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**CLIMATE CHANGE AND SOUTH AFRICA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE
NATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE RESPONSE WHITE PAPER AND THE PUSH
FOR TANGIBLE PRACTICES AND MEDIA-DRIVEN INITIATIVES**

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ABSTRACT

The South African government's response to the universal crisis of global warming has resulted in the creation of the National Climate Change Response White Paper, a proposed country-wide course of action that would aid in the stabilization of greenhouse gas emissions and intervene in current harmful environmental practices. The role of communication and the media is crucial to the success of any policy implementation as well as of the establishment of an 'action-inspired' mind-set amongst citizens that will bolster lifestyle change to support the cause. This paper will assess the National Climate Change Response White Paper in conjunction with climate change coverage from the South African daily online news source, News24. Additionally, films released from the Bjerkness Centre for Climate Research and discussion surrounding youth's use of relatable mediums to invoke lifestyle change from Lindie Buirski, Head of Environmental Capacity Building, Training and Education in the City of Cape Town's Environmental Resource Management (ERM) Department, will aid in analysis. Moreover, they will serve to bolster the argument of communications' critical role in realizing any goals set forth by the government. The paper will close by offering proposed climate-change directed development projects for the South African context and will refer to current international successful examples of media use to carry the message of climate change, while inviting audience input, participation, and most importantly, action.

Keywords: *climate change South Africa, climate change communications, White Paper, climate change media, climate change news coverage.*

I. Change Is Practicality, Participation and Education

For this paper, we will use the definition of ‘climate change’ provided by the National Climate Change Response White Paper which reads’ as follows, “the trend of changes in the earth’s general weather conditions as a result of an average rise in the temperature of the earth’s surface often referred to as global warming” (The Government of the Republic of South Africa, 2011, p. 1).

As this paper also pertains to development, where discussion of national government’s response to climate change is integral, we will use communication scholar Rachel Barker’s definition of ‘development,’ described as “improving the self-esteem of people by establishing the relevant social, economic and political systems and institutions that will promote human dignity and respect” (Barker, 2001, p. 4).

Furthermore, to define ‘development communication,’ we will refer to “the process by which people become leading actors in their own development; [it] enables people to go from being recipients of external development interventions to generators of their own development” (Bessette, 1996).

As previously mentioned, the purpose of the National Climate Change Response White Paper is to outline the country’s vision of effective climate change response, short-term, medium-term and long-term, and of the transition into a lower-carbon economy and society (The Government of the Republic of South Africa, 2011).

While the paper does provide solid education pertaining to the science behind global warming and its ramifications, and heeds the urgent call to rally all countries in the global effort to cut CO₂ emissions, it contains really no tangible, practical steps of how to involve the most important and influential party to bring *action* to the cause, namely the citizens of the country.

The White Paper preaches ‘sustainable development,’ but it seems to have neglected to look deeper into the meaning of what it is calling for. Mark Wilson (2007) in his paper, “At the Heart of Change: The Role of Communication Sustainable Development,” tells us that “sustainable development demands that people participate in the debates and decisions that affect their lives” (p. 3). Given this, it should be of the utmost importance that the government focuses on tuning into popular, relevant and commonplace communication outlets, not only to take the message to the people but also to involve the people in the message.

On the surface, the paper does incorporate the buzz words ‘education’ and ‘participation’ but lacks practical steps of how to achieve change through these elements as well as how to promote it. In the executive summary of the White Paper beneath the section of ‘Key elements in the overall approach to mitigation,’ we see the following outlined without explanation of application: Develop and implement education, training and public awareness programmes on climate change and its effects to promote and facilitate scientific, technical and managerial skills as well as public access to information, public awareness of and participation in addressing climate change (The Government of the Republic of South Africa, 2011, p. 6).

Furthermore, the White Paper continues, stating, “All sectors of South African society will take part in the effort to mainstream climate-resilient development” (The Government of the Republic of South Africa, 2011, p. 6). Here there are gaping holes pertaining to locations, who these ‘sectors’ are, and practically how they will take part.

Again, factually, the paper is in line with universal common knowledge that the effects of global warming will undoubtedly most strongly affect the world’s poorest and vulnerable communities (The Government of the Republic of South Africa, 2011). The White Paper also goes onto address the need to equip these vulnerable communities to adapt to, and recover

from, future human-induced natural disasters such as floods, fires and droughts amongst others (The Government of the Republic of South Africa, 2011).

