

## **Approaches to African communication management and public relations: a case for theory-building on the continent**

**Prof. Gary Mersham, School of Information and Social Sciences, The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand.**

**Chris Skinner, Research Associate, Department of Information Systems and Technology,  
University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa**

**Prof. Ronél Rensburg, Department of Marketing and Communication Management, University  
of Pretoria, South Africa**

### **Introduction**

Most of the scholarly body of knowledge of public relations built up over the last three decades has been undertaken in the United States and Western European countries. Naturally these conceptual frameworks have been suited to these areas of the world.

The focal point of the calls for a shift to a new, inclusive global economic order is the growing influence of the economies of the world's developing regions. The historic dominance of the West over the politics, economics, technologies, and cultures of the developing world is waning as the leadership in those sectors is moving to the developing world. This in turn has important implications for the growth and role of public relations and communication management in these regions.

Academic researchers need to build an African body of knowledge of public relations and theory based on an African world view so that Africa may effectively engage in the global refocusing of world economics and discussions on how public relations is practised in various countries and on different continents.

The continent of Africa, inhabited by around 1 billion people, is more diverse and complex than anywhere else in the world – a patchwork of 53 countries, some sharing common borders, with others separated by thousands of kilometres. They range from large, prosperous and cosmopolitan to impoverished and troubled (Mersham and Skinner, 2009). Indigenous populations have moved great distances, interacted and mingled with many different populations over the millennia. There is a legacy of colonial and post colonial influences from as far afield as the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, Portugal, France, Sweden, China,

Indonesia, the Arabian peninsula and the Mediterranean (Angus and Kapanga, 2007:6).The deliberations around NEPAD – the New Partnership for African Development, a continental-wide initiative for the social, economic and political development Africa – and the ‘African Renaissance’, much pushed by South Africa’s previous President Thabo Mbeki - in fact highlight the huge challenges that will have to be addressed before we can speak of an authentically integrated and united Africa.

Despite considerable progress and the great promise of Africa, much of the literature remains problem-focused, seeing Africa as a moral dilemma for the rest of the world with a never ending need for international aid. This attitude is propped up by a plethora of statistics that show how Africa remains a marginal region in global terms: with 12% of the world’s population(around 750 million people) in 53 countries, Africa accounts for less than 2% of global gross domestic product (GDP) and foreign direct investment (FDI), and less than 10% of FDI to all developing countries. Of the 81 poorest countries prioritised by the International Development Association, almost half are in Africa. And, even within Africa, there is highly skewed development, with the largest ten economies accounting for 75% of the continent’s GDP (Visser, McIntosh and Middleton, 2006:11).

Today almost one-half (23 of 48) of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are classed as democracies, and the majority of African states are on a democratic path, but the most populous states in the region and those with high population growth will face serious infrastructure problems. Although Africa is already assuming more of its own peacekeeping responsibilities, the region will continue to be vulnerable to civil conflict and complex forms of interstate conflict—with militaries fragmented along ethnic or other divides, limited control of border areas, and insurgents and criminal groups preying on unarmed civilians in neighboring countries (Global Trends, 2025).

Africa is experiencing dynamic changes in the social, political and economic spheres. Throughout the continent many traditional institutions are crumbling or being subjected to new pressures. The extended family, family structures and the traditional bases of authority and identity are some of these. The result is that there is a greater responsibility placed on communication practitioners in business and government to assist their stakeholders through this social change.

For commercial organizations, Africa is a potentially vast and untapped market, the world’s next great consumer market which will require a massive growth in effective marketing communications (Mersham and Skinner 2009).These are providing communication specialists

with new opportunities to expand their horizons. African practitioners are being challenged to develop their skills at both an international and intercultural level to assist in the development process. They are being required to facilitate communication with all key stakeholders from community leaders right up to senior governmental levels. (Taylor and Kent, 2006). There is an increasing interest in developing communication expertise that is not only appropriate for communicating with traditional, domestic audiences and publics, but one that can take into account international inter – African and intercultural communications (Pratt and Adamolekun, 2008:28;Mersham and Skinner 2009).A growing awareness by African practitioners of the need to professionalise and broaden their activities has led to the African Public Relations Associations (APRA), an umbrella body of all national public relations associations in Africa and a consultant to African governments and to the African Union, launching a 5-year 'All Africa' action plan to achieve this (Pratt and Adamolekun 2008:20).

The upshot of these developments is that the need for theory building for the continent has been brought into sharp relief. However, research on the continental practice of public relations in Africa is for the most part sparse and fragmented, a large proportion of it carried out on specific aspects of practice in specific countries (Mersham and Skinner, 2009). Among the most important constraints faced by the African research community are the extremely volatile political environment and the very precarious economic and social conditions in which it has to operate (Rensburg, 2007:6; Mersham and Skinner 2009).

Against this background, the debate around whether a generic model of public relations in Africa is possible has been the subject of considerable debate. Critics have argued that this has been largely one-sided, with the overwhelming bias towards the application of Western-based models of developed countries to developing countries (Mersham, Rensburg, and Skinner,1995; Holtzhausen, Petersen and Tindall, 2002).

It has long been accepted that the role of culture is central to African public relations and communication management because of the cultural diversity of Africa and the complexities of local languages, cultures and media structures. The linguistic, cultural, economic and even physical differences are immense. However, it has also been argued that shared, common African philosophical approaches can be identified and that these have an important role in communication throughout Africa (Mersham, Rensburg and Skinner, 1995;Mersham and Skinner 2009).

This review describes some of the influences that might shape African theory building and raises a number of questions along the way such as: Can there be an exclusively African public relations model? What is the balance between Western and African influences in the synthesis of a hybrid model? What has Africa to offer to Western theory?

We begin by providing commentary on aspects of societal culture, the infrastructure and the media environment, tools useful for the analysis of public relations practice in different regions of the world (Sriramesh and Verčič 2001).

### **The African world view**

Throughout the African continent, one of the most powerful influences on public relations practice is the African world-view (Mersham, 1992; 1993; Mersham, Rensburg and Skinner, 1995). This concept encompasses the value of community and the recognition of the value of all individuals. The philosophy of 'ubuntu' – 'I am because we are' – is a values-based traditional philosophy of African humanism and it runs deeply throughout African thought and action.

The term ubuntu is derived from the Zulu maxim *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, meaning 'a person is a person through other persons' or 'I am, because of others'. This maxim is also interpreted by different African cultures and in different African countries and languages to mean 'a person is defined in relation to the community', 'that I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am', that 'it is through others that one attains selfhood', that 'a person is born for the other' (Fourie, 2008:63).

