

# DIGITAL INCLUSION

## SUMMIT

 South Africa

### CONCEPT NOTE

From **Awareness**  
to **Access**  
to **Adoption**

Building a More Inclusive  
Digital Future for  
South Africa



#### AWARENESS

Inspiring people with knowledge of possibilities, opportunities and risks.



#### ACCESS

Removing barriers to devices, connectivity, tools and services.



#### ADOPTION

Enabling safe, confident and productive use that creates real value.

### ADDRESSING THE LAYERS OF THE DIGITAL DIVIDE



ACCESS  
DIVIDE



SKILLS  
DIVIDE



VALUE  
DIVIDE



CULTURAL  
DIVIDE



TOGETHER, LET'S BUILD AN INCLUSIVE,  
CONNECTED AND EMPOWERED SOUTH AFRICA.



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# Concept Note - Digital Inclusion Summit South Africa

**Working Theme:** *Confronting Digital Poverty and Unlocking Inclusive Digital Opportunity*

## 1. Introduction

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South Africa is experiencing a period of rapid digital transformation. Across the economy, public sector, and education system, digital tools and platforms are increasingly shaping how people learn, work, communicate, access services, and participate in society. Businesses are digitising operations and customer engagement. Government services are progressively moving onto digital platforms. Schools, training providers, and universities are integrating more digital content and systems into teaching and learning. Financial services, commerce, entrepreneurship, and social participation are all becoming more dependent on digital access and digital capability.

This shift presents significant opportunity, but it also creates urgency. As society becomes more digital, those who are excluded from digital systems risk being excluded more broadly from economic participation, public services, learning opportunities, and social mobility. Digital inclusion is therefore no longer a niche issue or a purely technical concern. It is becoming a central development, economic, and social justice issue.

The proposed Digital Inclusion Summit South Africa will bring together key stakeholders to explore the risks and opportunities of digital transformation and to build a shared agenda for advancing digital inclusion in South Africa. The summit will provide a platform to deepen understanding of the structural drivers of digital exclusion, to surface practical solutions, and to strengthen collaboration across sectors.

The summit will be engaging deeply with the layered nature of the digital divide and the forms of digital poverty that continue to entrench exclusion.

## 2. Background and Rationale

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South Africa's digital future is being shaped by the increasing digitisation of three critical domains:

### The Economy

Digital systems now influence how people search for work, build enterprises, market products, access customers, receive payments, and participate in the platform economy. Opportunities in ecommerce, digital work, online services, AI-enabled productivity, and digital entrepreneurship are growing, but access to these opportunities remains highly uneven.

### Public Sector Services

Government is increasingly adopting digital channels for communication, registration, administration, service delivery, and citizen engagement. While this can improve efficiency and reach, it can also deepen exclusion for citizens who lack devices, connectivity, skills, confidence, or support to navigate digital public infrastructure.

### Education and Skills Development

Education is becoming increasingly digital, from school-level learning tools to online content, administrative systems, remote learning, and digitally enabled skilling pathways. Yet learners, educators, and communities do not all have equal capacity to participate effectively in digital learning environments. As these domains digitise further, digital exclusion becomes more consequential.



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People are no longer simply excluded from technology; they are at risk of being excluded from opportunity itself.

At the same time, digital inclusion cannot be understood only in terms of infrastructure. Access to a phone or data bundle does not automatically translate into meaningful participation. Many people remain digitally present but economically excluded, vulnerable to harm, or unable to derive real value from the digital world.

For this reason, the summit will focus on the deeper layers of digital poverty and on the need for coordinated efforts that move people and communities beyond access alone and toward meaningful, safe, and productive digital participation.