The White Paper ventures into restrictive and, frankly, dangerous territory, as at times it puts forth a strict top-down approach to communication efforts, which is both “elitist and vertical” (Srampickal, 2006, p.7), stating that “government departments will start communicating with citizens about climate change to inform and educate them and to influence their behavioural choices” (The Government of the Republic of South Africa, 2011, p.7).

With this statement, the writers of the White Paper, likely unknowingly, have already disengaged the intended participants in the efforts laid forth in the paper as the wording strips away citizen participation, their say and their platform to utilize their talents and express their thoughts and passions on the subject that would have otherwise contributed to the cause. Confirming the view expressed by many experts in the field of development communication, Jacob Srampickal (2006) in his incisive paper on the subject professes, “Without an adequate two-way flow of information and dialogue between periphery and center – exchange of knowledge, market information, political dialogue – development is unlikely to take place” (p. 3).

Many researchers have found that when attempting to produce real behavioural change, especially within marginalized communities, community participation is key (Barker, 2001; Srampickal, 2006; Wilson, 2007). Furthermore, with respect to participatory action research, community leaders and stakeholders are identified and are invited to aggressively take part in shaping the programs as they are more or less the experts in community needs (Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). This mindset should have been adopted into the structure of the White Paper as its goal mirrors the goals of the above.

Addressing stakeholders is also a key element in development communication (Wilson, 2007). Under the ‘partnering with stakeholders’ section, the White Paper outlines that climate change is an issue for all South Africans and that the government will work with business, industry, civil society, academia and students. Particularly as regards civil society, the White Paper encourages members to “comment on and respond to initiatives of government and the private sector” (The Government of the Republic of South Africa, 2011, p. 38). This is a positive point where more two-way communication is encouraged. However, there should be more there that pledges government’s *response* to intended civil society comments. Furthermore, the government should provide platforms where two-way discussion can take place.

With respect to academia and student stakeholders, wording is focused on encouraging greater research on climate change but neglects younger learners and teachers who need to be allowed funding and training for fresh and engaging curricula focused on the environment.

As we outline the White Paper’s contents and its tone and goals with respect to development communication, it is necessary to introduce a broad picture of the media, their power, and the effect they can have in carrying out a message.

II. The Power of Media

Stepping back to take a look at the media at large, we can often overlook the real power it gives to a community, a state, or even a country.

As stated in a university lecture by Dr. Wallace Chuma, UCT senior lecturer and expert in media policy and regulation, “media is (*sic*) memorable” (Chuma, 2012), and they have more weight than we give them credit for. His examples centred on the rise of America as a superpower in its economy but also, perhaps, more notably in pop culture, or do they go hand-in-hand? With the large initial investment in the creation of Hollywood and its extended

media-sphere, how much have the costs returned and been far-surpassed in the long-run? More narrowly, how great an influence do American movies, TV programmes and music have on the rest of the world? How influential are the ideals, political stances, popular activities and practices expressed through those globally-reaching mediums (Chuma, 2012)?

If the South African government would take time to digest these realities of the mass impact of the media, perhaps it would be inclined to devote a substantial budget towards this arena with the end goal of being able to share, on a greater, global scale, their ideals and efforts in combating climate change, whilst bolstering their economy as well.

As Chuma (2012) continued to explain “when there is a coup, the first thing the new government does is to go to the broadcasting station” (p.). Perhaps even without realizing it, our actions and reactions tell us that the media are important, and communicating our message is also important.

III. Climate in the News

Now that we understand the profound impact media can have on a message and the potential they have to provide influence for action, we must assess how the topic of climate change has been covered in the national news within South Africa. Given the powerful role media can play in relation to a message and their ability to cause action, then why is not there more national news coverage concerning climate change? In analysing one week’s worth of current climate-change related material in one of South Africa’s major online news sources, *News 24*, only three articles surfaced pertaining to the topic, two of which focused specifically on the African continent. One article saluted a Nigerian environmentalist for his efforts to campaign on behalf of the victims of climate change, the poor and vulnerable, who consequentially have contributed least to the problem (AFP, 2012). The second article discussed the drastically declining ocean reefs in Singapore due to global warming and the

predictions of further sea-life destruction should we fail to substantially reduce CO₂ emissions (Fogarty, October 4, 2012). The third article spoke of the poor and vulnerable populations at large, African nations included, and the fact that they will be most affected by man-made environmental shifts and do not have the resources to cope (Reuters, October 3, 2012).

