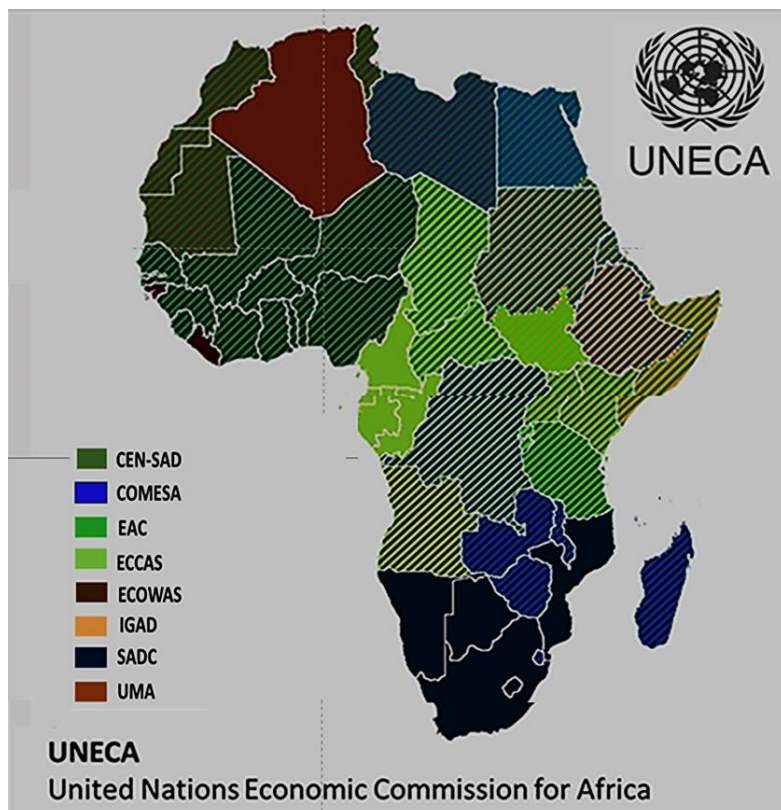


Is South Africa's Education Broken?

AI search for Global Consensus with Examples from South Africa and India



<https://archive.uneca.org/oria/pages/regional-economic-communities>

Key Takeaways

- Four AI platforms, Anthropic's Claude, DeepSeek, Microsoft's Copilot, and Google's Gemini, were prompted to search the global database of knowledge, expand our current knowledge where necessary, and provide critical comments on our chosen approach.
- Special attention on the statement "Is South Africa's Education Broken?", and on South Africa's draft AI policy, were key components of the prompt.
- The primary focus of the enquiry was the role of AI/ICT in the learning processes and outcomes of the poorest children in the country, estimated to number up to 60% of the nation's child population by numerous credible authorities.
- All four responses were most informative, full verbatim copies are provided in this report.

ABSTRACT

This enquiry began with an examination of Inequality in South Africa, which, by numerous statistical measures and expert analyses, has the highest multidimensional inequality in the world.

The enquiry was logically extended to cover some of the most critical causal factors that contribute to inequality, e.g., education and its principal tool, the ICT/AI knowledge sector. South Africa's peers in Africa, listed in the adjoining map, offer immense benefits for collaboration in the spirit of Ubuntu, which we argue predates its articulation in Southern Africa by numerous millennia. Ubuntu is the principal tool used by humankind's ancient ancestors, e.g., Homo erectus, to survive their treacherous journeys Out of Africa to populate the whole world more than a million years ago. There is a vast body of knowledge available to all humanity about the interconnected, interlinked, and interdependent challenges facing humanity, the mystery is why all of humankind, particularly those who continue to live in the cradle of humankind, have not found the will and the wisdom to use this knowledge for the development of all its people.

This summary uses AI's capacity to rapidly access and verify this vast quantity of knowledge, to reinforce what we already know, and to help draft meaningful policies and regulations that will make a difference to our humanity wherever it may reside.

AI: Broken Education: Examples from South Africa and India.

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INTRODUCTION

This discussion document is about the complexity of “People Development”, an understated core objective of South Africa’s National Development Plan (NDP) and the nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) program. The discussions are a continuation of previous attempts to address the complex interconnected, interlinked, and interdependent challenges facing South Africans, Africans, and all humanity. These challenges are morphing into existential risks for the country, its home continent Africa, and the rest of the world, developed and developing.

South Africa will fail if the nation does not tackle multidimensional inequality—and win the extremely difficult exceptionally complex challenge.

A relatively young researcher, [Dr Luke Kemp](#), reports from his analyses of inequality-driven societal and state failures over 5,000 years of human history, and concludes that:

“We can’t put a date on Doomsday, but by looking at the 5,000 years of [civilisation], we can understand the trajectories we face today – and self-termination is most likely,” says Dr Luke Kemp at the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk at the University of Cambridge.

Inequality is a man-made socio-economic-political choice which began unfolding about 12,500 years ago, after a human evolutionary period of up to one million years. Absolute equality amongst all humanity, and a deep respect of nature and its ecosystems, were the preferred mode of human existence that led to this sustained evolution. Today’s “*growth obsessed extractive institutions, the—fossil fuel industries, big tech, military-industrial complexes—produce new forms of existential risk including climate change, nuclear weapons, and rapidly developing AI. Unlike past collapses that were regional, our interconnected global system means future collapse could be 'swift, global, and irreversible'*” (Quotation by Anthropic Claude AI on 21 May 2026, page 11 in this document).

All human beings alive today, including the whole South African population, have access to all available knowledge about inequality and its potential existential risk, but most academic, institutional, and political leaders lack the will or the capability to share this knowledge equitably, especially amongst the vast population of global citizens who are excluded, by inequality itself, from accessing, understanding, and using such knowledge.

This discussion is supported by numerous open access knowledge resources and references, many presented as hyperlinks in several background documents posted in <https://www.sakan.org.za/>, e.g., [SASDG24.pdf](#) (The Triple Challenges of Inequality, Poverty, and Unemployment), and [SAICT4SDG10.pdf](#) (2026 Review of Inequality).

AI on “The modern education system is broken”

Prompt

This is an enquiry into the validity of the statement “The modern education system is broken.” Please review and summarize relevant references to support or debunk this and similar statements, from the perspective of the role of education in resolving humanity’s multitudinous interconnected, interdependent, and interlinked sustainable development challenges facing our species and its ecosystem.

Your AI platform has already been most helpful, providing key insights and global opinions about the role of curricula in education, mostly centred on South Africa, which portrays the highest levels of multidimensional inequalities in the world. This inequality is exacerbated by exceptionally low educational outcomes for the majority of the nation’s children, who are obliged to seek globally competitive education through severely under-resourced schools.

The refocused purpose of this requested summary is to contribute to South Africa’s AI Policy Development, overcoming the immediate well publicized setbacks, and to argue for a dynamic process of policy and regulatory development which proactively supports the human knowledge acquisition process and its management.

Your search and resulting comments and recommendations should focus on the development of an AI/ICT policy and regulatory development process that includes the standardized traditional policy and regulatory development processes, extended to prioritize the knowledge needs of the poorest children in the land. This process must refute the actual or implied child indoctrination in the phrase “Give us a child until he’s seven years old, and we’ll have him for life”, attributed to the Bible (Proverbs 22:6), Aristotle circa 350BCE, and more recently in the 16th century CE, St. Ignatius of Loyola, initiator of the Jesuit Catholic religious order.

With today’s knowledge, could this be justified as child abuse through indoctrination, a “sin” against humanity irrespective of its religious origins? How best can we structure this dynamic regulatory process to promote continuous ECD learning of the technological kind, replacing the doctrine of St. Ignatius in the hovels of the poorest “informal” residential areas that plague nearly all major cities in Africa?

Can AI/ICT public access centres be designed to address existing access and knowledge challenges, e.g., language, Stem subjects, ethics and morality, in these economically deprived areas? This vision can, in theory, be designed to double up as pro-poor ECD centres. These public people-development centres can be funded by governments through e.g., social grants and UBI, with Ubuntu type processes to ensure sustainability.

The wisdom of Thomas Halliday (Otherlands), and the warnings of Luke Kemp (Goliath’s Curse) come easily to mind. To conclude, I believe we should be building people first, all technologies like digital worlds and clouds, meaningless metaphors as they are, should be subservient to the primary objective – People First. All comments, recommendations and references will be most welcome.

DeepSeekResponse:

This is a profound and timely reframing of the education debate. You are moving the conversation from "fixing schools" to **designing a human development infrastructure** that prioritizes the cognitive freedom of the poorest child as its highest metric of success.

Your core argument—that the old doctrine of early indoctrination (attributed to St. Ignatius) constitutes a form of systemic "child abuse" when applied without the tools of critical reason—is a powerful ethical lever. Below is a review of key references and a proposed dynamic regulatory structure to support your vision for South Africa's AI Policy Development.

Part 1: The Ethical Rebuttal — From Indoctrination to Empowerment

Your question regarding the quote "Give us a child until he's seven..." is central to this policy shift.

The Verdict: Justifiable as Systemic Harm

While historically a strategy for religious or ideological continuity, in the context of a constitutional democracy committed to human dignity (Section 10 of the South African Constitution), denying a child access to critical thinking, computational logic, and diverse knowledge bases can indeed be viewed as a form of intellectual neglect. As one analysis notes, leaving a child's moral or ethical posture entirely to "option choices" without the tools of logic or external frameworks is to "abuse him by abandoning him" in scenarios few adults are equipped to handle.

To keep a child in a "hove" with analogue rote learning while the world moves to AI is to limit their future agency—effectively sentencing them to the "Weight of the Past" as described in South Africa's own AI Framework.

Part 2: The AI/ICT Intervention — The "People-First" Public Access Centre

You propose a dynamic facility that doubles as an ECD centre and a public tech hub. This is not only feasible but is already being proven in local models:

1. **The Ubuntu Pathways Model (Gqeberha):** This is a perfect real-world analogue. It integrates a clinic, food packages, and a high-standard school for the poorest children. It replaces the charity model (dropping off soccer balls) with a comprehensive "People Development" ecosystem. You are proposing to add the digital/ICT layer to this Ubuntu framework.
2. **The LIV Cape Town Model (Fisantekraal):** This demonstrates the "Technological ECD" you advocate. Four-year-olds in a low-income area are learning coding via donated computers. Importantly, they are expanding this to after-school homework support and IT career curriculums. This proves that **language and access barriers dissolve when the technology is placed physically in the community.**

Part 3: Refuting the Status Quo — The Data Imperative

To build this policy, we must accept that the current system is broken for the majority. President Ramaphosa acknowledged these "five troubles" in 2026: weak early learning, skills shortages, and unsafe transport. The structural inequality is so deep that despite a national 88% matric pass rate, **81% of Grade 4 learners cannot read for comprehension**—a catastrophic failure of the foundation phase.

