



Keeping Ahead in ICT

Breaking Down Barriers

Voice-over

Jubilation on the streets of South Africa as Nelson Mandela's government of national unity ends forty years of minority white domination

Peter Dzingwa, Phone Shop Owner

I got my pride back and I know that whatever I do I've got my country behind me which makes a very big difference.

Nelson Mandela – Inaugural Speech, May 1994

Today we are entering a new era for our country. Today we celebrate not a victory of apartheid, but a victory for all the people of South Africa.

Voice-over

For all the joy, there are tough choices facing the new government. It inherits a country divided by colour and wealth, the legacy of apartheid. Most white South Africans live in western style luxury, drive expensive cars, have large houses, and eat in their favourite restaurants, seemingly oblivious to the third of the thirty million black people who are destitute. President Mandela pledged to change South Africa, to empower the black population and build an equal and just society.

Jay Naidoo, Minister for Telecommunications

How do we harness technology to leapfrog the society into the 21st century, and how do we prepare our children, who are our future, in these poorer areas for a knowledge-based economy.

Voice-over

But the 21st century seems a long way away in the poverty-stricken black townships that surround the major cities. Many people have homes with no running water, more than half exist without electricity, but if South Africa is to create equality everyone must have access to another basic need – communication.

Jay Naidoo, Minister for Telecommunications

It's fundamental that people are able to talk to each other. We have a historical situation of migrant labour in this country where men leave the rural areas to work in the cities; for them to be able to communicate with their families, for kids to communicate with each other in terms of they're studying at universities, for a mother to call a hospital for an ambulance for a sick child. Those are very day-to-day functions that we take for granted, but in many rural areas they have to walk 30-50 kilometres to get access to a telephone, which usually gets charged at a very exorbitant rate.

Voice-over

In South Africa only one in a hundred black people in rural areas has access to a 'phone; even in urban townships only half the population has a 'phone within five kilometres. The government's dream is for every home to have a 'phone, and eventually for everyone to be wired to the internet, to take their place in the digital world.

Jay Naidoo, Minister for Telecommunications

We have a vision, you know, a country where I would like to see people in every household having a postal address, a physical address, an internet address, as well as a telephone address.

Voice-over

The vision is ambitious and the scale of the task immense, but a technological revolution, the mobile 'phone, might just be making it possible. In the 1980's the mobile 'phone exploded on the west as a yuppie status symbol, but today the same technology is playing a key part in South Africa's future.

Peter Dzingwa, Phone Shop Owner

I think that cell phones have, it's really what Africa has been waiting for, by virtue of the fact that, you know, Africa's come to a standstill for close to thirty, forty years, there was no development there, and I know a lot of guns went there and that type of thing, but the real development whereby you can bring very to the people and to the country this has not been going there unfortunately.