

## CHAPTER 3

### STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION: THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SYSTEM (GCIS)

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept strategic management is often used without a thorough examination of what it means in a given context. As Puth (2002:182) indicates,

“The problem in many organisations is that strategy is seen as the elitist ambit of a few people at the top.

As such, the process of drafting strategy and the management of its implementation is done by senior people within an organisation. This often results in employees working with little or no understanding of the organisation’s strategic direction.

As Puth (2002:182) further indicates, it is important that a wide-ranging process for interpreting, contextualising, and local area implementation of strategy should be in place in every organisation in order for the strategy to become a living entity. It is against this background that the focus of this chapter is firstly, on the concept

strategic management. The purpose of this discussion is to provide a theoretical framework within which the role of the GCIS in strategic management of government communication should be understood. Secondly, the background to the establishment of the GCIS, its mandate, and its approach to strategic management of government communication will be discussed taking into consideration the theoretical framework that the literature provides.

## **3.2 STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PROCESS**

### **3.2.1 Definition of strategic management**

Strategic management as Thompson and Strickland (1995:14) indicate is a process that involves the development of...

“...a mission, setting objectives, forming a strategy, implementing and executing the strategic plan, and evaluating performance...”.

David (1999:5) in this case argues that strategic management can also be defined as the art and science of formulating, implementing, and evaluating cross-functional decisions that enable an organisation to achieve its objectives. It can therefore be concluded that strategic management involves formulation, implementation and evaluation of the organisation's plans, taking into consideration the environment within which the organisation operates. That is why the strategic

management process is preceded by an analysis of an environment within which an organization operates.

Sanchez and Heene (2004:4) define strategic management as the process that is concerned with two major tasks, namely, defining the organisations' goals for value creation and distribution and designing the way the organisation will be composed, structured, and coordinated in pursuing its goals. In this regard, Osman (2004:3) indicates that the best way to determine the strategic intent of an organisation is to look at the tools that are often used, namely, vision, and mission and value statements of an organisation. Osman (2004: 3-4) further states that these tools have been around since military graduates started to join commercial organisations in key roles after World War Two and started to use military terminology in the business environment.

Strategic management in this regard should take into consideration that organisations operate in an environment that keeps on changing. The constant changes taking place in the world therefore make it necessary for organisations to conduct environmental analysis on a regular basis. Information technology and globalisation, for example, are some of the external changes that are transforming internal business dynamics in society today.

As a result, strategic management should be monitored regularly and should be seen as an ongoing process. This is because the environment within which an organisation operates is dynamic and keeps on changing.

This view was further explained by Thompson and Strickland (1995:14) who argue that strategic management requires constant evaluation and decisions have to be taken on whether to continue or to change a particular action.

The constant evaluation of strategic management is, as Thompson and Strickland (1995:14) argue, important because nothing about strategic management is final. This is largely because all prior actions are subject to modification as conditions in the surrounding environment change and ideas for improvement emerge. The strategic management process is therefore based on the belief that organisations should continually monitor internal and external events and trends so that timely changes can be made as the need arises (David, 1999:7).

Thompson and Strickland (1995:19) indicate that strategic management is important because it helps the managers to provide better guidance to the entire organisation. It also helps them to become aware of the changes in the environment, with regard to opportunities and threatening developments. As such, managers are provided with the rationale for evaluating competing budget

requests. It also helps to unify the numerous strategy-related decisions by managers across the organisation, and creating a more proactive approach to management.

In this regard, Formisano (2004: x) states that successful companies recognise that strategic management is a continuous process. It can therefore be concluded that a strategy is a selection of ideas and assets to meet long-term goals in an environment that keeps on changing. The strategic management process therefore takes place in different stages as indicated in the following discussions.

### **3.2.2 Stages in strategic management**

#### **3.2.2.1 Strategy formulation**

Strategy formulation includes developing a business mission, identifying an organisation's external strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. At this stage, it is important to note that strategy and organisational objectives are intertwined. According to Stonich (1982:2), the strategy formulation process should be based on an environmental scanning and analysis, factually based and its implementation should be consensus based.

David (1999:5) further states that strategy formulation includes developing a business mission, identifying an organisation's external opportunities and threats, determining internal strengths and weaknesses, establishing long-term objectives, generating alternative strategies, and choosing particular strategies to pursue. Strategy formulation also deals with the allocation of resources within the organisation. It can therefore be concluded that strategy formulation seeks to ensure that an organisation has a long-term competitive advantage with the resources at its disposal.

As far as the GCIS is concerned, the departmental strategy is informed by the National Government Communication strategy, the State of the Nation address and the government programme of action. Once the departmental strategy is finalised, the programmes within the organisation are required to work on their business plans and cost them in line with the corporate strategy.

### **3.2.2.2 Strategy implementation**

Strategy implementation deals with the establishment of annual objectives, devise policies, motivation of employees, and the allocation of resources so that the formulated strategies can be executed. According to Puth (2002: 184), it is important to note that, even a good strategy, if it lacks implementation, it means little to an organisation. In this regard, the business plans developed by the

different sections within the GCIS are reviewed annually. This is meant to monitor the strategy implementation process.

Heads of programmes are also required to review their budgets on a monthly basis. This is meant to monitor expenditure patterns, and to check if the expenditure is in line with the business plan and the departmental corporate strategy. The advantage of this process is that it enables management to intervene where deviations are identified with regard to strategy implementation.

David (1999:5) further states that strategy implementation requires an organisation to establish annual objectives, devise policies, motivate employees, and allocate resources so that the strategies can be implemented. Strategy implementation is often referred to as the action stage of the strategic management process. It is also seen as the most difficult stage as it requires discipline, commitment and sacrifice.

The success of strategy implementation to a large extent relies on the managers' ability to motivate employees. Interpersonal skills are therefore crucial for successful implementation of a strategy. In order to achieve this objective, the GCIS top management (Secretariat) meets every Friday to address organisational management issues. This is followed by meetings of the different programmes in which feedback from top management is discussed and implemented.

As this is the action stage of the strategy, it therefore becomes important to make sure that communication between and amongst the people who are affected by the implementation is effective. This is important because as Formisano (2004:21) indicates, studies have shown that there are three biggest barriers to strategic success, namely, failure to communicate the strategy clearly throughout the organisation, inconsistency between management talk and action, and a lack of top management support for strategic initiatives. Formisano (2004:22) further states that strategy implementation requires leadership and attention to detail because strategic ideas that flow through the entire organisation become real.

The communication systems within the organisation should therefore be monitored on an ongoing basis in order for the leadership to detect problems early, and make the necessary interventions on time. The other important aspect in strategy implementation is interpersonal communication. In this regard, David (1999:5) argues that strategy implementation activities affect all employees and stakeholders, thus interpersonal communication becomes central. It is also important because it enables the employees and managers to discuss the roles that they have to play in the implementation process. As David (1999:5) emphasised, strategies that are formulated but not implemented do not serve any purpose.