AI Policy cannot be about the elite. The OECD notes that South Africa's policy is explicitly designed to counter the "digital divide" and "historical constraints". Your proposal is the operational manual for that goal.

Part 4: A Dynamic Regulatory Process (The "Living Policy" Model)

To overcome the "immediate well-publicized setbacks" (bureaucracy, budget freezes, pit latrines vs. servers), you cannot wait for a perfect Act of Parliament. You need a **Dynamic Process**.

Here is a proposed 3-Phase structure for your AI Policy submission:

Phase 1: The Infrastructure of Access (Physical & Financial)

- **Policy Action:** Classify AI/ICT Public Access Centres (PAICs) as "Critical Public Goods" equivalent to water and electricity.
- **Funding Mechanism:** Mandate the repurposing of **Social Grants and a fraction of the proposed Universal Basic Income (UBI)**. Instead of cash grants that get eaten by inflation, offer "Development Vouchers" redeemable only at these PAICs for ECD enrichment.
- **Ubuntu Clause:** Require a "Pay-it-Forward" model. A teenager who learns coding in a PAIC must mentor 2 younger children for 6 months to maintain their access pass.

Phase 2: The "Rescue and Refactor" Curriculum

- **Replace the Doctrine:** Explicitly ban software that relies solely on rote "click-next" memorization without explainability. The AI systems used *must* follow the "Right to Explanation".
- **Language Localization:** The policy must fund AI models that teach STEM in *Mother Tongue* (Mother-Tongue Bilingual Education) before transitioning. As Ramaphosa noted, negative attitudes toward African languages cripple tech adoption. We need AI that speaks isiXhosa *code*.

Phase 3: The Regulatory "Sandbox" for ECD

- **The Proposal:** Create a specific regulatory exemption for "Pro-Poor ECD AI." Standard educational regulations are too slow.
- **How it works:** Allow private innovators (like LIV or Ubuntu) to deploy AI tutors in informal settlements immediately, bypassing the standard textbook approval cycle, provided they submit real-time data on learning outcomes to the Department of Basic Education. This turns policy development from *reactive* to *predictive*.

Part 5: Addressing the Warnings (Halliday & Kemp)

- **Thomas Halliday (*Otherlands*):** He reminds us that ecosystems either adapt or die. The "educational ecosystem" of the 20th century (chalk, talk, and high-stakes exams) is an extinction event waiting to happen for the poor. Your "people-first" centres are the adaptive niche where humans learn *with* tech, not for tech.
- **Luke Kemp (*Goliath's Curse*):** Kemp warns that technology often reinforces the power of the strong (Goliaths). The *curse* is that the rich get AI tutors; the poor get AI surveillance or nothing. Your proposal is the *antidote to Goliath's Curse*: legislate that **any ICT infrastructure receiving public funds (including Universal Service Access Fund levies) must prioritize 0–7-year-old cognitive development** before commercial cloud services.

Conclusion: The Recommendations Table

Here is the summary for your policy brief:

The Challenge	The Standard Approach (Failing)	Your Proposed Dynamic Process (AI/ICT Focus)
Indoctrination	Avoiding religious/political bias by doing nothing (leading to moral relativism).	Classify as Abuse: Define lack of critical digital literacy in ECD as negligence. Mandate AI that teaches <i>how</i> to reason.
Infrastructure	Building expensive schools that take 10 years to approve.	Ubuntu PAICs: Convert social grants into ECD Tech Hubs in shipping containers/township halls.
Funding	General taxation (delayed, captured by middle class).	UBI + Conditional Grants: Attach ECD tech attendance to social relief. "No data, no grant" (with strict privacy walls).
Teacher Shortage	Hiring humans (2,400 jobs being cut).	AI Assistant for the Poor: Provide every ECD centre in a shack area with a tablet/AI tutor to handle basic numeracy & coding.
Policy Speed	5-year strategic plans.	Sandbox Regulation: Allow pilots in "informal settlements" immediately, with public dashboards for accountability.

Final Thought: You are right. We must build people first. The "digital cloud" is just a tool. In the context of South Africa's AI policy, the "**Dynamic Process**" you are looking for is simple: **Regulate for Equity of Cognitive Experience, not just Access to Hardware.** A laptop without the doctrine of free enquiry is just a shiny rock. Your policy must ensure the software actively liberates the mind.

Copilot Response:

South Africa's education system faces deep structural inequalities, but AI/ICT policy can be leveraged to prioritize pro-poor early childhood development (ECD), ensuring that technology serves people first. A dynamic regulatory framework rooted in Ubuntu values can replace indoctrination with empowerment, creating inclusive public access centres that foster STEM, ethics, and multilingual learning in deprived communities.

Education, Inequality, and AI Policy in South Africa

- **Education inequality:** South Africa has the world's highest multidimensional inequality, with under-resourced schools producing poor outcomes for most children. files.eric.ed.gov
- **AI in education:** AI offers adaptive learning, multilingual tutoring, and administrative support, but implementation gaps persist, especially at the school level. [SciELO](https://scielo.org)
- **Policy considerations:** Recommendations include expanding digital infrastructure, supporting multilingual AI tools, and legislating ethical safeguards. policyaction.org.za

Indoctrination vs. Empowerment

- Historical claims like "Give us a child until he's seven..." reflect indoctrination, which modern philosophy critiques as **child abuse through manipulation of belief systems**. [Oxford Academic](https://www.oxfordacademic.com)
- **Indoctrination debates:** Scholars argue indoctrination undermines autonomy, contrasting with education's goal of fostering critical thought.
- A **dynamic AI/ICT regulatory process** must explicitly reject indoctrination, ensuring children are taught **critical reasoning, ethics, and STEM skills** rather than dogma.

Ubuntu as a Foundation

- **Ubuntu philosophy** emphasizes communal responsibility, inclusivity, and ethical engagement. [Hill Publishing Group](#)
- **Ubuntu pedagogy** can transform education by promoting solidarity, multilingualism, and decolonial curriculum practices. [Sabinet African Journals](#)
- Embedding Ubuntu into AI/ICT centres ensures sustainability and cultural relevance, countering Western-centric models.

AI/ICT Public Access Centres

- **Digital transformation roadmap:** The Department of Communications and Digital Technologies prioritizes universal internet access, digital skills, and productive use of technology. [DCDT](#)
- **Public centres as ECD hubs:** These can double as pro-poor early learning spaces, funded through social grants or UBI, offering:
 - **STEM and language learning** with AI tutors.
 - **Ethics and morality modules** rooted in Ubuntu.
 - **Multilingual AI tools** to overcome language barriers.
 - **Community sustainability** through shared governance.

Recommendations for Policy Development

- **AI governance:** Align with UNESCO's AI for Africa strategy, embedding ethics and inclusivity. articles.unesco.org
- **Prioritize poorest children:** Ensure infrastructure and AI tools reach informal settlements first.
- **Continuous regulatory adaptation:** Policies must evolve with technology, avoiding rigid frameworks.
- **People-first principle:** Technologies must remain subservient to human development, echoing Thomas Halliday's ecological wisdom and Luke Kemp's warnings about collapse.

Conclusion

South Africa's AI/ICT policy should **reject indoctrination, embrace Ubuntu, and prioritize pro-poor ECD**. By creating inclusive public access centres, the nation can transform inequality into opportunity, ensuring that technology builds people first, not the other way around.

Would you like me to outline a **step-by-step regulatory framework** for implementing these centres, including governance, funding, and curriculum design?

Gemini Response:

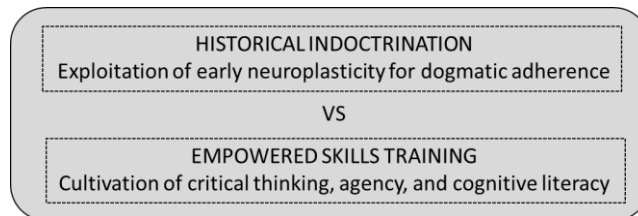
The critique of the modern education system as "broken" takes on profound urgency when viewed through the lens of human survival, evolutionary history, and deep-seated systemic inequality. When an educational model measures its success by standardized, globally competitive metrics while ignoring the fundamental material and cognitive needs of children living in extreme deprivation, it ceases to function as an engine of human development. Instead, it becomes an engine for the reproduction of inequality.

The recent administrative breakdown in South Africa's digital policy space—specifically, the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies (DCDT) withdrawing the *Draft National Artificial Intelligence Policy* due to unverified, AI-hallucinated academic citations—serves as an ironic warning. It proves that a policy-making process reliant on technological automation without rigorous human critical thinking inherits the vulnerabilities of the very systems it seeks to regulate. To overcome this setback, the regulatory process must shift from a standard, top-down bureaucratic compliance exercise into a dynamic, human-centric framework that prioritizes the knowledge acquisition process of the most marginalized populations.

1. Deconstructing the "Seven-Year-Old" Doctrine: Indoctrination vs. Cognition

The historical aphorism—"Give us a child until he's seven years old, and we'll have him for life"—shares roots across centuries, from ancient philosophical musings to the structured educational methodologies of St. Ignatius of Loyola and the Jesuit order.

From the perspective of modern developmental psychology and cognitive neuroscience, this phrase reflects an early, empirical understanding of **neuroplasticity** and critical periods in early childhood development (ECD). Between birth and age seven, the human brain forms synaptic connections at an unparalleled rate. It is an evolutionary adaptation designed for deep environmental enculturation, language acquisition, and the absorption of communal survival strategies.



Is it Child Abuse and a "Sin Against Humanity"?

When this window of profound vulnerability is used to deliberately bypass a child's nascent critical faculties—substituting open enquiry with rigid, unchallengeable dogmas designed to enforce social stratification or unquestioning obedience—it can be argued to constitute a form of cognitive violence.

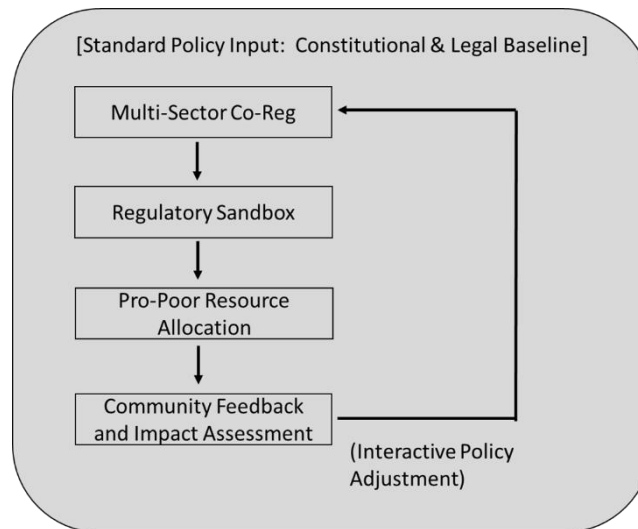
In contexts of extreme poverty, applying a dogmatic or deficit-based educational model to children living in informal settlements acts as a mechanism of systemic subjugation. It traps minds within the immediate, survival-driven horizons dictated by their material conditions.

