

**Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring
System in Government of India Ministries
and Departments**

Indian Institute of Public Administration

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We are hopeful that the Report will help the process of change in the direction of responsive and effective governance and will contribute towards an improved service delivery.

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I

Introduction:

Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System

The state of public grievances serves as a barometer to gauge the efficiency and effectiveness of the administrative processes and policies. Persistence of public grievances in any administrative system speaks of a wary state of administration. The absence of any record of public grievances can, however, indicate a worse scenario. For, grievances may remain unacknowledged despite being of a serious nature; these may finally assume unmanageable proportions and expose the system to a legitimacy crisis. Both timely ventilation and redress of grievances are therefore a serious concern of any citizen friendly administration. These are also instrumental in ensuring the health of the system.

The government of India has taken several initiatives in the direction of installation of machinery setting up processes to facilitate the timely redressal of public grievances, which may emanate from the exercise of administrative jurisdiction. At the apex level, there are primarily two designated nodal agencies in the Central Government for handling these grievances: (i) the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, and (ii) the Directorate of Public Grievances, Cabinet Secretariat. A Standing Committee of Secretaries for Grievance Redressal, headed by the Cabinet Secretary, conducts review of grievance redressal mechanism of different Ministries/Departments of Government of India.

The Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances(DARPG) has undertaken initiatives in the fields of administrative reforms and public grievances in the Government, aimed at the delivery of citizen-centric administration and quality public services in order to improve governance. The main responsibility of the DARPG is to lay down broad policy guidelines for the institutionalization of grievance redress system in

the Ministries/ Departments/ Organization. The Department is not engaged in substantive redress of grievances, which may arise from various agencies of the government across the country. Since most grievances arise at field level, their actual redress is expected to come from the agencies functioning at the local level. The grievances received by the Department are forwarded to the concerned Ministries/Departments/State Governments/Union Territories, dealing with the substantive functions related to which a particular grievance has been received. The complainant is also intimated about the action taken. On an average, the Department 'takes up' about 1000 grievances every year depending upon the seriousness of the grievances and follows them up regularly till their final disposal. This is aimed at enabling the Department to evaluate the effectiveness of the grievance redress machinery of the concerned government agency. On the basis of the grievances received, the Department identifies the problem areas regarding which recurring grievances are received. These problem areas are analyzed with a view to suggesting substantive and procedural improvements to the Ministry/ Department/ Organisation concerned.

The Directorate of Public Grievances was set up in the Cabinet Secretariat in 1988 based on the review of the public grievances redress machinery in Government of India carried out in 1987. Envisaged as an appellate body investigating grievances selectively with regard to complaints where the complainant had failed to get redress at the hands of the internal machinery and the hierarchical authorities, initially the Directorate looked into individual complaints pertaining to four Central Government Departments which were found to be relatively more prone to public complaints. Subsequently, other Departments having larger public interface were added to its purview. At present, this Directorate is handling grievances pertaining to 20 Central Government Organisations. Unlike the DARPG, Directorate of Public Grievances has been empowered to call for the files and officers to see that grievance handling has been done in a fair, objective and just manner. Wherever the Directorate is convinced that the grievance has not been dealt with in such a manner, it makes suitable recommendations for consideration and adoption by the concerned Ministry/Department, which is required implement these within a period of one month.

The DARPG has issued guidelines to the Ministries and Departments from time to time with a view to ensure prompt and effective redress of public grievances. These guidelines are aimed at strengthening the grievance redress machinery and streamlining the process of handling and redress of grievances. As per guidelines, all Ministries and Departments are required to put in place an internal machinery to address the grievances pertaining to their activities and designate a Director of Grievances in every office, including in autonomous bodies and public sector undertakings. For staff grievances, the guidelines provide for the setting up of a Staff Grievance Redress Machinery and designation of a Staff Grievance Officer.

In order to further the effectiveness of the machinery for redress of public grievances, the guidelines stipulate that the Ministries /Departments should display the name designation, room number, telephone number etc. of Director of Grievances at the reception and other convenient places, place locked complaint box at reception and observe a weekly meetingless day in the Central Secretariat Offices when all the officers above a specified level should be available at their desks to receive and hear public grievances- field level officers, having contact with the public, have also been advised to declare one day in the week as a meetingless day for the purpose of meeting people who approach with a grievance. The Ministries /Departments are further required to publicise the grievance redress mechanism through the Citizen's Charters, broadcast of audio-visual capsules, sports and websites, etc.

To streamline the process of grievance redress, the guidelines suggest that the Ministries /Departments should fix the timeframe for disposal of work relating to public grievances and staff grievances and strictly adhere to that, acknowledge each grievance petition within three days of receipt, indicating the name, designation and telephone number of the official who is processing the case. The timeframe within which a reply will be sent should also be indicated and a reasoned and speaking reply for every grievance rejected should be issued.

In order to ensure easy public access to the grievance redress mechanism, the guidelines further suggest that *lok adalats/ staff adalats*, should be constituted, if not already constituted, and held every quarter for quicker disposal of public as well as staff

grievances and pensioners' grievances. The constitution of a social audit panel or such other machinery for examining areas of public interface with a view to recommending essential changes in procedures to make the organization more people-friendly has been suggested. Establishing a single window system at points of public contact, wherever possible, to facilitate disposal of applications has been recommended.

Another significant guideline to ensure the sensitivity of government towards the public concerns relates to the Ministries/ Departments picking up grievances appearing in newspaper columns, which pertain to their jurisdiction, and take remedial action on them in a time-bound manner. Issuing rejoinders to newspapers after investigation in cases which were found to be baseless and/ or damaging to the image of the organisation was also considered important to build public trust.

The overarching guideline indeed is that the Ministries/ Departments should deal with every grievance in a fair, objective and just manner. The monitoring of grievances received and disposed of in the Ministries/ Departments and organizations under these by the Joint Secretary/ Director of Public Grievances on a monthly basis and measuring the level of citizen satisfaction on a regular basis has been recommended. Further, these have been instructed to prepare quarterly progress reports regarding the receipt and disposal of grievances in the Ministries/ Departments/ Organizations. Inclusion of the public grievances work and receipt/ disposal statistics relating to redress of public grievances in the Annual Action Plan and Annual Administrative Report of the Ministries/ Departments has also been suggested.

A concern for grievance prevention led to the recommendation regarding the analyses of public grievances received to identify the problem areas in which modifications of policies and procedures could be undertaken with a view to making the delivery of services easier and more expeditious. Further, the Ministries/ Departments have been advised to issue booklets/ pamphlets about the schemes/ services available to the public indicating the procedure and manner in which these can be availed and the right authority to be contracted for service, as also, the grievance redress authority.

Specific instructions were issued by the DARPG in September 2005 regarding the role of Director of Grievances in strengthening of PGR machinery. These instructions, *inter-alia*, stipulated that:

- (i) Each Ministry/ Department/ Public Sector Undertaking/ Autonomous Organisation may designate a full time Grievance Officer, known as the Director of Grievances. The Officer may be of the rank of joint Secretary to Government of India who by virtue of his experience and jurisdiction can take decisions more objectively.
- (ii) The Director of Grievances will be actively involved in the process of dealing with grievances. Each Ministry/Department/PSU/Autonomous Organisation may formulate a job-chart for the Director of Grievances.
- (iii) The Director of Grievances will be vested with powers to call for files/papers connected with grievances pending for more than three months in the Ministry/Department and to take a decision thereon with the approval of the Secretary of the Ministry/Department. He may also communicate the final decision to the aggrieved party.
- (iv) The Director of Grievance shall report directly to the Secretary/Head of the Organisation. His relationship with the line-functionaries may be clearly defined. The procedures necessary for his effective performance may also be clearly indicated.
- (v) The name and designation of the Director of Grievances should be separately incorporated in the list of officers appearing in the local telephone directories.

The uniform software called Public Grievances Redress and Monitoring System (PGRAMS) developed by the National Informatics Centre was installed in a number of Ministries/ Departments/ Organisations. In an endeavour to further improve the system, the Department developed and introduced a centralized web-enabled module (CPGRAMS), which is being installed to facilitate the Public Grievances Officers of various Ministries/ Departments/ Organisations to log in and view the grievances

forwarded by Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances to the concerned Ministries for expeditious redressal.

The CPGRAMS offers to the citizens the facility of lodging online grievances, on-line reminders and online view of current status of the grievances. It facilitates the Ministries/ Departments to add subordinate organizations and forward grievances to them for redress. They can also enter the grievances received locally, forward these to their respective organizations online, as also monitor pending cases. The system can be accessed by the public grievance officers through the web address www.darpg-grievance.nic.in. The system then asks for user name and password which has been provided to the Ministries/ Departments. The Ministries/ Departments have to inform the DARPG about the user name of their subordinate officers for updating, which has yet to be done.

Reports are generated periodically from the System to indicate the grievance-prone areas of different Ministries and Departments of Government of India. An annual advertisement is also issued in all national dailies and other newspapers covering the entire country for wider publicity of the name and address of the public grievance redress officers of different Ministries and Departments of Government of India. The DARPG has also been involved in monitoring and analysis of grievances, which it receives.

The present study seeks to look at the state of public grievance redress mechanisms and processes in the Government of India Ministries and Departments as well as some of their organizations. A detailed questionnaire, aimed at obtaining information about the state of grievance machinery, its utilization and effectiveness, was sent to all Ministries of the Government of India. Some of them forwarded it to the Departments under them; some others sent these to their attached, subordinate and autonomous organizations also. The responses obtained were supplemented by discussions, which took place during the Workshop on the theme organized by the Institute of Public Administration(IIPA) and the DARPG at IIPA, in which the Public Grievance Officers of several organizations participated. PG Officers of various Ministries and Departments were also visited and discussions were held with the officers available. Discussions were also held with a large number of service users, including civil

society groups, to ascertain their grievances and the experience of the public grievance mechanism. What follows is based on these various sources of information. Chapter II presents a brief overview of the state of public grievance redress mechanism and the state of implementation of various instructions of the DARPG. Chapter III provides a case by case discussion of the public grievance mechanism in select Ministries and Departments of Government of India. Chapter IV looks at the state of PG mechanism in select organizations of two Ministries. Chapter V presents the conclusions and recommendations for the institution of an effective, efficient, responsive and sustainable public grievance redress system.

II

Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System:

A Status Review

The various directives of DARPG seek to institute a system which may improve the prospects of grievance redress as well as grievance prevention. These directives deal with the administrative procedures and mechanisms which may improve grievance redress and prevention through specification of commitment on standards, improved visibility of available channels for redress and transparency, increased citizen-administration interface and strengthened accountability mechanisms. A look at the state of implementation of these directives leaves one in doubt regarding the genuineness of the Charter initiative, which aimed to bring the citizen at the centre stage and ensure responsive and accountable government.

Citizen's Charters and Public Grievances

Citizen's Charters were visualised as the key mechanism through which commitments regarding grievance redress system could be communicated. However, these have not assumed the role which they were expected to. A preliminary review of the Public Grievance Redress Mechanisms of about 47 Ministries/Departments/Organisations, as evident in their Citizen's Charters, presents a disappointing picture. While the Charters of most Ministries/Departments do indicate the mechanism available in the organisation for Public Grievance Redress, several Union Ministries/ Departments/Organisations under their administrative control as well as autonomous organisations do not even have a Citizen's Charter. The commitment of Charters in respect of timely response and redress, however, remains poor. Nearly 41% of the Charters did not indicate any timeframe for redress of public grievances. 61% of them did not indicate any time frame for acknowledging the public grievances and nearly 43% of them did not have timeframe for giving responses to the petitioners. The issue of compensation to the

aggrieved or fixing up responsibility and taking disciplinary action against violators is important.

Providing Information about Public Grievance Redressal Procedures

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid included	21	44.7	44.7	44.7
excluded	25	53.2	53.2	97.9
on web site	1	2.1	2.1	100.0
Total	47	100.0	100.0	

Information about Time frame for Public Grievance Redressal

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid included	27	57.4	57.4	57.4
excluded	19	40.4	40.4	97.9
on web site	1	2.1	2.1	100.0
Total	47	100.0	100.0	

Information about Time frame for acknowledgement

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid included	18	38.3	38.3	38.3
excluded	29	61.7	61.7	100.0
Total	47	100.0	100.0	

Information about Time frame for Response

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid included	27	57.4	57.4	57.4
excluded	20	42.6	42.6	100.0
Total	47	100.0	100.0	

The attitude of the organisation towards grievance redress can be read in the sensitivity with which its Charter proposes to handle the concerns and expectations of grievance makers. Charters can become instrumental in projecting the organisation's commitment to the public. In effect, however, most existing Charters shy away from making any commitments in respect of explaining the outcomes of the grievance redress process. None of the Charters reviewed specified whether a petitioner would be conveyed

the reasons for rejection of his grievance. Nor did any of these indicate any commitment of the organisation to convey the action taken to a petitioner whose grievance is accepted. Most of the Charters reviewed failed to indicate any commitment towards a systematic review of the public grievances, not to mention sharing the outcome of such a review to improve the functioning of the organisation. Nor has an interest been evinced by any significant number of organisations through the Charter towards inviting suggestions from the public about grievance redress and prevention strategies except by way of sharing the contact address and a blanket invitation for suggestions. Indicating commitment towards reviewing these suggestions for further action was not dared by any of these organisations.

Information about Systematic Review of all Public Grievances

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid included	4	8.5	8.5	8.5
excluded	43	91.5	91.5	100.0
Total	47	100.0	100.0	

Information about Outcome of Review of Grievances

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid included	1	2.1	2.1	2.1
excluded	46	97.9	97.9	100.0
Total	47	100.0	100.0	

Information about Procedures for inviting Suggestions/ inputs

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid included	16	34.0	34.0	34.0
excluded	29	61.7	61.7	95.7
on web site	2	4.3	4.3	100.0
Total	47	100.0	100.0	

Information about Time Frame for Review of Suggestions

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid excluded	47	100.0	100.0	100.0

Citizen's Charters of most of the organisations, in fact, need to be revised to strengthen commitments in respect of service delivery as well as grievance redress. No clear indications on how the implementation of specific provisions in the Charter would be ensured in practice are evident in most Charters. Even in the case of the Ministries/Departments, the Citizen's Charters of which mention that the timeframe for sending acknowledgements and final replies to the petitioners had been laid down, there was no indication as to how the Ministries/Departments would ensure that the time-frame was honoured by the officers/staff. There has been a complete neglect of the need to specify commitments related to a regular review and analysis of grievances received and responses offered in the Charter itself. Although a few organisations do hold occasional review meetings on public grievances, public sharing of the findings of review meetings is almost non-existent. Action Plan based on these meeting is also not attempted by the concerned organisations. In most cases, such meetings are only ad-hoc arrangements, if held at all.

Online System of Grievance Redress and Monitoring

Most organisations receive grievances by post or through in-person contact. In a few organisations, however, there has been an increasing trend towards online registration of complaints. This is especially true of the organisations which deal with clients/ stakeholders who have sufficient resources and skills to handle computers. There are also those organisations which are not approached even when their clients/ stakeholders have serious reasons for complaint, simply because there is little awareness and even less faith in the responsiveness of the organisation. Others have not moved towards online system because of the lack of human resource development- untrained personnel find it difficult to deal with the new technology and manage change properly through timely interventions.

CPGRAMS has still not been introduced by some Ministries and Departments. Ministry of Water, Ministry of Textiles, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Textiles, Ministry of Coal, etc. have yet to move towards the CPGRAMS. Some Ministries, such as, Ministry of Mines, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Ministry of Human

Resource Development, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, where CPGRAMS is working, generally do send the grievances online to the attached/subordinate offices or the PSUs /autonomous bodies respectively concerned with them. However, in some cases, they also send the grievances to such offices by special messengers. The replies or comments from these offices/PSUs are mostly received by post. Though the DARPG is sending the grievances online to the Ministries/Departments, the final replies to DARPG are also being sent by post in several cases. Since CPGRAMS has been introduced in most organisations only recently, efficient processes of delivery of the grievances to the attached/subordinate offices or the PSUs /autonomous bodies, and getting feedback/comments from them and transmission of final replies to DARPG have yet to be developed. Tracking of grievances is also not possible in many cases, where a grievance is submitted online through e-mail.

Public Grievances and Information Facilitaton Centres

No attempt has been made to facilitate the registration and tracking of grievances through the IFCs in case of many organisations. A review of 35 IFCs revealed that several IFCs did not facilitate even registration of public grievances. Grievances were being received in nearly 63 percent of the IFCs. In case of 5 IFCs, these could also be tracked. In case of 17 IFCs, however, this possibility was not there. Communication between the IFC and the PG Cell in organizations being quite poor, it is not possible to track the status of public grievances at IFCs. That would be possible if CPGRAMS and the local PGARMS are operative at the IFCs.

IFC and Public Grievances		
Status	Number of IFCs	Percent
	1	2.9
Grievances are not received	12	34.3
Grievances are received and can be tracked	5	14.3
Grievances are received and forwarded, status cannot be tracked	17	48.6
Total	35	100.0

The PGRAMS, whether centralised or local, was not operative at 65 percent of the IFCs.

PGRAMS software at IFC		
Status	Number of IFCs	Percent
	3	8.6
No	22	62.9
Withdrawn due to staff constraint	1	2.9
Yes	8	22.9
Yes , not used because of staff constraints	1	2.9
Total	35	100.0

In some cases, it had been withdrawn due to staff constraint. The software is operative in the PG Cell of some Ministries/ Departments. Even for grievances sent in through other means, it should be possible to track the status at the IFC. Updates in this regard should be communicated to the IFC. However, other facilitation responsibilities should not be abandoned for the sake of this, as has happened in some cases where the only work which the IFC performs is to receipt grievances. This requires capacity building at the IFC.

Public Interface Mechanisms

All Ministries and Departments had been instructed by the DARPG to work towards improving public interface mechanisms. One of the mechanisms is to observe a meetingless day to enable public meeting with the officials. However, on enquiry, it was found that neither the public nor the employees of most of these organisations have been even aware of the instruction. Even the IFCs of these organisations were unaware of any such rule having been adopted by the organisation. A few Ministries did claim that they observed a meetingless day, but unless this is publicised, it makes no difference to the aggrieved.

More significant mechanisms of public interface like *lok adalats* and *jan sunwais* have been institutionalised only by a few organisations despite their enormous potential to redress public grievances effectively and efficiently from the perspective of both the

organisation and the aggrieved. None of the organisations surveyed admitted to having set up a social audit panel for examining areas of public interface with a view to recommending essential changes in procedures to make the organization more people-friendly. Staff and money crunch are cited as the reasons for lack of initiative in this regard.

Authority and Resource Commitments

The issue of allocation of authority is crucial to the effectiveness of the grievance redress mechanism. The mechanism often fails to deliver because of jurisdictional conflicts and lack of powers vested with the Grievance Officer. In many cases, distance between the point at which the grievance is generated and the point at which it needs to be redressed makes it difficult for the grievance office to deliver results. In other cases the authority to decide and redress are vested at different places. The need for multiple points of redress, with adequate authority and accountability has not been appropriately addressed.

Most organisations are also struggling with a shortage of human resources and time to address the grievances, which are received by them, not to mention those which are raised elsewhere. While most Ministries /Departments have appointed a Joint Secretary level officer as Director of Public Grievance, the guideline that there should be a full-time Grievance Officer has not been complied with by most of the organisations on the ground that there is a shortage of staff.

As is evident from the table below, in most organisations the Director of Public Grievances is also entrusted a wide range of other responsibilities. In many cases , policy and administration are also looked after by the PG officer, and this imposes a serious constraint on the time commitment of PG Officer towards redress and prevention of grievances. In most organisations, the separation of staff and public grievances has also not taken place and the PG Cell is virtually hijacked by the staff grievances. There is also a shortage of support staff in the PG Cell, which makes it difficult to undertake a systematic analysis and review of grievances with a view to suggest changes in policies, rules, procedures for grievance prevention.

Status, Responsibilities and Support Staff of Public Grievance Officer in 15 Ministries and 4 Departments			
	Officer Incharge/ Director for Public Grievances	Other responsibilities of the Incharge	Number of Support Staff
Ministry of Coal	Director	Posting/transfer/promotion etc. of Board level officers in Coal companies, All matters of Coal Mines Provident Fund Organisation and Welfare of coal labour	Five(US, SO and three Assistants)
Ministry of Mines	Joint Secretary	Mining Policy, all legislative matters, Indian Bureau of Mines and all matters relating to Copper	Three (Director, US and SO)
Ministry of Women and Child Development	Joint Secretary	Administration, all policy matters relating to women and Women's Bureau	Three (Director,US and SO)
Ministry of Power	Joint Secretary	Finance and Budget Control	Three (DS,SO and one LDC)
Ministry of Labour and Employment	Joint Secretary	Administration (Part),Vigilance, Child Labour and Industrial Disputes Act	Three (Director, US and SO)
Ministry of Water Resources	Joint Secretary	Administration	Four (DS,US,SO and one Assistant)
Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment	Director	Administration, RTI Act and IFC	Five (US,SO and three Assistants)
Ministry of Tribal Affairs	Joint Secretary	Administration and Legislative matters.	Three (Director, US and SO)
Ministry of Information and Broadcasting	Joint Secretary	All policy matters, Administration and Advertising (including DAVP)	Four (OSD,SO and two Assistants)
Ministry of Human Resource Development	Joint Secretary	Higher Education and Vigilance(He is also t5he Chief Vigilance Officer of the Ministry)	Four (US,SO and two Assistants)
Ministry of Textiles	Joint Secretary	Administration, all policy matters relating to textile industry	Three (Director, Junior Analyst and one Assistant)
Ministry of Urban Development	Joint Secretary	Administration	Five (DS, SO and three Assistants)

Ministry of Environment and Forests	Director	Administration	Five (DS,SO and three Assistants)
Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers	There are two PG Cells- one in Department of Chemicals & Petrochemicals and the other in Department of Fertilizers, each headed by a Joint Secretary of the respective Department.	Both the Joint Secretaries deal with Administration and Policy Matters in the respective Department. However, the duties are flexible and keep on changing.	Specific information regarding staff strength in the PG Cells of the two Departments was not available.
Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas	Joint Secretary	Administration	Five (DS,SO and three Assistants)
Department of Agriculture and Cooperation	Joint Secretary	Administration	Five (DS, Senior Analyst and three Assistants)
Department of Commerce	Joint Secretary	Administration	Four (Director,US,SO and one Assistant)
Department of Telecommunications	A Deputy Director General of the Department who is of the rank of Joint Secretary	Administration	Seven Gazetted Officers (one Director, one US, one SO and four Assistant Directors) and a few Assistants.
Department of Posts	A Deputy Director General of the Department who is of the rank of Joint Secretary	Administration	Three Gazetted Officers (one Director, one US and one SO) and a few Assistants.

PG Cell in most organisations is considered a punishment posting, which not many persons are keen to take. The task of the Cell is also not appropriately perceived and is looked at only in the context of grievances registered having to be dealt with either by rejecting or accepting and redressing. Although the office is held by an officer of the rank of Joint Secretary, except in a few Ministries, there is often a conflict between the powers of Joint Secretary, Public Grievances, and Joint Secretary, Administration. Jurisdictional conflicts remain significant and power relations within the organisation affect the performance of the PG officer. Where the two responsibilities are in the same officer, the burden of responsibilities is too much. Overburdened officers and staff, assigned with multiple other responsibilities, often do not give any sense of priority to the

public grievance redress and prevention remains a non-concern, just as grievances which exist but do not reach the Cell. There is no proactive approach towards responding to the grievances which appear elsewhere.

In spite of the long-standing instructions from the DARPG to all Ministries and Departments to establish an institutional mechanism to pick and process grievances appearing in newspapers, none of the organisations, except the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, ESIC of the Ministry of Labour and Employment and the Ministry of Human Resource Development claimed to be processing grievances picked from newspapers. In most organisations, no one has been assigned the responsibility to do so on the ground that there is a shortage of manpower and no one can be spared for the task. The analysis of grievances for improving the prospects of prevention in future is not being undertaken by most organisations.

