GOVERNMENT DEDICATED TO BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE, EMBRACE DIGITAL ECONOMY, DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

The Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies, Mondli Gungubele acknowledged that the platform economy has recently just been added to the public agenda, and governments are attempting to fully grasp the phenomenon and its implications for all.

"Through digital platforms, new business imperatives are emerging, customers are being engaged in innovative ways – and by different parties. Smartphones, laptops and desktops in our own homes and businesses are becoming a channel through which retailers are orchestrating payment systems with customers. And social media businesses are establishing new forms of currency like Bitcoin and others," the minister told delegates when opening Government Technology (GovTech) conference.
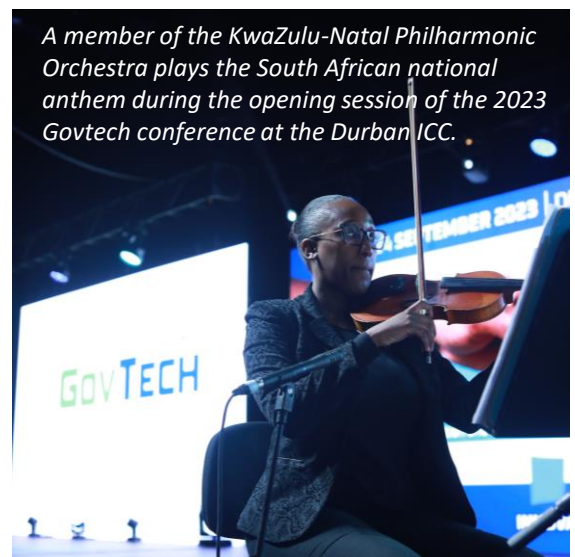
INNOVATE. COLLABORATE. ENGAGE

Minister of Communications Mondli Gungubele, Deputy Minister of Communications Philly Mapulane, KwaZulu-Natal Premier Nomusa Dube-Ncube. SITA Board chairperson Kiruben Pillay and Managing Director of SITA Dr Bongani Mabaso at the KZN Innovation Hub exhibit at the Govtech conference.

"As the digitalisation of the economy transforms the ways in which goods and services are delivered and consumed, the big question is what our role is as government and policymakers," the minister told GovTech 2023, a conference discussing new technology drivers in the digital economy, digital transformation and inclusive growth under the theme.

Themed "Platform Economy for Digital Transformation and Inclusive Growth" GovTech is being held **from September 12th to September 14th** at the **Durban International Convention Centre**.

As the government develops a strategy towards digitalisation, Gungubele said there was a need to incorporate a strategy towards the platform economy, rather than adopting policy measures specific to the platform economy alone.

A member of the KwaZulu-Natal Philharmonic Orchestra plays the South African national anthem during the opening session of the 2023 Govtech conference at the Durban ICC.

SA CONNECT

We cannot be left behind. The government has SA Connect, an implementation policy of the national broadband policy that was approved by Cabinet in 2013.

SA Connect seeks to meet the technology goal of the National Development Plan of creating an inclusive information society and position the government to play an enabling role in the provision of broadband to a number of underserved district municipalities thereby bridging broadband connectivity gaps.

Image from: www.freepik.com

This would be achieved by the pooling of public sector demand and procuring of high-capacity and future-proof network capacity at more affordable rates to address public sector broadband requirements. And in the process stimulating network builds by the network operators by reducing the associated investment risk, by ensuring demand.

The communications department will receive an additional R3 billion in the 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years, to implement phase two of South Africa Connect.

Phases one and two are allocated R3.8 billion over the next three years. Phase two involves SITA upgrading and connecting government sites from existing budgets, and the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa imposing universal service obligations on mobile network operators to connect 18 036 schools, 3 873 health facilities and 8 241 tribal authority sites. SA Connect ensures universal access to broadband services for all South Africans, prioritising rural and underserviced areas.

Minister of Communications Mondli Gungubele sitting next to KwaZulu-Natal Premier Nomusa Dube-Ncube during the opening session at the 2023 Govtech Conference at the Durban ICC on Tuesday.

