



CHAPTER 1: HOW THE TASK GROUP WORKED

THE BRIEF

The mandate required the Task Group on Government Communications to examine government communications at the local, provincial, national and international level, and to make recommendations on new policies, structures and budgets. Particular mention was made of the need to examine training and affirmative action policies; of the way in which ownership of the media affects government communication; and of South Africa's international information dissemination. We were asked to draw on the experience and best practices of other democracies in making recommendations.

From the outset, the Task Group decided to work in a fully transparent manner. We have held 37 full meetings. Every one of these meetings has been open to the public and the media. The work plan we designed contained the following major elements:

1.1 PUBLIC CONSULTATION

In March, advertisements calling on individuals and institutions to make written and/or oral submissions to the Task Group were placed in national and regional newspapers, as well as on radio stations in nine official languages. We also opened a Homepage on the Internet for information and comments. Our aim was to meet our obligation by obtaining input from every sector of society. In total we have received 150 written submissions. Copies of all of the submissions are available. Some of the more pertinent have been included as appendices to this report.

1.2 CONSULTATIONS AND HEARINGS

A total of 61 presentations from a wide range of stakeholders and experts was made to the Task Group. In addition, Task Group members visited provinces to meet with provincial government, experts and community groups and spoke on community radio. We attended a two-day presentation by the South African Communications Service (SACS). We ourselves made a presentation to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Communications. A list of all submissions and presentations is included in the report.¹

1 See list of submissions made to the Task Group,

1.3 QUESTIONNAIRES AND RESEARCH

In March, a questionnaire was submitted to all Ministries, Departments and Provinces asking for basic data on staffing, budgetary resources, and working methods in communications and inviting further comment and suggestions.² This was carried out to meet objective 1 (e) of our mandate – reviewing the relationships between government communication structures and non-governmental information providers.

The Task Group also commissioned an independent survey of media coverage of government communications by the Media Monitoring Project (MMP).³ The MMP surveyed national and regional print and broadcast sources over the three-month period from March 31 to June 30. Research was also carried out by Mr Robin MacGregor⁴ to describe current ownership and control of the South African Media. These two activities were required to meet objective 1 (g) of our mandate – reviewing the ownership and control of South African media and to interpret how these affect government communications.

1.4 INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME

Objective 3 of our mandate required Comtask to examine South Africa's international information dissemination; and Objective 4 to research international perspectives in democracies. With financial and technical assistance from the United Nations Development Programme and Commonwealth Secretariat, the Task Group travelled in teams of 2-3 members to 19 countries. During these visits, we also met with South African missions to discuss the ways in which South Africa was projecting its image.⁵ We subsequently met twice with the Department of Foreign Affairs to discuss these findings.⁶

1.5 THE PROCESS

The process has been as inclusive as we could make it: every sector of society has been contacted. In total we have met with about 1,000 individuals. The quality and thoughtfulness of input has been impressive. We would like to thank all contributors for the time and commitment they have given to this process.

This work has been a real learning experience. South Africans have never had the opportunity to consider how their government should communicate. There has never been such a review - at least in public - nor such transparency in the discussion of budgets, personnel and structures. Institutions have never before been consulted nor involved in discussing how these issues can be approached in the interests of the whole community. The overall picture has never been painted, nor has South Africa been contrasted with the best systems other democracies have developed.

We are grateful to have been given the opportunity to do all these things. We hope the recommendations and analysis contained in the report will assist you in reshaping South Africa's Government communications into the next millenium.

2 See Annexure 1.
3 See Annexure 2.
4 See Annexure 3.
5 See Annexure 4.
6 See Annexure 5.