

CHAPTER 3

THE USE OF RESEARCH IN GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION IN SOUTH AFRICA – UP TO THE LAUNCH OF THE GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SYSTEM

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter 3 the researcher provides an overview of the use of research in government communication and the dissemination of government information in South Africa by a central institution in the Public Service from 1936 up to the launch of the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) on 18 May 1998. This includes:

- the period up to the establishment of the Bureau for Information
- the time of the Bureau for Information, 1 September 1985 to 30 April 1991
- the South African Communication Service (SACS), 1 May 1991 to 17 May 1998.

Throughout chapter 3, specific reference is made to the use of research to promote the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information.

The process of reviewing and transforming government communication after the new constitutional dispensation was introduced in 1994 and the use of research in government communication since the launch of GCIS is given attention in chapter 4.

3.2 THE PERIOD UP TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BUREAU FOR INFORMATION

3.2.1 The period from 1936 to 26 November 1961

3.2.1.1 The State Information Bureau, Department of the Prime Minister – 1936 to 1939

On 29 January 1936 the Public Service Commission approved one post of “Information Officer” as a permanent position in a newly-created State Information Bureau in the Department of the Prime Minister (Hansard, cited by Mulder, 1975:10). According to Muller and van Jaarsveld (cited by Mulder, 1975:10), the establishment of this post must be seen against the background of circumstances in South Africa and outside its borders during 1936 to 1939. Within the country it was the period after the political merger of Hertzog and Smuts. Outside the borders of South Africa it was the time of the rise of Germany and pre-war turbulence in Europe. Wilson (cited by Mulder, 1975:1) mentioned that Genl JBM Hertzog, the Prime Minister, experienced many problems with the press at the time. After extensive criticism by the opposition and advertisement of the post in the media, an appointment was made on 9 May 1937 - one year and four months after approval of the post (Hansard, cited by Mulder, 1975: 13 and 16). The functions of the Information Officer were primarily to liaise with the press and to provide information to the press. According to Hansard (cited by Mulder, 1975:15), government expected from the person to ensure that the press received the correct information and to assist the press if they had the wrong information. After a personal interview with the relevant official, Mulder (1975:16) mentions that he did not perform above-mentioned functions but had to read newspapers and prepare newspaper clippings.

3.2.1.2 *The State Information Bureau, Department of the Interior – 1939 to 1946*

According to the Report of the Department of Information for 1 April 1969 to 31 March 1971 (p.4), the State Information Bureau was transferred to the Department of the Interior after the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. After “extensive investigation” Mulder (1975:26) concluded that the most important function of the State Information Bureau during this period was to disseminate propaganda regarding the war openly. Additional to disseminating information from the government to the public, the Bureau also regarded the provision of information from the public to the government as its responsibility (Mulder, 1975:45). “It was also vital to keep the Government informed as to what the public was thinking and one of the functions of the Press Section of the Bureau was to compile a daily press report outlining the criticisms which had appeared in the newspapers that morning and the evening before. The report was distributed to Cabinet Ministers and a limited number of officials. Where it was thought advisable, the attention of the responsible Minister or head of the Department was drawn to a specific complaint or grievance ventilated in the press” (article by unknown author in *The Nonqa*, cited by Mulder, 1975:45).

This initiative to inform government about “what the public was thinking”, can be regarded as the first recognition of the importance of feedback from the public to promote the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information. Mulder (1975:45) states that this feedback of information from the population to the government, and which resulted in the Bureau becoming a two-way channel, was especially emphasised by Dr HF Verwoerd as an important function of such an information service in the period after 1948.

3.2.1.3 *The State Information Office, Department of the Interior and the Native Information Service – 1947 to 1954*

Towards the end of the war, a number of investigations aimed at redefining the peace-time function of the Bureau were conducted. This resulted in the founding of the State Information Office in the Department of the Interior as successor to the State Information Bureau on 1 January 1947 (Department of Information, 1971:4). The functions of the State Information Office, as determined by the Interdepartmental Commission of 1945, are summarised as follows in the 1951 Annual Report of the State Information Office (State Information Office, 1952:4):

- to co-ordinate the publicity services of the State
- to arrange for the publication of official statements
- to assist State departments with their work of enlightenment
- to provide the Union's foreign representatives with information
- to advise the Government on information and publicity matters.

After the National Party came into power on 26 May 1948, Cabinet decided that the reorganisation, expansion and furtherance of the Union's information service abroad should also be entrusted to the State Information Office. In respect of the information service abroad the necessary co-ordination was affected with the Department of External Affairs. Although the Information Attachés were staff members of the State Information Office, they performed their work under the direct supervision of the heads of missions (State Information Office, 1952:4). According to the review of the activities of the different sections in the abovementioned Annual Report (1952:8-25) the professional staff of the State Information Office were sub-divided into the following seven sections:

- Foreign
- Press

- Visual Publicity
- Publications
- Films
- Research and Reference
- Radio.

Regarding the Research and Reference section, the Annual Report of the State Information Office for 1951 (1952:22) reads as follows:

This section comprises a large reference library and is responsible for the daily filing and indexing of South African and overseas news items under more than 2 000 separate headings, serves 13 Information Attachés and 10 South African missions abroad with airmailed newspaper cuttings, and answers queries about South African affairs received by telephone, letter and cable from all quarters of the globe.

The most important objective of the State Information Office in this period was to disseminate government information abroad. Within South Africa the State Information Office was a passive publicity office, providing information in South Africa only on request of government departments. Information was mostly provided to newspapers and not directly to the public (Mulder, 1975:97).

Towards the end of 1952 the first information officers were appointed by the newly-established Native Information Service to provide information to 'Natives' regarding the government's policies and objectives. The service was also expected to provide information back to the government. Whilst the State Information Office almost exclusively disseminated information abroad, the Native Information Service provided this service within South Africa (Mulder, 1975:95).

3.2.1.4 *The State Information Office, Department of External Affairs and the Native Information Service – 1955 to 1957*

The State Information Office was incorporated into the Department of External Affairs on 1 April 1955. Exactly a year later it became a semi-independent organisation under the control of the Minister of External Affairs and had a Director as accounting officer and a budget vote (Department of Information, 1971:4).

The functions of the officials of the regional offices of the Native Information Service described in Hansard (cited by Mulder 1975:119) are very relevant:

To provide people in their area with correct information regarding all aspects regarding 'Bantu' concerns, to work towards good relations between whites and the 'Bantu' regarding the implementation of the country's policy and legislation adopted by Parliament, to obtain information regarding the needs of 'Natives' on issues relevant to them through direct contact and personal discussion and to, where necessary, assist officials working in districts when they have too much to do with any relevant duties.

The Annual Report on the State Information Office for 1956 and 1957 (1957:18) reported as follows on the activities of the Research and Library section:

To meet the needs of State Information Office (SIO) offices abroad for a continuous flow of information material, the research section had to be strengthened and expanded during the year. The activities of this section are twofold: one is to collate and prepare information gleaned from the press, official reports and other publications and the second is to build up a reference library about South African affairs on as wide a basis as possible. The latter task is necessarily a slow as well as an important one because of the vast volume of

documentation, which has to be classified and indexed. For this reason the emphasis for the year under review was on the library aspect of this section's activities. The necessary posts were created and qualified staff was appointed. In the coming year additional attention will be devoted to the supply of library information as well as material to the overseas offices.

3.2.1.5 The South African Information Service, Native Informative Service and Coloured Information Service – 1957 to 26 November 1961

Towards the end of 1957 the name of the State Information Office was changed to the South African Information Service (Mulder, 1975:101-102). The State Information Office was also “under the control of the Minister of External Affairs” (Department of Information, 1971:4).

The coordination of information dissemination by government departments was discussed extensively during this period (Mulder, 1975:106-107). The South African Information Service was responsible for various publications of other government departments and liaised with the media on behalf of the government (Mulder, 1975:114).

The Native Information Service that had to provide information to the South African population and to the government was very active in South Africa during this period (Verwoerd, HF in Hansard, cited by Mulder 1975:117). Although the Native Information Service was not part of the South African Information Service, the two information services worked together. The Native Information Service assisted by addressing foreign visitors of the South African Information Service and by taking them around in the country (South African Information Service, 1958:9).

The Coloured Information Service was established within the Department of the Interior in 1957. According to Mulder (1975:126-127) the functions and approach of the Coloured Information Service were quite similar to that of the Native Information Service.

Towards the end of this period, the activities of the various information services increasingly overlapped. Various aspects contributed to a decision by government to establish a coordinated and autonomous Department of Information (Mulder, 1975:129).

3.2.1.6 Summary: the period from 1936 to 26 November 1961 – the role of research

According to the information available for the period 1936 to November 1961, the government role-players responsible for the dissemination of information were sensitive to the value of two-way communication: providing information from the public to the government (about 1942), and obtaining information regarding people's needs on issues relevant to them (1957). Unfortunately no information is available to determine whether information obtained from the public was constructively used to improve the availability of government information and to the benefit of people, or whether it was merely used for political purposes and in the interest of government.

What is clear, however, is that no scientific research projects were conducted to support the government's communication and information dissemination initiatives and programmes.

3.2.2 The period from 27 November 1961 to 16 September 1985

Following a whites-only referendum on 5 October 1960 on whether the country should remain a colony of the United Kingdom – or not – South Africa became a republic on 31 May 1961.

3.2.2.1 *The Department of Information – 27 November 1961 to 30 June 1978*

(a) The period 27 November 1961 to 30 March 1969

The Department of Information was created on 27 November 1961. The functions of the Department were outlined as follows in Government Notice No. 1142 of 1 December 1961 (Department of Information, 1971:4):

- The taking over of all the duties and responsibilities hitherto carried out, internally as well as externally, by the South African Information Service.
- The performance of all the functions hitherto carried out by the Information Service of the Department of Bantu Administration and Development (Native Information Service).
- The provision of an effective information service for the Coloured and Indian communities in South Africa and the distribution, internally as well as externally, of data concerning them and their development.
- The co-ordination of all State publicity services.
- The performance of all the additional services and the utilisation of such media as may be effective to supply, wherever it may be necessary or advisable, accurate information on all aspects of the way of life, activities and natural resources of South Africa and South West Africa.

