

CHAPTER 4

TRANSFORMATION OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION IN SOUTH AFRICA AFTER 1994 AND THE USE OF RESEARCH BY THE GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SYSTEM SINCE 18 MAY 1998

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter 3, the researcher provided an overview of the use of research in government communication and disseminating of government information by the South African government up to May 1998, when SACS was dissolved – four years after a democratic dispensation was introduced in the country.

The process of transforming government communication in the ‘new’ South Africa and the use of research by the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) since 18 May 1998 is given attention in chapter 4.

4.2 TRANSFORMATION OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION IN SOUTH AFRICA AFTER 1994

4.2.1 Introduction

After the historic election of the first democratically elected government of South Africa on 27 April 1994, it was immediately clear that the new Government’s focus was people-centred and that communication was regarded as a critical responsibility. In his inaugural address to a joint sitting of Parliament on 24 May 1994, President Mandela emphasised his Government’s commitment in this regard:

My government's commitment to create a people-centred society of liberty binds us to the pursuit of the goals of freedom from want, freedom from hunger, freedom from deprivation, freedom from ignorance, freedom from suppression and freedom from fear. These freedoms are fundamental to the guarantee of human dignity. They will therefore constitute part of the centerpiece of what this Government will seek to achieve, the focal point on which our attention will be continuously focused. The things we have said constitute the true meaning, the justification and the purpose of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), without which it would lose all legitimacy (Mandela, 1994:2-3).

In the 1995 budget vote speech on the SACS, (then) Deputy President Thabo Mbeki echoed this sentiment: “The government is committed to the view that as part of the building of a people-centred society the people have a right to be informed about the government’s policies, programmes and services It [government] therefore also has an unescapable responsibility to ensure that it keeps the people informed on a continuous basis, so that they will be able to intervene in an informed and purposeful manner where their future is at stake” (Mbeki, 1995a:4).

4.2.2 Conference of Government Communicators, August 1995

The Conference of Government Communicators held at Waenhuiskrans towards the end of August 1995, can probably be regarded as the beginning of a process to transform government communication to meet the needs of the new government and reality in the country. In his opening speech at the Conference on 25 August 1995, Thabo Mbeki remarked that the Conference was “starting a process that is long overdue, one that must culminate in the formulation of a government communication policy that will bring our theory and practice in this critical area in line with the ethos and challenges of our young democracy” (Mbeki, 1995b:1).

From a broader communication point of view the following statements by Mbeki at the Waenhuiskrans Conference (Mbeki, 1995b:2-3) on two-way communication and the importance for government to also receive information are of specific importance:

The principle of two-way communication between government and society is in this (RDP) context, central, so that people know what government is doing and they themselves contribute to the formulation of policy and take an active part in its implementation.

It goes without saying that if government did not get information, it would be struck by paralysis and rendered ineffective. Information is as vital for the functioning of government as the supply of blood to the brains. There are various categories of information – that which comes from the people, including their perceptions of government performance. The other comes from abroad, from our neighbours and the international community at large.

Mbeki, at that stage the Deputy President and political head of SACS, remarked at the Waenhuiskrans Conference of Government Communicators that the Conference was “charged with the responsibility to look into SACS in a purposeful and meaningful manner.” He requested the Conference to “come up with suggestions on how to restructure it in accordance with the needs of our time ... and how to make its operations even more effective” (Mbeki, 1995b:3). Mbeki’s sentiment that “there was an existing need for a central and specialised government information service” (Mbeki, 1995b:3), was echoed by one of the conference commissions:

There is a clear need for a central government communication body that will mainly provide communications support services to government, *inter alia*:

- manage government corporate image

- media monitoring and research
- coordinate communications campaign for reconciliation and reconstruction
- market the country internationally
- provide training and capacity building programmes (Conference of Government Communicators, 1995:1).

One of the Commissions at the Conference also resolved that Deputy President Thabo Mbeki had to appoint – by 15 September 1995 – an independent task group to investigate government communications. It was resolved that:

- the Task Group be charged with the responsibility of investigating policies and structures for the future of government communication in the country
- the Task group should comprise of persons with knowledge and experience in the field of communications and be as broadly representative as possible in terms of race, gender as well as the various fields of communications
- the Task group perform its functions in a transparent fashion and conduct research on communication practices of other democratic governments
- a broader Communicators' Conference should take place to discuss the Task Group's recommendations
- the recommendations of the Task Group will form the basis of a White Paper on Government Communications
- the White Paper be presented to Cabinet by the end of March 1996 (Conference of Government Communicators, 1995:1-2).

4.2.3 Task Group on Government Communications

Later in 1995, Deputy President Mbeki indeed appointed the Task Group on Government Communications (Comtask) to investigate government communication. The brief of the Task Group was extensive and it was

requested to complete its work “within six months of 1 March 1996” (Comtask, 1996a:2).

It was expected of Comtask to review:

- existing government communication policy at national, provincial and local level
- existing government communication structures and facilities at national, provincial and local level
- the relationship between government communication functions at national, provincial and local level
- existing government budgets with special reference to personnel, operations and equipment
- relationships between government communication structures and non-governmental information providers
- government communication training and capacity building with special emphasis on affirmative action
- ownership and control of South Africa media and to interpret how these affect government communication.

In addition it had to:

- define existing information delivery mechanisms
- examine international communication functions with special emphasis on information dissemination
- do research on government communication policies, functions and structures in other democracies, with special emphasis on developing countries
- make recommendations on new government communication policy, functions, structures, personnel and budget at international, national, provincial and local level (Comtask, 1996b:10).

