisioned a country pulled out of poverty and assured democracy, good governance and social justice founded on the participation and consent of the peoples. While looked at the mission, it was stated that the Office should act as government's spokesperson, and through maintaining an efficient and effective communication and information system would provide timely and correct information, undertake studies and research on communication and ensure media accessibility, and play a strategic leadership role in consensus creation on the fundamental issues of the country and publicize the already changing image of the country. (Note that this is unofficial translation of the researcher).

One of the major tasks of GCAO was providing information to the public in any way it can and collecting public information from the public itself. Simply put, any of the PR activities of the Office should gear towards achieving those shared national and organizational visions and mission.

GCAO major areas of public information service to the public as a PR institution would be editorial one. The weekly editorial statements, on which the government's position were explained, written and communicated to the general public on various channels, mostly managed by the head of the Office with a rank of Minister.

The researcher found the weekly editorial statement at which the government's position would be revealed on current affairs, is made to be linked with the government's vision, mission and goals of the country and the Organization as well under which it was administered. As the result, the editorial meetings to be held once in a week in the Office seemed to dictate the subject matter and the content of the editorial. As B, one of the interviewee, says

*We have editorial committee meetings once in a week whereby important issues are to be discussed and the Head of the Office or any one delegating him leads. We do write editorials based on issues to be raised on the editorial meeting, and for that matter the agenda the Head of the Office comes up with will determine the editorial content. And the head of the office will get the initial idea for our weekly editorials from meetings he participates in the Council of Ministers. That is how we often do; there are however some occasions we do not wait for direction from the Council of Ministers. Anyway, the Office has an editorial guideline to which it is governed.*

Although the editorial content of the Office focused on issues that have importance both to the government and the organization, it would only be made to include the viewpoints of the executive body for and by which the Office was established. Issues were crystallized and messages were framed from the government and organizational vantage point. This would perhaps make creating consensus and image building a very difficult endeavor no matter what the Office tried to disseminate accurate and timely information. Though disseminating information about the government, as spokesperson of the government, on a regular weekly basis should be encouraged, it needs to be in a manner that balances the interests of all of its stakeholders, or the general public.

Another important point that needs to be mentioned here in relations to the editorial is that how it would be made available to the public and the reaction or public opinion on it. As the researcher found from the respondents, C, and F the weekly editorial would be sent to all media outlets available, and to Ethiopia's embassies all around the world via Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and closely monitors both local media and international ones from which sometimes the editorial was based. Interviewees say mainstream and social media such as Facebook and YouTube were used to reach out the public, and every news story or information attached with the Organization would be posted online on the Office's website with few nationally important major news stories as well.

Disseminating information to Ethiopian embassies outside may raise awareness and stimulate interest to the country which in fact helps a great deal to image building. Therefore, GCAO needs to keep Ethiopian diplomats and the international community informed with its working relationship with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Yet, the researcher observed for some weeks and found that the main stream media, most importantly FM radios in the city, do not put the editorial on air. It is only through the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation that even those regionally owned television channels get the exact position of the government on various current issues relating to the country. In this regard, a lot needs to be done in listening to public opinion on its overall public relations and communication activities of which one is editorial. As D says about this situation,

*GCAO has conducted surveys as to how the media approaches our press releases, editorials and overall information and communication service we provide to the public, most importantly the media. The study is actually about the general landscape of the media. The findings showed the public was not satisfied in the way we frame messages and deliver to the media and thereby to the public. The majority of people who were surveyed responded EBC with which GCAO works presents information from one side. The majority of people who were surveyed responded that GCAO presents information from one side. This is what worries me, it is a big concern that might damage both the image of the government and the Office. And we have also other methods by which we collect feedbacks from our service recipients. There is a guestbook in each floorboard of our Office either a guest or any other information requesting us can write his comments complaints, or any other thoughts.*

No one disputes the above statement as B also pointed out there are many other issues that needs to be addressed if both the image of the organization and the country supposed to change. As B argues, though the progress so far achieved was as little as compared with vision and mission the organization has been rested upon. There are a

great deal of issues that would affect the effectiveness of the organization. When it comes to the duties and responsibilities of the Office, a number of items can be listed. Writing, media relations, public relations planning, counseling, research, community relations, and website development and management are some among the list. For example, an increasing amount of the publications are poor both in quality and content. It must be taken into consideration that people have different needs and qualifications for receiving government information; based on language, culture, abilities, functional ability, and lack of competence or access to digital channels. In this regard, traditional public relations tools, such as a press release, a public service announcement, a brochure, posters, newsletters, bulletins, billboards, and many others may be pretty good alternatives to reach everyone concerned, including citizens. Government agencies were good examples in this case being in the forefront disseminating such information by receiving it from GCAO. This would resolve a lot of problems first in that it would give them not only the right but the physical information they need in any way they prefer, and citizens would be motivated to take advantage of their rights. Second, by adjusting its information and communication to the diversity among the citizens GCAO would greatly be benefited earning citizens' trust and support back.

The problem the researcher found in relation to this issue however as mentioned above is the quality of those tools. As the researcher was informed, GCAO used printed information material as its primary channel of information and would expend much money on it though many of its publications were not reaching citizens appropriately. This means that government messages are not reaching citizens. The messages communicated by the government are not clear, easy to understand and with ambiguity. And this might indicate that appropriate channels of communication were not in use by the Office. Other federal government offices which have working relationship with the Office have bridged the gap by delivering the messages to citizens. This indicates that other tools such as website, social media, and short message services (SMS) especially during special events, seemed to be given less attention.

It is therefore important to fully exploit the potential of new media while not compromising the conventional ones. In this regard, using social media and short messages services (SMS) should be given due attention.

GCAO would arrange briefings, meetings with its stakeholders in different ways and use alternative channels to reach each of them. The Office holds a press conference with journalists twice a week and the Head would provide detailed information on government various activities, major enduring issues and talking points amid the public, including events that would take place in the country. GCAO had a good media relations and work aggressively to let all its news stories get covered by the media. In this regard, media houses, such as Ethiopian News Agency and Ethiopian Press Agency, accountable to the Office, would do everything in their capacity as being channel on regular basis.

In the same fashion, GCAO holds meetings with federal office public relations heads once every two weeks and gives agenda to which they must concentrate on. Many of the meetings and forums with the federal government PR officers however as some informants argued looked like where the government's position was revealed and direction to be given out with a view to garner public support and stand with, accordingly.

Having close contacts with media houses as well as with public relations officers on regular basis appears to be good. Nevertheless, how such close relationships might be affecting the reporting of news by the media is another legitimate concern, though.

## **B/ What are the PR policy and strategy employed by the GCAO for both the internal and external public?**

Government Communication Affairs Office is an organization which has so many stakeholders about whom it should care about. All of them want represented and get heard in matters that affect their lives. The Office therefore has an enormous responsibility of communicating

different actors such as government offices, internal employees, community members and other stakeholders group that are important to the organization. It has a number of target publics with which it is working. When looked at the size (largeness) of the publics, one may prefer to call them as 'mass'. The public relations of the Office, which is called the *Public & Media Relations General Directorate*, should devise the best way of approaching those stakeholders.

Communication policy and strategy is prerequisite for effective communication as any professional public relations would argue. Effective communication methods always should be founded on structured communications, including both formal and informal exchanges, to keep employees, organizations, and the different publics (stakeholders) informed. When looked at GCAO, a communication policy was not so far put into operation. The Office uses a draft communication and media policy and strategy which the researcher was denied as it was reasoned out never been endorsed by the top management. Hence, a comprehensive communication policy and strategy document where principles, objectives, procedures, and directives were articulated for both internal and external communication is absent.

