

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**  
**SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION**



**Auditing Federal Government Public Relations Practice in Ethiopia:  
Tool for Development Communication or propaganda?**

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**March, 2020**  
**ADDIS ABABA**

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# **Addis Ababa University**

## **Graduate School of Journalism and Communication**

This is to certify that the thesis is prepared by Makeda Getahun entitled “Auditing Federal Government Public relations practice in Ethiopia: tool for development communication or propaganda? submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Public relations and strategic communication. It complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality..

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## **ABSTRACT**

*In developing nation's government public relations is viewed as a tool for communicating policies and actions to groups or the public at large, and has been employed to assist governments in information dissemination. Looking at Ethiopia's public relations practice after the fall of derg regime, the practice of government public relations has been and is contested for being politically oriented than professionally driven with no specific communication policy and strategy guiding the practice. This research was conducted to assess the practice of federal government public relations either as a tool for development communication or propaganda. And to do so, the researcher used qualitative approach through an interview with federal ministries and media organizations, focus group discussion with media organizations and document analysis were used to collect the data. And a two-way symmetry of public relations theoretical framework was used as a base to conduct the research. The findings of the study depicted that public relations practice in the federal government is a tool for propaganda because, most of public relations practitioners believe public relations offices in federal government organizations are established to defend the interest of the government, limitation of understanding the management function of public relations to create mutual understanding with the public's and its assistance for an informed decision. The federal government public relations offices represented in the sample ministries uses different tools which are not enough in number, time and frequency to reach the public on regular basis. Lack of guiding policy for the practice of public relations, unreliability of government information by the media are also the major findings that associates government public relations practice with propaganda. Concerning the challenges, insufficiency of professionals, absence of national communication and public relations strategy and unprofessionalism, absence of professional leadership, and inadequate guidance from the government were highly cited as challenging in the practice public relations in federal government organizations. Based on this, the researcher calls up on the federal government for a professional driven public relations practice, the enactment of communication policy and strategies, to organize the public relations works professionally and structurally.*

# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the study

Communication is daily activity practiced starting from our daily lives to government affairs with different medium of communication to communicate each other. Among the communication strategies practiced by government, public relation has been identified as the effective way of delivering message to the targeted group, and the main objective of public relations is to communicate information to influence the decision of people/public. public relations is defined as “the management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends”. Where, government public relations could be considered the idealized version of public diplomacy, at least in the domestic context, because the government is identifying and clarifying arguments with constituents so they can make their own judgments. “Public Relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics” (prsa: 2012).

As Hopkins(2015:1-3) elaborated it briefly, categorizing Public relations among the different strategies which government can make use of to increase dialogue about policies and a government action with citizens. Government public relation is distinctive from other public relations because it specifically identifies the entity that is performing public relations which is the government.

Propaganda has been studied as history, journalism, political science, sociology, and psychology, as well as from an interdisciplinary perspective. To consider propaganda as journalism is to understand how news management or “spin” shapes information, emphasizing positive features and downplaying negative ones, casting institutions in a favorable light (Jowett and O’Donnell, 2012:1).

Propaganda, in the most neutral sense, means to disseminate or promote particular ideas. In their book studying propaganda as a type of communication, Jowett and O’Donnell, definition of propaganda focuses on the communication process most specifically, on the purpose of the

process and defined Propaganda as “the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist”(Ibid:7).

Ellul (1973) as cited by Gelders and Ihlen, argued that, in propaganda there are techniques of psychological influence combined with techniques of organization and the envelopment of people with the intention of sparking action (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010:60). Whereas similarly as quoted by Gelders and Ihlen, Vandebosch (2004) differentiate political communication and government Public relations and defines government public relations as “communication efforts in which the government/administration tries to be non-partisan, balanced and concise” (Ibid :61).

There have been four models of public relations described by Grunig and Hunt (1984:21-22) in relation to the variations the way public relations are practiced. They have defined the models in their book, *Managing public relations* as press gentry/publicity, public information, two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical. They described that the press gentry/publicity and public information are both one-way communication models. While two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical are two way communication models.

Looking at Government public relations as a Practice in developing nations, it is also viewed with communicating policies and actions to groups or the public at large, and has been employed to assist governments in information dissemination and governance. Though involvement of the public is limited through the process despite the practice of public relations in every developed and developing country for its betterment, rare has been researched about the status and practices of public relations in Ethiopia.

Comparing propaganda and government public relations, L'Etang(2002), as cited by Shimles, stated the preference of the academics use of the term persuasion, as opposed to propaganda (Shimles,2017:3). Moreover, Signitzer & Wamseras(2005) and as quoted by Shimles argued in distinguishing propaganda and public relations, by stating 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 (Ibid).

Ethiopia's public relations practice, the history goes back to the era of queen of Sheba, who traveled to Jerusalem to benefit from King Solomon's wisdom, and this is considered as breaking through for the beginning of Public relations in Ethiopia. Following the establishment of Ethiopian civil service agency, it includes public relation within the structure of government institutions ( Bereket 2017:590). Bereket stated even though the structure was established it was not internalized, and remained theoretical because practitioners were not invited to involve in the management decisions that is the core concept of public relations (Ibid).

Whereas, according to Shimles(2017:1) quoting Solomon(2000), argue 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. Regarding the mandate and functionality of public relations during the imperial regime, one public relations head at the final years of Emperor Haile Selassie had affirmed that, the notion and practice of public relations was developed during the 1960's until around 1974, a minimal consideration was given to public relations. A study was made in the ministry where by the activities were routine receptions, protocol, running the printing etc. System and strategy as to how to promote Ethiopia's real needs were unthinkable (Shimles, 2017:1)

The revolution that ousted the emperor was highly characterized by socialist orientation. The period that started in 1974 and ended 1991 will be remembered for nationalizing big business, Controlling the political power by dictatorship of military officers who later in the middle of 1980's established a Marxist Leninist party and constitution. The political right such as assembly, association and demonstration was only possibly if it were targeted to fight the "enemies of the revolution". The soviet model of socialism adopted by the military government led the public relations and the media practice to the full fledged propaganda. It was for this special mission that the then Ministry of Information and National Guidance came to existence. Public relations practices in government as well as mass political organizations were masterminded by political cadres especially assigned for this purpose which has suspended the professional and practical development of public relations (Zemedekun, 2014:24).

After the coming in to power of EPRDF, relative works has been done for the development of government communication in the country, the establishment of institutions that manages government Communication and the introduction of different communication and media laws can be cited as a progress step.

Under the federal government structure, the Federal Government Communication Affairs (lastly reestablished with regulation number 158/2002 and which transfers it mandate to the press secretariat office of the Prime Minister by end of 2018, was organized with a mandate to led the federal communication and assists other government ministries to be an effective and competent instrument for the Government in its task of governance and implementing its development policies. The office was established with a mission “To provide timely and credible information to Ethiopians and international community to create consensus among citizens and to build image of the country positively”.

In addition, the Office that was directly accountable to the Prime Minister Office is also 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 (Article 5, Council of Ministers Regulation No. 158/2008, 2008).

The press secretariat established in the end of 2018, under the Prime Minister Office took the government communications and public relations mandate and missions of the government communications affairs office and has been established. As per the Press release given by the press secretary on November 5<sup>th</sup> of 2018, the new established press secretariat unit established to undertake the following three major tasks:-

- a. Timely, transparent and accurate collection and dissemination of decisions and views of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia government to the public
- b. Collection , analysis and scaling- up of public responses, concern and feedbacks to the government: and

- c. Strengthening the relationship with the Prime minister office and the media for enhanced, factual and transparent reporting

Although the importance of public relations in Ethiopia started to receive recognition in an organized manner between middle and late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the profession and practice is still at its beginning stage (Shimles, 2017:7). Additionally, though Public relations activities of the government have attempted to introduce and give accounts of the various policies, decisions and activities to the public but the role it is playing is limited as well as blurry. Moreover, there is also lesser understanding of the critical role of public relations by government officials with their incapacity of how to lead public relation works in their respective institution. And this being the case in many government offices the role of government public relations is not serving its qualified role.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

In a country like Ethiopia where the government is the major factor in development efforts and in all other spheres of life, access to government information matters a lot. However, the information's that has been forwarded by many of the federal government offices do not have any possibility for two way communication (where the government and the public meet) which makes what has been said by these offices remains to be an information serving the interest of the government rather than to function as a development communication tool to bring the larger public to closer agenda. The different malfunctioning of government system we have been discovering lately, the failures of many developmental grand projects of the country which the citizens have contributed directly or indirectly can be a witness to raise the question of what role the government public relation had been and is really playing.

Now a days, public relation activities in Ethiopia are mainly considered as center of developmental activities; thus, from the highest point of the government structure which is the prime minister office, office of the parliament to in each government offices, there is an established public relation office. Among these offices, Federal Government communication affairs Office (currently press secretariat office) can be mentioned, and they are involving in communicating highest developmental activities of the nation as a whole in general and the federal government in particular. The former government communications affairs office which

transferred its mandate to press secretariat in the Prime Minister 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.

Moreover, with regard to the practice of government public relations in Ethiopia, it is commonly contested as a means for the government to spread its side of information only than to serve as a development tool that also encompasses the need and say of the public at large and with professionalism. The press secretariat office established at the end of 2018 under the prime minister office, took over the mission with no additional major task to accomplish than merely practicing liaising information between regional and federal government, media and the public.

The nonexistent of specific strategy and policy how the public relations practice of the office will be dealt in the new arrangement can also be seen as a major gap in the professional public relations practice. Moreover, as there is no national communication policy and strategy, government public relations is being practiced in the old communication fashion which uses mainly press release as technique. The press secretariat being established under the Prime Minister Office (political office) and abolishing government communication office which the public and government interact also raises a question of the secretariat function in serving the wider public.

Furthermore, as observed on its website, office of the Prime Minister (2019), / <http://pmo.gov.et/> the office emphasized that it is undertaking a comprehensive reform program and made democracy and rule of law a priority agenda for the government. The government still is declaring access to information is the key to peaceful, democratic and developmental process, and all government offices starting from top to the bottom have public relations directorates/offices/sections.



The different malfunctioning of government system we have been discovering lately, the failures of many developmental grand projects of the country which the citizens have contributed directly or indirectly can be a witness to raise the question of what role the government public relation had really been playing? Yet, there is much which we do not know with regard to the practice of Ethiopian government public relation whether it is contributing to the democratic and economic development or is functioning in the opposite side of building democratic and developmental governance. Hence, the researcher believes, there still exists a wide gap in Ethiopia in understanding the practical roles of government public relations. This also needed to be examined from the principle of the role of public relation in development.

Therefore, research needed to be done to find out the practical application of the Ethiopian Federal Government public relations in relation to the role it serves. The federal government public relations practice is examined with regard to the two way symmetric public relations model, which explains Public relation practice, should give equal importance to the interest of the public as that of the government. The study applies the fundamental models and roles of public relations to identify and further explore the practices and challenges of government public relations in Ethiopia.

### **1. 3. Objective of the Study**

#### **1.3.1 General objective**

The overall objective of the study is to assess whether Ethiopian federal government Public relation is being used as a tool for development communication or for spreading the propaganda of the government.

#### **1.3.2 Specific objectives**

The study encompasses the following specific objectives:-

1. To find out the major public relation activities of the federal government
2. To assess the role played by federal government public relations in light of available public relations models.
3. To examine the practical mode of Ethiopian federal government public relations

## **1.4. Research Questions**

The research attempts to address the following research questions;

1. How are government Public relations activities carried out?
2. What is the role of federal government public relations?
3. In what way is the federal government public relations practiced?

## **1.5. Significance of the study**

The research is conducted to have practical significance in the field of studying the practice of Ethiopian public relations. First it is expected to fill knowledge gap and contribute to better understanding of the government public relations practice in Ethiopia. Second it is hoped to push policy/decision makers to make enact an acceptable policy for the betterment of government public relations. Third, it is conducted to essentially be an input for understanding the public relations as a profession and initiate for other researches to be conducted on the Ethiopia's communication and public relations.

## **1.6. Scope of the Study**

The scope of the study is limited to auditing the practice of Federal government public relations by taking as 5 federal government offices as a study organizations. The practice is assessed focusing those federal government organizations that are basically working on the development agenda of the state and the institution that takes charge of provision of fundamental services to the larger public. The study therefore is limited to a single case that may or may not be representative of general public relations practice in the country.

## **1.7 Limitation of the study**

In conducting the research, various challenges were faced. Lack of similar data in the field of government public relations and unavailability of reference materials more specifically in the Ethiopian context was the major challenge on the part of the researcher. Another major limitation encountered in this study is though the support letter from the school is presented the press secretariat office was not responsive to the interview request which was presented personally and via email.

## Chapter Two

### Review of Related Literature and Theoretical Framework

Under this chapter, different writer's works and research findings with their discussions in the field of government public relations are presented. As well, historical evolvement of government public relations with the theoretical evolvement will be presented.

#### 2.1 Review of Literature

##### 2.1.1 Meaning of Government Public relations

As per the definition of Public relations academicians and practitioners of public relations defines Public relations in different settings. Harlow (1976) as quoted in Tench and Yeomans under their book '*exploring public relations*' defined as Public relations is distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics. (Tench and Yeomans, 2006: 4-5)

Moreover, White and Mazur (1996) offer a definition based on the goals of practicing public relations , they have defined in the following manner;

Public relations is to influence the behavior of groups of people in relation to each other. Influence should be exerted through dialogue not monologue with all the different corporate audiences, with public relations becoming a respected function in its own right, acting as a strategic resource and helping to implement corporate strategy.

As per Jacquie (2008:16) Public relations can be defined from the very essence of its name and the activity. He states, public relations clearly suggests an activity ongoing relationships that are open to view-they are public. Moreover the public may suggest a particular group or the general public or public opinion which is partly linked to notions of democratic process and broader political arrangements.

Public relations also involves the communication and exchange of ideas either in response to or to facilitate change. It entails argument and case making. He continued and stated that Public relations is intrinsically connected to policy initiatives, their promotion and responses to these by organizational actors and or their representatives (Jacquie, 2008: 18). There is also other definition of public relations which raise an ethical dimension. As per Cutlip and Center, 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).

According to this definition we can an insight that in public relations the communication is not one-way. Public relations role is not only communicating to the public but also requires listening and collecting feedback from the public.

The term government communication is often used to refer solely to top level executive communication. But it can also be used to refer to institutions established by government to do its work at national, regional and local levels. According to Canel and Sanders (2011), Government communication refers to the aims, role and practice of communication 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 (Canel and Sanders, 2011:85).