Accountability Mechanisms

One of the ways in which accountability of the organisation in respect of redressal of grievances can be ascertained is by incorporating the report on grievances, including not only grievances received, disposed of and pending, as evident in the annual report of a few organisations, but also an analysis of the nature and reasons for the specific type of grievances and the action plan to redress and prevent these. The Annual Reports of the Ministry of Labour and Employment, wherein grievance-prone areas and their reasons have been identified in respect of two of its organisations- EPFO and the ESIC- is an exception rather than rule. As is evident from the table below, the Annual Reports of several organisations donot even carry a chapter on public grievances.

Public Grievances Mechanism and the Annual Report	
Ministry/ Department	Whether information about Public Grievances Redress Mechanism given in Annual Report
Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers	Yes, but very briefly
Ministry of Civil Aviation	No
Ministry of Coal	No
Ministry of Culture	No

Ministry of Defence	No
Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region	No
Ministry of Earth Sciences	Yes, but very briefly
Ministry of Environment & Forests	Yes
Ministry of Human Resources Development	Yes, but very briefly in earlier Annual Reports. The Annual Report for 2007-08 will have an exhaustive write-up.
Ministry of Labour	Yes, very exhaustively for EPFO and ESIC but not so much in detail for the Ministry.
Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Industries	Yes, but very briefly, on 'complaints' only, not for 'public grievances'
Ministry of Mines	Yes, in brief
Ministry of Minority Affairs	No
Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas	Yes, but very briefly
Ministry of Power	Yes, in brief
Ministry of Road Transport and Highways	Yes, in brief
Ministry of Steel	Yes but very briefly
Ministry of Tourism	Yes, but very briefly, on 'complaints' only but not for 'public grievances'
Ministry of Tribal Affairs	No
Ministry of Urban Development	Yes, in detail.
Ministry of Water Resources	Yes, but very briefly, with reference to State Governments only, not for the Ministry.
Ministry of Women and Child Development	No
Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports	Yes, but very briefly
Department of Commerce	No
Department of Consumer Affairs	Yes, but only for National Test House and Bureau of Indian Standards
Department of Disinvestment	No
Department of Expenditure	Yes, but very briefly
Department of Food Processing Industries	No
Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion	Yes, in a Chapter on Citizen's Charter
Department of Revenue	Yes but in brief

In most cases, the PG Cell of the Ministries and Departments works only as post office and simply forwards the grievance to the level, office or organisation which deals with the subject. It is not possible for the aggrieved to know about the status of the grievance from the Cell because it does not keep track of the cases. There is no monitoring responsibility exercised by the Cell. While CPGRAMS has been installed in 89 Ministries/Departments/ Organisations of Government of India, it has yet to become operational in many of these. In the absence of an efficient information management system and networking across organisations, the one way flow of grievances will continue. The lack of trained personnel and lack of awareness among the public further make it insignificant.

Periodic review meetings are not held in most cases. Nor is any attention paid to the analysis of outcome of the decisions which are taken. No efforts are evident to hold satisfaction surveys to ascertain the outcome of measures taken by the organisation to redress the grievance or to carry out general administration. Very few organisations have made an occasional use of surveys to ascertain the satisfaction level of service users. Although feedback option is given on the website of some organisations, it is too general to invite comments or feedback on specific policies or programmes. There is also little concern for sharing the feedback or the action taken on it.

Publicity to the grievance redress mechanism as well as its performance is crucial to the very success of the organisation, not only the grievance redress mechanism. This has, however, not been assigned as much importance as it should.

Summing Up

There is considerable variation across organisations in respect of the Charter commitments as well as their implementation with regard to the redressal of public grievances. There is also considerable variation in respect of the number of grievances received, disposed off and pending in various organisations, as also the extent of institutionalisation of the redress processes. However, one encounters a disturbing similarity in respect of inadequate publicity, the burden of other work on the PG officers and staff, lack of required human resource support, lack of comprehensive training to address technological, managerial and behavioural needs of effective grievance redress

system and lack of efforts to institute innovations to improve citizen administration interface. Institutionalisation of *jan sunvais* or *lok adalats*, constitution of social audit panels, regular monitoring and reviews to assess performance, etc. are lacking in most organisations, making the grievance redress machinery more of a ritual than an effective instrument of organisational reinvention.

III

Public Grievances Redress and Monitoring System: Case Study of Select Ministries and Departments

The experience of Public Grievance Redress in various Ministries has varied significantly on account of not only the differences in their respective policy framework but also the mechanism and processes set up for the purpose. It is important to examine the extent to which these various Ministries/ Departments have been able to institute the requisite mechanisms as suggested by the DARPG from time to time and how these have been operating in order to be able to suggest possible interventions which may be crucial to make the system work effectively. What follows is a case by case analysis of the status of the public grievance redress mechanism and process as well as the pattern of grievances and the imperatives for grievance redress and prevention in certain Ministries and Departments.

Ministry of Urban Development

The Ministry of Urban Development and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation are the apex authorities of Government of India at the national level to formulate policies, sponsor and support programmes, coordinate the activities of various Central Ministries, State Governments and other nodal authorities and monitor the programmes concerning all the issues of urban development and housing in the country. The website of the Ministry of Urban Development strangely mentions a non-existent ministry, the Ministry of Urban Employment and Poverty Alleviation. This needs to be rectified.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (HUPA), as it is now called, is responsible for the formulation of housing policy and programme (except rural housing, which is assigned to the Department of Rural Development), review of the

implementation of the plan schemes, collection and dissemination of data on housing, building materials and techniques, general measures for reduction of building costs and nodal responsibility for National Housing Policy, human settlements, including the United Nations Commission for Human Settlements and International Cooperation, and technical assistance in the field of housing and human settlements, urban development including slum clearance schemes and the jhuggi and jhonpri removal schemes, international cooperation and technical assistance in this field, National Cooperative Housing Federation, implementation of the specific programmes of housing and urban poverty alleviation, such as Nehru Rozgar Yojana (NRY), Urban Basic Services for the Poor (UBSP), and Prime Minister's Integrated Urban Poverty Eradication Programme (PMIUPEP) and all matters relating to Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) other than those relating to urban infrastructure.

The Ministry of Urban Development and Housing and the Ministry of Urban Poverty Alleviation share a common Public Grievance Cell for handling the grievances pertaining to all organizations under the Ministry of Urban Development and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation. In fact, the Information and Facilitation Counter(IFC) of the Ministry has been converted into the PG Cell since it was felt that all attached and subordinate offices of the Ministry of Urban Development have their own IFCs and no centralised IFC was needed. While the website of the Ministry provides access to important office orders, circulars, office files, guidelines etc., the grievance redress section did not open. The website does not provide access to the CPGRAM. The information about the PG officer could be obtained only from the section on the RTI, which mentions the PG officer along with others.

The Public Grievance Cell in the Ministry is the designated 'section' for handling grievances pertaining to the two Ministries. It is supervised by a section officer and is working under the deputy secretary incharge of public grievance redressal who is designated as the PG Officer of the Ministry. Joint Secretary is the Director of Grievances and has the overall charge of the PGR Machinery of the Ministry. The Cell is located adjacent to the Reception of the Ministry at Nirman Bhavan. This location was selected to make the Cell easily accessible to the petitioners. However, the staff does not find the location conducive to operational efficiency, since on account of rush at the

Reception Counter, there is considerable noise, which does not allow careful scrutiny of grievances. The grievances are received through the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, Department of Personnel and Training, Directorate of Public Grievances (Cabinet Secretariat), President's Secretariat, Prime Minister's Office, registered associations and members of the public. The grievances received in the Ministry, we were informed, are duly acknowledged and referred to the concerned offices under this Ministry for redressal. These were also continuously monitored and the overall position reviewed periodically. However, no information on the periodicity of the review meetings was provided.

The proposition that staff grievances should be separated from public grievances and handed over from the DPG to Joint Secretary, Administration, as is the case in some Ministries, was strongly disapproved by the officers in this Ministry during informal discussions on the apprehension that this would create the queer scenario of the offender sitting in judgment over his own act. As per their assertion, discretion on the part of officers and, hence, misapplication of rules and regulations regarding staff matters gives rise to grievances which could be avoided if the officers and staff administering those rules and regulations were trained to understand the content of rules and regulations, and the objectives behind each rule/regulation so that they could apply these impersonally and objectively, which was often not the case.

The public grievance redress mechanism in the Ministry is a decentralized system in as much as the attached and subordinate offices and the autonomous bodies dealing with substantive functions, like CPWD, DDA, Directorate of Estates, Directorate of Printing and Land and Development Office, have their respective grievance redress machinery and a PG officer. In fact, the Ministry does not have a Citizen's Charter and the website of the Ministry provides access to the Charters of the attached offices of the Ministry. The grievances received by the Ministry are forwarded to the concerned offices for further necessary action in a time bound manner. In pursuance of a Supreme Court Judgment and on the recommendation of the National Commission for Women, a Complaints Committee of four members, including a Deputy Secretary, to look into the matters of sexual harassment of women at work place has been formed in the Ministry.

All the organizations/offices under the administrative control of this Ministry have also been asked to form similar Complaints Committees.

As far as the procedure for grievance redress is concerned, no timeframe has been fixed either for sending acknowledgements or for sending final replies to the petitioners. All the grievances received in the Ministry are forwarded after acknowledgement to the concerned organization, which deals with the substantive function linked with the grievance. The latter are asked to ensure the redress of grievances and send replies to the petitioners. It is claimed that no grievance is closed without sending a speaking order. However, how such a thing is ensured was not clear. The Public Grievances Cell of the Ministry follows those grievances where the petitioner fails to get redress at the hands of the internal machinery and the subordinate authorities.

There is a reporting system in respect of public grievances and review meetings are held. However, the periodicity of the review meetings has not been fixed. No classification of the grievances is being done. No review of the nature of grievances is being attempted but most of the grievances that are registered are staff grievances, which come from the employees of its organisations- CPWD, DDA, Directorate of Printing and Directorate of Estates. A sizeable number of grievances related to the allotment of government accommodation are also received. Information about grievances received and disposed of reveals that less than 50% of the grievances pending at the beginning of a financial year can actually be disposed off. 502 grievances were pending at the beginning of the year 2007, 375 grievances were received till December 2007, 206 grievances were disposed of and 671 grievances remained pending at the end of the year.

Numerous public grievances pertaining to the urban sector of the country frequently appear in newspapers, magazines, other publications and the Internet. Sometimes, the NGOs or Civil Society Organisations also raise such issues of concern in various fora. The Ministry also receives a large number of Parliament questions highlighting problems of the urban sector. On account of large-scale migration, delivery of services like water, food, electricity, roads etc. have posed a major challenge for administrators in urban areas. Waste management has become another problem on account of this. Inability to address these issues in a planned manner has been a major

source of grievances, most of which find expression through media rather than individuals approaching the PG Cell. The Public Grievances Cell of this Ministry, however, makes no systematic attempt to analyse these. This needs to be taken up.

It is also important to examine whether the existing arrangement under which the Public Grievances Cell of this Ministry not only handles grievances pertaining to the Ministry of Urban Development but also the grievances pertaining to the Ministry of Urban Employment and Poverty Alleviation, should continue. A regular system of review of grievances needs to be in place in order to enable appropriate interventions to prevent grievance situations. It should be mandatory for the Secretary to hold a monthly review of the grievances received by the two Ministries and the autonomous bodies under their control, including CPWD, Directorate of Estates and DDA. The meeting should examine the nature and pattern of grievances and explore the possible ways of addressing and preventing specific types of grievances. The Additional Secretary or at least a Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Urban Employment and Poverty Alleviation should also attend the meeting in case the two Ministries continue with the existing arrangement.

To improve the efficiency and credibility of the grievance mechanism, timeframe should be laid down for sending acknowledgements and final replies to the petitioners. During the meetings to be taken by the Secretary (Urban Development) to review the status of public grievances, the timeframe should be test-checked to ascertain whether the same is being honoured. Reasons for delay if the timeframe is violated or dishonoured in case of particular grievances should be provided. The installation and operationalisation of CPGRAMS should be given priority and the training of staff for operating the CPGRAMS should be undertaken to facilitate online redressal of grievances.

Public monitoring of the performance of the grievance redress system requires that there is greater transparency regarding the functioning of the mechanism. The statistical break-up of the disposal/pendency of the grievances received by the PG Cell and the autonomous bodies should appear in the Annual Report of the Ministry and be placed on the website too. The analysis of grievances and the reforms/changes attempted or contemplated, taking into account the analysis of the nature and type of grievances received should also find place in these. The grievance-prone areas should be identified

to take remedial measures and introduce procedural and policy changes that may be needed. The PG Cell of the Ministry should be provided with adequate infrastructure support in order to effectively carry out its responsibilities.

The Public Grievances Cell should not merely address the individual grievances which get registered but also the grievances which are embedded in the overall framework of policies and programmes. A research officer may be taken exclusively to undertake a regular scanning of the newspapers, journals, internet, reports and books on the subject. Consultations with stakeholders and civil society groups should be regularly held and the problems of the country's cities and towns expressed by the civil society organizations in various fora should be regularly analysed with a view to grievance prevention. The Cell should also carefully examine the Parliament questions for this Ministry and examine the issues of concern for urban development, which need to be addressed systematically. The result of all this analysis, grievance-wise or problem-wise, should also be put in the public domain to invite suggestions and participation of citizens and citizen's groups/stakeholders to address these problems.

A vigorous publicity campaign through the print and electronic media to make the citizens aware of the grievance redress mechanism of the Ministry and its autonomous bodies too needs to be undertaken in order to narrow the gap between the citizens and the urban development programmes of the Union Government. The various policies, programmes and schemes of the Ministry should also be publicised. This will help prevent many grievances and facilitate redress in case these do emerge.

Ministry of Water Resources

Water being a State subject, State Governments have the primary responsibility for the use and control of this resource. The administrative control and responsibility for development of water rests with the various State Departments and Corporations. Major and medium irrigation is handled by the Irrigation/ Water Resources Departments. Minor irrigation is looked after partly by Water Resources Departments, Minor Irrigation Corporations, Zilla Parishads/ Panchayats and by the other Departments such as Agriculture. Urban water supply is generally the responsibility of public health

Departments and Panchayats take care of rural water supply. Government tube wells are constructed and managed by the Irrigation/Water Resources Department or by tube well corporations set up for the purpose. Hydropower is the responsibility of the State Electricity Boards.

The Ministry of Water Resources is responsible for laying down the policy guidelines and programmes for the development and regulation of the country's water resources. The Ministry has been allocated overall planning, policy formulation, coordination and guidance in the water resources sector, particularly irrigation, flood control, groundwater resources, inter-state river disputes and international treatise. Policy formulation, planning and guidance, coordination, mediation and facilitation are its prime activities in those regards. It is responsible for technical assistance to the states on irrigation, multipurpose projects, ground water exploration and exploitation, command area development, drainage, flood control, water logging, sea erosion problems, dam safety and hydraulic structures for navigation and hydropower. It also oversees the regulation and development of inter-state rivers. These functions are carried out through various central organisations. The Ministry of Urban Development handles urban water supply and sewage disposal while Rural Water Supply comes under the purview of Department of Drinking Water under Ministry of Rural Development. The subject of hydroelectric power and thermal power is the responsibility of the Ministry of Power. Pollution and environment control fall under the purview of the Ministry of Environment and Forests.

There is a Grievance Redress Cell in the Ministry of Water Resources. A Joint Secretary, Administration, and a Deputy Secretary are in charge of public grievances and staff grievances respectively. Any person with a public grievance or staff grievance can meet the respective officer personally. The Ministry has set up a Complaints Committee on sexual harassment of women employees. Any staff member with such a complaint may also meet the Deputy Secretary for Coordination. PG Cell, however, does not have full-time staff to work on grievances exclusively. The Ministry has designated an officer to pick up grievances from the newspapers. However, the Ministry officials take the position that the Ministry has no direct public interface and, therefore, no grievances usually appear in newspapers. This is far from being true.

Grievances are received through post or formally in-person on fixed days/ fixed locations. Grievances received are diarised centrally. This is done manually through register. Efforts are being made to introduce the CPGRAMS in all the organisations in the Ministry. However, it is conveyed that numerous challenges and constraints are being experienced in the process. The staff is not trained to handle CPGRAMS. Besides, some of the organizations of the Ministry have not even heard of CPGRAMS. There is an apprehension of a surfeit of complaints through it, which might not be possible to handle, as, there is no systematic arrangement in place to handle the grievances received through the CPGRAMS. However, a matter of serious concern is that only staff grievances are being received in the Cell. The organization is also apprehensive of the possibility of monitoring action taken on grievances with respect to the seventeen organisations and their field offices online.

Grievances received in the Ministry, it is claimed, are duly acknowledged within three working days and the acknowledgement indicates the number of days in which the grievance would be redressed, as also, the contact points for follow up. Grievances are redressed in two months and disposed off once a final reply has been sent. Where necessary, these are sent for settlement to the concerned organizations under the Ministry. If, however, for any reason, it is not possible to settle the grievance within the stipulated period of two months, the concerned organizations are directed to send interim replies to the petitioners. As per assertion of the officials in the Ministry, grievance maker is informed of the reasons for rejection of his grievance and also in case acceptance led to any change in policy and procedure,.

Although meetings to undertake a review of the grievances do take place, no fixed periodicity of such meetings has been laid down so far. Reports are submitted to the Secretary, Water Resources. Quarterly returns on the subject are sent to the DARPG. A chapter on grievances has been included in the Annual Report of the Ministry. Pending cases are regularly analyzed at the level of Director, coordination, and Under Secretary, Coordination. public/staff grievance officers have been designated in each organization to monitor the status of action taken to redress the grievances. However, no separate time schedule has been framed for employees to attend to grievance redress at specific levels, the public/staff grievance officer of the concerned organization has to ensure that the

grievance is redressed timely. Causes of delay in redress are attributed to legal matters, which cannot be handled, or involvement of other organisations, which cannot be controlled for the purpose. Cases are pending because these concern rules and regulations that cannot be changed.

Many grievances which are received are usually dismissed as having no substance, often for being related to denial of such benefits, which are not admissible to the aggrieved. In case of grievances, which are considered 'genuine', negligence on the part of the staff applying the rules and regulations is considered to be the main reason. Sometimes the complexities of rules also lead to grievances. Preventive measures, the officers feel, already exist in the existing rules and regulations. If timely action is taken as per rules and regulations, public and staff grievances will not arise under normal circumstances. If senior officers ensure that the administrative staff takes necessary action on time, considerable hardship to the public can be avoided. Training may be conducted for the purpose of explaining the various rules and regulations to the staff.

Most of the grievances received in the PG Cell are related to service matters of the staff of the Ministry and its autonomous bodies/Subordinate Offices. Some of these are from the retired employees for early payment of their retirement benefits, and/or payment of interest on delayed payment of retirement benefits. Others relate to transfer, fixation of seniority of the employees, compassionate appointment, regularization of casual workers, etc.

It is a matter of concern that despite the increased citizen awareness about their rights, and a more assertive articulation on their part evident in the media and through the activist mode, the PG Cell is not able to evoke enough interest and trust of the citizens interested in grievance redress. Direct public interface mechanisms, such as, *jan sunvais* and *lok adalats* in the field, pertaining to different subject areas concerning water are not being attempted. The organization expressed satisfaction with the present arrangement in place for grievance redress in spite of the widespread discontent. No systematic attempt at inviting and processing suggestions has been institutionalized in the organization. The need for the same is also dismissed by the Ministry on the plea that the Ministry has no

direct public interface. No social audit panel is in place in the Ministry for examining its efforts in the area of improving public grievance redress and suggesting improvements.

Electronic and newspaper sources are not being looked into to identify grievances of people despite an officer having been designated to pick up grievances from newspapers. The view of the Ministry regarding this is that since it has no direct public interface, grievances generally do not appear in newspapers. This response is surprising since there are frequent newspaper reports about ground water contamination, illegal borings, widespread shortage of water for cultivation, etc. from different parts of the country. Due to excessive pollution, encroachments and sheer neglect, many water bodies-lakes, marshlands, and ponds cannot be revived. The soil around many of these water bodies was suitable only for ornamental plantation, according to a survey by the Department of Environment. The state of surface water raises concerns about the condition of ground water that is recharged through the surface water. Faced with poor water supply services, the farmers and urban population have resorted to pumping out ground water through tube wells. The ground water table is declining rapidly and the aquifers are depleting fast.

Most of the large water infrastructure of India is crumbling, not only on account of shortfalls in funding, which has led to an enormous backlog of maintenance, but also due to lack of participation and effective monitoring by the citizens, which has affected the quality of infrastructure and its maintenance. Grievances building up on account of the problems being faced in the execution of rainwater harvesting projects also need to be addressed. Many of these grievances do find expression in the media reports and research publications. However, these fail to reach the PG Cell of the Ministry and this is a reason for worry.

The performance of the PG Cell is adversely affected due to the lack of systematization of grievance redress and review processes. Although meetings to review the disposal of grievances do take place, no fixed periodicity of such meetings has been laid down so far. A monthly review of the grievances received by the PG Cell and by the autonomous bodies should be undertaken by the Secretary with a view to identify and address the problem areas. During the review meeting, adherence to the timeframes

should also be test-checked. It should be mandatory for the Director, Public Grievances, to explain the reasons for delay if the timeframe is violated or dishonoured in case of particular grievances. In addition, procedures and mechanisms for in-house review of grievances should be set up. The meeting should also review the extent to which grievances actually reach the Ministry or fail to reach it and the reasons for the same. The CPGRAMS should be made operational in this Ministry without any further delay and training of staff for the purpose needs to be organized.

Periodic reports on grievances and their analysis should be widely shared with the public at large through media as well as the website of the Ministry with a view to involve them in finding and executing solutions. Besides the statistical break-up of the disposal/pendency of grievances received by the Ministry and the autonomous bodies every year, the analysis of these and the reforms/changes in the policies, procedures or administrative arrangements attempted or contemplated should also find place in the Annual Report and the website of the Ministry. This will facilitate a healthy public debate and give opportunity to the Members of Parliament to consider the state of public grievances as well as necessary interventions for the purpose.

Besides provisioning for adequate infrastructure support and setting up procedures for redress and review, vigorous publicity campaign through the print and electronic media to make the citizens aware of the Grievance Redress Mechanism of the Ministry and its autonomous bodies must be undertaken in order to address the hiatus between the citizens and the Ministry. The CPGRAMS should be installed and operationalised in the Ministry and all the organisations of the Ministry. Necessary networking and information management for the purpose should be provided for. The PG Cell can institute or suggest mechanisms for effective participation and help rectify the situation.

The PG Cell needs to address grievance-prone areas pertaining to this Ministry proactively by inviting the participation of citizens in resolving their grievances. This may lead to an active engagement of civil society in addressing water related problems of the citizenry. The electronic and print media may also be involved in the process for the purpose of broader coverage and transparency. The Cell also needs the support of

research officers, who can pick up the grievances appearing in newspapers, journals, Internet, etc. and analyze such grievances from a professional angle keeping in view the policy, programmes and schemes of the Ministry.

Horizontal integration between the multiple organizations dealing with water related problems within as well as outside the Ministry is lacking and impairs the scope for effectively addressing the issue of water holistically. For that purpose, institutional innovations would need to be evolved in a way that involves other related Ministries, such as, the Ministry of Environment and agencies/departments /ministries involved in specific purposes outlined earlier. PG Cell should examine the scope and form of such cooperation.

