

Klaus Schwab, the founder of the World Economic Forum, argues that the single most important challenge facing humanity today is how to understand and shape the new technology revolution. What exactly is this revolution, and why does it matter, especially for Africa?

The fourth industrial revolution captures the idea of the confluence of new technologies and their cumulative impact on our world.

Artificial intelligence can produce a medical diagnosis from an x-ray faster than a radiologist and with pinpoint accuracy. Robots can manufacture cars faster and with more precision than assembly line workers. They can potentially mine base metals like platinum and copper, crucial ingredients for

renewable energy and carbon cleaning technologies.

3D printing will change manufacturing business models in almost inconceivable ways. Autonomous vehicles will change traffic flows by avoiding bottlenecks. Remote sensing and satellite imagery may help to locate a blocked storm water drain within minutes and avoid city flooding. Vertical farms could solve food security challenges.

The machines are still learning. But with human help they will soon be smarter than us.

The first industrial revolution spanned 1760 to 1840, epitomised by the steam engine. The second started in the late 19th century and made mass production possible. The third began in the 1960s with mainframe computing and semiconductors.

The argument for a new category – a fourth industrial revolution – is compelling. New technologies are developing with exponential velocity, breadth and depth. Their systemic impact is likely to be profound. Policymakers, academics and companies must understand why all these advances matter and what to do about them.

So why does the fourth industrial