SA CONNECT PHASES

Due to the magnitude of the project, the state determined the project should be implemented in two stages: phase one and phase two.

Phase one aimed to connect schools, health facilities, government offices, and post offices, in eight rural district municipalities, to broadband services. During this phase, about 970 government facilities have been connected to broadband.

The communications department, supported by state-owned entities such as Broadband Infraco, Sentech and SITA continue to provide broadband connectivity to government facilities.

The government's aim is to connect 5.8 million sites to high-speed internet by 2025/26, as part of the phase two rollout of SA Connect.

Gungubele said the future of the platform economy remains open. Answers to crucial questions are for the moment unknown. The answers depend on our choices.

"I hope that this iconic conference's resolutions will depend on how we believe markets should be structured—who gains and who can compete; how we innovate; what we value in society; how we protect our communities, our workers, and the clients and users of these technologies; and how we channel the enormous opportunities created by these sociotechnical changes", Gungubele told more than 2.500 delegates and exhibitors sharing their vision, knowledge, experience and expertise on the digital economy, digital transformation and inclusive growth.

Delegates, including information technology experts from the public and private sectors, Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs). In addition, there are 238 students from various institutions of higher learning as well as 40 learners representing top 5 schools that participated in the SITA Robotics Challenge earlier in the year.

Bhaveer Keshav, Tushar Vaga, Kashvika Govender, Tanishka Poonen and Mr Jateen Nana from the Shree Bharat Sharda School in Midrand, Gauteng, with their solar powered traffic light concept which was on exhibit at the 2023 Govtech conference at the Durban ICC on Tuesday.

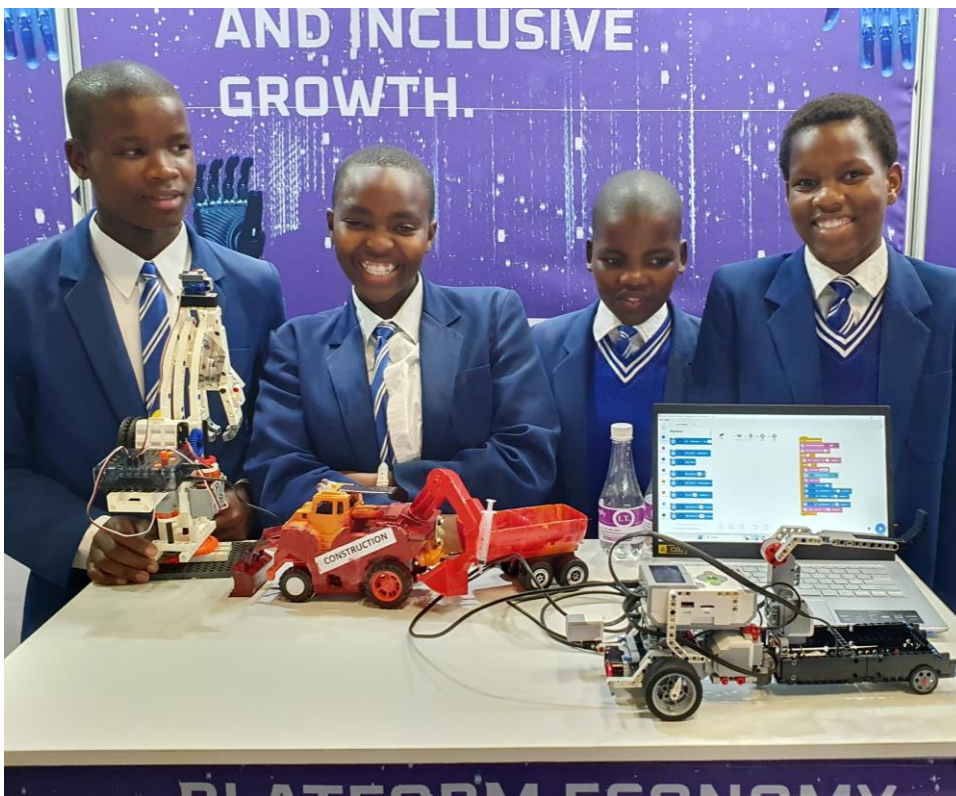# KZN IMPLEMENTING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY FOR GOVERNMENT, CITIZENS, AND BUSINESS

