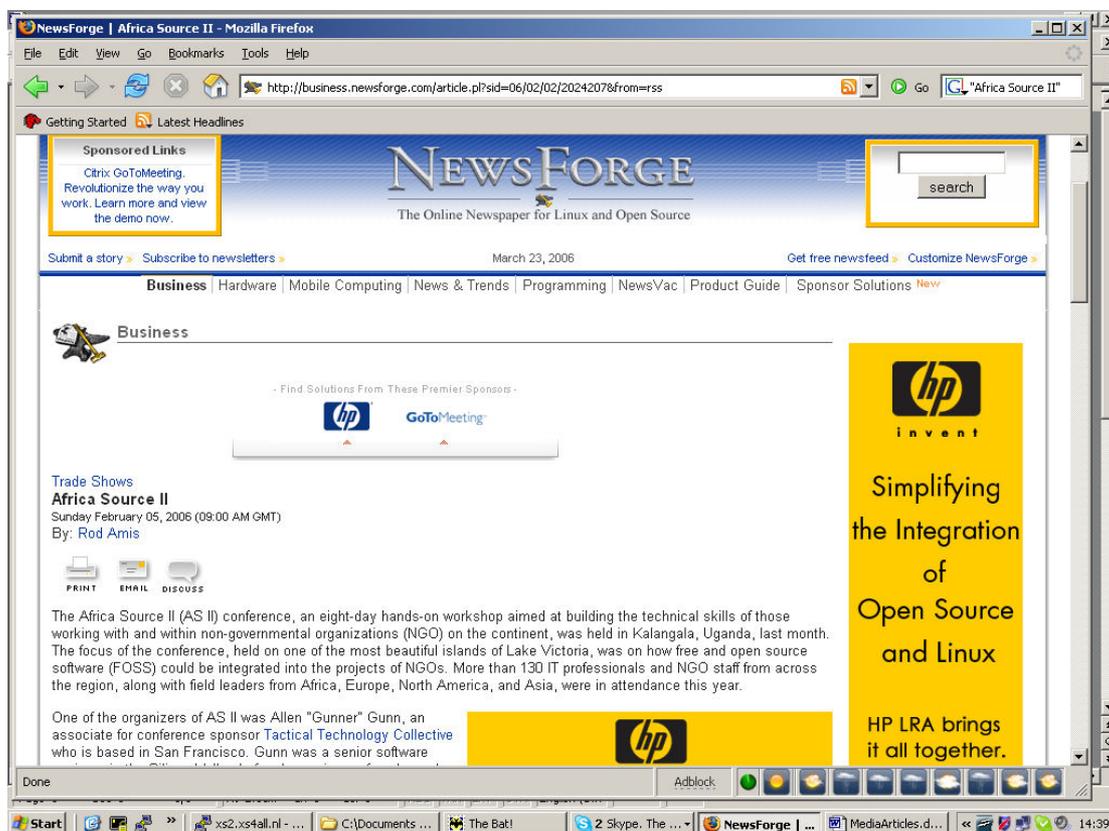




## Africa Source II – Press Selection

This selection is a range of publications about Africa Source II in newspapers, magazines, and other forms of media, varying from personal blogs to published articles. It includes the text of the articles and a screenshot of the website.



<http://business.newsforge.com/article.pl?sid=06/02/02/2024207&from=rss>

**Africa Source II**  
Sunday February 05, 2006 (09:00 AM GMT)  
By: Rod Amis

The Africa Source II (AS II) conference, an eight-day hands-on workshop aimed at building the technical skills of those working with and within non-governmental organizations (NGO) on the continent, was held in Kalangala, Uganda, last month. The focus of the conference, held on one of the most beautiful islands of Lake Victoria, was on how free and open source software (FOSS) could be integrated into the projects of NGOs. More than 130 IT professionals and NGO staff from across the region, along with field leaders from Africa, Europe, North America, and Asia, were in attendance this year.

One of the organizers of AS II was Allen "Gunner" Gunn, an associate for conference sponsor Tactical Technology Collective who is based in San Francisco. Gunn was a senior software engineer in the Silicon Valley before becoming co-founder and chief technology officer of Pensare, an eLearning "dotgone," as he phrased it. Today he is on the faculty at Foothill College in Los Altos, Calif., where he teaches Java programming and Web development. He also is co-director of Aspiration Tech, an organization that advises NGOs on technology strategy and best practices.

ITMJ: Please share with us some highlights of AS II. What were your successes? Who were the interesting participants?

Gunn: First, I believe we succeeded in strengthening the social network of FOSS practitioners in Africa. This is essential for building FOSS capacity in Africa; participants now have relationships and contact information for those who can help them to move forward in their migration to FOSS technologies.

Second, more than 120 participants left AS II with practical, hands-on experience and know-how about migrating NGOs and schools to FOSS. These skills include assessment, planning, deployment, configuration, training, and support. We look forward to watching them collaborate on the mailing lists, and to hearing their success stories and reflections both online and when next we convene.

The interesting participants were too many to list. A noteworthy dynamic was the percentage of women participants. AS II was more than 35% women, and we'll be striving in future events to achieve a full balance. Groups such as LinuxChix Africa were well-represented, and a good number of facilitators were women. Source events emphasize peer-to-peer sharing over lecture or panel formats, and virtually everyone stepped up and let their voice be heard.

The agenda was well-received, so any future Source events will likely have similar agenda content. What we'll definitely do better next time is to lock in better infrastructure; we had insufficient electricity and floor space for our participants at this event, and we'll look to find more robust venue resources, most likely in a less remote setting. But the scenery couldn't be beat!

ITMJ: What's the history of Africa Source? How did this conference get started?

Gunn: The first Source Camp took place in Croatia in September 2003. The goal was to bring together a range of practitioners and stakeholders working to implement FOSS solutions for NGOs in developing countries. Africa Source I was the second Source event, taking place in Namibia in March 2004. That event focused primarily on FOSS developers, seeking to strengthen social networks while also mapping out who was doing what on the continent.

ITMJ: What are some of the successes of FOSS on the continent and what benefits does it bring to the region?

Gunn: In terms of FOSS success stories on the continent, I would mention several excellent organizations: SchoolNet, and in particular SchoolNet Namibia, have really innovated with FOSS, installing it on recycled hardware and training high school students in the use and administration of the tools. TuxLabs has done similar things in the Western Cape region, building computer labs in schools with volunteer labor and the Ubuntu Linux distribution. Also, Ungana Afrika is doing amazing work to support NGOs in South Africa. In Uganda, both Linux Solutions and WOUUNET are helping to grow FOSS capacity.

FOSS is a preferable alternative for a range of reasons, including:

- \* Ability to localise tools and platforms for local communities
- \* More stable and secure environment than Microsoft Windows
- \* More secure platform for those doing activism and political work
- \* Ability to run on older, less powerful hardware, thus extending machine life and lowering hardware costs

ITMJ: Can you give us examples of specific challenges and issues faced by working CIOs at the conference?

Gunn: The biggie: ongoing challenges with cost and availability of Internet access, especially broadband. The debate about which technologies are most appropriate for backbone and edge zones of future network topologies is always fascinating in Africa; fiber is the preferable conduit but various wireless options have the potential to deliver access to underserved communities years and arguably decades sooner.

Localization: language drives the classic mountain/Mohammed debate: do you compel users to learn Western languages (English, French, Portuguese, Spanish) to utilize ICTs (Information Communications Technologies), or do you emphasize localization efforts with the vision that this will yield greater uptake and skill gain among potential ICT workers?