From the final report of the Task Group to Deputy President Thabo Mbeki in October 1996, it is evident that they did their work in a transparent and consultative way. All the meetings of the Task Group were open to the public and the media. On 11 March 1996 Comtask issued a press release, and later in the month ran advertisements in newspapers (national and regional) and on radio (in nine official languages) appealing to the media, government departments, institutions of civil society and individuals to express their views on the efficacy or otherwise of government communications by 12 April 1996 (Comtask, 1996a:1-2). Comtask also had a page on the Internet for information and comments. A total of 150 written submissions were received and 61 presentations from a wide range of stakeholders and experts were made to the Task Group. They attended a two-day presentation by SACS and made a presentation to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Communications. In March 1996, a questionnaire was submitted to all Ministries, Departments and Provinces in which information regarding staffing, budgetary resources and working methods were invited. It also invited comments and suggestions. The Task Group also commissioned an independent survey of media coverage of government communications, and research to describe ownership and control of the South African media. Furthermore, with financial and technical assistance from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Commonwealth Secretariat, members of the Task Group travelled in teams of two or three to 19 countries to examine South Africa's international information dissemination and to research international perspectives on government communication in democracies (Comtask, 1996b:11-12).

The final Comtask report delineates critical constraints which new policies regarding government communications in South Africa should take into account: the low status of government communicators, a tradition of inflexible and inward-looking bureaucracy, a high level of concentration of media ownership, a journalism profession impoverished by *apartheid*, obsolete media legislation and

the unfortunate reality of severe resource constraints on government (Comtask, 1996b:15-18).

According to the Comtask investigation, national and provincial government employed 1 095 and 406 communication personnel respectively at the time of its investigation – a total of 1 501. Based on the material submitted, the estimated expenditure on communications staff, operations and publicity in 1996 amounted to R380,48 million – R294,5 million at national level and R85,98 million at provincial government level. This represented an average of 0,31% of total government spending. Based on these figures, national government was spending about R7,20 per capita and provincial government R2,10 per capita – R9,30 per citizen per year (Comtask, 1996b:19-20). Providing a picture of government communication in 1996, the Comtask report lists the following five characteristics:

- The level of resources applied to communications is too low, although we do not believe increased percentages *per se* are an answer to improved communication. The extreme variations in range of expenditure and the lack of a clear budget and accounting system underline the fact that government does not accord communications sufficient priority. There is no overall government standard for setting budgets or national strategies, nor are there mechanisms for measuring performance. As a consequence, widely differing priorities are given between different bodies.
- There is a lack of central coordination. Although Cabinet has a Communication Sub-Committee, it does not meet frequently. Press conferences are conducted by the Director-General of the President's Office, and ministries are sometimes not involved, even where the information relates directly to their line functions. Also, despite the existence of a category in Cabinet memoranda regarding communications around particular pieces of legislation, this is either ignored or given the most cursory attention. Communicators are seldom asked for inputs.

- Communication is not taken sufficiently seriously at a high enough level. Although the President's Office runs an efficient communication system, Cabinet does not. Many ministries give insufficient attention to the messages flowing from government, and personnel are not sufficiently empowered or resourced (or often even informed) to do this for them.
- There is no coordination of messages between government departments. Advertising campaigns are individually launched, press conferences may clash with one another; sometimes contradictory messages go out. The annual parliamentary press briefing has no centrally defined message. The plethora of corporate images on letterheads also illustrates this point.
- There is also a lack of coordination of messages on one central issue within a department. Rather than operating on a campaign basis, and making all means of communication work together to convey and reinforce the message, production is often ad hoc and there is no corporate follow through (Comtask, 1996b:23-24).

The final report of the Task Group – *Communications 2000: a vision for government communication in South Africa* and its 23 annexures – were submitted to (then) Deputy President Thabo Mbeki in October 1996. The report contained a total of 83 recommendations on the following broader issues, based on the premise that considerable savings to the public purse could be affected through a more modern, streamlined and effective communication system:

- communication structures
- functions and responsibilities (e.g. GCIS and Presidency, bulk buying and outsourcing, research and analysis)
- personnel and training
- improving South Africa's image in the world
- information development (e.g. working in partnership with society, building infrastructure)

- access to information (e.g. Open Democracy legislation, plain language)
- the media environment (e.g. resources and funding for community media, diversity in media ownership).

The Task Group expressed the opinion that “opinion polls and research form an important part of the work of most governments” (Comtask, 1996b:74) and envisaged three kinds of research:

- evaluation of advertising and other campaigns by research companies as commissioned by government, measuring it against targeted objectives
- opinion surveys - a small specialised unit that had to link with Cabinet and departments to ensure that opinion surveys were conducted by the private sector with the purpose to “evaluate ongoing government performance and to solicit the views of the public on matters of concern” (Comtask, 1996b:74)
- a standard media clipping and media summary service that had to be available to all departments and other appropriate clients (e.g. embassies) on a daily basis – this had to be done either in-house or outsourced (Comtask, 1996b:74).

The Comtask report includes two recommendations where reference is made to research. Recommendation 49 reads as follows: “It is proposed that the CSA be responsible for ensuring that research is conducted and that government is kept informed through both large-scale research and opinion polls, internal monitoring of daily performance and a media clipping service” (Comtask, 1996b:74).

Recommendation 45 deals with bulk-buying:

“... responsible for the bulk-buying of advertising space and selecting and contracting advertising, marketing, research and other communication services on behalf of government” (Comtask, 1996b:73).

Comtask argued that Government was not using its substantial buying power in the marketplace to obtain favourable rates when Departments obtained these services individually (Comtask, 1996b:73).

4.2.4 Implementation of Comtask recommendations

On 19 February 1997 Cabinet approved the recommendations of Comtask in principle and requested that a Committee be set up to oversee the transformation of SACS “into a new-look Government Communication and Information System (GCIS)” (SACS, 1998:2). Dr Essop Pahad, at that stage Deputy Minister in the Office of the Deputy President and responsible for SACS, was requested to chair the Committee on the Implementation of the Comtask Report.

