Chapter 8:
Conclusions and the Way Forward

The findings reflected in the previous chapters represent some of the results of 8 months of investigation, research and intensive discussion. The Task Group has sought to reach conclusions that:

- take into account the overall policy directions of government

- address the constraints we have described

- reflect the problems identified with the current structural and infrastructural arrangements within government

- do so within a framework that addresses the problems inherent in our society.

- do so within a framework that takes account of best democratic practice in countries where communications achieve the broader aims necessary if government is to enter into dialogue with society.

8.1 OPENING UP A DIALOGUE: A NEW PHILOSOPHY OF COMMUNICATIONS

Modern communications theory is based on the notion of dialogue. That is, in order to be successful, the communicator must be both communicator and audience. In order to achieve this, old style notions of communications as a way of 'telling' people things, or 'persuading' them to act and respond in certain ways, is inadequate in a modern democracy. The communicator should have, as it were, a relationship with his/her audience, to their mutual benefit.

In South Africa, where government's attempts to open up such a relationship are as young as our democracy itself, and where the majority of the population has never experienced (and is still indeed generally not experiencing) such a relationship, the challenge is great. Where other democracies have had the advantage of a long evolution of ideas and practice, trial and error, South Africa urgently needs to do, in a short period of time, what other democracies have had years to perfect. In short, we must preserve and nurture our fragile democracy, and we must build a human rights culture through the length and breadth of our society.

Government's ability to do so will depend, in large part, on its ability to reach the population and to engage people in meaningful dialogue. This also has great significance for government's commitment to transparency.

8.2 THE STATUS OF COMMUNICATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

This raises a central issue: that of the status of communications and its role in our society. It is common cause that, as a society, we fail to reach the constituencies we most need to address. What is less well accepted or understood is the fact, that in order to do so, we must take practical steps to put communications high on the national agenda. Although no-one would actually argue with this proposition, there are clear signs that, in practice, communications enjoys a relatively low status in the machinery of government. This is

reflected in the uneven and often inadequate delivery of information by different sections of government, the low pay and ranking of government communicators, the failure to recognise communications as a profession in its own right (and not just something that can be taken on by an expert in another field), and in a lack of understanding of the role of press - both by government and in some sections of the press itself.

Thus, it is true to say that, whatever structural, infrastructural or other changes are made, if government in its entirety does not develop an understanding of the role of communications, together with the political will to ensure professionalism, efficiency and information delivery at all levels, the opportunities presented by the new recommended system cannot be realised.

In short, in countries where communications is seen and generally accepted to be successful, the one common factor is its established and recognised place and role in democratic government.

8.3 TAILORING SOUTH AFRICA'S COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

The ultimate goal of the Task Group's vision is the creation of a communication and information system tailored to meet the demands of the broader democratic human rights environment within the particular needs and constraints of the South African context.

Many of the problems government is experiencing can be traced directly to the inherited structures through which it must conduct its dialogue with society. Even where there have been attempts at transforming those structures, the way communications relates to government structures makes effective communications delivery unwieldy and difficult.

As a result, the Task Group has given a great deal of attention, first, to examining the structures that exist and, second, to redefining the basis on which a government communication system should work.[33]

The proposed new structures take a number of important factors into consideration:

8.3.1 The need to put elected government in control of communications.

The present arrangements separate the policy making function from the communications that should - according to all the laws of democratic accountable government - support this function. The new proposed system will ensure that government is empowered with a communications arm that accounts directly to and through the political process and reflects decision making and priorities at Cabinet level. Thus Cabinet itself should drive and direct overall policy with regard to communications, while the administration of that system should be directed from the Presidency. In addition, the entire status of communications and its practitioners must necessarily be raised.[34]

8.3.2 The need to coordinate messages.

The new system will recommend structural arrangements and relationships to ensure coordination and synchronisation of messages from the centre. Thus while implementation will continue to occur at the level of government closest to the structure in question, overall, centralised coordination is seen as essential.[35]

8.3.3 The need to reach communities via the three tiers of government

The new system will recommend direct structural responsibility for networking through the three tiers of government, thereby establishing vertical as well as horizontal coordination. The aim is to establish a coordinated network of information provision which will, in its turn, streamline information delivery at community level. The new system also envisages centralised support for community media and broadcasting where required.[36]

33   See Chapters 2,3 and 6 of this Report. See also Recommendations, Structures.
34   See Recommendations, Structures.
35   See Recommendations, Structures.
36   See Recommendations, Structures.

