



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

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY MINISTER MONDLI GUNGUBELE MP, MINISTER OF
COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AT THE DIGITAL AND FUTURE SKILLS
NATIONAL CONFERENCE: 26-27 OCTOBER 2023, EAST LONDON ICC**

Topic: “Scaling-up Skills Development to support Innovation and Digital Revolution”

Thank you, Programme Director

Honourable Deputy Minister of the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies,
Mr. Philly Mapulane

Honourable MEC of Education: Mr Fundile Gade

Acting Executive Mayor of Buffalo City Metro Municipality: Cllr Jaxa

Director General of the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, Ms. Nonkqubela
Jordan-Dyani

Executive leadership of our entities

Speakers and panellists

Esteemed guests, ladies, and gentlemen; Good morning!

SETTING THE SCENE

Psalm 118 v 22 says, “the stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner”.

In the wake of the recently released Census 2022 data by Statistics South Africa, it has become abundantly clear that our nation stands at a pivotal crossroads. The data illuminates a phenomenon

that we already aware of, the evolving demographics and challenges of our society, underlining the critical **need for comprehensive and timely action**.

South Africa is on the brink of a transformative era, particularly in the digital economy landscape. The numbers from the census emphasize the urgency for skilling, reskilling, and upskilling our workforce to match the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This will help us to **make the South African labour market more resilient**.

The Census 2022 results show that the population of South Africa was 62 million in 2022. Although the median age has increased consistently, from 22 years in 1996 to 28 years in 2022, South Africa remains a **relatively youthful country**.

We are also aware of the fact that the structure of South Africa's economy has changed dramatically over the past two-and-half decades with historical anchor sectors such as mining and energy reducing in terms of their aggregate contribution to GDP as well as their average growth rate over time.

It is heartening to note that amidst these challenges, we are presented with unprecedented opportunities. Exactly three years ago, in October 2020, we received the recommendations from the Presidential Commission on the Fourth Industrial Revolution which echoed this sentiment, highlighting the essentiality of investing in our most valuable resource: **human capital**.

Hosting this Digital and Future Skills Summit in South Africa at this precise moment is not just timely; it is imperative. It signifies our collective resolve to address the disparities in digital skills, nurture innovation, and prepare our workforce for the future.

By investing in human capital, we are not merely adapting to change; we are actively shaping a future where every South African can thrive in the digital economy. This summit serves as a platform for collaborative efforts, where policymakers, industry leaders, educators, and innovators can forge meaningful partnerships and chart a course toward a digitally inclusive and prosperous South Africa.

Now is the time to *“scale up skills development to support innovation and digital revolution”* as the theme of this conference suggests.

ENHANCED DIGITAL SKILLS ECOSYSTEM

In the ever-evolving landscape of the digital economy, a comprehensive approach to digital skills development is not desirable, it is a must. While technical skills form the backbone of digital proficiency, they are a fundamental ingredient, we must also recognize that the digital world demands more than just technical know-how.

Soft skills such as critical thinking, communication, creativity, and adaptability, are the linchpin of a truly effective digital workforce. These skills empower individuals not only to navigate the complexities of technology but also collaborate, innovate, network, and empathize.

In an era where human-machine collaboration is the norm, soft skills are the bridge that connects technology with human values and aspirations. A holistic approach, encompassing both the technical and soft skill, not only enhances employability but also cultivates entrepreneurship. It builds a workforce that can ideate, communicate ideas effectively, and solve complex problem creatively.

By nurturing a workforce that is equipped with a diverse skill set, we are not only future proofing our industries, but we are fostering a culture of innovation and resilience. The synergy between technical prowess and mastery of soft skills forms the cornerstone of a digitally literate society, ready to tackle the challenges and seize the opportunities of the digital age.

In his book titled “Shaping the Future of the Fourth Industrial Revolution” – the Founder and Executive Chairma of the World Economic Forum, Prof Klauss Schwab argues that *“we need to pay attention to the way the Fourth Industrial Revolution will impact different genders in various ways. In the first and second Industrial Revolution, women were pushed into the home, diminishing their political and economic influence.”*

Schwab further submits that if it is left unchecked, there is a possibility that *“the skills bias of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which favours highly technical workers and businesses could contribute to growing this divide.”*

I have been reliably informed that this conference will also deliberate on the role of women in the digital economy.

Programme Director, Ladies, and gentlemen

We must be deliberate in our efforts to empower youth and women with the requisite digital and future skills.

