

Implementation Strategies of the National Information and Communication Policy

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In order for a nation's people to fully utilise their communication potential as well as to protect them from communication abuse, the nation must establish legal guidelines on communication. These must include protections and limitations. Papua New Guinea is fortunate in possessing clear legal statements on both aspects.

The Constitution, as the nations' highest legal authority, provides both principles and specific statements related to communication. Fundamental to the Constitution are five National Goals and Directive Principles which themselves underscore implicitly the basic need for communication both to the nation's people and from them.

These Goals are:

1. Integral Human Development

We declare our first goal to be for every person to be dynamically involved in the process of freeing himself or herself from every form of domination or oppression so that each man or woman will have the opportunity to develop as a whole person in relationship with others.

2. Equality and Participation

We declare our second goal to be for all citizens to have an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, the development of our country.

3. National Sovereignty and Self-Reliance

We declare our third goal to be for Papua New Guinea to be politically and economically independent and, our economy basically self-reliant.

4. National Resources and Environment

We declare our fourth goal to be for Papua New Guinea's natural resources and environment to be conserved and used for the collective benefit of us all, and be replenished for the benefit of future generations.

5. Papua New Guinea

We declare our fifth goal to be to achieve development primarily through the use of Papua New Guinea forms of social, political and economic organization.

Beyond these generalized directives, the Constitution explicitly specifies every persons' rights to the Freedom of Expression and Information.

It stipulates clearly that in the enjoyment of these Rights, individuals may not prejudice the rights and freedoms of others of the legitimate public interest.

The fist of these Rights is guaranteed to all persons, whether citizens or non-citizens. In Section 46, Freedom of Expression is stated essentially as follows;

1. Every person has the right to freedom of expression and publication, except to the extent that the exercise of the right is regulated or restricted by a law.
2. In Subsection (I), "freedom of expression and publication" includes:
 - (a) freedom to hold opinions, to receive ideas and information, whether to the public generally or to a person or class of persons; and
 - (b) freedom of the press and other mass communications media.
3. Notwithstanding anything in this Section, an Act of Parliament may make reasonable provision for securing reasonable access to mass communications media for interested persons and associations:-
 - (a) for the communication of ideas and information; and
 - (b) to allow rebuttal of false or misleading statements concerning their acts, ideas or beliefs;

and generally for enabling and encouraging freedom of expression.

The second major Constitutional statement on communication distinguishes between the right to express information as stated above, and the right of access to information.

Citizens have the privilege of both of these rights, while non-citizens do not enjoy the automatic right to access to information. This restriction was motivated by the belief that non-citizens are capable of exercising considerable influence on national public opinion.

I could go on and cite Section 51 of the Constitution which deals with "The Right to Freedom of Information." But what's the point? Why start with the Constitution, when I'm to give "an account of the National Information and Communication Policy (NICP) and steps that need to be taken towards its implementation."

I deliberately began my paper this morning by drawing your attention to the National Constitution, in particular, to the National Goals and Directive Principles, and to Sections 46 and 51 which deals with "Freedom of Expression" and "Right to Freedom of Information", respectively. There are three basic reasons for this modus operandi, which I will go on to explain.

1. The Right to Communicate.

The history of the emergence of a right to communicate, or at least discussion of the question is well known. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights specifies that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

Allied with this formulation is the notion of "free flow of information" :the view that everyone, including groups of people, should be free to collect and disseminate information essentially without hindrance. This principle goes hand in hand with one of the basic beliefs of the founders of our Constitution.

- a. Communication is a basic right guaranteed by the Constitution, in particular, in the National Goals and Directive Principles. Thus, Communication is a right and must be equal with other rights. Like Article 19 of the Universal Declaration, it includes the right to inform and to be informed, the right to freedom of expression, the right to freedom of information and assembly, and the right to communication opportunities.
- b. Communication is fundamental for human cohabitation, and as such, is subject only to the rights of others under the Constitution.

