

ICT could be SA's lifeboat during the recession

 By [Steve Briggs](#)

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Most analysts would agree that a sense of political stability and renewed national hope has swept through South Africa recently, but ratings downgrades, international economic uncertainty and, now, a surprise recession, continue to present stubborn hurdles to our economic success.



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With South Africa's mining, manufacturing and agricultural sectors experiencing a worrying slowdown, many economists are wondering out loud what our next move will be as a nation. What will we do if we can no longer rely on what have been, for decades, the stalwart sectors of the South African economy?

But perhaps this rude awakening is a blessing in disguise. As employment, infrastructure and investor confidence garner headlines, technology shows greater and greater potential to not only lift flagging industries to new levels of prosperity, but to emerge as a powerhouse sector in its own right. South Africa is perfectly poised right now to lay the groundwork for a thriving digital economy. All we must do is seize the opportunity at our door.

Safeguarding our future through education

A thriving ICT sector in which universal, affordable internet access is prioritised, can help South Africa elevate levels of education and skills development to a new standard of excellence, convenience and affordability.

With reliable internet access, teachers and learners alike have constant access to information and resources from around the world, including up-to-date video content, which makes them less reliant on the physical school environment with its many inherited issues.



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Big data, augmented and virtual reality, and other emerging technologies have also shown enormous potential worldwide to improve the quality of education while decreasing its price tag – an essential mandate in South Africa if our skills shortages are to be addressed and our economy resuscitated.

Truly bringing public services to the public

South Africa's administrative departments, public health sector, energy grid and other vital services continue to strive to serve our communities, but they will need all the help they can get to more efficiently cater to our growing population.

Just imagine the improvements possible if technology and connectivity were enlisted to help overcome this and other challenges.

Having a connected IoT infrastructure and smart algorithms running our traffic systems could save millions of lost work hours per day. Big data and analytics could help our strained energy sector serve more people, more affordably.

South Africa's large rural population (34.7% of the national total in 2016) would be connected remotely to educational resources, health care services and administrative offices – and these, in turn, would be able to run leaner and get more done with the scarce resources available. South Africans are innovators at heart, and many, many more digital solutions are essential not only for convenience sake but to expand access to the people who have little to nothing and allow them to meaningfully engage in building our economy.

Giving South African SMMEs what they need to thrive

Entrepreneurship is central to the welfare of any economy, and in South Africa the urgency to encourage the founding and growth of SMMEs is even more critical. Our National Development Plan predicts that by 2030 SMMEs will provide 90% of the jobs the government aims to create during that time frame.



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Reliable ICT infrastructure, up-to-date skills and affordable IT services will be central to helping these small businesses survive and grow – whether by aiding them in reaching customers through social media, streamlining processes through automation, securing funding, or cutting costs through agile, technology-enhanced management practices.

South Africa, once the continent's ICT leader, has some catching up to do with other African nations that have, in recent years, put their ICT development first. Already, cities like Kigali and Nairobi have earned reputations as the continent's most

advanced “smart cities,” with an emphasis on ICT skills and the expansion of Internet infrastructure – and the benefits are showing for them.

The good news?

As a nation, we have the capacity, and we’ve laid the groundwork. It’s time for our business and government leaders to make full use of the new and emerging tools at our disposal to ensure our economy not only recovers, but thrives, and we can continue to move forward as a country.

And though I’ve listed only three areas where ICT investment holds enormous potential, it’s important to note that the advantages of widespread connectivity are so vast that they’re almost impossible to quantify. In today’s world, technology touches and improves any and every area of our lives. All we need do is commit to enabling it.

ABOUT STEVE BRIGGS

As Chief Commercial Officer at Seacom, Steve Briggs oversees sales performance, helps to optimise the product portfolio and drives superior customer experiences across the company’s commercial portfolio.

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