NURTURED INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Nurturing innovation and entrepreneurship is not just a strategy, it is a mindset that propels nations into the future. In today's dynamic digital landscape, innovation is the engine that drives progress, and entrepreneurship is the vehicle through which transformative ideas find expression in the real world.

By fostering a culture of innovation, we inspire people to think creatively, to challenge the status quo, and to envision possibilities beyond the current boundaries. Equally important is cultivating an entrepreneurial spirit, where individuals are not only equipped with the skills to start their ventures but are also encouraged and empowered to do so.

Entrepreneurship is not merely about starting businesses, it's about solving societal and economic problems. It is about creating jobs and driving economic growth.

At the heart of nurturing innovation and entrepreneurship lies support – support for research and development, for access to capital, for mentorship and training, and for a conducive regulatory environment.

By investing in innovation hubs, incubators, and accelerators, we create ecosystems where ideas flourish and where entrepreneurs can thrive. Empowering our innovators and entrepreneurs is an investment in our collective future, one that paves the way for groundbreaking solutions, economic vitality, and a society that embraces change with enthusiasm and purpose.

FUTURE-READY WORKFORCE

As we stand on the cusp of profound changes in the world of work, it is imperative that we equip our workforce with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to excel in an increasingly digital and automated world.

To be “future-ready” means more than being technologically literate, it means being agile, adaptive, curious, and lifelong learners. We must prioritize continuous learning and education to ensure that our workforce is remains versatile and capable of adapting to evolving industries and job roles.

Equally significant is fostering a mindset of innovation, problem-solving, and collaboration, as these attributes will empower our workforce to thrive in an environment characterised by constant change.

Preparing for the future of work is not a solitary endeavour, it demands concerted efforts from government, industry, civil society, and educational institutions. Together, we can redefine the way we approach education and training to ensure that every individual has the opportunity to become a valuable contributor to our digital society.

In recent years, South Africa has made significant strides towards embracing the digital realm. The government has recognized the importance of developing digital skills and has taken steps to bridge the digital divide. Initiatives such as the Presidential Commission on the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and the development of the National Digital and Future Skills Strategy, which was approved in August 2020, are amongst initiatives that government is undertaking to digitally transform the economy and society through implementation of digital skills programmes.

LABOUR MARKET RESILIENCE

National Digital and Future Skills Strategy is a response to the digital skills demand brought by the rapid rise of interactions on digital platforms. This Strategy provides a guide for the development of professional and societal digital skills required for the country's advancement as a digital economy. It also seeks to ensure that the citizens can benefit from enhanced level of digital skills leading to an improved quality of life, improved education, greater economic growth, and creation of new job opportunities.

Program Director, Ladies, and gentlemen

It has already been highlighted that the digital era has sparked a revolutionary process that is changing the fundamental characteristics of work in all sectors of the economy.

Therefore, as social partners we need to develop the labour market resilience through anticipating and mitigating challenges posed by digital disruptions, ensuring that policies and strategies are in place to safeguard jobs, support displaced workers, and promote skilling, reskilling, and upskilling.

We have since as DCDT partnered with the Tshwane University of Technology and the University of Johannesburg as part of the Presidential Commission on Fourth Industrial Revolution (PC4IR) recommendations that as a country we need to position ourselves and get the benefits from artificial intelligence and emerging technologies.

We have collaborated with these universities as institutions of higher learning are centres of knowledge and development, they play a very critical role in ensuring that the future we envision as a country and the continent at large is realised. We have launched Artificial Intelligence (AI) Hubs with these institutions for the purpose of enhancing the economic activity in various sectors through a series of catalytical projects that are focused on the use of technology.

For instance, the TUT AI Hub is linked to the automotive, health, transportation, digital identity, and mobility sectors, while the Johannesburg Business School (JBS) AI Hub is linked to manufacturing, mining, and the criminal justice system amongst others.

STRENGTHENED PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

In conclusion, ladies, and gentlemen

We believe that this conference should facilitate meaningful collaborations and partnerships between the public and private sectors, enabling the development and implementation of effective policies, educational programs, and initiatives that bridge skills gaps and drive innovation in the digital economy.

William Shakespeare wrote in one of his classical works, Julius Caesar:

“There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. Omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in miseries. On such a full sea are now afloat, and we must take the current when it serves, or lose our ventures.”

Opportunity, as Brutus submitted to Cassius, is a force that ebbs and flows in time. Therefore, now is the time for us to act. I thank you!