



## **POLICY BRIEF**

# **DIGITAL AND INCLUSIVE ECONOMIES**

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**Solidarity**

**Equality**

**Sustainability**

## ORGANIZATIONS

|   |   |
|---|---|
| ANNET   | Veromo Enterprise                                 |
| Good Hope Information Centre                            | Thato Digital Solutions                           |
| Malala Fund   | MaH Quests Enterprises                            |
| Siyabanceda   | Thaloki General Trading (Pty) Ltd                 |
| Small Scale Artisanal Miners Institute                  | Youth Policy Lab South Africa                     |
| Digital Pages Initiative                                | Convertech Creations                              |
| Lesedi Larona Home of Trust NPO                         | Makhaza waste                                     |
| Geledés - Black Woman Institute - Brazil                | Uniqueness  |
| Inqaba Yokulinda NPO                                    | Blind SA  |
| China Association for NGO Cooperation                   | Mzuvukile Day Care Center                         |
| Sira Communications                                     | Kuhlase disability center NPO                     |
| Moses Kotane Research Institute                         | World Benchmarking Alliance                       |
| Defend NHI Campaign                                     | Pretoria Network Creators                         |
| Automate Tech Solution                                  | Omang-Who Are You Youth Development Initiative    |
| Lesbian and Gay Community and Healrh Centre             | Linkage SA Group                                  |
| Global Public Investment Network                        | Sihlangene information youth center               |
| Habitat For Humanity South Africa                       | SkilQuest   |
| African Cooperative Desk                                | Headstrong Foundation                             |
| Liquid Intelligent Technologies                         | Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN)                 |
| Siyaya Community Development                            | Livewell Initiative                               |
| Umdoni Entrepreneurs with disabilities business chamber | Lethabo la Bana Day Care Organization             |
| Laura Group   | JK Pletts   |
| SIBOS House   | Vaal University of Technology                     |
| SUGARE GBVF EDU DEV & SUPPORT                           | Disabled People South Africa (DPSA)               |
| Do Right By You   | Power Of Women   We Are The Hope                  |
| South African Women in Dialogue                         | Innovation in IT                                  |
| SAGE Ethiopia community                                 | EFF   |
| Mofolo HBC  | SPLS  |
| Meti  | People4impact NPC                                 |
| KGOROGO SOCIAL INVESTMENTS                              | Malose Community Development and Foundation       |
| African Monarch Group                                   | Kupenya Foundation                                |
| Mordecai Ndlovu Foundation                              | CEGAA   |
| Global Shapers Community: Tshwane Hub                   | Buzzbyte  |
| The PRAKARSA  | African energy and economic youth council         |
| Thembisa magaqana                                       | Future Spot Technology                            |
| GoDigitalSA Foundation                                  | Njabulo ECO                                       |
| Vuyelwa M foundation                                    | Khuthala Youth Development Centre                 |
| Dr Xoliswa Majola                                       | Överstrand Unite                                  |
| Improv'a Youth South Africa                             | Engcobo Men As Partners                           |
| Thetha Enviro Group                                     | MET Agency for Development                        |
| Onalenna Day and Night Care Centre                      | Gayela Youth Development Resource Centre          |
| Lichaza Multi Projects                                  | Agathe Wehrli Mentoring Chair (AWMC)              |
| Start Small Foundation                                  | Ekuphumleni Cultural Village Multi-purpose Centre |
| PWGD  | Empowering Youth                                  |
| Big Africa  | SpaceSalad Studios                                |
| Protilagor Projects                                     | Remmogo ELC                                       |
| Nowel Empire  | Impactecha  |
| Kganye Football Club                                    | V3 Anti Human Trafficking                         |
| Globcor Enterprises                                     | Fresh Hope Group                                  |
| ZOOLOOH International                                   | Internet Society of China                         |
| Technorain Solutions                                    | Ethekwini Disability Business Chamber NPC         |
| Reithaupile4u   |   |