There has not been specific written guideline for each practice of public relations such as press release, press conference, etc. As C and D told the researcher, the practitioners would make use of a directory or a list of contacts while they need media houses for coverage.

Although there have been 8 years since the Office stood as an organization, a communication plan was rarely prepared on weekly and individual basis as E admitted. Another worth noting thing is lack of coordinating communication activities carried out by federal government offices during events, calendar based days, for instance, Nation and Nationalities & Peoples Day and Ginbot 20, the Downfall of Derg Military regime, and so on, which have come a source of conflict between media houses and public relations offices.

### **C/ What model of PR does the Office of Government Communication Affairs?**

When we closely observe the public relations practice in GCAO, almost entirely in the federal offices, main emphasis is on information provision B noted. As can be proved by the researcher, the routine practices of GCAO, the PR model that the Office was characterized is Public Information model. Whenever we observe the press statements and conferences of GCAO, they are aimed at informing the public and defending government position. This kind of public relations is more related to public information model where the big emphasis is on providing information rather than being open to accommodate the interest of the public. Nevertheless, as many PR scholars argue and any rational person with a brain assumes, effective public relations is where the interest of the institution is served best can only be achieved with equal emphasis to ensure the interest of the public. This was also asserted by D and says the following:

*All the way through GCAO does a spokes person role. Disseminating information was one of the top priorities why the Office was established for, as government institution. You cannot answer the how question. I think the what question is mostly well understood, and the how and sometimes the why remained unanswered when it becomes government like us which officially declared its political and media philosophy as closely attached with developmental journalism and communication. Everything starts from there, because public relations is mostly persuasion so that persuasion involves telling people whatever you believed it's true. And yet again, it involves telling people whatever you called false as if it was true. This is what are often being told and oriented by our bosses because of our interest we must maintain-that is what we call public interest which we think our interest is the public's interest.*

Credible public relations practices and techniques improve the public's relationship with government, resulting in a healthier democracy as many argue. Despite the fact that government's commitment to consolidate the public relations practices, factors

associated with poor understanding of the profession seemed to be a challenge. In this regard, it would be important for GCAO to ensure that its practitioners have the needed theoretical and professional knowledge required to carry out their roles effectively.

**D/ What are the media relations policies and practices of the GCAO with regard to local and international media?**

Many practitioners of public relations view their professional role as messaging, publicity, informational, and media relations function. They think that publications, news, communication campaigns, and media contacts are the only activities they are supposed to carry out. And more often, they believe that their organizations can define, or even create their publics, and target them so that they believed attitudes and behaviors' can be influenced. As one of the informants (D) has succinctly put their media relations activities:

*The media is in a good shape if we look at the broadcast, for example. Nowadays, as our statistics show we have about 10 public broadcasters, 12 commercial broadcasters, and 45 community FM radios across the country. Overall, there are about 70 radio stations are working right now in the country as either being public, commercial or community. Furthermore, there are television stations owned by regional states which have become an alternative for viewers and listeners. Only three regional states have not yet been able to have their own media. So, there is a big change as far as electronics media is concerned. Now, the problem we have is in the print media. There is a dramatic increase in the print media; we have only about 10 news papers and 12 magazines that are being circulated beyond one regional state as the data we received from broadcast showed.*

Another informant (B) also noted the media policy they adhered to was the press law Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation 590/2008) and the constitutional clause of sub article 3 of article 29 that provides "freedom of the press and other mass media and freedom of artistic creativity is guaranteed". The country doesn't have communication and media, according to the informant. Nevertheless, he mentioned the need for government public relations strategy in future. The researcher



asked the informant to reflect his as to why the Government needed to have public relations both in GCAO and other federal offices. He said the following:

*It is government's obligations to provide citizens adequate information on the overall activities of the country based on the very pillars of the constitution. From this point of view, there are two core objectives as to why public relations is needed. One PR is expected to deliver what the country hopes to see-crating national consensus through information delivery. Secondly, through inconsistent of information it is expected that the image of the country is built through time. These are the starting points of public relations in Ethiopia which are also compatible with the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.*

### **4.3 Document Analysis**

#### **A/Government communication Affairs Office Establishment Council of Ministers Regulation 158/2008**

This was a government regulation issued by the Council of Ministers in 2008 in order to GCAO as a legal government institution to play a leading role in the government information and communication system in the country.

As the document puts under its objectives (Article 4), the Office was established with a grand objective to 'ensuring smooth flow of information between the Government and the public and facilitate the process of building a society enriched with information and actively participate in the country's affairs and, in particular, facilitate the creation of equal opportunities for peoples and sectors of the society that need special support in accessing government information.' The document goes into details of elaborating the powers and duties of the Office in Article five. Under this article, there are about twenty detailed set of actions the Office was supposed to carry out. Almost all can we say, they are related with fundamental roles and functions of mass media and public relations in general. The difference with 'Freedom of Mass Media & Access to Information Proclamation No. 590/2008' is in that the Regulation (Government Communication

Affairs Office Establishment Council of Ministers Regulation No. 158/2008) issued touched upon the subject of website (online media). Of course, this has come out of nothing but rather as a result of knowing and believing in the importance of government presence in the online sphere. Moreover, it could partly be due to the presumption that flourishing telecom infrastructure all around the country. As we are living in the internet age, government's presence on web should not be a matter to be left for tomorrow.

There are about twenty powers and duties offered to the Office, yet none of them seemed so far properly implemented.

No significant change has been registered as we see from both respondents' responses and the researcher's personal observation and knowledge. The researcher has, in January and May this year, tried to access the Office's website three times per day for almost a week and found the way the information was presented never attracting so that small number of people have visited it. This in fact may be related with frequent interruption of the Internet which in turn disrupt the freedom of access to information stipulated in the constitution under Article 29 sub article (3), and under 'Freedom of Mass Media & Access to Information Proclamation No. 590/2008 claimed to be "guaranteed"'.

### **B/Federal Government Offices Public Relations Bodies Working Procedure**

This is an official guideline, which is the first of its kind, meant to govern the public relations bodies and at the federal level, published and distributed by GCAO in January 2014. The twenty pages working procedure/directive, small in size, consisted of seven parts would apply to both the GCAO and other federal government offices for which they are accounted.

According to the document, the overall objective of the guideline would be ensuring fast government communication system where disseminating correct, timely and

comprehensive government information would be possible. Achieving this objective would insure presenting the right picture of the country to the external world as well as to the internal public (GCAO, 2014:4-5).

As the document continued, it made clear that the position of department head of federal government offices would be on assignment and that would be done in consultation with the GCAO (GCAO, 2014:7). Though the regulation that established Government Communication Affairs Office gave the mandate of recruiting and assigning public relations heads and experts to the office, it was not implemented due to the fact that some federal government offices such as Ministry of Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Federal Police have defied the order as the researcher found from the interviewees' response.

The Working Directive enumerated about 23 duties and responsibilities of public relations of which the most important and worth mentioning ones for this research are the following:

- ✚ Performing the task of spokesperson,
- ✚ Preparing institutional strategies and annual plan that correspond with the plan of government communication affairs office,
- ✚ Planning capacity building programs that will help to create professional public relations,
- ✚ Develop a system that would enable gathering and organizing information that is related to the institution so that it can easily be accessed by information seekers.
  - Crisis management.
  - Conducting research and public opinion survey.
  - Creating, organizing and managing events.

