

This roundtable marks the second edition of the annual event jointly organized between the World Bank and the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) which was held for the first time in 2014 in an effort to raise awareness among World Bank staff regarding the work and mandate of Ombudsman Institutions (OIs) and possible entry points for further engagement.

The high-level panel included Chief Ombudsman Danang Girindrawardana of Indonesia, Ombudsman Peter Tyndall of Ireland, the Head of the IOI General Secretariat, Ms. Ulrike Grieshofer, and Senior Governance Advisor from the World Bank, Mr. Naseer Rana.

The roundtable presented experiences and good practices implemented by various OIs around the world. The panelists also addressed questions on how to make Ombudsman services available to those most vulnerable; how to reach the population located in remote areas; the role of CSOs on the work of OIs; the role of ICTs on promoting inclusive institutions; and possible synergies to be explored between the World Bank and OIs.

2nd Annual World Bank–International Ombudsman Institute Roundtable

THE ROLE OF OMBUDSMAN INSTITUTIONS IN PROMOTING CITIZEN-CENTRIC GOVERNANCE & INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONS

The World Bank and the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) organized the 2nd Annual Roundtable on “The Role of Ombudsman Institutions in Promoting Citizen-Centric Governance & Inclusive Institutions” which took place on Monday, May 11 at the World Bank Headquarters in Washington DC. This second edition of the roundtable built upon its first version which took place in 2014, and aimed to further promote and raise awareness regarding the work and mandate of Ombudsman Institutions (OIs), and also to explore possible entry points for mutual collaboration and further World Bank engagement with OIs, in accordance to the Governance Global Practice vision of citizen-centric governance and inclusive institutions.

The roundtable brought together World Bank staff, CSO leaders, academics, and international panelists. The lively discussion included a com-

bination of international first-hand experiences from the Chief Ombudsman of Indonesia, Mr. Danang Girindrawardana; the Ombudsman of Ireland, Mr. Peter Tyndall; the Head of the General Secretariat of the IOI, Ms. Ulrike Grieshofer; and Senior Governance Advisor at the World Bank, Mr. Naseer Rana. The roundtable was moderated by Ms. Hana Bixi, Global Lead for Public Service Delivery of the World Bank’s Governance Global Practice.

As part of the broader accountability system, OIs promote citizen rights, oversee government agencies and service providers, and serve as bridges between citizens and their respective governments. In this sense, Ombudsman Tyndall noted that while OIs may look into complaints caused by one-off incidences of poor service delivery, they are also capable of identifying more systemic problems within institutions that may affect



Panelists (From Left to Right): Hana Bixi (Moderator); Danang Girindrawardana, Ulrike Grieshofer, Peter Tyndall; Naseer Rana (connected via videoconference)

more than one single individual. In the case of Ireland, issues brought up to the OI can be categorized under 3 groups: i) minor administrative incidences unlikely to be replicated; ii) Instances where an institution must change its practices to prevent other people from suffering from the same difficulty, and iii) instances when there is a need for change in legislation or in processes across government or public bodies. The OI has the

ability to look at all 3 categories.

In the case of Indonesia, Chief Ombudsman Girindrawardana stated that the most important role of the OI in that country is to strike a balance between government and the people. Although the OI of Indonesia has only dealt with around 8,000 cases to date, the number of complaints is growing rapidly. Ombudsman Girindrawardana noted that this growing trend “is

because people are getting more aware, they speak louder and are using the OI to lodge complaints”.



“In Ireland, some public housing is provided by NGOs, and private nursing homes also get government financing... it is important to have OI redress for such services that target particularly vulnerable people”

-Peter Tyndall

Public Service Delivery & OIs

Mr. Rana stressed the need to frame the role of the OIs in terms of service delivery improvement rather than solely on good governance.

In the case of Indonesia, the Public Services Act and the Local Government Act provide the Ombudsman an important role in overseeing service delivery standards. In addition to filing complaints, the OI of Indonesia

encourages citizens to observe and report about compliance of public service standards through the “ASIK” online portal (asik.ombudsman.go.id), thus becoming more involved in the public service delivery system.

Another innovative example presented by Ombudsman Girindrawardana is the ‘mystery shopper’ program. This program which was applied to 3 major cities in Indonesia consisted of sending staff from the Ombudsman Office to act as citizens while interacting with public officials. Equipped with hidden cameras and microphones, these mystery shoppers were able to capture the reality of the service level provided on a day-to-day basis. The program was deemed as a powerful method to modify behaviors of public officials, and was so successful that it led to its implementation in other cities across Indonesia.

Further, when dealing with ser-

vice delivery in instances where a service has been privatized, as in the case of many countries, Ombudsman Tyndall emphasized the importance of ensuring that the redress mechanism is not privatized along with the service. In Ireland, new legislation was passed in 2012 which provided that complaints regarding services for which funding (or the bulk of it) is provided by the state, may still be brought to the Ombudsman. Some ways to prevent the privatization of the redress mechanism include legislation mandating that the OI retains jurisdiction or through clauses within contracts which require access to the OI as part of the service



“Most important role as OI is to strike a balance between the government and people to represent citizens in front of governments through mediation and recommendation processes”

-Danang Girindrawardana

delivery process.

