

**Information and Communication Technology
Policy
in the Republic of Namibia**

**Draft Policy Proposals
for the Department of Foreign Affairs, Information
and Broadcasting**

Submitted by Schoemans Office Systems

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Executive Summary

Namibia has been developing a modern information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure over several years. There is now a wide range of fixed and mobile telephone services as well as Internet access throughout the country, although rural communities remain poorly serviced. Several policy processes are underway to help shape the use of ICT by government and in the educational sector in particular. The Namibian Communications Commission has tabled a framework for telecommunications regulation. Most recently, in response to the guidelines of the African Information Society Initiative (AISI), the Department of Foreign Affairs, Information and Broadcasting established a national coordinating body for ICT—the Resource Network Group (RNG)—and charged it with the responsibility of tabling a draft ICT Policy in 2001. The RNG in turn commissioned the present team of consultants to conduct the necessary work. The results are contained in this document.

The team carried out its study in light of many similar studies in other developed and developing countries. Chapter Two describes the study methodology that combined desk research into international and African ICT trends with specific data gathering to understand the state of ICT in Namibia. The team interviewed nearly a hundred major role-players in the public and private sector—both suppliers and users of ICT facilities—and conducted three workshops to consolidate, test and ratify the findings and surface perceptions for future activity and priority actions. In particular well-known research findings as to country transitions from developing to developed status were used to structure the survey instrument used in the interviews. The study also drew on very current assessment methods and chose a particular framework to assess both urban and rural Namibia’s “readiness” to become a Networked Society.

Chapter Three summarises the extraordinary range of programmes, projects and initiatives underway throughout the world to work out how to exploit available and expected technologies for social and economic gain. In particular the current G8-country initiated “DOT Force” initiative involving some twenty developed and developing countries is noted. The activities underway in Africa are of special interest since they squarely address the narrowing of the so-called digital divide. Here the Economic Commission for Africa’s AISI programme is most prominent. Among other things the chapter makes clear that Namibia needs to remain fully up to date with international developments and continue to participate as fully as possible in the ongoing global and African ICT dialogues.

The legal and regulatory frameworks that underpin ICT and electronic commerce in particular are the subject of Chapter Four. There it is noted that Namibia has well formulated proposals for telecommunications regulation and liberalisation and recommends that they be implemented, possibly with modification to reflect the rapid changes in cellular telephony. The chapter goes into much more detail as to the type of legislation needed to foster e-commerce, because the country has paid very little attention to that topic so far. It covers several areas, discussing the international position, Namibia’s legal and statutory position and recommendations for action. Internationally the so-called UNCITRAL Model Law for Electronic Commerce is receiving wide acceptance as a basis for going forward. This report recommends it as a start-

ing point for Namibia as well, noting that a follow on Due Diligence Report is an essential precursor to legislative change.

Chapter Five summarises the rich set of quantitative and qualitative data gathered during the structured interview process and the workshops. The results show those aspects of ICT policy and practice that key role players from government, education, the parastatals and the private sector regard as most important and having the most impact on the country. The analysis allows us to identify “gaps,” the largest of which relate to improving rural access to information, the growing of the ICT professional community, the improvement of public ICT education and appropriate legislation to foster electronic commerce. The second workshop in this study specifically set out to explore the potential of multi-purpose telecentres in Namibia. The specially invited participants offered much useful input to shape future action in this area. It is clear that there are several projects already underway that could deliver educational material, enable e-commerce and provide access to government information to rural communities. An important recommendation of this report is that these and any new programmes be conducted in an open and transparent fashion to avoid wasting resources and ensure maximum synergy.

Current policy making and future ICT activities must be carried out in light of the state of ICT in Namibia. Chapters Six and Seven report on the state of the ICT infrastructure and existing patterns of usage by government and the private sector. The growth of the telecommunications backbone, the provision of Internet services and the stock of computer hardware and software are noted. In the Usage chapter, the rather limited usage of ICT in government and the manufacturing sector is highlighted. By contrast, the banking sector appears to be quite active in its promotion of ICT-based services. The great potential of ICT to support the tourism sector—as yet hardly tapped—emerges clearly.

Chapter Eight deals with the key issue of human resources and human resource development for the ICT sector. Namibia, as most countries, appears to be suffering a brain drain of ICT professionals. This is most pronounced in the public sector, with qualified staff leaving for better pay in the private sector, or leaving from both sectors for other countries. The chapter discusses reward structures and other incentives to retain and recruit staff. It also notes the very important role of industry bodies serving the needs of the ICT professional. The chapter discusses the existing ICT Education Policy, which has yet to be implemented. It also describes the school and university educational environment in both face-to-face and distance learning modes. There are several recommendations designed to bolster ICT education and ensure a growing skilled ICT labour pool.

The final chapter consolidates the findings of the study. It presents several overall findings to supplement the detailed recommendations of the earlier chapters. There are a very limited number of actions that are critical to the successful implementation of an ICT Policy for Namibia. Namibia has to succeed in those areas if it is to reap the rewards in the other areas. Essential are

A strong national body with committed leadership to guide the implementation of ICT Policy

and

A detailed implementation plan that defines indicators against which to measure success, lays out practical growth steps towards achievable targets, names responsible parties and sets realistic timelines.

Success in those critical areas will allow achievement of the detailed policy recommendations contained in the chapters of this report and especially those the team has identified as high priority in relation to the largest perceived gaps:

To enhance rural access to information:

- ❑ Strongly support and encourage synergy between the existing multi-purpose telecentre and community centre projects.
- ❑ Realise the proposed Universal Service Agency and corresponding Universal Service Fund comprising mandatory contributions from all telecommunications licensees

To grow and stabilise the ICT professional community:

- ❑ Encourage immigration of skilled ICT workers
- ❑ Form a single Namibian ICT Association
- ❑ Provide incentives to all government employees to obtain ICT qualifications

To facilitate excellent ICT public education, especially in schools

- ❑ Recognise ICT qualifications as a key factor in the promotion of teachers
- ❑ Continue to support schools connectivity through strong initiatives such as SchoolNet
- ❑ Revise the 1995 IT in Education Policy and implement it

To foster e-commerce, e-business and e-government

- ❑ Amend all relevant laws
- ❑ Establish appropriate statutory bodies to manage the e-enabled environment
- ❑ Carry out a pilot e-procurement project in government

To strengthen the existing ICT infrastructure

- ❑ Proceed with the programme of liberalisation of the telecommunications environment

To grow the ICT industry

- ❑ Create an ICT cluster in Windhoek linking the ICT industry, academic institutions and government.

The existing RNG is the appropriate starting point for an effective “Namibian Council for ICT,” but needs a re-defined mandate and review of membership criteria. As regards indicators, there are several in place already and those can be extended and refined along the lines of the “Readiness Guide for the Networked Society.” Suggestions are made as to how to move forward on those factors as well as with all the other recommendations listed above.

In contrast with most countries in Africa, Namibia has a well-developed telecommunications infrastructure upon which to build. Over the last few years the country has also carried out several policy actions designed to exploit ICT for social and economic growth. The study team was struck by the enthusiasm of those interviewed and the visible, widespread commitment to make ICT work for the country. The study team believes that Namibia is now well-positioned to take strong advantage of the opportunities afforded by the new information and communication technologies and the massive potential of globalisation in the Information Age. What remains is effective and aggressive implementation of the actions recommended in this draft policy document.

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