The consequences of ubuntuism for public relations lies in its emphasis on community and collectivity. Ubuntuism moves beyond an emphasis on the individual and individual rights, and places the emphasis on sharing and individual participation in a collective life. Community is the context in which personhood is defined. Here it differs from the emphasis on the self in mainstream Eurocentric philosophies. Whereas Western individualistic democracy insists on freedom of the self from intrusion by others, a person's freedom in ubuntuism depends for its exercise and fulfillment on personal relationships with others. A person is first and foremost a participatory being, dependent on others for his/her development. Ubuntuism therefore, places a high premium on negotiation, inclusiveness, transparency and tolerance (Fourie, 2008:

Similarly, an ancient Afrocentric conception of communication is revealed in various forms (Mersham and Skinner 1999:9). Many traditional African views of communication are connected by the underlying philosophical principles of humanism (ubuntu) and communalism (ubunye, ubudlelwane). Commonly, the reciprocity and mutuality of human relations is emphasized (isandla sigezesinye) and the belief that respect should always be reciprocated (ukuhlonishwana kabile). Becoming a person through one's relations with others (umuntu umuntu ngabantu); creating harmonious world relations with others (ukulingisa endaweni ubuhlobo babantu), also form part of the ancient African philosophies that relate to communication. Thus an African takes action or expresses an opinion based on its implied consistency with norms and patterns in a group.

Ubuntu gives the community pride of place over the individual who may defer to community interest when necessary. However, as Traber (1997:339) puts it "this does not simply mean that community is supreme at all costs and individuals have to subordinate themselves to it. It does mean that there is a moral commitment to community, aiming at both civic order and civic transformation".

Community in ubuntuism is not opposed to the individual and does not diminish the individual. It in fact places the individual as a unique centre of shared life (Blankenberg 1999: 43). This brings responsibilities for the welfare of others. This has implications for leadership. As Mersham has argued, the downfall of the famous historical figure King Shaka is interpreted in African myth as resulting ultimately from his rejection of ubuntu in the pursuit of ultimate power.

Christians (2004: 245) hints at the implication of ubuntu for post modern thought and Western conceptions of public relations:

Since the self cannot be conceived without necessarily conceiving of others, ubuntu adds a universal and compelling voice against the Enlightenment's atomistic individuals who exist prior to and independently of their social order. In the West, where 'individualism often translates into an impetuous competitiveness', the cooperation entailed by ubuntu 's 'plurality of personalities' in a 'multiplicity of relationships' is an attractive, though overwhelming concept. The modernist concept of individuality 'now has to move from solitary to solidarity, from independence to interdependence, from individuality vis-à-vis community to individuality a la community.

These aspects of African philosophy may explain why public relations theorists, practitioners and teachers increasingly find African public relations intriguing, posing challenges to accepted normative approaches, as they seek a conceptualization of a sustainable new global model of the profession.<sup>1</sup>

These values play themselves out in everyday life in ways important to communication management. For example, the power of the community, word of mouth, tradition and trust were identified as key factors in a study aimed at understanding of the key drivers of brand growth in Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique (Angus and Kapanga, 2007). Shopping, for example, takes place in open markets- few items are priced and the act of buying "involves a spirited debate with the store owner about the virtues of the product in question and the price to be paid for it" (Angus and Kapanga, 2007:9). Trust is central to the relationship between buyer and seller.

Conversely, Western civilisation and its penchant for automation often appears designed to reduce face to face interaction with others to an absolute minimum – in Western cities it is possible, even commonplace, to find one's way across the city on public transport, buy a load of groceries and get a take away meal on the way home without ever speaking to another human being. This is hardly possible in any African city. "Such a disconnect from the rest of humanity is anathema to African culture" (Angus and Kapanga, 2007:9). Everyday life in African countries is defined by social experience – working, shopping meals and commuting is characterised by ongoing conversation and interaction that is less prominent in Western life.

In African townships, cities and rural areas, the values of community are highly respected and treasured. We can surmise however, that the rise of interaction through social media in the West reflects what for Africans is an everyday experience.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Toni Muzi Falconi, a leading researcher in the quest for a global theory of public relations, found that participants in his Global Relations and Intercultural Communication course at New York University's Master of Science in Public Relations and Corporate Communication were fascinated by the section on Africa and the ubuntu concept (personal email communication, 7 Jan, 2007).

This concept of sharing is also a form of passing one's knowledge of brand and reputation to the other person, hence the importance of word of mouth. The next person that receives the product is then exposed to what the other person is using. The sense of community is also observed in the type of activities African people engage in during their spare time. A large part of everyday life is involved in visiting neighbours, attending community gatherings, going to church, or participating in Stokvels (communal saving clubs).

Movements by African people e.g. from the villages to the city or to an entirely different country in search of work, and the return to home, the feeling of being close to home is held dear by Africans.

Africa can provide a unique contribution to the global practice of Public Relations. The core of social responsibility is summarised in the African world-view and social structures (van Heerden 2004: 238). Disadvantaged groups in African communities survive through collective consciousness and unity that is the basis of ubuntu.

The words of Steve Biko, a celebrated South African anti-apartheid activist, perhaps have a new found significance for contemporary public relations with its renewed emphasis on establishing relationships and dialogue through social media:

Westerners have on many occasions been surprised at the capacity we have for talking to each other – not for the sake of arriving at a particular conclusion, but merely to enjoy the communication for its own sake (Biko, 1987:41).

And:

We believe that in the long run the special contribution to the world by Africa will be in this field of human relationships. The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa — giving the world a more human face (Biko 1987:47).

However, while ubuntu can be understood as a lived expression of an instinctive moral attitude and predisposition towards seeing and experiencing the self, other, life, and the world in a

communitarian way, there are difficulties and challenges in deriving specific principles by which ubuntu can serve as a complete framework for a normative theory of African public relations (Fourie, 2008: 73). Some unresolved challenges and questions include:

1. To what extent do the traditional values on which ubuntu is based no longer form part of the contemporary African experience?
2. How can the misuse of ubuntuism for unacceptable political and ideological purposes can avoided?
3. How does ubuntuism differ from other philosophies of communitarianism, and the degree to which participatory public relations theory already incorporates many of the precepts of ubuntuism;
4. What the practical implications of ubuntuism, as a normative framework, may have for universal public relations practices, constructs and principles related to, for example, freedom of expression, leadership, social responsibility, nation building and specific stakeholders and publics and charges of ethnocentric bias;
5. Can it or should it be integrative of all human philosophies about freedom of expression across space and time, thus making it dynamic and universally applicable?