As to Pasquier government communication can be defined as all the activities of public sector institutions and organizations that are aimed at conveying and sharing information, primarily for the purpose of presenting and explaining government decisions and actions, promoting the legitimacy of these interventions, defending recognized values and helping to maintain social bonds (Pasquier,2012:1).

Political public relations can also be defined as the following

Political public relations is the management process by which an organization or individual actor for 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, 2013b: 4).

Vandebosch (2004) as cited in ( Gelders & Ihlen ,2010: 4) seeks to differentiate the concept of political Public relation with government public relations and defines government public relations as "communication efforts in which the government/administration tries to be non-partisan, balanced and concise. These efforts are not aimed to put a political party or politician in the picture, but focus on the interest of the receiving citizen who needs to be informed".

Therefore as per the definitions forwarded in the above paragraphs, it is possible to determine government public relations as the type of communication strategy that governments utilize to increase policy dialogue with citizens and enhance persuasion for those whose needs must be met by the government. Consequently, the whole research process of the study is as per the above definition provided above.

### **2.1.2 Historical development of government public relations**

Leaders in virtually every great society throughout history understood the importance of influencing public opinion through persuasion. For example, the Romans, particularly Julius Caesar, were also masters of persuasive techniques. When faced with an upcoming battle, Caesar would rally public support through assorted publications and staged events. Later on, the Greeks generally elected their best speakers to leadership positions. Aspiring politicians enlisted the aid of Sophists (individuals renowned for their reasoning and rhetoric) to help fight verbal battles (Bastian, 2006:20).

Moreover Watson (2012:43) stating the above history of public relations often as called 'proto-Public relations' acknowledged the term 'public relations' was probably first used in the US in the late 19th century. He further added, there have been several claims of first use and it is contested as to which person or organization actually invoked the term first, however but tracing the history of public relations can take from the American railroads of the 19th century to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the bursting of the tech bubble.

Later, the term “Public Relations” was introduced in Europe by such personalities as Carl Hundhausen who defined this activity in 1937. Public Relations is based on the fact that people have opinions of each other as well as of government and other institutions. Therefore, individuals, corporations, government officials, schools, religious organizations, and every other type of institution desire to be accepted by the public on the best possible terms (Bastian, 2006:21).

Regarding the practice of government public relations, Strömbäck and Kiouisis (2013) claim it is virtually as old as politics and society itself , but also that many contemporary political public relations strategies and tactics have ancient roots. Further quoting Cutlip, 1995; Lamme & Russell, 2010) stated, 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, and many textbooks treat public relations in political contexts mostly in passing. Thus, there is a disconnect not only between practice and theory in political public relations, but also between theory and research in public relations, political science, political communication and political marketing (Strömbäck and Kiouisis ,2013:3)

The above historical evolutions shows Public relations as an academics and as a professional practice has passed through different process, though the gap in research and practice of government public relation is still being theorized from different perspective. However, one thing that cannot be left without mentioning on the development of Public relations in general and government public relations in particular is it has become a global activity and still is implemented in many corners of the world in different ways.

### **2.1.3 Function of government public relations**

The public sphere is the space where citizens come together to freely engage in dialogue and debate on issues which matter to their lives, and through that debate aim to influence government policy and bring about social change. Moreover, the public sphere is important in governance not only because it can facilitate public participation in decision making, but critically because it is also the space where public opinion is formed and articulated. Public opinion can be defined as

the majority view on a public issue after it has been discussed in the public arena (Mcloughlin and Scott, 2010: 8)

As per the above justification, it can be referred that public needs to be informed about different issues and government has a responsibility to create that space where the public should be engaged in different government activities for constructing its own public opinion and making an informed decision. Hence, among the tools that government can employ for facilitating the needs of the public, government communication and public relations takes the wider share.

Communication is inseparable from how governments operate. It is a dimension of every action or decision a government takes, from the way in which policies are made, promoted and enacted, to how government is organized and the relationships it builds with citizens, the media and other groups such as business and community organizations( Young ,2007: xxiii). A key aspect of governance is how citizens, leaders and public institutions relate to each other in order to make change happen. Without communications structures and processes which enable the two-way exchange of information between state and citizens, it is difficult to imagine how states can be responsive to public needs and expectations (Mcloughlin and Scott, 2010:6)

Moreover, (Mcloughlin and Scott, 2010:9) argues Providing citizens with information on priorities, programmes and activities is a vital government function which underpins state-society relations: Governments in the developed world are acutely aware of the need to communicate effectively both to influence public opinion and maintain their legitimacy, and often construct elaborate structures of press offices, and information ministries to perform the communications function.

Public relations is both inherent to public administration and a tool for helping an agency accomplish its mission (Lee, 2012:12). Lee in the book titled *The practice of government public relations*, argues public administrator's engagement in the practice of public relations born one out of choice, for the reason that it helps government organizations to do their core mission more effectively and, sometimes, less expensively and the other because the system requires because

the democratic requirements of government management, is closely tied to the public in public administration. Third which the writer mentions as the “the most controversial category” is the political use of public relations intended to advance the government organizations autonomy and power.

Using the above threefold typology, Lee (2012:12-13) put together how the different purposes of government public relations fit jointly:

**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

As per Yeomans (2006:595) ,other Public communication function of government are also to change knowledge, attitudes and behavior in tackling social problems, while, on the other hand, there is also a need for public organizations to work with communities to jointly solve these problems. Additionally she have identified that within a multicultural context, a healthy democracy requires public participation. In achieving this, the public sector needs to understand and communicate with minority groups and ‘marginalized’ communities.

**2.1.4 Public Relations in development communication**

Development as a concept is broad and therefore does not subject itself to a single definition. It indeed covers a wide range of human endeavors. Development in human society is a many sided process.



At the level of the individual, it implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material wellbeing. The achievement of any of these aspects is very much tied in with the state of the society as a whole (Asemah,2011:163).

Moreover, as quoted in Oyero (2007:228), (Meomeka 1989:4) defines development as "a change for the better in both the human, cultural, socio-economic and political conditions of the individual and consequently, of society". Therefore, the essence of development as per the above writers is about change, and the change could be about social, cultural, political or economic change for improvement or progress. It is in the above context that the researcher of this study looks at development.

Development communication has been defined in several ways by economic development experts, sociologists and communication experts. As cited by Kumar (2011) Quebral (1975) defined development communication, as the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth and makes possible greater economic and social equality and the larger fulfillment of human potential. Furthermore, a book titled *communication for development and social change* and edited by Servaes (2008: 14) defines Development Communication as the study of social change brought about by the application of communication research, theory, and technologies to bring about development.

While discussing about the uniqueness of development communication and how it is link with the society's and country's development, Kumar (2011:1-2) describes three major points. The first is Development communication is purposive communication, it is value-laden; and it is pragmatic. The second is Development communication being goal oriented. The ultimate goal of development communication is a higher quality of life for the people of a society by social and political change. And lastly what he describes as uniqueness is based on the type of audience .Development communication has to deal with which is : i) the communicators comprising development bureaucracy, media practitioners and professionals, and ii) the people i.e. the audience who can be informed or uninformed; educated or semi- literate or literate.

Participatory communication ensures that people are involved; informed and motivated to participate in the planning of their own development and are empowered with skills required to improve the quality of their life ( Imoh,2013:17). As per Absemah( 2011:167), Public relations as communication tool can be used to facilitate development in any country that is desperate for social, economic, political and technological development.

There seems to be a high degree of consensus amongst communication scholars and experts that proper development of any nations is dependent on sound Public Relations communication techniques. Oyenyi (2000:26) affirms that Public Relations practice via its communication techniques can help douse encumbrances impinging on rural and national development. These encumbrances include; multifarious political, economic, managerial, leadership, social moral or ethical, ethnic and similar development related problems. Thus, since development is believed to carry people along, Public Relations effective two way communication techniques is essentially inevitable as a potent tool and a magic wand for effective mass mobilization, orientation and re-orientation.

Therefore, Public relations to be successful for supporting the development journey of government; it should be able to be practiced with an objective of attracting the public attention and win their belief in the development goals. The Government needs to achieve understanding from the wider public and create good image for itself and positively influence public opinion and earn their good will. Government public relations if utilized properly can therefore make people feel as part of a development process, giving everyone a valid and meaningful influence, so that it increases maximal participation. Public relations professionals should therefore push for more inclusiveness, more transparency, more public input, and more physical and virtual spaces where people can come and talk about ideas and issues.

### **2.1.5 Government public relations and propaganda**

The word propaganda has obvious negative connotations of deceit and lies. The literature on propaganda, however, often contains definitions that are stripped of many of the most glaring ethical violations.

In defining Propaganda and Persuasion, Jowett and O'Donnell (2012) have studied both concepts as a type of communication. They have defined propaganda as ,the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.

Moreover As per Volkoff and as quoted in Bastian (2006:23), propaganda can also be defined as the spreading of information in order to influence public opinion and to manipulate other people's beliefs. Propaganda insists on a message that is intended primarily to serve the interests of the messenger.

Ellul (1965/1973) cited in (Gelders and Ihlen, 2010:59) argued that "in propaganda we find techniques of psychological influence combined with techniques of organization and the involvement of people with the intention of sparking action". At the outset then, (Gelders and Ihlen, 2010:60) stated that the above point seems to be what every public relations practitioner outside or inside government engages in. On the other hand, Jowett and O'Donnell (2012:17) differentiate the forms of propaganda as white, gray, or black, in relationship to an acknowledgment of its source and its accuracy of information.

As per their classification, White propaganda comes from a source that is identified correctly, and the information in the message tends to be accurate. Although what listeners hear is reasonably close to the truth, it is presented in a manner that attempts to convince the audience that the sender is the "good guy" with the best ideas and political ideology. The major outcome expected from practicing White propaganda is to build credibility with the audience, for this could have usefulness at some point in the future. While Black propaganda is when the source is concealed or credited to a false authority and spreads lies, fabrications, and deceptions. Black propaganda is the "big lie," including all types of creative deceit. The success or failure of black propaganda depends on the receiver's willingness to accept the credibility of the source and the content of the message ( Jowett and O'Donnell ,2012:18). Last of the classification which is Gray propaganda is, according to Jowett and O'Donnell (2012:22) falls somewhere between white and black propaganda. The source may or may not be correctly identified, and the accuracy of the information is uncertain. Gray propaganda is widespread.

As per the discussion in the definition and following parts of this chapter, it can be noted that Public Relations is simply one of the many strategies that government can utilize to increase policy and strategy dialogue with citizens and earn their support. However scholars like, E. Hopkins (2015:2) highlight the importance of an effort to be made to maintain and promote the ethical practice of public relations to prevent public relations from becoming propaganda. Grunig and Hunt (1984: 21) locate propaganda in the press agency model, which: 'Public relations serve a propaganda function and where Practitioners spread the faith of the organization involved, often through incomplete, distorted, or half-true information.' This links (some) public relations activity to propaganda but later makes clear this is often unethical in content (Fawkes, 2006:269).

Using discourse theory quoted in (Gelders and Ihlen, 2010:61 ) Weaver, Motion, and Roper (2006), point out that what is considered as truth is highly problematic and not necessarily something that will always help to distinguish ethical from unethical practice. In their view, "whether propaganda is ethical or not has to be assessed in relation to the context which it is practiced, the ends to which it is used, the quality of transparency in terms of the persuader's openness about the 'ends' they are seeking to achieve, and, as far as one is able to judge, the consequences of those ends".

Moreover, the real difference between the public relations and propaganda is two and is to be found in the free choice Public relations implies for its audience, the existence of alternative sources of information, available to the public, that can countermand any message positive or negative. If contradicted, Public Relations fail to achieve its goal, become unsuccessful and lose credibility, an option that suits neither practitioners nor clients (Bastia,2006:26).

As per Herman and Chomsky (2002), Propaganda requires an almost direct response in favor of the communicator and is usually one-way (encoder of the message to receiver only), they have explained propaganda as providing and selecting certain forms of information for publication and purposefully neglecting others to suppress certain forms of public information in order to protect interests.

In public relations however, communication is two-way (requires feedback and understanding), the communicator sends his messages but also ensures understanding by the receiver and a relationship should be built. From this definition, it is possible to discern that, public relations as a whole should have ethics. Moreover, to serve the needs of constituents, the government will always have an agenda and public relations is one of the many strategies that the government can utilize to increase policy dialogue with citizens. 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.

### **2.1.6 Government public relations tools**

Today, activities such as public relations are important for any organization, both commercial and non-profit. It is effective Public relations, which determines the image of the organization and widespread opinions about it the environment. Shaping the image of the company is essential Public relations task and it applies both to profit-oriented organizations, public administration, Nongovernmental organization or nation-states (Wyszomirski, 2014:168).

As we have seen in the above contents, government public relations are not only about communication and involve a wider group of stakeholders including the general public. Furthermore government Public relations also have many other Functions, and to achieve its goals it utilize different Public relation tools and strategies.

As per (Wyszomirski, 2014:171) attention should be paid to the use of tools for effective communication, shaping reputation and attitudes of active cooperation, as well as the selection of measures to promote country's development. A variety of tools can be employed to communicate to the larger public. Government Public Relations through communication is carried out in many forms, including press releases, media interviews, and speeches.

#### **1. Press Releases**

Press releases are amongst the most popular form of communication utilized by different governmental and nongovernmental as a tool for the maintenance of sound public relations (Ling, 2017:99). Autzen (2014:5) describes Press releases as the piece of communication means

used in order to relate to different publics. It is also a means of disseminating important information for establishing and maintaining mutual lines of communication.. Press release for government therefore is well proven way to get attention and establish contact with publics via information about policy's and projects in the news media. However a major Critic forwarded to press release as a public relations tool is its uncommunicativeness through dialogue; questions cannot be asked of a press release except the journalists who can contact the press offices giving the release.

## **2. Media Relations**

Maintaining media relations is one aspect of the government public relations team's responsibility. By directly engaging with the media people or houses, the PR experts reach out to the general public using different outlets. The goal of media relations is to establish and maintain solid and ethical relationships with media for accurate, balanced, timely information release. Theaker (2004:158) stating the reasons why media relations is important ,he argues that the main reason why public relations practitioners use media relations to get their message across is the media's role in forming public opinion. Moreover, Wragg (1996) quoted in Theaker (2004:159) argues that

The purpose of press relations is not to issue press releases, or handle enquiries from journalists, or even to generate a massive pile of press cuttings. The true purpose of press relations is to enhance the reputation of an organization and its products, and to influence and inform the target audience.

