

'A view from inside'

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Agenda

- ❑ Introduction
- ❑ Context
- ❑ Media coverage
- ❑ The Paradigm shift
- ❑ Some issues for debates
- ❑ What is to be done?
- ❑ Conclusion



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History and Background

- SA – *only 14 years ago*
 - Emerged from an incredibly repressive system
 - Violence at the core of forced minority rule
 - Some parties only agreeing to participate days before the election
 - We inherited an economy in tatters
 - Black youth marginalised and demoralised
 - Enormous development agenda from day one
- Media and communications not immune
 - Free media also faced wrath of apartheid state
 - State machinery (SACS) designed to be a propaganda machine



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Context

Political stability with a vibrant democracy

Strong constitution

Strong institutions e.g. judiciary, media civil society etc

Macro-economic policies firmly in place

Imperative to sustain the positive trends and build confidence in our ability to grow the economy and address challenges.



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Context: Track record since 94

- Our progress is faster than most post liberation projects but not fast enough for our own mandate
 - 3,5m households electrified by 2004
 - 2m jobs created between 2001 and 2007
 - Piped Water to more than 11m people
 - Over 1300 health care facilities built
 - Since 1994, **500 houses** have been built **each day** for the poor
 - **Tax revenue** in SA has increased by **220%** over the past 10 years
 - **12 million** South Africans benefit from access to **social grants**
 - The number of **tourists** visiting South Africa has grown by **116%** since 1994



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Context: Country challenges

- ◆ Unacceptably high ***crime*** levels
- ◆ ***Unacceptably high levels of poverty and unemployment***
- ◆ ***Electricity emergency***
- ◆ **dealing effectively with xenophobic tendencies**
- ◆ ***Need to manage the transition***
- ◆ **Rising cost of living (petrol, food, interest rates)**
- ◆ ***HIV/AIDS pandemic***



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Context: We are a resilient nation

- ◆ Some resort to seek greener pastures
- ◆ Others resort to crime
- ◆ Others to violence
- ◆ ***But***, the majority remain committed to making the country successful
- ◆ We will overcome any odds
- ◆ What role can the media play?



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media coverage

In general, media discourse tending towards negative profiling of South Africa and the continent

Economy is pumping, but . . .

OUTCRY OVER SERVICES

Growth plan can

Crime has corrupted SA's heart

The strike has struck at the heart of what's wrong in SA

wealth gap

DELIVERY IN RUINS

- In general, media tend to give higher prominence to negative stories because bad news sells
- Very little attempt to explain or even contextualise stories
- 'Good news' about the developing world are hard to find
- Diversity of views not always reflected with the notion of alternative media becoming foreign



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Some key issues for debate

- Media houses, are also driven by the bottom line, but does and should *the bottom line determine the bottom of the story* ?
- Are we already in a ‘tail wagging the dog’ scenario where editors get their ‘instructions’ from the business managers?
- Is the industry doing enough to attract and retain talent ? (news rooms are getting younger)
- Is it unreasonable to ask key questions of the media without being accused of questioning media freedom?



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Paradigm shift needed in the media

- ◆ Good news is not '*news*'
- ◆ Progress reports not covered
- ◆ Mistrust between media and government
- ◆ How big a factor is sensationalisation?
- ◆ Sometimes, not enough fact checking
- ◆ Does media contribute to negative mood ?



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Government communication shortcomings

- Government not accessible, especially, in times of crisis
- We are usually too **reactive and often defensive**
- We take **too long** to respond and clarify issues
- We assume that the public **understands – a bad mistake**
- Communication material packaged badly
- Silence is the ‘preferred medicine’
- Communicators not informed on content or lack authority to speak on behalf of departments



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Shortcomings of the system

- *Communication system is highly decentralised with no accountability to the centre*
- *Under-resourced*
- *Limited skills training*
- *Communication still an 'after-thought'*



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what is to be done ?

Cultivating solid relationships between media and govt

Our objective: *Better informed govt communicators and informed media = better informed citizens*

World will be better served by improved relations



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Measures to improve effectiveness

- GCIS runs training programmes on good government communications – need support from academic institutions
- Ensure that each department has a communication strategy and budget
- GCIS arranges sessions between journalists and communicators for networking
- Strengthen development communication on government programmes



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An important way forward

- The time for ‘finger pointing’ between govt and media is perhaps over
- Setting up the Presidential Press corps – a viable way forward
 - Will allow for regular briefings on current affairs by the Executive
 - Will allow for regular interaction
 - Will reduce tensions between government and media



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Looking ahead...

- More diversity in media ownership, staff, ideas etc, is required
- The web is allowing citizens to tell their own stories e.g. blogs
- Developing nations must invest in ICT to increase access to the web
- Community media –becoming alternative media
- A cadre of editors needed who are committed to inform and educate beyond selling media space



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Challenges

- Government communicators must change mindset and attitudes - *media not the enemy*
- Media must also change mindset and definition of news must include all angles
- Both sides must commit to building relationships based on trust and mutual respect
- Training on both sides is neglected and needs to be prioritised



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Conclusion

- ◆ Both sides have a duty to keep citizens informed
- ◆ Govt and business must support community media
- ◆ Government accepts that the ***media has a very important role to play*** in strengthening democracy –***not the enemy***
- ◆ ***A commitment to work together is an essential ingredient for improving relations between govt and the media***



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Thank you

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