
Communication Strategy for Punjab DSSP

Exploring an opportunity for building better relationships with stakeholders

1. Introduction

The Government of Punjab has embarked upon a number of initiatives that aim to reduce poverty, improve social sector indicators and create a functional model of good governance. Under the umbrella policy framework of the PRSP the Government has committed to achieving the MDGs and improve services for the poor. The legal and institutional framework that has come in to being as a result of the Devolution Plan and the promulgation of the Punjab Local Government Ordinance 2001, offers a number of opportunities for delivering better quality, more affordable and efficient services to the public. There is thus a need to develop, sustain and communicate to stakeholders—clearly and consistently—the efforts and the policy directions of the Government of Punjab in relation to its political commitment for improving social sector indicators. This form of development communication can not only serve to keep stakeholder informed but can help shape positive perceptions about the kind of clarity, commitment, innovation and relentless resolve to herald change that the Government of Punjab has shown. In addition, the achievement of the MDGs requires stakeholder involvement and an organized communication strategy can offer a framework for stakeholder and community involvement and enhanced public accountability. This communication strategy will also provide the Government with tools for policy dialogue within the government as well as with external audiences such as donor agencies, academia and media. Indeed, keeping stakeholders informed and maintaining an open communication channel with the various publics, is both a necessary and a sufficient condition towards achieving government objectives. Of course, some forms of this communication are made mandatory through legislation or regulatory requirements (Annual Reports, Financial Statements, budgetary documents etc.)—and here too there is a need to focus on greater public disclosure. But effective corporate communication that does not find itself either rooted in or limited to enforcement of regulatory dictates, is often what distinguishes between long term success and failure.

Historically speaking, stakeholder communication at the governmental level has had a chequered life. Although never dogged by controversies, despite constantly having to bear the

brunt of media, official and public scrutiny alike due to the nature of its business, the Government of Punjab has managed to survive any major faux pas in its media relations. Characterized traditionally by a conservative approach and low profiling, it is only recently that the Government has begun to actively communicate with the target audiences, particularly through the Punjab Education Sector Reforms Program as well as the newly established Punjab Industrial Estate. With stakeholder expectation for better performance raised and public attention tending to focus even more on the Government of Punjab and the way it works, the need for an effective communication strategy is clearly evident. There is a singular vision; and a managerial zeal to continue to innovate and provide better services. Through a comprehensive communication plan that allows all stakeholders—governments at all tiers including elected representatives and employees, media, academia, donor agencies and in particular, the public—to be kept informed on the plans, processes and progress achieved by the Government.

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

Vision

To build Government of Punjab's reputation as a committed, dynamic, client - focused government, striving for delivering better quality social services

2. Objectives

- To develop and sustain a strong corporate image and brand identity for Government of Punjab through an integrated corporate image building initiative, using the goodwill generated from the recent track record of effective performance in the social sectors
- To highlight efforts being made by the Government to achieve MDGs
- To reach out to stakeholders and solicit their support in helping the Government achieve its targets and objectives for the social sector

- To develop and communicate success stories, to the target audiences
- To consistently interact with stakeholders on new projects and programs, new activity and to explore new avenues for increasing the profile of Government of Punjab

3. Anatomy of Change

The Government of Punjab has taken a number of steps that have led towards the strengthening of the range and quality of social services. These include:

- Introduction of a new legal and institutional framework for service delivery through promulgation of the PLGO 2001
- Launch of several governance reforms in the social sectors, aiming to improve efficiency, equity and effectiveness of social service delivery
- Continuous engagement with end-users and private sector to deliver customer driven services through various public private partnership models
- Assignment of priority to improving fiscal space for social sectors through progressively higher social sector allocations in provincial budgets and provision of incentives to local governments for higher allocations for education, health and WSS
- Launch of several purpose-specific projects and programs in the social sector, such as the PESRP and PDSSP
- Raising of the bar on public accountability for Governmental actions, at all tiers of Government

4. The Issues

a. Perception Deficit

Despite the fact that substantial effort has been made by the Government of Punjab to engage with stakeholders in different ways and to communicate the policies, initiatives and results of these efforts, there is always the possibility of the creation of a **perception deficit** between what the Government has done or plans to do and what the public perception of these actions and results is.

