

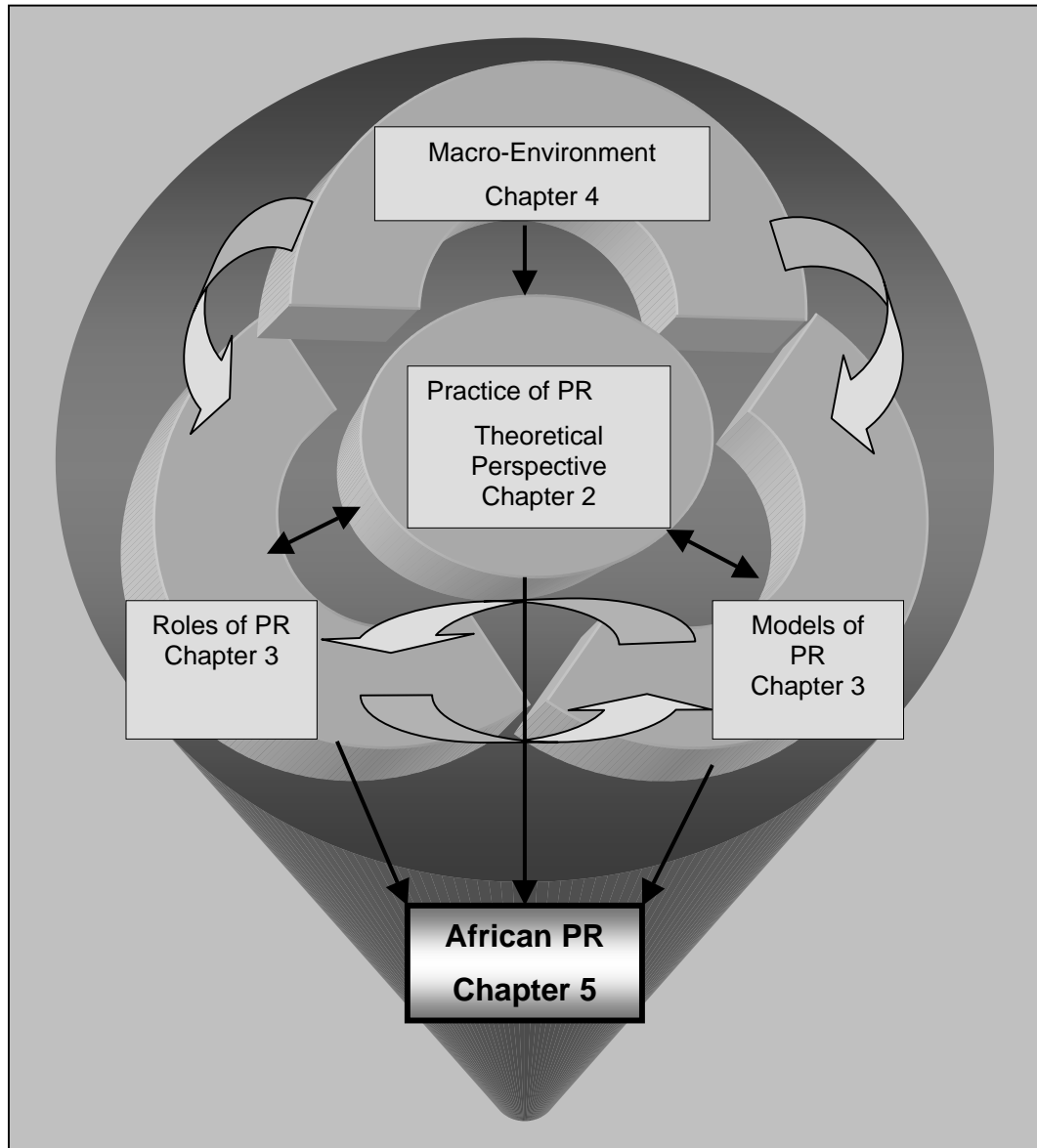
---

**CHAPTER 5**  
**THE PRACTICE OF PR IN AFRICA****5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter aims to explore the practice of PR in Africa. The chapter commences by referring to the theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter 2. The origin of PR in the African context will be discussed, and then the practice of PR will be explored. The impact of the macro-environment, specifically referring to the remote and industry environments as discussed in Chapter 4, will also be discussed. This discussion of the macro-environment will provide a foundation in order to create a better understanding of the continent's situation. A critical point of discussion is that of African culture, as this is fundamental to the social activities performed in this context. These factors shaping the dynamic nature of the African environment as well as the systematic recognition of these connections and interdependencies have an effect on the way in which PR is practiced in Africa. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the future of the practice of PR. The very nature of the African context, the people and the challenges faced by businesses has changed. The core, however, has always been to be socially responsible and community focused, and confidence building.

Chapters 2 to 4 discussed all the various aspects influencing the practice of PR. This chapter will use all these shaping factors to explain the African context. In order to put this discussion into context with the rest of the study a conceptual framework is provided in Figure 5.1, highlighting the topic of discussion.

