



Digital Horizons: Hon. Tatenda Mavetera Challenges Women to Shape Zimbabwe's Digital Future

Zimbabwe's Minister of Information Communication Technology, Postal and Courier Services, Honourable Tatenda A. Mavetera, delivered an inspiring keynote address titled *Digital Horizons: Empowering the Next Generation of Women Leaders* during the fourth Women's University in Africa Alumni Engagement Lecture Series held on 21 August 2026. Drawing from her own journey as a WUA alumna, the Minister challenged women and girls to position themselves at the forefront

of Zimbabwe's digital transformation and to become architects of the nation's technological future.

Opening her address, the Minister reflected on her progression from student to Cabinet Minister, describing her return to WUA as a "full-circle moment." She noted that the University's mission of empowering women has produced leaders who now contribute meaningfully in government, business, academia and public service. She emphasised that institutions such as WUA continue to play a critical role in creating pathways for women to assume leadership positions and influence national development.

A central theme of the keynote address was Zimbabwe's digital transformation journey under Vision 2030 and the National Development Strategies. The Minister highlighted the growing importance of information and communication technologies as a driver of economic growth, innovation and service delivery across sectors including agriculture, health and education. She noted that internet penetration reached 78.5% nationally in 2024, while mobile penetration exceeded 96%, underscoring the country's progress in expanding digital access. Government efforts are now focused on ensuring affordable high-speed internet access for 80% of the population by 2030 through continued infrastructure development, including the expansion of 5G services.

The Minister stressed that digital connectivity is no longer a luxury but an essential requirement for economic participation and national competitiveness. However, she cautioned that progress remains uneven, particularly for women and girls. Citing continental statistics, she observed that women account for only 12% of Africa's ICT workforce, while just 16% of ICT ministers across the continent are women. Furthermore, only about 30% of women in Sub-Saharan Africa pursue STEM-related education and careers. These disparities, she argued, demonstrate the urgency of implementing deliberate interventions to ensure women's meaningful participation in the digital economy.

Addressing the significance of women's digital inclusion, Minister Mavetera described closing the gender digital divide as both a social imperative and an economic growth strategy. She explained that when women gain access to digital technologies, skills and opportunities, the benefits extend far beyond individual advancement. Digitally empowered women entrepreneurs are better positioned to grow their businesses, strengthen household incomes and contribute to national productivity. According to the Minister, women's participation in the digital economy creates a multiplier effect capable of accelerating poverty reduction, expanding financial inclusion and supporting Zimbabwe's broader development goals.

The keynote further outlined four pillars guiding the Ministry's vision for an inclusive digital economy: access, skills, cybersecurity and innovation. The first pillar focuses on expanding connectivity through broadband infrastructure, 5G deployment, satellite technologies and targeted investments in underserved communities and girls' schools. The second pillar centres on building digital and STEM capabilities through school digitalisation programmes, coding initiatives, Girls-in-ICT activities, mentorship opportunities and strategic partnerships with universities and technical institutions.

The Minister also highlighted cybersecurity as an emerging area of opportunity for women leaders. She outlined ongoing efforts to develop a National Cybersecurity Strategy, establish a National Cybersecurity Authority and strengthen national incident response capabilities. These initiatives, she noted, are creating new opportunities for women to participate in high-impact sectors that will shape Zimbabwe's digital future.

Innovation and artificial intelligence featured prominently in the Minister's vision for the future. She revealed plans for an AI-powered citizen engagement platform that will operate in Zimbabwe's 16 official languages, making digital government services more accessible to all citizens. She further highlighted the transformative potential of technology in agriculture, healthcare and education through innovations that connect farmers to markets, expand telemedicine services and democratise access to learning opportunities.

The Minister reaffirmed her Ministry's commitment to increasing women's participation in ICT leadership, cybersecurity governance and digital economy policymaking. Programmes such as Girls-in-ICT and SheTech are designed to strengthen pathways for women's participation in technology fields, while collaborative efforts are also underway to combat technology-facilitated gender-based violence and promote safer digital spaces.

In a powerful call to action, Minister Mavetera challenged students to pursue careers in cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, data science and related fields. She encouraged alumnae to mentor young women entering the sector and called upon higher education institutions to continuously align curricula with evolving industry needs. Most

importantly, she urged all citizens to view digital literacy as a civic responsibility that is critical to national development and inclusive growth.

Concluding her keynote address, the Minister articulated a vision for Zimbabwe in 2030: a digitally connected nation where affordable internet access is widely available, women possess advanced digital skills, cybersecurity institutions are robust and inclusive, and women actively shape the technologies and policies that govern society. She reminded participants that the future is not something to be awaited but something that must be intentionally built through collective effort, innovation and leadership.

The Digital Horizons keynote delivered a compelling message: Zimbabwe's digital future will be strongest when women are fully represented as innovators, leaders, decision-makers and creators of technology. Through education, mentorship, digital inclusion and strategic investment, women will play a defining role in shaping the country's journey towards Vision 2030.

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