

## SchoolNet Namibia: Eyes on the Prize!

*This year's winner of the APC Haffkin Prize is SchoolNet Namibia. The theme for the prize was 'People-centred ICT policy in Africa'. SchoolNet Namibia has established a network among schools and allied educational institutions in Namibia with strategic and operational partnerships of key stakeholders nationally and internationally. Immediately after the awards ceremony held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, iConnect Africa spoke to the head of SchoolNet Namibia, Mr. Joris Komen, about the work of his institution in the country and the plans for using the \$US7, 500 prize.*

**iConnect Africa:** What are the main objectives of SchoolNet Namibia?

**JK:** SchoolNet Namibia is building capacity and know-how at all levels in this network through data communication, data-links, computing facilities, software, operational and management procedures, based on a series of agreements among partners, and training programmes for teachers and learners, relating to the operation of the network, for the use of ICTs in education in Namibia. This process supports the introduction of new curricula and provides communication channels for educational institutions throughout the country. Another dimension is to explore and initiate creative ways of ensuring the sustainability of school-networking activities, such as low-cost solutions that extend the democratization of access, especially to rural areas. This also involves developing local applications and educational content, as well as encourages the critical role of ICT champions and mechanisms to ensure sustainability. Furthermore, the organization monitors and evaluates the impact of the use of ICTs in education, increases awareness and understanding of the potential of ICTs in education, shares information on best practices in school networking and develops partnerships.

**iConnect Africa:** Is SchoolNet Namibia involved in the national ICT policy process in Namibia?

**JK:** Of course! In fact, SchoolNet is one of the prime movers of the ICT policy agenda in Namibia. We played a leading role in the formulation of the policy, which has been submitted to the Cabinet and the bill will be approved shortly. The organization was represented on the National Information and Communication Infrastructure plan (NICI) working group that engineered the national ICT policy paper. We lobbied on a wide range of education sector issues among partners - senior ministry officials, school principals, tertiary institutions - as well as the private sector partners to participate in the process also. In the subsequent national consultative workshops, we played a key role in identifying a wide range of stakeholders from all sectors of the community. SchoolNet Namibia was also closely involved in the NICI consultancy with respect to reviewing pre-publication chapter drafts.

**iConnect Africa:** Will the organization be involved in implementing the policy?

**JK:** Yes. We are planning to lead the implementation of the national strategy. We already have plans that will be implemented as soon as the Government approves the policy. Some programmes are also being implemented, and SchoolNet Namibia is a case in point.

**iConnect Africa:** What has been the real and visible impact of SchoolNet Namibia's work?

**JK:** Just in a year and half of its existence, SchoolNet Namibia has moved from 20 connected schools to over 230. Schoolchildren in Namibia are benefiting a lot from this connectivity and access to ICT tools, which are also enhancing the teaching and



*"I believe that Africa has a great potential in benefiting from and contributing to the global information society. This can be achieved only through the implementation of innovative applications that involve the youth."*

Joris Komen, SchoolNet Namibia

### Inside:

#### News in Brief

Viva African Civil Society & the Information Society!	
Viva! Viva!	2
Farmers and market traders in Senegal using wireless technology to improve business efficiencies	2
Age and gender defy technologies in Africa	2
Gender evaluation of Internet initiatives	2
<i>and more ...</i>	

#### Spotlight 3

#### The Quartely Story 4

#### Notice Board 5

#### Forthcoming Events 6

continued on page 3

## News in Brief

### Viva African Civil Society & the Information Society! Viva! Viva!

These were the words that opened the first-ever Africa-wide workshop on civil society and their engagement in ICT policy-making in their countries. Organized by the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) with support from human rights organizations. The workshop led to the creation of a network of ICT policy mobilizers to be based in the subregions of the continent. They will dedicate themselves to building an inclusive information society throughout Africa. The workshop, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia brought together over 80 representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), human rights organizations, media and women's groups, development agencies and researchers from 24 African countries. They gathered to discuss the role of African civil society in ICT policy-making and to outline a plan of action to move the agenda forward. The Workshop Statement and Action Plan can be accessed from: <http://africa.rights.apc.org/workshop.shtml> or <http://www.uneca.org/aisi/cspr.htm>.

