

Chinese Yangtze Optics Africa Cable steps up skills development efforts in SA

Optical fibre will change the way in which people and businesses connect, and local skills development will be critical in meeting the anticipated boom in demand

05 September 2016, South Africa: As China continues to strengthen relations in South Africa, Chinese majority owned Yangtze Optics Africa Cable (YOAC) also continues its efforts to facilitate opportunities for skills development between the two countries. Its activities are centred on Durban, where the company is mid-way through the construction of one of the biggest optical fibre cable manufacturing plants in South Africa. Eight of the 120 South Africans to be employed by YOAC have travelled to China for skills transfer and training on fibre cable manufacturing in preparation for the launch of the plant in January 2017.

The training programme covers the full spectrum of fibre cable manufacturing from optic fibre colouring, secondary coating, stranding, sheathing to cable testing and quality control.

On completion of their training in mid-September, the team will come back to South Africa to train the rest of the teams that will run the South African plant. Yangtze Optics Africa Cable (YOAC), has committed itself to a four-year skills development plan to expand local skills in specialist roles in optical fibre cable manufacturing.

Speaking about the training experience, Velile Mngonyama, Production Supervisor at Yangtze Optics Africa Cable (YOAC) says that although he has training and experience in cable production, the precision and detail required in optical fibre is on a much larger scale.

Having worked in operations at a number of cable manufacturing companies Mngonyama says, “Although the processes for copper cable manufacturing and optical fibre are similar, the technical specifications and applications for optical fibre are totally different. The experience

has been an eye opener and we cannot wait to come back home to share what we have learnt with the rest of the team in South Africa.”

Another recipient of the training programme, Mohammed Rawat, Maintenance Manager, Yangtze Optics Africa Cable (YOAC) says, “The optical fibre industry is totally different from the copper cables that we are used to. Although the industries are similar, the plant management, maintenance and technology used is much more advanced. The training has been intense. Interesting to note is the level of precision required in the manufacturing of optical fibre cable.”

“While copper cables have been a reliable medium in the past, optical fibre is the future, with speeds and capacity of orders of magnitude higher than copper cables, optical fibre will definitely change the way in which people and businesses connect,” says Mr Pieter Viljoen, CEO of Yangtze Optics Africa Cable (YOAC) .

He notes that, in the next few years, fibre optic network rollout will increase significantly, as developing countries invest in fibre networks as these are faster, and provide much more reliable connections than copper.

“With increased demand for fibre optic networks, there will be a need to train local people to set up fibre optical local manufacturing plants to supply the anticipated huge potential market,” comments Viljoen . Referring to the recent China (Guangdong) - South Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation Conference, Viljoen reiterated that YOFC’s efforts are aimed at further strengthening relations with South Africa, and ensuring that while Chinese companies invest in South Africa, they tap into local resources and empower and upskill people, and make sure that where there are skills gaps, solutions come from local people.

The new YOFC manufacturing facility comprises a R150 million investment by YOFC and its local joint venture partner “Mustek Limited”. The plant has manufacturing capacity of more than one million fibre kilometres, and will supply cable to Fibre to the Home (FTTH) service providers, to private sector companies, mobile

telecommunications providers, and the public sector. The 15 000m² manufacturing facility based at the Dube Trade Port in Durban is scheduled for completion in November this year, production will commence in December, and the plant is expected to be fully operational by January 2017.