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**Solidarity**

**Equality**

**Sustainability**



## INTRODUCTION

The global South is living through a defining moment. Africa, in particular, is facing the intersecting crises of inequality, climate change, and rapid technological transformation. Yet, we have never been so emboldened and equipped to find solutions rooted in solidarity, equality, legitimacy, and sustainability. This policy brief reflects the deliberations of a globally representative civil society Working Group on Digital and Inclusive Economies (WGDIE) under the C20 South Africa. This brief is a result of deliberations born from a broad spectrum of voices that have identified specific avenues for the Department of International Relations and other relevant ministries to take immediately, leading us closer to digital and inclusive economies that leave no one behind.

As the digital revolution accelerates, it must have a bottom-up effect, where the proliferation of modern technology should first benefit and uplift the most vulnerable through prioritising connectivity and training on how to maximise access to digital resources. This brief proposes a curated list of feasible policy changes that can lead to steps to connect rural and indigenous communities by leveraging current international relations to foster digital and private sector collaboration, creating inclusive communities that benefit everyone and endure over time. Our recommendations call for a reframing of the measurement of growth to test growth by the degree to which it promotes inclusive, just, and resilient development. These proposals are informed by previous G20 commitments, particularly the 2024 Rio Leaders' Declaration and the 2025 Seville Commitments, and build upon the legacy of the Brazilian and Indian C20 presidencies.

## THE CHALLENGE

Current economic systems continue to reproduce inequality within and between countries. Many nations in the Global South face mounting debt burdens, exploitative global trade and tax practices, and limited fiscal space for inclusive public investment. At the same time, digital technologies, which could act as levers for empowerment, are primarily shaped by and serve the interests of entities outside our regions. Digital exclusion, extractive data practices, and a limited public digital infrastructure threaten to widen inequality.

Persistent discrimination in all its forms continues to exacerbate global inequalities and hinder economic and social development. In the Global South, these inequities intersect with economic structures to marginalise entire communities. Groups historically excluded, specifically indigenous populations, face systemic barriers to connectivity, let alone accessing finance, digital resources, and economic opportunities.

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## INTRODUCTION

Without urgent intervention, we risk deepening a model that is unjust, extractive and unsustainable. As civil society, we advocate for solidarity-driven cooperation that recognises that, in practice, sustainable development involves the interdependence of the planet, people and profit. Within this interdependence, the economy is an integral part of society, and society, in turn, relies on the environment. This indicates that economic growth occurs within a complex web of social connections. As such, profit-making should not come at the expense of social and environmental sustainability.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this policy brief is to catalyse that shift by addressing an aspect of inclusivity that prefaces any other policy shift. By connecting rural and indigenous communities, individuals will be empowered to access opportunities introduced by digitalisation, increase efficiency in existing economic models, and add value by realising new sustainable avenues for growth within these communities.

## INCLUSIVE ECONOMIES

Prioritise inclusive economic policies that centre the needs and agency of marginalised groups.

- Ensure accessibility to digital platforms that promote local economic structures.
- Skills transfer in the form of readily accessible training in native languages on how to optimise use of digital tools. Providing Support initiatives that leverage AI tools:
  - targeted support for the development of assistive and inclusive green local technologies:
  - These can be identified through expos and innovation hubs.
- Design economic interventions that value care work, enable the translation of skills, and foster sustainable livelihoods in sunset industries.

## DIGITAL ECONOMIES

### a. Develop digital public infrastructure

#### i. Create a Sovereign-Backed “Rural & Indigenous Connectivity” SPV + Bond Facility

**Purpose:** raise upfront capital (regional digital infrastructure bonds) to finance last-mile networks, satellite backhaul, community access points, assistive tech and local content hubs, bonds structured so future digital services tax (DST) receipts or spectrum auction proceeds partially service debt.

