

MetroWired's Communities Wi-Fi programme directly addresses SA's digital divide

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With the era of 4IR comes a significant change in our way of life and how we communicate. [MetroWired](#) is committed to bringing every man, woman and child along for the digital journey.



Wezi Shezi, head of Customer Division at MetroWired

The formation of an inclusive digital society in the 4IR era

One of the consistent challenges in 4IR is the call for marginalised communities to be included in digital transformation. As a part of this journey, [MetroWired](#) understands that connectivity plays a major role in unlocking innovation and economic opportunities. MetroWired's head of Customer Division, Wezi Shezi says: "It is our mission to help enable the rural communities, particularly our youth and women, as participants and contributors in South Africa's digital journey. Connectivity will open infinite possibilities for citizens, and allow all sectors of government to reach and service more citizens through their digital services."

Global and National Innovation Goals

In line with the Global Sustainable Development Goals SDG9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure and its objective 'to build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation', the South African government, through the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, has recently outlined their strategy within the draft National Infrastructure Plan (NIP) to provide 'free universal internet access' to communities and citizens. With these commitments accommodated for at the highest level, and outcomes clearly defined, MetroWired's Community Wi-Fi programme is on track with the country's future plan, making a positive contribution to achieving our national infrastructure and innovation goals.

The digital divide widens

Affordable, reliable internet/bandwidth connectivity availability is not a new topic, with various interventions together with some funding having been made available to bridge the technology divide between rural and urban areas. End users have surpassed the need for the internet to merely search and access social media, now utilising digital platforms to access education, employment opportunities, government and health services amongst others. In turn, these platforms are each rapidly adapting and evolving into future-oriented engagement mediums with users. Unfortunately, this also places heavy reliance on the availability of wireless networks for internet access, and in an ever-evolving world, the era we live in is driven largely by technology. This sentiment cannot be more accurately confirmed as we enter the 4IR, where we as a people need to change the way we work, live, and communicate with technology at the heart of that change.

While urban areas continue to enjoy ample connectivity options, the digital divide in the rural areas of South Africa continue to widen as most communities struggle with stable internet connectivity, if any. MetroWired plays a vital role in seeking to address some of these challenges with our enterprise value-add and top-tier certified partnership status with Huawei Technologies, which gives us access to coveted global commercial and technical resources that dedicate the most professional services and technical support available to our customers.

In the City of Johannesburg's (COJ) initiative, as part of the COJ's Smart City project to provide free and reliable connectivity to high density areas, MetroWired was instrumental in the delivery of the design, planning and execution of connectivity through the Wi-Fi 6 technology in and around Johannesburg.

Along with connectivity, the other alarming constant is the exorbitant price of data for the average South African. South Africans pay around R85 per gigabyte (GB) of data, ranking as the world's most expensive mobile data prices, according to the Worldwide Mobile Data Pricing 2021 report. The City of Tshwane, having rolled out their public Wi-Fi project with services such as virtual academy to assist high school students with lessons and exams, is also seeing an emerging trend of citizens gathering outside municipal offices and other public service offices simply to access Wi-Fi.

MetroWired's Communities Wi-Fi programme

For MetroWired, The Communities Wi-Fi programme is not a tick-box exercise. The programme considers the global SDG's and the country's vision for digital inclusion, aligning itself to the intended outcomes of these interventions through the implementation of a robust Wi-Fi programme aimed specifically at communities. "We seek to deliver on every outlined outcome by rolling out services that will meet or surpass the expectations outlined in the commitments our country has made. The partners we have chosen for this programme are global industry experts and have the type of infrastructure and services MetroWired believes in to deliver on our promise. We pride ourselves on the quality of the Wi-Fi projects we have undertaken thus far and are equally excited with what we have in the pipeline for future rollouts to enable tomorrow," says Shezi.

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