### **New developments in communication media infrastructure**

An essential element of public relations theory lies in the availability of media channels. Media channels and availability vary radically across the continent and it is essential to plan and manage communications at a local level on a country by country basis. Broadly speaking radio continues to have the broadest reach, and a diversity of the press channels include weeklies and dailies, in national and regional formats , though distribution of any newspapers outside the major cities is limited (Mersham and Skinner 2009).

However, the failure of African states to provide populations with telecommunications fixed wire type infrastructure since independence has resulted in a massive take up of mobile



(cellular) technology creating a revolution in connectivity(Mersham and Skinner 2009). Mobile phone usage has grown by 800% over the past 7 years with penetration ranging from 7% to 100% in 21 countries. The average is 30.4% and there are over 280 million subscribers in total, making Africa the fastest growing mobile market in the world (Gosier, 2008).In Chad, the 11th-least developed country in the world, mobile phone usage jumped from 10,000 to 200,000 in three years (Coynes, 2008). As one analyst has put it, Africa is "where virtually everyone is reachable by SMS" (Harris, 2008:1).

Such is the impact of this new technology on African societies, it has been suggested that recent progress in governance, transparency, political stability and economy are largely thanks to the emergence of efficient telecommunications for the first time in history (Angus and Kapanga, 2007:6). Mobile phones are being used for everything from advocacy and violence monitoring to campaigns, domestic violence hotlines, education and trade. This indicates a possible 'leapfrog' into mobile (broadband) Internet access.

Plainly this has implications for communication management in Africa and the world. With mobile phone subscriptions in the world estimated at four billion in 2008, there is an explosion of activity related to the use of mobile phones to access information, express opinions, and for producing and consuming media. Most importantly, it is often the only technology to which people in developing countries have access.

Because there is limited terrestrial fiber for connecting to the internet, internet connectivity currently is distributed nearly entirely by satellite. This keeps prices comparatively high while internet speeds tend to be comparatively slow in comparison to the rest of the world. Google however, is launching sixteen inexpensive, low-orbit satellites to bring three billion people in the developing world (mainly in parts of Asia and Africa) online.

While satellite has provided internet connectivity in areas of Africa that don't have electricity, terrestrial broadband infrastructure is minimal. But mobile users in Africa are leapfrogging the traditional wired access to the web and are engaging with WAP and mobile web adoption. The increasing availability of 3G phones countries with inexpensive 3G data rates is leading to a population of mobile consumers that sees the online world through an entirely new lens. "With these capabilities, who needs a PC with web access?" (Harris, 2008:1).

Clearly majority access to the Internet is likely to come to Africa through the mobile device. The African profile is unique in this respect. In the world's most developed OECD countries, just 2% of subscribers –3.4 million – subscribe to wireless broadband services, the majority of 61% getting their broadband through DSL services. In Africa, 40% use wireless broadband and 59% use DSL, (Hersman, 2008).

Even though the continent suffers from extreme poverty, internet connectivity has increased by over 1000% in the last eight years to 51 million users in 2008. Nigeria, Egypt and Morocco have the highest number of users but other countries coming off a low base have experienced rapid growth (Somalia 48,900.0 %; Democratic Republic of Congo 45,980.0 % ( <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm>). In areas that don't have grid electricity, innovative approaches include solar, wind and battery power .

As elsewhere, the Internet in Africa has a symbiotic relationship with other media, particularly television. There were five million downloads of a controversial scene in the second series of Big Brother. Ninety per cent of those downloads came from within Africa and of those 33% were from South Africa and 37% from Nigeria and Uganda. Similar response rates on SMS voting and competitions shows that this will be fertile ground for public relations activities as subscriber numbers increase. There are substantial and growing internet audiences in South Africa, Kenya, Egypt and Nigeria (Gosier, 2008).

#### Innovations in communication media and technology

Traditionally, one of the greatest impediments faced by people in Africa has been lack of communication media and access to information. New developments in connectivity have important implications for public relations practice at a number of levels, particularly in the social media.

A number of web and mobile applications are providing financial economic services, business information, interaction with government administrations and undermining the activities of dictators and totalitarian governments. Some examples include:

M-Pesa is a unique pre-paid, mobile payment system that allows users to exchange money and make payments cheaply via SMS without the need for a bank account ([www.safaricom.co.ke](http://www.safaricom.co.ke)) and has attracted extensive international attention (Masi 2008;Mwakugu). The project faced

formidable social, cultural, regulatory, financial and political hurdles but may become a model for the rest of the world (Hughes and Lonie, 2007:1). M-Pesa agents can make cash payments from the subscriber's M-Pesa balance. It currently operates largely in Kenya and more recently in Tanzania. Apart from transferring cash - a service much in demand among urban Kenyans supporting relatives in rural areas - customers of the network will be able to keep up to 50,000 Kenyan shillings in a "virtual account" on their handsets.

Tradenet, the West African Agricultural Trade Network, allows registered traders to buy and sell across the region using their mobile phones for transactions.

MamaMikes is an online shop that enables friends and family outside Kenya to purchase airtime, pay electricity bills, buy fuel, etc, for people in Kenya.

The new African news portal, AfricaNews ([www.africanews.com](http://www.africanews.com)), is an important indigenous online news medium. AfricaNews goes further than previous attempts to create online news communities serving Africa. All content is created by African reporters and locally based citizen journalists using mobile phones and the Internet. There are currently 250 reporters from 32 countries but the aim is to create three times this number and to provide them with the necessary technology to produce their own stories.

Afrigator(<http://afrigator.com>) is a social media aggregator and directory that is built especially for African citizens.

Ushahidi (<http://ushahidi.com>), which means 'witness' in Swahili, is a web application that allows anyone with a cell phone or web connectivity to report incidents of political violence. This application was built after the aftermath of the Kenyan 2008 elections and is also available in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Muti.co.za is a South African social bookmarking news site, inspired by reddit and Digg but dedicated to content of interest to Africans or those interested in Africa.

Sokwanele.com is a Zimbabwean-based site for Zimbabwe Civic Action Support Group. It hosts a pro-democracy freedom activist blog, a business watch section and an 'election violence map'

that provides detailed information related to localised occurrences of violence related to the recent election. During the most recent crisis in Zimbabwe, Sokwanele was used to get information out of the country when the government began restricting communication.