2. Development Strategies and Policy Initiatives.

- a. National development strategies and policies should not deviate from the National Goals and Directive Principles enshrined in the Constitution. In order to effectively plan for the wisest and most economic use of the communication resources for maximum benefit, and in keeping with our overall goals, it is necessary to determine what principles of communication we will establish and build upon.
- b. Communication is indeed an important element in the matrix of influences which can lead to innovation and modernisation of society. If planned and then used constructively for the widest good, the medium of communication can create an environment conducive to change and development.
- c. Communication can enlarge horizons, bringing information about the experiences of tribes such as the Bougainvilleans, Tolais, the Hagahais, or of the little community of men isolated from their families on the Kumul Terminal in the Gulf of Papua. It can enhance our knowledge about other life forms and the environment on the Martian planet.

- d. There is a need for us to plan in agriculture, commerce, manufacturing, health, transport and communication, social and community services. Plans take shape in accordance with national directives and policy decisions about the kind of society the government and the people want. This includes the priorities for economic development, the importance placed on education, on the retention of cultural values and the speed of progress and development deemed necessary by the policy makers.
- e. Communication, therefore, is part and parcel of the whole process of development and needs its own infrastructure. It is a misconception for anyone to believe or think of communication only in the context of telecommunication, radio, television, telephones, facsimiles and newspapers. Communication doesn't only refer to the mass media, but also to all those resources used by a society to enable information in a society to flow within it. It must include, organised face-to-face communication, such as is involved in rural extension and communication development work; and the traditional channels used by a society or a tribe to pass on knowledge and information at the grass-roots level, may it be a smoke signal from a mountain-top or valley, blowing of a conch shell or the beating of a garamut.

Traditionally, rudimentary but skill communications allowed our ancestors to relate meaningfully to their environment and to modify and adopt to new forms of existence. It is quite unfortunate that we have not until today, appreciated the importance of communication as one of the most fundamental forces of change for our socio-political evolution.

3. Principles of National Information and Communication Policy

It is no coincidence that the writers of the National Information and Communication Policy have to start from the nation's highest legal authority to provide the principles and statements related to communication. In the preamble to the National Information and Communication Policy, it is explicitly stated;

"The basic rights guaranteed by the National Constitution, in particular, the National Goals and Directive Principles shall be upheld in our National Information and Communication Policy, and in all future endeavours and the expressions of the policy.

In this policy we shall strive to ensure: "Better information and Communication for all." The development of an appropriate information and communication policy is not entirely a new initiative. I'll walk you back the memory lane.

In 1978, a group of experts advising UNESCO on its Communication Policies Conferences for Asia and the Pacific has this to say to Papua New Guinea at a Policy Seminar held here in Port Moresby, almost 19 years ago. This is what the experts told us.

- (a) A national communication policy would create in a country the climate and the spirit of common endeavour:

- (b) It would help ensure the optional and systematic use of the communication resources of a country in its efforts at social, cultural and economic development”
- (c) It would ensure also that the people of a country were not only kept informed of developments relevant to their daily life, but motivated in a sustained way to contribute to and participate in their country’s efforts at development.
- (d) It would bring about the much needed co-operation between the various agencies and organisations in the public and private sectors which are actively engaged in the collection, processing and dissemination of information.
- (e) It would facilitate and encourage participation of the public in communication activities which are by and large presently one-way and vertically downwards in the social structure.
- (f) The formulation of a communication policy, with the involvement of all interested sectors and institutions in a society, would promote that development of a rational structure for communication activities and help reduce unnecessary duplication of work, redundancy, and the wastage of limited resources.

Following the UNESCO policy conference in Port Moresby, ground-breaking work for the development of an appropriate information and communication policy began to take shape in 1978 and 79.