8.3.4 The need to provide limited service support

Although the overall principle is for streamlined, efficient internal services on a carefully rationalised basis, certain core services will be provided to government structures and communities. These core services will be centres of excellence functioning in a highly professional environment, based on a value for money approach.[37]

8.4 THE NEED FOR STRATEGIES AND OBJECTIVES.

The question of how to develop budgets, goals and strategies needs to be visited. Ad hoc communications is expensive and often wasteful. Furthermore, it often fails to meet targets and reach audiences.

In this regard, a more professional approach towards communications needs to be developed, including the institution of a culture of continuous evaluation of needs, audiences and objectives. The research conducted by the Constitutional Assembly must be commended.[38] It is only through such a process that communications can be tested for its effectiveness at all stages of the process.

8.5 THE NEED FOR CREDIBILITY

One of the aspects we have been forced to take into account is the credibility of the present arrangements. Our reasons are that, above all things, government communications must be seen as credible and trustworthy. People will not simply believe what they hear from structures they do not trust - structures indeed that they do not feel, in some way, that they own. This is so all over the world. In South Africa, Apartheid disinformation and propaganda has left a legacy of mistrust

8.6 THE NEED FOR CORPORATE IMAGE[39]

One of the aspects that arose during the Task Group's investigations is the failure of government to present a coherent corporate image to the public. This is reflected in a diverse array of stationery, in the failure to identify public buildings outside or to supply adequate signage inside, the way government presents to the public telephonically and by letter, etc. This must form a critical part of dialogue government must develop with society. Government must be seen to be transparent, accessible and, indeed, part of the fabric of society.

8.7 A PROFESSIONAL CORPS OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATORS

The key to making the new system work will be the development of a corps of highly professional communicators.[40]

The Task Group's recommendations will, therefore, indicate practical ways in which this can be achieved: through training programmes, mentorship and on-the-job training, accreditation and employment criteria, as well as new ranking. The present system of employing experts in other fields to play the role of communicators has been noted both as diminishing the expertise of a professional category all of its own and, frequently, resulting in inefficient delivery.

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37 See Recommendations, Structures and Recommendations Functions and Responsiblities.
38 A New Constitution for a New South Africa, Evaluating the Constitutional Assembly, CASE Report October 1996.
39 See Recommendations 53.
40 See Recommendations, Personnel and Training.

8.8 TRAINING

The Task Group will offer concrete recommendations with regard to the development of and budgeting for a specialised training programme for government communicators.

This training programme will be developed in cooperation with the private sector and will consist of topnotch training in a variety of focussed areas.[41]

8.9 STREAMLINED, EFFICIENT AND TRANSPARENT: THE WAY TO GO

Arising both out of investigations elsewhere and our assessment of current government policy and thinking, the Task Group identified a need to reduce bulky civil service structures and to replace and restructure them in a way that renders them streamlined, cost efficient and ultimately transparent.

This is, as indicated, in accordance with government policy which has committed itself to the reduction of a bloated civil service, and zero sum budgeting based on management by objectives. Budgets will no longer be granted according to some inherited notion from a previous year of what should be spent. They will be allocated on the basis of what government wants to achieve and how it plans to achieve it. Our recommendations reflect (and commend) this approach.[42]

Another crucial aspect of this is the need to eliminate wasteful and costly attempts to duplicate what civil society, by its very nature, does better than government. Government should act in partnership with society, not in competition.

There are thus four major benefits that accrue from the management by objectives approach:

8.9.1   Financial benefits

The financial benefits of this approach are clear. By introducing procedures for bulk buying and outsourcing, government can save (as demonstrated elsewhere) millions of rands. Instead of the cost of maintaining large staff components together with the back up and equipment required by such bloated structures government should be able to see a direct return for its communications investment.

8.9.2   Partnership with civil society

The second benefit lies in the way in which government communicates with civil society. The partnership principle implies that, rather than government attempting to duplicate what civil society does, it should work with civil society to attain its goals. Government should do what it does best; it should leave to civil society what it does best. Where common goals can be identified, government should enter into a relationship with civil society.