Amatomou (<http://Amatomou.com>) is a South African news and social media aggregator ranks bloggers and provides charts and statistics for their blogs. It also has the ability to track trends and monitor keywords in the local blogosphere via buzzgraphs.

BlogSpirit (<http://nodesix.net/blogspirit>) is a Ugandan blog aggregator.

Mzalendo (<http://www.mzalendo.com>) is an aggregation platform for tracking the actions, activities and communication of Kenya's Parliament. By sending an SMS to a Kenyan short code, citizens can tell their Member of Parliament what he or she must do for them. Unsurprisingly, many of the complaints registered through the system so far are related to infrastructure, including access to electricity and water, better road quality, and reliable sources.

Zoopy (<http://www.zoopy.com>) is a social media tool allows its users to upload videos, podcasts, and pictures and share them on the web.

Feedelix (<http://www.feedelix.com>) specializes in integrating text and instant messaging between the desk-top and mobile phones for subscribers who use Ethiopic, Chinese and Hindi characters. It was created in response to the Ethiopian government when it instituted an SMS filtering service to censor mobile communication. The application bypasses the government censoring filter.

Before we can continue with our concern for theory-building of public relations on the African continent, we need to consider the political, social and economic relevance of the profession and its reputation worldwide.

### **The crisis of Western public relations**

Wilson (Wilson, 1994a, 1994b) suggests that the Western business management approach is in crisis, and with it, public relations. The root of the crisis, she maintains, is a failure of the traditional rationalist and number-oriented management approach which has dominated

Western business models for decades As Peters and Waterman put it "It is right enough to be dangerously wrong, and it has arguably led us seriously astray (1984: 29). The short-term, profit-driven rational method of wealth creation, which was once the driver for unprecedented growth has ultimately failed, giving rise to the global economic meltdown.

Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1993:4-5) posit that the prominence of the "value-empty discipline of Economics" and the ideology of individualism (a primary value of American and British systems) has blinded us to that which makes all economic activity sustainable: human relationships and communitarianism (the latter a value that distinguishes European, Asian, African and other systems).

The self-first, profit at all costs, market-driven application has become inadequate, especially as societies, individually and as global entities, emerge as more complex and intertwined organisms requiring a communitarian approach to problem solving. This is clearly illustrated by efforts to deal with the global economic meltdown and credit crisis, and growing concerns about the moral basis of the free market philosophy.

Typically the public relations role is to control the environment and organizational influences to maintain or increase bottom-line profits (cf, Grunig, 1993; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig and Repper, 1992). Clearly this dominant strategic-management approach to public relations is a key organ of this now seriously suffering patient. A number of trends in society should have directed public relations to its roots in communication and relationships, instead of blind support for rationalist business management methods. These include:

1. increasingly segmented publics requiring alternatives to traditional mass media channels and the dissemination of 'one size fits all' messages
2. Declining levels of trust in big business and government
3. business turning to communicators as relationship specialists to succeed where management techniques have failed in controlling a business environment heavily burdened with social problems

4. work forces whose productivity is seriously affected by social problems
5. a growing public demand for the commitment of corporate resources to solving global problems of wealth disparity and poverty. The call to achieve 'mutual understanding' of so many classic definitions of public relations has not been translated into achieving 'mutually beneficial outcomes'. Similarly, the requirement to 'establish relationships' has often led to the formation of relationships of discontent.

These trends should have signaled that the true role of public relations is not to manipulate the environment but rather to build authentic and respectful bridges and relationships. Instead, dominant theories and models abdicate our greatest potential contribution to business in the process of wealth creation: establishing and maintaining the balanced relationships necessary for organizations to thrive over the long term.

This short term manipulation of publics has led to inevitable conflicts over issues important to stakeholders and crises and conflict has become endemic. Historically, organisations have turned public relations to handle them, and crisis communication was born.

When reactive crisis communication was not enough, management concepts were applied to prepare organizations for events that might affect their environments and the profitability of their operations in the future. From this issues management was spawned. Although conceived as a long-term approach to identification and resolution of problems before they become crises, theories and models of issue management are largely congruent with the dominant Anglo American business model, with few exceptions. Skinner and Mersham argue that "the free market has not alleviated poverty – the root of many crises in the world today" and that business leaders and managers are expected "to demonstrate their position on the issues involved and take action to resolve them". The walls of "cultural insensitivity and social and political ignorance that once excused and protected business" from facing up to poverty, widening social disparities and political violence are no longer acceptable (2002:2-3).

Largely however, the approach has centered on organizations trying to influence change by controlling the environments in which issues emerge and are discussed. The interactive approach recognises a need to accommodate some public expectations, but the focus is still on meeting the short-term bottom line and organisational needs rather than on better serving community and society. Even though issues are identified years in advance and mediated, as

depicted in Hainsworth's (1990) issue cycle, the purpose is to save the organisation from future difficulty, reduction of uncertainty and reduced liability for directors and officers (Issue Management Council, 2008), not to address the needs of organizational publics because they are intrinsically valued.

Historically, public relations has consistently edged away from a 'relations' orientation. In fact, the very term public relations has suffered disrepute, perhaps, because of the emptiness of the promise implied. The role of public relations in today's society has always been narrowly addressed in the context of business, economics, and competition, but the dramatic changes in contemporary society, people and audiences have been completely ignored (Wilson, 1996:71). Wilson (1994b:138) concludes that "Now, more than ever, the emphasis in public relations is on relationship building".

### **South African models**

In 1995 in our book *Public relations, development and social investment: A southern African perspective*, we described a South African model of public relations practice. We argued that the circumstances that led to demise of apartheid, democratisation and far-reaching political, social and economic transformation in South Africa, had transformed inappropriate Western models of practice to create a synthesis of established global practice with the needs of an African state in transition to democracy.

In this context, the South African crucible of change became the laboratory for academic thinking about the value of traditional public relations models in a changed set of circumstances (Mersham, Rensburg and Skinner, 1995; Holtzhausen et al 2002).