And in the six part of the directive, ethical principles of public relations have been listed down that should serve as a guide in the daily public relations practices of the PR offices. More or less, these so called ethical principles which the researcher would briefly see shortly, support the very principles that were stated in the FDRE's constitution and the freedom of the mass media and access to information proclamation. No conflicting points between these ethical principles, and the premises of the constitution and the proclamation. The ethical principles which the document stated are as follows:

1. To be responsive kindly to public information demands,
2. To be honest to the constitution and public interest,
3. Serving the organization honestly by communicating the correct information,
4. Developing transparency presenting factual evidences to the public,
5. Keeping confidential information that endangers the organization and the country,
6. Discharging responsibility by communicating the public with correct and credible information,
7. Serving the public without discrimination by fighting mismanagement,
8. Respecting public's right to information,
9. To be a role model by responding quick information,
10. Giving special attention to quality information.

Nothing wrong with both the ethical principles and the responsibilities and duties mentioned above. Nevertheless, it would be appropriate to ask if these principles are preserved wholeheartedly and recurring crisis that are happening over again and again at national level were well managed and well communicated by all the PR officers, most importantly, GCAO as an institution entitled to lead government public relations. The researcher therefore would like to see two of this core issues against this background.

Though a number of issues about the essence, role and practice of public relations are addressed almost in all the documents the researcher analyzed, much is not seen on the ground on how GCAO integrates and coordinates its work with the regional state governments PR practitioners.

### **C. Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation 590/2008**

The proclamation contains six parts along with fifty one articles. It puts in crystal clear terms in its prelude and lists down about ten reasons to answer the why question. Having taken into account that only few of them are relevant for this study, the researcher preferred to spot and look at them accordingly. These are:

- ✚ **Cognizant** of the necessity of preserving and consolidating past achievements and positive practices pertaining to freedom of expression while removing structural and institutional impediments that hinder the independent operation of the mass media and the free expression of information and ideas;
- ✚ **Aware** of that a free, independent, and diverse mass media with high ethical standards professional competence plays an indispensable role in the national endeavor to build democratic order in Ethiopia;
- ✚ **Recalling** the role of the mass media in ensuring respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, and in promoting peace, democracy, equality and justice;
- ✚ **Recognizing** the right of the media to collect and disseminate information, including of a critical nature; realizing that an independent mass media that serves as a public forum for uninhabited democratic dialogue thrives on a viable freedom of information system that facilitates the free flow of information and ideas among citizens by enabling them to exercise their right to seek, receive and impart information and opinions freely;

- ✚ **Affirming** the fundamental importance, in a democracy, transparent conduct of government affairs and, in particular, the right of individuals to access information held by public bodies;
- ✚ **Determined** to promote and consolidate the values of transparency and accountability in the conduct of public affairs, as guaranteed by the Constitution, and to impose a legal obligation on public officials to facilitate access to individuals and the mass media to information so that matters of public interest may be disclosed and discussed publicly;

Honestly speaking, the researcher did find no significant defects under all articles in the Proclamation. Of course, this phrase has become a common cliché in every public meeting, events, forums, and television political debates at which variety of government policies were mediated and communicated and even in close friends informal discussions in which political and social issues can be raised. Whatever the case, the researcher wondered whether the proclamation has brought a positive change in the lives of people and in the country's mass media and public relations practices.

One of the positive things the researcher found about the proclamation is that it offered equal attention for both the public relations practices and the mass media to help them develop as one entity. This created a conducive environment where the public relations support the media and the media plays the role in the information relay. It is presumed that two way beneficial relationships can be built with shared goals though sometimes they have conflicting interests with varying degrees each in different settings. Yet again, it gives full power and gate-keeping role to the public relations officer, as a result anyone either the media or any other body should pass by the PR.

In the mean time, there is a tendency that one depends on another. Public relations complained about the media that they were not accessible to them and information they provide was not being communicated to the public. They accused journalists and because of less media coverage though they have a number of important information

which they want to communicate to their publics. On the other hand, journalists allege PR practitioners saying their doors were closed for them.

Different roles of the media and public relations are the impediment for the two professions to stay close without scrutiny all the time, though. On the one hand, there is the interest of the public relations practitioners to impart information that its organization needs to communicate. On the other hand, there is an interest of journalists to inform their audience without taking sides in a fair and balanced manner. Therefore, there is always conflict of interest between journalism and public relations, as Dennis L. Wilcox (2005) noted.

Another related point, part three of the Proclamation (from Article 11 to 39) has taken much space as compared to other parts of it, and tells about public relations and the information held by public bodies, in this case, government bodies. Out of the total fifty one articles of the Proclamation, twenty nine of them were found under part three which it dubbed as 'Access to Information'. This in fact speaks volumes about the role and function of government public relations officers and the information held by them. Moreover, it reflects information is an instrument whereby citizens become engaged in government activities so that good relationship would exist between all actors. That's why the proclamation enforces public officials or public relations officers to be responsive for information requests made by anyone. Needless to mention, the following 'objective' statements of Article eleven of Proclamation proves the case in point. It reads as following:

- 1) to give effect to the right of citizens to access, receive and impart information held by public bodies, subject to justifiable limits based on overriding public and private interests;

2) to establish mechanisms and procedures to give effect to that right in a manner which enables persons to obtain information as quickly, inexpensively and effortlessly as is reasonably possible; and

3) to encourage and promote public participation and public empowerment, to foster a culture of transparency, accountability and efficiency in the functions of public bodies and to encourage and promote good governance.

**(Freedom of the Mass Media & Access to Information, Proclamation No. 590/2008)**

The constitution of many countries stipulate the public right to know. This constitutional right is based on the right to know not on the need to know. This is no exception to Ethiopia, which stated such rights in its constitution and proclamation, one may argue. Whatever it is, the spirit, be the constitution or the proclamation or statements mentioned above warn that public relations professionals should propagate and live for disclosing information rather than withholding it.

Article twelve sub article (3) of the Proclamation at which the right of access to information was stipulated also went into clarifying the issue in detail in an effort to be well understood by public relations or officials, by saying:

Nothing in this Proclamation shall be understood as limiting the power of public bodies to provide access to information on an informal basis.

Another point worth mentioning in regard with public relations information is that Article thirteen sub article (1) of the Proclamation (duty to publish) which states that 'any public body shall publish information concerning its organizational structure, main duties and responsibilities; the powers and responsibilities of the officials as well as decision making procedures; description of the services it provides for the public; brief descriptions of the complaint hearing mechanism available to the public and public body's response frequently asked questions by the public; a description of the



type of the records under its possession, a brief description of the contents of its records and the detailed explanation of the procedure to be followed by persons who wish to access this information; a description of its regulations, directives, policies, guidelines and manuals, which govern the operation and activities of its various organs, along with a description of any amendment or repeal of such provisions; its directives, regulations, guidelines and other documents which governs the activities of the employees of the organization.'

As the researcher observed in a number of federal government office, implementing this article was a challenge due to mainly shortage of financial resources allocated for public relations offices. In GCAO too, the researcher found few newly published items which are held by public relations officers personal initiatives, not by the Office they work for. Directives, policies, and guidelines etc are not organized and prepared in such a way that they would be distributed for, and used by public. Yet, a directive prepared, published and distributed to federal government public relations offices stipulates that public relations units should be filled with important working equipment and sufficient budget (GCAO, 2014:14). As the researcher confirmed from interviewees and other published official documents, 46, 303, 020 and 62, 337, 72.14 birr budget was allocated for the year 2008 and 2007 E.C respectively. (GCAO, 2016: 442; 2015:444 ;)

The researcher has found similar problem in GCAO with regard to Article fourteen of the Proclamation which states about requests to be made for public information. Although Article fourteen of the Proclamation proclaims that 'in presenting a request for information one shall not be required to provide reasons for the request', there are some instances whereby those requesting information were requested back for reasons. Another point that should not be bypassed without mentioning is that the proclamation article 14, sub article (8) which stipulated that a month's period to give information is being used as a cover not to give the information at all. Some public relation practitioners postpone appointments not to give information to media houses without

any ground as the researcher knew. So, the time prescribed in the proclamation needs to be improved, either shortened or the motive as to why PR officers reject information requests of the media must be investigated thoroughly as this is serious issue that has to do with rent seeking attitude. In addition to that, public officials or PR officers' refusal may sometimes be a reason for writing unbalanced news stories, which in turn leads both sides into conflict.

