

# What 4IR means in the Namibian context

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The world is on the verge of a major revolution; while developed countries are keeping pace with major technological advancements, developing countries, mostly in Africa, are still making efforts to industrialise their economies, trying to map their way out of the extractive sector.



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Nonetheless, not all is lost, given the fluid nature of technology; there are opportunities for developing countries to catch up. The good news is that there is realisation in developing countries of the vital role technology can place in alleviating some of the teething development challenges weighing down their prospects for growth. Stakeholders and the Namibian Government are keenly aware of the crucial role the ICT sector can play in speeding up development in Namibia.

Ubiquitous, mobile supercomputing, intelligent robots, self-driving cars, neuro-technological brain enhancements, genetic editing, are all evidence of dramatic change around us and it's happening at exponential speed.

It goes without saying that economically superior countries are those who have embraced and enhanced technology in almost all areas of economic activities. Technology can drive innovation and catapult countries to the forefront economically, empower its people and the fact that it's called the Fourth Industrial Revolution is apt. It's a seismic shift in how things are done, produced and how people interact.

Namibia roadmap to turn itself into a knowledge-based society is called Vision 2030. In the day of major technological advancements, it's however, increasingly clear we need to employ these innovations and enable the use of technology to achieve Vision 2030.

The industrial revolution liberated mankind from animal power, made mass production possible and brought digital capabilities to billions of people. This Fourth Industrial Revolution is, however, fundamentally different. The advancement in technologies now offers opportunities for low and medium income countries to make use of ICT.

In the case of mobile phones, it has been surprisingly fast and socially widespread. We can empower our people, our organisations, develop new businesses, new revenue streams and truly make Namibia and in turn Africa rise.

## **Namibia: a knowledge-based society**

Namibia is focused on creating a knowledge-based society where technology, innovation, entrepreneurship at every socio-economic level becomes the norm. Vision 2030 and the Harambee Prosperity Plan are both working towards this goal.

Being able to see and act upon potential opportunities for change through innovation is the only path to success. This means that the business environment needs to change. It can only survive if Namibia can successfully compete and even flourish in the face of the range of emerging adverse and fluctuating business and economic conditions. The country needs to become service orientated, this does not just mean offering good quality services but adding value to the economy by selling services.

We can fully embrace new technology, embrace cloud services and avoid mistakes that the early adopters made. We can engage and implement best practices and adapt them to our own needs and circumstances. We will engage and implement the best possible solutions, hardware and people to continue to improve our ICT rankings in the coming years as well as gaining a competitive edge in the region since we are willing to use technology and innovation to our advantage.

There is a need to develop home-grown talent through internships with relevant companies, international partnerships, skills exchange and by stimulating tertiary institutions to continue focusing on ICT-skills development for the knowledge-based economy. If we look at other emerging nations that have made giant economic strides, it's because they have embraced the service-industries in all their forms.

Namibia has a chance to build networks, acquire and develop tailor-made technology that suits our particular set of challenges and issues, using the latest technology available. Consider the West Africa Cable System (WACS) or our 4G networks that have connected our large but sparsely populated country. This is not a pipe-dream and certainly not impossible.

We can establish an environment where everything is set up to stimulate an innovative economy and be the catalyst for an innovative economic sector. This environment is facilitated by high-speed internet that is always on, stable and available nationwide. As well giving organisations access to the right advice and making sure that knowledge and experience is developed, harnessed, shared and retained within the borders of Namibia

This is how we fulfil Vision 2030.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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