FRONTLINE SMS AND MyTxTBox – THE NEXT FRONTIER

Lack of communication can be a major barrier for grassroots non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in developing countries. The Northern Projects Node on September 23, 2010 held a meeting with the resolution of this challenge in mind, by leveraging basic tools already available to most NGOs—computers and mobile phones with the theme "FrontlineSMS and MyTxtBox"

Welcoming the participants, the Northern regional co-ordinator for GINKS, Mr. Agbenyo John Stephen, gave a brief expose on the objectives of the meeting. He applauded all who travelled from long distances to be part of the meeting and urged all participants to make their efforts count by participating attentively and actively.

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 that there is a mobile signal and that it does not need the Internet, a major advantage for many grassroot NGOs. Mr. Nsiah stated that once you have the software running on your computer, you can send messages to wide groups of people, and collect responses to any questions or surveys you 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
- Provide 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

Mr. Nsiah went ahead to say 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).

After his presentation, Mr. Nsiah 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 that with the MyTxtBox, one needs 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, adding that MyTxtBox will help small businesses and organizations save time, decrease advertising costs and improve work efficiency, while increasing customer satisfaction. MyTxTBox according to him, also 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.

EDITORIAL

ICT4ALL

There was a time when ICT and ICT tools were so mystified that they were seen as an addition to the toys of the rich; a sign of affluence. Today, knowledge of ICT and ownership of ICT tools are no longer seen as luxury or show off, but as a necessity that is inevitable, if a person or organisation wants to drive vision to the highest standards of achievements and success.

ICT speaks and understands every language and transcends every gender. It does not discriminate, it does not have any party affiliations, but is a companion to all. Our rural communities which have been denied so much due to infrastructures like roads, have now begun to thrive above the set-backs of poor roads and poor road networks with the use of ICT tools.

People are taking their destinies into their own hands, refusing to lose the chance to be on the cutting edge of whatever it is that they have chosen to do in life.

GINKS has contributed so much to the achievement of the ICT dream in Ghana, and is still exposing Ghanaians to opportunities that so many never imagined existed, even in tools as small as their mobile phones.

It gives me hope… Hope that sometime in the nearest future, ICT will not be a strange phenomenon to anyone in Ghana, whether in the North or in the South. That ICT will be on the lips of every child in Ghana irrespective of his family background or ethnic group. That the police, the courts and every other sector of society will embrace it just as the banks and schools are doing.

There is still so much to do. For now, there is hope… great hope in the horizon. ICT4ALL !!

GHANA TO IMPROVE RURAL ICT

Ghana's Ghana Investment Fund for Electronic Communications (GIFEC) will focus on extending improved ICT access to rural areas, says Kofi Attor, the fund's CEO.

Attor was speaking at a recent Commonwealth African Rural Connectivity Initiative (COMARCI) In-Country capacity building workshop in Ho in the Volta Region.

He said that by the end of this year, people in the rural areas "won't be afraid of the computer". Among other initiatives, GIFEC has erected 52 masts in areas that are inaccessible to telecommunications companies to enable them to provide services to the people.

In addition, 20 community information centres in the country will be equipped with computers to promote the learning of computer, 38 Colleges of Education will also be provided with ICT facilities to train students to acquire the necessary skills in the technology, and by the end of this year, all technical, vocational and youth leadership institutes will be equipped with ICT. ICTs will also be rolled out to 15 Post Offices around the country.

Next year, all Nurses Training Colleges and Secondary-Technical institutes will also be hooked to ICT.

WOMEN NEED ICT TOO

In its bid to help further strengthen ICT and gender, the Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS) organised a 2-day workshop for female teachers in Junior High schools. This capacity-building workshop was designed to help the participants acquaint themselves with basic ICT tools and solutions that help them in their activities both in their personal lives and as teachers in schools.

Welcoming the participants, the co-ordinator of GINKS Mr. Ibrahim Inusah, said that he had high hopes, that the workshop will add a lot of value to the lives and works of the participants, and foster the more effective application of the ICT in Education policy in Junior High Schools. He mentioned that the reason why the workshop was an all-women one was that GINKS among other objectives, is also particularly interested in Youth and Women empowerment in ICT, building capacity for women in ICT and stirring up their enthusiasm in the area. He thus opened the workshop with words encouraging them to feel free to express themselves in order to make the workshop fruitful.