In terms of hardware in developing regions, "rugged" is still the way. Stabilizers and UPS components play a much more critical role in the developing world, where power grids fluctuate like the weather, and planning for extreme hardware redundancy (as in "at least one extra of everything you need") is a critical part of sustainable, successful ICT deployment.

ITMJ: What's the big opportunity for IT on the continent?

Gunn: I think an interesting topic for discussion is ICT project collaboration between NGOs and for-profit ventures. NGOs are sorely lacking services and resources they would pay to obtain, while corporate entities so often prove utterly uninformed about how to work with civil society partners.



<http://www.worldchanging.com/archives/004054.html>

Africa Source II Report | Jamais Cascio

Black Looks points to details from Becky Faith of Pambazuka News on the recent Africa Source II conference, an attempt to expand the discussion of open source software and the open source concept in Africa. (We noted the conference earlier this month.) Highlights

include discussions of the Creative Commons License as a benefit for Africa, localization of software for community empowerment, and the needs of disabled computer users in Africa. Of particular note was the emphasis on getting women involved in open source development:

Women from Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Nigeria, Malawi, Kenya, South Africa, Ghana, Senegal, Uganda, Sierra Leone and Guinea, and Egypt got together to discuss how they might advocate for open source amongst women. Mentoring for school-age girls to get them to consider information technology as a career was seen as a top priority. The openness of the FOSS community was seen as a great opportunity for learning and participation by women.

Faith points to the Africa Linux Chix website and mailing lists, which appear to be well-worth checking out.

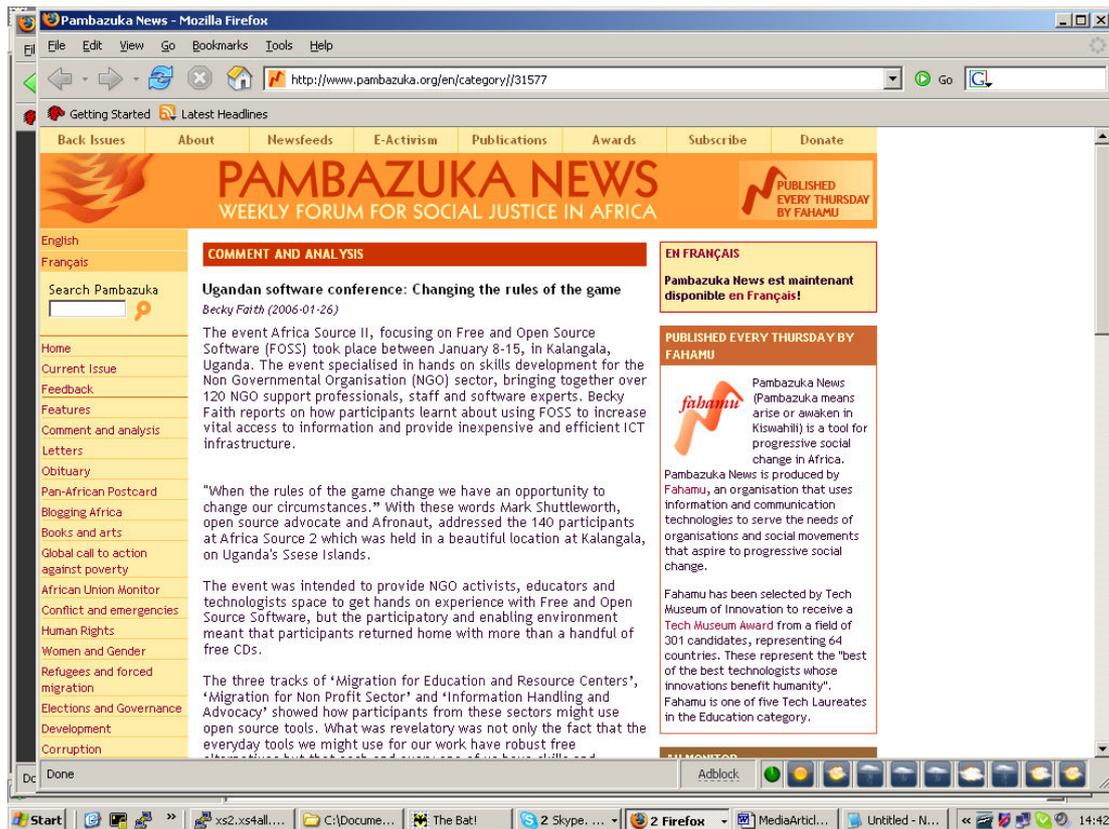


[http://okrasoup.typepad.com/black\\_looks/2006/01/africa\\_source\\_i.html](http://okrasoup.typepad.com/black_looks/2006/01/africa_source_i.html)

January 15, 2006  
Africa Source II

Africa Source II - "Free and Open Source Software for Local Communities took place in Kalangala, Uganda between 8th - 15th January. Tactical Technology Collective blogs about the 8 days of workshops. There is also a Wiki on the project.

"This isnt just about software, it's about sharing your content in the "digital commons", its about using ICTs to liberate people, its about sharing your skills and experience in an egalitarian setting where everyone has something valid to contribute. Its about user experiences which dont exclude disabled people (did you know the screen reading software blind people need to use windows costs \$800? Whereas you can get free software to do this) and which can be translated into your local language - even if it has non-unicode characters"....Participant



<http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category//31577>

## Ugandan software conference: Changing the rules of the game Becky Faith (2006-01-26)

The event Africa Source II, focusing on Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) took place between January 8-15, in Kalangala, Uganda. The event specialised in hands on skills development for the Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) sector, bringing together over 120 NGO support professionals, staff and software experts. Becky Faith reports on how participants learnt about using FOSS to increase vital access to information and provide inexpensive and efficient ICT infrastructure.

"When the rules of the game change we have an opportunity to change our circumstances." With these words Mark Shuttleworth, open source advocate and Afronaut, addressed the 140 participants at Africa Source 2 which was held in a beautiful location at Kalangala, on Uganda's Ssese Islands.

The event was intended to provide NGO activists, educators and technologists space to get hands on experience with Free and Open Source Software, but the participatory and enabling environment meant that participants returned home with more than a handful of free CDs.

The three tracks of 'Migration for Education and Resource Centers', 'Migration for Non Profit Sector' and 'Information Handling and Advocacy' showed how participants from these sectors might use open source tools. What was revelatory was not only the fact that the everyday tools we might use for our work have robust free alternatives but that each and every one of us have skills and experiences that are useful for us to share.

In the information handling track some time was spent exploring collaborative software. An introduction to Wiki's showed how they might be easily set up through sites like <http://www.wikispaces.com/> and prove valuable in an educational context. Content management systems (<http://www.socialsource.org.uk/pmwiki.php/IssuesAndResources/ContentManagement>) were

demoed and compared as well as tools for the use of SMS in activism and human rights monitoring such as Txtmob (<http://www.txtmob.com/>) and Asterisk (<http://www.voip-info.org/wiki/>). Activists from Egypt discussed the importance of blogging in recent political campaigns (<http://www.manalaa.net/egblogs>) and how RSS feeds ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS\\_%28file\\_format%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS_%28file_format%29)) were a vital tool in mobilising participation.

