

2.0 CONTEXT

2.1 Information and service-delivery context

Much work remains to be done in meeting government's information needs and the service needs of South Africa's citizens. Many people remain marginalised in terms of convenient access to aspects of government service delivery. In some cases, challenges around access relate to a lack of communication and information, while in other cases challenges relate more strongly to physical access issues. This lack of access impacts negatively on citizens' quality of life and developmental prospects. Increasingly, it is being realised that meaningful developmental progress can only be addressed at the local level where needs are more clearly understood and where the interface between government and citizens occurs. The Thusong Service Centres concept is regarded as a powerful tool in enabling this interface and directly impacting on improving citizens' quality of life. This recognition is reflected in the prominence of the concept in various policy statements.

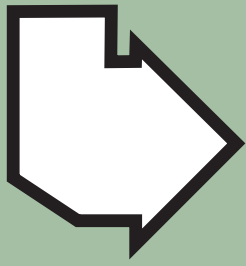
2.2 Mandate: policy and legislative context

A number of policies have shaped government's approach with regard to Thusong Service Centres and the mandate for the programme. These include the following:

- **Comtask Report:** The Communication Task Group Report, published in 1996, included in its recommendations for the overhaul of government's communication system, Recommendation 65 regarding the development of Thusong Service Centres to expand access to information, in line with sections 32(1) (a) and (b) of the Constitution.
- **White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (Thusong), 1997:** Government's approach to service delivery requires that efforts should not only be directed at serving people, but at doing so in the best possible manner.
- **Cabinet Memorandum No. 15 of November 1999:** This memorandum mandated GCIS to provide information to the public to enable them to be active participants in changing their lives for the better. This included facilitating and co-ordinating the establishment of Thusong Service Centres.
- **President's State of the Nation Address (SoNA), May 2004:** The policy statement made by President Mbeki, during his SoNA in May 2004, indicated that over the next 10 years, one Thusong Service Centre would be established in each local municipality.
- **Other regulations:** Other related regulations are important in ensuring that the Thusong Service Centre programme is efficiently and effectively implemented. As we approach the second generation of Thusong Service Centres, it is important to take note of the Public Finance Management Act, 1999; Municipal Finance Management Act, 2003; Municipal System Act, 2000; Municipal Structures Act, 1998, etc.

These legislative and policy documents set out the broad vision of government's efforts to promote two-way unmediated communication and to bring government information and services closer to the people.

- **National Spatial Development Perspective (NSDP) Alignment:** The NSDP was recently developed. It reflects a (spatially oriented) approach to considering choices about government investment and development spending across all spheres of government. As the roll-out of Thusong Service Centres across the country represents a significant capital investment (either in fixed or mobile infrastructure) and



an ongoing operational cost to the State, this perspective (as well as policy which will align to it, including provincial growth and development strategies [PGDSs] and municipal integrated development plans [IDPs]), should be regarded as critical guiding mechanisms.

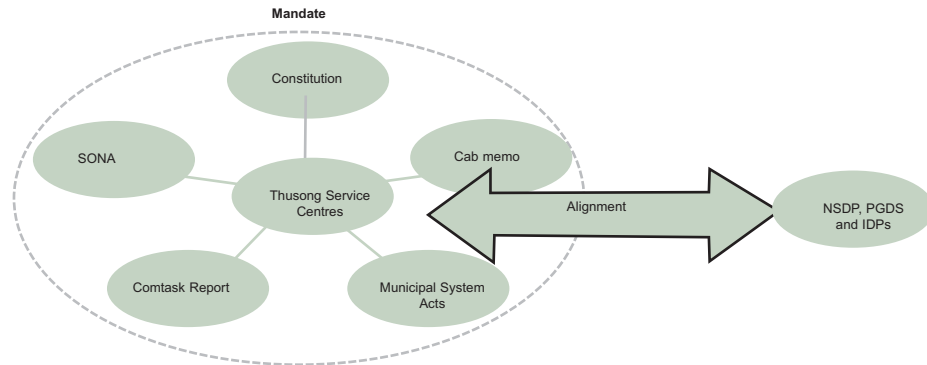


Figure 3: Mandate and alignment issues for second-generation roll-out

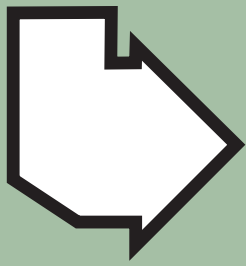
2.3 First-generation Thusong Service Centre context

A number of issues have been identified as being critical aspects to be dealt with in the second-generation roll-out and associated business plan. These issues have emerged from research activities, including site visits, a Thusong Service Centre survey and questionnaire, and the Thusong Service Centre workshop held from 28 to 30 November 2005 in Buffalo City. Issues identified include:

- constraints around the consistency and standard of service provision at the centres
- challenges around the provision of infrastructure where, on occasion, it has been out of line with service-provider and user needs
- challenges around co-ordinating action across spheres of government, which are hampering roll-out and operations at the centres
- the non-payment of rentals by government service-providers, which impacts on the sustainability of the Thusong Service Centre model
- concerns around the effectiveness of the communication and marketing programme reflected by inconsistencies in branding and limited penetration into municipal and external role-players' consciousness
- capacity constraints, particularly at centre manager level
- service-provider capacity (financial and human) to staff Thusong Service Centres.