### **3. 2.2.3 Strategy monitoring and evaluation**



Strategy evaluation is the final stage in strategic management. This stage involves the determination of whether a particular strategy is working or not. According to David, (1999:5-6), strategy evaluation is important because sometimes there is a need for strategic modification because external and internal factors might change. Stonich (1982:5) further states that the implementation requirements must be kept in mind when evaluating possible alternative strategies.

Strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation activities should be performed on a continual basis and not just at the end of the year or semiannually (David, 1999:13). The strategic management process should therefore be a dynamic and continuous process. The most fundamental stages of strategy evaluation are reviewing external and internal factors that are the basis for current strategies, measuring performance, and taking corrective actions (David, 1999:6).

Strategy evaluation is important because today's success cannot be a guarantee of tomorrow's success, but can only give an indication of what works and what does not work. This is also largely because of the constant changes in the environment within which business takes place. According to Steyn and Nunes (2001:43), strategy evaluation should be done periodically and must look at efficiency, relevance as well as impact in relation to the stated objectives, and also provides the project reports to the organisation.

It should however be noted that strategy evaluation also takes into consideration the nature and context of the project. It is in this context that Steyn and Nunes (2001:43) state that a participatory evaluation system is one that involves everyone responsible for or interested in the project. The ongoing self-evaluation in the development communication context should be a participatory learning process, continuing throughout the life of a project, not only at the beginning or at the end of the project.

The evaluation is therefore based on what the affected parties have decided is important to the project, and the milestones that have been set. In this regard, Formisano (2004:22) states that strategy evaluation is based on the measurement systems that have been put in place. Strategy evaluation at the GCIS attempts to involve all the people in the department. This is largely because each section is expected to evaluate its performance against the broad organisational objectives.

### **3.2.3 Importance of strategic management**

#### **3.2.3.1 Proactive abilities**

Strategic management is important because it enables an organisation to be more proactive than reactive in shaping its own future and influence activities (David (1999:13). Strategic management also helps organisations to make better

strategies through the use of a more systematic, logical, and rational approach to strategic choices. In the communication environment within which the GCIS operates, it is important to be proactive in their activities because the communication environment is dynamic, and keeps on changing.

### **3.2.3.2 Informed workforce**

Research shows that the process rather than the decision or document, is the most important contribution of strategic management in an organisation (David, 1999:15). This implies that the process of strategic planning and management should be inclusive of all employees in an organisation.

Fundamental to effective strategic management is also fully informed employees at all organizational levels. This could be seen as a process of empowering employees in an organization (David, 1999:16). The understanding of the organisation's strategic plans may be the most important benefit of strategic management, followed by commitment. This is mainly because once employees understand the organisation's plans, they will be in a better position to make a meaningful contribution to the attainment of its objectives. In as far as the GCIS is concerned, the process does not involve the employees right from the start, but rather the strategy is developed at top management level and later on people are requested to make input on the developed strategy.

### **3.2.3.3 Allocation of resources**

According to Kroon (1990:138), strategic management helps to set priorities for products, which may serve as a guideline for the allocation of the limited resources. This is because strategic objectives determine the resources needed

for their attainment. The allocation of resources also has implications on the organisation's communication strategy, and therefore can enhance or inhibit its impact.

It is evident from the above discussion that strategic management is a process which takes into consideration the environment within which an organisation operates. It is against this background that the role of the GCIS in strategic management of government communication will be discussed.

## **3.3 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SYSTEM (GCIS)**

The following discussion will focus on the historical background of the GCIS. Firstly, the focus will be on the South African Communication Services (SACS), which is the predecessor to the GCIS, and secondly, the focus will be on the

establishment of the Comtask leading to the establishment of the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS). The purpose of this discussion is to place the role of the GCIS in a particular historical context to provide a better understanding of its mandate of strategically managing government communication.

### **3.3.1 South African Communication Services (SACS)**

Government communication prior to 1998 was co-coordinated by the South African Communication Services (SACS). As Horwitz (2001: 287) indicates, the SACS began as the Department of Information after the National Party came to power in 1948.

The mandate of the SACS was to create a positive image of the apartheid government in the face of criticism by the local and international media. The SACS then emerged as the main distributor of government information and interpreter of events during the state of emergency. This was largely because it was one of the only entities legally permitted to report in areas of unrests. It is against this background that the government imposed restrictions on the press regarding the scope of their reporting. This has resulted in many newspapers that violated the imposed restrictions being banned.

The SACS was also required to communicate with South Africans on behalf of other government departments about their activities and to coordinate pronouncements coming out of various state agencies. It was what according to Horwitz (2001: 287) the “above ground” organisation of the State Security Council (SSC). Its main responsibility was the handling of government communications and information during the 1980s. This could be simply defined as the co-ordination of strategic management of government communication during the apartheid government era.

Some of the functions the State Security Council (SSC) as articulated by Horwitz (2001: 288), included the Strategic Communications branch, known as Stratkom. Stratkom established a network of agents in the mass media. Their responsibility was to influence public perception to ensure that it is favourable towards government. In order to achieve this objective, the SACS established a Communication Centre whose main responsibility was to monitor domestic and international news 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. The purpose of the monitoring was to identify communication problems and opportunities for government to enable government communicators to respond accordingly (Horwitz 2001: 288).

As the 1994 elections approached, the SACS tried to reinvent itself to become a neutral government agency seeking to build a two-way communication between

government and the people. Its operations shifted to professional services at the request of ministries and government departments (Horwitz (2001:288). After the 1994 democratic elections, the SACS was however found to be incompatible with the new democratic set up. This led to the formation of the Communications Task Group (Comtask) whose mandate was to review government communication and to make recommendations on possible improvements.

### **3.3.2 Communication Task Group (Comtask)**

The following discussion of the Comtask will deal with its background, its mandate, its main findings and its main recommendations, which led to the establishment of the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS).

#### **3.3.2.1 Background of the Comtask**

The period of transition provided the media with a new critical zeal in their reporting (Horwitz 2001:289). As a result, the media had more latitude and confidence in their reporting. This was because they no longer feared harassment by the government. The media were thus free to broadcast or write

stories that were critical of government. As a result, politicians began to raise concerns that government achievements were not receiving adequate media coverage. A perception also prevailed that the media seemed to enjoy highlighting stories of perceived black government's incompetence.

Arising from this concern, a meeting of government communicators and those in the media industry was called by Thabo Mbeki, who was then South Africa's Deputy President. This meeting was held at a Western Cape village called Arniston, in August 1995. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss government communications and to recommend improvements. The meeting recommended that a Communications Task Group (Comtask) be established. Mbeki was mandated to appoint a 10-member board of inquiry, following a public nomination process (Horwitz 2001:297).

### **3.3.2.2 Mandate of the COMTASK Group**

The Comtask Group was mandated to examine government communications at the local, provincial, national and international levels. It was also expected to make recommendations on new policies, structures and budgets. A particular mention was made on the need to examine training and affirmative action policies, the way in which ownership of the media affects government communication and of South Africa's international information dissemination processes (Communications 2000



1996:10). The Comtask was also required to recommend policy choices on government communications.