Figure 5.1 Conceptual framework for the impact of the theoretical discussion of the practice of PR, the models and roles of the practice of PR as well as the macro-environment on the practice of African PR



## 5.2 RELATING AFRICA TO THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was anchored in three theoretical frameworks, namely the system theory, the social systems theory and the excellence theory. These frameworks have been used to empirically test the major concept, namely the

practice of PR. This concept will, however, be tested in a very unique and dynamic context namely the African continent. This section discusses the way in which Africa will be assessed in terms of each theoretical framework.

### **5.2.1 Africa in terms of the systems theory**

From a systems theoretical perspective, Africa is seen as a subsystem influencing the whole system, the globe. The components (continents) of the system are integrally linked in a web of complexity and therefore influence one another. Therefore, the input-transformation-output cycle has reciprocal transactions with the environment. All aspects of the African continent therefore have an effect and an impact on the globe. As Africa enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century as one of the world's poorest continents, many of the global development problems are largely confined to Africa. In terms of global economy, Africa's place has eroded. Where declining export shares are present, very little diversification into new lines of business, massive capital flight and a loss of skills to other regions are a reality in Africa (The World Bank, 2000:1). In order to create long-term sustainable development it is necessary to empower people from poor societies. Stronger institutions can be build by giving people a real stake in society (Ugwuegbu, 2001:31). This can only be done through an open system model providing structures and processes with specific goals identified. The international environment has committed itself to development and therefore Africa has become a main priority.

### **5.2.2 Africa in terms of the social systems theory**

The aim of the social systems theory is to generate social trust. The African societies have become complex. This is mainly the result of the conflicting values between the Western and African societies caused by colonialism. The discourse on economic reform and democratisation has claimed that globalisation is conducive to democratisation. In Africa this is particularly a problem where authoritarianism and economic crises have destroyed the social and political fabric of the continent. Civil societies in Africa have been

instrumental in reforming authoritarian regimes but globalisation has weakened the social forces. Therefore, in Africa the necessity of establishing basic institutional elements of democracy is premised (Ninsin, 2000:11).

Most African leaders have inherited colonial states where power was maintained by accentuating the differences amongst groups. The lack of social cohesion and government capacity to provide in basic needs has contributed to a lack of legitimacy. Africa needs a development process that will not alienate man from his society and culture but will in fact increase self-confidence and self-reliance. This process should also sustain the needs of the society in an equitable and just manner (Sihlongonyane, 2000:24). African organisations need to understand that they have to adapt to the expectations of their social responsibilities. When organisations decide not to listen to the needs of the community the environment in which they operate may become hostile. For this reason it is essential that organisations understand that they are part of society as they assist in wealth creation which influences people's lives (Narty, 1988:25).

### **5.2.3 Africa in terms of the excellence theory**

The excellence theory assessed PR from an economic and management perspective, asking the question, what value PR can add to an organisation. In this study it is essential to understand what the African organisation entails before it is possible to understand what value PR can add to the organisation. A typical African organisation is faced with a myriad of publics with whom it needs to communicate regularly. Organisations therefore need to be sensitive to the needs and aspirations of the people who inhabit the country where they operate (Narty, 1988:25). It is also important to refer to the PR practitioner and assess the knowledge base regarding PR in order to gain a better in-depth understanding of the practice of PR in Africa. The excellence study is the most well-known work done in PR and is therefore critical as a foundation to understand African PR.

The complex and diverse nature of the cultural, development, economic and socio-political issues of the African environment have an impact on the effectiveness of PR practitioners. Western scholars often struggle to appreciate these complexities and the strong collectivistic approach (as opposed to the traditional individualistic Western approach) of the African continent (Rensburg, 2002:12). Section 5.3 discusses the origin of African PR in order to address the aim of this study.

### **5.3 ORIGIN OF AFRICAN PR**

The application of PR techniques is not a new concept on the African continent. It dates back to the beginning of the African civilization. According to Narty Rensburg (2002:5), the concept of PR was practiced in Africa before the era of colonialism. In ancient Egypt, the pharaohs proclaimed their achievements through word-pictures on impressive monuments. Narty further explains how the task of the spokesman at the chief's seat of power in traditional villages is very similar to that of a PR practitioner. According to tradition, no African chief spoke directly to a visitor who called at the chief's seat of power. All interactions and communication with the chief were channelled through a spokesman. These spokesmen were well versed in the customs and traditional practices of the village. Such individuals assumed eminent positions and were highly respected by the people. This, incidentally, is still the case in some remote and traditional rural areas of Africa. PR is therefore not a foreign concept in the African context but it has been practiced in a different format and is deeply rooted in the African culture (Rensburg, 2002:6).

Traditionally an African chief or elder in the village did not speak to a visitor who calls the Chief's palace. All interaction and communication was channelled through a spokesman, a linguist, or an interpreter. These individuals are known to be well versed in the custom and traditional practices of the village and are highly respected by the people. In many African countries the families of these individuals are honoured by passing this position on from generation to generation. The philosophy behind this is to ensure that

the skills of communication are passed on easily and wholeheartedly. Many other examples can be given to illustrate the fact that PR has been present for a long time and examples will be briefly mentioned (Narty, 1988:25):

- African marital affairs are another example where the concept of PR was found. During the initial stages and through the negotiations of the marriage contract a mediator plays a crucial role in the success of the union. This individual is referred to as the “Munyayi” or “Dombo” in the Shona traditional culture and negotiates the value to be awarded to the bride’s family.
- The concept of “Noboa”, meaning co-operative, depends to a large extent on effective communication. On appointed days of the week, members and heads of the various clans in the village gather to help on the farm of one of their members. The other days work will be done on other members’ farms until each clan member in the village has been assisted.
- Other sophisticated forms of communication are epitomised in traditional music and dancing. Drums convey messages that may announce an important event in the day-to-day activities of the people in the village – it may be an accident or tidings of a joyful occasion.