- The performance of such functions as may be decided upon from time to time.

Originally, the new Department consisted of three sections: Publicity, Liaison and Administration (Department of Information, 1962:16). In an interview with *Die Transvaler* (article in *Die Transvaler*, 17 July 1962 as cited by Mulder, 1975:136) the Secretary for the Department of Information summarised the responsibility of the Department as that of having to provide a complete picture of the different population groups living in the country by means of guidance and information – how they live, what they do and how the country is developed. The Secretary also added that the Department needed to provide a support service to other government departments.

The Department of Information was criticised from the beginning. Mulder (1975:137-140) quoted extensively from Hansard to indicate that the House of Assembly debated heavily about the activities and objectives of the Department in 1961 and 1962 – specifically regarding its functions within South Africa. One of the parliamentarians expressed concern that it could be the beginning of an extensive initiative to indoctrinate and influence the ‘Bantu’ in South Africa under the surveillance of the Minister of Information. Another Parliamentarian raised the concern that taxpayers’ money would be used by the Department of Information to finance a party-political propaganda machine to the benefit of Government.

In the Annual Report of the Department of Information for 1962-63 (Department of Information, 1963:30) it is claimed that the ‘dual purpose’ envisaged for the information service to the ‘Bantu’ had been largely achieved. According to this Annual Report, ‘Bantu’ organisations and individuals made contact with officials of the Department to a growing extent – to present their problems and to ask for advice. Also a few years later in the Report of the Department of Information for

April 1966 to March 1968 (1968:41), it is repeated that the Department's functions as far as the 'non-White' sections of the population were concerned, operated in two directions: "The task of the Department's regional officers is to make known to the non-whites, in their areas the State's policies and actions on behalf of the non-whites, and at the same time *determine the non-White reactions and wishes*⁷." Zimmerman (cited by Mulder, 1975:178) referred to the "real function" of the Department's Bantu-liaison sub-division to be that of "liaison", and to "win the goodwill and confidence of the community in order to ensure that the message of government makes impact and also that the population will have the confidence and frankness to disclose their opinions and possible grievances."

It is relevant to note that the Department of Information's Report for the period April 1966 to March 1968 (Department of Information, 1968:6) mentions that a Data Section had been established with the "task of doing the initial research necessary to problems that may arise in the course of overseas information campaigns and in the preparation of articles, brochures and books for use in South Africa as well as overseas." This 'research' entailed the acquisition of relevant information, but did not include any initiative to determine needs, levels of knowledge or relevant attitudes and behaviour.

In the period November 1961 to March 1969 the work of the Department of Information introduced a more integrated approach in terms of information dissemination by the government within South Africa and abroad. For the first time the responsibility of information dissemination by government was coordinated in one body, the Department of Information. Furthermore, the Department was responsible for the coordination of all publicity services of the government.

⁷ Researcher's emphasis

Although no scientific research projects were conducted to support the Department's function during this period, there are indications of a sensitivity regarding the importance for the Department of Information to take account of the 'problems' as well as the 'reactions and wishes' (see previous paragraphs in this section) of specifically 'non-White' South Africans.

(b) The period 1 April 1969 to May 1972

From 1 April 1969 to 31 March 1971, the Department of Information consisted of four professional divisions apart from the customary Administrative and Financial Divisions. These were Interior, Foreign, Audio-visual Services and Publication, and Press Liaison. The Annual Report for the time (1971:4-5) reported on the activities of the professional divisions:

- The Interior Division – with its subdivisions of White Liaison, Coloured Liaison, Indian Liaison and Bantu Liaison had as its main function to provide South Africa's various population groups with information on official policy and its implementation, and to convey the wishes and opinions of those groups to other government bodies.
- The Foreign Division co-ordinated the activities of the Department's 19 overseas offices which were responsible for distributing information on South Africa in the countries in which they were situated.
- The Audio-visual Services and Publication Division was the Department's production machine. It had to supply publications – both regular and occasional – films, photographs and slides series. Art and layout work for departmental publications, exhibitions and so forth were also handled. The Data Subdivision was a research and production unit responsible for compiling occasional publications such as brochures, background articles, information documents and articles on specific subjects for the use of other sections of the Department and internal and overseas offices. This

subdivision on request also undertook tasks such as the revision of articles appearing in standard textbooks and encyclopedias.

- The Press Liaison Division, which was created on 19 October 1970 to establish and maintain close liaison between the Department and the press handled press announcements on behalf of Ministers and government departments and distributed them to the press, magazines, the South African Broadcast Corporation (SABC), foreign press correspondents and information offices and various organisations and private individuals. It also provided assistance to representatives of foreign newspapers and magazines, and arranged their accreditation.

From the information provided in the preceding paragraphs the researcher concludes that the functions and structures of the Department of Information were refined to meet the political needs of the government during this period (1969-1972). No scientific research projects were conducted, but the responsibility of the Interior Division included conveying 'the wishes and opinions' of South Africans 'to other government bodies' (see information provided regarding activities of this Division earlier in this section).

(c) The period June 1972 to 28 February 1975

The then Minister of Information, Dr CP Mulder, explained in the House of Assembly on 19 May 1972 that certain new complications had resulted in new demands to the Department and that he therefore envisaged reorganisation of the Department (Hansard, cited by Mulder, 1975:182). In the Annual Report of the Department of Information for 1972 (1973:5) the purpose of the reorganisation is explained: "The structural changes and improvements are not only aimed at improving the time in which the Department responds to requests but also to simplify procedures enabling the organisation to make urgent adjustments to its priorities and *modus operandi* when necessary."

Apart from an administrative component, the Department consisted of eight professional divisions in 1972 (Department of Information, 1973:8):

- Guests and Visitors
- Foreign Information
- Foreign Publications
- Film, Television and Radio production
- Visual Services
- Press Liaison
- Training
- Internal Information that included Interior Publications.

During the early 1970s the Department was notably active abroad – among others with the so-called *détente* initiative in Africa. Internal activities also increased, and a Deputy Minister was appointed in October 1975 to oversee these (interview with Dr CP Mulder, Minister of Information – cited by Mulder, 1975: 185). In this regard the newspaper *Die Vaderland* reported on 20 October 1975 that the Department of Information would be responsible for a new campaign of the government to improve *détente* within South Africa. The campaign was undertaken by the Internal Information division of the Department. Information was provided to all population groups, including whites, regarding aspects like moving away from discrimination, racial relations and elimination of irritating measures (cited by Mulder, 1975:185).

In order to “adapt to changed conditions” and “to promote efficiency as well as making the organisation more streamlined, organisational adjustments were made ... as from 1 October 1973. A new division, Planning was created, while the divisions Visual Services and Film, Television and Radio Production were linked together in one division, namely Audiovisual Services and Production. In

addition the division Guests and Visitors as from the same date became part of the Foreign Information Division” (Department of Information, 1974:8).

The first time reference is made of an initiative to conduct research in support of the Department’s work is in the Report of the Department of Information for 1 January 1974 to 31 December 1974 (Department of Information, 1975:10). The Report refers to an analysis of the image of South Africa in 14 countries abroad which was conducted in 1973 with the assistance of overseas research companies. During 1974 the results were made available to the Department’s offices abroad and other public institutions concerned. The Report (1975:10) also mentions that the Department’s officials were able to ”adapt their action plans in a scientific way to fit the reality instead of acting intuitively.” The report proceeds to explain that the results obtained from the market analysis were also used in decision-making regarding themes and nuances for departmental films, publications and advertisements (Department of Information, 1975:10). The Division Planning, responsible for this “market analysis”, was also responsible for advertising. The extent to which this market analysis was found to be useful at the time, was emphasised in the Annual Report (Department of Information, 1975:10). The copy and themes of the advertisements were judged and evaluated on the basis of the research results. Thereafter the concept product was tested abroad. Only after the pretesting had proven that the concept would be successful, was it implemented. After the advertising campaign, post-testing was done to determine whether the campaign had been successful.

It is interesting to note that the 1974 Annual Report of the Department (Department of Information, 1975:10-11) refers to two more research projects conducted during this period.

- Firstly, after the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) had shown a film of the Department (*Black man alive – the facts*) and following a debate between two South African officials with critics of the country, an

independent research company in London conducted research on behalf of the Department. According to the research results, South Africa succeeded in changing the opinion of 13 percent of the viewers whilst 85 percent supported the BBC decision to allow both sides to raise their points of view instead of only allowing the anti-South Africa viewpoint to be raised. By using the research results the Department's office in London was able to measure the impact of the initiative scientifically – instead of haphazardly and only by means of media coverage.

- Secondly, a study was conducted about the effectiveness and impact of the publication *SA Panorama* both internationally and in South Africa. It was envisaged that the study would enable the Department to adapt the content of the publication – and possibly also the format and design – to fit the preference and interest of the readers (Department of Information, 1975:13). Letters from the readers were the only guidelines that the editorial staff previously had in preparing the magazine – a measurement not regarded as being accurate.

According to information available the Department of Information was increasingly involved in disseminating government information internationally and in South Africa during the period June 1972 to February 1975. Following the establishment of the Planning Division, the Department, for the first time in the history, conducted scientific research to enhance effectiveness of its initiatives of government communication and information work in South Africa. Three research projects were conducted by the Department of Information during the period.

(d) The period 1 March 1975 to 30 June 1978

The Report of the Department of Information for the period 1 January 1975 to 31 December 1975 (Department of Information, 1976:10) provides information about

the restructuring of the Department that was implemented on 1 March 1975. The Department then consisted of two professional branches, the Information Branch and the Planning Branch, and an administrative one, Administration Services.

The 1973 market analysis aimed at investigating South Africa's image in 14 countries (see page 71) was extended to Japan and Brazil in 1975 (Department of Information, 1976:10).

Also in 1975 a series of advertisements appeared in leading newspapers and periodicals in the United States (US) and Britain. According to the Department's Annual Report for 1975 (Department of Information, 1976:10) "the theme was South Africa's rightful role in the international community of which three specific aspects were stressed in different advertisements: South Africa's role in international sport, its aid to other African countries and its strategic importance to the West. The series of advertisements was, with the aid of scientific methods of investigation of prominent overseas research groups, subjected to preliminary investigations and its effect on readers effectively measured. From this it appeared that the most important arguments in the advertisements were brought pertinently to the attention of those at whom they were directed."