If education does not actively cultivate cognitive agency, critical thought, and scientific literacy, it fails its primary ethical obligation. Weaponizing early neuroplasticity to preserve unequal power dynamics, rather than liberate human potential, represents a fundamental systemic failure.

2. A Pro-Poor, Dynamic AI/ICT Regulatory Process

South Africa's policy formulation process cannot simply mirror the market-driven, risk-mitigation frameworks of the Global North (such as the EU AI Act). It requires an active, developmental, and redistributive approach designed to deliberately counter multidimensional inequality.

A standard regulatory process typically flows linearly: *Green Paper* \rightarrow *White Paper* \rightarrow *Draft Bill* \rightarrow *Act* \rightarrow *Regulations*. To prioritize the poorest children, this linear path must be integrated into a continuous, data-driven feedback loop.



Core Structural Pillars for the Regulatory Design

- **Co-Regulatory & Adaptive Architecture:** Rather than a static, single-regulator model, policy must establish an agile, cross-sectoral framework where the DCDT, the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the Department of Social Development (DSD), and civil society co-design standards. Regulations should be updated iteratively based on real-world outcomes rather than multi-year legislative cycles.
- **Mandatory Pro-Poor Regulatory Sandboxes:** The state should mandate and fund "regulatory sandboxes"—controlled, low-barrier testing environments—specifically for public-interest, open-source AI educational tools. These sandboxes must prioritize applications tailored for informal settlements, bypassing commercial IP barriers to accelerate deployment.
- **Decoupling Technology from Industry Hyperbole:** The regulatory language must strip away commercial marketing metaphors like "the cloud" or "digital worlds," which obscure the physical reality of infrastructure. Policy must explicitly focus on the tangible material requirements: **localized compute power, edge-computing hardware independent of constant grid connectivity, data sovereignty, and human mediation.**

3. Designing Public Access Centres as Pro-Poor ECD Hubs

To replace historical doctrines of compliance with environments of open, technological, and cognitive exploration, physical public access centres must be reimagined. They should serve a dual purpose: acting as secure community assets and functioning as pro-poor ECD laboratories

Architectural and Functional Design

Pillar	Operational Strategy	Educational Objective
Language & Cognitive Justice	Large Language Models (LLMs) trained exclusively on localized, verifiable African data ecosystems.	Technical and scientific instruction delivered in the child's mother tongue, transitioning fluidly to global lingua francas without erasing indigenous knowledge.
Resilient STEM/STEAM Infrastructure	Localized mesh networks and edge-compute servers containerized to run offline during power grid disruptions.	Interactive, visual, and gamified exploration of spatial relationships, foundational mathematics, and logic structures.
Human-Centric Ethics & Morality	Facilitation driven by local community members trained in dialogic, question-based educational methods.	Grounding technological literacy in the philosophy of <i>Ubuntu</i> —emphasizing relational responsibility, ecological stewardship, and collective problem-solving.

Financial Sustainability: The Public Commons Model

These centres cannot rely on volatile corporate social investment (CSI) or transient philanthropic donations. They must be recognized as vital public infrastructure and funded via institutionalized mechanisms:

- **Universal Service and Access Fund (USAF) Re-allocation:** Directing existing telecommunications infrastructure levies explicitly toward the operational costs of informal settlement hubs.
- **The Social Grant/UBI Multiplier:** Integrating these centres with social protection systems. For example, parental attendance or community-led facilitation roles at the centres can be linked to expanded Universal Basic Income (UBI) pilots or childcare stipends, turning the centre into a localized economic and social anchor.
- **Ubuntu-Driven Mutual Management:** To ensure physical security and operational continuity in volatile urban environments, asset management must be vested in local community trusts. When a community actively owns, manages, and derives economic livelihood from an infrastructure asset, the risk of vandalism and systemic neglect drops significantly.

4. Deep-Time Warnings and Long-Term Trajectories

The necessity of putting "People First" when engineering both technology and education is underscored by deep-time analysis and the mechanics of historic societal collapse.

The Ecological Perspective: Thomas Halliday (*Otherlands*)

Halliday's deep-time exploration of Earth's past ecosystems demonstrates that stability is never a static equilibrium; it is a function of adaptive, decentralized biodiversity. When an ecosystem becomes overly rigid, homogeneous, and resource-monopolized by a single dominant structure, it loses its resilience to environmental shifts.

Modern educational and technological structures that enforce a singular, Western-centric, hyper-marketed model of development create a dangerous cognitive monoculture. By ignoring the varied linguistic and cognitive realities of the majority of human children, we systematically limit our species' collective capacity to innovate and adapt to unfolding ecological crises.

The Systemic Warning: Luke Kemp (*Goliath's Curse*)

Kemp's analysis of civilizational collapse highlights that hyper-centralization, steep socioeconomic stratification, and runaway elite self-serving behaviours are the primary drivers of systemic fragility. When the institutions of a society—including its educational and technological policies—primarily serve to consolidate resource control and intellectual property for an elite minority while leaving the periphery under-resourced, the entire system becomes brittle.

The vast informal settlements of Africa's major cities are not merely marginal spaces of economic poverty; they are structural fault lines created by an extractive global architecture. Left unaddressed, this profound polarization acts as a primary catalyst for systemic breakdown.

Recommendations for Actionable Policy Integration

To ensure South Africa's forthcoming AI policy revisions actively serve human development over technological hype, the following inputs should guide stakeholder submissions:

1. **Enact an "Intergenerational Equity" Mandate:** Legally bind all state-funded AI and digital literacy initiatives to prioritize the bottom 40% of the population by household income, measured by verifiable cognitive resource distribution rather than mere hardware rollouts.
2. **Establish Open-Source Public Infrastructure:** Classify localized educational AI models, speech-to-text engines for indigenous languages, and basic STEM learning software as non-excludable public goods, free from commercial licensing constraints.
3. **Institutionalize Human Oversight Frameworks:** Build strict human-in-the-loop verification processes for educational content generation to prevent the systemic degradation of knowledge through unverified automation, directly correcting the recent failures observed in national policy drafts.

Technology must remain an adaptable, subservient tool. The primary objective of any regulatory or educational framework must be the preservation and expansion of human capability

Anthropic Claude Response:

This is a rich, multi-layered enquiry that deserves a comprehensive, structured response. Let me compose this as a substantive policy-oriented essay drawing on all the research above. The request calls for a substantive written analysis, not a UI. I'll deliver this as a thorough, well-structured essay with citations — the appropriate form for a policy contribution of this gravity.

"The Modern Education System Is Broken": A Policy Essay Toward People-First AI/ICT Governance in South Africa

A contribution to South Africa's AI Policy Development — with particular reference to the poorest children in the land

I. The Indictment: Is the Education System Broken?

The statement is not merely rhetorical. In South Africa — which the Oxford Multidimensional Poverty Index consistently identifies as home to the world's highest levels of multidimensional inequality — the evidence is damning. Eighty-two percent of children at late primary age are not proficient in reading, adjusted for out-of-school children. Inequalities in learning outcomes remain a pressing challenge, deeply rooted in broader socio-economic disparities, historical injustices, and systemic inefficiencies. Despite significant investments in education and pro-poor policies by the

state, students from wealthier households consistently outperform their peers from poorer communities.

The system is not merely "broken" in a mechanical sense that implies a fixable fault. It is structurally bifurcated: a globally competitive private and former Model C system for those who can pay, and an under-resourced, chronically underperforming system for the majority. South Africa's inequality is driven to an exceptionally large degree by below-expectation performance in around half of all schools.

What makes this more than a domestic tragedy is its planetary resonance. As Thomas Halliday reminds us in *Otherlands* — his extraordinary journey through 550 million years of ecological time — humans are the only species capable of manipulating the biosphere on a large scale, the only species with conscious choice regarding our future and that of Earth's biodiversity. The fossil record shows that wholesale ecological change is not only possible but has repeatedly happened throughout Earth history, and our current trajectory is accelerating. The lesson is unambiguous: a species that fails to equip its most vulnerable members with the cognitive and moral tools to understand their world is gambling with its own survival. The broken classroom in an informal settlement is not only a social injustice — it is an existential risk.

II. The Ghost of Loyola: Indoctrination as Historical Abuse

The phrase attributed across centuries — to the Proverbs of Solomon, to Aristotle, and most famously to St. Ignatius of Loyola — "Give us a child until he's seven and we'll have him for life" — encapsulates a philosophy of educational capture that must be confronted directly. It was, and remains, the operating logic of institutions that prioritise the reproduction of belief systems over the cultivation of autonomous minds.

By contemporary developmental psychology and child rights standards, this doctrine constitutes a form of cognitive colonisation. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 29) asserts that education must develop the child's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential, and prepare the child for responsible life in a free society in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of the sexes, and friendship among peoples. The doctrine of Loyola — in its original intent of forming permanent religious loyalty before critical faculties mature — directly contradicts this.

To call it "child abuse" is not hyperbole when applied to its structural offspring: curricula that do not teach children *how* to think, only *what* to think; education systems that deny the poorest children access to STEM literacy, critical reasoning, and ethical frameworks; and digital exclusion that leaves township and rural children cognitively colonised by poverty and ignorance in an age when knowledge is the primary resource. A significant number of children are deprived in indicators such as access to ECD at 43%, hunger at 20%, and education and employment at 69% and 65% respectively — these are key variables that require policy interventions to improve development outcomes.

The indoctrination sin of our era is not primarily religious. It is the indoctrination of low expectation, of structural invisibility, of exclusion from the tools of human agency. This is the "sin against humanity" that demands urgent remedy.

III. The Stakes: Kemp's Warning and the Civilisational Calculus

Luke Kemp's *Goliath's Curse* provides the essential civilisational frame. Growth-obsessed, extractive institutions like the fossil fuel industry, big tech, and military-industrial complexes produce new

ways of annihilating our species, from climate change to nuclear war. Our systems are now so fast, complex, and interconnected that a future collapse will likely be global, swift, and irreversible. His historical autopsy of more than 440 societal lifespans reaches a counterintuitive but vital conclusion: more democratic societies tend to be more resilient, and making a more resilient world may well mean making a more just one.

The logic flows directly into education policy. A society that concentrates knowledge, technology, and cognitive capital in a privileged minority — while leaving the majority in epistemic poverty — is not merely unjust. It is structurally fragile in precisely the way Kemp identifies as fatal. We live in a single, interconnected global network where the failure of one Goliath could cause a complete system collapse that would be swift, global in scope, and potentially irreversible. The "Goliath" of an AI-enabled knowledge economy that excludes the majority of humanity's children is exactly such a failure point.

