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To Reflect, Imagine And Co-Create In Africa And Its Diaspora: Humanities Demands From The Fourth Industrial Revolution

This keynote presentation to the SAHUDA 2019 Conference is about the meaning and practice of Humanities Education in Africa and its diaspora, in the face of transformational innovations that are increasingly challenging the academy and society, globally. It interrogates Klaus Schwab's concept of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and argues that 4IR in Africa and the global South should be more about educating and empowering people, about advancing indigenous productivity and preserving our shared humanity. It is within that context that we should consider the role of such emerging digital technologies as artificial intelligence, robotics and algorithms, as advanced by Schwab. The presentation advocates a critical and selective approach to 4IR and places it within the context of other historical 'periodisations' of humanity's interface with technology.

To better cope with emerging innovations in this era, a managed re-structuring of disciplinary boundaries in the academy is advocated, with a view to more inter-disciplinary and convergent approaches to research and curriculum reform. The goal is to enable researchers and students of the Humanities to combine their people-centred scholarship with an improved understanding of relevant applications in Science, Technology and Engineering, and vice versa. The presentation concludes that such reforms, needed at the regional, national and institutional levels, must include the space to reflect historically and culturally, the capacity to re-imagine our own futures and the time and competences to co-create indigenous material or virtual content, as equals with other academic disciplines, moving into the third decade of the 21st century.

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