



MINISTRY  
COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## **DEPUTY MINISTER PINKY KEKANA**

### **BBI: Tech Trends Roundtable**

**23 March 2021 | 9am**

Good afternoon,

- Mr Andrew Matseke, Broadband Infracore
- Ms Juanita Clark, Digital Council Africa
- Mr Garsen Naidu, CISCO
- Mr Mandla Mkhwanazi, Transnet
- Mr Kamal Ramsingh, GEO Intelligence Corp
- Mr Ryan Smit, BMIT Africa
- Ladies and gentlemen

“Covid-19” ... the name that has been etched into the technology industry for generations to come. It single-handedly, not only changed our world in terms of health and lives, but it put the technology industry into free-fall. No matter how disruptive or innovative a tech company was, life as we knew it, all over the globe, changed forever in March 2020.

According to a research paper released in February 2021, a plurality of tech experts collectively think that the pandemic’s sweeping societal change, and the technology response to it, will actually make life worse for most people in a post Covid era, as greater inequality, rising authoritarianism, and rampant misinformation, take hold.

The 'New Normal' in 2025 will be more technologically pervasive, making our lives far more technical and Tech-Driven, presenting complex challenges.

Being in government, we have many conversations with various technology industry leaders, across the world – my teacher training tells me that for Africa, it could be a hybrid.

We are observers to emerging change at the moment, in a world transitioning, and we are in the throes of the human element of accepting change, while dealing with rapid advancements in technology to meet the needs of this changed world.

When pandemics infiltrate societies, they overturn critical structures, such as health systems, medical treatments, economic life, socioeconomic class structures, race relations, institutional pecking orders, communities, and even every-day family life.

History has shown though, that while life as we knew it, is obliterated, as humanity, we only rise from the ashes of destruction. Huge advancements in human evolution have only come about in post-destruction era. Destructions so epic, there is an extinction of some kind. So, while emotionally and psychologically we are experiencing a great tragedy for human beings, it is a technological evolutionary moment in history.

The universal view of the 915 tech industry leaders from all across the world, included in the research study - is that people's relationship with technology will deepen radically, as larger segments of the world come to unequivocally rely more on digital connections for work, education, health care, daily commercial transactions, social interactions, even entertainment and human relations.

They describe this as a "tele-everything" world.

One of the things I love to do is 'future-gazing' and looking into the future of our world, through the eyes of various futurists and thought leaders. A favourite is The Economist's 'The world if' supplement, which explores subjects like "what if antibiotics did not work anymore", or "what if there were no borders", or "what if data workers of the world unite", or my favourite of all time, "what if 50% of the world's CEOs were women, called Generation XX and a look into the world in January 2069." I can tell you one thing – the line-up for today's roundtable would have been far more diverse and inclusive, when looking tech trends. Women are the major consumers for themselves and their families, so consumer technology impacts them more than men or even youth, in general – this is a fact.

Reimagining the world as we know it, intentionally, in a post -Covid era means that as the technology industry in Africa, the world's youngest continent, we have an opportunity to close the digital divide, not make it worse. We have the power just at this table to turn the world on its head and push against the urge to develop more innovative, more disruptive technology for the wealthy, but rather look at disrupting

and innovating for poverty alleviation and bringing more and more people up to a benchmarked point of making an actual impact on the digital divide. The wealthy will get wealthier anyway if we disrupt poverty alleviation.

The tech trends of the future need to be SET by us, not followed by Africans.

We would not be a continent afflicted with aid if we were not powerful. But only if we realise it and see ourselves as such powerful beings.

I have all of you at this table with me – my appeal to you in the name of tech trends, is to look at innovation and disruption, through a human filter.

There needs to be more women, there needs to be more youth, there needs to be more people who speak different languages, and there definitely needs to be more differently abled people at this table, so that our perspectives of the world are broader, vaster and our take-aways for development, are more meaningful. This will ensure a better resultant effect of global human impact, through technology.

If a woman designs a city, the streetlights will be placed differently, because only she knows what it feels like to fear walking alone on a street – a man does not. A wheelchair bound young man will design a building differently because he will look at all the things he is challenged by, like speed and distance of mobility, thereby increasing value for his able-bodied peers.

A French, Swahili, or Arabic speaking person will have a different approach to creating AI assistants on our phones, because the no 1 language in Africa, is not English.

A young person will approach the design of technology whether that be a smartphone, an app, or even transport and education, with a view of the future taking into account the earth's environmental challenges, money and wealth creation, and such, because they are looking forward to their lives – we look at it in the rear-view mirror.

Technology should encompass life and meet humanity somewhere – it cannot be in total control of a world with huge inequality, emotional and psychological capacities. It is not the driver of humanity; it is an enabler to humanity's drive.

The tech trends of the future tell us that economic equality will worsen because access to technology will be the defining factor, so I challenge you to find a way to democratize access. It tells us that the big tech companies will become even bigger – have we not learnt our lesson as human beings who are continually doomed to repeat history. I challenge you to focus on tech entrepreneurs, the start-ups – why are there no young innovators and techpreneurs at THESE roundtables. The conversation would be different.

Trends start with us.

The spread of disinformation and misinformation is multiplying alarmingly, and nobody is focussed on it, because we're all trying to become the mega tech conglomerate. I'll tell you secret – you'll become a mega tech force of nature, if you figure out how to deal with misinformation.

I know I can rely on all of you at this table to hear what I am saying as you go back to your businesses and engage in the business of technology innovation. As you do that, always bear in mind, that innovation and disruption will always be about human beings, and our experience of this world, whether that be solutions for funerals, weddings, saving lives through medical intervention, getting an education, or a new love story.

The most valuable and thereby profitable technology solutions of the future will always make the human being, the protagonist.

I thank you.