It is necessary to note that all three articles were taken from alternative sources, Reuters and ASP, and not directly from South African reporters. There is undoubtedly more relevant climate change news than three article's worth of reporting, and these topics should, in turn, be relevant and reported on by South African journalists. How can the government hope to gain attention and traction on the White Paper contents if national news sources do not make efforts to educate the public on the local happenings regarding current harmful CO₂ induced impact on the climate?

This sampling of national news relating to climate change in many ways reflects the National Climate Change Response White Paper in that it provides sound factual evidence of the global conversation around the topic although it does not, as the White Paper does, report on specific effects for South Africa. However, as with the White Paper, we are missing the 'so now what?' message of how specifically South Africa, and the many communities and cultures in it, are to combat these current and coming global warming problems and how they are to communicate their initiatives.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that in the *News24* archives, no media attention was given to the White Paper itself or to current articles relating to the procedures, protocols, and strategies that would arise from its initiatives.

Of what good is an informative and action-enlisting policy document if no one knows it exists? We must next look at this paper's suggestions for best practices to alert and inform the

public, and perhaps more importantly, engage and inspire the various groups to take hold of the information, join the conversation and movement to create change.

IV. Meeting People Where They Are at

As Mahatma Ghandi tells us, we are to “be the change we wish to see in the world.” While these words are seemingly powerful, they actually will produce nothing if there is no thought or plan as to the ‘how.’

Chuma (2012) goes on to say that a government could have the best ideas and best policies in the world, but without a successful means of implementation, you have nothing. “You must make [ideas] stick. You must make them have traction.” To have successful implementation, you must know your audience, know their culture, how they communicate and bring the messaging and strategy to match those levels (Barker, 2001).

South Africa is a country of 11 distinct national languages, a multitude of cultures and traditions, each with its own specific means of communicating. The South African diverse cultural context is a unique one, and must be respected as such.

Nowhere in the White Paper is there any acknowledgement of these multiple languages and cultures, aside from economic groups, which are both factors of supreme importance when implementing development communication (Barker, 2001; Srampickal, 2006). A key question to ask is “whose culture will it assume?” (Srampickal, 2006, p. 9). If not noted otherwise, the answer oftentimes is that it caters for the elite (Srampickal, 2006; Barker, 2001).

With respect to the White Paper, it is a strong point that it recognizes the multiple and varied settlements within the country, mentioning the scattered economic groups, and addresses their individual challenges. There are specific sections on rural settlements, which make up “70 percent of the country’s poorest households” (The Government of the Republic

of South Africa, 2011, p. 22), coastal settlements, noted as “the most vulnerable to an increase in sea-level rise due to climate change” (p. 23), and urban settlements, where “more than 60 percent of South Africa’s population live” (p. 21). Within each section, challenges are noted and followed by South Africa’s response. Within the rural settlement section, a point of response includes, “Empower local communities, particularly women who are often primary producers, in the process of designing and implementing adaptation strategies” (The Government of the Republic of South Africa, 2011, p. 22).

Empowerment for women, and particularly rural women, is strongly backed by Srampickal and others in the field as women “are so central in development at the community and regional levels” (Srampickal, 2006, p. 23). However, while acknowledgement of physical locations and the inclusion of women are high points, we are still missing the crucial elements of language and culture which should go hand-in-hand with addressing economic groups and gender (Srampickal, 2006).

Furthermore, there is no mention of the women *communicating* the adaptation strategies they will supposedly take part in creating, which is a barrier to the success of the strategy. As Wilson states, “most aspects of everyday life have a communication dimension” (Wilson, 2007, p. 15), that is already in place and the government must recognize and utilize this if sustainable development is to occur. These findings from Wilson and Srampickal advocating current successfully established and practised means of communication within communities will further be explained and supported later in the section describing the ways South Africans can undergo behavioural change: ‘Ways of Change: South Africa.’ However, before we can understand this, a target group with the power to spear-head behavioural-change must be addressed, namely the youth.