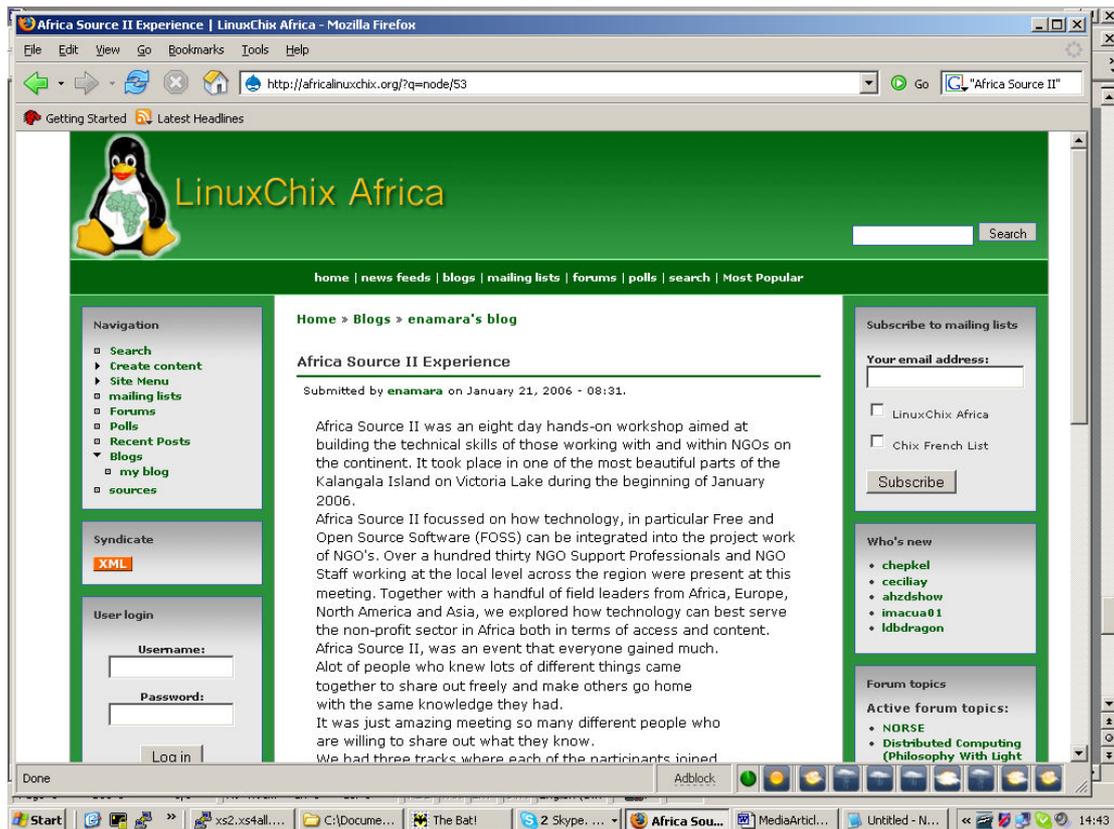
Other sessions saw the concepts of open knowledge explored in greater depth. An introduction to copyright and the creative commons movement (<http://www.common-sense.org/>) showed how the burgeoning digital commons can benefit Africa and how adoption of creative commons licenses (<http://creativecommons.org/license/>) can actually be a smart business model.

Yet computers can only serve to empower communities if they are adapted for local needs. Africa Source provided an opportunity for the localisation (<http://translate.org.za/>, <http://translate.or.ug/>) of popular software such as Open Office and showed how others might go about localising into their language.

The empowerment of disabled computer users was also addressed. Arun Mehta called for help for the visually challenged from geeks - (<http://wiki.africasource2.tacticaltech.org/post/main/02mAzpaeWZNprwBC>). He would like to see open source screenreaders to help blind and illiterate computer users - the proprietary Windows software costs in the region of \$900.

Throughout Africa Source 2 participants were encouraged to offer their skills and experiences to benefit others. Most technical environments offer a strict division between 'techies' (usually male) and non techies, yet the atmosphere at Kalangala encouraged those with any skills or experience to share them with the group.

Africa Source 2 also saw major progress in the development of the African Linux Chix community. Women from Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Nigeria, Malawi, Kenya, South Africa, Ghana, Senegal, Uganda, Sierra Leone and Guinea, and Egypt got together to discuss how they might advocate for open source amongst women. Mentoring for school-age girls to get them to consider information technology as a career was seen as a top priority. The openness of the FOSS community was seen as a great opportunity for learning and participation by women. To join the mailing lists in English and French visit the site at <http://www.africalinuxchix.org/>



<http://africalinuxchix.org/?q=node/53>

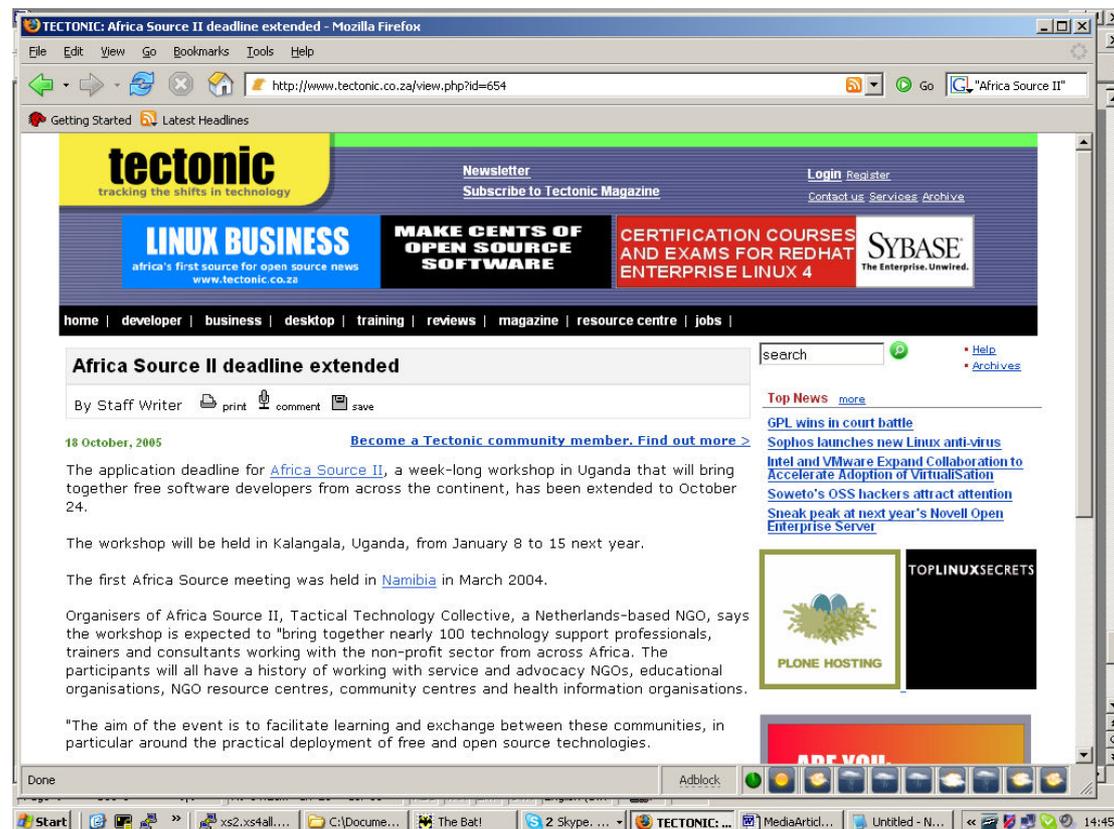
## Africa Source II Experience

Submitted by enamara on January 21, 2006 - 08:31.

