

Terms of Reference for Individual Consultant to Strengthen Communication Strategies for Welfare Benefits Board – Individual Consultant Selection Method

1. Background

Sri Lanka has experienced a significant economic downturn since 2022. The spread of the coronavirus pandemic, as well as fiscal and monetary indiscipline have shrunk the economy. Sri Lanka's gross domestic product contracted by 7.8% in 2022, while inflation peaked at 69.8% in September 2022, and the Sri Lankan Rupee (LKR) depreciated close to 80% against the US dollar in 2022.

As a result, the poverty rate doubled from 13.1% to 25% (\$3.65 per capita, 2017 PPP) between 2021 and 2022. Around 75% of households were estimated to have experienced a reduction in their incomes, and 37% of households were facing acute food insecurity in November 2022. Moreover, women-headed households, which were already 60% poorer than male headed households, were pushed deeper into poverty.

This has come at a time of an inadequate social protection (SP) system. The targeting performance of the largest cash transfer program, Samurdhi, was weak and the transfers since the mid-1990s have had limited impact on poverty alleviation. The real value of the benefit has also been progressively eroded by inflation. Moreover, despite the existence of many non-cash services, including livelihood support through the Department of Samurdhi Development, they do not tackle the multi-dimensional constraints of the poor and vulnerable. In 2019, nearly 23% of poor adults had not completed primary education, including no schooling. They were also more likely to be non-salaried workers and relying on volatile livelihoods. Moreover, poor households were far more likely to be indebted to sustain an economic activity than non-poor households.

[The Social Protection Project](#), approved by the World Bank (WB) Executive Board for 2024-2028, supports the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) in remedying this situation. With a value of USD 200 million, the project supports the implementation of *Aswesuma* and contributes to pursuing the social protection reforms included in the IMF program and World Bank Development Policy Financing (DPF). It will partially support the government in providing targeted cash transfers over three years. The project will finance system strengthening efforts as well as government capacity building activities, so that future reforms can be carried out more satisfactorily.

The social protection reforms are crucial to help the poorest and most disadvantaged Sri Lankans to weather the current economic storms and build their resilience to future crises. Starting in 2023, these reforms are in the initial stages of implementation. **Success of the reforms rests not only on their technical strength, but also on robust public communication, sustained engagement with diverse stakeholders, and strong feedback systems including monitoring of media and periodic gathering of public perceptions. In other words, not only messaging and outreach but listening and reflecting.**

2. Objective

The Social Protection Project (SPP) is looking for an experienced professional to be engaged as a Communication Consultant to support the [Welfare Benefits Board \(WBB\)](#), coming under the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development. This position will work closely with the WBB's and SPP's inhouse communication staff, as well as the World Bank's senior communication consultant, to provide strategic direction and guidance in public communication and stakeholder engagement on: 1) reforming social protection in Sri Lanka; and 2) implementing the Aswesuma program.

The Communication Consultant needs to have a sound understanding of the political economy of social protection in Sri Lanka, as well as of the complex challenges involved in pursuing any kind of reforms in any sector.

The Communication Consultant will support the implementation of the SPP Communication Strategy, as well as the [Stakeholder Engagement Plan](#) and the [Environmental and Social Commitment Plan \(ESCP\)](#) (which are already developed).

Overall, the Communication Consultant will be responsible for pro-actively identifying communication gaps and risks to the successful implementation of the SP operation and advise the WBB and SPP staff on the most effective communication strategy/approach that manages public expectations of the reform program, builds public trust in the social protection system, and mitigates potential risks.

3. Scope of Work

The work entails strategic level interfacing with the Chair and Board of the WBB, and operational level coordination with the SPP's Deputy Project Director and relevant staff in communication work, organized under three overlapping thrusts as follows:

A. [Message Sharing and Feedback Monitoring](#)

- Help develop and implement realistic plans for implementing the WBB/SPP Communication Strategy adopted in June 2024.
- Streamline existing Communication Action Plan, also developed in mid-2024, prioritizing actions and sharpening focus
- Assess the clarity and effectiveness of the current communication actions, recommend improvements and help implement them
- Help developing clearer messages on the overall SP reforms, as well as on the Aswesuma program's more specific operational aspects
- Design and implement a realistic mechanism for pre-testing messages before releasing them to the public and/or public administration officials
- Monitor feedback on messaging and public perceptions or reactions using, 1) media monitoring; 2) social media monitoring; 3) public perception surveys; 4) field visits; and any other methods to be agreed upon.

