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'INCREASING THE CAPACITY OF THE STATE TO MEET ITS OBLIGATIONS TO THE CITIZENS, READY TO SERVE'

COMMUNICATORS' HANDBOOK

1 PREFACE

The new political dispensation has posed numerous challenges and opportunities to the Government communication system and government communicators. The democratic breakthrough of 1994 signalled government's commitment to society – a commitment to create space for every member of society to participate in building our new democratic State, based on the respect of human rights and human development.

This paradigm compels a government communicator to view communication as a strategic element of service delivery. Because this challenge is new to all of us, it is a critical and challenging period of great learning.

Cabinet decided in September 2000 that 'a handbook on government communication will be published by Government Communications (GCIS), to entrench the new ethos and approach'. This *Government Communicators' Handbook* is designed to assist government communicators to locate themselves in the overall Government communication system in a rapidly changing working environment.

This Handbook seeks to provide the Government communicator with simple guidelines and a reference tool about government communication. These guidelines include among others, the Government Communication Strategy (GCS), media liaison and management, campaign management, Development Communication, understanding of government policy, marketing and advertising, and managing the corporate identity of the government.

In the First Decade of Democracy we have witnessed many positive changes with respect to providing a professional, effective and efficient government communication service. The establishment of the GCIS ushered in a new approach to shape the integration, co-ordination and improvement of government communication.

This includes, among others, promoting policies and mechanisms which encourage media diversity, communication and information resource management; a professional, effective and creative communication service; broadcast production; content development and production; distribution channels and media placement.

Strategy and planning are key elements for effective, integrated and co-ordinated government communication. The capacity to communicate with one voice is

promoted by such practices as Pre-Cabinet Meetings, Government Communicators' Forum (GCF), Media Liaison Officers' (MLO) Forum, Communication Clusters, Post-Cabinet Briefings and joint communication around programmes and campaigns undertaken collectively by Ministries.

However, there are still a number of challenges for government communicators and the country at large. The central challenge is to infuse in government an appreciation of government communication as a strategic element of service delivery. Related to this is the challenge of providing the public with information that enables people to become active and conscious participants in the complex process of social transformation.

Key to the achievement of these objectives is the commitment to intensify direct and unmediated communication with the public and professionalising all aspects of our operations with an emphasis on planning and implementation, sharpening media response mechanisms, and nurturing the relationship between the media and government.

It is hoped that this Handbook will add value and further equip government communicators with requisite skills and knowledge to broadly locate themselves in the entire Government communication system.

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2 INTRODUCTION

This *Government Communicators' Handbook* provides government communicators with an overview of the government communication system, practical guidelines and quick reference relevant to their work. It is written with sufficient flexibility to provide the communicator with a one-stop-shop reference to challenges which cuts across all government communication areas.

The Handbook covers the history, the paradigm and the political framework within which government communication in South Africa takes place. It provides an overview of the communication system and the role of the GCIS in co-ordinating government communication.

The Government Communicators' Toolkit within the Handbook also, as its main objective, provides practical guidelines relating to the challenges facing a government communicator. The Toolkit is complemented by relevant documents.

The last section of the Handbook contains names and addresses of media organisations. There is also a list of relevant websites, an editorial Style Guide and the National Coat of Arms Corporate Identity Guidelines.

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3 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION IN CONTEXT

The current approach to government communication takes its cue from the constitutional imperative of freedom of information and the objectives of making a visible shift from the Apartheid State to a truly democratic State. The free flow of information, open dialogue, openness and accountability, and media freedom are all fundamental tenets of a thriving democracy.

This requires government to maintain continued interaction with the citizenry. This communication promotes an informed and appropriate response to people's needs in order to enable all South Africans to become active and conscious participants in social transformation. It ensures that government is sensitive to the needs of the people.

3.1. The national communication environment

Government's Programme of Action for each year is outlined in the President's State of the Nation Address and the Budget Speech by the Minister of Finance. They define the government's priorities that inform Government communication. The imperatives create communication implications, opportunities and challenges for

government communicators in an ever-changing environment. Therefore, it becomes necessary for government communicators to regularly assess the communication environment and identify communication challenges that need to be addressed in order to communicate a coherent and cohesive message to the public.

Communicating the Programme of Action requires government communicators to have a firm grasp of government policies and priorities and of progress on problems in implementation. This includes an objective analysis and understanding of research, media reports and commentary around the quality, pace and comprehensiveness of service delivery which shape people's attitudes and perceptions regarding government's commitment to improve their lives and its capacity to do so.

It is critical for a government communicator to understand that the environment is not static. Therefore, it is important for every communicator to assess the social, economic and political environment periodically. Government communication in the current political dispensation operates within the constitutional and political framework.

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