Ministry of Environment and Forests

The Ministry of Environment and Forests is the nodal agency in the administrative structure of the Central Government, for the planning, promotion, co-ordination and overseeing the implementation of environmental and forestry programmes. The Ministry is also the nodal agency in the country for the United Nations Environment Programme(UNEP). The principal activities undertaken by the Ministry of Environment and Forests consist of conservation and survey of flora, fauna, forests and Wildlife, prevention and control of pollution, afforestation and regeneration of degraded areas and protection of environment. The main tools utilized for this include surveys, impact assessment, control of pollution, regeneration programmes, support to organizations, research to find solutions and training to augment the requisite manpower, collection and dissemination of environmental information and creation of environmental awareness among all sectors of the country's population. The organizational structure of the Ministry covers a number of divisions, directorates, boards, subordinate offices, autonomous institutions and public sector undertakings.

The Grievance Cell in this Ministry was constituted in October 1991 to attend to the complaints of the people regarding environmental problems. Like most of the other Ministries/Departments, the Director of Public Grievances in this Ministry is a Joint Secretary. A Section Officer heads the Grievance Cell. The Cell deals with the public

grievances related to laws and procedures, environmental problems, garbage dumping and forest-related matters. Staff grievances are dealt with in the Administration Wing. For access, the website of the Ministry and a display board at the entrance of the Ministry's building give the name and contact details of the Public Grievances Officer. The Citizen's Charter of the Ministry does mention the PG mechanism of the Ministry, but access to CPGRAM is not provided through the website. People generally send in grievances to this Ministry through post, the website of the Ministry or e-mail to the PG Cell. All the officers of the level of Deputy Secretary and above have been instructed to be available on every Wednesday in the forenoon to receive and hear public grievances.

The CPGRAMS has not yet become operational here but the Ministry plans to introduce it this year itself. Manpower crunch is identified as the main problem. Besides it is felt that the staff has not been trained to handle CPGRAMS. The Ministry is getting a very large number of grievances now, mainly on account of the publicity of its mechanism through its Citizen's Charter and website as well as the growing concerns about environmental matters and afforestation drives. Because of manpower shortage in the Ministry's PG Cell, the rate of disposal of grievances is now very low as compared to the rush of receipt.

Grievances received are diarised centrally through computer. Communications received are classified as grievances, requests, suggestions, allegations and matters needing legal redress. The complaint is seen by the Public Grievance Officer, who sends it to the Assistant Public Grievance Officer, who, in turn, forwards it to the concerned officer for redress. No timeframe has been fixed for sending acknowledgement to the grievance maker. Even in cases where acknowledgement is sent, the petitioner is not informed of the number of days in which the grievance could be addressed, or the contact points for follow up. No timeframe has been fixed for giving final replies to the petitioners. Communications regarding acceptance or rejection of grievance are made. The petitioner is informed of the action taken or contemplated on acceptance of his grievance. No collective reviews are undertaken to inquire into the nature of grievances being received with a view to taking preventive measures. No institutional mechanism exists for the purpose.

Pendency of cases, it is admitted, arises due to plain inattention on the part of officials. Pending cases are not analyzed to detect recurrence. Delay in redress is attributed to the fact that redress involves other organisations that cannot be regulated for the purpose or it involves legal matters, which cannot be tackled by the organization and rules and regulations, which are archaic. Manpower constraint has been cited by the Ministry as the reason behind lack of initiative in this regard.

There is no institutional arrangement in place in the Ministry for a regular public interface. There is no social audit panel. The Ministry has not designated any officer to pick up grievances from newspaper columns and other sources. Manpower constraint has been cited as a reason for the same. No serious measures have been undertaken by the Ministry to publicise the Public Grievance Redress Mechanism. The Ministry has not set up any mechanisms at any level for inviting suggestions from the clients/stakeholders and citizens. The Ministry has no direct public interface systems like *lok adalats* or *jan sunvai* . Grievances are not picked up for necessary action from newspapers.

The role of the Public Grievances Cell of the Ministry has, in effect, remained that of a post office only. The Cell merely forwards the grievances to the concerned unit of the Ministry or the concerned autonomous body or other organizations, the District Magistrates, Municipal Corporations, Pollution Control Boards and other development authorities for redressal, and send back their response to the petitioner without adding or modifying anything. Though the Cell is supposed to give the final view of the Ministry, nothing of the sort is actually done, unless a Member of Parliament takes up the case forcing the Ministry to take an objective view. Shortage of staff is a major constraint in this regard. Even the Director of Public Grievances is not engaged full time to deal with the grievances. Other duties often take priority over public grievances.

The nature of grievances being received has changed as people have become more aware of their rights and are sending in grievances in respect of environment and forest related matters, besides some administrative issues. The major grievance-prone areas pertaining to this Ministry include environmental pollution, pay and allowances, revision of family pension, forest related matters, garbage dumping, mining, quarrying and cutting of trees.

The majority of the grievances received by the PG Cell are staff grievances. The Annual Report of the Ministry underlines that most public grievances pertain to the following areas:

(a) Location of unauthorized industries located in residential areas discharging harmful gases and hazardous effluents in the immediate neighbourhood

(b) Environmental degradation caused by mismanagement of civic amenities like location of the wastewater dump and water logging

(c) Maintenance of open areas and ornamental parks

(d) Commercial establishment being operated illegally in residential buildings

Many of the critical issues related to the environment are not being addressed by the PG Cell of the Ministry. Environmental degradation being caused by the open cast mining projects, for instance, has been a serious issue; yet, it has not been addressed by the PG Cell. In many countries, the mining companies are placed under a legal or administrative obligation to restore the mining area to its original shape after the mining is over. In India, there is no such obligation. The legacy of innumerable closed mines and orphaned mine sites poses serious environmental hazards. On account of this, the farming communities in many areas have lost their means of livelihood forever, yet no compensation has been paid to them, not to talk of land reclamation! Since all the major developmental activities in coal mining areas are related to mining, the fact that reclamation of all such lands degraded or partially degraded by coal mining is not insisted upon by the Ministry of Environment and Forests is quite disturbing. The same applies to mining of other minerals, which require a large area, for example, iron ore, bauxite, limestone etc. While a provision has been made for public hearing before sanctioning a project, many aspects of the problems of later stages remain unaddressed. It is imperative that the Ministry seriously considers the social and environmental responsibility of mining industries and gets proactive in preventing grievances in this regard. The PG Cell can play an important role in suggesting ways to addressing this.

The officers concerned with the public grievance redress mechanism feel that public grievances could be more effectively redressed if adequate infrastructure and

human resource support was provided to the PG Cell. The PG Cell also needs research support to regularly pick up the grievances from the Parliament questions, newspapers, Internet, books, journals, etc., and analyse them to suggest viable solutions to such problems after consulting the civil society groups working on the issues and the people who are affected. Adequate infrastructure and library support are also crucial for its effective functioning.

Grievance redress procedures also need to be streamlined and commitments in this regard should be clearly stated in the Citizen's Charter of the organisation. Timeframe for sending acknowledgements to petitioners and for sending final replies should be fixed up. The reasons for rejection should be invariably sent to the petitioner whose grievance is found unacceptable. A monthly review of the grievances received by the Ministry and the autonomous organisations should be taken up by the Secretary. In this review meeting, the heads of the attached/subordinate and autonomous bodies/organisations of the Ministry should also be asked to report. The timeframe for sending final replies to petitioners should be test-checked to ascertain whether the same is being honoured. Director, Public Grievances, should be required to explain the reasons for delay in case the timeframe is violated or dishonoured in particular grievances. The CPGRAMS should be operationalised and the creation of back-end support as well as the training of staff for its for the purpose should be given utmost priority.

A Chapter on public grievances is included in the Annual Report of the Ministry, which is submitted to the Standing Committee of Parliament and, thereafter, placed before the Parliament. The Report should carry not only a statistical break-up of the disposal/pendency of the grievances received by the PG Cell and the autonomous bodies but also an analysis of the grievances received by the Ministry and the autonomous bodies and the reforms/changes done or contemplated taking into account the analysis should also find a place in the Annual Report. This should also be placed on the website of the Ministry.

Adequate publicity should be given through the print and electronic media to the grievance redress mechanism of the Ministry and its subordinate, attached and autonomous organisations so that the citizens become aware of it and can utilise it. The

PG Cell should also become proactive in addressing the issues which are raised in the public domain.

Ministry of Tribal Affairs

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs was constituted in October 1999 with the objective of providing more focused attention on the integrated socio-economic development of the most under-privileged sections of the Indian society, the Scheduled Tribes (STs), in a coordinated and planned manner. It is the nodal Ministry for the overall policy, planning and coordination of programmes for development of STs. The Ministry undertakes activities that include social security and social insurance to the Scheduled Tribes, tribal welfare planning, project formulation, research, evaluation, statistics and training, promotion and development of voluntary efforts for tribal welfare, including scholarship to students belonging to such tribes, and development of Scheduled Tribes. The Commission to Report on the Administration of Scheduled Areas and the Welfare of the Scheduled Tribes and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes also fall under its administration. It is responsible for the Implementation of the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 and the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, excluding administration of criminal justice in regard to offences in so far as they relate to Scheduled Tribes, and for the implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.

Like most of the other Ministries/Departments, the Director of Public Grievances in this Ministry is a Joint Secretary. However, the Director has several other responsibilities to attend and grievance redress and prevention fail to get the attention, which these should, given the vast responsibilities of the Ministry and the widespread discontent with the implementation of the policies and programmes. The Grievance Cell is headed by a Section Officer.

The website of the Ministry provides a two-page Citizen's Charter, which says nothing much about the specific commitments of the Ministry to the citizens of the country; it only speaks of the general state of functions and roles of the Ministry and provides no timelines for anything stated in the Charter. The website says nothing on the PG mechanism. Only one 'contact us' window has been there and that mentions the e-mail address of Director(IT). There is no link with the CPGRAMS through the website. Nor does it appear to be concerned about its operationalisation and the training of its staff for the purpose.

The Ministry has not fixed any timeframe for sending acknowledgements to the petitioners. Even in cases where acknowledgement is sent, the petitioner is not informed of the number of days by which the grievances will be addressed or contact points for follow up. Timeframe of one month has been fixed for redressal of grievances but this timeframe is not strictly adhered to. The reason cited is that in some cases other organisations are involved in taking the decision. The grievances are finally disposed of at the level of Director of Public Grievances. The officials in the Ministry assert that there is regular interaction with the staff of the Ministry for the redressal of grievances and reviews are undertaken as and when the need arises. Pending cases are also analyzed quarterly at the level of Director for Grievances. As of now, there are no pending cases to review. However, no institutional mechanism has been set up for this purpose. The reasons for rejection are not conveyed to the petitioner whose grievance is found unacceptable. The petitioner is also not informed of the action taken or contemplated on the acceptance of his grievance.

In spite of the well-known fact that the tribal communities are denied the benefits of numerous schemes and programmes of the Central and State Governments for the welfare of the tribals, and that much of the funds and other benefits are being appropriated by the middlemen in the intermediary channels, the PG Cell has remained largely dormant. Only five grievances (one through the Ministry of Environment and Forests and four through the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances) were received by the Cell in 2007. It is difficult to understand why the Cell, or even, the Ministry has not made any attempt to find out the reasons for this state of affairs in order to alter it. Even the DARPG has not taken any initiative in this regard.

The Ministry has not instituted any direct public interface systems like *lok adalats* or *jan sunvais*. At the state level, concerned state government officials are involved in State Committee meetings. There is no institutional arrangement in place to invite ‘suggestions from citizens, clients/stakeholders. There is no social audit panel. The Ministry has also not designated any officer to pick up grievances from newspaper columns, periodicals and other print or electronic sources.

It is not difficult to see that the tribal communities are by and large unaware of the existence of the Public Grievance Redress Mechanism of this Ministry. Nor do the tribals living in remote areas of the country have the capacity to reach the centralised public grievance redress machinery which has been set up by the Ministry. Another contributory factor towards the PG Cell becoming almost dysfunctional is that its client group, the tribal communities of the country, do not have much exposure to either English or the Hindi language, which are used by the Ministry to communicate its policies, programmes and the PG mechanism. This creates a major communication barrier with the stakeholders/ tribal communities. Ironically, no grievances are received by the PG Cell from the civil society organizations which have been working among the tribal communities and that is alarming. Most of them resort to other channels to express their grievances.

Given the large-scale poverty and illiteracy, which characterizes tribal communities, it would be more meaningful if the Ministry instituted direct public interface systems like the *lok adalat* at local levels, preferably through the *Gram Sabhas*. No ‘publicity measures’ have been undertaken by this Ministry to publicise its PG mechanism. Strangely enough, despite the poor number of grievances received, the Ministry does not feel the need for publicity efforts.

In view of the prevailing state of discontent with the performance of policies and programmes of the Ministry, it must take initiatives to ensure that public grievances are registered in the first place, and grievance-prone areas are addressed through policy interventions. Monthly review of the grievances, not only those received by the Ministry but also those raised elsewhere, should be taken by the Secretary. A proactive approach to grievance redress is crucial for a Ministry like the Tribal Affairs. The Ministry needs to

work on the possibility of ensuring that the public grievance system is available at the points of implementation of its policies and programmes and it is effectively monitored.

The immediate need in case of the PG Cell of this Ministry is to build up bridges between the Ministry and the tribal communities, which are presently operating in their own isolated worlds. An active campaign should be launched in the tribal languages to publicise the policies, programmes and the grievance redress mechanisms. It should include direct verbal contact with the tribals and their spokespersons/leaders. It should also make a liberal use of electronic media, especially local radio. Information in tribal languages regarding policies, programmes and schemes for the tribals should be made available in tribal villages through the schools and colleges where tribal children and the youth study as well as through the Panchayats. Without this, the public grievance redress would not be effective, no matter how many experts and how much of secretarial equipment is pumped in.

Ministry of Labour and Employment

The Ministry of Labour has the mandate to protect and safeguard the interests of workers in general, and those constituting the deprived and marginal classes of the society in particular, with due regard to the creation of a healthy work environment for higher production and productivity. The Ministry seeks to achieve this objective through enactment and enforcement of labour laws and implementation of schemes / programmes for the welfare, health, safety and social security of the workers. The clientele of the Ministry also include emigrants, child labour, unorganised labour, construction workers, agricultural workers, bonded labour and several other deprived sections of the society aspiring to join the labour force.

In-house mechanisms have been set up in the Ministry and all its attached and subordinate offices for effective redressal of grievances received from the public, its own employees as well as other Departments. There exists a Grievance Cell under the Joint Secretary, Administration, who is designated the Director of Public Grievances. Under him, there is an Under Secretary and a Section Officer. However, none of these three

officers is working exclusively on grievances. Similar Cells have been set up in attached and subordinate offices. An e-mail address laborweb@nic.in has been provided for e-mail complaints; the Public Grievances Cell of the Ministry also has an e-mail address where grievances can be sent. The IFC of the Ministry too receives the applications for redress of grievances. The website of the Ministry also provides an e-window for lodging grievances. However, there is no mechanism for tracking the status of grievances. CPGRAMS has not been installed. The Ministry plans to introduce it during the current financial year but is not sure when the staff training will start. A Complaint Committee to deal with sexual harassment of women at the workplace has also been constituted to deal such complaints.

The website of the Ministry provides access to the Citizen's Charter of the organisation. The timeframe fixed in the Citizen's Charter of the Ministry for the issue of acknowledgement / interim reply to the petitioner is two weeks, forwarding of the grievances / petition to the concerned authority two weeks, final disposal of transferred / referred cases by the concerned Ministry / Department / State and for informing the position of the outcome is three months, and that for cases referred to Complaint Committee on Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace, three months. Notably, very few grievances are received by the Ministry. However, some of the organisations of the Ministry, such as, ESIC and EPFO, receive a very large number of grievances/complaints. The grievance redress mechanism and its functioning in these has been discussed in the next Chapter.

The Annual Report of the Ministry carries a Chapter on 'Vigilance and Public Grievances'. This mentions a system of ventilation of grievances from employees' trade unions and subscribers/ members in the Ministry, ESIC and EPFO, two autonomous organisations of the Ministry. The Annual Report, however, talks of the public grievance redress mechanisms, processes and outcomes in case of ESIC and EPFO rather than that of the PG Cell of the Ministry. Nothing is mentioned in the Report about the PGR system in the other organisations of the Ministry

It is noteworthy that the Ministry lays down the policy framework, which has implications for labour as well as the employers. While labour is aggrieved at the poor

conditions of work and lack of social security, the major grievance of the Indian entrepreneurs and foreign nationals/entities, keen to do business in India, is the need for labour law reforms to address the multiplicity and rigidity of Indian labour laws. Not many of these grievances, however, reach the Ministry.

The basic problem with the Ministry's PG Cell is that it does not look beyond the grievances it gets directly. It does not scan and analyse the grievances appearing in the electronic and print media and other publications. Even the Parliament questions received in the Ministry are not analysed on a regular basis with a view to address the problems. The Civil Society organizations have often raised grievances about child labour, bonded labour and contract labour, etc., these have remained outside the consideration of the Ministry's PG Cell. There are unattended policy issues concerning labour in the unorganised sector. The insecure conditions of work, the issue of social security, harassment by police and administration, the issue of minimum wage, health issues, conditions of work for the contract labour, gender just laws and policies are some of the issues that need to be addressed in order to prevent the grievances from emerging.

Many of the problems pertaining to the functioning of the Ministry and its ability to carry out its mandate effectively persist because of the failure of the PG Cell to identify and analyse user requirements for effective redressal. The vast sections of unorganised and informal sector workers are unable to avail the benefits of programmes and schemes meant for them on account of the poor state of implementation. Many of them have a grievance to seek redress. However, they find it difficult to access the mechanisms set up by the Ministry. There are many policy areas which remain unattended on account of lack of pressure from the concerned interests, who are either not articulate enough or lack the resources to access policy process and influence policy making favourably. Vulnerable sections, such as, child labour, bonded labour, poor women, etc. may not make use of the grievance mechanisms, yet, they may have many grievances. It is important therefore that their grievances are understood by the PG Cell, which may then raise these at appropriate fora and introduce appropriate correctives in policies, programmes and procedures.

In order to ensure that the grievances are ventilated through appropriate channels and can thereby be addressed, it is important to not only publicize the mechanisms for redress but also review of their performance, highlighting effectiveness, if evidence suggests. A major reason for grievances is the lack of awareness of the procedures for obtaining benefits, which results in the ineffectiveness to access the benefits. Transparent procedures and the ability to publicize these can help the organization to address these limitations. Simplifying procedures will also be helpful in preventing some grievances. It is a challenge to address the rationalization of labour laws while paying adequate attention to the concerns for labour welfare and protection.

The Citizen's Charter of the Ministry does make several commitments to the clients/ stakeholders, which can help prevent grievances. These cover important areas as given below:

- Speedy and timely redressal of grievances of workers by creating worker-friendly environment.
- Ensure welfare of emigrants, child labour, unorganised labour, construction workers, agricultural workers, bonded labour and other deprived sections of the society.
- Improve the effectiveness of the conciliation machinery to resolve disputes.
- Simplification and rationalization of the system for the beneficiaries under various welfare schemes.
- Transparency in working by creating an internet based system.
- Simplification of procedure for reports and returns.
- Progressive increase in use of e-governance as a measure for improving efficiency of the Ministry.
- Resolve to maintain tripartism by providing fora for tripartite consultations at the apex level, e.g. Indian Labour Conference and Standing Labour Committees, which have shaped and influenced the labour policy in India through their recommendations.

However, the Charter fails to specify these ends in terms of measurable categories and remains silent on how these are sought to be accomplished. Nor does it talk about any mechanism for the systematic review of performance on these or suggestions to address these. The system of review of the grievances in the Ministry needs to be strengthened. The Public Grievances Cell of the Ministry should also review the grievances expressed through the media and research and other publications. Further, it should monitor and analyse the grievances being received in all other attached and subordinate offices and take necessary steps regarding the grievance-prone areas in these autonomous bodies. Public interface mechanisms like lok adalats and jan sunvais can be effectively used to receive and address grievances. A social audit panel should be constituted to examine the efforts in the area of improving public grievance redress and suggest improvements.

The functioning of the PG Cell in the Ministry needs improvement. The CPGRAMS should be made operational and training of staff for the purpose needs to be undertaken on top priority. Regular review meetings to identify grievance-prone areas and prepare action plan for addressing these as well as to test check the implementation of timelines and other commitments made in the Charter should be taken by the Secretary with the PG Officer as well as the heads of autonomous and other organisations of the Ministry. In order to improve the functioning of the Public Grievances Cell of the Ministry and help the process of grievance redress as well as prevention of grievances, it is important that adequate professional expertise in labour-related matters, staff support and infrastructure is provided. Adequate publicity measures should be undertaken to make the citizens aware of the Public Grievances Cell of the Ministry as well as the policies, programmes and schemes. Besides utilising the website, the media- both electronic and print- should also be utilised to publicise its policies and programmes in general and the PG system in particular, as also, to invite suggestions for improving its working to reduce the generation of grievances.

Ministry of Human Resources Development

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has two departments, namely, the Department of Elementary Education and Literacy and the Department of Secondary and Higher Education. The Minister for Human Resource Development is assisted by one Minister of State. Each Department is headed by a Secretary to the Government of India. The Departments are organized into bureaus, divisions, branches, desks, sections and units. Each bureau is under the charge of a Joint Secretary assisted by divisional heads at the level of Deputy Secretary and Director.

Both the Department of Higher Education and the Department of School Education and Literacy share a common Grievance Redress Machinery. The PG Cell is headed by a Joint Secretary who is also the Chief Vigilance Officer (CVO) in the Ministry. A Director, an Under Secretary and a Section Officer report to him on PG related matters. The Under Secretary has a 'section', no doubt, but that 'section' is overwhelmingly tilted towards vigilance with little time to spare for grievances.

The Director of Public Grievances can be accessed by the staff as well as members of the public to seek redressal of their grievances every Wednesday. The Director, Public Grievances, also claims to personally respond to the grievances e-mailed to him. The Ministry has set up a committee on complaints regarding sexual harassment of women. All the autonomous organizations under the Ministry have also been asked to set up their own Complaints Cell dealing with sexual harassment. The PSUs and the autonomous/subordinate organizations under the Ministry have their respective Director of Public Grievances.

Grievances are generally received by post or through formal in-person contact, but sometimes by e-mail too. Grievances received through mail or in person are diarized manually. No timeframe has been laid down by the Ministry either for sending acknowledgements or for sending final replies to the petitioners. The officers opine that indicating timelines would not be feasible as most grievance petitions received in the Ministry pertain to various autonomous organizations, such as, the universities/ schools/ councils/ institutions, which have to be contacted for getting the grievance redressed. This logic, however, is difficult to accept as this is not the only Ministry receiving grievances pertaining to the autonomous bodies etc. Though separate time schedules have

been formulated for employees to attend to grievance redress at specific levels, accountability of individual employees for adherence has not been fixed. Employees responsible for review and analyses at different levels have also not been identified so far.

The Ministry, in its response to the questionnaire, pointed out that it had yet to start operating the CPGRAMS. Three major areas of concern regarding the CPGRAMS were identified. *One*, Staff was not trained to handle the CPGRAMS. DARPG had been requested to train the officers of this Department to introduce the software. During interaction with the officials, it emerged that the matter of training was not followed up; hence no definite programme or plan to start the operation existed. *Two*, the software itself was not considered user-friendly. The organization, however, had not suggested any specific changes in it. *Three*, the lack of awareness on the part of people was considered a disincentive for investing in utilizing the mechanism, especially in the context of acute shortage of support staff in the Ministry. The software, however, was installed in May 2008 with the help of NIC. Almost all the grievances being received in its CPGRAMS are related to the autonomous bodies of the Ministry. Even grievances related to schools are being included in the Ministry's CPGRAMS. Only one staff member, a Section Officer is working for the Ministry's CPGRAMS. As regards training, the Ministry took up the matter several times with the DARPG but received no response.