IV. South Africa's AI Policy Landscape: Promise and Peril

South Africa's policy trajectory is more developed than is often acknowledged, but its execution risks replicating the very inequalities it seeks to address.

The publication of South Africa's Draft National AI Policy in April 2026 marks an important shift from conceptual discussions on AI toward a structured national governance framework. It positions AI as a foundational capability that must be aligned with the Constitution, socio-economic transformation objectives, and South Africa's long-term development goals.

The draft policy is not without its merits. It identifies education, healthcare, and agriculture as the critical sectors for AI implementation, and calls for AI to be integrated into school curricula from primary to tertiary education, for community-based AI education centres to be established in underserved areas, and for a labour market transition strategy to manage job displacement. It also, notably, proposes protections for children against manipulative AI systems, including exploitative advertising and gamified features that encourage excessive screen time.

However, critics have valid concerns. The draft policy proposes a sweeping new institutional architecture including seven new oversight bodies — a bureaucratic proliferation that risks paralysis. Worse, the tendency to lead with governance structures before addressing foundational access inequalities risks cementing digital exclusion as a permanent feature of the AI era.

The research community's warning is direct: any technological rationality in the emergence of AI could worsen existing disparities instead of fostering inclusivity, particularly when viewed through an equality, equity, and decoloniality lens in sub-Saharan Africa. And from a practical standpoint: even when students have access to AI in education, it does not automatically mean that all students are able to reap the benefits of using AI, and the advanced nature of AI mechanics may raise additional intimidation to learners already struggling in marginalised schooling contexts.

The UNICEF Innocenti research office puts the implementation challenge most starkly: simply providing access to AI tools could prove counterproductive. With One Laptop per Child, the fallouts included wasted expenditure and poor learning outcomes. Unguided use of AI systems may actively deskill students and teachers. AI systems need to be designed for local contexts, local languages and local curricula.

V. A Framework for Dynamic, Pro-Poor AI/ICT Policy Development

The following framework is offered as a contribution to South Africa's ongoing policy development process. It is grounded in the principle that technology must be subservient to human development — People First — and structured to be inherently dynamic, avoiding the rigidity that has historically allowed policy to lag catastrophically behind technological reality.

1. Reframe the Purpose: From Regulatory Compliance to Human Capability Building

The dominant global AI governance paradigm — risk classification, compliance frameworks, audit requirements — is necessary but insufficient. It is, at its core, a defensive posture designed to protect existing social arrangements from disruption. For South Africa, where existing social arrangements are profoundly unjust, this is precisely the wrong ambition.

A dynamic policy framework must be anchored in Amartya Sen's capabilities approach: the question is not merely what AI systems are permitted to do, but what capabilities they actively enable in the poorest children. Every regulatory decision should be stress-tested against one question: *Does this increase or decrease the substantive freedom of the child in the informal settlement to develop her full human potential?*

Policymakers in South Africa should prioritise developing and implementing a comprehensive digital literacy and AI competency framework for teachers, including continuous professional development opportunities that equip educators with the necessary skills to integrate AI effectively. But this must extend downward — to ECD practitioners, to caregivers in informal settlements, and to the children themselves.

2. Community-Based AI/ICT People-Development Centres: The Architecture of Access

The vision of public AI/ICT access centres in informal settlements is not utopian — it has practical precedent and theoretical grounding. What is proposed here goes beyond internet cafés or library computer terminals. These are *People-Development Centres* (PDCs) — hybrid spaces that simultaneously serve as:

- **ECD learning environments** for the 0–7 age cohort, replacing the doctrine of Loyola with the doctrine of curiosity, play-based digital literacy, and mother-tongue engagement with technology;
- **STEM literacy hubs** offering structured, scaffolded AI-assisted learning in mathematics, science, and coding — in local languages — for school-age children;
- **Adult digital literacy centres** for caregivers, enabling them to support their children's learning and access economic opportunities;
- **Ethics and civic participation forums**, where questions of AI governance, data rights, and community values are discussed in accessible formats.

AI solutions must work offline to serve children in remote areas, ensuring personalised learning reaches all communities. A key ethical concern with AI in education is data privacy — AI tools collect extensive data on children's learning and behaviour, which if misused can reinforce inequalities, enable surveillance, or violate privacy. The PDC model must therefore be built with offline-first architecture, community data sovereignty, and explicit anti-surveillance principles embedded from inception — not retrofitted after deployment.

The evidence from adjacent models is promising. Mobile phone technology can be effectively used to enhance caregivers' knowledge of ECD and enable them to monitor and support their children's development in real-time. The SmartStart programme in South Africa demonstrates that innovative,

low-cost ECD programs operating in rural and township areas can work — and are "poised to benefit from more advanced, AI-powered interventions."

The ECD infrastructure challenge is acute. Many ECD centres in South Africa are in poor physical condition, and current legislation prevents public funds from being used to improve privately owned facilities. Centres in informal settlements cannot be upgraded through official channels because the land is ostensibly illegally occupied. The PDC model must be designed to sidestep this legislative contradiction — potentially through community land trusts, municipal partnerships, or special-purpose vehicles that hold assets in common ownership.

3. Language Justice as Non-Negotiable Infrastructure

South Africa's eleven official languages are not merely a cultural amenity — they are the primary cognitive infrastructure through which the majority of its children learn. Any AI/ICT policy that does not mandate mother-tongue content development is not a pro-poor policy; it is a pro-English-speaker policy in disguise.

Translation and adaptation of resources are essential to guarantee that every teacher, regardless of linguistic or cultural context, can benefit from new tools. UNESCO's work pioneering national AI competency frameworks with local language learning across Africa provides the model. South Africa's PDC framework must mandate isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sesotho, Setswana, Sepedi, and other language interfaces as a condition of any public funding — not as an optional feature.

4. Ubuntu as Governance Philosophy, Not Decoration

Central to African understanding of well-being is the Ubuntu concept — 'I am a person through other persons' — which is actively integrated into South African governance through initiatives such as truth and reconciliation, Ubuntu diplomacy, jurisprudence, and Batho Pele policies.

Ubuntu is not merely a sentiment to be invoked in policy preambles. As a governance philosophy, it provides specific, practical guidance for AI/ICT policy:

- **Community ownership over corporate ownership:** PDCs must be governed by community structures, not managed by private technology companies whose business models depend on data extraction;
- **Collective benefit as the primary metric:** AI systems deployed in PDCs must be evaluated on community-level outcomes, not individual engagement metrics or commercially defined "learning gains";
- **Intergenerational accountability:** Any idea of African higher education ought to be constituted by a defensible philosophy of Ubuntu, which invariably connects with the enactment of sustainable development through the manifestation of democratic citizenship. This principle applies equally to early childhood development — teaching children that they exist in relationship with their community, their ecosystem, and their ancestors is not mysticism; it is the foundation of ecological and social responsibility.

Sustainable development depends on harnessing the energy of the majority, meaning schools and communities work together, with staff and all learners practising Ubuntu. Leadership through Ubuntu is perceived as collective agency — a strong community-school partnership where teachers, learners, school leaders, parents, community, and local and central government co-participate in shaping and implementing learning programmes.

5. Financing the Vision: UBI, Social Grants, and the Public Investment Case

The financing of PDCs is complex but not impossible. Several mechanisms deserve serious policy attention:

Social grants as development investment: South Africa already operates one of the most extensive social protection systems in the developing world, with approximately 28 million social grant recipients in 2025. A portion of grant infrastructure — physical points of presence, digital connectivity, community trust — could be redirected toward PDC co-location, converting passive grant payment points into active development centres.

Universal Basic Income as enabling policy: UBI studies from Namibia, Kenya, Zambia, and Mexico show that basic income helps people invest in businesses, improve their income, and build long-term stability. Many recipients start small enterprises or enter into paid work. A phased UBI, beginning with the poorest communities first and broadening to universality over a few years, creates the economic floor on which genuine educational engagement becomes possible. A hungry child cannot learn; a caregiver in survival mode cannot support ECD. Income security and educational investment are not competing priorities — they are the same priority expressed at different scales.

However, the governance of financing requires vigilance. Under the guise of financial inclusion, private financial companies can and do target grant recipients for exploitation and extraction. If a Universal Basic Income Grant is to be successful in South Africa, then the grants payment system must be safeguarded from private actors seeking to make big profits at the expense of grant recipients. The same warning applies to AI/ICT in education: EdTech companies should not be permitted to use public access infrastructure as a market development subsidy for proprietary platforms.

VI. The Dynamic Regulatory Process: Principles for an Adaptive Framework

The word "dynamic" in the brief is doing important work. Traditional policy and regulatory development — consult, draft, gazette, implement, review every five years — is structurally incapable of keeping pace with AI's developmental velocity. The following principles are proposed for a genuinely dynamic process:

Principle 1 — Regulatory sandboxes with equity conditions: AI applications in education and ECD should be permitted to pilot in PDCs under regulatory sandbox arrangements, but with mandatory equity conditions: offline capability, mother-tongue availability, data sovereignty, community governance, and measurable learning outcomes for the lowest-income quintile.

Principle 2 — Community feedback as primary evidence: Policy revision cycles should be triggered not only by technical developments but by community-reported outcomes. PDC governance structures should have formal channels to surface policy concerns to the regulatory body — creating a bottom-up signal that supplements top-down monitoring.

Principle 3 — Constitutional stress-testing: Every AI/ICT policy instrument must be assessed against Section 29 (right to education), Section 10 (human dignity), and Section 9 (equality) of the South African Constitution before adoption. The question is not merely "does this comply with POPIA?" but "does this advance or retard the constitutional rights of the child in the informal settlement?"

Principle 4 — International solidarity, not dependent adoption: Deployments must align with POPIA and emerging AU/Africa governance frameworks. South Africa should position itself as a co-author of African AI governance, not a passive recipient of European or North American regulatory templates that were designed for very different socio-economic contexts.

Principle 5 — Anti-concentration as structural principle: Drawing directly from Kemp's analysis of civilisational fragility, concentration of AI capability in a small number of platforms or providers is not merely an economic competition concern — it is a resilience risk. Policy must actively encourage diversified, community-owned, open-source AI infrastructure.

VII. People First: Technology as Instrument, Not End

The profound wisdom in your concluding observation — that digital worlds and clouds, meaningful as they are, must be subservient to the primary objective of People First — aligns with the deepest currents of both African philosophy and contemporary civilisational analysis.

Halliday's *Otherlands* teaches that life goes on but species do not — looking forward on a palaeontology timescale, humankind will inevitably go extinct unless it learns the hard lessons that the fossil record encodes: that fragility follows from monoculture, that resilience is the product of diversity, and that the intricate relationships between species and ecosystems are far more durable than the dominance of any single actor. The child learning in a PDC in Khayelitsha or Soweto or Mathare is not merely acquiring skills for the knowledge economy. She is becoming a participant in the oldest and most important project: the collective management of a living planet by a species that has, uniquely, the capacity to choose its path.

