



communications
& digital technologies

Department:
Communications & Digital Technologies
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES, HONOURABLE PHILLY MAPULANE AT THE LIMPOPO DIGITAL SUMMIT, POLOKWANE, 01 JUNE 2023

The Executive Mayor of Capricorn District Municipality, Councilor Mamodupi Teffo

Senior officials from the Department and from all the entities of the Department

Ms Marilyn White, Founder and Director of Provisional Growth Participants, guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Fellow South Africans

Good morning

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for the invitation to address this gathering on this, the first day of the “Youth Month” in South Africa. This month we recall and commemorate the fearless generation of young people who in 1976 declared that enough is enough with apartheid and its education system. The 2023 Youth Month is celebrated under the theme “*Accelerating youth economic emancipation for a sustainable future.*” It is an appropriate theme approved by Cabinet considering the sacrifices made by the youth in the struggle for freedom in our country.

It was the youth of our country who launched a gallant struggle against the introduction of the draconian and demeaning system of Bantu Education. Demanding that learners use Afrikaans as medium of instruction was never the main reason but simply the trigger, it was in colloquial terms, the last straw that broke the camel’s back. Bantu education, as a system of education meant to condemn the African child to nothing above the level of certain forms of labour, was part of the grand apartheid social engineering driven by its principal architect, the ultra-racist HF Vervoerd.

It will be betrayal of the struggle if no efforts are made to ensure that the youth attain economic emancipation in our lifetime for a sustainable future.

Young people aged 15-34 are the most vulnerable in the South African labour market today. According to StatsSA's Quarterly Labour Force Survey for the first quarter of 2023, the total number of unemployed youth increased by 241 000 to 4,9 million while there was an increase of 28 000 in the number of employed youth to 5,6 million during the same period. This resulted in an increase in youth unemployment rate by 1,1 percentage points to 46,5% in the first quarter of 2023. Clearly the growth of our economy cannot keep up with the demand for absorption by our youth. Our Department, the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies is called upon to make an intervention.

The National Development Plan (NDP), our blueprint to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality, visualises a significant role to be played by the ICT sector. It articulates that by 2030 the ICTs, or the Digital economy as we characterise it, will underpin the development of a dynamic and connected information society and vibrant knowledge economy that is more inclusive and prosperous. We are committed to leaving no one behind on our journey to meaningful participation in the unfolding digital economy. We will achieve this goal of digital transformation by ensuring universal access to the internet and investing in digital skills development.

GROWTH OF THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

Despite the decline in other sectors of the economy, the digital economy continues to show a robust positive growth trajectory. Growing at an average rate of 15,6% globally and accounting for 45% of global GDP. It has become a new economic growth engine for developing countries, growing at an average of 22,3% in developing countries. Propelled by the the Fourth Industrial Revolution that is characterised by the growing use and adoption of new technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, robotics, big data, 3D printing and the Internet of Things, this positive growth trajectory is bound to continue into the distant future.

This robust positive growth trajectory clearly demonstrates that the Digital economy is our hope to tackle the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment, and inequality.

DIGITAL SKILLS: THE CORNERSTONE OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

While South Africa has long recognised the importance of ICTs for socio-economic development, the adoption of digital technologies was very minimal until Covid-19 struck. Since then, digital technologies had to be integrated into all areas of business and government for continued operation and delivery of services to clients. All sectors of the economy switched to online operation thus accelerating the digital transformation.

While these technologies made it easy for people to stay in contact and work remotely, it changed the nature of jobs that were performed by humans. As the dependence on new technologies became the order of the day, existing skills became obsolete and a demand for new digital skills accelerated. These changes require humans to be equipped with relevant and necessary skills to perform new jobs.

A comprehensive digital skills gap analysis, commissioned by the Department prior to the development of the National Digital and Future Skills Strategy, identified the digital skills as a cornerstone for both digital transformation and an inclusive digital economy. It emphasised the importance of stakeholder collaboration to implement a well-coordinated drive to skill, re-skills and up skill the citizens of South Africa to ensure inclusive participation in the digital economy.

To keep up with the adoption of new technologies that continue to change the nature of jobs, everyone is now required to have a certain level of skills to interact with new technological innovations.

