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**SUBMISSION BY MEDIA MONITORING AFRICA:**

**DRAFT NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY FOR 2020-2030 (NYP2030)**

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## INTRODUCTION

1. Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Minister for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (the Minister) on the National Youth Policy for 2020-2030 (NYP2030). We note the important purpose of this policy in creating optimal youth development in South Africa, as well as the inherent need to decisively address new and emerging opportunities and challenges experienced by the youth. Further, we are of the view that the NYP2030 has the potential to contribute positively to sustainable, accessible and adequate opportunities for the social and economic development of the youth in South Africa.
2. This submission is narrowly tailored to two key issues relevant to the NYP2030:
  - 2.1. **Universal access:** The first key aspect that we submit the NYP2030 should deal with pertains to the importance of universal access to the internet, to facilitate the enjoyment of fundamental rights and development opportunities that the internet can provide.
  - 2.2. **Media and information literacy:** The second key aspect pertains to the urgent need for media and information literacy skills, including digital literacy, to be inculcated in the education curriculum, especially aimed at children who are unfamiliar with risks and opportunities related to the internet.
3. The purpose of this submission is to bring to the attention of the Minister the importance of universal access and digital literacy for youth development. This submission further seeks to illustrate that without universal access and digital literacy, the capabilities and potential of the youth in South Africa will not be fully realised, limiting the ability of the youth to constructively engage with society and achieve digital inclusion. MMA is concerned that these two aspects, which are fundamental to youth development, are not adequately addressed in the NYP2030.
4. Accordingly, this submission deals with each of these key aspects in turn, with reference to the draft NYP2030, including MMA's proposals and recommendations for how these issues can be constructively taken forward over the next decade.

## OVERVIEW OF MEDIA MONITORING AFRICA

5. MMA is a not-for-profit organisation that has been monitoring the media since 1993. MMA's objectives are to promote the development of a free, fair, ethical and critical media culture in South Africa and the rest of the continent. The three key areas that MMA seeks to address through a human rights-based approach are media ethics, media quality and media freedom.

6. MMA has over 20 years' experience in media monitoring and direct engagement with media, civil society organisations, State institutions and citizens. MMA is the only independent organisation that analyses and engages with media according to this framework. In all of our projects, we seek to demonstrate leadership, creativity and progressive approaches to meet the changing needs of the media environment.
7. MMA noted that the NYP2030 has defined youth as between 14 and 35. MMA has a specific focus on the rights of children below the age of 18 who fall within this range. Notably, children's rights have played a central role in MMA's work, ranging from empowering children through media literacy workshops, providing editorial guidelines and principles for the reporting of children in the media, and making submissions to the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development on behalf of children. MMA has established a digital literacy project designed to allow young people to gain critical skills and knowledge around online safety and digital citizenship. The programme is run together with major partners including Google, Facebook, the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies (DCDT), the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) and MTN. In addition to online safety, the programme also equips young people with the skills to critical engage with content, learn how to spot disinformation, and also develop methods on how to use the internet to build South Africa's democracy. MMA believes that children's rights to universal access to the internet are essential in our digitally transforming society.
8. For more information about MMA, please visit: [www.mediamonitoringafrica.org](http://www.mediamonitoringafrica.org).

## **THE ROLE OF UNIVERSAL ACCESS**

### *Universal access overview*

9. There are more than 32 million internet users in South Africa, 25 million of whom are mobile internet users.<sup>1</sup> It is well known that the internet has transformed the free flow of information between individuals by offering anyone with an internet connection the ability to gather and share information and ideas. This, in turn, has had a profound effect on the exercise and protection of the triad of information rights, namely the right to freedom of expression, access to information and privacy.<sup>2</sup>
10. Beyond these rights, the internet has created enabling spaces for the advancement of the right of freedom of assembly, the right to freedom of opinion, thought and belief, the right to be free from discrimination in all forms, the right to education, the right to culture and language, and the right of access to socio-economic services.

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<sup>1</sup> Statista, 'Number of internet users in selected countries in Africa as of June 2019, by country' (accessible at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/505883/number-of-internet-users-in-african-countries/>) and Statista, 'Mobile phone internet user penetration in South Africa from 2017 to 2023' (accessible at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/558867/number-of-mobile-internet-user-in-south-africa/>).

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression (accessible at [https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/17session/A.HRC.17.27\\_en.pdf](https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/17session/A.HRC.17.27_en.pdf)).

11. According to the Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and the Internet<sup>3</sup> (Joint Declaration), states are under a positive obligation to facilitate universal access to the internet. In this regard, states are required to:
  - 11.1. Provide regulatory mechanisms, including pricing regimes, universal access requirements and licensing agreements, that foster greater access to the internet.
  - 11.2. Provide direct support to facilitate access, including the establishment of public internet access points.
  - 11.3. Provide mechanisms that ensure equitable access to the internet.
  
12. MMA submits that the NYP2030 should clearly stipulate universal access to the internet for all youth as one of its overarching objectives. MMA's call in this regard coheres with South Africa's international and domestic obligations in this regard. For example:
  - 12.1. Article 19(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) provides that "[e]veryone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice." General Comment No. 34 to the ICCPR expands on article 19(2) of the ICCPR, and provides that:

"States parties should take account of the extent to which developments in information and communication technologies, such as internet and mobile based electronic information dissemination systems, have substantially changed communication practices around the world. There is now a global network for exchanging ideas and opinions that does not necessarily rely on the traditional mass media intermediaries. States parties should take all necessary steps to foster the independence of these new media and to ensure access of individuals thereto."
  
  - 12.2. Goal 9.c of the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seeks to "significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020". Moreover, goal 5.b of the SDGs further seeks to "enhance the use of enabling technology, information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women". We would submit that this commitment should be expanded to youth more broadly.

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<sup>3</sup> Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and the Internet (2011) <https://www.osce.org/fom/78309?download=true>). This declaration is published by the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression for the United Nations, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information for the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, the Representative on Freedom of the Media for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression for the Organization of American States.

- 12.3. Resolution 32/13 of the United Nations Human Rights Council has committed all states “to consider formulating, through transparent and inclusive processes with all stakeholders, and adopting national Internet-related public policies that have the objective of universal access and enjoyment of human rights at their core”.
- 12.4. Chapter 4 of the National Development Plan (NDP), which deals with economic infrastructure, contains a section dealing specifically with information and communications infrastructure. This section identifies there as being “[a]n immediate policy goal to ensure that national ICT structures adequately support the needs of the economy, allowing for parties beyond the public sector to participate”. The NDP set out its overall vision for ICTs in South Africa as follows:

“By 2030, ICT will underpin the development of a dynamic and connected information society and a vibrant knowledge economy that is more inclusive and prosperous. A seamless information infrastructure will be universally available and accessible and will meet the needs of citizens, business and the public sector, providing access to the creation and consumption of a wide range of converged services required for effective economic and social participation – at a cost and quality at least equal to South Africa's main peers and competitors. Within this vision, the underlying ICT infrastructure and institutions will be the core of a widespread digital communications system. This ecosystem of digital networks, services, applications, content and devices, firmly integrated in the economic and social fabric, will connect public administration and the active citizen; promote economic growth, development and competitiveness; drive the creation of decent work; underpin nation building and strengthen social cohesion; and support local, national and regional integration. Public services and educational and information products will be accessible to all, and will build on the information, education and entertainment role envisaged for public broadcasting. The human development on which all this is premised will have created an e-literate (online) public able to take advantage of these technological advances and drive demand for services.”

- 12.5. South Africa Connect, published by the Department of Communications (as it then was) in terms of section 3(1) of the Electronic Communications Act 36 of 2005, sets out specific targets for the achievement of universal access in South Africa. Importantly, it commits that by 2030, 100% broadband access will be achieved at a speed of 10Mbps for all users in South Africa. It also commits to achieve 100% broadband access at a speed of 1Gbps in all schools and health facilities, and 100% broadband access at a speed of 100Mbps in all public sector facilities.

