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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Colleagues,

This Women's Month, we celebrate the women whose leadership and resilience have paved the way for today's digital generation. From those who fought for space in boardrooms to those now driving innovation in fibre, cloud, and AI, their contributions continue to shape our sector in profound ways.

Globally, we are seeing encouraging signs of progress. The ITU's first female Secretary-General, Doreen Bogdan-Martin, has gone beyond symbolism, establishing a Global Network of Women Digital Leaders to accelerate gender equality in ICT. Just last month, the United Nations unveiled its Gender Equality Clarion Call and Acceleration Plan, recog-

nising that no indicator under SDG 5 is on track and rallying governments, industry, and civil society to make 2025 a true turning point. These efforts remind us that gender inclusion is not a peripheral issue—it is central to building sustainable, innovative economies.

The era of artificial intelligence presents both opportunity and risk. AI already influences everything from finance to healthcare, but without vigilance, it can entrench bias—misperceiving women, erasing diversity, and amplifying inequality. We cannot allow the future to be coded with the prejudices of the past.

As Africa designs sovereign digital policies, invests in green data centres, and advances towards IMT-2030 (6G), women must be central to this effort—as innovators, policymakers, and entrepreneurs. Inclusion is not just about representation; it is about ensuring that women's voices and leadership actively shape the future of our digital economy.

Warm Regards,  
Andile Ngcaba  
President, Digital Council Africa



# 15

**YEARS**  
CREATING  
CONNECTIONS

# NOTICE BOARD

## What is Conext?

**“CONEXT: a relationship in which a person or thing is linked or associated with someone or something else.”**

Conext is the Digital Council Africa’s member-driven newsletter—created to keep our community informed, connected, and engaged in shaping the future of Africa’s digital economy.

### We share:

- Industry news and updates
- DCA activities, events, and working group insights
- Thought leadership and contributions from our members

It’s a space for collaboration, best practice sharing, and strengthening dialogue between government and the private sector. Most importantly, Conext belongs to our members—and we invite you to make your voice heard.

**To contribute**, email Nadene Reignier at [nadene@digitalcouncil.africa](mailto:nadene@digitalcouncil.africa)

## Social Media

Follow us for the latest updates on **DCA initiatives, member highlights, and key industry news**. We’re growing our reach—and yours—by spotlighting the people and progress powering digital transformation.

### LET’S STAY CONEXTED. FOLLOW US ON



## Want to feature your company in the upcoming Conext?

### Conext is a free platform for DCA members. We welcome:

- Sector news, updates and insights
- Company or product updates
- Thought leadership articles and conversations on digital economy development
- Adverts and advertorials

**Next Issue:** June 2025

Contributions can be sent to Nadene Reignier at [nadene@digitalcouncil.africa](mailto:nadene@digitalcouncil.africa)

## Member Benefits

For 15 years, the Digital Council Africa has brought together the people and sectors driving Africa’s digital transformation. From fibre networks and data centres to cloud, towers, and the platform economy—our members are at the heart of the continent’s digital future.

### As a member, you can:

- Access exclusive market research and insights
- Join working groups and policy discussions
- Share content in Conext at no cost
- Attend member-only webinars and events
- Grow your network through conferences and industry gatherings
- Be represented in high-level government engagement

### Want to get involved?

Email [Reesha@digitalcouncil.africa](mailto:Reesha@digitalcouncil.africa) or visit [digitalcouncil.africa/#become-member](https://digitalcouncil.africa/#become-member)



# NOTICE BOARD

## Let's keep in touch

People move, roles change—and we want to make sure we're **staying connected** with the right people at your organisation.

- Please take a moment to **update your contact details** so you don't miss out on the latest news, event invites, or Conext submission calls.
- If there's someone else on your team who should be receiving our updates—like a **marketing lead** or industry specialist—please send their details too.

Email updates to Nadene Reignier at [nadene@digitalcouncil.africa](mailto:nadene@digitalcouncil.africa)

**Thanks for helping us keep our community strong and connected!**

## Member Webinars

We invite DCA members to collaborate with us on webinars focused on relevant, thought-provoking industry topics. Webinars are hosted on an ad-hoc basis and shared via our member mailing list.

If you'd like to **host a session** or propose a topic, we'd love to hear from you—provided the content is insightful and aligned with our sector focus.

Get in touch with Reesha Iyer at [reesha@digitalcouncil.africa](mailto:reesha@digitalcouncil.africa)



## DCA On Demand

**Explore the conversations shaping South Africa's digital future—anytime, anywhere.**

Missed one of our recent events or webinars? No problem!

Visit the [\*\*DCA YouTube channel\*\*](#) to watch recordings of our webinars & events—on your schedule.

All publicly available recordings (excluding member-only events) are hosted on our official YouTube channel.

**Subscribe now to stay informed, inspired, and connected.**

WEBINAR

National Policy on  
Rapid Deployment  
of Electronic  
Communications  
Networks and Facilities

WEBINAR

Draft Data & Cloud  
Implementation Plan  
Presentation

## Developing the Way to a Connected Digital Economy



### A PIVOTAL MOMENT FOR AFRICA'S DIGITAL FUTURE



Digital transformation is reshaping Africa—and investment in digital infrastructure is at the heart of this shift. From high-speed fibre to towers, data centres, cloud platforms and submarine cables, the future depends on secure, scalable networks.

The **Department of Communications and Digital Technologies (DCDT)**, in partnership with **Digital Council Africa (DCA)**, presents Conext 2025—a high-level summit bringing together government, industry, and investors to explore opportunities for impactful investment and inclusive digital growth.

*Together, we will examine what it takes to scale, secure, and sustain the digital ecosystems of tomorrow.*

### ENABLING DIGITAL INCLUSION



#### **communications & digital technologies**

Department:  
Communications & Digital Technologies  
**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

As the national department leading South Africa's digital transformation, the **DCDT** plays a vital role in shaping policy, driving infrastructure development, and expanding access to digital services. Its commitment to Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies is helping build an inclusive digital society and enabling sustainable economic growth.

### CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF CONNECTION



2025 also marks the **15th anniversary of DCA**, recognising its role in connecting industry and government, shaping digital policy, and expanding access to connectivity across the continent.

*Conext 2025 is more than a conference—it is a gathering of changemakers ready to shape the next decade of Africa's digital transformation.*

### WHAT TO EXPECT

#### **Day 1 - Plenary & Technical Sessions**

Deep-dives into the latest developments in digital infrastructure, with sector-specific workshops on technology, sustainability, and skills development.

