



MINISTRY  
COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**Speech by the Minister Communications and Digital Technologies, Mondli Gungubele (MP),  
during the Launch of the National Digital Skills Forum,  
The Capital – Menlyn Maine,  
01 March 2024**

Programme Director, Deputy Director General of SOC in DCDT Mr Omega Shelembe

DCDT Deputy Minister; Mr Philly Mapulane DCDT Director;  
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Distinguished guests; Captains of Industry and Academia, Members of the media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have awakened to a new age of literacy.

The rapid advancements of technology we see today have not only ushered to the world the convenience of powerful digital tools, but a stark reality, that we find ourselves at a risk of being left behind in a world fluent in the language of digital literacy.

For eons literacy in the traditional sense of learning numeracy, and how to read and write, has been the common language in the global village.

As such it has been one of the endeavours of governments across the world to ensure the literacy levels among their citizens is above reproach.

Our government has been no different.

We meet here today during a monumental year for our nation, one that marks a unique milestone.

We have journeyed to the peak of this mountain, and we, for a brief moment, relish the opportunity to reflect on the work of this 6<sup>th</sup> administration, and that of this democratic government three decades on.

Where literacy is concerned, according to a StatsSA report on Social Challenges, between 2002 and 2017, South Africa saw improvements in school-going learners aged 6–18 years.

It states that school attendance rose from 91,3% to 96,0% and problems around access to text books as reported by households dropped from 24,3% to 5,9%. The increase in school attendance was boosted by the implementation of the 'no-fee' policy.

The percentage of learners benefiting from the 'no-fee' policy rose from 0,3% to 64,8% by 2017. Learners attending public schools in Limpopo, Free State and Eastern Cape were the major beneficiaries of this policy.

However, ladies and gentlemen, as technology has become a critical aspect of our daily lives, the digital economy has in the same pace demanded that all citizens be digitally literate.

It is for this reason therefore that we face the new task of building a digitally literate nation in a rapidly digital progressing world.

The speedy advancement, adoption and deployment of technologies in developing countries like ours has resulted in a shortage of digital skills. These skills include basic digital skills which relate to the usage of digital devices.

Societies around the world have become increasingly interconnected and dependent on digital technologies. This has compelled the economy to have a digitally skilled workforce.

South Africa's ability to expand economically and remain competitive globally depends on its ability to develop massive digital skills programmes which are vital components of human capacity.

It is therefore apparent that skills development will always remain essential for the country's economic growth and competitiveness in the global economy and the broader global landscape.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Our government has recognized the importance of developing digital skills, and has taken giant steps towards bridging the digital divide.

One of those significant steps was evident in the establishment of the Presidential Commission on the 4IR (PC4IR) by His Excellency, President Matamela Ramaphosa in 2019. This commission was mandated to provide leadership for society to understand, navigate and assume agency over what will be the fundamentally altered future.

The Department Of Communications and Digital Technologies a year later developed the National Digital and Future Skills Strategy, based on a comprehensive assessment of the digital skills gaps that exist in the country and those necessary in the future.

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 levels of digital skills, leading to an improved quality of life, education, greater economic growth, and creation of new jobs.

Amongst other objectives, the National Digital and Future Skills Strategy seeks to ensure that citizens are provided with the necessary levels of basic and specialized digital skills that will empower them to function within the digital economy.

It also seeks to ensure that no citizen is left behind in the drive to digitize the economy.

As part of the implementation of this National Digital and Future Skills Strategy:

- Our department partnered with NEMISA to launched what we call the Ya Rona Digital Programme.

The programme is a "Digital Skills Massification Drive" which empowers youth in particular and offer them an opportunity to become Digital Ambassadors to train their communities in digital skills.

The programme has been successfully rolled out in the North West, Kwa Zulu-Natal, Limpopo and Free State provinces. It is currently underway in the Eastern Cape province and is intended to be rolled out to all provinces in South Africa. To date, over 20, 000 citizens in these provinces have been successfully trained by ambassadors on basic digital literacy concepts.

- We have partnerships with other Government Departments, State Owned Entities (SoEs) and the business sector through the SA Connect flagship project.

SA Connect supports implementation of the National Digital and Future Skills Strategy by deployment of relevant ICT infrastructure.

- The objective is to expedite connectivity to 5.5 million rural and township households enabled by 32055 Wi-Fi hotspots in the next 3 to 4 years;
  - 1.5 million households enabled by 8415 Wi-Fi hotspots by December 2024;
  - 747 000 households enabled by 4250 Wi-Fi hotspots by the end of this financial year
  - To date, we can report that we have achieved a coverage of 361 000 households enabled by 2502 Wi-Fi hotspots.
- It is important to note that there are numerous challenges that hamper progress in digital skills development. Key amongst them is the lack of funding and collaboration.

Nevertheless, the Department is in the process of bringing together more partners to assist in creating internships and work placements for graduates and citizens.

We are partnering with GIZ-South Africa [which is a skills development agency of the German government] in implementing digital skills programmes. Through this partnership, 250 not in education and not in training (NEET) young women were put on 12-month digital entrepreneur learnership programme, The GIZ is conducting research to find ways to support TVET colleges.

- In the year 2022, the Department launched the Artificial Intelligence Institute in partnership with the University of Johannesburg and the Tshwane University of Technology.

The Institute aims to increase access to advanced digital skills, research and enable the creation of new knowledge and innovative technology applications in industries such as health, agriculture, education, energy, manufacturing, tourism, and ICT.

- In 2022, the Department agreed to partner 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. The Programme aims to promote digital skills among South African youth.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We are here all of us because, by virtue of the knowledge and different experiences we have been entrusted with, are burdened with responsibility. The responsibility to carry a nation towards a secured digital future.

As such, we have gathered you, captains of industry and academia, to engage in a maiden dialogue on activities around digital skills.

It is my honour therefore, to officially launch this Digital Skills Forum (DSF). This gathering will provide guidance and oversight on implementation of the National Digital Skills Programme.

The most crucial role of the DSF will be to bring together the necessary expertise, financial resources and institutional support as well as to track the performance of the National Digital Skills Programme. The work of the DSF will be based on specific focus areas identified in the National Digital and Future Skills Strategy.

The DSF will be expected to work closely with the Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) by providing the necessary technical support to the work of the HRDC and the general human resource development of the country.

**In conclusion programme director,**

The Department is hard at work to ensure that the youth, particularly those in the rural settlements and the Not in Education Employment and Training (NEET) have access to ICTs and digital skills necessary to enable them to actively take part in the digital economy.

I am confident therefore that the work of this Forum to manifest the objectives of the National Digital Skills Programme will result in a digitally skilled South Africa of the future.

We encourage that you take your place in this forum individually and as a unit, to be generous with your contributions to enhance digital skills in our country.

I thank you.