

**Policy Statement by the Deputy Minister of Communication and Digital
Technologies of South Africa – Mr Mondli Gungubele**

ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC) 2025

**Title: Leveraging Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) to Promote Digital Inclusion
and Empowerment for All**

Honorable Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

South Africa recognizes that Digital Public Infrastructure — from ***digital identity systems to interoperable payment systems, and trusted data exchange platforms*** — is no longer a luxury, it is the backbone of an inclusive digital society. Our vision is clear: every citizen, regardless of geography or income, must be able not only to connect, but to participate fully and safely in the digital economy

For our citizens, DPI is not an abstract concept. It is the difference between being excluded from the financial system or making a secure low-cost digital payment, between a child being left behind or accessing digital learning and social protection. That is why our government has embraced DPI as a foundational enabler to bridge the digital divide and has developed a guiding Digital Transformation Roadmap. At its heart, the Roadmap aims to establish a One Person, One Government, One Touch system – a unified, reliable platform that links individuals to essential services. Through interoperable systems such as digital identity (via Home Affairs), digital payments (through the South African Reserve Bank and fintech innovation), and data exchange platforms, we are building a trusted digital ecosystem that empowers every citizen.

In rural and underserved communities, we are deploying community Wi-Fi zones, expanding mobile broadband through spectrum licensing reforms, and intending to investing in satellite connectivity to reach the last mile. Our Broadband Access Fund supports local ISPs and cooperatives to extend affordable internet to remote areas.

- 1. Policy Measures for Equitable Access:** To guarantee equitable access, we have implemented the following key policies:

SA Connect Phase II: Accelerating universal broadband coverage with a focus on schools, clinics, and traditional councils.

Digital Skills for All: A national program offering foundational and advanced digital literacy training, prioritizing youth, women, and persons with disabilities. The program aims to ensure that our people not only access digital tools but also use them meaningfully to create livelihoods and participate in the digital economy.

Zero-rating of mobile content provided by Public Benefit Organizations (PBOs), including websites with the .gov.za domain: Ensuring free access to essential government platforms such as education, health, and social services.

Device Access Initiatives: Partnering with private sector and development agencies to subsidize smart devices for low-income households.

Yet we must be honest: the promise of DPI will not be realized automatically. If poorly governed, DPI can entrench power imbalances, deepen surveillance and exclude those who are already on the margins, from women and girls to persons with disabilities and people in remote areas. Data, if misused, can amplify harm rather than generate public value

2. **To that end**, we are investing in **Digital ID and secure data platforms** to facilitate trusted transactions and inclusion in e-government, health, and financial services. These efforts are underpinned by **data protection and cybersecurity frameworks** that safeguard citizens' rights and build confidence in digital systems. South Africa's cybersecurity efforts align with a broader mission to secure Africa's digital growth. Through frameworks like the African Union's Malabo Convention and initiatives from SADC, ITU, and BRICS, we aim to create a unified cybersecurity architecture for the continent.

Through universal service and access obligations attached to electronic communications and spectrum licences, operators are required to roll out networks in underserved areas and to connect public institutions such as schools, clinics, hospitals and libraries. In addition, all operators contribute annually to the Universal Service and Access Fund, which finances targeted interventions for disadvantaged communities.

We are also fostering innovation through the implementation of our Digital Economy Masterplan and operationalization of the African Digital Transformation Centre (ADTC) with support from the ITU, aimed at building sustainable ecosystems to support

leveraging market opportunities for emerging technologies for socio-economic development while enabling SMMEs to thrive in e-commerce and digital services.

South Africa believes that digital public infrastructure must be open, interoperable, and inclusive by design. and empowering by intent. We call on global partners to collaborate in building open, equitable, and resilient digital ecosystems that leave no one behind.

Key priorities for advancing South Africa's digital economy include:

- Expanding broadband and accelerating 4G/5G rollout
- Increasing access to smart devices
- Scaling digital skills for youth, workers and entrepreneurs
- Strengthening cybersecurity
- Digitizing public services like MyMzansi

The ITU is providing essential support as a Knowledge Partner to the G20 Digital Economy Working Group (DEWG) during South Africa's Presidency. Its contributions focus on, *inter alia*, Equitable Digital Inclusion, Digital Public Infrastructure, Digital Innovation Ecosystems, supporting MSMEs, and ethical AI practices. Additionally, ITU has aided the Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction with expertise in digital warning systems and resilient infrastructure, bolstering global risk management.

Together, let us harness the power of digital public infrastructure to unlock opportunity, dignity, and prosperity for all. My country stands ready to work with the ITU, with our regional partners and with all stakeholders represented in this room to build digital public infrastructure that truly leaves no one behind.

Thank you.