### 3. Summit Purpose and Framing

The purpose of the Digital Inclusion Summit is to bring together a broad coalition of stakeholders to examine why digital inclusion is becoming increasingly important in South Africa, unpack the structural layers of the digital divide that entrench digital poverty, identify practical responses to these barriers, strengthen coordination across sectors and thematic areas, and build momentum toward a shared commitment to advancing digital inclusion in South Africa. The summit will also explore how digital poverty is entrenched through four interrelated divides:

- **Access Divide** - This includes barriers relating to devices, connectivity, infrastructure, electricity, affordability, and basic digital entry points.
- **Productive Capability / Skills Divide** - This includes the gap in digital literacy, confidence, practical skills, and productive capability needed to use digital tools for learning, work, business, and problem-solving.
- **Value Divide** - This refers to the inability to convert digital access and productive capability into tangible value, such as income, entrepreneurship, improved services, educational progress, social capital, or economic mobility.
- **Cultural Divide** - This refers to the lack of representation, relevance, inclusivity, and contextual fit in the digital world, including questions of language, identity, local content, design bias, and whether people see themselves and their realities reflected in digital systems.

Together, these divides help explain why digital access alone is not enough, and why more integrated and human-centred approaches are needed.

#### Summit Objectives

The summit will aim to:

1. establish a shared understanding of why digital inclusion matters in the context of South Africa's ongoing digital transformation;
2. unpack the deeper layers of the digital divide that continue to entrench exclusion and digital poverty;
3. convene stakeholders around practical responses to the access, skills, value, and cultural divides;
4. elevate examples of innovation, partnership, and implementation that can strengthen inclusion;
5. create a space for integration across efforts that are often fragmented or siloed;
6. secure a visible, collective commitment from stakeholders to work together to advance digital inclusion in South Africa.



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## 4. Proposed Draft Summit Structure

The summit is envisaged as a structured journey that moves from context, to diagnosis, to solutioning, to integration, and finally to commitment.

### Session 1: Opening and Contextual Framing - Why Digital Inclusion Matters Now

The summit will begin by contextualising why digital inclusion is increasingly important in South Africa, particularly in light of the ongoing digitisation of the economy, public services, and education.

This opening session will frame digital inclusion not simply as a technology issue, but as a cross-cutting issue linked to opportunity, equity, resilience, citizenship, and national development. It will establish the case that as more systems and opportunities move online, digital exclusion becomes more costly and more harmful.

This session may include:

- a high-level keynote on the digital transformation of South Africa;
- reflections on the implications of digitisation for equity and participation;
- a framing input on the Triple A model and the layered nature of digital inclusion.

### Session 2: Unpacking the Structural Drivers of Digital Poverty

The second segment of the summit will focus on unpacking the four key layers of the digital divide that entrench digital poverty. This part of the programme will help participants move beyond narrow or simplistic understandings of the digital divide. It will provide a shared conceptual foundation for the rest of the summit and create a common language for discussing barriers and solutions.

The four layers to be explored are:

- Access divide
- Productive capability / skills divide
- Value divide
- Cultural divide

This session may be structured as a sequence of short provocations, presentations, or panel inputs, each focused on one divide and helping participants understand:

- what the divide means;
- how it manifests in South Africa;
- who is most affected;
- why it matters;
- how it connects to the other divides.

### Session 3: Action Streams - Addressing the Barriers to Digital Inclusion

Following the framing and diagnosis sessions, the summit will move into four dedicated thematic streams. Each stream will focus on one of the core barriers and explore practical responses, case studies, innovations, and policy or partnership opportunities.

Each stream will include presentations and inputs from relevant stakeholders, such as government departments, technology companies, education and skills organisations, mobile operators, financial institutions, civil society actors, funders, and community-based implementers.



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### **Stream A: Addressing the Access Divide**

This stream will focus on solutions that improve equitable access to devices, connectivity, infrastructure, onboarding support, and affordability. Possible themes include:

- affordable connectivity models;
- devices and device access programmes;
- public access models and community access points;
- zero-rating and subsidised digital services;
- last-mile infrastructure and inclusion strategies.

### **Stream B: Addressing the Productive Capability / Skills Divide**

This stream will focus on building the skills, confidence, and practical capability required for meaningful digital participation. Possible themes include:

- digital literacy and digital citizenship;
- applied digital skills for youth and adults;
- educator and community facilitator capacity;
- skills for entrepreneurship, employability, and digital productivity;
- human support systems for adoption and use.

