



the doc

Department:  
Communications  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Deputy Minister

e-Skills Summit Opening Address – 27 Jul7 2010

***“e-Skills Key to our Future”***

I take this opportunity to extend my warm greetings and good wishes to the organizers and officials of this e-Skills Summit, our overseas visitors, political and community leaders, other distinguished guests, and all those who are participating to contribute to the successful outcome of this very historic event.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the opening of the first e-Skills Summit of South Africa hosted by the Department of Communications (DoC).

This e-Skills Summit is very crucial to our development and the aspirations of our people and country to create a society where all our citizens share in the resources and prosperity of our non-racial and non-sexist democracy. It comes at a very opportune time in our history as South Africa prepares its response to its positioning on the global e-readiness index. It is also critical as we mobilized ourselves as a country to leverage the promise of increased ICT connectivity into the advancing economies of the world.

As a former teacher, and as a student, because in the information society school is never out, I marvel at those learners who today have the opportunity to be schooled via an e-connected environment. It provides endless possibilities for self-development and adding value to our family, society and country.

I would like to share with you the perspective, particularly with our foreign guests, that it is not surprising that sixteen years after the founding of our democracy, the skilling of our people for meaningful work is still one of our most important priorities as a country and nation.

As a people liberated from the bondage of systematic racism and oppression, we realized that designing a new flag, composing a new national anthem, creating new national symbols, and even writing of a new constitution were going to be much easier than the long term goal of development of our country and our people.

Above all, we realized that the historical imbalances between the advantaged and the disadvantaged would be with us for quite some time and that it would take an even a greater struggle, involving even greater commitment and passion, to create a more equal society in all aspects of our society and country.

The ongoing struggle for our country and our people would be to narrow the gap between the haves and have-nots, the skilled and the un-skilled, as well as bridge the new gaps, particularly those created by the digital age.

It is a paradox of technology that it contributes to development but at the same it widens the inequality gap between those who are digitally endowed and those who are not.

Skilling and up-skilling our people to make use of the new information and communications technologies is an increasingly significant part to increase our people's life chances and gain meaningful work in our rapidly changing world.

It gives us great encouragement to be empowered with Information Communication Technologies and that we are able to leverage ICTs and the necessary e-Skilling in our efforts to break the cycle of poverty and create meaningful work and employment.

Our service delivery across all government services; our capacity to develop existing and new industries; our resourcefulness to help our people become more self reliant, innovative and engaged in ways that will help them get meaningful work throughout their lives will be to a very large degree determined by our capacity to empower our people with ICTs and e-Skills. This has to happen across the entire spectrum of our country and from the apex to the base of our society.

It is uplifting that with every passing day more and more key stakeholders in our country both in government and civil society at large are making a buy-in that ICTs and e-Skills are indispensable to our development. In fact, there is the increasing realization that the delivery of ICTs and e-Skilling are also essential deliverables like water, electricity, housing, etc.

In fact, the Connectivity Plan for Schools which aims to e-connect all South Africa's primary and secondary schools would be the greatest beneficiaries of the e-Skills initiative. The Connectivity Plan for Schools which is spearheaded by the Departments of Communications and Basic Education, and supported by the Departments of Rural Development, Science & Technology, and Public Service and Administration would impact greatly on reducing our country's e-skills deficit.

The initiative to empower teachers with laptops and to speed up the e-Skills literacy of teachers would be part of the overall contribution what this e-Skills Summit is seeking to accomplish.

Whilst we undoubtedly have very significant issues to deal with in terms of providing housing, health, social cohesion, adequate service delivery into rural, peri-urban and rural communities, ICTs and e-Skills can be enablers across all platforms to speed up delivery and contribute to more efficient and productive outcomes.

There is a need for us to raise the profile of ICTs and e-Skills in the development of our country and our people. We must ensure that ICTs and e-Skills remain high on the priority list of our government, private enterprise and civil society as a whole.