"The platform economy, evolving as it does from the broader digital economy, presents the most advanced practice of production and holds the great potential to inspire change across the economy" said Premier of Kwazulu-Natal, Nomusa Dube-Ncube

Opening the 2023 State Information Technology Agency's (SITA) Government Technology (GovTech), the conference discussing new technology drivers in the digital economy, digital transformation and inclusive growth, the premier said has adopted the KwaZulu-Natal Digital Transformation Strategy (2020-2025

"As such, we are delighted that this Conference's theme enjoins all of us to consider the embrace and leverage of the platform economy as a steppingstone towards the achievement of our national objectives."

"We also hold the view that this Govtech Conference should be a melting pot of ideas on how to position not only our government and our country as a leader in the digital economy, in general, but that it provides the stage for the advancement of the African agenda when it comes to ICT.

"As the province of KwaZulu-Natal, we are cognizant of the fact that without a proper plan, digital transformation will remain a pipe dream.

Sbusile Mthembu, Nyawo Esihle, Mnguni Dalisu and Mahlangu Simphiwe from Ntulabakayise High School from Hluhluwe, KwaZulu-Natal stand behind their robotic road paver which was featured at the 2023 Govtech conference.
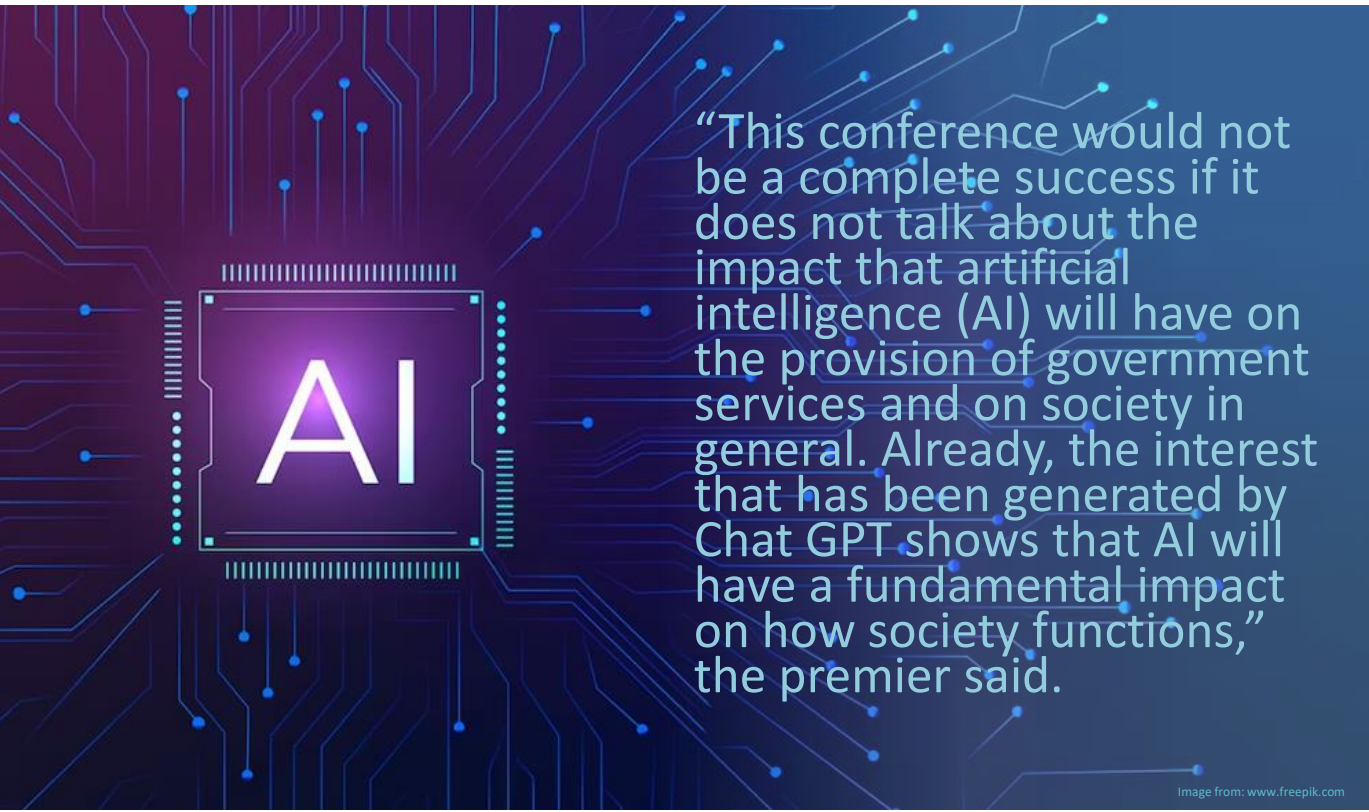
To this end, we adopted the KwaZulu-Natal Digital Transformation Strategy (2020-2025). This strategy is premised on six strategic priorities, namely Connectivity, Digital Skilling, Information Management, Knowledge Management and Security, Process Automation, Systems Integration and Digitisation.