8.9.3   Empowering civil society

The third benefit lies in the consequent ability of government to impact on the communications profession in the private sector. By developing a coherent and balanced set of criteria for outsourcing, government can ensure that its broader policy objectives (e.g. affirmative action, the promotion of SMMEs) begin to be reflected in the private sector.

8.9.4   Value for money

The result of outsourcing and bulk buying, provided the criteria are right, will also result in government receiving better value for money. Because it will have access to the best, government's communications spend can be allocated to ensure the best possible results.

41   See Recommendations, Personnel and Training.
42   See Recommendations, Functions and Responsiblities and 8.22, Resource allocation and Budgets.

8.10 COMMUNICATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT

The new recommended system and its roles and responsibilities draws from the best and most effective practice of democracies throughout the world.

It is also, however, firmly rooted in the South African environment. It takes account of the fact that large parts of our society are information deprived. The worst scenario can be seen in our remote rural areas where some 30% of South Africans - the majority of them women - live, poor, isolated and out of touch with the rest of the country and, hence, with democracy itself.

No task is greater or more pressing than finding ways to alleviate the isolation of those who, through apartheid, poverty and present circumstance are deprived of the information with which to take control of their lives and enter into dialogue with government.

Our recommendations include a number of ways in which these problems can begin to be addressed, in partnership with other sectors of society - servicing at community level, the advancement of information technology, language strategies, the encouragement of community media and broadcasting, partnerships between government and other media producers. Others relate to the increased capacity of the national public broadcaster, telecommunications and other infrastructure.

8.11 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY & DEVELOPMENT[43]

South Africa, as the Task Group found during its research internationally, is seriously behind the world - including the developing world - in the area of information technology.

It is essential that South Africa focuses intensively on the rapid development of suitable infrastructure that will cover the country and link all areas - particularly those which are most information deprived - into one national network. Because, as in so many other areas, there has been a massive failure to keep pace with global developments in the past, the task will be massive and must begin virtually from the ground up.

The benefits, particularly to those with poor access to information, are as follows:

8.11.1   Basic information

Once the infrastructure is in place, information can be relayed to communities relatively cheaply. This means that, via an information network, people can gain access to government messages and information of all kinds that they need to run their daily lives.

8.11.2   Building dialogue

In addition, in a relatively cheap, effective and simple way, people can establish a dialogue with government through which they can express their views, make their complaints and ask for specific information.

8.11.3   Access to the world of information technology

The overall advantage is that such a network brings people into touch with a technology that is fast becoming a major focus of communication throughout the world. Many communities and previously disadvantaged groups are making use of this technology. Because of its flexibility - voice, pictures and written language - the user is also able to access information in a way that is appropriate, non-threatening, easy to use and ultimately empowering.

8.12 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FOR GENERAL GOVERNMENT USE[44]

The use of information technology, as has been observed, is poorly developed in government where it could do much to enhance delivery in a number of areas.

For professional communications purposes it is, to state the obvious, essential. Its development is, however, dependent on the design of a coherent, integrated system which networks with all sectors of government and government-related bodies as well as civil society for the benefit both of internal communications and broader communication with the public.

8.13 THE MEDIA: THE PRINCIPLE OF DIVERSITY[45]

The fewer the voices, the more blinkered the message. This has been one of the consequences of the patterns of ownership and control of media in our society. Ownership patterns are changing; control must still go through a transformation but these internal tasks must, on the whole, be performed by the media itself. It is now a free press, a press that is constitutionally beyond interference; but, like any other body with rights it must now undertake the obligation of its own transformation in order best to reflect the complex and diverse nature of our society.

It is the view of the Task Group that the issue of monopolies must, however, be dealt with within the broader framework of government policy.

Monopolies, effectively the means by which the resources of society can be kept, as it were, in-house to wealthy and powerful sectors, are being addressed in this country, as elsewhere, through a competitions policy. The United States Supreme Court has commented that: "Antitrust laws are the Magna Carta of free enterprise. They are as important to the preservation of economic freedom as the Bill of Rights is to the protection of our fundamental personal freedoms."

The Task Group believes that the issue of press monopolies, especially where they involve the ownership of other stages of the press chain - paper manufacture and distribution should be dealt with by the same process as other monopolistic structures - to which, indeed, they relate.

Diversity must be the goal. It is for this reason that the Task Group has also made recommendations aimed at the support of community media and broadcasting in an effort to increase the number of voices in society.

