

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY MINISTER STELLA TEMBISA NDABENI
STARTUP20 SUMMIT
13 NOVEMBER 2025
GALLAGHER CONVENTION CENTRE, MIDRAND

His Royal Highness Chief Langa Mavuso Deputy Chair of the National House of Traditional leaders and Khoi San

Startup20 Chairperson, Mr Vuyani Jarana

DIRCO and the Office of the G20 Sherpa Ms Baloi

Prince Fahad bin Mansour bin Nasser bin Abdulaziz AL Saud representing Startup20 Saudi Arabia

Jonathon Ortman President of Global Entrepreneurship Network,

Members of the international steering committee of SU20

Chairs and Members of the various Task Forces

Director General Thulisile Manzini and officials from the Department of Small Business Development, and the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation

Mr Thloele from Absa our platinum sponsor

Chairperson, board members and executives from our agencies SEDFA and TIA

Head of the Startup 20 Secretariat led by Kizito Okechukwu

Representatives from the private sector, academia, and startup support ecosystem

Entrepreneurs and startups from various countries

Members of the media

It is an honour, on behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of South Africa, to welcome you to this historic convening of the SU20 Summit.

Today, we stand not only as policymakers and practitioners,

but as architects of a new global economy. One defined by innovation, inclusion, and solidarity.

We are joined by representatives from more than 41 countries across the world, united by a shared vision, which is to strengthen the role of startups and MSMEs as engines of sustainable growth.

The hosting of the G20, and in particular the SU20, on African soil therefore marks a profoundly significant milestone for South Africa and the continent. It is a declaration that Africa is not merely a recipient of policy, but a co-author and co-architect of global solutions.

As President Cyril Ramaphosa often reminds us, our continent is rich not because of its resources, but because of its people, their creativity, resilience, and determination to reimagine possibility against all odds.

Accordingly, this summit comes at a pivotal moment for the global economy. A time demanding new ideas, new partnerships, and new instruments of change.

For South Africa, it reinforces our conviction that the transformation of the MSME and startup ecosystem is not peripheral, it is central to building a just, inclusive, and sustainable economy that leaves no one behind. Moreover, it aligns with key policy and legislative interventions that anchor our commitment to unlocking the potential of township and rural enterprises, youth innovators, and women-led businesses.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Africa is a continent of possibility and innovation, powered by her youthful population, acceleration of digital transformation, including a booming tech ecosystem and an unprecedented rise in venture-capital investment.

This wave of innovation is addressing structural challenges in agriculture, healthcare, and education, while creating businesses with measurable social impact. It is imperative for survival and growth as entrepreneurs across the continent continue to

design resilient, resource-efficient, and scalable solutions that bypass traditional hurdles, turning scarcity into opportunity.

As government, we recognise that innovation is not only about technology, but also about empowerment.

This is why we are advancing initiatives such as SEDFA Pay, a digital payments and financial-inclusion platform designed to integrate micro and informal enterprises, spaza shops, street traders, and township MSMEs into the formal economy. SEDFA Pay will enable a secure, low-cost, and interoperable digital ecosystem, facilitating access to finance, record-keeping, and market participation. In doing so, it will position South Africa's small-enterprise ecosystem for a cash-light, inclusive, and data-driven economy, while advancing our national objectives of localisation, transformation, and job creation.

Distinguished delegates,

As a dedicated engagement group under the G20, StartUp 20 elevates the importance MSMEs as drivers of inclusive, innovative, and sustainable economic growth. It provides practical support to help them start, scale, and sustain their impact. It further serves as a formal mechanism to integrate startup ecosystems into the core of global policy dialogue, ensuring that entrepreneurship is not marginal, but central to how future economies are imagined.

Over the past six months, Startup 20 Africa, under South Africa's chairship, has united entrepreneurs, founders, policymakers, investors, and ecosystem enablers around this shared mission. Our leadership took a bold and contextual approach, localising global priorities to our realities, recognising township and rural entrepreneurship as engines of bottom-up innovation, embracing digital transformation in the informal economy, and maintaining a strong focus on youth, gender, and grassroots scalability.

The engagement process was structured around five taskforces, each addressing practical barriers faced by entrepreneurs globally. This work was concretised during the Mid-Term Meeting, held in July 2025, an important milestone

where taskforce leaders presented their recommendations for refinement. The process culminated in the official hand-over of the Startup 20 South Africa Recommendations on 30 October 2025, symbolising the conclusion of South Africa's leadership in this global engagement group.

The taskforces have put forth the following recommendations:

- The Foundation and Alliance taskforce proposes mechanisms for improved transnational collaboration, ensuring African innovation systems are connected and visible in the global economy.
- The Innovation and Sustainability taskforce advances a global vision of green and inclusive growth, looking at how MSMEs in the developing world can access affordable climate-aligned capital. This will ensure that the clean energy transition towards decarbonization is a Just Energy Transition.
- The finance and investment taskforce takes on the challenge of closing the global USD 1.7 trillion MSME funding gap by calling for a Global Startup Economy Fund and a harmonised tax incentive framework to unlock USD 150 billion in new capital flows.
- The trade and market access taskforce envisions a fair and harmonised trade architecture where African startups can operate seamlessly across borders.
- The Township and Rural entrepreneurship task force calls for new innovative finance systems, including community investment vehicles and digital infrastructure, to unlock opportunities for underserved and underprivileged small enterprises in marginalized spatial areas.

Esteemed colleagues,

Under South Africa's G20 Presidency theme of "Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability," these recommendations are bold, visionary, and forward-looking. They offer a practical roadmap to turn entrepreneurship into a systematic engine of inclusive growth in the country, continent, developing and G20 countries. They focus on inclusive innovation, the responsible use of emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and Blockchain, and the mobilisation of green finance to support MSMEs and sustainable development, particularly in Africa and other emerging economies. Together these

recommendations demonstrate that Africa can design and export policy innovations that respond to both local and global challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These recommendations further align with our National Development Plan (NDP), the Just Transition Framework, and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

They also find expression in our domestic policies. From the Access-to-Finance Policy for small enterprises and co-operatives to forthcoming frameworks such as the Incubation and Business Development Policy and the Township and Rural Economy Revitalisation Policy that will soon be tabled before Cabinet.

As I move towards conclusion,

As we deliberate over the next two days, let us be guided by the conviction that the future of work, trade, and innovation will not be written in the boardrooms of the North, but co-authored in the innovation hubs, cooperatives, and digital corridors of the Global South.

Let us therefore commit ourselves as governments, investors, ecosystem builders, and entrepreneurs to move from dialogue to delivery, from ambition to action. The political economy of the future must be one that prioritises dignity over dependency, innovation over inertia, and partnership over isolation.

Allow me to conclude with the words of Charlotte Maxeke and I quote, "This work is not for yourself. Kill that spirit of self and do not live above your people but live with them. If you can rise, bring someone with you."

Africa's time is now. And through Startup 20, we are not waiting for the future; we are shaping it with unity, courage, and conviction.

I thank you.