#### **Day 2 - Leadership Summit**

High-level dialogue between government and industry decision-makers focused on infrastructure deployment, regulatory innovation, and investment strategy.

### THE VENUE *the forum | the campus*



Located in Bryanston, this 5-star venue combines world-class tech and architecture with serene gardens and exceptional catering—an ideal setting for Africa's leading digital infrastructure summit.

### PARTNER WITH US AS WE CELEBRATE THE 15-YEAR MILESTONE

To learn more or get involved, contact:  
Reesha Iyer at [reesha@digitalcouncil.africa](mailto:reesha@digitalcouncil.africa)

## EVENT PARTNERS

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At **Nokia**, we create technology that helps the world act together. As a **B2B technology innovation leader**, we are pioneering networks that sense, think and act by leveraging our work across **mobile, fixed and cloud networks**. In addition, we create value with intellec-

tual property and long-term research, led by the **award-winning Nokia Bell Labs**.

Service providers, enterprises and partners worldwide trust Nokia to deliver secure, reliable and sustainable networks today – and work with us to create the digital services and applications of the future. **In Africa we are the trusted partner in increasing the continent's digital resiliency and actively participate in closing the digital gap to unlock the value of the digital economy – leaving nobody behind!**

To find out more visit <https://www.nokia.com/about-us/>

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**Amazon Web Services (AWS)** is the world's most comprehensive and broadly adopted cloud platform, offering over 200 fully featured services from data centres globally.

**Millions of customers**, including the fastest-growing startups, largest enterprises, and leading government agencies, are **using AWS to lower costs, become more agile, and innovate faster**.

Whether you need to deploy your application workloads across the globe in a single click, or you want to build and deploy specific applications closer to your end-users with single-digit millisecond latency, **AWS provides you the cloud infrastructure where and when you need it**.

Learn more at <https://aws.amazon.com/>

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Since 2007, **DFA** has been **financing, building, installing, managing, and maintaining a state-of-the-art fibre network** that transmits both metro and long-haul telecommunications traffic.

Their extensive network now includes **over 14,000 km of ducting infrastructure** across major cities, secondary hubs, and smaller towns—ensuring **reliable, high-uptime connectivity** nationwide. DFA's infrastructure is available to operators, ISPs, media companies, educational institutions, municipalities, govern-

ment, and businesses of all sizes—on equal terms.

Their **world-class Network Operations Centre**, located in Rivonia, Johannesburg, provides 24/7 monitoring and maintenance to ensure top-tier service and uptime for all users.

DFA is part of the **MAZIV Group** and is a Level 1 B-BBEE Contributor under the ICT Sector Codes—demonstrating **a strong commitment to inclusive, transformative participation in South Africa's digital economy**.

Learn more at [dfafrica.co.za/about](https://dfafrica.co.za/about)

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BUILD SMART | CONNECT FAST | THRIVE

**Founded in 2018, TELE-EXPERT** is a leading technology company **specialising in the design, deployment, and maintenance of critical fibre optic and wireless infrastructure** across South Africa and internationally.

With a team of highly skilled engineers and technical experts, TELE-EXPERT brings extensive experience in delivering complex **fibre optic and wireless solutions** to **Fibre Network Operators and ISPs**. Through strong partnerships with **global fibre optic and wireless OEM manufacturers**, the company provides complete systems integration solutions — including **in-house technical support, installation, training, and maintenance**.

Well positioned to meet the growing demand for **robust, secure, and resilient network infrastructure**, TELE-EXPERT has successfully implemented major projects in the communications sector. By **combining professional expertise with efficient systems** for management and control, the company consistently delivers on its promise of service excellence and client satisfaction.

Learn more at <https://www.tele-expert.com/>



— INVITATION —

# CONEXION

JOIN US AS WE TOAST TO 15 YEARS OF CREATING CONNECTION!

9 October 2025 | 17h30 - 20h30  
The Forum | Bryanston



## JOIN US AS WE TOAST TO 15 YEARS OF CREATING CONNECTION!

**Delegates-only** networking cocktail for registered Conext 2025 attendees, sponsors and speakers.

As part of **Conext 2025**, this special edition of our **annual cocktail evening** brings together **great company, canapés, drinks, and live music**—plus a celebratory nod to the **milestones** we've reached together over the past 15 years.

**Unwind, connect, and raise a glass to the progress we've made and the future we're building.**

**9 October 2025 | The Forum, Bryanston**

Visit <https://conextconference.africa/> for full event info and delegate registration.

*Please note: This event is not open to the public.*



**communications &  
digital technologies**

Department:  
Communications & Digital Technologies  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Digital  
Council

**15** YEARS  
CREATING  
CONNECTIONS

In Partnership with  
**aws**





Connecting You to the Future  
Connectez-vous au Futur

afrifiber

## Celebrating Women's Month

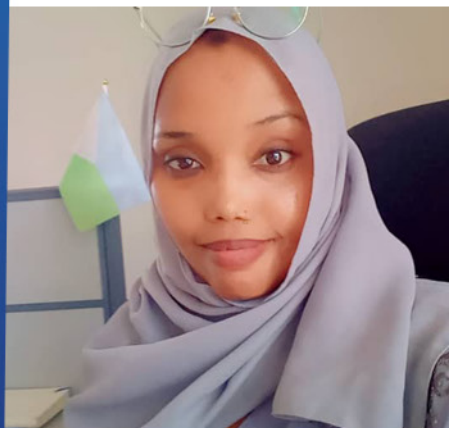
Ifrah Ali Cheik Indole  
Network Implementation

“ My hands-on experience has taught me design and given me the ability to interpret digital network layouts, optimize routes, and contribute strategically to our fiber rollout plans, merging engineering precision with digital innovation. I am deeply proud to be part of afrifiber's mission and even more passionate about advocating for local female talent to lead Africa's digital transformation. ”



Bilane Omar Ali  
Sales

“ Since joining afrifiber, I have deepened my expertise in the FTTH/FTTB sector. I played a pivotal role in the success of several large-scale projects and raised awareness in the Djiboutian market of fiber-optic technology and afrifiber's robust infrastructure. Commercial development is the backbone of any successful business, and I am thrilled to be part of a forward-thinking, ambitious, and excellence-driven organization. ”



Amina Ahmed Osman  
Operations and Marketing

“ My versatility and expertise in telecommunications have enabled me to successfully manage complex FTTH projects, addressing critical service quality challenges. By implementing effective SOPs, I reduced risks and ensured business continuity in a context of strong growth. I am fully invested in a meaningful mission: connecting regions, supporting local economies, and fostering digital inclusion, to build a fairer and more innovative future. ”



Get in touch

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info@afrifiber.com



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## How Corning's Optical Fiber and Connectivity Solutions Make High-Speed Broadband and AI Accessible To More People

By Joe Jensen

The next time you buy something online, artificial intelligence (AI) may not only help you find the right product faster, but it could also possibly even order it for you. New tools recently unveiled by some of the largest AI companies are giving users the power to try on clothes virtually or even give you your own personalized agent to take care of online tasks like making reservations or buying tickets. It's no surprise considering a recent study found AI tools are increasingly influencing buying habits. The study revealed more than 30% of shoppers in 2024 used AI-powered assistants to help them make purchase decisions, up from 22% in 2023. AI is not only transforming the way we shop, but our relationship with technology, the internet, and the communities we live in.

