

## Masterclass

### Digital Diplomacy in a Multi-Polar World: Navigating Technology, Power and Governance

This program builds the capacity of South African and regional government officials to understand and influence international digital governance. It recognizes that diplomacy now extends beyond traditional negotiations to include cyber norms, AI ethics, data flows, and standards-setting processes.

Participants will gain the knowledge and tools needed to align national interests with global digital policy developments and engage confidently in key multilateral forums—such as the UN, WTO, ILO, AU, and IGF. The program empowers African diplomats and policy leaders to move from reactive roles to shaping the global digital agenda.

**Start Date:**  
16 Aug 2025

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The course is structured into nine targeted modules, each designed to progressively build upon the previous one, ensuring participants develop a cohesive and practical approach to the concept of Digital Diplomacy. The course has a practical element, based on case studies that complements the theoretical learnings..

Governments around the world are under growing pressure to deliver security and economic opportunity amid global uncertainty, economic downturns, and disruptive challenges such as pandemics. Traditional and emerging conflicts are becoming more complex, driven by geopolitical tensions, instability, and the spread of powerful technologies—including cyberweapons, artificial intelligence, and robotics—that can target critical infrastructure and threaten sovereignty.



The rise of digital technologies is also shifting the landscape of influence, expanding the role of non-state actors such as tech corporations and individuals in shaping global decisions. As a result, diplomacy must evolve. Citizens are demanding more responsive governance, placing public servants under pressure to be more capable, skilled, and agile in navigating this fast-changing environment.

Developing countries, including those in Southern Africa, must strengthen their capacity to influence global policy processes and advance their developmental aspirations in the digital age. Diplomacy, though rooted in tradition, must adapt to new domains—especially digital governance.

As noted by Houlin Zhao, former Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union, digital infrastructure like broadband is now as vital as health, water, and electricity. Coordinated global action and cross-sector collaboration are essential to drive innovation and ensure equitable development.

### **Course Objectives:**

Upon completing this masterclass, participants will be able to:

- Understand key actors, processes, and institutions that shape digital governance at the global level
- Navigate multilateral and multi-stakeholder digital diplomacy forums
- Analyze how AI, cybersecurity, data flows, and standards intersect with diplomacy and national interests
- Formulate negotiation strategies and policy positions aligned with South Africa's and regional priorities

### **Module Breakdown**

#### **Module 1: Foundations of Digital Diplomacy**

Covers the transformation of diplomacy in the digital age and South Africa's evolving digital foreign policy agenda. Introduces the geopolitical implications of digital technologies and Africa's role in shaping a fair global digital order.

#### **Module 5: Emerging Technologies and Global Disruption**

Provides an accessible overview of foundational emerging technologies including artificial intelligence, blockchain, quantum computing, 5G, and the Internet of Things (IoT). Discusses how these technologies disrupt diplomacy, security, development, and governance; introduces their technical foundations and geopolitical implications; and explores global negotiations shaping their use and regulation.

#### **Module 2: The Architecture of Global Digital Governance**

Explores the actors and venues where digital rules are made. Focuses on key forums such as the UN (OEWG, GGE, Cybercrime Committee), WTO (e-commerce negotiations), ILO (digital labour rights), ITU, ICANN, and ISO. Covers Africa's engagement in forums like the IGF, Smart Africa, and the AU Digital Strategy.

#### **Module 3: Cybersecurity Diplomacy and Norms Negotiations**

Unpacks the growing relevance of cyber stability, norms for state behaviour in cyberspace, and emerging instruments like the Malabo Convention, Budapest Convention, and the UN cyber norms processes. Includes analysis of multistakeholder responses to cybercrime and trust-building measures.

#### **Module 4: Internet Governance and Technical Standards**

Introduces the governance of internet infrastructure and standards development bodies such as ICANN, IETF, IEEE, and W3C. Explores Africa's participation in technical standard-setting and the implications of protocol politics and digital sovereignty.

- Build cross-sectoral alliances to influence outcomes in international digital fora

**Duration**

2 day on site immersion

**Language**

English

**Effort**

8 hours per day

Online materials to be shared prior to session

**Module 6: Data Governance, AI Ethics, and Digital Rights**

Examines how diplomacy intersects with issues like data sovereignty, cross-border data flows, digital identity, AI ethics, and emerging rights (e.g., right to explanation). Focuses on the global divide in AI capabilities and Africa's advocacy for equitable AI governance.

**Module 7: Trade, Development, and Digital Economy Negotiations**

Focuses on how digital diplomacy affects economic outcomes. Explores WTO e-commerce frameworks, AfCFTA digital protocols, UNCTAD's digital economy strategies, and the developmental implications of cross-border taxation, IP regimes, and fintech regulation.

**Module 8: Disinformation, Soft Power, and Strategic Communication**

Analyzes how disinformation and digital media influence international relations and diplomacy. Covers soft power tools, strategic narratives, reputational risk, and the role of digital platforms in shaping perceptions.

**Module 9: Negotiation Tactics and Regional Diplomacy**

A simulation-based module that enhances participants' skills in multilateral negotiation, alliance-building, and positioning within regional and international digital governance coalitions.