

# POSSIBLE CONTENTS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGNS ON SOCIAL SECURITY

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The second Annual Work Plan for Component 2 of the EU China Social security reform project includes, as Activity 2.18 under the Public relations cluster, the development of technical assistance to participating Provinces in the design and development of visibility and public relations strategy.

As part of this technical assistance programme, a Note was prepared in October 2009 on Social Security Public Relations Campaigns<sup>1</sup>. The Note pointed out that “Public relation is basically the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics”. As such, social security public relations campaigns should obviously primarily respond to the expectations, questions, doubts or reluctance of its public and stakeholders and, to be efficient, avoid “Narcissistic type” approaches which may please higher levels of management, but bear little if not negative impact on the clients and the general public.

Within the same AWP II Business processes cluster (activity 2.9) a survey on social security clients’ satisfaction is being held across Jilin Province which will provide crucial information on which focus Provincial and local social security institutions should adopt, to design efficient PR campaigns, i.e. campaigns that are both useful in terms of image, and interesting for the proper use of services by the clients.

In order to prepare for a speedy and efficient use of the results of this survey – as well as of similar surveys that might be conducted in other Provinces - the present Note relates the contents of clients’ satisfaction indexes to items of possible public relations campaigns that would aim at improving levels established via such indexes.

It is hereby recalled that clients’ satisfaction indexes usually record information according to four areas, which are accessibility for social security, equal treatment for all customers, staff professional approach and the learning process of the institution itself (see Annex I- Indicators for Clients’ satisfaction).

This Note will therefore subsequently address possible contents of social security public relations campaigns on the basis of these four structuring areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Social Security Public Relations Campaigns – Preliminary proposals on visibility, Jean-Victor Gruat, EUCSS Reform Project October 2009  
[http://www.eucss.org.cn/fileadmin/research\\_papers/C2/BP/Social\\_security\\_public\\_relations\\_campaigns.pdf](http://www.eucss.org.cn/fileadmin/research_papers/C2/BP/Social_security_public_relations_campaigns.pdf)

## **I – Accessibility to Social security**

### ***Issues at stake***

Accessibility relates to the fact that those in need of its services may access social security easily, whenever they actually need it. Access may be physical, or remote.

### ***Difficulties experienced by clients***

Social security offices may be insufficient in numbers, hence located too far away from clients' residences. Capacity of offices may be insufficient to cope with all clients requests. Opening hours may not correspond to the schedules when clients are available for visiting the offices. Hotlines and other remote access channels do not respond when called upon.

### ***Social security PR response***

Public relations campaigns dealing with accessibility issues might aim at convincingly showing to the clients that the institution is within their reach whenever they are in need of its services.

To achieve this goal, maps – including interactive maps – are usually considered as interesting communication vehicles – all the more that in addition to showing the location of the various social security outlets it provides useful information on the city – for example main Government buildings or transportation routes.

Another campaign theme may be around the topic “Social security – present whenever you need” insisting upon times where services are opened to the public, and alternative means for efficient contact. Such campaigns may be launched in conjunction with information dissemination related to the circulation of new social security cards.

An important point for the positive image of social security is to convincingly show that staff are in great numbers, and that they actively work in response to the expectations of their clients. Communication may then be organized around a topic such as “Social security staff – an army to better serve” providing information concerning numbers of staff, of insured persons, of registered employers, of beneficiaries – per category of benefit.

## II - Equal Treatment in Social Security

### *Issues at stake*

Equal treatment for social security clients expresses the fact that quality of attention provided should not depend upon the type of service or the type of client.

### *Difficulties experienced by clients*

Clients with literacy difficulties, disabled persons, clients with non standard work hours or on shift work may have difficulties in accessing social security premises and/or in visiting those at core hours. Further, staff allocation at various desks may be such that, for those applications of interest to fewer clients, waiting will be minimal, while for those applications most commonly sought, queues will form.

### *Social security PR response*

Public relations campaigns dealing with equal treatment might aim at providing clients with information on special measures taken by social security institutions to ensure that all their clients be equally treated when requiring access to services.

In that respect, posters or communication might insist on the point that all are welcome on social security premises – and insist on provisions made to facilitate access to persons with limited mobility, for which illustrations may be a convincing argument.

Another issue worth highlighting is that the introduction of a unique window, where all types of formalities can be accomplished by one attendant, facilitates the smoothing up of clients' waiting time irrespective of the nature of their request. In such campaigns, statistics data may be of interest – such as “We, social security, commit ourselves to serving you in less than ... minutes whenever you visit our premises.”

For those clients working at unusual hours, who cannot visit main social security offices at their core opening hours, campaigns might insist, in addition to remote access, on proximity services such as those established at the community level, or with support from enterprises' human resources departments. Networking as a way of providing services to all is usually considered as a powerful focus for a public relations campaign on equal treatment.

