

UK South Africa Joint Announcement – Commonwealth Digital Connectivity Agenda

Increasing prosperity through digital trade: the UK and South Africa agree to co-lead the Commonwealth Digital Connectivity Agenda.

During Africa Tech Week, which took place in Cape Town on 4 and 5 March, the UK and South Africa announced their agreement to co-lead the Commonwealth Digital Connectivity Agenda. This is one of five clusters of activity promoted by the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda on Trade and Investment, agreed at the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London.

The Digital Connectivity Agenda will facilitate an exchange of experiences, views and best practices on digital connectivity to support inclusive growth and sustainable development in the Commonwealth. Member states will cooperate across a range of areas for the development of national digital economies, including: ICT capability; regulatory frameworks; digital infrastructure; the disruptive effects of digital trade; and the participation of women in the digital economy, in order to enable all members to take advantage of the opportunities presented by digitisation and respond to its challenges. Within this framework, there will be emphasis on enabling least developed and developing countries to overcome the challenges of digitisation brought about by the 4th Industrial Revolution and realise the benefits of digital trade and related investment.

The first meeting, scheduled to take place on 19 and 20 March 2019 in South Africa, will bring together senior policy officials from all regions in the Commonwealth to explore the effects of digital transformation and opportunities to enhance digital connectivity.

The UK International Trade Secretary, Dr Liam Fox MP, said: “As Chair-in-Office, the UK is committed to working closely with South Africa and other Commonwealth partners to enable all member states to harness digital trade as a means of driving inclusive economic growth and delivering a more prosperous future for our citizens.

“The Commonwealth offers vast potential for trade and investment opportunities, with intra-Commonwealth trade consistently growing faster than the global average. This agenda provides a unique platform for Commonwealth countries to respond to global economic challenges and unlock these opportunities for the benefit of all members.”

The UK Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Jeremy Wright, added: “The UK has a proud history of digital innovation and through our co-leadership of the Digital Connectivity Agenda we will work with our partners across the Commonwealth to unlock the benefits of digital technology.

"This exciting programme will explore ways to boost digital skills, promote inclusion in the tech sector and empower more people and small businesses across the world to drive growth through digital trade."

The South African Minister for Trade and Industry, Dr Rob Davies MP, said: “We embrace the undeniable benefits and new opportunities brought about by the advances in ICTs, especially in the context of the 4th Industrial Revolution. But we also take note of the significant potential for disruptive effects of the digital revolution, in particular to least developed countries. Appropriate policies and measures need to be taken to ensure that developing countries benefit from the advantages of technological progress and do not suffer from lack of its early adoption. Effective policies are required to bridge the digital divides, including through supporting people to learn and by adopting new technologies and ensuring effective mechanisms for transfer of relevant technologies.

“We look forward to using this platform to cooperate with fellow Commonwealth members in exchanging experiences and best practises in order to ensure that the digital economy supports inclusive growth.”

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Patricia Scotland said: “Economies are going through a period of profound change. Digitisation is rapidly shifting the business and policy environment for trade and investment. As Commonwealth countries prepare to embrace the opportunities this offers, and to ensure that the smaller and more vulnerable are not left behind, collaboration and innovation are of supreme importance.

The Commonwealth Digital Connectivity Agenda is a splendid example of how, by working together, our 53member countries are able to take practical action towards overcoming impediments to inclusive trade and sustainable prosperity in which all can share. It carries forward in fresh ways our fine Commonwealth record of cooperation to promote development by sharing knowledge and creating employment.

We will see this in action at the inaugural meeting of the Digital Connectivity Cluster, with Commonwealth members from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe and the Pacific assembling and working together to ensure that all our communities benefit from the 4th Industrial Revolution.”

Background notes to editors

At the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), Heads of Government expressed a desire to harness trade and investment as a means of delivering inclusive economic growth and prosperity for their citizens. With the ambition of increasing intra-Commonwealth trade to \$2 trillion by 2030, Leaders adopted the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment (CCA).

The CCA is designed to be fundamentally a collaborative, cooperative member-led platform that brings together trade officials and sectoral policymakers, regulators and implementers to explore ways to increase inclusive and sustainable trade and expand investment across the Commonwealth through peer-to-peer learning, capacity building and the promotion of investments, among other activities.

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