The 1975 Annual Report also mentions that "a survey by Fessel Market Research in Austria of the readers of the Information Service monthly *Südafrika Kompass* (and the weekly news service *Heute aus Südafrika*) revealed that 84 percent of the readers thought the contents to be balanced, 55 percent accepted this as accurate and reliable and 32 percent as being at least partially reliable and balanced. Almost 40 percent of the newspaper editors who receive the two publications have replied that they use the material in their newspapers" (Department of Information, 1976:6).

According to the report of the Department of Information for the following year, January to December 1976, the Planning branch had to “analyse tendencies and world events in order to properly plan ahead. The process of determining strategy does not merely rely on worldwide media coverage” (Department of Information, 1977:10). The report continues by stating that “many opinion-makers and decision-makers, both locally and from abroad, were involved with the analysis and determination of priorities – apart from opinion surveys in some countries” (Department of Information, 1977:10). Unfortunately, despite the fact that the Annual Report provides information regarding the Department’s activities in 19 countries where it had offices, no information is provided regarding the opinion surveys mentioned.

The 1977 Annual Report also mentions opinion surveys: “During 1977 the Planning Division had no comprehensive opinion surveys conducted abroad, but on several occasions commissioned surveys in respect of specific matters. Data acquired in this way (specific opinion surveys) are of particular value in planning the operation and priorities of the various overseas offices. The findings also help to determine the contents of publications, lectures, advertisements and films” (Department of Information, 1978:21).

The following quotations from the 1977 report of the Department is an outstanding example of how incorrect and unreliable one’s own evaluation of the impact of certain initiatives can be – if research were conducted amongst those targeted for the communication initiatives their evaluation would have been much different:

The large-scale dislocation caused by the riots in various Black communities in general and at certain schools in particular is well-known. The Interior Division was compelled to adapt tried and trusted liaison techniques to new circumstances to ensure that vital contact remained intact. Pamphlets, literally

compiled and printed within hours and often distributed in a highly unorthodox manner, proved to be of particular value. In this way the Department succeeded in defusing the highly explosive situation in Soweto following the announcement of increased rents. In the event, the higher tariffs were accepted quietly. By using the same technique the Division played a part in ending the examination boycott on the Witwatersrand and in the Free State, and in isolating the agitators with the help of responsible elements in the local communities (Department of Information, 1978:29).

Blacks in Bloemfontein accepted the idea of a community council after the Division had distributed a small brochure to every inhabitant” (Department of Information, 1978:27-28).

Another survey conducted in 1977 was aimed at updating the mailing list and “to establish whether the existence of the *Progress Series* could still be justified. It was surmised that these publications no longer served a useful purpose. In the event, the survey surprisingly proved “the exact opposite” (Department of Information, 1978:29). On the basis of the research results, efforts were then made “to increase the circulation, but with better control over the contents of these magazines” (Department of Information, 1978:29).

Early in 1978 the Planning Division “engaged in pilot studies of a new series of advertisements for the overseas press and in planning a new world-wide market analysis to determine South Africa’s image abroad” (Department of Information, 1978:21).

During the period 1 March 1975 to 30 June 1978 the Department of Information conducted various research projects to enhance the effectiveness of departmental initiatives. The value of information acquired by conducting ‘opinion surveys’ is appreciated in the Department’s 1977 Annual Report (see

discussion earlier in this section). Despite this recognition of the value of research by the Department, the researcher refers to the reality that the Department evaluated some of its initiatives in South Africa from an internal perspective instead of conducting scientific research amongst South Africans towards whom certain messages were directed – and came to a conclusion that we know from history was incorrect.

3.2.2.2 *The period 1 July 1978 to 16 September 1985*

The Department of Information was dissolved on 1 July 1978 following a government decision and a recommendation by the Public Service Commission. On the same date the Bureau of National and International Communication was established – resorting under the Secretary for Plural Relations and Development. All the activities of the former Department of Information, excluding secret projects, were transferred to the Bureau. On 1 September 1978 the Bureau was assigned to the Department of Foreign Affairs. The secret activities were transferred to the Bureau on 7 November 1978. Following a Cabinet decision and at the recommendation of the Public Service Commission, the Bureau was renamed the Information Service of South Africa (INSA) with effect from 1 February 1979 (INSA, 1979:4). According to the source mentioned (INSA, 1979:4) the objectives of the Information Service were:

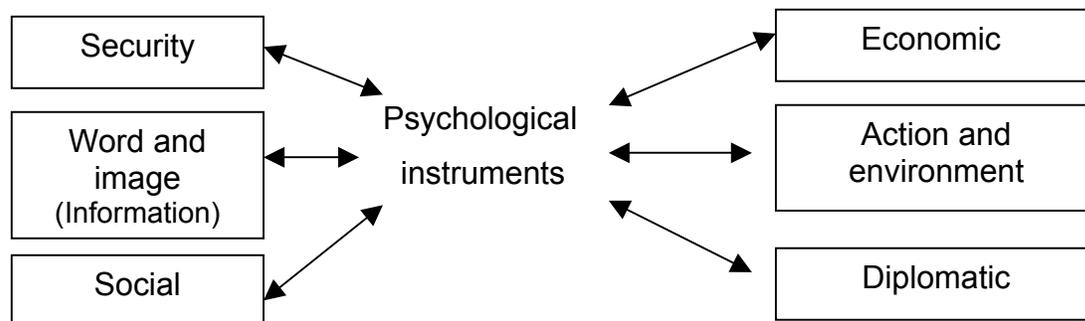
- to promote South Africa's image and to cultivate a positive attitude towards the RSA
- to repulse the psychological onslaughts against South Africa.

The report also mentions two target groups – overseas target groups, and internal target groups including target groups in neighbouring countries (INSA, 1979:4).

The only reference to research in the INSA Annual Report for 1 April 1978 to 31 March 1979 relates to *Alpha* – the magazine of the section responsible for ‘Coloured Liaison’: “The magazine *Alpha* (circulation 19 200) was effectively used to publicise and explain the proposals (regarding the proposed new constitutional plan). An investigation by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) showed that 20,8 percent of all adult coloureds read the magazine. This means that one copy is read by as many as 20 people” (INSA, 1979:7).

The last Annual Report of INSA – for the period 1 April 1979 to 31 December 1979 – provides information regarding the “Primary function” and “Reference framework” of INSA. Its primary function is described as “to project a favourable image of the Republic of South Africa and to improve local and overseas attitudes towards the country, as well as to ward-off the onslaught against it both here and abroad with the aid of the spoken and written word and film.” According to the Annual Report the methodology decided upon, and the strategy followed, were based on the assumption that there was a group of at least six instruments which had to be employed to ensure the safety and progress of the Republic. A simplified schematic representation of these instruments was portrayed as follows:

Figure 3.1: *The inter-relationship between the psychological and other instruments*⁸



⁸ INSA, 1980:3

According to the Annual Report of INSA for 1 April 1979 to 31 December 1979 the instruments portrayed in figure 3.1 “... determine and form the reference framework of the target(s) in so far as the Republic is concerned. What is *read*, *seen* and *heard* determines the imagery which is eventually conjured up by the concept ‘RSA’. The *reference framework* of observers of the RSA and its socio-economic problems is thus continually being formed and adapted by *images*, *words*, *actions* and *environmental impressions*. To create favourable frames of reference for South Africa, it is Information’s task to make purposeful and scientifically planned audio-visual impressions on targets, to imprint specific positive images and values and, if need be, to modify fallacies” (INSA, 1980:3-4).

The last Annual Report of INSA does not mention any scientific research. Despite this, INSA claimed in this report – where reporting on the work of the Foreign Information Branch – that: “The Prime Minister’s new initiatives enjoyed effective and worldwide publicity during this period” and that “It was discovered that people who already possessed first-hand knowledge of South Africa were particularly impressed with the new developments in the Republic” (INSA, 1980:11). This claim of INSA is not motivated by means of objective feedback from the target audience – e.g. by means of scientific research – but based on subjective interpretation of the situation.

Nevertheless, INSA reflects some understanding of the importance of being sensitive to the needs and perceptions of the target audience – at least to some extent: “To be able to identify the needs of isolated Coloured communities and to bring them to date with swiftly-changing trends, contact tours were undertaken during which films were shown, addresses and lectures given, and publications supplied to the public.” Also, although it seems that INSA made the conclusions from their own, subjective point of view, some sort of sensitivity towards the importance of feedback from the target audience is revealed: “The feedback of information, even from the most isolated areas, to the government body

concerned is an important facet of the activities of the Information Service” (INSA, 1980:11).

In its 1979 Annual Report INSA claims that “in the period under review a thorough investigation into the effectiveness of the Information Service’s advertising programme was made, and in the light of this, various new approaches will be followed in the new financial year. It will form part of integrated communication plans and programmes feasible within our financial capabilities” (INSA, 1980:13). Again, no information is provided on how this “thorough investigation” was done, but from the information available it can be interpreted that it was not by means of conducting research.

It is significant that the last Annual Report of the Information Service of South Africa makes no reference to the so-called “Information scandal” that was such prominent news both in South Africa and internationally since the second half of 1978. According to the *Official yearbook of the Republic of South Africa 1980/81* (Department of Foreign Affairs and Information, 1981:746-747) the Information scandal concerned the spending of tens of millions of State money from a secret fund on a vast complex of secret projects financed by the Department of Information. At that stage the Department’s political head was Dr CP Mulder, leader of the Transvaal National Party, and its administrative head was the Secretary for Information, Dr EM Rhodie. Breaking at the time when Mr Vorster was being succeeded as Prime Minister by the Minister of Defence, PW Botha, after a narrow victory over Dr Mulder in the National Party Parliamentary caucus, the “Information scandal” shook public opinion as it unfolded in a series of press and official revelations affecting the Vorster government. Some newspapers, indulging in investigative journalism to the full in a field of secret projects, covert deals and misspent State funds, aroused great political anger exceeding the level of that during previous confrontations (between government and the media). At the centre of the storm about misspent State funds was *The Citizen*, an English-

language daily newspaper published in Johannesburg and founded ostensibly by an Afrikaner entrepreneur, Mr Louis Luyt, in 1976.