We argued that

...in the South African context, rapid political and social change has led to more questioning and a closer review of the social purpose and social accountability dimensions of public relations. Public relations is a communication phenomenon which is rooted in the understanding of social issues, and emphasises the integral part it has to play in the constructive engagement of a post-apartheid South Africa (Mersham, Rensburg and Skinner, 1995:15)

And, as Holtzhausen suggested,

...the South African environment offers the public relations researcher the opportunity to explore not only generic public relations practices, but also culturally specific practices developed in the African context to address Africa-specific social, political, and economic issues while using African communication models. (Holtzhausen et al 2002:3)

The key aspects of the model are follows:

#### *Public Relations and development*

Apart from culture which has seen a few studies linked to public relations, very few have linked the other variables with economic level of development being a crucial variable when undertaking public relations in an emerging country or from an emerging country (Hayes, 2007:9).

Mersham, Rensburg and Skinner (1995) stress the importance of a developmental approach to public relations practice in Africa. They argue that public relations practice should emphasise Corporate Responsibility and must take into account, and be aligned to, national (governmental) development initiatives. In Africa, corporate social responsibility should be part of the *national development philosophy*. The concept of social responsibility includes an organisation's relationship to the society in which it operates, and its involvement in problems of national significance that face that society.

Indeed, governments in African countries "attempt to mandate indirectly the role of the private sector in national development. Organizations in that sector therefore, attempt to develop programs on their own to demonstrate their unwavering support of governments" (Van Leuven and Pratt 1996:95).

#### *The communicator as 'listener/receiver'*

In many first world models emphasis is accorded to the organisational communicator and the recipient as the 'automatic' and passive receiver. We argued that it must be recognised that for members of under developed communities in Africa, no other community or section of it, no



experts, or corporate organisation can prescribe ways of doing things that are superior to those that they themselves may envisage.

The public relations practitioner in Africa should first prompt stakeholders to initiate the messages about their needs. The place of the initiator in the traditional CMR (Communicator-Message-Recipient) model of communication is reversed. The initiator or facilitator becomes the recipient of community messages.

#### *The practitioner as a 'change agent'*

We demonstrated that practitioners could serve as conscience of organisations by reversing the CMR model to become the recipients of messages from communities about their development needs. In many instances African practitioners could act as 'change agents' voicing and facilitating articulation of dissenting voices. Some researchers, such as Holtzhausen et al (2002) in her post modern critique 'radicalised' this view further by suggesting that practitioners should become activists within the organisation in her robust questioning of the notion of a two-way symmetrical model of public relations.

Mersham and Skinner (2009) argue that the African public relations practitioner is at the cutting edge of social change. The practitioner is increasingly charged with communicating messages of change and facilitating the development process in a context where traditionalism and western oriented globalism meet.

As Mersham, Rensburg and Skinner (1995) and Holtzhausen et al (2002) have suggested, it is the combination of Western public relations practices and indigenous African communication practices that makes South Africa the ideal social laboratory for an emerging hybrid theory. In South Africa, Western based practice was catalysed by African based, social, political, and cultural dispensation in the country thus exerting a powerful influence. "Rapid social change has led to an enhanced questioning and review of the social purpose and social accountability dimensions of public relations" (Mersham, Rensburg and Skinner, 1995:78).

Thus South African practice and research provides unique insights into the development of public relations hybrid theories that take into account African cultural and communicative norms.

### **What does an 'All Africa' model look like?**

The question of whether African public relations practices can or should be 'global and generic' has long been controversial in the context of Africa. Can Western assumptions and practices be generalized to any country and virtually every type of setting, as Verčič, Grunig and Grunig (1996) insist, or do unique social, political, and economic factors play a much greater role in shaping the practice, as other authors such as Taylor (2000) and Sriramesh and Verčič (2001) assert?

Taylor and Kent (1999) have warned against the ethnocentric assumptions underlying international public relations studies. Holtzhausen, Petersen, and Tindall (2003) have declared that normative public relations models such as symmetry and asymmetry in South Africa are not relevant, and argue for culture-specific public relations models. Pieczka (2006) has robustly demonstrated the limitations of normative approaches such as Grunig's model and by extension systems theories in general. She contends that this is an attempt to impose a single perspective on others. Leitch and Neilson (2001: 134) suggest the normative public relations focus has been on the surface characteristics rather than on the "underlying structure or goals viewed from within a broader socio cultural context".

Some researchers such as Van Leuven and Pratt (1996:95) have suggested that Africa presents little opportunity for "practicing public relations in the Western sense of the term". Clearly this proposition ignores the 40 year old history of Western-style public relations practice in South Africa, often omitted by those conducting international public relations research because of its isolation under the apartheid regime (Mersham, Rensburg and Skinner, 1995; Holtzhausen et al, 2002:2). By today's standards this statement under represents the scope and extent of public relations activities in Africa.

However, the majority of international studies have assumed that a normative theory can be universally applied to different international settings (Choi and Cameron, 2004:2).

Pal and Dutta (2008:159-179) are critical of the modernist goals of public relations research that predominantly privilege a management discourse, and state that the intertwined nature of cultural phenomena in the context of globalization necessitates alternative ways of thinking about public relations. Curtin and Gaither (2005) illustrate that the dominant normative theoretical paradigm privileges Western, corporate models of public relations practice. They propose a 'circuit of culture' as a basis for developing public relations theory that informs the wide variety of public relations practices found globally. This model merges recent critical-cultural and postmodern perspectives, providing a confluence of institutional and situated

factors that recognize the primacy of identity, difference, and power in discursive practice while recognizing the reality of the economic globalization.

We suggest that an African model of public relations must encompass the union of African cultural phenomena with globalization. "With globalization, public relations professionals are thrust to the forefront of managing relations among peoples of varied nations and cultures and must therefore, have a multicultural and global perspective". Sriramesh (2004:7). Thus, public relations practitioners serve as cultural intermediaries operating within the larger cultural economy to structure information at the juncture of production and consumption. We believe that an African model of public relations is necessarily complex - both normative in the sense it exhibits characteristics of normative Western models - and post modern because it challenges some aspects of normative theory (for example, the emphasis on the disconnected individual versus the individual situated within a community). It has specific aspects that are common to developing countries and others that are 'continent specific' and 'country specific'. Below we outline what we believe are the key factors of the 'All Africa' model.

### **The influence of communalism**

We have described in this review the influence of the African World view, its emphasis on social justice, solidarity and human dignity and its impact on communication in the daily lives of African people.. The core of Western ideas of corporate social responsibility are contained in the African world-view and social structures. This signals the growing importance of Corporate Social Responsibility as a key plank in establishing authentic relationships which are strongly resonant with traditional communitarian values and African humanism (Visser, 2008: 493).