### Data Demand and Connectivity

As consumer demand for inferencing AI grows, so too are the demands for the fiber networks that make it all a reality. Generative AI is leveraging the near limitless potential of optical fiber to transmit data at light speed within and between data centers where it can then be quickly processed to create large language models which AI learns from and uses to operate. Individual users who want to take full advantage of AI's capabilities need the kind of rapid fire connectivity in their homes that can be provided most efficiently with fiber.

While we don't yet fully know how AI will become part of our daily lives, we do know optical fiber's low loss, low latency and high reliability makes it more capable than other traditional connections to handle not only AI, but video conferencing, media streaming, and remote work all at the same time.

### No Communities Left Behind

Recent public interest in AI and a trend towards more digitally connected communities is making even more clear the so-called digital divide – where lack of access to technology is creating digital inequality in underserved communities that is often split along geographic lines. Gauging by the rate at which data demands are increasing, communities that are still relying on traditional copper networks to stay connected to the internet are at risk of getting left behind if they don't get transitioned to a more reliable source of broadband.



The need for fiber broadband is not just about enjoying the conveniences of speedy AI responses and other modern connected technologies. Communities that do not move to fiber are potentially losing out on significant economic growth, too. Fiber broadband has already demonstrated its ability to provide a tangible economic lift to communities where it is broadly implemented, in some cases boosting employment trends upwards of 40%.

## Connectivity Innovations Speeding Up Deployment

Closing the digital divide requires innovative solutions to deploy networks faster and more cost effectively. Corning's expanding **Pushlok®** portfolio lets customers do just that. It gives installers the option to hit the "easy button," enabling scalable, faster, and lower cost installations. Our new **Field-Installable Pushlok** connector combines the award-winning simplicity of Pushlok with the flexibility of a field-installable solution, allowing for quicker and easier installations. This hardened connector reduces the complexity and cost of subscriber connections by allowing installers to strip, clean, cleave, and connect in a fusion splice-free installation. Field-Installable Pushlok can significantly cut down installation time to five minutes or less — more than twice as fast compared to previous versions of hardened field installable connectors.

### About the author:

**Joe Jensen** is Senior Director of Value Creation for Carrier & Enterprise Networks at **Corning Optical Communications**. With more than two decades of telecom experience in engineering, product management, and product development, Joe pioneers FTTx architectures, optical solution advancement, and design optimization for today's evolving networks. This approach to optical network evolution helps make fiber based access networks more accessible by using innovation to lower barriers to deployment. Joe obtained his B.S. in Electrical Engineering from NCSU and Executive MBA from UNC Chapel Hill.



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# #ShePowersDigital – Five Women, Five Perspectives, One Shared Call for Change

South Africa is often hailed as progressive on paper, but the numbers reveal persistent inequalities. Women face higher unemployment rates (35.9% vs 31% for men), are paid 20.1-32.5% less on average, and remain underrepresented in senior leadership (only about 25% in private sector and about 37% in public sector positions).

Against this backdrop, Digital Council Africa CEO Juanita Clark sat down with five remarkable women in digital infrastructure to ask the same set of questions: *What does inclusion mean in practice? What advice would you give to your younger self? And if you could set policy, what would you change?*

Juanita emphasises that these conversations represent just a snapshot of the incredible women driving change in the sector: *"Every day I learn from phenomenal women across our industry. I am inspired, encouraged, and deeply grateful to each and every one of them."*

Their answers — personal, powerful, and diverse — reflect not only their individual journeys but also a collective vision for a more inclusive digital future.



### Rachael Ayo-Oladejo - Chief Strategy & Business Transformation, Cell C

Rachael speaks about inclusion beyond numbers: true inclusion is when voices are genuinely heard and acted on. She urges young women not to force themselves into systems not built with them in mind, but instead to *"lead like a woman"* and open doors for others.

*"Don't just sit at the table — make space for others to sit with you."*



### Dr Karen Smit Accessibility Lead, Vodacom

Karen brings a vital lens: disability inclusion. She emphasises that women with disabilities face double barriers — as women, and as people with disabilities — yet are too often left out of both gender and disability conversations. She calls for policies that go beyond compliance to true belonging.

*"We need to say to women and girls with disabilities: we see you, you belong, and your voice matters."*



### Yonela Mfeya Executive Head: Capital Projects, MAST

Yonela highlights the importance of early exposure: girls need equal encouragement into STEM pathways from primary school onwards. By the time careers begin, choices are already shaped — and representation is still far from equal.

*"By the time we reach the workplace, it's too late. Exposure must start at foundation level."*

# IN CONVERSATION WITH



**Eleni Kwinana**  
Chief Executive, Vulatel

Eleni calls inclusion “making sure no one gets left behind,” whether by geography, gender, or circumstance. She stresses that equality requires intention, with real accountability for pay parity, representation, and decision-making power.

*“Stop trying to shrink to fit into rooms that weren’t built for you.”*



**Thembi Mazibuko** - Group Strategy & Business Management, SEACOM

For Thembi, courage is the foundation — courage to ask for help, step forward, and embrace learning even when it’s uncomfortable. She calls for workplace models that adapt to women’s realities rather than expecting women to adapt to outdated structures.

*“Courage means putting yourself out there, even when you’re afraid.”*

## From Awareness to Action

Together, these voices highlight three interconnected layers of change:

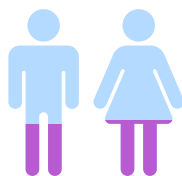
- **Personal courage** — pushing past fear and embracing opportunity.
- **Workplace inclusion** — pay parity, representation, and cultures of belonging.
- **Systemic reform** — education, policy, and structural shifts that create lasting equity.