This Ministry confirmed that grievances have been on the rise over the years. The DARPG statement shows 283 grievances received through the CPGRAMS were pending with MHRD. The Ministry alleged that the statement included quite a few cases repeated many times. Moreover, though MHRD had written to DARPG inviting their attention to closure of quite a few grievances, such cases were not deleted from the pendency list. Reviews, we were informed, are undertaken to gain insight into the nature of complaints being received and identify possible ways to prevent them in the future. Grievances are reviewed from time to time in meetings convened by the Director of Public Grievances and Secretaries of the Departments with the heads of the various organizations, at least, once a year. Pending cases, it is claimed, are analyzed to detect reasons and prevent recurrence. The reason pointed out for pending cases is that redress concerns rules that cannot be changed. There is no further clarity evident from the

response regarding what the organization feels needs to be done about these cases, how these are to be addressed, and whether or not clarifications in respect of these cases are made to the clients. Frequent delays in redress of grievances are attributed to the fact that redress involves other organizations or legal matters which cannot be regulated for the purpose by the organization and concerns service rules that do not provide requisite flexibility.

The Ministry does not have a direct public interface system like *lok adalat* or *jan sunvai*. No institutional arrangement, such as a social audit panel is in place in the Ministry for examining its efforts in the area of improving public grievance redress and suggesting improvements. Attached, subordinate and autonomous organisations of the Ministry like the CBSE, NCERT, KVS, NVS, National School of Open Learning, IGNOU, UGC and the Central Universities, do have public dealing. It is, therefore, not clear why the Ministry does not think of building up public interface in respect of the public dealings of these bodies. The Ministry has not proposed any mechanisms to invite and process suggestions from clients/stakeholders and citizens at any level. Regarding publicity measures taken up to spread information about its public grievance redress mechanism, the Ministry has only reported that instructions are issued from time to time to autonomous/subordinate organizations and PSUs under the administrative control of the Department. However, it was not possible to obtain a copy of these instructions from the Ministry.

Most grievances received in this Ministry are related to service matters, particularly, counting of past services of teachers of Kendriya Vidyalayas and Navodaya Vidyalayas, and transfer and posting of teachers. Delay in the grant of CBSE affiliation is a prominent grievance-prone area. This is a big Ministry. Although the grievances directly related to the Ministry are not significant in number, a large number of grievances are received in the autonomous bodies like CBSE, NCERT, IGNOU, UGC, AICTE, Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan, Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti, National School of Open Learning, Bureau of Promotion of Urdu and the Central Universities. Grievances are received regarding recruitment of teachers by states, their transfer, their pay scales, etc. However, it is felt by the Ministry officials that the Ministry is not the correct level for redress of such grievances and that people should rightly approach state/district

offices for grievance redress of matters which fall under the jurisdiction of the latter. Grievances being received by the Ministry in such matters are at present forwarded to the concerned state officers with a copy to the complainant.

Many grievances related to the education sector are often expressed in the print and electronic media and research publications. A significant number of these relate to the problem of access to educational institutions. The deficiencies in implementation of the various schemes have quite often been felt by the people. The shortage of school textbooks published by the NCERT is a perpetual problem being faced by the students of the CBSE-affiliated schools all over the country. The Ministry response to the questionnaire indicated that an Officer has been designated to pick up grievances from the newspapers and the Cell is monitoring the grievances being received in the newspapers against the autonomous bodies also. However, the PG Cell of the Ministry has not addressed such grievances in any effective manner and instead feels that such problems should be tackled by the agencies dealing with these issues.

Accountability of organizations under the Ministry with regard of grievance redress needs to be ensured. Review meetings to take stock of disposal of grievances are held, but not with regularity. Last year only one meeting was held.. It is important to institute a regular system of grievance analysis. An in-house monthly review of the grievances received by the PG Cell and the various attached/ subordinate/ autonomous organisations of the Ministry, such as, the CBSE, NCERT, KVS, NVS, UGC, AICTE, NCTE, NIEPA, the National School of Open Learning, IGNOU and the Directorate of Adult Education, , including those from students, parents, teachers and general public, by the respective Secretaries of the Department of Higher Education and the Department of School Education and Literacy should be made mandatory. Such reviews should not only examine the disposal and pendency but also analyze the very nature of grievances in order that the Ministry can ascertain or locate the specific areas where reforms or changes are needed. The objective should be to address the policy and procedures, which may be the reason for grievances in the first place. These reviews are likely to make the Ministry more citizen-friendly and the autonomous bodies more accountable.

The present trend of the Public Grievances Cell of the Ministry distancing from these autonomous bodies needs to be changed. It is noteworthy that the Ministry is accountable to the Parliament and the CAG in respect of the autonomous bodies. If there is a Parliamentary question or a letter from a Member of Parliament regarding a grievance against any of such autonomous bodies, the reply is given by the Ministry. Similarly, the Ministry is answerable to the CAG for any audit para in respect of the autonomous bodies. Therefore, no procedural violation would take place if the Ministry takes stock of the grievances that are received in the autonomous bodies from the students, parents, teachers and the general public.

The Cell should take some research officers to identify grievance-prone areas and suggest ways of grievance prevention as well as redressal. It should also make use of the experts from research institutions to initiate innovative ways of addressing the wide range of grievances being expressed in the public domain as well as in the Cell.

No annual report on public grievances is prepared in this Ministry. However, information about the PG Cell is given briefly in the Annual Report of the Ministry. The Annual Report should carry, besides the statistical break-up of the disposal/pendency of the grievances received by the PG Cell and the autonomous bodies, the analysis of grievances received and those appearing in the media, as also, the reforms/changes done or contemplated in the light of the analysis. This will facilitate public discussion on the possible action points to address grievances and will improve the system.

The Ministry should adopt a Citizen's Charter, which should indicate its vision, mission as well as commitments in respect of service standards and mechanisms and procedures for redress available to citizens in case of non-compliance. At present, the Ministry tries to escape the exercise on the pretext that it does not have direct public interface. This perspective needs to be given a relook.

Training of staff for operating the CPGRAMS, including for the autonomous organisations of the Ministry, should be undertaken on top priority. This will make tracking of grievances possible and facilitate not only monitoring but also analysis and speedier redress of grievances across the various organisations of the Ministry.

The fact that the two Departments share a common grievance redress machinery and the Joint Secretary, Public Grievances, belongs to the Department of Higher Education, has been causing operational problems. There is no system of reporting to either of the Secretaries of the two Departments. The PG Cell, catering to both the Departments, could submit two separate reports, one for the grievances related to the Department of Higher Education and the other for the grievances related to the Department of School Education and Literacy, but that is not being done on account of staff shortage. The Public Grievances Cell is also woefully lacking in infrastructure. The Department of School Education and Literacy, it is felt, should have a separate Grievance Redress Machinery.

It is also important that 'Vigilance' and 'Public Grievances' are separated in this Ministry as the merger has been causing considerable operational problems and confusion. The separation of these two functions will eliminate recurrence of the tendency to look at every grievance from a vigilance angle. This approach should be changed in order to streamline the public grievance redress process.

A vigorous publicity campaign through the print and electronic media to make the citizens aware of the grievance redress mechanisms of the Ministry and its autonomous bodies needs to be undertaken in order to narrow the gap between the citizens and the educational administration. Various policies, programmes and schemes of the Ministry should also be publicised in order to ensure that many likely grievances can be prevented.

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting is the apex body for formulation and administration of the rules and regulations and laws relating to information, broadcasting, the press and films. This Ministry is also responsible for international co-operation in the field of mass media, films and broadcasting and interacts with its foreign counterparts on behalf of the Government of India.

A Public Grievances Cell is functioning in the main Secretariat of the Ministry headed by the Joint Secretary. Similar Cells have been set up in all the attached and

subordinate offices. Grievance Officers have also been appointed in all the subordinate organisations of the Ministry. Each media unit of the Ministry has either a Joint Secretary or a Director/Deputy Secretary nominated as a Public Grievance Officer. The fact that the Joint Secretary for Policy, Public Grievance and Administration in this Ministry has been designated as the head of the 'Internal Grievance Redressal Machinery' of the Ministry has, however, affected the efficiency of the public grievance redress mechanism of the Ministry. For the Joint Secretary, burdened with Administration of this big Ministry as well as policy matters, can manage little time to devote to the grievances. The entire work related to grievances is in effect being handled by an officer on special duty, who is of the rank of Under Secretary.

The Ministry has a Citizen's Charter, which claims that the Ministry is sensitized to redress grievances received from public and employees directly or through Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances in a responsible and effective manner. It mentions the public grievance mechanism as well as the timelines accepted by the Ministry for various stages in grievance redress. The time fixed for acknowledgement / interim reply to the petitioner is two weeks, for forwarding of the grievances / petition to the concerned authority, two weeks, for final disposal of transferred / referred cases by the concerned Ministry / Department / State and timeframe for informing the position of the outcome, three months and for cases referred to Complaint Committee on 'Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace', three months. Citizen's Charter has been formulated by all the Media Units / Autonomous Organisation / Public Sector Undertakings under the Ministry.

For any public grievance, an e-mail address has been given on the website of the Ministry. Keeping in view the need for effective monitoring of the progress in the grievance redressal, CPGRAMS is being used by the Ministry. This Ministry provided access to the CPGRAMS through its website since it was introduced by the DARPG in May 2007. However, very few grievances are received through the CPGRAMS. It has so far either cleared or settled 5 cases and 2 are pending as on date. Only one staff member, a section officer, is working for the CPGRAMS though two staff members of the

Ministry have been trained in CPGRAMS so far. The training took place just before CPGRAMS was introduced in the Ministry.

The Public Grievance Cell receives grievances from the President's Secretariat, Prime Minister's Office, DARPG, Cabinet Secretariat, Department of Pension and Pensioner's Welfare and the aggrieved directly. All grievances are diarised and pursued meticulously. However, as in several other organisations, the 'post office' style of functioning is visible here also. The grievances are forwarded to the concerned media units/offices/divisions for 'final disposal' with the direction 'to send final replies to the petitioners as per rules'. It is important to note, however, that two staff members each from the five Media Units of the Ministry have also been trained in CPGRAMS.

In order to increase the responsiveness of each media unit to the grievances being received from the staff/public, the media head of each unit has been asked to fix time, on a particular day of each month, when the pending grievances may be reviewed at the level of the media head. The web page of the media units can be accessed to ascertain the day and time designated by the media head for the purpose. Despite the various provisions for grievance redress, however, most people are not aware of the mechanism, with the result that the mechanism remains poorly utilised. There is a need to consider some aspects of the process also. The existing timeframe of two weeks for sending acknowledgements to petitioners also needs to be reduced. The reasons for rejection should invariably be sent to the petitioner whose grievance is found unacceptable. The petitioner should invariably be informed of the action taken or contemplated in case of acceptance of his grievance.

Report on grievances is put up to the Joint Secretary every month and review meetings are also held. But, the review is only statistical, that is, to keep track of the disposal or to liquidate the pendency. No review to analyse the nature of the grievances is being undertaken. Grievances which are received relate to service matters as well as programmes and administration.

In addition to the in-house review of public grievances by the Director of Public Grievances, the Secretary (I&B) should also take a monthly review meeting with all unit heads and autonomous bodies, during which an analysis of grievances received and

pending along with an analysis of grievance-prone areas should be undertaken with a view to make necessary changes in policy and procedures. During the meeting, the timeframe for sending acknowledgements and final replies to petitioners should also be test-checked to ascertain whether the same is being honoured. Director, Public Grievances, should explain the reasons for delay in case the timeframe is violated or dishonoured in case of particular grievances. The minutes of the meeting and action taken report should be put on the website of the Ministry.

Not only the statistical break-up of the disposal/pendency of the grievances received by the PG Cell and the autonomous bodies every year but also the analysis of the grievances received and the reforms/changes done or contemplated taking into account the analysis should also find place in the Annual Report and the website of the Ministry. Review reports should also be put in the public domain.

Public interface mechanisms like *lok adalats* and *jan sunvais* should be organised by the Ministry for grievances pertaining to specific organisations. Social audit should be institutionalised. The Ministry should also give wide publicity to its PG Cell and its performance through the print and electronic media, particularly using its own services, to make the citizens aware of the grievances redress mechanism of the Ministry and its organisations/companies.

Ministry of Mines

The Ministry of Mines is responsible for survey and exploration of all minerals, (other than natural gas and petroleum) for mining and metallurgy of non-ferrous metals like aluminum, copper, zinc, lead, gold, nickel etc. and for administration of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act) in respect of all mines and minerals other than coal and lignite- the Ministry of Coal administers the MMDR Act for coal and lignite. By definition, the MMDR Act does not extend to petroleum and natural gas. The Ministry is responsible for legislation for regulation of mines and development of minerals within the territory of India, and all other metals and minerals not specifically allotted to any other Ministry/Department such as aluminium, zinc, copper, gold, diamond, lead and nickel, besides planning, development and control

of and assistance to all industries dealt with by the Ministry. It has, under its administrative control, two subordinate offices, GSI Kolkata and IBM, Nagpur. The Public Sector Undertakings under the Ministry include National Aluminium Company Limited, Bhubaneswar, Hindustan Copper Limited, Kolkata, and Mineral Exploration Corporation Limited, Nagpur. The chief executives of the PSUs and the heads of the subordinate offices have been entrusted with the responsibility of strengthening the grievances redress machinery by designating senior level officers to look after the job and report directly to the chief executive/ head.

In this Ministry too, the Director of Public Grievances is a Joint Secretary. Below the Director, Public Grievances, there is an Under Secretary and a Section Officer. None of these three officers has the exclusive charge of grievances. Other responsibilities generally take precedence over their responsibility towards grievance redress. Whenever a grievance is considered to be genuine by the PG Cell of the Ministry, it is referred by it to the concerned executive authority within the Ministry or to the relevant subordinate office, autonomous organisation under it to take appropriate corrective measures. The Chief Executives of the subordinate offices and public sector undertakings have been instructed to designate a senior officer to look after the public grievance redressal. In order to discourage the tendency of the employees of the Ministry and the subordinate offices and public sector undertakings to seek outside help for redressal of their grievances related to service matters, the Ministry has designated Staff Grievances Officers in the PSUs and subordinate offices.

While the centralised portal for grievance redress(CPGRAMS) can be accessed through the website of the Ministry, no information is available on the website about the PG officer and to contact the PG Cell through the PG window. The information about the Director of Public Grievances and Under Secretary can be obtained only in the section which provides information under sec. 4 b(ii) of RTI Act 2005. That too is not easy to locate because the heads of information are not provided, only sections are mentioned. It is not possible for the common people to know which section deals with what. On the positive side, the website of the Ministry does provide access to some important Laws, Rules, Acts and forms, which can help access and thereby prevent some grievances.

Grievances received by the Ministry are not diarised and the reason is attributed to staff shortage. No timeframe has been laid down either for sending acknowledgements or for sending final replies to the petitioners. However, acknowledgements, it is claimed, are being sent to every petitioner. The Ministry claims that final replies indicating rejection or acceptance are sent within three months and for grievances, which are accepted, action taken on acceptance is also intimated to the petitioners.

Quarterly reports about the grievances received and disposed off are submitted by the subordinate offices and Public Sector Undertakings to the Ministry. During the year 2006-07 (upto December 2006), 39 cases including those of GSI, IBM, MECL, NALCO and BGML were received, out of which 16 cases were disposed off. The rate of disposal annually hovers around 45%, which is quite low but appears reasonable enough when compared to the PG Cells of several other Union Ministries/Departments. The Annual Report of the Ministry includes a section on public grievance redressal in the Chapter on 'Welfare Measures'.

Meetings to take stock of disposal of the grievances are held every quarter. The Joint Secretary, who is incharge of the Grievances Cell, reviews pending grievances on quarterly basis with Grievance Officers of PSUs and Subordinate Offices. Secretary, Mines, reviews pending grievances during the quarterly performance review meetings. Many of the grievances received in the PG Cell relate to service matters like counting of past services, payment of retirement dues etc. On mining matters, surprisingly, the PG Cell hardly receives any grievance. The Ministry has also displayed the cases of public grievances on the website of the Ministry; and these cases are updated every fortnight. The website can be accessed by any person to get the update of his/her grievance. The Director of Public Grievances reviews the pending cases of public grievances on a quarterly basis. The grievance cases are also reviewed by the Secretary in quarterly performance review meetings of the subordinate offices and public sector undertakings.

Grievances related to procedures involved in clearing of mining projects emerge from both sides, that is, from the parties involved in executing the projects and the people affected by these. While the major grievance of mining companies relates to the delay in grant of mining leases, the major grievance of those affected as well as the civil society

representatives is that the mining activities create adverse impact on air quality, hydrology, water quality, ecology, biodiversity and even on the socio-cultural conditions and public health but environmental, social and health matters are not given adequate consideration while determining the economic viability and sustainability of the mining projects. The latter assumes significance in a country, which produces as many as 89 minerals. The grievances of the farmers, who have not been paid compensation for loss of their land to mining projects, the issues of unemployment in the mining areas, post-mining closure, quality of life in mining areas and alcoholism among the mining labour have also been quite well-known. Yet these have engaged the attention of the PG Cell.

The citizens at large, including many stakeholders, are largely ignorant of the PG mechanism of this Ministry, which has not undertaken any publicity drive through the print and electronic media. It is not surprising that despite the prevalence of widespread discontent, hardly any public grievances related to the mining policy are received by the Cell. It is not that people are not aggrieved. In many cases, people take recourse to direct action methods or agitations to get their grievances redressed. The inability of the PG Cell to take initiatives in identifying possible grievances and addressing them in a proactive manner accounts for much of the public protests on a range of issues involved in the implementation of mining projects. These competing concerns have generated conflicting pressures on the Ministry and the PG Cell can think of devising appropriate mechanisms for resolving these conflicts within the broader Constitutional-legal framework. This needs to be done at an early stage, if possible, before the projects are sanctioned.

The PG Cell needs adequate infrastructure and in-house research officers who can be entrusted the task of picking up and analyzing public grievances on policy matters from the newspapers, Internet, journals and other publications and suggest solutions based on a comparative analysis of similar situations elsewhere and a regular consultation with various stakeholders. The analysis of grievances and the solutions as well as the action plan to address these should be placed in the public domain.

The Citizen's Charter of the Ministry should be revised and clear commitments regarding service standards should be made through the Citizen's Charter of the Ministry.

Timelines should be laid down for various services as well as for sending acknowledgements and final replies to the grievance petitioners. The petitioners, whose grievances are rejected, should be informed of the reasons for rejection. Similarly, the petitioners whose grievances are accepted should be informed of the action taken on acceptance of their grievances. During the meetings to be taken by Secretary to review the status of Public Grievances, Director of Public Grievances should explain undue delays in providing redress, if any. Grievances received and redressed and those raised elsewhere should be analysed with a view to address the problems with policies and procedures. At least a section officer in the Ministry should work predominantly for grievance redress and prevention. The CPGRAMS should be made effective by strengthening the back-end processes, providing training to the staff and giving publicity to the mechanism.

Adequate information about the PG mechanism and its performance should be publicized in the electronic and print media as well as other alternate mechanisms. It should also find a place on the website of the Ministry. The PG Cell should also proactively invite suggestions from the people affected by or likely to be affected by the decisions of the Ministry and analyse and respond to these suggestions actively.

Ministry of Coal

The Ministry of Coal has the overall responsibility of determining policies and strategies in respect of exploration and development of coal and lignite reserves, sanctioning of important projects of high value and for deciding all the related issues. Under the administrative control of the Ministry, these key functions are exercised through the Public Sector Undertakings, namely, Coal India Ltd. and its subsidiaries and the Neyveli Lignite Corporation Limited. Other than Coal India Ltd. and Neyveli Lignite Corporation Ltd., the Ministry of Coal also has a joint venture with the Government of Andhra Pradesh called Singareni Collieries Company Limited.

The Ministry of Coal claims that a standard public grievance and staff grievance procedure exists in the Ministry. However, discussion with the Director of Public Grievances in the Ministry revealed that the mechanism is deficient in many respects.

Unlike most of the other Ministries/Departments, the Director, Public Grievances in this Ministry is not a Joint Secretary. The Ministry has nominated another officer, Director, Administration-PRIW-II, as Director of Staff Grievances. Almost the entire bulk of staff grievances come from the employees of the Coal India Limited, its eight subsidiary companies and the staff of Neyvelli Lignite Corporation and such grievances are received by the Director, Public Grievances, and not by the Director, PRIW-II. The procedure needs to be streamlined in this respect. The total number of employees of these companies is many times more than the number of employees of the Ministry.

Following DARPG guidelines, the Ministry has fixed Wednesday as a meetingless day in order that the petitioners can meet the Director, Public Grievances, with their grievances. Similar system has been introduced in all the organizations functioning under the Ministry's administrative control. The Information and Facilitation Centre of the Ministry has been instructed to allow the petitioners to meet the officers without any prior appointment. This information has been displayed on a board on the third floor of Shastri Bhavan. However, it would have helped further if another board on the ground floor of Shastri Bhavan outside the security zone displayed the same information. A complaint box has been kept at the reception counter of the Ministry.

The website of the Ministry provides access to the Citizen's Charter. On opening it, one finds that it is the old Charter of the Department of Coal as it was under the Ministry of Coal and Mines. Even the word 'Department' has not been changed to the 'Ministry' This, when the Annual Report of the Ministry claims to have provided for an updated website. The website no doubt provides access to important laws, rules, acts, guidelines, screening committee meetings, even forms. However, the section on the public grievances takes one to the position in 2003-04. Nothing has been changed since then. The Annual Report carries a chapter on vigilance matters, but not on the public grievances. There is a mention of public grievance monitoring system in the chapter of Information Technology. However, one does not find any analysis of grievances in the Report.

Most grievances received in the Ministry are received through post and e-mail, but a few of these arrive through formal and informal in-person communication in

descending order of preference. Grievances are also received from the Cabinet Secretariat, Prime Minister's Office, Presidents' Secretariat, the DARPG and from VIPs. The CPGRAMS has not been installed in this Ministry. The lack of training is regarded by the Ministry officials as a major constraint inhibiting the exercise. The back-end processes across the various attached and subordinate offices also need to be instituted to enable swift communication flow across them and the PG Cell in the Ministry.

The role of the Public Grievances Cell of the Ministry in grievance redress appears to be that of a post office only in as much as the Cell merely forwards the grievances to the concerned company/ organisation and sends back the latter's response or the response of the subordinate unit, as the case may be, to the petitioner, without adding or modifying anything. Grievances received are diarised centrally through computer. Grievances received from people and civil society groups are classified separately. Complaints received in the organization are forwarded to the coal companies and CMPFO and are disposed off at the company's level. A copy is sent to the grievance maker. There is no timeframe specified for sending acknowledgements and interim response. No separate time schedule has been framed to attend to grievance redress at specific levels. The Ministry asserts that on the acceptance of a grievance, the grievance maker is informed of this. However, no communication is made regarding the reasons for rejection. Although the Cell is supposed to give the final view of the Ministry, nothing of that sort is actually done, unless a Member of Parliament takes up the case, thus forcing the Ministry to take a view.

Shortage of staff is a major constraint, which inhibits the streamlining of grievance redress procedures. Even the Director of Public Grievances is not engaged full time to deal with the grievances, but is instead assigned various other duties also. Often, over-burdened with his non-grievance work, the Director of Public Grievances finds little time to submit reports on grievances. Interest in undertaking any systematic review of the grievances is not evident either. The review of grievances is undertaken at regular intervals at the level of Director, PRIW-II. However, such exercises have not resulted in any preventive measures in respect of the grievance-prone areas. Employees responsible for review and analysis have not been specified at all levels. Pending cases are reviewed

every month at the level of the dealing hand and Section Officer. Often, cases get pending because information is required from coal companies which takes time.