Africa Source II was an eight day hands-on workshop aimed at building the technical skills of those working with and within NGOs on the continent. It took place in one of the most beautiful parts of the Kalangala Island on Victoria Lake during the beginning of January 2006. Africa Source II focussed on how technology, in particular Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) can be integrated into the project work of NGO's. Over a hundred thirty NGO Support Professionals and NGO Staff working at the local level across the region were present at this meeting. Together with a handful of field leaders from Africa, Europe, North America and Asia, we explored how technology can best serve the non-profit sector in Africa both in terms of access and content. Africa Source II, was an event that everyone gained much. A lot of people who knew lots of different things came together to share out freely and make others go home with the same knowledge they had. It was just amazing meeting so many different people who are willing to share out what they know. We had three tracks where each of the participants joined, the NGO Migration, which focussed on enabling NGOs migrate from using proprietary software and entirely go FLOSS. The Education Migration, which was focussed on enabling the Educational Sectors realise the use of FLOSS and how FLOSS can ease the work of People in the Educational Sector. We had people from places like Schoolnet Namibia, Tuxlabs from SouthAfrica and lots more share their experiences in using FLOSS in the Educational Sector. Another Track was the Information Handling Media Track which also had lots to share about how they can make the sector adopt FLOSS.

We usually met in the morning in each of our tracks to share experiences and come up with Migration plans for each of our organisations. Afternoon sessions, we had people share out specific topics of participants interest, and we would rap up each day with a skill share session where people who knew how to do certain things would gather in small groups and learn from each other. We had sessions on alternative access, securing networks from hackers, dealing with wireless technologies, localisation, developing blogs etc. Africa Source II is an event that empowered many people to realise that there is much they can achieve in the FLOSS world that they could never have achieved elsewhere

Thanks to the Sponsors, Organisers, Participants, and everyone who made the source event happen!!  
We are now back home implementing what we learned from the source camp.



<http://www.tectonic.co.za/view.php?id=654>

18 October, 2005

The application deadline for Africa Source II, a week-long workshop in Uganda that will bring together free software developers from across the continent, has been extended to October 24.

The workshop will be held in Kalangala, Uganda, from January 8 to 15 next year.

The first Africa Source meeting was held in Namibia in March 2004.

Organisers of Africa Source II, Tactical Technology Collective, a Netherlands-based NGO, says the workshop is expected to "bring together nearly 100 technology support professionals, trainers and consultants working with the non-profit sector from across Africa. The participants will all have a history of working with service and advocacy NGOs, educational organisations, NGO resource centres, community centres and health information organisations.

"The aim of the event is to facilitate learning and exchange between these communities, in particular around the practical deployment of free and open source technologies.

"The intention is to move beyond conceptual discussions of the benefits of FOSS and technology in general, and to test out these ideas and focus on practical skill sharing between technology implementers in the region."

The "Source" events are held around the globe and focus on developing the potential of free software developers to create, deploy and support free software applications in their own countries, particularly in the NGO sector.

Past events have been held in Croatia, Namibia and India. Future events are planned for the Middle East & Northern Africa, Central Asia and Latin America.

A limited number of travel and registration fee scholarships are also available.

Africa Source II - Derick Odemba



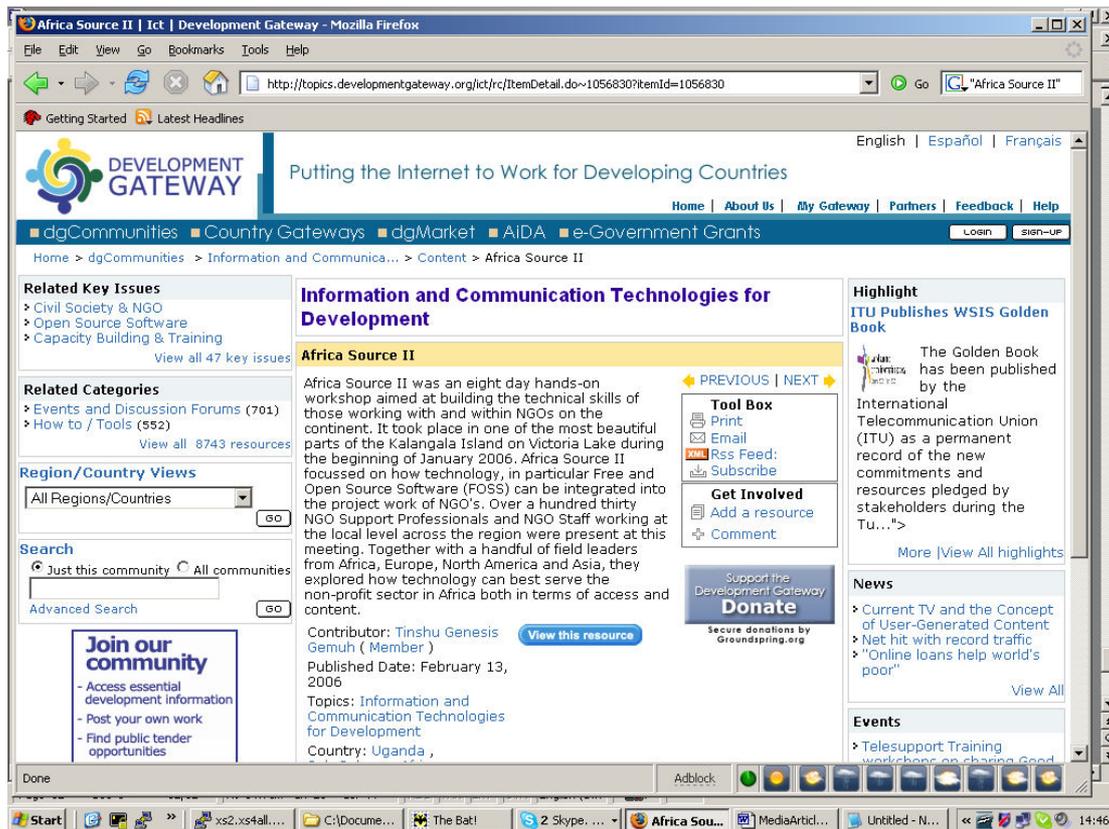
<http://www.aspirationtech.org/node/132?PHPSESSID=78d42136c8c77b27b33bce64cca18fbe>

Aspiration Facilitates at Africa Source II  
19 January, 2006

Aspiration managed the facilitation of Africa Source II, an eight-day hands-on workshop aimed at building the technical skills of those working with and within NGOs on the African continent. The event took place on Kalangala Island on Victoria Lake, working with our favorite collaborators and event organizers, Tactical Technology Collective, and in partnership with local organizations including Wougnet and Linux Solutions.

Aspiration Executive Director Allen Gunn was interviewed about Africa Source II by Tectonic and News Forge. Photos from the event can be viewed with the Flickr tag [africasource2](#).

Africa Source II focused on how technology, in particular Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) can be integrated into the project work of NGO's. Over a hundred thirty NGO Support Professionals and NGO Staff working at the local level across the region were present at this meeting. Together with a handful of field leaders from Africa, Europe, North America and Asia, they explored how technology can best serve the non-profit sector in Africa both in terms of access and content. Proceedings from the event can be found on the [event wiki](#).



