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SPEECH

PANEL 2: DIGITAL SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE:
BUILDING CAPACITIES FOR AI INTEGRATION

By

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DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL
INTELLIGENCE: EMPOWERING SMES IN THE BRICS FOR A
COMPETITIVE FUTURE

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5:30 PM to 8:30 PM IST



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Thank you, Mr Alexandre Barbosa, for this opportunity to speak in this panel, and many thanks to Luciana Mancini, Special Advisor to the Minister there, and Fernanda Linhares Garcês de Vasconcelos for all the support extended.

The question was how can education and professional training support the digital transformation of SMEs? The answer is 'Yes.' Education and professional training can support the transformation of SME, but 'how?' - the underling question!

Who is an SME? And what are challenges and opportunities?

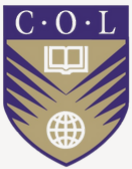
First let us understand who is an SME? Small and Medium Enterprise. In BRICS, this is a bit different. These are MMEs and FBs – Mini and Micro-businesses and family-owned and single account businesses. More than 85% of the workforce is in the MME, FB and SOBs! And, they contribute to over 50% of the nation's economy.

Secondly, we need to look at their current situation. They have:

- **Budgetary constraints** – finding it difficult to invest in digital technologies
- **Lack of digital skills** – hinder the effective implementation of digital solutions
- **Cybersecurity concerns:** do not know how to address cybersecurity risks and are unaware of how to protect their sensitive data
- **Resistance to change** – do not wish to change their business practices
- But they are all vulnerable to the introduction of AI, especially GenAI

Benefits are well known

- **Increased Efficiency:** Digital tools can automate processes and improve productivity.
- **Expanded Market Reach:** Online platforms enable SMEs to reach customers beyond their local areas.
- **Improved Customer Experience:** Digital communication and customer support tools can enhance customer satisfaction.
- **Data-Driven Decision-Making:** Analytics provide valuable insights for informed business decisions.
- **Reduced Operational Costs:** Automation and digital processes can reduce costs.



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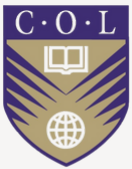
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Key Applications of AI for BRICS SMEs:

- **Enhanced Operational Efficiency:** AI-powered automation can streamline repetitive tasks in areas like inventory management, accounting, and customer service. This frees up valuable time and resources, allowing SMEs to focus on strategic initiatives.
- **Predictive maintenance:** AI can predict when machinery needs maintenance, reducing downtime and costs.
- **Improved Customer Experience:** AI-driven chatbots and virtual assistants can provide 24/7 customer support, enhancing responsiveness and satisfaction.
- **Personalized marketing:** AI algorithms can analyze customer data to deliver targeted promotions and recommendations, boosting sales.
- **Customer sentiment analysis:** AI can help to understand customer feelings about products and services.
- **Data-Driven Decision-Making:** AI-powered analytics can extract valuable insights from vast amounts of data, enabling SMEs to make informed decisions about product development, marketing, and sales.
- **Market trend analysis:** AI can identify emerging market trends and opportunities, helping SMEs stay ahead of the competition.
- **Increased Market Access:** AI-powered translation tools can facilitate communication with international customers, expanding market reach.
- **E-commerce optimization:** AI can optimize product listings and pricing on online marketplaces, increasing visibility and sales.
- **Financial Services:** AI-powered credit scoring can provide SMEs with access to financing, even if they lack traditional credit histories.
- **Fraud detection:** AI can help to prevent fraud and financial losses.

Considerations for BRICS Nations:

- **Infrastructure Development:** Investing in robust digital infrastructure, including high-speed internet and cloud computing, is essential for AI adoption.
- **Skills Development:** Providing training and education programs to equip SMEs with the skills needed to leverage AI technologies is crucial.
- **Data Privacy and Security:** Establishing clear regulations and safeguards to protect data privacy and security is essential.



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- **Government Support:** Governments can play a vital role in promoting AI adoption by providing funding, incentives, and regulatory frameworks.
- **Collaboration:** BRICS nations collaboration on AI research and development can help to share knowledge and resources.

CEMCA's efforts

In spite of all these efforts, the effectiveness is very poor – due to a variety of reasons

- Education and skilling ecosystems should converge to address the problems
- CEMCA's attempts!
- Range of course for SME skill development
 - Financial literacy, Digital literacy
 - Tools to thrive in business, Knowledge-intensive courses in Agriculture
 - Bamboo furniture making to elder care to simple trade skills
 - Looking at Blended Learning techniques
- Working with HEIs to understand the skilling ecosystem, especially towards developing skill qualifications

CEMCA's AI Literacy for Farmers course

Our first attempt is among the farmers, especially the youth in the farming sector

- Basic introduction to AI, and the impact in everyday life, especially by GenAI tools
- AI tools for farming, data collection, farm management, market analysis, prediction, etc.
- Ethics and the responsible use of AI
- Hands-on use of AI tools
- Assessment and certification



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CEMCA's Call to Action

- Universities take farmers and informal sector workers as lifelong learners
- Introductory programme in AI shall encourage the farmers to access many other courses of the University – entrepreneurship, remote sensing, IoT in Agriculture, Biopesticides, Farm Management, etc
- A new clientele for the University system and strengthening of training and visitation programme of the government