13. In the light of the commitments that have already been made by South Africa to achieve universal access to the internet for all persons in South Africa, it would therefore be appropriate – and necessary – for the NYP2030 to similarly make such a commitment. Clear targets, that may be progressively realised over time, should be set, and guidance provided on how the NYP2030 foresees meeting these targets.
14. Further in this regard, we draw the Minister’s attention to a report that was prepared by MMA, together with a coalition of organisations – the South African National Editors’ Forum, the Interactive Advertising Bureau of South Africa and the Association for Progressive Communications – that sets out a seven-point plan for achieving universal access to the internet and free public access in South Africa.<sup>4</sup> The seven-point plan proposes the following initiatives:
  - 14.1. Free public access to the internet at government facilities.
  - 14.2. Zero-rated access to government websites.
  - 14.3. Free wi-fi in public spaces.
  - 14.4. Access to the internet as a basic municipal service.
  - 14.5. Digital literacy and skills development programmes.
  - 14.6. Minimum protections in the provision of free access to the internet.
  - 14.7. Oversight and monitoring of the progressive realisation of free access to the internet.
15. MMA urges the Minister to have regard to these recommendations and incorporate them, as appropriate, into the NYP2030, as prospective measures for achieving universal access to the internet for all persons in South Africa.

***Universal access as a catalyst for youth development***

16. Access to the internet in many ways is a catalyst for the empowerment of marginalised members of society. It has become a core ingredient for social, economic and human development. In order for the youth to reach their full developmental potential, universal access to the internet is paramount.
17. The SDGs recognise that “the spread of information and communications technology and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress, to bridge the digital divide and to develop knowledge societies<sup>5</sup>”. The United Nations Human Rights

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<sup>4</sup> Accessible at <https://internetaccess.africa/universal-access/>.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations General Assembly, ‘Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development’, A/Res/70/1,

Council Resolution recognised the “global and open nature of the Internet as a driving force in accelerating progress towards development in its various forms”.<sup>6</sup> This was confirmed by the Resolution on the Right to Freedom of Information and Expression on the Internet by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR).<sup>7</sup> In this resolution, the ACHPR called on member states to take legislative and other measures to guarantee, respect and protect citizen’s rights to freedom of information and expression through access to internet services.

18. The developmental potential of access to the internet is most profound for the youth. According to a report published by the International Development Research Centre on “Youth, deprivation and the internet in Africa”,<sup>8</sup> the following are some of the notable findings in relation to internet access and youth development:

- 18.1. **Education:** Internet access is seen to have the potential to enhance pupils’ learning opportunities in terms of access to educational material, and in some instances, by giving them the capacity to explore the world.
- 18.2. **Employment opportunities:** The internet provides young people with useful information about employment opportunities. Employment opportunities are either found through local platforms, social media groups or networks that share work opportunities they have found online.
- 18.3. **Access to information for skills development:** The internet was reported to be used in various ways to learn new skills or advance their existing skills.
- 18.4. **Challenging narratives:** The internet, in particular for young women, has become a tool for reshaping life narratives, based on finding motivation, role models and inspiration. In societies where local role models are often difficult to find, or where young women are perceived in a negative way, accessing this particular content may provide knowledge and build the necessary confidence for young women to shape their own narratives and claim some form of agency in their lives.

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(2015) (accessible at <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/transforming-our-world-2030-agenda-sustainable-development>).

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, “The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet” A/HRC/20/L.13 (2012) (accessible at <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/G12/147/10/PDF/G1214710.pdf?OpenElement>).

<sup>7</sup> ACHPR, ‘Resolution on the right to freedom of information and expression on the internet in Africa’, ACHPR/Res.362(LIX) (2016) (accessible at <https://www.achpr.org/sessions/resolutions?id=377>).

<sup>8</sup> International Development Research Centre, ‘Youth, Deprivation and the Internet in Africa’ (2018) (accessible at [https://researchictafrica.net/after-access-survey-papers/2018/After Access: youth and digital inequality in Africa.pdf](https://researchictafrica.net/after-access-survey-papers/2018/After%20Access%20youth%20and%20digital%20inequality%20in%20Africa.pdf)).

19. The United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD) similarly recognises the importance of access to the internet to enable access to capital, markets and training, which are needed to pursue a career or studies.<sup>9</sup> The IANYD notes that access to technology, the internet and information promotes youth entrepreneurship, which provides a viable solution for youth employment. Notably, in relation to equality and inclusions, the IANYD observes:

“The United Nations recognizes young people as avid and creative users of ICTs, and as key contributors to building an inclusive Information Society and bridging the Digital Divide. In particular targeting girls and young women by promoting better and more inclusive access to ICT so as to promote their academic, social and economic development is crucial to not only bridging this digital divide, but also in helping close the gender gap.