V. Go Youth or Go Home

Children are the future of the world; thus, it is of utmost importance that ample attention and support be given to the youth, especially regarding such globally important topics with life-long effects as climate change. As scholars London, Zimmerman and Erbstein (2003) profess, youth actually are the key-holders to societal change. “When thought of and practised together, youth, organisational, and community development can exponentially improve all community efforts” (p. 35).

The White Paper echoes the sentiments above, with a section dedicated to the importance of educating youth on the realities of global warming as well as mainstreaming efforts to reduce harmful environment practices. “This will require systematic interventions to empower and capacitate people. We need to mainstream climate-change knowledge into education and training curricula” (The Government of the Republic of South Africa, 2011, p. 44).

The agenda does establish incentives for research training in the form of bursaries to encourage students and scholars to research climate change (The Government of the Republic of South Africa, 2011, p. 44), but what about the different material suitable for primary schools, high schools, and universities? What about the training curricula for the different levels of education? Each of these sectors of education is separate and finite, and thus deserving of individualized programmes that cater for each age group and maturity level.

Caren B. Cooper (2011), expert in media literacy and climate change, stresses that “scientists and educators need to be media literate if they are to use media in all of their forms to increase the size of, and the connection with, their audience” (p. 235). Furthermore, the public also must be media-literate before they can be climate literate.

In encouraging climate literacy with regard to teaching materials, the Bjerkness Centre for Climate Research in Norway should be commended for their production of low-budget, easy-

to-follow videos pertaining to climate change. The two short films *A Journey to the Climate of the Future* and *The Story of Climate Change during the Past 600 Years* provide a very clear and chronological picture of the earth 600 years ago and its transformation or rather decline since the industrial revolution.

Easy-to-digest videos such as those created by the Bjerkness Centre could be starting points for climate-change education to be incorporated into school curricula. Looking at the current state of the lack of climate-change information available in the news, as noted previously in the three paltry *News24* articles, and the lack of information shared and practised in schools, short, to-the-point, impactful slices of climate-change content would seem to prove highly beneficial.

As much as two-way participatory communication is essential and central to development, there must be also space for the trainers to be trained and to learn at the very least the elements of climate change and future impact. The films are extremely short, to the point, and although very lack-lustre and fact-based, they whittle down the mountain of “climate change” and strip it of emotion, presenting the viewer with the facts he needs as his foundation to build his emotion and ideas upon (Bjerkness Centre, 2012).

Curricula among all age groups would need to incorporate interactive materials with learners allowed to be creative, to share ideas, and to have open dialogue about turning the information into conclusions that induce life-altering behaviour. Within the White Paper, examples of teaching and training materials such as the above videos should be included to give a tangible component to its call for climate change education.

Just as Gandhi’s statement urges people to “be the change,” although he provides no further how-to information, the White Paper also offers little in terms of tools or protocols of *how* these nice ideals of ‘mainstreaming climate change into curricula’ should come about. There should be answers in the White Paper that address questions such as what media will

be used? What is the tone of the messaging? To what tones are youth most receptive? (Scare tactics? Hopeful messages?) There are many ways and in many tones can ‘green’ messages be communicated to an audience and, as Srampickal (2006) warns, “development workers need to choose their type of communication carefully” (p. 9). If one does not conduct proper research into what types of messages spur action and not apathy, serious, irreversible damage could stunt behavioural change towards ‘greener’ living.

According to Romy Maxime, who is working on a messaging campaign for Ogilvy Earth with a view to creating specialised sustainability communication for companies and their brands:

It is integral that you get your messaging right. You have to do lots of research to find out what types of messages people will respond to and in what demographics. You do not want to scare people away by being too intense, but you cannot take the matter too lightly either. (personal communication, 2012, October 4)

As Maxime explains, much time, energy, research and resources must be given to the execution, style and tone of messages. This market research should be looked into by the South African government, and a budget should be established and directed towards research strategies of tone, message and medium when communicating environment and climate-change related messaging, specifically when tackling youth education.