The Implementation Committee submitted a Cabinet Memorandum on 26 September 1997 with recommendations “based on the proposals of the Task Group on Government Communications (Comtask) and on further discussions and investigations” (Office of the Deputy President, 1997:1). The Memorandum, discussed by Cabinet on 8 October 1997, proposed the “development of a professional and effective corps of government communicators through the setting up of a system aimed at professionalising and streamlining communications.” The principles on which the Implementation Committee wanted GCIS to be based included:

- the need to develop a communications arm that provides proper support for government and allows it to promote (market) its policies and enter into dialogue with citizens in a coordinated, coherent and planned way – in a manner that benefits the public at large
- the need to build a coordinated communication network to establish a system that works horizontally (between ministries and departments) and vertically (between the three spheres of government)

- the need to develop a corps of highly trained, professional communicators capable of developing and implementing appropriate strategies
- the need to build systems and networks which advance the cause of democracy by developing the capacity of government to provide mass information and enter into two-way communication with the public - focusing particularly on communities with poor access to information
- the need to achieve the above in a way that is streamlined, cost and energy efficient and of a high professional standard (Office of the Deputy President, 1997:1-2).

On 21 January 1998 Cabinet approved the appointment of Mr Joel Netshitenzhe as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Mr Yacoob Abba Omar as the Deputy CEO of the new Government Communication and Information System (GCIS).

At the occasion of a briefing to the parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Communication on 11 May 1998, the CEO made it clear that the GCIS derived its mandate first and foremost from the Constitution, which in Section 16 of the Bill of Rights guarantees citizens freedom of speech (Netshitenzhe, 1998:1). In the 1998 Annual Report of GCIS (GCIS, 1999:2) it is explained that, as a consequence of this, citizens do not only have the right to receive information about Government, but also to “communicate their views and activities” to Government. Relevant to this and again reflecting the necessity for government communicators to ‘listen’ to the people, is a statement by Dr Essop Pahad, (then) Deputy Minister in the Office of the Deputy President responsible for government communications at the first Government Communicators Consultative Conference held on 6 May 1998: “Our task, hand in hand with partners in the communication industry including the media, is to ensure that this right is indeed realised in practical life. It is to see that all South Africans receive comment and information that enable them to make rational choices about their lives. It is to see to it that they themselves can pass on information and views about their

activities as they change their lives for the better. They have got the right to know and to be heard” (Pahad, 1998:1). At the same conference Dr Pahad also stated that GCIS strategy should be “based on scientific research rather than what we ourselves want to hear” (Pahad, 1998:3).

On 18 May 1998 history was made in the field of government communications when Dr Pahad delivered SACS’s last Budget Vote speech in Parliament and officially launched GCIS.

4.3 THE GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SYSTEM – 18 MAY 1998 TO DATE

4.3.1 Introduction

On the basis of the Comtask recommendations, and the principles of government communication identified by the Implementation Committee (see par. 4.2.4), the newly-appointed top management (Secretariat) of GCIS started a process of consultation with the various elements of government communications even before the official launch of the organisation. These elements of government communications included the Communications Directors Forum (from national government), the Provincial Communication Directors Forum and the Ministerial Liaison Officers (MLO) Forum (GCIS, 1999:6). These consultations, as well as a thorough analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the new organisation, informed the Secretariat in formulating the vision and mission of the new organisation to read:

Vision: A comprehensive communication system on behalf of government to facilitate optimum involvement of the majority of South Africans in the entire process of reconstruction and development, nation-building and reconciliation (GCIS, 1999:3).

Mission: Playing a coordination, facilitating and strategising role for all of government communications, and to provide cost-effective communication services to all of government (GCIS, 1999:3).

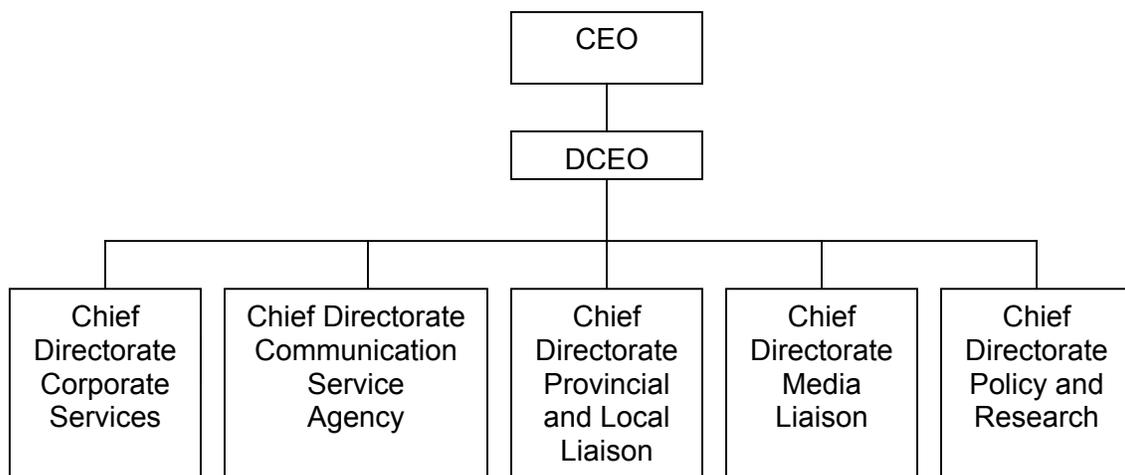
According to the first GCIS Annual Report (GCIS, 1999:6-7) the Secretariat also identified the following eight key priorities for the organisation's first operational year – that is May to December 1998:

- Coherent government message: Ensuring coherence and consistency of various elements of government communication in terms of both message and method of delivery were regarded as the main challenge for government communication.
- Development communication: This is information directed primarily at those in rural areas, townships, the illiterate, the youth and women to empower them both to know their rights and to take full advantage of socio-economic opportunities.
- Restructuring the government communication system to be more cost-effective: The Secretariat held meetings with ministerial, departmental and provincial communication structures to define cost-effective relationships.
- Training of government communicators to improve competence: The establishment of a National Training Board (NTB) for government communicators was one of the immediate Comtask proposals that GCIS had to attend to.
- Better servicing of the media: The Secretariat worked from the premise that GCIS's relationship with the media had to be built on the recognition of the principle that they were partners in communication, sharing a common responsibility and obligations: that of keeping the public informed.
- Better utilisation of Internet technology: This entailed the development of the then GCIS website into a single entry point for government information and the encouragement of government departments to develop their own websites.