South Africa remains one of the most unequal societies in the world. But these women remind us that equality will not happen by chance. It requires intention, courage, and a collective commitment to building systems where every voice can be heard.

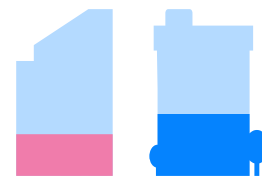
Explore the full #ShePowersDigital series on our [LinkedIn page](#) or view individual videos by clicking on the play buttons.



Despite progress, women remain paid **20.1-32.5% less than men**



Women’s unemployment at **35.9% vs men at 31%**



Women hold only **25% of private sector leadership roles, 37% in public**



**86.7% unemployment among people with disabilities**



**9.6% of adult women live with disabilities**



# Competition and Investment in the Internet Value Chain: Why Africa Needs a New Approach

The internet is no longer a luxury — it is the backbone of Africa’s economic growth, social development, and digital inclusion. Yet, for all its promise, the continent’s internet value chain is at risk of being stifled by outdated competition frameworks and investment barriers that do not reflect today’s digital realities.

This is the focus of the Digital Council Africa’s new White Paper: *Competition and Investment in the Internet Value Chain in Africa*. The report provides fresh insights into the challenges facing African markets and offers practical policy recommendations to unlock investment, innovation, and affordability in the digital economy.

## Understanding the Value Chain

The internet value chain is not a single entity but a **complex ecosystem of actors: infrastructure providers, data centres, cloud services, platforms, and content providers**. In Africa, each of these layers faces unique challenges — from limited investment in backbone infrastructure, to high costs of spectrum, to competition concerns around dominant global platforms.

The White Paper argues that **current regulatory frameworks**, often inherited from a pre-digital era, have not kept pace with the convergence of telecoms, platforms, and services. **This leaves African markets vulnerable to both under-investment and anti-competitive practices.**







## Why It Matters

At stake is nothing less than Africa's digital future.

### Without reform:

- **Investment could stall** — leaving broadband rollouts incomplete and rural communities disconnected.
- **Costs could rise** — making data unaffordable for millions of Africans.
- **Local innovation could be crowded out** — with global players dominating key markets.

### Conversely, the right policy approach could:

- **Encourage sustainable investment** in networks and data infrastructure.
- **Lower costs** for consumers and businesses.
- **Stimulate innovation** by creating fairer competition between local and global players.

## Key Recommendations

The White Paper highlights several strategic shifts:

1. **Modernising competition policy** to reflect the realities of digital platforms, cloud services, and cross-border connectivity.
2. **Enabling infrastructure investment** through fair spectrum pricing, open access frameworks, and streamlined licensing.
3. **Supporting regional collaboration**, recognising that digital markets transcend national borders.
4. **Balancing global and local dynamics**, ensuring Africa benefits from global platforms while creating space for home-grown innovation.

## A Call to Action

The Digital Council Africa is committed to working with policymakers, regulators, and industry to create a digital environment that fosters competition, attracts investment, and ensures affordable, reliable connectivity for all Africans.

We invite all stakeholders — from government leaders to private investors and civil society — to read the full White Paper and join us in shaping a digital future that works for Africa.

[Read the full White Paper here](#)

## WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

# Women's BREAKFAST



On 8 August, the **Digital Council Africa**, in collaboration with the **Department of Communications and Digital Technologies** and **ACT**, hosted its annual Women's Breakfast at the beautiful Irene Country Club, bringing together women leaders and colleagues from across the digital and communications sector for a morning of connection, inspiration, and celebration.

The event opened with a message from **Minister Solly Malatsi**, Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies, who underscored the importance of inclusion and women's leadership in shaping the future of the sector. Guests then enjoyed a sit-down breakfast in a welcoming, vibrant atmosphere before hearing from **Rashika Ramlal**, Public Sector Country Lead for Amazon Web Services South Africa. Rashika shared her personal journey and invited attendees to open up about their own stories, sparking an engaging and supportive dialogue filled with laughter, friendship, and encouragement.

**Juanita Clark**, CEO of Digital Council Africa, facilitated table discussions, providing an opportunity for meaningful conversations and exchange. The morning concluded with closing remarks and a vote of thanks by **Nomvuyiso Batyi**, CEO of the Association for Communications and Technology (ACT).

The Women's Breakfast once again highlighted the strength and unity of women in the industry, creating a space where shared experiences and mutual support build the foundation for lasting impact.

Download photos of the breakfast [here](#).



**communications &  
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Association of  
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## Connecting Futures: Insights from Minister Malatsi's Budget Vote

### Inspiring Local Innovation

Minister Solly Malatsi opened the Budget Vote with a powerful story from Limpopo—two young innovators, Marvel Shibambu and Malunghelo Mathonsi, used R700 and a second-hand computer to build NOVAR, a free e-learning platform for high school learners. Their journey went viral and sparked support through crowdfunding, mentorship, and equipment donations—a vivid example of how digital access can empower and transform lives.

### From Connectivity to Capability

The Minister also emphasized the need for updated legislation and robust digital governance. This includes a fast-tracked policy colloquium and a gazetted White Paper on Audio, Audiovisual, and Online Safety. The department aims to deepen digital skills, train 30,000 government workers in AI and cybersecurity, and support enterprise readiness across the public sector.

### Why It Matters for Us

These investments and reforms underscore a shared vision: that digital infrastructure isn't just about pipes and platforms, but about building opportunity, capability, and inclusivity. As members closely aligned with the DCDT, this budget sets a roadmap for the future of digital connectivity across Africa—anchored in accessibility, innovation, and collaboration.



Digital  
Council

## Working Groups

## WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

### Fibre Infrastructure Deployment Working Group

The **Fibre Infrastructure Network Deployment Working Group (FIND Working Group)** — a platform dedicated to tackling some of the most pressing challenges in fibre roll-out, network deployment, and policy alignment across the sector.



### Led by industry veteran Thinus Mulder

Thinus brings more than three decades of financial and executive leadership to the Working Group. A Chartered Accountant by training, he has held senior roles across banking, insurance, and listed companies, before joining Dark Fibre Africa in 2008. Rising from CFO to CEO, he steered DFA through a period of major growth and also chaired the boards of its group companies. Today, he serves as Chairperson of the Board at Herotel and as Treasurer of the DCA. His deep sector expertise and long-standing commitment to advancing fibre infrastructure make him a trusted leader for the FIND Working Group.

### The mission of the Working Group is to:

- Identify and address barriers to fibre deployment.
- Share operational experiences and collaborate on practical solutions.
- Contribute to shaping policies that enable faster, more efficient infrastructure roll-out.