From 1 April 1980 the Information Service of South Africa was taken up in a wider, newly-created Department of Foreign Affairs and Information. The implication was that the information organisation of the government did not continue as a separate and independent organisation with its own accountable head and staff structure. Although it was the aim, at the time of the Department of Information's demise, to drastically reorganise the new Information Service administratively and functionally, these efforts were not altogether successful. Other priorities came first. The rationalisation plans of the Civil Service as a whole were so all-embracing that INSA could not be examined on its own. However, there were attempts to reach this ideal. Ad hoc additions to the establishment enabled INSA to gauge important information needs scientifically, and to work out an effective system of method and strategy. The over-all priorities of the Civil Service in other fields, however, resulted in a position where the function of information analysis within the framework of the two institutes of INSA could not be made to work. These two institutes were the Institute of Information Analysis and Development (foreign-orientated), and an Institute for Southern Africa. Other factors which played a role were the shortage of funds for development, the freezing of the staff establishment in favour of the priorities of rationalisation, and the additional burden emanating from the demands of the State Security Council and the work of the State Trust Board – which investigated the projects of the former Department of Information (INSA, 1980:3).

No annual reports are available for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Information between 1980 and 1985. The *Official yearbook of the Republic of South Africa 1982* (Department of Foreign Affairs and Information, 1982:144) provided the following information regarding the aim and functions of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Information:

- Aim: To implement the RSA's foreign policy; to promote relations abroad; and enhance the country's image.
- Functions:
 - Co-coordinating and implementing South Africa's foreign policy
 - Promoting relations abroad
 - Protecting and promoting the interests of the RSA and its citizens abroad
 - Supporting the efforts of developing countries towards economic growth and the evolution of their social systems
 - Conveying in a co-coordinated manner relevant facts concerning the RSA to the people, particularly the opinion formers and decision makers in all spheres, of other countries
 - Rendering a Government publicity service in the RSA.

3.2.2.3 Summary: the period from 27 November 1961 to 16 September 1985 – the role of research

From 1961 to 1984 there was an increasing understanding by the institution in Public Service responsible for the dissemination of government information that government needed to "listen" to its target audience. Feedback from target groups – specifically those that did not have the opportunity to take part in elections – was an important objective.

In the early 1960s (1962-1963) the Department claimed that its "dual purpose" envisaged for service to the "Bantu" had been largely achieved due to the situation that "Bantu" organisations and individuals made contact with officials of the Department "to present their problems". In the middle to late 1960s (1966-1968), the Department perceived it as part of their responsibility to "determine the non-white reactions and wishes". In the period 1969 to 1972, the Interior Division

was expected to, additional to its other responsibilities, “convey the wishes and opinions of South Africans to other government bodies.”

In 1973 the first scientific research project was conducted to enhance effectiveness of government’s communication initiatives. The research project was outsourced to overseas research companies and entailed an analysis of the image of South Africa in 14 countries abroad.

Most of the research projects conducted by the Department from 1973 up to 1 July 1978 when the Department of Information was dissolved, were conducted abroad. These projects included an extension of the 1973 market analysis to Japan and Brazil. In 1975 a readership study of two Departmental publications circulated in Austria and testing advertisements that appeared in magazines in the US and the UK. The two research projects conducted by the Department in South Africa during the late 1970s both related to departmental publications. A survey was conducted to establish whether the existence of the *Progress Series* could still be justified, and a readership study was done for *Alpha*.

The last Annual Report of INSA (1980:3) refers to an initiative where “ad hoc additions to the establishment enabled INSA to gauge important information needs scientifically.” Unfortunately nothing more is known about this project. From documentation available regarding the activities of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Information between 1980 and 1985, no reference is made to any research conducted to enhance effectiveness of the information function.

3.3 THE BUREAU FOR INFORMATION – 17 SEPTEMBER 1985 TO 30 APRIL 1991

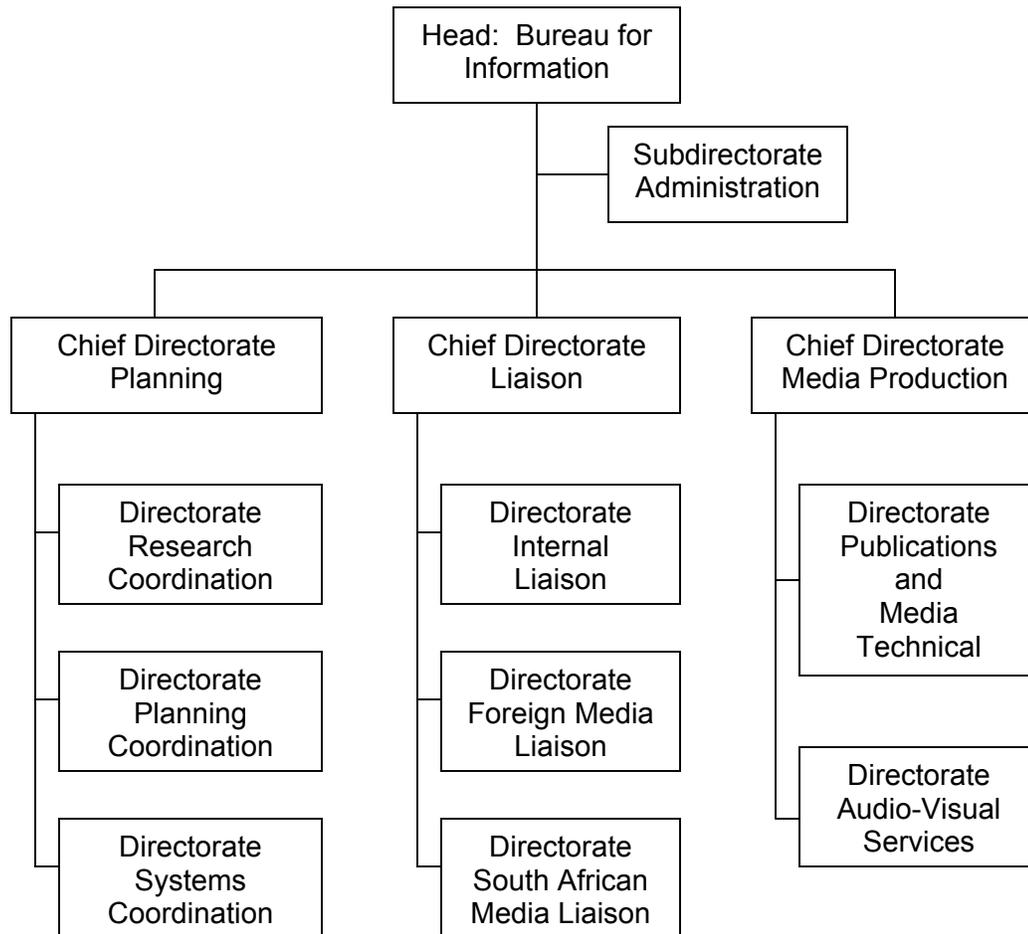
3.3.1 The establishment and structure of the Bureau for Information

According to the first Annual Report of the Bureau for Information (1987:2) the organisation was established on 17 September 1985, following a decision by the Government and at the recommendation of the Commission for Administration. “All domestic activities which were formerly handled by the Department of Foreign Affairs, were transferred to the Bureau. Up to 31 March 1986 the overall management of the Subdirectorate: Administration was carried out by staff of the Office of the Commission for Administration. When the Bureau became an autonomous institution on 1 April 1986 the post of Deputy Director: Administration was established to head the Subdirectorate: Administration” (Bureau for Information, 1987:10). The first year of the Bureau for Information was “marked by activities aimed at laying a foundation for an effective communication organisation.”

In addition to the Subdirectorate Administration, the Bureau for Information was structured into three line-function chief directorates, each comprising different directorates (see figure 3.2):

- The Chief Directorate Planning, which promoted “effective communication at the national level”, comprised the directorates Systems Coordination, Planning Coordination and Research Coordination (Bureau for Information, 1987:2).

Figure 3.2 *Bureau for Information – structure, 1986*⁹



- The Chief Directorate Liaison had as its task “the promotion of communication with all population groups and foreign media representatives in South Africa.” This Chief Directorate comprised Internal Liaison, Foreign Media Liaison and South African Media Liaison (Bureau for Information, 1987:4).
- The Chief Directorate Media Production comprised the Publications and Media Technical Services Directorate and the Audio-Visual Services Directorate. “Apart from publication and audio-visual services and material

⁹ Researcher’s own compilation

directed at the domestic market, the Chief Directorate also produced publications and audio-visual material for the Department of Foreign Affairs on an agency basis” (Bureau for Information, 1987:8).

The 1988 Annual Report of the Bureau for Information provides information regarding the clients and objectives of the Directorate Research Coordination: “The Directorate Research Coordination provides a continuous communication research and communication advice service to the Minister, the Head of the Bureau, other directorates, regional offices and other government departments in order to constantly improve the quality and efficiency of government communication, thereby endeavouring to ensure maximal cost-efficiency” (Bureau for Information, 1989:3).

3.3.2 Directorate Research Coordination

3.3.2.1 Research – May to December 1986

Already in the introductory (“Background”) paragraph to the Bureau’s Annual Report for 1986, reference is made to the research function: “To promote effective communication, a research section was established” (Bureau for Information, 1987:2). The Directorate Research Coordination was established in May 1986 with the “primary responsibility to undertake research that would contribute to meaningful communication between the Government and the people of South Africa” (Bureau for Information, 1987:4). The projects conducted by the Directorate Research Coordination from June to December 1986 comprised more than opinion and attitude surveys. According to the relevant Annual Report, the Directorate undertook the following projects during the period mentioned:

- Monitoring the National State of Emergency (NSE) on a continuous basis
- Planning and management of opinion and attitude surveys

- Planning and compiling communication packages on a variety of subjects
- Computerising information for easy retrieval
- Monitoring and analysing news reports in the media
- Basic surveys in Black townships (Bureau for Information, 1987:4).