### **3.3.2.3 Findings of the COMTASK Group**

Generally, the Comtask inquiry found that most government functions, structures and personnel were largely uncoordinated and inefficient. The inquiry also found that government functions were characterised by a lack of strategic planning and co-ordination at all levels of government (Communications 2000: 1996: 50).

The findings of the Comtask could therefore be divided into the following main categories: government communications in general, relations between government and the media, and development communication. The following is a summary of the main findings as contained in the Comtask report (Communications 2000:20-22).

*Regarding government communication in general, the Comtask had the following findings:*

- There were no clear standards to measure communication capacity and costs.
- Communication staff suffered from poor morale and lack of mandate.

- The South African Communication Services (SACS) had low-level interaction with government departments and provinces and as a result it was not maximally meeting their needs.
- Overall, government communication lacked central co-ordination of its messages; adequate planning of information campaigns and communication was given a low priority.

*With regard to the relationship between government and the media, the Comtask had the following findings:*

- Government and media relations in a democracy are always sensitive, and occasionally acrimonious.
- Apartheid weakened the communication profession in South Africa; and there is an agreement that capacity building is needed to improve standards and to open the profession and media management to disadvantaged groups.
- The South African media, especially the press, lacks experienced journalists able to cover stories in depth and context.

*Regarding development communication, the Comtask had the following findings:*

- There is a fundamental need to reach out to most South Africans, especially the disadvantaged.
- There is inadequate public infrastructure in broadcasting and telecommunication to respond to development needs of the community.

- A closely co-ordinated strategy is required to extend the telecommunications and ICT infrastructure to needy communities.

It is against the above-mentioned findings that the Comtask recommended the establishment of a new policy and structural framework for South Africa's government communication and information system. The recommended system would be called the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), which will be located in The Presidency. The GCIS would replace the SACS. The head of the GCIS would be the head of government communications (Communications 2000:10). The GCIS was then established in May 1998.

### **3.3.3 Government Communication and Information System (GCIS)**

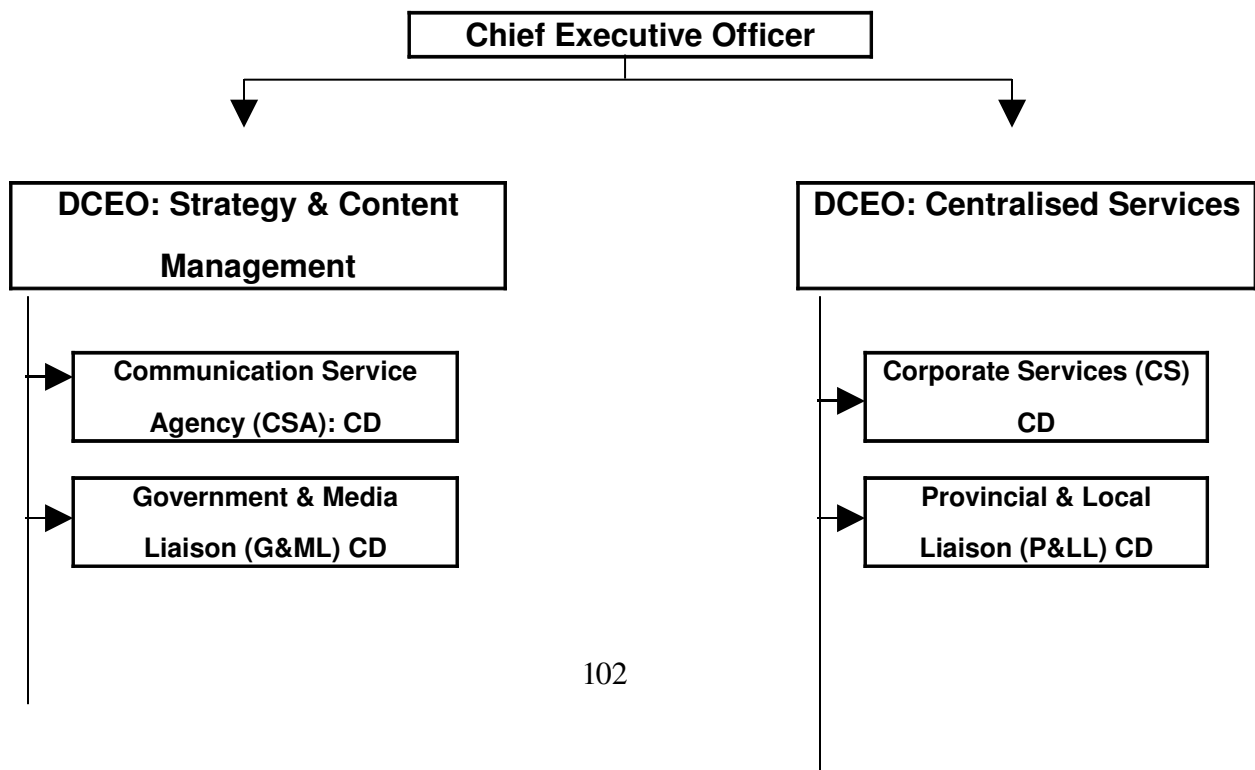
This section will outline the mandate of the GCIS and its approach to strategic management of government communication.

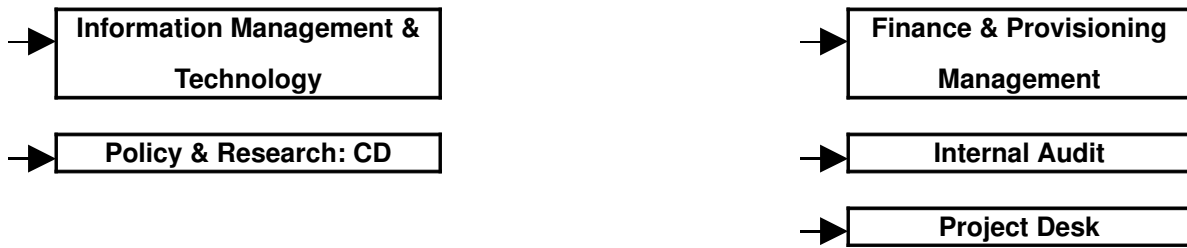
#### **3.3.3.1 Mandate of the GCIS**

The mandate of the GCIS is to develop infrastructure, which would ensure that there is co-ordination between the three tiers of government (national, provincial and local government), government bodies and parastatals. The GCIS has also been mandated to ensure that there is interaction between government and the people, and to increase people's access to government information, which would ultimately help them to make informed decisions about their lives.

The GCIS was also tasked with the strategic management of government communication. The organogram of the GCIS in Figure 3.1 provides an indication of how it has been structured to enable it to manage government communication.

**Figure 3.1 Organogram of the GCIS**





**CD=Chief Directorate**

It should be noted that the structure of an organisation determines the flow of communication and the role that each member of the organogram plays in organisational communication. As Smit and Cronje (1999:335) indicate, effective organisational communication gives organisations a competitive edge and such organisations are most likely to be more successful.