Africans and South Africans have surprised the world that we are the fastest growing users of mobile phones. This is so, in spite of the fact that many mobile users fall outside the middle class income bracket. Whilst the adoption of cell phones in many of the market led economies in the world, with high GDPs and very high average incomes when compared to us, has peaked at below 50%, uptake rates in South Africa continues to grow well above these levels.

The capabilities of the new communications technologies are converging and increasing in capacity at an amazing rate. So too are the mobility and social applications. Technological developments, particularly in ICTs, continue to amaze us. Most of us are trying to play catch up, as voice, data and TV convergences on a single platform, and companies bring new ICT products to the market place.

It is breathtaking to know that mobile companies are exploring ways to bring cheaper smart phones with Internet and Web capabilities to the mass mobile market. This would bring the information society even closer to the majority of mobile users. In fact, with the lowering of the cost to communicate, which the Department of Communication is spearheading, the gap between the digitally connected and the digitally disconnected would be bridged considerably.

The total population of Africa is estimated at 1 billion (as of November 2009) and it represents a significant market opportunity for ICTs and its related industries. ICTs bring a changed landscape of opportunities which enriches the lives of our people, revolutionizes businesses and the market place, provides new platforms for the State to interact with its citizens, and above all expands the frontiers of communication, knowledge, and networking at a local and global scale.

It is a reality of the ICT landscape that whilst the majority of those who are e-Skilled will use their e-skills to add value to ICTs, some would apply their skills to commit Cybercrimes. But Cybercrime is as much a part of the technology paradox as the opportunities and social challenges which accompany ICTs. But Cybercrime also necessitates the need for greater and broader e-Skills of our people to protect our interests.

Experience is showing that it does not really matter just how big or small you are in this new e-enabled world, the way ahead is through collaboration across stakeholders; it is no longer just about product or service based competition, although of course this is and will remain a significant matter. We are seeing more and more, alliances across and within major stakeholder groups as they work to develop new approaches that strive for impact, for economies of scale, for differentiation in new combinations or 'baskets of value' for consumers, users, voters, learners, citizens, professions and so forth.

Crucial to all of this is a capacity to use the new technologies in innovative ways and be able to keep abreast of the new waves of technologies being developed.

In South Africa we simply have a substantive lack of e-Skills which not only dramatically limits our capacity to address our immediate needs (which some investigation puts at 60 000 jobs) but just as importantly limits our capacity to prepare our nation for a future that will inevitably be heavily dependent upon an adequately e-Skilled workforce, service delivery capacity, educational provision sector and civil society.

Despite the strong commitment of many agencies across Government, Business, Education and Training and Civil Society to addressing our sectoral and national needs, we simply are not getting to where we need to be in either addressing our immediate needs or planning for our future needs.

This is why the Department of Communications with the support from the then Presidential International Advisory Commission (PIAC) for the Information Society and Development established the e-Skills Institute. This initiative has since been reinforced under the current administration with the re-establishment of the e-Skills Council and the e-Skills Working Group earlier this year.

This initiative under the leadership of Dr Harold Wesso has been hard at work over the past 2 years looking at global best practice and interacting with a wide range of contributors across Business, Government, Education and Civil Society (including Labour) Stakeholder Groups. We have been very fortunate that a number of international agencies and governments, particularly Finland and Korea, have strongly supported our efforts with knowledge, skilled people and resources operating in needy communities across the country.

Further, many corporate and local businesses have willingly contributed highly skilled people and resources to helping the Government to better understand all the complex matters involved in e-Skilling a Nation. And it is indeed pleasing to see representatives from these businesses here today committing to helping us address the very serious matters that we face in e-Skilling our Nation.

We gratefully recognise the sponsorship provided by CISCO, Promethean, the City of Cape Town, Telkom, Oracle and Microsoft to this event as a further indication of their commitments to helping us address this significant issue of e-Skilling our Nation and people. There has also been very useful and committed involvement from the Higher Education Sector (Universities and training authorities) through the various processes they have with Government and in special arrangements with the e-Skills Institute in delivering and developing approaches for Human Resource Development for the Information Society and Knowledge Economies.

