

**Delegation from the Republic of South Africa**  
***Position Paper for the General Assembly***

The topics before the General Assembly are Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) for Sustainable Economic and Financial Development and Disaster Risk Reduction. The state of South Africa stresses the critical role of sustainable ICTs and innovative risk reduction plans in the global effort to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and looks forwards to discussing these topics at the upcoming conference.

**I. Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) for Sustainable Economic and Financial Development**

In the global struggle to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) set out in the 2030 Agenda, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are a crucial instrument. ICTs are fundamental drivers of economic and financial growth: The ICT sector creates job opportunities, thus decreasing unemployment and contributes to the intensification of trade, hence raising nations' GDPs. Moreover, ICTs contribute to sustainable solutions to the world's problems such as poverty, hunger, and climate change. Especially during the pandemic, the importance of ICTs drastically increased. Whole nations relied on technical devices and stable internet connections to enable virtual communication and remote education and to participate in the digital economy. Besides those positive effects, ICTs also have negative impacts. For example, unequal access to ICTs increases the digital gap and thus contributes to inequality. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 37% of the world's population has no access to the internet - of which 96% live in developing countries. Furthermore, women are affected predominantly: Only 57 % of women globally and only 19 % of women in the least developing countries have access to the internet. The lack of digitalization in developing countries leads to exclusion from the international markets and drastically slows down economic and financial development. Another key problem connected to ICTs is their reverse effect on climate change. While ICTs are key to innovative sustainable solutions combating climate change, ICT consumption also contributes to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Consequently, although ICTs help to tackle the problems the Sustainable Development Goals aim to solve, they also add to the source of those problems. Hence, the demand for ICTs to be sustainable and equal is critical.

Since the early 2000s, the international community aims to promote ICTs as means to drive sustainable and economic and financial development. The international consensus on the relationship between the development of ICTs and improvements in quality of life is reflected in the 2003 and 2005 World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) which resulted in the *Declaration of Principles*, the *Tunis Commitment*, and the *Tunis Agenda*. Those documents established the importance of the promotion of ICTs and offered concrete policy recommendations and measurements for enabling the implementation of ICTs worldwide. Another international key document is the *Addis Ababa Action Agenda* (AAAA) from 2015, which created frameworks to increase investments in ICTS. In addition, international conferences are crucial to reflect on countries' commitment and to share and foster new ideas. For example, in 2016, WSIS outlined a specific action plan for how ICTs can contribute to each SDG. Furthermore, organizations and agencies such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) are crucial when it comes to transmitting those goals into action. South Africa, having one of Africa's largest ICT markets, proved technological leadership when hosting ITU's annual conference in 2018. As a result, ITU launched an important project dedicated to the implementation of ICTs at affordable rates within hospitals and remote areas in Africa. This project supports South Africa in its effort to increase access to ICTs in the region. As South Africa's ICT sector is further developing, it is an increasingly important contributor to the country's export GDP, by creating job opportunities and increasing export rates. Thus, South Africa is not only developing its own economy sustainably but also serves neighboring countries with supply and plays an important role in the international market.

To further expand the ICT sector, South Africa is dedicated to increasing the financing of smaller businesses and generating access of ICT products to the markets. Therefore, South Africa will establish a program called "Entrepreneurs Solving South Africa's Problems", which will host annual conferences where entrepreneurs can present their innovative ideas on how ICTs can solve society's problems. As South Africa takes into consideration the necessary reduction of the negative consequences of ICTs such as the contribution to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, one requirement for the participants of the conference will be the sustainability of their products. The winner of each conference will receive extensive funding and

training. Moreover, South Africa considers closing the digital gap between rural areas and urban areas the country's main goal until 2025. Hence, in the upcoming months, a designated ministerial committee will map out a national plan to improve access and affordability of wireless internet connections and digital devices such as fair distribution of ICTs. Achieving this goal will be critical to drive South Africa's overall economic and financial development and to improve the quality of life in all South African regions. Furthermore, South Africa is dedicated to aiding its neighboring countries with their economic development by increasing its ICT supply and export.

## II. Disaster Risk Reduction

Considering the growing threat of climate change and the still ongoing pandemic, the urgent need for disaster risk reduction becomes obvious. Climate change as the key driver of natural catastrophes is the main target of the international community when it comes to disaster risk reduction. The consequences of climate change such as the large-scale destruction of economies and societies have affected 1,5 billion people in the last 10 years. Hence, disaster risks are a threat to humanity and a threat to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 1 (end poverty), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), and 13 (climate change), and must be combatted as such. Despite the international consensus, comprehensive surveys among UN Member States showed that almost no country has the necessary capacities to effectively reduce and prevent disaster risks. Especially underdeveloped countries lack the necessary infrastructure to build resilience against any kind of risks. One critical problem the international community is facing is the unequal impacts of climate change. Especially those regions predominantly affected by Climate Change and its consequences, are the weakest and thus least likely to be prepared for any kind of catastrophes. Thus, the international community is required to increase measures for a stronger approach to reducing risks and better preventing them.

The first global framework on disaster risk reduction – the *Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World* - was adopted by the World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 1994. In 1999, the UN established a separate designated body called the Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) to enable risk assessments and possible impacts of disaster risks on societies, infrastructures, and economies. The 2005 World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction adopted the *Hyogo Framework for Action* aims to reduce the negative impact of disasters on social, economic, and environmental assets. Therefore, the *Hyogo Framework* mapped out a practical roadmap to creating more resilient communities and highlighted the crucial role local and national governments must play. Another very important document is the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR)*, adopted in 2015, which still serves as the current fundamental UN framework document on disaster risk reduction. Besides improving disaster risk management, the SFDRR focuses on mobilizing financial resources for disaster risk reduction and improving disaster preparedness. As the region of South Africa relies on the agricultural sector, the country is predominantly affected by disaster risks. For example, in the past five years, South Africa has been battling against the effects of the worst drought recorded since 1926. Additionally, recent devastating floods threaten South Africa's hard-earned development gains. Thus, climate change is deemed to be the largest factor in increasing the vulnerability and fragility of the region and reducing resilience in South Africa. As the South African Delegation to the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2019 stated, South Africa is putting several measures in place to strengthen the country's resilience. For instance, the establishment of an Early Warning System (MHEWS) is an effective method to achieve better preparedness for extreme weather conditions. Furthermore, South Africa has recently enacted a disaster management legislative and policy framework with a two-fold approach aiming for risk assessment through research and data collection and risk reduction through education, training, and attracting financial support.

In the continuous effort to further increase preparedness and resilience to disaster risks, South Africa plans to work in close alignment with the SFDRR. To enable sufficient reporting to the SFDRR, South Africa will enact a law that requires the ministerial committees to develop, implement and report on comprehensive disaster risk management plans with a special focus on the needs of vulnerable groups such as women, children, the elderly, and disabled. Since South Africa's rural areas are predominantly affected by natural catastrophes, the South African government decided to put a recovery fund in place to support those regions by providing immediate response and support in critical situations. Additionally, South Africa aims to improve its nationwide communication and warning systems through an increase in Information and Communications Technologies, which will then improve the preparedness for disaster risks.