The Resource Persons for the workshop, Mr. Eric Acquaye and Mr. Joseph Kpetigo, after introducing themselves to the participants began to take them through the introduction to Computer and some Microsoft applications. They took time to give them the theory, of what a computer is and the various components that make it up. After this, a practical session on the use of computers was given.

After the use of computer session, the participants were taken through the use and creation of PowerPoint, so that they would be able to create a simple presentation.

Every participant had a computer to herself and they were very receptive inspite of the fact that they (over 80%) were new in this area. They also did a hands-on experience on word processing, using Microsoft word. They were also given a small test; a practice they were excited to engage in.

The participants could not hide their enthusiasm and eagerness towards this workshop, and were not shy to say that they were looking forward to receiving the package from day 2 of the workshop.

On the second day of the workshop, the participants were given the opportunity to share their experiences from Day 1, and the challenges (if any) they encountered in the process of their exercise. After this session, all the participants put on their computers by themselves, and they were ushered into the session where they were introduced to the internet, its use and the benefits they could derive from its use as teachers, in research and in their private activities. They were zealous about creating and sending e-mails, and they promised they will do all that is practicable to stay in tune with the information they received in the two day workshop. They hoped that they will always have as much access to computers and the internet as they did during the workshop.

At the end of the workshop, Mr. Ibrahim Inusah thanked the participants for coming, and encouraged them not only to continue to develop themselves with the information they received, but to also to impart to their colleagues and friends (especially the women) the same information. While admitting that access to computers and the internet might be a challenge in the country presently, he still encouraged them to try as much as they can to make the sacrifice to practice their use, at least once or twice a week. He told them to feel free to come to the GINKS secretariat anytime for technical support. He concluded by sharing with them, the legendary maxim that "where there is a will, there is a way"

AGBENYO JOHN STEPHEN MAKES A CASE FOR MOBILE NUMBER PORTABILITY IN GHANA AT THE GINKS NORTHERN ICT4D FORUM

Mr. Agbenyo John Stephen, Northern regional co-ordinator for GINKS, and Director of Savana Signatures, an NGO based in the Northern Region working primarily in mainstreaming ICTS into Education, spoke on the positive impact that the mobile number portability system will have on Ghana, at the August session of the Northern ICT4D Forum held at the Institute for Local Government Studies, Tamale.

According to Mr. Agbenyo, Mobile Number Portability is a facility given by operators where a subscriber can move from one service provider to another without changing the number allocated to the subscriber. He added that Mobile Number Portability is a system that allows a customer to keep his number, including the network prefix, when changing from one network operator to another.

He explained that for best regulatory practice, the National Communications Authority of Ghana Act 2008, Act 769 mandates the Authority to among other things 'Protect the interest of consumers or users of communications networks or communications services and in particular to the interest of consumers' choice, quality of services and value for money.

He further explained that because of the legal framework backing the work of the National Communications Authority, there is a legal and regulatory framework for Mobile Number Portability in Ghana. "The electronic communications ACT 2008, act 775 section 6(1)(0), states that "Network operator or service provider shall provide number portability when required to do so by the Authority."

Speaking on countries that have Mobile Number Portability in operation, Mr. Agbenyo mentioned that even though the system is currently operational in at least 34 countries, its implementation takes different forms in different jurisdictions, depending on the peculiar regulation regime of individual

countries. He added that several countries with mature telecom operations such as the United States, Ireland, Australia and Singapore have successfully implemented Mobile Number Portability.

On the relevance of Mobile Number Portability to Ghana, Mr. Agbenyo said that with its implementation, Mobile Number Portability will eliminate the inability of end users to switch networks while retaining the same telephone number, thereby increasing subscriber's choice. He added that an increase in subscriber-choice means greater competition which should lead to improved customer service and

may also reduce cost. He went further, by saying that the implementation of Mobile Number Portability will facilitate competition in saturated markets as ours, reduce subscriber cost of switching networks (because there is no need to circulate new numbers), motivate service providers to provide high quality service, deploy advanced services and provide more choice to end users. He also postulated that the claims and counter claims by network operators on which one has the best network quality will all be put to rest when Mobile Number Portability is implemented to give the subscriber the power to decide which network is best.

