Convergence of ICT and the Education sector in SADC: A need for legal reform to embrace the 4th Industrial Revolution.

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Abstract

The 21st Century witnessed the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) unfolding. At the core of the 4IR lie Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The inception of ICT and AI and their application in various fields, including education, is without doubt a great milestone in harnessing teaching, learning, research and publication. The implications of 4IR, particularly the convergence of ICT and the education sector is a subject of much debate world-wide and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region is no exception. The proponents of convergence theory on ICT and education, juxtapose with precision that an effectively regulated ICT is a catalyst for enhanced open, distance and e-learning education. It follows that the benefits, notwithstanding the challenges, of the convergence are immeasurable. Construed from the legal-centrism theoretical framework curved under the lens of the right to education, it is this paper's argument that for the SADC to optimally realise its potential in enhancing these various forms of learning there is a need to traverse and go beyond the state-based (silo) approach to ICT policies as well as the Regional Infrastructure Development Master Plan (RIDMP) as key implementation instrument.

The working assumption is that the current silo (state-based) policies and RIDMP on ICT and education, fails to effectively integrate or interconnect SADC, embrace the 4IR turbulences, they are inadequate and lacks the necessary legal framework to inform rigorous implementation of the convergence of ICT and education in SADC. To ensure the requisite rigour and effective implementation of the convergence and interconnectedness, SADC needs to develop a framework that is comprehensive and responsive to the needs of the 4IR - particularly the ever-evolving ICT and education sector. Here, the rationale is to create a discourse and persuade the SADC governments to develop an effective trans-SADC ICT policy with the object to improve the current state-based (silo) policies and RIDMP on convergence between ICT and education sector. The premise for this aspiration is founded on, *inter alia*,

that state-silo-based ICT policies, unlike the envisioned trans-SADC ICT policy, lacks requisite legal force to ensure effective implementation of transnational education. The opposite also holds: the promulgation of a trans-SADC ICT policy on education can effect teaching and learning anywhere within the SADC; thereby embracing and upholding the right to education as well as access to tertiary institutions, within the SADC, during pandemics. In addition, the trans-SADC ICT framework has the potential to mitigate the transborder movement of pandemics.

The paper adopts a qualitative research approach, utilising desktop methods, to conduct a content analysis (review) of the existing RIDMP, domestic ICT policies, legislations and national Constitutions in the SADC that supports the implementation of ICT and AI, as well as the right to education.

Key words: *Trans-SADC, Fourth Industrial Revolution, Information and Communication Technology, Education, E-learning, Open and Distance Learning, Convergence, Policy*