Lindie Buirski, Head of Environmental Capacity Building, Training and Education in the City of Cape Town’s Environmental Resource Management (ERM) Department, believes in targeting the youth with community projects and initiatives as “kids are where our future lies” (Buirski, 2012). Her work immerses her in the language of the youth, that is drama. She recognizes the power the younger generation has over the world around them, promotes topics of climate-change in fun, age-appropriate activities, and tries to boost skill development in the arts. From acting to script-writing, directing, movement, and vocal

training, Buirski's work is delivering the message of climate change in a relatable way that has lasting impacts on the students it is shared with.

Furthermore, following a more participatory, two-way communication, participants in the drama programs are provided with forums to discuss what they think of climate change and how it is affecting them. They have the opportunity to create productions centred on specific climate-change related topics that are most relevant to them.

Buirski (2012) says that with this method, "you cannot walk away unchanged." When you allow real people to discuss real issues dealing with one topic, words become relevant and relevance spurs action. If these are goals mirrored by the South African government, and its hope to cause real and lasting change among citizens pertaining to living greener, resources should be given to such creative initiatives.

Buirski's programme also has in place evaluations of how receptive the youth participants are to the message, "If you do not get the message across, why continue with it?," she says. It would be most beneficial if in the White Paper there was a framework of strategy implementation evaluations and room to remould and readjust tactics found unfruitful.

Thus far, we have gone through sections describing what it takes to produce behavioural change: practicality, participation and education; the power of media and its role in spurring change. We have also reviewed a sampling of South Africa's national climate change coverage concluding that messages must be more frequent and more targeted to meet the public where they are. Now, that we have also addressed key catalysts for behavioural change, namely the youth, we can take a look at how the youth globally are using their demographic and cultural specific platforms to make big waves in ways of thinking and living.

VI. Ways of Change

A. Global

As climate change is an issue affecting all areas of the world, it is helpful to take a look at current successful methods of two-way media use that are alive and thriving outside of South Africa.

While it is dangerous to implement carbon-copy methods from other countries due to differing cultures, norms, economies, modes of communication, etc., it can also be useful to research them to learn about the success of community involvement in media and in stimulating behavioural change, keeping in mind ways of adapting one's home culture.

The first example is Sonny Green, a young teenage boy from a low-income area of London who has recently become something of a Youtube phenomenon with his captivating 'spoken word' videos expressing *his* thoughts (*OneTaste UK*, 2012). Green is one of the artists launched by *OneTaste UK*, a renowned music and spoken word collective, which is known for launching some of the UK's most gifted artists (*OneTaste Music and Spoken Word*, 2003). In his Youtube video titled *SPG*, Green uses the music style and communication medium most popular and fitting for his generation and demographic to share his beliefs and thoughts on the above issues. Without taking into consideration his audience, it is highly likely Green would not have been able to reach over 74,000 viewers worldwide and attain the level of receptiveness and engagement he achieved. The proof of this is the Youtube video's comments and the 'likes' which climbed to well over 1,000.

Strampickal (2006), among other development communication experts, reveals the success of the community approach as in Green's "grassroots awareness-raising model" (p.7). Through popular grass-roots, no-cost means like Youtube and other social media, citizens have the platform to make their voices heard and potentially reach millions with their message. Social media also invite conversation sharing amongst the audience.

The second example is from South America. Trekking through Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil, two British women in their mid-twenties have created a blog “In Our Nature” documenting their first-hand experiences of South American practices of sustainable farming and sustainable living, gleaned information and digitally sharing with the world (Harrington-Griffin & Jean, September 12, 2012). Travelling from farm to farm, they learn about the practices, gather stories, as well as share their own skills in the media (both women are experts in digital marketing and communications). They create websites for the farms so they may have a voice and platform to continue sharing their learning and practices with sustainable living. Testimonials from the blog show that those whom the “In Our Nature” creators serve, trumpet the need for, and appreciation of, the chance of a platform to make their voices heard:

Laura Jean and Filippa did an outstanding job making our dream of website come to fruition with remarkable enthusiasm, patience, flexibility and creativity. They had all the knowledge and persistence to make it look fantastic as well adding all the several requests the family members had! Thank you from the bottom of our hearts, we couldn't have done it without you!' - Maria Fernanda Pereira Lima Fazenda Santo Antonio da Agua Limpa. (Harrington-Griffin & Jean, 2012).

