

AFRICAN OMBUDSMAN RESEARCH CENTRE
DEALING WITH THE MEDIA – FACILITATED DISCUSSION
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Presentation Outline

- **Role of Ombudsman in Context**
- **Mandate of CHRAJ as Ghana's Ombudsman**
- **Ombudsman and Accountability**
- **The Media as Tool of Accountability: Role of Press Releases and Statements**
- **Challenges and Prospects**

Role of Ombudsman in Context

- Ombudsman institution is conceived as an instrument of democratic accountability between the individuals (citizens/people) and the administration of the State
- Ombudsman institutions therefore seek improved service delivery within the public service and the enhancement of accountability to the public (the governed) in the nature of administrative justice by ensuring that:
 - public bodies and officials exercising public functions make right decisions and where these officials get things wrong they are held accountable through an effective redress/grievance mechanism by individuals/citizens (UK Administrative Justice Institute (UKAJI), 2016).

Mandate of CHRAJ as Ghana's Ombudsman

- As Ghana's Ombudsman, CHRAJ's mandate in ensuring accountability and transparency includes:
 - investigating complaints of violations of fundamental rights and freedoms, injustice, corruption, abuse of power and unfair treatment by public officials;
 - educating the public to demand and hold public officials accountable in the performance of their duties; and
 - to report annually to Parliament on the performance of its functions.

Ombudsman and Accountability

- It has been said that, at the core of any effort to establish accountability are indispensable and interlinked rights namely: the right to truth; the right to justice; and the right to an effective remedy and reparation (**Navanethem Pillay, UN OHCHR**)
- Routinely, Ombudsman institutions account to the public on its performance through:
 - Submission of annual and periodic reports to Parliament or designated state institution(s);
 - Submission of investigation reports and related recommendations to parties to complaints; and
 - Public education/awareness campaigns through any medium the Commissioner may decide (e.g. outreach/face-to-face engagements with the public, dissemination of research findings, publications in in-house newsletters, journals, websites, etc.)

The Media as Tool of Accountability: Role of Press Releases and Statements

- Universally, a free, vibrant and responsible media landscape has been acknowledged as an enabler for the promotion of the ethos of democratic governance, rule of law and human rights, as critical pillars for engendering transparency and accountability in public administration.
- The media therefore serve as medium for informing and empowering the citizens/people about the work of Ombudsman institutions as well as providing the needed information to citizens to hold public institutions and officials accountable in the performance of their duties.
- **Press Releases and Statements**
- Like all institutions or corporate entities, Press Releases and Statements are issued by Ombudsman institutions to deal with or publicise information of a strategic nature aimed at eliciting positive impact or response(s) from a targeted audience or members of the public
- **Methods/tools**
 - Traditional media – i.e. print (newspapers, journals, etc.) and audio-visual (radio, television, etc.)
 - New media/social media (twitter, facebook, instagram, WharsApp, etc.), including digital (websites, etc)
 - **The CHRAJ Experience**
 - CHRAJ uses both traditional and new media platforms to disseminate **Advisories** on issues/themes relating to administrative justice/good governance and human rights
 - CHRAJ regularly issues Press Statements and Releases, including media briefings on investigation reports on investigation reports/decisions on matters of public interests (mostly investigations dealing with high public officials – e.g. former and sitting Presidents, the Chief Justice, Ministers, CEOs of public/state institutions, etc.)

- CHRAJ has effectively collaborated with reputable state and private media houses/outlets (Ghana News Agency (GNA), Daily Graphic, Ghanaian Times, Joynews, Citi FM, etc.)
- CHRAJ uses WhatsApp platform to update its key staff on issues of public concern which have bearing on its mandates, including the Ombudsman's role in promoting good governance.

Challenges and Prospects

Challenges

- Cost of engaging the media in the absence of 'agreed' collaboration
- Lack of needed professionalism, including credibility and integrity of Ombudsman institutions affect effective engagement with the media and vice versa
- Limited/inadequate space allotment for dissemination of programmes of Ombudsman institutions

Prospects

Ombudsman institutions can improve their operations as well as increase their visibility through:

- Enhanced knowledge and capacity building of their staff, public officials/duty bearers and the citizenry.
- Increased cooperation with allied institutions and key stakeholders.
- Increased collaboration with the media.
- Recourse to right to information law to boost access to information for the promotion of accountability and transparency in public administration.