We invite all interested members to participate in this important initiative and play a role in driving the sector forward.

# WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

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## Tower Working Group: Strengthening the Sector's Voice

The Independent Tower Working Group continues to unite operators and stakeholders to tackle regulatory challenges and drive sector stability. In recent months, the group has stepped up its efforts to highlight critical deployment and compliance issues impacting the tower industry. Through constructive dialogue with key authorities, it has helped lay the groundwork for a more coordinated, transparent, and enabling regulatory framework.

By combining advocacy, knowledge exchange, and cross-sector collaboration, the Working Group continues to strengthen the industry's collective voice and align on priorities essential for stability, operational efficiency, and long-term growth.

We invite all members with an interest in independent tower and telecommunications infrastructure, regulatory engagement, or policy development to actively participate. Your expertise and perspectives are invaluable in shaping the future of the sector.



### Led by Simone von Helden

Simone is General Counsel for Africa and Asia at American Tower Corporation, bringing nearly 20 years of executive legal leadership to the sector. She previously served as Chief Legal Officer at Virgin Mobile for a decade, where she helped establish South Africa's first MVNO, and later spent five years consulting in telecommunications and financial services. Since 2020, she has led Legal, Public Affairs, and Compliance at ATC South Africa. Her deep regulatory expertise and industry perspective position her strongly to guide the Tower Working Group's efforts in strengthening the sector's collective voice.

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## Data Centre Working Group

The Data Centre & Cloud Working Group continues to play a pivotal role in addressing the sector's most pressing challenges and opportunities. At its recent meeting, members reviewed progress on key projects, shared regulatory and operational concerns, and aligned on upcoming industry engagements.

**Key Projects:** Energy White Paper: A draft report has been developed, analysing global and local consumption patterns with a strong focus on South Africa. It highlights rising energy demand across the sector and has been circulated for member input.

**Eskom Engagement:** Constructive progress is being made in recognising data centres as large energy consumers. Dialogue is advancing on renewable energy wheeling and preferential tariffs, though unresolved municipal debt and regulatory constraints remain barriers.

The Working Group remains committed to collaboration, policy influence, and practical solutions, ensuring South Africa's data centre industry is well-positioned for sustainable growth.



### Led by Lee Perrin

Lee Perrin, Chair of the Data Centre & Cloud Working Group and Director for CBRE's Data Centre operations across MEA, brings extensive global and regional expertise to the role. Having spent 14 years in the UK — over a decade of that with CBRE — Lee worked his way up from junior technician to senior leadership, helping shape CBRE's Data Centre Solutions business. His career spans stabilising and growing critical portfolios for clients in banking, insurance, aviation, and hyperscale technology, while building high-performing teams in complex environments.

Now based back in South Africa, Lee leads CBRE's MEA operations with a focus on innovation, excellence, and skills development. He is also active in regional industry bodies, including the Africa Data Centre Association and Digital Council Africa, where he drives collaboration on skills, power distribution, and sustainable growth for Africa's fast-expanding digital economy.

For more information or to join a Working Group, please contact Reesha Iyer at [reesha@digitalcouncil.africa](mailto:reesha@digitalcouncil.africa)



## Empowering Women in the Digital Sector

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, the call to empower women as a tool to reach out to the underserved, the digitally distant, is more than a moral imperative, but a strategic necessity. As technology reshapes livelihoods, industries and societies, ensuring that women are equally represented, supported, and equipped to lead in the digital sector is essential for sustainable growth.

In this issue of CONEXT, ATC South Africa (ATC) celebrates the impact of its achievements in being an integral part of closing South Africa's digital gap, not just by installation and maintenance of telecommunications infrastructure on the ground, but also by the strides we continue to make in advancing gender equity in tech. Through leadership development, mentorship, business incubation, inclusive policies, harnessing creativity and digital skills training, ATC is deliberate in building a future where women not only thrive, but lead digital innovation. ATC's workforce is 50% women, and an impressive 80% of its executive leadership is female.

**Within our community, we are proud to spotlight a few initiatives and women who are breaking barriers and setting new standards in digital leadership.**



### Loueen Blunden, COO, ATC South Africa

Stepping into leadership in the ICT sector as a woman can be both exhilarating and, at times, intimidating. The industry moves fast, driven by constant innovation, evolving skills, and shifting demands. And while the representation of women is growing, it's not always balanced. Throughout my journey, I've held onto a simple but powerful philosophy: **lead with authenticity, purpose, and heart.**

Early on, I realized that our strength lies in our people. Each person brings something unique to the table, different perspectives, experiences, and character. When we embrace that diversity and connect on a human level, we unlock the true potential of our teams. That's where the magic happens.

**My advice to anyone navigating their path, especially in fast-paced, high-pressure environments, is this: Be yourself. Invest in yourself. Find your own path.**

Don't shy away from the unknown. Embrace it. Surround yourself with people who challenge and support you, and who share your vision and values. And most importantly, don't forget to breathe. Take deliberate time to pause, reflect, and refresh your perspective. Growth often comes from stillness, and clarity from change. Stay open, stay curious, and allow yourself the freedom to evolve.





## Deshree Chetty, Head of Power, ATC South Africa

In the world of telecommunications, power is more than just electricity - it's the heartbeat of connectivity. As Head of Power at ATC, I've come to appreciate how critical energy infrastructure and solutions are to bridging the digital divide. But beyond the technical solutions I oversee, I've also learned that power, real power, comes from representation, inclusion, and the courage to lead.

My journey has had its challenges, like many women in STEM, I've had to navigate environments where I was the only woman in the room, where my expertise was questioned, and where I had to prove myself twice over.

But every challenge became fuel. Every obstacle sharpened my resolve. And today, I lead a division that ensures our towers stay energized, our communities stay connected, and our mission stays alive.

Technical leadership in a technical world requires precision, resilience, and vision. It means making decisions that impact many lives, often in real time. But it also means mentoring, listening, and creating space for others to rise. At ATC, I'm proud to be part of a team where women are not just present, they're leading. We're redefining what leadership looks like in infrastructure, engineering, and energy.

If you're a woman aspiring to lead and looking to step into leadership, especially in the technical sector, here's what I want you to know:

- **You belong here.** Your voice, your ideas, and your presence are needed.
- **You don't have to fit a mold.** Lead with authenticity. Technical brilliance and emotional intelligence are not mutually exclusive.
- **You are allowed to take up space.** Don't shrink to fit. Expand to lead.