These submissions were made through a committee commissioned and appointed by the Government to review information services in the country, headed by the late Leo Morgan. Consequently, the Morgan Committee in 1978, among other pertinent issues “recommended to the government to recognise the strategic role of communication in all aspects of development and give it high policy priority.” The Committee wrote - and I quote: “At the direction of the Minister for Media, the Research Branch of the Office of Information began work on the policy in early 1978”. Its mandate was to:-

- (a) Co-ordinate all forms of communication in relation to the strategy for national development,
- (b) Ensure that adequate planning for communication is taken into account at all levels; and
- (c) Ensure that alternatives, choices and the location of decision making operations be supplied to the people through appropriate communication systems, so that participation in development becomes a practical reality.

The research group, later formed under the Policy Secretariat Division, immediately began gathering first-hand information from as many individuals, both within government employment and outside it, who have experience and/or knowledge about existing communication needs, then.

Approximately 100 interviews were conducted with representatives of national government departments and most communication agencies outside the government structure. Eight leaders of provincial governments were consulted, in an attempt to formulate comprehensively and realistically a communication policy of maximum good to the entire nation.

Then an Information Paper on this was submitted to the National Executive Council in May, 1978.

In addition to the interviews conducted, public seminars were also organised to;

- (a) Further inform the public about communication as a priority in development,
- (b) Allow them to become more aware of the drafting of a communication policy; and
- (c) Allow them to further express concerns for the structure of the policy.

The Morgan Committee received submissions from all sectors of the community while it was reviewing information services in the country. Then years later, the 1987 Report of the Board of Inquiry into Broadcasting (including Television, also known as the Kalo Report) under the Chairmanship of Sir Kwamala Kalo laid appropriate solid ground work of policies to provide legislative direction in operation both broadcast and cable television.

Round about this time also, mention should be made about the aborted efforts of a former Minister for Communication, Hon. Gabriel Ramoi, MP, to legislate the media in the country. The recommendations of committees, conferences and efforts of individuals were further acknowledgement of the need and for the formulation of the current National Information and Communication Policy in 1994.

After the 1992 National General Elections, the Wingti-Chan government of the Fifth National Parliament recognised that it had to get involved in the total communication system of the country if they were to protect the rights of individual citizens, the rights of the social groups, particularly minority groups, and the sovereignty and the cultural autonomy of the nation as a whole.

Development of the communication system, and the resultant effects of that communication system on political, economic and social development could not be left solely in the hands of the various communication industries in the country. The communication system had to be made to serve the needs and aspirations of the nation's citizens and reflect their values rather than the needs or wants of foreign nations, transnational corporations or the country's own wealthiest citizens. This is primarily why we needed to put in place a National Information and Communication Policy.

The National Information and Communication Policy was a major initiative of the Wingti-Chan government. Unlike any other governments before, it was committed to increasing

the opportunities for our people to actively engage in their own personal development and in the development of the nation.

This government committed itself to strategies aimed at bringing the entire PNG community closer together through communication, making the centre of power more sensitive and responsive to the needs of the community. And, in turn, providing the community with the information, skills and resources necessary for participation in our common endeavour.

Until then, limited attention and lip-service was paid to the development of an appropriate umbrella policy to enhance information and communication process in the country, in a coherent manner. Whatever information and communication related policies developed were done with the aim of fulfilling specific sectoral requirements. The Information Technology (IT) policy by Department of Personnel Management (DPM), policy on Library and Archives by the Department of Education, policy covering Post and Telikom and the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) to name a few.

The 1987 Kalo Report that I mentioned earlier in this paper lays appropriate groundwork for policies to provide legislative direction in operating both the radio and television broadcast.

However, certain operators in the country have taken advantage of the absence of a clearly defined policy on television, to tap into satellite broadcasting. Random importation of communication equipment and appliances indicates lack of guidelines in the standard of items imported.

All media industries in Papua New Guinea operate without proper government policy directives, whether legislative or administrative, leaving the country open to unscrupulous media persons to take advantage of the policy vacuum.

These are a few indications for the urgency of the need to establish sound policy guidelines for information and communication development in the country to keep pace with the global technological advances.

Communication is information based in the sense that good part of communication processes are based on information. Information, therefore, forms a significant function in communication. The National Information and Communication Policy took a broad view of the whole spectrum of communication to service the cause of information flow and communication processes in development.

