

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Government's national Communication and Information System (coordinated at the GCIS) has, among other things, been tasked, in the Cabinet-approved Comtask Report (1996), with providing development communication and information to the public to ensure that they become active participants in changing their lives for the better (ref. Cabinet Memorandum 15 of 1999, dated 18 November 1999). To achieve this objective, all appropriate forms of media have been utilised to provide the required information and promote two-way communication between government and communities. These media include print and electronic media, direct communication with communities through unmediated products and community liaison, the Internet and tele-centres.

In South Africa, Multi-purpose Community Centres (MPCCs) have been identified as the primary approach for the implementation of development communication and information as these offer a wide range of services that communities can use for their own empowerment.

An MPCC is a one-stop, integrated community development centre, where there is community participation and people's needs are addressed by providing relevant services. An MPCC aims to empower the poor and disadvantaged by means of access to information, services and resources from both governmental and non-governmental sources, which can be used for their own development. Its advantages are the following:

- ▼ MPCCs are supported by government through a Cabinet mandate (ref. Cabinet Memorandum 15 of 1999, dated 18 November 1999) and recommendation 65 of the Comtask report, which stipulates: 'It is proposed that the GCIS promotes and accelerates the development of Multi-Purpose Information Service/Centres';
- ▼ It provides a broad range of relevant

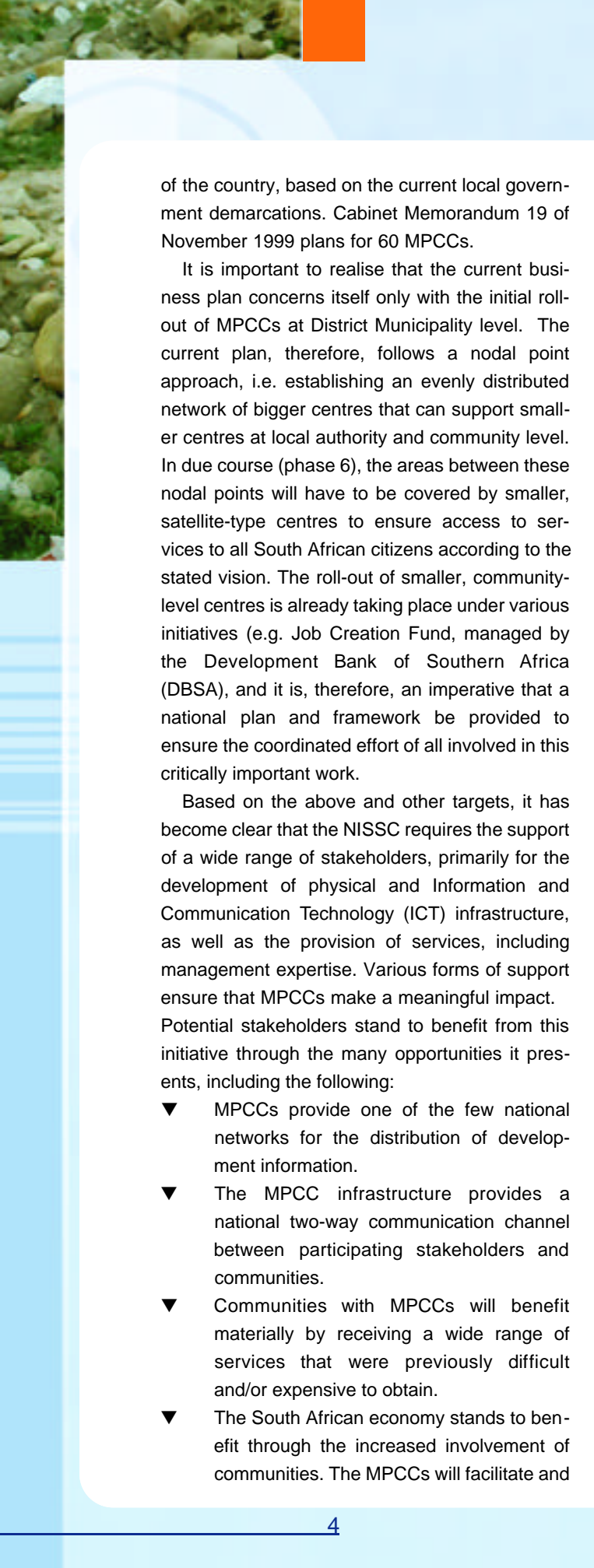
services in an integrated manner, some of which other service providers cannot economically and sustainably provide;

- ▼ It offers a unique institutional arrangement for partnerships between government, civil society and business.