Discussions revealed that hardly any grievances are received by the Cell on coal mining matters, or even, coal policy matters. No effort is made to invite suggestions. Informal discussions with the officials suggested the prevalence of a viewpoint that the Ministry of Coal has no public dealing. This despite the fact that all the matters it deals with, from coal block allotment, to the coal linkage (i.e. coal supply), from the mines of Coal India Limited to industrial plants, coal distribution to coal consumers, rates of coal royalty and the prices of various grades of coking and non-coking coal directly affect the public as consumers and as entrepreneurs. The Ministry, including its Public Grievances Cell, cannot continue to avert public interface mechanisms

There has been no attempt on the part of the Ministry to improve public interface through an institutional mechanisms, such as, *jan sunvais* or *lok adalats*. There is no social audit panel either. Although the organization claims to have designated an officer to pick up grievances from newspapers, it failed to give recent examples of any such reports that may have been picked up. It appears to be a dormant exercise in the Ministry. Nothing has so far been done to make stakeholders and common people aware of the existence and effectiveness of the grievance redress system. In respect of the above exercises, the organization has not articulated any constraints that might have inhibited possible attempts on its part. This appears to be on account of sheer lack of interest in the issue.

Personnel policy adopted by the coal companies and delay in clearing provident fund cases in Coal Mines Provident Fund Organisation, Dhanbad, have been important grievance-generating factors. However, the Public Grievances Cell does not do any classification of the grievances. No systematic review of the grievances registered with the PG Cell and those raised elsewhere is being done with a view to identify the grievance-prone areas and prevention strategies. As a result, the Ministry is not able to take remedial and preventive measures in such areas.

A glance at various newspaper reports pertaining to the Ministry as well as other print and electronic media reports reveals that there are many areas of grievance which

need to be addressed by the Ministry, but these do not reach the PG Cell. A major grievance against the Ministry, which needs to be addressed, pertains to the lack of transparency and clarity on policy issues and administrative procedures, this notwithstanding the first impression of transparency created by the website. The stakeholders have very little information about the plans of the Ministry of Coal with regard to improved longwall mining practices, coal bed methane exploitation, fly ash utilization, recycling of waste and solid waste disposal, clean coal technologies, environmental impact of coal mining, development of infrastructure around coal mining areas, research and development initiatives in coal exploration and mining, exploration of off-shore coal reserves, land reclamation in dormant coal mining areas, improvement in the quality of life of coal labour, etc.

Another important grievance against the Ministry, which emanates from the lack of transparency, is on account of its failure to put in place the reasons for rejection of allotment of captive coal blocks. A party whose application is rejected does not have the right to be informed of the reasons for rejection. The rejection is not even conveyed to the parties; only the list of parties which are allotted the blocks is brought out. Given that the demand for captive coal blocks is very high as compared to supply, this creates considerable unease. It is necessary that the Ministry should convey the reasons of rejection of an application.

The absence of clear guidelines for fixing charges for various services, such as, providing geological reports to prepare mining plans of private parties is another source of grievances. Grievances also exist with regard to the Standing Linkage Committees (SLCs), long-term and short-term. The SLC (long-term) considers the coal needs of consumers at the planning stage and links the needs in the long-term perspective from a rational source after examining the factors like quantity and quality required, time-frame, location of the consuming plant, transport logistics, development plan for the coal mine etc. The SLCs for power and cement function in the Ministry of Coal whereas the SLC for steel functions in the Ministry of Steel. The parties whose coal requirement is not considered or met by the concerned SLC have no way to know why their coal demand was rejected. Similar grievances exist in respect of the SLCs (short-term) deciding the monthly dispatch plans in quarterly meetings.

Grievances pertaining to the interest of the small consumers of coal are important too. There are innumerable tiny industrial units and eating houses whose coal requirement is not very large. Such small consumers, numbering around a million or so, are not expected to be considered by the Standing Linkage Committee. They get their supply through wholesalers. These small consumers have no means to know how the Ministry of Coal ensures that the wholesalers do not resort to hoarding and create artificial shortage, thereby, putting the small consumers into jeopardy. Land acquisition, rehabilitation of displaced families, etc., are also a source of public grievance and need to be addressed systematically with a view to not only redress but also prevention.

The Ministry has not set up any mechanism of obtaining feedback and suggestions from citizens on the quality of the services provided to them and on the areas in which they expect improvement. No forum has been provided where the client groups or citizens can express their opinion. No programme of conducting independent surveys on citizen's perceptions and assessment of its performance is there, which may lead to systemic changes, coal sector reforms, procedural improvements, improvements in accessibility of the client groups to the services and changes in policies.

The entire structure of the PG mechanism in the Ministry needs to be overhauled. As a first step, a Joint Secretary of the Ministry may be appointed the Director of Public Grievances, as has been done in other Ministries/Departments. The aptitude of the officers towards public grievance redress should be a major consideration in the appointment. The Cell should regularly analyze the Parliament questions received in this Ministry and identify the grievance-prone areas. The grievances being expressed in the internet, newspapers, and other publications should also be picked up by this Cell and analyzed with a view to redress and prevention.

Citizen's Charter of the Ministry should be revised and timeframe should be laid down for sending acknowledgements and final replies to the petitioners. It should be ensured that the petitioners, whose grievances are rejected, are informed of the reasons for rejection. Similarly, the petitioners whose grievances have been accepted should be informed of the action taken on the acceptance of their grievances.

A review of the grievances received by the Ministry, the autonomous and other bodies of the Ministry as well as the coal companies should be undertaken by the Secretary. During the meeting the status of public grievances and analysis of grievances with a view to identify grievance-prone areas and actions taken or contemplated to deal with these should be analysed. Besides, the timeframes and other accepted standards should be test-checked to ascertain whether the same are being honoured. The Director, Public Grievances, should explain the reasons for delay in case the timeframe is violated or dishonoured in respect of particular grievances. Operation of the CPGRAMS should be started immediately and training of staff for operating the CPGRAMS should be undertaken on top priority.

The Ministry of Coal should launch a publicity campaign through the print and electronic media to make the citizens aware of the grievance redress mechanism of the Ministry and its organisations/companies in order to narrow the gap between the citizens and the government. Besides the statistical break-up of the disposal/ pendency of the grievances received by the PG Cell and the autonomous bodies/coal companies analysis of the grievances received and the reforms/changes introduced or contemplated taking into account the analysis should also find place in the Annual Report and the website. This will give opportunity to the Members of Parliament and the public to address the issues appropriately.

Ministry of Textiles

The Ministry of Textiles is responsible for policy formulation, planning, development export promotion and trade regulation in respect of the textile sector. The developmental activities of the Ministry are oriented towards making adequate quantities of raw material available to all sectors of the textile industry and augmenting the production of fabrics at reasonable prices from the organized and decentralized sectors of the industry. Towards this objective, the Ministry lays down guidelines for a planned and harmonious growth of various sectors of the industry. Special emphasis is given to the development of handlooms in view of its vast employment potential. The Ministry monitors the techno-economic status of the industry and provides the requisite policy

framework for modernization and rehabilitation. It coordinates the activities of Textiles Research Associations and lends financial support to them for undertaking research and development. The Ministry has two attached offices- the Office of the Development Commissioner for Handlooms and the Office of the Development Commissioner for Handicrafts- and two subordinate offices- the Office of the Textile Commissioner and the Office of the Jute Commissioner- besides nine export promotion councils, three autonomous bodies, three statutory bodies, nine public sector undertakings, eight advisory bodies and eight textile research associations.

The Director of Public Grievances in this Ministry is a Joint Secretary. Besides dealing with grievances, the Joint Secretary also looks after administration as well as all policy matters related to the textile industry. The Grievance Cell is headed by a Junior Analyst who reports to a Deputy Secretary, whose main charge is public grievances. Grievances Officers have also been nominated in the attached/subordinate offices of the Ministry, such as, the Office of the Development Commissioner for Handicrafts, the Office of the Development Commissioner for Handlooms, the Office of the Textile Commissioner and the Office of the Jute Commissioner. In order to monitor the functioning of the PGRAMS, in the Ministry of Textiles as well as its organizations, a Grievance Committee headed by the Director of Public Grievances has been formed. A Deputy Secretary, in charge of grievances, is a member of this Committee. The heads of all attached and subordinate offices (concerned with grievance cases) of the Ministry of Textiles or their representatives are also the members of this Committee.

The Ministry of Textiles has a Citizen's Charter and a window on public/staff grievances which gives details about timelines. The Ministry has no immediate plan to start CPGRAMS; nor has it planned their staff training for the purpose. A complaint box is placed at the Facilitation Centre. Names of public grievance officers in various organizations of the Ministry and the status of grievance cases is also given for the monitoring of PGRM, Grievances are registered through post, informal personal contact, the e-mail of the contact officer in the PG Cell and the website of the Ministry, in that order of preference. The Ministry has no immediate plan to start CPGRAMS; nor has it planned the staff training for the purpose. Grievances received are not diarised centrally. Lack of trained staff to handle the computerized system of grievance redress and lack of

system to process the grievances thus received have been a problem area. There has been an increase in the number of grievances in recent years, the identified reasons being increased pressure of demand on services and less personnel to handle vital tasks.

The Charter prescribes the timelines to be seven days for the issue of acknowledgements and two months for disposal of grievances. Seven days is too long to issue an acknowledgement and needs to be revised in consultation with the stakeholders. Acknowledgements, containing necessary information like the number of days in which grievance would be redressed and contact points for follow up, are not being issued, though the organization favours such a practice for the future. Even though timeframe has been fixed for giving reply to the grievance, the same is not strictly followed. Cases are settled and closed when the reply submitted by the concerned offices is deemed satisfactory and approved as such by the Director of Public Grievances. Nothing is being done to fix accountability of officials responsible to ensure adherence to the time schedule fixed for dealing with the grievances.

The Director of Public Grievances reviews the status of pending grievance cases. If necessary, the files related to pending grievances are called for and the cases are settled in the meeting itself. Despite the arrangement, pending cases have persisted. Significantly, all of the nine public grievances received in the Ministry during March-April 2007 are pending. Disposal rate for staff grievances is also quite poor, with only nine out of the forty-eight grievances received during the period having been disposed off. Delay in redress of grievances is explained in terms of the fact that redress involves legal matters, which cannot be tackled by the organization. Lack of statutory powers to control the offending parties or plain inattention to the task or plain inability to handle the complex issues involved are considered important reasons for redress failures.

To monitor the functioning of PGRAMS in the Ministry of Textiles as well as its organisations, periodical meetings of the Committee are held. In these meetings, the Director of Public Grievances reviews the status of the pending grievance cases. If necessary, the files related to the pending grievances are called for and cases are settled in the meeting itself. This organization is receiving both staff and public grievances. Grievances from newspapers are presently not being picked although these carry many

such reports. The reason cited for this is lack of manpower, particularly computer-trained staff.

It is noteworthy that not enough public grievances are being received concerning the interests of poor weavers/artisans. The Ministry does provide for the organisation of direct public interface. However, only one public grievance meeting was organised last year which was attended by the Director of Public Grievances, Deputy Secretary and Junior Analyst from the official side. Concerned heads of organisations were also invited. Staff and public grievances were discussed in detail in the meeting. Decisions were taken and forwarded with the approval of the Director of Public Grievances and sent to the concerned sections for approval. No social audit panel has been constituted. The Ministry does not have any suggestions to make on improving the system. No analysis with regard to the suggestions being received from the citizens is being done

No systematic review and analysis of grievances is undertaken although the functioning of the PGRM is monitored by the Grievance Committee. For the effective functioning of the grievance redress mechanism, it is important that a monthly review of the grievances received by the Ministry is undertaken by the Secretary. The heads of the autonomous bodies/organisations of the Ministry should attend the review meeting. During this meeting, Director of Public Grievances should explain the reasons for delay in case the timeframe is violated or dishonoured in case of particular grievances. To address the issue of increasing grievances, it should be ensured that the petitioners, whose grievances have been rejected, are informed of the reasons for rejection. The review meeting should also examine the pattern of grievances and changes in policy/ procedures and their implementation process required for remedial and preventive purposes.

Adequate staff and infrastructure support to the PG Cell is also essential to ensure quick response as well as to undertake systematic analysis of grievances which appear in newspapers, periodicals and electronic media and plan interventions for grievance prevention. Training of staff for operationalising the CPGRAMS should be assigned top priority. Organisation of back-end support requires that training must extend to various levels in the organisation. It is also important to strengthen networking across

organisations and within the organisation in order to effectively respond to the grievances.

Publicity through the print and electronic media needs to be given by this Ministry to the grievance redress mechanism of the Ministry and the organisations under its control so that the citizens become aware of the grievance redress mechanism of the Ministry and its autonomous bodies. The Annual Report of the Ministry contains a chapter on vigilance, not public grievances. Besides the statistical break-up of the disposal/pendency of the grievances received by the PG Cell every year, analysis of grievances and the changes effected or contemplated taking into account the analysis should also find place in the Annual Report and the website of the Ministry. This will facilitate public debate on the effectiveness of the PG mechanism and plan appropriate interventions if needed.

The Ministry should also make its commitments known through the Citizen's Charter. Charter should be made available in regional and local languages. Since an important the client group of the organization is the handloom weavers and handicraft workers, most of whom are below poverty line, they are not expected to have functional knowledge of English. A major grievance of these sections has been that the organization has not translated the guidelines of its schemes in Hindi and regional languages in order that they make use of the information. Disbursing schemes widely, particularly in rural areas through the Block Development Offices, Zila Panchayat offices, Village Panchayats, Agriculture Extension Offices and Post Offices etc. is important. Effort in this regard may help prevent several grievances. It is also important to decentralize the grievance redress machinery.

Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas is entrusted with the responsibility of exploration and production of oil and natural gas, their refining, distribution and marketing, import, export, and conservation of petroleum products and liquified natural gas. The Ministry has 14 PSUs, one subsidiary and eight other organizations.

The PG Cell is integrated with the Information and Facilitation Counter of the Ministry. It is headed by the Director of Public Grievances and supervised by a Consultant who is a retired member of the organization. It has full time staff to work on public grievances. The Ministry receives public grievances from Directorate of Public Grievances, Cabinet Secretariat and DARPG in addition to the grievances being received directly from the aggrieved by post and e-mail. Grievances received are forwarded to the concerned PSUs. Replies received from the companies are sent to the grievance makers.

This Ministry operationalised CPGRAMS in June 2008, which has been made available through its website. Only one staff member of the Ministry has been trained in CPGRAMS so far. The training took place just before CPGRAMS was introduced in the Ministry. However, a few staff members of the Autonomous Bodies and PSUs were trained. Most of the grievances being received in the CPGRAMS, however, pertain to the autonomous bodies and PSUs. In total, 374 grievances have since been received; of these, only 12 could be settled. The Ministry has so far cleared or settled 5 cases and 2 are pending as on date. Datewise information was not available immediately. The receipt and pendency figures were not readily available. Only one staff member is working for the Ministry's CPGRAMS. There is no systematization of the back-end processes in the attached and subordinate organizations of the Ministry to facilitate information flow, which is essential if CPGRAMS is to be successful.

There are no institutional arrangements in place, such as, *jan sunvais* or *lok adalats*, for improving public interface. No efforts have been made to give publicity to the PG system. The Annual Report of the Ministry, which is submitted to the Parliament, includes a brief section on grievances. Most grievances received in the organization are regarding distribution of liquified petroleum gas, particularly erratic supply of domestic gas and dealership. Staff grievances are also received regarding service matters. The Ministry has not yet introduced any mechanism for inviting suggestions from its client groups, stakeholders and the citizens. Nor has it designated any officer to pick up grievances from the newspapers and analyse them. No grievances are picked from newspaper columns, which is a major omission.

There is no timeframe fixed for sending acknowledgement to the petitioners- it may take more than five working days according to the response received from the Ministry. The acknowledgement does not indicate the number of days within which the grievance would be addressed and the contact points for follow up. However, the timeframe of three months has been laid down for giving final replies to the petitioners. Timelines for redress at different levels have also been provided. There is, however, no system in place to ascertain the satisfaction of the grievance maker with the final decision/action taken. As per claim made by the organization, the reasons for rejection are communicated along with the decision. No institutional arrangement for undertaking a systematic review of grievances received has been in place. Employees responsible for review and analysis exercises have not been identified. The communications being received in the Ministry are not even being classified. No suggestion processing exercise is attempted in the organization. The organization has not attempted to identify and involve stakeholders in any significant way.

In order to improve the performance of the Ministry, specifying timelines and strengthening monitoring on the part of the PG Cell to ensure adherence to the specifications is extremely important. Besides, a regular reporting system needs to be set up to ensure continuous monitoring of the decentralized mechanisms. The Grievance Cell, which is part of the Information and Facilitation Counter, did not even have an internet connection at the time of the visit. Regular interaction, both formal and informal, between the Ministry and the PSUs needs to be instituted for better communication flow with regard to the constraints being experienced and the citizen grievances being received.

Most important, for effective outcomes, the grievance redress mechanism needs to be made available at the very points of distribution where citizens are likely to come up with complaints. In a recent initiative, three Oil Marketing Public Sector Undertakings (OMCs) under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas viz. IOC, BPCL and HPCL have separately provided toll free numbers through call centers for complaint registration and follow up on the complaints, thus introducing a massive public grievance redressal mechanism across the country for domestic LPG, petrol and

diesel users. The implementation and outcome of this, however, remains to be seen. Publicity to the mechanism is crucial for its effectiveness.

Department of Chemicals and Petrochemicals, Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers

The Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers has two Departments- the Department of Chemicals and Petrochemicals and the Department of Fertilizers. Both these Departments have their separate PG Cells, each headed by a Joint Secretary of the respective Department. The Department of Chemicals and Petrochemicals deals with policies relating to drugs and pharmaceuticals, dyestuff and dye intermediaries, all organic and inorganic chemicals, molasses (pricing and distribution), petrochemicals, synthetic rubber and plastics. The Department has three functional divisions, viz. chemicals, petrochemicals, drugs and pharmaceuticals (National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority). There are two Public Sector Undertakings in the chemicals sector and five of them in the pharmaceutical sector. Three organizations receive financial grants from the latter.

The Grievance Cell of the Department of Chemicals and Petrochemicals is headed by Joint Secretary, Administration, who also functions as Director of Public Grievances. This arrangement is expected to ensure expeditious redressal of grievances. There is also the online facility to lodge grievances through the website. The CPGRAMS has been installed on the Department's website since January 2008. However, the system has not yet become fully functional though the Department is keen to develop it. Staff training has taken place and is planned to be expanded in near future. On average, about 25 grievances are received every month through the CPGRAMS. Citizens can lodge complaint or give their suggestions through a toll-free helpline too.

There are no direct interface mechanisms, such as, *jan sunvai* or *lok adalat*, which may result in the effective ventilation of grievances and possible solutions that the stakeholders consider to be important. Although the Department indicated that it is working on instituting these, specific commitment of the Department in respect of the expected time by which this arrangement will be put in place is not evident yet. There is a

separate staff designated to pick up grievances from newspaper columns. However, lack of manpower constraints the exercise.

The most common means adopted by people to send in grievances to the PG Cell, in descending order of preference are: the e-mail, post, informal/formal personal contact with PG officer and telephone/fax. Grievances received in the Department are diarsied manually through register. Though the organization has not favored the setting up of help lines/ call centers, it expressed the need such innovations in the grievance redress system. Grievance Cell monitors grievances related to the availability, quality, pricing, policy matters, etc.

As per inputs received from the Department, the number of grievances received in the Cell has been increasing over the years. The nature of grievances being received also shows a change due to new policies and decisions being taken as well as the increased citizen awareness about their rights. One of the reasons for the increase in the grievances registered is that new channels have been opened up for people to send in grievances. The creation of Public Grievance Cell, the installation of local PGRAMS, the CPGRAMS, better education and increasing citizen awareness about their rights are all considered to be the contributory factors in the process. However, it is felt that since CPGRAMS has been introduced, it would be more fruitful if all grievances and suggestions were routed through it and the local PGRAMS was withdrawn.

Communications received in the Department are classified into grievances, requests, suggestions, allegations and matters needing legal redress. Those received from professional associations and the general public are taken up separately. Acknowledgement is sent within three working days. The Department does not follow the practice of indicating the number of days in which the grievance would be addressed and the contact points for follow up in the acknowledgement sent. It is considering the possibility of reducing the timeframe that has been fixed for sending a reply to the grievance maker that his grievance has been accepted or rejected.

Discussions with the officials revealed that although a review mechanism exists, no fixed periodicity has been laid down for review meetings. Reviews are undertaken at the level of the Deputy Secretary and Joint Secretary from time to time, depending on the

gravity of the situation- at the time of response, six months had already lapsed after the last such meeting. The Department admits the desirability of holding such exercises at shorter intervals for better impact. Delay in redress of grievances is attributed to the fact that redress involves other organisations that cannot be regulated for the purpose and legal matters that cannot be addressed by the organisation, besides lack of manpower. Pending cases are analysed by the Deputy Secretary and Joint Secretary in the Public Grievance Cell. Cases are pending because they are either sub-judice or there is lack of manpower to attend to them.

Timeframe for grievance redress at various levels in the organisation has been specified and employees have been identified for review and analyses exercises. However, the timeframe for sending acknowledgements to the petitioners and for sending final replies to the petitioners should be strictly adhered to by the Department. The Department should ensure that the reasons for rejection are invariably sent to a petitioner whose grievance is found unacceptable. The petitioner should invariably be informed of the action taken or contemplated on the acceptance of his grievance. Accountability for these purposes is not rigorously enforced through any specific means. The Department is not doing any systematic review of grievances from the point of view of gaining insights into the nature of grievances being received with a view to introduce policy and procedural improvements. Suggestions, we were informed, are frequently received from the stakeholders and citizens on various issues. Suggestion processing is also pursued and inputs, it is claimed, are communicated to the concerned bodies where they are taken up.

A large part of the grievances received in the organization are with regard to prices of drugs and pharmaceuticals. There is pressure from some stakeholders for change in the Drugs Price Control Order. Grievances are also received concerning laws and the attitude of officials. The grievances being received in the CPGRAMS are mostly staff grievances. Rarely the CPGRAMS receives grievances on issues like the pricing of chemicals, export or import of chemicals, the problems being faced by the chemical industry of the country and chemical policy of the Government of India.

A monthly review of the grievances received by the Department and the autonomous bodies should be undertaken by the Secretary of the Department. During the

review meetings, the status of public grievances, the Director of Public Grievances should explain the reasons for delay if the timeframe is violated or dishonoured in case of particular grievances. Besides the statistical break-up of the disposal/pendency of the grievances received by the PG Cell and the autonomous bodies, the analysis of these and the reforms/changes done or contemplated taking into account the analysis should also find place in the Annual Report as well as on the Department website.

The Department admits that the present arrangement for receiving and processing of public grievances needs to be improved. Publicity to the grievance mechanism is also considered important for the purpose of improving the effectiveness of the mechanism. The organization feels a strong need for increasing awareness, as also, facilities in respect of grievance redressal. The need to increase the frequency of newspaper advertisements about the public grievance redress system is also emphasised. However, lack of funds, it is underlined, inhibits publicity exercises. This needs to be addressed.

Department of Telecommunications

The Department of Technology functions within the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. The telecom services have been recognized the world-over as an important tool for the socio-economic development of a nation and hence telecom infrastructure is treated as a crucial factor to realize the socio-economic objectives in India. Accordingly, the Department of Telecom has been formulating developmental policies for the accelerated growth of the telecommunication services. The Department is also responsible for grant of licenses for various telecom services like Unified Access Service Internet and VSAT service and for frequency management in the field of radio communication in close coordination with the international bodies. It also enforces wireless regulatory measures by monitoring wireless transmission of all users in the country.

