



MINISTRY
COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

DEPUTY MINISTER MR. PHILLY MAPULANE'S KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT THE NEMISA DIGITAL SKILLS AND COLLOQUIUM

Protocols

- Ambassador to the UN Prof Muhammadou Kah
- British High Commissioner to SA – Mr Antony Phillipson
- Vice Chancellor of Cape Peninsula University Prof. Chris Nhlapo
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Deputy Resident Representative for South Africa: Mr. Gabriel Dava
- International Labour Organisation (ILO) Assistant Director General and Regional Director for Africa: Ms. Cynthia Samuel-Olonjuwon
- International Telecommunications Union (ITU) Regional Director for Africa: Ms. Anne-Rachel Inné
- DCDT Officials present
- NEMISA Board Chairperson and Board Members
- Board Members and officials of state entities present
- Various partners supporting the summit (British High Commission, GIZ, CoLabs, UNISA, CPUT)

Context

The “Fact Sheet on NEET” published by the Department of Higher Education and Training in March 2021, paints a devastating picture of an exceedingly high number of young people not in employment nor training. This was further confirmed in the **Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS)** released by Statistics SA in December 2021, which indicated that “the official unemployment rate increasing by 0,5 of a percentage point from 34,4% in the second quarter of 2021 to 34,9% in the third quarter of 2021 – the highest since the start of the QLFS in 2008”. It is important to note that COVID-19 had a dramatic effect on the size of the South African NEET population in 2020. It is, however, an undeniable fact that even before the pandemic, youth unemployment has been very high in South Africa. This information is indeed a true demonstration of a need to strengthen partnerships and coordination mechanisms which will open opportunities for young people, especially the NEETs in South Africa.

The National Digital and Future Skills Strategy approved by Cabinet in August 2020, provides strategic actions to guide the development of professional and societal digital skills required for the country’s advancement as a digital economy. 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.

The importance of the Summit

This Summit is another step in confirming South Africa’s resolve to be in the forefront of digital transformation that many countries of the world are going through. The digital transformation is driven by massive and disruptive changes at a social and economic levels and this being enabled by digital technologies. The changes affect individual citizens, government, big and small businesses, productive livelihoods in general as well as the skills and capabilities required to be effective in a context that can no longer be easily predicted. The changes permeate every facet of life such as health, education, safety and security, social services, environment and climate change, In the economy, digital technologies are changing almost every industry with examples such as smart manufacturing using advanced robotics and 3D printing, the use of Artificial Intelligence in offering services such as banking and the examples are many.

Through this Summit with the theme: "*The Future of Work and Digital Skills*" the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies (DCDT) demonstrates the commitment to play a critical role in digital skills development which are a cornerstone for South Africa’s readiness to be a leader in digital transformation. The DCDT is ensuring that NEMISA is poised to proactively engage on the skills needed for the new and changed world.

The discussions at this summit should engage on how to promote transformation and reduce digital divide by empowering women, youth and people with disabilities to enable them to participate meaningfully in the digital economy. NEMISA's focus should also be generally on the marginalised areas including rural areas and townships. Young women are therefore encouraged to take up available opportunities to enter the ICT industry which has been known to be dominated by males. Partnerships are critical to contribute to ensure that massive digital skills development is achievable. It is a must that NEMISA, other DCDT entities and relevant stakeholders that include the private sector, organised labour, SMEs, NPOs, TVET Colleges, universities, Schools, international bodies and organisations are working synergistically in the delivery of highest quality and adequate digital skills.

How can such partnerships be made to be effective and a much bigger scale of delivery?

The South African Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP) notes that the country has experienced stagnation over the past decade, which has hampered attempts to combat the structural and social inequalities and poverty. The Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan is advocating a response that matches or even exceeds the scale of the damage. This summit is therefore challenged to be bold in its approach and propose bold and sustainable actions that aim at assisting with the provision of skills that will take the country towards the desired path.

Investment in research, innovation and development is critical and it is pleasing that this summit has a strong slant towards such. The Research papers presented by Student Researchers, yesterday (on Day 1), in line with the Digital Transformation principles, are a true testimony of how South Africa is moving at leaps and bounds towards a citizenry and a workforce aligned to the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Data and new knowledge production coupled with a massive drive for coordinated innovation efforts have the potential for South Africa to find its own solutions and even to take them to the world. NEMISA through partnerships is well positioned to support the need unearth the new gold to be brought by such innovations.