- Bulk-buying. Secretariat decided that the Government, through the GCIS, should issue a tender for the handling of placements of all campaign advertising and negotiate the rates, commissions, etc.
- Media diversity: The achievement of a diversity of voices in the media was considered as a critical element in the GCIS vision. One of the priorities of the new organisation was to start discussions and a process to draft legislation on media ownership, distribution channels and printing and to deal with the establishment of the Media Development Agency that would help formulate policy on the distribution of resources to community media.

Besides the Chief Directorate Corporate Services, GCIS had four additional line-functional chief directorates, namely the Communication Service Agency (CSA), Provincial and Local Liaison, Media Liaison, and Policy and Research (see figure 4.1). Committed to the Comtask principle of a lean communication organisation, the Secretariat reduced the establishment from the 501 of SACS to 360.

Figure 4.1: *GCIS – structure, 1998*¹⁴



¹⁴ Researcher's own compilation

4.3.2 Chief Directorate Policy and Research

The Chief Directorate Policy and Research consisted (as is the situation in 2001) of three Directorates, Information Resource Management, Research and Policy.

The responsibilities of Research entailed the following:

- conducting communication and information needs studies and research on specific issues as requested
- testing the impact/success of communication and information campaigns/products/services (e.g. pre- and post-testing)
- conducting communication audits
- evaluating ongoing government performance and soliciting the views of the public on matters of concern
- providing a communication and information research advice service
- documentary research (e.g. demographic profile and media exposure of client groups) (GCIS, 1999: 15).

4.3.2.1 *Research – 1998*

The 1998 Annual Report of GCIS states that: “By conducting surveys, the GCIS established in its first year of existence a formal communication link with its target audiences, impacting positively on the need for transparency within the Public Service” (GCIS, 1999:27).

During 1998 various qualitative and quantitative research projects were conducted on behalf of other government departments and for GCIS. In the case of studies that were not extensive, quantitative research was conducted by staff of the Directorate Research whilst all qualitative and extensive quantitative research projects were outsourced to the private sector.

Highlights of the research conducted in 1998, included:

- Projects at the request of the GCIS Secretariat to assist in the process of transforming government communication and establishing a government communication and information system:
 - an audit amongst government communicators on national and provincial government level to determine human resource capacity, skills of personnel, activities and responsibilities of the communication components and to obtain suggestions to improve government communication. (This audit was conducted in response to Comtask recommendation 54: “it is proposed that an audit and evaluation of existing skills be conducted in order to identify problems and build capacity ...”)
 - an audit (national and provincial governments) to determine expenditure on advertising and research
 - an audit amongst Departmental Heads of Communication and Ministerial Liaison Officers (MLOs) to determine progress in transformation of the communication function
 - an audit on existing or planned Internet publishing
 - an audit amongst national government departments, provincial communication components and other stakeholders to determine spending and initiatives regarding international liaison and marketing
- Other research projects for GCIS:
 - evaluation of the government’s *Midterm Report* in terms of awareness and perceptions
 - evaluation of two consultative conferences for government communicators by means of self-completion questionnaires

- a documentary research report which provided a summary of the results of research projects conducted on the government information needs of people since 1995.
- Research for other government departments:
 - determination of information needs and perceptions regarding various economy-related issues – a focus group study for the Department of Trade and Industry;
 - evaluation of the utilisation and need for more abattoirs to be established country-wide for the Directorate Veterinary Public Health, Department of Agriculture – personal interviews
 - an extensive country-wide internal communication audit for the Department of Correctional Services – self-completion questionnaires
 - a readership study on *Nexus*, the in-house magazine of the Department of Correctional Services
 - an audience research project amongst rural radio listeners for the Department of Agriculture
 - public perceptions regarding government performance for the Presidency by buying into a syndicated survey conducted by a private sector research company.

4.3.2.2 *Research – 1999*

During 1999, the Directorate's activities were "mainly in support of the determination of the information and communication needs of the Government and the public" (GCIS, 2000a: 25). The request for research to support government communication increased and initiatives were taken to pro-actively and constructively contribute to the development of a national government communication strategy and GCIS priorities. Research conducted in 1999 was

used in planning various communication strategies, activities, products, services and structures. Highlights included the following:

- Assessing the communication environment for government communication initiatives and campaigns:
 - including questions in two country-wide syndicates to assess public perceptions regarding government performance and voter registration for the 1999 general election
 - including relevant questions in a country-wide syndicated survey to assess public perceptions regarding the compliance of various systems in South Africa for the change-over to the next millennium (Y2K) for the Department of Provincial and Local Government
 - pre-testing concept advertisements (for radio and television) regarding the process of registration before the 1999 elections and attitudes towards participation in the election amongst the youth by means of personal interviews and focus groups
 - determining public perceptions on the Department of Defence and the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) – an extensive study conducted by means of focus groups and in-depth interviews
 - determination of perceptions of chief magistrates, regional heads of the Department of Justice, registrars and regional court presidents regarding the payment of witness fees – a study conducted through self-completion questionnaires for the Department of Justice
 - following a request to the GCIS by the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) on HIV/AIDS to assist in the development of a renewed communication campaign, the Directorate, as part of an extensive research process, compiled a report on available communication-related research; included relevant questions in a syndicated survey and started working on two qualitative research projects

- a focus group study was conducted to assess the communication environment for the State of the Nation Address and the impact of government communication.

- Determining information and communication needs:
 - an extensive, qualitative research project (focus groups) country-wide to identify the need for government information amongst the South African population was outsourced
 - assistance with a survey amongst key stakeholders (e.g. investment analysts, the media and tourism sectors) in eight foreign countries to assess attitudes and perceptions within the international community *vis-a-vis* South Africa as pertaining to its attractiveness as a tourism destination and an investment region – to serve as an input in planning for an extensive campaign to market South Africa internationally
 - an audit regarding the competencies and training needs of government communicators at national, provincial and local government level, conducted at the request of the Chief Director: National Training Board.

