

## Advancing Public Participation in Audit Process in Oman: State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution's (SFAAI) Smart Phone Apps receives UN Award

This is the age of hopeful citizens throughout the Middle East and North Africa Region (MENA) where in almost every country in the region citizens are mobilizing, marching and, at times successfully, pushing for change. Recent political and economic transitions demonstrated that government and other state institutions' outreach to civil society is critical to building confidence and trust. In a post-revolutionary environment of raised expectations, state organizations have an opportunity to interact more constructively with citizens and stakeholders across society. The rapid spread of ICTs in the region also presents an attractive opportunity for these institutions to collapse communication barriers among citizens and state institutions.

In light of this, a prime example of a successful initiative with an innovative citizen-feedback mechanism is **SFAAI Smart Phone Apps** in the Oman. Launched by the **State Financial and Administrative Audit Institution (SFAAI)** in 2011, it has managed to get real results on the ground.



The initiative aims to improve the quality of services provided by the entities under the SFAAI, besides facilitating communication mechanisms between the supreme audit institution and citizens. The application includes several windows in both Arabic and English. They are: Contact Us, Complaints window, SFAAI laws and regulations, etc. Through this system, one can receive complaints and reports that could help detect financial and administrative deviations in the public sector companies under the SFAAI.

The 'Complaints' window has helped in detecting a number of administrative and financial violations. Since the introduction of the Community Relations Department in July 2011 until the July 2013, it received 644 reports and complaints. The complaints about administrative and financial violations numbered 351 (almost 54.5 per cent) while 78 complaints concerned interests of citizens, 65 about misuse of power, 36 about award of improper bids and 114 other complaints<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.timesofoman.com/News/Article-20921.aspx>

It should be noted that the SFAAI deals with complaints and reports received through its website [www.sai.gov.om](http://www.sai.gov.om) or via other channels as well.



**United Nations Award for Public Service**

This initiative also received international recognition. The SFAAI's Complaint window scored the first place in the United Nations Award for Public Service in the category of preventing and combating corruption in public services delivery in 2013.

As more and more people now have smartphones in their pockets, SFAAI's Complaint will help to bolster the public's faith in the government to eradicate corrupt or malpractices and to ensure transparency. In addition, public complaints and feedback are now properly recorded, handled and monitored, giving them the assurance that the Supreme Audit Institution takes their feedback seriously and is working hard to protect public funds without fear of being marginalized.

It's truly remarkable what this initiative has been able to accomplish in a short period of time. Its model is an inspiration for other Supreme Audit Institutions in the region who want to promote citizen engagement practices in external audit process.