
Awards Category: **3. Best product or service to Connect the Unconnected**

Project Title: **WiFi TV - lights, camera, citizenship!**

Project Description:

Active citizenship is key in the development of the City of Tshwane, South Africa's executive capital pegged to become "the African Capital City of excellence". The first metropolitan municipality in South Africa to roll out Free WiFi, the vision is to bring Free WiFi within walking distance of every citizen in Tshwane.

Project Isizwe has joined forces with the City's local government and begun the necessary work to get connectivity in place for Tshwane's population of over 2.9 million. Using innovative configuration techniques and a novel non-profit structure, the organisation is able to pool bandwidth and utilise the capacity of local internet service providers without incurring the the traditional excessive mark-ups associated with enabling connectivity. The organisation's commitment to building collaborative working relationships with service providers in a way that facilitates development as a priority, has made the city-wide connectivity roll-out possible.

Since 2013, 1.9 million users have connected to the internet via 752 Free Internet Zones (FIZ) situated in public spaces - at schools, healthcare facilities and community centres - predominantly serving the low-income communities living and working in the City's townships.

But WiFi for WiFi's sake is not enough. As local government seeks to grow citizen partnership as a key factor in the City's sustainable development, more avenues are being onboarded to enable the voices of the people of Tshwane to join the conversations and discussions pertaining to their City's future.

Various value added services have been developed to further the impact of Free WiFi including voice and chat services, a world-first mobile bus service for commuters and a free, unlimited access content portal which curates the best education, employment and entertainment resources for Free WiFi users.

WiFi TV is one of the Free WiFi services borne out of Project Isizwe's innovative partnership with the City of Tshwane. This initiative is a hyper-local, video-on-demand, low production cost service available for free, unlimited streaming on Tobetsa. The WiFi TV offering provides informative, engaging and entertaining short format video content to audiences who would otherwise not have access to content that is actively produced for them, in their communities by young, local citizen journalists.

Tobetsa was developed as a mechanism to grow and facilitate connectivity. As Tshwane Free WiFi rolled out into the City's communities, Project Isizwe realised that an interface was necessary between the user and the connectivity; a landing page which would support users in their ability to begin navigating the internet. The provision of Free WiFi 'meta-content' offers users support and capacity building opportunities: providing 'how to's' to browsing the internet and making the most of one's data, safety and browsing tips, and explanatory content about products and services. Initially, this 'getting started' approach to the portal went a long way to facilitating the way in which users connected to and became comfortable with browsing the internet. In low-income communities across South Africa, especially where access to technology is only slowly being enabled and where education is limited and insufficient, there remains a great need for this approach to integrating and facilitating how people are brought online: safely, empowered and able to quickly begin making meaningful use of what the internet has to offer.

As key content produced specifically for the Free WiFi and Tobetsa audiences in Tshwane, the WiFi TV offering quickly became one of the most relevant mediums via which to reach users. For the first time, the people of Tshwane were able to watch short-form video content, on demand, about their lives: produced in the prevalent vernacular languages, by local journalists from the communities who were actively sourcing stories and delivering content specifically for them. WiFi TV quickly became an authentic and easy-to-deliver way of showcasing to users what the internet has to offer; providing relevant, local, immediately accessible content that is informative, educational, entertaining and empowering.

What is most exciting about the WiFi TV service is the innovative way in which it is developing as a model with the potential to address and offer solutions to various key challenges in South Africa. The short-format shooting process and low production cost model that continues to evolve is fast becoming a feasible business model that serves local digital video content to consumers who otherwise would not have access to this for affordability reasons.

Citizen journalism is a well documented approach, able to relevantly contribute to development by giving local people in a community the opportunity to source and document the stories and issues pertinent to their lives. In the case of WiFi TV, the young people from Tshwane are being given a platform through which to have a voice, many of them for the first time included in a space where they are encouraged and guided to seek out stories and content that is important to them and their communities.

Tshwane is one of South Africa's youngest cities where 37% of the population are classified as youth. The young people of Tshwane are hopeful and passionate about their futures; adamant to further themselves and

become successful. But faced with the reality of the high unemployment in South Africa, these young people have their work cut out for them. The young journalists employed, interning and volunteering at WiFi TV have found a way to actively participate in a relevant field which offers them access to a feasible livelihood and career path while enabling them to play the increasingly relevant role of producing change-enabling media in their country.

At the heart of WiFi TV is a training model which not only provides high quality local content, but also formally facilitates learning and skills development for the young media producers who have become employed and continue to be empowered. The combination of enabling young voices to be heard while offering a developmental training programme extends the impact of WiFi TV. The young journalists follow a formal training programme designed to grow their skill sets in the broadcast media field. Regular training workshops cover specific theory and content, while oversight, management and mentorship is provided by senior media producers who not only have the necessary experience but who themselves are successful individuals from the local communities with a passion for growing young people and producing meaningful content.

WiFi TV has been well received; the 500+ original videos produced continue to be the most popular content consumed by the half a million Tobetsa users each month. As more WiFi sites are deployed, audiences continue to increase and the portal as well as WiFi TV continue to produce and curate the most appropriate and relevant content.

The WiFi TV content management process has evolved since the project's inception. Content is broadly divided into two categories - City and Entertainment. The City content has become a key source of local news and public interest coverage in Tshwane, creating a communication channel between the citizens of Tshwane and local government and contributing to a growing dialogue of interaction. This is particularly the case with #AskRamokgopa, a regular Q&A session with the City's Executive Mayor, Kgosietso Ramokgopa. Citizens have the opportunity to ask questions about services and issues in Tshwane, and have them directly answered by their mayor. This format and content is having a direct contribution to the improvement of service delivery, and acts as a vehicle for communication between the people and the City.

City content includes coverage of newsworthy local events and public interest stories. There is also a drive to cover Success Stories which showcase how people in the City are using and benefitting from the opportunities that WiFi is giving them: entrepreneurs are accessing training and online tools; the unemployed are accessing job listings, applying for positions and becoming employed; learners and students and accessing online

resources to assist their studies; social sector organisations are accessing resources and funding opportunities to help them continue to provide their impactful services.

This relevant and specific content is contributing to enhancing and improving the user experience as more and more people are able to access the Free WiFi. The content is immediately available via the landing page with new videos added to the homepage every day. The entertainment content - which include short, formatted and scripted shows - gives users the opportunity to enjoy customised content which profiles local celebrities, showcases upcoming musicians and serves them mobi-dramas in easy to consume, streaming video.

Project Isizwe is proud to be able to share and showcase the WiFi TV model as a service that has emerged complementary to Free WiFi. As this service continues to help facilitate the uptake of connectivity in the township communities of Tshwane, the intention is to develop it so as to further enable social impact through the low-cost and sustainable citizen journalist, training-focused business model. Plans are underway to increase WiFi TV's sustainability through revenue generation opportunities like advertising and sponsored shows. Project Isizwe's intention is to be able to showcase a development model, within a theory of change, which will document the 'birth and rise' of a broadcast production house from funded start-up to an increasingly sustainable business venture in its own right.