Telecom service sector was opened for private participation in New Technology Policy, 1994, for the first time. Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, which gave the exclusive rights to the Central Government, was also amended to accommodate the private sector to operate Telecom Services. In NTP, 1999, the basic telephony was also opened for private

sector. The Citizen's Charter of the Department of Telecommunications has, however, not been accordingly revised. The operative part of the Department of Telecommunications was converted into a company, BSNL, in October 2000. Prior to corporatisation, a large number of statutory functions of the Central Government were performed by the field units of DoT in addition to the network operations. To perform the statutory functions of the government, a need was felt to have residual set ups of Department of Telecom in the field. Therefore, thirty-four Vigilance Telecom Monitoring(VTM) Cells were created covering twenty-four telecom circles and ten big cities. The VTM Cells have since August 2008 been changed to Telecom Enforcement, Resource and Monitoring (TERM) Cells among other responsibilities, redress grievances of subscribers in respect of deficiency by various operators.

Discussions with staff at the PG Cell revealed that grievances are received through post as well as e-mail. The PGRAMS is functioning quite effectively in the Department. There is designated staff to receive and process complaints through the PGRAMS, telephonically, through post, as also, in person. Although there is a shortage of staff in the PG Cell, an attempt is made to send the acknowledgements to grievance makers promptly. Interim responses are also sent to the grievance makers on specific request by them and also at the initiative of the staff of the organization. Urgency in this regard depends on the manpower available to dedicate to the task. This could be regularized as a practice pertaining to all cases only if the staff strength was increased. Action taken on the grievance can be seen electronically at the user-end. Scanned copies of the action taken can also be accessed through the docket number, which the grievance maker is assigned on registering his grievance. Both staff and public grievances are received in the Cell.

However, the PG Cell needs to be revamped. In order to make the PG Cell effective, the Staff Relations Cell, the PG Cell and the Legal Cell need to be given clearly earmarked functions and clearly specified accountability. There is diffused accountability and little role clarity between the Staff Relations Cell, the Legal Cell and the PG Cell. Consequently, the PG Cell is saddled with court cases, which are increasing day by day as the subscriber base is increasing, although the task belongs to the Legal Cell. Only those court cases that concern public grievances should be given over to the PG Cell. In

the week before the visit, 4303 cases had been received, out of which 2358 were cleared, and 2000 were pending. 2000 cases are found to be pending on any working day. Court cases have to be defended before various Courts, which is considered an unsavory preoccupation at the PG Cell. Those cases that concern staff matters should go to the Staff Relations Cell.

It was further asserted by the Ministry officials that staff and public grievances should be separated. The staff grievances should be handled by the Staff Relations Cell reporting to the DoPT. Presently, the staff is using multiple sources to register grievances, that is, the PGRAMS, the CPGRAMS, through the DPG, and Cabinet Secretariat, in the hope that it would be attended somewhere. In effect, however, due to multiple channels for redress, no one is clearly accountable for providing redress. It was expressed that most staff grievances arise because rules and regulations were not properly applied by the concerned authority and negligence is willful since it is convenient for the authorities to wait for the aggrieved to approach the Court. If authorities in the Staff Relations Cell were made clearly accountable for omissions and commissions, reporting to the DoPT, much of the present confusion would be addressed.

From the viewpoint of the service users, there is also a need to empower the PG Cell with statutory powers to deal with offenders who are the private operators, such as, Airtel, Hutch etc. With liberalization, the role of the Ministry has been restricted to policy making alone. The operations part has gone to BSNL, MTNL, etc. They have a Citizen's Charter at their level, which gives the three-tier arrangement for lodging complaints- Call Centre of concerned service provider; Nodal Officer of concerned service provider; and the Appellate Authority within the company of service provider. In case, the grievance is not redressed after exhausting all these three levels of the concerned service provider, the complainant may approach Public Grievance Cell of Department. The process is cumbersome and time consuming with no guarantee of redress for the aggrieved at the level of the service provider. Authorities are complacent as they wait for the consumer to approach the court with his case. They do not feel obligated to settle at their level.

TRAI undertakes collective reviews of grievances, that is, if 10 complaints dealing with the same problem were received it would look into the problem. But for one

complainant there is no guarantee of relief. The PG Cell does not have the statutory power to watch over deterioration in service quality standards at the level of the private operator. They could call for a file after 60 days lapse and can take action with the permission of the Secretary in charge which cannot be done for each individual case. It is a queer dilemma the staff of the Department is facing. They are accountable for the services they no longer provide directly and lack statutory powers to control the actual service providers, which are BSNL, MTNL, Airtel, and Vodafone etc. Bill processing has been outsourced to the Standard Chartered bank. There are still complaints about wrong bills/ inflated bills, etc. Hence, the monitoring function of the DoT needs to be strengthened vis a vis the private service providers for reasons of public interest.

Through the Citizen's Charter, necessary information about certain basic rules and procedures regarding which repetitive grievances are received in large numbers, and the process of lodging complaints and information about appellate authorities in respective areas should be provided to the people. The private service providers, that is, Airtel, BSNL etc. should be required to make their Citizen's Charters as per instructions issued in this regard by TRAI, for, on account of liberalization, DoT is not a direct service provider any more. The user survey carried out at two Telephone Exchanges brought to light the problems in the redressal of grievances that are arising since the privatization of specific DoT services.

Conclusion:

The above case studies clearly suggest the wide variations in the mechanisms instituted public grievance mechanism across the Ministries and Departments. While some Ministries/Departments have been quite indifferent to the needs of an effective public grievance redress and monitoring system, and have a mere ritualistic presence on the public grievance redress map of the government of India, others have gone ahead to institutionalise the mechanisms and processes and publicise them too. However, such cases are limited and many of the Ministries and Departments have not been inclined to follow the guidelines which have been issued by DARPG from time to time. The CPGRAMS has not been operationised by many of them. These have not instituted any public interface mechanisms for grievance redress like *jan sunvais* and *lok adalats*. No

social audit panel has been constituted despite instructions to that effect. No effort to scan and address grievances appearing in the media or internet are undertaken in most cases.

While a Citizen's Charter has been adopted by most Ministries and Departments, in most cases the Charter has not been revised for long and contains information which no longer carries any validity. Many of the recent developments in respect of the structure and powers of the Ministry/ Department are not incorporated in the Charter. Even when the Charter is not redundant, Charter commitments in respect of the grievance redress mechanism, especially in terms of review and response timelines are missing in most cases. Review meetings are not conducted regularly, and there is little effort to undertake a serious grievance analysis and response system analysis with a view to improve grievance redress and prevention exercise. To the extent this has happened, one finds little role being played in this exercise by the PG Cell. The effectiveness of the Cell has been constrained by the lack of authority within the Ministry/ Department as well as lack of resources and capacity building initiatives. Publicity to the CPGRAMS in particular and the grievance redress system in general, using media, the website of the organisation as well as other public avenues has also not been paid much attention by most of the Ministries/ Departments. Some of them do have a window on public grievances on their website, but this does not carry much information and cannot create enough sense of public trust unless carefully planned. The institution of CPGRAMS can help the process of bringing the citizen to the centre stage by making the organisation responsive and accountable. But this too requires the strengthening of networking across the Ministry/ Department and their organisations.

IV

Public Grievances Redress and Monitoring System: Case Study of Select Organisations

This chapter looks at the grievance redress mechanism and processes in a few organisations of the Ministry of Labour and Employment and the Ministry of Water Resources. The case studies have been selected for detailed discussion in view of the responses obtained from these and the ground for some comparison which these offer. It is not possible to cover all the organisations which are attached to these because of the lack of information made available by them about their PG system- in certain cases, this is because the very fact of there not being a well developed and effective mechanism for grievance redress in existence in these organisations.

Organisations of the Ministry of Labour and Employment

This Ministry of Labour has four attached offices, namely (a) Office of the Chief Labour Commissioner (Central), New Delhi, (b) Directorate General Employment and Training (DGET), New Delhi, (c) Labour Bureau, Shimla and (d) Directorate General, Factory Advice and Labour Institute (DGFASLI), Mumbai. The website of Labour Bureau has, *inter alia*, a statement titled 'Information of Right to Information Act' which includes the name, e-mail id and office telephone number of two Joint Directors, who have been nominated as Public Grievance Officers. Unfortunately, the matters coming under the charge of these two officers have been indicated on the website in abbreviations. With great difficulty, it became clear that one of the officers is concerned with grievances related to Consumer Price Index, agricultural labour, rural labour, wage rates and some other matters expressed in abbreviations. The other is concerned with grievances related to 'HO' and it was not clear what is meant by the abbreviation 'HO'.

The website of DGFASLI running into fifteen pages does not even mention public grievance, making it doubtful whether this organization has any public grievance redress mechanism. No information regarding the public grievance redress mechanism in DGET and Office of the Chief Labour Commissioner (Central) could be obtained from any source.

This Ministry has nine subordinate offices, which include the Directorate General Mines Safety, Dhanbad and eight offices of Welfare Commissioners at Allahabad, Bangalore, Bhubaneswar, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Jabalpur, Karmi (Bihar) and Nagpur. No information regarding the public grievance redress mechanism in any of these nine Subordinate Offices could be obtained from any source. Even the Annual Report of DGMS is silent about the public grievance redress mechanism in the organization.

The Ministry also has four autonomous organisations, namely (a) ESIC (b) EPFO (c) V.V. Giri National Labour Institute and (d) Central Board for Workers' Education (CBWE). ESIC and EPFO have an elaborate and comprehensive system of public grievance redress, which is discussed below in some details. The CBWE has an institutional arrangement in place to address the grievances of the employees. The organization handles grievances at the Regional, Zonal and Headquarter levels. The CBWE has set up a Committee on sexual harassment of women at the workplace. CBWE has adopted a time frame of two weeks for issue of acknowledgements/ interim replies to petitioners, two weeks for forwarding of grievances to the competent authorities, three months for the final disposal and issue of final replies to petitioners, three months for forwarding of cases to the Committee on sexual harassment of women at the workplace.

One of the organizations connected to this Ministry is the Office of the Protector General of Emigrants. The grievances that this office receives relate to the overcharging of fees, repatriation of workers without giving them any work, workers getting stranded in foreign countries and foreign employers not adhering to the terms and conditions of employment initially offered through the local recruiting agents. The Protector General of Emigrants holds public hearings on every Tuesday and Friday and after hearing the complainants and the recruiting agents, appropriate decisions are taken. Majority of the complaints are settled on the day of the hearing. In the event of the agents not complying

with the directions of the Protector General of Emigrants', immediate action is taken for suspension/cancellation of their certificate.

Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO):

The Public Grievances Redress Mechanism in EPFO as well as in the ESIC is far more elaborate compared to the tiny Public Grievance Cell of the Ministry. The EPFO headquarters in New Delhi, as also, its 32 regional offices and 72 sub-regional centers across the country are equipped with Facilitation Centres, Public Relations Officers and supporting staff that can be approached by the members of EPFO to get their grievances registered and redressed. The Public Relations Officers (PROs) at the Reception Counters are available on all working days to handle the grievances of the visiting members. All communications received except grievances are sent to the respective division. Grievances are classified into public grievances and staff grievances.

EPFO has a two-tier organizational structure for redress of public grievances. One, at the head office level is known as the Customer Service Division, which is headed by an Additional Central Provident Fund Commissioner. He is assisted by the Regional Provident Fund Commissioner, Assistant Provident Fund Commissioner and the PRO. The other units at field office level are generally headed by Regional Provident Fund Commissioners. Some of these units are headed by the Assistant Provident Fund Commissioners. All these field units get assistance of the PRO as well.

The Regional Provident Fund Commissioner of every region and the Officer Incharge of the sub-regional offices/sub-accounts offices of the EPFO remain available in person, even without prior permission, to the members of the Fund for redress of their grievances on all working days throughout the office hours. Besides this, the Regional Provident Fund Commissioner who is the Incharge of the Customer Service Division at EPFO Headquarters attends to the grievances of the members of the Fund in person on all working days throughout the working hours. The members who are not satisfied can meet the Additional Central Provident Fund Commissioner (Customer Service Division) or the Central Provident Fund Commissioner. All grievances received by the EPFO Head Office in the Customer Service Division are monitored fortnightly with IT system support.

The grievances received from the members of EPFO relating to the settlement of claims, issue of account slips, matters arising out of ‘non-compliance- etc., are required to be redressed by the field offices. Feedback of all such grievances obtained from the field offices is conveyed to the members of the Fund along with the status/disposal of the grievances. The grievances received through the EPFO website are acknowledged at the Corporate Headquarters through e-mail and forwarded to the concerned Officer Incharge of the appropriate field office on the same day. Regular monitoring ensures speedy disposal of such grievances.

EPFO holds *lok adalat* every month on a fixed day. All field offices conduct *bhavishya nidhi adalats* for redressal of complex nature of grievances of members of the Fund. The *bhavishya nidhi adalats* are held on the same day. The grievances, which appear in various newspapers, are also registered and the concerned field office is advised to redress the grievance.

The organisation not only analyses the grievances but also publicly shares its analysis of the reasons for grievances through the Annual Report of the Ministry of Labour. An analysis of grievances being received at EPFO offices, presented in the Annual Report of the Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2007-08, relate to settlement of claims of Provident Fund, Employees’ Pension Scheme, Employees’ Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme, transfer of provident fund account, advances; issue of annual statement of accounts; non-coverage of employees for EPF benefits; incorrect PF settlement; pension released being less than entitlement; pension arrears not being remitted; pension not being released from due date.

The Annual Report further reveals that the delay in settlement of claims is mainly due to deficiencies in respect of attestation of forms by unauthorized officials, absence of addresses of the attesting authority other than the employer, incorrect provident fund account number, difference in name of member and his/ her parentage in official records, incomplete postal address, incomplete information and address of bank, non-affixing of revenue stamp on the advance receipt, non-submission of contribution details through specified forms by the establishment, non-furnishing of relevant documents prescribed for advance, non-submission of relevant documents with application for pension, non-

signing across the revenue stamp on the advance receipt, or because the establishment is in liquidation.

In many of these cases, information dissemination about the requirements can help resolve the problems. In some others, procedural changes may be required. PG Cell may make a systematic review of procedures and information dissemination practices to address these. To reduce the number of public grievances, the organization has taken various measures. In order to create awareness about the provisions of the Employees Provident Funds (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1952 among the members and employers, brochures and pamphlets on schemes under the Act are provided. Seminars are arranged to educate the employers, employees and their various representatives. Public functions are organized by field offices to provide a copy of the pension payment order (PPO) and related papers to retiring employee members on the day of retirement. Death cases are settled on priority basis and widows are requested to attend the function and get the pension papers.

The organization plans to have radical changes in the existing business processes through 're-inventing' EPF India. This is expected to retool the accounting procedure from single to double entry to meet international accounting system standards and enable the process with information and communication technology to set up a high availability country-wide information system layer.

Employees' State Insurance Corporation:

The mandate of the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) is implementation of the Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948, which provides for medical care and treatment to the insured persons and their families. It includes providing assistance during sickness and maternity, compensation for employment injury, pension for dependants on the death of workers due to employment injury, etc. to the employees covered under the ESIC Act.

The ESI Scheme, being a multi-level service, intensive social security programme has been organized for workers. An estimated 3.5 lakh beneficiaries visit the service outlets at the grassroots level daily either for treatment or for availing cash benefits. The Corporation has, therefore, set up a system for redressal of public grievances and

complaints at various levels. Grievances can be reported in writing, on telephone, by post or in person to the designated officer at the branch office level, dispensary level, hospital level, regional level and corporate level. A toll free helpline of ESIC has been working. The complaints are also received through e-mail and information is sent through the on-line mechanism. The CPGRAMS is not being operated here because the ESIC staff has not yet been trained to handle the same. There is an officer to pick up complaints from the newspapers.

In the regional/ sub-regional offices of ESI Corporation, a notice board with the name of the complaint officer is displayed at a prominent place advising the beneficiaries to approach him for any grievance or complaint. All communications received, except the grievances, are sent to the respective divisions. The grievances are classified into public grievances and staff grievances. For vigilance related issues, employers and employees covered under the scheme can contact the Regional Director of their area or write to the Chief Vigilance Officer/Director, Vigilance. The address has been provided on the website of the Ministry.

The Corporation has opened Facilitation Centers in all the regional offices / sub-regional offices / ESI hospitals in order to have better interaction with the beneficiaries of the scheme. All these Facilitation Counters (IFCs) at the ESIC offices/units receive grievances. Each grievance is registered and allotted a registration number. Acknowledgement is also sent to the petitioner. The timeframe laid down for sending acknowledgements is two working days. For sending final replies, the timeframe is one month. Adhering to the timelines is not always easy. Every acknowledgement being sent to a petitioner indicates the number of days that the grievance is likely to take to be settled. In order to ensure transparency when any complaint/ grievance is rejected, reasons thereof are communicated to the concerned person. In other cases, after taking necessary action the result is communicated to the complainant. Facilitation Centers receive complaints/ grievances from different sources, namely insured persons, employers, VIPs, etc. Items appearing in the newspapers are also taken note of.

The Corporation monitors public grievances received from various quarters through a network of Public Grievance Officers posted in various offices of the

Corporation. Grievances received from the Prime Minister's Office and the Cabinet Secretariat are directly monitored by a senior officer in the headquarters office of the Corporation for their effective redressal and periodical weekly and monthly reports are sent to the Ministry of Labour and Employment. In so far as disposal of other PG cases for various institutions of the Corporation, i.e., regional offices / sub-regional offices / ESI hospitals / dispensaries, is concerned, a consolidated quarterly report is sent to the Ministry of Labour at the end of every quarter. The monitoring of public grievances received in the regional offices, sub-regional offices, ESI hospitals / dispensaries is done by a designated Public Grievance Officer.

Apart from this, periodic *shikayat adalats* / open house meetings are conducted in the respective Regions at regular intervals by the Regional Directors themselves. Such meetings are generally presided over by the Regional Director or a senior officer who decides and redress the grievances across the table. In the States where the ESI Scheme has been implemented, the grievances related to the medical benefits are taken up with the State Government authorities by Regional Directors as well as Senior State Medical Commissioners / State Medical Commissioners for timely redress of grievances at the regional level. In addition to this, the Corporation conducts workshops and seminars on public grievances for its officers and staff.

The Public Grievance Cells of the ESIC receive around 3,500 grievances from various sources. The number of grievances has increased over the years, more recently on account of the raise in wage ceiling limit for coverage under the ESI scheme. The general improvement in educational level of the workers is also responsible for the increase in the number of grievances. Out of the 4749 grievances received during the period from October 2006 to September 2007, which included 950 grievances pending in the beginning of October 2006, it was possible to settle 3758 grievances. The number of grievances pending at the beginning of October 2007 was 991. The staff at the Central PG Cell of ESIC comprises one Additional Commissioner, one Office Superintendent, three Assistants and one LDC and they are all working in the PG Cell part-time as their main responsibilities are different.

The major grievance-prone areas in ESIC are: harassment by ESI hospital staff, particularly doctors and nurses, mis-behaviour on the part of ESI hospital staff, lack of doctors, nurses inadequacy of ESI hospital beds as compared to the rush of patients and lack of medicines at ESI hospitals and dispensaries, particularly in the OPD units. A large number of the existing grievances, however, remain unregistered due to either ignorance or lack of time, or sometimes due to the lack of public trust in the redress possibilities.

While some of the grievances invite major resource commitment to improve public service delivery, others call for a more systematic exercise at ensuring that the administration is responsible and sensitive to the concerns of the public. Some of these grievances have persisted because of lack of adequate attention to address these issues effectively. The grievances related to the various ESIC services, particularly the medical services being provided by the ESI hospitals should be looked into more carefully. There is a need to undertake a wide publicity campaign to make the organized labour aware of the ESI benefits, the facilities available in ESI hospitals and the system of redress of grievances related to such matters. ESIC should consider publicising the *Shikayat Adalats*, which it holds at various levels, as also, the outcome of these *adalats*.

Organisations of the Ministry of Water Resources

The Ministry of Water Resources has seventeen organisations in its fold. The following account is based on the responses to the questionnaires sent to them. Only those organisations, which responded to the questionnaire have been discussed. Hence, the account that follows does not cover all seventeen organisations.

Bansagar Control Board: The Government of India through a resolution set up Bansagar Control Board in January 1976. The resolution was amended in 1990. This resolution was in accordance with an agreement reached between the Governments of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar on the 16 September 1973 for sharing the waters of River Sone and the cost of the Bansagar dam. The Control Board was given overall charge of the project including its technical and financial aspects which will be executed in the three states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

In the Bansagar Control Board, there is no provision of direct public interface through *jan sunvais* and *lok adalats* to obtain feedback/ suggestions in respect of the various concerns involved in dam construction, including resettlement of project affected families in the submerged areas. The CPGRAMS is not operational. No initiatives for giving publicity to the PG system have been attempted, apart from putting details on the website, and displaying the name, designation and telephone numbers of the Grievance Officer at the entrance of the office. This reflects a passive approach to articulate the concerns of the affected people.

It is not surprising that no public grievances are being received as of now- only staff grievances, pertaining to service rules, are received. The reasons for delay in redress, whenever evident, have been attributed to the fact that the process involves other organizations, which cannot be regulated for the purpose and service rules do not allow requisite flexibility.

Farrakka Barrage Project: In the Farrakka Barrage Project, any grievance received is dealt through the respective unit of the project to which the case pertains. Grievances are received mainly through post. Other means, such as, e-mail or newspapers etc. are not being used by the aggrieved. The CPGRAMS is not being used, as the staff is not trained to handle it. The processing of grievance cases is monitored in the General Manager's office, by the Superintending Engineer. Whenever any grievance is received, it is claimed to be processed and sent to the aggrieved party in a timebound manner. As claimed by the organization, acknowledgements are issued within two working days and redress is delivered within the standard time of three months. Many grievance cases require vetting and review/approval outside the purview of Department, it is difficult to give timeframe for such cases. Time taken for the disposal of the grievance depends on the nature of grievance.

The most grievance-prone area identified by the organization is 'procedure'- this has given rise to many arbitration cases. The organization prepares an Annual Report on grievances though it is not published. Complex rules and regulations and improper authorization/delegations and complicated procedures are reportedly the main reasons for grievances. If that be so, the organization should initiate the process of simplifying the

rules, regulations and procedures. Suggestions, it is claimed, are being made to the respective authorities to bring changes in laid procedures, which are complicated in nature. There is delay in redress and this is attributed to the following factors, which need to be examined for service improvement: redress involves other organisations, which cannot be regulated for the purpose; redress involves legal matters, which cannot be tackled by the organization; procedures are inflexible; rules and regulations are archaic; and service rules do not provide requisite flexibility for required networking and innovation.

Pending cases are analysed by the Director of Staff Grievances in a timebound manner. Through constant reminders and guidance, adherence to timelines prescribed for grievance handling is ensured at the 'levels' down the hierarchy. There is no officer to pick up grievances from newspapers. Meetings of the Public Advisory Committee in which peoples' representatives are invited are held from time to time. Stakeholder comments and suggestions are invited proactively for performance improvement. Anti-erosion works handled by this organization are meant to save lives and properties of local people. It is therefore important to involve them in taking vital decisions and for this feedback from local people is important. Mechanisms should be instituted for the purpose at the local levels.

National Institute of Hydrology: The National Institute of Hydrology was established in December 1979 by the Government of India as an autonomous society fully aided by the Union Ministry of Water Resources. Its main functions are to undertake, aid, promote and co-ordinate systematic and scientific work in all aspects of hydrology, to co-operate and collaborate with other national, foreign and international organisations in the field of hydrology, to establish and maintain a research and reference library in pursuance of objectives of the society and equip the same with books, reviews, magazines newspapers and other relevant publications.

As conveyed by the organization, the existing mechanism for grievance redress in the Institute lacks teeth. In fact, no grievances have been received during the last two years. Grievance Cell in the present form is not effective at all. Scientists and staff stopped giving grievances long back. Grievance prone subjects have been identified to be

related to laws and procedures. Other specific issues stated to be grievance prone in the organization are regarding service matters such as remuneration for Hindi translation, promotion policy, transfer policy, equitable distribution of facilities of infrastructure, , (residential facilities) etc. Grievance Cell, it is felt by the concerned officers, needs restructuring and more teeth. The guidelines need to be modified in order to give more autonomy and authority. Grievances are mostly submitted formally in-person. Other mechanisms are not being used. There is no awareness of the PGRAM in this organization.

