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Microsoft reinforces its commitment to South Africa with R1.3 billion investment to spur job creation

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From left to right: Malebo Mabitje-Thompson, Acting Director-General of the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition; Minister Ebrahim Patel, Minister for the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition; Kalane Rampai, Managing Director, Microsoft South Africa; and Lillian Barnard, President, Microsoft Africa.

- Investment to accelerate capabilities for SMMEs and youth
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Microsoft South Africa is deepening its commitment to the country and job creation to spur SMME development, create local opportunities, growth, and ready the country for AI transformation.

The company will invest more than R1.3 billion to unlock inclusive growth, contribute to building a digital economy, foster entrepreneurship, and innovation, and fuel the job creation engine. It will enable SMMEs to be engines of growth and expand local industry for South Africa.

“The Fund will assist black South Africans in non-tech sectors to harness the power of technology and improve their competitiveness and ability to innovate and expand their operations. It will also act as a bridge to enable young people to get training, certification, and job-placement, so that talented South Africans gain access to the opportunities that arise from an increasingly digitalised world,” said Mr Ebrahim Patel, Minister of Trade, Industry and Competition.

The digital revolution requires people with enhanced fluency in cloud, security, data analysis, AI, and machine learning. Through this investment, Microsoft is equipping present and future workers with the advanced skills needed to enable them to harness the potential of rapidly developing technologies. At the same time, this investment provides opportunities to spur entrepreneurship, especially amongst women and other previously disadvantaged individuals.

The programmes are designed to build ICT capability in SMMEs and youth so that South Africans can create new ways to address youth unemployment, employability, inequality, sustainability, and global competitiveness in the areas of Data Analytics, Cybersecurity, AI, Machine Learning amongst others.

“Consistent with our mission to empower every person and every organisation on the planet to achieve more, this investment represents our commitment to empowering individuals and small businesses to be part of Africa’s digital economy, and to drive job creation and growth that will benefit the entire region,” said Lillian Barnard, President for Microsoft Africa.

The SMME development programme focuses not only on technical skills (for those organisations in the ICT sector), but entrepreneurial capabilities which will create sustainable businesses in South Africa, and also enable them to become engines for job creation.

Commenting on the scale of the investment, Barnard said, “Transformative technologies, such as cloud and AI, have the potential to solve some of South Africa’s most pressing challenges, while also unlocking opportunities to fuel inclusive, sustainable economic growth.”

South Africa and Africa are home to the workforce of the future and by 2040 half of the world’s young people will live on the continent. “The world is changing rapidly, and the era of AI is ushering in a future brimming with innovation, and the opportunity for Africa is immense. Through this programme, we want to meet the demand for digital skills, whilst also creating opportunities for SMMEs to grow and thrive, and to leverage the innovative spirit of South Africans, with key investments in research and development that will stretch beyond borders,” said Kalane Rampai, Managing Director at Microsoft South Africa.

In striving to be a catalyst for a digitally inclusive and technologically proficient South Africa, Microsoft recognises the need to partner with government to create a positive change in the structure of the economy. Through the Public Sector Workplace Placement programme, Microsoft will augment skilled candidates with crucial low code/no code training, empowering them to deliver rapid prototyping and automation capabilities into key government departments.