The role of OIs in promoting citizen-centric governance is also clearly illustrated in the Pakistan context. Mr. Rana explained how the Federal Ombudsman in that country was able to influence the way in which railroad retirees would get their retire-

ment compensation. The Ombudsman intervened on the basis of news reports about retirees not receiving their due pensions. After becoming aware of the situation, the Federal Ombudsman investigated the causes for the delays and ordered Pakistan Railways to implement a series of directives intended to

fix the issue, including the computerization of service records, proper record maintenance of retirees, introduce direct payment system through banks and appoint a focal person to timely finalize pension cases.

The Role of OIs in Promoting Inclusive Institutions

Ulrike Grieshofer of the IOI mentioned that OIs should not only promote inclusive institutions but they themselves should be as inclusive as possible. She further noted that the daily work of OIs --at its core-- is to promote transparency, encourage more inclusive institutions, and fight discrimination, thus bringing a human rights perspective into their work. Regardless of encompassing a human rights mandate, an anti-corruption mandate or the classic focus on complaint handling



“It is this nature of being low-threshold which makes OIs very inclusive and open for all society to participate and be engaged ”

–Ulrike Grieshofer

against maladministration, OIs are low threshold institutions because they provide citizens with an easy and cost-free access to a redress mechanism, in addition to giving voice to people who may otherwise not be able to address their concerns.

OIs are also able to support specific sectors of the community (children, women, elderly, etc.). In this sense, Pakistan established a Women’s OI mandated with the protection of women’s rights. This OI has an all-female staff in order to facilitate outreach to women, and protect those who may be victims of workplace harassment, forced to sign off their inheritance, among other exploitations. In addition, the Pakistan Federal Ombudsman also has a human rights and child rights division to deal with relevant cases.

Moreover, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) also play a big role in making OIs and other public institutions more inclusive and accessible by all. In Indonesia for example, people are encouraged to



“The ability of an OI to correct systemic issues and provide an external mechanism –regardless of there already being an internal one– increases trust of citizens in OIs”

–Naseer Rana

not only lodge complaints using their mobile phones, but also to observe and report compliance in public service delivery standards through a web portal (asik.ombudsman.go.id). In Pakistan, an online feedback mechanism is on the process of being launched to help improve OI services based on direct citizen feedback.

But what happens when ICTs are not readily available? For instance, the Serbian Ombudsman developed a project with

local libraries which serve as community centers and provide internet connection in order to connect elderly people and those in remote areas with the Ombudsman. Likewise, in Pakistan, the Federal Ombudsman set up video-conference connections with remote areas which enabled the Ombudsman to hear cases, make decisions, and substantially reduce the wait times for the population in such areas to receive a response. Further, other initiatives to promote greater inclusiveness were shared, such as the Ombudsman in Netherlands who tours the country on the Ombudsman Bus to come to the citizens when they cannot come

to the Ombudsman. “It is this nature of being low-threshold which makes OIs very inclusive and open to all society” Ms. Grieshofer noted. Mr. Rana also reinforced the notion that OIs are inclusive because they are pro-poor institutions: there’s no need for lawyers and there are no costs –people have the ability to simply lodge complaints.

Further, Ms. Grieshofer noted that CSOs are an integral part of OIs work as they are able to provide a realistic account of the situation on the ground across the country. In addition, citizens sometimes are afraid of complaining, and would rather go to CSOs; this reinforces the im-

portance for OIs to further open up to CSOs. In this sense, the situation is not much different in Ireland where the OI is in constant contact with CSOs who work with women, elderly people, LGBT, asylum seekers, etc.

Lastly, it is important to note that OIs do not solely engage with citizens. Non-citizens alike may also approach the OI in the country where they are present, since asylum seekers and immigrants also have the right to redress mechanisms and are among the segment of society that most needs OI services.

How can the World Bank Further Engage with OIs?

Ms. Grieshofer concluded by stating that there is further room for mutual cooperation to be achieved between the WB and the IOI, especially through training initiatives for OIs staff to better cope with their mandates, and reiterated the importance of having resources available so OIs may work independently. Ombudsman Girindrawardana concurred in that there is a clear need for further

training and awareness raising on the role of OIs not only among public officials from all levels of government, but also among the public.

Similarly, Ombudsman Tyndall mentioned that the WB could assist by ensuring that there is always a complaint handling mechanism built into their projects and that simple conversation between the WB and coun-

tries at the national level could yield further understanding of possible synergies. In this line, Mr. Rana concluded that the WB is not always making good use of effective institutions such as OIs. Given that there is a need for complaints handling for WB projects and operations, the WB should strive to strengthen OIs so that the WB itself may rely more on country complaint systems.

You may access the recording of this event by clicking on the following link:

<http://streaming2.worldbank.org:8080/vvflash/GGO26/>