### **Stream C: Addressing the Value Divide**

This stream will focus on how people and communities can convert access and skills into real value. Possible themes include:

- digital livelihoods and platform economy opportunities;
- ecommerce and micro-enterprise participation;
- financial inclusion and digital transactions;
- pathways into digital work and entrepreneurship;
- support systems that help users convert participation into income and opportunity.

### **Stream D: Addressing the Cultural Divide**

This stream will focus on inclusion, representation, and relevance in the digital world. Possible themes include:

- language inclusion and local content;
- contextually relevant tools and user experiences;
- inclusive design and accessibility;
- representation in digital platforms and datasets;
- strengthening local creativity, voice, and cultural presence in digital ecosystems.

## **Session 4: Integration - Towards a More Coordinated Digital Inclusion Agenda**

After the four streams, the summit will reconvene in a working session focused on integration across all four areas.

This session is important because the divides are interdependent. Access without skills does not lead to meaningful participation. Skills without value pathways can lead to frustration and disengagement.



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Value pathways without cultural inclusion can reproduce exclusion. Cultural relevance without access still leaves people behind. The purpose of this working session will therefore be to identify:

- common priorities across the four streams;
- opportunities for alignment and collaboration;
- roles for different stakeholder groups;
- practical pathways for combining efforts into a more coherent national or ecosystem approach.

This may be structured as a facilitated synthesis session, a multi-stakeholder roundtable, or a moderated working dialogue that draws together the main themes and recommendations from each stream.

## Session 5: Digital Inclusion Pledge for South Africa

The final act of the summit will be the signing of a Digital Inclusion Pledge by participating stakeholders. The intention of the pledge will be to create a visible and practical commitment to collaboration in support of digital inclusion in South Africa. The pledge can serve as both a symbolic and strategic outcome of the summit, signalling shared intent and laying the foundation for continued engagement after the event.

The pledge may include commitments such as:

- working collaboratively across sectors;
- advancing practical initiatives that address the four divides;
- strengthening inclusive access, productive capability, and adoption;
- promoting safe, inclusive, and value-generating digital participation;
- supporting local relevance, representation, and opportunity in the digital ecosystem;
- contributing to a stronger national digital inclusion agenda.

This closing commitment will help ensure that the summit is not only a space for discussion, but also a catalyst for action.

## 5. Intended Participants

The summit will seek participation from a broad cross-section of stakeholders, including:

- government departments and public agencies;
- technology companies and digital ecosystem actors;
- mobile network operators and connectivity partners;
- education and skills development organisations;
- financial institutions and fintech partners;
- donor agencies and philanthropic funders;
- NGOs, civil society organisations, and community-based implementers;
- youth-focused organisations and digital inclusion practitioners;
- researchers, thought leaders, and policy actors.



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## 6. Expected Outcomes

The summit is expected to produce the following outcomes:

- stronger shared understanding of digital inclusion in the South African context;
- a more nuanced and practical framing of the digital divide and digital poverty;
- increased visibility for interventions that address each of the four divides;
- stronger relationships and alignment between stakeholders working in this space;
- a clearer basis for integrated action across multiple domains of digital inclusion;
- a public commitment by stakeholders through the Digital Inclusion Pledge.

## 7. Conclusion

The Digital Inclusion Summit South Africa is intended to provide a timely and strategic platform for advancing a more integrated and action-oriented digital inclusion agenda. By starting with the broader context of digitisation, unpacking the structural layers of digital poverty, and then focusing on practical responses across four core streams, the summit will help move the conversation from diagnosis to collaboration and commitment.

The proposed structure is designed to ensure that the summit is both intellectually grounded and practically useful. It recognises that digital inclusion is not a single issue, but a system of interrelated barriers that require coordinated responses. It also recognises that South Africa now needs stronger alignment between those investing in infrastructure, capability, opportunity, relevance, and inclusion.

The summit will therefore aim not only to deepen dialogue, but also to build momentum for joint action through a shared pledge to advance digital inclusion in South Africa.



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Together, let's build  
an inclusive, connected  
and empowered  
South Africa.

Advancing digital inclusion through  
awareness, access and adoption.



YOUTH FORCE  
BY YOMOBI



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