Infrastructure theft, vandalism thwarting SA's digital transformation progress

By Matone Ditlhake

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Urgent action needs to be taken against criminals that are delaying the country's digital transformation plan. Telecoms infrastructure is constantly being stolen and vandalised and is costing the country billions of rands each year.

Matone Ditlhake, CEO of Corridor Africa Technologies. Source: Supplied

In addition to this, the country has to deal with the recent catastrophe in Kwa-Zulu Natal where 900 cell towers were damaged by floods. This damage could cost in the region of R2m to restore each tower, a total loss of nearly R1.8bn.

Communications infrastructure was also targeted in the recent unrest across the country. The vandalism of more than 100 towers caused disruption of communication services and the closure of community radio stations.

Icasa chairperson Dr Keabetswe Modimoeng called on communities to assist in guarding and protecting critical infrastructure and asked Intelligence Services to prioritise the safeguarding and protection of critical telecommunications infrastructure.

Importance of growing digital economy

President Cyril Ramaphosa recently highlighted the importance of growing the country's digital economy. He stated that South Africa could not be left behind by the digital economy. More importantly, he stressed that no community and no person should be left behind in experiencing the vast benefits of being digitally connected to the world.

For businesses, digital innovation plays an important role in today's competitive environment. It creates value and increases productivity. But without proper infrastructure, they cannot start their digital transformation journey.

The government's 2030 vision to ensure universal, affordable access to the internet, is only possible through innovative policy-making.

Government has identified the new broadband spectrum as a key reform for driving economic growth. It is expected to reduce data costs and provide everyone with access to the internet. However, without adequate infrastructure, this long-awaited auction of high-demand spectrum will be fruitless.

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Theft and vandalism are the two biggest constraints on the growth of the telecommunications sector. The other challenges being regulatory issues and infrastructure approval delays due to regulators and slow local authority processes.

Local authorities don't always realise the importance of wireless infrastructure and how it will help local communities become digitally connected to the world. Government's vision has to be implemented at a local government level.

ABOUT MATONE DITLHAKE

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