### Farmers and market traders in Senegal using wireless technology to improve business efficiencies

Manobi, established by French and Senegalese entrepreneurs, allows farmers to check prices of foods and goods through mobile phones before going into town to make purchases. Before having access to such technology for obtaining market information, middlemen often took advantage of farmers, selling them goods at higher prices. The technology allows mobile phones to dial in to a server, where prices are stored in a database. Even though Manobi is only being tested, it is already having an effect on the way farmers grow crops. About 150 participants who also use mobile devices to load boats and check weather forecasts are testing the technology.

See website: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/2290540.stm>

### Age and gender defy technologies in Africa

Seventy-year old Anastacia never went to school and does not speak a word of English, but has a way with the mouse! Anastacia picked up her computer skills at a telecentre in Nakaseke, which is approximately 2 hours outside of Uganda's capital, Kampala. The Telecentre has Internet, telephone and fax services for the surrounding community, co-sponsored by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the International Women's Tribune Centre (IWTC), and the Government of Uganda. Anastacia epitomizes the effect that demystified technologies can have on non-literate and rural women in the developing world. Beyond making technologies available to rural women, the project has taken on a popular and unique edge, creating locally appropriate content, using the language and imagery of the women it targets. For more on this story go to: <http://www.uneca.org/aisi/ictstory1.htm>

### Gender evaluation of Internet initiatives

The APC Women's Networking Support Programme has put together a gender evaluation methodology that ICT practitioners can use in assessing their social-change projects. The methodology - GEM - provides a means for determining whether ICTs are really improving women's lives and gender relations, and are promoting positive change at the individual, institutional, community and broader social levels. The guide provides users with an overview of the evaluation process (including links to general evaluation resources) and outlines suggested strategies and methodologies for incorporating gender analysis throughout the evaluation process. It can be used to ensure that gender concerns are integrated into project planning processes. For more information, see: <http://www.apcwomen.org/gem/go4.htm>

### Africa should use open source

In the context of limited financial resources, Africa should investigate

how to use the opportunities presented by open-source software better, according to South Africa's Public Service and Administration Minister, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi. She said the high costs of ICT goods and services forced such an approach. "I would like us to start thinking critically about how we can make better use of the opportunities availed by the emergence of open-source software to drive the costs of ICT products, and hopefully, services to our benefit". Read more: <http://www.itweb.co.za/sections/software/2002/0210291210.asp?O=TE>

### PDAs boost rural research capacity

"SATELLIFE Health Information Project" from the United States was one of the two winning projects at the 2002 Stockholm Challenge Award in the 'Health' category. SATELLIFE uses multiple technologies - from satellites to modems - to connect health professionals to critical information in under-resourced areas. In rural Africa, manual health surveys are expensive, inadequate, inaccurate and slow. The project uses PDAs to collect timely public health data, return them to policy-makers and explore appropriate affordable technology for the environment. In a Ghanaian trial programme, 30 volunteers were trained to conduct PDAs and completed over 2,400 surveys within five days. The data were analysed and the report delivered in six days instead of the usual four to six months. Read more: <http://www.healthnet.org/index2.php>

### Senegal: Healing and technology

Healers who brew medicines from indigenous plants are using computers to help preserve their knowledge and to provide them with an income. Read more: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/2296893.stm>

### Ghana Dot Gov - Researching the potential for e-Government services in Ghana.

Co-financed with the Ghana Ministry of Information and Presidential

*continued on page 3*

## Spotlight

### Sight or Vision? Advancing ICTs for Ethiopia's Blind

In recent years, the world has witnessed incredible ICT advances, which have proved to be far more efficient and much faster than ever before for human activity and interaction. Even more fascinating is the fact that technology is now being adapted for blind users to access computers and the Internet independently. Not surprisingly, this technology is not so widespread in Africa and the rest of the developing world.