Media and public relations have strong ties and perhaps media relation has become one of the larger functions of government public relations. That is why Scholars Including Ferguson (1984) And Grunig (1992) as cited in McCollough (2015: 4 ) called For public Relations practitioners to emphasize on building and Maintaining relationships with the media, rather than message craft, dissemination, and control. Similarly, Public relation officers especially government practitioners are liaisons between government and the public.

Therefore, government public relations efforts focus on engaging journalists and media outlets (from the traditional Newspapers, Wire services/ news, syndicates, Magazines, Radio, Television, to the new outlets of government websites, Blogs, Chat rooms, Podcasts, Social

Media, Video casts) in order to prompt media coverage regarding topics of key priority to the government agenda and/or to convey point of view on governmental matters affecting the larger public.

### **3. Events**

Events are opportunities for corporate and governments to gain exposure for their businesses, promote new products or services, policies ,strategies and make sure accurate information reaches targeted audience. 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 government 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 (Shimelis,2017: 27)

### **4. Speeches**

Speeches do also belong to the major PR tools because they can create powerful product and company publicity. Increasingly, company executives must field questions from the media or give talks at trade associations or sales meetings, and these events can either build, but also hurt the firm's image.

A political speech is a communication activity which can be used both for campaigning and garnering public support for government programs and projects. Speeches as a public relations tool, is relevant for reaching large groups in the community. According to (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2011) as refrenced by (Shimlis,2017:24) ,Speeches by government officials can be effective for agenda setting, increasing political knowledge, and stimulating support for a cause, policy, or candidate during elections.

### **5. Written and audio visual materials**

Public relations should also involve written and audiovisual materials. With the help of these materials, Public Relation practitioners can reach and influence their target pubic. These

materials include annual reports, brochures, articles, newsletters and magazines, DVDs and, online videos are being used more and more as Public Relations tools.

### **2.1.7 International public relations**

Public relations as an academics and practice have evolved through many years. It has been practiced as a tool for communication in different countries with different forms. However because of many driving forces mainly globalization the domestic approach of Public relations has been shaped and has grown in to international perspective.

International public relations have been defined by different people in diverse settings. As per, (Wilcox et. al. 2001), for some American writers, international Public relations is simply about how to overcome barriers that are created by other cultures, including language, laws or cultural issues, which are often identified as ‘problems’ rather than opportunities or the manifestation of diversity.

While Practitioners and scholars alike would rather support and considered International Public relations ‘one of the most rapidly growing areas of the profession, and one of the least understood’. On the other hand there are also very few practitioners who argued that ‘there’s no such thing as international public relations’.

International public relations is the planned communication activity of a (multinational) organization, a supra- or international institution or government to create a positive and receptive environment through interactions in the target country which facilitates the organization (or government) to achieve its policy or business objectives without harming the interests of the host publics (Szondi,2006:115)

Public relations practitioners will have to work with clients (public and private) in countries other than their own create campaign materials that may have to be translated into multiple languages and may have to travel to various countries to conduct public relations work.



Therefore, international public relations is far from being a cut and dried operation, nor should it be given to anyone with little understanding of foreign countries, or for whom it is necessary to create a job. The way things are developing, it is assuming ever greater importance, and can decisively influence corporate sales and country's reputation (Goferry,1971: 78).

## **2.2 Theoretical framework and public relations model**

Theories about how public relations strategies and tactics work originated in university schools of management and communication, where the first public relations courses were taught. Management was one home to public relations courses, because public relations as a profession are part of the management of organizations (Edwards, 2006; 144). According to Edwards (2006) early communication theories were relatively simple, focusing on the actual process of one-way persuasive communication and consisting of the following concepts, sometimes abbreviated to SMCRE which is:

- Sender – transmitting the message
- Message – what is being communicated
- Channel – the means by which the message is sent
- Receiver – the target for receiving the message
- Effect – the results, if any, of the communication.

As per the above path of communication, it can be understood that the flow is clearly linear and deals only about the sender transmitting the message and omits the responsibility of the receiver. Reflecting this parity, and in a theoretical development particularly relevant to Public Relations, (Windahl and Signitzer 1992), introduced an additional role into the mix that of the 'gatekeeper', who is positioned between the sender and the receiver of a message and may alter the original message before it reaches its intended recipient. Not only does this model allow for the role of Public Relations practitioners as intermediaries between an organization and its publics, but it also accommodates the role of the mass media, which filters the multitude of messages from organizations and individuals trying to attract the attention of readers, listeners and viewers. (Edwards, 2006; 145).

In addition to what (Windahl and Signitzer 1992), contributed to the evolution of communication theory which only use to explain how effective a message from a source will be transmitted to the medium in order to generate a positive response, other scholars have also developed turned to develop communication theories that give emphasis on audiences. Among such audience centric theories one is constructivism.

Constructivism is a communication theory that seeks to explain individual differences in people's ability to communicate skillfully in social situations. As per Delia (2000:99), the core assumption of constructivism is that "persons make sense of the world through systems of personal constructs." Constructs are the cognitive templates or stencils we fit over reality to bring order to our perceptions.

Moreover, (Seitel, 2011) as referred in Zemedekun (2014:26), argues Constructivism communication theory suggests that knowledge is constructed not transmitted". According to this theory, for effective communication it is important to have some information about the receiver such as beliefs, predictions and background. When we communicate primarily through conversation we construct our own social realities of what is going on and what kind of action is appropriate. Therefore, the whole point of this theory emphasizes the fact that communication is not a simple task of transmitting message.

In the contemporary theories of public relations of communications, it might be difficult to find a widely discussed theory than that of the four models of Grunig and Hunt. Gruing and Hunt(1984:21) explain that in its early development, public relation was generally equated with persuasion and or propaganda and most people still have that concept of Public Relations today. According to them, the four models they have developed shows the developmental stages in the history of Public relations and will help to understand how it is practiced today.

### **2.2.1 Press agentry (Publicity) Model**

This model has come in to existence first from all the other three Public Relations models, in the period from 1850 to 1900. The model of communication for this public relations, is basically one way which is sending message from the source to the receiver-no dialogue with the intended audience is required and the main objective is to put forward one particular view of the world

(Edwards, 2006:147). Moreover, Solomon (1998) as quoted in Zemedekun, also states this model of communication was marked by manipulation, exaggeration and deception. According to Gruing and Hunt (1984:22), the purpose of this kind of communication model is propaganda where the nature of communication is one way and a complete truth is not essential.

The practitioners of this model of Public Relation do not always feel obligated to present the complete picture of the organization, the state or the product they represent. With reference to the value of research in this model, the practitioners seldom use research, unless it is informal observation of whether their publicity materials have been used in the media or at times may also count the house to see if they have gotten audiences to attend their event or buy their product and their services (Gruing and Hunt,1984:24). Organizations that equate Public relations with publicity and promotions today generally practice the press agency/Publicity model.

### **2.2.2 Public Information Model**

It was in the beginning of 1900 where this model has started to be practiced and continued as the major model of Public Relations until the 1920s. As indicated by Zemedkun (2014:27) when huge business organizations were under serious attack from the media on issues of corruption and other forms of injustice, and were forced to establish public relations offices and hire practitioners. As per Edwards (2006:147), the model of communication is the same as press agency public relation model which is one-way and information dissemination is the purpose of the activity, but it differs from press agency in that truth is fundamental.

The practitioners of this model of Public Relation however, unlike the Press agency always feel obligated to present the complete picture of the organization, the state or the product they represent. These public relations practitioners do little research; they follow up a journalistic model of preparing informational materials for largely unknown sources. But for the most part, the practitioners have little idea of what happens to the materials they prepare (Gruing and Hunt,1984:24). As per its practical application in organizations, Public information model is still the most frequently used public relations model implemented today. It nearly is always the model used in government agencies, on profit associations as well as many business firms to inform the public's through offering news, producing informational Pamphlets, fact sheets films and videos (Gruing and Hunt, 1984: 24).

### **2.2.3 Two - way asymmetric Model**

Developed in the 1920's, it was introduced as two ways communication as result of looking for a feedback for information disseminated that began to be considered as part of the communication process (Zemedkun, 2014:28). This type of Public Relations is rooted in persuasive communications and aims to generate agreement between the organization and its audiences by bringing them around to the organization's way of thinking (Edwards,2006:147). The function of two way asymmetric Public relations model is more like the press agent or publicist however their purpose can best be described as scientific persuasion.

In this public relations model, communication flows both from and to the public but the nature of communication model is "asymmetric", because the effects of the Public relations are imbalanced infavour of the organization. Hence, the organization does not change as a result of the Public Relations; it attempts to change public attitudes and behavior. Because of the involvement of feedback in this model, many Public Relations Practitioners today used this model as a two way communication. However, according to (Gruing and Hunt, 1984;25) ,Edwards( 2006:147) argue that is not the case because, as the "feedback" gathered in this model will not be used to alter the organization's position., rather strives to adapt communications strategies to be more persuasive and change the attitude of the receiver -which makes the communication one sided.

The importance of research is significant in this Public Relations model and in fact as the same as the fourth public relations model, research is the very reason that makes them to be called two way models. In two way asymmetric, the public relations practitioner uses formative research to find out what the public will accept and tolerate to identify policies and procedures of an individual or an organization with the public interest. When the practitioners do evaluative research they examine the feedback with the attitudes and behavior of the public's before and after the Public relations effort, to see what affect the campaign has had (Gruing and Hunt, 1984:26). The majority follower of this model can be found in business firms especially those that face considerable competition, Moreover it is this model that can ranked first as a provision of public relations service provided by consulting firms to clients.

#### **2.2.4 Two - way symmetric Model**

The major advocate and founder of this model James E. Grunig (1984:42) mentioned that it would be difficult to exactly identify when this model came into being. However states that the model came much later, in the 1960's and 1970's and argues though they have practiced another model, most of the historical public relations figures from the 20<sup>th</sup> century have defined public relations in symmetric form.

In two-way symmetric communication the aim is to generate mutual understanding – the two-way communications process should lead to changes in both the audience's and the organization's position on an issue (Edwards, 2006: 148). Under this model, there is no communicating party called sender and receiver, person or group as the person or the group will be communicating and interacting highly they will rapidly be changed from sender to receiver and vice versa (Grunig and Hunt, 1984:24).

Research for this type of Public Relations does not just measure attitudes, but also investigates the understanding that has led to those attitudes, therefore establishing the quality of the dialogue taking place (Edwards, 2006: 148). Moreover the practitioners do formative research to learn how the public perceives the organization and to determine what consequences does the organization has for the public. And the research can therefore be used to counsel management on public reaction to policies and how those policies could be managed to better serve the public interest (Grunig and Hunt, 1984:25)

As to the practical application of the Public relations models, the symmetric and asymmetric communication models in particular have stimulated a large body of research into how public relations is practiced and evidence suggests that it is associated with ethical and effective communications practices (Grunig 1992). However, the four models of public relations and specifically Grunig's and Hunt's advocacy for the symmetric model over the others could not stand without counter arguments.

(L'Etang 1996) indicated in Edwards (2006: 148) stated Critics have also argued that it is an idealistic model, which misrepresents the communications process in reality, where vested

interests dictate the nature of public relations practice and rarely encourage a truly balanced communications process. For example, Cheney and Christensen (2001) argue that Grunig's research is based on self-reports by managers and should therefore be treated with caution. The idea of symmetric communications also obscures the networks of power and influence that shape these practices, as exemplified, for example, by organizations' pre-selection of target publics and topics for dialogue (Ibid). As the recent development of a public relations model, it can be expected for many more arguments and counter arguments to be developed towards the two way symmetric as well as asymmetric model of public relations and even for new model to be developed for that matter.

This research is 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. Especially in a country like Ethiopia, where the government is giving much emphasis for development and development communication, the model for such a system is the two way symmetric.

### **2.3 Public relations in Ethiopia**

As discussed in the historical evolution and development of the public relations, the practice of modern public relations has a two century history at global level, though the development and practice of the profession is not as old as the global one. However, the earliest manifestation of public relation as a practice has been part of the Ethiopian civilization similar for most nations in the world. The oldest phenomenon of public relation has not been unconnected from the practice of government activities through persuasion form and with a goal to mobilize the public at large.

However as per Zemdekun(2014:20), referencing ministry of Information(2003) stated, the beginning of newspapers since 1900's that provided advertisement space for business organizations together with the introduction of printing press, telecommunication and the rail way by Emperor Minilik II in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century paved the development of mass media and communications in all aspects including the emergence of modern public relations practice. public relations resembling practices during those times, such as preparing and distributing news papers entitled "Bandirachen" (Our flag) in order to arise patriotism among Ethiopian guerrillas

during the fascist Italy occupation of 1936-1941, and Amharic language paper entitled “Yeter Wore” (War news) that was distributed by the allied forces during world war II can be mentioned. However the practice was not as modern and institutionalized like how it was started to be in the 1960’s.

As stated by Shimles(2014:1) quoting Solomon (1998), though it cannot exactly be told when modern public relations practice started in Ethiopia, there is a belief that it might have been in 1940s with the establishment of the ministry of pen in 1940’s paving the way for public relations practice in government offices. The creation of the organization of African Unity in 1963 as its head quarter in Addis Ababa which was followed by the establishment of the UN Economic Commission for Africa again as its head quarter in Addis Ababa were among the significant dynamics that were worth mentioning. While such huge developments were taking shape in the country, the public relations practice in the country remained without any remarkable progress.

In the history of public relations in Ethiopia 1960’s was also a period when private public relations practice came in to existence. According to Zemdekun (2104:21) quoting Solomon Alem public relations consultancy established by writers Sibhat Gebreigziabher and Dereje Deressa was the first public relations consultancy firm in the history of the country. Under this firm 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 used to be prepared and distributed by this firm until the firm was closed after 7 years by the order of the revolutionary government .

The soviet model of socialism adopted by the military government led the public relations and the media practice to the full fledged propaganda. The media and the few government public relations units fell under a strict control and guidance of assigned military officers. It was for this special mission that the then Ministry of Information and National Guidance came to existence. Public relations practices in government as well as mass political organizations were masterminded by political cadres especially assigned for this purpose. Solomon (1998) as

indicated in Zemdekun (2014:24) has summarized the public relations practices at those two periods as follows.

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

After the coming of Ethiopian people's revolutionary democracy front , a lot has been done at least at in recognizing the flow of information and communication as a prominent aspect of the government. The decision of the government to establish the then ministry of information in 2002 was one of such an effort aimed to realize the effective dissemination of government information. The ministry was bestowed both with the information transaction and regulatory task. However, at that point significant numbers of government offices were not having public relations units as well as practitioners, which make the development of the practice of government public relations nominal Even those who were assumed to have public relations departments and practitioners were tied up with so many problems that would hinder them to function properly.

