



MINISTRY
COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES
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45th Southern African Telecommunication Association (SATA) Annual Conference

Programme Director,

Government officials from South Africa, Representatives of the SADC region, SATA
Board members and CEOs, Regulators and ICT leaders,

CRASA, SAPOA, and industry partners, Members of the media,

Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is a pleasure to officially open the 45th Southern African Telecommunications
Association's (SATA) Annual Conference, hosted by Telkom Group and Openserve.

On behalf of the South African government and the Department of Communications
and Digital Technologies, I extend a warm welcome to all delegates and guests.

This year's conference occurs at a truly historic moment — one that holds immense
significance not just for South Africa, but for the entire continent.

For the first time, an African country holds the Presidency of the G20. South Africa is
truly honoured to lead this global platform.

We understand that our Presidency of the G20 comes with the added responsibility of promoting the interests of our broader Southern African and African community.

It is with this shared responsibility in mind that I reflect on the theme of this year's conference: *ICT Connectivity and Service Delivery for the Benefit of All: Transforming Our Society Through Broadband and ICT Development*.

Our region faces multiple developmental challenges. While the nature and extent of the challenges each member country faces may be different, their impact remains the same: too many of our people are still denied the chance to reach their full potential.

I am a firm believer that ICT connectivity can be the catalyst that changes the trajectory of our region.

From improved access to healthcare, education, government services to economic opportunities – these are all drivers of development in which connectivity plays a crucial role.

As we come together over the next three days to discuss various matters, I encourage you to remain focused on the very human impact of our work, and our collective potential to improve the lives of millions.

I am pleased to note that deliberations will also include how we connect the SADC region both regionally and internationally through ICT infrastructure and services.

At a time when isolationism is on the rise globally, I am encouraged that the topic of cross-border collaboration remains central to our regional agenda. At a time when the world seems to be pulling apart, it is encouraging we are choosing to stay connected on connectivity.

We are grateful to SATA for providing the platform for us to pursue our shared goals.

Close to our hearts is the issue of affordability and accessibility to internet services and devices. Access to low-cost smartphones and computers helps bridge the digital divide and is a critical first step to digital inclusion.

In this regard, I am proud to highlight that the South African government has removed the 9% ad valorem excise duty on smartphones priced below R2,500.

This intervention serves as an example of the policy levers governments can use to improve access – but governments cannot solve this challenge alone.

It is only through working together, as partners in a shared mission, can we hope to achieve the level of infrastructure investment required to ensure our people can enjoy the benefits of connectivity.

Connectivity, however, is just the first step. As we work on getting more people connected, we must also prepare for the wave of technologies reshaping our world.

It is significant that the G20's Digital Economy Working Group and the Task Force on Artificial Intelligence, Data Governance, and Innovation for Sustainable Development are shaped by four strategic priorities:

1. Promoting responsible and inclusive artificial intelligence
2. Expanding inclusive digital public infrastructure
3. Supporting innovation ecosystems for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)
4. Advancing universal and meaningful connectivity

These priorities reflect the real challenges and opportunities that our region faces. I therefore urge this conference to engage with them — to reflect on how SATA's work can strengthen regional implementation and ensure that Africa's voice is present in the global digital dialogue.

We have deliberately ensured that the G20 forum includes experts from the African Union (AU), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and others.

Likewise, the B20 offers a critical avenue for business and industry players in the SADC region to contribute their insights and expertise.

To this end, the appointment of Telkom Group CEO Mr Serame Taukobong to the B20's Local Business Advisory Council means this sector now has a direct channel of influence over shaping the future of the global digital economy.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate him on this important appointment.

Additionally, as delegates to this Conference, your insights are key to shaping a collective approach to leveraging these emerging technologies for the benefit of all the people of our region.

In line with the SATA Constitution, Openserve now assumes the Chairmanship of this respected SADC institution. I extend our congratulations and full support to Openserve and Telkom as they lead SATA through 2025–2026.

My Department and I stand ready to work alongside you in delivering meaningful digital transformation in our region.

I would also like to take this opportunity to urge all operators and service providers not yet part of SATA to join this collaborative platform.

It is only through a whole of society approach — across government, industry, and civil society — that we can build a connected future that serves everyone across the SADC region.

Let the outcomes of this conference inspire tangible action - both regionally and globally - as we work together for a connected, empowered Southern Africa.

Let us commit to turning our shared vision into action — and making meaningful connectivity a reality for all.

I hereby declare the 45th SATA Annual Conference officially opened.

I thank you.