However, through the work of Adaptive Technology Centre for the Blind (ATCB), an NGO established in 2000 and based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, ICTs are becoming increasingly available to the blind in Ethiopia. ATCB, which is a unique and pioneering institution on the continent, was the brain-child of a blind Ethio-Canadian. The organization promotes adaptive technology in Ethiopia with the help and support of a group of dedicated blind colleagues who work on a voluntary basis. With such initiatives, blind people will not be left out of the ICT revolution, removal of other barriers permitting.

ATCB has so far introduced such computer-based adaptive technical training in the country as accessing screen-readers, Braille computing,

manipulation of multimedia, scanning documents, communicating via Internet and computerized Braille transcription. These are important skills for blind students and professionals alike. Furthermore, such training strengthens the capacity of institutions of higher education, national examination and curriculum development centres and the Ethiopian National Association of the Blind (ENAB). These all require skilled human resources in Braille computing to provide sufficient and effective transcription services, particularly for those working in office environments.

ATCB is not only providing a valuable service by creating an information society for the blind, but is also helping to enhance employment opportunities. Through the acquisition of Braille computing skills, blind people's sense of security increases, as they gain easier access to information on current affairs, health and family issues such as HIV/AIDS and other pandemics. This in turn can create a sense of independence for them and reduce their over-dependence on the assistance of others for routine needs such as reading, writing, and the processing of information. In addition, through the use of voice-pow-

ered computers and Braille keyboards, more blind people can access the Internet and send email messages as a matter of course.

Consequently, the organization feels it also has to play a key role in engaging the Ethiopian Government to sensitize policy-makers and decision-makers on the need to for ICT policies and strategies that ensure the needs of the country's disabled community.

To date, more than 30 blind Ethiopians have graduated from the Centre, equipped with skills and competencies in Braille-computing technology that can assist them in the information age. According to Ato Getu Mulatu, the current Coordinator, "the next steps would be for ATCB to localize adaptive technologies even further by exploring opportunities for using our local language, Amharic. That way we can further increase access to the majority of the people and not just those who speak English".

'I don't have sight. However, I have a vision!' *Tameru Belay, Founder and Director of ATCB*

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### SchoolNet Namibia ...

*continued from page 1*

learning process. The leading role that we are playing in developing and implementing the national ICT policy is our significant achievement and impact on development in Namibia. Moreover, currently there are over 87 ongoing projects as a result of SchoolNet Namibia. Some of these projects include the management of computer network installation projects on behalf of the Ministry of Education, NGOs, donors and corporate bodies; provision and implementation of low-cost networking options to schools and educators, using new and refurbished equipment and stable open source (free) software including Linux, Open (and Star) Office, school administration software, cross-platform compatible

educational content, and bona fide educational portals to web-based resources; provision of affordable, subsidized Internet to schools and educators using both landline and wireless solutions (school Internet access is free, telecom costs at \$US0.026/unit - currently 20% less than a local exchange call). In addition, we have established areas of support and have created a SchoolNet ISP with a reduced-cost 0700 national number for dial-up clients, especially for those with remote and poor Telecom infrastructure (e.g. ultraphones). Furthermore, a 0800 toll-free number for help-desk and technical support services - 08 00 00 57 93 - is currently

*continued on page 5*

### News in brief ...

*continued from page 2*

Affairs, this project is examining and testing concrete e-Government systems and applications in Ghana. It will result in a demonstration portal for the Ministry, applications and content... Read more: [http://www.iicd.org/base/base\\_index?project\\_id=item\\_id](http://www.iicd.org/base/base_index?project_id=item_id)

### La Francophonie group has started a campaign in nine African countries

Nine workshops in nine countries are being developed in the organization's ICT laboratory, 'LABTIC', in partnership with the local free software users association. More at: <http://intif.francophonie.org/INTIF/CP/VoirCP.cfm?ID=230>

## The Quarterly Story

### ICT Plans Caught up in Ugandan Bureaucracy

The Internet is coming to Uganda's rural districts - offering scope for Government and citizens to interact with each other. Peter Lievens reports from some IICD-supported activities at the district level.

Stephen Dagada is Chairman of the Kayunga District Council, which makes him the most powerful man in the district. He has a notebook and a mobile telephone in front of him but the GSM operator, whose network reaches Kayunga, has not yet succeeded in setting up an Internet connection. Yet, in the not too distant future, there needs to be a Point of Presence (PoP) for Internet traffic available, that will also allow communication with remote villages in the district. Kayunga is one of four districts that are participating in a Districtnet project supported by the IICD.

