communications & digital technologies
Department:
Communications & Digital Technologies
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

SPEECH BY DEPUTY MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES, HON. PHILLY MAPULANE (MP) AT THE NATIONAL DIGITAL AND FUTURE SKILLS CONFERENCE, AHA GATEWAY HOTEL, UMHLANGA, KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE ON 22 NOVEMBER 2022

Program Director

Honourable Premier of the Province of KwaZulu-Natal, Hon Nomusa Dube-Ncube

Mrs Christian Gruen from the German Embassy

The Chair of NEMISA, Ms Lebo Leshabane and the CEO Trevor Rammitlwa

The DG of the Province of KZN, DDGs from the Dept and other senior officials

Distinguished guests, delegates to this conference Ladies and gentlemen

The emergence of digital technologies such as digital automation, artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, augmented reality, 3D printing, and a range of other digital technologies have changed the nature of jobs that were routinely performed by humans. As various sectors of the economy continue to use and depend on these new digital technologies, the legacy skills as well as existing ICT skills are becoming obsolete, and this increases the demand for new digital skills.

In September 2020, Cabinet approved the National Digital and Future Skills Strategy, which is a government's programmatic response to ensuring that citizens are adequately equipped for the future of work. Subsequent to the cabinet approval, our Department put together an Implementation programme that directs and identifies practical measures and targets that should be pursued by various stakeholders in achieving a digital skills revolution in our country.

Today we are hosting this Digital and Future Skills Conference under the theme: "***Digital Skills a Cornerstone for Digital Economy***", where we seek to realise a "Digital Adoptive and Adaptive Society" which can actively participate in the Digital Economy. The

Digital and Future Skills Strategy, for which this Conference is anchored on, emphasizes among others, the need to rollout a large-scale digital literacy programme to focus on building digital competence in information, media and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety, devices and software operations, problem solving, and career as well as entrepreneurship-related information and knowledge. It also works towards a vision of South Africa in which all its people can benefit from enhanced level of digital skills, thereby providing a significantly enhanced quality of life, improved education, greater economic growth, creation of new jobs and promotion of social development through the initiatives that will be implemented in the eight strategy elements.

Optimizing Available Resources Through Partnerships

The deployment of digital skills in South Africa requires major investments. Government is called upon to join efforts with various role players from private sector, civil society, labour, academia as well as youth fraternities to ensure successful deployment of digital skills in the Country. The department is continuously exploring ways to establish and forge partnerships for the deployment of digital skills across the country.

Partnership with GIZ-SA

That is why we are proud of the partnership that we have forged with GIZ South Africa to host this National Digital and Future Skills Conference in the next two days. GIZ-SA is working with us as part of implementing their Digital Skills for Jobs and Income (DS4JI) project which is aligned with the objectives of the National Digital and Future Skills Strategy. The DS4JI, funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, aims to ensure that young people, especially young women and girls, access to quality vocational training and innovative skills development is improved in the context of digital transformation to advance the development of digital skills.

This National Digital Skills Conference takes place at a time when the country is grappling with challenges of bridging the Digital divide. One of the fastest growing sectors in the domestic economy is that which is driven by digital technologies. At the global level, the digital economy is developing rapidly at two times the global GDP growth rate, and it is currently estimated at constituting $14,9 trillion of the global economy. It is expected that 50% of the global GDP will be digitalised by the end of this year.

However, as the digital economy is growing at the rapid pace, the world, and indeed our country South Africa and our continent of Africa, is contending with the reality of bridging the digital divide and ensuring that more and more people are connected.

According to the study by the United Nations, there has been over 1 billion new Internet users globally who have been added over the last five years. Yet under half of the world's population, which is approximately 3.7 billion people, do not have access to the Internet. Connectivity gaps in rural areas are especially more pronounced in least developed countries, where 17% of the rural population live in areas with no mobile coverage at all, and 19% of the rural population is covered by only a 2G network

The effective use of digital skills has proven to be a resilience- boosting factor not only in South Africa, but all over the world. The Global Skills Report of 2022 found that when compared to the rest of the globe, African nations have an advantage in terms of data visualisation, with SA leading the pack. SA has a global score of 94% proficiency in data visualisation. ‘Data visualisation is a skill that falls under the data science domain and is said to involve the creation and study of visual representations of data to communicate information clearly and efficiently’.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The advance of new technologies has seen routine-based professions vanishing, and new job types developing. All citizens require at least fundamental digital competencies to engage in life, and many occupations are rapidly requiring specialized ICT profiles and higher ICT skills. Recently, the Institute for the Future, in partnership with Dell, issued a report which predicted that 85% of jobs that will be available in 2030 haven’t been invented yet. Scary and unbelievable as it may sound, to comprehend the probability of such a possibility, it would be ideal to reflect 8 years back, how much of today’s technology did we utilise? The reality that faces us is that the evolution of technology is inevitably followed by the demand for new digital skills. In the modern world, the digital skills shortage we are experiencing means that there’s just not sufficient people with the required digital skills to power transformation now and in the future. There is low supply and high demand for digital skills.

However there is hope. IT Web concurs that SA appears to be increasingly competitive in digital skills, specifically in skills proficiency for cloud computing, which is at 54%, machine learning at 51% and software engineering at 50%.

Program Director,

Digital skills are not solely meant for the digital economy or employability of citizens, but also the ability of the citizenry to adapt to life and the tools of engagement and survival. These skills help people communicate and collaborate, develop, and share digital content.