Concluding on why Mobile Number Portability would be good for Ghana, Mr. Agbenyo mentioned that Mobile Number Portability would give the subscriber the power of choice and luxury of flexibility. The subscriber would be empowered with a double edged sword to punish poor quality network service by migrating to another network and also keeping the number and network code that originally belongs to the previous service provider, citing Cost of upgrading of existing networks, software modifications and the assessment of effective call routing mechanism, as its only possible challenges.

THE MEDIA:
AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR POPULARIZING PROJECTS

The GINKS southern Project-node meeting was held on Thursday, September 30, 2010, on the theme "Popularizing Your Projects Using The Media". In opening the meeting, Mr. Ibrahim Inusah (Co-ordinator of GINKS) welcomed all the participants (who were both from the public and private sector) and mentioned to them that the purpose for the meeting is to help

members of the node understand the impact that popularization could have on projects and how to apply themselves to popularizing their projects using one of the most effective tools (if not the most effective) of popularization which is the media.

Mounting the podium, the Resource Person (and outgoing dean of

Journalism and Communication at the African University College of Communications) Prof. Absalom Mutere started by asking the participants to share their experiences in the projects they are running presently and how they expect the theme of the meeting to address their need to popularize those projects. He said that organisations have not quite

Prof Mutere deliberating on the theme at the Southern Project Node Meeting

Some Female teachers at the ICT and Gender Forum.

Some participants listening at the Southern Project Node Meeting

appreciated the power in information and delivery systems, and how they can use this to boost the popularity of their projects and harness their image.

According to him, popularization must go beyond what makes an organisation look good to the level of applying it as a strategic version of reality. To this extent, popularization must be:

- **Deliberate:** Intentional. Designed to influence, gain understanding, provide information and obtain feedback.

- **Planned:** organized and systematic, requiring research and analysis.

- **Performance oriented:** Policy and projects which are responsive to community concerns.

- **Public interest specific:** Mutually beneficial to the organization and public concerns and interests.

Prof. Mutere continued by postulating that popularizing must follow a cycle, as this is what determines how stories which ordinarily will not make front page news suddenly become a media success. Namely:

Research and analysis – You must clearly identify who you are talking to, which ought to lead to Policy formulation, and programming of the details pertaining to the pattern (what should be addressed and how) and time frame for the project activity.

This must then be properly communicated in order to get the desired feedback, as the feedback will not only help to justify the project but would also help to do program assessment and adjustment (where necessary). Leaving this part of his presentation, the Prof. educated the participants that events that make news, end up creating dialogue and setting the agenda.

Apart from the cycle that popularization must follow, Prof. Mutere added that it must have certain components, as this would help an organisation to decide whether to develop its own media structure or to engage an already existing media to popularize its projects. He said that these components would include:

- Counselling–this will help people come to a certain level of awareness about the project.

- Employee relations

- Community relations

- Media relations

Bearing in mind (and detecting from the observations and contributions of the participants) that most projects are under-funded, Prof. Mutere recommended to the participants that:

1. The onus is on organisations to cultivate a relationship between themselves (in their projects) and the media.

2. Build a relationship with the media on a personal level, and always make every presentation insightful, no matter how short the time is.

3. Always take what you have to the media.

4. Every week, have a headline and have a feature story. Be willing to give your story for free, even if the media takes credit for it.

At the end of his presentation, Mr. Ibrahim thanked Prof. Mutere and the participants for an insightful meeting, and recommended that the discussion should continue (online) until the opportunities available in popularizing projects through the media are effectively harnessed and tapped into, for the benefit of the projects and the project-node.

Section of participants at the
Northern Project Node Meeting

Section of participants at the
Southern Project Node Meeting

Participants at the
Northern Project Node Meeting

Three Communities Enjoy ICT and Library

Babianeha (B/A) Aug. 16, GNA - Three farming communities along the Ghana-Cote d'Ivoire border in the Dormaa municipality now have access to Information Communication Technology (ICT) and a Community Library.

The beneficiary communities of the two projects, which cost GHC 7000, are Babianeha, Benekrom and Kofibadukrom.

The library containing a variety of books and the ICT Centre, which has 11 lap-top computers and accessories including modems, were established by a team of five under-graduates from Michigan Technological University who spent five weeks in Ghana as part of the university's Overseas Development Project.

The team's visit was facilitated by Dr. Emmanuel Opuni-Frimpong, a citizen of Babianeha who works with the Forestry Research Unit of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research CSIR) in Kumasi.

Commissioning the facilities, Nana Nkumsa Agyemang 111, chief of Babianeha, expressed appreciation to Michigan Technological University for the project, which the youth would benefit from immensely.

He noted that the facilities would assist Junior High School (JHS) graduates in accessing their Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) results on-line.

Nana Nkumsa told the visiting undergraduates that the communities would not only utilize the facilities to their utmost benefit but would also maintain them for their longer lifespan.

He commended Dr. Opuni-Frimpong for the initiative and appealed to citizens of the three beneficiary communities at home and abroad to take a cue from the university's benevolence and contribute towards the growth of education and help improve the standard of living of the people.

Nana Nkumsa expressed gratitude to Dormaa Municipal Assembly for donating materials towards the construction of the two projects.

In a speech read for him, Mr. Vincent Oppong Asamoah, Dormaa Municipal Chief Executive, appealed to parents to ensure their children patronized the ICT Centre regularly.

He reminded parents and traditional authorities that the establishment of ICT and other education-oriented infrastructure

would come to nothing if children's interest in education was low as a result of their obsession to leave for other countries in search for greener pastures.

The MCE called for parental guidance and counselling as an effective tool in training their children well at home to become responsible adults in future.

A representative of the undergraduates, Mr. Timothy Kwame Veverica, lauded the warm reception the team received in the host communities and would share this impression with their colleagues back at home in the USA.

He announced that the next team would be working to install a power generator for Kwame-Yeboakrom, also in Dormaa Municipality to provide power for the community clinic and a bore-hole.

Mr. Veverica said the provision of solar energy was a vital area the university was considering for investment in rural communities in the rural areas.

source:
http://www.ghananewsagency.org/s_social/r_19379/

OPEN SOURCE: A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE

The Southern Chapter of the GINKS project node held a meeting on June 30, 2010, to look at free and open source software, and how it can be used in project management.

The co-ordinator of GINKS, opened the meeting with a brief introduction of the topic for discussion and why it has become important for the node to look at it, its benefits and how it can help in the effective execution of projects.

After this, the resource person Mr. Nii Okai Quaye, began by

introducing himself and expressing great hope that his presentation and subsequent interaction will assist the participants in more effective execution of their various projects.

In discussing the concept of Open-source software(s), Nii laid a foundation regarding software generally and restrictions that the proprietary software poses. According to him the proprietary software does not allow user to duplicate, modify, rebrand or redistribute because users are not given access to the source code. This

is what open-source addresses.

He further stated that open-source software has the following benefits:

1. It is an alternative that is available

2. Security: because you can view your source code, you are able to assess what you are getting.

3. Freedom to modify because you have access to the source code.

4. It helps you build capacity as you learn when you modify the software.

5. It will help you create software consistent with the community and environment it seeks to serve.

6. It avoids vendor locking when creator locks and determines when and how it is modified.

7. It is flexible by virtue of the fact that the source code can be modified, unlike the proprietary software where modification can only be done on the end product

Nii Okai was quick to stress that open-source software is not synonymous with free software (or freeware or free bear), but represents the fact that there is the freedom to modify it to suit the context or environment the user has in mind.

He also exposed the participants to the fact that there is an open source version of every software available today, whether it is in relation to

• Operating software
• Browser software
• Office Productivity suite (whether for text processing or presentations)
• Communication and entertainment; or
• Data collection (especially for monitoring and evaluation);

and brought participants to the exciting realisation that they have been using open source software in certain areas of their work without being aware of it. He then went further to recommend that the use of open-source should be advocated for by the participants in their respective offices and in their projects, because of the benefits and opportunities that it affords.

After Nii Okai's presentation, Mr. Ibrahim Inusah on behalf of GINKS and the project node, thanked Nii Okai for his presentation which he referred to as an eye opener, especially as it covers the expectations that participants set for themselves while managing their projects. He concluded by encouraging the participants to make the most of open-source.

GINKS at the end distributed a collection of open source software on CD to the participants to assist them in the execution of their various projects.

EXPERT CALLS FOR NATIONAL BODY TO COMBAT CYBER THREATS

A telecommunications security expert, Major Emmanuel Owusu-Adansi has suggested the establishment of a functional independent national body to combat the threats cyber crimes pose to the development of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and internal security in Ghana.

He said the country needed to redouble its efforts at countering the negative effects of the ICT environment, considering the widespread, aggressive, growing and increasingly sophisticated nature of cyber crimes, which held implications for national and economic security.