Districtnet fits in with the Uganda Government policy. The Local Government Act has seen to the decentralization of government roles. The problem is that district administrators, such as those of Kayunga, are not equipped to carry out all the required administrative and managerial tasks. The absence of telecom connections with villages makes it impossible to run matters adequately, according to Dagada. 'If the Government asks me to report on how many teachers are working in the district, I have to send out one of my assistants to do a physical count. It can take weeks before all the villages have been visited.'

Districtnet is ultimately expected to provide a telecom connection between the district headquarters and the larger villages that make up the administrative centre for the surrounding area sub-counties. It will also introduce the administrative and financial management systems that make it possible to produce reports. A third role for Districtnet is the provision of information from Government to citizens and vice versa.

While the administrative tasks may have been delegated to the districts,

Kampala remains the place where policy is determined. Dagada wants to make use of Districtnet to realize various ambitious programmes. 'President Museveni has initiated an agricultural programme that is intended to result in larger adjoining pieces of land, all growing the same crops, creating so-called product zones. Our information officer will need to advise people via Districtnet of the fact that to merge the fields of individual family members achieves greater economy.'

Dagada can picture the PoP, which is to link Districtnet via a satellite connection to the rest of the world, ultimately ending up in the hands of an entrepreneur. 'With fifty customers in the district, companies and NGOs and an Internet cafe in the city, it should be possible for the venture to be viable. In the near future we want to encourage tourism: rafting on the Nile, and that means hotels and catering. It should be possible, for instance, to interest an Internet entrepreneur from Kampala in something like that.'

To provide a connection to the villages, it should be possible to make use of a wireless connection via the free 2.4 gigahertz band, which is technology that is much used in Uganda, as well as via mobile connection, or restored land lines left over from a distant past. Dagada is optimistic. 'Once people have become familiar with the Internet, they will continue using it.'

Marcel Werner, Programme Manager within IICD, who is responsible for the projects in Uganda, holds a more down-to-earth view. 'The connections will make little else possible but the use of e-mail'. He considers it important that people have access to information, crop prices, for example, allowing them to negotiate more effectively with traders. Districtnet must also create transparency in local and district government. Citizens must be able to call them to account in matters of policy and expenditure.'

Districtnet, which is backed by the Uganda Ministry of Local Government and has attracted funds from

the UK Department for International Development (DFID), exists only on paper so far. Costs for the infrastructure, software and training are estimated at \$US300, 000. Once the network is up and running, the management and maintenance costs will be the responsibility of the district.

Patrick Mwesigwa is Technical Manager of the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC). UCC was established in 1998 to keep a watchful eye on the telecom market, which was deregulated under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In addition to the former state telecom company, UTL, 51 per cent of which is now in foreign ownership, the South African MTN was allowed to enter the Ugandan market. Both parties have their own gateway. The third party, Celtel, offers only mobile services and depends on UTL and MTN for interconnection.

Uganda, which has a population of 22 million people, has sixty thousand fixed telephone connections. With the freeing up of the telecom market, mobile telephone use has shown an explosive increase. More than 350, 000 people, especially in the cities, use mobile phones. Many parts of the rural areas, however, where 80 per cent of Ugandans live and work, are without any telephone access. One of the objectives of the UCC is to see to the provision of Internet and telephone services to rural areas, Mwesigwa states. 'At the present moment, 154 of the more than 900 sub-counties have no telephone service at all. By 2005, these districts are to have at least one public telephone per five thousand inhabitants. In addition to that, every district must have Internet access by then. There are currently 11, 000 Internet users in Uganda, almost all in Kampala, Entebbe and Jinja.'

Werner, in fact, tends to doubt the feasibility of profitably operating telecom services in these districts. 'The turnover will have to come from the local NGOs, government bodies

continued on page 5

## SchoolNet Namibia ...

*continued from page 3*

available at our newly established headquarters in Katutura, Windhoek. There are free installations (by SchoolNet Volunteers) of a local area computer network as well as continued free support, maintenance and help-desk services by these volunteers.