<http://topics.developmentgateway.org/ict/rc/ItemDetail.do~1056830?itemId=1056830>

## Information and Communication Technologies for Development Africa Source II

Africa Source II was an eight day hands-on workshop aimed at building the technical skills of those working with and within NGOs on the continent. It took place in one of the most beautiful parts of the Kalangala Island on Victoria Lake during the beginning of January 2006. Africa Source II focussed on how technology, in particular Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) can be integrated into the project work of NGO's. Over a hundred thirty NGO Support Professionals and NGO Staff working at the local level across the region were present at this meeting. Together with a handful of field leaders from Africa, Europe, North America and Asia, they explored how technology can best serve the non-profit sector in Africa both in terms of access and content.

Contributor: Tinshu Genesis Gemuh ( Member )



[http://www.civiblog.org/blog/\\_archives/2005/9/29/1268199.html](http://www.civiblog.org/blog/_archives/2005/9/29/1268199.html)

## Africa Source II - Free and Open Source Software for Local Communities September 29, 2005

Africa Source II will be an eight day hands-on workshop aimed at building the technical skills of those working with NGOs on the continent. It will take place in one of the most beautiful parts of the Kalangala Island on Victoria Lake during the beginning of January 2006.

Africa Source II will bring together more than 100 NGOs and NGO technology support professionals working at the local level across the region, together with a handful of field leaders from Africa, Europe, North America and Asia. Africa Source II will be a free and open source software (FOSS) event. It's primary goal will be to increase the practical use of FOSS desktop applications and tools amongst the non profit sector in Africa.

Specifically, Africa Source II will focus on how Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) can be integrated into the mission-critical work of NGO's. We will be bringing together nearly 100 NGO Support Professionals and NGO Staff from across Africa to learn new skills, exchange tips, and share experiences. All participants will have a history of work with service and advocacy NGOs, educational organisations, NGO resource centres, community centres and health information organisations.

Participants with a range of experience will learn from one another about how FOSS can help make their NGO's more efficient, build capacity and assure that they are complying with software licensing laws. They will be given an opportunity to develop their understanding of FOSS, including exploring the challenges and the future potential of FOSS adoption. There will be a range of sessions for participants to take part in and will include:

- \* How to help NGO's plan for, migrate to and adopt FOSS applications
- \* How to use FOSS applications to handle information, publish content using citizen's media tools and engage constituency
- \* How FOSS can increase accessibility through localization, translation into local language and dialects

During these sessions participants will get an opportunity to learn from peers about how FOSS has impacted their work through case studies and skill shares. The workshops will be lead by a range of facilitators from the respective region with strong experience in deploying free and open source solutions and of working in the non-profit sector. They will be joined by a handful of others with relevant experiences from developing and transition countries, as well as a select number of leaders in from specific fields

The camp will focus on learning by doing, rather than by listening. We aim for a "workshop vibe" as opposed to a "conference vibe"; we hope that elements like the location, shared housing, and the nature of the sessions keep the energy level high and the interest in active participation over passive learning strong. Like other source events, Africa Source II will be intentionally designed to foster community building, this creates an atmosphere conducive to learning, but more importantly is essential if longer term relationships are to be built.

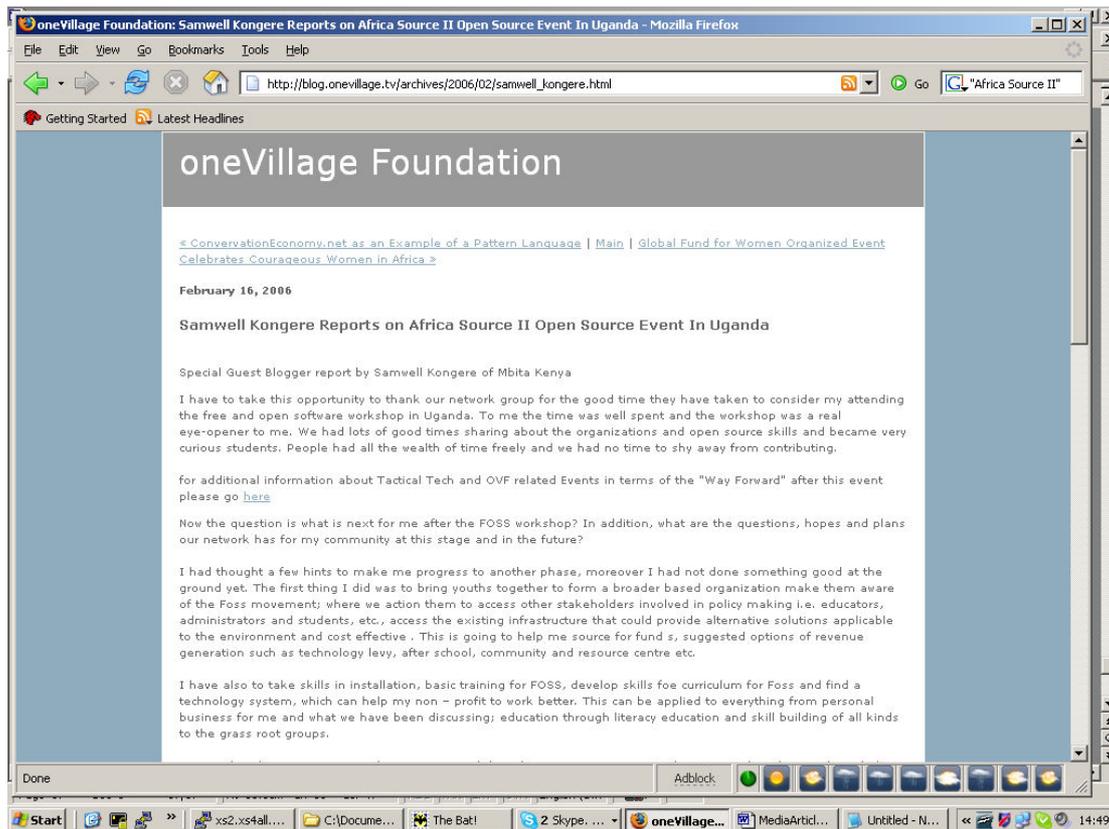
Building on the previous Africa Source event (Namibia, March 2004), which brought together African FOSS developers working in the social sector, Africa Source II will work at the next level to bring together those working at the complimentary intermediary level. Besides new ideas, skills and contacts that participants will gain they will also leave the workshop equipped with an event specific version of NGO-in-a-box, a collection of Free and Open Source Software that will be relevant to their work.

The Association for Progressive Communication APC (regional network), Fantsuam Foundation (Nigeria), Schoolnet Africa (regional network), Translate.org.za, WOUGNET (Uganda), Aspiration (USA) and The Tactical Technology Collective (the Netherlands) will collaborate to organise the content of the workshop and to build strong relationships between the participants. The project partners are committed to examining the challenges of implementing FOSS in the African context, stretching its potential to fit the needs on the ground, and building local capacities to realise this. Our local partners there are East African Center for Open Source (EACOSS), Linux Solutions and WOUGNET.

We are able to organise Africa Source II thanks to generous support from IDRC - The International Development Research Centre (<http://www.idrc.ca/>), OSI - Open Society Institute Information Program (<http://www.soros.org/initiatives/information>) and OSISA Open Society Initiative for South Africa (<http://www.osisa.org/>).

Previous source events have taken place in Croatia - September 2003, Namibia - March 2004 and India - February 2005. As well as in Middle East & Northern Africa future source events will take place in Central Asia (<http://www.tacticaltech.org/fossroad>) and Middle East. Interaction and learning between these regional events is facilitated through the exchange of project models and individual expertise.

