



MINISTRY
COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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CLOSING ADDRESS BY DEPUTY MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES, HON. PHILLY MAPULANE MP, AT THE DIGITAL AND FUTURE SKILLS NATIONAL CONFERENCE: 26-27 OCTOBER 2023, EAST LONDON ICC

REALISING THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

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

Thank you, Programme Director;

Honourable Minister of Communications and Digital

Technologies, Minister Mondli Gungubele

Director General of the Department of Communications and

Digital Technologies, Nonkqubela Jordan-Dyani

Members of the Boards and Chief Executives of our State

Owned Entities

Distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen

Good afternoon

INTRODUCTION

What a wonderful conference we've just had. What a wonderful two days we've spend here in East London. I'm certain that I speak for the majority of you, if not all of the delegates who gathered here that this has been the two days well spend here in the Eastern Cape, the home of the legends, the province which gave us Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Govan Mbeki, Chris Hani, Winnie Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Thabo Mbeki, our very own Minister Gungubele and many more legends.

On behalf of the Ministry and the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, let me take this opportunity to express my thanks and appreciation to each and everyone of you for your attendance and participation in this event. Our Minister Gungubele, who set the scene with a keynote address and boldly articulated the commitment of the political leadership of the department not only to embrace the ideas and recommendations arising out of this digital skills conference, but to act as its principal champion. In him you have a dependable ally. The political will is in abundance. MEC Gade, who challenged each one of us to abandon the mentality of victimhood and to embrace the spirit of being heroes. Acting Executive Mayor, our speakers, moderators, and panellists, you have collectively made this conference a tremendous success. The knowledge and insights you shared during these two days is invaluable in advancing our understanding of the rapidly evolving digital landscape. We appreciate your participation in this conference and your dedication to creating a brighter future for our country.

As we adjourn this conference, let us remember the commitment we made over the past two days, that this conference should not be just a platform for dialogue; but must be an incubator for action. The insights gained here must serve as building blocks to shape our collective digital future. Together, we must ensure that the benefits of the digital age are accessible to all, regardless of background or circumstance. Scaling up skills development to support innovation and the digital revolution is an investment in the future. It's not only about empowering individuals with the tools to succeed but also about driving economic growth and societal progress. By embracing these principles, we can unlock the full potential of the digital age and foster a culture of innovation and adaptability.

THE DIGITAL SKILLS DEMAND

The 2022 report on Supply and Demand of Skills in South Africa by the Department of Higher education and Training reminded us that skills shortages and the high levels of unemployment are amongst the stubborn concerns facing the South African society. The unemployment rate in South Africa is amongst the highest in the world and has remained consistently high with the overall

unemployment rate estimated by the recent StatsSA report to be at 32,6 percent, while 3.5 million of young people aged 15–24 years are currently not in employment, education, or training (NEET). The report notes that 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 2020 digital and Future Skills Strategy, which is anchoring this conference, seeks to make an intervention on digital skills to address the structural mismatch as identified by the report.

While digital transformation promises to massively improve lives and to be used to lift millions of our people out of poverty, South Africa is dealing with what could be characterised as a digital inequality paradox. The more technology advances in society, the more widespread and pervasive the digital divide (Research ICT Africa, 2020).

Throughout the conference yesterday, we have delved deep into the world of digital skills, exploring emerging technologies, best practices, and the impact of digitalization on various industries. We've also discussed the importance of inclusive digital education, bridging the digital divide, and promoting diversity within the ICT sector.

It is abundantly clear that digital skills are not only a necessity in our modern world, but they are also a driver of economic growth and innovation. The demand for individuals proficient in various digital domains is growing exponentially, and as we've seen, the right skills can open doors and career opportunities. Skills development, fostering innovation and navigating the digital revolution requires a holistic approach to skills development. This includes both technical skills like coding, data analysis, and cybersecurity, as well as soft skills like creativity, critical thinking, and adaptability.

Skills development for a digital economy is not a one-time effort but an ongoing journey. It requires collaboration between educational institutions, businesses, individuals, and governments to ensure that we are well-prepared for the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital age. The ability to adapt and grow in this ever-changing landscape is essential for success.

The insights shared by our esteemed speakers and the discussions among all participants have been truly enlightening. It's a testament to the collective dedication to enhancing digital skills and shaping the future of our increasingly digital world.

As we leave this conference, let's not forget the importance of continuous learning and adaptation. The digital landscape will continue to evolve, and our skills must evolve with it. I encourage you all to remain curious, stay informed, and seek opportunities for growth.

PARTNESHIPS

Programme Director let me also take this opportunity and thank those who have pledged to enter into partnerships with the department who were announced last night at the Gala Dinner by the Director General. The pledges have surpassed the 90 000 target of the Minister.

We thank all the companies for this act of patriotic duty to contribute to changing digital skills landscape and position our country is among the best in the world, thus contributing to the growth of the economy.

The seed you are planting today will germinate and grow into a giant baobab tree, under which future generations will find refuge under its shade.

WAYFORWARD

The Minister has directed, which directive we agree should be a key resolution of this conference, that the Digital Skills Forum, which is forum envisaged by the implementation plan of the Digital Skills Strategy, must be convened and launched before the end of this calendar year.

This forum, to be chaired by the Minister and supported by the Deputy Minister, will serve as an institutional mechanism for reporting on all digital skills initiatives in the country. It will report to Human Resource Development Committee which is chaired by the Deputy President and focusing on the broader human capacity development in the country.

During this inaugural meeting before the end of the year, the forum will receive a conference report of this conference, inclusive of the resolutions.

In the words of the Minister, we are launching a movement. Gone are the days of the talk shops. We want action and action is what we are going to get.

CONCLUSION

In closing, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all our speakers, panellists, sponsors, and each of you for your active participation and for your discipline. It's your commitment to enhancing digital skills that makes events like these so impactful. Let's carry the knowledge and inspiration gained here forward and work together to make a positive impact on the digital landscape. Let's not be

observers of this landscape; lets become its principal architects. With the right skills, vision, and determination, we can shape a digital future that benefits us all.

Let me leave you with a quote from the founding father of the People's Republic of China, Mao Zeodong, when he challenged the intellectuals of the time to contribute to the intellectual development of China, which I think aptly characterised what we've just witnessed here in the past two days "Let a hundred flowers bloom; let a thousand schools of thought contend".

I thank you!

Issued by the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies.