

South Africa's 5G rollout race is against load shedding

In February this year, the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies gave SA's telcos five years to roll out 5G networks nationwide, including remote areas. The aim is to lower data prices, provide cheap and fast internet for everyone, and boost the development of new technologies in the country. But the country's worst power cuts ever this year could jeopardise the target and affect South Africa's economy, innovation, and competitiveness. Public-private partnerships are crucial to ensure the delivery timeframe is met.



SA's 5G rollout could be in jeopardy. Source: Mhammed Hassan/Pixabay

This is according to Reabetswe Motsamai, marketing and communications manager at MakwaIT Technologies, which unlocks the benefits of digital transformation for businesses, who explains that if the rollout of 5G is halted, South Africa will be deprived of the fast speeds, increased data capacity, and low latency that these networks can offer.



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“What this means is that the country will lag behind the rest of the world in terms of technological advancement. This is already evident with South Africa ranking 60th in the world out of 63 countries for competitiveness.”

5G penetration benefits

“Increased 5G penetration, however, could lead to the development of new products, services, and business models. Additionally, with these networks enabling faster communication, collaboration, and access to information, this could help to increase the productivity of the country's businesses. These shifts could contribute to much-needed economic growth,” she points out.

Referring to the [Digital Africa: Technological Transformation for Jobs report](#), Motsamai says that delayed 5G deployment cannot continue if we are to address social and economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment and inequality which currently plague South Africa.

She notes that the country's electricity crisis should not be a roadblock to innovation but rather an opportunity for



Reabetswe Mtsamai

collaboration.

“When Government co-operates effectively with the private sector to create an enabling environment, we can allow technology to work for us. Ideally, the state should be working with mobile network operators and other stakeholders to develop and implement policies and regulations that support the deployment of 5G infrastructure and increase network quality.”

Network quality improvement

“For example, government is finalising the national data and cloud policy to improve the environment for the establishment of networks. But provision needs to also be made to host some core 5G components in the national cloud,” says Mtsamai.

“Not only could this help to improve network quality, but also reduce the cost of rolling out 5G infrastructure, and through doing so, aid in providing mobile broadband access to the public at a lower cost.”



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This is supported by Vodacom SA who recently spoke of the high density of 5G devices in Cape Town enabling the network operator to free up network capacity from LTE bands through deploying more 5G.

“We need to double down on correct policy and the appropriate partnerships in order for South Africa to become a hub for productivity and innovation. The country’s future depends on it,” she concludes.

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