



MINISTRY
COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**DEBATE SPEECH BY THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES DEPUTY
MINISTER MONDLI GUNGUBELE DURING BUDGET VOTE 1 2024 – NATIONAL ASSEMBLY - CAPE TOWN, 23
July 2024**

Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly, Thoko Didiza
Chairperson of National Council of Provinces, Refilwe Mtsweni-Tsipane
His Excellency, President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa
Deputy President, Paul Mashatile
Honourable members of this house,

INTRODUCTION

The short-sighted unimaginative mind will conclude that the African National Congress through its decision to pursue the Government of National Unity reneges on what it stands for. But we remain true to the innate purpose of this movement, a purpose for a united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society.

The social cohesion we experience in our streets today post the 2024 provincial and national election results is a consequence of credible leadership, unparalleled emotional intelligence and the IQ of treasured professionals – and as many South Africans have come to coin as a description for what drives us, - “it is not DNA, it is RSA”.

As we convene today to deliberate on the critical matter of **digital communication and inclusive transformation**, it is imperative that as a country we recognize the significance of aligning ourselves with developments in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) for the sake of our economy.

As the President said in his Opening of Parliament Address, “[We] will pursue every action that contributes to sustainable, rapid economic growth and remove every

obstacle that stands in the way of growth. We are determined that growth must be inclusive. It must be transformational.”

As a developing country, 4IR has presented us with an opportunity to skip into new sectors and industries by accessing advanced technologies directly, fostering economic growth and job creation.

For South Africa to remain globally competitive and to drive sustainable economic growth, we must embrace these new tech advancements characterized by the fusion of physical, digital, and biological worlds.

By leveraging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and the Internet of Things, we can develop innovative solutions to address systemic challenges.

STAYING THE 4IR COURSE

Honourable Members, In our quest to resolve South Africa’s historical scars of poverty, unemployment, and inequality, we must be intentional about the role of the State. Our commitment to the 4IR was demonstrated when the government appointed a Presidential Commission of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

This Commission, led by Prof. Tshilidzi Marwala, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Johannesburg, made eight key recommendations, including investment in human capital, establishment of an AI Institute, and building of the 4IR infrastructure. These recommendations are actively being implemented through adaptive policies and investment in digital infrastructure such as data centres, fibre rollout and 5G deployment.

A COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY DRIVEN ECONOMY

Madam Speaker, The modern economy, powered by communications and digital technologies, is characterised by continuous innovation, seamless connectivity, and strategic data use.

High-speed internet and mobile networks facilitate real-time communication, while cloud computing, data analytics, and AI improve efficiency and customer experience.

Economic growth is driven by enhanced productivity through digital tools, creating new markets and opportunities.

Digital technologies democratize access to information and services, benefiting rural and underserved communities. Ensuring broadband access across South Africa remains crucial for inclusivity.

Entrepreneurs can leverage digital platforms to access global markets and grow their businesses, supported by innovation hubs and tech incubators that drive entrepreneurship and economic growth.

DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

Digital communications have transformed South Africa's educational advancement, providing students and educators with access to a vast array of online resources, enhancing the learning experience and making education more engaging and effective. During the COVID-19 lockdown, digital technologies ensured that education could continue despite disruptions.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC NECESSITY OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION IN URBAN AREAS

Digital communication tools, such as social media platforms, messaging apps, and video conferencing, facilitate real-time interaction and connectivity among communities. These tools help maintain personal and professional relationships, support community engagement, and foster social cohesion.

In times of crisis or emergencies, digital communication tools have proved to be crucial for disseminating information and coordinating responses as we have witnessed in areas such as the Eastern and Western Cape, and in KZN.

Social media and emergency alert systems help keep residents informed about safety measures, evacuation plans, and other critical updates.

LINKING DIGITAL REVOLUTION TO LAND AND AGRARIAN REFORM

The digital revolution is critical for advancing land and agrarian reform, offering transformative solutions to enhance efficiency, transparency, and sustainability in these sectors. Digital technologies, such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), satellite imagery, and drones, enable precise land administration and management.

