

TOWARDS EFFECTIVE INTEGRATED GOVERNANCE AND COMMUNICATION

Communitas

ISSN 1023-0556

2002 7: 123-125

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In his State of the Nation address in February this year, President Mbeki created a platform for the National Communication Strategy for Government. The key message was: Lend a hand in the partnership against poverty. As professional communicators we should devote our energies and direct our efforts towards this goal. The Government Communication Strategy also demands *inter alia* a people-centred government which is effective, integrated and interactive.

The Free State provincial government aligns itself to national priorities. The following key objectives are identified in the Free State Development Plan:

- Enhancing economic development and job creation;
- Providing and facilitating sustainable infrastructure development;
- Investing in the development of people of the Province;
- Ensuring a safe and secure environment; and
- Good/co-operative governance with sustainable use of resources and the environment.

President Mbeki also referred to integrated governance and communication in his State of the Nation address early this year. It is for this reason that we have Ministers and Director Generals Clusters and a President Coordinating Council that consists of all Premiers. This is done to have an integrated approach towards problem solving and effective communication.

There is a need for integrated governance and communication. Despite numerous efforts and endeavors that Government has taken to speed up service delivery, many of our people still complain about

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Government's service delivery and lack of information. The report from a team of academics at the University of Stellenbosch led by Professor Willie Esterhuyse found that "communication by government is not always optimum". This team provided a fair assessment of Government's work in 2001/2002.

Government has also in all its tiers engaged in an Imbizo programme as a style of interactive governance and communication. The focus of these Imbizos is to involve people in a partnership with Government in order to deal in a lasting way with the scourge of poverty.

The Free State Department of Tourism, and Environmental & Economic Affairs, for which I am responsible, has been charged with the task of finding ways to fight poverty in the Province. As provincial government we are of the view that, in the current macro-economic context, entrepreneurship development and Small and Medium Market Enterprise (SMME) promotion are imperative, in order to create both short and long term capacity for labour absorption and output growth, as well as to improve income generation and redistribution. Throughout the world one finds that SMMEs are playing a critical role in absorbing labour, penetrating new markets, and generally in expanding economies in creative and innovative ways. They are also often the vehicles by which the lowest income people gain access to economic opportunities.

Let me also mention the one industry, namely tourism that is very important if we are to do away with this whirlpool of poverty. The Province, in an effort to develop the Free State as a tourism destination for both national and international tourists, intends launching marketing campaigns that will expose tourists to its diverse attractions – from the beautiful, majestic mountains in the east to the vast open spaces of the southern Free State. We are responding to the challenge of marketing our natural resources to the whole world.

In embracing this challenge we as communicators must believe in ourselves and the products we communicate to others. Only then will other people believe in us.

Our society is continuously moving towards a knowledge-based economy: an economy in which the application of knowledge plays an even more important role than capital, raw materials, and labour as the main means of production. The synergy of combining news information and communication technologies with human skills has dramatically altered job content and skills requirements at the work

place. Good jobs have become technologically complex and are demanding sophisticated work skills. Simple, routine and low-level functions are diminishing.

The perception of the role of human interventions in the economy has also changed. The potential contribution that an individual can make in acquiring and applying knowledge for improving processes, products and services is becoming more important than the physical labour. The knowledge embodied in a product has become a key element of production.

The above emphasises the fact that we should be innovative. We must not just be followers, but also leaders in a true business sense.