### **A developmental focus**

We must stress the importance of a developmental approach to public relations practice in Africa. The development of a body of knowledge for public relations in Africa must include the perspective of a developing continent (Rensburg, 2007:1; Mersham, Rensburg and Skinner 1995; Mersham and Skinner 2009). Public relations practice should emphasise Corporate Social Responsibility and must take into account, and be aligned to, national (governmental) development initiatives. In Africa, corporate social responsibility should be part of the national development philosophy and mandate directly the role of the private sector in national development.

### **Facilitation of social change**

African public relations has an important role to play in communicating messages of social change and accommodation. Africa is experiencing a period of extensive social, economic and political change in a context where traditionalism and western oriented globalism meet. As

democracy matures on the continent, urbanisation continues, and development projects increase, government communications and information provision will have to keep track and public sector communications will increase. Obviously private sector communication will also play its part, serving a greater boundary spanning role, becoming a recipient of messages from communities about their needs to be fed into corporate social responsibility programmes. In many instances African practitioners will act as 'change agents' voicing and articulating the voices of community stakeholders.

### **Innovations in communication media and technology**

Clearly the few examples shared earlier in the chapter point to a near revolution in mobile communications taking place in Africa. An African theory of practice will have to take into account this burgeoning connectivity, an amalgam of the mobile media technology, Western conceptions of social media with elements of African pragmatism.

### **Establishing a mutuality of interests**

It is not a simple matter to establish relationships with all stakeholders. Nor is it enough to simply aim to reach mutual understanding. It is the quality of the nature of the relationship that is important. As discussed above in 'The crisis of Western public relations', there must be a mutuality of interests. As Pratt (2003:452) neatly puts it "African communities have development challenges which may seem far-fetched to a creditor of a multinational corporation" - and for that matter to the millions of baby boomers based in Western countries with money invested in corporations as part of their retirement and pension portfolios.

The problem therefore, is that 'stakeholder management' in Africa is much more complex than the phrase might suggest. Not all of an organisation's stakeholders are perceived to have equal importance or necessarily have the means or will to communicate with the organisation. Theorists argue that in developing regions this is not unusual – mainstream media and government were often more important to commercial organizations than were less powerful publics (Taylor and Kent, 1999; Taylor 2000).

The challenge for the African communication manager lies in discovering, articulating and expressing those shared interests which include a multiplex of local, provincial and national interests and often international interests as well. This suggests that African practitioners will need advanced local communication skills coupled with a world view that embodies an understanding of investors, shareholders, foreign corporate managements, owners, managers, employees, local authorities and communities and national governments. In the authors'

experience throughout Africa, large, national corporates, Transnational Corporations (TNC's), and governments and their departments, dominate attendance at formal public relations training workshops held in Africa.

### **The importance of CSR**

Research by Van Heerden (2004:21) found that the role of the manager as conceptualised in western-based theory is much less extensive in the African context but that African practitioners are very aware that an organisation's reputation in the African context is formed by its involvement in socially responsible activities. While this study does not indicate that authentic dialogue between the organisations and society takes place, it does indicate that in Africa "the main purpose of public relations pertains to understanding society" and the influence that public relations has in "top management's decisions regarding organizational behaviour and decisions in order to become good corporate citizens" (2004:239). The findings of this study indicate that the activities of African practitioners show a high concern for societal issues. It can be concluded that a societal perspective must characterise the practice of public relations in the African context (Van Heerden and Rensburg, 2005:85).

The track record of big business in Africa is mixed with no shortage of examples of specific corporate complicity in political corruption, environmental destruction, labour exploitation and social disruption (see, for example, Skinner and Mersham, 2002:162). Equally, there is abundant evidence of the benefits of business bringing capital investment, job creation, skills transfer, infrastructure development, knowledge sharing and social responsibility programmes to countries throughout Africa (Visser, McIntosh, and Middleton, 2006:12).

While there are detractors and debate, there is general agreement that the private sector will make a significant positive contribution towards improving social, economic and environmental conditions in Africa. Recognition of this role is especially evident in the recent spate of publications on business's potential to impact on development and poverty alleviation. Hence, corporate citizenship is enmeshed in the debate about Africa's future. (Visser, McIntosh, and Middleton, 2006:13).

An example of how the South African concept of Corporate Social Investment (CSI) is becoming mainstream is illustrated in a recent agreement between South Africa and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In 2006 South Africa committed itself to a range of capacity building, training, and infrastructure rehabilitation efforts in the DRC. Early in 2008 the African Institute of Corporate Citizenship's (AICC) was asked to undertake an assessment of the CSI

strategies of 44 South African companies with business interests in the DRC by the South African Department of Provincial and Local Government as part of the contribution to this capacity building agreement.

What makes corporate citizenship in Africa of critical importance is that the continent embodies many of the most vexing dilemmas that business faces in its attempt to be responsible, ethical and sustainable: When do local cultural traditions take precedence over global standards and policies? How far do companies' responsibilities extend in providing public services? When does involvement in local governance become an unwarranted intrusion into the political process? (Mersham, Rensburg and Skinner, 1995: 87-88). How can business avoid creating a culture of entitlement and dependency through its charitable activities? Do global companies have a right to impose Western ideas of ethics on African societies that have their own often different sets of values?

There are many examples of large multinationals cooperating with civil society in Africa on solving societal and environmental issues and phrases such as 'business diplomacy' and 'corporate responsibility' are used to describe this collaboration as Hayes (2007:4) points out.

### **The fractured image of Africa**

Africa has not been fairly and evenly treated in the world's communication media (Mersham, Rensburg and Skinner, 1995:199-201). The achievements of the continent are not fully understood and appreciated abroad. It is in the rectification of this imbalance that the public relations practitioner can make a difference. Africa continues to be stereotyped as 'the dark continent', backward and barbaric, referred to as 'the world's basket case' by the world's media. Africa is portrayed "as a land of pestilence, disease, war and calamity...flagrant corruption, and incompetent leadership" (Eko, cited in MacMunn, 2008). While Africa's failures and conflicts are regularly exposed (and need to be revealed), equally the authentic efforts made by African states to overcome these and other problems, usually against formidable odds, remain largely ignored. However, the recent handling by South Africa of the very successful FIFA World cup has greatly improved the image of the country and the continent in the eyes of both visitors and viewers worldwide.