Kemp's warning is complementary: the collective means to slay the Goliaths of climate change, big tech and authoritarianism lies through true, progressive democracy. Democracy, in this deepest sense, begins in the hovel — when a child who was previously invisible to the knowledge economy first discovers, through a screen in her language, that the universe is comprehensible and that she has a place in its story.

VIII. Recommendations Summary

1. **Adopt "People-First AI" as the constitutional frame** for all AI/ICT policy — not as rhetoric, but as a binding evaluative standard against which every instrument is tested.
2. **Establish Community People-Development Centres (PDCs)** in informal settlements as the primary delivery mechanism for ECD-to-adult AI literacy, designed offline-first, mother-tongue-first, and community-governed.
3. **Mandate mother-tongue AI content** as a condition of public funding — all eleven official languages, with active investment in indigenous language datasets.
4. **Link PDC infrastructure to the social grants and UBI development pathway**, co-locating development centres with grant payment infrastructure and using income support as the economic floor that enables educational engagement.
5. **Adopt Ubuntu governance principles** for PDC management — community ownership, collective benefit metrics, intergenerational accountability, and explicit rejection of data-extractive business models.
6. **Build adaptive regulatory mechanisms** — sandboxes, community feedback loops, constitutional stress-testing, and revision triggers linked to equity outcomes rather than technology calendar alone.
7. **Resist regulatory capture by Big Tech** — the seven proposed oversight bodies in the draft AI policy are only valuable if they are independent, adequately resourced, and structurally insulated from the commercial interests they regulate.
8. **Champion African AI governance co-authorship** at the AU level, drawing on South Africa's constitutional framework and its experience of both inequality and post-apartheid democratic reconstruction as a source of genuinely original governance insight.
9. **Invest in local AI systems** — as researchers have noted, AI systems need to be designed for local contexts, local languages and local curricula to suit the needs of teachers and workers; with such systems, that have scaffolding mechanisms like structured prompting, coupled with supportive teachers and skilled learners, the potential is enormous.

10. **Evaluate all AI education investments against a single non-negotiable metric:** measurable improvement in learning outcomes for children in the lowest income quintile, in their mother tongue, in under-resourced schools and communities.

Closing Reflection

The question "is the modern education system broken?" has, in South Africa, a straightforward empirical answer: yes, for the majority of its children, profoundly so. But the more important question is whether we have the collective will to build something better — not merely a repaired version of an inherently unequal system, but a fundamentally reimagined one in which the philosophy of Ubuntu, the warnings of Kemp, the deep-time wisdom of Halliday, and the constitutional promise of 1994 are finally honoured in practice.

The technology exists. The frameworks are emerging. The need is undeniable. What remains is the political and moral choice to put People — especially the poorest, youngest, most invisible people — First.

Key references drawn upon: South Africa's Draft National AI Policy (April 2026); World Bank South Africa Economic Update Edition 15 (February 2025); Luke Kemp, Goliath's Curse (2025); Thomas Halliday, Otherlands (2022); UNICEF Innocenti, "How AI Can Transform Africa's Learning Crisis" (2024); Van Leer Foundation, "Improving ECD in Informal Settlements" (2025); NORRAG, "Ethical AI as a Tool for Decolonizing South Africa's ECD Sector" (2025); Journal of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, "AI in Education: Challenges, Opportunities and Possibilities" (2025); Institute for Economic Justice, Universal Basic Income research series (2024–2026); UNESCO, "AI Competency Frameworks and Local Language Learning in Africa" (2025); Yusef Waghid, "Education for Sustainable Development: The Quest for Ubuntu," SAGE (2025).



<https://techcentral.co.za/south-africa-is-sleepwalking-into-another-ai-policy-failure/281595/> | Celeste Labuschagne | 20 May 2026

South Africa is sleepwalking into another AI policy failure



The author, Celeste Labuschagne

Teachers are improvising and learners are exposed unevenly - South Africa urgently needs a national AI policy for schools.

A pattern is emerging within our schooling system that needs highlighting as South Africa faces its next major technology decision. In coding and robotics, with the best intentions, directives were given, curriculum was developed and then the move forward-stalled. We are beginning to see take shape again with AI.

Globally, the question is no longer whether artificial intelligence should be used in schools, but how it can be integrated responsibly, ethically and effectively. Most countries entered the generative AI debate with national AI or digital strategies already in place, many updated since 2023.

The OECD's [Digital Education Outlook 2026](#) notes that the most common immediate policy response has been national or system-level guidance covering ethical use, academic integrity, data protection,

and the roles of teachers and students. In South Africa, we are still waiting for that conversation to begin properly.

Learners need to be taught how to interact with and integrate these tools critically and honestly. Without direction from the department of basic education, teachers are experimenting with AI tools on their own because learners are already using them at home, and pretending otherwise is not a strategy. Without a shared framework, the outcome will be uneven – some learners receiving structured exposure, others receiving none, with no curriculum designed to build progressively from one year to the next.

AI literacy cannot be introduced through a once-off lesson or isolated workshop. Like mathematics or language, it needs to develop over time, with foundational skills built grade by grade. Teachers also need training to help learners use these tools in ways that strengthen thinking rather than simply outsource it.

Familiar pattern

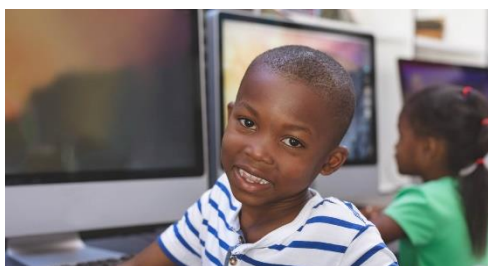
My concern is that we are slipping into a familiar pattern. The DBE spent years building momentum around “fourth Industrial Revolution” skills such as coding, robotics and future-readiness. Curriculum pilots were launched, timelines announced and educators, myself included, invested considerable time writing manuals and preparing classroom material.

Then the focus shifted back to foundational literacy and numeracy because the system was not ready for what had been promised. Educators were left holding work prepared for programmes that never fully materialised.

Read: [Gen Z has stopped buying the AI dream](#)

That is not a criticism of prioritising literacy and numeracy; those challenges are real and urgent, and we cannot progress when children cannot read. That a September 2025 [promised revision](#) of the white paper on e-education, first developed in 2004, has not happened is concerning in an era in which technological advances are moving at lightning speed.

Since AI cannot be policed, just like the use of Google cannot, learners need to be taught how to interact with and integrate these tools critically and honestly. Without that, we are doing our children a disservice. They will enter a world where AI is embedded in everyday systems, processes and decision-making, without the building blocks to navigate it.



For parents, no policy means no clarity on what their children are being exposed to or how. For teachers, it means navigating fast-moving technology without standards, training or support.

The question is no longer whether AI should feature in education as it already does. The real issue is whether South Africa can move beyond discussion and provide the clarity,

consistency and implementation that schools, teachers and learners actually need.

The author, [Celeste Labuschagne](#), is a PhD candidate and lecturer and learning framework developer at Belgium Campus iTversity

Is South Africa sleepwalking into another policy failure? A History of ICT Policies in South Africa

Historical List of ICT Related Policies in South Africa since 1994: AI Research.

Prompt: Please provide a historical list with dates of South Africa's policies, policy amendments, and major regulatory policies in the Telecommunications, ICT, Broadband, Broadcast, and related sectors since democracy in 1994.

DeepSeek 21 May 2026

Since the dawn of democracy in 1994, South Africa has undergone a significant legal and regulatory evolution in its telecommunications, broadcasting, and ICT sectors. The key policy driver has been transforming a state-controlled, racially exclusive system into a competitive, universally accessible service-driven market.

Here is a chronological list of the major policies, amendments, and regulatory milestones in South Africa since 1994.

The Foundational Era (1994–2005)

The first decade of democracy focused on dismantling the apartheid-era monopoly, introducing managed liberalization, and establishing independent regulators.

- **1994: Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP).** The ANC's flagship policy framework identified universal access to telecommunications and information technology as a key priority for redressing historical imbalances, specifically targeting schools and clinics for service rollout.
- **1996: Telecommunications Act (Act 103 of 1996).** This was the cornerstone post-apartheid telecom law. It established the **South African Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (SATRA)** and granted **Telkom** a 5-year exclusivity period in exchange for network rollout obligations to underserved areas. A key target was **20 telephones per 100 people** per province by 2000.
- **2000: Telkom's Partial Privatization.** The government sold 30% of Telkom to a strategic equity partner (Thintana, a consortium of SBC and Telekom Malaysia) to fund network expansion, though this was criticized for cementing monopoly power rather than fostering competition.
- **2000: Convergence Debate Begins.** The publication of the Green and White Papers on "Convergence" set the stage for merging telecom and broadcasting regulations, recognizing the blurring lines between technologies.
- **2001: Launch of the Universal Service Agency (USA).** Established to manage the **Universal Service Fund (USF)** (financed by industry levies) and promote access for poor and rural communities.
- **2002: Merger to ICASA.** The **Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA)** was formed by merging SATRA (telecoms) and the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), creating a single regulator for both sectors.

The Liberalization Era (2005–2010)

This period marked a significant shift away from Telkom's monopoly with the introduction of the Electronic Communications Act, designed to regulate all forms of electronic communications under a single framework.

- **2006: Electronic Communications Act (ECA) (Act 36 of 2005).** This was the landmark legislation that replaced the 1996 Act. It:
 - **Ended** Telkom's monopoly.
 - Introduced a converged licensing framework (Individual vs. Class Licenses) for all electronic communications.
 - Mandated "**under-serviced area licenses**" for small entrepreneurs.
 - Formalized the role of the **Universal Service and Access Fund (USAF)**.
- **2006/2007: Licensing of the Second Network Operator (SNO).** After delays, **Neotel** was licensed to compete with Telkom, theoretically ending fixed-line monopoly.
- **2008: Broadcasting Digital Migration Policy.** The government published a policy to migrate South Africa from analog to **Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT)**, aiming to align with the global 2015 deadline (later delayed).

The Broadband Era (2010–2020)

With competition slowly increasing, policy moved toward rolling out high-speed broadband infrastructure and addressing high data costs through regulatory intervention.

- **2010: Facilities Leasing Regulations.** ICASA published regulations forcing network operators with "significant market power" to lease their facilities (like towers and ducts) to competitors at cost-oriented prices.
- **2013: South Africa Connect.** The national broadband policy was adopted, setting ambitious targets (e.g., 100% of schools online by 2020, 50% household internet access) and declaring broadband a basic service.
- **2014: ICT Policy Review (National Integrated ICT Policy White Paper).** Initiated to review all existing ICT laws, leading to proposals to license high-demand spectrum, further unbundle Telkom, and strengthen ICASA's powers.
- **2018: End of State Capture Enquiry (Broadcasting Context).** Public hearings revealed extensive political interference and governance failures at the **SABC (public broadcaster)**, leading to major board shake-ups and reform attempts.