It is also mentioned in the Annual Report that “the findings of these research projects were used as basis for regular lectures by Directorate staff to, amongst others, businessmen, educationists, women’s organisations, government officials, visitors from overseas, journalists and academics. Directorate staff also acted as spokesmen for the government during press conferences and in radio and television programmes” (Bureau for Information, 1987:4).

From own experience the researcher can say that the “regular lectures” referred to in the Annual Report, were almost exclusively on the basis of analysis of statistics regarding the National State of Emergency declared in June 1986.

The Directorate Research Coordination was responsible for two “opinion survey” research projects in 1986:

- A telephone survey amongst whites and blacks was conducted by a private sector research company on behalf of the Bureau. The abolition of the pass laws and attacks by the South African Defence Force (SADF) on military ‘bases’ of the African National Congress (ANC) were the two main subjects of the project.
- The Bureau subscribed to a multi-purpose survey conducted country-wide amongst whites on a syndicated basis. Questions regarding attitude to government policies (e.g. separate education, homeland policy and the Group Areas Act), ‘inter-group relations’ and sources of government information were included.

During the period the Bureau purchased research results relevant to its work from the private sector, including attitudes of whites regarding the National State of Emergency, and perceptions of blacks in urban areas regarding high-density housing.

The results of the two opinion survey research projects conducted and the results purchased from the private sector were used by the Bureau and other government role-players to plan for communication and policy development.

3.3.2.2 *Research – 1987*

According to the Annual Report for 1987, the “Bureau’s ability to communicate effectively with the South African public was enhanced by the expansion of its communication research capability” (Bureau for Information, 1988:2). Reporting on the work of the Directorate Research Coordination for the calendar year 1987, the Annual Report reads as follows: “The Directorate Research Coordination is responsible for communication research which, on a continuing basis, enables the other directorates within the Bureau, the Bureau’s regional offices and other state departments to contribute effectively to communication between the Government and the population of the RSA” (Bureau for Information, 1988:3). The Annual Report referred to some of the research projects that were undertaken by the Directorate Research Coordination. Topics included:

- the long-term monitoring of the critical variables underlying the National State of Emergency
- reform legislation
- profiles of six self-governing states within the RSA
- profiles of Transkei, Ciskei, Venda and Bophuthatswana
- democracy
- attitudes towards sanctions and disinvestment

- social and economic attitudes of whites, coloureds, blacks and indians
- whites' attitudes towards the SADF's involvement in Angola (Bureau for Information, 1988:3-4).

Similar to 1986, the information provided in the 1987 Annual Report of the Bureau regarding the projects undertaken by the Directorate Research Coordination points to involvement in research projects broader than opinion surveys. Although it is claimed that "all communication by the Bureau was continuously monitored and evaluated to promote the effective use of funds" (Bureau for Information, 1988:4) it was primarily done by means of monitoring and interpreting media coverage regarding the communication and/or done from a theoretic perspective.

A list of empirical research projects conducted by the Directorate Research Coordination during 1987 (GCIS, Directorate Research, 2001a) includes the following:

- Attitudes of blacks in Soweto and Mamelodi regarding the Nonzame campaign, a campaign "to normalise rent and service" (Bureau for Information, 1988:3) – personal interviews
- The attitude of whites regarding media regulations (part of the National State of Emergency regulations) – a telephone survey
- Perceptions of whites regarding discussions between a delegation of the Institute for Democratic Alternatives for South Africa (IDASA), led by Dr Van Zyl Slabbert, and the African National Congress (ANC) in Dakar, Senegal – a telephone survey
- Perceptions of whites on the involvement of the South African Defence Force (SADF) in Angola and the release of Mr Govan Mbeki – a telephone survey

- Perceptions of blacks, coloureds and asians regarding various socio-political, socio-economic and security issues – personal interviews.

All these surveys were outsourced to private sector research companies and, with the exception of the first, conducted country-wide.

The empirical research projects conducted during 1987 focused on two of the major challenges of government – the boycott of rent and services payment in specifically the former ‘black townships’ and the National State of Emergency. Three surveys conducted during 1987 provided results regarding issues relevant to the process of political change that was initiated in the country (GCIS, Directorate Research, 2001a).

3.3.2.3 *Research – 1988*

The contribution of research to enhance the effectiveness of the Bureau’s initiatives is again emphasised in the introduction to the 1988 Annual Report: “During 1988 the Bureau made extensive use of public opinion surveys, conducted on its behalf by private organisations. The Bureau has found that it is impossible to communicate with the public without a clear idea of the public’s current perceptions and attitudes. The Bureau also regards such surveys as an essential part of its function of promoting two-way communication between the government and the people of South Africa” (Bureau for Information, 1989:2).

Reporting on the activities of the Directorate, the 1988 Annual Report distinguishes the following three components:

- The Subdirector Evaluation and Monitoring. This Subdirector surveyed the printed media on a daily basis during 1988 with the aim to identify, categorise and computerise all relevant media information in a database in terms of which the Bureau could evaluate its communication

projects and undertake its communication planning. The Subdirectorate also evaluated monitored press reports on important events, documentary films, videos and Bureau publications and projects. Communication appearances by ministers and civil servants were evaluated on request to advise such persons.

- The Subdirectorate Information Products. According to the Annual Report this Subdirectorate continuously handled *ad hoc* requests for information and researched and compiled 65 information documents. These documents related to virtually all levels of society. A new information brochure entitled “On ---“ or “Met betrekking tot ---“ was also launched. The aim of this brochure was to convey interpreted messages on the one hand and factual information on the other to the public in the most understandable manner.
- The section Opinion Polls. According to the Annual Report this section “offered increasing opportunities to the population to communicate with the government. Numerous quantitative nation-wide and regional opinion polls were undertaken. During and upon completion of each publicity project undertaken, the impact of the project was determined¹⁰.

Resultant from the surveys undertaken, numerous information documents were compiled and a wide variety of opinion-forming groups in both the private and public sectors were briefed” (Bureau for Information, 1989:3-4).

After acquiring the *Survey System* software, the Subdirectorate conducted its first in-house research project in 1988 – an evaluation of *Puisano*, the regional newspaper of the Port Elizabeth office of the Bureau. The *Puisano* evaluation was done by means of self-completion questionnaires.

¹⁰ From own experience the researcher needs to remark that the Annual Report is *not* correct. Research was conducted regarding only some of the projects.

The other research projects were outsourced to the private sector, and included the following:

- Perceptions of the Black elite in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging (PWV) area regarding constitutional reform – a telephone survey
- Perceptions of blacks, coloureds and asians regarding various socio-political, socio-economic and security issues – a survey conducted country-wide by means of personal interviews, addressing primarily the same issues as a survey conducted during 1987 among the same target group
- Perceptions of whites regarding South Africa's future – a telephone survey
- Evaluating the effectiveness of an advertising campaign of the Bureau to promote participation in the municipal elections – a telephone survey conducted amongst whites in the PWV area and blacks in Port Elizabeth
- Perceptions and attitudes regarding "Nation-building" – a telephone survey amongst Black elite in Soweto (GCIS, Directorate Research, 2001a).

With the exception of the *Puisano* study, all other projects related to broader socio-political issues.

3.3.2.4 *Research – 1989*

After his election as the State President of South Africa in September 1989, FW de Klerk did not appoint a Minister of Information, but for the time being assumed responsibility for the information portfolio himself. "This was in keeping with his rejection of a centralised information function and the view that Ministers and government departments should instead be responsible for their own communication. In executing this responsibility, government departments should, however, not unnecessarily duplicate the entire range of communication services that can be provided more cost-effectively on a centralised basis or purchased from the private sector. The provision of such services is the main objective of the Bureau for Information" (Bureau for Information, 1990:i).

In 1989 the Directorate Research Coordination still consisted of the three components: Evaluation and Monitoring, Information Products and Opinion Polls. The previous 'section' *Opinion Polls* was upgraded to a subdirectorate in 1989.

According to the 1989 Annual Report the Subdirectorate Opinion Polls “offered all population groups the opportunity of communicating their opinions scientifically to the government” and that a large number of qualitative and quantitative opinion polls and product project tests were initiated, planned and conducted on behalf of the Bureau’s executive management, other directorates, regional offices, the State President, Cabinet and other departments. Through these opinion polls, which dealt with divergent subjects such as constitutional initiatives, reform and high-density housing, valuable information was obtained pertaining to the population’s needs, preferences, fears and attitudes. The results obtained were utilised for communication planning and specialised briefings” (Bureau for Information, 1990:1).

A list of the 25 research projects conducted by the Subdirectorate *Opinion Polls* provides proof that the research indeed related to certain initiatives indicating the start of a process of change in the country. Research projects regarding the population’s needs and perceptions were useful in the Bureau’s communication. Projects outsourced included:

- Perception of whites regarding the discussions between State President PW Botha and Mr Nelson Mandela – a telephone survey
- Knowledge and perceptions of whites with regard to Resolution 435 (independence of South West Africa/Namibia) and related issues – a telephone survey
- Perceptions and attitudes of coloureds in the Western Cape regarding local authorities – a survey conducted by means of personal interviews

- Perceptions of whites with regard to the South African Police (SAP) and media reports regarding SAP ‘murder squads’ – telephone survey
- Perceptions and attitudes of blacks regarding the concepts “Peace”, “Prosperity”, “Progress” and “Participation” – research conducted by means of focus group discussions in the three main metropolitan areas to pre-test concepts for a communication campaign.

The first research project on behalf of another government department by the Bureau was conducted in 1989. It was a project amongst people in Soweto regarding high-density housing conducted by means of focus groups for the Department of Local Government and National Housing. The project was outsourced to the private sector.

Two of the research projects conducted during 1989 were conducted by staff of the Subdirectorate:

- Attitudes and perceptions of blacks and coloureds in Walvis Bay regarding the incorporation of the area into South West Africa/Namibia – conducted by means of personal interviews by interviewers recruited from the area, and trained and managed by staff of the Bureau
- A readership study of the Bureau’s magazine *SA Today* – self-completion questionnaires.