Every time I walk into a meeting, every time I solve a challenge, I'm reminded that leadership is not about titles, it's about impact. And the most powerful thing we can do is lift others as we climb.



## Heaven Nen, ATC South Africa's Bursary Beneficiary

As an ATC bursary recipient, I have been fortunate enough to have been granted the opportunity to further my studies, by pursuing a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) at the University of South Africa (UNISA). At the beginning of my studies, I was both nervous and excited about this new phase in my life. I knew that this phase marked the start of endless possibilities including learning and strengthening my ability to look at life through a different lens. Looking back on my life thus far, I have developed the trait of resilience. Having lost both my parents at a young age, this has been an essential trait that I have developed that has helped me overcome my challenges. During all the years of my studies, I have received incomparable support from each team member during my times of academic and personal difficulties.

Their emotional support, in addition to tuition support, is an aspect that has been invaluable to me.

As I near the end of my studies and reflect on my journey with ATC, I am thankful for all the lessons learnt and long-lasting relationships that I have formed with the team.

I am certain that upon completion of my studies, I will be equipped to handle the opportunities that come my way and develop a professional life that will reflect the values of ATC and inspire those who share similar stories to mine. One of my lifelong aspirations is to support youth - particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds - to reach their highest potential.

# EMPOWERING WOMEN IN CONNECTIVITY

## ICL Yushu Academy Celebrates Women's Month with Skills, Confidence, and Career Development

As South Africa commemorates Women's Month, ICL Yushu Academy proudly reaffirms its commitment to empowering women through certified, skills-based training in fibre optics. By offering MICT-SETA-accredited courses, the academy is actively addressing the gender gap in the telecoms industry and helping women gain access to meaningful careers in a high-demand industry.

### WHY FIBRE OPTICS? WHY NOW?

Fibre optics form the backbone of today's digital world, enabling internet access, mobile data, smart cities, and cloud technology. For women, this sector's growing demand presents an opportunity not only for employment but for personal growth, financial independence, flexible work, and career advancement.

The impact of ICL Yushu Academy's training is best seen in the journeys of women like Sarina Kotlolo, a student who participated in the July 2025 Certified Fibre Optic Technician (CFOTT) course. "I enjoyed the OTDR practical's; it gave me a realistic idea of how to deal with real-life situations," she said.

### MORE THAN TECHNICAL SKILLS

Under the guidance of Dean of Students, Jabu Mdaka, the academy blends technical instruction with personal mentorship—an approach that supports learners at all levels. "We're not just teaching fibre," said Mdaka. "We're building confidence, problem-solving abilities, and workplace readiness. Women shouldn't just see themselves as capable, they must know they're essential to the future of this industry."

### A PLATFORM FOR INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH

Zach Yacumakis, CEO of IC Logistix, sees the academy as a launchpad for inclusive development across the continent. "Africa's digital transformation must include women," he said. "We're proud to help women gain high-value technical skills, enter the workforce, and rise into leadership. Fibre is the future, and women deserve to shape it."

*Enroll Today*



**JOIN THE**  
*Movement*

The academy's mission extends beyond the classroom. With ongoing mentorship, advanced training in OTDR and ribbon splicing and skills assessments for employers, ICL Yushu Academy provides a full support system for women seeking to grow their careers. From school leavers to career changers and moms returning to work, all women are encouraged to explore this growing field.



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## Championing Women in Tech Leadership

### Spotlight on

**Christina Reddy**  
Executive Director of Amazon  
Data Services, South Africa

As we celebrate **Women's Month**, Conext is proud to highlight trailblazers who are reshaping the digital and technology sectors. Christina Reddy, Executive Director of Amazon Data Services South Africa, is one such leader. Recognised as part of the Women in Tech South Africa nominations, her work reflects the power of intentional leadership and strategic innovation in creating pathways for women to thrive in technical roles. The following profile shares how her efforts are driving meaningful change across the industry.

Her journey illustrates this vividly. Christina exemplifies transformative leadership in technology. She has created lasting change through the appointments of female leaders in Data Center Engineering and the implementation of innovative development programs to support internal growth. These strategic achievements have established new benchmarks for women's advancement in technology leadership.

#### Her three-pillar strategy delivered unprecedented results through:

- **Innovative recruitment campaigns** specifically attracting **female talent for technical roles**, resulting in a significant increase in qualified women applicants.
- **Ground-breaking partnerships** between Talent Acquisition, Cluster Leadership, and Employment Equity teams that **created seamless pathways for women in technology**.
- **Data-driven progress** monitoring with quantifiable metrics ensuring **sustainable advancement and accountability** across all organizational levels.

*"Gender does not determine leadership capabilities. Everyone has the capability to be an influential leader, whether or not you have people reporting to you. As a female in a leadership role, I feel this brings an added responsibility to change the status quo and prove women are capable of doing the hard jobs and making the hard decisions while being mothers, wives, daughters and sisters."* Christina Reddy





## Rebuilding Trust at AFRINIC: A Critical Election for Africa's Internet

AFRINIC, the regional internet registry for Africa and the sole source of numbering resources for network operators on the continent, remains in a prolonged operational and governance crisis. For much of the last decade, the organisation has faced allegations of corruption and ongoing legal disputes. **Since 2023, it has operated without a functioning Board or CEO, leaving number resource applications from paying members unanswered and preventing new members from joining.**

In response, the Mauritian courts **placed AFRINIC under receivership in 2023**, mandating a court-appointed Receiver to oversee the election of a new Board of Directors. **Numbering resources underpin every internet network worldwide, and the stakes are high: if AFRINIC collapses, or if governance falls into the wrong hands, the cost of deploying networks across Africa could rise dramatically, and the integrity of the allocation database could be at risk.**

The first attempt to hold elections on 23 June 2025 collapsed after widespread reports of fraudulent Powers of Attorney and voting irregularities. The election was subsequently annulled, and the Mauritian courts extended the Receiver's mandate to **organise a new election by 30 September 2025.**

### Latest Update

On **18 July**, the Prime Minister of Mauritius announced an **investigation into AFRINIC's affairs** and the activities of Cloud Innovation, a Hong Kong-based company whose numerous lawsuits caused AFRINIC to be placed under receivership in the first place. **Despite further legal efforts to block this investigation, the Mauritian courts have now cleared the way for this investigation to proceed.**

**A fresh election is also underway to select a Board for AFRINIC** and restore governance to the organisation. At the time of publication, the window for appointing voting representatives has closed, but **nominations for Board candidates remain open until 29th August.**

### Why You Should Participate

**If you have appointed a voting representative, thank you for participating in this important process. If you are not sure if your organisation has appointed a voter, keep an eye out for the publication of the list of organisations eligible to vote on 5 September. It is important for South African operators to make sure that no third parties have attempted to steal their votes.**

**The list of candidates standing for the Board election will also be published on 5 September, with online voting taking place the following week. The DCA is working closely with other stakeholders around the continent to ensure that there is a slate of candidates worthy of your votes. Please keep an eye out for further communications in this regard once the list of candidates is published.**

To find out more visit <https://afrinic.net/>



Africa's data centre industry is scaling rapidly—but the talent pipeline simply isn't keeping pace and recruitment recycles a limited pool. Too few pathways connect young people and career-switchers to real jobs with training that is often inaccessible or misaligned.