We are especially grateful for the commitments that the University of the Western Cape, Walter Sisulu University, Durban University of Technology, the University of Pretoria and the Eidos Institute (Australia) have made through Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) signed with the e-Skills Institute.

Following the reconstitution of the e-Skills Council by the department last year, the work of the Council is on track with the National e-Skills Study conducted and a report adopted by the Working Group. The final report is ready for presentation to Cabinet.

What has become very clear to us is that the matter of e-Skills and Human Resource development for the Information Society and the Knowledge Economies is a complex matter involving many contributors with particular focus areas to suit particular agency and sectoral needs. There is confusion, there is overlap, there are large gaps and there are approaches that need to be enhanced to best suit the emerging environment and sectoral needs.

But it doesn't really matter how tough or how complex the problem is; the reality is that we have no alternative but to address the matter from the ground up, from the top down and from the flank with new approaches which will ensure that South Africa has a meaningful role to play in the emerging 'e-enabled' world.

It was quite telling for us all to hear President Obama refer to a comparison between his African ancestral home of Kenya and South Korea when he made the point that just 20 years ago both of these countries had the same GDP. Now South Korea is arguably the world leader in innovative development and use of ICTs. So what was the differentiator? It was about leadership, aspiration, focus, commitment, and perseverance around what South Korea wanted to achieve as a country, and where Koreans wanted to be as a people. In other words South Korea had a plan that brought complex matters together to share a common commitment to a national strategy.

Now we have a national strategy and it is called the National Medium Strategic Framework (MTSF 2009-14) which lays out 10 issues and 12 impact goals. All of these targets will need to involve increased levels of e-Skills to a large degree if they are to be successful and sustainable for the long term future.

The work of the e-Skills Institute to date has proposed 4 types of e-Skills and 4 stakeholder groups to act as a framework for engagement and it has been able to determine that there are three key unifying issues and these are:

1. Determining the scope of e-Skills and obtaining a widely accepted definition of e-Skills across sectors of our society.
2. Defining the research, policy development and evaluation of the impact of e-Skills in meaningful application across the breadth and depth of human resource development for our Nation in order to position itself well for the emerging Information Society and Knowledge Economies.
3. Aligning the e-Skills impact to the goals and aspirations of the MTSF.

These matters form the three underlying pillars of this e-Skills Summit and will form the basis of discussion here.

What we now need is a National e-Skills Plan of Action (NeSPA) that brings together the skills, the focus and the commitment of the stakeholders in ways that has meaning for the interests of the Nation; and both meaning and a recognised place for the stakeholder entities and the stakeholder sectoral interests.

The work of this important e-Skills Summit is therefore to bring together the knowledge, the energy and the obvious interest of thought leaders. Those who have demonstrated their commitment and willingness to represent their sectoral interests by building the base for a National Plan for e-Skills and Human Resource Development enhancement that can adequately represent sectoral interest and provide a base for the Government to support.

Despite the broadly based support and the commitment of diverging interests, this will not be an easy, but achievable task.

Addressing and solving the complexity of worthwhile issues like e-Skilling our nation, is not an easy matter, but this does not diminish the need or the urgency of doing so.

We have present here today the necessary skill, knowledge and representation that can be a beacon to deliver on our aspiration to achieve what we set out to accomplish. This can provide the collaborative basis for government, business, education, labour and civil society to embark on our e-Skills activism which would make our country one of the leading e-Skilled and e-Enabled Societies in the world.

On behalf of the Department of Communication, the Government of South Africa and the hopes of so many people, I want to express my gratitude for your efforts and I look forward to being able to take the output and recommendations of this Summit into the Government decision making process. This sits in our vision for 2010 and beyond as part of our Program of Action.

Thanks and best regards.