8.14 AN OPEN SOCIETY[46]

In order to strengthen the principles contained in the Constitution: the right to information and the right to freedom of expression, the Task Group will make certain recommendations and suggestions with regard to Open Democracy legislation and also the removal of anachronistic legislative restrictions that remain on the statute books.

8.15 THE PUBLIC BROADCASTER[47]

Over time, the SABC must transform itself into the national public broadcaster. Regulated by the IBA, it will be independent of government interference, but it will be accountable to society as a whole - to the greater good of all sectors.

In order to do this it must have funding from government and, in order to ensure that this funding cannot be tied, or bound by conditionalities, the Task Group makes recommendations on ways in which this complex relationship can be serviced.

44   See Recommendations, Development Information and Recommendations, Functions and Responsibilities (of the CSA).
45   See Recommendations, The Media Environment.
46   See Recommendations, Access to Information.
47   See Recommendations, The Media Environment.

8.16 CHANNEL AFRICA[48]

The Task Group will make recommendations in relation to the continued existence of Channel Africa and ways in which it can be funded.

8.17 COMMUNICATING INTERNATIONALLY[49]

The lack of a strategy and coordination in projecting South African policies and priorities was expressed forcibly by Heads of Mission in the countries visited by the Task Group. Lack of access to specialised services and resources, including Internet, were cited as major problems. These and other findings are reflected in research done by Foreign Affairs.

It was noted that the standard of delivery is lower than in many other countries - particularly those of the Americas, Europe and Asia. Comparable developing countries have Internet sites, and major efforts are made to make commercial and statistical information available in this way.

Similar problems relate to the way in which visitor support to South Africa - both state and lower status - is conducted.

Recommendations to improve this situation have been included.

8.18 THE QUESTION OF LANGUAGE[50]

A critical factor in the modern democracy is the growing demand on government to speak to the population in a language and manner they understand.

This has important implications as regards the use of language of choice which is, indeed, a constitutional requirement. This is an issue that government will have to grapple with, particularly once the Pan Language Board has developed its language policy. A great deal will hang on these policy proposals, particularly as regards the delicate problem (in the view of the Task Group) of balancing nation-building and unity with the right to communicate in the language of choice.

It must be noted that braille, signing and other such specialised languages need to be incorporated as languages in daily use by large numbers of people.[51]

There is, in addition, the problem (common throughout government and much of civil society) of language that is not plain. A growing and relatively well-established lobby exists (certainly in English-speaking countries and Scandinavia) premised on the belief that people have a right to read (or hear) and understand government documents. Legislation, contracts, official correspondence, forms and other written matter used by government must therefore come under scrutiny to ensure that ways are found to make them accessible.The British Rayner Commission is estimated to have resulted in direct savings to the British government of 15 million pounds with indirect savings of some 250 million pounds. The commission checked 171 000 government documents, scrapped 36 000 and revised another 58 000.[52]

8.19 LITERACY AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

One of the most serious results of apartheid education is that over half of our population cannot read. Solving this problem is not within the focus of the Task Group, but a couple

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48   See Recommendations, The Media Environment.
49   See Recommendations, Improving South Africa's Image in the World.
50   See Recommendations, Access to Information
51   See Recommendations, Access to Information.
52   See Recommendations 70 - 73.

of points need to be made where illiteracy or low literacy impacts on communications. The common response to the problem is to underline the need to use radio when speaking to communities with low literacy levels. Undoubtedly this is so. However, one must also be careful not to reinforce illiteracy by assuming that this is the only means of communication open to us. The effect of this is to deprive people of the opportunity of gaining familiarity with the written word. Print plays a different role to radio and is used in different ways.

At the same time, illiteracy is experienced by those who cannot read and write as a form of disability. Learning to read and deal with written texts is thus a form of empowerment. There is evidence, furthermore, that access to written texts automatically impacts on literacy levels.

It is therefore critical that government avoid the 'soft' option of simply using one means of communication to address a large section of our population. All people should have access to all forms of communication.

8.20 AFFIRMATIVE ACTION[53]

Affirmative action is a critical part of addressing the apartheid legacy and therefore a continuous theme in the Task Group's report. Affirmative action is implicit in all recommendations made to the Deputy President and must incorporate all sectors disadvantaged by apartheid, as well as by socio economic or other circumstance. Thus disadvantages with regard to gender, disability, age and other factors must be equally reflected. Diversity is an issue here, too, as, if the voices of government and society are male, young and able, the perspective of other groups will not be brought to bear and society will be the poorer for this.