As Mersham Rensburg and Skinner (1995:199-201) have argued, African public relations practitioners can help to promote a balanced view in a variety of ways:

1. Practitioners in African governments need to establish better communication networks with local, foreign and international media representatives and convince foreign media of the need to report more fully and regularly on positive achievements and encourage greater openness by government with respect to disclosing failures. This certainly happened during the six week period May-July 2010 when the FIFA World Cup was being played.
2. Practitioners can play a major role in mobilising African people to grow more food. National awareness programmes mounted by national public relations bodies need to be directed towards African heads of state.
3. A major problem inhibiting the development of Africa is that of mistrust and suspicion by African leaders. Practitioners have a responsibility to make it clear that Africa's salvation can only come through its cooperation.
4. Practitioners have a role to play in disseminating messages which call for political stability, respect for human rights, political transparency and guaranteed protection of the life and property of citizens. African governments need to be urged to promote peace, democracy and stability through good government.
5. Ethnic intolerance, religious intolerance and corruption impede development. Practitioners have a responsibility to highlight these impediments to development.

### **Chinese engagement in Africa**

Launched in 2000, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation became the flagship of China's 'thrust into Africa'. It was followed by a number of other initiatives culminating in The Beijing Summit of China-Africa Cooperation Forum held in November 2006.

In 2006, it declared a policy of "the Year of Africa," by which it sought to develop "a new type of strategic partnership with Africa which features political equality and mutual trust, economic win-win cooperation and cultural exchange" (China's African Policy, 2006, pt. III, 2-5).

As a result of this focus on Africa, China has encouraged various Chinese enterprises to invest and launch factories in Africa. Mutual trade volume has skyrocketed: \$US 73.3 billion dollars in 2007 and 53.1 billion dollars in first half of 2008. China's investments in Africa have reached \$6.27 billion and rising, promoting economic development in the continent and increasing local employment(GOV.cn).

Other developments include a trade and economic cooperation zone, a framework agreement on preferential loans with 20 countries; a Bilateral Improvement and Investment Protection Agreement with 29 African countries and establishment of an Africa Union Headquarters, an agricultural center of excellence, a malaria control and prevention center, a China-Africa Development Fund of about US \$100 million (GOV.cn). A measure of the importance of China to Africa is the fact that of the 53 countries in Africa, 47 have established diplomatic relations with China.

China's strategies for transferring its economic model of growth and development have been particularly attractive to Africa's professional institutions and governments, and the country is now a key player in the continent's social and economic development programs.

China conducts its policy in Africa on the basis of a development model, "a new type of strategic partnership" (Beijing Summit, 2006:1) and non-interference in domestic political affairs. A negative result, according to Pratt and Adamolekun (2008) is that this policy strengthens the hold that authoritarian, non-democratic African leaders have on their countries by providing economic growth at the cost of ignoring human rights abuses. Its defense of sovereignty and repudiation of the notion that external interference into a nation's governance can be legitimate (for example by the United Nations), benefits corrupt regimes, and is likely to undermine existing efforts at political liberalization. Revenues from a boom in Chinese-African trade and taxes, development assistance, increased aid, debt cancellation, and other means of support for Africa's autocrats help them to rein in domestic demands for democracy and the respect for human rights. (Tull, 2006: 474).

China's vastly increased involvement in Africa contradicts the idea of the international marginalisation of Africa and brings with it significant economic and political consequences. By offering aid without preconditions, China has presented an attractive alternative to conditional Western aid. However, according to Tull (2006: 1), supporting authoritarian governments at the expense of human rights make the economic consequences of increased "Chinese involvement in Africa mixed at best, while the political consequences are bound to prove deleterious".



Pratt and Adamolekun (2008) analyse how China's new found influence and huge investment footprint in Africa has boosted the activities of the Federation of African Public Relations Associations (FAPRA), the umbrella body of all national public relations associations in Africa. They suggest that China and FAPRA are "collaborating to create environments conducive to enhancing the practice in Africa and to laying a foundation for an expansive view of public relations research" (2008:1) through the implementation of a five year action education and training plan by FAPRA.

Against this background, Pratt and Adamolekun put forward five implications of China's engagement for communication in Africa(2008:28), which we detail below.

### **Implications of China's engagement for communication in Africa**

First, there is an increasing interest in developing communication expertise beyond communication with traditional, domestic audiences and publics to include international and intercultural communications. China's impact on the economic and social life of Africans is expected to increase, requiring the contributions of local communicators to facilitate interactions between different cultural and business groups.

Second, practitioners will be challenged to develop communication approaches and skills to resolve the discordance between the Chinese business-as-business practice and the prevailing African orthodoxy of business-as-a-social cause on the continent. They will have to deal with possible tensions that arise from political pressure on Chinese investors to engage in socially responsible actions.

Third, economic and social growth translates into expanding professional responsibilities for communicators; business growth places communicators at the centre of increasingly complex issues that range from workplace safety to employee benefits, professional development and environmental issues. In the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, for example, skirmishes between locals and expatriate oil workers have led to vandalizing infrastructure, tampering with products, and taking hostages. On the other, such responsibilities require that communication counsellors be better equipped to respond to their evolving community-centered responsibilities as spanners of the boundary between environmental activists and advocates and multinational corporations.

Fourth, there is growing pressure on management firms and corporate communication specialists to respond to multinational pressure rather than accede to their own domestic partners' and clients' interests, resulting in the risk that their loyalty to multinational interests will be to the detriment of their domestic partners and clients.

Where such alliances are split, inequalities in organizational and public sector communications can result. For example, in the aftermath of events of 9/11, there was an increased need for collaboration among Africa's religious groups, national institutions, and communities in areas where vulnerabilities to outside political and religious influences tended to be more pronounced. Presumed safe havens were kept off the information loop—further deepening the information divide among districts or regions and exacerbating the emergence of alliances with discrete interests.

Fifth, there is the danger that the strategic partnerships that China are forging on the continent is perceived as colonialism all over again. Pratt and Adamolekun (2008:30) suggest that this implies that public relations should be "visibly undertaken on the continent in an attempt to deflect unhealthy sentiments: one that caters to complementary development goals of multinational partners, responds to community interests and addresses regional and historical realities even as it positions itself in a globalising environment"

According to Pratt and Adamolekun (2008:30) here lies the importance of APRA's involvement in the momentum resulting from China's African policy. It requires APRA to develop a more pragmatic, postmodern approach to public relations practice—one anchored on responsibility to society, sensitivity to the environment and the welfare of employees, their families and communities, receptivity to local concerns, acceptance of diverse views, and "objectivity to investors whose confidence need to be secured and harnessed".

