



Universal Access to the Internet and Free Public Access in South Africa

// A Seven-Point Implementation Plan

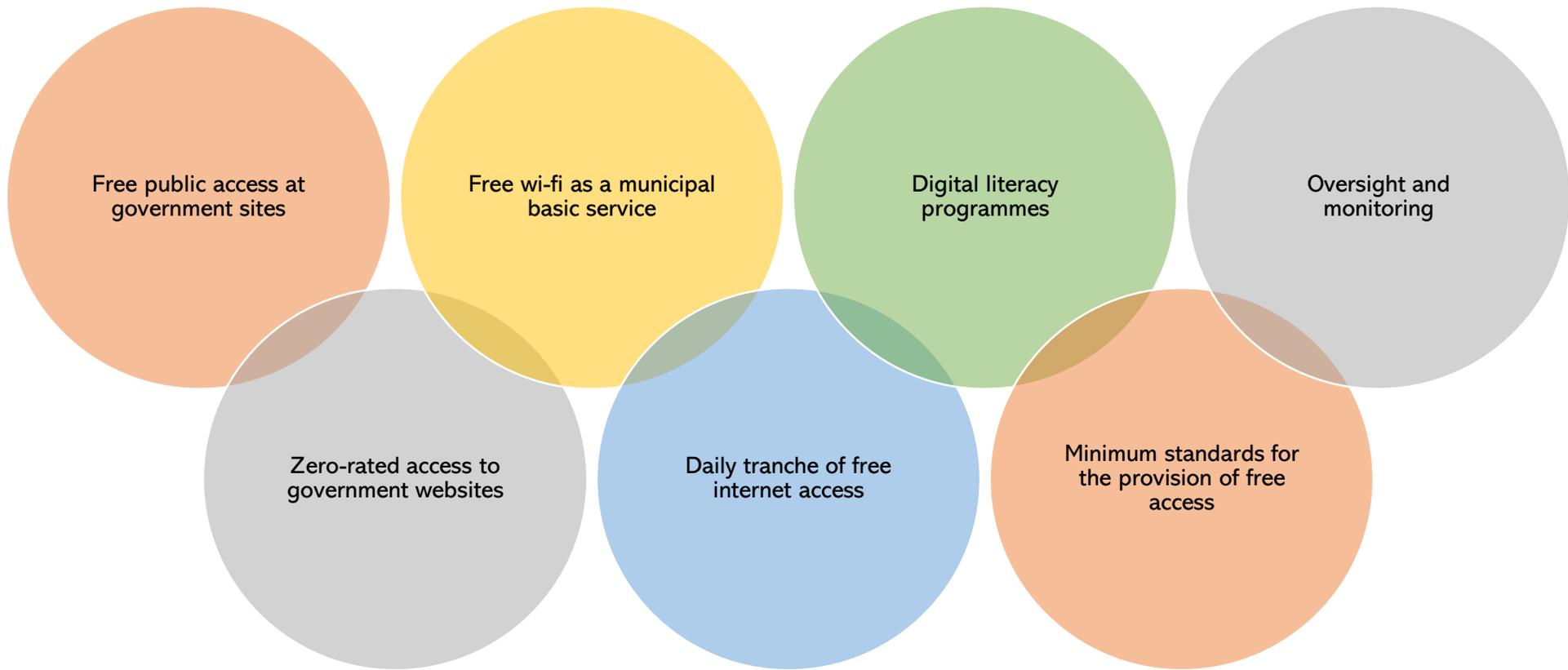




“When it comes to digital inclusion, the focus must be on achieving critical mass on internet penetration. We all know that economic growth, job creation and entrepreneurial activity is inextricably linked to broadband access. We therefore need to ensure that broadband access – like healthcare and education – is available to all.

If we do not overcome social, economic and spatial inequality in the provision of broadband, we will simply perpetuate the economic exclusion of the majority of people.”

- Welcome remarks delivered by Finance Minister Mboweni on behalf of President Ramaphosa, World Economic Forum, 5 September 2019





// Overarching themes of the seven-point plan

- *Access to relevant content:* The first theme seeks to provide universal access to relevant online content and to provide a basic level of free access to those who cannot afford it. Through a set of proposed measures, it is intended that all persons in South Africa should be enabled to enjoy the benefits that the internet can offer, regardless of their income, so that the cost of access does not present an insurmountable barrier.
- *Safety of access:* The second theme seeks to ensure that, once people are online, they are safe and free from harm. This is further intended to ensure that people have trust in the internet, and can maximise the developmental potential that access to the internet presents. This requires appropriate skills development to empower users with the necessary information, and to ensure that safeguards underpin the systems themselves to protect the rights of users and the systems themselves.
- *Implementation of access:* The third theme is intended to ensure that the overarching aim of the seven-point plan – this being to achieve universal and free access to online information in South Africa – is realised. This requires targets to be set, relevant data to be gathered and analysed, and a process of monitoring and evaluation to be undertaken to ensure that the realisation of this aim remains consistently on track.