- Research contributing to GCIS internal processes:
 - an evaluation of GCIS Open Days organised by the Directorate: Project Management
 - a skills/competency audit amongst GCIS staff
 - evaluation of the GCIS *Bosberaad*
 - evaluation of the Government Communicators Consultative Conference III
 - evaluation of a course in project management

- evaluation of a conference on Multi-Purpose Community Centres (MPCCs) in the Western Cape
- documentary research on MPCCs.
- Communication and/or climate audits: Internal communication audits and/or climate audits were conducted within GCIS, and for the Office of the Premier in the Northern Province.

4.3.2.3 GCIS Corporate Strategy – January 2000 to March 2001: implications for research

Towards the end of 1999, the GCIS Secretariat developed a corporate strategy for the organisation for January 2000 to March 2001. The corporate strategy contained revised vision and mission statements for the organisation, as well as specific objectives for the period. The vision statement was reformulated to better reflect the organisation's intention to make a meaningful contribution in an environment where society is working with the government whilst the revised mission statement was more specific than the previous one regarding the contribution of GCIS as a government communication agency:

- Vision: Making an indispensable and widely valued contribution to a society working with the Government for a better life for all, by meeting the Government's communication needs and the public's information needs (GCIS, 2000b:4).
- Mission: As a government communication agency the GCIS's mission is to develop, promote, provide and coordinate:
 - communication strategy for the Government
 - development communication between the Government and the public
 - coherence across spheres and sectors of the Government
 - identification of public information needs
 - excellent media and communication services to the Government

- policies for a democratic communication and information environment
- projection of South Africa's image internationally
- training strategies and programmes for government communicators
- government's corporate identity (GCIS, 2000b:4).

The Corporate Strategy specified the following five objectives for the GCIS for January 2000 to March 2001:

- transform the GCIS into an efficient organisation
- render excellent media and communication services to the Government
- make the Government Information Centres (GICs) a centerpiece of government communication information (the GICs are the provincial offices of GCIS)
- help develop government media, communication and information policy
- promote South Africa in trade, investment and tourism (GCIS, 2000b:4-5).

Furthermore, the GCIS Corporate Strategy for the period January 2000 to March 2001 identified six key strategic issues and various key campaigns. The key strategic issues were issues which GCIS as a whole was responsible for:

- Strategic Issue One: Communication to promote the Government's mandate

This involved the promotion of communication that facilitated the implementation of the government's democratic mandate. It included the development of a national communication strategy, promoting understanding of the communication environment and assistance in the implementation of the national communication strategy through particular strategies for departments, provinces, and campaigns, as well as the concrete realisation of these strategies in communication projects. It also required capacity-building throughout government for developing and

implementing communication strategy as well as overseeing the restructuring of communication structures.

- Strategic Issue Two: Transformation of structures and personnel
These included the training of staff, initiatives to steer GCIS towards a learning organisation, conducting a climate study to help clarify how to keep staff morale high, development and implementation of an incentives system and an internal communication strategy. Another area identified for attention was that of diversity management in terms of race and gender.
- Strategic Issue Three: Information and communication programme
Arguing that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) critically affect the working environment of GCIS, the organisation had to deal with matters pertaining to the Information Economy, the interaction of information and communication technologies and availing these technologies for people-centred development as priority issues. GCIS had to work closely with the Department of Communications on the issue of ICTs, and drive the process of developing media policy and the vehicle for media diversity and development.
- Strategic Issue Four: Identifying and meeting public information needs for government information
The GCIS had to formulate a clear approach to follow up on the qualitative research conducted at the beginning of 1999. GCIS had to spell out the information content of the MPCCs; the training needs of people staffing them; how they were connected to the Subdirector Information Centre (the component handling information enquiries) and how call centre technology could be utilised by the public.

- Strategic Issue Five: Improving service delivery to clients
The organisation had to ensure that a relevant service was provided to clients – a service based on GCIS strengths matched with the needs of the clients. The GCIS had to advise clients on outsourcing services which could be delivered.
- Strategic Issue Six: Corporate issues
There was an urgent need to develop efficient financial management systems, management information systems, clear supplier databases and strategies, and to look at long-term budget reallocation in line with GCIS strategic objectives.

Various key campaigns were identified for the relevant period – some to be *done* by the GCIS, others to be *managed* by GCIS and others where the GCIS had to make input regarding its *outsourcing* or the execution thereof by client departments:

- Campaigns to be *done* by the GCIS:
These were campaigns which Cabinet had allocated to GCIS which originated in the Presidency or which were initiated by GCIS:
 - African Renaissance
 - National Consensus
 - Openings of Parliament
 - Corporate Identity of the Government
 - Multi-Purpose Community Centres (MPCCs)
 - *Official Yearbook of South Africa*
- Campaigns where GCIS had to provide leadership to interdepartmental teams, i.e. GCIS *managed* the campaigns:
 - Job creation

- HIV/AIDS
 - Local elections on behalf of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)
 - Moral Integrity, e.g. Anti-corruption campaign
- Campaigns where the GCIS had to provide input regarding the *outsourcing* or execution by the specific departments:
 - Hanover 2000
 - Awareness on people with disabilities
 - Public Service Negotiations
 - Gun Control
 - E-commerce
 - National productivity
 - Taxi Recapitalisation
 - Y2K
 - Public Sector IT Policy

4.3.2.4 *Research – 2000*

During the calendar year 2000, the Research directorate conducted research projects in support of the GCIS corporate strategy and at the request of government departments and institutions. Some of the highlights of the contribution from Research, categorised according to the key issues and key campaigns in the corporate strategy, included:

- Communication to promote the Government's mandate
A focus group research project that was conducted country-wide was outsourced on behalf of the Presidency. The results of this project provided information to help understand the communication environment and to develop a national communication strategy for Government for the year 2001. The Directorate also subscribed to relevant research reports

available from a private sector research company. In his speech to Parliament on the GCIS Budget Vote on 11 May 2001, Dr Essop Pahad referred to this research: “Most of the trends reported in surveys indicate that there is growing appreciation for the gains of our transition to democracy. Furthermore, there is confidence in this government to bring about a better life for all” (Pahad, 2001:1).