Both of these examples illustrate Chuma's (2012) earlier statement that “media is (*sic*) memorable.” You have to use what is popular and what is accessible as a channel for your messaging that invites others to participate. Harrington-Griffin, (personal communication, 2012, October 3) “In Our Nature” co-creator, echoes this sentiment, “I believe, it is of crucial importance to harness and utilise modern media tools as a force for change.”

Now that global accounts of youth spurring change through culturally relevant media have been explored, one can use such examples to piece together unique ways in which South Africa may also further develop its means of producing behavioural change.

B. South Africa

As Wilson (2007) makes clear, “people want a say in their future” (p. 14), so what a missed opportunity for the White Paper to engage with the public to encourage expression of their ideas about implementation of practical changes within their community and to provide strategies for participants to communicate their efforts. I believe that with a concept and mandate as important as addressing climate change, a tone-change is needed to put power in the hands of the people, not just in terms of action but in terms of communicating that action.

Borrowing ideas from the method of participatory action research, where empowerment, community involvement and relationships are key (Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006), the government should seek to include community members who are better qualified as experts in what works and what does not work in their areas. This needs to be done in order to devise and implement functional methods to bring about change and a means to communicate these methods.

Additionally, Wilson (2007) states, “most aspects of everyday life have a communication dimension” (p. 15) that is already in place, and the government must recognize and utilize this if sustainable development is to occur. By using modes of communication that are already in place, ones that are already successfully transmitted and received within communities, not only can governments save energy and time by not ‘re-inventing the wheel,’ but they can also more fully and sincerely empower community members with the initiative and include them in the plan of action and implementation.

The research of Srampickal (2006) on development communication that strongly advocates previously established modes of communication within communities, heavily supported by that of others in the field, offers communication tools that have been proven successful when communicating topics such as oppression, injustice, and social imbalances among the lower-income classes, which make up the majority of South Africa. Theatre, as previously shown in

Buirsk's local practices, creates a casual and communal place where participants are less inhibited to share sensitive ideas (Buirk, 2012; Srampickal, 2006).

Street theatre, which is already a form of participatory communication within South African indigenous culture, could serve as another avenue through which to implement two-way communication amongst the marginalized, and most affected communities. This is a practice that encourages audience involvement through live performance of usually a drama or comedy and incorporates an organizational message (Barker, 2001). Advantages include attracting an engaged audience, and relaying messages created *for* the audience. Thus, messages are better received and understood, and there is an opportunity to communicate the message directly (Barker, 2001). Furthermore, various forms of live theatre can be used to perform or act out issues experienced in the community (such as effects of climate change), that would otherwise have limited effect if communicated through alternative forms of media such as a an office memo (Barker, 2001).

Theatre, along with traditional folk media that include messages woven into poems, songs, rhythms, dances, puppet plays, etc. fall under the umbrella of oramedia (Barker, 2001), and are another tactic by which culturally relevant topics, such as climate change, can be addressed. While it is true that these types of oramedia communication “can only reach a small number of people at a time, they can be an effective relay chain to the mass media” (Barker, 2001, p. 10).

Furthermore, when utilizing theatre for teaching and eliciting behavioural change, “people are empowered by an environment that gives them the freedom to express themselves” (Srampickal, 2006, p. 8).

In closing, I feel it relevant to revisit a pivotal analysis point of this paper: analyzing the White Paper's success in implementing development communication. Keeping in mind the previously introduced definition of development communication as “the process by which

people become leading actors in their own development; [it] enables people to go from being recipients of external development interventions to generators of their own development” (Bessette, 1996). From the evidence provided in this paper, it can only be surmised that the White Paper has failed to achieve a strategy of development communication implementation. As noted, the White Paper continually instills a top-down approach of relaying procedures, and uses ‘blanket,’ one-size-fits-all ideas for climate-change education to be incorporated into mainstream schools and places of learning. It fails to see the common citizen, who lives in a host of communities with varying demographics, languages and cultural norms as the key to change and the only vehicle by which their messages can truly take hold.

In conjunction with utilizing community members to devise and communicate bottom-up strategies responding to climate change, education, as previously stated, is where focus and budget must be. Two-way, engaging, relevant teachings that perhaps utilize the above-mentioned techniques such as theatre, the arts, digital media (in areas where this medium is already a common communication tool), could be ways in which the government can successfully implement the changes they have laid out in the White Paper.

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