The major goal of the National Information and Communication Policy was to provide a co-ordinated umbrella policy directions in information and communication to enhance developmental processes in the country.

As well as upholding the basic rights guaranteed to us by the Constitution, it is based on Christian values and principles. It further takes into account specific sectoral policies in existence, gives strong support and complements other policy initiatives, and sets out

broad guidelines for the development of information and communication in enhancing overall development strategies for Papua New Guinea.

The National Information and Communication Policy adopted by Parliament in February 1994, paved the way for the information and communication industry in Papua New Guinea to be regulated in a more coherent manner.

The policy also provides for the establishment of a National Information and Communication Council (NIC) to oversee the effective implementation, control and co-ordination of the policy. The Council would act as the advisory body with members drawn from both government, statutory organisations, and the non government sector.

When established it would have sub committees, study groups or task forces on specific aspects of communication development, and make recommendations to the Council on policy issues, priorities, co-ordination, and strategies for utilizing communication for social purposes.

The established National Information and Communication Policy covers major policy areas. These include telecommunication and postal services; print media; book publishing; radio and television broadcasting; film and cinema; traditional and group media; interpersonal communication; information services; information technology; information technology standards; audio visual media; human resource and communication training; communication research; news agency; advertising; copyright; movie industry rating and code of ethics. And all this requires effective implementation by an agency of the government responsible for policy development, implementation and co-ordination.

There is a need for an agency responsible for the development, implementation and co-ordination of the policy. This need has been hampered by constant changes, lack of vision and priority by governments, since the decade of the seventies. The Office of Information and Communication and Extension Services was established with the responsibility of dissemination of development information relating to political, economic, social and cultural development in the country. The Office status was upgraded to a department level and it became the Department of Information and Extension Services (DIES). The government in its endeavour to rationalise the Public Service abolished the Department and its functions in the 1980s.

Only a marginal functional responsibility was maintained in the Department of the Prime Minister and NEC through the National Information Services (NIS).

It was not until 1992 after the National General Elections as pointed out earlier, that the need arose again for an agency responsible for policy and regulatory matters to be established. Hence, the Department of Information and Communication was established. Again, the government's rationalisation of the Public Service saw the Department abolished in 1995 and its status reduced to an Office, administratively linked to the Department of Prime Minister and NEC, as before. These sort of arrangements, off, on and off, can only be described as short sighted.

The short-sightedness caused lots of confusion and inconsistencies of the government policy direction. There were good intentions made known that Department of Information and Communication, now the Office of Information and Communication would become an important agency, responsible for policy and regulatory matters relating to information and communication.

For the media to be responsible, the government needs an effective agency, to carry out that function. The National Information and Communication Policy cannot be effectively implemented until all administrative arrangements are put in place properly. A responsible government cannot allow the media organisations in a country to operate in a policy vacuum.

Further, there is a need for the government to support the agency with necessary resources. The agency cannot function without backing or financial resources. Grand plans can be made, grand policies can be written, but if the resources are not forthcoming and if the governments cannot set its priority right, then all exercise is in futile.

It is pleasing to note that the current government has shown keen interest about creating a separate department for the Information and Communication ministry. The new Minister for Communication, Hon Simeon Wai made this point very clear through the media during his first week in office stating that he will be seeking cabinet endorsement for the setting up of a new department.

This will upgrade the current Office status back to a department with at least department powers to effectively coordinate and facilitate the implementation of the National Information and Communication Policy.

The important achievement since the inception of this policy is the recent corporatisation of the most important Statutory Organisations within the ministry. Notably the then National Broadcasting Commission now known as the National Broadcasting Corporation.

And almost simultaneously, the former Post and Telecommunication Corporation, previously known in short for PTC was broken into three separate companies. These three companies are today known as Telikom PNG charged with the telecommunication business activities, Post PNG taking the postal services and the third one PNGTEL taking the most important role of spectrum management to monitor and regulate the telecommunication market.

Some critics are already complaining to the government that Spectrum management role is an important asset for the state and should not be performed by the industry whilst at the same time expected to monitor and regulate the market.

The Office of Information and Communication, in consultation with the management of Pangtel will be addressing this issue very closely in the immediate future to come up with an appropriate advise for the government on this question. Many of these critics claim

that Pangtel's existence among the telecommunication industry players somewhat constitutes a conflict of interest. Well let's appreciate, the first and foremost important achievement is that this function has been taken away from an organisation which was carrying out three distinct roles. Previously PTC was responsible for spectrum management as well as providing telecommunication services and postal services. Perhaps all other anomalies that may have been created in haste will be corrected when the mistakes are picked up.

Having said this, we need to appreciate the fact that the policy addresses so many areas of information and communication. Implementation of all these information and communication aspects are catered for in different sectors. Just to name a few:

1. TELECOMMUNICATIONS:

(a) Improvement and Expansion of Telecommunication Services: Policy Ref: 2.1.1

- (i) Rural Telecommunication Programme.
- (ii) Establishment of Pacific Mobile Pty Ltd.
- (iii) Easy Pay Telephone Service.
- (iv) Pacstar Satellite Development
- (v) Voicemail Service, etc.

(b) Radio Frequency Spectrum: Policy Ref: 2.1.2

- (i) Valuing radio frequency spectrum as a national asset.
- (ii) Establishment of PNGTEL Pty Ltd as the sole regulatory and licensing authority.

(c) Carrier Privatisation: Policy Ref: 2.1.7

Corporatisation of PTC in three (3) different corporate entities;

- (i) Telikom PNG
- (ii) Post PNG and
- (iii) PNGTEL PNG Pty Ltd

2. BROADCASTING

(a) Ownership and expansion of Broadcast Media: Policy Ref: 2.5.1

Corporatisation of;

- (i) National Broadcasting Commission, and
- (ii) Establishment of Nau FM broadcasting services.

(b) Programme Standard: Policy Ref: 2.5.3

(i) Improved broadcasting programmes and programme output.

3. POSTAL SERVICES

(a) Improved Postal Services in PNG: Policy Ref: 2.5.5

(i) Rural Postal Service

(ii) Express Mail Service

(iii) Electronic Mail Transfer

There is a need to have an umbrella legislation to cover all areas of information and communication development and management in the country. As the government policies on commercialisation, corporatisation and privatisation of government agencies continue in particular, in media industry, the government must regulate those activities.

Nothing will be done in isolation. There will be consultation between the industry, community leaders, non government organisations, interest groups and all other parties affected by any move to bring new legislation. The current existing PTC legislation including Post and telegraph Act, Postal and Telecommunication Corporation Act and Radio Communication Act needs to be updated. There are still some grey areas that are misleading which caused previous government some problems.

For example, in the Radio Communication Act, the Minister for Communication has an "exclusive privilege" to issue or grant licenses. There is no clear cut provision for who is to do what or who is responsible for what. The National Broadcasting Corporation Act needs urgent reviewing as it has now been corporatised. Same applies to the Printing Act which the Government Printing Office administers. The Defamation Act is outdated and needs urgent attention for updating as well as the Censorship Board Act. These Acts were based on what the situation was like at the time. This is now 1997, and the 21st Century is just around the corner. Traditional cultures have been influenced by the modern lifestyle and the coming of new technologies must be taken into consideration.

Papua New Guinea being "free society" cannot be taken for granted. Media must be regulated through the effective implementation of the provisions of the Constitution, in particular Sections 46 & 51. The adoption of the National Information and Communication Policy by National Parliament in February 1994 is just the first hurdle. The implementation is next, and it requires political direction to support the existing machinery with the much needed resources to effectively co-ordinate, and facilitate the implementation of the National Information and Communication Policy.

Efforts are being made by relevant media and communication organisations in the country to implement the National Information and Communication Policy. And whilst we would encourage and highly commend these efforts, it is regretted though that these efforts are not been regulated nor monitored due to lack of resources.

