MINISTER'S ADDRESS:

3RD MEETING OF THE G20 DIGITAL ECONOMY WORKING GROUP

9 June 2025, Polokwane

Programme Director

Premier

Representatives of G20 Members

Distinguished guests

Good morning.

Welcome to Polokwane. It is fitting that we meet here, in a city where the contrast between digital access in urban centres and rural communities is clearly visible – and instructive.

It is also here in Limpopo where we can see how the provincial government's digital public infrastructure projects have improved the lives of their citizens – whether that be through mobile clinics, digital classrooms or the provision of spectrum for smart agriculture.

The myriads of events that have transpired in the two months since we last met in Gqeberha perfectly illustrate just how important the themes of South Africa's G20 Presidency are. Now, more than ever, we need Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainability in the way we approach our shared developmental agenda.

This third meeting of the Digital Economy Working Group reflects our shared commitments. Together, we are advancing a set of shared priorities designed to make the digital economy more inclusive, more accountable, and more enabling of sustainable development.

Let me briefly highlight the key areas of work we are advancing under our Presidency.

First, on Connectivity for Inclusive Digital Development:

As we adopt new waves of technological progress, it is critically important that we address the structural barriers to digital inclusion. If we fail to make progress on levelling the playing field, we risk further entrenching our social inequalities.

Our collaboration with the ITU, the Development Bank of Southern Africa, and Research ICT Africa is focusing on developing a framework to identify and resolve the persistent barriers to meaningful access.

The initial insights from this collaborative effort tell us that while the conversation about access is so often dominated by infrastructure, which is important, we must understand the full ecosystem of digital inclusion.

Handset costs, income levels, the affordability of data, the relevance of digital services to daily life, and digital literacy all shape the ability of people to participate in the digital economy – especially for people living in rural areas.

To tackle this, we are also investing in better statistical data, as we know that we cannot address what we do not measure. Our aim is to support Member States in developing context-sensitive strategies that prioritise the demand-side of connectivity, and not only the supply.

Second, on Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI):

We are proposing a Public Value Measurement Framework that will support countries in designing DPI systems that are not only technically sound, but socially valuable. This includes identifying the benefits, mitigating potential risks, and building a compelling investment case.

This is complemented by our work on Integrated Governance Guidelines for DPI, following on from previous G20 presidencies. Through our partnerships with the AU, ITU, UNDP, and academic institutions like University College London and Research ICT Africa, we are fostering a coherent approach to DPI that is scalable, sustainable, and inclusive.

We are also excited by the early responses to the G20 DPI Call for Innovations—including innovations emerging from the African continent that hold global relevance.

In South Africa, we are not only talking about DPI, but taking action.

Solidarity Equality Sustainability

Just last month, we launched our Digital Transformation Roadmap for Government. This whole-of-government approach will see a transformative shift in how government interacts with its citizens, and we feel fortunate that we will have the opportunity to implement the learnings from this G20 workstream to the benefit of South Africans.

Third, on Digital Innovation Ecosystems for MSMEs:

A few weeks ago, I was privileged enough to witness two young entrepreneurs from Gumbani Village, right here in Limpopo, receive significant funding and support from Liberty. These two young men built NOVAR, a free e-learning platform, with no formal training and a second-hand computer, but will now have the chance to scale their product to the benefit of more South African learners.

In economies where structural unemployment remains a stubborn challenge, these types of enterprises must be provided all the opportunity to succeed, and we know that digital inclusion can amplify success.

But this requires an enabling digital ecosystem that caters for the specific needs of medium, small and micro enterprises, so that NOVAR's success story becomes the norm, not an outlier.

Through collaboration between DCDT, CSIR, DSTI, ITU, and our own Digitech programme, we are developing an approach on how to enable innovation ecosystems that are responsive to future trends.

This includes financing for digital MSMEs and policy recommendations to help them grow, connect, and scale.

We are also engaging with research from the World Bank and Research ICT Africa on how to bring micro-enterprises more fully into the digital economy. These businesses are resilient and resourceful – but they need platforms, access, and applications tailored to their needs.

Fourth, on Equitable, Inclusive, and Just Artificial Intelligence:

Artificial Intelligence holds transformative potential, but it also raises urgent questions about fairness, representation, and integrity.

To address this, we are developing a toolkit, in partnership with UNESCO, to address inequality in AI systems – whether through biased data, flawed design, or a lack of transparency.

We are also exploring language model development for South African languages, in collaboration with the SABC, DSTI and academia, to ensure our linguistic diversity is reflected in future AI systems.

Furthermore, we are looking at the evolving capabilities of generative AI and the risks posed by deepfakes, which is an issue of growing concern for information integrity and public trust.

Solidarity Equality Sustainability

Finally, the DCDT has established a Task Force on AI, Data Governance and Innovation for Sustainable Development, which is engaging across G20 Working Groups, and preparing for the flagship AI for Africa Conference to be held in September.

This initiative aims to align global efforts with the AU's Artificial Intelligence Strategy and Data Policy Framework, and to mobilise meaningful support for the continent's priorities.

Colleagues,

We thank you for the constructive engagement thus far, and we look forward to your continued inputs as we work toward the G20 Digital Economy Ministerial in September.

Let this week's meeting remind us of what is truly at stake. Let us not situate our work solely in the language of policies and frameworks, but in the lived experiences of millions who remain excluded from digital opportunity.

Let us continue to work with Solidarity, pursue Equality, and design for Sustainability.

I thank you.