To assist in addressing this gap, a new initiative—the Africa Data Centre Talent Project—has been announced. The aim is to source, train, certify, an Africa-wide pool of data centre talent. The project is led by IBTC (International Business Training College) and powered by the Digital Investment Facility (DIF), in collaboration with Africa Data Centres Association (ADCA), DC Elite, CBRE (input from Lee Perrin), and with support from the Digital Council Africa.

## The Project aims to:

- **Recruit** high-potential youth and career-switchers through a national drive.
- **Train** students using accessible, affordable, African-relevant curricula aligned to global standards (including micro-certifications via hybrid/online/offline modes).
- **Place** graduates into real DC work environments through partnerships with operators and employers.

**But to ensure it is an industry led programme – we need your help:**

**This 3 minute survey will help size the skills gap, map priority roles, and shape training that reflects real-world needs. [Take the Africa Data Centre Skills Survey](#)**

**[Learn more about the project / get involved](#)**

## Who should respond?

- DC operators & vendors: Share workforce gaps; register interest as a workplace placement partner.
- Training providers: Collaborate on African-relevant curricula and micro-credentials.
- Engineers, managers & HR leads: Identify roles, skills, and experience you most need.
- Students & career-switchers: Signal interest; discover pathways into a future-ready DC career.

## Why this matters for our community?

The Digital Council Africa brings the sector together to align on practical solutions, a credible, scalable pipeline of DC talent is foundational to growth. Your input help shape training, placements, and policy recommendations that benefit the entire ecosystem.

Please also share this with your peers. The more inputs we receive, the better the outcome.

**For more information please contact:**

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Research Partner

# Why is one-cord referencing crucial for efficiency in deploying data centre networks?

By Vincent Racine, Senior Product Line Manager, EXFO

In the world of data centres with high-speed and high-density fibre networks, efficiency and accuracy are paramount. As the demand for faster deployments grows, so does the need for tools and methodologies that streamline the testing process. With the appearance of various connector types for duplex communication, testing has become complex. For instance, complying with recommended one-cord reference method has become impossible using legacy test instruments. Using optical loss test set (OLTS) designed for today's connectivity is the only way to fully comply with the one-cord reference method. But what is the one-cord reference method, and why is it so critical for efficient and reliable deployments? Let's break it down.

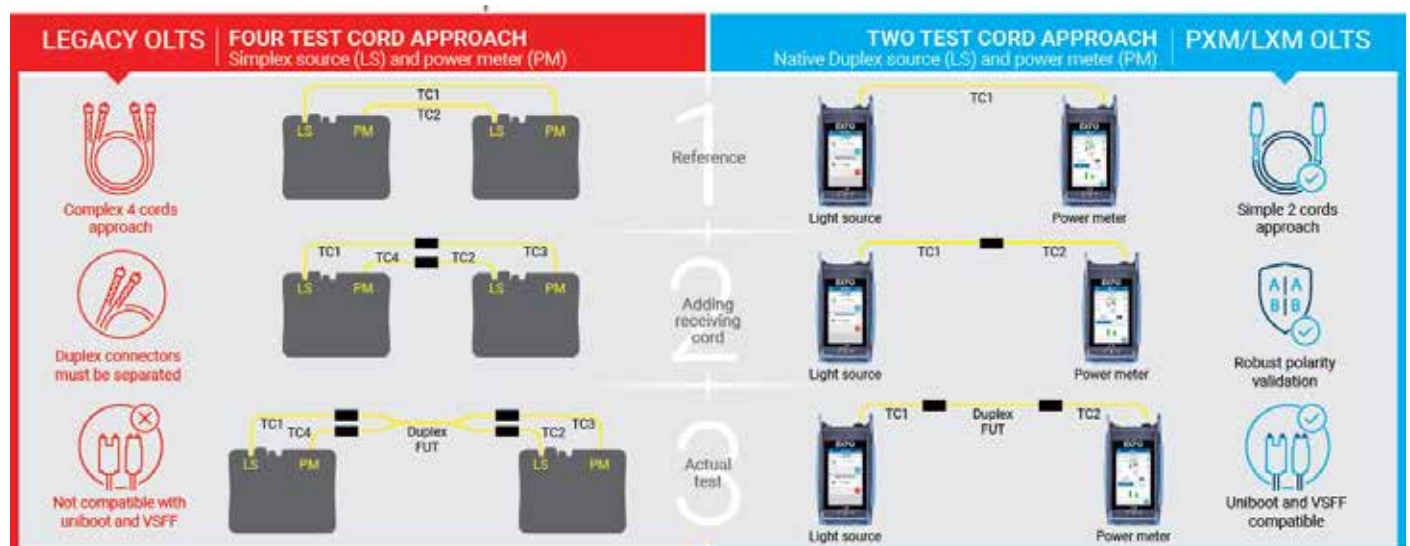
## The fundamentals of fibre testing

When installing or maintaining a fibre-optic network, technicians need to test the cables to make sure they work properly. This involves checking three main things:

1. **Link loss:** How much signal gets lost as light travels through the fibre.
2. **Length:** The total fibre length, which impacts signal attenuation and is crucial for verifying proper installation.
3. **Polarity:** Making sure the transmitted signal will reach the receiver at the end of the link.

These tests ensure that the network will perform as expected and meet industry standards. Traditionally, setting up these tests could be tricky, involving different cords and adapters depending on the type of connectors used. That's where one-cord referencing greatly simplifies things.

## Enable Tier-1 compliance with the one-cord method





## What is one-cord referencing?

Imagine you're cutting two pieces of wood to the same length. Instead of measuring each piece separately, which could lead to slight differences, you use a single guide to measure and cut both pieces precisely. This ensures consistency and saves time. Duplex one-cord referencing works similarly in fiber testing: it uses one cord to handle both the TX (transmit) and RX (receive) paths of a duplex cable, ensuring precise and consistent measurements without the need for multiple cords or adapters.