- Transformation of structures and personnel
The Directorate Research conducted a climate study amongst GCIS staff through self-completion questionnaires and personal interviews. The results of the climate study helped to clarify how to improve staff morale and contributed to the formulation of an internal communication strategy.
- Information and communication programme
Using an Online questionnaire, the Directorate assisted in a more extensive initiative to evaluate the official government website, *SA Government Online*. The focus of the evaluation was on content, information architecture, navigation, the search facility, and the design and layout of the site. The results were used to improve the site.
- Identifying and meeting public information needs for government communication
GCIS staff conducted research to identify client needs in terms of government information and services in Kgautswane (Northern Province) and Zwelentemba (Western Cape) where MPCCs were launched. Documentary research was done regarding service delivery at MPCCs and a consolidated research report was produced.
- Improving service delivery to clients
The GCIS product, *Bua News*, aimed primarily at community media, was evaluated amongst clients through telephone interviews and self-completion questionnaires. Two research projects were outsourced to support the initiatives of the country’s international marketing initiative, and results presented at the first meeting of the International Marketing

Council. Furthermore, a private sector research company was commissioned to conduct a telephone survey amongst government communicators to assess the products and services of GCIS. The purpose of this survey was to assist in the process of improving service delivery to government clients and to contribute to the development of the GCIS marketing strategy.

- Corporate issues

Contributions from the Directorate Research to this strategic issue included research to evaluate specific events, e.g. the Budget *Lekgotla* of the GCIS management.

- Key campaigns

Activities of the Directorate Research in the year 2000 supported various key campaigns. Additional to research regarding the MPCC initiative and the campaign to market South Africa internationally, highlights in terms of supporting key campaigns included the following:

- On the basis of the communication plan for the November 2000 local government elections, a research plan was developed. GCIS assisted the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to outsource two research projects in order to enhance effective communication – to make people aware of the elections and to promote the level of participation.
- GCIS was involved in government's efforts to promote public awareness of HIV/AIDS. The organisation was also involved in the launch of the *Partnership Against Aids* initiative on 9 October 1998. This *Partnership* initiative was "aimed at heightening public awareness of the national crisis that HIV/AIDS poses" and "aimed to do so by creating a partnership of all sectors of our society on the basis of a commitment to share responsibility for addressing the problem" (Trew, 1999:2). However, President Mbeki noted soon after his election as President, when he opened Parliament in June

1999, that heightened public awareness yet needed to bring the change of behaviour which was needed. “In the light of the President’s commitment of the government to a renewed national effort, the GCIS was asked to help answer the question why behaviour is not changing as much as it should, and whether government should be communicating in a different way on this matter. Such a daunting research challenge called for some humility on the part of a communications agency. GCIS argued that, if the task of the organisation is to translate knowledge into a message for leaders of our nation and society to communicate, the organisation needs to follow the message of the *Partnership Against Aids* and try to promote a partnership of all those engaged in research related to HIV/AIDS as a national research response to this national crisis” (Trew, 1999:2).

As a result of the GCIS initiative, with the assistance of the Department of Health and the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, such a partnership indeed emerged. The partnership embraced academic researchers, the private sector market research industry and a donor agency. Two extensive qualitative research projects were outsourced – one of it funded by an international donor agency. Three research companies made relevant research results available at no cost. Five of the prominent research companies in South Africa agreed to include relevant questions in syndicated surveys conducted country-wide on a *pro bono* basis.

- Following the launch of the country’s new Coat of Arms on 27 April 2000, the Directorate included questions in a country-wide syndicated survey in June 2000 to determine levels of awareness and perceptions regarding this new national symbol. The results

were used to inform further communication planning in this regard. Contributing to the process to develop a new corporate identity for Government around the new Coat of Arms, a qualitative research project conducted amongst Ministers, Directors-General of national government departments, communicators from the three spheres of government and from other government structures, bodies, commissions and task groups as well as corporate identity specialists was outsourced.

- Questions were included in country-wide syndicated surveys conducted by private sector research companies (in March, May and June 2000) to assess exposure and awareness of the State of the Nation address and communication initiatives (e.g. the pamphlet *A nation at work for a better life, 2000*) in this regard. The results were used to plan communication initiatives around the State of the Nation address in February 2001.
- An extensive research proposal was developed to support the communication strategy for the project *Awareness on people with disabilities* (GCIS, Directorate Research, 2001a).

4.3.2.5 GCIS Corporate Strategy – April 2001 to March 2002: implications for research

At the beginning of 2001, the GCIS Secretariat developed a corporate strategy for the organisation for the financial year April 2001 to March 2002. The vision, mission and strategic objectives of the organisation were again revised to better reflect the responsibility of GCIS to provide leadership and to work with other role-players in meeting the communication and information needs of government and the people (GCIS, 2001a:1):

- Vision: Helping to meet the communication and information needs of government and the people to ensure a better life for all.

- Mission: To provide leadership in government communications and keep the public informed of government's implementation of its mandate.

- Strategic objectives:
 - Providing leadership to government communications by:
 - assisting in the development and implementation of communication strategies for the government, including the Presidency
 - playing a facilitating, strategising, co-ordinating and outsourcing role
 - Establishing a rapid response capacity
 - Keeping the public informed on government's delivery of its mandate
 - Developing strategies for the better utilisation of advances in information and communication technologies in communicating and in the management of GCIS
 - Increasing the resources and capacity available to GCIS
 - Addressing the ongoing transformation of GCIS by paying attention to gender representivity at management level; the recruitment of disabled workers; and running programmes on HIV/AIDS.

