

Background:

With Bhutan on the information highway the Royal Government is seeking a clear vision, drawing up a comprehensive work plan, and putting the right institutions in place to develop the information, communication, and media sector.

This paper defines DoIM's mission and function, based on the Royal Government's media vision and policy, within an effective institutional, legal and administrative framework. It outlines DoIM's critical role in directing the growth of the traditional and emerging new media.

In the broad scheme of development, the RGOB envisions that the information and media sector will play a vital role in taking Bhutan into the future. Poised at the crossroads of an exciting era in the development of the Bhutanese media, the Ministry of Information and Communications has already taken a number of initiatives to ensure the healthy growth of the Bhutanese media.

This paper looks at the strategies that need to be adopted by the Ministry to shape this broad vision into a coherent and practical plan of action. The institutional plan was drawn up in close consultation within the Ministry and numerous stakeholders both public and private.

The department being in an early stage of development, an in-depth background has been provided to form the basis of the proposed vision and mission statements.

Towards an Information Society:

The term Information Society refers to communities that have ready access to information, leading to sustainable and equitable opportunities for growth and progress.

In an information society, there is free flow of two-way communication between governments and their people, and among the people themselves. In such a society, everyone is informed of policies, developments, current affairs, especially those that affect them directly; and everyone has the ability to make his or her voice heard. Hence, everyone has a say in shaping socio-economic plans and strategies of national relevance.

Media is a vital tool in an information society. In such a society, communication has to reach the masses. It has to reach the grass roots – to villages and *Gewogs* and to the remote nomadic communities in the north. Communities' needs and aspirations, culture and values, indigenous wisdom and experience have to filter up to policy makers and other stakeholders in order for communication to truly improve people's quality of life.

The most cost-effective way of achieving such widespread communication is through the mass media, especially the radio.

Media in Bhutan needs to focus on public service obligations and move away from the tendency towards advertising. It needs to focus on rural communities, marginalized groups, and those who are not within easy reach. The ultimate aim is to focus on what is termed “media pluralism” where media reflects the needs of all members of Bhutanese society, especially those whose voices have not been heard till now. (youth, women, elderly etc)

The government acknowledges that the challenge for Bhutan today is how to take advantage of globalization and the information revolution and yet preserve and promote essential elements of Bhutan’s culture and traditions in order to enhance our spiritual well-being. DoIM can help to create greater awareness of the information society, and what can be done to help the media to promote the concept and goals of the information society.

Department's Mission Plan and Mandate:

The Department's mission and mandate are based on the Royal Government's Vision for the information and media sector: *Towards a connected¹, and knowledge-based society.*

Mission:

To create a vibrant and informed society to realize Bhutan’s national policies, priorities and the overall goal of Gross National Happiness.

Mandate:

The Department will promote and support the development of a sensitive and professional information and media sector.

It will provide leadership, co-ordination, and advice to the information and media sector (both public and private undertakings).

Objectives:

1. to build a vibrant and creative infocom-media sector that is responsive to Bhutan’s needs

¹ By connected, we refer not just to IT connectivity but to connecting people from all corners of Bhutan and sections of society with access to information and media.

2. to promote good governance and foster socio-economic development; and
3. to promote efforts to reach the un-reached for a connected and knowledge-based society

Strategies:

1. Promote and support the development of quality content

Government support - in terms of infrastructure, funding, and professional expertise - is needed given the rising expectations and the limited resources of a young information and media sector and an increasingly educated public. The Government must also play a lead role in supporting the development and promotion of culture, particularly contemporary culture, through mass media and the arts. The aim is to promote the creation of dynamic, diverse and locally relevant content. The support will help boost the creative industry so that local producers of content - whether it is web content, broadcast or print, music and film, or advertising - are able to achieve quality in production.

2. To use the information and media sector to promote Policies and Goals to achieve national aspirations

People today need to understand the government's policies and priorities to make relevant and informed decisions. The government must make policies known through wide-spread dissemination in the media. The government's goals must be clearly understood. The information and media sector can enhance the transparency of the government's actions so that the public and private sector are more aware of and involved in nation building.

The government must provide policy directives to help develop the information and media sector. Government support is necessary to build a true information society in Bhutan to fulfill national aspirations. The challenge is to create an effective policy environment to nurture an independent and diverse media and to promote skills that enable people to disseminate and access information. It can simultaneously, encourage people to provide feedback and comments to help refine national policies and strategies.