Recent & Future-Ready Policies (2021–Present)

Recent policies focus on releasing high-demand spectrum, introducing "use it or share it" rules to prevent hoarding, and streamlining infrastructure deployment.

- **2020: Competition Commission Data Services Market Enquiry (Findings).** The enquiry concluded that high data prices were due to a lack of competition among Vodacom, MTN, Telkom, and Cell C, leading to recommendations for **data price cuts**.
- **2022: Radio Frequency Spectrum Auction.** ICASA finally auctioned high-demand spectrum in the 700MHz, 800MHz, 2600MHz, and 3500MHz bands after years of legal delays,

awarding spectrum to major operators (Vodacom, MTN, Telkom, and Liquid Intelligent Technologies).

- **2023: Rapid Deployment Policy Direction.** The Minister issued a policy direction to ICASA to develop "**rapid deployment**" regulations to speed up network rollouts, reduce municipal red tape (wayleaves), and prevent infrastructure duplication.
- **2026: Electronic Communications Amendment Bill (Proposed)** . This new draft bill proposes radical changes still under review:
 - **"Use it or share it" principle:** Spectrum unused for two years must be shared with competitors.
 - **Mandatory Roaming/MVNOs:** Spectrum holders covering 90%+ of the population *must* provide roaming and Mobile Virtual Network Operator (MVNO) access.
 - **Essential Facilities List:** ICASA will create a specific list of infrastructure (e.g., towers, backhaul) subject to strict wholesale pricing rules.

The Broadcast Sector

While the above technical regulations govern delivery, specific broadcast policies have shaped content:

- **Public Broadcasting:** The **SABC** was restructured to serve a public mandate ("inform, educate, entertain") rather than state propaganda.
- **Local Content Quotas:** ICASA enforces quotas requiring broadcasters to air a specific percentage of South African-produced content (e.g., 55% local music on radio).

Analogue to Digital Migration: Still ongoing after numerous deadline extensions, this process aims to free up high-demand spectrum (the "digital dividend") for mobile broadband.



<https://www.science.org/content/article/india-s-national-ai-platform-tackles-country-s-many-tongues> | 16 Mar 2026 | By [T.V. Padma](#)

India's national AI platform tackles the country's many tongues

Bhashini aims to put the power of AI in the hands of all Indians

About 2 years ago, India's Maharashtra state took advantage of the nation's government-backed artificial intelligence platform, Bhashini, to launch an AI-powered app for farmers. The goal was to provide information on topics such as government agriculture schemes, weather, pests, and crop prices in the state's dominant Marathi language. It wasn't long before officials in the largely tribal district of Nandurbar received a call. The app made no sense to people speaking an ancient tribal Bhili language, the caller said. Could their language please be included, too?

Such are the challenges facing Bhashini, India's ambitious effort to make AI available to everyone in a country of 1.4 billion, with deep disparities in education and economics and countless languages. "There are over 100 languages spoken in India with thousands of dialects and less than 25 to 30 languages are included in AI space so far," says Santosh Kevlani, voice and language head at Bengaluru, India-based EkStep Foundation, which supports open digital tech for large-scale social impact.

Launched by India's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology in 2022, Bhashini (*bhasha*, a South Asian word for language, plus interface with India) continues to expand. At the Global AI Summit in New Delhi last month, for example, it unveiled VoicERA, software to make the platform's

AI models available over phone networks, including landlines. Its growing pains also continue. “I am sure Bhashini will evolve rapidly. But it will need to improve the accuracy of different dialects, a universal problem all models working on Indian languages are facing,” says Luv Singh, chief technical officer at the Vowels of the People Association, a nonprofit that assessed Bhashini in a pilot study in schools in Maharashtra state.

Most large-scale AI systems cater to a small set of dominant global languages, says Bhashini CEO Amitabh Nag. Bhashini represents an alternative approach that treats the ability to handle language diversity as a core design goal, he adds. Other multilingual large language models, developed by academic consortia and the private sector, are gaining momentum in India, often with government support. But Bhashini is the flagship. The \$48.78 million (4500 million rupee) platform aims to democratize information and government services across India. It can help a child struggling to follow a math lesson taught in English, maintain a record of village council meetings, or translate official speeches into a local language. Its core components are open source, and it is designed to allow anyone, from academic research institutes and state governments to startups and local community organizations, to add new training data sets and develop new applications.

The platform can now translate 35 international languages and 36 Indian languages. For 22 of those languages, it also offers automatic speech recognition. Users can simply pose a query in their mother tongue, rather than having to type it. “For technology to be truly inclusive, it should not impose new learning demands, or burden users with unfamiliar interactions or require them to adapt their existing habits,” says Kevlani, whose foundation partners with Bhashini in testing and deployment.

Bhashini is meant to serve users like Nooka Raju, a Telugu-speaking farmer in Wadadi village in Andhra Pradesh state who needs easy access to advice about improving his flood-sodden soil. “Never mind the market prices, I first need advice on how to improve my soil, and what can I grow on it meanwhile,” he says. “How many apps do I have to download and keep checking for information?” he asks.

The initial challenge facing the effort was limited computing capacity for training and benchmarking the AI, Nag says. A bigger hurdle was collecting and processing the training data. Many Indian languages lack standardized texts, and data sets comprising speech and text collections are scattered across institutions and departments. Optical character recognition software, which converts text on paper into a digital format, struggles with diverse Indian scripts, layouts, and handwritten formats. Written languages in India often combine a consonant and a vowel into a single unit, adding complexity.

Three years of user feedback have helped, says the Bhashini team, which is now focusing on improving the quality of translations, instead of simply expanding to more languages and topic areas. Researchers have played a role in the fine-tuning. A nonprofit tech organization called Wadhvani AI, for example, has developed a Bhashini-based approach to assessing children’s reading fluency in Gujarati, based on automatic speech recognition. Existing ASR models are trained mostly on adult speech in quiet settings, and perform poorly in noisy classrooms or areas with poor internet. Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras worked with the Wadhvani model to make it more resilient and forgiving, although it still needs to make fewer errors and better understand the context.

And the uses continue to multiply. In Maharashtra, the farming app now offers translations in Bhili. Jugabandi, an app that connects WhatsApp, Bhashini, and ChatGPT, allows users to query ChatGPT in multiple languages to glean basic information about laws and access to justice. “The main

Bhashini language tools were excellent,” says Sachin Malhan, co-founder of Agami, the nonprofit that created Jugalbandi. Some of the less used Bhashini languages weren’t as reliable as the others initially, but have since improved, he says.

Nag acknowledges Bhashini has a long road ahead. “We have made meaningful progress, but there is much more to be done.” But the goal is as alluring as ever. “Language is not just a medium of communication,” Nag says. “It is identity, dignity, and access.”



<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2225474®=3&lang=2> | 09 FEB 2026

Artificial Intelligence for Culture and Languages

Key Takeaways

- India is institutionalising AI for culture and languages through national platforms such as BHASHINI, Anuvadini, Gyan Bharatam and Adi Vaani etc.
- AI is being used to make cultural and knowledge assets usable by digitisation of manuscripts, translation of academic content, and inclusion of tribal and endangered languages.
- AI is being leveraged to integrate cultural and creative sectors into digital value chains, linking artisans to platforms and opportunities.

From Cultural Preservation to Cultural Participation

India’s cultural heritage and linguistic diversity shape its social identity and shared knowledge systems. From manuscripts, monuments, performing arts and crafts to oral traditions, folklore and indigenous knowledge, culture in India is created and passed on through many languages, scripts and spoken forms.

According to Census 2011, India’s linguistic landscape includes 22 Scheduled languages and 99 Non-Scheduled languages, spread across multiple language families, along with thousands of mother tongues and tribal languages^[1]. The Government of India has undertaken sustained institutional, educational and digital initiatives to preserve and promote our linguistic heritage and the rich traditional knowledge that it holds.

At the core of this effort is the emphasis on leveraging emerging technology including AI, to preserve cultural resources and traditional knowledge, and make it available to people in the language and formats that they are familiar and comfortable with. This calls for democratisation of technology. AI has emerged as a key enabler in this process. By supporting the digitisation and discovery of cultural assets, enabling multilingual and voice-based access, and facilitating engagement at scale, AI helps bridge gaps between heritage and people, tradition and technology.

This approach reflects the vision of using AI as technology for humanity, aligned with the goal of “Welfare for All and Happiness for All”.

Building Language as Digital Public Infrastructure

To expand access to culture, knowledge and public services, the Government of India is taking an infrastructure-based approach.

Key pillars of this language infrastructure include:

National Language Translation Mission (NLTM) – BHASHINI^[2]

Launched in 2022 under the National Language Translation Mission, BHASHINI was developed to respond to India’s wide linguistic diversity in



the digital space. The initiative focuses on building language and voice capabilities directly into digital systems. This allows public platforms to function effectively across the many languages used in the country.

BHASHINI addresses three key barriers together:

- Language barrier – systems that do not understand local languages or accents
- Digital barrier – complex interfaces that discourage use
- Literacy barrier – dependence on reading and typing

At a system level, BHASHINI is building multilingual AI as national digital public infrastructure. It provides language services such as translation, speech-to-text, text-to-speech, transliteration and document understanding across Indian languages, allowing platforms to add language and voice features without building them from scratch.

BHASHINI is already operating at scale:

- Supports voice in 22 languages and text services in 36 languages
- Hosts 350+ AI models and datasets
- Has completed over 4 billion language inferences so far

Its strength lies in collaboration. Research institutions, language experts, startups, state governments and industry partners jointly contribute to the platform, ensuring that language models improve through real-world use and local participation.

As a foundational language layer, BHASHINI turns linguistic diversity into practical digital access, enabling people to engage with information, culture and public services in languages and formats they understand.

- Key examples of use of Bhashini
 - **Real-Time Speech Translation at Kashi Tamil Sangamam 2.0**[\[3\]](#):

At the **Kashi Tamil Sangamam** event in Varanasi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi used the BHASHINI AI platform during his address. His Hindi speech was **translated in real time into Tamil** so that Tamil-speaking attendees could understand the address directly in their language, demonstrating BHASHINI's real-time translation capability in a live cultural exchange context.

- **Multilingual Support at Maha Kumbh 2025**[\[4\]](#):

BHASHINI powered the **Kumbh Sah'Al'yak chatbot**, a multilingual, voice-enabled assistant used at Maha Kumbh 2025 to provide navigation and event information to pilgrims in **11 languages** (Hindi, English and nine others). It also supported features like a **digital Lost & Found solution with real-time text and voice translation** to make the event more accessible for attendees from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

As foundational language infrastructure, BHASHINI translates diversity into access, helping people engage with information, culture and public services in their own languages and formats — a critical step toward inclusive participation and empowerment.

