

## **NORTHERN PROJECTS NODE MEETING**

**Theme: “Frontline SMS and MyTxtBox”**



The Northern Projects Node successfully held the Northern Projects Node Meeting on the theme **“Frontline SMS and MyTxtBox”**.

A lack of communication can be a major barrier for grassroots non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in developing countries. By leveraging basic tools already available to most NGOs — computers and mobile phones — FrontlineSMS enables instantaneous two-way communication on a large scale.

It is with the above background that the Northern Projects node meeting was held on Thursday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September. The meeting had the following objectives:

1. To learn about the advantages of Frontline SMS and how it works
2. To be able to install frontline SMS
3. To be able to use simple features of Frontline SMS efficiently

The meeting started with a word of welcome from the Northern Projects Node Coordinator, Mr. Agbenyo John Stephen. He gave a brief on the objectives of the meeting and urged all participants to attentively and actively participate. He thanked all who travelled from far and near for their presence.

Mr. William Nsiah Asare, the resource person did a presentation on Frontline SMS. He explained that Frontline SMS, invented by Ken Banks of Kiwanja is software that turns a laptop or desktop computer and a mobile phone or



modem into a two-way group messaging hub. He added that it works anywhere there is a mobile signal and that it does not need the Internet, a major advantage for many grassroots NGOs. Mr. Nsiah stated that once one had the software running on one's computer, one can send messages to wide groups of people, and collect responses to any questions or surveys one might want to run, all via text message.

On the features of the software, Mr. Nsiah mentioned that the software could be used to

- Create and manage all of your SMS-related contact groups
- Send and receive messages via special on-screen consoles
- Provides incoming and outgoing message history for each contact
- Engage with your contact groups – run surveys, competitions etc. via the **Survey Manager**
- Run your own text-based information service via the automated **Reply Manager**
- Export data to Excel and other programs
- No need to be on-line – works on any GSM network via your own PC or laptop

On the tools or technology needed, Mr. Nsiah mentioned that Frontline SMS requires a GSM modem or a mobile phone to be connected to a computer via Serial, USB or Bluetooth. He listed a computer, a modem or mobile phone and text message-based software (Frontline SMS).

Mr. William Nsiah Asare after his presentation, then took participants through a demonstration of installing the software, managing and importing contacts, sending SMSs, setting auto reply, and configuring the platform in general

Mr. Stephen Agbenyo, the node coordinator also took participants through MyTxtBox, an online platform for bulk messaging. He mentioned that the platform has similar features with the Frontline SMS except. The only difference, he mentioned is that with the MyTxtBox, one needed to buy vouchers.

He stated that MyTxtBox provides a highly affordable means for small businesses and organizations to interact with their clients at a fraction of the costs of telephone calls especially with the limited capital base available. He stated that SMS facilitates mobile marketing and makes it easy to reach or communicate with clients and partners. He added that MyTxtBox allows small businesses and organizations to facilitate the following:

1. Improved Work Efficiency- Multiple messages can be sent out to a large number of recipients simultaneously, eliminating the need to call each individual separately.
2. Saves Time - Customers use much less time to read a message than logging onto a website or receiving phone calls from businesses.
3. Increased Customer Satisfaction – Customers receive only relevant and useful information thus establishing a more personal both-way relationship
4. Decrease Advertising Costs - Send out marketing offers to customers first.

Explaining the key features of the MyTxtBox platform, Mr. Agbenyo mentioned some of the features as Perfect

for bulk SMS messaging, only few clicks to send 1,000's of text messages, quick and secure delivery, easy contact upload and management, supports offline messaging, supports two-way messaging and supports alphanumeric sender ID

He ended his presentation with a practical demonstration of how the platform works. He took participants through managing and importing contacts, sending SMSs, setting auto reply, and configuring the platform in general.

The Northern Projects Node Meeting ended with Mr. Olaf Erz, Country Manager, IICD, holding an open discussion with the project partners on the next plan of action of IICD in the ensuing years.