3. Promote public access (accurate, timely, and accessible information) to reach all sections of society

Promoting access, especially for remote communities, has become a priority in today's changing political and socio-economic environment. It will be difficult for media, especially private media, to reach rural Bhutan without government

support.

Efforts must be made to ensure that information and media reaches all sections of Bhutanese society, and that their views are also reflected in national coverage. Access to information is essential in the creation of a knowledge-based society. The Government will assist in creating a more accessible environment to be built upon by media organizations and the private sector.

4. Build Media Relations so that the information and media sector plays a healthy role in nation-building

As the information and media sector plays an increasingly important role in all aspects of development, and in building a knowledge-based society, it is critical that the government provides a healthy direction to the information and media sector. The Government must also sensitize its agencies on the role of media and encourage government organizations to take advantage of media to further its goals. The Department will also encourage the creation of an open, free sharing culture to boost efficiency and accountability. To achieve this, the government must gain the trust and confidence of information and media professionals so that they are sensitive to Bhutan's interests and priorities.

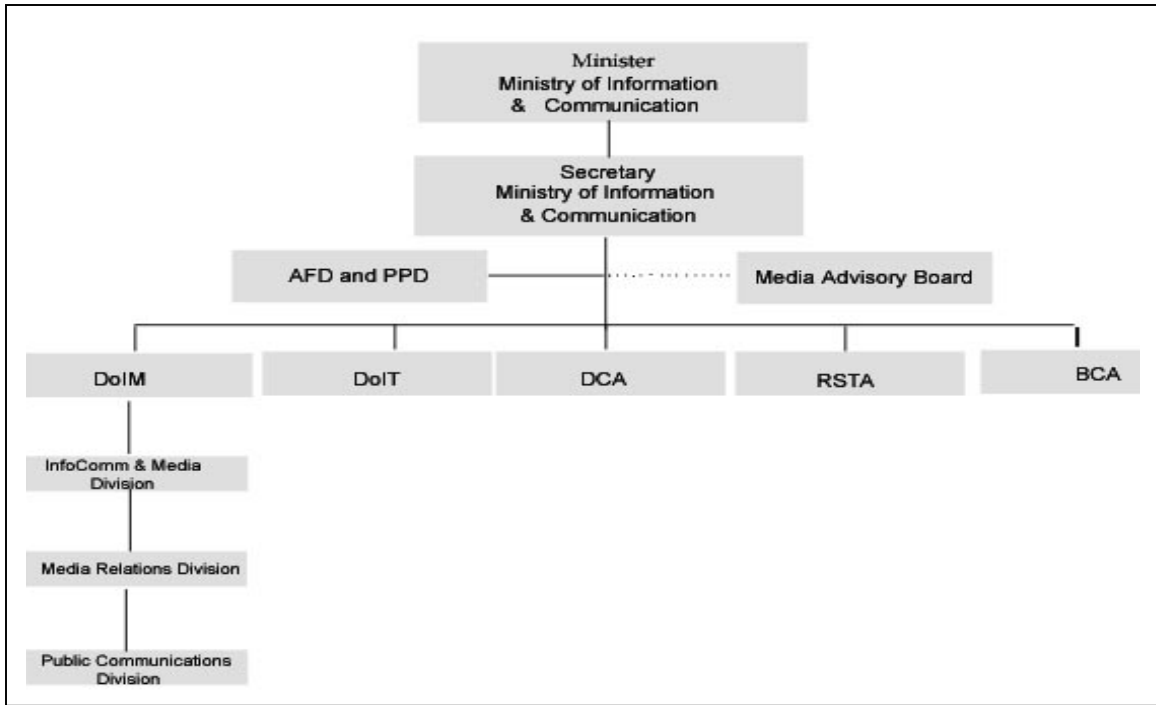
Proposed structure:

The Ministry of Information and Communications has two key agencies dealing with information and media: the Department of Information and the Media (DoIM) and the Department of Information Technology (DIT).

The overall function of the Department is to promote the development of the information/ media sector through policy and development plans. It shall also facilitate and promote the establishment of an open information-sharing environment as the basis for a knowledge-based society, and enable the government to build and strengthen media relations as a tool for enhancing national goals and priorities.