**3.3.3.2 The GCIS approach to strategic management of government communication**

**3.3.3.2.1 GCIS corporate strategy**

The GCIS approach to strategic management is guided by its corporate strategy. It should however be noted that this strategy is informed by the State of the Nation Address (SONA), government's programme of action, and the National Government Communication Strategy. This is meant to ensure that given that the GCIS is the custodian of government communication, its communication activities are in line with government's broader communication objectives.

In this regard, the GCIS has developed a corporate strategy framework which stretches from April 2004-March 2007. This framework simply provides a framework within which the GCIS must operate (See Appendix A for a full version of the GCIS corporate strategy).

Given that the communication environment keeps on changing, flexibility within the framework is allowed to accommodate such changes. The following is a summary of the GCIS corporate strategy (please refer to Appendix A for a detailed GCIS corporate strategy):

- Vision: To help meet the communication needs of government and information needs of the people, thereby ensure a better life for all.
- Mission: To provide leadership in government communication and ensure that the public is informed of government's implementation of its mandate.
- Strategic objective: To enhance the Government Communication System and its operations in ways that contribute to the process of further consolidating our democracy and taking the country onto a higher growth and development path.

It is evident from the corporate strategy that the ultimate objective of the GCIS is to make sure that government meets its communication objectives. The ultimate objective is to improve the lives of South African citizens. In line with its mandate, the GCIS is meant to co-ordinate government communication activities, and to provide leadership with regard to communication.

As indicated in the corporate strategy, the activities of the GCIS take into consideration that government departments are divided into five clusters, namely, governance and administration, international, economic, social and justice, crime prevention, and security cluster. The activities of these clusters are taken into consideration when the GCIS plans its activities.

The other aspect to be taken into consideration is that the GCIS corporate strategy takes into consideration the various government campaigns and projects. In order to manage these activities, the GCIS has adopted the project management approach to its management of government communication.

#### **3.3.3.2.2 Project management at the GCIS**

The GCIS has adopted the project management approach to strategic management in 1999. As a result of operational changes, the GCIS established a Directorate called the Project Desk. Its responsibilities include amongst other

things, co-ordination of the establishment of project teams and the provision of support to such teams. It is also expected to manage cross-cutting requests for assistance with project management from other government departments. The question in this case is how project management is defined in relation to how it is practiced at the GCIS.

Project management as defined by Black (2000:7) can be described...

... as the ability to create the impossible, with the unwilling, against insurmountable odds, under budget, on time...”.

Black (2000:10) further states that...

“project management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools and techniques to satisfy the expectations of the project stakeholders”.

The required skills in project management are project planning, definition of the scope, estimating and controlling time, estimating and controlling costs, quality assurance, human resource management, creation, collection, distribution of information, risk management, and procurement (Black, 2000: 10).



What is however generally common in project management is that the stakes are high and the visibility is high as there are set deadlines and milestones that must be met. The introduction of the project management approach at the GCIS necessitated changes in the daily operations. This was largely because people started to operate beyond the confines of their sections and work with colleagues in other sections, and in some instances with other government departments, and civil society stakeholders.

The other aspect to be considered is that the project management approach made it necessary for the GCIS to draw distinctions between the types of work that require input from one section of the GCIS (line function) and the type of work that requires expertise from more than one section of the GCIS (project) (Project management handbook 2003: 5).

The distinction of responsibilities that took place at the GCIS was well articulated by Lockyer and Gordon (1996:3) who stated that operations that proceed under conventional line management are involved in what is normally a substantially stable situation, whilst on the other hand project management is concerned with the introduction and management of change, which is likely to cross conventional functional boundaries.

In this application of project management principles, project teams are formed to deal with a specific project. People from different sections are selected to a project team on the basis of their skills, competencies, interests and the nature of the project. Depending on the nature of the project, people from other government departments may also form part of the project team. Imbizo for example, has the core project team which is mainly comprised of internal GCIS employees, and an extended team which includes representatives from other departments whose services and expertise are relevant to Imbizo.

The advantage of project management is that it assists in the allocation of resources, enables the organisation to involve people from different sections in projects. Project management also helps to keep employees informed about government projects and drawing from their skills. The other advantage is that it enables the GCIS to adapt to the ever-changing communication environment in which government communication takes place.

In as far as Imbizo is concerned; people are allocated responsibilities taking into consideration amongst other things, their skills, and relevance of their line function. Team members are therefore requested to provide feedback to the project team within an agreed time frame. This arrangement enables the project team leaders to make the necessary interventions.

### **3.4 CONCLUSION**

It is evident from the discussion that strategic management is an ongoing process. It also requires that an organisation conducts environmental analysis to keep abreast with the developments in the environment within which it operates. The communication environment within which the GCIS operates keeps on changing, and as a result, its approach to strategic management must take this factor into account. This is largely because past successes do not necessarily guarantee future success.

## **CHAPTER 4**

## **ANALYSIS OF THE IMBIZO COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FRAMEWORK**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In his address during the State of the Nation address (SONA), President Mbeki said that:

“The tide has turned. The people's contract for a better tomorrow is taking shape. I trust that all of us will identify with this historic process. Given the great possibility we have to move forward, we dare not falter” (Mbeki 2003:21).

The contract referred to in the above quotation, from a government perspective, refers to the working relationship between government and the people in a participatory and consultative manner to improve the lives of all South Africans. It is with this understanding that the South African government has adopted Imbizo as a communication strategy that encourages the participation of the community on issues of governance.

Against this background, that this chapter will focus on the analysis of Imbizo as a strategy for participatory development communication and the importance of environmental scanning in the development of a communication strategy. In order

to achieve this objective, the analysis will draw from available literature on how to develop a communication strategy. Other frameworks that are used for the development of a communication strategy will also be discussed to provide a framework within which Imbizo communication strategy should be understood. The main idea behind the analysis is to identify possible gaps in the Imbizo communication strategy framework for possible improvement.

#### **4.2 THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

Environmental scanning is the first step in the development of a communication strategy. The process of environmental scanning deals with an analysis of the context within which the organisation operates or where a particular campaign is going to take place. The analysis of the communication environment deals with both the internal and external context of the organization.

The external environment on the one hand deals with the remote environment, social factors, economic factors, political factors, technological factors and ecological factors and the identification of relevant strategic stakeholders (Steyn and Puth 2000:57-58 & Gilbert et al 1998:28).

With regard to the internal environment, the focus is on the analysis of the infrastructure that the organisation possesses, what can be used in the

implementation of the strategy and the extent to which the organisation's employees understand the main objectives of the strategy, so that they know how they can contribute in the implementation process. As Steyn and Puth (2000:54-56) indicate, the internal environment also deals with the corporate profile, vision, mission, corporate values, corporate philosophy, corporate culture, and corporate policy.

In this regard Grunig (1992:473) suggests that organisations need to adapt to the environment within which they operate if they want to increase their effectiveness and to survive. The implication in this regard is that the communication strategies that are developed should take into consideration the environment within which communication will take place.

