

Embrace 4IR to address poverty, inequality and unemployment

"Our nation is forging a digital compact that is a critical contributor to our development as a nation - a digital compact with economic, justice and social benefit and innovation at its heart," said President Cyril Ramaphosa at the first Digital Economy Summit (4IRSA) hosted by the 4IRSA Partnership in Johannesburg.



"The digital compact is an important component of the new social compact to which I referred during my recent State of the Nation address."

"The 4IRSA partnership aims to accelerate the development of an inclusive, coherent, national response to the 4IR for South Africa, based on research," said Professor Brian Armstrong, chair of Digital Business at Wits University and secretary of 4IRSA - an alliance between the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, Telkom, the Universities of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg and Fort Hare and private sector partners Deloitte, Huawei and Vodacom.

The Summit brought together key constituencies from the public and private sectors, academia and civil society to work towards developing a unique Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) blueprint for South Africa.

“The Summit was convened to stimulate and facilitate an inclusive national dialogue on the 4IR in South Africa. While there are several 4IR-related processes and dialogues underway in South Africa in government, industry, academia and society at large, these are, in the main, fragmented, eclectic and divergent. The Summit provides a platform for all these conversations so that they can become mutually visible, thereby facilitating progressive coherence between them,” said Armstrong.

Opening the event, Gauteng Premier David Makhura said, “The Fourth Industrial Revolution is upon us and we must take action to prepare our nation fully for the new economy and new society. We need a national strategy and South Africa must take a lead in order to ensure that we collectively harness the opportunities and navigate the challenges brought about by the Fourth Industrial Revolution.”

His talk was followed by internationally renowned geopolitical forecaster, international affairs strategist and best-selling author, Dr George Friedman, who provided a global view on 4IR, saying that, in South Africa, he foresees this period of instability and tension evolving into new growth in two directions - 4IR and upward mobility for South Africans.

While unpacking what 4IRSA is and the objectives of the Digital Economy Summit, Wits vice-chancellor and principal, Professor Adam Habib, said, “We need to train scholars to deal with the challenges of the 21st century, some which we may not yet have encountered. We need to work across sectors to develop the technology required for us to leapfrog across eons of poverty, unemployment and inequality, and in so doing, create a new world order that prioritises humanity before profits and power.”

Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies, Stella Ndabeni-Abrahams said, “The Ministry of Communications and Digital Technologies has taken a conscious decision that at the heart of the 4IR conversation, is a people-centred response that speaks to jobs, skills and broad economic participation. As such, we have endeavoured to ensure that skills development is an important pillar to position the nation for the 4IR. ”

“To this end, we recently commissioned a digital skills study that revealed that skills in areas such as Artificial Intelligence, Big Data, Cybersecurity, Digital Communications, Digital Modelling, Machine Learning, Mechatronics and Cloud Computing will equip South Africans for future occupations. That is why we have developed initiatives such as the ‘Building a capable 4IR Army’ programme to ensure that our communities, especially the youth, are equipped to take advantage of new digital technologies, unlock future jobs and drive competitiveness.”

She added, “The impending 5G world and the reality of the Fourth Industrial Revolution requires us to ensure that the digital divide does not expand; that there is real transformation in terms of access to affordable ICT infrastructure and services; and that there is a clear long-term and sustainable programme to promote the 4IR.”

The President concluded the morning’s talks by saying, “Given what we know today about the potential benefits of what the Fourth Industrial Revolution can yield, we must embrace this historic conference of human insights and engagements, artificial intelligence, and technology, to rise to the challenges and enable us to address poverty, inequality as well as unemployment, which is the biggest triple problem that we face in our country. With the Fourth Industrial Revolution, we are going to be early adopters and we are going to be ahead.”

In a first for South Africa, Ramaphosa’s address was broadcast live via a hologram to an audience in the Rustenburg Civic Centre. This was the first ever live holographic broadcast of a Head of State and a sign of South Africa’s readiness to be a leader in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

“ *A live 3D holographic image of President Cyril Ramaphosa transmitted from the Gallagher Convention Centre to the Rustenburg Civic Centre in the North West during the inaugural 4th Industrial Revolution SA - Digital Economy Summit. #4IRSA #4IR #DigitalEconomySummit pic.twitter.com/HMRC DYJ2Z3— Shadi B (@shadisofla) [July 5, 2019](#)* ”

“The Digital Economy Summit brought the Fourth Industrial Revolution to the national highlight – unique to this event was the holographic approach of projecting our beloved President in two places at the same time! This demonstrates the

advancing nature of 4IR and associated jobs – jobs redefined.

Through artificial intelligence, a broader approach for spectrum allocation, a people-centred approach, there is a real prospect of engaging with data differently, for new economic stimulus, and for productivity enhancement. The approach must, however, ensure that 4IR serves people broadly that inequality is reduced through this industrial revolution,” said Professor Saurabh Sinha, deputy vice-chancellor: Research and Internationalisation at the University of Johannesburg.

Telkom Group CEO, Sipho Maseko shared, “Our dialogue today is laying a firm foundation for action that will uplift South Africa, therefore decisions that we make now will shape our social and economic landscape for decades to come. The digital economy requires us to challenge our preconceived beliefs and the way we have done things for generations. But the potential payoff, of an economy that is more inclusive, that lifts people out of poverty, that connects communities and builds a stronger society, is well worth the challenge.”

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