In this sense, promoting universal, non-discriminatory, equitable and affordable access of youth to ICT is central to ensuring digital and social inclusion. Disadvantaged and marginalized youth, such as migrant and refugee youth, youth with HIV and AIDS, indigenous youth, youth with disabilities, rural youth, youth experiencing poverty, and those facing discrimination, are often excluded from access to ICTs. The effective allocation of resources so as to ensure equal opportunities and access to ICTs for youth living in vulnerable situations is critical to ensuring that ICTs are used and developed in an inclusive and equitable manner.”

20. In its proposals for actions, the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) listed “making information and communications technology available to all youth”.<sup>10</sup> The WPAY proposed that: “Governments should develop domestic policies to ensure that ICT is fully and appropriately integrated into education and training at all levels, including in the development of curricula, teacher training and institutional administration and management, as well as in support of the concept of lifelong learning.”
21. It is clear that universal access can significantly contribute to youth development in a variety of meaningful ways. MMA submits that this should be expressly and explicitly recognised in the NYP2030, to ensure digital equity and equality for all persons in South Africa.

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<sup>9</sup> United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development, “Youth and ICT” (accessible at <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-icts.pdf>).

<sup>10</sup> World Programme of Action for Youth (accessible at <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/wpav2010.pdf>).

## THE IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS, INCLUDING DIGITAL LITERACY SKILLS

### *Overview of digital literacy*

22. A lack of digital literacy is emerging as the main barrier to internet use. MMA submits that universal access needs to be coupled with effective digital literacy programmes to ensure meaningful access. The seven-point plan described above requires the introduction of digital literacy programmes in education curricula and as part of free internet schemes, especially aimed at children and those unfamiliar with risks and opportunities related to the internet.
23. Digital literacy can simply be understood as a set of necessary skills for using the internet. It can enable participation and information sharing. It also denotes a range of professional computing skills. Notably, digital literacy equips an individual with the “capability to achieve other valued outputs in life, especially in the modern digital economy.”<sup>11</sup> Being digitally literate is crucial for employability and is a core enabler of economic transformation. In addition to these elements, digital literacy also empowers people to look after their digital footprint, stay safe online and also know and understand how to deal with some of the possible dangers of being online.
24. The need to ensure digital literacy falls squarely under SDG 4, which seeks to ensure “inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. One of the SDG 4 global indicators looks at the proportion of youth and adults with ICT skills, by type of skill:

“ICT skills determine the effective use of information and communication technology. The lack of such skills continues to be one of the key barriers keeping people, and in particular women, from fully benefitting from the potential of ICTs. The global indicator is based on the percentage of individuals with ICT skills by type of skill. It measures ICT skills based on the number of people who report to have undertaken certain computer-related activities in a given time period (usually during the last 12 months in the case of Eurostat or 3 months in the case of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU)).”<sup>12</sup>

25. Digital literacy enables meaningful and active participation with online services. The Joint Declaration provides that states have a positive obligation provide adequate awareness on the use of the internet, especially for the under privileged, children, the elderly and rural populations and to provide appropriate resourcing for digital literacy programmes.

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<sup>11</sup> Chetty et al, ‘Bridging the digital divide: measuring digital literacy’ Economics: The Open-Access, Open-Assessment E-Journal (2018) (accessible at <http://www.economics-ejournal.org/economics/journalarticles/2018-23>).

<sup>12</sup> UNESCO, ‘Quick Guide to Education Indicators for SDG 4’ (2018) (accessible at <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/quick-guide-education-indicators-sdg4-2018-en.pdf>).

26. The United Nations Special Rapporteur in Freedom of Expression recognises that, in addition to access to the internet, people need to possess the necessary skills to make full use of the internet; in other words, they need to be digitally literate.<sup>13</sup> The Special Rapporteur encourages states to provide support for training in ICTs, which can range from basic computer skills to creating web pages. Additionally, the Special Rapporteur believes that internet literacy should be included in school curricula, as well as in learning modules outside of schools.
27. Additionally, the Special Rapporteur called upon states to empower marginalised groups by ensuring that they receive effective digital literacy training, noting the importance of strengthening the voices of those without power, especially people living in extreme poverty. The Special Rapporteur noted that having access to the internet and being digitally literate “allows people who are disadvantaged, discriminated against or marginalized to obtain information, assert their rights and participate in the public debate concerning social and political changes.”

