

## Ordina, IICD and EACOSS boost Open Source Software in East Africa



### In a nutshell...

- The East Africa Open Source Software project aims to encourage the use of Open Source Software (OSS) in East Africa. It is the first joint initiative emanating from the public-private partnership between Ordina, IICD and EACOSS (East African Centre for Open Source Software).
- Thousands of East African network operators and technicians will learn how to use, develop and adapt OSS to meet local needs through this three-year project.
- Many new jobs will be created in East Africa's Information Technology sector as the demand for Open Source (OS) computer engineers soars and growing numbers of organisations switch to OSS.
- OS Word processing programmes can be run on 'obsolete' hardware which will make computers more accessible and appealing to the general public and boost computer use in the region.

### Encouraging Open Source in East Africa

One of the most compelling arguments for stimulating the widespread use of Open Source Software (OSS) such as Linux in Africa is that it is cheap, flexible, runs much faster on old, outdated computers, and can be easily adapted to the very different needs of African communities. An added bonus is that Open Office – the Open Source equivalent of MicroSoft Office – can be made available in local African languages, such as Kiswahili and Luganda which both offer access to word-processing, spreadsheet, and presentation software facilities.

Successful OS products however are still few and far between in Africa and only a handful of organisations have migrated fully to OSS so far. Given Africa's low bandwidth internet connection and insufficient local knowledge about OSS this situation is not about to change in the short term; at least, not without a concerted and structured effort.

### Ordina, IICD and EACOSS join forces

Ordina, IICD and the EACOSS centre have therefore risen to the challenge and have joined forces to launch the East Africa OSS project. In May 2005 these three very different organisations entered into a public-private partnership. Their goal: to further encourage the widespread use of Open Source Software in East Africa by pooling their respective skills, knowledge and resources. Together, they will provide training to the region's next generation of computer engineers. The partnership is a potent mix as each organisation brings a unique set of skills to the East Africa OSS project. With over 3600 employees, Ordina is a large and well-known private sector company in the Netherlands specialising in ICT and management consultancy services. IICD on the other hand, is a not-for-profit organisation with a wealth of experience in setting up locally owned, demand-driven ICT training programmes in developing countries.

EACOSS centre's area of expertise is in providing OSS training in Africa.

### Training Africa's next generation of computer engineers

The East Africa OSS project is first and foremost an ambitious capacity development programme run from the EACOSS training centre in Kampala, Uganda to address the acute shortage of East African computer engineers trained in OSS. The training programme provides local computer engineers with basic and advanced courses in OSS leading to a formal OSS qualification and also provides local computer engineers with quick, easy and affordable access to up-to-date OSS and supporting materials.

### Advantages for public-private partners

The public-private partnership between Ordina, IICD and EACOSS is based on collaboration, knowledge sharing, and hands-on experience at the grass roots level in an effort to find sustainable software solutions for Africa.



*Victor van Reijswoud (EACOSS), Tom Rodrigues (Ordina) and Jac Stienen (IICD) seal their partnership in a letter of intent in The Hague, the Netherlands.*

This partnership is very much a reciprocal process, however some of the advantages for organisations are as follows:

- Knowledge sharing on both sides often generates a wide range of innovative solutions that prove to be invaluable commercially;
- Reinforced sense of pride and loyalty at working for a private-sector company that is willing to share its knowledge and human resources in this way;
- Professionals from the North are able to further develop their understanding of different cultures while enhancing their intercultural communication skills: a 'must' in today's global society;
- Professionals from the North outsourced to the South are forced to sharpen their problem-solving skills and 'think outside the box'.



### The long-term vision

The widespread use of OSS in Uganda among civil society can be encouraged by policy-makers and decision-makers alike. The project aims therefore to enhance the understanding of the software choices available to them, while raising the profile of OSS among public, private and civil society organisations.

Summing up the long-term vision of the partnership, Mr Frank van der Tang, project manager of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative within Ordina, stated: *'We have entered into a formal agreement for the next few years to train the first generation of Linux-experts. Training and certification should turn this group into pioneers in Uganda, and perhaps even throughout the whole of East Africa. In this way, we hope to boost OSS and stimulate the independent development of the ICT sector in the region'.*

### More information

If you have any questions about the Ordina, IICD, EACOSS partnership or if you are interested in learning how to become an IICD partner, please contact [information@iicd.org](mailto:information@iicd.org). Be sure to visit the websites of Ordina ([www.ordina.nl](http://www.ordina.nl)), IICD ([www.iicd.org](http://www.iicd.org)) and EACOSS ([www.eacoss.org](http://www.eacoss.org)) to learn more about each organisation and its activities in the field of local capacity development in developing countries.

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*The International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) assists developing countries to realise locally owned sustainable development by harnessing the potential of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). IICD realises its mission through two strategic approaches. First, Country Programmes bring local organisations together and help them to formulate and execute ICT-supported development policies and projects. The approach aims to strengthen local institutional capacities to develop and manage Country Programmes, which are currently being implemented in Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Ecuador, Ghana, Jamaica, Mali, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Second, Thematic Networking links country and international partners working in similar areas, connecting local knowledge with global knowledge and promoting South-South and South-North exchanges. Thematic Networking focuses on sectors like education, health, governance, environment, livelihood opportunities - especially agriculture - and overarching issues such as training and evaluation. These efforts are supported by various information and communication activities provided by IICD or its partners. IICD is an independent non-profit foundation, established by the Netherlands Ministry for Development Cooperation in 1997. Its core funders include the Dutch Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGIS), the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).*