After serving for 6 years, the ministry has been established by Federal Government Communication Affairs with regulation number 158/2008. The very general objective of the office was to play a leading role in the government information and communication system. Moreover, among the power and duties of the minister ensuring the employment and administration of communication and public relations officers of federal government offices was part of it.

Though the government has displayed the intention to keep on the effort of establishing effective government communication system by organizing an office, the role the Public relations unites and practitioners play has put the practice in query. The government has made these unites political with an agenda of using them as a tool for development communication, and made the



public relations practitioners as more of politically committed individuals rather than professionals. This practice has made the development of the government public relations at stagnant position and seems that most of the public relations offices do not have a clearly defined and professional roles and responsibilities.

## **Chapter three**

### **Research methodology**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter demonstrates with the kind of research methods and procedures a researcher make use of for the study and such as research design, data sources and how data will be collected will also be illustrated under this chapter. Moreover, subjects of the research and procedure, sampling and sampling techniques, are discussed under this chapter.

#### **3.1 Research approach**

According to Kotari (2005), research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem. It may be understood as a science of studying how research is done scientifically. There are two basic approaches to research: quantitative approach and the qualitative approach. The former involves the generation of data in quantitative form which can be subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis in a formal and rigid fashion. While qualitative approach to research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behavior (kotari, 2005:5-8).

As Creswell (2014: 32) notes in his definition of approaches to research, he has described qualitative research as an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. Whereas, regarding the approach Wimmer and Dominick, 2011:115 states, and qualitative research uses a flexible questioning approach. Although a basic set of questions is designed to start the project, the researcher can change questions or ask follow-up questions at any time.

Quantitative research is an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. These variables, in turn, can be measured, typically on instruments, so that

numbered data can be analyzed using statistical procedures (Creswell, 2014: 32). The last research approach is what is called mixed methods research.

Creswell (2014:33) has described this approach as an approach to inquiry involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data, and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. The core assumption of this form of inquiry is that the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone.

For the purpose of this study qualitative research method is applied. Thus, qualitative research will be applied because the study will be describing an already existed knowledge and practice related with government public relations than trying to find new knowledge and fact. Moreover, 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. Therefore, the above characteristics of this approach inclined the researcher to make use of qualitative approach as an approach to address the research questions of the study. From qualitative research method, Interviews, focus group discussions and documents related with communication and Public Relations will be applied as it will be helpful to meet the study objectives.

In-depth Interviews is selected with an assumption that the technique would help to get information that is not only limited to the knowledge and experience of the researcher. As the study is practical application, the researcher will also have a room that would make things easier to ask follow-up questions to get viable information out of the interviewee. Document analysis is used to consolidate the data that will be gained from the in-depth interview and to uphold the findings. Therefore, documents related to federal government public relations, media and other appropriate materials supporting the research will be described and analyzed.

### **3.2 Data Collection Procedures and tools**

As per Walliman (2011:130), qualitative research is practiced in many disciplines, so a range of data collection methods has been devised to cater for the varied requirements of the different subjects, such as: qualitative interviewing, focus groups, participant, discourse and conversation analysis and analysis of texts and documents are the major ones.

For the study at hand, as the research topic deals with the practice of federal government public relations, special emphasis is given to describing what the practice looks like( whether it is propaganda or used a development communication tool) with regard to other public relations standards. Therefore the study at hand is an already existed belief by individual practitioners and those interact with public relation professionals. In an attempt to answer the research questions and achieve the research objective in-depth interview and document analysis will be employed.

The data source for this research comes from two sources. The first source of data comes collected from federal government public relations practitioners from selected federal government organizations. Five federal organizations were purposively selected based on their approximate and daily engagement with the larger public. This is done with the emphasis on finding out the procedures, principles, strategies and practice that are aimed at establishing and developing the practice of public relations. Moreover the data is collected with an aim of finding out practitioners reflections on matters related to this research topic. The second source of data is collected from media professionals and institutions working with and governing the media. This is done with the objective evaluating the availability of information from federal government and the type and way of acquiring the information. The data collected was useful to analyze the federal government communication practice in the judgment of those that collect and disseminate the information to the public.

In-depth interview have a major objective of attaining an objective of examining Federal government public relations practice with the practitioner's reflections those working with federal government Public relations and also journalists on the interview questions prepared.

Moreover, documents such as Public relations regulations, guidelines, strategies and any related file sources that are aimed at governing the practice of public relations will be examined.

Based on this, this research uses in-depth interview, focus group discussion and document analysis for they are appropriate to answer the research questions.

The following three sections discuss these data collection tools briefly and how they will be suitable and applied to the study.

### **3.2.1 In-depth Interview**

In this qualitative data collection method, the researcher conducts face-to-face interviews with participants, telephone interviews. These interviews involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants (Creswell, 2014: 239). Moreover, Interviews are more suitable for questions that require probing to obtain adequate information. The use of interviews to question samples of people is a very flexible tool with a wide range of applications (Walliman, 2011:99).

Furthermore, as per Wimmer & Dominick,( 2011: 139) when compared to more traditional survey methods, intensive interviewing provides more accurate responses on sensitive issues. The rapport between respondent and interviewer makes it easier to approach certain topics that might be taboo in other approaches.

As previously indicated, the aim of this study is to find out how the federal government public relations is practiced and communicates with its stakeholders and the general public as a whole. Therefore, interviewing the public relations practitioners and media personnel's is found to be the best method to achieve this. Therefore, in this study, structured in-depth interview with structured questions was used as a main tool to gather data from practitioners concerning the practice of federal government public relations activities. Moreover, In order to allow active participation a less formal approach that encourages participants to openly forward their opinion focus group discussion is also applied.

In depth interview is selected with an assumption that the method will help the researcher to get information related with practice of federal government public relations which is not limited to the knowledge and understanding of the researcher.

### **3.2.2 Focus Group Discussion**

The emphasis of conducting a focus group discussion according to Flick is the interactive aspect of data collection which is to gain information that would be difficult to come across without the interaction (Flick, 2009:115). Thus, focus group is described as a method of generating and maintaining conversation with the focus group participants on different topics (May, 2001:45). Focus group discussions also makes use of interview but it is different in such a way that questions are not forwarded to one discussant as in the case of individual interview, nevertheless to the group as an entire. This provides the advantage of engaging people in active group interactions, in facts that wouldn't have surfaced else. Focus groups discussions allow exploring group dynamics regarding the issues the researcher wants to explore (May, 2001:50).

Therefore, taking the study at hand it has become necessary to organize a focus group discussion as it will be very essential to encourage debate on the research topic, whether government Public relations is a tool for development communication or propaganda. Moreover, organizing a focus group discussion will provide data on areas where most participants agree on and also their differentiated opinion as well.

### **3.2.3 Document Analysis**

In the effort of identifying how public relations is practiced in federal government structure, documents such regulations, guidelines, strategies and the likes that are aimed at regulating the practice of public relations were examined. Even though in-depth interview has been used as a main tool to gather data from research participants, to consolidate the data to be gathered with the in-depth interview, document analysis is 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.

Document analysis was used to consolidate the data that will be gained from the in-depth interview and to uphold the findings. Therefore, documents related to federal government public relations like government communication Affairs Office Establishment Council of Ministers Regulation 158/2008, Proclamation Number, 1097/2018 defining Powers and Duties of the Executive Organs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation 590/2008 and documents that meant to regulate the government public relations practice that were prepared by the former Government Communication Affairs Office were also analyzed .

### **3.3 Sampling**

In defining Sampling, Gentles (2015) describes “sampling is the selection of specific data sources from which data are collected to address the research objectives” (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & Mckibbon,2015:1775). Qualitative approaches to research demand different sampling techniques from those commonly used in quantitative studies. Rarely are they probabilistic or random. Instead they are purposeful, based on the purpose of the investigation (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 157). Moreover, they are less rigid and do not starts with the establishment of a strict sampling frame, as in quantitative studies. This is because qualitative sampling develops during the research process as you discover new avenues and clues to follow up (ibid: 158).

Therefore, to meet the research objective of the study, the researcher uses purposeful sampling as strategy to select important samples to select information rich study areas, documents and personalities.

#### **3.3.1 Purposeful Sampling**

The underlying principle of gaining rich, in-depth information guides the sampling strategies of qualitative researchers. Whom you select for your study, where and when depends on certain criteria which are determined by the purpose of your study. Therefore, the term purposive or purposeful sampling is applied (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 159).

In depth Interview as a data collection method is employed to obtain relevant information about the practice and challenges of public relations in federal government as per the view of the

government itself and what literatures discuss as well. The data gathering strategy indicated above clearly shows that the sampling method is purposive. The institutions selected for document analysis and the participants for interview, will be selected purposely to get the information needed for the research topic. Interview and analysis elements of the study are selected based on the researcher's judgment that they provide access to the desired information. For the purpose of this research, selected federal government offices, Medias and guiding documents are identified for examination. The government offices are selected by the critical role they play in policy making, enactment of law and the practical application of government Public relations in the socio-economic and political system. Moreover, they are selected based on the valuable public information they hold and also larger expectation from the public on the dissemination of the information.

Moreover media houses are selected out of the researcher's belief that Medias are the major public relation tool that the government is using to communicate with the public and also Medias primary objective of informing the public about government affairs. Two media houses are selected for the research purpose, one radio from the private sector and the other television from government.

Therefore, out of the above stated justification and because the researcher believes the organizations selected will be valuable for the study different organizations are chosen based on purposeful sampling technique. The federal government organizations selected for interview are five federal Ministries' namely;

- Ministry of Education,
- Ministry of Health,
- Ministry of Agriculture
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and
- Civil service Commission.

The Ministries are selected purposely based on the researcher's belief that the primary goal of the above stated organizations is highly connected to the public.

Moreover, the media institutions are,



- Radio Sheger FM is selected for interview.
- Ethiopian broadcasting corporation for a focus group discussion

### **3.3.2 Sample size**

Quantitative research requires sufficiently large sample sizes to produce statistically precise quantitative estimates; smaller samples are used in qualitative research. This is because the general aim of sampling in qualitative research is to acquire information that is useful for understanding the complexity, depth, variation, or context surrounding a phenomenon, rather than to represent populations as in quantitative research (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & Mckibbon, 2015: 1782). Although there are no rigid rules or guidelines for sample size, generally qualitative sampling consists of small sampling units studied in depth. Some research texts recommend six to eight data units when the sample consists of a homogeneous group, and twelve to twenty for a heterogeneous sample (Daymon and Holloway, 2002: 163).

For this particular study, a sample size of 9 interviewees from federal offices and 3 interviewees from media is used for gathering data. Moreover one focus group discussion was conducted at a media house with 5 participants in the discussion. For the document analysis, documents related to federal government public relations starting from the constitution to other laws like government communication Affairs Office Establishment Council of Ministers Regulation 158/2008, Proclamation Number, 1097/2018 defining Powers and Duties of the Executive Organs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation 590/2008 and also documents meant to regulate the government public relations practice that is prepared by the former Government Communication Affairs Office were also analyzed.

### **3.4 Data Analysis procedures**

As the study was conducted by employing qualitative research methods, the data was collected through interview, focus group discussion and by analyzing different documents. The analysis out of the data generated through the above tools were analyzed by using content based analysis which needs categorization and sub-categorization of the data to create issues and sub- issues. Each interview was transcribed and coded. Subsequently summaries of concepts were being

organized into different categories, and finally pertinent themes were identified to address the research question. Each of these themes were described, explained and interpreted in detail being supported by quotations or extracts from the semi-structured interviews and the focus group.

### **3.5 Ethical consideration**

An ethical aspect is one of the most important stances in research due to this reason; the researcher strictly abided by the ethical standards regarding research. The researcher had a letter from Addis Ababa University School of Journalism and communication to the study site to get permission from the organizations from which the data is collected. The identity of the participants was kept anonymous and confidential. The researcher clearly explained the purpose of the study to the respondents, got the consent from participant and also inform the participants in the study that the result is only used for academic purposes not for other purposes. The information provided by each study participants was kept in confidential.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Data Presentation and Analysis of Findings**

#### **Introduction**

The following chapter deals with presentation of the data with analysis and discussion on the findings. As the research deals with identifying the practice of government public relations as a tool for development communication or propaganda, the finding is presented from three perspectives.

The first is from the analysis of existing documents that meant to establish and develop the practice of public relations in federal government offices with the researchers' belief that practical application can only be discussed when there are supporting documents which shows the role of the government in the process of the establishment and development of public relations in the federal government offices. This is done through document analysis of different laws and relevant documents that are related to the matter.

The second is the point of view from the Public relations practitioners in federal government offices. Here the major point of discussion is to find out practitioners understanding on the role of Public relation, how public relations is practiced in their respective office, their perception towards the practical application of government public relations and major challenges faced while carrying out their duties and responsibilities. In this regard, interview with government public relations practitioners was conducted in addition to a focus group discussion conducted to get a full picture on how they recognize their practice.

The third perspective is from Media personnel's point of view. This is done to get complete information on the research at hand and data on understands of media personnel's on the role of public relations, their perception towards the practice of government public relations and the practitioners and major challenges were collected. Interview and focus group discussions are the research tools applied to collect information on the research areas.

Hence, the whole discussion in this chapter is attempting to answer the research questions with a major theme of whether the government has recognized the role of public relations as an

important contributing tool for its development communication to support its process of social transformation or as a propaganda tool to only serve for communicating the government perspective of issues in away the government wants and when it wants.

## **4.1 Document Analysis**

Though it has become impossible to find a compiled document about the practice of public relations, modern public relations in Ethiopia is believed to have started in 1960's. Even the documents that are prepared to guide the public relation at national level are prepared at recent times by the former Government communication affairs office. However, until these days the government public relations in most organization, including the ones that are included in this study is guided by this document. Therefore, as there is no current and updated government public relations guideline, the researcher is obligated to focus on those documents prepared by the government communication affairs office with other communication related laws which seems relevant to addressing the research questions. The documents were analyzed according to the following two major points.

### **4.1.1 Policy and legal framework**

#### **4.1.1.1 Policy Framework**

As to a national guiding policy that guides the overall communication and media landscape of the state the researcher did not found any that deals with the matter at hand. Discussing with Public relations practitioners, media personnel's and academicians it has been understood that the document is at draft stage. However, looking at the practical application of the government public relations work, the researcher has confirmed the applicable and guiding documents are those prepared by the former federal government communication affairs office.