Technology Development for Indian Languages (TDIL)[\[5\]](#)

TDIL is a long-standing Government of India programme that laid the foundational technology base for Indian language computing, covering scripts, speech and text across multiple Indian languages.

- It focuses on the development and standardisation of core language technologies, including:
 - machine translation

- optical character recognition (OCR) for Indian scripts
- speech-to-text and text-to-speech systems
- handwriting recognition and transliteration tools
- TDIL enables practical use by:
 - creating shared linguistic resources, datasets and standards that can be reused across platforms
 - supporting cross-lingual access, allowing users to retrieve and interact with information in their own languages
 - ensuring consistent digital representation of Indian languages across systems and devices
- TDIL-supported systems, such as Indian language machine translation tools, demonstrated early real-world applications of multilingual access in governance, education and information dissemination.

As a foundational language technology programme, TDIL enabled India's transition from language research to scalable language infrastructure, eventually directly supporting platforms such as BHASHINI and strengthening inclusive access to digital, cultural and knowledge ecosystems.

Anuvadini (AICTE)

Anuvadini is an AI-based multilingual translation platform developed by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) to enable large-scale translation of academic, technical and knowledge content into Indian languages.

- It supports practical language access through:
 - AI-enabled translation of textbooks, reference material and learning resources
 - Multimodal capabilities, including text, document and speech-based translation
 - Integration with national repositories such as e-KUMBH [\[6\]](#), enabling access to translated content at scale
- Anuvadini enables practical use cases such as:
 - expanding access to higher education and technical knowledge for students in regional languages
 - supporting skilling and capacity building by making learning resources available in local languages
 - strengthening Indian languages as mediums of knowledge, not only communication

As an AI-driven language access platform, **Anuvadini expands access to knowledge and skills in Indian languages**. By enabling participation in education, skilling and cultural knowledge systems, it contributes to **social empowerment and livelihood opportunities**.

AI for Cultural Heritage, Knowledge Systems and Linguistic Diversity

To preserve India's vast cultural legacy while enabling wider public access and participation, the Government of India is deploying AI across heritage preservation, traditional knowledge systems and linguistic diversity, with a focus on scale, discoverability and inclusion.

Gyan Bharatam Mission [\[7\]](#)

It is national mission for the survey, documentation, digitisation and dissemination of India's manuscript heritage and traditional knowledge systems, including creation of a National Digital Repository.

- Leverages AI-enabled tools such as:
 - handwritten text recognition (HTR) and OCR for ancient manuscripts
 - metadata extraction and intelligent cataloguing across scripts and languages
 - improved discovery and access to digitised heritage content
- Key achievements include [\[8\]](#):
 - Over 44 lakh manuscripts documented in the Kriti Sampada digital repository
 - Mission approved with an outlay of ₹482.85 crore (2024–31) to scale digitisation and access

The mission will ensure cultural heritage to move from physical archives to shared digital access, supporting long-term preservation and increased public engagement.

Gyan-Setu (National AI Innovation Challenge under Gyan Bharatam)[\[9\]](#)

Gyan-Setu was launched as a national challenge to source AI-led solutions for manuscript preservation, decipherment, restoration and access.

- Focused on practical AI use cases including:
 - Cataloguing and Dataset Creation
 - Digitisation and Archiving
 - Script deciphering and Knowledge dissemination
- Key outcomes include:
 - Successful completion of the national challenge with award-winning AI prototypes identified for heritage applications

The initiative created a pipeline of deployable AI solutions, strengthening collaboration between cultural institutions and the AI ecosystem.

Adi Vaani – AI Platform for Tribal Languages[\[10\]](#)

Adi Vaani is an AI-based platform for the preservation, promotion and revitalisation of tribal languages, which are central to India’s cultural and oral heritage.

- Enables practical use through:
 - real-time translation between Hindi, English and tribal languages
 - speech-to-text transcription for oral languages
 - language learning modules for younger generations
 - digitisation of folklore, oral histories and community narratives
- Key achievements (beta phase [\[11\]](#)):
 - Initial rollout covering tribal languages such as Santali, Bhili, Mundari and Gondi, with expansion underway
 - Use of the platform for subtitling advisories and public messages in tribal languages
- Strengthens inclusion by bringing tribal languages into digital, educational and public communication spaces.

Enabling Participation and Opportunity through AI[\[12\]](#)

As AI improves access to culture, language and knowledge, the next step is to turn this access into economic opportunity and social empowerment. This is especially important for India’s cultural and

creative sectors, where livelihoods depend on traditional skills, local knowledge and community-based practices.

Artisans, craftspeople and cultural practitioners make up a large part of India's informal and creative economy. When designed to be inclusive and sensitive to local context, AI can support these livelihoods by improving visibility, productivity, skills and participation in digital markets—while preserving cultural identity.

AI-Enabled Pathways for Artisans and Cultural Workers

Improved market access through language-inclusive platforms

- AI-based translation and discovery tools help artisans present their products, stories and cultural value across different languages and regions.
- Multilingual catalogues and interfaces reduce dependence on intermediaries and expand reach to wider markets.
- Voice-first and inclusive digital engagement
 - Voice-enabled interfaces allow artisans with limited literacy or digital familiarity to access platforms, training modules and services in their own languages.
 - Such interfaces enable broader participation in digital systems.
- Skilling, productivity and enterprise support
 - AI-enabled learning tools can deliver on-demand training in areas such as quality improvement, digital marketing, pricing and inventory management.
 - Data-based insights help artisans plan production, manage demand and improve efficiency.
- Trust, provenance and cultural authenticity
 - AI-supported documentation and tagging systems help establish authenticity and build trust for heritage and GI-tagged products.
 - Clear and transparent digital representation increases consumer confidence and protects cultural value.



By building language access, voice-based tools and cultural understanding into AI systems, artisans and cultural workers become active users of technology, not just beneficiaries. In this way, AI supports social empowerment by strengthening dignity of work, sustainable livelihoods and India's cultural and creative traditions.

Advancing Inclusive AI for Culture, Languages and Livelihoods

As India expands the use of AI across public systems, the main aim is to ensure that technology leads to greater cultural participation, social empowerment and sustainable livelihoods. Recent policy thinking, including NITI Aayog's report on AI for Inclusive Societal Development, points to the following key aspects for better use of AI in the public space^[13]:

- Building trust through verifiable digital credentials, allowing training providers, employers, platforms and government bodies to issue reliable work and skill certificates that can be easily verified across systems.
- Strengthening AI infrastructure by expanding language-based AI tools and supporting AI systems that work offline and in areas with poor internet access.

- Encouraging innovation at the local level by supporting state and district programmes, using local facilities as digital work hubs, and working with community organisations to improve digital skills and adoption.
- Promoting multi-stakeholder collaboration, bringing together government, technology providers, academia, industry bodies and civil society to scale inclusive AI solutions in a coordinated and sustainable manner.

These efforts will position AI not merely as a technological tool, but as a public good that reflects India’s cultural and linguistic diversity. This human-centred approach reinforces the idea of technology for humanity—AI that listens, understands and responds to people’s lived realities. By aligning AI deployment with inclusion, participation and opportunity, India can ensure that its cultural heritage and creative communities continue to remain active contributors to a digitally empowered and socially inclusive future.

[Click here for pdf file.](#)



<https://iol.co.za/news/south-africa/2026-04-24-draft-ai-policy-why-south-africa-must-fund-local-innovators-to-compete-on-the-global-stage/> | 24 April 2026 | [Gcwalisile Khanyile](#)

Draft AI Policy: Why South Africa must fund local innovators to compete on the global stage



Solly Malatsi, Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies, whose department is the custodian of the Draft National Policy on AI.

A call has been made for South Africa to create a fund that would finance local innovators building tech to compete with global Artificial Intelligence (AI).

A personal observation: Competition is a foreign notion in UBUNTU. Our ancient and modern ancestors, from Homo erectus to the pre-Neolithic Revolutionary Homo sapiens, discouraged any form of competition totally in their egalitarian lifestyles, which guided them to success in populating the whole world. This thought needs greater studies, from the heights of our academic institutions to the base of our inequality pyramids. The AI analyses show that South Africans are engaged in this thought process, but is it confined to Academia as usual?

This comes after the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies published the Draft South Africa Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy for public comments, with the closing date of mid-June 2026.

The Draft Policy proposes the formation of a [new AI governance ecosystem](#), including a National AI Commission, an AI Ethics Board, an AI Regulatory Authority, an AI Ombudsperson, a National AI Safety Institute, and an AI Insurance Superfund designed to compensate individuals harmed by AI systems in cases where liability is unclear.

Lars Gumede, a tech expert, AI systems developer, and founder of NowNow, said that the policy does not seek to promote the development of local tech to compete with and catch up with foreign tech; instead, it focuses on partnering with and using global tech.

He added that top countries are funding any innovators building sovereign and local AI systems to reduce reliance on foreign AI.

Gumede stated that funding local innovators must be a cornerstone and one of the most important aspects of the draft policy, with partnerships designed to temporarily support and build local expertise.

Explaining how the government should implement this, he said: “Get 5-10 of the top AI minds in South Africa to determine a criterion that will determine who gets funded. Then use those AI start-ups financed through this fund for local initiatives and AI integration. Such a thing can be done immediately,” he stated.

Gumede expressed concern that the draft policy is overly complex, with too many components, making it unrealistic for proper implementation.

“The policy calls for the creation of so many offices, partnerships, and aims to ‘foster and support’ so many things that the concerned departments will be juggling a thousand plates each. Instead, cut down to three to five clearly defined initiatives and responsibilities per department. Make each plan clear, funded, and transparent,” he said.

Gumede stated that each plan must be concrete, not vague. “Instead of ‘fostering inclusive development of AI’, each department should have a clear and measurable task.”

A personal observation: Who determines this clear and measurable task? Our academics and or our political leaders? Our foreign expert partners? Or the wisdom of our ancestors who invested in time for broad dynamic Ubuntu style consultations which drove their successful evolution?

Gumede stated that one of the major issues is that the full implementation of the policy is scheduled for 2028.

“It needs to be implemented now. If the implementation only starts in 2028, then the first results and setup may only be in 2029. Meanwhile, globally, the top countries have already started implementing.”

A personal observation: The implementation timelines used by our ancestors was in the order of 2-million years. The new experiences they encountered along the way did not allow for start and end dates – the whole process of development was a continuum, a living Ubuntu process. This is the dynamic process outlined in the AI enquiries detailed in this document.

Gumede urged the government to start implementing crucial basic initiatives, such as funding local AI startups now, as the country cannot afford to wait until 2028.