### ***Digital literacy as a catalyst for youth development***

28. It has been noted that: “Digital literacy skills are essential for children to have meaningful access to the Internet, and children’s right to education in a digital world encompasses the learning necessary to fully exercise their rights online.”<sup>14</sup> Digital literacy is a significant contributor to meaningful and sustainable youth development, and has been described as “a life skill”.<sup>15</sup>
29. The skills and benefits reaped from universal access, as discussed above, are advanced by digital literacy in the following ways:
- 29.1. **Employment:** Employability and facilitating the employment process is improved by digital literacy. Digital literacy can also facilitate the acquisition of other important life skills that positively contribute towards development.
- 29.2. **Education:** Education is undeniably enhanced when digital literacy is incorporated. The United Nations Human Rights Council has emphasised “that access to information on the Internet facilitates vast opportunities for affordable and inclusive education globally, thereby being an important tool to facilitate the promotion of the right to education, while underlining the need to address digital literacy and the digital divide, as it affects the enjoyment of the right to education.” The Human Rights Council has further affirmed “that quality education plays a decisive role in development, and therefore calls upon all States

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<sup>13</sup> United Nations Special Rapporteur in Freedom of Expression Report A/66/290 (2011) (accessible at <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Opinion/A.66.290.pdf>).

<sup>14</sup> UNICEF ‘Access to the Internet and Digital Literacy’ (2017) (accessible at [https://www.unicef.org/csr/css/UNICEF\\_CRB\\_Digital\\_World\\_Series\\_ACCESS.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/csr/css/UNICEF_CRB_Digital_World_Series_ACCESS.pdf)).

<sup>15</sup> UNESCO ‘Digital Literacy in Education’ (2011) (accessible at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000214485>).

to promote digital literacy and to facilitate access to information on the Internet, which can be an important tool in facilitating the promotion of the right to education.”<sup>16</sup>

29.3. **Equality:** Digital divides, be it based on socio-economic status, gender or differing abilities, can be overcome with digital literacy. The United Nations Human Rights Council has stressed “the importance of empowering all women and girls by enhancing their access to information and communications technology, promoting digital literacy and the participation of women and girls in education and training on information and communications technology, and encouraging women and girls to embark on careers in the sciences and information and communications technology”. It further called on states to “bridge the gender digital divide and to enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of all women and girls”. The United Nations Human Rights Council further encouraged states to “take appropriate measures to promote, with the participation of persons with disabilities, the design, development, production and distribution of information and communications technology and systems, including assistive and adaptive technologies, that are accessible to persons with disabilities.”<sup>17</sup>

30. Digital literacy is also important for ensuring that the youth are safe online. UNICEF has noted that there is need for—

“greater collaboration between governments and technologists to develop ICT platforms and curricula from primary school through high school, supporting online libraries and expanding the capacity of public libraries to teach digital skills; investing in teacher training in digital technology; teaching children how to recognize and protect themselves from online dangers; and making digital citizenship a core component of digital literacy instruction.”<sup>18</sup>

31. The benefits of digital literacy are clear and accordingly provisions need to be made to ensure that the youth in South Africa are digital literate so that they can reach their full developmental capacity, in whatever shape or form that may take.

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<sup>16</sup> UNCHR, ‘Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet’ A/HRC/RES/32/13 (2016) (accessible at <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/156/90/PDF/G1615690.pdf?OpenElement>).

<sup>17</sup> Id.

<sup>18</sup> UNICEF ‘Children in a Digital World’ (2017) (accessible at [https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/SOWC\\_2017\\_ENG\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/SOWC_2017_ENG_WEB.pdf)).

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NYP2030

32. MMA submits that the above explanations clearly indicate why universal access and media and information literacy skills are necessary for youth development, particularly to enable the youth to meaningfully engage with society – a digitally transforming society. Accordingly, MMA recommends that “[a]ccess, skills, risks and opportunities are all part of the overall picture of children’s well-being and rights in the digital age and should all, therefore, be kept in mind when developing policy interventions”.<sup>19</sup>
33. With the above in mind, MMA makes the following recommendations:

### *Prioritisation of universal access and digital literacy*

34. MMA acknowledges the various references to the need for the youth to be equipped with technological and digital skills. However, MMA submits that the NYP2030 needs to prioritise universal access and digital literacy in order to “develop young people’s capabilities as part of a long-term solution to poverty, unemployment and inequalities which will open opportunities for the youth to participate in and take advantage of what South Africa has to offer.”<sup>20</sup>
35. MMA submits that without universal access and digital literacy, young people cannot become fully empowered, they will be ill-equipped to deal with online harms, and they may also be easy victims for online scams and cybercrimes. Furthermore, they will not possess information, knowledge and skills that “enable them to realise their full potential and understand seize opportunities, play their roles and take responsibilities in making a meaningful contribution to the development of a non-racial, non-sexist, equal, democratic and prosperous South Africa.”<sup>21</sup>
36. Accordingly, MMA recommends that the NYP2030 gives fuller and more meaningful acknowledgments to the opportunities and challenges of access to the internet. MMA recommends the following inclusions:
- 36.1. A discussion on digital challenges and opportunities must be part of the “Rationale” of NYP2030.
- 36.2. Universal access and digital literacy must be listed “Objectives” of the NYP2030.
- 36.3. Under the “Accessibility” principle universal access and digital literacy must be explicitly included.

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<sup>19</sup> UNICEF, ‘Global Kids Online Research Synthesis’ (2016) (accessible at [https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRR\\_2016\\_01.pdf](https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IRR_2016_01.pdf)).

<sup>20</sup> NYP2030 at 4.

<sup>21</sup> Id at 8.

- 36.4. The reflection on the “impact of the previous policy and general government policies” appears to place the onus of digital inclusion elsewhere. It further suggests that there have been more successes than is apparent and that the bulk of the work has been done. This section must include a fair reflection of both successes and the challenges that are still prevalent.
- 36.5. A lack of universal access and digital literacy are undeniable contributors to the “weak pipelines for human capital development” and “low skills”. The NYP2030 must acknowledge the intersection between access and development. Statistics of the current rate of access or lack thereof must be included under these sections.

***Inclusion of the “lack of access to the internet” in the situational analysis***

37. The NYP2030 fails to recognise the lack of internet in South Africa in its situational analysis. This omission fails to provide a holistic account of the present reality. Given the significant role that access to the internet and digital literacy can play addressing the other issues listed, it is necessary to include the “lack of access to the internet” as a serious and contemporary challenging facing the youth in South Africa. Accordingly, MMA recommends that a section analysing the lack of access to the internet must be included.

***Stronger commitments and interventions***

38. MMA acknowledges the following proposed interventions of the NYP2030:
  - 38.1. Basic computer literacy should be included in the school curriculum. Access to wi-fi and internet connectivity should be enhanced.
  - 38.2. The curriculum reform should be based on the fourth industrial revolution to better prepare learners in terms of the future skills.
39. While these interventions are welcome, MMA recommends that the phrasing of such interventions needs to be far firmer and clearer. MMA brings to the attention of the Minister some the recommendations captured by UNICEF in relation to national initiatives dealing with digital literacy:
  - 39.1. Initiatives aiming to ensure digital literacy for all, for example by integrating digital competencies into school curricula or by building ICT labs and community learning centres.
  - 39.2. Projects to teach coding skills to children, including the integration of coding in national school curricula, the creation of outside-school coding clubs, or the distribution of low-cost computers with preloaded courses and applications.

- 39.3. Programmes to develop youth digital skills with a view to future employability, including national employability strategies, training programmes for unemployed or marginalised youth and other forms of skills development.
- 39.4. Actions to foster ‘soft digital skills’, that aim to ensure digital safety, develop digital participation, or increase awareness of how digital technology, big data and algorithms shape society, and also how to critically engage with media content and spot disinformation.<sup>22</sup>
40. MMA recommends that the NYP2030 takes consideration of the above, but that it also goes further to include more concrete and tangible interventions to ensure universal access and digital literacy for the youth of South Africa.