It is proposed that the Department establishes three divisions to fulfill the responsibilities described:

1. Information-Communications and Media Development Division (IMDD)
2. Media Relations Division (MRD) and
3. Public Communications Division (PCD)



As an agency dealing specifically with information, communications and media, the department is expected to be the hub of all information, communication and media development activities. The functions of the divisions are as follows:

Info-comm and Media Development Division (IMDD)

- Undertake research to monitor the evolution of an information and knowledge-based society. Research, analysis and the findings will provide the foundation to initiate the drafting of policy and legislation, prepare policy briefings for the Ministry on the information and media sector, and update policy and legislation when required.
- Identify priority areas for development and prepare action plans and where necessary prepare project proposals for seeking funding support from the government or international donor agencies.
- Spearhead initiatives to encourage investment and innovations in the information /media industry both in private and public sector and prepare operating guidelines for industry and provide advice and assistance to develop relevant and quality contents.
- Prepare five year development plans for the department, monitor and review the progress and prepare periodic review/progress reports.

- Function as a secretariat to the ICT and Media Advisory Committee or Board and submit relevant issues for Ministry's deliberations and recommendations.

Media Relations Division (MRD)

- Establish and maintain contacts with regional and international information and media organizations to develop and promote relationships for learning and cooperation.
- Monitor media coverage on Bhutan, reproduce and distribute news clippings to relevant organizations and where necessary prepare responses on behalf of the Government in consultation with the relevant government agencies.
- Facilitate/arrange participation by Bhutanese media personnel in various media events within and outside the country.
- Process, coordinate and facilitate the visits of foreign journalists and media personnel to Bhutan. As appropriate, the Media Relations Division shall consult the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Ensure/arrange media coverage on national events and international meetings in Bhutan.
- Coordinate and implement programs for training, study visits, seminars, and workshops for media personnel to enable them to produce relevant and quality contents.

Public Communications Division (PCD)

- Communicate RGOB's policies, priorities and goals relating to information and media sector as well as the plans, programs and activities of the Department through publication of information booklets, newsletters, website and other medium.
- Develop a model for sharing of information among government agencies and between the government agencies and the public on a two-way basis to ensure that the public service obligations are met in an effective and transparent manner.

- Encourage/assist other government agencies in creating relevant contents and making them accessible in the public domain.
- Build up and maintain a comprehensive print and audio-visual archive.
- Produce and/or facilitate production of audio visual programs to promote or create awareness about issues of relevance to society.

(The functions of Department will evolve and grow in the years to come as information and media play increasing role and new issues and challenges emerge).

Infrastructure:

The Department shall establish:

- A library and reading room with access to the Internet and digital archives of its picture and research files. (Note: The draft media legislation and regulations need to specify legal deposits on local publications for the department.)
- A media centre with TV/ video player, and computer and worktable for monitoring media and for small in-house print productions (eg. newsletter).

Budget: Budget provisions will be required for the Department to acquire and commission reports and programs on national events, and to produce publications.

Equipment:

- LCD projector and laptop
- Projector Screen
- Library computers/ chairs and reading tables/ shelves/ filing cabinets
- Colour copier – to produce in house newsletter
- Digital camera and video camera for photographs and websites
- Leased line internet service
- TV set / video recorder
- Software for digitalizing and storing pictures and reports

16. Staffing requirements:

Table 2: Staffing

Post	Staff strength (before 2006)	Remarks
Department		

Director	1	
Personal Assistant	1	
Messenger	1	
Sub-total	3	
Info-com and Media Development Division		
Policy and program officer	1 (communications background)	
Research officer	1 (sociologist /research background)	
Research associate/ statistics officer	1 (statistician/ research background)	
Sub-total	3	
Media Relations Division		
Media relations officer	1 (media or PR background)	
Information officer	2 (communications or media background)	
Sub-total	3	
Public Communications Division		
Communications officer	1 (communications backgrd.)	
Production officer	1 (print or media background)	
Librarian	1	
Sub-total	3	
Admin and Support staff		
Data manager/webmaster	1	
Office Secretary	1	
Driver	1	
Cleaner	1	
Sub-total	4	
Department Total	16	

Note: Recruits for the program posts will be graduates with specialized degrees or persons with class 12 qualifications with the relevant work experience.

Training

Various short term, and longer-term masters or diploma level trainings are being recommended in public administration, policy and planning, mass communications, media and other specialized areas covering communications.