Maj. Owusu-Adansi, who is also the Director of Special Projects at the National Communications Authority (NCA), made the suggestion in Accra at a day's seminar on the management of Cyber security in Ghana, organized by the Penuel Technology, a security consultancy and advocacy group.

The Seminar which was on the theme: "Management of Cyber Security in Contemporary Ghana: The Way Forward", was aimed at sensitizing the country's security managers, national institutions and corporate Ghana on the growth and security challenges of the ICT environment.

Maj. Owusu-Adansi suggested that such a national body, which could be christened "National Cyberspace Commission" that derived its authority from the Presidency, could among others be mandated to develop a coordinated national cyberspace security response system to prevent, detect, deter, respond to and recover from cyber incidents.

The body should facilitate the enactment and enforcement of a comprehensive set of laws relating to cyber security and cyber crime consistent with provisions of the 2001 Convention on Cyber Crime.

Additionally, he said, that the body should become the focal point of managing cyber incidents that brought together critical elements from government, industry, ICT systems and infrastructure operators to reduce the risk and severity of incidents.

Maj. Owusu-Adansi also suggested that such an entity should be mandated to create awareness in government agencies, corporate institutions, schools, religious bodies and social clubs of the importance and challenges of the cyber technology and how citizens and organisations can insulate themselves from harm.

He said that body should also develop and test emergency response plans to ensure effective coordination in crisis, and to promote a national culture of security consciousness, consistent with the UN General Assembly Resolution 58/199, that calls for a creation of a global culture of cyber security and the protection of critical information infrastructures.

The security expert proposed that such a functional body could comprise representatives from several national and corporate institutions including the National Security Council, the national Information Technology Agency (NITA), the NCA, the Ghana Armed Forces, the Ghana Police and major telecommunications service providers.

Others are the Ghana Internet Service Providers Association, the Ghana Association of Software Companies, the Ministry of Communications, Association of Internet Café Operators, the Volta River Authority and its affiliates-Gridco, and ECG, the Academia, the Association of Ghana

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Industries and the Association of Bankers.

Maj. Owusu-Adansi indicated that funding for the body could be sourced from government, industry; levy on the use of ICT and from other international bodies that dealt with ICT.

He maintained that such a partnership between government and industry would provide a platform for harnessing a diversity of perspectives, equities and knowledge needed for security at the national level.

The telecommunications engineer also advocated that the police Service and the Judiciary be trained extensively on the use of ICT and laws relating to the cyberspace and other laws that were in the process of enactment.

He was emphatic that these recommendations, if adopted, would promote cyber security and enable the country build confidence in the use of ICT for national development.

Participants at the seminar were drawn from the various security

agencies and some corporate institutions.

Even though the participants were unanimous in the support of the recommendations, some suggested that bodies such as the NCA and the recently- inaugurated NITA be given the mandate to deal with such issues arising out of the use of ICT.

source: http://www.ghanabusinessnews.com/2010/08/27/experts-calls-for-national-body-to-combat-cyber-threats/

Calendar of Events

EVENT	DATE	VENUE	CONTACT
Northern ICT4D Series	28th Oct. 2010	Institute of Local Gov't Studies, Tamale	secretary@ginks.org
Forum on ICT & Education Policy	23rd Nov. 2010	Tamale	secretary@ginks.org
Northern ICT4D Series	25th Nov. 2010	Institute of Local Gov't Studies, Tamale	secretary@ginks.org
IICD Cross Country Learning Event on Livelihoods	29th Nov. to 2nd Dec. 2010	Afienya, Tema	secretary@ginks.org
Northern ICT4D Series	16th Dec. 2010	Institute of Local Gov't Studies, Tamale	secretary@ginks.org
IICD Project Node Meeting (Joint Meeting)	2011	Tamale	secretary@ginks.org

ABOUT iConnect Ghana

IConnect Ghana is an online, offline and e-mail service knowledge vehicle designed to enable the rapid, effective and efficient use of ICTs as a tool for Ghana's development. IConnet Ghana is joint initiative of Ghana Information Network for Knowledge Sharing (GINKS), the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) and IICD's local partners.

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ABOUT GINKS
GINKS is a Network for Information
and Knowledge Sharing that puts ICTs
within the reach of all. The Network
is open to all who share in our vision.

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