A practical example is a cadastral system that is currently being implemented by the minerals and mining department to provide a reliable and detailed mapping service with mine boundaries, mineral rights and other information needed by both investors and government.

In agriculture, digital innovations like precision farming, farm management systems, and e-commerce platforms significantly boost productivity and market access.

WHAT HAS BEEN DELIVERED IN THE SECTOR THUS FAR

Honorable Members, so far, we have established **AI hubs** at four institutions of higher learning: the University of Johannesburg (focusing on manufacturing), Tshwane University of Technology (focusing on the automotive sector), Central University of Technology (focusing on farming and food production), and the South African Military Academy (dedicated to defence and military sector).

These hubs harness the transformative power of AI and position South Africa strategically as a force to be reckoned with.

Through SITA, the department developed the National **e-Government** Portal with 132 digitized government services. SITA will connect/upgrade 14,342 government sites over 36 months. More than 1,718 upgrades to government facilities have been completed. SITA continues to improve building a resilient and modern **digital environment**.

The Department has ensured that as part of the Digital Migration Programme, all the 123 **analogue transmitters** above 694 MHz were **switched off** by 31 July 2023 to release spectrum for other telecommunications use.

On 17 January 2024, ICASA issued amended IMT **Spectrum Licenses** with **Social Obligations** to 5 licensees who acquired IMT Spectrum in March 2022 for connectivity

at 16,139 Schools; 4,232 Health Facilities; 570 Libraries; and 937 Traditional & Tribal Authority Centres. The implementation will be monitored from the office of the Director-General.

To date, more than 4 250 WI-FI hotspots have been installed resulting in over 749 700 households being connected to the internet. This work involved 76 Internet Service Providers which are SMMEs resulting in 4 500 direct and indirect job opportunities.

By December 2024, 8,415 Wi-Fi hotspots will have been installed connecting 1.5 million households.

5.5 million households will be connected via 32,055 Wi-Fi hotspots in the next 3 to 4 years. According to the StatSA census of 2022, 79% of households had access to internet services.

The Department developed the National Digital and Future Skills Strategy to prepare for the changes brought by the 4IR and to ensure a coordinated and integrated implementation of the **Digital Skills Programme** for South Africa, the Implementation Plan for 2021 – 2025 was subsequently developed.

Furthermore, a research study conducted by the department during 2023/24 financial year found that the MNOs have lowered the cost of 1GB by 43%, from R149 to R85, following the mandatory price reductions emanating from ICASA and Competition Commission data market inquiries.

The SABC has relaunched its OTT platform – **SABC Plus** – with streaming functionality, an improved interface, personalised recommendations, catch-up, voice commands for content search, and an electronic programming guide. The platform has reached 4.6 million unique views between the 1st and the 20th of June 2024.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN THE DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS SECTOR

Honourable Members, the digital communications sector has seen significant job growth due to technological advancements and rising demand for digital services. This growth is reflected in the proliferation of tech companies, the expansion of telecommunications infrastructure, and the emergence of innovative digital platforms.

Advanced network deployments, like 4G and 5G, have created opportunities in network engineering, construction, and maintenance. The demand for digital content has surged, leading to increased opportunities in digital media, content creation, and digital marketing. The increasing threat of cyberattacks has boosted the demand for cybersecurity professionals. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift towards remote work, expanding freelance and remote job opportunities globally.

DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AS THE FUTURE

Digital communication has undeniably surpassed print media, establishing itself as the primary mode of sustainable information exchange and signalling a transformative shift towards a digital future. This change is driven by accessibility, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and the ability to reach a global audience instantly.

The Presidential Commission on the 4IR report states that at the hands of this technological development, we're on course to creating 150 million new digital jobs.

Honourable Speaker,

As I conclude,

We cannot be oblivious to the opportune moment presented before us by the GNU towards building on the progress made for the attainment of the National Development Plan (Vision 2030) as adopted by Parliament in 2012.

We will not be deterred by Johnny come-latelys masquerading as revolutionaries who do not care about the advancement of the people of South Africa.

As we drive forward, towards an inclusive future, inspired by non-sexism, non-racialism and inclusive growth, we stand fast to the reality that the future of communication and economic growth is digital, our role is to make it more inclusive!

I thank you