In his Budget Vote speech on the Bureau for Information for 1989, delivered in Parliament on 17 April 1990, President FW de Klerk emphasised that it was particularly important that the South African government had to be able to communicate effectively with all the people in the country:

In the first place, our government needs to communicate effectively to identify and promote the important interests which our complex population shares and which forms the basis of an emerging national consensus. In the second place

our government requires special communication skills to participate in the national debate on the constitutional future of South Africa. Thirdly, many of the problems which our country experiences internally and abroad have their origin in incorrect perceptions of South Africa. These distorted perceptions can best be addressed by effective communication (De Klerk, 1990:1).

De Klerk continued by remarking that the main task of the Bureau for Information was to ensure that the South African Government was well equipped to meet these communication challenges (De Klerk, 1990:2). He expanded further:

How does one communicate with a population as complex as the population of South Africa - a country of 30 million people in which eight different languages are spoken by more than a million people, in which no single language is spoken by a majority? How does one communicate with a population comprising so many different cultures and stages of economic development, where a message which is understood by one group will alienate another, a country in which modern media still do not reach millions of people? The Bureau believes that this task cannot be accomplished without a clear understanding of this complex population, of their attitudes, their aspirations and their needs. The Bureau has accordingly become a major commissioner of opinion surveys and market research. The data which we acquire in this fashion provides us not only with the basis for our own communication. It is also the means by which we listen to the views of all our people - since it is quite impossible to have one-directional communication. Our research, in addition, provides heartening evidence that the vast majority of our population shares important interest which will serve as the basis for the emerging national consensus (De Klerk, 1990:2).

3.3.2.5 Research – 1990

It is generally agreed that major changes and developments were introduced in South Africa after FW de Klerk's historic speech in Parliament on 2 February 1990. According to the Annual Report of the Bureau for Information for 1990 (Bureau for Information, 1991:i) the year 1990 was one of dramatic development in government communication in South Africa:

The State President's speech of February 2 and the subsequent developments opened the way to a much easier relationship between the government and the national and international media. These developments also created a much greater need for the flow of information between the government, the media and the public. There was consequently greater demand for the Bureau's services. The Bureau was able to play a supportive role, particularly with regard to media arrangements at various occasions including at the time of Mr Nelson Mandela's release from prison and during the discussions between the ANC and government at Grootte Schuur and in Pretoria. At the same time, the Bureau was able to consolidate and expand the communication services which it provides to the government and to government departments. These services include assistance with communication advice and planning; market and media research¹¹; advertising; media liaison services, including the more effective distribution of government press releases by way of the SAPA PR wire service; the government's international guest programme; exhibition and shows; the provisioning of extensive regional liaison services; the production of publications, videos and films, and the provisioning of photographic and graphic services.

The government's point of view with regard to a centralised communication and/or information function and the provision of communication services is also

¹¹ Researcher's emphasis

explained in the 1990 Annual Report: “Our intention in providing these services is not to take over the communication role of government departments, but to provide specialised communication support to them. We also trust that the provision of such specialised communication services on a centralised basis, will help to avoid the unnecessary duplication and proliferation of communication capabilities throughout the Public Service” (Bureau for Information, 1991:i-ii).

The opinion polls conducted during 1990 “dealt with divergent subjects such as constitutional initiatives, reform, use of leisure time and hostel accommodation” (Bureau for Information, 1991:i). Surveys conducted by the Subdirectorate Opinion Polls included the following:

- Perceptions and attitudes of blacks, coloureds and Asians on the tour of the cricket team of England – a telephone survey
- Perceptions and attitudes of South Africans (all population groups) regarding State President FW de Klerk’s speech in Parliament on 2 February 1990 – a telephone survey
- Perceptions and attitudes of South Africans (all population groups) regarding the release of Mr Nelson Mandela from prison – a telephone survey
- Attitudes of whites towards socio-political changes in the country – subscription to a multi-purpose survey conducted country-wide by means of personal interviews
- Response of whites regarding the negotiations between the government and the ANC at ‘*Grootte Schuur*’ – a telephone survey
- Evaluation of the regional newspaper of the Cape Town office of the Bureau, *Caret* – self-completion questionnaires, done by Bureau staff
- Sentiments and aspirations of blacks in metropolitan areas – conducted by means of focus group discussions
- Investment and financial confidence amongst whites – a telephone survey

- Response of whites and blacks regarding negotiations between the government and the ANC in Pretoria (*Grootte Schuur II*) and related issues – a telephone survey
- Knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of blacks regarding the rent and services boycott – subscription to a multi-purpose survey conducted country-wide by means of personal interviews.

3.3.3 Summary: Bureau for Information – the role of research

During the lifetime of the Bureau for Information, government started making extensive use of research or “opinion polls” as they were referred to.

The researcher is of the opinion that the Bureau’s research initiatives were originally primarily in support of the government’s communication needs and political interest. From 1987 some of the research projects were also directed at determining the public’s information needs and to enhance the effectiveness of the Bureau in fulfilling its function to disseminate government information to the people.

Since 1989 the Bureau conducted communication research projects at the request of other government departments. Various research projects were conducted since 1989 to support the process of political transformation and democratisation in the country and government communication in that regard.

3.4 THE SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNICATION SERVICE – 1 MAY 1991 TO 17 MAY 1998

3.4.1 The establishment and structure of the South African Communication Service

On 1 May 1991 the name of the Bureau for Information changed to South African Communication Service (SACS). In the 1991 Annual Report of the SACS it is argued that the old name “had for quite some time been unsatisfactory because it did not adequately reflect the function of the organisation and caused confusion with other information bureaus, particularly in the regions. The old logo, a shield, was too militaristic and did not reflect the image which we wish to project” (SACS, 1992:i).

Another important development for SACS during 1991 was Cabinet’s decision to transfer responsibility for the promotion of inter-community relations from the Department of Planning and Provincial Affairs and the provinces to SACS (SACS, 1992:i). According to the Annual Report of SACS for 1993, “the extension of the functions of the Bureau for Information to include the development of co-operative structures within communities led to the decision to rename the Bureau the South African Communication Service on 1 May 1991” (SACS, 1994:i).

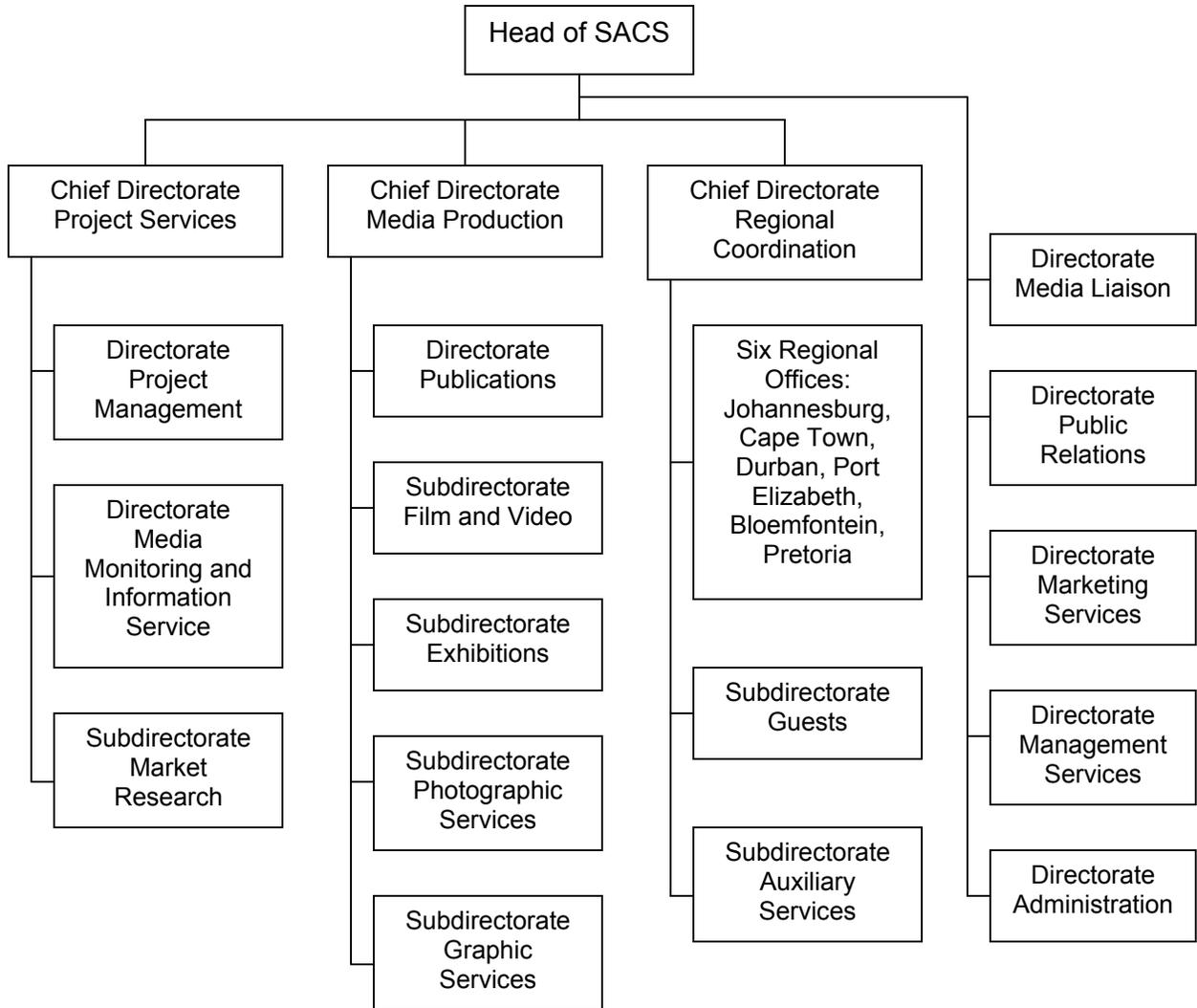
In 1991 the mission of SACS was “to promote South Africa’s national goals by providing cost-effective communication services, products and expertise to the government.” The importance placed on cost-effectiveness and coordination is reflected in the aim and main function of the organisation:

“The SACS *aims* in the long, medium and short term to provide maximal communication value for the funds we receive. We wish to do this by ensuring

the most effective management of our costs and by producing the greatest possible value in terms of our products and services, measured against market-related norms. The SACS's *main function* is to provide to the government and government departments those communication services and products which can be rendered most cost-effectively on a centralised basis. It can also play an important role with regard to the coordination of government communication and to the implementation of the government's National Communication Policy and Strategy (NCPS)" (SACS, 1992:1).

At the time of its launch in 1991, SACS was structured into three Chief Directorates (comprising different Directorates) and five Directorates which reported directly to the Head of SACS (see figure 3.3):

Figure 3.3 SACS – structure, 1991¹²



¹² Researcher's own compilation

- Chief Directorate Project Services, consisting of the Directorate Project Management, the Directorate Media Monitoring and Information Service and the Subdirectorates Market Research
- Chief Directorate Media Production, consisting of the Directorate Publications and Subdirectorates Film and Video, Exhibitions, Photographic Services and Graphic Services
- Chief Directorate Regional Coordination, consisting of six regional offices of SACS and the Subdirectorates Guests and Auxiliary Services
- The five Directorates reporting directly to the Head of SACS were Media Liaison, Public Relations, Marketing Services, Management Services and Administration (SACS, 1992:ii).

3.4.2 Research by the South African Communication Service

At the time of the launch of SACS, the name of the Subdirectorates Opinion Polls had been changed to Market Research. According to the SACS's Annual Report for 1991 (SACS, 1992:2) the functions of this Subdirectorates were to:

- manage research projects
- compile research reports and to interpret research findings
- conduct fieldwork independently
- target analysis
- advice
- identification of new sources of information.

3.4.2.1 Research – 1991

In 1991, the Subdirectorates Market Research assisted “other directorates and government departments in their communication actions by providing information

on public attitudes for planning purposes. It conducted numerous qualitative and quantitative surveys, studies, readership profiles and target analyses. These studies covered various topics such as constitutional reform, HIV/AIDS, value-added tax (VAT) and market research on SACS's own publications, *SA Panorama* and the regional papers *Umso* and *Vision*. The results were used for communication planning and specialised briefings" (SACS, 1992:2).

Of the research projects conducted in 1991, 14 related to the process of constitutional reform in the country. A total of eight research projects were conducted on behalf of the Department of Finance to assist with their communication regarding the implementation of VAT. Seven projects were conducted amongst the Black youth regarding the image of the South African Police, the rent and services boycott, the process of political transformation and sexually transmitted diseases. A study was conducted amongst journalists by means of personal in-depth interviews to determine perceptions regarding government communication. For the first time a specific study was conducted to determine the needs of people regarding government information. This research project was conducted by means of focus group discussions amongst all population groups in the greater Johannesburg area. Two research projects were conducted for the Department of Health in support of their communication initiatives on HIV/AIDS (GCIS, Directorate Research, 2001a).

Compared to the previous years, the scope of the research projects conducted in 1991 was broader. The results of research projects conducted could be used to enhance effectiveness of government communication regarding constitutional reform, communication campaigns on specific issues (e.g. HIV/AIDS, value-added tax and the boycott of rent and services payment) and government communications in general (e.g. study amongst journalists and study to determine population's needs for government information).

3.4.2.2 *Research – 1992*

In 1992, the inter-community relationship function which had been transferred to the SACS (in 1991) received “priority attention”, and an interpretation of those initiatives is reflected in the Annual Report: “The SACS, acting as facilitator to bring communities together across artificial divides, is increasingly helping to ensure that meaningful and grassroots debate on the future of communities takes place. The increased contact and mutual understanding which is being established is very encouraging. Considerable success have been achieved and an ever-increasing demand for more such ventures is being experienced” (SACS, 1993:2).

During 1992, the SACS formulated a vision for the organisation and reviewed the mission of the organisation to properly reflect its responsibility. The vision and mission were formulated as follows:

- Vision: Informed and committed communities for the sake of peace and prosperity
- Mission: To render a cost-effective, co-ordinated and specialised government information service to the population in order to inform and involve them, as well as to render such a service to foreigners on request (SACS, 1993:5).

In 1992 the Directorate: Research was established, consisting of the Subdirectorates Market Research and Information Service. According to the SACS’s Annual Report of 1992, the Subdirectorate Information Service “gathers information on a wide variety of subjects, computerises it and makes it available to clients. The products supplied focus on identified needs, for example, a departmental directory and a media contact list” (SACS, 1993:18). Staff of the

Information Service were also responsible for responding to information enquiries from clients.

The 1992 Annual Report mentions: “The need for communication research constantly increased during 1992” (SACS, 1993:18). This was indeed the case as 60 research projects were conducted in 1992 compared to 45 in 1991.

Research was conducted in 38 communities in support of the SACS’s new function to improve “inter-community relationships” and to determine the need for government information. Most of these projects were conducted by staff of the Subdirectorate Market Research. Interviewers were recruited and trained. White respondents were mostly interviewed telephonically whilst personal interviews were used to interview blacks, coloureds and asians. The results of these research projects were provided to the relevant SACS regional offices, and were used to set up “community structures” in the respective communities with the aim to improve inter-community relationships.

Various research projects were outsourced to support the process of constitutional reform – specifically regarding the *Convention for a Democratic South Africa* (Codesa) negotiations that took place in Kempton Park between representatives of various political and interest groups over a period of several months. The results were made available to the Department of Constitutional Development, and the Head of SACS briefed the Cabinet on the findings.

Studies to specifically determine government information needs were conducted in the Durban metropole (blacks, focus groups) and in Aliwal North (telephone interviews with whites and personal interviews with coloureds and blacks).

Readership studies were conducted for *Vision* and *Izindaba* (regional newspapers of the Durban office of SACS), and the SACS magazine *RSA Policy Review*.

Communication audits were conducted for the Department of Public Works and for the Cape Provincial Administration's section for Nature Conservation.

A focus group study was conducted amongst public servants to assess their image and perceptions of the Public Service for the Public Service Commission. The other studies included one by means of personal interviews with blacks in the greater Johannesburg area to assess the effectiveness of the distribution of government information by post and the 'knock-and-drop' method (GCIS, Directorate Research, 2001a).

3.4.2.3 Research – 1993

The role and contribution of research in the process of reshaping the SACS is emphasised in the foreword to the 1993 Annual Report: "Even before the normalisation of the political process in South Africa and the government's acceptance that *apartheid* was developing into a national disaster, the South African Communication Service underwent a radical change in its thinking. Opinion Polls undertaken amongst all population groups since 1986 emphasised the reality of irreversible political change and exposed the dehumanising results of *apartheid*" (SACS, 1994:i).

In 1993, the vision and mission of the organisation were both slightly changed. Consequently, the vision, mission and aim of SACS were formulated as follows:

- Vision: Informed and involved communities in promotion of peace and prosperity for all in South Africa

- Mission: To provide a cost-effective, co-ordinated and specialised national information service to inform the population of the government's initiatives and thereby to involve them, and to provide such a service to foreigners on request
- Aim: To promote effective two-way communication between the government and the population (SACS, 1994:1).

During 1993, the Subdirectorate Market Research, within the Directorate Research, conducted research projects in support of the co-operation processes of the SACS's regional offices in 29 communities. In addition to this, a number of surveys were conducted to determine the population's knowledge of, attitudes towards and perceptions on the constitutional reform process. Research on SACS products and services also helped to ensure value for money. Research projects in this regard included a postal survey on the *Official South African yearbook*, a qualitative project (focus groups) to evaluate the newspapers of the SACS's regional offices and another postal survey to evaluate the products of the Subdirectorate Information Service. The logo used in the advertisements to inform South Africans that they needed Identity Documents in order to vote in the 1994 elections was tested by means of focus groups. Ten training courses presented in SACS were evaluated. Other projects included one on the information needs of staff at South Africa's missions abroad, an evaluation of how satisfied SACS staff were and an evaluation of the in-house magazine *Let's Talk* (GCIS, Directorate Research, 2001a).

The results of research projects conducted in 1994 were available to enhance the effectiveness of different communication products (e.g. *Official South African yearbook*), important communication campaigns (e.g. Identity Documents for 1994 elections), the process of SACS regional offices to improve inter-community relationships and government communication regarding the process of political change and constitutional reform.

3.4.2.4 Research – 1994

After the historic democratic election in South Africa on 27 April 1994, the Executive Deputy President, Mr TM Mbeki, became the political principal of SACS.

The vision and mission of SACS were again revised in 1994. “In so doing, the organisation confirmed its commitment to major transformation and to non-racialism. The abilities and resources of the SACS were focused specifically on the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), and on the other aims of the Government National Unity (GNU)” (SACS, 1995:3). After review, the vision and mission of the SACS became:

- Vision: Excellence in communication as an instrument in reconstruction, development and nationbuilding.
- Mission: To render a coordinated and relevant information and client service in promotion of public involvement and of meaningful dialogue between the government and the population (SACS, 1995:3).

In 1994 the Subdirectorate Market Research was involved in fewer projects. This was largely due to the political transition before the election of 27 April 1994, and to the decision of the SACS Chief Management to halt all activities that could have impacted on the election. Various planned studies were put on hold in order to give the new government the opportunity to determine its own market research needs. Studies that were planned and carried out in 1994 conformed to the broad objectives of the SACS. The inter-group communication actions of the SACS regional offices, which were undertaken with a view to encouraging greater community interaction, were supported by the majority of these studies. The implementation of the RDP at local level was a further subject for market research. Increasingly important activities were the testing before, during and after of advertising concepts; the measuring of service and product efficiency; the

analysing of target markets, and the auditing of internal communications. Examples of work done include a study of the magazine *Social Work Practice* for the Department of Welfare; a readership analysis of subscribers to the publication *RSA 2000* for the South African Mission in Bonn; a communication audit for the Department of Finance, and an investigation into the viability of a newspaper for semi-literate South Africans. A new area introduced in 1994 was that of literature studies. For example, the theories of development communication and of target market analysis were investigated (SACS, 1995:12-13).