#### **D/ Issues of Establishing Democratic System in Ethiopia**

The last but the major policy document on which the government's position on media and public relations demonstrated was perhaps the one entitled "*Issues of Establishing Democratic System in Ethiopia*". The document published and distributed by the former MOI in 2002 has incorporated a number of issues that were deemed necessary for the establishment of democracy (Zemdkun Tekle, 2014).

What makes this document different from others is that it sheds light on how the media should direct the developmental goals of the country. Though the document didn't talk much on public relations practices, it gives some direction as to how the media should look like and underscores the need for disseminating government information.

Yet, there are some elements which might need close examination. The document, in its explanation of the importance of the media for a democracy, states the following for example- "From long term plan, the most important thing should be creating common beliefs and attitudes and getting rid of the dependency syndrome among the business society" (MOI, 2002, 122). This is in direct contradiction with a democratic principle that discourages single view of reality. It seemed that the government had secretly planned to limiting dissent voices and let one dominant view, government view, which would make the public adopt it accordingly.

On another page of the document, it also notes, "for those who have the desire and are capable of providing correct and timely information to the society, the government

should start providing government information” (Mol, 2002, 125). A close reading of the above statements reveal that the government contradicts itself, most specifically it directly contradicts article 29, sub - article 3 of the constitution, which stipulates the following: “Freedom of the press and other mass media and freedom of artistic creativity is guaranteed. Freedom of press shall specifically include a) Access to information of public interest” (constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Proclamation No.1/1995).

The sub article in the constitution is specifically mentioned to qualify the elements of press freedom and it will not pre suppose any precondition. It simply says the press has the right to get information. The policy statement mentioned above, however, says the government must be ready to provide information for those media which have the desire and capacity to disseminate correct and timely government information to the public. Whatever the case, the policy document realized the need to disseminate timely and correct government information to the public which might be considered here as a positive move towards strengthening the process of democratization. Meanwhile, the policy document presupposes the establishment of public relations units in government offices to its aspirations of democratizing the country.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

There is a wide range of debate on the role of public relations in society, without ignoring the attacks on its practices. On one side of the debate are the critics of public relations (D.Miller, Stauber and Rampton, Chomsky, Ewen, among others) who argue that public relations, past and present, undermines democracy and stifles or distorts debates. On the other side of the debate public relations defenders (Grunig, Dozier, Cutlip, Gregory, Vercic and others) tend to minimize public relations historical roots in propaganda and maintain the practice can improve democracy if correctly be used. However, those defending PR tended to marginalize the role of persuasion and instead concentrate on the positive role that public relations makes to society and democracy.

Government public relations is increasingly strategic, meaning it must meet stated goals of the organization, in this case the goals of the government. There is growing interest everywhere throughout the world, however, in what strategic government communication does to the neutrality and the public service ethic of its practitioners. There is interest in what happens when the goals of government become the goals of the party in power, and whether that politicizes the communication work of public servants.

As a communicative agent, PR enables different interests to interact. Moloney (2006) asserted this naked truth also by noting that “where democracy has spread there is more evidence of PR”. As part of this development of democratic structures Davis (2000) identifies the importance of the growth of pressure groups giving voice to individual concerns, and so shaping public opinion and public policy. Among these groups include public relations practitioners, journalists, stakeholders, different publics and so on.

The researcher of this study argues public relations should not be viewed as a malevolent force due to the fact that much of government PR involves informing the

public and being informed by the public—a legitimate and important two-way conversation. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that public relations is managing different kinds of communication relationships with different kinds of publics that implies there is a potential to do more than simply inform and react. It can be proactive; in other words, it can work to create a public opinion environment that is friendly to the government’s policies or actions whether that is deserved or not. That is where the line government public relations walks. Government public relations may not answer all the questions, but it makes a worthy contribution to the discussion and thereby an informed public.

Government communicators are a vital link between the people and the government and, by doing so, they frequently make people aware of life-changing information. If we look at one spectacular case about Ethiopia’s success on which its name has been praised was the health sector. Millions of people or more so have been saved from HIV/AIDS because government-produced public service announcements alerted them to prevent unsafe sex. Educating the public about HIV preventive methods and an open free of charge hotlines for HIV positive people encouraging them to call for help contributed a great deal to halt the spread of the epidemic. And many more thousand others have become fully aware of voluntary HIV/AIDS test by reading government produced and distributed brochures.

The PR practitioners in GCAO attribute the weekly editorial position of GCAO as one of the cornerstones of their professional activity. Services such as producing publications such as (e.g. news releases and newsletters) and media relations activities such as media monitoring are among many in the list. Furthermore, they prepare and coordinate annual meetings, conferences, seminars and communications materials such as speeches, Internet site content, magazines, annual reports and quarterly statements. And promoting government activities to the public is one of the major goals of the

Office. The results of this study illustrate the need for public relations practitioners to make their practice into a more dynamic, highly interactive approach.

Another worth mentioning point here is the researcher found written or unwritten codes and procedures of that are updated regularly in order to guide the work of the Office instead of a well developed policy and strategy that defines the public relations practices of GCAO. These codes of behavior and working procedures indicate if GCAO PR officers and its employees follow a loyalty to the organization, self, profession, or society. Here in come ethical practices of public relations theory of Grunig. Seib and Fitzpatrick (1995) identify three main duties in public relations: duty to self, duty to the employer, and duty to society.

Duty to self is defined by a personal value system. This personal system determines what a professional will or will not do and exemplifies the ideals of professionalism in social responsibility (Prabu, Kline & Yang, 2005; Wright, 1979). It guides personal actions and, by so doing, guides organizational action. A public relations practitioner's second duty, duty to the employer, is an obligation to the organization the professional agrees to represent. This duty is enacted by the response and actions of an organization in an effort to favorably position the organization in the environment. Much like the self interest approach, duty to the employer considers all actions through the lens of the organization's best interest.

The central question for the practitioner is now how this activity benefits in an organizational type such as GCAO, more political. The question-is social responsibility possible for practitioners who identify their first duty to the organization comes to everybody's mind. There is an inevitable danger that the public relations practitioner fights with various loyalties-organization (the employer) self, or society that often conflict with one another and the practitioner has to discern the level of conflict and priority be given to each.

Seib & Fitzpatrick (1995) identify a practitioner's final duty as a duty to society. Duty to society is an obligation to practice symmetrical public relations with their external publics. This duty is believed to be more important than a duty to self and a duty to the employer. Generally speaking, this loyalty is higher than a loyalty to an organization.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings suggest that, to the extent that organizations – including governments – have political agendas and try to influence political opinion formation or policy-making processes so that practitioners tend to lose balance the conflict of interest that arises between their organization and their different publics. In GCAO, all information dissemination efforts are tailored to build the image of the government, ignoring fully or partially the interest of the public due to a self interest orientation of the government.

Nevertheless, symmetrical public relations practices to maintain a balance between self interest and concern for the interest of others. Grunig argues that public relations practitioners ought to engage in symmetrical practices, as they are both morally superior to, and more effective than, the asymmetrical forms. He went further to relate the symmetrical/asymmetrical distinction not only to public relations practices but also to the goals of communication arguing that the major purpose of communication is to “facilitate understanding among people and other such systems as organizations, publics, or societies. Persuasion of one person or system by another is less desirable” (2001).