In response to these challenges, a number of recommendations are made, expanding on those identified by the Public Service Commission (PSC). These range from detailed specific recommendations around the design of centres to broader programme-level recommendations. Salient recommendations include, among other things:

- improving design and infrastructure development to cater for service-provider and user needs in a more meaningful manner
- adopting a flexible approach to the order of infrastructure roll-out, including considering mobile services and locally appropriate operating hours
- institutionalising the programme through legislation or policy



- strengthening institutional arrangements to promote payment of rentals and agreement on service-provider commitments to Thusong Service Centres
- agreeing on service-provider hours and levels of service
- greater consistency in the branding and promotion of Thusong Service Centres
- relocating government service-providers to Thusong Service Centres
- training centre managers and other staff
- exploring innovative means to access funding and improve revenue related to Thusong Service Centres.

2.4 Towards the roll-out of second-generation Thusong Service Centres: a refined approach

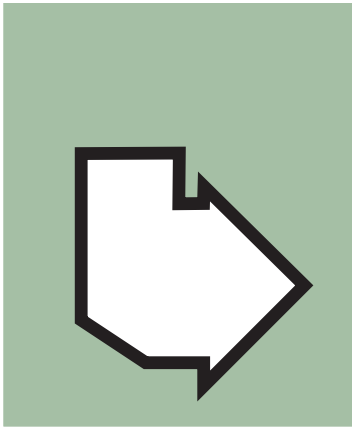
In the context of the issues, recommendations and the need to ensure the long-term sustainability of the planned expanded roll-out of Thusong Service Centres, the business plan identifies the need to shift the trajectory of the programme in a number of areas.

The first area relates to the need for a nuanced approach to the broad service and infrastructure roll-out. There needs to be careful consideration around the manner in which the expanded network of Thusong Service Centres is developed, specifically in the light of (potentially increased) ongoing operational cost implications. Broad-scale investment in new capital investment across the country needs to be tempered by viability considerations around the continued operating costs of this infrastructure. This is not to say that the network of services should not be considerably expanded – the question is around the manner in which this occurs. In this regard, the business plan places greater emphasis on ensuring that the target of Thusong Service Centres in all local municipalities is not mechanically applied through the implementation of 'blueprint infrastructure', but rather adopts a nuanced approach that recognises variations in local context and needs. This nuanced approach is based on the premise that infrastructure is regarded as a means to an end. The provision of services considered at the local level should lead with considerations around infrastructure following.

Furthermore, this approach points to the fact that the provision of services and infrastructure as part of the programme should be guided by the spatial priorities of government as reflected in the NSDP, provincial growth and development strategies (PGDS) and intergrated development plans (IDPs). In summary, the approach needed with regard to the broad service (and hence infrastructure) roll-out could best be described as ambitious but measured and locally specific.

The second area relates to the need for partnerships to ensure sustainability and effective delivery. The second-generation business plan entails a major focus on building partnerships. If an expanded roll-out is envisaged, there is no scope for parochialism. Rather, all of government needs to contribute to achieving success and ensuring alignment between actions around the programme. Furthermore, the hand of partnership needs to be extended beyond government. Information and service provision is not the sole preserve of government and other role-players will need to be drawn in to add value to Thusong Service Centres.

Linked to this, the third area relates to the need to build greater awareness. A shift is required from what is regarded as, to a large extent, an internal government programme to a broader shared programme that targets other role-players with the aim of achieving a greater service-delivery impact and a strengthened resource base.



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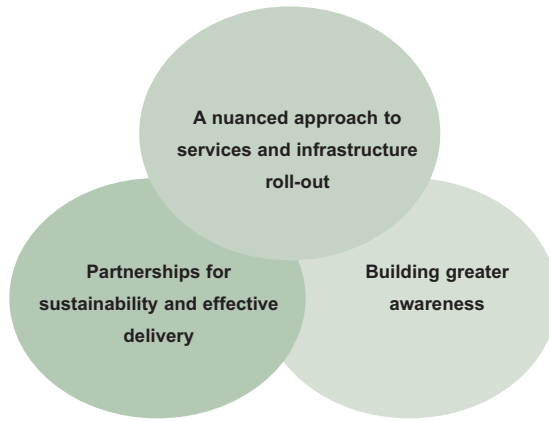


Figure 4: Refined approach for second-generation roll-out

The remainder of the business plan aims at achieving these refinements in the Thusong Service Centres programme. It does so by building strategies which are firmly based on a set of principles that will guide the roll-out to 2014 and beyond.