

May the 4th industrial revolution leave no child behind - Part 2

By [Chumisa Ndlazi](#)

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Currently, the 4th industrial revolution (4IR) is merely a buzzword that has not been put into context. Judging by the recent establishment of the Presidential 4IR commission and various government initiatives to engage with foreign investment, the public and private sector, it is quite obvious that the future of South Africa's socio-economic landscape will be highly influenced by this wave. Therefore, if we intend on driving socio-economic development through industrialisation, we need to take on a more inclusive, accessible and relatable communication approach.



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We ought to think carefully about how we should be informing and educating the public about (a) what the 4th industrial revolution phenomenon really means, (b) how does it impact the country's economy and market because ultimately, this has ripple effect on (c) the skills required and will define future jobs and market opportunities.

If we don't, we run the risk of leaving people behind and having a public majority that is not prepared to embrace the winds of change.



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Chumisa Ndlazi 30 Apr 2019



I therefore propose that as we begin to embrace the wave of 4IR, which is characterised by merging the physical, digital and biological. The following solutions should be considered:

Unpacking 4IR through mass-communication platforms

As a point of departure, we must ask ourselves, how are we using our mass-communication platforms to unpack the 4IR? In

my view, there needs to be more of a concerted effort to synergise government policy (National Development Plan) and the South African public broadcaster. What policy puts emphasis on, should somehow find expression through a mass-communication platform like the SABC.

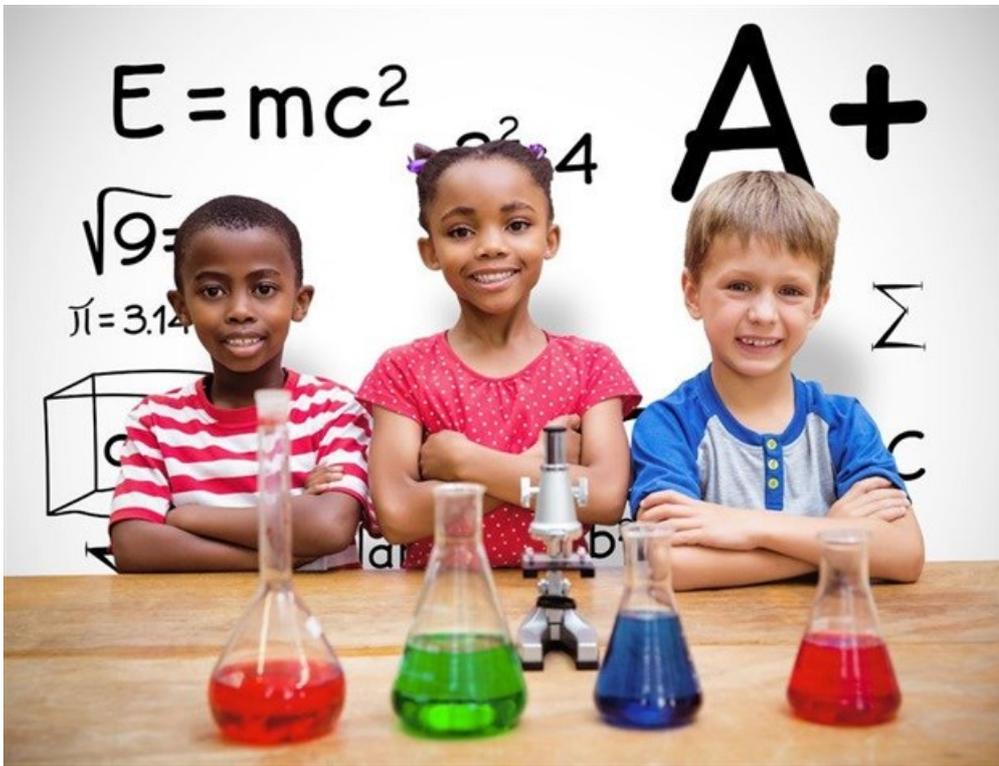
The objective? To increase public understanding, drive public engagement and influence public discourse. Of course, the role of the South African public broadcaster in this regard would not be to turn it into a propaganda machine, but to start a conversation that will assist in increasing public understanding so that the general public is made aware of the developments happening around them, and how they affect their lives.

During the 90s and early 00s, SABC programming was extremely entertaining but educational and informative. I think of TV programmes like Soul City which weaved health and social issues into real-life stories. Sponsored by the Department of Health, BP, UNAIDS and the Department of Land Affairs, they discussed issues on HIV/Aids, housing and land, depression and youth sexuality to name a few. More investment in entertaining and educational programmes that contextualise 4IR are some of the key initiatives that should also be considered that will ultimately contribute towards public understanding.

The importance of supporting black science organisations

While organisations like SAASTA and the CSIR have played an instrumental role in taking science, technology and innovation to communities through outreach programmes and exhibitions, they cannot reach all black South African communities. While initiatives like SciFest Africa and the National Science Week are equally important, they take place once a year and we all know, knowledge is more meaningful when it is shared and taught consistently.

Therefore, in addition to what already exists, the growth of more impact-driven black science awareness organisations should be encouraged and those that already exist, should continue to be supported. Over the past two years, I have seen a growing number of black scientists and engineers mobilising themselves to either create or join organisations that ensure black communities are educated and are prepared for the 4IR wave. This level of community mobilisation for science awareness is important in order to maximise reach, address challenges unique to the community of interest and monitor impact.



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Establishment of science, innovation and languages centre

Finally, as part of consistent learning, community-based science, innovation and languages centres should also form part of science awareness. Organisations like Inspire Foundation Group (IFG) Africa have done an excellent job by establishing such centres which provide Maths and Science learner's access to academic assistance and career guidance, and have designed fun programmes which encourage critical thinking, science communication and innovation. Similarly, the US Embassy through its Mae Jemison centre based in Mamelodi, have taken on the same approach, thus making science learning accessible. When you plant centres of this nature in communities, not only do you make science and technology facilities accessible, you inspire outside of the classroom, application-based learning.

When we are more intentional about how we communicate information as a country, we indirectly give our people the opportunity to mobilise and educate themselves so that they make informed decisions. When we fail to do this, we disempower the majority, leaving them in limbo. I pray that in the wake of 4IR, the latter will not be the fate of the South African child.

ABOUT CHUMISA NDLAZI

Chumisa Ndlazi is a Marketing and Communications Practitioner working at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). Currently, she is responsible for managing all marketing, media and communication activities for the CSIR National Laser Centre. As a Marketing and Communications professional, she has played a pivotal role in increasing the public awareness and media engagement for Project Aeroswift - world's largest and fastest 3D printer.

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