A Committee for grievance review has been set up, which includes a senior scientist, a senior administrative officer and one staff member. Delay in redress occurs when redress involves other organisations and legal matters, which cannot be tackled by the organization and plain inattention to the task on the part of officials. The reasons for pendency have been specified as lack of time to address the issues involved and the ineffectiveness of the grievance machinery. For suggestion processing, a committee has been constituted with scientist F as chairman and senior administrative officer as member secretary. Only one meeting has, however, been held so far. It is therefore not possible to comment on its effectiveness. There is little effort to relate the grievance mechanism to public grievances and make efforts towards inviting the public to use it.

Central Water and Power Research Station: The Central Water and Power Research Station provides comprehensive R and D support to a variety of projects in the areas of water and energy resources development and water borne transport. The main functions of this organization are planning, organizing and undertaking specific research studies concerning water resources development including water-borne transport, environmental aspects, rendering consultancy and/or advisory services to the Central and State Governments as may be called upon from time to time, disseminating research findings and building up of a technical data base in water resources, promoting/ assisting research activities in State and other institutions concerned with water resources, as the premier national institute in the area of research associated with water resources development and carrying out training for research manpower.

The Joint Director is the Chairman of Grievance Redressal Cell. There is no provision of direct public interface in the organization. Clients and stakeholder comments and suggestions are not invited proactively by the organization. The organization has not specified if they are using the CPGRAMS. The accent of Cell, as evident from the response to the questionnaire, is on staff grievances. The perception is that the Cell can serve the Central Government employees to enhance their living standards by making promotion procedures faster.

The organization is mostly receiving grievances related to finance. Due to reduction in staff, employees are not taken care of as they were earlier. To prevent such grievances from arising, timely promotions and faster procedures have been suggested. Grievances are classified as those pertaining to procedural delay, misbehavior and unsympathetic behavior of staff, service matters and others. Timeframe for sending acknowledgments is five weeks, which is too long. Acknowledgment does not carry information regarding expected time and contacts for follow up on the case. The reason given for that is that for different types of grievances, different divisions and officers need to be contacted. This requires more time, which makes classification difficult. Pending cases are analyzed on a quarterly basis, reason for pendency being offered is that rules cannot be changed. A chapter on grievances is included in the Annual Report of the organization, which is submitted to the Ministry of Water Resources. The Report is not published.

Betwa River Board: The Betwa River Board has been established for the creation of a reservoir at Rajghat by construction on behalf of the Government of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh of a dam on the Betwa River at Rajghat and for the regulation of such reservoir. It is an inter-state project and public representatives from Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh are nominated in an environmental monitoring sub-committee for consultation on the formulation of policy regarding environmental safeguard or implementation thereof. No facility for giving information to the citizens is presently available in the Board. However, there is a Grievance Cell headed by the Chairman assisted by a Member-Secretary, Chief Administrative Officer to handle the staff grievances.

The Board is functioning in the traditional mode. Grievances are sent by the aggrieved only through post; other means are not being used. Acknowledgement is not sent by the organisation even in five working days. The contact points for follow-up are not provided in the acknowledgement. The standard timeline of three months is followed for final redress. Pending cases are analysed at the level of Director, Staff/Public Grievance, on a quarterly basis. No report is prepared on grievances. No suggestion processing is being done. No mechanisms of direct interface, such as, *jan sunvai or lok adalat*, have been instituted. There is no a social audit panel either. The CPGRAMS is not being used in the Board, and this is explained by the organization in terms of the fact that the staff has not been trained for that

Narmada Control Authority (NCA): The Narmada Control Authority has been set up under the final orders and decision of the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal (NWDT) as machinery for the implementation of its directions and decision. The authority started functioning in December 1980. The authority is a body corporate with representatives of the four States of Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and representatives of the Government of India. The authority is funded in equal proportions by all the four States. Secretary, Water Resources, Government of India, is the ex-officio Chairman of the Authority, whereas the routine administration is the responsibility of Executive Member of the Authority.

The appeal mechanism has been established in the policy statements by all the three State Governments for the redressal of grievances of the PAFs. According to this mechanism, if a displaced person is aggrieved by the decision from any of the rehabilitation officers in respect of Relief and Rehabilitation process, an appeal to the concerned agency /officer for proper resettlement within a time period is possible. Besides, there are independent authorities in the States especially for redressing the grievances of the project-affected families. The Member (Power), NCA, who is an officer of the level of Joint Secretary to the Government of India has been designated as Director of Grievances. However, the Grievance Cell of the NCA receives primarily staff grievances.

The Government of Gujarat constituted an independent Grievances Redressal Authority (GRA) with a retired Judge of Supreme Court as the Chairman in February

1999 for redressing the grievances of project-affected people (PAPs) resettled in Gujarat. GRA of Gujarat has taken an innovative step in installing a permanent in-house grievances redressal mechanism known as Grievances Redressal Cell within Sardar Sarovar Punarvasan Agency (SSPA). The Cell deals with grievances on the basis of applications on the spot through *Tatkal Fariyad Nivaran Yojna* (TFNY) and through single window clearance system.

In pursuance of the government notification of Narmada Valley Development Department, dated 30th March, 2000, the Government of Madhya Pradesh constituted an independent Grievances Redressal Authority (GRA) for redressing the grievances in the area of Resettlement and Rehabilitation (R&R) of the Sardar Sarovar Project affected persons to be resettled in Madhya Pradesh. The Authority has been functioning under the Chairmanship of a retired Chief Justice of M.P. High Court. The GOMP has appointed Rehabilitation Assistants and Companion for helping GRA in the implementation of R&R projects.

The Government of Maharashtra also constituted an independent Grievance Redressal Authority in April 2000, which has been redressing the grievances in the area of Resettlement and Rehabilitation under the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP). The Authority has a retired Judge of Maharashtra High Court, Mumbai, as the Chairman.

Surprisingly, grievances received in the Narmada Control Authority are also mostly staff grievances, specific issues being policies/norms regarding medical reimbursement, allotment of office accommodation, promotion and transfer policy and recruitment rules, etc. There is no commitment made in the acknowledgement in respect of the number of days in which the grievance would be addressed and contact points for follow up. Although presently, there is a timeframe of three months provided for giving a reply to the grievance maker regarding acceptance or rejection of the grievance, it is not being followed. There is delay in redress of grievances, as, in certain cases grievances involve other organisations or legal matters that cause inevitable delay, or require using discretion, or deviating from the set procedure or government norms, which is not possible, in order to dispose of such grievances in favour of the aggrieved officer/staff. It is admitted that there is no trained staff in the NCA to redress grievances.

NCA has a website but it is not interactive, though, as per claim by the Ministry, stakeholder participation is currently instituted through committees and sub-committees set up for different subjects areas. The Narmada Ghati Vikas Patrika, a quarterly journal, which covers the various activities of the organization is seen as a public interface mechanism by the organisation. However, it has a limited reach and is also not used as an instrument of eliciting inputs and feedback from the people about the activities of the organisation. Direct public interface mechanisms which can enable the organization to facilitate participation, such as, *jan sunwais* and *lok adalats*, have not been constituted. There is no social audit panel. Frequently asked questions (FAQs) have been compiled and placed on NCA's website. There is an officer designated to pick up grievances from newspapers. It is not known if his interventions are effective. The CPGRAMS is not being used as staff is not trained and there is no systematic arrangement in place to process grievances so received. Even the details of PGRAM had not been provided to the Authority.

Information giving statistics of the grievance is included in the Annual Report of the organisation, which is laid in both the Houses of Parliament and sent to the beneficiary states, Members of the NCA and other concerned organisations/departments that are the stakeholders of NCA. The Report is also published. Other proposed improvements in processing grievances are computerization of the grievance redress mechanism and uploading the details on the NCA website.

National Water Development Agency (NWDA): National Water Development Agency was set up in July 1982 as Autonomous Society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, to carry out the water balance and other studies on a scientific and realistic basis for optimum utilization of water resources of the peninsular rivers system for preparation of feasibility reports and thus to give concrete shape to peninsular rivers development component of national perspective. In 1990, NWDA was also entrusted with the task of Himalayan Rivers Development Component of national perspectives. Recently, the functions of NWDA have been further modified and the work of preparation of detailed project reports (DPR) of various link proposals and pre-feasibility reports and feasibility reports of intra-State links as proposed by the States have been

included in the functions of NWDA. A Chief Engineer of NWDA Headquarters has been designated as Chief Grievances Officer of the organization.

Most grievances received in the National Water Development Agency are about interlinking of rivers. The organization does not indicate the number of days for addressing the grievances and the contacts for follow up in the acknowledgement sent to the petitioner. There is no officer to pick up grievances from newspapers and no arrangement for public interface, such as *jan sunvai* or *lok adalat*. Besides the engineering aspect of inter-linking, there are other concerns that need to be addressed. These other concerns presently are not being considered at the level of the agency. The organization prepares an Annual Report on grievances, which is submitted to the Ministry of Water Resources and also published. No suggestions are being received in the organization. This is explained in terms of the argument that it is not a direct interface organization. Although there is a broad suggestion window on the website of the Ministry, there is nothing on grievance redress or the PG Cell on the website. The CPGRAMS is not being used because no thought has been given to the exercise up till now. There is no awareness of CPGRAMS in the organisation.

Central Soil and Materials Research Station (CSMRS): The CSMRS is an attached office of the Ministry of Water Resources and is a premier institute in the country located at New Delhi which deals with field and laboratory investigations, basic and applied research on problems in geo-mechanics, concrete technology, construction materials and associated environment issues, having direct bearing on the development of irrigation and power in the country and functions as an adviser and consultant in the above fields to various projects and organizations in India and abroad.

Soil chemistry is an issue, which is of direct relevance to the farmers. Still, grievances received from staff in the Central Soil and Materials Research Station mostly pertain to service rules, which are well-defined, hence, grievances are limited in nature as per articulation by the organisation. No public grievances are being received. There is no provision of direct public interface through *jan sunvais* and *lok adalats* or a social audit panel to improve its effectiveness. No efforts have been made to publicise the public grievance system apart from putting details on the website, and displaying the name,

designation and telephone numbers of the grievance officer at the entrance of the office. Reasons for delay in the redress of grievances received have been attributed to the fact that the process of grievance redress involves other organizations, which cannot be regulated for the purpose and service rules do not allow requisite flexibility. Collective reviews are undertaken at the level of the head of the department. The CPGRAMS is not being used though the organisation proposes to take it up soon. There is a Vigilance Cell to take action on complaints having a vigilance angle, initiation of disciplinary proceedings in accordance with the CCA (CCS) Conduct Rules, 1965. A quarterly report on grievances is sent to the Ministry and also published.

Brahmaputra Board: The Board is a statutory body, which was set up by the Government of India under an Act of Parliament i.e. Brahmaputra Board, Act, 1980 under the Ministry of Irrigation, now renamed as the Ministry of Water Resources. The jurisdiction of the Board includes both the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys and covers all the States of the North Eastern Region either in full or in part. The Board consists of twenty-one members out of which four are full-time members and seventeen are part-time members representing the States of the North Eastern Region, North Eastern Council, concerned Ministries viz. Ministry of Water Resources, Agriculture, Finance, Power and Surface Transport and a few organisations of the Government of India viz. Central Water Commission, Geological Survey of India, Meteorological Department and Central Electricity Authority. A High Powered Review Board is there for taking decisions on the functioning of the Board.

There is a Grievance Cell in the Board, which is headed by a Deputy Secretary in the Brahmaputra Board, and all grievances receive are dealt separately by the Cell. Mostly staff grievances, which generally concern grievances of a personal nature, such as, those regarding promotions etc., are being received in the Cell. Grievances are received mostly through mail and are diarised manually, through register.

No direct public interface mechanisms have been created. Mechanisms like the *jan sunvai* or the *lok adalat* have not been constituted. No social audit panel has been constituted to study the impact of the organization's functioning. There is an officer designated to pick up grievances from newspaper columns. In recent years, however, no

grievance has been received in this manner, which is surprising. Telephone numbers and e-mail addresses have been given on the website under 'contact us'.

The PGRAM, it is stated, is being used here and there are no problems with its functioning. There is no timeframe fixed for sending acknowledgements or for final redress. Cases are finally settled at the level of the Secretary. The three months standard timeline, it is claimed, is followed. The organization has proposed to computerize the records in the Grievance Cell, such as, diary keeping and monitoring of cases. The organization further claims that as part of the grievance redress procedure, the grievance maker is informed if his grievance led to any change in policy or procedure or reasons for rejection of his grievance – no evidence of this, however, was provided. There is delay sometimes in redress as other organizations are involved which cannot be regulated for the purpose of grievance redress, and legal matters are involved which cannot be tackled by the organization. Cases remain pending because these concern rules that cannot be changed. For specific levels though, time schedules for review have not been prescribed and employees for review and analyses exercises have not been identified. Collective reviews are undertaken to gain insight into the nature of complaints being received. There is a Vigilance Cell and a 'Committee on Gender Issues', we are informed, although it is not clear whether it is the same as Committee against Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace. No publicity measures have been taken yet in respect of the public grievance redress mechanism and process. However, Board's activities, it is asserted, are widely publicized through journals, souvenirs, which serve as advertisement. No suggestion processing is done. No report on grievances is prepared; nor is a section included in the Annual Report.

Water and Power Consultancy Services (India) Limited: The Water and Power Consultancy Services (India) Limited provides integrated package of consultancy services in the water resources sector in that it deals with the generic aspects related to development of the water resource and related structures, which makes it a focal agency to receive and process grievances. This is further corroborated by the fact that the main objects for which the company is established are: to establish, provide and perform engineering and related technical and consultancy services for development of water resources, irrigation and drainage, electric power, flood control and water supply projects

and to establish, provide, maintain and perform procurement, inspection, expediting, management of construction and related services in connection with the construction of water resources development projects including dams, barrages, weirs, tunnels, canals, hydropower stations; and thermal power stations and transmission and distribution systems.

However, no public grievances are being received. The organization underlines that it does not have direct public dealing and accordingly no public complaint has ever been received so far. There is a window for grievance redress on the website of the Ministry, which simply gives the contacts of grievance redress officers in all organizations of the Ministry of Water Resources. The PGRAMS is not being used, as staff has not been trained, because people do not use it, and also because there is no systematic arrangement in place within the organisation to process the grievances received through the PGRAMS. Computerization of the grievance redress system is being proposed.

There is no timeframe for sending acknowledgements. For redress, the standard timeline of three months is followed. As per assertion by the officials of the organization, timelines for grievance redress have been laid down at various levels. Reasons for action taken are not communicated to the grievance makers. For picking up grievances from newspapers, the Grievance Officer himself is mandated to act. No recent examples of such cognizance on the part of the Grievance Officer have, however, been provided by the organization. A chapter on staff grievances is included in the Annual Report, which is submitted to the Board of Directors. The Report is not published. No reviews are done of the grievances received and no suggestions have been received so far from clients/stakeholders.

Ganga Flood Control Commission: The Ganga Flood Control Commission was established in April 1972 with head quarter at Patna. It serves as the Secretariat and the executive limb of the Ganga Flood Control Board (GFCB) headed by the Union Minister of Water Resources. Union Ministers of Finance, Railways, Surface Transport and Agriculture and the Member, Planning Commissions, are among members of the Board. The respective Chief Ministers or their representatives as members represent the Ganga

Basin States. The Commission is headed by a Chairman and is assisted by two full time Members and other supporting officers and staff. The Commission has been assigned the task of preparing a comprehensive plan for flood management of the river system in the Ganga basin, drawing out the phased programme of implementation of various schemes, monitoring of important flood management schemes, assessment of adequacy of waterways under road and rail bridges and providing other technical guidance to the basin States. The Commission also accords technical clearance to flood management schemes for the Ganga Basin.

The Ganga Flood Control Commission is a small organization. Thus, grievances received from people through Ministry of Water Resources are diarised in this office manually through register. Surprisingly, in the Ganga Flood Control Commission, no public grievance has been received during the last three years. This is mainly because hardly anybody outside the organization is aware of the existence of the PG Mechanism. The website of the organization has a section on staff grievances, which has not been updated for several years. It mentions the number of grievances received, disposed off, and pending as on 1.4.1999. The PGRAMS is not being used as the staff is not trained. Staff training is not being pursued with the DARPG through the Ministry of Water Resources. Awareness of the software would have to be generated and the associated staff would need to be trained in handling PGRAM.

Once a grievance is received, the matter is referred to the technical/ administrative unit and their reply is obtained which is then examined by the Grievance Cell. The requisite files and documents are called for, if required. The norm for sending the acknowledgement in case a grievance is received is two working days, which, it is conveyed, indicates contacts for follow up and the estimated time in which the grievance would be redressed. Three months is the timeframe set for redress of a grievance. The grievance maker, it is claimed, is informed of the reasons in case his grievance is rejected though he is not informed of any positive change brought about in policy or procedure as a result of such intervention.

There is no committee to review grievances and no office designated to pick up grievances from newspapers. The reason cited is that it is a small office with a hundred

member staff. To ensure adherence to timelines for grievance redress at levels lower down, official reprimands are issued and discussions with the dealing official are carried out. No suggestions from the public have been received so far in the organization. There is no social audit panel either. A chapter on grievances is included in the Annual Report of the organization, which is submitted to all Ganga basin states dealing with flood management programmes in the region. The report is not published but it is proposed to be put on the website of the Ministry.

Upper Yamuna River Board(UYRB): Although functioning since 1995, the Board established its independent office in 2003. The office is still in the establishment stage and is functioning with meagre staff strength for carrying out the day-to-day activities of the Board Office. All the posts in UYRB are filled on deputation basis from the officers/ officials from Central/ State Government. The total sanctioned strength of UYRB is 58, out of which only seven posts have been filled up.

Since the Upper Yamuna River Board has been constituted to implement the inter-state agreement for sharing the waters of Upper Yamuna River among the riparian States, the clients/ stakeholders for UYRB are the riparian States viz. Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and NCT of Delhi. It has still not formulated a Citizen's Charter because the required staff strength from top management to formulate the working group for Citizen's Charter is not available. There is hardly any Public Grievance System in place in the organisation.

Central Ground Water Control Authority (CGWCA): The (CGWCA) was constituted in response to a PIL filed by a citizen referring to over-exploitation of ground water resources in Delhi. The authority has a nationwide jurisdiction, since the Supreme Court in its judgment stated that the problem is acute everywhere, not just in Delhi. Since then complaints regarding illegal borings, and other relating to ground water are being received at the CGWCA. On being received, these are sent to the Collector, who takes cognizance of the case in his capacity as the Executive Magistrate of the area. The case is then sent to the police for investigation, and is fought duly in the Court. Certain municipalities have been authorized for receiving grievances, such as, the Ghaziabad municipal corporation, where complaints can be filed by the common citizens. The

authority stops at referrals and has no further jurisdiction since the matter then goes within the jurisdiction of the Court.

The other pertinent issue is regarding awareness generation among farmers, since ground water contamination and illegal extraction is rampant in the countryside and affects livelihoods and health of the crops adversely. The responsibility of awareness generation is with the District Collector and the desirable agency to carry it out in the present dispensation, post 73rd and 74th amendments, is the Gram Panchayat. However, officials felt there is considerable awareness among people, since, in the year 2007, a total of 224 complaints had been received about illegal borings and duly referred to the concerned authorities. This indeed is a very small number in view of the enormity of the problem across the country. There is little by way of redress that is provided by the organisation to the people who are affected by ground water shortages and worsening quality of ground water resources on account of contamination from various sources.

Conclusion:

The discussion above suggests that the public grievance mechanism in the organisations varies considerably across the organisations. Some organisations of the Ministry of Labour, especially those having large-scale direct public interface, and faced with pressure to respond, have been quite concerned about streamlining their grievance mechanisms and processes. Other organisations of the same Ministry need to work on that with a citizen-centric perspective. Some of the organisations of the Ministry of Water Resources deal with issues which have a significant bearing on the lives of people, yet they do not have a direct public interface and therefore no effective mechanisms and processes for grievance redress are in place in these. Most grievances pertaining to their activities are raised through media or through direct agitation methods.

There is a need to establish/ strengthen the public-interface mechanisms for grievance redress and prevention in these. Opening up these organisations to suggestions and making them responsive to citizen grievances is important. The institution of CPGRAMs can also help the process of bringing the citizen to the centre stage by making the organisation responsive and accountable. But this also requires the strengthening of networking across organisations and the Ministry/ Department concerned.

V

Public Grievance Redress, Monitoring and Prevention: The Way Forward

As is evident from the case studies discussed in the previous Chapters, most Ministries, Departments and Organisations have set up an internal mechanism for redress of grievances but wide variations are apparent across these organizations in respect of the extent of commitment, framework and processes instituted and the capacity to handle grievances. The centralized public grievance redress system that has been introduced by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances has also not been uniformly operationalised in all organizations- many organizations have not taken any initiative in this regard. It is desirable at this point to briefly review the overall performance of the Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring (PGRM) system in respect of the Ministries/ Departments/ Organisations in the Government of India and examine the specific ways in which improvements leading to redress and prevention of grievances can be introduced.

The Parameters of Performance

Any system of public grievance redress can be sustained only if it delivers redress and becomes instrumental in making the organization citizen-centric and capable of instituting responsive governance. The organization finds it productive as it can save it from public resentment and improve its public image as well as the capacity to deliver by facilitating corrective and preventive action in respect of the various tasks undertaken by the organisation. To produce these outcomes, the public grievance redress system must have three essential attributes. These are (a) effectiveness, (b) efficiency, and (c) credibility. Effectiveness of the PGR system implies its ability to provide redress. Efficiency of the PGR system involves its ability to deliver timely redress in a cost-effective manner. Credibility of the PGR system entails its ability to win the trust of the people who may need its services. The public grievance redress system in the Ministries,

Departments and Organisations of the Government of India, as evident from the appraisal undertaken here, leaves many arenas of stress when reviewed in terms of these parameters. This also accounts for the state of demand, supply and capacity incompatibility which confronts many of these organisations.

(a) Effectiveness of the PGR System

In as much as the effectiveness of the PGRM system implies its ability to provide redress, it is important to look at the extent of redress which emanated from or failed to result from its functioning. Most organizations, however, tend to present their effectiveness in terms of the number of grievances received, redressed and pending. There is rarely an attempt to assess the level of citizen satisfaction with the redress process and its outcomes. It is therefore not possible to arrive at the extent of effectiveness of the PGR system in terms of statistics about grievance redress which are generated by the concerned organizations. Even so, one may take note of the fact that only a very small proportion of the grievances received are actually redressed in most organisations with large public interface. Many of the grievances received are rejected on grounds, such as, jurisdictional limitations, legal constraints, lack of evidence, etc. Others which are redressed from the viewpoint of the organization are not considered redressed by the aggrieved and, often, the latter tend to move to other channels available to them, such as, the courts or tribunals. The PG Cell of the organisation, in many cases, is unable to offer redress because the matter involves other organizations and cannot be decided upon by the Cell. From the viewpoint of the aggrieved, this implies ineffectiveness of the mechanism to provide redress. Ineffectiveness also results from the inability to ensure redress from the relevant levels within the organization. The history of poor effectiveness has been a significant reason for the aggrieved often not approaching the available mechanism of redress. Discussions with service users also revealed that in case of most organisations, effective redress was perceived to be impossible through the normal course of events on account of apathy of officer.