**iConnect Africa:** What does winning the 2002 APC Hafkin Prize mean to you?

**JK:** We are extremely delighted and honoured to be the winner of the 2002 APC Hafkin Prize. I think it gives us more energy and dedication to achieving our goals and it will have great impact on our future work in Namibia and outside. It will motivate us to do more and also it can be seen as a proof of recognition of our work. Importantly, it comes at a time when a lot of attention has been given to Open Source solutions in education

and other civil society organization (CSO) development areas, and I can only hope that our Government (and those of other African countries) will appreciate the great value of such open-source solutions!

**iConnect Africa:** How will SchoolNet Namibia utilize its prize money?

**JK:** The prize, worth \$US7,500, is intended to seed a start-up open-source research and development (R&D) team comprising young African "geeks". This will empower them and other young local experts to develop open-source applications in education - curricular content, life-long learning skills, distance learning and special education needs for persons with disabilities. We have received an expression of interest from a number of partners, to work with us in this area. This project will be

region-wide and in three languages: English, French, and Portuguese, and may cost well over \$US250,000. I believe that Africa has a great potential in benefiting from and contributing to the global information society. This can be achieved only through the implementation of innovative applications that involve the youth. There are quite a significant number of African schoolchildren who have great skills. These skills can be tapped into if the necessary conditions, particularly access to ICTs, are put in place. Moreover, I believe the future of Africa in the ICT field will be in the use of open-source applications that are locally developed, maintained and supported, in the context of the limited financial resources for using tools and applications in Africa. ■

## Notice Board

### ICTs and Civil Society in Focus

**Development Information Network (DevNet)** is a coalition of over 100 NGOs and other CSOs that utilize development information. It was formed in 1994 under the auspices of the British Council and is based in Lagos, Nigeria. Contact: DevNet@infoweb.abs.net Tel/Fax: 234-01 4618953, P. O. Box 9524. GPO Marina, Lagos, Nigeria

**APC-Africa-Women** is a network of organizations and individuals that work to empower African women's organizations to access and use ICTs for promoting equality and development. APC-Africa-Women is the Africa regional programme of APC's Women's Networking Support Programme (APC WNSP). More: <http://www.apcfricawomen.org>

**Bridges.org**, a non-profit corporation founded in 2000, is an independent organization conducting research and analysis on ICT issues in developing countries. It catalyses public support for ICT policies by explaining the issues in layman's terms, thus helping citizens to understand the potential benefits of ICT for their daily lives. The policy team publishes community articles that detail the implications of policy issues in a meaningful way, and covers topical issues such as digital public records and citizen rights to privacy. More at: <http://www.bridges.org>

**National Community Radio Forum (NCRF)** is a national, membership-driven association of community radio stations and support service organizations in South Africa. Radio Station members are independent non-profit community-based organizations (CBOs), owned and run by diverse local communities who actively participate in the development of programming activities for sustainable, non-discriminatory local development. More: <http://www.ncrf.org.za>

**Women Farmers Network (WOFAN)** is based in Kano, Nigeria and focuses on mobilizing, training and supporting community members to manage informa-

tion and communication for their own development. Contact: P. O. Box 22 (Gyadi-Gyadi) Kano, Nigeria. Tel./Fax: 234-64-665487/234-64-662199 Email: wofangroup@yahoo.org, wofan@mega.bw ■

### ICT Plans ...

*continued from page 4*

and one or two small businesses. The local residents have no money.' Nevertheless, Werner wants to call on the funds for the four pilot districts: The Districtnet model expects the PoP in the district capitals to be run as a business. But Mwesigwa throws up his hands in a gesture of frustration. 'Before any money can be handed over, a committee needs to be formed to manage the fund and the electricity project must be underway. The tender document for that project is just now being drawn up. It will take at least another six months before it will be ready to be sent out.' ■

