

## **FOURTH SMS CONFERENCE**

### **“BUILDING IMPLEMENTATION CAPACITY FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT – IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PUBLIC SERVICE”**

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*Communicating government’s vision and mobilising the public  
service in implementing government’s programme of action.  
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## **DEFINING A QUESTION**

I would like to thank the organisers for putting the topic of communication on an agenda focused on building implementation capacity. It is not only an opportunity to speak to senior managers about communication. It is also a timely reminder to us as communicators that capacity for implementation should be high on our agenda.

As any gambler will tell you, chance does sometimes deal a good hand. The topic I have been asked to speak about, so I was told, is the merger of two that were originally planned – one, “communicating government’s vision”, the other, “mobilising the public service in implementation of government’s programme of action”. Diary problems have forced them together.

In fact they do belong very much together, but the relationship between communicating government’s vision and mobilising the public service does pose a particular challenge for government communication. It is one which, I believe, we have yet to come fully to grips with.

To put it simply, government has made great strides in communicating with the public in particular around government’s programme of action – in ways this presentation will outline - but it has become clear that there is a need to complement public communication with a major effort of internal communication to inform and mobilise public servants in all spheres to fully play their part in implementation.

The need is highlighted by the current focus on the organisation and capacity of the state, but equally by communication experience around some of the major current interventions to expand socio-economic opportunities, end social exclusion and eradicate poverty.

That experience emphasises that mobilisation for implementation requires communication of government’s vision and programme both to the public and to the public service so that all can play to the full their part in the People’s Contract.

So, as well as “presenting some key initiatives that government has put in place to communicate and interact with the public,” I would like to end this presentation with some questions about initiatives to communicate with public servants?

## **COMMUNICATION PRIORITIES OF THE CURRENT PERIOD**

The focus of communication in any period derives from what is needed to achieve our objectives in the prevailing environment. Two factors are critical in defining the prevailing environment, over and above issues shaping the immediate environment that evolves from year to year, month to month and day to day:

First, the start of this period was marked by both the beginning of the term of a government elected with a new mandate and the beginning of the Second Decade of Freedom. This has decisive weight given the imperative of aligning communication with the policy process;

Secondly, we are experiencing “an unprecedented confluence of encouraging possibilities”. Public mood is as positive as it was in the euphoria of the transition in 1994. Polls on the sense of whether the country is going in the right direction as well as the various economic confidence indicators reflect this. This is in part an effect of the Ten Year celebrations – and elections – as people reflected on the country’s progress. Sustained positive economic trends have played a major part.

The Ten Year Review itself drew conclusions with critical relevance for communication, some specifically for what is being discussed today.

The first concerns partnership and derives from limitations in the capacity of the state. Progress was greatest in the first ten years in areas directly under the control of the state – changing laws, providing social services, transforming state institutions. Where there was reliance on partnership with others, or on their leadership, progress was more limited – such as investment, job-creation, and

empowerment. So, building partnership, a people's contract, is a priority for this decade

For communications this puts emphasis on articulating a vision that can harness all of society in united action around common development objectives. It implies also the importance of building communication partnerships that can promote such a vision, consolidate pride in our country and a positive image of our country abroad.

A further conclusion of the ten year review was the need to improve the state performance. This applies naturally to better performance of the government communication system.

A third conclusion relates to the key role of economic programmes in the coming period, informed in part by recognition of the persistence of two economies in one country, with emphasis on measures to promote the integration of all of society into a growing economy that benefits all. This places particular weight on communication to promote the success of "Second Economy" interventions.

To these communication priorities emanating from the Ten Year Review should be added those arising from the positioning of the new government as one committed to faster implementation of a detailed programme to fulfil a mandate emphasising on job-creating growth and reducing poverty. In particular this requires popularising the programme of action with emphasis on implementation;

## **REVIEWING PROGRESS**

This is not an exhaustive statement of priorities, but of those most directly relevant to today's topic. They define focal areas including most recent major initiatives bringing significant advances in the form, content and impact of communication.

**Popularising the programme of action with emphasis on implementation;**

This core activity has steadily intensified with increasing attention to expanding reach and using languages, styles and platforms with which most people are comfortable.

The annual campaign to disseminate the programme of action following the President's State of the Nation Address has grown in scale and in the range of multi-media products.

There has been greater use of broadcast media and at the same time innovation into more popular print formats – such as a photo story version of the Programme of Action, for the first time this year, serialised over five weeks in newspapers with the greatest reach amongst the poor. Dissemination of this information has become integral to the Imbizo Focus Weeks held each year

An important innovation introduced last year is the publication on the government web site of the detailed decisions and timeframes that define the Programme of Action and the regular update of its record of progress. This element of government's move towards a government-wide monitoring and evaluation system has had a significant impact on media coverage - and therefore on what the public knows – about government activities. It provides a frame of reference for media reporting and analysis that is available to all, a framework defined by what government has committed itself to doing.

Broadly, public awareness of the content of Programme of Action has increased compared with several years back. On the other hand it has not changed much over the past two or three years. We need some way of further extending that awareness, if South Africa is indeed to be a nation of citizens actively engaged in improving their own lives and the well-being of the nation.

### **Promoting partnership around common development objectives;**

If one enduring theme has defined democratic government's message, expressed in different words at different times, it has been that of unity in action for change, the partnership which remains a priority of the current period. This includes cooperation both between government and sectors of society and within government.

Imbizo brings public and government – in all spheres – into interaction around implementation of the programme of action. It has proved a very popular and steadily growing platform for social mobilisation and building partnership for development.