In Grunig's model, persuasion is firmly located on the asymmetrical side of the distinction. Grunig makes clear its morally suspect nature by regularly associating the term 'persuasion' with a range of terms with obvious negative connotations, such as 'manipulation', 'domination', and 'taking advantage of'. On the other hand, symmetrical forms of public relations are described in more positive, or at least neutral, terms such as 'bargaining', 'negotiation', 'mutual understanding', 'conflict resolution', and 'relationship building' (Grunig 2001).

According to James E. Grunig, there are four models of public relations. The press agency/publicity model seeks media attention, often through propaganda techniques. The other model is the public information model that follows basic journalistic practice in disseminating information, but the information is selective and does not include negative information. And both of these are described as one-way communication models that are less effective than their two-way communication counterparts.

The two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical models of public relations are more sophisticated in their use of research and two-way communication methods. The two-way asymmetrical model identifies messages most likely to produce the support of publics without having to change the behavior of the organization. It is based on persuasive techniques in order to attain a desired attitude or action from a public. The two-way symmetrical model seeks mutual benefits between an organization and its publics in order to bring about changes in the attitudes and actions of both. Researchers have identified the two-way symmetrical model as the most effective and most ethical model for practitioners to follow (Grunig, 1992, 2000; 2001; Pearson, 1989a; Prabu, 2004; Roper, 2005; Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995)

Generally, the two-way symmetric public relations on which this study is based on and Grunig has elaborated in depth relies on honest and open two-way communication and mutual give-and-take rather than one-way persuasion; focuses on mutual respect and efforts to achieve mutual understanding; emphasizes negotiation and a willingness to adapt and make compromises; requires organizations engaging in public relations to be willing to make significant adjustments in how they operate in order to accommodate their publics.

When GCAO is analyzed in the context of Grunig models of public relations, most importantly, two-way symmetrical PR practices, the majority, if not all, of its practices are deemed ineffective. Public relations and communication practices are merely carried



out to promote the interests of the organization with little or no concern for the interest of publics. There are almost no interactions of this sort between GCAO and its publics. If we look at internet disruption, which the researcher of this work had faced for three months due to state of emergency declared in 2016-2007, is in violation of the pure constitution, to collect information, monitor media, public opinion on issues, and engage in direct dialogue with their publics about a variety of issues incapacitated the Office. This implication is little research has been conducted on the way public relations is practiced in public organization which in fact could determine what type of public relations models are used GCAO and what role the public relations practitioner play. It is like "public relations is a field more often characterized by what it does than what it is", as Ledingham and Bruning (2000) observed.

Organizations which value the concerns of their publics (are higher in communality) are rated higher in quality and lower in conflict than organizations which do not regard publics' needs. In other words, organizations that engage in exploitive and manipulative relationships are likely to be judged more negatively by their publics than are organizations that engage in contractual or exchange relationships. In contrary, organizations that engage in communal and mutual communal relationships are likely to be perceived most positively. Despite efforts, it can be argued that GCAO, as government PR institution, is still far from the ideal in excellent communication, that is why it may have often been hit by crisis (as the recent conflict in the country).

As a result, the study calls for GCAO to review its current position and integrate the two-way symmetric model of public relations. It is the responsibility of GCAO and the public relations professionals to anticipate and inform management of trends and coming events which may affect the organization's reputation and/or operations. This duty is consistent with the dialogue approach in social responsibility and therefore, it has to work *with* the environment through an exchange of needs and action in order to build relationships with its publics. An organization's social responsibility is often

reflected in its ethical standards (Wright, 1979). Responsibility to society also includes an element of accountability to society for irresponsible action.

Therefore, if a public relations practitioner finds himself/herself representing GCAO in which the top management is short-sighted and less interested in the public interest than in profit or other considerations, then the public relations practitioner has the responsibility to make recommendations for changes known in every possible reasonable manner. Should management choose not to change its policies and practices, then the public relations professional must choose between leaving the organization or staying, depending upon his/her conscience.

Within political public relations and communication, public relations have been mostly limited to managing relations with the media (MacNair, 1999). However, if understood as communication management (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), public relations cannot be limited to a mere instrumental view of media relations. Public relations enable the development of communication, both internally, as far as intra-party communication is concerned, and externally, clearly by establishing relationships with various publics.

Information that is generated by a public relations practitioner to publicize the organization, its products, or a specific point of view is called information subsidy (Gandy, 1982; Zoch & Molleda, 2006).

According to Gandy, information subsidies are the efforts to decrease the cost of information in order to enhance its consumption. This trend has economic implications for both media and public relations professionals. Public relations practitioners spend resources to produce the packages of information, whereas media organizations basically receive these packages for free.

Scholars (Taylor, 2000; Taylor & Doerfel, 2005) argued that the practice of information subsidy has enormous potential to help get important social issues on the public agenda. It allows for establishing positive, mutually beneficial relationships between

journalists and public relations practitioners and explains how the two groups of media professionals need to interact in order to create news content. According to Taylor and Kent (2007), media organizations need information and public relations practitioners need a channel of communication to reach the targeted audience. Taylor and Kent argued that this is particularly true in those parts of the world where the media is largely owned by governments.

However, information subsidies taken to extreme may damage the credibility of the news media, as well as the value of the news stories generated by public relations practitioners as Taylor and Kent (2007) noted. Grunig also noted that the use of information subsidies results in an indirect manipulation of publics. They “influence the actions of others by controlling their access to and use of information relevant to those actions (Gandy, 1982, p. 61).

As has been seen above in the interview and document analysis, contextual variables both internal and external to GCAO (such as culture, political system, economic system, and media system) influence public relations practices.

Regrettably however, many people - including journalists supposed to know better - persist in using journalism standards to judge public relations activities. While it's true that public relations once had its roots in journalism and many public relations practitioners were once journalists, it is misguided and unfair to both professions to apply journalism standards to public relations today. Practitioners in both fields do use some similar skills, and both are communicators, but the two professions are fundamentally different with very different missions, goals, and operating policies. This doesn't, however, mean that one is any more or less ethical than the other. It just means they have different goals, guidelines, and norms and should only be judged by the standards of their own profession.

More often, there is a conflict between media and PR practitioners. PR people may tend to whom they wish to send the message, and the media ignores the stories. This is mainly related with conflicts of interest. On one hand, it can be attributed to lack of skills of writing for media from the public practitioners' side. On the other hand, it is more related with payments the media looking for publicity and exposure. This has become a sort of controversy among many government public relations and journalists. Those who cover the daily activities of the organization are provided with awards and those failing to communicate with them may be denied information. This is intentionally done as part of PR strategy. As these unethical practices of the media and the PR practitioners are widespread, it will have a negative consequence on the public demand to have timely information. It will impact government's effort of disseminating information in a sustainable and systematic manner as well. So, the more two-way symmetrical approach public relations model is used, the more it becomes transparent and accountable.

In light of this, there are misconceptions among both the government public relations and journalism professionals. Even to the extent of published government documents it there is an enormous trend seeing both journalism (media) and public relations practices as being one. It is up to everyone's knowledge that public relations institutions and the media must go in harmony to execute government aims. Yet, there roles should be defined clearly in policies, strategies and other pertinent government documents as well.

