SA's practical approach to 4IR

Agritech startup, Aerobotics, recently hosted a panel discussion to unpack the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and its impact on the country and continent.

Featured in the panel were S'onqoba Vuba, a member of the Presidential Commission on 4IR; Dario Giuliani, founder of Briter Bridges and Tim Willis, COO of Aerobotics.

During the discussion, Vuba explained the role and focus of the Commission as well as how South Africans can get involved.

"The Commission was established in April and is comprised of 30 volunteers who come from different parts of society, including public servants, big business, entrepreneurs, labour and civil society. We have been tasked to come up with a South African 4IR strategy that finds a way for the country to address its social and economic issues using 4IR as a means to an end, as opposed to using technology for technology's sake.

How 4IR is creating more jobs
29 Nov 2019

As the task at hand is quite broad and far-reaching, the Commission has split itself up into seven workstreams, each with a specific focus area. Every workstream is looking at what is the current status quo in South Africa regarding their particular focus area, what a 4IR lens adds to that and the recommendations to take SA forward in that space."

The seven workstreams are Science, Research and Innovation; Industrialisation and Commercialisation; Infrastructure and Resources; Policy and Legal; Economic & Social Impact of 4IR; Human Capital and Future World of Work; and Capital Markets and Financing. There is also an additional workstream that has an integrative project management function which Vuba heads up.

At the beginning of November, the Commission met with the President and provided him with a diagnostic report. In the lead up to this, the Commission has engaged with over 200 organisations and government departments to develop the top recommendations for each workstream.

These consultations will be continuing throughout November and most of December and the recommendations will be handed over to the President at the beginning of January next year.

"What we are trying to do is make sure that we are speaking to the right players at the coalface to get a sense of existing solutions and see how we can coordinate, collaborate and scale these. We encourage those wanting to be involved and wanting to share their inputs to reach out to the Commissioners, the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies as well as organising bodies.

The recommendations that emerge from our consultations and engagements have to be practical. As a country, we don't have the time to not be practical. From a Commission perspective, we are tired of long reports, long strategies and non-implementation, therefore in the recommendations we will be submitting, we are taking a very pragmatic approach with short documents that contain the highest impact items that can be implemented in a short amount of time."

At the end of November, the Commission engaged with the organising bodies for big business, together with entrepreneurs and startups that are specifically using and growing the 4IR space.

SA taking steps towards a 4IR economy
11 Nov 2019

Opportunity of 4IR

With this in mind, Willis said that he believes the biggest opportunity offered by 4IR is the creation of more startups.

"Not only will this benefit the country's economy, but further develop South Africa's reputation as a tech hub on the continent. Aerobotics has proven that South African tech companies can create technology that has application worldwide and, with that, create jobs. So, as opposed to people fearing jobs being taken away by technology, by growing tech companies in South Africa we can create jobs in this country and export the technology globally."

Giuliani, whose company datafies innovation across emerging markets and has recently produced the largest infographic on Africa's agritech landscape, concurred saying: "We've mapped thousands of startups across Africa and there is this narrative about African technology solving African problems, but there are a lot of these same problems that are experienced globally. Technology goes beyond borders. If you get technology right, there is no reason for it not to go global. This is quite evident with Aerobotics which is now operating in multiple markets around the world."

Looking at the challenges associated with 4IR, Giuliani said it is the tendency to categorise AI as a sector. "AI is about optimisation and efficiency, not a sector in itself." He added that there is also a major focus on buzzwords like blockchain, AI and Virtual Reality without any understanding of how these solutions are used.

For Vuba, the biggest challenge currently is lack of government understanding of and awareness about 4IR, its importance and potential. "We need education and collaboration between government departments and 4IR savvy stakeholders to move

the needle and the country forward."

For more, visit: https://www.bizcommunity.com