***Adequate reflection of the digital divide and the emphasis on collaboration***

41. MMA acknowledges the following inclusion:

“A youth information and communications technology (ICT) strategy must be developed by the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition led by the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies (DCDT). Barriers to entry to the information technology sector are low because it is a new sector that does not suffer from legacy problems. Nationally, according to the General Household Survey of 2013, only 5 percent of households do not have access to either landlines or mobile phones. This makes the ICT sector relatively accessible to young people. The Independent Communication Authority of South Africa should be lobbied to issue regulations that make specific public-benefit apps, websites and services that are accessible on mobile phones zero-rated by networks. Network operators could recoup these costs through their ICT code (social development obligations to the Universal Services and Access Fund).”<sup>23</sup>

42. However, MMA notes two overarching concerns with this:

- 42.1. Without universal access and digital literacy, it is unclear how to make the “ICT sector relatively accessible to young people”. This statement fails to take into account the digital divide in South Africa, in particular to the socio-economic circumstances that make access to this sector plausible for some, and challenging and out of reach for others. MMA recommends that a more accurate reflection of the digital divide and obstacles to accessing to opportunities must be included.

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<sup>22</sup> UNICEF ‘Digital Literacy for Children: Exploring definitions and frameworks’ (2019) (accessible at <https://www.ikanos.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/UNICEF-Digital-Literacy-Scoping-Paper-FINAL-27-Aug-2019.pdf>).

<sup>23</sup> NYP2030 at 6.

MMA bring to the attention of the Minister commentary from Violence Prevention Through Urban Upgrading, who have noted as follows:

“In the case of South Africa, the unequal distribution of these advances [technological advances] intensifies a stark digital divide. It doesn’t take much to see that internet access, education, skilled-employment and technological innovation are stratified along class and racial lines, thus reinforcing apartheid-era inequality. . .

As one of the most unequal societies in the world, many historically disadvantaged South Africans still experience an overwhelming lack of access to basic services, skills training, and employment opportunities. Moreover, a digital divide exists not just between those people with and without internet access. A divide also exists between those with digital literacy skills, the ability to produce content online, and the financial resources for optimal internet usage, and those without these.

Access to digital skills as well as affordable and quality internet coverage remains unevenly distributed in South Africa. Higher-income young people are able to get a good education and increase their skills for the digital future. However, each year thousands of lower-income young South Africans leave schools without even basic digital literacy. If predictions of decreasing demand for low-skilled labour are anything to go by, this is a valid cause of concern.”<sup>24</sup>

42.2. Research ICT Africa further notes that:

“[I]ncreasing Internet connections suggests a bridging of the digital divide yet, as more people are connected, digital inequality paradoxically increases. Inequality exists not only between people online and offline, but also between those who have the skills and financial resources to use the Internet optimally, and those who do not. Without policy interventions to reduce these disparities offline inequalities will simply be mirrored online – or potentially even amplified.”<sup>25</sup>

42.3. The second concern relates to an apparent lack of coordination among relevant stakeholders that have a role to play in ensuring access and literacy. MMA recommends that better coordination between different government departments needs to be established and harnessed in order to have a functioning and adequate ICT strategy. MMA submits that there needs to be

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<sup>24</sup> Violence Prevention Through Urban Upgrading, ‘Bridging the New Digital Divide’ (2019) (accessible at <http://vpuu.org.za/ict4d/digital-divide-south-africa/>).

<sup>25</sup> ICT Africa, ‘After Access series: The State of ICT in South Africa’ (accessible at <https://researchictafrica.net/2018/09/10/state-of-ict-in-south-africa/>).

collaboration and coordination between at least the following government stakeholders:

- 42.3.1. Department of Basic Education
- 42.3.2. Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities
- 42.3.3. Department of Communications and Digital Technologies
- 42.3.4. Department of Science and Technology
- 42.3.5. Independent Communications Authority of South Africa
- 42.3.6. Information Regulator

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

- 43. Universal access and digital literacy are central to the realistic attainment of youth development in South Africa. Informed access to the internet allows the youth – from urban and remote and marginalised communities – to receive and impart information and to learn, associate, educate and innovate. Given that we are in a digital age with rapid technological developments and advancements, universal access and digital literacy are tantamount to the youth exercising their rights and realising their potential. Access coupled with literacy will open up a world of opportunities for the youth.
- 44. MMA recommends that the urgent prioritisation and inclusion of universal access digital literacy is imperative for “an integrated, holistic and sustainable youth development, conscious of the diversities and developmental capacities, historical imbalances and current realities, in building capacities of young people and their organisations, so that they can in turn contribute their full potential in building a better life for all.”
- 45. MMA remains available to assist and contribute further to the processes relating to the NYP2030, including to present oral submissions at any public hearings and to make further written submissions on amended drafts of the NYP2030. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require any further information.

**Media Monitoring Africa  
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