

To put into practice the ideas resulting from strategising requires an action plan that spells out in detail what is to be done for each event in the programme; who is to do it; what its specific targets and objectives are, budgets, and so on. This will also serve as an instrument of strategic management and coordination to make sure the objectives are met.

An action plan is best set out in a table format (see example on page 11).

A critical part of the action plan is to identify other supporting plans needed, for example:

- media liaison strategy consisting of a detailed plan of interviews, press briefings, media/journalists to be targeted and opinion pieces. Most importantly, from the communication strategy, we may be able to develop a statement of key messages and Questions and Answers (FAQs), for communicators and writers to use.
- especially for campaigns whose objectives are to educate and inform and have a medium to long term duration, there is a need for a positioning strategy with a clear statement of the type of brand identity to be developed, something related to the objective, challenges and message.
- A distribution strategy citing a detailed plan on how the various products/ services will be disseminated to the identified target audiences.

#### 4.4 POLITICS AND A GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATOR

If there is one area of governance which fully represents the political and administrative interface it is the task of communication. The communicator straddles the relationship of political and administrative operations, harmonises the varying emphasis of these two Siamese fraternities to emerge with messages which reflect their unity of purpose. It is usually a

government communicator who must deal with packaging messages in a manner which harmonises the administrative and political arms of government. The elements of the administrative and political interface are represented by individual Ministers on the one hand, and the Departmental heads on the other.

Indirectly, the work of the communicator is likely to be related to party political expressions as he/she communicates policy positions most of which, if not all, are associated with a ruling party. To this extent a government communicator presents policies, positions and information which may be counter to those of opposition parties.

Government communicators often need to make the fine distinction between communicating the policies of government and improperly using one's position to promote or prejudice the interest of a political party. Government communicators are public servants, whose operational code is impartiality and professionalism as encapsulated in the Public Service Regulations. Section 36 (c) of the Public Service Act states that public servants are prohibited from acting in a manner that is intended to promote or prejudice any political party. It reads as follows, "*an officer or employee may not draw up or publish any writing or deliver a public speech to promote or prejudice the interests of any political party*".

It must also be noted that communication tends to be an embodiment of the politics of a ruling party and government administration with messages emerging from the administrative-political melting pot. The following is an abridged version of guidelines regarding the conduct of government communicators during elections.

##### 4.4.1 Guidelines on Government Communication during an election period

The period of elections is usually a testing time for government communicators because it requires a government communicator to identify the fine line between party political communication

and government communication. It is normal practice in most democracies that, during an election period, particular attention is paid to ensuring that government communication structures and officers do not act in a way that advantages or disadvantages participants in the electoral contest.

Prior to the national election in 1999, the GCIS developed guidelines on government communications during the formal election period.

On 31 March 1999, Cabinet decided on a possible "framework to be formulated to regulate against the dissemination of government information during election periods" in a way that is to the advantage of one political party and to the disadvantage of others. It adopted the guidelines on 28 April 1999.

The guidelines remain relevant and are meant to assist government communicators and other relevant public servants in determining the specific parameters within which they should conduct their work during the election period. The guidelines have been decided upon at the initiative of government. The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) may, independently, take whatever relevant steps it deems necessary on this matter.

##### 4.4.2 Scope of Application

According to the IEC, an election period is the period during which the IEC's Code of Conduct and Independent Communication Authority of South Africa (ICASA) regulations apply. For municipal elections, this period will be determined once the date for the election has been announced, and party lists are submitted and participating parties and candidates confirmed. The period will end when election results are certified and announced.

Strictly formulated, during an election period: "state-financed media shall not be used for the purpose of promoting or prejudicing the interests of any political party". What is state-financed media?

"State-financed media" means any newspaper, book, periodical, pamphlet, poster, media release or other printed matter, or statement, or any audio and video material, or any information in electronic format such as CD-Rom, Internet or e-mail which is produced and disseminated to the public, and which is financed by, and directly under the control of, government". *Bua News Online*, internal government newsletters and magazines are some examples of state-financed media.

These regulations apply to communicators and other relevant public servants. In so far as Ministers, other political representatives, contractual workers and employees in role-playing posts are concerned, the parameters of their political work in government are regulated by the *Ministerial Handbook* and other relevant regulations; and they are not the subject of these guidelines.

##### 4.4.3 Public Service Act

In accordance with the Public Service Act, public servants are prohibited from acting in a manner that is intended to promote or prejudice any political party. In particular, Section 36 (c) prohibits an employee from drawing up or publishing any writing or delivering a public speech which promotes or prejudices the interests of any political grouping or party.

According to Section 20 (g) of the Act, "an officer, other than a member of the services or an educator or a member of the National Intelligence Services shall be guilty of misconduct and may be dealt with in accordance" with Public Service regulations "if he or she makes use of his or her position in the Public Service to promote or to prejudice the interests of any political party." This includes the use of government resources.

During an election period, these and other provisions of the Act continue to apply to all public servants. Communication agencies and components of government and their employees have to exercise special care to ensure that their media

# ANC fund abuse probed

City Press, 05 November 2000

NORTHERN Province director general Manching Benedicta Monama launched an investigation into the abuse of state resources for electioneering by the ANC on Friday.

The probe into alleged abuse in the office of the premier follows media questions about the use of tax funds and government officials to organise a rally at the ANC's Ga-Sekgopo constituency office yesterday.

MEC in the premier's office, Catherine Mabuza, hosted and addressed the rally to officially open the office, which was assigned to her for political party work by the provincial legislature.