#### **5.4 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRACTICE OF PR IN AFRICA**

In an attempt to explore the historical development of contemporary PR in Africa, Okereke (2002:2-3) is of the opinion that PR started in the 1940’s in Africa. During this time colonial, governments dominated most African countries and the first key issue that was identified, as a need was public information. A second issue was the growth of nationalism and the emergence of political leaders and parties in Africa, fighting for independence. The third issue was the pressure by ex-servicemen. It was during 1947 that the first PR department was set up to address the problems faced by commercial organisations during 1940-1955. During the next phase, 1950-1970,

independence was attained and the practice of PR was more focused in terms of intended audiences, programmes and budgets (Okereke, 2002:4-5).

During the early 1980's the PR profession in Africa had no focus and was relegated to the lowest realms of management in most organisations. PR activities included the role of being a personal assistant to the CEO or the press or information officer and often referred to as the "gin and tonic" PR on the continent. The beginning of the practice of PR emerged from the press agency model as organisations saw media relations as the most critical skills. The era of democratisation and the global attempt to increase transparency and accountability have been one of the greatest influences behind the PR scene in Africa (Opukah, 1992:14-15).

The greatest influence in Africa in the last decade has been the emergence of the era of democratisation. The PR scene has been influenced by public power across the globe, leading to increased transparency and accountability. PR is one of the most direct by-products of democracy. This was such an important issue that IPRA's 1991 professional development and educators' seminar in Nairobi, Kenya, was titled 'The pace of change – Africa's PR challenge'. It was during this time that the media took on a new role, acting on behalf of the silent majority and giving democratic interest groups, pressure groups and others a voice for their concern (Opukah, 1992:15).

PR practitioners should represent and manage information that is noble and uplifting. It is expected of African PR practitioners to accentuate the positive issues in Africa. These practitioners can no longer remain on the sidelines but should get involved in Africa's development and regard themselves as partners in development and promote development of the continent. Strong relationships should be built with society in order to ensure transparency and accountability in governance. This can be achieved through collaboration and networking between society and organisations (Agyeman-Duah, 2003:1-4).

The role of society has changed as it has engaged in a fight against corruption and abuse of human rights. Many crimes are still taking place because of corrupt regimes and therefore the role of society should be based on individual merits. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is bound to be a century with more regulatory scenarios. Therefore, a freer society becomes, the more regulated it becomes and the more citizens are expected to act responsibly. PR should therefore listen to society and focus on how the reputation of the organisation can be managed effectively (Opukah, 2003:8-9). The following definition by Ogbuagu (2003:9) defines PR in terms of listening to the public and acting accordingly:

*“the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an organisation with the public interest, and executes programmes of action to earn public understanding and acceptance, including a policy of enlightened self-interest by which process a business or organisation continually tries to win the goodwill and understanding of its customers, employees and the public at large”.*

No empirical evidence on the practice of PR in Africa has been recorded. Most information obtained in this literature review is based on papers delivered at PR practitioners conferences in Africa and non-accredited journals focusing on practice and not theory. The information is based on individuals' experiences and case studies. It is, however, essential for Africa to document research findings as this will contribute to the body of knowledge for African PR as well as develop an African PR theory. This is critical in order to really develop a scientific foundation for African PR and develop an African body of knowledge. Therefore, in an attempt to understand the practice of PR in Africa, global theory was used as benchmarks. These benchmarks were theoretically explained in Chapter 3 by referring to the models and roles of PR. It also addressed the latest global developments of the practice of PR. These theoretical explanations will be used to empirically verify the practice of PR in Africa according to global theory.



## 5.5 AFRICA AND GLOBALISATION

A reality in world economy is that businesses are operating in an interdependent global economy. Developing countries (a total of 142) are significant actors in this international business arena. Economically, the Third World is essential and becoming even more important. These countries are buyers, suppliers, competitors and capital users (Austin, 1990:5).

Economies, societies, cultures and nature evolve but at different speeds. Change and transformation are the key to development. This creates tension that needs to be addressed and managed. In an era of globalisation the growing speed and change in human activity sometimes outpace the rate at which natural processes and life-support systems can adapt. These changes also alter the nature of social interaction affecting the efficacy of existing institutions. Globalisation and technological changes offer many benefits, but they can have serious effects if institutions at local, national and international level do not evolve fast enough to deal with the adverse spill-overs. (World Development Report, 2003:3). In Africa the rapidly changing cultural trends of the 21<sup>st</sup> century continue to erode and even undermine various nations' heritage. As globalisation seems to be eroding heritage, PR practitioners have a role to play in an attempt to strengthen national identities and build national reputations (Opukah, 2003:7).

