

Laying the foundation of the government communication system

The year under review saw the rapid maturation of the GCIS into a communication agency offering a wide variety of quality services. There were three key areas that dominated the activities of the GCIS:

- transformation of the organisation
- providing leadership to government communication
- improving service delivery.

Transformation of the GCIS

In the previous Annual Report we reported that the GCIS was engaged with the task of translating the recommendations made by the Communications Task Group (Comtask) into a broad strategy. This process could be followed in earnest from May onwards when the majority of the management echelon had been filled.

In May 1999, the GCIS held a planning session where it looked at the type of scenarios it should prepare for.

The GCIS sees the future being marked by the following features:

- the South African public becoming increasingly involved in the process of governance and thus demanding more information about specific areas
- at the same time there will be a substantial part of the South African public who will, for many years to come, still require information basic to their survival
- the development of new media technologies and the emergence of new newspaper titles, radio stations and TV channels will provide government with more opportunities to communicate with the public.

Following the May 1999 *Bosberaad*, the organization established a Transformation Council that looked at how the GCIS should be restructured, what competencies should be developed and what technologies should be considered to position the organisation for the future. As a result of the work of the Transformation Council the GCIS, *inter alia*, took the following decisions:

- to separate the Chief Directorate: Communication Service Agency from that of Corporate Services
- to create a Project Desk as the main point at which requests from departments can be processed
- to immediately establish a Project Management training programme custom designed for GCIS purposes
- to create a Directorate dedicated to meeting the communication training needs of the Government

- to examine ways in which the public enquiry service can be expanded.

Furthermore, after months of agonising over the best approach to be taken for development communication, the GCIS took the significant step of recasting its nine regional offices into Government Information Centres (GICs), with a plan to open 44 GICs, located at the district level. This decision was taken after much soul-searching on how the organisation could best give expression to its commitment to bringing the Government closer to the people.

Described by the Minister of Public Service and Administration as an expression of the Government's *Batho Pele* (People First) programme, the project sees the GCIS working with about 25 partners drawn from government departments and parastatals. The approach has been to establish Multi-purpose Community Centres (MPCCs) within which GICs and several other government departments are located.

The Tombo MPCC in the Eastern Cape was launched by the Minister of Public Works, Stella Sigcau and the CEO of the GCIS, Joel Netshitenzhe in December 1999.

Additional MPCCs will be launched in Kgautswane in the Northern Province, and Worcester in the Western Cape before the end of the 1999/2000 financial year, while the GCIS plans to launch a further 20 in the coming financial year. It is expected that the roll-out programme will be completed in the 2001/2002 financial year.

The following areas will continue receiving attention in the coming financial year as part of the transformation agenda:

- ensuring the organisation remains committed to its objective of being representative of the South African population
- training staff in the management of diversity

- establishing the GCIS as a learning organisation which celebrates innovation and creativity
- ensuring the organisational climate contributes to the contentment of employees and thus their high productivity
- improving the corporate services of the GCIS so that they play an efficient support role to the GCIS's communication efforts.

Leadership in government communication

The past 12 months have seen the foundation of the Government Communication and Information System being built upon.

The GCIS has continued providing overall leadership by developing the Government's communication strategy, coordinating the efforts of government departments, and strategising for transversal campaigns.

In July 1999, the GCIS produced the second government communication strategy based on the Government's programme articulated by President Mbeki in his State of the Nation Address. Based on the theme 'Anation at work for a better life', it was used as a framework for individual departments to develop communication strategies for their line functions.

Coordination between government departments continued to improve with the fortnightly meetings of the Government Communicators' Forum being well attended. However, the cluster approach that has come to characterise the work of Ministers and Directors-General has yet to take off completely amongst communicators. The Criminal Justice Cluster is the leading light in these efforts. The GCIS is exploring how better coordination can be achieved with the use of information technology. Relations with the communicators of provincial governments continued to strengthen, and the GCIS Secretariat continued having regular meetings with the Provincial

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Directors' Forum. There has been concrete collaboration on the establishment of MPCCs.

A particularly exciting development has been the adoption by the Cabinet of an international marketing strategy that the GCIS will be coordinating with the departments of Trade and Industry; Foreign Affairs; Arts, Culture, Science and Technology; Education; Finance, and Sport and Recreation.

Improving service delivery

The GCIS's commitment to improving service delivery, which was noted in the previous Annual Report, continued to characterise the organisation. The following are some of the highlights of the continuous improvements of its services:

- The instituting of a panel of advertising agencies. This is aimed at reducing lead times for communication campaigns.
- The appointment of two agencies to handle the

bulk-buying of media space. This is aimed at ensuring the Government can flex its considerable economic muscle to achieve reductions in advertising costs.

- The bulk-buying approach will be applied to research as well as to the distribution of material.
- The GCIS taking the initiative to install a video conferencing facility in Cape Town, at the Union Buildings and at GCIS Head Office.
- Developing a database of service providers ensuring a larger number of firms can be sourced by government communicators.
- Providing the lead to government departments in constituting structures for education and training.

Inundated by innumerable requests which the GCIS has been unable to meet entirely, the organisation has decided to institute a three-tiered categorisation of campaigns and projects.

In the first category are campaigns which emanate from the Presidency or which the GCIS has been specifically mandated by the Cabinet to execute. These include the Opening of Parliament, International Marketing and the African Renaissance.

The second category consists of campaigns which the GCIS runs with an interdepartmental team. Communication around HIV/AIDS, anti-corruption and job creation are apt examples.

The third category refers to an increasing number of campaigns that the GCIS helps to outsource. The GCIS nevertheless adds value by advising the departments on strategies to be adopted and the service providers to be approached.