

Durban becoming the ICT hub of Africa.

At SmartXchange, young IT businesses are given a helping hand, and the programme seems to work much better than straight government hand-outs.

Part of the process of building a vibrant ICT hub is to encourage dialogue and sharing of knowledge within the ICT community. Together with industry partners Dimension Data, Cisco and Internet Solutions, the Skills Corridor was born.

On 30 December 2009, the World Bank released its long-awaited global study of ICT incubators in which SmartXchange was one of five incubators in the world to be identified as a replication model for incubation in sub-Saharan Africa.

Robynne Erwin, CEO of SmartXchange says: "We are extremely proud to receive such credible recognition of the work we do. To be one of five incubators in the developing world cited in this report is indeed an honour."

Steve Giddings, regional facilitator: Africa, Incubator Initiative, infoDev, a global ICT division of the World Bank, said that SmartXchange was selected from a number of ICT incubators evaluated in South Africa because of its range of seemingly unique facets of its business model.

"SmartXchange stood out for having built a number of strategic linkages with commercial organisations that help support the credibility of both the organisation and the incubated companies. Another of its unique facets is its successful branding."

Internet and books

The eThekweni municipality is proud of its libraries. Even in outlying rural areas, there are new public libraries in containers, and many have internet connections. This is a vital part of the strategy for the provision of free public internet access. The municipality's libraries are also involved in the digitisation of current valuable collections in the museums and art galleries in the Durban metro area.

Ulwazi

Another local project that is helping bridge the digital divide through knowledge is Ulwazi, an



indigenous knowledge Wiki. Young members of local communities are trained to collect historical, cultural and environmental information in their communities and post the images, articles and videos online to the Ulwazi portal, which runs on Web 2.0 technology.

Cross-cultural knowledge-sharing is promoted and digital skills are transferred to communities, contributing to the eThekweni's City concept. Senior librarian Betsie Greyling, known by the young fieldworkers as Ma Betsie, is the custodian of this project.

Durban is a smart city, not only because of the partnerships between local government and the University of KZN and the Innovation Fund that created a virtual Quantum City where the vital services of the city can connect securely (a world-first), or because the city has devised its own revenue management system.

eThekweni is smart because it is growing a new generation of ITC entrepreneurs and businesses at SmartXchange and because it is looking after our shared heritage by digitising the museums and art collections and sending youngsters into the communities to hear the stories and to put them on a Wiki so that we can begin to write our own history.

And more than all this, eThekweni Municipality knows that by bringing affordable, high-quality broadband to the people of the city, they will be opening wide the gates of access to information. They will be giving the citizens a better, faster, easier way to communicate. And this can only make the city smarter. **B**



SmartXchange has received international recognition for its work partnering private enterprise with young IT entrepreneurs, says Robynne Erwin.

Photo: Karen Lotter