The first document drafted by the former Government Communication Affairs Office prepared in April 2007 is a guideline referred as "Public relations work for fundamental change". The guideline incorporates different points starting from the need for Public relations in Ethiopia, the definition of public relations, Public relations tools, media relations, and crisis communication management and goes in to details about what a public relations officer should look like, ethical principles to follow. The other document that is prepared at the same time with the above

guideline is a document title “National public relations system and Public relations tools directive”. The directive includes the strategic objective of public relations, major activities of government public relations, structural arrangement of government public relations departments, media reactions and a detailed description of public relation tools and how to use the tools.

In January 2014, the above two documents have been merged together and an updated but almost similar as the above to govern the public relations bodies at the federal level titled “Federal Government Offices Public Relations Bodies Working Procedure”. This is the official guideline, which is still guiding the government public relations works and the relation with the media and the public. According to the document, the overall objective of the guideline would be ensuring fast government communication system by disseminating correct, timely and comprehensive government information to the public and stakeholders as deemed necessary. In order to achieve the objective, the document has specified more than 20 duties and responsibilities of public relations. The most important one which the researcher find relevant to mention are the following:

- Building national consensus
- Preparing institutional strategies and annual plan that correspond with the plan of government communication affairs office,
- Representing the organization as spokesperson,
- 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 communication management.
- Conducting research and public opinion survey

The other major part of the directive is the part that discusses about the ethical principles of public relations to guide the daily public relations practice of government the Public relations offices. As the researcher reviewed, the ethical principles listed seem to base its foundation and do relate with the constitution and the freedom of the mass media and access to information proclamation.

As per the document and guiding principles, the researcher has not found anything wrong with the contents incorporated in the document. Nonetheless, as the major objective of the research is the practical application, it is appropriate to ask if these principles are understood fully by the government itself, government institution leaders and the practitioners themselves. Looking at the professional practice of the government public relations and how crisis are managed in relation to communication, one shall pose a question if the document based essence of public relations is really on the ground and is being lead professionally.

#### **4.1.1.2 Legal Framework**

Article 29 of the democratic republic of Ethiopia's constitution is the major stepping stone for all other legal documents that are cited while discussing about communication and media in Ethiopia. The article guarantees rights of thought, opinion and expression and specifically emphasizes the importance of the independence of the media for the interest of the public.

It stipulates,

Everyone has the right to freedom of expression without any interference. This right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any media of his choice (Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Proclamation No.1/1995).

Moreover, Article 29, sub - article 3 of the constitution, stipulates the following:

Freedom of the press and other mass media and freedom of artistic creativity is guaranteed. Freedom of press shall specifically include b) Access to information of public interest (Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Proclamation No.1/1995).

Evaluating the above articles and other sub articles, what the law encompasses is mostly qualifying the press freedom, by stating the press has the right to get information. However does not specifically stipulate the responsibility of government offices in providing information that can freely be communicated by the press.

The other law that is significant to discuss and is enacted based on the above constitutional article is the law titled " Proclamation to Provide for Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information 590/2008". Even though the current proclamation is also under way for amendment, it is a worth mention proclamation as it is the exclusive law that provides the relationship between media and public relation offices and also puts responsibility of government offices in providing government information to the media and/or anyone who wants access to government related information.

Moreover the law has created an appropriate situation where the public relations support the media by provision of truthful and timely information whereas the media plays the role by disseminating information to the public.

The proclamation under article 11, has stipulated the following major points:

- 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)

As compared to other parts the proclamation, part three which deals with 'Access to Information' has covered much details about public relations, public information and also information that can be held by government bodies. Moreover the law gives coverage 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 media and/or anyone. Under this part, it can also be said that equal attention for both the public relations practices and the mass media has been given and urges for collaboration.

Browsing through the part that illustrates about access to information, we can say that the presumption is the media and government public relation correlation with a shared goal of respecting the public's right to access to government information. However, an important point that can't be passed with discussing is the conflict of interest which is mostly raised surprisingly by parties, the government public relations officers and the Medias. The conflict mostly arises out of the public relation officers' interest in communicating with the public with the information they want to be communicated and in a way they want to be communicated. On the other hand, there is the interest of journalists to inform their audience without taking sides in a fair and balanced manner. Moreover, the journalists also wants to communicate with the public not only about the success of the organizations but also prepare news and programs on their drawback and how thy overcome it. Therefore, regardless of the wish from the legislators, there always is conflict of interest between journalism and public relations.

Another point that should not be bypassed without mentioning is that the proclamation article 14, sub article (3) which stipulated that, the public relations practitioners shall respond to requests of information within a month's period. Moreover, if the public relation practitioners believe there exists a situation that can fall under the conditions stated under sub article 8, they also have a right to extend for days that does not exceed 30 days. However, journalists and also other personnel's who went to government institutions, claim above stated days is used as a cover for some public relation practitioners to postpone appointments to the extent of not providing information at all.

The above challenge is also raised when the researcher conducted an interview with journalists. Moreover through the government offices the researcher went to conduct the research, the only organization that follows the above prerequisite to provide me with information was Ministry Of foreign Affairs though the process went through Human resource department but not the communications and public relations office. Therefore, this are some of the challenges related with the legal framework of public relations practice which the researcher believes are problem that can be triumph over with standardizing the government public relations practice (proper policy and legal framework) and building the confidence of the practitioners, this article should



be taken in to consideration in to the newly amended law, as this gap may sometimes be a reason for writing unbalanced news stories by the Medias.

#### **4.1.2 Institutional framework**

The establishment of the former government communication affairs office under the councils of ministers regulation number 158/2008 can be considered as government's recognition of the importance of communicating government information to the public. The law has specifically states the major objective for the establishment of institution is for the organization "to play a leading role in the government information and communication system". The office has been given about twenty powers and duties starting from incorporating duties of setting directions for public relations activities in federal government offices, serving as main source for government information, coordinating the content and execution of government communication programs to undertaking capacity building activities for public relation officers of federal government offices and provide general guideline for their deployment and promotion. Moreover, A comprehensible role given to the public relations departments, the duty to given to federal government organizations to organize public relations units, to include the head of the public relations in the executive wing of the institution coupled with a clearly defined relationship with government communication affairs office were indicators of government commitment for the growth of public relations as a practice.

However, after serving for almost ten years, the Government communication affairs office has come to an end in 2018 and as the proclamation number 1097/2018, enacted to provide the definitions of the powers and duties of the executive organs of the federal democratic republic of Ethiopia article 36(28) states the rights and obligations of government communications affairs office are here by transferred to civil service commission, Nothing more nothing less. As per the information the researcher acquired from the civil service commission, what is transferred is regarding the equipments and the personnel's under the office. On the contrary, a press secretariat office has been established with in the prime minister office without any legal support.

On the first press conference given by the press secretariat office on November 5/2018, the press secretary has stated the office has taken over the role and responsibilities of the former government communications affairs office while minimizing the major responsibilities of the office in to the following three major areas

- A. Timely, transparent and accurate collection and dissemination of decisions and views of the Federal democratic Republic of Ethiopia government to the public
- B. Collection , analysis and scaling- up of public responses, concern and feedbacks to the government: and
- C. Strengthening the relationship with the Prime minister office and the media for enhanced, factual and transparent reporting.

However, details about the structure of the office, regarding government communication policy, public relation guideline, its interaction with other government offices, and the public relations officers assigned in the different government offices and how they will be interacting with the office has not been yet communicated until this research paper is finalized. And this gap has created a hole in the overall institutionalism of government communication in general and the public relation work in particular. The press secretariat being existed in the prime minister office, has also been stated as challenge for accessing any information about government affairs easily unless the office has called the media, the missing of clear strategy on how the government communication is being lead, what the major objectives and principles of government communication is and its public relations principles as well.

Furthermore, even with the existence of the former communication affairs office following up on the practice and all the guidelines, the professional practice of the government public relations has been under scrutiny by the media and other stakeholders for losing standardization and professionalism. And now the institutionalization issue added to the above claim together with lack of guideline on how federal communication and public relations to be practiced remains the basic challenge for the growth of professional public relations in the country.

## 4.2 Demographic Presentation of Respondents

Table 1- Demographic characteristics of Interview participants (public relations practitioners)

Code	Organization	Sex	Educational Background	Work experience	Job title/position
Interviewee 1	Ministry of Education	Male	BA in journalism and Communication	3 Years	senior Public relation officer
Interviewee 2		Male	BA in Business management	10 years	Public relation Officer
Interviewee 3	Ministry of Health	Male	MA journalism and communication	10 years	Deputy Director, Public relation and communication
Interviewee 4		Male	BA in literature	12 years	Electronics media case team leader
Interviewee 5	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Male	MA in regional and local studies, International relations	20 years	Director of Digital Diplomacy
Interviewee 6	Civil service Commission	Male	BA in political science	4years	communications officer
Interviewee 7		Male	BA in literature	12 years	team leader (Public relations and communications)
Interviewee 8	Ministry of Agriculture	Male	MA in climate change and development	30 years	Acting Head of the Public Relations & Communication
Interviewee 9		Male	Journalism and communication	5 years	communication Affair expert

*Table 2- Demographic characteristics of Interview participants (journalists)*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Work experience</b>	<b>Job title/position</b>
Interviewee 1	Sheger FM Radio	Male	10 years	senior reporter
Interviewee 2		Male	6 years	senior reporter
Interviewee 3		Male	6 years	senior reporter

*Table 3- Demographic characteristics of FGD participants*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Work experience</b>	<b>Job title/position</b>
Code 1	Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation	Male	6 years	senior reporter
Code 2		Female	7 years	Editor
Code 3		Male	10 years	senior editor
Code 4		Male	2 years	Reporter 2
Code 5		Male	10 years	Editor

## **4.3 Data presentation, Interpretation and Analysis of Findings**

### **4.3.1 Role of public relations**

#### **The Practitioners view**

First part of the interview with public relations practitioners deals with the general role and objective of public relations as a profession (taking government public relations specifically). The responses from the interviewees show there seem to be a common understanding with regard to a role of government public relations being acting as a bridge between the government and the public. For interviewee number 1, the role of government public relations is basically communicating the interest and objective of the government to the public for the accomplishment of the government's vision. The interviewee continues and stated the role government public relations play in the country's development is very vital;

‘Government public relations, has a role in country's development by providing timely and truthful information to the public so that there will not be any gap in the flow information. Especially in the time of crisis government Public relations has a role by providing information to the public for a peaceful state‘ (Personal interview conducted on August 12, 2019).

In contrary to what has been generally stated by other respondents to the interview, interviewee 3 stated the role of public relations in government offices is not primarily about acting as a bridge between the government and the public rather it is creating mutual benefit. The interviewee continued and stated

‘The objective of government public relations is basically to transform the society through information, education and participation of the public. Public relation has a role in country's development by communicating the country's developmental agenda, not only communicating but also by participating and educating the public to bring national consensus for the accomplishment of the developed developmental agenda‘(Personal Interview conducted on August 13, 2019).

Moreover, as per interviewee number 5, the role of government public relation is more than communicating to the internal public but also requires equal communication with the external publics as well. As per the interviewee, development in the many sectors requires external

stakeholder's engagement and for this enabling conditions and positive image of the country shall be effectively communicated.

Other interviewees also stressed the role of public relations as creating an opportunity for public engagement for the achievement of developmental Agenda. Informant number 6 and 7 have stated,

Government public relation plays a very important role for the government as a structure (comprehensive flow of information from one center) as well as a practice. It serves as a tool for communicating government's policies and strategies; citizens will be accessing truthful information about the deeds of the government and will be participating with full awareness. Moreover, it will be used as a tool for taking feedback from the public in the development of different policies and strategies, it creates opportunity for citizens to be aware of governments' affair and can be used a mobilization tool. Therefore, a developmental policy and strategy developed with full knowledge of the public is an asset for the government in achieving its developmental agenda (Personal Interview conducted on August 15, 2019).

### **The Media view**

According interviewee number 1, government public relations is a political assigned position and its role is limited to represent the stand of the government to the public. Moreover, it is to serve as a bridge between the government and the public through provision of truthful and timely information to the public and mobilizing for developmental agenda. Interviewee with number 2 respond, the role of government public relations is providing information and communicating the public with truthful and full information about the organization, including its failures and how to overcome it. In addition, an informant with number 3 believes, the major role of government public relations is communicating the public on government plan of actions and government doings to construct an informed society.

One common point which binds all the three interviewees perception is they all believe government public relation has a role for the country's development but to serve for the development of the country, the information that is communicated shall not only be defending one's organization but also balancing information provision based on the public's need of

information and the governments answer towards the request. And while these requirements are met government public relations will serve as its role for the development of the country.

During the focus group decision with media personnel's, it has been discussed especially in a country like Ethiopia where many of our practices are backward, government public relations is mainly prominent in increasing the community awareness in different areas, and citizens that are well informed can play a greater role in the development of the country. Moreover, a participant with code number 1 also states,

For a country to build transparent and accountable institutions, good governance and development information is essential. And among the channels the information is transmitted, government public relation is the prominent one. Government public relations provide different information and stand of the government to the public and takes public feedback to make adjustments towards different government policies and laws (Focus group discussion conducted on August 19, 2019).

Moreover, from the interviewees approached by the researcher, informant number 2, states in addition serving as a bridge between government (represented by the organizations) and the public it is also a connecting point between the organizations and the media. The informant has also added the existence of government public relations has been helpful for the media in appointing a person of contact when dealing with government affairs.

On the other hand from the focus group member with code number 2 have said with regard to the role of government public relations:

Public relations is promotion by itself, and it promotes the work of the organization with the public and the media and through this information the audience will earn information about the organization and the government what it does, and this information will assist the public to make informed the decisions (Focus group discussion conducted on August 19, 2019).

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

communication. Accordingly equal emphasis shall be given to the interest of the public while describing the role of government public relations. From the interview conducted with public relations practitioners and journalists, documents reviewed and focus group discussions with journalists it can be said that the role of public relation is limited to acting as a bridge between the government and the public for provision of information.

However, working to satisfy the interest of the public as a role of public relations seems to be rated in lesser priority. Whenever we observe the press statements from different government offices, news coverage and program by Medias, most of them are intended to tell the story of the government, disseminating information without worrying about the public feedback, defending the practice of the government and providing reasons for failures in provision of services than taking accountability for its deeds. Moreover, examining the role public relations play in most of government organizations, it is mostly tailored to show the success of the organization (which is building the image of the government) and the researcher believes the thought, requests and interest of the public in most of the works either is fully or partially is being ignored.