The following issues characterise the global environment and these issues will be briefly mentioned as they directly impact on the practice of PR (Opukah, 2003:6):

- Increased emphasis on public power, democratisation and freedom;
- Unsustainable population growth in poor countries;
- The major consumer and voting block is the power of the youth;
- A trend to multipolarity of nations to US unipolarity;
- Global brands' growth and power are increasing;

- 
- The donor community's power and influence are increasing;
  - Increasing poverty;
  - Increasing literacy and multilingualism;
  - Increasing urbanisation characterised by urban poverty and crime;
  - Rapid growth of technology - a world in which we now have virtual teams and real-time communication;
  - Ongoing major wars and live media coverage;
  - The increase of mass killers such as the spread of AIDS despite sophisticated scientific advancement, and finally
  - the increasing depletion of resources.

From the above it is clear that many issues relating to globalisation have an effect and an impact on the African continent and therefore the practice of PR as well.

## 5.6 AFRICA AND WORLD DEVELOPMENT

Africa is the second largest continent in the world, four times larger than the United States (Ruch, 1989:273). Poverty, poor governance and corruption are seen as major global challenges as well as major problems across the African continent. In a continent where most of the nations suffer from military dictatorship, corruption, civil unrest and war, underdevelopment and immense poverty, Africa is often referred to as the Dark Continent or a lost crusade. The African continent has numerous problems such as economical (now more than ever before Africa is facing an economic crisis so detrimental that a recovering period might take forever), hunger, poverty, social (tribalism, ethnic differences and religious intolerance), health problems (of which AIDS is the most well-known dilemma) and political instability. An integrative approach is the way in which Africa refers to life and the wholeness thereof (Mersham *et al*, 1995; Camdessus, 1998; Kopelman & van Niekerk, 2002).

Western capitalism's development path started in the transformation of the rural economy and the rural social relationships. The uprooting of traditional rural economic relations was the prerequisite for the rise of capitalism in the West and laid the foundations thereof. This did not happen in Africa. The capitalism that came to Africa was confined to specific areas, mostly set by the Europeans for Europeans. The incredible pace at which Africa wanted to modernise, develop and industrialise the African economy, has forgotten that the industrial revolution was preceded by the agricultural revolution. It is therefore believed that in order for Africa to become an industrialised society the initiation of the agricultural revolution is essential. This has far-reaching consequences for economic, cultural, political and social development on the continent (Vilakazi, 2001:34-35).

### **5.6.1 Economic issues**

Since 1993, there has been a steady increase in the poverty numbers in Africa. The global attempt at reducing poverty requires sustained economic growth in order to increase productivity and income in developing countries. There is, however, more to development than just economic growth. In order to ensure sustainable development, attention to economic, environmental and social issues is required. If the transformation of society and the management of the environment are addressed together with economic growth, then long-term growth will occur (World Development Report, 2003:1-3). The fight against poverty is evident in the African region. The national economies of African countries rely mainly on agriculture and the extraction of mineral and biological resources to generate the income needed to provide basic services and development essential for the poor. This natural resource base on which so much depends is steadily deteriorating, which has a tremendous impact on the livelihood, welfare and economic development of the people of Africa and therefore has become a global issue (The World Bank, 2002:13-18).

Even though Africa is perceived as stagnant or even regressing economically after 20 years of decline, Africa's economies are growing again. In macro-

economic terms, Africa has many well-managed economies and the private sector is also growing simultaneously. This is the result of more favourable policies and new leaders at all levels of society, while democratisation of many countries is changing the political power structures. The private sector, NGO's, community groups, women's associations and farmers' organisations are all becoming increasingly more active. But the progress of the continent is still very fragile. This is owing to four urgent threats, namely rapid population growth (highest in the world at 2.8 per cent), the HIV/AIDS crisis (11 million have died and another 22 million are living with HIV/AIDS; the 21 countries with the highest prevalence of AIDS are in Africa), political conflicts (of the 27 major armed conflicts in the world during 2002, 11 were fought in Africa and about 20 per cent of Africans live in countries formally at war) and environmental degradation (The World Bank, 2002:19-23).

In the African society, 60-70 per cent of the total national population is not contributing to the wealth, goods, skills or knowledge of the national economy. This is due to the fact that the vast majority of people in Africa live in the rural areas of African countries. This group is the source of the African economic crisis. This sector therefore has a debit relation to the national economy, contributing to the problems of the national economies of countries. It is this sector that to a great extent drives the African economy and therefore should be the focus, rather than foreign investment (Vilakazi, 2001:36).

The United Nations called a special assembly in 2000 where world leaders committed themselves to work together and to mobilise the international community in meeting the development goal of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015. During the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), 100 heads of state discussed two important issues. The two issues were the interaction between population and economic growth and secondly, environmental quality and natural resources. The world is actively involved in decreasing poverty, while Africa is in actual fact becoming steadily poorer (Pearce & Robinson, 2000; Mercer & Wilter, 2002; Verwey & du Plooy-Cilliers, 2002).

A unique development strategy should be developed for Africa. African intellectuals have considered the possibility to eliminate the underdevelopment of the African people by starting with rural development. African towns and cities are taking strain owing to the influx of rural people migrating to towns and cities. Some typical signs of this are businesses fleeing the inner cities to suburbs, the tax base of municipalities and local governments being eroded, and a fiscal crisis emerging, resulting in diminished funding for social services. African cities and towns are collapsing and public institutions are economically under tremendous strain because of the migration and urbanisation of towns and cities (Vilakazi, 2001:36).