### **III – Staff professional approach**

#### ***Issues at stake***

Staff professional approach relates to the fact that staff interacting with clients are both conversant with the technical matters they handle, and with the situation of their clients. Professional approach directly relates to staff capacity to accomplish their function without errors or without temptation of defrauding the institution.

#### ***Difficulties experienced by clients***

Lack of professionalism from the staff results in delays and errors in keeping records and processing claims. Clients may also be confronted with situations where because of unclear or insufficient explanations they experience difficulties in completing their files with all required documentation. Clients may also be preoccupied with the consequences of fraud on the decent and honest functioning of social security, and hesitate to entrust their future and protection to an institution that might be suspect of accommodating illegal practices.

#### ***Social security PR response***

Public relations campaigns insisting on staff professionalism might aim at building clients' confidence in the quality and reliability of services delivered by social security institutions, as well as attaching an image of modernity and technical soundness to these institutions.

In that respect, a first component of a public relations campaign might show how seriously social security takes combating fraud – and mottos such as “Defrauding social security is defrauding YOU – Report doubts and anomalies” might prove to be efficient not only in terms of feedback on suspicious attitudes, but also with respect to public confidence.

Another useful PR action would be to widely circulate brochures indicating very precisely what types of documents are required in what circumstances – and stating commitment for staff to avoid as much as possible multiple back- and forth moves for completing documentation. To also provide an image of efficiency, a component of a PR campaign might insist upon the effective integration of front and back office, advocating the use of online facilities and web terminals on social security premises, as well as highlighting pilot experiments of automatic data exchange between the institution and the employers.

## IV – Learning Processes

### *Issues at stake*

Learning processes relate to the fact that social security institutions are expected to act upon complaints received from clients, and draw lessons from past mistakes in order to improve their records in terms of clients' satisfaction.

### *Difficulties experienced by clients*

Clients may feel that social security institutions are not responsive enough to their queries and preoccupations, and in a sense abuse of their monopolistic position on the social protection market. Also, whenever they consider lodging a complaint against – or simply requesting a change in position from social security institutions, clients may have the impression that they are confronted with bureaucratic hurdles almost impossible to overcome.

### *Social security PR response*

Public relations campaigns based on Learning processes may tend to show to clients that they are on equal footing with social security institutions, and that the basic function of the latter is indeed to fully respect the rights of the former.

Related campaigns will insist on the privileges attached to the quality of social security client, and promote a social security bill of rights including specific timings for typical operations, the entitlement of clients to obtain a response to their queries and the formalities to follow to initiate appeals.

Another component of such campaigns would emphasize the reception function of social security institutions, and insist on the usefulness of this function for clients to raise questions and take independent or at least objective advice on how to proceed in case of difficulties.

In order to attach humanity to social security, public relations campaigns may show that the institution is managed by competent persons, close to those they serve, and include highly personalized components, featuring staff from various categories, performing their daily work with efficiency and attention.

## ANNEX - Selected Indicators for Measuring Clients' Satisfaction in Social Security

AREA	INDICATOR	CORRELATE WITH
Accessibility	Nb. of social security offices	Distance from clients, public transports access, opening hours
	Nb. of front desk staff	Nb. of clients to serve, nb. of social risks (branches) to be addressed
	Nb. of clients received	Nb. of clients to serve, per category of client
	Nb. of communications received	Nb. of files treated, per type of communication
Equal Treatment	Nb. of claims received	Nb. of clients, nb. of staff handling claims
	Nb. of claims treated	Nb. of claims received, nb. of insured persons for related risk
	Nb. of claims rejected	Nb. of claims received – <i>to be positive, this indicator should show a negative trend</i>
	Nb. of post benefits requests handled	Nb. of benefits awarded or in award, nb. of beneficiaries
Professional Approach	Nb. of staff trained	Total nb. of staff – per job, per level. <i>Refers to prospective methods for human resources forecast</i>
	Nb. of staff in contact with clients	Nb. of clients, per type. Nb. of claims received or treated. Nb. of requests handled. Nb. of communications received
	Nb. of outside inspections	Nb. of outlets to visit per type ( <i>hospitals, social care, vocational training, banks, tax authorities, enterprises ...</i> )
	Nb. of desk audits	Nb. of departments, sections, offices ... to be audited, nb. of complaints received
Learning processes	Nb. of quality reviews conducted	Nb. of social security offices, nb. of outside contact points for clients, nb. of enterprises
	Nb. of complaints received	Nb. of clients, nb. of benefit claims handled, nb. of communications received – <i>to be positive, this indicator should show a negative trend</i>
	Nb. of survey questionnaires received	Nb. of clients, nb. of benefit claims, nb. of questionnaires issued
	Nb. of public relations campaign launched	Nb. of outlets for contacting clients, nb. of enterprises registered, nb. of administrative units covered
	Nb. of statistical indicators monitored	Types of clients, types of beneficiaries, types of risks covered