(b) Efficiency of the PGR System

Efficiency of the PGR system essentially implies its ability to deliver timely redress in a cost effective manner. Redress which is delivered late is often a wasted

exercise. It neither serves the purpose of effective policy implementation, nor does it help retrieve the image of the organization, lost on account of grievances, by adding to citizen satisfaction. In most organizations, it emerged that the process of redress was quite tiresome and prolonged. Several cases remained pending for long. In some cases, the grievance process itself became a source of grievance because of the complex or unclear procedures that added to delayed redress. Inefficiency of the system emanated from the inability of the organisations to reduce its own delivery cost and ensure that the service users/citizens actually benefit from the processes without having to incur high costs in terms of money, time and energy. From the user perspective, efficiency deficit has been characteristic of most organisations, which get a large number of grievances and find it difficult to handle these due to either lack of staff or poor training or lack of coordination within the organisation. The poor handling of the location factor, the speed of the process and the expenditure that had to be incurred by the user made the PGR system poor on count of efficiency. Inefficient delivery emanated from shortage of staff as well as resources; but it also resulted from the poor management of available resources and inadequate capacity building initiatives.

Some organizations, which did not get many grievance cases, felt that the mechanism itself was a source of inefficiency from their viewpoint as the set up took away considerable organisational resources without generating enough work, and without contributing to any change in the image of the organisation. Efficiency deficit was high for the organisation when it was unable to fulfil the promise of the PGR system; but it was also high when it failed to ensure its adequate utilisation. Organisational energy was wasted on account of an inefficient PGR system.

(c) Credibility of the PGRM System

Credibility of the PGR system entails its ability to win the trust of the people who may need its services. A cursory glance at the number of grievances received itself reveals that in many organizations, lack of public confidence has been quite pronounced. Very few grievances were received although widespread discontent regarding the working of the organisation and policy or programme delivery could be seen from the media reports. The grievance redress mechanism provided in government organisations

failed to invite the trust of people in its ability to redress their grievances. People usually do not approach the PG Cell even when they know about it. Unless the PGR system is perceived as a fair, accessible, equitable, effective and efficient mechanism for seeking redress, it is unlikely to be used by those in need of redress. The inability to cultivate trust, based either on its past performance or its future promise, has characterised a large number of organisations.

Organisational efforts in the direction of projection of the PGRM system as a credible mechanism for redress have remained limited to a few advertisements, that too, depicting only the existence of a mechanism rather than the performance of the system. Past performance has been either poor or remained poorly projected, and failed to work towards taking the PGR system to a high credibility. The inability of most organisations to streamline grievance redress machinery and processes, ensuring the issuance of prompt acknowledgements, maintenance of regular communication thereafter till final disposal, delivery of timely and satisfactory redress through involvement of the aggrieved in the process, communication of reasons for rejection and acknowledgement in case of acceptance of a grievance led to any constructive change, which are some of the essential requisites of a sound grievance redress system, has further obstructed the ability of organizations to win credibility for the system.

Sustainability of the PGR System

As mentioned earlier, sustainability of the PGR system depends on its ability to become a worthwhile mechanism for both citizens and the organization. The former gains from it in terms of improved service delivery; the latter, in terms of enhanced public trust and support. There can be substantial reduction in public resentment when organization gets the opportunity to take timely corrective action on its policies and decisions because of the public grievance system. These outcomes are, however, essentially conditioned on the improvement in effectiveness, efficiency and credibility of its PGR System. A review of the prevailing state of the PGR system suggests that any sustainable improvement in these attributes of the PGR system requires a four-fold strategy, covering questions of allocation of authority and resources, accessibility of the mechanism, institution of accountability and prevention strategy.

Appropriate Allocation of Authority and Resources:

The effectiveness as well as efficiency of the PGRM system depends considerably on the appropriate arrangement of authority and vesting of adequate resources with the redress mechanism. Discussions with PG officers revealed the prevalence of widespread discontent among them with regard to the hiatus between their responsibilities and powers entrusted to them to actually offer redress. In many cases, grievances are only received by the PG Cell and forwarded to the deciding authority. The PG Cell often does not enjoy/ exercise any power to offer relief or even to give directions to the concerned officers in the matter or do a follow-up of the grievance redress process. Authority issue involves complex questions of inter and intra-institutional jurisdictions in matters of redress. The issue of deciding authority and redressing authority resting in a different position needs to be addressed. The authority deficit experienced in the PG Cell is a matter of concern. So also is the issue of coordination mechanisms when grievance redress calls for action at multiple levels.

At the same time, there is a need to address the issue of an overload of responsibilities due to shortage of staff. In case of many organisations, the officers and staff in the PG Cell carry out many other responsibilities, too, and can therefore spare only a limited time and effort to meet the challenge of public grievances. The Director of Public Grievances also feel overworked as they have to answer several organizations, such as, the CBI, CVC, etc. This takes their time away from the main mandate in respect of public grievances. Besides, many miscellaneous files are often sent to the Director which puts extra pressure on the office. This calls for an increase in staff strength and reallocation of authority to improve the possibilities of effective and efficient delivery of redress.

The vesting of authority in matter of both public and staff grievances in the same officers also subjects the PGR system to an overload of staff grievances. Most grievances registered at the PG Cell of many Ministries and Departments are in effect staff grievances; in some cases, these are grievances of the retired employees. A significant number of PG officers feel that the very notion of public grievances needs to be revisited. Many of them underline the need to relieve the office of the Director of Public

Grievances from the burden of staff grievances, which, it is suggested, could be routed through the office of Joint Secretary, Administration. While the significance of addressing staff grievances can not be overlooked for the effective functioning of any organisation, it is important to keep the two separate so that public grievances get their due attention. This has happened only in a few organisations.

Both effectiveness and efficiency of the PGRM system depends considerably on the ability of the organization to so plan the levels and processes of authority for delivering redress that there is minimum resource and energy loss in the process of offering and obtaining redress. Strengthening grievance redress at decentralized levels enhances the possibilities of improvement in both effectiveness and efficiency, and may thereby improve the credibility of the system.

Primary responsibility of the Public Grievances Cell should be to receive as well as proactively articulate public grievances and work towards their redressal and prevention. Pertinent issues pertaining to the jurisdiction of the organization should be raised by the PG Cell, thereby imparting voice to the service users and their representatives. Effort should be made to seek out public grievances which appear in the print and electronic media, or get raised in the Parliament or at other public fora. Besides, a systematic analysis and review of grievances and grievance prone areas, in particular, organisational policies, programmes and their implementation, may be undertaken regularly in order to alter the grievance scenario. All this requires adequate staff strength and resource support, on the one hand, and adequate vesting of authority to coordinate and facilitate action at different levels of the organisation, on the other. Unless these issues are addressed, it not possible to deliver effective and efficient PGR system, which enjoys credibility with the public.

Ensuring Accessibility of the PGR Mechanism:

The accessibility of the PGRM system defines not only the efficiency of the PGR system but the very possibilities of its being used by the aggrieved, and thereby the very credibility of the system. The hard reality which needs to be confronted is that the PGR system has been poorly utilized in most organizations of the Government of India. In spite of their having a grievance, people do not generally access the mechanisms for

redress available in the organisation. Access depends as much on the location, technological competence and resource position as on their awareness of the existence of the mechanism and conviction about its utility, dependability and ease of access. Whether it is the technology-centred CPGRAMS or the traditional mechanisms of grievance making and redress, the ability to service users to access these has remained quite limited. So also has the awareness of these mechanisms and their effectiveness.

Little effort has been made in the direction of creating awareness about the mechanism. People are by and large unaware of even the existence of the PG Cell. It has been observed that the DARPG instruction to the Ministries and Departments regarding the display of name, designation, room number, telephone number etc. of Directors of Grievances at the reception and other convenient places, placing locked complaint box at reception has either not been followed or had limited impact on improving access of ordinary people to public grievance redress system of the organisation.

Inability to take care of physical constraints through decentralisation of the PGR system has prevented many people with grievances from approaching the redress mechanism. Instead, they resorted to extreme steps like public protest when things went beyond their tolerance. Making information technology based systems simpler to use and using these creatively to cross the limits of physical barriers to seeking redress is a challenge for all organizations in a country where access to technology is limited for reasons of lack of education as well as resources, on which depends the possible connectivity for communicating grievance or redress possibilities. Taking the CPGRAMS to the people in villages and facilitating them to use it requires commitment and effort. At present, the CPGRAMS is being used mostly by the staff, that too, in a few organisations. In this regard, the example of *Lokvani*, an online grievance redress system that is running in the Sitapur region of Lucknow is worth looking at. It is a local PGRAMS, which helps people redress their grievances through the online mechanism. It worked because people were made aware of and facilitated to use it, and an effective monitoring system is set up. An online system can work among the poor people too. However, this requires considerable ground work in order to be successful, especially in view of the scale at which this will need to become effective and the need for information management, which this would generate.

A major challenge to the institutionalisation of the CPGRAMS in organisations is to ensure back-end support. Organisations need to institute back-end support in their subordinate offices to enable smooth reception of grievances in a relay process through their respective ministries and departments, who, in turn, would receive forwarded grievances from the DARPG, the entire process being online. In most organisations, due to lack of such ‘back-end’ support, grievances get stuck, creating a *glut* like situation, which inhibits smooth running of the process. This is a serious matter of concern. This implies that each organization is required to undertake a process-reengineering and switch over from a manual system of registering grievances to a web based system of registration and tracking of grievances. Practice in this regard would need to be instituted at senior as well as junior levels, by imparting training to operate through computers and the net and would require that short refresher/orientation courses are organized from time to time.

To make the process of sending in grievances more user-friendly for people who do not have access to the electronic medium, it should also be possible to send in grievances pertaining to different ministries and departments through a single window. Establishing a single window system at points of public contact, wherever possible, however, remains only a dream for the users. A decentralised single window system is crucial to improve access to redress mechanism.

Accessibility of the PGR system also depends on its capacity to take the system to people who feel inhibited by the formal structures of bureaucracy, especially the underprivileged sections of society, in a proactive manner. In spite of the emphasis laid by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on evolving a grievance redress mechanism that would serve the non-literates, and despite all Ministries and Departments being apprised of this, little effort has evidently been made in this direction. Mechanisms to provide direct public interface, such as *jan sunvais* or *lok adalats*, if instituted, can go a long way towards redressal and prevention of public grievances with regard to specific policies, programmes and procedures. These would also put the organizations under public view and thereby increase their credibility. These need to be seriously considered in order to both improve vitality and trust in the PGR system. So far, only a few organizations have utilized these.

Since a major factor inhibiting the service users/ citizens from accessing the PGR system is the lack of public trust in the effectiveness of the PGR mechanism itself, it is important that the organisations are proactive in improving the visibility and credibility of these mechanisms. Information about the PGR system as well as its performance should be displayed widely at public places like bus stops, railway stations, post offices etc. besides being communicated through the print and electronic media. Publishing the outcome of the grievances registered can improve the credibility of the system. Engaging a professional agency for the purpose may help in a limited way; but organisational effectiveness and its projection can go a long way to alter public perception and the deficit of public trust , which confronts the PGR system.

Institution of Accountability:

Accountability issues relate to the fixing of responsibility as well as answerability for actions and inaction. Accountability needs be instituted at both individual and organisational level. It involves the institution of appropriate reporting, monitoring and review mechanisms. Transparency in governmental processes is essential to make accountability effective. For only if actions and inactions are open to public can these be questioned; and only then can the responsibility be ascertained.

Explicit commitment regarding service standards and remedies is crucial to the process of instituting accountability. Formulation and implementation of Charters can be instrumental in this regard. However, this remains a challenge in the Indian milieu. Not only do we find organisations which have still not formulated their Charter; many of the Charters that have been adopted fail to communicate any clear standards and remedies. It is observed that many of the Citizen's Charters, which have been formulated by various organisations, do not clarify the grievance redress machinery in progressive succession. This has complicated access in that people lodge in grievances at the wrong level, which leads to unnecessary delays in grievance redress resulting in dissatisfaction for the aggrieved. Besides, due to lack of awareness about the existence of the mechanism and also its efficacy, people who have a serious grievance also tend to take early recourse to Courts. Hence, the entire machinery, step-wise, should be duly communicated along with specific timelines at each level since that remains a very significant variable in effective

redress, considering the anxiety of the aggrieved and that enables the aggrieved to seek compliance with the standards accepted by the organisation.

Accountability can be strengthened by offering tangible remedies to the aggrieved in the form of compensation and refunds, repairs and replacements through Citizen's Charters specifically in terms of the service standards specified. The issue of compensation for undue harassment or loss caused to an aggrieved due to inaction or delayed action on the part of the serving officers is important and has been addressed in many countries which have taken initiatives in the direction of administrative reforms. However, this has largely been ignored here. Even an apology is not offered in most cases.

A serious effort towards the implementation of Charters is also not evident in most organisations. Lack of staff, funds or plain unwillingness to assign individual responsibility to the officers for the act of omission and commission on their part in the course of addressing commitments towards the citizens have impeded the exercise. An elaborate public grievance redress system should not only be an integral part of the Charter programme; it should also be an effective arrangement that works. In this respect, the PG Cell should regularly undertake grievance analysis with respect to not only the proportion and number of different types of grievances being received and redressed but also the reasons of these grievances and look into the possible ways of prevention and improved redress in the light of the analysis.

Monitoring of compliance standards and commitments is significant for ensuring accountability. Periodic review meetings as a formalised mandatory process to appraise Charter implementation as well as the functioning of the PGR system are crucial to ensure compliance with quality and quantity norms pertaining to service delivery and grievance redress, which are specified internally by each organization. Review meetings should be formalized at different levels. At the level of the Ministry/ Department, Secretary should conduct the meeting. In case of big ministries whose actions have far-reaching ramifications, a review committee consisting of a representative cross-section of interests may be set up. Rather than simply examine the statistical profile of the grievances taken up and redressed, the review meeting should also examine the extent of

compliance with timeframe for sending acknowledgements and final replies to petitioners. The reasons for delay should be explained in case of violation of time norms. The review of grievances should also aim at gaining insights into the nature of complaints being received and possible interventions that can redress and prevent such grievances. Many of the organisations surveyed do not hold such meetings. In many cases, the meetings to review the status and performance of grievances are reportedly held “as and when the need arises”. Regular reviews are essential for making the system accountable.

The DARPG instruction to the Ministries/ Departments/ Organisations to include the public grievances work and receipt/disposal statistics relating to redress of public grievances in their Annual Action Plan and Annual Administrative Report is not being followed by many organisations. Even when the information is given in the Annual Report in most cases, it is too sketchy, being limited to indicating the existence of grievance mechanism, or at best providing statistics regarding the number of grievances, received, disposed off and pending,. Besides the statistical break-up of the disposal/pendency of the grievances received by the PG Cell and the autonomous bodies, the section on grievances in the Annual Report should also provide an analysis of grievances, especially, the grievance prone areas, along with the remedies attempted/ proposed. The insights gained from collective reviews at various levels and communicated through a reporting mechanism should also be given. This would enable Parliamentarians and civil society groups to develop an understanding of the impact of certain policies/ procedures that may have caused the grievances and channelise efforts in the desired direction.

Social audit is an important mechanism to ensure accountability and credibility of the PGRM system. Despite repeated instructions from the DARPG to constitute a Social Audit Panel or such other machinery for examining areas of public interface with a view to recommending essential changes in procedures to make the organization more people-friendly, none of the organisations surveyed have set up a Social Audit Panel. Staff and money crunch are cited as the reasons for lack of initiative in this regard.

Grievance Prevention Strategy:

Grievance prevention involves a proactive approach towards identification of grievance prone areas and grievance patterns, analyzing these and addressing policy and procedural changes to avert the very emergence of grievances. The prevention of grievances involves attention to a wide range of policies, decisions and processes in the organization aimed at the following concerns:

- Improve Access to Policy Information and Benefits
- Ensure Transparency
- Ensure Accountability
- Ensure Voice and Participation
- Ensure Communication Channels
- Provide Procedural Clarity and Simplicity
- Ascertain Equity and Avoid Discrimination

Improve Access to Policy Information and Benefits: Access to information and benefits of policy should be easy and assured for all those who are expected to benefit from a policy. It is important that policy access is possible at the closest points to the possible users. Making delivery of information and access a decentralized process is an important aspect of this process. It is possible to make use of information technology for the purpose. Channelising the processes of information dissemination through local institutions can improve the possibilities of access. Panchayat and block office can be effectively used for the purpose.

Ensure Transparency: It is important to make the process of policy implementation transparent and open to public reading. People should be able to know the policy and administrative processes without much difficulty in order to be able to make use of these. The processes of policy as well as the exercise of discretion should be made public. The reasons for acceptance as well as rejection of the claims or applications should be made public too. This would prevent many from holding a grievance.

Ensure Accountability: Accountability mechanisms should be strengthened to deter and rectify wrong doing and increase faith in the systems. Both external and

internal mechanisms of accountability should be utilized. Effective monitoring system can put meaning into the accountability systems by making it possible to detect and question wrong actions and assign responsibility for that.

Ensure Voice and Participation: Channels for participation and expression of voice by the people during the decision making process itself is important to prevent the possibilities of policy being hijacked by the administrators or other vested interests. This can go a long way towards obtaining decisions which reflect the concerns of people. Many possible loopholes in policy can also be taken care in course of participatory processes.

Ensure Communication Channels: Providing effective channels for timely Communication of decisions as well as voice of the people is a challenge for the organization. Information about many decisions of the organizations remains confined to the small elite which is close to the administrators. There is no space for inviting for policy or for improving ways of its implementation of decisions. This can take care of many possible grievances even before the decisions get taken.

Procedural Clarity and Simplicity: A large part of grievances in most organizations owe themselves to ambiguity and complexity of rules and procedures. If these can be taken care of the likelihood of grievances can be substantially reduced.

Ascertain Equity and Avoid Discrimination: In as much as a substantial portion of grievances relate to the discriminatory treatment meted out by the administration to different people either on account of discretion or other mechanisms for discrimination, prevention of grievances requires a more equitable framework of policy as well as administration of policy.

Addressing Demand, Supply and Capacity Deficits

The four-fold strategy, covering questions of allocation of authority and resources, accessibility of the mechanism, institution of accountability and prevention strategy, it is argued, is crucial to any improvement in the effectiveness, efficiency and credibility of the PGR mechanism. For only this can address the demand, supply and

capacity deficits which confront in varied manifestations and proportion the Public Grievance Cells of various Government of India Ministries, Departments and Organisations.

Towards Grievance Redress and Prevention

Action Plan for the Ministries/ Departments/ Organisations

- Constitute separate public and staff grievances authorities and make the public grievance officer responsible for redress and analysis for prevention by identifying grievance prone areas and their reasons and suggesting changes in policies and procedures to take care of these.
- Strengthen the PG Cell in terms of personnel and resource support, including technology and human resource development for actively addressing redress and prevention possibilities.
- Publicise the existing PGR system as well as invite the public to approach it in case of grievance by highlighting the performance of the Cell through print and electronic media as well as the website, publications of the organization and office notice boards.
- Adopt/ revise Citizen's Charter incorporating service standards and information about the public grievance mechanism, process, timelines for acknowledgement and response, review commitments and remedies/ compensation for the aggrieved in case standards and commitments are violated.
- Regularly review and publicise Charter implementation through the website, media and office notice boards, etc. and other public places.
- Create multiple access points to the PGR system, using the decentralisation route, where needed, and offer an integrated single window for redress at these access points.
- Institute CPGRAMS and organise training for its operationalisation, as, by creating mechanisms for providing back-end support, improving information management systems and allocating authority at

appropriate levels through decentralisation or delegation for facilitating immediate redress.

- Strengthen public interface mechanisms for redress like *lok adalats* and *jan sunvais*, wherever feasible, taking it to the doorstep of the people needing redress. This can be decided in the light of complaints as well as the very field of policy, as when it is location specific.

- Undertake a regular review of the grievances received and those raised through other channels and identify the grievance-prone areas and ways of addressing these as well as Action Plan for redress.

- Hold monthly review meetings at the level of Secretary to which all attached/ subordinate /autonomous offices should also report. These meetings should test-check the implementation of timelines and other commitments regarding grievance redress and prevention. The minutes of these meetings and the Reports submitted should be put on the website.

- Fix individual responsibility in each and every case of delay, default or dereliction in performance of every day duties on failure to deliver services, and take disciplinary action to avoid recurrence.

- Undertake an annual review of laws, rules, regulations, instructions and procedures to identify problem areas in consultation with stakeholders with a view to action for grievance prevention as a focus area for further improvement.

- Improve the overall responsiveness, transparency and accountability of administration to the public, making use of information and communication technology for the purpose.

- Take feedback and suggestions from the public in order to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and credibility of grievance redress mechanism and grievance prevention possibilities. Best suggestions should be rewarded and their implementation and value addition should be highlighted for improving the credibility of the system.

Action Plan for the DARPG

- DARPG should revise and update its list of PG Officers and contact numbers for various Ministries /Departments/ Organizations. The new list should be in conformity with the existing structures. There has been some restructuring/change in these.
- DARPG should ensure that any reorganization of the structure and revision of authority is duly incorporated in information provided on its website. The Citizen's Charter of the Ministries/ Departments/ Organizations on its website should also appropriately incorporate and reflect this.
- DARPG should ensure that the Citizen's Charter of the Ministries/ Departments/ Organizations carry information on the public grievance mechanism, process, timelines for acknowledgement and response, review commitments and remedies/ compensation for the aggrieved.
- DARPG should seek quarterly Reports regarding grievances received, redressed and pending, the nature and pattern of these grievances and an analysis of the reasons for these from various Ministries /Departments/ Organizations, review the performance of their PGR system and present the comparative picture on its website.
- DARPG should also seek quarterly Report on the implementation of its various instructions and the reasons for non-implementation as well as plan of action with regard to these. A comparative statement in this regard should be prepared and put on its website and a copy should be forwarded to the PMO for information.
- DARPG should ensure that the CPGRAM is publicized widely across the country and back-end processes are strengthened so that redress process can be operationalised online wherever feasible. Training for its operationalisation should be extended to the attached/ subordinate/ and autonomous offices of the Ministries and Departments, without which Ministries cannot make effective use of the CPGRAM. Information about the training should

be publicized, along with the names of organizations which have received the training, in order to plan further training.

- DARPG require that the Ministries /Departments undertake a regular review of grievances, which are raised in print and electronic media and include the analysis in the quarterly report submitted to the DARPG. It should also ensure that the review undertaken by them and the action taken on the suggestions are put on its website.

- DARPG should invite feedback and suggestions from the public regarding improvements in administration in respect of specific functions/ activities of various Ministries /Departments/ Organizations and invite the response/comments of the respective Ministries /Departments/ Organizations on the feedback and suggestions so received.

Ministries and Departments selected for Case Study

- Ministry of Urban Development
- Ministry of Water Resources
- Ministry of Environment and Forests
- Ministry of Tribal Affairs
- Ministry of Labour and Employment
- Ministry of Human Resources Development
- Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
- Ministry of Mines
- Ministry of Coal
- Ministry of Textiles
- Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas
- Department of Chemicals and Petrochemicals, Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers
- Department of Telecommunications

Organisations of the Ministry of Labour and Employment

- Employees Provident Fund Organisation
- Employees' State Insurance Corporation

Organisations of the Ministry of Water Resources

- Bansagar Control Board
- Farrakka Barrage Project
- National Institute of Hydrology
- Central Water and Power Research Station
- Betwa River Board
- Narmada Control Authority
- National Water Development Agency
- Central Soil and Materials Research Station
- Brahmaputra Board
- Water and Power Consultancy Services (India) Limited
- Ganga Flood Control Commission
- Upper Yamuna River Board
- Central Ground Water Control Authority

Registered Participants in the Workshop on “Installation of the Public Grievance Mechanism in Government of India Ministries and Departments” organized by IIPA and DARPG at IIPA on 14th February 2008

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2.	Sh.Vijay Singh	Director Ministry of Agriculture Department of Agriculture and Cooperation
3.	Sh. Vinod K. Samuel	Dy. Director Railway Board
4.	Sh. D.K. Mandal	Deptt. of Public Grievances Ministry of Railways
5.	Sh. B.B Sharma	Dy. Director Ministry of Tribal Affairs
6.	Sh. P.S. Rana	Under Secretary Ministry of Environment & Forest
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