### **4.3.2 Professionalism (knowledge and skills)**

#### **The Practitioners view**

The other element that the researcher believes is important in examining the practice of government public relations is the knowledge and skill of practitioners. Questions were forwarded to interviewees regarding if they believe they have the knowledge and skill of practicing public relations and professionalism of Public relations in government offices.

As per the response by interviewee 5, the knowledge and technical skills required for the practice of government public relations is possessed by spokesperson office at the organization. It has been described that the major objective of the organization and also why communication to different stakeholders of the organization is well known by the practitioners in the department. And there is judgment that the public relations aspect of communication is being practiced professionally as per the mission and objective of the organization.



On the other hand, Interviewee number 1 states, even though there are provision of different trainings given by the former government communications affairs offices, but that does not make the practice professional. It has been stated by the informant that, the practice of public relations in government offices is not practiced as per theoretical foundation of public relations and the role it meant to serve. This is because the professionals get influenced by the politicians and leader of their respective organization. As per the informant's word;

In most of the time information about the government offices and government in general got modified by the organization leaders and the Public relations officer has an obligation to disseminate that information not as how it should be communicated but in a way the leader wants it to be communicated (personal interview conducted on August 12, 2019).

Moreover as per interviewee number 3, the unprofessionalism of the practice of public relations in government offices starts from its beginning. As per the interviewee, the introduction of public relations by the government was politically motivated. The following was taken from what has been said by the interviewee;

When the practice of government public relations starts, people were selected by their political commitment than professionalism to serve as a mouth for the government and got assigned in different government institutions. Until recently, there is no higher institution that provides proper education on public relation, its theoretical orientation and how it should be practiced until recently. Most of the practitioners at government offices have background in other social sciences and also natural science field. I personally do not believe the government itself still understands the concept of Public relation let alone to assist for professional practice (personal interview conducted on August 13, 2019)

On the contrary, statement by informant number 2 is different from what has been said above. The informant express even though the educational background is not related with communication but through the short term trainings provided by the former government communications the knowledge and technical skills required to practice a professional public relations is acquired. Interviewee number 2 said the following describing the professionalism of public relations in government offices:

Public relations in government offices is currently being practiced with full understanding of the concept and its role for development. Especially after 2007 where the government recruits different personnel to serve as a public relation officer in different government offices, was what is expressed as the commitment of the government for the professional practice of public relations (personal interview conducted on August 12,2019)

Interviewee's 4 and 6 also states the practice of government public relations lack professionalism. The explanation given by the interviewees for categorizing the public relation practice as unprofessional is presented below;

There is no policy, Legal and institutional framework for practicing public relations at government offices. The only documents which we were using were prepared by the former government communication and we are not even sure whether we should continue using it or not. The abolishment of the office, in addition to affecting the flow of compiled, in-depth and easily accessed information about work of government offices, it has also give rise to ungoverned scattered practiced public relations. Regarding practitioners, most of the officers in the government institution are not professionals and their educational background is not suitable for public relations (Interview conducted on august 13 and15, 2019).

### **The Media View**

During the interview and focus group discussion with media personnel's the professional practice of government public relations and professionalism of the practitioners were among the basic points that were discussed. Surprisingly enough, every participant in the interview as well as in the focus group discussion has responded similarly stating government public relations is not practiced professionally as well as the practitioners are not professional as well.

According to interviewee number 1, the public relations position in the government office being a political assignment and also the practitioners coming from different field of education and always doing a defensive work for the government are the major reasons for limitation in the unprofessional setting of the government public relation as a practice as well as the

professionals. In agreement with the above statement, Interviewee number 2 stated though any formal research has not been done but through the different engagement with the public it can boldly be said ,the public perceives the practitioners as political affiliate to the government not as professional and do not have trust in the works they do. The Interviewee states the unprofessional setting of government public relation, stating:

It is the unprofessional practice of the government public relations that contributed to the over flow of fake information and the country's problems. Most of the practitioners are not confident, even they do not have full information about what is being done in their organization in particular and the government in general (personal interview conducted on August 14, 2019).

Moreover during the focus group discussion it has been discussed about government public relations and practitioners by the participants pointing out political assignment to the position, educational background of practitioners, practitioners believe that being a public relation officer at the government office is only defending of government even its wrongdoings to the extent of lying and/ denying the reality, limiting the content of government public relations to presenting reports and organizing events and practicing only one way communication (no room for gathering feedback) as the major illustration of the unprofessional setting of government public relations.

As understood from the different documents prepared by government communications affairs, public relations is introduced in most of the government organizations, it was assumed by the government that public relations that serves the interest of the government can be established by recruiting politically affiliated personnel's. And this recruitment from the start raises an issue of government public relations as a profession and a practice. As this was made to happen, public relations turned to be a fully politically oriented instrument for the government than equally serving the interest of the public.

Moreover noticing that public relations in government offices can be done by anyone irrespective of their educational background coupled with the positions are filled by assignment, it can easily be concluded that it is not considered as a profession. And it can be said the very important prerequisite for practicing public relations in government offices is not as a

professional stream that need in-depth knowledge and different skills, rather is a political instrument that need politically committed personnel.

And the finding from the data gathered from public relations practitioners and journalists, the way public relations deepen its roots in government organizations, the government public relation practice in Ethiopia is devoid of professionalism. it can be understood the difficulty of finding an element of professionalism to be practiced on the ground. For most people, including those that responded ‘although I do not have public relations and/communications background I believe I am a great public relations officer’, the practice of public relations is related with speaking and writing well. However, this assumption proves that there is no clear understanding of public relations as a profession as well as a practice.

### **4.3.3 Public relations Tools**

#### **Practitioners view**

Among the major component in the practice of public relations, public relation tools are significant in identifying audience’s preference of channel to be communicated with. The interviewees have been asked about the major tools they employ to communicate with the public and their culture of researching about the impact of the tools and make adjustments accordingly. All interviewees have stated they use almost all public relations tools in their respective institutions. Interviewee number 1 has identified the following;

There are different kinds of Public relations tools which we use as an organization to communicate with our audience. For example printed materials like booklets, flier’s, brusher’s annual magazines and also electronics; Public service announcement, website and social Medias. We use these tools some with planned platform while others unplanned whenever necessary and based on the type of audiences we communicate (Personal interview conducted on August 12, 2019)

The above statement is endorsed by other interviewees and stated public relations tools are more or less used by the federal government organization in their quest to reaching out to the public. However interviewee number 5 described the mostly used public relations tools in the organization is mostly Conference and meetings, press release, press conference, mainstream and social media. With regard to planning the public relation tools interviewee number 3, 4 and 5

described there is a detailed plan for every public relations tools and employ the tools accordingly, while the other interviewees stated the tools will be planned but because of different reasons like human resource and budget there are some that do not get to be applied (especially with regard to printed tools).

Another significant point addressed with the interviewees with regard to public relations tools is the agenda of research. The interviewees have been asked if they have conducted planned research or have created a feedback platform with regard to stakeholders and/or public perception towards their works. As per interviewee number 1 statement, there is feedback collection platform about the works of the organization in general. It has been asserted by the interviewee, the feedback gathered from the general public shows there is a long way ahead in relation to accompanying the organizational goal.

Until today there is no formal research conducted in the organization on the response of the public/stakeholders towards the public relation works of the organization.

On the other hand, interviewee number 3 and 4 stated the following,

There is annual supervision checklist to evaluate the public relation conducted through electronics media (Television and radio) which mostly is done focusing on the contents and time of the broadcast against the plan. However there is no planned and structured formal research conducted on the outcome of the tools and feedback from the public. However looking at the changes brought in the health sector, I believe it is possible to say the communication work has brought significant change in the lives of the public (Personal interview conducted on August 13,2019)

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). As it can be clearly seen from the finding, a variety of public relations tools including press releases, media interviews, events and speeches can be employed to communicate with the public. As equal as selecting the public relations tools to be applied for the public relation work, research shall be given equal emphasis as it explains the very important question of why public relations in government institutions and why using all those tools for communicating. Moreover, for public

relation to play a role of counseling the upper management on how to communicate with its respective public, for planning on the public relations tools, deciding what tool for what audience, for seeking approval of budget, research should also be considered.

However, analyzing the response forwarded from the interviewees, it can be said most public relations offices in the government organization does not take research as part of their public relation activities and have undermined the role it plays in the process of the public relations plan to the practical application. As per the interviewees response on the role of public relations, it has was stated repeatedly to be a bridge between the government and the public, though if research is not conducted , how can the interest of the public will be accommodated in developmental agendas. Consequently, looking at the practice; there is same path that is followed by most public relations offices, using all tools throughout the year and the practitioners have minimized their role and use most of their time in reporting what has been done and giving lesser thought on what needs to be done in their institution.

#### **4.3.4 Media Relations**

##### **The practitioners view**

Media relations as one component in the practice of public relations, it was taken in to consideration in the study. The discussion points with the public relations practitioners were their thought in the significance of media relations to their work, existence of media relations plan/strategy, the methods they employ to meet with the media and the kinds of issue they usually communicate with the media. Almost all of the public relations practitioners share similar understanding as to the significance of media relations in public relations work.

Accordingly, Interviewee number 1 boldly states, the significance of media relations for the success of public relations works is inevitable and believing that harmonious relationship with the media is built. Another interviewee also raised, Media has a very prominent factor in communicating most of the government's agenda to the public and stakeholders. Interviewee number 2 has stated the following while describing the relationship between government public relations and the media;

Media relations have a significant role in boosting the developmental agenda of the government. As per ministry of education, we have a very good relation with the media. The way we communicate with them is through press release, letters and phone calls. We sometimes reach out to them for coverage of our programs and work (internal and external) and on some other days they reach out to us. As per the media relation strategy, we have a communication strategy and the media relation guideline is incorporated in the communication strategy. As the media coverage is unpredicted there is no specific stated time, so we always monitor electronic and print Medias and give feedbacks and correction as deemed necessary ( personal interview conducted on August 12,2019).

Other interviewees, interviewee 3 and 4 also shares same points with the above informants about the significance of media for public relations works. They have explained it in a detailed manner as follows;

Media is very prominent for government in communicating the major developmental objectives. We have a structure and a case team that deals with media issues. Especially the electronics media play a significant role with regard to accessing a larger number of audiences at the same time. For example, we address the public through the media about vaccination, sanitation and it brings the public on board with regard protecting itself from diseases. We usually communicate the Medias on press conference, visits to different and when they contact us to do their own program. We also have a media forum where we meet with media personnel's twice a year and where we evaluate our relationship and provide feedbacks. As per, media relations strategy, though we do not have a singled out media relation strategy but we have incorporated it with national health communication strategy. Monitoring and evaluation of Medias is done weekly by its own designated officer in the Public relations department (Personal interview conducted on August 13,2019).

Informant number 5 has almost said similar things while discussing the significance of media relations for government relations with the external world. As per the interviewee, media relations should be planned and lead professionally. He further elaborate;

As Medias are basically set up to disseminate information and since government has different works and agendas that it wishes to be communicated with the public, the best channel to achieve the objective is communicating through media. As Ministry of foreign Affairs, We monitor different local and especially international medias daily and we organize what they write in to , and will be discussed by the management then we take stand in every issue then the report will be disseminated to all embassies and consular (Personal interview conducted on August 15,2019).

### **The Media view**

The other element which the interview and the focus group discussion with media personnels try to find out is their practical relation with public relations practitioners. Accordingly interviewee number 1 responded about the media relation with the public relations practitioners the relation is two ways, sometimes the media reach out to the practitioners while on other days, the practitioners reach out to the media. Interviewee number 2 while agreeing the communication is two way but also states when the practitioners reach out to the media the content is always similar, which is mostly to glorify their success through their monthly and/or yearly reports.

Government public relation practitioners communicate with the media when they believe they have achieved something but when the media go to their institutions to acquire information about different issues they make themselves unavailable’(personal interview conducted on August 13, 2019).

The above statement is given by informant number 3 describing the communication between the media and the practitioners.

As to a planned media relation, the interviewees raised there are some institutions that have planned media relation and reach out to the media about their service provision and related matter, though most reach out to them to cover their events. The statement is also backed by the focus group discussion participants with code number 1 and mentioned Ministry of foreign Affairs as exemplenary institution with planned media relation.

Another point that has been raised by interviewee number 1 is in relation to the challenge the media’s face while communicating with the practitioners. The interviewee stated, that the biggest



challenge faced with the Public relations practitioners in covering their organization's stories is, the public relations practitioners want their issue to be communicated to the public in a way they want too, they sometimes sent a correction letter not because what was being covered is erroneous but the way it was covered.

As per Larsson, there is a clear relationship between public relations and media,

The features of the relationship between political organizations(public organization) and media is usually smooth but sometimes contesting, because of these organizations' position as being fundamental to a democratic society and therefore considered to be legitimate opinion leaders. Their actions thus become "in the interest of the public". Public authorities are also by their nature obvious targets of media observation (Larsson, 2009: 134).

The above statement is also supported by most of the interviewees of the study, and the participants generally believe in the importance of media relations and discussed that the media have become an increasingly important stage for their communication with the external public. As per the finding, though both practitioners and journalists' claim the existence of the relationship, however there seems to be a gap in the relevancy of the content to be contacted. Practitioners claim there is a trial they try to plan media relations and make the relationship to be consistent with a planned and relevant content. On the other hand journalists claim, there are only limited government organizations which have planned media relation plan and content. And also there is developed sense by journalists believing public relations practitioners always give favorable responses about their organization and expect for Media's always producing and reporting positive things about their organization.

Acting proactively with media personnel's with planned contents about different issues of the organization is said to be important as practitioners will be able to create their own contents. Moreover, as their will be frequent contacts with the media they will familiarize themselves with basic questions from the public and will work accordingly to the interest of the public. However, as per the journalists claim and personal observation( as an audience) by the researcher on the worthiness of the contents shared by different government organizations, it can be understood the content and quality of message prepared by the public relations practitioner's is not fit for media.

### 4.3.5 Crisis communication

#### The Practitioners View

Crisis communication, are among public relations responsibilities that demand due consideration in planning. In any country, crisis might happen due to different natural and manmade causes. Even though crisis is inevitable, especially if it has natural cause but Proper communication during crisis before it escalates will prevent and also prepare many to respond to the matter. And government organization with advanced crisis communication plan will be protected from devastation in its reputation as an organization. As to how crisis is managed in communicating with the public and stakeholders in their respective institutions, interviewees were asked what their practice looks like.