Informed by the experience of the first years of imbizo, it has now become more integrated with municipal processes, in particular by alignment of the Municipal Imbizo Programme with Project Consolidate. Cabinet has just agreed a detailed programme in which all Ministers and Deputy Ministers will be engaging with local municipalities identified by Project Consolidate, complementing and feeding into the work being done by President and Deputy President in District Municipal Izimbizo. This new phase reflects the evolution of imbizo from interchange of concerns and programmes to social mobilisation and administrative engagement for implementation and solution of problems.

Seminal events like the Tenth Anniversary of Freedom provide moments of great potential for advancing national unity around common goals. They demand special efforts of government to provide a compelling communication framework for the expression of a shared vision. The hosting of the 2010 world cup brings similar opportunities.

The development of communication partnerships has relevance also to particular departments and policy initiatives. Those sectors of society, experts and stakeholders who have an interest in policies are often very effective in communicating the issues.

Of special importance in this regard and impacting especially on the work of departments concerned with international economic marketing is the work of the International Marketing Council established as a partnership of government and private sector to bring coordination into those efforts. Strengthening liaison amongst such departments and the IMC is something currently receiving attention.

### **Intensifying communication around economic and other opportunities**

Unless those who could benefit from programmes expanding economic opportunities are aware of the opportunities, the policies will fail. In the case of our Second Economy interventions, the challenge is heightened by the fact that those who are marginalised from the main stream economy have least access to information. Add the complexity of many programmes and their sometimes fragmented nature, the need for a single communication campaign to present all such opportunities in a single vehicle and popular form becomes compelling.

Such a campaign on economic opportunities was initiated last year by the FOSAD Economic Cluster – possibly the first cluster funded programme. The publication is being revised and turned into a TV serial to be broadcast by the SABC from October. The response indicated both the need for such campaigns and a need to extend it to all areas of socio-opportunity, not just economic.

The government magazine to be launched shortly will similarly have a focus on practical information people can use to improve their lives.

This area of work can be considered a successful innovation – but it has also been one that has emphasised some of the challenges of mobilising public servants for implementation

Critical to the dissemination this kind of information is an infrastructure of platforms and intermediaries able to reach people who need the information. In particular that would include MPCCs; CDWs and others in provincial and municipal government, all drawing on the back-office resources of the Batho Pele Gateway and relevant structures in national departments. They need to work with one another, in alignment with local integrated development plans and provincial growth and development strategies, as well as the organisations relevant to implementation of Growth and Development Summit commitments.

Such structures therefore define a terrain of strategic importance for communication to mobilise for implementation.

**Improved performance of government's communication system**

Before GCIS was established there was a debate whether it should be a **service** – doing the communication of departments, for departments – or a **system** – bringing co-ordination, integration and coherence to the communication of departments by departments. Those who said “S” is for “System” won the day

The communication approach that resulted is informed by a few basic principles. There is considerable progress in applying them, but with some unevenness creating a constant need to strengthen and maintain the system

- Each department/ministry should have one integrated communication component, headed by a senior official – preferably a chief director – with access to the senior management deliberations of the department – responsible to the political principal but managed by the accounting officer
- Communication processes should be aligned with policy processes and cycles of governance. Thus we have an annual strategising cycle aligned with the Lekgotla and State of the Nation Address (and then State of the Province Addresses). Out of these come national, cluster and departmental communication programmes for the year, informed by and deriving from the national framework, as well as strategies and programmes for particular campaigns or policy processes. Cabinet’s two-monthly monitoring and evaluation of the Programme of Action; monthly FOSAD cluster meetings; and fortnightly cabinet meetings defined further communication cycles.

Within departments, it is strongly recommended that departments’ communication components meet weekly to monitor implementation of strategy, in the context of the department’s current imperatives and the communication environment in order to identify action to be taken.

- A major current initiative is the extension to the municipal sphere of this communication methodology. Building the communication system started in 1998 at national level then extended to provinces. Its extension to the local sphere brings in sight the completion of the task of creating a national communication system.

## **MOBILISING THE PUBLIC SERVICE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

From this brief review it is clear that there is a wide repertoire of communication with the public, still evolving and not without problems, but making progress.

It is common cause that we do require an intense campaign of internal communication to mobilise the public service for implementation.

The Batho Pele revitalisation is part of the response. Government does also communicate with its public service in the same ways that it communicates with the rest of society. Public servants are members of the public; they read newspapers, listen to radio and watch TV. Publishing the Programme of Action is also communication that mobilises for implementation, as any of us could testify who have had the experience of an approaching public deadline!

And there are of course many circulars and many workshops— such as this conference itself.

The questions whether this is sufficient to mobilise for implementation? When we plan the implementation of programmes, and attend to supporting communication, do we give to “internal” communication the same systematic attention that we give to communication with the public? Do we draw on the same rich repertoire of products, media and platforms?

The experience of the Economic Opportunities campaign suggested that we need to supplement communication on the ethics of public service with more communication that builds understanding of the content of our programmes in the implementing structures.

As an illustration of how we sometimes assume there is no need to communicate with civil servants, a somewhat embarrassing one - once this question was posed we recognised that our information products such as those on the programme of action have generally

been distributed entirely outside of government leaving no copies for those who work in government.

The breakaway commissions of this conference are to look at the capacity needs for addressing challenges. What are the communication requirements for mobilising the public service to meet those challenges? What would it take, by way of products, platforms and media, to meet these requirements?

If these questions become routinely part of what we ask whenever approaching implementation, it would indeed build our capacity for implementation!

It would strengthen the People's Contract for Growth and Development!