This would require the organisation to develop monitoring and feedback methods to continuously assess their environment. This is important largely because environmental scanning provides the organisation with a broader understanding of the context within which it operates, its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, also known as SWOT analysis.

According to Thompson and Strickland (1995:92), a SWOT analysis provides a quick overview of the organisation's strategic situation. The strengths and weaknesses focus more on the internal capabilities of an organisation and its

external situation is reflected by its opportunities and threats. The environmental scan plays an important role in the development of the organisation's strategy and the communication strategy that has to be developed to communicate with both internal and external stakeholders.

The general rule is that managers should build their strategies around what the company does best and avoid strategies that place heavy demands on areas where the company is weakest or has an unproven ability. (Thompson & Strickland, 1995:93). The implication in this regard is that the communication strategy that an organisation develops should maximally use its strengths in order to ensure that it gets maximum impact.

#### **4.3 IMPORTANCE OF A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

As Mersham and Skinner (2001:5) indicate, communication gives life to organisational structure because an organisation's structure tends to affect the communication processes. A communication strategy is important because it is a work tool through which individuals understand their roles in the organisation and how they should communicate with clients and other relevant stakeholders.

Moss and Warnaby (1998:133) argue that looking at the importance of the strategic leadership in organisations, both in terms of the rational analytical mode, and the

symbolic role of leaders, there is clearly a need to communicate the organisational leaders' strategic vision to external stakeholders. Strategy communication also helps to ensure broader understanding and acceptance of the leadership's strategic vision both internally and externally (Moss and Warnaby, 1998:135).

According to Puth (1994:73), organisational communication is a fundamental component of management when it comes to influencing the employees' understanding of business goals, employees' attitude and performance. It can therefore be argued that the communication strategy also serves to make sure that the relevant stakeholders understand and buy-into what the organisation seeks to achieve.

In some instances, depending on what the organisation seeks to achieve, it might be necessary to involve the stakeholders in taking decisions on what needs to be communicated and how this should be done. For example, in a development communication environment where the purpose of the communication would be to change the lives of the recipients of information for the better, it may be necessary to make sure that they actively participate in the decision making processes. This is important because they are in a position where they can assist in mobilizing local people to support the project or campaign.



It is therefore important to ensure that there is an organisational policy that ensures broad management participation and support. In developing the organisational policy on communication, it is important to make sure that the employees are involved in such a process. The importance of their involvement is that they will be in a position where they understand it and take ownership of the process and the final product. This could help to ensure that the employees feel valued and could also enable them to make a meaningful contribution in the implementation of the strategy.

Another aspect is that communicating strategy helps to build a climate of mutual trust and understanding between managers and stakeholders. According to Fischer (2002:11), the reality is that while it is good to enjoy high media profile, it is probably as important to keep staff informed about what is happening in a company. This is mainly because they are the ones who have the responsibility to make sure that the company makes a profit, which will in turn please the shareholders.

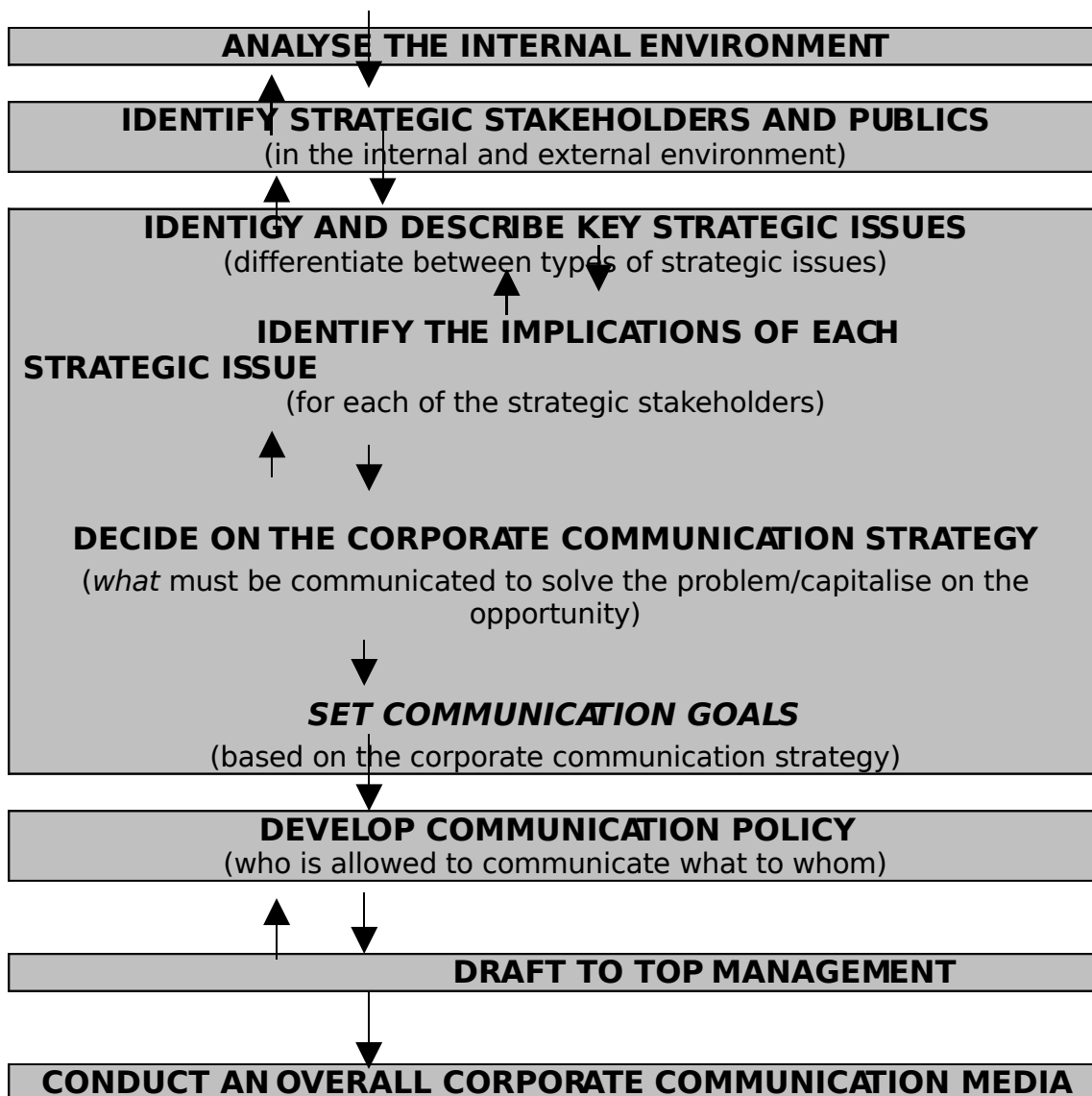
#### **4.4 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FRAMEWORKS: EXAMPLES**

The following discussion deals with the different frameworks that can be used in developing a communication strategy. The focus of the discussion will be on the framework developed by Steyn and Nunes (2001), the one developed by the

Economic and Social Research Council and the framework developed by the GCIS for all government communication strategies. The framework developed by the GCIS will be analysed looking at how it is used for the purposes of the Imbizo campaign.

