

Recommendations: Information Development

INFORMATION FOR EMPOWERMENT:

Working in partnership with society

The guiding framework should be the development of a network of information service delivery points throughout South Africa.

Via this network, and through the new government network based in the CSA, government will have the ability to connect with communities throughout the country.

This, or similar, systems are in current use in a large number of countries and are seen, ultimately as the most effective long-term way, on a mass basis, to:

- deliver information and government messages directly to communities in a regular, large scale and (once the infrastructure is in place) affordable way;
- open dialogue with the broader public through a two-way flow allowing for communication to, as well as from, government;
- deliver and receive information in a way that is versatile and takes account of illiteracy and visual or auditory disabilities as it gives the option of sound, images or the written word.
- provide large-scale access to information technology, in itself a development objective.

In the design of the government system, due attention should be given to the above factors, together with questions of accessibility of language, design and other access requirements. The principle should be that information provided must be accessible, usable and thus empowering.

Because there are a large variety of important initiatives, governmental, parastatal and in civil society, the government should attempt to help facilitate the development of a network of delivery agents, to ensure that, insofar as is possible, costly duplication and unco-ordinated delivery is avoided.

Recommendation 64

It is proposed that the design of the government electronic system give special attention to efficient co-ordination with existing networks as well as to the question of communications (design and language) that is accessible and ultimately empowering.

Particular note must be made of the Open Democracy initiative and the importance of ensuring that this legislation serves, not only those who already have access to information, but those who do not.

MULTIPURPOSE INFORMATION SERVICE CENTRES

Initiatives already underway to develop a network of Multipurpose Information Service Centres should be supported. A number of organisations, parastatals and other bodies have already done developmental and some implementation work in this regard. This work should be supported by government and every attempt should be made to facilitate co-ordination of activities, balanced distribution, adequate focus on remote areas and cost effective partnership agreements between the various players.

Such centres have been declared a Presidential Lead Project.

Recommendation 65

It is proposed that the GCIS promote and accelerate the development of Multi Purpose Information Centres.

THE ROLE OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS

The Department of Posts Telecommunications and Broadcasting has access to a network of post offices and agencies. If each post office and agency is supplied with a dedicated telephone line and solid state monitor, people visiting post offices can, in a variety of simple ways, access information and remain in touch with government thinking by image, voice or the written word.

The opportunity, therefore, exists for government to communicate directly with people through these means, as well as providing a mechanism whereby information can be requested and supplied.

As an initial step, this would be an important and implementable way of linking government with the people in a reasonably short period of time and at relatively low cost. It is noted that there is a possibility of commercial sponsorship in this regard.

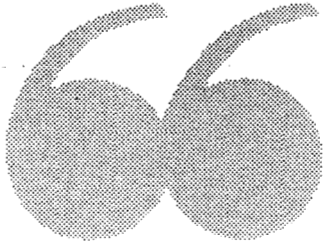
Recommendation 66

It is proposed that the GCIS give support to the Department of Posts Telecommunications and Broadcasting proposal for the development of a telecommunications project designed to link people, through post offices, with government information systems.

BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE

In order to achieve the objectives of linking the mass of the population and thereby addressing the massive disadvantages that result from 'isolation' from the main stream of world communication and information systems, we strongly recommend that government (via the GCIS) give attention to the urgent development of suitable infrastructure in the following areas:

- information technology infrastructure and the supply of at least one information point in each community within a reasonable period of time;
- broadcasting signal distribution so that the limited TV and radio footprint can be extended. In most developed countries, there is close to 100% coverage; in South Africa, the figure is well short of this. Transmitters need to be installed in rural areas and linked with satellite systems.



Recommendation 67

It is proposed that the capacity and extent of existing infrastructure be bolstered and extended, and that information technology infrastructure and broadcasting networks be developed and put in place as soon as practicable.

The information and communication development drive should become a factor in other key government sectoral work such as the National Youth Commission, the Women's Desk, the Disability Desk and so on.