Also an important thing to be noted is how the political system in each country is engineered. For instance, it seems countries that are not tolerant about much freedom of their citizens tend to be reluctant to make dialogic relationships with either domestic publics or international publics. Reasons for this tendency could be behaviors, to name a few, religious ideologies, social unrest, or political oppression. To them, free exchange of ideas and free communication are intolerable and unfavorable, not to mention

dialogic relationship building. They tend to block any communication flow either from inside or from outside. However, even if a country is not based on true democracy, it should actively participate in global public relations as a whole to compete successfully in this global war of trade and economy. On that account, GCAO and Ministry of Foreign Affairs may have relatively succeeded in good relationship building even though the country's political status is still recognized as dictatorship.

This researcher argued that a multi party system with several voices competing to be heard is favorable to the practice of two way symmetrical communication as it arguably leads to more publics to communicate with, and thus offers more opportunities to communicate symmetrically.

GCAO, generally, displayed a combination of public information, one way asymmetrical and inconsiderable symmetrical views, and practices of public relations model, where the nature of quality of information and relationship is low. Yet, the Office can be said as one having no clear defined policies and strategies but trying to find itself.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This Chapter tries to deal with a brief conclusion and recommendations of the research topic. Thus, the conclusion is to be treated first followed by possible recommendations that could help get rid of the problems and sustain the strengths.

#### 6.1 Conclusion

The main focus of this study was on how public relations is practiced and examine the practices in light of fundamental PR and communication practices how public relations is understood, and what public relations missions are stipulated and what media strategies are adhered to in the Office to reach out the larger public.

In the literature review section, the essence and the major activities of public relations were discussed with brief historical development of public relations in Ethiopia. Commonly observed public relations models in use all around the world are also touched under the literature review.

The researcher preferred to employ qualitative method in order to answer the research questions raised, and has conducted in-depth interview with appropriate officials and public relations practitioners. What else, he went further to look at the most available documents written on government public relations and so as to supplement the research work. And both the responses gathered from key informants and the documents were analyzed. Based on the findings obtained from the research, the following conclusions are drawn:

While government has a right and a duty to communicate its programs, policies, activities to the public, how it does so is the subject of on-going examination in academia, in the media, among the public, and in government itself. Therefore, countries of the world today, more specifically developing ones, would face an enormous communication challenges as equal as their struggle for change and

development. Hence, it is a matter of concern for countries like Ethiopia to foster peace, development and democracy.

On top of this, the study has looked at a number of issues which need to be taken into consideration by the government public relations and communication practitioners and policy makers to encourage public confidence in their activities.

The major topical issue that the Ethiopian Government Communication Affairs Office concentrates on is creating a national consensus and image building. As the country was plunged for a century in prolonged and protracted wars, famine and drought, no one will doubt the necessity of government public relations to help change the situation. The process of both consensus creation and image building starts with thoughts—they are ideas formed, which they are ultimately information. That is why ideas, free flow of information and communication are conceived to be vital for a democracy to flourish. No contemporary social communication system can fully develop without the free and undisturbed practice of public relations for that matter, a fact acknowledged by many social science scholars. Without simple availability and access to information to citizens, no country can move forward and make its vision a reality. The same is true to Ethiopia as well.

When it comes to the progress of public relations and democracy in Ethiopia, although the Government continues to argue it is growing fast, it should be fair to argue that it remained one of the most challenging issues to address; yet, it would make the government to revisit its laws and working procedures. Government Communication Affairs Office elapsed 8 years since it was established as an independent executive organ to play a leading role in the government information and communication system. Though the Office assumes special responsibility for coordinating government PR and communication activities, its decision making power is still weak.

The different weighting that governments of different nations assign to public relations practices determines how people should see its role in a given society. Some see PR as a good force to facilitate public discourses that could transform the political cultures whereas some others see the government public relations practice as a state propaganda or a bureaucratic intelligence. Due to past regimes political traditions, there are still misconceptions that remained in the public which perhaps require some time to change. In sum, little strategic planning, problems with coordination, impromptu performance, and scarce evaluation of the coverage and of public perceptions and neutrality of information are gaps being observed in the practices of Ethiopian government public relations. Lack of strategy is due partly to a poorly systematized decision-making process, to lack of resources, and to lack of strategic and planning skills as observed.

What is more, there is an increasing need for two-way communication. The communication needs to be personalized. Though there are efforts to reach key targets in various ways such, there is lack of decision making whereby important suggestions and recommendations gathered from meetings and public forums be implemented in its day to day activities.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are forwarded:

1. Developing a professional and unbiased public relations and media is a must with a clear vision and mission. For that to happen, the Office needs to work aggressively in partnership with academic institutions.
2. Policy and strategy issues need to be addressed if the GCAO wants to stand on its feet and face the dynamic changes taking place in the country.
3. GCAO needs to empower itself in a manner that enables it plays strategic, up to standard and professional leadership role for the public relations and the media in general.



4. There is also a need to plan carefully to make sure a message cannot be misinterpreted or cause offense.
5. Increasing information and coordination between GCAO and its stakeholders is also helpful to resolve conflict of interest, most importantly between the PR and the media in the course of information relay. Cooperation should be their guiding principle than competition.
6. With regard to the recent crisis, we heard from the government that around 800 people were killed in the protest and close to 20 million birr in damage. The problem in the GCAO is lack of crisis management and constant update of information about the situations in all media outlets. But beyond that, there is a huge problem of getting information from regional, zonal, and wereda communication bureaus to the GCAO as fast as possible which can have a significant impact on the practitioners interest to communicate the public as desired. The Public and Media Relations for sure lose interest to communicate if he won't be empowered and accessed to information that are sensitive to the general public. Overall, a crisis management and communication is very much needed in the Office that will make latest information circulate to the public in any available media format the public prefers. Having this system will ensure that everyone can directly access information regardless of location. This ensures rapid synergies and eliminates the information gap about the country. Therefore, it is pivotal and upfront about any crisis the country might be facing as perfection is a devious expectation. Preparing to calmly address questions and criticism that come from any angle is professional. That is where the social obligations becomes even more important as it will create an opportunity for the public to chime in and help and support the good cause and distribute the right information. Equally, it is important to have a media crisis management plan. Official social pages are successful ways to prevent problems that could arise from lack of information or misinformation. It will help the media to pick up information from such platforms. This not only makes things easier for the media

but also to the public who are searching for quick facts. Although this will not replace press conferences on major occasions, it is an ideal method to disseminate developing stories on daily basis. Failing to do this might be considered as keeping information from the public.

7. The culture of secrecy needs to be rooted out in the society as it impedes flow of information and ultimately development itself. To eliminate this attitude both in the society and in the GCAO there needs to be again a communication plan. And it should be reflected in its training manuals, guidelines, and working procedures. GCAO must work out wholeheartedly with schools teachers and mini media groups and public figures, and for that needs to spend its full time, energy and financial resources.
8. GCAO need to consider on how ethics in public relations can be improved. Helping practitioners have ethics education, taking disciplinary action against violators of codes of ethics, and emphasizing professionalism of practitioners can be taken as good strategies for improving practitioner ethics.
9. Unlimited free Wi-Fi internet access or service needs to be encouraged at least for those people where the Office is located to show that GCAO cares about the general public, more specifically to its most close ones in terms of its location.
10. Last, but not least, is that the government should consider whether it needs to have additional policies and procedures in place to protect the integrity of, and public confidence in, its public affairs efforts and to ensure the transparency of its public relations activities."

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## APPENDIX A

### English version of the Interview Questions

These interview questions are prepared basically to collect data from the public relation relations officers, experts and team leaders in order to find out how the public relation practice of the Government Communication Affairs Office is conducted so that problem can be identified and thereafter possible recommendations will be given.

The researcher has exhaustively listed as much questions as possible to get the necessary replies that would help the research make robust. All the interview questions are connected with the research questions but for the sake of clarity it was believed to divide them into four major groups.

