



Publication		
NEW AGE WESTERN CAPE		
Page	Date	AVE (ZAR)
8	Tues 16 Jan 2018	43154.85



Taking the internet to the poor

Ex-NWU student says her desire is to bridge the digital divide between the suburbs and townships in South Africa

ELFAS TORRAI

A FORMER student at North West University is on a mission to have townships connected to the internet not only in North West but across South Africa.

Dudu Mkhwanazi, 26, did her general and honours degree in political science at the Vanderbijlpark (Vaal) campus for 2009 to 2012.

She has since become the youngest-ever CEO of Project Isizwe, an innovative non-profit organisation (NPO) behind Africa's most successful free Wi-Fi network.

Mkhwanazi said that her desire is to bridge the digital divide between suburbs and townships in South Africa.

She is also calling on all South Africans to step up and do their bit to increase internet access to low-income communities.

Since her appointment as CEO in August 2017, this dynamic young lady has passionately advocated for internet access to be viewed as a basic human right the same way as access to water and electricity is.

Mkhwanazi recently hosted a business seminar via the popular TEDx-talk platform in Johannesburg. The TEDxTalk franchise represents an international platform from where innovative ideas are celebrated and shared with the world and by doing so, amplifying novel ideas and creative thinking.

At the seminar, Mkhwanazi said that by elevating internet access to the poor as a basic human right, the South African government would accomplish much more than merely passing down pioneering legislation.

She said that the internet should be used as an empowerment tool that

would yield both economic and social benefits.

"It becomes clear, especially in the South African context, that by subsidising internet access, the state will benefit from a sizable return on investment," she said.

Mkhwanazi said that in its simplest form, the value of free internet hot spots within walking distance can be viewed in the same way as a communal tap where everybody benefits.

While free internet access remains a long-term goal, Dudu urges all South Africans to assist those in their spheres to have a foothold on the internet.

"For instance, share your Wi-Fi password with your domestic worker. The government departments, like the Basic Education Department, require parents to register their children online and without internet this simple task can be very daunting.

"Keep a dongle in your bag and help someone who needs to send a quick email or apply online to further his/her studies," she said.

Mkhwanazi said that those who are good with the internet can help a great deal by visiting local schools and assisting teachers in searching and sharing information.

Shared skills will eventually be transferred to pupils and the pool will keep on increasing.

"Ultimately the conversation should not be about cheaper data, but on the sustainability and scalability of Wi-Fi projects," Mkhwanazi says.

During her time as a student, Mkhwanazi said that she enjoyed an active student life and served on the campus Student Representative Council (SRC) for the term 2012-13 in the



INVENTIVE: Dudu Mkhwanazi is driving a programme to have internet access in the rural areas. PICTURE: YOUTUBE

portfolio constitutions and societies officer.

As a strong academic contender she also acted as a teacher to the subject groups of political science and environmental history.

She further holds a masters degree in public policy analysis from Université Montpellier in France.

Meanwhile, the NWU's Enterprising Women programme at the same campus, now presents an opportunity for female entrepreneurs in central South Africa to enrol this year.

The year 2018 marks the sixth anniversary of the programme and it is hosted by the NWU's Enterprise Development Centre in Vanderbijlpark.

Through the programme, start-up female entrepreneurs are empowered to not only achieve their business dreams but also to stand tall as active contributors to the economy.

Already, the programme has seen female entrepreneurs breaking new ground in numerous fields like app development, catering, construction, fashion design, interior decorating and maintenance management.

Some of the women graduates from the programme have become employers and are taking other young women under their wings, spreading the spirit of entrepreneurship.

Information sessions on the programme run on two days this month. The first is today with the other one coming up on January 30.

All those wishing to apply have to do so by 2pm on January 30. During the information sessions prospective participants will be afforded the opportunity to interact directly with women who have successfully completed the programme in previous years and who are now heading up their own businesses.

The programme manager, Johann Landsberg, said that there was a lot aspiring entrepreneurs could learn from those who had gone through the programme and started their own business ventures.

elfast@thenewage.co.za