The premier said the provincial government was hard at work implementing this strategy. The Digital Transformation Strategy is for government, citizens, and business.

- **Government-to-Government Interaction**: This entails facilitating communication among government spheres (national, provincial, and local) to enhance interrelationships and intergovernmental access to government information systems.

- **Government-to-Citizen Interaction**: This entails encouraging citizens to become actively involved in governance and to enable information sharing between government and citizens.

- **Government-to-Business Interaction**: This entails delivering information and services relevant to specific business needs.

"This conference would not be a complete success if it does not talk about the impact that artificial intelligence (AI) will have on the provision of government services and on society in general. Already, the interest that has been generated by Chat GPT shows that AI will have a fundamental impact on how society functions," the premier said.

Image from: www.freepik.com

SMART CITIES RELIES ON TECHNOLOGY TO PROVIDE QUALITY SERVICES, GROWING THE ECONOMY AND CREATING JOBS – ETHEKWINI EXECUTIVE MAYOR

"Aptly themed: *"Platform Economy for Digital Transformation and Inclusive Growth"* this conference sends a strong message to all of us that as the country, we are now at a critical point in the digital revolution and the fact that you continue to choose Durban as the host city confirms that we are ready to become the centre of digital transformation in the country," said Mxolisi Kaunda, Executive Mayor of Ethekwini

"We are mindful of the fact that we cannot be able to achieve this alone and it is for this reason we appreciate the fact that in our midst we have government, private sector, academia and civil society organisations. This demonstrates that it is only when we work together as social partners that we can build a common digital future," the mayor told the 2023 State Information Technology Agency's (SITA) Government Technology (GovTech) conference being held from until Thursday 14th at the Durban International Convention Centre.

"We are pleased that this year's conference seeks to achieve, among other things, a digital future that is citizen centric.

This gives us hope that the digital transformation journey the country is undertaking will leave no one behind. In fact, we are confident that it will not only unleash the talents and creativity of young people, but it will also bridge a digital divide that still exist in our communities and accelerate service delivery.

SITA board chairperson Kiruben Pillay, Minister of Communications Mondli Gungubele and KwaZulu-Natal Premier Nomusa Dube-Ncube watch as students from Ntulabakayise High School demonstrate their robot prototype of their pothole fixer.

"We are hopeful that some of the discussions that will take place in this conference will help us on our path to becoming a smart city.

We all know that smart cities rely heavily on technology to providing quality services, growing the economy and creating jobs.

It is for this reason that we have forged strategic partnerships with institutions of higher learning including IT-related institutions to drive the digital skills of the future. "We want to reiterate that building a capable developmental state requires all of us to use technology as a strategic tool to enhance service delivery and improve efficiency of our key economic sectors so that we can also be able to address the triple threat of poverty, unemployment and inequality," the mayor said.

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