### **5.6.2 Political issues**

The government structure of African countries did not emerge from the social body of the African society. This structure was implanted from outside Africa. In most developing countries the majority of societies are overwhelmingly the rural people. Therefore, the government should in fact reflect the majority. This, however, has not been the case in the African countries. The revolution in Africa has not included the participation of the rural people and rural culture in government institutions. In fact, the majority of the people have been excluded from participation in government structures (Vilakazi, 2001:38).

Democratisation is a key to equitable and sustainable development, and of the 53 African countries only 20 have electoral democracies. Issues such as human rights, rule of law, democracy and good governance can only prosper in an atmosphere of political stability. Political instability affects the social and economic foundation of a country (Antwi, 2002:3). The New Partnership for Africa's Development (hereafter referred to as NEPAD) is an African initiative created by the leaders of the African continent. The vision of NEPAD is to lead African integration and poverty reduction strategies. This initiative is a people-centred process. NEPAD gives hope to the continent as it shifts its focus to conditions for development. This is done by ensuring peace and security through conflict management and combating the trade in arms. Furthermore,

the promotion of democracy and sound political governance through inclusiveness and political participation is also a key issue. Lastly, it institutes sound economic and corporate governance by enforcing sound management of public finances and ethical and socially responsible conduct of business affairs. All this is done through respect for human rights, the rule of law, accountability and integrity (Aguyman-Duah, 2003:1).

The need for an effective, stable government to regulate social order is evident in the African continent. The aim of NEPAD is to draw Africa and Africans away from the status of international supplicants and to rather build a relationship around shared obligations between donor and recipient governments. Chaka (2003:1) is of the opinion that fundamental to good governance is the fact that governments should first be responsible to the people. Therefore, this accountability should be at the core of NEPAD using a participatory communication approach. NEPAD aims to replace a relationship of dependency with a relationship of development. This can only happen through cooperation, mutual understanding and partnership in the global economy. The successes of this initiative, to which all the stakeholders share the vision of NEPAD, will not only depend on the commitment shown by African leaders and governments but also on the extent (Asante, 2003:3).

The challenge for PR practitioners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to understand and interpret political dynamics, manage the impacts and implications and leverage these dynamics. The opportunities for doing this will only be available where democracy, freedom and liberty are allowed to thrive. Therefore, the political environment needs to provide for free media, free speech, protection of human rights, an independent judiciary and a freely elected legislature to give rise to a dynamic environment for PR (Opukah, 2003:2).

### **5.6.3 African culture**

One of the most fundamental aspects of the African culture is the importance attached to man and the belief in the goodness of man. Africa has always

been a man-centred society. It is, however, not merely man's welfare or material well being but man himself with all his ramifications that has been the cornerstone of the African society. The desire to share with others and the deep concern for each other is essential to the African person. Communication is therefore core to the well being of the individual. The love for song and rhythm illustrates the eagerness to communicate with each other. Many burdens and pleasures are shared through music. The dependence on one another is illustrated through the village community and is the basis of African society. The importance of building community has been the result of emphasising the importance of people. People are never used as stepping-stones. Slower progress will rather be considered if it means that all will be marching according to the same tune (Biko in Coetzee & Roux, 1998:26-30).

#### **5.6.4 Social issues**

The African society is divided in terms of age and gender classes. A great sense of respect is showed towards an older person. It is believed that an elderly person is more of a person than a younger one. This is due to the fact that elder people have more to offer by way of personal influence and power. The elderly play an important part in society, which is directly opposite to the dominance of the youth in the Western world. Respect for the nation, state, government, knowledge, labour, education, health care, control of nature and gender relations emphasises the importance of integrating all areas in decision-making. The participation of each member of society is essential, instead of certain members disappearing in the whole (Schutte in Prinsloo, 2000:277). Therefore, the division amongst the African family as a result of urbanisation has brought about social problems such as the breaking down of the African family and morals, which has been the cause of many social problems in this context (Vilakazi, 2001:36).

Prinsloo (2000:277) explains social relations in the African context by referring to the extended family, distant relatives and friends forming a network and involving solidarity of man with man. Great importance is attached to

interpersonal relationships. Intimacy, according to Biko (in Coetzee & Roux, 1998:26), is a term not exclusive to particular people – it is applied to the whole group of people, emphasising the importance of communication. The regard for others emphasises the importance to stand up for others by showing concern. This is reflected through a self-imposed voluntary and spontaneous sense of duty towards the needy. The consciousness of social responsibility therefore determines that no one should be rejected or condemned as worthless. The African society therefore accommodates all contingencies of human character and of social, economic and political disasters (Prinsloo, 2000:276).

## **5.7 BUSINESS IN AFRICAN SOCIETIES**

Developing countries are fundamentally different to developed countries when referring to the distinct nature of the business environment. The distinct business environment is derived from the differences in the development levels and the processes between less developed countries and more developed countries. These differences affect all functional areas of management as well as overall strategies. The macro-economic situation and business environment are affected by loans and economic aid provided by developed countries and multilateral agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. This external assistance complicates the political economy but creates business opportunities related to development projects (Austin, 1990:1-5).