#### 4.4.1 Steyn and Nunes framework

Figure 4.1 Guidelines for the development of a corporate communication Strategy (Steyn and Puth, 2000:63)



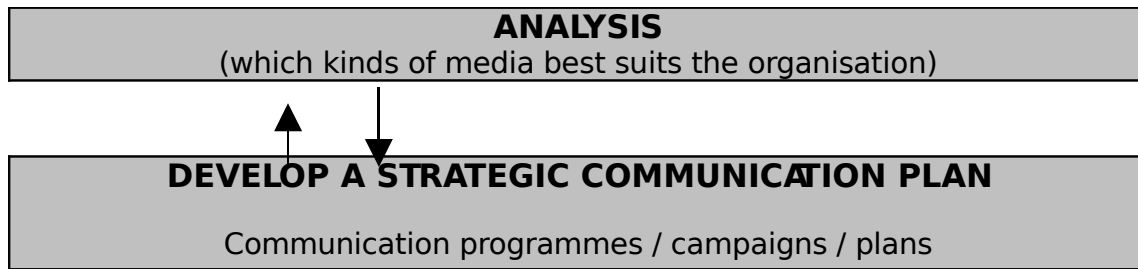
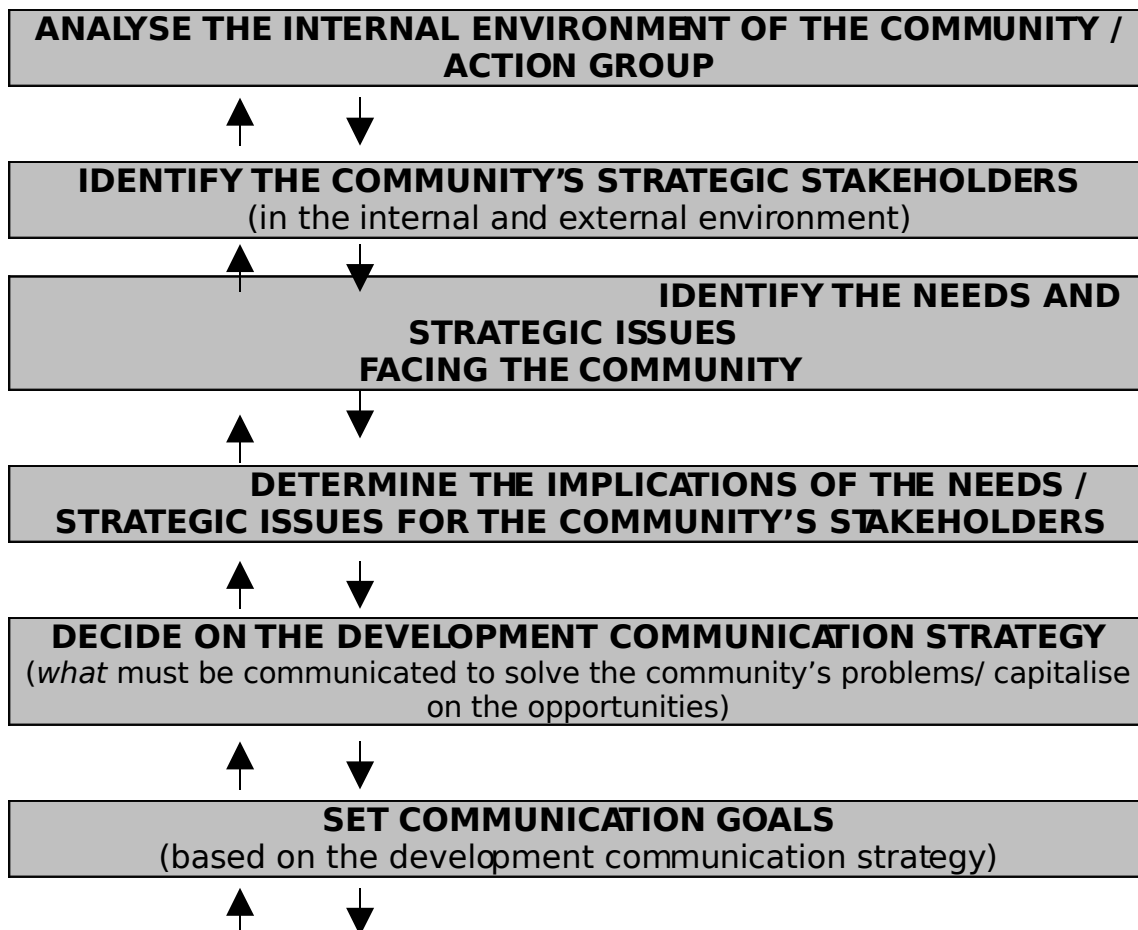


Figure 4.2

Guidelines for the development of a development communication strategy  
(Steyn and Nunes, 2001:46)





The model outlined in Figure 4.1 has been developed focusing more on the development of corporate communication strategy. However, Steyn and Nunes (2001) adapted this framework to the development of a communication strategy which is meant for development communication purposes (Figure 4.2).

At the conclusion of their Heifer project: South Africa, Steyn and Nunes (2001:45) indicated that the model for the development of a corporate communication strategy (Figure 4.1) could also be used by development agencies for the purposes of their corporate communication strategy. This they argue will ensure the two-way communication with their range of strategic stakeholders, and a strategic role for development communication facilitators in policy-making and strategy formulation.

Steyn and Nunes (2001:46) further state that the adaptation of the corporate communication strategy framework would assist to ensure that the participatory approach to development, especially the participatory communication approach, be even more participatory. This is largely because the strategic information on issues and stakeholders will be provided by the community and its designated communicators.

In this case, Steyn and Nunes (2001:47) indicated that...

“...the philosophy of participation can only be strengthened by having the community involved in the identification of strategic issues (which would probably focus on developmental needs and problems), determining their implications for the community’s stakeholders, deciding *what* should be communicated to solve those problems (development communication *strategy*), and deciding *how* it should be communicated to stakeholders (communication plans)”.

It is with this understanding that they recommended that the corporate communication strategy framework be used as it is but with slight changes for use for development communication purposes. It can therefore be argued that the communication framework discussed in Figure 4.2 as Steyn and Nunes (2001:46) indicate seeks to ensure that there is maximum participation in the development of the communication strategy meant for development communication purposes. However, there are certain aspects in the framework that may compromise the extent and nature of community participation.

Firstly, consultation with the traditional leaders and other role players regarding the strategy for development communication is done almost towards the end of the process. At this stage, critical decisions have already been taken with regard to who should communicate, what should be communicated, the identification of community strategic issues and the analysis of the environment. The problem in this regard is that traditional leaders, for example, are influential in their communities and if they are not consulted at the beginning of the project, they may feel undermined or feel that decisions are imposed on them, and thus undermining their authority. This might have a detrimental effect on the participation of the local community.