For more information please visit <http://www.tacticaltech.org/africasource2>



[http://blog.onevillage.tv/archives/2006/02/samwell\\_kongere.html](http://blog.onevillage.tv/archives/2006/02/samwell_kongere.html)

February 16, 2006

Samwell Kongere Reports on Africa Source II Open Source Event In Uganda

Special Guest Blogger report by Samwell Kongere of Mbita Kenya

I have to take this opportunity to thank our network group for the good time they have taken to consider my attending the free and open software workshop in Uganda. To me the time was well spent and the workshop was a real eye-opener to me. We had lots of good times sharing about the organizations and open source skills and became very curious students. People had all the wealth of time freely and we had no time to shy away from contributing for additional information about Tactical Tech and OVF related Events in terms of the "Way Forward" after this event please go here

Now the question is what is next for me after the FOSS workshop? In addition, what are the questions, hopes and plans our network has for my community at this stage and in the future?

I had thought a few hints to make me progress to another phase, moreover I had not done something good at the ground yet. The first thing I did was to bring youths together to form a broader based organization make them aware of the Foss movement; where we action them to access other stakeholders involved in policy making i.e. educators, administrators and students, etc., access the existing infrastructure that could provide alternative solutions applicable to the environment and cost effective . This is going to help me source for fund s, suggested options of revenue generation such as technology levy, after school, community and resource centre etc.

I have also to take skills in installation, basic training for FOSS, develop skills foe curriculum for Foss and find a technology system, which can help my non – profit to work better. This can be applied to everything from personal business for me and what we have been discussing; education through literacy education and skill building of all kinds to the grass root groups.

We need to discuss cooperation between you and the other organizations, network my Linux (Foss) tutorials and what I need to learn in using Foss. We have to devise ways of setting up craft business, literacy project (with major focus in education and technology training and research). These must be included in my campaign, I need to network, link up with a local training institute to distribute tutorials for learning environment, in terms of hardware and software for schools and CBOs, I have sped up the creation of resource centers or education centers for learning FOSS where the community can gather information and skill sharing. We need to get the market, which is here for FOSS; we will be the first FOSS solution center in the whole province with about 14 districts.

The resources will combine ICT hardware, software, training trainers (in computer maintenance, installation - computers, for the center, community radio, cameras etc. and buildings to operate from); besides these, we can as well sell other tech accessories and other tech services to the people.

We have to couple the craft business, snacks, and literacy project ICT centre to make these ideas possible and real. On the implementation stage, I will check on the ICT challenge in our community, which I am already collecting out, investigating to the extent of interest and activity in the use of ICT, open up discussion to stimulate action research in this area and find out if our community can inherit the new invented technology of FOSS. In this case, ICT is not suggested as a substitute for paper and pencil exercises, but as an additional resource to allow people understand their own information skills.

I am already on the go, installed Linux in some computers at an organization here, they trust it with comments that it is user friendly an added option for the windows. I want to become the junior Linux administrator here. If more Linux administration jobs increases this option become more effective for my hoped community empowerment for capacity building.

My hopes therefore, is to a broad skill based experience for the management of the project, project writing which I will need our group support totally. First, I must have access to the hardware (computers), internet connectivity, and budget costs and then convince the stakeholders, educators, etc., to use a Foss as a learning platform.

I may say all the hell to you but hope our members in the forum will discuss this as my immediate collaborators, we have to plan these together to forge ahead in my having funds, written proposals, to source out cost implementations, do planning etc. Janet can as well plan a meeting with me to discuss. If possible, I can meet your project managers in Mumias and collaborate to make a branch in Suba - District. We can start Foss either in Suba (Mbita, Kisumu or Mumias).

Lastly had held a first meeting with some community stakeholders and we have a decision to make on 4th Feb 2006 if we can have land to do the implementation of community resource centre. We named a lobby group for youths, a combination of all small self-help groups called (Rusinga Island Youth Development Forum Initiative) to come up with resolutions to discuss the comparing strategy for community resource center. I am planning to meet Henry Migingo after 4th 2006 meeting to share much.

Let me receive your comments and do all the additional exchanges, networks, posts about this. And God bless.



<http://insecurityforum.org/ojs/201/>

**Africa Source II: A workshop for NGOs**  
Olaf Jan Schmidt - 9 October 2005, 21:41 UTC

Some days ago I blogged about the benefit of using open-source software. One of the most important obstacles here is the necessity for training.

Today I found a post at civiblog reporting on the Africa Source II conference in Uganda that addresses exactly this need: "Africa Source II will be an eight day hands-on workshop aimed at building the technical skills of those working with NGOs on the continent. It will take place in one of the most beautiful parts of the Kalangala Island on Victoria Lake during the beginning of January 2006." The exact date is Jan 08-Jan 15, 2006.

The event is a follow-up to an earlier conference in Namibia early last year. "The camp will focus on learning by doing, rather than by listening. [...] Like other source events, Africa Source II will be intentionally designed to foster community building, this creates an atmosphere conducive to learning, but more importantly is essential if longer term relationships are to be built."



<http://www.worldchanging.com/archives/004004.html>

## Open Source, Development and Design | Jamais Cascio

Why do we consider the "open source" model a driver of leapfrog development? There are (at least) three good reasons: it enables production as well as consumption; it enables localization for communities that don't have the resources to tempt commercial developers to provide local versions of their products; it can be free as in "gratis" as well as free as in "libre" -- an important consideration for developing communities. All of this will be familiar territory for regular readers, but two more good examples of the utility of the free/libre/open source model emerged in recent days: the Africa Source conference in Uganda, and the Open Source Appropriate Technology discussion at Agroblogger.

The Africa Source II conference, held in Kalangala, Uganda, has just finished up, and it looks to have been a real success. Africa Source II focuses on how open source technologies can be implemented by non-governmental organizations working in Africa. Sponsored by the Tactical Technology Collective (which also produced the Asia Source conference Ethan talked about last year), Africa Source II mainly looked at how free/libre/open source software could be applied to education and development support, but also addressed the role of Citizen Media as a model for information distribution. A conference wiki contains links to notes from all of the sessions, and the conference blog has back-channel discussion and some interesting interviews with participants:

Q: From your experiences, what works best?

[Stephen Settimi, USAID's Global Health Bureau's senior technical advisor for knowledge management and ICT4D.] The solutions that have proven the best in international development are those that are heavily-driven by community expressions of need and desire to develop in certain ways. Needs for better health, or needs for better transportation of water. When it's community-driven, we get better outcomes. Specially if the community is integrally involved.

Q: Could you cite any small-but-successful projects?

Small is a relative term. Let me think... ICT for communications, exposing people to new ideas, giving people a chance to exchange and share knowledge. Among youth, internet cafes are a real good investment. Community portals for using internet technology for a variety of purposes also help.

Some of the larger ones could be the Last Mile Initiative. It's an attempt to bring technologies, specially internet connectivity, out to the most rural areas in countries.

I guess if you're also looking at the specific tools, once they get their wikis and blogs, these could be very important for the community; such tools serve as channels for communication. It offers learning from people who live elsewhere on what could be done or not.

Africa Source II billed itself as a hands-on experience, with education and learn-by-doing examples side-by-side with presentations and plenary discussions. This is exactly the right sort of environment for talking about open source technology, as it emphasizes the participatory nature of the model. (Via Black Looks)

The open source model can be applied to more than software, as we well know. One of the more interesting applications -- and one that's still in its infancy -- is in the realm of "appropriate technology." The website Agroblogger has published an interesting ongoing series of articles about the role of the open source concept in the world of appropriate technology, including a few links to pioneering organizations.

