

“According to the European Commission, the importance of ICT lies less in the technology itself than in its ability to create greater access to information and communication in underserved populations. Many countries around the world have established organisations for the promotion of ICTs, because it is feared that unless less technologically advanced areas have a chance to catch up, the increasing technological advances in developed nations will only serve to exacerbate the already-existing economic gap between technological “have” and “have not” areas.”



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This is the crux of why the Helen Suzman Foundation has chosen to look at the subject. The Foundation’s aim is to promote liberal constitutional democracy, and the Constitution obliges the Government to establish an “Independent Authority to Regulate Broadcasting (section 192). The Bill of Rights also gives expression to a range of rights from equality, human dignity, freedom of expression, freedom of trade, occupation and profession, to housing, health care, social security, education, and access to information. Many of these rights can be realized and exercised through and with access to affordable technology.

ICT stands for “information and communication technology” and is an umbrella term that includes any communication device or application, encompassing: radio, television, cellular phones, computer and network hardware and software, satellite systems and so on, as well as the various services and applications associated with them, such as videoconferencing and distance learning. The emphasis in this edition of *Focus* is on cellular telephony and the Internet; but our writers also review the history of some of the regulators, the ANC’s discussion document, and the National Planning Commission on ICT and its regulation.

For those not intimately involved in any of the ICT sectors, or those of us who are barely “literate” in ICT terms, or where our sense of ICT regulation and business is patchy, we trust that this edition of *Focus* should help to clarify some misconceptions, explain some concepts and provide intriguing insights into the unavoidable future.

John Mattison begins our discussion with personal reflections of his period at the Independent Broadcasting Authority. He provides us with a short history of broadcasting in order to contextualize the changes which came in the wake of the democratic dispensation. His concluding remarks are sobering, and his observation that the public broadcasting sector, despite the constitutional injunction to be independent, is highly politicized. He ends with a counterfactual conclusion: if the Telkom monopoly had been managed or broken... so that the massive funds washing around the telecom sector in the 1990s had been allowed to go to a competing telecommunications provider, our world internet standing would have been higher, we would have been a bigger factor in the world information economy, and many very good, clean, above ground jobs would have been created.

Sara Gon condenses and summarizes the ANC’s communication policy discussion document. She points out that unlike many other discussion documents that the ANC released in April 2012 which were replete with ideological clichés and short on analysis and proposals, this document is frank in its assessment of ICTs in South Africa.

Jane Duncan responds to the ANC's discussion document. She is sober in her assessment that society's key problems cannot really be solved by an "add ICTs and stir" approach. She does point out that what is particularly noteworthy about the document is that, for the first time, ANC policy making on communications focuses on the state of the ICT sector, and not just on the legacy media.

Alison Gillwald places the whole question of ICT within the context of the National Development Plan. She points out that what is required is a fundamental policy review that will produce a national e-strategy for the country that acknowledges the contribution of this sector to the national economy, but also as a critical input into all other sectors of the economy particularly the service sectors.

Alan Knott-Craig, in an interview with Sara Gon, reflects on the development of the cellular telephone industry in South Africa. His reflections and observations should be taken seriously by all policy makers. His reflections on the RICA process will, no doubt, prove somewhat uncomfortable to policy makers. But they represent an honest assessment by a key industry player.

Arthur Goldstuck, has researched the quiet engine of the South African economy and explores the impact of the internet on the economy. He offers an important overview of the impact which the e-economy has on the SME sector in addition to the larger corporate sectors. His concluding recommendations should be taken very seriously by policy makers.

Rabelani Dagada, deriving his methodology from Alvin Toffler's work, argues that ICT will be able to provide the means for the South African economy to leap-frog into what he calls the Fourth Wave. He argues that well crafted and implemented ICT and education policies which played a critical role in Asian economic development, could have a similar effect on South Africa's economic and social development.

Jess Roussos essentially addresses an older audience of which the present writer is a member. She gently takes us through the wonders of cellphone service delivery – what she calls ICT on an interpersonal level.

We conclude with book reviews by John Endres, Antony Altbeker, David Fowkes and Joe Roussos.