Ya Rona Ambassadors programme

In our quest to achieve digital literacy, earlier this year, in June, we launched the Ya Rona Digital Literacy Skills programme in Zeerust, in the North-West province, which is a programme pioneered by NEMISA, an entity within our Department responsible for digital skills training in the department. Through this programme we recruit 15 Ya-Rona Digital Literacy Ambassadors to be trained as community trainers and thereafter be deployed to train targeted populations within their respective local municipalities. The appointed Ya-Rona Ambassadors are provided with work tools such as laptops, data, work regalia (T-shirts, caps). The Ambassadors are being recruited from the unemployed youth, women, and people with disabilities in the localities they will serve, and they are paid a stipend of R 3000.00 for the period of the project.

The Ya-Rona Digital Literacy Project has proved to be a success following its pilot here in the KZN in Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma Local Municipality (3200 people trained), Alfred Duma and Ubuhlebezwe Municipality (4 390 people trained). The project was further expanded in Collins Chabane and Elias Motsoaledi local municipalities in Limpopo (3 239 people trained) as well as five local municipalities within Lejweleputswa Municipality in the Free State Province (13 334 people trained. The project is being rolled out nationally by NEMISA.

We should cultivate a generation of digitally skilled population that can solve technical challenges; innovate the country's technological responses to our digital needs and be able to identify digital competence gaps.

Program Director,

Data Must Fall

As government, we will do our best to ensure that all barriers are removed to achieve a digitally skilled generation. This includes the reduction of data costs. In the past, industry commentators have noted that South African companies have the intention to embrace AI but are often held back by the high cost of data and, more importantly, the shortage of digital

skills. The Data Service Market Enquiry Report of the Competition Commission published in 2019 established that data costs for the prepaid market, which is predominantly constituted of low- income earners, are disproportionately high. High Data costs are an impediment towards an inclusive Digital Society as stated in the 4IR Commission Report. We are working with the regulator, ICASA, to ensure the implementation of the recommendations of the Data market enquiry report. We wish to reiterate our call that “Data Must Fall”

Launch of Artificial Intelligence Institute

Ladies and Gentlemen, the world is moving towards high tech space such as the use of Artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain and other new technologies. We have noted that Research and Development, as well as implementation capabilities in Al are thus critical and must be embedded within the state. This will enable the generation of new knowledge and creative technology applications in sectors such as health, agriculture, education, energy, manufacturing, tourism & ICT, amongst others. As such, the department is currently implementing recommendations of the Presidential Commision on the 4IR, particularly on the establishment of the Artificial Intelligence Institute. At the end of this month, we will be launching the Artificial Intelligence Institute, working with the University of Johannesburg and Tshwane University of Technology. Tomorrow we are briefing the Cabinet Committee on the launch of the Al Institute which we hope will be a turning point in government working with institutions of higher learning to explore the full potential and benefits of the 4IR.

Opportunity to Tackle the Unemployment Crisis

The demand for new digital skills sets present a great opportunity for the country to tackle its unemployment crisis. Such skills will remain scarce or in short supply for decades unless there is massive rollout of digital skills through collaboration with private sector, academia, Non-Government Organisations. The reality is that businesses will continue to look outside South Africa to find people with the skills they need if the country does not meet the demand. This will translate into loss of job opportunities needed to address unemployment.

Connected Smart Province Project in KwaZulu-Natal

We are aware that the province of KwaZulu-Natal, through the office of The Hon. Premier is spearheading the development of a Connected Smart Province to convert KwaZulu-Natal into a Smart Province. It is quite comforting to learn that the initiative intends connecting rural areas through the rollout of broadband connectivity as well as

provision of Wi-Fi access points in those remote areas. Government sites such as Thusong Centers as well as health centers will be connected through this initiative.

SA Connect

We stand ready to support this initiative through our own SA Connect project. The SA Connect project aims to connect 80% of South Africa to the internet in the next 3 years. Through SA Connect project we seek to ensure the provision of 840 Open Access Base stations (at about 4 Base Stations per local municipality for all the 226 local Municipalities) to cater for 5 830

208 households and 33 539 community Wi-Fi hotspots. Local Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and the Mobile Virtual Network Operators (MVNOs) will be required to provide metered broadband services from the base stations to the households (based on 1 ISP/MVNO per Metro and District Municipality).

We are also working with the mobile network operators, as part of the social obligations imposed on the spectrum licenses allocated recently though an auction, to connect:

- 18 036 schools,
- 3 873 health facilities,
- 8241 tribal authority sites and
- 949 community libraries or Thusong centers within 36 months from date of licensing.

Digital Skills Innovation Challenge

Working through a partnership with the United Nations Development Agencies, the ITU, ILO and UNDP, we launched in February 2022, the Joint Programme on the Digital Skills for Decent Jobs for Youth. Through this Joint Programme the ILO has concluded the Digital Skills Innovation Challenge to recognize the active role of individuals and organizations in driving innovation in skill systems and addressing pressing skills challenges. In this challenge, innovators were invited to propose new and practical ideas as well as solutions to major current and future skills challenges they confront. They are also encouraged to form innovative partnerships involving representatives of employers' and workers' organizations to rollout the identified innovative ideas and solutions to those challenges.

The challenge has reached the final stage of selecting the winners of the following 3 financial prizes and the Winners will be announced during the Gala Dinner tonight.

The Prizes for the Innovation Challenge are:

- **1st Prize:** USD 40,000 for eSkills4girls which focuses on women's and girls' access to and participation in the digital economy.
- **2nd Prize:** USD 25,000 for digitalSkills4youth which focuses on prototyping a new digital skills programme for youth NEET; and
- **3rd Prize:** USD 20,000 for digitalskills4youth deals with scaling up a tested digital skills programme for youth NEET.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I wish to call on all the stakeholders to commit and sign the Accord aimed at fast-tracking the roll-out of digital skills in the Country.

I thank you