Let us imagine an active online community participating in vibrant discussions and sharing of AT plans and experiences. Let us imagine the AT equivalent of a sourceforge.net, a place where designers and field workers can go to download plans of greenhouses, beehives, water pumps, animal traction implements, and biodiesel equipment. And, within the legal framework of an AT General Public License (GPL), those plans can be used freely, modified, and republished under the same AT GPL. IRC channels dedicated to specific programmatic areas could serve as a dynamic forum where "newbies" can gain wisdom and insight from experienced field practitioners.

In this way, appropriate technology will become a true rival to the megalithic technologies that have so dominated civilization since the industrial revolution.

Jeff at WorldChanging ally Sustainablog raises an important question: "Is this a concept that generally will appeal to the more technically inclined, but leave the rest of us out of the loop?" Although many open source advocates would likely be quick to assure Jeff that this is not the case, I'm inclined to share his concern. The problem isn't whether or not the open source technologies can meet the needs of potential users, but whether the technologies can do so in a way that encourages continued use. It's a question of interface.

Historically, open source projects (software and otherwise) have tended to focus on the nuts-and-bolts of the underlying processes, and leave the interface aspects for the last minute. Computer users are familiar with the digital implementation of an interface, but many designers use the term to refer to any point of connection between the object and the user, be it keyboard or pump handle. The questions a good interface designer must contend with are daunting. Does the interface make sense to the unexperienced user? Are there ways that the interface can be misinterpreted, leading the user to do the wrong thing? What happens when the user does the wrong thing -- is there any indication of a problem, does the system just sit there, or (worst of all) does it misbehave in a dangerous way? How can the user tell when the system is operating properly? How well could an experienced user instruct an inexperienced user on the details of the system? How could we make the user experience more pleasing?

As non-technical people who have given Linux a try know, too many open source designers see good interfaces as somehow "dumbing down" a system, and strive instead for complexity as a sign of completeness.

This all ties back to open source appropriate technology when we stop to consider the ways in which seemingly-simple tasks can be made difficult through obscure design, and the way that good design can make even tedious tasks a joy. Jeff cites the Play Pump as an example

of good appropriate technology, and not only do I agree, I see it also as an example of truly excellent design.

The lesson here for open source appropriate technology creators is that functionality is necessary but not sufficient. Of course the technology has to work, but if commercial/proprietary technologies are simpler to use or provide the user a better sense of control over outcomes, it doesn't matter how gratis or libre the technology is -- it won't be widely used.

Ultimately, I think that the free/libre/open source model is an ideal engine for leapfrog development. This requires due consideration of how the technologies fit into the lives of potential users, from both a cultural impact perspective and a user need perspective. The connection between open source and the appropriate technology movement is potentially quite fruitful, and I look forward to seeing how it will evolve.



<http://www.linuxtoday.com/infrastructure/2006020601326NWSWEV>

NewsForge: Africa Source II  
Feb 6, 2006, 18 :15 UTC

"The Africa Source II (AS II) conference, an eight-day hands-on workshop aimed at building the technical skills of those working with and within non-governmental organizations (NGO) on the continent, was held in Kalangala, Uganda, last month. The focus of the conference, held on one of the most beautiful islands of Lake Victoria, was on how free and open source software (FOSS) could be integrated into the projects of NGOs. More than 130 IT professionals and NGO staff from across the region, along with field leaders from Africa, Europe, North America, and Asia, were in attendance this year.



<http://www.tectonic.co.za/view.php?id=850&page=2>

## Critical advantages of free software

3 February, 2006

Let's talk about impact. You've dealt with a lot of non-profits. Are NGOs saving money using open source?

I don't have any data off the top of my head for cost-savings, and total cost of ownership is a very complex calculation because a lot of people are tempted just to add up the licence fees, where for free software it is zero and for proprietary software it is not zero, but because of all these support issues I detailed earlier, it is really quite subjective to compare relevant costs. And so while we definitely believe that there are cost-savings by going the free software route, we don't emphasise cost savings as the primary reason to adopt.

Three factors that I think are critically important in Africa:

The first is localisation. If you look at what organisations like [translate.org.za](http://translate.org.za) have done where they've translated OpenOffice into all 11 official South African languages. That to me is revolutionary because you're taking the technology to the people and you're not telling the people that to use technology they first have to learn English or learn French or learn Portuguese, so that to me is something.

In addition, you also have the security issues and there are two of those in particular.

I think you can identify a profound cost savings when NGOs aren't spending a lot of time getting viruses off their machines and cleaning hard disks of spyware and dealing with the performance hits that spyware puts on your processors

NGOs enjoy a much better uptime when they are running a Linux desktop, provided all the support-issues are addressed.

The third aspect of free and open source software that I find really compelling is that, by virtue of the distribution approach, you're able to get very appropriately targeted configurations for different needs.

One that I find stunning is the life-extension of hardware based on small Linux distributions - the Linux distributions that are friendliest to old hardware, help people to take PII's that are fundamentally unusable with Windows XP and they're still extremely useful boxes in the Linux world whether they are running client desktops or running as thin clients.

Is there a distinction between the issues faced by non-profits in the West versus everywhere else?

I think there are definitely different issues in different parts of the world. I think you [in the developing world] also have two fundamental constraints that are much less pronounced in the West.

The first is the hardware, you find older hardware in circulation in developing countries and so the Linux variable in the equation becomes much more critical because running current versions of Windows is much less of an option.

Especially if you want to connect to the Internet, you need to be running the latest browsers to take advantage of all the content that's out there. With Linux that is possible on very old hardware, and that is really quite cool.

The other issue you run into, that is not so much a Linux issue, or open source issue, but it is still a fundamental issue, is the availability of both electricity and Internet access. I find in general that NGOs in developing countries spend a substantial amount of time:

- a) building infrastructure that can deal with the fluctuating power grid, if there is a power grid to begin with; and
- b) dealing with either low availability or high cost of internet access.

An example of where you see open source software offering some compelling alternatives -- take a look at the telecentre movement, where you are able with a lot of these telecentres in Africa, to go in and see folks running free and open source software thin client networks, so that people have Internet access through this central point, but it is sustainable because of the fact that hardware and the infrastructure required are not particularly daunting to the telecentre.

You've just been to Africa Source II. What did you take out of that event?

I was very inspired. The progress since Africa Source I was dramatic. One way that we measured that was the number of Africa Source I participants who were able to come to Africa Source II and share skills and their knowledge from applying what they had learned at Africa Source I, and so you certainly see some capacity and community growth.

I think you also see increasing sophistication around use of things like thin-client networks, and getting to use specialised distros for specialised purposes. I continue to be inspired by the educational initiatives, so the tuxlabs and Schoolnet, especially Schoolnet Namibia .

The other development at Africa Source II that is very encouraging is the number of women involved. Around 35% of the participants at Africa Source II were women. And many of them led discussions and really were showing a lot of leadership. I think that is an extremely exciting development, as we look to both to broaden the outreach of Linux but also the relevance.

Obviously you believe quite strongly in open source. In the next 10 years, looking forward, how do you expect this movement to grow? Will there be a death of Windows ever? When people ask me about death of Windows, I answer with a single word, which is: Cobol . Because, you may not be aware of this, but well over 80% of software in existence is written in Cobol, and that was borne out [during] the Y2K scare. But the point is that you have got massive software applications written in a legacy language and in the same sense there is such an absolute in the Windows infrastructure that I don't think it will ever die completely.

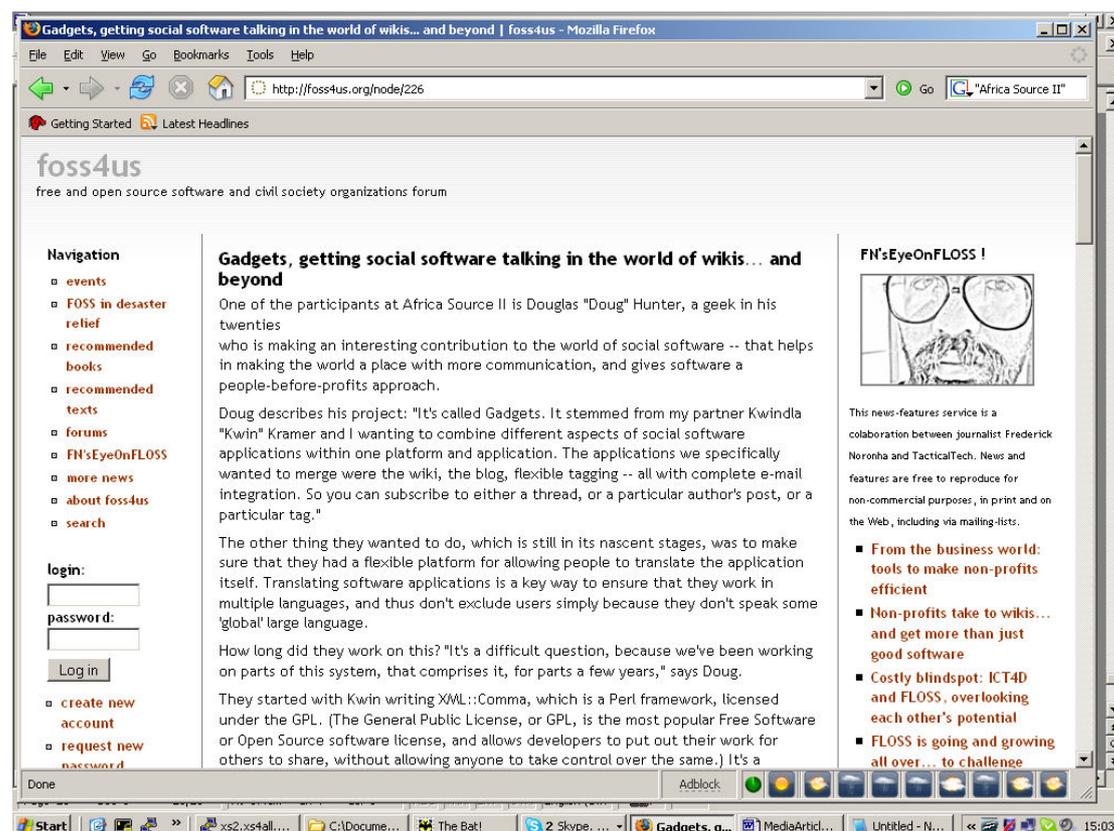
But what I think you're going to see in the next 10 years that I find very exciting, is a much richer weight of options available to software consumers and as the software usage paradigm evolves -- where I think we're moving more and more toward web-based application delivery - - that's going to change the way that consumer-choice or NGO-choice functions for software decisions.

And I think because Windows is such a poor server platform both in terms of security and in terms of administration and scalability, I really think that you're going to see the various flavours of Linux and FreeBSD continue to shine and a lot of passion is going to be poured into building out infrastructure on those operating system platforms.

But just to be clear, I try to stay somewhat balanced in my opinion on software because my belief is an NGO should use the tool that is most appropriate and if that tool is proprietary, so be it.

I think it is a mistake to prioritise software philosophy or software ideology over utility, because the net effect in doing that is that NGOs end up using tools that are less appropriate for their needs, and develop bad attitudes about free and open source software.

And so to me the challenge over the next 10 years, is to make it so that they are never having to take second-class software when they go the free software route. The challenge over the next 10 years is to get tools available and an inventory that rivals and surpasses corresponding proprietary offerings, because that is where the real revolution will occur.



<http://foss4us.org/node/226>

One of the participants at Africa Source II is Douglas "Doug" Hunter, a geek in his twenties who is making an interesting contribution to the world of social software -- that helps in making the world a place with more communication, and gives software a people-before-profits approach.

Doug describes his project: "It's called Gadgets. It stemmed from my partner Kwindla "Kwin" Kramer and I wanting to combine different aspects of social software applications within one platform and application. The applications we specifically wanted to merge were the wiki, the blog, flexible tagging -- all with complete e-mail integration. So you can subscribe to either a thread, or a particular author's post, or a particular tag."

The other thing they wanted to do, which is still in its nascent stages, was to make sure that they had a flexible platform for allowing people to translate the application itself. Translating software applications is a key way to ensure that they work in multiple languages, and thus don't exclude users simply because they don't speak some 'global' large language.

How long did they work on this? "It's a difficult question, because we've been working on parts of this system, that comprises it, for parts a few years," says Doug.

They started with Kwin writing XML::Comma, which is a Perl framework, licensed under the GPL. (The General Public License, or GPL, is the most popular Free Software or Open Source software license, and allows developers to put out their work for others to share, without allowing anyone to take control over the same.) It's a framework for flexibly managing large stores of documents.

"We ended up building quite a few different websites on top of XML::Comma. We combined that with a templating framework HTML::Mason. Just to make dynamic websites," explains Doug.

A few of the sites they built with this were [allafrica.com](http://allafrica.com), which is the largest provider of African news on the Internet. They also did a complete set of tools for the Democratic Party in the US. As well as many more, African-centric and progressive political organisations in the United States, and abroad.

How is their product better than others in the field?

"This is the first time that I've seen all of these different social software applications -- the blog, wiki, tagging, image handling, audio handling, basically any sort of file attachment -- with complete email integration, all combined into a single piece of software," explains Doug.

Says he: "You can create new posts via email, which allows bloggers in low-bandwidth situations to communicate with the outside world via a hand-held device that supports email. We have plans to extend that support to SMS as well."

While accessing the Internet at high speeds is not an issue in many larger cities, it is a major hurdle for most places of the planet, where citizens in smaller communities simply don't have the bandwidth to access the Net at anything other than crawling speeds.

This software is available in a repository for anybody who needs. Doug says you can get a copy by writing to him at [dug@plusthree.com](mailto:dug@plusthree.com) "We plan to have a public release within a couple of months," he announces.

Doug calls himself a "freelance hacker and sometimes entrepreneur", based in New York. He's 28. Kwin is the CTO of All Africa Global Media (which runs [allafrica.com](http://allafrica.com)), and a couple of years senior, is based in Washington DC.

What motivates him to do this work?

"It's fun. I get to do this kind of an event (Africa Source II), and meet these wonderful people who are doing amazing things, and it's both exciting and inspiring," says he.

Doug studied English Literature at the University of Washington, but adds "I didn't get a degree". He explains: "I actually was too distracted by social life, so when I had to drop out and get a real job. I got a job at an Internet service provider, Seonet, a local provider at Seattle Washington and and actually enjoyed it."

He views Gadgets as not just a piece of software, but it's also a platform for developing social software applications.

What are his priorities for the further growth of social software, a realm that doesn't offer billions in profit, but could really help meet the need of allowing people to communicate and share knowledge in ways they badly need to?

"The things I always end up coming back to are ease of use, accessibility (ideally for everyone), translatability and localisability," he says.

And others at Africa Source II say they're already impressed by his work.  
By fredericknoronha at 2006/01/09 - 12:05