Meeting stakeholder expectations and managing them is never an easy task and always one that requires careful thought and execution that goes beyond making policies and/or providing great services

b. Mobilization of stakeholders

It is also important to note that in relation to the social sectors and the MDGs, the Government needs to mobilize communities and stakeholders from the civil society, so as to create working partnerships where the achievement of the MDGs is not left to the Government alone, but allows stakeholders to contribute by playing specific roles and assuming certain responsibilities. This will be possible if the Government communication clearly identifies communities as their partners and not just as clients, otherwise, the communities will always view the Governments and their actions with distanced involvement, which will contribute to widen the gulf of perceptions.

c. Credibility of communication

A fine line between communication and propaganda needs to be drawn, so as to make communication credible. Perceptions differ most where facts are distorted and as a strategy, we should be ensuring that all communication on social sector plans, progress and problems should be upfront, credible and phased to avoid message overload.

d. Focus on Public Disclosure and Public Accountability

There is a renewed focus on enhancing public disclosure and on strengthening public accountability mechanisms and systems. Within the social sector context, important provisions have been made in the PLGO 2001, such as preparation and publication of annual reports of various Council committees and using participatory methods of planning and oversight of social service provision. Similarly, at the Provincial level, the political process in place requires deliberations in the Assembly and presentation of details to the Standing Committees of the Assembly, while the Freedom of Information Act calls for providing greater access to information for the public. We thus need to ensure that our strategy supports these legal and institutional frameworks.

5. The Opportunity

Clearly, this **perception deficit** needs to be filled—or the possibility of it widening, arrested. The solution to this lies in identifying this as an opportunity and not a threat and to approach it from a holistic, positive viewpoint, primarily by the creation of a strong brand identity and the communication of this identity to all the stakeholders through formal and informal channels. It is long established that people buy brands, not products. Specific positive attributes of the Government's policies and actions need to be packaged and presented to the target audience through a well-developed strategy that focuses on the strengths of the Government of Punjab, highlights the success stories and communicates with the target audience on a regular, organized basis.

Critical for success in achieving this is clearly identifying the communication needs of the various stakeholders. Information needs of the employees are different from that of the clients as are the objectives of communicating with each of them. Thus, it is vital that these needs be meticulously addressed so that there is a synergetic mapping between what the Government wants to communicate and what the stakeholder or the target audience wants to learn or be informed about. This in turn is predicated on the construction of a sharp demographic and psychographic profile of the target audiences.

Moreover, there is a need to build on ongoing initiatives and to tap the goodwill that may already exist amongst stakeholders. For example, in the health sector, frequent and structured communication is made through various media on several issues such as EPI, maternal and ante-natal care, service provision through Lady Health Workers, AIDS/HIV awareness, emergency treatments for dehydration etc. Similarly, in the case of education, the recent campaign about the Government's efforts to increase enrolment and reducing the gender gap through the PESRP has raised awareness about the services that the Government is improving and the results that these efforts have borne. The communication strategy for PDSSP can benefit from these ongoing activities and partner with them, supporting and reinforcing the messages already being communicated and adding PDSSP specific issues where applicable. This would ensure consistency of communication and would present a consolidated view of the Government efforts in the social sectors.

6. The Personality

Given that Government of Punjab has so much material to use to good effect, the prospects for building on the existing communication initiatives are considerable. The key lies in identifying the right elements for developing a personality of the brand that is the Government of Punjab. These elements would include:

- Presenting a positive, progressive outlook
- A confident approach towards improving solving problems in social sectors
- Unity of objectives in communication, but not of content
- The drive to innovate and initiate new ideas for service delivery

7. The Process

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

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

8. Target Audience

The target audience for PDSSP would broadly cover two categories: external audiences and internal audiences. Each of these segments would require slightly different communication messages, approaches, instruments and channels:

External Audience

1. The general public

2. International donor agencies
3. Civil society, including private sector organizations and CBOs
4. Media

Internal Audience

1. Provincial Government departments, agencies, officials
2. Local governments
3. Elected representatives

9. Instruments and media

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

Communication : External Publics

Communication with the external publics would be executed through the following mix of communication instruments.

