

Soweto wireless pushes for content to stay local

The Soweto Wireless User Group (SOWUG) says it will go live this month, and it is partly thanks to critical support received from Africa's only vendor neutral data centre, Teraco. SOWUG is a registered Non-Profit Organisation that provides free wireless to residents of Soweto. It forms part of a number of development projects facilitated by The Foundation for Internet Development (FID), which was formed by ZACR (formerly UniForum SA), ISPA, WAPA and ISOC-ZA to provide a mechanism for ICT industry players to make a meaningful contribution in terms of Enterprise Development, but do not have the capacity, nor the platform to do so themselves.

SOWUG founder, Jabulani Vilakazi says that Teraco's donation has played a significant role in the formation and launch of the SOWUG: "Teraco's Joburg data centre is where backhaul fibre and Internet breakout aggregate. Access to this kind of world-class infrastructure enables network peering with the likes of NAPAfrica, Africa's largest Internet eXchange point. This is a fundamental element that reduces the cost of local bandwidth to users and makes what we are trying to do possible."

The purpose of FID is to consolidate the Enterprise Development efforts of the ICT industry. Vilakazi says that Teraco took the initiative and supported FID by offering to host SOWUG as part of its Enterprise and Supplier Development Initiative: "They provided cabinet space and power, connecting us to what is most definitely a global standard data centre. As an NGO we could never afford this high level infrastructure."

He says that what is more significant is that SOWUG's presence in Teraco will provide opportunities for local developers to produce content, which will be hosted locally, reducing international transit costs and stimulating local emerging online services: "The locally hosted content can either be cached or stored in servers and because we have access to the last mile, we can deliver content closer to the end user, minimising the distance that video data travels over the general Internet, and ultimately deliver it more quickly and reliably."

Lex van Wyk, CEO, Teraco says that the SOWUG concept is exactly what needs to be happening in and around South

Africa: "Access to information is critical and keeping content local is even more significant. We are privileged to be working with SOWUG and remain committed to help achieve its goal of providing access to information to all residents in and around Soweto."

Vilakazi says that when visiting Teraco, the team was impressed by its world-class infrastructure: "We were also excited to learn that the Netherlands (AMS-IX) and London (LINX) have partnered with Teraco. This together with its Internet exchange point, NAPAfrica, opens SOWUG to content from global content providers such as YouTube and Facebook. We are also hoping to learn more data centre skills, which will enhance Internet usage and improve the existing access infrastructure," says Vilakazi.