The amount of resource needed to deploy digital skills in the country can only be sourced by attracting investment and establishing partnerships. As mandated to lead digital transformation in South Africa, the DCDT is continuously exploring ways to establish and forge partnerships for the deployment of digital skills across the country.

Partnership with ITU, ILO & UNDP

The DCDT is delighted to announce its partnership, with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), International Labour Organisation (ILO) and United Nations Development Program (UNDP), on the development of the *National Programme on Digital Skills for Decent*

Jobs for Youth in South Africa.

In 2019, the DCDT signed a “Letter of Intent” (LoI), with ITU, ILO and UNDP to coordinate and collaborate in the development of a national Programme on Digital Skills for Decent Jobs for Youth NEET in South Africa. The work contributes further to the implementation of the ITU, ILO and African Union continental decent jobs and skills for youth programme and global Digital Skills for Decent Jobs for Youth Campaign.

Aims of the Programme

The Digital Skills for Decent Jobs for Youth Programme in South Africa aims to:

- Raise awareness about the importance of training young people with job-ready digital skills and the implications of 4IR; build political and inter-ministerial cooperation and private-sector buy-in to do so; and create related communities of practice.
- Enhance the national digital skills assessment and gap analysis carried out by DCDT, as well as by other stakeholders, to include inputs from industry, employers, workers and the Fourth Industrial Revolution Commission, and to further understand the specific needs of youth, particularly those not in employment, education and training.
- Facilitate national forums on digital skills for 4IR.
- Support the implementation of demand-driven training programmes on 4IR digital skills, by enhancing the capacity of training institutions to respond to the changing needs of labour markets.
- Fund the delivery of selected pre-entry level digital skills training programmes for youth and encourage employers to fund trainings to fill the digital skills gap.
- Develop and deliver computational and design thinking and coding curriculum for South African schools, vocational institutions and universities (including training teachers and university professors to teach computational and design thinking and coding).
- Support the matching and linking of young people to education, training and job opportunities, through information and data-sharing by entities in the digital skills and labour market ecosystem and as the basis for policy making;

- Track training and employment outcomes through the national Pathway Management Network and the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth online platforms.

Key highlights of the partnership

The Partnership has, among others, resulted in the development of a national Programme on Digital Skills for Decent Jobs for Youth in South Africa with focus on Youth Not-in-Employment, Education, or Training. This Youth Programme is recognised by the approved National Digital and Future Skills Strategy as a strategic intervention for the development of a Digital Society in South Africa. Through this partnership, the ITU, ILO and UNDP also provided technical support in developing the National Digital and Future Skills Implementation Programme.

The partnership carried out in 2021 a comprehensive assessment of the “Skills supply and demand for South Africa’s Digital Economy” at national and district level, which, while informing the design and delivery of training programmes, will assist in identifying the right point of entry to contribute to the National Pathway Management Network (NPMN) initiative led by the Presidency. The NPMN is a digital multiple channel network that aims to grow a national network to reach and link three million young people to employment opportunities. The research was conceived with the view to identify gaps, opportunities and detect specific skills needs that, if addressed, can generate new employment opportunities for young people. Furthermore, it is meant to directly contribute to the overarching goal of the NPMN by linking youth to digital skills development as well as employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. The research findings will be presented to this Summit, tomorrow the 17th of February 2022.

Conclusion

The Digital and Future Skills Strategy and its Implementation Programme require all stakeholders to work together to realize these ambitious objectives. That way South African citizens will be able to benefit from enhanced digital skills, thereby contributing to a significantly enhanced quality of life, improved education and higher economic growth. Digital skills are one of the key skills sets required for the creation of 21st century jobs.

The Department appreciates the assistance from ITU, ILO and UNDP. In addition to providing technical and financial support for the development of the Implementation Plan, they are working with the DCDT to increase visibility of the programme as well as to attract partners and investors to support the National Programme on Digital Skills for Decent Jobs for Youth Programme.

The DCDT would also like to invite more organisations and private sector companies to join the implementation of the National Digital and Future Skills Programme.

I wish you fruitful discussions and as the DCDT we look forward to outcomes that will take the digital skills agenda to another level

I thank you