

**MINISTER STELLA TEMBISA NDABENI'S OPENING ADDRESS AT THE  
STARTUP20 MIDTERM ENGAGEMENT GROUP MEETING**

**BIRCHWOOD, JOHANNESBURG**

**21 JULY 2025**

Executive Mayor Nkosindiphile Xhakaza

Startup20 Chair Mr Vuyani Jarana

Ms Salome Baloi representing the Office of the G20 Sherpa

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

Dr Chintan Vaishnav representing Startup20 India in absentia

İsmail Tüzgen representing Startup20 Turkey

Chrystéle Sanon representing Startup20 France

Giulia Ajmone Marsan representing Startup20 Indonesia

Christopher Rachal representing Startup20 USA

Ingrid Barth representing Startup20 Brazil

Members of the Startup 20 Secretariat led by Kizito Okechukwu

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

Board members and executives from our agency the Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency and the Technology Innovation Agency

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

Members of the media

Entrepreneurs and startups

I am humbled to be standing before you today to open this Interim Meeting of the Startup20 Engagement Group.

I would like to welcome you all, and especially our international guests. Hopefully you will find time to explore some of the tourist treasures for which our beautiful country is renowned.

South Africa is hosting the G20 summit for 2025 under the theme **Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability**. As we know, South Africa has taken over the G20 presidency from Brazil and is the first time an African country is hosting this prestigious event.

We would like to thank Brazil and India before them for the sterling work done in getting Startup 20 up and running, and to the Startup20 International Board under the leadership of Prince Fahad and ....for the continuity and direction provided from one country to the next.

We are taking up the baton in difficult times of global volatility, fragmenting global supply chains, and shifts towards unilateralism and protectionism.

The United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres refers to the current moment *as a world of impunity, of inequality and of deep uncertainty, all fraying at the seams of our global order.*

Our President, His Excellency President Ramaphosa, has expressed our country's commitment to use our G20 Presidency to reinvigorate multilateralism, and the reform of global governance institutions and financial architecture to make them more representative and more focused on the needs of the most vulnerable.

We will champion the developmental issues of the Global South and Africa in particular, including issues of public debt, food security, market access, and the availability and cost of capital.

With the African Union's induction as a permanent G20 member in 2023, Africa's voice is now more prominent in global policymaking. South Africa plays a dual role: both as a sovereign G20 member and as a strategic member of the AU. As such we are well positioned to support the continent's startup and MSME agenda.

This alignment allows for greater policy coherence, enabling South Africa to serve as a bridge between global discourse and regional development aspirations, particularly in areas such as startup financing, regulatory reform, and digital transformation.

As the Department of Small Business Development, we serve in the G20 Trade and Investment Working Group and have specific responsibility for the Startup 20 Engagement Group, which we undertake in partnership with the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation.

Unfortunately, the Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Minister Blade Nzimande, is out of the country and cannot be with us over these two days.

This Engagement Group is aimed at strengthening the global startup eco-system, focusing on innovation, digital transformation, access to finance and markets, and policy collaboration.

For South Africa, the Engagement Group enables us to leverage global policy lessons, best practices, as well as strategic partnerships to support our entrepreneurs and startups.

The Engagement Group also allows us to ensure that our local realities, including township and rural dynamics, are better reflected in global policy discourse.

We have identified five priority areas for the Startup20 Engagement Group.

First, **Foundation and Alliance** with the focus on enabling policies, and ways to build a more supportive and resourced eco-system for early-stage entrepreneurs and scale-ups.

Second, **Finance and Investment** with the focus on addressing gaps in early-stage financing, cross-border financing, and ways to derisk investment, for underserved regions and groups. like women and youth, including through pre-investment capital readiness support.

Third, **Inclusion and Sustainability** with the focus on circular economy models, green innovation incentives, and pre-investment business support for youth and women led enterprises to improve capital readiness.

Fourth, **Market Access** with the focus on facilitating international trade, enabling e-commerce, reforming public procurement systems and supporting regional integration, and

Fifth, **Township and Rural Entrepreneurship** with the focus on strengthening local value chains, improving infrastructure and connectivity, and improving access to finance and eco-system support for supporting co-operatives and micro enterprises.

Task Teams made up of South African and international representatives have been established in these five priority areas.

This Midterm Engagement Group Session provides the opportunity for these Task Forces together with others in the broader eco-system to develop policy recommendations that culminate in a clear programme of action to be finalized in the Startup20 Summit on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of November.

This Summit in November will also include the inaugural Startup20 Awards, where the best startups and eco-system enablers from the G20 countries will be recognized. We will also, as DSBD, integrate our Presidential MSME Awards where we recognize and reward our best local talent.

Programme Director, this is indeed a historic week for entrepreneurs and MSMEs.

Running parallel to this Midterm Startup20 Engagement Group Meeting is a meeting of Global Trade Promotion Organizations, which we are co-hosting with the DTIC and the International Trade Centre. They will consider how the global trade system is being reconfigured, and how MSMEs can build resilience and pivot towards new markets.

Then on Wednesday and Thursday we host the Global SME Ministerial with the International Trade Centre. This meeting will see Ministers, Deputy Ministers and

officials from more than 60 countries as well as various multilateral organizations converge to discuss entrepreneurship and MSME policy and look at ways to scale global support for MSMEs, especially in underserved countries.

Specifically, the high-level meeting will look at (1) how to bridge the digital divide to empower MSMEs and startups with the infrastructure, skills, and tools needed to compete globally; (2) how to unlock capital access, especially for women- and youth-led businesses, through inclusive financial ecosystems; (3) how to position MSMEs as key actors in the green economy, supporting sustainable practices and circular innovation; and (4) how to foster inclusive trade policies that ensure MSMEs have a seat at the global economic table.

The outcome will be a **Call to Action**, endorsed by the 60 plus countries, which will contain practical policy measures and reforms which will be championed in the UN system and which we can integrate with our G20 MSME agenda.

Building on the work started in Brazil, as South Africa we want a dedicated **G20 MSME and Startup Working Group** and this week's deliberations will greatly assist us craft clear terms of reference and agenda for this working group.

We have structured the Ministerial programme so that there will be opportunities for inputs from this Startup20 Midterm Engagement. Some of you, including the Chair, Mr Jarana, will be given space to share thinking with the delegates at the Ministerial Meeting.

Together we will build a more equal and sustainable future led by MSMEs and startups.

I end with the words of **Ban Ki-moon, Former UN Secretary-General**, **“Sustainability and innovation are not luxuries for the few. They are necessities for the many. Our future depends on building economies that work for everyone, especially those whose voices are often unheard.”**

I Thank You.