



MINISTRY
COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Private Bag X860, PRETORIA, 0001 – iParioli Office Park, 1166 Park, Hatfield, PRETORIA

Tel: +27 12 427 8000 –Email: Media@DCDT.gov.za URL: www.dcdt.gov.za

**Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies, Hon. Mondli Gungubele Address on
the Occasion of the Ya-Rona Digital Ambassadors' Programme Launch in
Buffalo City Metro, Eastern Cape, 10 August 2023**

Honourable Deputy Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies, Hon. Philly Mapulane

Honourable Mayor Process Faku

NEMISA Board Representative, Ms Nomonde Hlatshaneni

Honourable Councillors and MMCs;

Honoured Digital Ambassadors

Other dignitaries and guests present,

All protocol observed,

It is my honour to address you in the month when we celebrate women and recognising their contribution in South Africa both historically and now. The future is also bright as we continue to build a country that embraces gender equality and discourages chauvinism and patriarchy. We should continue to ensure that digital inclusion is not inclusion without women. We should also find ways to effectively and strategically use digital technologies to fight GBV and femicide in South Africa and the world.

Countries across the globe, including South Africa, are racing against time to achieve digital transformations at all levels and across all age groups. Digital transformation affects psycho-social and economic life, government and the private sectors and small and large enterprises. The digital transformation we are in, is inherently about massive change in how people live, socialise, transact, learn and even how they access services and products. It also includes changes in how people interact with the environment, how data is collected and analysed, converting inputs into services

and products, and improving livelihoods. In essence it impacts all facets of life. While digital transformation promises to massively improve lives and it being used to lift millions of our people out of poverty, South Africa is dealing with a digital inequality paradox. The more technology advances introduced into society, the more widespread and pervasive the digital divide (Research ICT Africa, 2020).

The digital divide is a stark reality in South Africa, impacting all generations. It is a striking symptom of socioeconomic challenges associated with being the most economically unequal country in the world (World Bank, 2022). While this is a challenge our resolve as government is to push this frontier back and effectively build a nation that embraces change and is tech savvy as the country builds up towards prosperity.

Scholars argue that the digital divide has been perceived as a matter of physical access to technology, often framed as a binary distinction between 'haves' and 'have-nots' which led to coining the concept of digital divide. However, this view has evolved to include the importance of digital skills in effective ICT usage. Research indicates that the digital divide is a combination of gaps in access and skills, creating a cycle where developing digital skills is challenging without access to ICT, and access to ICT is futile without the ability to utilise it effectively. Therefore, the discourse on digital inclusion has broadened to consider additional critical factors for ensuring digital equality. Digital inclusion is as such more complex. It means that digital literacy should be delivered in a more strategic manner to target the different age groups, genders, people in different socio-economic positions and for example: older people tend to face unique complexities in age-related barriers, limited exposure to and use of technology, and a lack of tailored digital literacy programmes. Consequently, many older adults struggle to navigate digital platforms, access online services, and maintain essential social connections digitally. It is therefore critical that our approach consider challenges such as language and cultural realities when the training is done for them. The Ya-Rona Digital Ambassadors Programme is designed to address skills challenges such as these.

As the provision of services is increasingly migrating towards digital channels (for example, shopping, banking, medical consultations, and municipal services), people without digital literacy are at risk of not only missing out on the benefits but get left behind as technology continues to change. (World Economic Forum, 2021).

The digital inclusion requires access to learning with age-friendly design and relevant, ethical, and safe for digital environments that are at play. What is also required, is an informed understanding of skills needs towards the use of emerging technologies. The digital literacy offered through the Ya Rona programme is aimed at reducing the digital divide in our communities. The intention is to extend it to as many municipalities as possible. It also offers an entry point towards higher order skills that are so much needed for entrepreneurial or work opportunities. In the absence of such

understanding, it is difficult to devise relevant and appropriate digital skills interventions and support strategies for meaningful outcomes.

Honourable Deputy Minister and Mayor, please note that as we deliver this training beneficiaries gain value at three levels as follows:

Psychological benefits

Psychological benefits encompass changes in behaviour regarding the use of mobile devices, gaining feelings of self-awareness, empowerment, motivation and confidence, and changes in mindset and attitude regarding the value of technology.

Economic benefits

Economic benefits in this regard relate to respondents gaining knowledge and the ability to use mobile devices to access employment opportunities, manage resumés, save money, conduct business activities, and do money-related transactions.

Social benefits

Social benefits entail participants gaining feelings of inclusion, social capital, and a desire to uplift others by sharing the knowledge and skills gained. Many beneficiaries start using a mobile device to facilitate new ways of communicating and interacting with people, including using email communications that many never new how to use or did not even have an email address.

Concluding remarks

As we induct these young people and with more to follow in the province of the Eastern Cape and other provinces the digital ambassadors are applauded for the work they do, changing one life at a time. The learning journey never reaches the end as the digital world continues expand and evolve all the time. Beyond digital literacy, there are many other courses in digital technologies available through NEMISA arranged facilitated training or online. Among the most demanded skills developed through those courses are, Data science or Data Analysis, Software development including coding and App development, Cyber Security, Internet of things, Cloud Technologies, and Artificial Intelligence. All these are available for free at NEMISA. Digital Literacy services are a steppingstone to get beneficiaries to progress to higher end skills.

The Digital Ambassadors initiative provide digital skills training to members of the community, especially focusing on locally relevant digital content and services, the Yarona Digital Ambassadors initiative will improve the skills, capacity, and employment prospects of beneficiaries. It will further demonstrate the worth of utilizing modern technology to the broader communities. We therefore call on members of the society, in particular young people of Mdantsane, Duncan Village, King Williams

Town and East London and the Eastern Cape to join this digital revolution and involve themselves in these initiatives by enrolling with NEMISA and take part.

Together let us create the opportunities for the digital economy and grow South Africa!!

I thank you.

...END...

Issued by the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies