

# PLUGGED IN

Angola Cables is focused on international connectivity and plans to provide a major telecoms hub on the continent, says its CEO, António Nunes. **BY KERRY DIMMER**

**DESPITE** being Africa's largest oil producer, the Angolan government has dedicated the country to diversifying its economy and lessening its dependence on petroleum. To enable this, and aid in creating an enhanced business climate, the telecoms sector is starting to boom.

Encouraged by the country's Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, infrastructure upgrades have been motivated by the welcoming of competitors and licensed private companies such as Angola Cables.

In describing the Angolan telecoms sector as robust, Angola Cables CEO António Nunes says that state-owned Angola Telecoms has ensured the installation of fibre optics in all main cities as well as in the backbone of the country. 'Along with mobile networks and fixed-line operators, what we have is an IT industry that is sophisticated and digitally advancing,' he says.

This puts Angola Cables in a favourable position for achieving its major objective – providing one of the biggest telecoms hubs in Africa, especially in terms of the SADC region. For this reason, the organisation is focused on international connectivity through voice and data, which is why looking beyond African shores is crucial to achieving its goal.

Angola Cables is currently installing cable infrastructure to Fortaleza in Brazil through SACS, the South Atlantic Cable System. This affiliation makes enormous sense given the developing nature of the two countries, and particularly more so considering that Brazil's cabling to the US has one of the biggest flows of traffic in the world.

'America is obviously a huge business gate, and by tapping into that we will be providing massive connectivity to both nations,' says Nunes.

On the back of this is the news that a further cabling system, MONET, is to be developed, which will create a direct line between Angola and North America via a fibre-optic connection between Santos and Fortaleza in northern Brazil with Miami, Florida in the US. Nunes explains that while southern Brazil has a very capable and modern telecoms environment, the northern region, particularly the western side, has been somewhat neglected.

'This is understandable as Brazil is more like a continent than a country, with many issues given its developing nature,' he says. 'In growing data centres between the SADC region and Brazil, we are setting

Angola Cables on a path to becoming a much bigger player in Africa.'

The Angolan side of the infrastructure is already operational, with the Brazilian connection currently under construction. Angola Cables presently uses WACS, the West Africa Cable System, which it co-owns with several telecoms operators in Africa and Europe. At present, WACS connects 12 African nations, including Angola, to three European countries.

The company is working to improve the efficiency of its network by installing point of presence (commonly referred to as PoP) in strategic South African and European sites, connecting to several internet exchange points. Among these are Angonix (Luanda); GigaPIX (Portugal); LINX (London); and ECIX (Frankfurt). By year end, the goal is to peer with DE-CIX (Spain and France); ESspanix (Spain); France-IX (France); AMS-IX (Netherlands); and NAPAfrica (South Africa).

While these developments set Angola Cables on a growth path, it is not about being the best or the biggest.

'We just want to be part of the hub environment – and to be recognised,' according to Nunes. 'We are doing our best to achieve an enormous amount in a short period of time.' It starts with the laying of cable infrastructure.

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PHOTOGRAPHY ANGOLA CABLES



## *'In growing data centres between the SADC region and Brazil, we are setting Angola Cables on a path to becoming a much bigger player in Africa'*

However, this does not mean Angola Cables is set solely on that single achievement. 'If that was our only focus, then our business would fail very quickly,' he says.

In principle, every country could be a telecoms hub as long as there is adequate and appropriate investment. But to stand out requires a differentiator. For Angola Cables, this translates into offering a host and connectivity service in one pack. 'No-one else is doing that right now in Africa,' says Nunes.

With this in mind, Angola Cables is developing strategic partnerships, one of which is with Microsoft, among others. These are businesses that provide support services, such as cloud providers.

'If our partners are selling cloud services now for the future, we all benefit by growing quickly together, bearing in mind that Angola Cables is the backbone support to what those service providers offer. This also generates and motivates entrepreneurship and creates jobs,' he says.

'I also believe that being attuned to the future now gives us time to understand our future clients' needs. You need to be in their shoes to fully comprehend requirements and changing trends.'

This is similarly applied to how the company works internally. In going to market with different brands concurrently, opinions will differ, which is why Nunes acknowledges the 100-plus Angola Cables employees (at offices in Brazil, South Africa, Portugal and Angola) as being open to a learning environment.

'We do not work the same way today as we did in the past. Technology changes everything – there is so much more to

consider and many different levels of needs. You have to remain open to those changes – adapt and find solutions that work for everyone, particularly customers.'

Ultimately, Angola Cables will serve larger businesses – instead of individuals – that lie between other recognised hubs in South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya, and those in the SADC region predominantly.

What has also provided Angola Cables with confidence in its future is that it has an IP network that is growing exceptionally quickly. Active for the past year, it has already established itself as the third-biggest ISP in Africa. It is one thing to have a feasible business study that leads to investment, but to see that play out even better than expected is 'amazing', as Nunes points out.

'We didn't expect to grow that quickly. It means we are investing in the right direction, especially with regard to our connection with Brazil, which is the fourth-biggest market in the world,' he says.

'In terms of our business case, the growth says we are putting our money in the proper place, and gives further merit to our future plan to connect to the east coast of Africa through the partnerships we are currently developing.'

Further evidence of success comes from being voted by readers of TMT News magazine as 'Best Angolan Telecommunications Operator 2016'.

With some 82 000 global readers, the award recognises 'exemplary work done by the company for the development of the technology, media and telecommunications sector in Angola'.

Exemplary is a word that can also be applied to the humanitarian and environmental conscience of Angola Cables, given its focus on the conservation of sea turtles through its support of the Kitabanga Project, hosted by the department of biology at the faculty of science of Luanda-based Agostinho Neto University.

While the conservation of sea turtles may seem a somewhat unusual social responsibility choice for a telecoms company, for Angola Cables it makes perfect sense.

Bear in mind that six of the seven varieties of sea turtles globally – five of which are found in the waters surrounding Angola – are endangered. 'Our building in Angola faces the sea, and the sea is where our profitability is ultimately sourced given that all our systems depend on what we lay on the seabed,' says Nunes. 'The Sangano beach is the African SACS landing station and it is here that many turtles choose to breed.'

'When it became obvious that the efforts of the Kitabanga Project were being constrained by lack of funds we stepped in. We believe that in helping to protect the turtles, we are similarly protecting our beach infrastructure.'

Reports vary but it is suggested that the Kitabanga Project has managed to protect some 9 000 nests since its launch in 2002.

Whether it's turtles or cables, big or small business, ultimately survival is about growth and having vision. Nunes' view on this provides a lesson for all.

'When you dream big, you must slice that cake into pieces,' he says. 'By taking a step-by-step approach, we will ultimately have a much bigger presence in Africa.' **AD**