

## Highlights

The **International Ombudsman Institute** is a global organization which promotes cooperation of over 155 independent ombudsman institutions from around 90 countries worldwide. The [IOI](#) provides support to its member organizations through training, research and regional subsidies.

Johanna Suurpaa, from the **Nordic Trust Fund**, stressed how the World Bank can benefit from collaboration with Ombudsman Institutions given their distinctive features. These institutions are effective accountability mechanisms, can also serve as bridge with other actors, supervise activities of the government and voice the concerns from the citizens.

Robert Beschel, Lead Public Sector Specialist, presented the World Bank new [web resource on Ombudsman](#).

Marcos Mendiburu from World Bank Institute noted that collaboration between social accountability and state accountability institutions - including the Ombudsman Institutions - is central for the **Global Partnership for Social Accountability** as public oversight involves a diverse set of actors, both formal and informal control mechanisms in order to control public administration and service provision.

## The Role of Ombudsman Offices in Promoting Good Governance and Effective Service Delivery

“Ombudsman Institutions are gateways for citizens into governments: providing information, mediating conflict, investigating malpractice, and ensuring complaints lead to investigations” said Jeff Thindwa, Manager of the Social Accountability Practice at the World Bank Institute, when opening the ‘Roundtable on the Role of Ombudsman Offices in Promoting Good Governance’ at the World Bank offices in Washington DC on February 25<sup>th</sup>. The Roundtable brought together Ombudsman representatives, academics, CSO experts and World Bank staff in order to explore opportunities for World Bank systematic engagement with Ombudsman offices.

The term Ombudsman originated in Scandinavia and literally means ‘representative’. Claudia Rosanna del Pozo Goicochea, Deputy Ombudsman of Peru, spoke about her role as a “bridge” between public officials and indigenous people. She highlighted how we might have one particular idea and vision, but this may not be the same as the citizens: “It’s very important to recognize those people who have another vision: not worse, simply different”. According to Claudia, “the most powerful tool Ombudsman offices have are the power of persuasion and the force of investigation”, and this power rests firmly on the fact that it originates from the citizens.

***“The Ombudsman through its field experiences and direct work with both civil society and government – has access to a wealth of information, data and good practices examples, which should be highly valuable to international organizations.”***

- Claudia del Pozo, Deputy Ombudsman of Peru.

Many speakers at the roundtable noted how the mandates of Ombudsman Offices are very diverse. Each country that has established an Ombudsman adapts it to local context and circumstances. As a consequence, Ombudsman Institutions have variations in functions.

Ombudsman Offices are rather unusual institutions according to Prof. Tom Pegram, Deputy Director of the Institute of Global Governance, University College London. “They occupy a very unique place within the state structure, sitting at the intersection between state and civil society, between horizontal accountability institutions and vertical accountability mechanisms. It is in this unusual location they exercise their influence.” Tom highlighted the repertoire of tools Ombudsman Institutions have, such as investigations, reports, complaint processes etc. This is particularly important in transitional countries

where we see large gaps in rule of law frameworks. He further added, that in a context where formal rules are neither stable nor uniformly enforced, authority based on a platform of social legitimacy, combined with the ability to generate momentum behind the rights claim in question, may prove particularly potent.



Panelists (from right to left): Renzo Lavin, Claudia del Pozo Goicochea, Helene Grandvoinnet, Jeff Thindwa, Diane Welborn, Foziya Amin and Tom Pegram

When encouraging governments, Ombudsman Offices and CSOs to work together, Renzo Lavin, Co-Director, from *Asociación Civil para la Igualdad y la Justicia* in Argentina, outlined the mutual interests and benefits, and how strong collaboration leads to better impact for all.

The Roundtable focused on experiences from the Ombudsman Office in Peru and the Ethiopian Institution of Ombudsman (EIO). The EIO was established in 2000 with the main function of preventing and rectifying maladministration and promoting good governance. Foziya Amin, Chief Ombudsman in Ethiopia shared how her office has been working closely with the Government and the World Bank through the Promotion of Basic Services (PBS) program to improve service delivery at the local level. Foziya explained that while her Office receives support from the World Bank, including capacity building, it is important for it to exercise its mandate freely, without interference from the international community.

***Some benefits of collaboration between CSOs and Ombudsman***

- ✓ Increase the impact of their work.
- ✓ Ombudsmen get information directly from the field from CSOs working on specific issues.
- ✓ CSOs can access valuable information shared by government agencies with the Ombudsman Offices.
- ✓ Ombudsman can serve as articulator with other horizontal accountability institutions.

Through World Bank support to the government-implemented PBS III Program in Ethiopia, approximately 2 million USD were allocated to work with the Ethiopian Institution of Ombudsman (EIO) to expand its accessibility by opening regional branches, investigate complaints on basic services such as health, education services from target populations by the Program, and collaborate with the regional and district grievance redress offices (which report to their respective chief administrators) at subnational level. Yoseph Adbissa, Sr Social Protection Specialist from the Ethiopia WB office noted the importance of working with the EIO as a means of strengthening the country's GRM system as a whole rather than creating project-specific mechanisms which may not be sustainable after the end of the project implementation.

The Ombudsman Office in Peru has played a pivotal role in facilitating access to and enhancing quality of public services including water and health among others; as well overseeing compliance with implementation of three key open government reforms: [access to information legislation](#), public consultations policies with vulnerable populations (such as indigenous people) and public hearings.

### ***Collaboration between Defensoria del Pueblo and Civil Society: The experience of Peru***

- ✓ With support from CARE Peru, [Indigenous women](#) monitor health services and produce reports that are analyzed jointly with Ombudsman Regional Offices and civil society.
- ✓ With *Ciudadanos al Día* (CAD) the Ombudsman annually hosts an awards competition on good practices on public administration.
- ✓ With *Proetica* (TI local chapter), the Ombudsman jointly launched the “Education without corruption” campaign; a project in 26 regions to encourage citizens to denounce corruption.

With Ombudsman Institutions now in over 100 countries, this was a timely opportunity for the Bank to reflect on its engagement with them. In making the case for more systematic World Bank support to Ombudsman Offices, Helene Grandvoinet, WB Lead Social Development Specialist, pointed out how compatible these relationships are with other areas of the Bank’s work such as the ongoing development of a citizen engagement strategy and the right to information work. Helene cited another example where the Bank works very closely with the Provincial Ombudsman in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province in Pakistan, and how that office is working hard to restore citizen trust using score cards.

Echoing the potential for the Bank in further engaging with Ombudsman Offices, Diane Welborn, Ombudsman, Joint Office of Citizen Complaints for Dayton, Ohio, (USA) and IOI 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President, saw a number of areas where the Bank could work together with them; such as training opportunities, linking the Bank offices and Ombudsman Offices at regional levels, and the Bank utilizing the Ombudsman’s offices data and reports.

***“The Ombudsman is seen as impartial and its role is particularly important in fragile states that may not have a long history of democratic rule of law – where it can also contribute to minimizing the conflict. It is a power resource for those that will mobilize accountability.”***

- Tom Pegram, University College London

The strong and unanimous message from the Roundtable is that Ombudsman Institutions are increasingly important to the Bank in their quest to build effective, responsive and accountable governance, and we can expect to see more collaboration in the future.