## Forthcoming Events

### Dec. 2002 - March 2003

**6-7 February 2003, San Diego, California: The Internet Society's 2003 Network and Distributed System Security Symposium (Ndss'03).** The 10th annual NDSS Symposium brings together innovative and forward-thinking members of the Internet community, including leading-edge security researchers and implementers, globally recognized security-technology experts, and users from both the private and public sectors. These are the people who design, develop, exploit, and deploy the technologies that define network and distributed system security. This year's topics include: 'Defending Against Network Attacks'; 'Secure Routing and Mobility'; 'Security in Multicast Protocols'; 'Cryptographic Protocols and Constructs'; 'Network Monitoring and Intrusion Detection'; 'Access Control and Penetration Resistance'. For online information and registration, see: <http://www.isoc.org/ndss03/>

**12 February 2003, Geneva: Second United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Workshop on E-regulations.** The Second Annual Workshop on E-Regulations will focus on the theme of 'E-Security and its Implications for Development of the Knowledge Economy.' The discussion aims to highlight the extent of positive correlation and negative externalities between these highly intertwined domains and the potential role of governments, business community and international organizations in ensuring the secure environment of the digital economy and sustainable development of the Information Society. For more go to: <http://www.unece.org/press/pr2002/02opa21e.htm>

**17- 28 February 2003 in Geneva: The Second Meeting of the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom-2) of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).** More: [http://www.itu.int/wsis/events/events\\_WSISandITUEvents\\_Prepcom2.html](http://www.itu.int/wsis/events/events_WSISandITUEvents_Prepcom2.html)

**19-21 February 2003 in Accra, Ghana: CTO Digital Africa Summit.** CTO is organizing a major conference on 'Digital Africa: Building Digital Opportunities through Public-Private Partnerships'. High-level participants from throughout the continent are expected to attend. The conference will be addressed by a wide range of high-level official and non-official speakers from Africa and international organizations and from the investment community. For more information, see: <http://www.cto.int/frame.php?dir=02&sd=12&id=63&back=frame.php%3Fdir%3D02%26sd%3D10>

**26 - 28 February 2003, Bangkok, Thailand: Closing Gaps in the Digital Divide: Regional Conference on Digital GMS.** Accessing information, boosting business, saving time, money and lives, and other priorities are on the agenda for demonstrating ICT benefits. Participants from academia, industry, government agencies, international organizations, and NGOs are being invited. Further information may be obtained at: [www.ait.ac.th/digital\\_gms](http://www.ait.ac.th/digital_gms) or by email: [gital\\_gms\\_chair@ait.ac.th](mailto:gital_gms_chair@ait.ac.th) or in writing: Peter Haddawy, Chair, Regional Conference on Digital GMS, Asian Institute of Technology, P.O. Box 4, Klong Luang, Pathumthani 12120, Thailand, Tel: (66 2) 524-5705, Fax: (66 2) 524-5069.

**28-30 March 2003: Intellectual Leadership and the Information Society: What Role for Africa's Academia.** ECA is collaborating with The Ford Foundation to provide a platform and space for a select group of leading African academics to reflect on the many intellectual issues that they face as they develop strategies for enhancing their role in the information society. For more information, contact: Aida Opoku-Mensah, ECA at [aopoku-mensah@uneca.org](mailto:aopoku-mensah@uneca.org)

**24-28 March 2003, Prague, Czech Republic: Twenty-third Internationalization and Unicode Conference (IUC23) on Unicode, Internationalization and the Web-The Global Connection.** This event is the premier technical conference worldwide for both software and Web internationalization. New technologies, innovative Internet applications, and the evolving Unicode Standard bring new challenges along with new capabilities. This technical conference will explore the opportunities created by the latest advances and how to leverage them for global users, as well as potential pitfalls to be aware of, and problem areas that need further research. There will also be demonstrations of best practices for designing applications that can accommodate any language. More at: <http://www.unicode.org/unicode/conference/about-conf.html>

### About iConnect Africa

iConnect-Africa is a quarterly web, paper, and email service that aims to raise awareness in the wider African development community regarding the possibilities offered by ICTs in development. It is produced by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD). It reports on activities forming part of the Africa Information Society Initiative "AISIP" and Building Digital Opportunities programme "BDO". It is funded by the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department for International Development Cooperation (DGIS) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

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