To facilitate and coordinate the roll-out of the MPCC initiative, a National Inter-sectoral Steering Committee (NISSC) was established. This Committee was formed on 17 June 1999, and comprises 20 representatives from national government departments, eight parastatals, three non-governmental organisations, four research agencies and tertiary institutions, the private sector and other stakeholders with various degrees of MPCC interest and involvement. An executive team, which was constituted to be responsible for coordinating different management areas to be addressed in establishing MPCCs, heads the NISSC. The team comprises convenors of task teams focusing on the following: local stakeholder cultivation, care and maintenance, as well as communication, marketing and promotion; financial planning, costing, accounting, fund generation and disbursement, implementation planning, guidance and monitoring; technical planning, guidance and monitoring; pre- and post-implementation research, monitoring and evaluation; information requirements in establishing and running MPCCs, especially regarding service requirements; and foreign stakeholder cultivation, care and maintenance and foreign marketing and promotion of the MPCC initiative.

Achievements to date include buy-in by various stakeholders from government, the private sector, NGOs and academic institutions; ownership and acceptance of the project by provincial government structures; ownership and acceptance by community structures; the establishment of 14 MPCCs to date; a multitude of government services brought to rural and under-served communities; functional and implementation communication strategies in place, and development communication becoming the popular paradigm for public communication.

The NISSC aims to have an MPCC in each of the 43 District and six Metropolitan Municipalities



of the country, based on the current local government demarcations. Cabinet Memorandum 19 of November 1999 plans for 60 MPCCs.

It is important to realise that the current business plan concerns itself only with the initial roll-out of MPCCs at District Municipality level. The current plan, therefore, follows a nodal point approach, i.e. establishing an evenly distributed network of bigger centres that can support smaller centres at local authority and community level. In due course (phase 6), the areas between these nodal points will have to be covered by smaller, satellite-type centres to ensure access to services to all South African citizens according to the stated vision. The roll-out of smaller, community-level centres is already taking place under various initiatives (e.g. Job Creation Fund, managed by the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), and it is, therefore, an imperative that a national plan and framework be provided to ensure the coordinated effort of all involved in this critically important work.

Based on the above and other targets, it has become clear that the NISSC requires the support of a wide range of stakeholders, primarily for the development of physical and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure, as well as the provision of services, including management expertise. Various forms of support ensure that MPCCs make a meaningful impact. Potential stakeholders stand to benefit from this initiative through the many opportunities it presents, including the following:

- ▼ MPCCs provide one of the few national networks for the distribution of development information.
- ▼ The MPCC infrastructure provides a national two-way communication channel between participating stakeholders and communities.
- ▼ Communities with MPCCs will benefit materially by receiving a wide range of services that were previously difficult and/or expensive to obtain.
- ▼ The South African economy stands to benefit through the increased involvement of communities. The MPCCs will facilitate and

enable wider economic participation by the South African population. The MPCCs will contribute to the personal and economic development of individuals and other important sectors, such as small, micro and medium enterprises (SMMEs), enabling more participation in the national economy.

- ▼ The MPCC initiative provides stakeholders with access to a captive market.
- ▼ Cost-sharing initiatives in the nation-wide development of infrastructure and operational expenses can be explored with all stakeholders, e.g. potential stakeholders can partner the NISSC to develop the infrastructure instead of developing their own infrastructure at a much higher cost.
- ▼ MPCCs are a high profile initiative with the backing of the South African Government. Stakeholders can earn extensive mileage when any of their contributions are recognised.
- ▼ The MPCC initiative provides a well-controlled, high profile conduit for the channelling of resources intended for fulfilling social responsibility obligations, whether from the public or private sector.

The NISSC's long-range strategy has been developed to ensure sustainability of MPCCs through quality service delivery. To this end, the NISSC will strive to ensure that MPCCs attain self-sustainability without compromising the level or quality of service. It is the NISSC's intention to have MPCCs that are able to support themselves to the extent that they generate capital to fund future growth.

It is, furthermore, important to know that this business plan is supported by a detailed 'Implementation Framework', which contains the plans of the various task teams, and also the more extensive detailed guidelines and budgets for activities at provincial, district and local authority levels.