

CASE IN POINT

By CD Anderson

The Quiet Storm of Sustainability

Through the good management of sustainability issues such as education, job creation and health, the South African Weather Service (SAWS) – celebrating 150 years of service to the people of South Africa – hopes to continue the effective relationships with its stakeholders, including government, utility industries, the aviation and agriculture industries and the South African public.



Modjadji Makoela, General Manager for Corporate Affairs, South African Weather Service

Modjadji Makoela, General Manager for Corporate Affairs at SAWS, explains that integrated sustainability reporting for organisations is key to good corporate governance and strong relationships with stakeholders. “In 2007, we finalised our Comprehensive Corporate Communications and Stakeholders Relationship Strategy, which addresses our brand awareness, our media and stakeholder engagement, as well as communications within the organisation,” Makoela says. Stakeholder-specific engagement includes programmes like annual stakeholder meetings, where various issues and challenges are openly discussed and solutions can be formulated.

SAWS strives for transparency in all projects and relationships with stakeholders through the accessibility of information for all interested parties. “We are compliant with the Promotion of Access to Information (PIA) Act, as well as

adhering to government financial information and annual reporting acts. Additionally, in the case of the commercial aviation industry, our information is openly available to all for decision-making value.”

Various programmes are in place that ensure SAWS retain and motivate their internal stakeholders, namely staff. The Recognition Awards project highlights some of the individual achievements of scientists who have not only made SAWS a bastion of extensive research and development, but also extend the organisation’s commitment and service to the people of South Africa. “In 2007/08, SAWS also conducted a communications audit on what our internal stakeholders wanted to see changes in the organisation and how this should be communicated. Based on these findings, our internal communications strategy has been introduced to fulfil these recommendations. An impact assessment will be done in 2010/11 to assess the progress made since this audit,” explains Makoela.

SAWS’s Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects also link closely to the strategic goals of the organisation. “One of our areas of focus for our CSR is on education,” says Makoela. The organisation spends over R3-million a year on bursaries for meteorology students, through the partnerships with the universities of Pretoria and Zululand, and seeks to absorb some of this new emerging science talent into the organisation.

Makoela also explains the SAWS extensive community projects, “In Highbury, Mthatha, where we have one of our weather radar projects, we have upgraded their primary school. While in Venda, our FOGNET water harvesting project offers valuable experience to the students who are part of our bursary programme.” The organisation is also involved in health issues in these and other areas, focussing on HIV/Aids education. SAWS also sponsors and works with NGOs that are addressing health and gender issues at grassroots’ level across the country. “As a good corporate citizen, SAWS heeds the government’s call to integrate issues of sustainability, and SAWS wants play a role in promoting issues of health, education and environment concerns that are essential for nation building,” Makoela enthuses.

Makoela concludes that stakeholder communication in South Africa has evolved much over the last two decades, as organisations realise that the relationships built with clients, staff and the general public are increasingly vital for effective corporate strategy, particularly for reputation management, service delivery and corporate responsibility. A trend, she says, SAWS is committed to adhere to in their quest to bring the science of weather to all South Africans. “South Africa,” she says, “is a diverse country, with diverse cultures and languages. Communication plays an important role in cultural understanding and behavioural change.” □