



PRESS RELEASE

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TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION AGENCY (TIA) FUNDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFFORDABLE INTERNET SOLUTION FOR TOWNSHIPS

The Technology Innovation Agency (TIA), an entity of the Department of Science and Innovation, is funding a Gauteng-based start-up that is developing an alternative antenna-based high-speed fixed internet solution for low-income communities.

FibrePoynt (Pty) Ltd is developing this internet/wireless communication system that can be an alternative or supplementary to fibre to the home (FTTH) underground or overhead cable technology.

The technology not only puts South Africa on the map but responds to the socio-economic challenges and the country's strategic broadband imperatives; to make internet accessible to everyone irrespective of their socio-economic status and geographic location. Low to middle income peri-urban and township households can now connect to the internet which was not possible with current technologies.

The innovation will also solve signal strength problems and costs typically found in existing "last mile" antenna wireless rollouts. The aim is to enable internet network owners to deliver internet to dwellings at a lower cost than currently possible.

The FibrePoynt technology uses passive beam forming, beam pattern diversity and beam shaping to get the best possible signal to the home units which then provides Wi-Fi for the end user devices to connect to. This technology has been demonstrated and proven in the marketplace. The current state of business is commercialisation of the product for mass adoption.

FibrePoynt enables the rollout of fixed wireless broadband network without trenching underground fibre in the last-mile connection to homes thus reducing infrastructure costs by more than 50%. The technology promises a cost effective, faster-rollout, and high-speed alternative deployment of broadband infrastructure in areas that were previously deemed unfeasible

"The technology is not only backed by an innovative and sustainable business model but an inclusive model which gives local entrepreneurs skills and the opportunity to operate and roll out network to their respective communities. Local empowerment is the critical antidote to socio-economic ills. We call upon follow on funders and Network Operators to support the full-scale commercialisation of this exciting and impactful technology," says Siphon Dikweni, Portfolio Commercialisation Manager, TIA.

The company is funded through the commercialisation wing of TIA, in the Information Communication and Technology unit (ICT). The ICT unit supports the development and exploitation of ICT driven innovations with a broad socio-economic impact focusing on Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data and Block Chain, wireless connectivity and scalable ICT inclusive innovations, thereby addressing the challenges of unemployment, inequality, and poverty.



The ICT Unit further supports the development and commercialisation of highly competitive innovative technologies that will increase South Africa’s competitiveness and participation in the fourth industrial revolution.

TIA has been actively involved throughout the development of the FibrePoynt project providing both financial and non-financial support ensuring that the project becomes a success. The project has strong intellectual property, an innovative business model and demonstrates South Africa’s contribution and competitiveness in knowledge-based economies.

A solution like FibrePoynt could make sure that the neglected obtain real internet in their homes and surrounding neighbourhoods on their smart devices. “We want to use this innovation to tackle digital inequality,” says FibrePoynt CEO, Eduard Walker.

As part of the advancement of the initial TIA funded technology innovation, FibrePoynt has launched HomePoynt; a derivative innovation spun out of the core FibrePoynt wireless technology.

“A solution like HomePoynt is more critical in our society as the spread of the coronavirus has laid bare the need to get everyone connected to high-speed internet. This would improve access to critical services like home-schooling to a larger proportion of the population,” Mr Walker adds.

HomePoynt is an innovative last-mile connectivity solution that has the potential to bring down internet costs to as low as R89.00 a month for uncapped Wi-Fi. The technology has been developed with a key focus on townships, peri-urban and small towns thus closing digital divide in under-served areas. HomePoynt connects users to broadband core networks in a peer-to-peer setup and provides wireless internet service for homes and public areas, where there is already backhaul coverage but no end-user access.

In the process of market validation FibrePoynt has developed an innovative internet service provider (ISP) model, termed Kasiwave, transferring the skills to the local communities to build and maintain the network infrastructure. The goal is to ensure that 20% of the revenue generation remains in the local communities.

Ends.

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About TIA

The Technology Innovation Agency (TIA) is a public entity in South Africa that serves as the key institutional intervention to bridge the innovation chasm (gap) between research and development from higher education institutions, science councils, public entities, and private



sector, and commercialisation (beneficiation). TIA was established in 2010 and has a national reach with offices in KwaZulu Natal, Western Cape and Gauteng. The main thrust of the mandate of TIA is funding and supporting innovative technologies that show potential to be commercialised. The organisation also has programmes that provide non-financial support to innovators and SMMEs. Lastly, TIA is a catalyst and enabler of innovation through various partnership initiatives locally, in the African continent and globally.

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