Coding could become a school subject

Government will consider introducing computer coding in South Africa's education system, Communications Deputy Minister Pinky Kekana said on Wednesday, 20 June 2018.

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"The time has come for us to introduce basic coding in our education system," said the Deputy Minister.

Addressing the IBM South Africa annual Think Johannesburg conference at Kyalami Grand Prix Circuit, Kekana said government acknowledges that for the country to fully reap the benefits of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, South Africa should invest in the needed infrastructure and skills.

"We must constantly assess how we future proof our children in a society that is constantly changing," she said.

The Deputy Minister's comments were also emphasised by IBM senior vice president for global industries, platforms and blockchain, Bridget van Kralingen.

"Everybody needs to be a coder," said Van Kralingen, adding that one of the company's eight research labs is in located in South Africa.

The IBM Think Conference is regarded as a flagship conference for innovators in the technology sector and focuses on topics like Artificial Intelligence (AI) cloud technology, the digital economy and blockchains, among others.

Preparing for the Fourth Industrial Revolution

IBM South Africa's country general manager Hamilton Ratshefola echoed Kekana's sentiments, saying it's important to remain relevant for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. IBM continues to invest in the South African economy through its digital studios in Braamfontein, which Ratshefola said the company would expand.

Kekana said the growth of technology also requires the country to examine what humanity would look like in five to 15 years from now and how the country can prepare itself for that particular society.

That examination must also extend to the question of employment, with a recently published McKinsey report stating that 45% of all current tasks could be automated with present technology.

Meanwhile, the World Economic Forum estimates that 33% of jobs in 2020 do not even exist yet.

"We need to ensure that this does not exacerbate the rampant inequality we are currently confronted with as a nation," said Kekana.

In the meantime, government will continue to encourage entrepreneurship and ensure that the education system provides appropriate skills for the digital economy.

"We are moving into an economy that's heavy on technology and light on labour. Therefore, it is crucial that we consider smart interventions," Kekana said.

The Deputy Minister said the rise of technology should not make the country anxious.

"The evolution of jobs should not deter us from moving forward to an automated society."

In the same vein, the country must not leave others behind.

"This should be alleviated by putting measures in place to ensure that citizens are reskilled and we adopt new learning methods for the nation," said Kekana.