### **A template for theory building**

Pratt and Adamolekun put forward four propositions for what they call "a template" for theory building in the African context. The first three they call key drivers of economic growth and poverty reduction, namely culture, good governance and rule of law, and economic freedom. The fourth is the assumption that APRA's integrated, continent wide programs offer directions,

guidelines, and opportunities for re-examining communication management practices, with a view toward revamping them for effective contributory roles in three areas.

## Culture

Research by both development theorists and development communicators demonstrates the significant role of culture in development. Communication in an African context is imbedded in cultural contexts and grounded in community mores and it therefore, makes good business sense “to integrate them into corporate strategies and public relations research” to avoid the “disconnectedness of communications from culture” (Pratt and Adamolekun, 2008:37). They add that researchers above all need to pose focal questions on the impact of globalization on both communication culture and networks-individually and collectively. To what extent does globalization affect culture-based organizational communication? Does the Chinese preference for relationships—*guanxi*—have direct reinforcing, neutral, or negative effects on Africa’s business practices? The spirit and practise of CSR is strongly resonant with traditional communitarian values of African humanism (*ubuntu*) and harmonious society (*xiaokang*) in China (Visser, 2008: 493). Chinese *guanxi*, defined as ‘connecting socially, ‘social networking’, or ‘special interpersonal relationship’ links individuals to enable a social interaction and exchange (Hackley & Dong, 2002: 17), and embodies principles implied in symmetry (Chen, 1996; Chen & Culbertson, 1992). *Guanxi*, then, fits well with the African cultural and normative premium of cultivating amicable relationships as a quintessential precursor to doing business (Pratt and Adamolekun, 2008:36).

## Good Governance and the Rule of Law

Africa is home to 53 nations, each with its own political demands and social system. Some are one party states like China that emphasise a strong central government and practice forms of African socialism that stress cultural values as they respond to poverty and promote development. A few see a liberal capitalist system as an appropriate response to development needs. Thus, Africa has had a historical mix of political systems, from the authoritarian administrations of Angola, Libya, Sudan and Zimbabwe; to the neo democracies of Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo; to multiparty parliamentary systems in Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Egypt.

A number of studies have stressed the link between public relations and democracy including the fundamental rights of freedom of speech and information and access to channels of communication media (Mersham, 1992; Mersham, 1993; De Beer, A.S. & Mersham, G.M. 2002; Mersham, G.M. and Skinner, C. 2009). As Pratt and Adamolekun (2008:39) put it “Africa’s

businesses effectiveness in communications management is thus a function of the forms of political freedoms the continent's citizens have, and the level of expertise that communication practitioners bring to bear as they straddle two disparate worlds".

### Economic Freedom

Pratt and Adamolekun, 2008:40) cite Schaefer's definition of economic freedom as "the absence of government coercion or constraint on the production, distribution or consumption of goods and services beyond the extent necessary for citizens to protect and maintain liberty itself."(Schaefer 2006:8)

However, economic freedom is a controversial term used in economic research and policy debates. As with freedom generally, there are various definitions, but no universally accepted concept of economic freedom. One major approach to economic freedom comes from the libertarian tradition emphasizing free markets and private property, while another extends to welfare economics. We would suggest that exclusively 'free market' conceptions of economic freedom are not necessarily appropriate as we have argued earlier in this chapter, and that in the African context we should include freedom from want(poverty alleviation) and the freedom to engage in collective bargaining as equally important concepts.

Nevertheless, although average levels of economic freedom in Africa remain poor and the region remains the world's least free economically, great strides in economic freedom have been made and Chinese investment is likely to provide further significant economic benefits. As a result there will be a greater call for counselling by host country African practitioners, particularly in areas such as social responsibility, crisis management, reputation management, communication laws and regulations.

### APRA's role

APRA's challenge will be the contribution it is able to make lies in the opportunities it is able to create across the continent for re-examining communication management practices in the three areas of culture, good governance and rule of law, economic freedom discussed above. As Pratt and Adamolekun (2008:40) emphasise, this proposition remains untested.

### Conclusion

Public relations has yet to realise its full responsibilities to the urban and rural classes of Africa. A tremendous gap separates our public relations practice from the needs and aspirations of millions of people in Africa. To meet these needs and aspirations, a new approach to public relations practice needs to be devised through communication and collaboration with the African social and political order. We have outlined what we feel are seeds of a new approach to public relations in Africa. It must aim to enhance the ability of the dispossessed to determine their development needs and set about fulfilling them. Public relations educators have an important part to play in this movement, but we believe there will have to be changes in the training and outlook of practitioners to make this contribution possible.

For public relations to be relevant to Africa it must engage its current and future practitioners with the issues and debates presented in this chapter. It is clear that normative public relations theory in an African context cannot be based on a single world view. Any normative theory or framework must take into account indigenous and global influences.

In such a post colonial, post modern perspective for public relations in Africa, a case can be argued for the central position of indigenous frameworks based on indigenous epistemologies, namely the African moral philosophy of ubuntuism.

It must also account for the international dynamic in various contexts. Public relations is challenged to define itself, as we have argued above, as a professional practice stressing commitment to and the quality relationships, a sense of social cohesion. If such a role is valuable within individual countries, then it will be much more so in the globalising community of which Africa is part (Hayes, 2007:4). Globalisation from an African perspective will need to be high on the African theoretical body of knowledge.

Development issues remain particularly significant for the people of Africa and the majority of their governments. Poverty and health issues remain huge problems and governments will continue to expect the private sector to play a large role in national development and support the national development agenda.

China is poised to have more impact on Africa over the next 20 years than any other country. This has important implications for the African body of knowledge, which must include a greater

knowledge of Chinese culture and political systems with a special focus on the cross cultural synergies of guanxi and ubuntu.

According to the Global Trends 2025 report, Sub-Saharan Africa is likely to become "the most vulnerable region on Earth" in terms of economic challenges, population stresses, civil conflict, and political instability. It will continue to be a major supplier of oil, gas, and metals to world markets and increasingly will attract the attention of China and India seeking access to resources. The challenge will be to ensure that increased resource income will go towards addressing these challenges and benefit the majority of the population.

This will have implications, not just for the practice, but also for teaching and research in public relations. The emerging generation of African practitioners will carry a huge responsibility to act as change agents and boundary spanners. They will act as brokers and counsellors to managements to ensure that corporate responsibility becomes generic to African business programmes in the pursuit of a mutuality of interests and concerns.

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