The GCIS Corporate Strategy for 2001/2002 again contained information regarding five key issues – issues that the GCIS as a whole is responsible for. All Directorates were requested to examine the impact of these issues on their work, and to plan accordingly for the relevant time period. The key issues for 2001/2002 are:

- Strategic Issue One: Providing leadership in government communications
The GCIS shall do this by:

- Making strategic inputs into the communications programme of the Presidency and encouraging departments to think more proactively on how the Presidency fits into their communication programmes.
 - Drafting of communication strategy for Government. This would require working to the cycle from the January Cabinet *Lekgotla*; overseeing the development of departmental and cluster strategies; and the review of communications work at the end of each year.
 - Managing the corporate identity of Government.
 - Ensuring that Government has a common, positive approach to the media.
 - Prioritising providing leadership in transversal campaigns. An example of this would be the *South Africa Unlimited* campaign (a campaign to market the country internationally).
 - Establishing a strategically informed rapid response capacity.
 - Proactively encouraging departments to run specific campaigns and interrogating more closely the ones being launched.
- Strategic Issue Two: Keeping the public informed
The following measures will be undertaken:
 - The long-term role of the MPCCs shall be clarified. This would include setting out what GCIS's long-term relations with the MPCCs shall be; examining the strategies to be followed to meet increasing public demand for information; and the relationship between MPCCs and the *Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Strategy (ISRDS)*.
 - The further use of the Internet and the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) will be explored to look at the structural and developmental implications for GCIS.

- Special attention shall be paid to the development of the content necessary for keeping the public informed of government's implementation of its mandate.

- Strategic Issue Three: Enhance the quality of government communication
This will be done at three levels:
 - Information products: The GCIS will review the information and communication products it shall be producing for the coming year; set up mechanisms for evaluating the products departments will be disseminating and have a clear strategy to streamline, strengthen and market GCIS's distribution service.
 - Audit capacity: GCIS shall audit communication capacity in government; intervene directly in departments to help develop capacity and benchmark itself against international experiences.
 - New Communicator: GCIS shall develop a manual giving guidelines on how communicators in a democratic South Africa should operate.

- Strategic Issue Four: Improving the climate in GCIS
 - GCIS shall strive to create and maintain an exciting, creative work environment where the contribution of all staff members is valued. We shall expect all managers to have dynamic and healthy working relations with their staff.
 - We shall continue improving on the internal communication system and the physical office environment.
 - We shall also ensure the active implementation of our equity plan and build better relations between management and the employees, and their representatives.

- More attention shall be paid to issues around gender discrimination, HIV/AIDS and disabilities.
- Strategic Issue Five: Improve GCIS strategic capacity and resources
 - GCIS shall strive to improve its strategic role. GCIS shall position itself as providing quality consultancy across a number of areas. This will mean that in the medium term its structures shall become oriented to playing a more strategic role. This will mean more attention being paid to our retention strategy. Furthermore it shall draw on a database of specialists for communication purposes.
 - GCIS shall continue working towards improved better allocations of resources to communicate through the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) processes, while trying to raise funds through donors and establish a trading account.
 - We shall ensure that project management is the responsibility of all line functions and promote the further institutionalisation of the project management based approach of GCIS.
 - GCIS shall contribute to furthering government's use of ICTs. The GCIS shall continue with the implementation of the e-GCIS strategy, ensuring that it is aligned with its business processes. It shall develop a medium term approach to be taken to the use of ICTs in enhancing communication. It shall find ways of enhancing government's web capacity and cohesion with special focus on design and writing, MPCCs, distribution and usage of all possible means of communication (GCIS, 2001a:4-8).

Additional to the five key issues identified in the GCIS Corporate Strategy for 2001/2002, the Secretariat developed the *Government Communication Programme* (GCP) for the same time period. This programme “aims to identify

important events under each of the themes identified in the government communication strategy” (GCIS, 2001b: 1). The themes for 2001/2002 are:

- Effective governance
- Building international partnerships
- Decisiveness on economic growth and job creation
- Fighting crime and corruption
- Visibility of socio-economic programmes.

Additional to these five themes, some transversal and GCIS campaigns were also identified.

4.3.2.6 *Research – 2001*

From January 2001 to middle September 2001, the Directorate Research again conducted various research projects in support of the GCIS Corporate Strategy and in support of the GCP. Some of the research projects were conducted by GCIS staff whilst others were outsourced. Also, research advice and support were provided to various government departments. The service provided by the Directorate Research, categorised according to the key issues in the GCIS Corporate Strategy and the themes of the GCP for the relevant time period, included the following (GCIS, Directorate Research, 2001a):

- Providing leadership in government communications
Questions were included in two country-wide syndicated research projects conducted by means of personal interviews by private sector research companies to assess the communication environment in which government operates. Questions in the syndicated surveys, as well as two telephone surveys conducted in the three main metropolitan areas, provided results on the public’s exposure to the Presidency’s communication programme as well as perceptions in this regard. Focus group research projects conducted in both urban and rural areas in five

provinces improved understanding of the communication environment, public perceptions on service delivery and information dissemination by government as well as expectations in this regard.

- Keeping the public informed

The Directorate provided support to the MPCC initiative by developing a template to be used by MPCC staff to record client statistics, services used and responses to services provided at the MPCCs. A training manual was developed to assist GCIS staff which operate at grassroots level to determine information and development needs in communities and to evaluate the response of clients to services provided. Towards the end of September 2001, an initiative to obtain donor funding for an extensive, baseline research programme in support of the MPCC initiative was still under way. The aim of the research programme is to enhance and promote the availability and quality of services provided by various role-players through MPCCs. The MPCC research programme has various objectives, including:

- assessing awareness and needs with regard to government services and information
- evaluating the availability and utilisation of services provided at MPCCs as well as client satisfaction
- identifying and assessing systems and procedures to promote the sustainability of MPCCs.

Questions to determine the public's needs in terms of government information and communication were included in the questionnaires used for the syndicated and telephone surveys and the discussion guides used for the focus group projects mentioned in the previous paragraph.