Most of the countries in Africa are developing countries and it is therefore essential to understand management within this context. The key to effective management in developing countries is the capacity to understand and manage the external forces influencing the organisation. External factors influencing the organisation can be divided into four categories, namely economic, political, cultural and demographic. Furthermore, it is essential to understand that the business environment is divided into four levels, namely the international, national, industry and company level. The business environment is shaped by



the external factors. These factors influence events in the international arena, shape national government's development strategies and policies, affect the structure and dynamics of the industry and directly influence specific activities of the organisation (Austin, 1990: 29-31 & 39).

The greatest problem in Africa is the relationship between the city and the country. This refers to the discontinuity between the African village, which is the basic cell of the African society and the African city, structured around Western education, modern African state and politics. The focus should be on synthesising the authenticity of the African village with the authenticity of the Western civilisation. The poverty crisis is forcing people to move from rural areas into towns and cities. The infrastructure of these cities is not appropriate to accommodate the millions of people in terms of housing, schools, hospitals and employment. Various European management systems have been imported into Africa. Most of these systems are in direct conflict with the African way of doing things. This has caused a cross-continental inferiority complex enforcing a sense of hopelessness amongst Africans. The current economic paradigm exists in the minds of individuals trained on the basis of the Western industrialised experience based on the economic experiences of the Western industrialised society (Vilakazi, 2001:36).

Africa is a region in transition, where important trends toward decentralisation and democratisation as well as a growing demand for accountability in the management of public assets occur. The roles of the public sector, the private sector and civil society at all levels are being redefined. An emphasis has been put on increasing the private sector investment. A trend toward sub regional integration has the potential for very positive impacts on both the people and their environment. Organisational management in Africa is colonial in character. Even though African countries have been independent for decades, most management theories and practices reflect colonial management models. This is evident in both the public and private sector organisations in Africa (Ugwuegbu, 2001:11).

The triple bottom line comprising the social, environmental and economic issues is of major concern for businesses. This environment has shifted to encompass virtually all the issues known to society. A call for responsibility and urgency to act has been present. The changes have been enhanced by the rapid nature of globalisation. Businesses need to protect and manage their reputations and this can be done effectively by focusing on corporate social responsibility. PR practitioners can contribute to this by ensuring that commercial, moral and political contributions to stability and sustainability are maintained (Opukah, 2003:4 & 5). Social and economic development should therefore include moral development because without such development massive injections of capital cannot guarantee real economic and social development (Teffo in Prinsloo, 2000:277).

In order to understand African business it is essential to refer to the nature of the African business environment. The uniqueness of African business is deeply rooted in the African world-view and cultural foundations and will be briefly explained below.

### **5.7.1 An African world-view**

African people have a sacred view of man as a social being (Prinsloo, 2000:277). The collective consciousness is manifested in behavioural patterns, expressions and spiritual self-fulfilment. Because of poverty and deprivation, African communities have to survive through brotherly group care and not individual self-reliance. The sensitivity to the needs of others and the understanding of people as social beings is essential in the African society. Disadvantaged groups survive through collective consciousness and collective unity and this forms the basis of Ubuntu (Mbigi, 1995:58).

### **5.7.2 The basic views of Ubuntu**

Ubuntu is based on the dignity of human beings by stating that “a person is a person through other persons” or “I am because you are” (Makuhudu in Prinsloo, 2000:277). According to Makhudu in Prinsloo (2000:276), traits such as “*warmth, empathy, understanding, the ability to communicate, interaction, participation, sharing, reciprocation, harmony, co-operation and a shared world-view*” are essential for the development of human potential. These qualities collectively make up the Ubuntu culture. The morality of man is acquired through his socialisation in society and the obligation towards others, and is therefore clearly manifested by his social setting (Teffo in Prinsloo, 2000:267). In an attempt to know what one can become it is essential to understand who you are, this can only effectively be done collectively (Mbigi, 1995:55).

Mbigi (1995:4-6) is of the opinion that Africa will only be able to enter and excel in the global environment by drawing on the spiritual and social heritage of this continent. The traditional African society had its own institutions, which functioned effectively on certain traditional principles and practices. The starting point for the challenges of development in Africa is therefore a triple heritage from an African, Eastern and Western perspective, but the roots are in Africa. Therefore, in order for a revolution to start in business and development as proven, a cultural revolution also needs to happen. African cultural heritage includes rituals, symbols, oral story telling, oral literature, music, dance and spirits. The intellectual base of African is emphasised on rituals, symbols, intuition, community, group and Ubuntu (Holtzhausen 2003:8).

### **5.7.3 Participatory management**

Mbigi (1995) refers to sharing, which is referred to as a basic view of Ubuntu thinkers, as participation when it is applied to management (Chinkanda, Makhudu, Teffo in Prinsloo, 2000:278). Traditionally, leadership in the African context consisted of extensive ceremonial and oral skills. This was based on African proverbs, story telling, folk history, games, songs and dance. Collective singing, rhythmic dancing and collectively sharing food and drink created a

sense of participation. Therefore, freedom of expression and grass-roots participation could be ensured through consultation, discussion and consensus (Holtzhausen, 2003:8). According to Mbigi (1995:106), leadership in the African context needs to be servant leadership that is visible, symbolic and articulated in terms of face-to-face communication.