The interviewees have responded that there are limitations in planning crisis communication. As per Interviewee number 1 the understanding of crisis communication, is the crisis that has been pointed out as an organization and how to respond to it. On the word of the interviewee;

There are listed potential threats related to our organization and there are also mitigating plans on how to respond to those threats as an organization. During these times, committees will be formed from immediately to deal with the matters which communication personnel will be member of. As per the strategy, there is content of crisis communication under the communication strategy but it is more of on how to deal with crisis but not on detailed flow of information on how and when of the information flow (personal interview conducted on August 11,2019).

As per interviewee number 3 and 4, a separate crisis communication plan and/or strategy does not exist in their organization however when crisis happen that is directly related with their organization, a communication plan is mostly included in the strategy that is prepared for the general mitigation of the crisis. Correspondingly, interviewee number 6 and 7 has stated the following as to crisis communication in their respective organization

Our organizations publics are mostly government organization employees, and so far we have not come across a crisis that is large that needs a communication. Moreover our limitation in human resource also impacts us on preparing a professionalized

communication strategy that encompasses crisis communication. However as public relations department we believe crisis communication is part of a modern public relation and one of the major functions of public relations. And taking that in to consideration, we are currently preparing a communication strategy and crisis communication will be part of the draft strategy (personal interview conducted on August 15, 2019).

### **The Media View**

In addition to a voluntary exchange of information between media and government public relations, time of crisis is among the things that forces for the two parties to communicate frequently. It is so because public have a right be informed with timely and truthful information about the crisis. Therefore, there needs to be a plan by the government public relations practitioners on how to communicate through crisis. Informant number 1, while responding to path of communication in crisis, states, not many government organizations have crisis communication strategy. In contrary to the above statement, interviewee number 2 said the following;

Most of the government organizations let alone to have a crisis communication strategy most do not know how to lead their communication works. Most of the practitioners and the organizations are not familiar with the concept of crisis communication. They just organize themselves during crisis than to prepare ahead before the crisis. And during crisis it is very difficult to get timely information from the organizations (personal interview conducted on August 13, 2019).

Backing up the above statement, participant with code number 5 in the focus group discussion stated, it is with great regret that it can be said, most public relations practitioners do even know what crisis communication is. And during crisis it is very difficult to find first hand information about crisis from the relevant body. On the other hand, another participant, with code number 2 in the Focus group discussion stated it will not be right to reach in to one conclusion of government organization do not have crisis communication strategy. The statement was backed taking Ethiopian airlines as an example with such a strategy and knows how to communicate

during crisis. Moreover, the participant also described a major concern in relation with crisis communication and stated;

There seems to be fusion of roles, and do not think most organizations and their leaders know crisis communication is part of Public relations. Information's which are supposed to be communicated through the public relation professionals of the concerned organizations and issues; you find the organization leader providing it and in some areas the Prime minister office or the Prime minister himself (Focus group discussion conducted on August 19, 2019).

Crisis public relations management is one of the most critical aspects of modern communications. A crisis is an event that disrupts normal operations of a company or organization and if badly managed can ruin hard-won reputations in just days and even, in some cases, write off companies. In a crisis, there is always more than the immediate issue at stake (Tench and Yeomans,2006:397). As per Tench and Yeomans, the key to public relations crisis management is preparedness. It is vital to effective crisis management that a crisis is identified before it happens and, when it does, that it does not get out of control. In this 'information and communications' age, when a crisis does happen, it is crucial to understand the role communication plays and particularly the role of the internet.

Crisis communication is a vital part of any organizations' overall communication strategy. However, there were different kinds of crisis that happen in the past years at organizational and country level that display the unpreparedness of government public relations practitioners in responding to the crisis. In some of the crisis, there was mixture of duties in communicating to the public while in some cases the crisis has escalated due to the late communication conducted. As per the finding from the study its has been identified that most of government organizations including those that have been part of the study does not have crisis communication plan.

#### **4.3.6 Government Public relations practice as a tool for development communication or propaganda**

##### **The Practitioners view**

In this point, discussions are performed with participants around arguments of designating Ethiopian Government public relations practice as a tool for development communication while it is a practice of propaganda for others. The informants with whom the researcher conducted in-depth interview had opposing views on the issue of government public relations practice.

According to interviewee number 2 the practice of government public relations is used as a tool for development communication. While supporting his statement with reason, the informant has said the following

Among the channels the government uses to communicate its developmental Agenda, the government public relations play a significant role. Government uses public relations to communicate its agenda starting from the plan to its annual accomplishment. And this shows the government is using public relations to communicate its developmental agenda. But that does not mean there is no problem. There still is a gap in communicating the exact works of the government through its institutions. There is increasing of data and information with no supporting evidence for the sake of getting acceptance from the public. But looking at most of the organizations public relations practice I believe it is being used for development communication (personal interview conducted on August 12, 2019).

Consequently, interviewee number 5 and 6 has noted the government public relations is being practiced professionally and as a tool for development communication. In addition he has stated the government and the public is communicating through public relations freely and timely and public relations is being used to communicate only what has been done, nothing more nothing less. In contrast, some of the interviewees did not agree with the fact that government public relations is used as a tool for development communication, they argued that the practice of public relations is propaganda.

Interviewees number 1 and 4 have noted the following:

The practice of government public relations is most of propaganda, the work of the Public relations mostly focus on discussing about the interest of our organization, our positive image and the good things done by the government. We mostly defend the organization than taking an initiative of researching on our problems and challenges, from the public and stakeholders need, make analysis and forward it to the management for correction. The leaders of the organization/politicians involvement in the flow of the information also compromises professionalism. Moreover if we see most of the work by government, it is full of propaganda, and public relations has become a platform to manifest that. I believe this is so because of lack of understanding about what government public relation is and its role as well. However, this shouldn't be taken as there are no organizations that use government public relation for development communication (personal interview conducted on August 11&13, 2019).

For interviewee number 8, it was difficult to categorize public relations practice in government offices as a development communication tools or propaganda. So the informant preferred to describe the practice as inefficient and ineffective. Elaborating on his justification the interviewee has given the following statement as

The government public relations practice is not efficient & effective. The sector leaders as well the Public relations heads are not well equipped with necessity of communication. There is confusion, lack of consistence in terms of having well organized Communication structure as the nation. In Ethiopia, what is done is depending on person's outlook & willingness, depends on political willingness with no policy, directives, national strategy, rules & regulation etc supporting the cause (personal interview conducted on October 3,2019).

For interviewee number 3, a difficulty of categorizing the government public relations either as a tool for development communication or propaganda was raised because as per his believe, mostly it is dependant on the work of the organization and the professionals. Some use it for development communication while some use it for propaganda (only publicizing their

organization's stand and acts as the mouth of the government/state only), However as per his declaration,

Looking at the aggregate we can say the past years practice of government public relation is used for the later purpose (personal interview conducted on August 13, 2019).

### **The Media view**

As the major objective of the research, question was forwarded to the informants and participants in the focus group discussion whether or not the current government public relations practice is a tool for development communication or propaganda?

An informant whom the researcher marked as number 1 said the government is the totally using the public relations for propaganda. The main reason stated to support the thought is due to the political appointment of practitioners in the government offices. It is also raised this practice shows government has no commitment to professionalize the position rather wants the practitioners to be the mouth of the government and defend its stand. Moreover an informant number 2 stating the practice as propaganda because of the public relations practitioners believe of development communication is defending their organization and leadership whatever the case, provision of defensive information and misleading the media about any wrongdoings than working for the truth and solutions for their organizations problems. However, these kinds of deeds will not serve the government than dragging back all the good things done because public will lose faith in the government because of the information and will hesitate to participate in any of governments developmental agenda. Interviewee number 3 has similar believe with the above respondents and stated:

The major point that makes the practice propaganda is most of the works by public relations office is not primarily communicating information to the public but informing for political gain out of the information. The communication is done in one way and it is

only to communicate what the government has done for the public (personal interview conducted on August 13, 2019).

During the focus group discussion all participants agree the practice is propaganda and issues like only communicating what the organization want with no room for two way communication and feedback session, practitioners believe of development communication as only talking about the good image of the organization and government, the states' political situation being closed for a genuine communication has been raised as major points to consider the practice of government public relations as propaganda tool.

Among the focus group participants, the participant with code number 3 said that:

The public relations professionals are propaganda machine to the government. They only focus on building the good image of the organization, whereas when questions about their challenges or problems arise they do not like to give information about it. Their issue of communication also tells they are a tool for propaganda. They always call the media in communicating their success or positive image, however when we want them for interviewing about public demand, or their problem they fail to provide information (Focus group discussion conducted on August 19, 2019).

Moreover a participant with code number 5 also discusses the following while arguing public relations being used as a propaganda tool for the government;

It clearly is propaganda. The government lies in our faces, politicians lie. Propaganda is information, ideas, or rumors deliberately spread widely to influence opinions, usually to preserve the self-interest of a nation. Government Public relations practice is not professional. Mostly government Public relations officers don't cooperate with the media when they have something to hide. They only try to show the success of their organizations, never their failure. And they usually exaggerate their success and under-report their negative side (Focus group discussion conducted on August 19, 2019).

In the contemporary theories of public relations, it might be difficult to find a widely discussed theory than that of the four models of Gruing and Hunt (1984:21). According to them, the four models they have developed show the developmental stages in the history of Public relations and will help to understand how it is practiced today. Even though the public relations models has



evolved from a practice of persuasion/propaganda where by the actor is one (government/sender of information) to mutual relationship ( between government and the public), but there are still practices in different areas where the practice is equated with persuasion.

As per the finding from the study and when government public relations is analyzed in the context of Grunig's and Hunt's models of public relations, most importantly, two-way symmetrical Public Relations practices which the research bases itself, most of the practices, the if not all, of its practices are deemed ineffective. In most of the government organizations, information dissemination efforts by the public relations practitioners are tailored to transfer information from the government to the public and build the image of the government which basically disregards the interest of the public.

As described in the response of study participants, the practice of researching on public feedback is almost at zero stage. There are almost no interactions of this sort between government organizations and its publics. Moreover, the findings suggest that, government's reservation in supporting the practice of public relations with policies and strategies, its involvement in the practice of government public relations to the extent of assigning public relations practitioners based on their affiliation than meritocracy/professionalism tends the public relation practitioners to lose balance on the conflict of interest that arises between their organization and their different publics. Generally, it can be understood from the finding that the practice of federal government public relations mostly displayed a public information model where the nature of the content is basically transmitting information from the government perspective and the relationship with the public's perspective of the information is low.

### **4.3.7 Challenges of public relations**

#### **The Practitioners View**

The last part of interview with public relations practitioners deals with categorization of the major challenges that face public relations. From interviewee number 1 to 7 there are challenges shared by most of the respondents while some different. Exceptionally, respondent from Ministry of foreign affairs coded as interviewee number 5 has stated, he do not face such challenges in the area of their work. According to his statement, not much challenge is faced in their relation with

other government organizations, and when information and or data is requested, they manage to acquire it so he has not stated any challenge in the practice of government public relations.

However, for the respondents from the other government institutions many drawbacks have been mentioned as challenges on the practice of public relations. The knowledge and skill gap in the public relation practitioners and professionalism is the top challenge that is shared by all of the respondents. Government's commitment and lessor attention given by head of government organizations happens to be the second challenge shared by interviewees.

As per the interviewee whom the researcher marked as number 1 said that

The major challenge in the practice of government Public relations is political influence in the practice because it limits timely and free flow of information. The other is the structural problem of government public relations. Especially, the abolishment of government communication office has brought a problem in the flow of integrated information from region to federal and organized data in the area of education. Moreover public relations is practiced by anyone with any educational background and this needs to be changed for the practice to be considered professional (personal interview conducted on August 12, 2019)

Similarly, interviewee number 2 discussed, following to government commitment to modernize the sector, the attention given to public relations practitioners by top management members is a very determinant factor for the success of professional practice .He also stated the allocation of budget is another factor that bases on the thought and acceptance of public relations as a profession. Lack of professionalism in the government public relations sector and designating and limiting the work of public relations to protocol and events is mentioned as the major challenges by interviewee number 4. Accordingly, the interviewee also said the following regarding additional challenges in the government public relations practice,

Most of upper management leaders have a lessor perception towards public relations practitioners. They appoint of limited budget for the works of public relations and even when there are many practitioners from different departments that are sent to abroad for short and long term trainings, until today there are no trainings organized for public

relations practitioners except those given by the former government public relations. This shows public relations is not considered as a profession by even those that are at the decision wheel. Moreover especially these days the abolishment of government communications affairs office is highly impacting the practice of government public relations. In my opinion the current practice of government public relation is done through the routine activities as designated before with no government policy and institution that checks after the practice (personal interview conducted in August 13, 2019).

Furthermore, lack of focus by government to professionalize the public relation sector through academics and also the less involvement of academicians and elites in the communication sector in guiding and influencing government for the professional practice of public relations, familiarizing government leaders about the importance of public relations in getting public support and how it can serve the interest of the public are additional challenges mentioned by the interviewees.

### **The Media view**

The last question from the interview guideline and focus group discussion deals with sorting out the major challenges in relation with the practice of public relations. Almost all the interviewees and focus group participants rose what they considered as a challenge. As per listing out the challenges, some of the problems were common and redundant though they were presented by different speakers participated in the interviewee as well as in the focus group discussion.

The challenges stated by participants can be categorized in to two sides; the first side is from the practitioners themselves, which are knowledge and skill gap, defensive behavior and sometimes lie about fact, always waiting approval from leaders to respond to questions to the extent of developing fear. Abolishment of government communication affairs (has impacted an aggregated flow of information about government's affairs), setting up public relations departments for serving the political interest of the government and absence of policy governing the professional practice of public relations coupled with lack of a clear educational curriculum in the area of public relations are the major challenges stated in the second side which makes the government is the key player.

For Informant number 2, it has been difficult where to start and was also irritated while describing the challenges of government public relations. However while describing the challenges the statement was given in the following way;

I do not believe there is a challenge (it seems a lot is done and little is left), but I believe there are very big problems in the government public relations sector. First the practitioners themselves do not know what they are doing and why they are doing it. They have limited government public relations also include communicating the public with the truth about their organization' affirm. But most of them do not do that as they fear for their job security. The other biggest problem is government inability of enforcing its own law. Public relation practitioners need to be corrected when they make mistakes and acting against the responsibilities given to them under the law (Personal Interview conducted on August13,2019).

In addition to the challenges described collectively, participant in the focus group discussion with code number 5 has stated the challenge stressing on the fact of politics;

I think the major challenge of government Public relations is not separating the work of politicians and public relations officers. And also, government political influence in the government public relation, unprofessionalism of the practitioners , lack of trust from the public and limitation on allocation of budget for government public relations works can also be mentioned as challenges (Focus group discussion conducted on August 19, 2019).