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### KEY PRIVATE PARTNERS TO ENGAGE EARLY:

- Telecom operators (incumbent and regional challengers) for network build & operations.
- Satellite / LEO providers (e.g., partnership with companies deploying LEO constellations or HTS satellite operators) for immediate backhaul to remote areas.
- Infrastructure investors and regional pension funds for bond buy-in.
- Fintechs & mobile money platforms (for service monetisation & local revenue flows).

### FINANCING LEVERS:

- Partial guarantees/grants from DFIs (AfDB, World Bank, KfW).
- Senior commercial tranches sold to institutional investors.
- Use DST ringfence + spectrum receipts as credit enhancement.

## II. LAUNCH A PUBLIC-PRIVATE “COMMUNITY CONNECTIVITY ACCELERATOR”

Purpose: incentivise private actors (telcos, ISPs, social enterprises) to roll out community-owned connectivity and local content in indigenous languages with subsidies, tax incentives and a guaranteed revenue-share mechanism.

### KEY PRIVATE PARTNERS:

- Mobile network operators (for wholesale capacity) and tower companies.
- Local ISPs and small wireless ISPs (for last-mile, community networks).
- Content & assistive tech developers (edtech, audio content in indigenous languages, screen-readers, low-bandwidth apps).
- Impact funds and telecom-focused venture funds (to invest in pilots and scale winners).

### FINANCING LEVERS:

- Capex subsidies from SPV bonds + tax credits for private co-investors.
- Performance-based availability payments (public per-coverage or per-user support).
- Small grants from cultural funds for indigenous language content + DFIs for scaling.

## III. MANDATE A 3% NATIONAL DPI BUDGET LINE + FAST-TRACK ENABLING REGULATIONS

Purpose: institutionalise sustained funding and a regulatory environment that lowers investment friction for private partners and protects sovereign digital sovereignty.

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## KEY PRIVATE PARTNERS:

- Large multinational organisations, towercos, cloud providers, platform companies with Africa strategies.
- Global infrastructure funds and regional pension funds.
- Technology firms with local development capabilities (for local content & assistive tech).
- Social enterprises and local SMEs to ensure distribution & community ownership.

## FINANCING LEVERS:

- Direct national budget (3% target) + matching private capital (1:1 or 1:2 preferred leverage).
- Tax incentives and accelerated depreciation for DPI capital expenditures.
- Utilisation of government guarantees to encourage private lending where appropriate.

### b. Digital identity systems

Digital identity systems, as a key component of digital public infrastructure (DPI) and digital governance, must be rights-based, inclusive, and voluntary.

- Biometric identification must be undertaken on a privacy-by-design basis, allowing citizens to develop trust in the systems and adopt the new technology. Access to essential services should not depend solely on digital ID, and non-digital alternatives must be guaranteed.
- These DIS can also be the foundation to addressing data abuse, particularly for stateless persons, undocumented individuals, displaced persons, and historically marginalised communities.

### c. Digital literacy and skills development

Endorse the Global Digital Skills Compact, co-designed with grassroots civil society, which aims to provide AI fluency and digital and financial literacy training to 10 million girls and youth in rural and peri-urban areas by 2030, encompassing all marginalised populations, including children, persons with disabilities, women, and survivors of technology-related violence. This must include persons with disabilities, with disability-specific curricula, assistive technology integration, and training delivered in accessible formats, including national sign languages and open captioning. Digital upskilling and reskilling efforts must include, be led and co-created with persons with disabilities to avoid further marginalisation. Curricula must include digital rights, safe technology use and accessible design principles. Skills development initiatives must include accessible learning materials and delivery platforms that cater to the needs of persons with disabilities.

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#### **d. AI governance and public participation**

- Institutionalise deliberative mechanisms (e.g., citizen assemblies) in AI policymaking.
- Establish independent oversight bodies with representation from civil society.
- Ensure that ethical AI development prioritises public benefit, equity, and human rights at its core.
- AI governance frameworks must integrate disability-inclusive principles and ensure participation of persons with disabilities in all stages of design, implementation and oversight. This includes safeguards against algorithmic bias, transparency in automated decision-making and the use of universal design and accessible data practices to prevent digital exclusion

#### **e. Technology and knowledge transfer**

Reaffirm G20 commitments to open innovation and technology transfer. Establish South-South cooperation platforms for digital innovation. Ensure digital accountability frameworks include mechanisms to monitor accessibility compliance, safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities and enable redress where digital services exclude or discriminate.

#### **f. Data justice and digital sovereignty**

Require native led innovation products to locally process data and information to uphold data protection. Develop regional data protection laws that are grounded in community rights and African and Diaspora values. Ensure children, People of African Descent, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable populations benefit from their data and are protected from exploitative use. Capacitate and adequately resource data protection authorities to enable them to not only perform their duties but also be at the cutting edge of issues within their functional areas. Advocate for the inclusion of disability rights representatives in global governance forums on emerging technologies to ensure inclusivity for this rights-based policy design and implementation.

#### **g. Accountability of tech corporations**

Establish comprehensive accountability mechanisms for tech companies across their supply chains, particularly regarding labour rights, e-waste, and the extraction of critical minerals. This includes carbon taxes on data centres, with revenues ring-fenced for renewable energy transitions, and extraction taxes on critical minerals, accompanied by mandatory local value addition requirements. These fiscal instruments ensure that the environmental and social costs of digital transformation are internalised rather than externalised to vulnerable communities.

Digitally innovative technologies driven by artificial intelligence (AI) must undergo critical and ethical review, as well as community validation, before being implemented and scaled up for societal use. Such reviews must assess biases in training data and model output to avoid perpetuating inequalities, ensure transparency in AI decision-making for accountability, and adhere to local privacy and data protection regulations by complying with laws such as the Protection of Personal Information Act, No. 4 of 2013 (POPI Act). Without ethical safeguarding, scaling AI-driven technologies risks amplifying harm, perpetuating societal inequalities, alienating marginalised communities, and eroding civic and public trust.

#### **h. Information integrity**

Promote and systematise transparency and accountability of digital platforms. Invest in healthy information ecosystems by implementing content moderation safeguards, promoting algorithmic transparency, and launching media literacy campaigns. Ensure content moderation and media literacy efforts are inclusive of persons with disabilities, including those with sensory, cognitive and communication disabilities, to protect their right to access and share verified information online.

#### **i. Safety and Inclusion by Design in the digital space**

In Africa, the digital platform has become the new frontline for the exploitation of children, with online abuse often facilitated by transnational networks that transcend borders. Children are increasingly exposed to grooming, cyberbullying, sextortion, exposure to harmful content, and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images - harms that not only violate their rights but have long-term psychological, social, and educational consequences. In some African countries, nearly a fifth of children under 17 reported receiving unsolicited online requests to talk about sex or sexual acts, with one-third of those in South Africa going on to meet the person face-to-face, highlighting both the scale of the risk and the urgent need for systemic intervention. As digital economies grow, safety and inclusion must be embedded by design. We call for urgent action to integrate child online protection into all national and regional digital policies, grounded in survivor-led insights and a justice-centred approach. This must include harmonised cross-border legislation, accessible and child- and disability-friendly reporting mechanisms, inclusive digital environments, and increased investment in awareness and capacity-building for children, caregivers, educators, and frontline workers.

Governments and technology companies must move beyond reactive measures and work collaboratively to co-create protective digital infrastructures with historically excluded groups, including children with disabilities and survivors of online harm. We urge Member States to adopt and implement the AU Child Online Safety and Empowerment Policy, which outlines ten strategic goals, among them, strengthening criminal justice systems, fostering corporate accountability, investing in prevention and reporting infrastructure, and establishing a continent-wide child online safety fund. This is not a call for charity, but a demand for justice. A just and inclusive digital economy must be built on the safety, dignity, and human rights of children, recognising that their lived experiences and leadership are essential to shaping secure and equitable digital futures for all.