#### State of the Profession and the General Characteristics

What are your guiding principles?

How are government PR activities carried out in the Office-the nature of PR?

What are the public relations functional roles, do you have operational procedures and manuals?

How important is the use of public relations information for the citizens?

What are the PR strategies employed by the GCAO for both the internal and external public?

- ***Botan says an analysis of these factors will reveal the state of practice in a given country. Botan, C., 1992. International public relations: critique and reformulation. Public Relations Review, 18(2), p.149-59.***

#### Relationship between Government Public Relations Practitioners and the Media

What are the media relations policies and practices of the GCAO with regard to local and international media?

How do you highlight the significance of communicating government policies, strategies and programmes to the larger public?

How can best be explained the degree of government control over information dissemination-the independence of the government Public relations practitioners and the Office in general?

Do you think the communication policy, proclamation, outdated government directives, rules and regulations hampering to have effective communication with your customers?

### **Crisis Management & Communication, Issue Management**

How is PR involved in crisis situation in the country?

Who are your stakeholders? What problems do you encounter while trying to reach out them? What strategies are you using?

How do you describe the act of coordinating all communication public relations activities so that the corporate identity is effectively and consistently communicated to internal and external groups?

### **Challenges for Public Relations Practices**

How is the public relations perception in the public-any research or study you made?

What are the challenges for government public relations activities in your office in particular and in the country in general?

## APPENDIX B

### Amharic version of the Interview Questions

#### ለቁልፍ አስረጃዎች የቀረቡ መነሻ ጥያቄዎች

1. የጽ/ቤቱ ተልዕኮዎች፣ ራዕይና ግቦች ምን ምን ናቸው-በአጠቃላይ? አጠቃላይ የተቋሙ መርሆዎች ምን ምን ናቸው?
2. የህዝብ ግንኙነት ሲባል ያው ሰፊ ፅንሰ ሃሳብ እንደሆነ ይታወቃል። በመንግስትም በግል ተቋማትም የህዝብ ግንኙነት ስራዎች እንዳሉም እንደዚሁ። ተቋሙ የመንግስት ተቋም እንደመሆኑ የህዝብ ግንኙነት ተግባራትን በጽ/ቤታችሁ እንዴት ነው የሚከናወነው/ደግሞ ስራው በምን መልክ ነው የሚካሄደው?
3. የህዝብ ግንኙነት ተግባራዊ ሚናዎች ምንድን ናቸው ተብሎ ነው የሚታሰበው እያንዳንዱን የህዝብ ግንኙነት ስራ በምታከናውኑበት ጊዜስ የአሰራር መመሪያ/ማኑዋል አላችሁ?
4. የህዝብ ግንኙነት መረጃዎች ለዜጎች ያላቸው ጠቀሜታ ወይም አስፈላጊነት ምን ያህል ነው? ይህንን በምሳሌ አስደግፈን ማየት ከቻልን? ምን ድረስ ነው የሚለውን በምን መልክ ነው እነዚህን መረጃዎችስ ተደራሽ የምታደርጉት?
5. የውስጥና የውጭ ባለድርሻ አካላትን ተደራሽ ከመሆን አኳያ በተቋማችሁ ያለው የህዝብ ግንኙነት ስትራቴጂ እንዴት ይገለጻል? የስትራቴጂዎቹ ዋና ዋና ወይም አንኳር ነጥቦች ምን ምን ናቸው?

#### የመንግስት የህዝብ ግንኙነት ባለሞያዎችና የሚዲያ ግንኙነት

6. የተቋሙ የሚዲያ ግንኙነት ፖሊሲዎቻችሁና ተግባራት ከሀገር ውስጥና ከውጭ ሚዲያ አኳያ እንዴት ይቃኛሉ? የፖሊሲዎቻችሁ ይዘትና ተግባራቶችስ ምን ምን ናቸው?
7. የመንግስት የተለያዩ የልማት ተግባራትን ወይም ፖሊሲዎችንና ስትራቴጂዎችን ለሰፊው ህዝብ ማስተዋወቅ አንጻር ምን ጥቅም አለው ምንስ ያስገኛል?
8. መረጃን ከመቆጣጠርና ከማሰራጨት አንጻር የተቋማችሁ የህዝብ ግንኙነት ባለሞያዎች ያላቸው ነፃነትና መንግስት ያለው ድርሻ እንዴት ይገለጻል?
9. የኮሚዩኒኬሽን ፖሊሲ ያለመኖር፣ ሌሎች ስራ ላይ ያሉ አዎጆች፣ ጊዜ ያለፈባቸው የመንግስት መመሪያዎችና ደንቦች፣ ከባለድርሻ አካላት ጋር በሚኖራችሁ መስተጋብር ያሳደሩት ተፅእኖ አለ? የትኞቹ ሀጎች፣ ፖሊሲዎች ወይም መመሪያዎችና ደንቦች ናቸው በዚህ ረገድ በባለድርሻ አካላት መካከል ስኬታማ ተግባቦት እንዳይኖር መሰናክል ሆነዋል ተብለው የሚታመኑት?

#### የቀውስ አስተዳደርና የቀውስ ጊዜ ተግባቦት፣

10. በሀገሪቱ በሚከሰቱ ሰው ሰራሽም ሆነ በተፈጥሮ በሚከሰቱ የቀውስ ሁኔታዎች ወይም ክስተቶች የህዝብ ግንኙነት ስራዎችን በምን መልክ ነው የሚከናወኑት? በቀውስ ጊዜ ባሉ ሁኔታዎች ባለድርሻዎቻችሁ እነማን ናቸው? ከኖርማል ጊዜ ወይም ከመደበኛው ጊዜ የተለየ የህዝብ ግንኙነትና የኮሚዩኒኬሽን ስትራቴጂ ትኩረታዎችሁ ወይስ እንደማንኛውም ጊዜ ተመሳሳይ ነው ብሎ መውሰድ ይቻላል? ከባለድርሻ አካላት ግንኙነት ፈጥሮ ወይም ኮሚዩኒኬት አድርጎ ለቀውሱ ወዲያው ፈጣን ምላሽ ከመስጠት አንጻር ያሉ ችግሮች ምንምን ናቸው?

11. የተቋሙን የውስጥና የውጭ ባለድርሻ አካላት ወቅታዊና አስተማማኝ መረጃ በመስጠት ሁሉንም የህዝብ ግንኙነትና ኮሚዩኒኬሽን ተግባራት በማቀናጀት በኩል ያለው እንቅስቃሴ እንዴት ይገለጻል

**ለህዝብ ግንኙነትና ኮሚዩኒኬሽን ተግባራት ፈታኝ የሆኑ ጉዳዮች የትኞቹ ናቸው?**

12. የህዝብ ግንኙነት ሙያ በህዝቡ ዘንድ ያለው አመለካከት እንዴት ይገለጻል? ያደረጋችሁት ጥናትስ አለ በዚህ ዙርያ?

13. ለመንግስት የህዝብ ግንኙነት ስራዎች መቀላጠፍ አመቺ አይደሉም፣ ፈታኝ ናቸው የሚባሉት ምን ምን ጉዳዮች ወይም ተግባራት ናቸው፣ በምን መልኩስ እነዚህን ፈታኝ ጉዳዮች ማለፍ ይቻላል? መንግስት ወይም ሌላ ባለድርሻ አካል ሊያደርገው የሚገባ ነገር ካለ ከልምድም?