Secondly, the beneficiaries of any development initiative understand their situation better, and are therefore well placed to articulate their needs. However, if they think that decisions are imposed on them, this may affect the extent to which they may want to participate in the project. It is therefore important for a framework like this to make sure that the community which is meant to benefit from this process is involved right from the beginning of the project.

Thirdly, although the framework seeks to ensure that there is community participation, the role of the community is not clearly defined. It is therefore important to define the responsibilities of the stakeholders because this would enable them to understand the project to which their commitment is sought. It can be argued that although the above concerns have been identified, this framework can assist greatly in the development of a communication strategy to be used for development purposes.

#### **4.4.2 Economic and social research council framework**

The Economic and Social Research Council framework was developed largely for the purpose of assisting students to market their research more effectively

(Economic and social research council, 2003:1). However, this framework provides an insight into the development of a communication strategy.

It has identified the following steps as the most important in the development of a communication strategy:

- Checking perceptions through environmental scanning.
- Setting measurable objectives.
- Agreeing on principles (what the strategy seeks to achieve).
- Developing messages and branding.
- Prioritising audiences.
- Choosing channels.
- Planning activities.
- Estimating time.
- Estimating budget.
- Evaluating success/failures.

This framework places emphasis on gaining an understanding of the environment of the audience as the basis for the development of the communication strategy.

This, it is hoped that will help in the achievement of some form of relevance and credibility on what needs to be communicated. It is on the basis of the



communication environment analysis that clear and measurable objectives of the communication strategy are developed.

It must be noted that communication processes for a particular project may not be able to communicate everything that is relevant to the project, because of amongst other things, limited financial and human resources. As a result, this framework stipulates that it is important to clearly indicate what the communication strategy will do and what it will not do.

This framework also places emphasis on the importance of the development of the messages and branding material and how such material can be used in different contexts. For example, a press release may be used in a particular context, whilst a newspaper article may be relevant to another context. There is therefore a need to make sure that the branding of Imbizo is in line with its overall objectives. Given that the project is meant to convey a message, a decision therefore needs to be taken to determine the target audience in advance. The audience should then be prioritised taking into consideration the objectives of the project. This would therefore require an investigation into the nature of the audience. Amongst other things, this would include their lifestyle, social conditions, economic status, expenditure and media usage patterns.

The selection of the channels of communication through which the audience may be reached is to large extent determined by the target audience that the campaign seeks to reach. It is therefore important for the strategy to use the relevant channels that the community prefers to ensure maximum reach and impact of the communication strategy.

All campaigns have activities through which the messages that they want to convey are communicated. It therefore becomes important to consolidate the communication activities into a workable project plan, with set deadlines and the people responsible for the implementation of specific activities.

The implementation of a communication strategy has budgetary implications. And as a result, the costing of the communication strategy must be done. This is important because even if a communication strategy is good, without the budget, it might be difficult to implement it.

The evaluation of the implementation of the communication strategy should be done taking into consideration the objectives which have been developed for the purposes of the communication strategy.

Although this framework provides some insights into the process of developing a communication strategy, there are some limitations that can be identified with regard to its applicability when used for development communication purposes.

Firstly, this framework looks at communication from a one-way perspective. The audiences are perceived to be passive recipients of the messages. This is largely because it does not accommodate the aspect of consultation between the audience and the communicators. Looking at this communication strategy framework from a participatory development communication perspective, the audiences should be actively involved right from the initial stages of the project. This is important because they are more familiar with the environment within which the communication will take place. The issue of consultation is important in order to avoid a situation where solutions are provided to what the communicators might see as problems, whilst on the other hand the beneficiaries do not think there is a problem, and as a result, irrelevant solutions are provided to the beneficiaries.

Secondly, it focuses mainly on the use of the mainstream media at the expense of unmediated communication, which is more suitable for participatory development communication. The mainstream media (especially the press) is important for development communication. However, if it is to be used, it cannot be used as the main channel of communication because of the inherent limitations. These include the high rate of illiteracy in the country and limited accessibility to newspapers. It

should therefore be used in conjunction with other popular channels such as radio, television, and interpersonal communication platforms.

It is also important though to note that a development communication strategy should seek to make use of all the available channels of communication to ensure that it gets maximum impact. However, this aspect seems to be missing in this framework.

Thirdly, framework also places emphasis on the importance of evaluation of communication to assess the successes and/or failures of the project. The focus in this case is on the evaluation largely from an internal organisational perspective. In this case, the focus is on the internal processes that have been put in place and the extent to which they have been implemented as planned. This means that it does not evaluate the communication from the perspective of the recipients; an aspect which could provide more insight into the impact a particular communication strategy.

In order for the communication strategy to be effective, this study contends that the intended beneficiaries should be involved right at the beginning of the project. This has several obvious benefits.

Firstly, their involvement from the beginning would help to create a sense of ownership among the beneficiaries. This would help to ensure that they actively participate in the project.

Secondly, every project team member is communicator for the project, and as such, every contact that they have in their environments is an opportunity to communicate about the project. Given that beneficiaries are familiar with their environments, they are in a better position to also mobilise fellow community members to support the project.

#### **4.5 IMBIZO AS A STRATEGY FOR PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION**

##### **4.5.1 Evolution of Imbizo**

Imbizo refers to a traditional gathering convened by an Inkosi (a traditional leader). It is normally convened when there is an issue to be discussed or when an Inkosi wants to discuss a particular issue with his subjects, or to address problems within the community.

Traditionally, Imbizo serves as a platform where people discuss issues that affect them in the community such as, major crisis like drought, and a threat from outside and when there is a need for resources. Traditional leaders use Imbizo gatherings

to get suggestions from their subjects and possibly respond to the issues raised during the discussions.

As a result, community members are given the chance to participate in decision-making processes. The other advantage with the traditional approach to Imbizo is that people are able to express themselves in their own languages. This is made possible because this practice draws from the African cultural traditions, values and belief systems.

It is in this context that Mbigi (2004:8) argues that Africa needs a holistic developmental approach that is rooted in its cultural traditions, values, and belief systems. This, he argues, is important because cultural identity is a central problem which African intellectuals must address. It is therefore imperative for any adaptation of Imbizo to be seriously rooted in African traditions.

Mbigi (2004:8) in this regard further states that,

“... no society has ever met the challenge of development without harnessing the strong elements of their culture.”

This is largely because, as Mbigi (2004:8) further states, African culture places emphasis on the collective effort, and that a community is a cradle of the individual

and his achievements. As such, it becomes important for development and transformation efforts to take into consideration that change does not start with an individual but with the development of communities.

This is because, as Mbigi (2004:9) further states, the cultural paradigms that individuals carry are owned by particular communities. It therefore becomes important for any Imbizo campaign to take into consideration the cultural paradigms of a community within which communication is going to take place. This would involve conducting a needs analysis in a particular community in order to understand their needs and their cultural make-up. A needs analysis in this case would help to prevent situations in which irrelevant solutions are provided to a particular community, or solutions are provided where a community does not have any problems. It will also enable development practitioners to understand community dynamics and the role that each individual plays in the community.