Affirmative action must operate at three levels in the communication chain:

8.20.1 Audience

The needs, sensitivities, language, etc. of the audience must be considered at all times. Practically, this requires careful research and the application of continuously monitored systems of communication.

8.20.2 Communicator

The people who transmit the messages must represent all sectors of society. They must speak with the voices of society. This means that selection and training processes must be reviewed and overhauled.

8.20.3 The producer

Outsourcing provides excellent opportunities for the empowerment of sectors of society. The Task Group recommends procedures for the establishment of criteria to influence the development of private sector production capacity and skills training. This is also in tune with the notion of civil professional society in partnership with government

8.21 THE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE

It is the view of the Task Group, informed by local investigations and reinforced by its international research, that effective delivery in the government communication sector is immeasurably enriched by partnerships with civil society.

53   See footnote 7 on Qualifiers.

We are also informed by the broader political perspective of democracy as a process that calls for the integration - and not the separation - of government and society. The Task Group has noted with concern the tendency to duplication, even competition (with civil society) that exists in relation to government communications. For this reason it is in full support of the view, expressed in many countries visited, that government should do what it is elected to do. Where a function can be better performed by civil society, civil society should be used to perform that function. Failure to observe this principle results in the kind of bloated civil service we have today.

Liaison with civil society should, therefore, be a key element of the new communication and information system. And such liaison means more than occasional consultation or farming out the odd job. It means a process of building a relationship with those with the skills, the special knowledge and the networks to reach the nooks and crannies of our incredibly rich, complex society.

8.22 BUDGETS AND RESOURCES

It is recognised that Government faces severe financial constraints. The Task Group has, therefore, developed a framework for a new communication structure which will make efficient use of personnel and resources in the most streamlined manner.

The lack of a clear, agreed system for measuring costs and output also makes it difficult to precisely quantify the impact of the recommendations on the fiscus. Moreover, a detailed costing of the new system would be premature without certain key steps, including the personnel skills audit, the consultative process with the Public Administration Ministry and Public Service Commission, and the detailed design of the CSA. However, it is possible to provide some general comments on the cost impact.

We estimate that savings can be effected in the following ways:

- reduction of duplication, and greater integration of services (providing economies of scale)
- a reduced overall personnel component (in the range of 10-15%)
- lower advertising costs as a result of bulk buying by the CSA (a saving of at least R30m/year)

There will be some increased costs occasioned by the need to set up the new structure within the Presidency and the CSA, by the need to improve training and other services offered by government (e.g. funding for certain services such as the development information service and IT under the CSA), and by some increase in remuneration levels due to the proposed higher level of seniority of some communications personnel. We also believe that the efficiency of individual departments will require an increase in the share of their budget devoted to communications, although this has no net impact on government spending.

An established system for costing and measuring performance will also assist the drive for efficiency. Net savings to government purely on personnel and operations should be in the order of R50m per year, or between 10-15% of current costs.

We also recommend funding for public broadcasting and the community media sector. Parliament has already resolved to fund the public broadcaster on a triennial basis and our recommendation in this regard will hopefully facilitate the process. In the case of community media, government will be required to contribute part of these subsidies. The

willingness of foreign governments and institutions to support this system will ensure that the contribution by the South African government will be modest.

Overall, if the new system is implemented, there are grounds to believe that in the medium to long term savings can be in the order of hundreds of millions of rands. Moreover, the costs to government of the current system include "invisible" loses due the need to duplicate and repeat messages, and the loss of revenues from citizens outside the main economic system.

8.23 MAKING THE TRANSITION[54]

Finally, the Task Group recommends the transformation of government communications structures can proceed.

The Task Group believes it is essential that the wider community continue to be involved in the development of a new government communication system once the intensive phase we are currently involved in is complete.

On the basis that no structure has the capacity to transform itself, and following the principle of partnership with civil society, the Task Group will recommend an advisory body made up of representatives of the professional sector to donate their time and expertise to work with government for an interim period.

In this way, the communications and other related professions will become an integral part of the new government communications system from the start - creating the building blocks for a new and successful partnership.

54   See Recommendations, Structures, Communications 2000.