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## DIGITALLY ENABLED ECONOMIES

### j. Standards and regulations of digital tools

Create globally recognised, equity-focused standards for digital tools used in education, health, governance, and finance. This includes establishing and endorsing a Global Artificial Intelligence Yearly Assessment mechanism as a universal ethical auditing protocol to certify digital tools in education, healthcare, finance, and governance. The assessment should include community feedback, algorithmic audit trails, equity metrics, universal accessibility standards, and digital rights compliance. In developing equity-focused standards for digital tools, particularly in education, health, governance and finance, it is essential to embed persons with disabilities in the design, testing and evaluation of these tools. Standards must include accessibility-by-design protocols and enforceable requirements for inclusive user interfaces to ensure usability by persons with varying disabilities from the outset.

### k. Digital government for inclusion

Invest in digital public services designed for universal access and accessibility, with a focus on participatory, transparent, and accountable digital governance, particularly in regions where the informal sector is a major economic driver. This includes upskilling public sector incumbents to process and leverage data for improved public service delivery. Digital government solution should be developed through co-creation processes with historically excluded groups, including persons with disabilities. This includes ensuring that digital public services are available in accessible formats (e.g. sign language video interfaces, screen reader compatibility, captioning), and that digital literacy training is accessible to all population groups.

### l. Support for inclusive innovation ecosystems

Fund women, youth and disability -led tech enterprises across social tiers. Embed persons with disabilities in the design, governance, and evaluation of innovation ecosystems. - Funding and capacity building initiatives should intentionally target innovation by persons with disabilities and their representative organisations. This means providing grant and procurement opportunities, accessible mentorship platforms and removing structural barriers to participation in tech ecosystems, including communication accessibility, adaptive technology and digital infrastructure.

### **m. Sustainable digital development**

Promote and invest in design for longevity in digital infrastructure, reduce tech waste, and ensure digital development aligns with environmental justice goals. Sustainability must be considered alongside equity. Digital infrastructure projects should incorporate disability-inclusive sustainability indicators, including e-waste management practices that support accessible device recycling and distribution to low-income populations with disabilities. The purpose of the recommendations listed above is to contribute to the body of knowledge of shifting from GDP to well-being economies. Those that centre on human development, with measurable indicators aligned across health, education, social protection, and ecological sustainability. This transition requires parallel reforms in public finance frameworks, gradually shifting from GDP-based fiscal targets to well-being-oriented budgetary allocations as these indicators mature and gain international recognition.

## **CONCLUSION**

Our recommendations reflect a vision for a just transition towards digital and inclusive economies that work for all. Grounded in solidarity, driven by equality, and committed to sustainability, these proposals demand not only bold policymaking but also a reimagining of power, ownership, and participation in the global economy. We call on the G20 and its member states to heed these calls, not as charity, but as a matter of justice. We are not asking to be included in someone else's economy. We are building the economy of the future together. This future economy must be co-created with historically excluded groups - including persons with disabilities - whose lived experiences, innovations and leadership are critical to shaping inclusive, accessible and sustainable systems. Their full participation is not optional; it is essential to ensuring economic justice for all. Unlike abuse that happens due to physical contact, online exploitation and abuse draws perpetrators from across the globe, hence the need for cross-border collaborations in tackling the problem, from policies that protect children, to child-friendly reporting options available, harmonised sentencing laws to hold perpetrators to account. Technology is a rapidly evolving field, and hence, there is an urgent need to escalate learning and sharing of best practices in prevention and response measures across countries and incorporating the lived experiences of young adults who have gone through this to ensure support systems and other mechanisms are aligned with the realities and experiences of victim/survivors.

There is an urgent need to ensure that national policies align with broader frameworks for preventing online exploitation. Investing in children, caregivers, and parents' awareness and training on how to remain safe online is paramount.

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