To succeed in the ever-changing workplace of the future, society require some skills-sets in identified areas such as: Digital Literacy; Coding; Robotics; Data analytics; Data Science; Network Engineering; Internet of Things; Cloud computing; Machine Learning; Software Development and Engineering; Competency Skills (creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, negotiation).

Even though these digital skills can greatly improve prospects for decent employment, thousands of people in the rural areas still lack basic digital literacy. Furthermore, most of the young people in these communities leave schools without even basic digital literacy. The differences in access to digital technologies and digital skills need to be addressed through various interventions. To respond to this challenge, the Department has taken steps towards empowering the nation through the development of a National Digital and Future Skills Strategy approved by Cabinet in August 2020. The Strategy provides a guide for the development of professional and societal digital skills required for the country's advancement as a digital economy. The rollout of the 5-year Digital and Future Skills Implementation Programme has commenced, however Government cannot rollout the digital skills by itself, partnerships and collaboration by all role players is required.

We have wish to call on every interested parties to partner and invest in digital skills development in order to bridge the digital divide.

Working with our implementing agency, NEMISA, the Department has embarked on digital skills development programmes to ensure a more digitally literate society that can benefit from the technological developments.

One of the programmes I have had a pleasure to champion and launch in several districts across the country, the recent launch happened here in the Capricon District at the Capricon TVET College on the 22 April this year, is the Yarona Digital Ambassadors programme. YARONA is a digital skills massification drive that seeks to intervene in addressing unemployment and to empower and upskill the unemployed youth with basic digital skills. It offers unemployed young people an opportunity to become digital ambassadors to train their communities in digital literacy.

Through this programme we placed 124 such ambassadors in various municipalities that NEMISA partnered with. The aim is to increase the number of new recruits to 150 or more in the 2023/24 financial year.

CONNECTING SOUTH AFRICA AND BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Ladies and gentlemen, let me briefly update you on the work we are going in connecting South Africa and bridging the Digital divide. South Africa's Government response to addressing the digital divide is articulated in our National Broadband Policy of 2013, which is known as "SA Connect". Through this policy and its programme, for which we have secured R3 billion from the fiscus over the next two years, we are rolling out broadband infrastructure across the country to ensure that 80% of South Africans have access to the internet by 2024. This broadband policy has 3 components,

The 1st components will entail the roll-out of over 33 000 community Wi-Fi hot spots

The second involve community connectivity, where the state will provide the backhaul through the construction of various base stations across the country and working with the ISPs/MVNO (mobile virtual network operators) will provide metered broadband services from the base stations to approximately 5,8 million households

The 3rd aspect of the policy involves the mobile network operators connecting the designated public facilities. In June last year, we auctioned the much needed high-demand spectrum to allow the operators to decongest our networks and deploy 4G and 5G networks across the country.

The release and Licensing of spectrum involved social obligations where we've agreed with the mobile operators to connect over 18 000 public schools, 6000 health facilities, public libraries and 8000 traditional authorities sites over the next 3 years.

EMPOWERING SMMEs:

SMMEs are the lifeblood of our economy, providing employment opportunities, driving innovation, and contributing to economic growth. However, these businesses often face numerous challenges, such as limited access to resources, market barriers, and bureaucratic hurdles. The Digitech SMME platform that we've launched last year serves as a catalyst to overcome these obstacles, empowering SMMEs to thrive and contribute even more significantly to our nation's prosperity.

DATA AND CLOUD POLICY

Before the end of the current financial year we will release the Data and Cloud Policy. This policy seeks to reduce the gap between government and citizen as well as government and industry, by enabling access to data and cloud services. The policy further seeks to facilitate cloud adoption across government, outline governance requirements and articulate government expectations in respect of cloud service providers (CPS)

The aim of the policy is to universalise cloud adoption across all government departments to achieving total digital transformation at all levels of government.

We seek through this policy to regularise government cloud computing to drive digital transformation in government, support government's socio-economic objectives towards building a robust digital economy while ensuring capacity enablement, compliance with data security and privacy requirements as well as cost- optimisation.

This policy will be applicable to all government departments, national and provincial, as well as State Owned companies and other State organs.

CONCLUSION

We are committed to the *vision of an affordable, high-speed internet access for all*, announced by the President in his 2023 State of the Nation Address. It is a vision we will not achieve working alone. We need a social compact with all of society to ensure that no one is left behind.

I wish you well as you will be further interrogating these issues. I thank you!

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