3.4.2.5 Research – 1995

In 1995 the Subdirectorate Communication Centre also became part of the Directorate Research in addition to the Information Service and Market Research. The Annual Report indicates the activities of each Subdirectorate as follows:

- The Communication Centre monitored news, articles and the current affairs programmes in the print and electronic media and timeously informed the government of events which received media coverage, as well as the reported perceptions related to these events. Government was also informed on a continuous basis of news reports that deserved speedy attention and reaction. A report identifying possible communication problem areas for the government was also issued daily. The Centre's 24-hour monitoring service proved worthwhile, as various events occurred at night and the responsible Ministries' liaison officers could be notified timeously, for example about violence, mine disasters and events of national and international significance (SACS, 1996:48-49).
- The Information Service rendered a comprehensive information enquiry service. Approximately 6 900 enquiries were answered (compared to 4 296 in 1994) of which 32 percent came from government institutions, 36

percent from non-governmental and private organisations, 25 percent from SACS and seven percent from foreign embassies. The computerised information retrieval system, *Topic*, was expanded and stored various types of full-text information, which considerably eased the storage and indexing of information and the answering of enquiries. During the second half of 1995, SACS installed computer equipment and software to get access to the Internet. Information publishing was initiated via this medium, thus providing a further channel for the local and international distribution of government information. Various value-added information products were also produced by the Subdirectorate Information Centre:

- *Constitutional Process* which documents the constitutional process chronologically
- *Local government*, which deals with events at local government level
- *Verbatim*, which contains extracts from important statements by government and its other spokespersons
- *Directory of Contacts*, containing information on political, financial and labour organisations and the media
- *Government of National Unity: A Directory*, containing information on Ministers and Deputy Ministers, provincial governments and other government institutions
- *Profile*, containing profiles of Ministers and Deputy Ministers and some parliamentary officials.

A comprehensive daily newspaper clipping service was also provided (SACS, 1996:49-50).

- The Subdirectorate Market Research “attempted to obtain a balance between external and internal service rendering, and to render an increasingly cost-effective service to its clients. In the light of budgetary restrictions, the Subdirectorate conducted more studies independently in order to make the research more affordable. The focus was largely on the

RDP and determining the information needs of the population” (SACS, 1996:50).

Research projects conducted in 1995 included:

- an extensive national survey on the public’s perceptions and levels of knowledge regarding the RDP – conducted by means of personal interviews
- three national studies, focusing on a variety of socio-political and socio-economical issues on behalf of the Office of the President conducted by means of both personal interviews and focus groups
- a survey on behalf of the Central Statistical Service (CSS) to ascertain perceptions and knowledge of the population with regard to the 1996 Population Census
- an internal communication audit for the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism
- a readership study of the Department of Public Works’ in-house magazine, *Clinker*
- RDP-related studies carried out in Sedgfield, Ladismith, Bronkhorstpruit, Witbank and Davidsonville at the request of the SACS regional offices, to determine specific needs and priorities
- the feasibility of a new magazine for women – tested by means of focus groups on behalf of the Directorate Publications
- determining information needs became an increasingly important focus. Questions in this regard were included in the RDP-related studies mentioned above. A countrywide qualitative research project covering the whole spectrum of the specific information needs of the population was done at the request of the Information Service and the Directorate Publications. A request from SACS’s Pietersburg regional office led to the determination of information needs in the Northern Province (GCIS, Directorate Research, 2001a).

3.4.2.6 Research – 1996

Despite severe budget restrictions, the Subdirectorate Market Research “stroved to maintain a high standard of timeous and cost-effective service to clients” in 1996 (SACS, 1997:38). Most studies were conducted by SACS itself to save costs. The focus was largely on the RDP and on determining the information needs of the population in various provinces. Studies included:

- various studies for the Department of Welfare on the *I'm addicted to life* campaign (against the abuse of alcohol and drugs) to test the effectiveness of various workshops and to pre-test a video on alcohol and drug abuse
- two readership studies for the Department of Agriculture, both by means of postal surveys
- an assessment of the training needs of managers in the Public Service for the South African Management Development Institute (SAMDI) through self-completion questionnaires
- evaluating several SAMDI courses among course attendants
- pre-testing a logo on subsistence farming among general assistants of the Department of Agriculture by means of focus groups
- two national studies (personal interviews) focusing on the public's attitudes and needs regarding socio-political and socio-economic issues, on behalf of the Office of the President
- a comprehensive internal communication audit by means of self-completion questionnaires for the Department of Home Affairs
- determining information and development needs in the Northern Province, Mpumalanga, the Western Cape, Free State, and in Morgenzon
- the need for a gender desk at SACS
- focus group research amongst local and foreign journalists to evaluate the services of the Directorate Media Liaison
- evaluating the information needs of various community radio stations

- evaluating the Communication Centre's products and services.

3.4.2.7 Research – 1997

During 1997 various research projects were conducted on behalf of other government departments and the SACS regional offices. The studies conducted in 1997 included:

- Evaluation of products/services/campaigns by means of pre-, post- and impact testing:
 - further studies to evaluate the *I'm addicted to Life* campaign for the Department of Welfare, including an extensive qualitative survey to investigate the impact of the campaign on the youth, an evaluation of 10 *Drug Demand Reduction* workshops, nine *Retrain the Trainer* workshops and five workshops on the *Impact of the workshops on Drug Demand Reduction*
 - an assessment of the need for a forum representing all government communications: a survey conducted among all communication personnel employed by national government departments at the request of the Government Communicators' Forum (GCF) Steering Committee
 - determination of various economic-related perceptions among the population at the request of the Department of Trade and Industry
 - determination of the level of knowledge about HIV/AIDS among the youth of Mpumalanga at the request of the SACS regional office in Nelspruit
 - evaluation of service-rendering by the News Service (SACS)
 - needs assessment regarding a refreshment kiosk for the SACS
 - needs assessment regarding a social club for the SACS

- Evaluation of communication channels and determination of information needs among personnel of the State Library, the National Secretariat for Safety and Security, and the Department of Minerals and Energy
- Determination of training needs amongst managers at the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Trade and Industry
- Determination of the information needs of the population in the Eastern Cape and in Gauteng conducted by means of personal interviews and focus groups respectively (GCIS, Directorate Research, 2001a).

3.4.3 Summary: South African Communication Service – the role of research

During SACS's existence, the request for research to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information increased substantially. This included an increase in requests from other government departments for assistance with relevant research projects and research to enhance the effectiveness of communication campaigns – some of these campaigns being very extensive. A large number of research projects were conducted in support of the SACS regional offices' responsibility to promote inter-community relations.

Of specific significance are the various extensive and specific research projects conducted to support the process of negotiations and democratisation in South Africa and support to the new government of 1994 to keep track with the communication environment.

SACS research staff conducted various studies independently and this enabled SACS to satisfy the needs of an increased number of clients and contributed to the development of staff.

The SACS also progressed from the Bureau for Information which almost exclusively attended to government's communication needs, to an organisation which contributed to an understanding of the public's information needs as well as their knowledge of, perceptions on and attitudes towards government initiatives, policies, products and services.

3.5 THE USE OF RESEARCH IN GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION, 1936 TO 17 MAY 1998 – A SUMMARY

During a period of 62 years – from 1936 to 1998 – the use of research by the government in South Africa to enhance the effectiveness of its communication and the dissemination of government information changed substantially.

Available documentation indicates that government communicators in the 1940s and 1950s provided information from the public to the government and obtained information regarding people's needs. However, no scientific research projects were conducted to support the government's communication and information dissemination initiatives and programmes. During the early 1960s the importance for government communicators to obtain feedback from target groups – especially those who did not have the opportunity to take part in elections – was perceived as an important objective. No information is available to determine whether government communicators used this 'information' and 'feedback' from the public to enhance the availability of government information useful to the people or whether it was used primarily to serve the political interests of government.

The first scientific research project to enhance the effectiveness of the South African government's communication initiatives was conducted less than 30

years ago – the analysis of the image of SA in 14 countries abroad conducted in 1973. Most of the few other research projects conducted until the Department of Information was dissolved in 1978 were conducted abroad. Indications from official documentation are that the research results were indeed used to enhance the effectiveness of communication initiatives.

No reference to relevant research is available for the period 1 July 1978 up to the launch of the Bureau for Information in 1985.

The Directorate Research Coordination was established in the Bureau for Information in May 1986. The availability of relevant research results soon proved to be extremely useful to government. The 1988 Annual Report of the Bureau even contains the following statement in this regard: “The Bureau has found that it is impossible to communicate with the public without a clear idea of the public’s current perceptions and attitudes. The Bureau also *regards such surveys as an integral part of its function of promoting two-way communication between the government and the people of South Africa*”¹³ (Bureau for Information, 1989:2).

The researcher is of the opinion that the research initiatives of the Bureau were originally not aimed at improvement of government information useful to the people of the country, but primarily in support of the government’s political interests and communication needs in that regard. Since 1987 though, some of the research projects were aimed at determining the public’s needs in terms of government information and to enhance the effectiveness of some of the Bureau’s initiatives to disseminate government information to the people. From 1989, the Bureau also assisted other government departments to conduct communication research. Various research projects conducted since 1989 to assess public opinion regarding various socio-political issues, probably had some

¹³ Researcher’s emphasis

impact on the 1990 initiatives to introduce a process of substantial political and constitutional transformation in South Africa. The Bureau's research also supported government communication during the process of transformation and democratisation – including the dissemination of information in this regard to the public.

The request for research to enhance effectiveness of government communication and dissemination of government information increased during the period of SACS's existence. A large number of research projects were conducted at the request of other government departments and to enhance the effectiveness of government communication campaigns.

Most research projects by SACS since 1991 were conducted in support of the process of negotiations and democratisation in the country. These included research in support of communication initiatives before the first democratic elections in 1994. Related to these are the research projects conducted in various communities all over the country in support of the initiatives of the SACS regional offices to promote 'inter-community' relationships, and various research projects aimed at assessing the population's needs in terms of government information.

The researcher is of the opinion that research conducted by SACS did not only assist in meeting government's communication needs, but also contributed to an increased effectiveness in meeting the public's information needs.