In dealing with Imbizo and its role in community development in South Africa, it is important to note that its operation has been affected by political developments. For example, the emergence of the elected local government leaders was seen, and in some instances, is still seen, amongst traditional leaders as a threat, hence the friction that exist in some quarters. However, even in the midst of these challenges and developments, the role of an Imbizo approach as a strategy for participatory development communication was recognised and adopted by the South African government as a communication strategy for participatory governance.

The introduction of Imbizo as a government approach to interaction with the people can among other things be traced back to the African National Congress' (ANC) need to ensure that it interacts actively with the people. It is important to note that the ANC's position generally becomes government position because it is the ruling party. The need for increased interaction with the people has been clearly articulated in the following quotation:

“The empowerment of the people to participate in the process of governance, expressed in the concepts of a people-centred society and people-driven processes of transformation, indicates the centrality of the concept of popular and participatory democracy to the democratic movement's understanding of the functioning of a democratic state. It shows



the commitment of this movement to the proclamation in the Freedom Charter that “The People Shall Govern” (African National Congress 1996:7).

The challenge posed by the above quotation was for the ANC to come up with an approach which would help to ensure that its objective of actively interacting with the people is achieved. As a result, in October 2001, Cabinet decided that after the President’s State of the Nation Address (SONA) it would engage in Imbizo communication campaigns, which would use the same approach adopted in traditional Imbizos. The traditional approach was adopted because it was seen as the best practice regarding consultative governance.

In government circles, Imbizo has been acknowledged as an effective forum for enhancing interaction between government and the people. It is against this background that Imbizo is also aimed at building partnerships between government and the South African public and to enhance social change. In order to achieve this objective, the president has set aside time to be involved in the Imbizo programme, through visits to provinces (Government Communicators’

Handbook 2003: 36). Cabinet Ministers, Premiers, Mayors and MECs are also expected to engage in outreach programmes to give support to government’s development programme (Government Communicators’ Handbook 2003: 36).

The fact that Imbizo aims to interact with the people, requires that its planning involves extensive communication with the people in the area that is going to be visited. The leaders in the area should therefore be briefed on the impending visit by the president or other political leaders, service delivery reports are compiled, task teams are set up, sites to be visited are identified, and infrastructure for the meeting is set up. The planning also involves working on the logistics of the Imbizo meeting.

#### **4.5.2 Analysis of the communication strategy framework for Imbizo**

The GCIS as the custodian of government communication has developed a framework which is meant to guide government communicators throughout government in the development of the communication strategy for their various communication projects. The following are the steps that are followed in the development of a communication strategy in a government context (specific reference will be made to its usage in Imbizo):

- Background (why do we need to communicate).
- Objectives of the communication strategy (intended objectives of the communication strategy).
- Analysis of the communication environment.
- Communication challenges.

- Development of messages and themes.
- Deciding on the audience, channels and type of event.
- Phased communication programme.
- Structures and processes.
- Strategy document.
- Action plan.

This communication strategy framework raises some pertinent concerns when applied to projects which are meant to be participatory. In the government context, participatory development communication takes the form of Imbizo.

Firstly, the purpose of Imbizo is to provide a platform on which politicians interact with the people and discuss their needs with them. It also provides an opportunity for politicians to explain government policies and programmes to the people using the languages that they understand in a participatory manner.

However, the problem with Imbizo is that the decisions on the intended outcomes of the Imbizo communication strategy are taken with little or no input from the beneficiaries. This is largely because what is finally communicated is informed by the national communication strategy of government, government programme of action with little or no input from the beneficiaries from the beginning of the project.

Secondly, if the purpose of Imbizo is to enable the politicians to gain first hand information about the lives of the people they lead, it should be on the basis of their findings during the visits to the communities that they should devise forms of interventions to address the problems that they have identified. However, the fact that communication objectives and messages are developed before politicians meet with the people, suggests that they attend these meetings with preconceived ideas about the conditions, of the areas to be visited, what people are going to say and what they intend to communicate.

This framework therefore suggests that the communication is not about the partnership between government and the people, but about government and what it wants to communicate. This, therefore, creates a perception that government simply wants to communicate a particular message, irrespective of what the people might say during Imbizo.

Thirdly, amongst other things, Imbizo is supposed to be a fact-finding activity. This should therefore be reflected in the communication strategy. It could therefore be argued that once the fact-finding mission is completed, this is when most communication should take place. The purpose of this communication would be to then inform the people of what is going to be done with regard to the issues that were discussed with politicians during an Imbizo meeting.

However, what is happening at the moment is that there is an extensive pre-Imbizo publicity generating communication, but not much is communicated with regard to the issues that have been identified as needing attention from government. The other concern is that there is little or no communication around the implementation time frames. This study contends that even if there is little or no progress, it is still important to communicate the situation to the people as this would help to build a culture of trust.

Fourthly, the other concern is that the objectives of the communication strategy are informed by the analysis of the communication environment. This analysis takes various forms such as research and analysis of the media coverage of certain issues. The problem in this regard is that a researcher, for example, who does not know anything about the community concerned is given the responsibility to conduct an analysis of the environment in the community that will be visited. The lack of understanding of the material conditions on the ground could minimise the impact of Imbizo communication. It is therefore important for government to work closely with the local people because they understand their environment better.

Fifthly, the key messages that are developed for the purposes of the campaign are developed before the Imbizo meeting takes place. The problem with this approach is that it assumes that government communicators know beforehand what the

needs of the community are. The question that needs to be answered is what informs these messages? The other problem is that the messages might not be relevant to the needs of a particular community.

Sixthly, this communication strategy framework does not make provision for communicating the strategic objectives within the GCIS and throughout government. This is a problem because even though not all GCIS staff members and officials in other government departments are not directly involved in Imbizo, an understanding of how it works and its objectives could help them to explain the campaign to their family members and friends, thus generating more publicity. This study therefore contends that every government employee, if well informed, can be in a better position to help in publicising the Imbizo initiative.

Seventh, the other concern is that the branding material used for the purposes of generating publicity around Imbizo are developed at the GCIS, with no involvement of the stakeholders. These products, amongst other things include radio television and press adverts and billboards. Brochures are also developed providing an outline of government's achievements, and in some instances to generate publicity.

The relevance and impact of these products become a serious concern. Against this background, there is a need to develop community-specific information

products and thereby avoid developing generic information products which may not be relevant to some of the communities.

#### **4.6 CONCLUSION**

Imbizo is meant to provide both the politicians and the people an opportunity to interact and discuss issues that affect the people in general. However, the communication strategy framework used for the purposes of Imbizo does not explicitly make provision for people's participation in decision making. It has also become evident that there are no significant differences between the GCIS framework and that developed by Steyn and Nunes (2001) and that developed by the Economic and Social Research Council. The main gap that can be identified in these frameworks is that they look at communication as a one-way process. It can therefore be concluded that the development of any communication which is meant to be participatory, in this case Imbizo, must involve the people who are meant to be beneficiaries of such a process.