

An overview of the IFAP South Africa programme for Information Ethics 2020 – 2025

Coetzee Bester

IFAP Chair: South Africa

Member of the Information Ethics Working Group IFAP/UNESCO

Introduction

With many local and international focus on the academic and research available, it became important to focus on interdisciplinary application of Information Ethics. Further to this, the South African Information Ethics team is already working with various African countries on understanding and sustaining Information Ethics. The activities related to Information Ethics in Africa can, since 2007, be divided in two distinct phases. Each phase reflects the needs and contributions that are associated with a particular time and development in digital/knowledge societies, globally, in Africa and in particularly, South Africa. The two phases could roughly be identified as; (i) the preparatory and research phase between 2007 and 2019, and (ii) the interdisciplinary application and action phase that is envisaged from 2020 and 2025.

Background and research between 2007 and 2019

The first phase was highlighted by the establishment of the academic based Africa Network on Information Ethics (ANIE), an International Conference on Information Ethics in African as well as the research and publications. These results produced the African Centre of Excellence for Information Ethics (ACEIE) at the University of Pretoria in 2012. The ACEIE was established according to a UP Senate decision on 17 May 2012. The ACEIE is based at the Department of Information Science within the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology at the University of Pretoria and is managed according to the policies and procedures of the University of Pretoria.

ANIE was also expanded to include various ANIE Chapters in the 24 participating African countries. In these countries more than 110 tertiary education and government institutions became part of the Information Ethics Network.

During this phase of activities the ACEIE Co-Chaired the International Centre for Information Ethics (ICIE) as well as the UNESCO Information for All Program (IFAP) secretariat for South Africa. During this phase the ACEIE activities were funded by a formal Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) between the South African Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services and the University of Pretoria. The MoA was renewed in January 2016 and was in effect until March 2018. During this time the ACEIE received funding and support from: UNESCO (2011, 2014, 2015, 2018), Department of Communications (2012 - 2014) and the Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services (2015 - 2017). During this time the ACEIE conducted more than 130 workshops and conferences in various African countries and published 13 books (more detail can be provided should it be requested). More information can be obtained from www.up.ac.za/aceie and <https://www.i-c-i-e.org/inclusive-ai>)

The second phase (2020 and 2025) will focus on interdisciplinary application of Information Ethics in practice

The second phase will focus on interdisciplinary application and activities that will enhance implementation of Information Ethics into related disciplines in the 4th Industrial revolution. Preparatory workshops indicated the urgent link between Information Ethics and Human Rights, smart- and connected cities as well as smart and connected villages. This will further connect the African realities to the 4th Industrial Revolution to matters related to sustainable energy supplies, responsibility towards environmental issues, sustainable food production, recognition of cultural diversity, information ethics in artificial intelligence, prevention of violent and online radicalism and extremism, the importance of Media and Information Literacy (MIL) all with a link to access to information.

Practical projects between 2020 and 2025

In addition to the mentioned preparatory workshops, a number of projects were identified. These projects are in the process to be developed in practical and sustainable plans. Both human and financial resources will impact on the speed and sustainability of the 2020-2025 projects. In achieving the set objectives, the South Africa team is looking forward to further cooperation with global and continental partners. The following projects were already identified for further development and implementation:

1. Practical and academic interaction with a specific network for universities of technology, which will focus on:

- development for a new generation of science leaders in Africa
- actively builds networks between leaders of science across Africa and the rest of the world
- develops interdisciplinary and multinational research teams who, together with societal structures, can engage in impactful research to find solutions to complex problems
- places equity and sustainability central in its research and engagement related to African challenges”

2. The development of a school- and basic training network in a LDC in Southern Africa.

- linking rural schools
- digital distance education
- infrastructure design and development

3. Support to and implementation of the African Union Agenda 2063 and UN formulated SDG's

- objectives related to IFAP objectives and Information Ethics in particular

4. The Square Kilometre Array (SKA) project is an international effort to build the world's largest radio telescope, with eventually over a square kilometre (one million square metres) of collecting area. Information Ethics and accessibility of information for the local communities around the super-powerful SKA international internet-based facilities in South Africa and Africa needs constant monitoring and focus on:

- methods to measure and evaluate to opportunities for surrounding communities
- application of guidelines for smart towns, smart villages and smart communities

5. Support to the community of people with disabilities

- Focus on persons with hearing disabilities
- Policy development and implementation

IFAP: South Africa

December 2020