B. Communication through Partnerships

- Find greater synergy between the Communications Strategy and communication activities indicated in the [Environmental and Social Commitment Plan \(ESCP\)](#) and the [Stakeholder Engagement Plan](#)
- Strengthen existing partnerships with the Department of Government Information and state media institutions
- Forge new strategic partnerships with mainstream media houses, for example through the [Broadcasters' Guild of Sri Lanka](#) and [Sri Lanka Press Institute](#).
- Explore and forge partnerships with relevant thinktanks and leading national NGOs that work in poverty studies, social justice and human rights

C. Monitoring and Countering Dis/misinformation

- Streamline currently ad hoc methods of media and social media monitoring to provide WBB/SPP early warnings on emerging/spreading falsehoods, distortions and misinterpretations
- Develop the ready response capability inhouse to assess the relative harms of dis/misinformation and determine the best course of action

4. Deliverables

The consultant will be responsible for the following deliverables:

- ❖ Situation analysis (report/presentation) reflecting on the current situation about the clarity and effectiveness of WBB/SPP communications and make recommendations.
- ❖ Proposing and implementing a system for regularly monitoring progress in implementing SPP's Communication Strategy & Action Plan finalized in June 2024 (now Chapter 7 in Operations Manual)
- ❖ Proposing and implementing a mechanism for rapidly pre-testing messages before releasing them to any stakeholders
- ❖ An arrangement (need not be inhouse) for on-going feedback gathering, especially through the monitoring of mass media and social media in both Sinhala and Tamil
- ❖ Proposing and implementing a system of assessing and responding (where warranted) to dis/misinformation on SP reforms and/or Aswesuma
- ❖ Proposing and initiating a plan for engaging relevant thinktanks and national NGOs active in poverty studies, social justice or human rights
- ❖ Effective implementation of media and NGO stakeholder consultation meetings

5. Reporting obligation

The Communication Consultant will report directly to the Chairman of the WBB and Deputy Project Director of SPP. He will liaise closely with the World Bank's Senior Communication Consultant, and other World Bank team members (staff/consultant) as and where relevant.

6. Timeline and Duty Station

The Communication Consultant will work initially for three months on a full-time basis, based at the WBB/SPP office in Colombo 7.

7. Qualifications

- ❖ A Master degree in mass media, journalism, development communication, economics, sociology or related field (a master’s degree would be an advantage)
- ❖ At least 10 years of relevant work experience in strategic communications, including a minimum of 3 years in any development sector. Experience in World Bank-funded or other donor-funded projects is an advantage.
- ❖ Excellent report writing and good command of both spoken and written English and at least one of the two local languages (Sinhala/Tamil) are required.
- ❖ Experience in monitoring media (both traditional and social media) is an advantage.
- ❖ Experience in forging and managing strategic partnerships would be desirable.
- ❖ High level of computer literacy, and intermediate to advanced knowledge of Microsoft Office Package (Outlook, Excel, Word and Power Point) and internet use.
- ❖ Proven track record of successfully completing similar assignments within the last five year

8. Method of Recruitment

The consultant will be selected through the Individual Consultant Selection (ICS) method, in accordance with the **World Bank Procurement Regulations for IPF Borrowers—Procurement in Investment Project Financing: Goods, Works, Non-Consulting, and Consulting Services** (Fifth Edition, 2023).

A shortlist of consultants will be prepared based on Expressions of Interest (EOIs), considering qualifications, experience, and competence relevant to the assignment. Shortlisted candidates will then be invited to submit proposals, which will be evaluated accordingly. The selection process will include a review of proposals and, if necessary, interviews to assess the consultant’s suitability for the role.

The contract will be awarded to the most qualified candidate who meets the required criteria and demonstrates the best value for the assignment.

9. Payment Methodology

#	Deliverable	% of the Payment	Timeline
1	Submission and approval of an Inception Report outlining the detailed work plan, methodology, and stakeholder engagement approach.	10%	Within 2 weeks of the Contract Signing
2	Submission of an Assessment Report on the current communication strategies, challenges, and gaps, including recommendations for improvement.	20%	Within 4 weeks of the Contract Signing

3	Development and submission of a rapid response strategy and plan for the Welfare Benefits Board, encompassing key messaging, a media engagement plan, a stakeholder outreach plan, guideline protocol, framework, and a monitoring plan.	30%	Within 8 weeks of the Contract Signing
4	Submission of a Final Report summarizing the implementation progress, lessons learned, and recommendations for sustainability.	20%	Within 10 weeks of the Contract Signing
5	Implementing of the Pilot communication strategy	20%	Within 12 weeks of the Contract Signing