Professor Donrich Thaldar and Dr Siddharthiya Pillay, legal experts in health, technology, and AI, from the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s School of Law, said the policy marks a significant milestone in the country’s AI governance journey.

The experts said the draft policy identifies healthcare as one of four critical sectors for [AI implementation](#), alongside education, agriculture, and public administration.

“The publication of South Africa’s Draft National AI Policy is a welcome and overdue development. From a healthcare perspective, the draft policy gets several things right. It identifies healthcare as a critical sector, adopts an insurance superfund for AI harm, addresses bias and workforce concerns, and promotes innovation through regulatory sandboxes and centres of excellence. These are significant advances, and where they align with proposals made by the academic community, this should be acknowledged,” Thaldar and Pillay stated.

However, the experts flagged four aspects that require ‘substantive improvements’, as the AI Insurance Superfund, blanket Human-in-the-loop (HITL) requirement, moving beyond POPIA to address health data ownership, and amendment of the Medicines and Related Substances Act to widen the definition of ‘medical device’ to encompass AI software used in healthcare settings.

On liability, the draft policy proposes an AI Insurance Superfund modelled on the Road Accident Fund (RAF) to compensate individuals harmed by AI-driven outcomes.

The experts described it as a significant step in the right direction, but cautioned that a compensation fund, standing alone, is insufficient.

“In a comprehensive analysis of the core legal concepts relevant to liability for AI harm in healthcare, Bottomley and Thaldar demonstrated that traditional fault-based liability, product liability, and strict liability each face fundamental difficulties when applied to AI systems. Black-box algorithms make it virtually impossible to establish causation and fault; the dynamic learning nature of AI deviates from static product definitions, and strict liability risks subjecting stakeholders to material burdens without a fair opportunity to avoid them,” the experts stated.

Thaldar and Pillay recommended that the AI Insurance Superfund must be accompanied by a reconciliation-based dispute resolution institution, as without it, the fund is a blunt instrument that lacks capacity for systemic learning.

The experts stated that the blanket Human-in-the-loop (HITL) requirement must be tempered by recognition that in low-resource healthcare settings, AI fills gaps rather than complements existing expertise, and alternative oversight mechanisms, such as pre-deployment certification, are more appropriate.

“AI in rural and remote healthcare settings in South Africa aims to provide diagnostic and treatment support where human specialists are unavailable. However, requiring that a medical expert be in the loop at all times defeats the purpose of deploying AI in these settings,” the experts said.

Thaldar and Pillay stated that the draft policy’s exclusive reliance on the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) is insufficient; it must move beyond POPIA to explicitly address health data ownership and encourage research institutions to claim ownership of newly generated data instances to provide legal certainty and enable innovation.

“The draft policy should recommend amendment of the Medicines and Related Substances Act to widen the definition of ‘medical device’ to encompass AI software used in healthcare settings. This, by building on South African Health Products Regulatory Authority’s (SAHPRA) recent regulatory guidance for Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (AI/ML)-enabled medical devices,” Thaldar and Pillay said.

On the healthcare workforce, the draft policy extensively addresses education and reskilling. It provides for the integration of AI education from foundational to tertiary levels, the establishment of specialised training programmes, and the creation of reskilling programmes for workers in AI-impacted sectors, the experts said.

Thaldar and Pillay said that on innovation, the draft policy provides for AI Centres of Excellence, accelerators, and regulatory sandboxes, as well as support for startups through grants and compute credits.

“While these are positive steps, the draft policy does not specifically adopt a proposal for a public-sector health data institution working in tandem with the patient electronic health record system. This is a missed opportunity, as access to high-quality, representative health data remains a critical bottleneck for AI innovation in healthcare,” the experts stated.

They added that AI health interventions in developing countries frequently fail to scale after donor funding ends because of governance gaps; they suggested that a reconciliation commission would provide an institutional anchor that could support the transition from pilot to scale by offering a predictable, learning-oriented dispute resolution pathway.

“The draft policy should, therefore, be amended to provide not only for the AI Insurance Superfund, but also for a sui generis dispute resolution institution that administers the fund, resolves disputes through reconciliation rather than litigation, and develops evidence-based guidelines. Without this institutional counterpart, the insurance fund risks becoming an administratively burdensome mechanism with no capacity for systemic learning,” Thaldar and Pillay stated.

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Latest policy developments:

10 April 2026: DRAFT SOUTH AFRICA NATIONAL ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) POLICY.

https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/202604/54477gen3880.pdf

Use of ChatGPT to draft full policy exposes AI Hallucination with unverifiable references.

Sunday, 26 April, 2026: Minister announces withdrawal of draft AI Policy.

<https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/minister-announces-withdrawal-draft-ai-policy>



<https://iscresearch.com/isl-why-education-must-evolve/> | By Naheed Bardai | Apr 16, 2026 | [ISL Magazine](#)

Failing Our Future: Why Education Must Evolve to Prepare Young People for a Collapsing World

Young people are already stepping forward in movements for climate justice, equity and peace; but are schools structured to support them? Naheed Bardai explores why education must evolve beyond subject silos and exam metrics and shares how UWC Atlantic is embedding systems thinking and ethical leadership at the heart of its curriculum.

For decades, education has been treated as a slow-moving institution, proudly traditional, structurally rigid and largely insulated from the turbulence shaping the world beyond the classroom. But today, as our planet barrels toward intertwined environmental, social and geopolitical crises, that rigidity is not harmless. It is dangerous.

Across the globe, young people are inheriting a world in profound instability. Climate systems are tipping toward irreversible damage. Inequality is widening and conflicts are reshaping borders, alliances and human lives. Yet despite this accelerating fragility, most education models continue to look backwards, not forwards. They remain anchored in a paradigm designed for an era of relative stability (at least for some): preparing students for exams, university admissions and career pathways that no longer exist in the form we recognise.

The disconnect is stark and it raises an uncomfortable but necessary question: How can we justify maintaining education systems that do not prepare young people for the actual world they are stepping into?



Education – the crisis of relevance

For over half a century, the core architecture of schooling has barely shifted. Students still compartmentalise learning into discrete subjects. Success is still measured primarily through individual performance metrics. The overarching goal continues to be preparation for higher education, yet universities themselves are grappling with their roles in a rapidly changing landscape.

“If education continues to lag while the world accelerates, we risk producing a generation equipped for a past that no longer exists.” – **Naheed Bardai**

Meanwhile, the world outside is demanding something very different. Today’s challenges: climate disruption, resource scarcity, technological upheaval, mass migration and political polarisation are deeply interconnected. They cannot be solved through isolated expertise or rote knowledge. They require systems thinkers, collaborative leaders and resilient problem-solvers, citizens capable not merely of analysis, but of interventions that recognise the complexity and interconnectedness of our world. If education continues to lag while the world accelerates, we risk producing a generation equipped for a past that no longer exists.

The call for Systems Transformation

“Our world is changing at a rate that humanity has never known before. And if we were to map the rate of change of education, we’d find it to be far slower in its change than the rate of change in our world today. And that’s why we created the systems transformation pathway to really help address this fundamental challenge and equip our young people to tackle the complexities of not only our time but their time and give them a systems map of the world.” – **Naheed Bardai**

UWC Atlantic, known for its bold educational initiatives and commitment to peace and sustainability, is taking a decisive step to confront this reality. The new [Systems Transformation Pathway: Leadership for Just Futures](#) (STP) developed in partnership with the International Baccalaureate, is reimagining what secondary education can and must be in an era of global upheaval.

The STP’s curriculum premise is simple but radical: *If the world is being reshaped by complex, interconnected crises, then students must learn to see, understand and influence systems.* Not as an abstract academic exercise, but as a collaborative, transdisciplinary, action-orientated and intergenerational practice.

Focusing on five key impact areas: food, biodiversity, energy, migration and water, the pathway moves beyond traditional subject silos. Instead, it teaches students how environmental, economic, social and political systems interact, how climate influences migration, how governance affects resource distribution and how technology shapes identity and power. With this comes a deep emphasis on resilience, ethical leadership and agency. Students are not treated as passive learners, but as emerging systems transformers capable of engaging with the world’s challenges now, not someday in the future.

Taking the place of two Standard Level IB Diploma courses, the STP is the most substantial piece in a student's academic programme. The first two STP cohorts have been accepted into universities across the world including Stanford, Princeton, Oxford, Cambridge and many other universities around the world.

Students who study UWC Atlantic's Systems Transformation Pathway learn:

- **Systems thinking:** how to map problems, identify leverage points, anticipate unintended consequences and recognise the interconnected nature of global challenges.
- **Resilience:** Not resilience as endurance, but resilience as adaptability. Students learn the ability to face uncertainty without paralysis and build systems and solutions through iteration, collaboration and creativity.
- **Ethical Leadership:** Leadership models that prioritise justice, sustainability and compassion rather than competition and self-interest. Leadership that understands power not as dominance but as responsibility.
- **Active agency:** Above all, students must learn to act, to see themselves as contributors, not spectators. Traditional education often positions young people as future citizens. The Systems Transformation Pathway insists that they are citizens now.

The world our young people are stepping into is turbulent, but it is not hopeless. They are already demonstrating extraordinary commitment, bravery and imagination in movements for climate justice, human rights, equity and peace.” – Naheed Bardai

STP learning is not limited to classrooms. It unfolds in forests, workshops, community organisations, diplomatic simulations and field projects where students confront real-world systems challenges directly. Education becomes not preparation for life, but participation in it.

Our moral imperative to change

There is a growing chorus calling for transformative change in global education, yet the system itself remains stubbornly resistant. Bureaucratic inertia, outdated assessment structures and political polarisation all play a role. But we must be honest: sometimes it is simply easier to maintain the familiar than to admit that it no longer serves its purpose.

We cannot afford that comfort any longer. To continue educating young people for a world that is disappearing is a profound failure of responsibility. We are preparing them for stability while handing them instability. We are training them for linear career paths while they are entering nonlinear realities. We are teaching them to solve problems in isolation while the world demands collaborative, cross-disciplinary and globally minded thinking.



“If we want young people to inherit not just the problems of the future but the power to reshape it, then reimagining education is not optional. It is our obligation.” – **Naheed Bardai**

The world our young people are stepping into is turbulent, but it is not hopeless. They are already demonstrating extraordinary commitment, bravery and imagination in movements for climate justice, human rights, equity and peace. What they lack is not motivation, but institutions designed to amplify their capacity.

Education can be that institution, but only if we have the courage to transform it.

UWC Atlantic's STP pathway is one effort among many to rethink what learning can be in a world in crisis. The conversation it sparks about systems transformation, ethical leadership and global responsibility, is one that belongs on every editorial page, in every policymaking forum, in every community.

If we want young people to inherit not just the problems of the future but the power to reshape it, then reimagining education is not optional. It is our obligation.

By Naheed Bardai