Ubuntu-style management involves a departure from hierarchically structured management relations, as well as the introduction of a co-operative and supportive form of management in which the collective solidarity of the various groups employed is respected and enhanced. Mbigi (1995:120-123) is of the opinion that the African village experience can provide very valuable inputs to the functioning of organisations by focusing on the following aspects:

- A grass-roots democracy is the process followed in a village setting. Open communication is key to the effective functioning of the village. The focus is on including all levels of employees and leaving room for discussion that is not part of the agenda.
- The celebrations of achievements and the sharing of misfortunes in the village setting is characterised by rituals and ceremonies. The sharing of rewards emphasises the importance of the team and these rituals, either formal or informal, provides a sense of community sharing and recognition of rewards.
- Participation in a village setting is key but authority and expertise are highly respected in this context. A sense of order and stability is therefore brought into the African village in this way.
- Mutual trust, respect and care are the foundation of the village. These elements will convert and enhance into a competitive edge in organisational terms.

- Collective unity and a common agenda form a bond that makes the village thrive even more. These are unifying elements in a divided society, emphasising the importance of regularly communicating with stakeholders in order to reach a common agenda.
- In the village context it is assumed that problems have no final solution. Discussions are therefore critical in order to suggest possible solutions but these are not necessarily final decisions. This provides a platform for individuals to continuously discuss solutions to problems.

All these aspects rooted in the traditional African village can contribute to ensuring a more human approach to management. It emphasises the importance of building community, trust and ultimately legitimacy for organisations. Consequently, Africa needs to discover its own collective self-identity in order to create value and economic growth (Mbigi, 1995).

## **5.8 AFRICA AND THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF PR**

PR in Africa has been faced with numerous changes in the past couple of years. Changes in communication, technology, politics and management are all challenges that influence and impact on PR. Opukah (1993:12) has considered PR practice by embracing both the practitioners and the professionals in PR. The difference between these two groups will be explained briefly. PR practitioners are individuals who currently occupy senior positions, mostly in the public sector. These positions were, however, not achieved through professional/educational merit but through mobility, therefore practising what they have seen and not learned. These individuals experience a lack of knowledge and experience in the area of corporate strategy. This group is generally 50 years and older. The PR professionals are individuals who work in the private sector and PR consultancies by virtue of merit, mostly tertiary educated and PR experience. These individuals are usually also beneficiaries of a wide range of management training and are therefore able to act and think

strategically. This group is generally young and ambitious, between the ages of 33-48 (Opukah, 1993:12 & 13).

Africa has taken the lead in modern PR by giving professional status to PR practice, something that the Western world has been aiming for since the time of Edward Bernays. During 2001, the Institute of PR in Ghana was successful in ensuring the inclusion of a provision in the National Communications Bill, stating that if PR practitioners are not members of the Institute of PR they are not allowed to practice PR in Ghana (Dharmadasa, 2002:1).

In order to professionalise the profession of PR it is essential that there is a regulating authority. This authority needs to look after the education, standards and ethics of the profession. This is essential if the profession would like PR practitioners to really serve society. The professional associations within countries usually play this role and will be discussed in the section 5.8.

### **5.8.1 African and professional associations**

Through correspondence with the International PR Association (hereafter referred to as IPRA) during 2001, it was found that the following African countries are currently registered with IPRA: the PR Society of Kenya, the Nigerian Institute of PR, the PR Institute of Southern Africa (South Africa, Namibia, Lesotho and Botswana), the Swaziland PR Association, the Zimbabwe Institute of PR, the Arab PR Society (Egypt), the Institute of PR in Ghana, the PR Association of Uganda, and the Cameroon PR Association.

It was found that the professional associations on the African continent are very active in organising conferences amongst practitioners. Most African PR professional associations have annual conferences and these conferences are very well attended. These conferences mainly focus on PR from a practitioner's perspective. Ideas and experiences are shared and case studies are illustrated and discussed, but very little empirical research is shared. The

conferences focus on the sharing of experiences, sometimes applied research but very little critical research that can contribute to building theory.

In 1991 a general meeting of the Federation of African PR Associations (hereafter referred to as FAPRA) adopted a 12-point communiqué called “The Kampala Declaration”. This document calls on African governments to fund their national PR bodies in order to assist in funding the professional development of practitioners in various countries and consequently on the African continent (Opukah, 1992:22). FAPRA as stated before represents the continent’s PR associations. The 1991 Kampala Declaration stated that FAPRA’s responsibility is to positively influence the promotion of social, economic and political development in Africa. Secondly, FAPRA should be involved in conserving, improving and protecting the African environment. Thirdly, FAPRA should work towards enhancing democratic practices and the observance of human rights in Africa, whilst attempting to improve the status of women and children in Africa (Opukah, 1992:22).

The South African PR practice has been active and has an established professional association called the PR Association of South Africa (hereafter referred to as PRISA). This association was established in 1957 (Skinner & Von Essen, 1995:21), and is currently the only PR association in the world to obtain the International Standards Organisation’s certification (ISO 9002) (Rensburg, 2002:9). PRISA has a consultancy chapter – the PR Consultancy Chapter (PRCC) and there are more than 45 registered consultancies belonging to this chapter.