## Why is one-cord referencing important?

- **It ensures standards compliance**

Fiber-optic networks must meet strict standards, like those set by TIA, ISO, and IEC. For example, TIA specifies methods to ensure accurate testing and certification of optical fibre installations. Using one-cord referencing complies with these standards by minimizing the variability caused by multiple cords or adapters. With fewer connections, the reference loss measurement aligns more closely with TIA's requirement for precise and consistent testing practices.

- **It saves time**

Every second counts in data centre builds and fibre installations. Traditional referencing methods often require multiple cords and reconfiguration when switching between connector types. With one-cord referencing, these steps are minimized, allowing technicians to complete tests faster and move on to the next task.

- **It improves accuracy and repeatability**

Every time you add a cord or adapter to your test setup, you're introducing the possibility of errors. Extra connections can affect your results, leading to inaccurate measurements. With one-cord referencing, you reduce the number of connections, which means more consistent results and fewer mistakes.

- **It's easier to learn and use**

If you're new to fibre testing, the fewer steps there are, the better. Traditional setups can feel overwhelming with all the cords and adapters. One-cord referencing simplifies the process so you can focus on the results instead of the setup.

## A real-world example

Let's say you're testing a duplex fibre cable in a data centre. The cable has connectors on both ends that need to match for transmit and receive signals. With traditional methods, you might need different cords to handle different connector types. This adds on complexity, making it difficult to achieve robust polarity validation as users may easily reverse test cords during manipulations. But with duplex one-cord referencing, you can quickly test both paths with one cord getting the robust polarity validation required to ensure TX (transmit) will communicate with RX (receive) on the other end. Using one-cord referencing also increases accuracy by reducing the number of test cords used. You save time, reduce errors, and get reliable results.

## A giant breakthrough in testing very small form factors (VSFF)

The innovative capability for an OLTS to perform one-cord referencing for duplex cables, including uniboot and VSFF, marks a significant milestone in the industry. This advancement provides data centre operators with a practical way to validate and adopt VSFF technologies with confidence, ensuring their networks meet evolving high-density fibre requirements. Additionally, contractors equipped with EXFO's PXM/LXM OLTS and the FIP-500 inspection scope can further differentiate themselves from the competition by offering comprehensive testing and certification for VSFF and other high-density connectors. This capability not only streamlines testing but also drives business opportunities by enabling faster, more accurate fibre deployments.

## The future of fibre testing

As networks become faster and more complex, testing methods need to keep up. One-cord referencing isn't a buzz word—it's a smarter, faster way to test optical cables. It empowers technicians of any experience level in getting the job done more efficiently. If you're looking for a way to simplify your fibre testing process, consider exploring tools that offer one-cord referencing such as [\*EXFO's PXM/LXM duplex and multi-fibre OLTS\*](#). The right tools don't just speed up testing—they set the standard.

# m4a

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# WOMEN IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT *Summit*

Join us for an inspirational event celebrating the Women in Project Management

## KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Introducing Juanita Clark,  
Founder and Chief Executive Officer  
at Digital Council Africa

**Fireside Chat:**  
Shaping Africa's Digital Future: Fibre, Connectivity,  
and the Evolution of Project Leadership



**Juanita Clark**  
Digital Council Africa

 [www.projectmanagers.co.za](http://www.projectmanagers.co.za)  29 AUGUST, 2025

## Women in Project Management Summit 2025

Digital Council Africa CEO, Juanita Clark, will be a keynote speaker at the Women in Project Management Summit 2025, taking place later this year.

Juanita will lead a fireside chat on "Shaping Africa's Digital Future: Fibre, Connectivity, and the Evolution of Project Management" — exploring how digital infrastructure and project leadership intersect to drive transformation across the continent.

The summit brings together women leaders from diverse industries to celebrate achievements, share insights, and inspire the next generation of project professionals.

Scan the QR code on Juanita's speaker card to learn more about the event.





## FROM THE CEO'S DESK

Dear Colleagues,

As we mark Women's Month, I am reminded of how many phenomenal women power Africa's digital future. In this edition of Conext, we share insights from our #ShePowersDigital interview series, alongside highlights from our Women's Breakfast held earlier this month. Each story is a reminder that progress is never the work of one voice alone — it is the collective impact of many. I continue to be inspired by the women I meet across our sector, and grateful for the way they lift and challenge all of us to do more.

This issue also turns to some of the pressing realities shaping our industry: the ongoing AFRINIC governance crisis, the growing energy demands of data centres, and the evolving dynamics of competition and investment across the internet value chain. These are not abstract challenges; they are deeply connected to our ability to build a sustainable, inclusive digital economy.

Looking ahead, we are just weeks away from our flagship Conext Conference. This gathering is not only a milestone in the DCA calendar, but also a platform for every member of our ecosystem — from executives to emerging leaders — to connect, share, and influence the future of digital infrastructure in Africa. I encourage you to join us, lend your perspective, and be part of shaping the conversations that matter most.

Thank you, as always, for being part of this journey with us.

Warm regards,

*Juanita*

CEO, Digital Council Africa



**15** YEARS  
CREATING  
CONNECTIONS

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## POPI ACT INFO

The Digital Council Africa respects your right to privacy and we aim to ensure that we comply with the POPI Act (Act 4 of 2013), which regulates the manner in which we collect, process, store, share and destroy any personal information which you have provided to us. Your personal information is strictly confidential and we will notify you immediately should we become aware of any unauthorised use, disclosure or processing of your personal information. Kindly note that you may choose to opt out at any time from all marketing and other communications by contacting Reesha Iyer at [reesha@digitalcouncil.africa](mailto:reesha@digitalcouncil.africa).

## LOST AND FOUND

The Digital Council Africa has an [Equipment Monitoring page](#) on its website. The aim is to curb theft of equipment.

To view a list of stolen equipment, you can access the list [here](#).

We encourage members to regularly send through the serial numbers of stolen equipment, and inform us when equipment is recovered to ensure that the information remains up to date and accurate.

Information can be sent to Reesha Iyer at [reesha@digitalcouncil.africa](mailto:reesha@digitalcouncil.africa)

In addition, it remains the responsibility of the industry to regularly do spot checks against the serial numbers of contractor equipment to ensure that stolen equipment is identified and that culprits are eradicated from the industry.

Companies wishing to purchase second hand equipment should compare the equipment serial numbers against those listed on the website.