Credible and professional public relations techniques and practices are methods to improve the public's relationship with government which results in creating an informed society which results in mobilization of the public towards developmental agenda. The limited role government public relations plays, the knowledge and skill limitation of the public relations practitioners, non research based practice of using public relation tools, unguided and unplanned relationship with media professionals, inadequacy in handling crisis and the government public relations practice serving as a tool for propaganda are the challenges hindering the development of professional practice of government public relations.

Despite all the above gaps stated by the participants in the study, the actions expected from governments to strengthen and professionalize the public relations practices, factors associated with poor understanding of the profession by the public and other stakeholders still remains to be a challenge to make use of the development. Moreover, a government that preaches development in its everyday activity and prepares vast strategies to get closer to its vision have overlooked the preparation of a well compiled communication and public relations strategy in familiarizing the public with the plan and able to mobilize support for its greater achievement.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions and Recommendations

#### Introduction

In the different parts of this research an attempt has been made to study the basic matters in relation to the practice of federal government public relations. The following chapter provides a brief conclusion and recommendations of the research topic. Thus, the first section deals with conclusion while the second section deals with possible recommendation which the researcher believes will be helpful to move the practice of public relations one step further.

#### 5.1 Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to assess what the practice of public relations encompasses in the federal government organizations .Basically it was researched to identify whether public relations is a tool for development communication or Propaganda. As it was mentioned in the beginning of the research, even though there is no compiled data and researches done with regard to the exact beginning time of public relations, it is believed to have been started during the 1960's. However there was not much improvement in the public relations sector its professionals and professional practice. And because of that the practice has been criticized for its lack of professionalism and professionals as well as serving a tool of politics for the government.

The main focus of the study is on government public relations development and practice in the recent times which basically is after the federal structure is established. Exploration of how government public relations is carried out, identifying government's communication and public relations policies and strategies and the major role public relations play in the government sector and the practical purpose of public relations were the research questions identified to be studied.

In the literature review section, meaning and the evolution of government public relations, relation of government public relations with development and propaganda, the major public relations tools and theoretical foundation of public relations model which the practice will be evaluated against were discussed. International public relations in general and brief description on the practice of public relations in Ethiopia are also touched under the literature part.

In order to answer the research questions, the study employed qualitative research methods. In this regard, relevant Government public relations documents were analyzed, in-depth interviews with public relations practitioners and journalists and also focus group discussions with journalists were also conducted. And both the relevant contents in the documents, responses from the interviewees and discussions from the focus group discussion were analyzed.

Though the practical practice of public relations is the major objective of the study, however understanding that different factors affects the practice of public relations, examining polices, legal and institutional framework, how the role public relations is understood, professionalism, major public relations tools used in government offices, Crisis communication and finally challenges encountered while practicing public relations were also the major important analysis points used to discuss the practical application of federal government public relations against the professional standards. Based on the findings obtained from the research, the following conclusions are drawn:

The effort of establishing government public relations on a professional foundation requires a well uttered policy, strategies, legal and institutional framework with academic guidance. In this regard, there is a lot of gap to be filled to professionalize the government public relations. There are no enacted policies, strategies and laws that specifically govern government public relations as a profession as well as a practice. The documents that believed to be guiding the current practice are very much scattered and worse are very much difficult to find. Furthermore, No theoretical foundation has been laid by academicians and policy makers in relation to the kind of public relations model our country tends to pursue and what its objective is. The absence of such guiding laws and strategies have compromised the professional practice of public relations and rather confined it to political practice.

Government has a responsibility of communicating its affairs to the public for better accomplishment of its developmental agenda and also it is the public's right to be engaged in different decisions that affects their day to day live. In order to do so government uses different communication platform, which public relations takes the leading role as it is easier for all organizations to engage their respective public. On top of the role government public relations plays, the study has looked at a number of related matters which need to be taken into consideration by the policy makers, government public relations and communication

practitioners for flourishing professional practice of government public relations and encourage practitioners.

The relation between politics and government public relations compromising professionalism is also another major point which the study has identified. Public relation practitioners being professionals in other fields, lesser commitment by practitioners to upgrade themselves and the limitation of academic organization that provides public relation education has impacted the professional growth of public relation and makes the public and journalists to lose faith and trust in the professionals. Media professionals alleging the information provided by the public relation practitioners is not always truthful and timely, and media's limitation on influencing the government in creating a modernized communication platform and contribute to creating a transparent and accountable government not only affects the growth of professional public relations' but compromises decision making ability of the public regarding governments affairs. Moreover, practitioners being busy in communicating affairs that are not much relevant to the media and the public, not being able to do research on their communication platform and properly guiding their media relations is a result of not practicing public relations professionally.

Crisis does not come planned but it is possible to plan on how to minimize the effects crisis causes with proper crisis communication plan. The research has studied government organizations habit of preparing themselves ahead so that proper information will be provided for the public up on problem. However looking at the practice, this remains to be a challenge for many of the Public relations practitioners. Based on the data collected during the interview session with the practitioners many of them explain state they do not have crisis communication rather try to get in to it when the crisis actually happens. Similarly, the media professionals' strengthen the fact that most of the government organizations which they keep in touch with does not have such a plan and always make their work difficult in finding timely and proper information. And as one of the journalists states if the government public relations has been planning on how to communicate during crisis, we could have minimized fake news and its effects which we have seen in the past years.



Among the public relations models, the two-way symmetric public relations model which the study rests on describes that; organizations should equally care for the interest of the public as that of the institution. The model strongly emphasizes organizations can only ensure their interest through the practice of public relations, if they can equally care for the interest of the Public. Moreover, for facilitating a long lasting development, public relations as a communication tool ensures that people are involved; informed and motivated to participate in the planning of their own development. Consequently, effective and professional public relations require research work for identifying public needs, participating the public, discovering the gap in the public relations practice and make corrections accordingly.

However, the research findings in this regard shows the opposite and describes current public relations practice about defending the interest of their organization which do not give equal priority about the interest of the public ,has serious lack of proper public relations research and no existed mechanism where the public is involved in decision making process. Moreover, the Public relations practice is dominantly considered as a political instrument than to serve the very purpose of development communication tool. Lack of public relations strategy for most of our development programs, practitioners not recognizing that the task of communicating with the public as their primarily responsibility and lack of professionalism (knowledge and skill gap) in practicing public relations categorize the current federal government public relations practice as a propaganda tool for the government than serving as a development communication which primarily requires the public involvement in the process.

In conclusion, though the existence of public relations departments in government offices can be taken as an encouraging point for the development of professional public relations practice there still remains a lot of work starting from dissociating politics and public relations profession, development of proper government public relations strategy, establishing a two-way communication, working on the knowledge and skills of the practitioners in order to make the most out of the practice of government public relations.

## 5.2 Recommendations

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

- The development of government public relations practice in the country should be given due attention. And the role public relations play for the development should clearly be communicated and shared by all public relations practitioners. Moreover, the role should also be shared by public officials so that they will know the basic role public relations and be supportive for the practitioners.
- Professionalism in the practice of government public relations should be given also be given priority. Accordingly, the responsibility in making this a reality rests up on the government, academicians, higher institutions, researchers, media and the practitioners themselves.
- The government's public relations Government public relations model should be clearly specified. The government claiming to be committed to democratic principles and striving support for developmental programs, the model should clearly promote and practically show the practice of government public relations striving for the interest of the public as equal as the government.
- Institutionalization of government public relations needs to be considered, the existence of an institution that strategize, professionalize and set professional standard in the practice of public relations not only be useful in the development of knowledge and skill of practitioners, professional practice public relations, but will also be valuable in creating accountability on the public relations practitioners for their success as well as failure.
- In government public relations practice, trustworthiness of information by the media and the public is a very important element. Hence government should refrain from mixing the politics in to the profession and measures such as educational standard, recruitment procedures, and experience required for officer and of public relations heads should be identified and set according to high and best standard.
- Research needs to be conducted in every process of government public relations. Until the practitioner knows what the public requires, gather feedbacks on its works, simple

planning of public relations will be just be a routine work that takes a lot of budget but does not meet its target which is communicating with the public. Moreover, researches and intellectual discourses in the area of government public relations practice should also be conducted by academicians for professionalization of public relations.

- There should be a strategically planned media relations guideline that will be helpful for public relations practitioners to communicate with the public more frequently and with a content that is relevant. Moreover increasing timely and truthful information and coordination between public relations practitioners with the media will be supportive to resolve conflict in the course of communication.
- Crisis management and communication is very much needed in the government system, especially these days where information is circulating easily to the extent not knowing which one is right and which one is wrong. Having this system in every government organizations will ensure that publics can access timely and reliable information. Therefore, it is pivotal to prepare to address questions, worries and criticism that come from any angle is professional and calms citizens to get in to different speculations and decisions that might even worsen a crisis.

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## Appendix One

### Interview question for Federal Government Public relations Practitioners

Addis Ababa University

Graduate School of Journalism and Communication

My name is Makeda Getahun, MA student of Public Relations and Strategic Communication at Addis Ababa University School of Journalism. This is a survey question for a thesis titled “**Auditing Federal Government Public Relations Practice in Ethiopia: a tool for development communication or propaganda**”. The purpose of this research is assessing the federal government Public Relations practice and how it is used by the different government institutions and identifying the role Public Relations is playing.

**I, hereby, pledge ethically to keep your response with the rules of confidentiality.** Therefore, I would like to request for your cooperation to respond as per the demand of the question honestly & objectively. Thank you for your time

#### 1. Part-One

##### General information

1.1 Name of the organization \_\_\_\_\_

1.2 Sex \_\_\_\_\_

1.3 Educational Background  Diploma  Degree  Masters

1.4 Field of study \_\_\_\_\_

1.5 Position \_\_\_\_\_

1.6 Work experience \_\_\_\_\_

#### 2. Part-Two

##### 2.1 Understanding the concept government public relations

1. How do you define the concept of government public relations? and what are its major objectives and role
2. Do you believe a government public relations have a role in the country’s development? Please Explain?

## **2.2 Knowledge and skill of public relations**

1. Are you practicing public relations professionally with a clear understanding of its role and objective?
2. Have you taken any short and/or long term professional training/or education in Public relations?

## **2.3 Federal government Public relations Practice**

### **2.3.1 Legal and policy framework**

1. Is there any communication policy, proclamation, government directives, rules and regulations assisting/hindering the professional practice of government public relations?

### **2.3.2 Practical application**

1. What are the major government Public relations tools practiced in our organization?
2. How frequent do you reach out to the public about government policies?
3. What is the public perception/response of the government Public relations practice, and stakeholder's perception towards public relations officers? Have you made any research?

## **2.4 Government Public relations and the Media**

1. What is the significance of media relations in achieving government developmental agenda objectives?
2. Do you have media relations and/or crisis management policy and/or strategy? How do you communicate with the media?
3. What are the media relations practices of your organization with local and international media? On what kind of issues do you usually communicate with the media?
4. How frequent are you monitoring and evaluating the media?

## **2.5 Challenges of government Public Relations Practice**

1. What are the major challenges of Government Public relations practice in serving as a tool for development communication?
2. What do you recommend to be done to improve/overcome the challenges in the practice of government public relation?

## **Appendix Two**

### **Interview question for Media Professionals Addis Ababa University**

#### **Graduate School of Journalism and Communication**

My name is Makeda Getahun, MA student of Public Relations and Strategic Communication at Addis Ababa University School of Journalism. This is a survey question for a thesis titled “**Auditing Federal Government Public Relations Practice in Ethiopia: a tool for development communication or propaganda**”. The purpose of this research is assessing the federal government Public Relations practice and how it is used by the different government institutions and identifying the role Public Relations is playing.

**I, hereby, pledge ethically to keep your response with the rules of confidentiality.** Therefore, I would like to request for your cooperation to respond as per the demand of the question honestly & objectively. Thank you for your time

#### **1. Part-One**

##### **General information**

1.1 Name of the organization \_\_\_\_\_

1.2 Sex \_\_\_\_\_

1.3 Position \_\_\_\_\_

1.4 Work experience \_\_\_\_\_

1.5 Date of interview \_\_\_\_\_

#### **2. Part-Two**

##### **2.1 Understanding the concept of government public relations**

1. What do you think is the role of government public relations in the country’s development? (Please Explain)

##### **2.2 Knowledge and skill of practitioners**

1. Do you believe federal government a public relations is practiced professionally with a clear understanding of its role and objective?

2. How open and confident are Public relations officers to the media in providing information?

## **2.3 Federal government Public relations practice**

### **2.3.2 Practical application**

1. Have you made any research on the public perception/response of the government Public relations practice? If yes what is the public perception?
2. In your opinion, is government Public relations used as tool for development communication or propaganda?

## **2.4 Government Public relations and the Media**

1. How frequent and on what kind of issues do federal government organizations reach out to the media?
2. Have you come across federal government offices that have crisis management policy and/or strategy? How do they communicate with the media during crisis?

## **2.5 Challenges of government Public relations Practice**

1. What do you think are the major challenges of government Public relations activities of federal government?
2. What do you recommend to be done to improve/overcome the challenges in the practice of government public relation?

## Appendix Three

### Focus Group Discussion guide for Media Professionals Addis Ababa University

#### Graduate School of Journalism and Communication

First of all, I would like to thank you for taking a time to have this focus group discussion. My name is Makeda Getahun, MA student of Public Relations and Strategic Communication at Addis Ababa University School of Journalism. I am doing my thesis titled “**Auditing Federal Government Public Relations Practice in Ethiopia: a tool for development communication or propaganda?**”

The below guiding questions are prepared for an intensive discussion with government public relations professionals and media persons about the practise of government public relations and whether it is practised as a tool for development communication or propaganda.

1.1 Name of the organization \_\_\_\_\_

1.2 Sex \_\_\_\_\_

1.3 Position \_\_\_\_\_

1.4 Work experience \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you believe a government public relations have a role in the country’s development?  
If Yes, How? / if No Why?
2. Do you think a government a public relations is practiced professionally by understanding its significance for the government and the public? If “yes” please elaborate/if “No” why?
3. Have you come across any federal government offices that have crisis communication management policy and/or strategy? How do they communicate with the media during crisis?
4. In your opinion, is federal government Public relations practice a tool for development communication or propaganda? Please elaborate
5. What are the major challenges of government public relations practice?
6. What do you recommend to be done to improve/overcome the challenges in the practice of government public relation?