- a. Annual Reports** that comply with legal provisions such as those in the PLGO2001 and include reports on Budgets or performance reports in the case of Provincial Departments. These reports will form the principle instruments for public disclosure of agencies working on the social sector.

Frequency: Annual

Format: Hardcopy and Online

Responsibility: PLDs, LGs

- b. PDSSP Corporate Newsletters** that portrays—and builds on the existing image of—Government of Punjab as a modern, professional organization that has remained at the forefront of providing better service provision. Success stories would be highlighted. These could be developed in online and offline formats and in Urdu and English.

Frequency: Quarterly

Format: Hardcopy and Online

Responsibility: PDSSP PSU

- c. Performance Fact Sheets and Social Sector Updates** for general awareness on what has been achieved in the social sectors. These could be prepared by PDSPP in partnership with the sector Provincial Line Departments and the local governments.

Frequency: Quarterly

Format: Hardcopy and Online

Responsibility: PLDs/PDSSP

- d. Participation /Sponsorship of Community Events, School Health/Environmental Education Programs and Competitions** to mobilize communities at facility levels such as School Councils, Patient Welfare Associations, BHUs and etc. to raise stakeholder awareness of issues in social sector development and in identifying innovative solutions for improving service delivery. In addition. competitions could be organized at various levels, taking the form of poster design, essay, innovative project incubator competitions related to MDGs and making social services more effective and efficient.

Frequency: Demand based Format: Offline and online Responsibility:PDSSP/LGs

- e. Media Briefings and press releases** to keep the media abreast of the Government's efforts in the social sectors and to provide insight and information to specific activities being undertaken at different tiers of government.

Frequency: Need based Format: Offline and online Responsibility:PLDs/LGs

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

Frequency: Weekly Format: 30 minute shows Responsibility: PDSSP/PLDs

- g. PDSSP Website** to act as a vehicle for public disclosure on program activities and a web-based information centre for all social sector activities in Punjab.

Frequency: Weekly Format: 30 minute shows Responsibility: PDSSP PSU

- h. Call Centre** to provide a dial-in service for general public to register complaints and get information about procedures related to gaining access to social services. With a 0900 number which will provide financial sustenance for the Call Centre, this project can be developed and operated as a public-private initiative

- i. Print and Electronic media advertising** to build on the ongoing efforts and to highlight MDGs and what is being done to achieve these. These advertisements will be in English, Urdu, Punjabi and other regional languages to ensure wide outreach of the message. The advertisements would be a mix of corporate, sector issues and PDSSP specific, covering a

range of issues such as what MDGs are, what the Government is doing to achieve these, how the PDSSP is helping achieve MDGs, what is the role of stakeholders, what progress has been achieved so far in social sectors and what next steps are being undertaken.

Frequency: Need based Format: print/tv ads Responsibility: PLDs/PDSSP

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

Frequency: Need based Format: various Responsibility: PDSSP/PLDs/LGs

- k. **Targeted research and analysis** to either track progress on social sector indicators or on processes, approaches and models being employed to provide services

Frequency: Demand based Format: reports, surveys, studies Responsibility: PDSSP/PLDs

Communication: Internal Publics

Most of the instruments identified above will also be relevant for the internal audiences. However, there are some other instruments which can be used to communicate with this segment:

- **Quarterly presentations by social sector programs/project managers in the PDSSP Program Steering Committee, providing Updates & Analysis of implementation and outcomes**
- **Sharing of outcomes of negotiations with donor agencies and private sector as well as aide memoires and other related documents**

10. Mobilizing Stakeholders

As outlined earlier, there is a need to mobilize stakeholders and to enter into various modes of partnership that would enable all stakeholders to effectively play a role in achieving the objectives. Some of the ways in which this can be achieved have been indicated in the list of the communication instruments above. However, it must be pointed out that investments to build the capacities of stakeholders would need to be made and the PDSSP TA funds can be used for this purpose. The exact use of the TA funds can be based on the results of a communication audit,

which would help identify capacity gaps and propose investments in specific areas to address outstanding issues.

11. Monitoring & Evaluation

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