



MINISTRY
COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL
TECHNOLOGIES, HON. MR MONDLI GUNGUBELE AT DIGITAL SKILLS
PARTNERSHIPS MEETING, PRETORIA, 29 September 2023**

*Thank you, Programme Director, Partners in Digitally
Skilling our Nation, Ladies and gentlemen*

Good morning

Thank you for joining us for this crucial meeting of partners on Digital Skills. When we came into this office six months ago, we identified the centrality of digital skills in the advancement of economic transformation as part of the seven apex priorities of this 6th Administration of our democratic government. Today's gathering is therefore an essential platform for us to come together as partners in pursuit of a common objective.

The National Development Plan (NDP), which is our lodestar, acknowledges that the global economy is evolving and requires greater attention to enhance industrial skills development. Furthermore, the National Integrated ICT White Paper, published by the Department in 2013, alluded to the need for the development of a Digital Society in which digital skills is a requirement.

The Digital and Future Skills Strategy published in 2020, by the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, has been a strategic and intentional response to global dynamics which require a much efficient workforce for the future. The strategy sets out a structured series of initiatives intended to contribute to the capacities of South Africans to meet the challenges arising from the increasing deployment and adoption of digital technologies. It also presents a vision of a South Africa in which all its people can benefit from enhanced digital skills, thereby contributing to a significantly enhanced quality of life, improved education, and higher economic growth.

The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated this demand. According to the Institute for Information Technology Professionals of South Africa the key drivers of change influencing skills demand and

supply across the Media, Information and Communications Technology (MICT) sector include artificial intelligence, cloud computing, big data analytics, 5G and Internet of Things. It further indicates that the pandemic brought about several new ways of doing things, such as working remotely, which brought about an exponential rise in video calls/phone calls as an increasing number of people are organizing meetings via apps or collaboration platforms; resulting in a rise in e-learning; online education; and e-governance, amongst others.

South Africa's Skills landscape

The 2022 Department of Higher Education and Training report on Supply and Demand of Skills in South Africa indicates that skills shortages and the high levels of unemployment, particularly youth unemployment are amongst the stubborn concerns facing the nation.

Although South Africa's high level of unemployment is not unique, it is compounded by skills shortages that result in a structural mismatch between labour demand and supply. This structural mismatch occurs because many of the skills shortages occur in the high-end skills market, while the majority of the employed and the unemployed have low-level skills.

The Presidential Commission on Fourth Industrial Revolution report emphasised the need to invest in Human Capital. The 4IR requires a skilled, capable, and technologically advanced workforce which is continuously learning and keeping pace with the rate of development and change that the 4IR makes the norm. Research indicates that one of the factors associated with SA's youth unemployment crisis is the lack of skills and qualifications that are relevant to the sectors of the economy in which there are employment opportunities- what is commonly referred to as "*skills mismatch*".

Scholars agree that investing in Human Capital is a costly exercise, takes time and has high returns. In that regard, government prioritises the issue of Human Capital Development, starting with building digital skills foundations, wherein learners are now introduced to basic coding and robotics at basic education level. The focus on building the digital pedagogical knowledge for teachers and development of educator digital learning competencies is spoused in the Digital Learning Framework.

A holistic approach in building digital mastery skills is evident in the interventions done by the Department of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation, working with the SETAs, accreditation and qualifications authorities, and various government departments and state-owned entities. NEMISA has also identified programmes for accreditation by relevant authorities; and engagements are taking place.

Importance of partnerships

In the 2023 Budget Vote Speech of the Department Communications and Digital Technologies, we outlined the in-roads made by the Department working its Entities as it relates to the Digital Skills programme. We further emphasised the need to forge partnerships with the likes of yourselves for us to achieve the huge responsibility to flatten the curve of unemployment, especially for the young people of this nation.

We set a target number of 90 000 beneficiaries who must be taken through the pipeline of digital skills development on various digital related skills with a magnified lens on cell phone repairs, laptop refurbishment, as these skills can lead to direct economic spin-offs for the youth.

Digital Literacy is still one of the areas we all need to focus on to ensure that every citizen can participate in the Digital Economy. There are intermediate and high skills which we are also required to focus on.

The Director-General, subsequently reached out to the call for a joint support to achieve this task and you responded very positively, hence we are here today.

The Department believes that multi-stakeholder initiatives provide an important means to building awareness, creating interest, drawing national attention, launching major initiatives, forging partnerships, and motivating people to acquire digital skills.

Government, the private sector, social partners, non-profit organisations, and education providers can work together to foster greater impact in initiatives to advance digital skills in South Africa. We would like to strengthen the commitment. The National Electronic and Media Institute of South Africa (NEMISA) our “implementing arm” for Digital Skills training, also present here today, is hard at work towards achieving these targets, however more hands and resources are required.

Conclusion

Working with the Director-General and her team and NEMISA, the partnerships will be formalised, and efficient monitoring and tracking mechanisms shall be developed.

Because time is not on our side, I would like to receive a report of the work done with the partners consolidated by the time we all go the upcoming Digital and Future Skills National Conference on 26-27 October 2023 in the East London.

This partnership will lift South Africa, make an impact on thousands of youth who are desperate for meaningful future. I am certain that in a year’s time, when we reflect on progress, we will see

positive change in the lives of the youth and unemployed person, in the business operation and output, and in government – that makes South Africa a digital hub in this digital economy.

I look forward to this engagement and impact it aims to make. I thank you.