



Public Relations' Development Conception of Center for Economic and Social Development.

This conception

was prepared by Center for Economic and Social Development within the Institutional Assistance Project of the "Think Tank" Fund.

BAKU

July 2010

Center for Economic and social Development

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Introduction

During the last 3-4 years, both governmental and non-governmental organizations in Azerbaijan began to take a deeper interest in Public Relations (PR). Compared to what happened previously, when activities, concerning Public Relations could be found only in foreign organizations, today situation is rather different. Organizations (both governmental and non-governmental) in order to raise their images try to strengthen their relations with public. Those that are mostly interested in creating Public Relations departments are non-governmental organizations, huge oil companies and business organizations with an annual turnover of more than 80 million AZN. But even in these organizations PR have not been significantly developed. PR building and development is a new activity in Azerbaijan, that is why there are many challenges to face. For example, while all over the world PR work has 2 essential conditions, professionalism and finance in Azerbaijan PR activity is mainly based on contacts, rather than on professionalism and finance. This means that PR specialist must have good relations and contacts with government, business organizations and media.

Furthermore, there is a misunderstanding of the terms Public Relations, which are perceived in Azeri as “Public awareness” rather than as “Public Relations”. This causes a limitation in the majority of the PR departments’ activity regarding the ‘information spreading’. Besides public awareness, PR has to collect information that might be useful for the organization, analyze it, and help administration in making right decisions. One of the characteristics that differs PR from other management fields is that, Public Relations activities are connected with both the internal and external environment of an organization.

Although PR is a new field in Azerbaijan, the organizations with proactive PR departments have lower probability to undergo a sudden crash of their reputation. PR is strategically very important for any organization’s life cycle.

PR building in NGOs

Up to date researches show that not each of the 2570 NGOs currently operating in Azerbaijan, has an active PR departments. This is due on one hand to poor financial resources of organizations, on the other hand to the lack of interest that civil society institutes demonstrated toward PR specialists .. But well-working PR can change the mind of public even about the least popular of all organizations. All NGOs, that play a fundamental role in civil society, need PR development in order to improve their activity and make it more clear and reported. Furthermore, PR must keep in touch with similiar organizations abroad, and with local NGOs, state agencies and business organizations and also with the media. Right and professionally built relations in these four directions are very important in providing long, clear and reported activity to the NGOs, increasing projects' influence power and meeting organization's goals. But building relations with governmental and business organizations is not so easy.

Problems with State Agencies.

First of all, some state agencies (in Azerbaijan??specify!) are closed to Civil Society institutes, this probably depending on the fact that they are not used to work with NGOs. Though, in most of the state structures there are PR departments, they don't focus their activity on building such relations. Notably, they are not interested in building business relations with civil society institutions. They don't even answer to NGOs' information enquiries. On the other hand, it must be said that NGOs are not professional in this field and don't have enough skills to work with state agencies. There are few NGOs, that have state representatives on activities that they carry out. And also there are few NGOs that keep informed state structures about their annual activities.

Problems with business organizations

Another problem is that big business companies do not cooperate with NGOs. There are no examples of existing relations between civil society organizations and business companies in Azerbaijan. Government also seems not interested in this matter. As a matter of fact, there are no tax norms that would be able to motivate Business-NGO cooperation. NGOs also play their part in not being able to build relations with business companies. Both sides don't have enough information in Cooperative Social Responsibility case, and enough skills to work in this field.

Relations with the media

Comparing with other public relations, NGO-Media relations can be considered effectively developed, even though there are some persistent problems. For example, the media consider NGOs responsible of two institutes' cooperated work. NGOs must be properly trained in preparing and spreading informations to the media by increasing professionalism of people working in PR departments. NGOs' discontents towards media behaviour is due to the fact that news agencies often send non-professional specialists to Civil Society organizations' events and do not give them proper attention.

Public Relations in CESD

Center for Economic and Social Development was established in 2005 by economic and social, abroad educated, experts. Since the foundation of the Center, they have been focusing on Public Relations. CESD was awarded with the name of the 'most active economic brain' by the Parlaq Social Research Center. Since Institutional Grant Project by Think Tank Fund was started, there have been established separated PR department. The Department implements its activity in 4 directions:

İqtisadi və Sosial İnkişaf Mərkəzinin İctimai Əlaqələr Üzrə İnkişaf Konsepsiyası

1. Relations with media
2. Relations with NGOs
3. Relations with governmental organizations
4. Foreign relations

Though this is a new kind of activity for CESD, all the directions reached achievements. More than 140 articles concerning economical and social processes in the country have been prepared within the first 7 months of 2010. Besides being available on the CESD's website, the documents were also published in broadcasts such as "anspress", "mia", "modern", "var", "olaylar" is newspapers like "Yeni Musavat", "Həftə içi", "Ekspress", "Bakı Xəbər", "Mərkəz", "Zaman", "Olaylar", "Ayna", "Exo". As result, in the last 6 months local media quoted CESD information more than 500 times.

Local NGOs also got interested in explanations given by CESD chairman and experts, and placed those articles on their webpages.

Recently PR department organized 4 press conferences, concerning agriculture, problems in allocation of grants and defaults in tax legislation. This events were very important in order to build relations with state structures. Because Representatives from Grain Fund, National Oil Fund, Ministries of Taxes and Agriculture attended these conferences. The press releases prepared from briefings were reported in media.

Also experts from CESD give daily explanations in media, that is why CESD is always demanded in Media.

As we noted, the Department builds international ties, especially with foreign media. for instance the interview that was prepared and given to the Belarus newspaper "BelQazeta". "Public Relations" department played a big role in the organization of the CESD's website As we noted, information concerning organization are posted . PR Department also closely attended NGOs' events and took part in discussions.

CESD's PR department also try to build and develop relations with state agencies. But some of them not only reject cooperation with independent NGOs and are also indifferent to events held by them. these agencies are: Financial Ministry, Ministry of Economical Development and other state structures. They don't take into account that NGOs are established in order help solving social problems. NGO-government relations are very important for Civil society's development..

Future works and objectives

Public Relations is a way to build and keep successful relations. Essential conditions of these relations are: truth, sincerity and morality. CESD's Public Relations activity is directed to the right coordination of relations with all representatives of public and aims to answer all their information inquiries. The department's activity includes, for instance:

- Always have strategy and communication plan.
- Answer all inquiries in time, writing press releases about achievements and successes in our activity.
- posting financial reports about achievements and projects on the website.
- Increase work skills with Social networks.
- increase of relations with International and European NGOs.
- increase of relations with state agencies, providing mutual information exchange.
- increase of relations with foreign media.
- release quarterly reports for the public opinion.
- PR organization for young experts of the Center.