

# We can't keep dreaming of the future of yesterday, 25 years later - we need action and to own our future now!

By Baxolile Nodada MP – DA Shadow Deputy Minister Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation

Chairperson,  
Malungu Abekekileyo,  
Molweni,

Chairperson, yesterday I visited Ndagala Village, after driving for 3 hours on gravel with no network, to a community that has no access to radio, television or basic necessities like water.

Which begged the question; what does Science, Technology and Innovation mean to these South Africans as we discuss the budget allocation today? They are probably not watching as we speak.

We can't keep dreaming of the future of yesterday, twenty-five years later. For the sake of these South Africans, Chairperson, we need to act now.

The physical, digital and biological merging of things is happening. In the wake of the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution, South Africa is inundated with inequality, poverty and unemployment.

On one end, ten million South Africans are unemployed of which 55% are young people and are met daily with these challenges. On the other end, there are South Africans whom experience the age of digitisation through developing apps that will make life easier driven by innovation, skills and jobs with ease.

In this budget vote we must aim to build One South Africa for All and avoid widening the gap between insiders and outsiders.

For the 25-year-old innovative unemployed graduate, uBathandwa wase-Ntabankulu, who managed to conquer the challenges of our broken education system, to him, the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution is inequality on steroids due to the lack of access to ICT infrastructure.

The absence of such infrastructure means a lack of access to information and opportunities. This is the reality of many young South Africans who have to take two taxis just to access the nearest internet café, let alone think about innovation.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution for the 35-year-old bank teller uNolizwi waseNgangelizwe Township, translates to retrenchment due to the age of digitisation.

The 74-year-old Mme Mosabadi in Matatiele wont access quality healthcare with new advanced technology because it is expensive and not available in our clinics or hospitals.

It is during this time of excitement and uncertainty that we must embrace the good work done by the Department of Science and Technology with their stringent budget but to also remind our government of a greater responsibility of ensuring that these South Africans are not left behind.

The 4th Industrial Revolution is not just essential to compete globally, but to drive socio-economic development in South Africa, particularly in areas that are still struggling with the 2nd and 3rd industrial revolution, and have on many occasions, found themselves wanting in this rapidly changing world. My visit to Mount Ayliff yesterday proves just the fact!

In order for the Department to continue doing its excellent work we need to allocate adequate funding to broaden their reach to the most vulnerable and untapped spaces, R8 billion is surely not enough.

A South Africanised approach inclusive of these areas is required if we are to drive innovation that equips people with skills and opportunities to participate in the economy. How does Tumelo in Randfontein acquire a skill in refineries for gold digging in the mines in his community; or Michelle the maritime science skills used to find oil in our shores and Kobus with his interest in astronomy?

This Department is more than just about high-tech innovation, it should also be people centred.

When we begin to think of Science, Technology and Innovation in this way, the 4th Industrial Revolution becomes a wave that is not only led by and beneficial to the industry but, it becomes a movement that is equally led by the ordinary South African citizen and in this end, innovation positively impacts communities.

However, the youth, the budding engineers or aspiring entrepreneurs, cannot thrive in an environment that does not support innovation. The core fundamentals which disable the ordinary South African staying e-Bizana from being an active participant of this revolution is due to lack of access to:

- Electricity;
- Good quality education that is aligned with the demands of market and provides a pathway to science and innovation;
- ICT infrastructure, Wi-Fi and broadband access; and,
- Poor allocation of budget for wider reach.

South Africa's success will be determined by our ability to generate knowledge and innovative ideas with the appropriate infrastructure, financial support and incentives to sustain every phase of the innovation process.

The Democratic Alliance's proposals can strengthen our innovation systems and make them effective drivers of growth and development.

We therefore propose:

- Skills development and innovation centres for the community, where Bathandwa does not have to catch two taxis just to access internet for 20 minutes, before running out of credit;
- Funding support for SET-based organisations as entities that operate in our communities;
- Government must subsidise entrepreneurs who conduct scientific research and run centers of innovation;
- Science and innovation collaborating with different departments to develop our learning outputs;
- Budget to include refineries as an innovative study especially in the local sectors; and,
- A much greater focus on vocational training as a science and innovation tool.

It is at a time like this that the people of South Africa are counting on us to not only speak from our imagination but rather, to translate what we imagine and innovate it into a tangible socio-economic opportunity for all South Africans.

I thank you.