
A new skill set for South Africa to compete with the world

By Fellingeng Yende

The Industrial Revolution dates back to the 1700s in Britain, which brought with it the rural-urban migration. People flocked to cities to access economic opportunities in large scale manufacturing factories, with steam, water and coal at the forefront of this revolution. A new way of conducting business was born. The capitalist economic system as we know it today was fashioned during this era, which was bolstered by the following two revolutions: electricity, as well as electronics and automation.

Fast forward to the 21st Century and human beings are merging the capabilities of both human and machine to usher in the era of Artificial Intelligence (AI), 3D printing, biometrics, amongst other phenomenon's that are in the process of changing society forever. The Fourth Industrial Revolution also known as Industry 4.0 is all about "cyber-physical systems" according to the World Economic Forum.

A report by Price Water Coopers (PWC) predicts that by 2030, AI will boost the global economy by \$15.7 trillion. The South African government is well aware of the opportunities the Fourth Industrial Revolution will bring to our shores. As a result, the government has implemented a number of reforms to address these opportunities. One of them is the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) 2030 – which seeks to develop 'an educated, skilled and capable workforce for South Africa'.

Our government is constantly looking for ways to empower and upskill our youth and women through education, skills development and training while mitigating the challenges of crime, poverty, unemployment, substance abuse and teenage pregnancy. This is a core transformational mandate of the NSDP. Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA) have a huge responsibility in addressing the triple challenges of unemployment, poverty alleviation and rural development.

There are eight critical outcomes that we as the SETA are compelled to realise, which include but are not limited to: linking education and workplace, improving the level of skills in the South African workforce, supporting the increase in access to occupationally directed programmes, encouraging and supporting worker-initiated training, but to name a few.

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) is the custodian of the NSDP. In consultation with various stakeholders including the likes of the National Skills Authority (NSA),

the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) and SETA, the plan aims to assist the government to grow our economy, create jobs and drive social development.

Fibre Processing and Manufacturing Sector Education and Training Authority (FP&M SETA) is one of the twenty-one SETAs that have been mandated by the South African government to manage the skills development needs of the South African economy in accordance to all sectors that contribute to our Gross Domestic Product.

The FP&M SETA was established in 2011 to streamline and integrate the value chain of interrelated and interdependent sub-sectors of manufacturing, engineering, clothing textiles, footwear, leather and furniture, timber, printing as well as packaging and publishing.

During the course of our eight-year existence, we have provided more training and retraining opportunities for the unemployed through learnerships, internships and work-integrated-learning occasions. Placement of unemployed learners in jobs post training continues through additional upskilling.

The FP&M SETA is vigorously pursuing and realising the promotion and facilitation of an improved skills profile for the sector's workforce, employers and the economy of the country at large.

Research and Development is of paramount importance if South Africa is going to realise the opportunities that present themselves with the Fourth Industrial Revolution. We are providing skills to our young people to embrace and engage with new digital technologies that will give them a competitive edge in an increasingly global market.

We believe in developing a society that will embrace digital technologies. At the recent National Skills Authority Awards held on the 14th of March 2019, FP&M SETA won gold in the following categories: Best Skills Development for the Aranda Textile Mills project and Most Outstanding SETA for FP&M. I had the honour of being awarded a Bronze in the Minister's award for Recognition of Most Outstanding Individual in Skills Development.

These accolades are a testament to the high-performance culture that has been inculcated within the FP&M SETA – we realise and appreciate that we have a role to play in developing young people to be future leaders that will drive the economic growth of our country.

Despite the high level of youth unemployment, we still need young people to come forward and fully immerse themselves in skills training and education, ultimately leaving the skills development programmes as different people who are employable and can make a contribution to the economic growth of this country.

The work done by FP&M SETA goes beyond the scopes of any SETA. We have built relationships and partnerships that have provided the individual learner with a foot in the doorway of post-school education and training as well as the world of work. Learners have grasped these opportunities with both hands and succeeded. We are proud as these learners are well positioned and equipped to play a formidable role in the Fourth Industrial Revolution – an era of artificial intelligence, robotics and automation.

It is our impact on the lives of learners that are at the heart of everything we do. Over the years since 2011, 101 722 individuals have encountered FP&M SETA at different stages of their career journey and have been left stronger and better prepared for sustained success through the experience. Among these are 62 184 learners who entered FP&M SETA occupationally-directed programmes and 39 538 learners who have successfully completed occupational qualifications and are ready to make an impact in their societies.

We continue to turn the legacy of this organisation into a material force that transforms the destinies of the poor, the unemployed, youth, women, people with disabilities as well as the geographically and socially marginalised.