



Quick Brief

A news update from the NBI on its programmes, business leadership and issues on sustainable development.

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The Fourth Industrial Revolution And The Future Of Work In South Africa

Hosted by Barloworld, the National Business Initiative (NBI) and Adcorp held the second in a series of thought leadership dialogues recently on the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the future of work in South Africa in the context of decent work and future opportunities for the country. This revolution is described as the convergence of technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) machine learning, robotics, biotechnology and additive manufacturing. The forces of globalisation and recent technological advances have revolutionised the world of work internationally and fundamentally changed the nature of employment relationships.

Keynote speakers were **Dr Joni Musabayana**, ILO, Director: Decent Work Team for Eastern and Southern Africa Country Office for Botswana, Lesotho, South Africa and Swaziland and **Mthunzi Mdwaba**, IOE VP to the ILO and Commissioner of the Global Commission on the Future of Work. They gave trenchant presentations on the far-reaching impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution internationally. They then honed in on the specific challenges faced by South Africa in an environment of high youth unemployment, the move to informality in the labour market and the problems of entrenched inequality.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has identified three key drivers of change in the world of work:

1. Advances in technology and innovation;
2. The forces of globalisation and the fragmentation of production and work; and
3. The changing nature of employment relationships.

A powerful message that emerged from the presentations based on extensive ILO research and dialogue was the belief that the unending wave of technological advances should not be resisted but rather interrogated and actively managed by the social partners.

It was highlighted that current policy instruments would be challenged and that, unlike the circumstances of the previous industrial revolutions in which much of society was largely passive, we as a society can now be participants in shaping this brave new world. There are active choices to be made – also we need to recognise that it is critical to understand that these choices would vary across different sectors and contexts.

An important driver of the ability to successfully manage the global transitions sparked by the Fourth Industrial Revolution would be recognition of the rapid emergence of new jobs across the spectrum of occupations and skills levels coupled with the obsolescence of many traditional occupations.

The business community would need to engage with the other social partners on the direction of the new technological and social challenges ahead. This will require a move away from tired human capital tropes to a strategic focus on education and the trajectory of the future skills required in emerging occupations which will demand upskilling, reskilling and the management of complex transitions.

A robust discussion session followed the presentations where business leaders, many of them young people, sparked debate on the basis of an optimistic approach to managing the relentless change ahead.

The over-riding message that emanated from the workshop was the need for the social partners to adopt a proactive, action-oriented approach to the tidal wave of disruption caused by technological change and economic instability. An important first step was the need to embark on a sectoral analysis of the implications of the changes to the world of work in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, seen through the lens of a focus on gender inequality, migration and the deep divisions in South African society that might well be exacerbated by the forces of globalisation.

With the advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the march of new technologies, the global kaleidoscope has been well and truly shaken. Current megatrends have complex political, economic and social implications across the globe. Active engagement in the process of change by all stakeholders is essential to ensure that innovation is embraced and promoted to foster the growth of productive forces and ensure positive outcomes for the economy of the country and enhanced social justice for individuals in society.

The key outcome of the second in the thought leadership series of workshops was general agreement on the need to begin to move from analysis to action. The first step would be the undertaking of sector analysis exercises as a critical foundation for advancing the economic inclusion of young people on the basis of a new skills trajectory to meet the rapidly evolving social and technological challenges of the future.

Click [here](#) to view the presentations on the NBI website.

We would also like to hear your feedback so please send your thoughts and comments to [Gillian Hutchings](#).

Business Action for Sustainable Growth

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