1 // 7: Free public access at government sites

- Public access refers to facilities that allow any member of the public to make use of computers with broadband connection.
- Public access at government sites assists persons in overcoming challenges such as high costs, lack of devices with internet connectivity, or lack of electricity.
- South Africa's national broadband policy - SA Connect - sets out connectivity targets for schools, health facilities and government facilities, with an aim of 100% broadband access by 2030.
- Indicators for public access at government sites include speed, quality and cost of network capacity at government facilities; speed and rollout of quality service; network reach and price of access; increased investment by network operators; and the take up of services in the public sector, schools and clinics.
- Key considerations for implementation:
 - Awareness-raising and an enabling environment
 - Appropriate allocation of resources
 - Technical training to support public access facilities
 - Need to go beyond simple access
 - Security
 - Prioritisation of remote areas



2 // 7: Zero-rated access to government websites and data

- e-Government can be defined as the use of ICTs to more effectively and efficiently deliver government services to citizens and businesses.
- The national e-Government Strategy and Roadmap contains the following guiding principles: interoperability; ICT security; economies of scale; elimination of duplication; adoption of indigenous languages in ICT applications; digital inclusion.
- South Africa has eight commitments in terms of the Open Government Partnership.
- Once the government has made the relevant information and services available on its websites, the next step is to ensure that users can access this for free through zero-rating.
- Need to strike the correct balance between zero-rating and net neutrality through fair access practices.
- Key considerations for implementation:
 - e-Government Strategy and Open Government Partnership commitments
 - Public interest considerations
 - Avoiding anti-competitive practices
 - Openness
 - Criteria for selection of websites



3 // 7: Free public wi-fi

- Access to wi-fi has become relatively commonplace in South Africa, but the key question is: who should pay for the backhaul / bandwidth?
- There are both benefits and shortcomings to offering free public wi-fi.
- Examples of free public wi-fi initiatives: Project Isizwe; Western Cape provincial government initiative.
- Important role played by the private sector in the roll-out of wi-fi services, typically in exchange for payment or in terms of an incentivised scheme.
- Need to ensure appropriate procurement processes are followed.
- Key considerations for implementation:
 - Determining the allocation of free wi-fi
 - Consistency in the service provision
 - Zero-rated content portals and access to government websites
 - Avoidance of data exploitation
 - Appropriate security measures
 - Corporate accountability



4 // 7: Provision of free basic internet as a basic municipal service

- Basic municipal services are provided for in South Africa in terms of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 (MSA).
- The MSA does not contain a finite list of what constitutes a basic municipal service.
- Current basic services include free basic water, free basic electricity and free basic sewerage and sanitation; only indigent households qualify for free basic services.
- Obvious parallel to be drawn between the basic municipal services currently offered and the importance of access to the internet in the realisation of fundamental rights.
- Example: Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, where persons who qualify for free basic water and electricity from the municipality also receive a tranche of free basic internet access in the amount of 250 megabytes per month.
- Key considerations for implementation:
 - Scope of the MSA
 - Beneficiaries
 - Delivery of service
 - Provision of service



5 // 7: Digital literacy programmes

- Media and information literacy – including digital literacy – provides answers to the key questions that users of ICTs may ask themselves: how to access, search, critically assess, use and contribute content wisely, both online and offline; what the ethical issues are that surround the access and use of information; and how to engage with media and ICTs to promote equality, dialogue, peace, sustainability, freedom of expression and access to information.
- Categories of skills: supply-side; demand-side; institutional capability; media and information literacy.
- Example of child-led digital literacy intervention: Web Rangers initiative run by Media Monitoring Africa, in partnership with the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, Google and Facebook, among others.
- Need to move from skills to jobs by addressing the skills gap, increase employability, create quality jobs and spark innovation.
- Needs to be coupled with the availability of relevant content, including local content in local languages.
- Key considerations for implementation:
 - Types of skills required
 - Delivery of skills provision
 - Utility and relevance



6 // 7: Minimum protections in the provision of free access

- Minimum protections for the user:
 - Compliance with the right to privacy and data protection frameworks
 - Minimal collection and retention of data
 - Requirement that consent be informed, voluntary and freely given
 - Adequacy, appropriateness and quality of the service provided
- Minimum protections for the network:
 - Legal framework
 - Organisational framework
 - Technical framework
 - Capacity building and cooperation
- Key considerations for implementation:
 - Relevant frameworks
 - Consent of the user
 - Service provided
 - Interdependence



7 // 7: Oversight and monitoring of the progressive realisation of free access

- Need to develop an appropriate oversight and monitoring framework for the realisation of access to the internet and the interplay that this has in the realisation of other fundamental rights, including freedom of expression and access to information.
- The ROAMX Principles, developed by UNESCO, offer a useful framework for monitoring the universality of the internet in a country:
 - **R**: the internet must be based on human rights
 - **O**: the internet must be open
 - **A**: the internet must be accessible to all
 - **M**: a multi-stakeholder approach should be adopted
 - **X**: cross-cutting and contextual considerations should be considered
- Key considerations for implementation:
 - Assessment of implicated rights
 - Development of targets and monitoring framework
 - Engagement in state-reporting processes
 - Tracking of recommendations and follow-up



// Implementation of the seven-point plan

- General considerations:
 - The need for a public interest and rights-based approach
 - Coordination among relevant stakeholders
 - Appropriate regulatory and policy framework
 - Prioritisation of vulnerable and marginalised groups
 - Addressing socio-economic divides
 - Coverage
 - Oversight
 - Public-private partnerships
- Checklist for the implementation of the seven-point plan
- To access the full report, please visit <https://internetaccess.africa/universal-access>