Her government public relations officer, used government computers, fax machines and telephones to organise the rally and invite 40 dignitaries and 300 local residents to the event.

Monama's spokesperson, Kenny Mathivha, con-

firmed on Friday that investigators would also probe indications that state funds were used to rent a tent, chairs and other equipment.

The use of state resources for political party campaigning is strictly prohibited by South Africa's electoral and public service regulations.

"We acknowledge there was a misuse of resources here and if we find that any state money was used we will act against the officials and recover the money," said Mathivha.

"Constituency work never falls within the definition of government duties and cannot be funded at taxpayer expense, even when there are no elections."

Mathivha confirmed that provincial public relations officers were warned about the potential for abuse earlier this week and insisted the PRO acted without the knowledge or approval

of his superiors.

National government communication information service head Joel Netshitenzhe added that the incident was the first reported abuse of state resources during the run-up to local government elections on December 12.

"Government issued clear guidelines that apply to all government structures during the election period.

"No public servant is allowed to act in a way that unfairly advantages or prejudices any political party," said Netshitenzhe.

Stressing officials were constitutionally allowed to belong to political parties, Netshitenzhe said they could only do volunteer work for their parties after hours.

Elected politicians and some of their closest assistants are, however, allowed to use state property such as vehicles to

do constituency work under limited conditions.

The incident is not the first time the ANC has been accused of misusing public property for electioneering in the Northern Province.

Premier Ngoako Ramatlhodi was previously criticised for using government vehicles, staff and military helicopters to ferry journalists round the province on an ANC election campaign during the June 1999 general elections.

Ramatlhodi flew journalists from Pietersburg to Hoedspruit, Bushbuckridge and Giyani in a SAAir Force Oryx helicopter at a cost of roughly R25 000 to attend a series of ANC political rallies which starred ANC president Thabo Mbeki as keynote speaker, but which had no link to official or government business.

African Eye News Service

**Government communicators are not allowed to use their positions in the Public Service to promote party political interests.**

products, statements and public events do not promote or prejudice any political party.

## 4.4.4 Constitutional Rights and Obligations

Government communicators and their departments should continue meeting the obligation of government to provide information to the citizenry. Thus, they should continue exercising their responsibility to articulate, promote and defend the policies, programmes and actions of the government. Like all other citizens, communication officers have the freedom of association to belong to any party of their choice. Subject to provisions of the Public Service Act quoted above, any political activities that individual public servants, including communicators, may wish to undertake, in their own private time, is their own private matter.

## 4.5. UNDERSTANDING GOVERNMENT POLICY

It is a clear government policy to communicate with the people. This policy is founded on the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Section 32 (1) which states the following:

- (1) *Everyone has the right to;*
  - (a) *any information held by the state*
  - (b) *any information that is held by another person and that is required for the exercise or protection of any rights.*
- (2) *National legislation must be enacted to give effect to this right, and may provide for reasonable measures to alleviate the administrative and financial burden on the state.*

The Promotion of Access to Information Act seeks to give effect to the right of the public to information as provided for by the

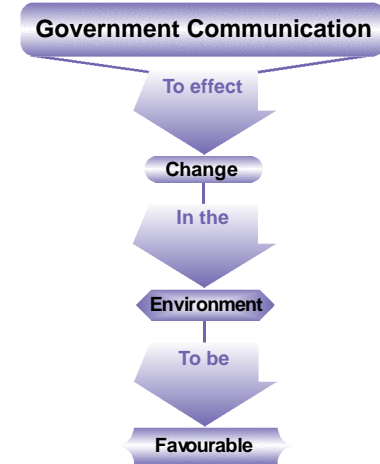
Constitution. It is imperative for government communicators to have a firm grasp of government policies to be able to articulate government's position confidently.

## 4.6 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING

Communication in government is complex in nature and character. While it sometimes happens in government bureaucracy, it is pursued to fulfil the mandate and duty to inform the public. As a government communicator, you are expected to understand the chain of events in the government communication system. Moreover, you should be able to examine all objective and subjective conditions that characterise the environment. Government communication takes place in an environment which must either be changed, improved, sustained or encouraged.

The above illustration suggests that a communicator pursues the function of communication to alter certain environments in favour of his/her communication objective in the fulfilment of government's mandate. It is, therefore, of paramount importance that as a government communicator, you make serious attempts to analyse the environment in which your messages will be communicated.

As a government communicator you must bear in mind that your function is directly linked to the function of meeting the information needs of society. The key messages are, amongst others, communicated to satisfy this need. So, every communicator must seek to execute their function with the knowledge that the messages are to satisfy a public expectation. These messages may also be mediated by various media. The challenge for a government communicator arises because these mediators are not devoid of interest groups agendas, some of which might be in conflict with those of government or any



state department. So, a communicator must understand these dynamics that are always at play within the environment.

The next challenge for a government communicator is to understand the journey taken by the messages to be communicated. What and who deals with these messages before they reach those they are intended for. More often, those who communicate tend to lose sight of the intended receiver of the message. Before messages are disseminated, as a government communicator you must analyse the probable line of your message from its exit point to the target audience. In this way you will understand possible distortions and mediations and their effect on your original message.

As a government communicator it is critical that you understand that the messages you will communicate may reach your target audience through the interpretation of those who are mediating them. So, your communication strategy must take this into account. The key issue to deal with is the possible changes in the message and how your strategy will minimise distortions to the content of your message.