A few countries in Africa have constitutions and codes of ethics for PR when referring to standards agreed on for the profession. These countries encourage the maintenance of high standards through education. Examples of such countries are Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Narty in Ferreira, 1998:7). According to Narty (1988:25) the profession of PR in Africa gives an indication that education and training are the main preoccupations of the various national PR associations. The

constitutions and codes of ethics of PR associations in Africa represent a broad spectrum to encourage the observance and maintenance of high standards through education.

### 5.8.2 Africa and PR education

The PR profession and PR education in South Africa have largely been isolated from the rest of Africa and therefore very little is known about PR in the African context. One *ad hoc* research study was found that was done between 1995 and 1997. The goal of this study was to supply South African PR educators with an overview of the development and current state of PR practice and education in Africa. The author stated that South Africa was in a position to contribute significantly to the development of PR in the African continent (Ferreira, 1999:31).

PR education in Africa can be placed in two categories, namely the formal and the informal sector. The formal sector relates to education that is offered in institutionalised settings such as universities, colleges and other higher institutions of learning. The informal sector largely comprises tuition offered by private or what is described in some countries as 'independent colleges'. Training and seminars organised by the various national PR associations and societies also fall in this category. The educational programmes for the African PR practitioner should include a set of principles, ideas, attitudes and activities characterising and guiding professional behaviour (Ophuka, 1993:17).

African PR practitioners used to be poorly qualified and not trained for high levels of management. No need was seen for PR managers in the management team. During the early 80's management thinking was centred on the business without referring to the human side. The focus of the press during these times was predominantly on political issues, often quoting continent leaders verbatim. But times have changed, the focus is much more on the human side of an organisation and therefore the training addresses



these issues. The training of PR practitioners mostly occurred abroad (Opukah, 1992:14 & 15).

Like the majority of PR practitioners worldwide, PR also entered the profession through journalism and therefore most individuals lacked formal training in PR, this incidentally is currently also the case on the African continent (Dharmadasa, 2002). PR practitioners need to be professionally qualified in order to cope with all the challenges of the profession. Training and education are prerequisites for the practice of PR (Opuhuka, 1993:17).

The 21<sup>st</sup> century PR arena calls for proper and adequate education and training in order to address the challenges and trends of this era. PR practitioners are called in this era to manage the reputation of the organisation. Therefore, education and training should focus on equipping the PR practitioner to function from the centre of the organisation and not from the periphery (Opukah, 2003:7).

### **5.8.3 An African PR body of knowledge**

An African body of knowledge is essential in order to assist PR practitioners to understand the dynamic role it needs to play in the PR profession. A body of knowledge guides the education and research in a particular field. Therefore, in order for African PR to be professional, a high level of education and research is necessary. In the African context not much has been documented regarding applied, descriptive or scientific research. This is a problem for researchers as there is no foundation that can be used to base their research on and to contribute and build theory. The field of PR can only really become professional if proper education and training takes place. Equally important for the profession to grow, however, it is essential for scientific, applied and descriptive research to be conducted and documented.

## 5.9 AFRICA AND THE FUTURE

Based on this chapter's discussion on the situation in Africa in terms of globalisation and world development it is essential for Africa to define its vision. This process has started with the NEPAD initiative. Africa is in a situation where it needs to re-define its vision. According to Okereke (2002:11), PR practice has a very bright future in Africa and he foresees the following development in the African continent:

- Globalisation will lead to the spread of multinational PR consultancies in Africa;
- International standards will be expected from African PR practitioners;
- Training, development and continuing professional development will become a core issue;
- Service quality and total quality PR services will become essential to African PR practitioners;
- Electronic PR will be used increasingly in Africa;
- The image of Africa should become a key issue for African PR practitioners;
- An increasing need for co-operation and networking amongst African PR practitioners, and lastly
- Global media will impact positively on PR practice in Africa.

Democracy, freedom and growth in the private sector as heavily influenced by globalisation constitute the key pillars of the dynamic and challenging nature of PR in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These various dynamics are challenging and therefore offer huge opportunities for PR in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The nature and quality of political leadership will determine the growth and trajectory of PR. The focus therefore is not merely on doing PR with philanthropy. This movement towards corporate social responsibility points to areas of need, which characterise the present, influencing the nature and practice of PR in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Opukah, 2003:1).

## 5.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter explored the practice of PR within the African context by referring to the macro-environment, namely the remote and industry environments. These issues have a major impact and influence on the African continent and therefore on the practice of PR. In order to understand the practice of PR it is essential to understand the business within the African context. A discussion on the African culture is necessary in order to better understand the African context. This explanation contributed to the understanding that corporate social responsibility is essential within the African culture and therefore might influence the way in which PR is practiced. The strong cultural influence aimed at the importance of social responsibility contributed to the decision to include the European reflective paradigm. The core of this paradigm as mentioned before was legitimacy and social responsibility, and therefore needs to be included in this study. Lastly, reference was made to the importance of professionalism in PR by referring to the importance of the role of PR associations in this context as well as the linkage between education, training and the importance of the development of a PR body of knowledge in Africa.

The next chapter will focus on the methodology that was followed in this study.