- Enhance the quality of government communication

Questions to assess the impact of and response to communication initiatives (e.g. a pamphlet and discussion programmes on radio and television to inform the population about the government's priorities for the

year) were included in a country-wide syndicated survey and a focus group study conducted in the Northern Province. An audit on the capacity and competencies of government communicators was conducted by means of personal interviews with the heads of communication in national government departments. Advice and support was provided to the Subdirectorate Electronic Information Resources to conduct an audit of the websites of national government departments. Some of the GCIS products and services were evaluated amongst the clients or users – e.g. various training courses, the *Government Contact Directory* and the GCIS library.

- Improving the climate in GCIS

Staff from the Directorate Research conducted a study by means of in-depth personal interviews with GCIS staff to evaluate service delivery by the Chief Directorate Corporate Services. Both Corporate Services staff (as services providers) and staff from the line function chief directorates (as clients) were interviewed. The results of the survey are being used to develop appropriate strategic plans to improve service delivery to internal clients and to enhance overall effectiveness of GCIS activities.

Two Budget *Lekgotlas* of the GCIS management were evaluated amongst those who attended. At the time of this research another internal communication audit was planned for execution before the end of the 2001/2002 financial year.

- Improve GCIS strategic capacity and resources

An audit was conducted by means of personal interviews with Directors-General and with heads of communication of national government departments regarding partnerships with civil society in the field of government communication. The audit flowed directly from a decision by Cabinet in March 2001 that, amongst other things, government departments had to emphasise building partnerships with civil society to

facilitate communication around government's policies and programmes. It was intended such partnerships would also constitute part of the broader partnership of all spheres of society with government in order to achieve the goal of a better life for all South Africans.

Research conducted in 2001 to enhance effectiveness of communication and information dissemination, categorised according to the campaign themes of the Government Communication Programme (GCP) for the current period, included:

- Effective governance
Questions to ascertain public perceptions regarding the quality of service delivery by government and the Public Service as well as expectations in this regard were included in two *country-wide syndicated surveys*.
- Building international partnership
A research project was conducted to identify the various initiatives by both government and non-government entities to market South Africa internationally. The aim was to contribute to the process to develop an integrated approach to the international marketing of South Africa. What is meant by partnership in this context is voluntary cooperation without payment of services.

Questions to assess public response to the *World Conference Against Racism* that took place in Durban during September 2001, were included in a country-wide syndicated survey conducted by a private sector research company in October 2001.

- Decisiveness on economic growth and job creation
Public sentiment regarding the government's initiatives to restructure state assets, mass action of organised labour regarding privatisation and government communication in this regard were assessed by means of relevant questions in a focus group research project conducted in two

provinces during September 2001 and by relevant questions in a country-wide syndicated survey.

- Fighting crime and corruption

Research results relevant to this campaign theme were made available from a research product that Directorate Research subscribes to, and by including appropriate questions in discussion guides used for the various focus group research projects.

- Visibility of the socio-economic programme, Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Strategy (ISRDS)

Questions regarding the ISRDS and urban renewal were included in questionnaires or discussion guides of various research projects. Furthermore, research results on public sentiment regarding government performance on a variety of issues (e.g. housing, job creation, health services and land restitution) are available from the research product Directorate Research subscribes to. A research proposal was developed to determine the public's knowledge of, attitudes towards and behaviour relevant to communication on cholera.

- Transversal campaigns

Additional to questions regarding HIV/AIDS included *pro bono* by private sector research companies in syndicated surveys, a research report was compiled to consolidate the findings from various research projects conducted on HIV/AIDS since 1999.

Research regarding the MPCC initiative and the community-outreach (*Imbizo*) campaign also supported some of the transversal campaigns identified.

- GCIS Campaigns

Results from various research projects provided support to evaluate communication initiatives regarding the opening of Parliament and future planning in this regard.

4.3.3 Summary: GCIS – the role of research

Even before the official launch of GCIS, it was clear that research would be an important part of the work of the new organisation and in the broader government communications environment where GCIS needed to provide strategic guidance and advice, as well as contribute to effective coordination in government communications.

Research conducted by GCIS since May 1998 was mainly conducted within the strategic guidelines provided by the GCIS Secretariat, including the GCIS corporate strategy. Research results were used extensively, e.g. in the further process to transform government communication, to strategise for overall government communication and for specific campaigns, to assess the communication environment in which government communicators had to perform their responsibilities, to evaluate ongoing government performance, to assess the impact of various communication and information campaigns, products and services, and to determine the public's information and communication needs.

Initiatives to enhance the cost-effectiveness of research was taken broader than conducting some of the projects in-house. It was done by negotiating international donor funding and *pro bono* work by private sector research companies.

The Directorate Research assisted different government departments, provincial governments and other government institutions by either conducting research projects at their request, by providing support and advice to outsource research to private sector research companies and by rendering research advice.

Current shortcomings in government communication research in South Africa include the following:

- Relevant research is often not conducted or not used appropriately due to a lack of understanding by some government communicators that research can be of incalculable help to enhance the effectiveness of their communication and information dissemination initiatives.
- Due to a lack of coordination and sharing of communication research results, government cannot make optimum use of results from communication research conducted by government role-players, and duplication takes place.
- Communication research mostly takes place as a once-off initiative, and not throughout the campaign – e.g. to test the impact of a communication campaign or product, or to do some pre-testing.
- Government seems not to allocate appropriate funding for communication research.

4.4 SUMMARY

In chapter 4 the researcher provides an overview of the process of transforming government communication in South Africa after 1994. Information is presented on the Conference of Government Communications – regarded as the beginning of the process of transforming government communication, the responsibilities and findings of the Task Group on Government Communications and the process of implementing the Comtask recommendations.

Furthermore, the researcher discusses the strategic framework and priorities within which the GCIS has operated and performed its tasks since its launch in May 1998. Specific attention is given to the research conducted by GCIS to enhance the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination

of government information. The researcher points out that research is an important part of the work of GCIS and the broad government communications environment and that the research conducted by GCIS is mainly conducted within the strategic guidelines provided by the GCIS Secretariat.