APPENDIX C

Illustration of GCAO Press Release

በኢ.ፌ.ዴ.ሪ የመንግስት ኮሙዩኒኬሽን ጉዳዮች ጽ/ቤት የተዘጋጀ ሳምንታዊ የአቋም መግለጫ

ጥቅምት 24 ቀን 2010 ዓ.ም

**የህዝቦች የአብሮትና የመደጋገፍ ባህሪ ለመጠናከር ይቀጥላል!**

በአሮሚያና በኢትዮጵያ ሶማሌ አዋሳኝ አካባቢዎች ተፈጥሮ በነበረው ግጭት ሳቢያ የተፈጠረውን አለመረጋጋት ወደ ቀድሞው ሰላማዊ ሁኔታ ለመመለስና በግጭቱ የተፈናቀሉ ወገኖቻችንን በዘለቄታው መልሶ ለማቋቋም ልዩ ልዩ ጥረቶች እየተካሄዱ ይገኛሉ። ይህንኑ ጥረት ለማገዝም ሰሞኑን ሦስት ክልሎች የ30 ሚሊዮን ብር ድጋፍ አበርክተዋል። በተመሳሳይ የአዲስ አበባ አስተዳደር ቀደም ሲል የ20 ሚሊዮን ብር ድጋፍ ማድረጉንም ከብሄራዊ የአደጋና ስጋት ስራ አመራር ኮሚሽን የተገኘው መረጃ ያመለክታል። የግጭቱ አጎራባች ክልሎች የሆኑት የሃረሪ ክልልና የድሬደዋ ከተማ አስተዳደር ተፈናቃዮችን በመደገፍ ረገድ ከፍተኛ አስተዋጽኦ ያደረጉ ሲሆን ግጭቶቹ ተከስተውባቸው በነበሩ አንዳንድ አካባቢዎችም ተመሳሳይ የህዝብ ለህዝብ ድጋፍ ተስተውሏል።

በብሄራዊ የአደጋና ስጋት ስራ አመራር ኮሚሽን አማካኝነት ለተፈናቃዮች ማቋቋሚያ እንዲውል የሚደረገውን የገንዘብ ድጋፍ ላበረከቱት የትግራይ የአማራና የደቡብ ብሄር ብሄረሰቦችና ህዝቦች ክልሎች፣ ለአዲስ አበባ አስተዳደር፣ ተፈናቃዮችን ተቀብሎ በማስተናገድና በተለያዩ መልኩ በመደገፍ ላይ ላሉት የሃረሪ ክልልና የድሬደዋ ከተማ አስተዳደር፣ እንዲሁም ግጭቶች ተከስተውባቸው በነበሩ አንዳንድ የአሮሚያና የኢትዮጵያ ሶማሌ አካባቢዎች ለታየው አኩሪ ኢትዮጵያዊ የህዝብ ለህዝብ መደጋገፍ ተግባር ሁሉ የኢ.ፌ.ዴ.ሪ መንግስት እውቅና ይሰጣል፣ ምስጋናውንም ያቀርባል። ይኸው ተግባር ተጠናክሮ እንዲቀጥልም በዚህ አጋጣሚ ጥሪውን ያቀርባል።

የኢትዮጵያ ህዝቦች ከጥንት ጀምሮ በክፉም ይሁን በደጉ ጊዜ ጠንካራ የህዝብ ለህዝብ ትስስር ያላቸው ናቸው። ከአብዛሂነታቸው አኳያ ያዳበሯቸው የመከባበር፣ በሰላም የመኖርና የመቻቻል፣ የመረደዳትና የመደጋገፍ እሴቶቻቸውም ዓለምን ያስደነቁ ናቸው። በታሪክ ሲወራረዱ የመጡት እነዚህ ጠቃሚ እሴቶቻቸውም በአሁኑ ጊዜ በህዝቦች መፈቃቀድ እውን በሆነችው አዲሲቷ ኢትዮጵያ ይበልጥ ተጠናክረው ቀጥለዋል። ይህ የሆነውም የኢትዮጵያ ህዝቦች ከታሪካቸው የወረሱት አብሮትነታቸው አሁን ድረስ ስለዘለቀም ብቻ አይደለም። ይልቁንም የጋራ ጥቅማቸው በዘለቄታው ሊረጋገጥ የሚችለው በመፈቃቀድ አንድነታቸውን አጠናክረው ሲጓዙ መሆኑን ከልብ ተቀብለው፣ እየሄዱበት ባለው ትክክለኛና አዋጭ መንገድ መሆኑም ሊታወቅ ይገባል።

ከዚህ አንጻር ክልሎቹ ያደረጉት ድጋፍ ከቁሳዊ ጠቀሜታው በላይ የሚያሳየን ቁም ነገር አለ። ድጋፉ በአንድ በኩል በኢትዮጵያ ህዝቦች መካከል ምን ያህል ትስስርና መረዳዳት እንዳለ የሚያሳይ ሲሆን፣ በሌላ በኩል መላ ኢትዮጵያውያን በልዩነታቸው ውስጥ የደመቀ አንድነት ፈጥረው የጋራ የኢኮኖሚና የፖለቲካ ማህበረሰብ ለመገንባት ያላቸውን ቁርጠኝነት አመላካች ነው።

ድህነትን ታሪክ ለማድረግና በሂደትም አገራችን ኢትዮጵያን ወደ ስልጣኔ ማማ ከፍ ለማድረግ እንደምንችል በእርግጠኝነት እንድንናገር የሚያደርገንም በፌዴራላዊ ስርዓታችን አማካኝነት በአዲስ መልክ እንዲቃኝ የተደረገው ይኸው የህዝቦች ትስስር ይበልጥ ተጠናክሮ መቀጠሉ መሆኑ ሊሰመርበት ይገባል። ህዝቦች በአካባቢያዊና በጋራ ጉዳዮች ላይ የመወሰን ስልጣን እንዲኖራቸው የመሪነትና የፈጻሚነት ሚና እንዲጫወቱ ያስቻለው የፌዴራል ሥርዓታችን እያስመዘገቡ ካሉ እያንዳንዱ የሰላም፣ የልማትና የብልጽግና ስኬቶቻችን ጀርባ የኢትዮጵያ ህዝቦችን ማሰለፍ የቻለ ነውና። የአገራዊ ስኬቶቻችን ሁሉ ምንጭ የፌዴራላዊው ስርዓት ባለቤትም ሆነ ጠባቂው ህዝቡ ነው የምንለውም በዚህ ምክንያት እንደሆነ ሊታወቅ ይገባል።

እንደስኬቶቻችን ሁሉ ችግሮች ቢያጋጥሙንም የሚፈቱት በመላው ህዝባችን ተሳትፎ እንደሆነ ያለፍንበት ሂደት አስተምሮናል። ኢትዮጵያውያን የበርካታ አንጻራዊ ድሎች ባለቤት የሆኑት በየወቅቱ ያጋጠሟቸውን ፈተናዎች ሁሉ በጋራ እየፈቱ በመጓዛቸው እንጂ መንገዳቸው ሁሉ የተቃና ሆኖላቸው አለመሆኑን ልብ ማለት ይገባል። አሁን ባለንበት ወቅትም ቢሆን ያጋጠሙንን እንቅፋቶች በዘለቄታው መፍታት የምንችለው በህዝቦቻችን የጋራ ርብርብ ብቻ ነው።

በመሆኑም መላው ህዝባችን ሰላምን በመጠበቅ፣ ግጭቶችን በመፍታት፣ ተፈናቃዮችን በመርዳት፣ ድርቅን በመቋቋም፣ ልማትን በማፋጠን እና በመሳሰሉት አገራዊ ጉዳዮች ላይ እየተጫወተ ያለውን ሚና አጠናክሮ ሊቀጥል ይገባል።

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