

# infoDev

The Newsletter of the infoDev Community

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# eXchange

## Learning Lessons from ICT Stories

IICD and infoDev host the Stories project, an initiative aimed at sharing knowledge and lessons learned on how ICT can help fight poverty and promote economic and social development. Every year an internationally acclaimed ICT Stories jury selects the winning stories from a growing database. The winning stories are then officially presented to the international community on the occasion of a major international conference. This year the four winning stories were presented during the INET conference in Washington DC in June 2002. The four winning stories were also presented at the World Bank, during a seminar organized by infoDev.

This year's winning stories are on an Internet initiative carried out through a community radio in Nepal; an e-commerce initiative thriving in Kenya; a project connecting villages in India through a self-sustainable franchising scheme; and a project supporting networking among grassroot organizations in Africa.

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## Carlos Braga on the Development Gateway

*After leaving his position as infoDev Manager in June 2001, Carlos Braga joined the Development Gateway as its Director. The Development Gateway Foundation is a not-for-profit organization whose objectives are to reduce poverty and support sustainable development through the use of in-*



*formation and communication technologies (ICT).*

*In this interview with the eXchange, Carlos tells us about the creation and the future activities of the Development Gateway Foundation.*

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## Why Software Should Be Free

Richard Stallman is the founder of the Free Software movement, started in 1984 as a reaction to the restrictions imposed by the software industry. The ethics of Free Software is based on the belief that software users should be free to change and redistribute the software they use.

In an interview with the eXchange, Richard Stallman shares his views about the ethics of free software, and discusses what free software can do for development.

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*"infoDev promotes innovative projects on the use of information and communication technologies for economic and social development, with a special emphasis on the needs of the poor in developing economies."*

# Why Software Should Be Free

*An Interview with Richard Stallman*

*Richard Stallman is the founder of the Free Software movement, started in 1984 as a reaction to the restrictions imposed by the software industry. The ethics of Free Software is based on the belief that software users should be free to change and redistribute the software they use.*

*In this interview with the eXchange, Richard Stallman shares his views about the ethics of free software, and discusses what free software can do for development.*

*What was the origin of the Free Software movement and how has it evolved?*

Around 1983 I was in a situation where the only future I could see in front of me was one of using proprietary software and having to sign a non-disclosure agreement to get a copy. It was even harder to get permission to work on improving the operating system. I was an operating system developer; improving operating systems was just what I loved to do, and was my field. In order to be able to do it, I [would have] to promise to lock up my knowledge and refuse to share it with other people. My conscience revolted at that idea.

The only thing I could do was to make an alternative, so I started the Free Software movement. I wanted to be able, once again, to use computers as part of a community where people have the freedom to cooperate

with each other when they want to, when they are not individually imprisoned in solitary confinement.

The obstacle was that at that time all operating systems were proprietary. There was no way you could use a computer using free software, because you had to have an operating system. So, from the very first step you had to do something wrong, you had to get involved in refusing to share with people. Our only solution was to develop another operating system that would be free. This alternative would give people the chance to use computers without promising they wouldn't help their neighbors.

*What was the main challenge you had to face at that time?*

At the beginning I was writing software by myself—I just needed the computer to use. I quit my job at the MIT to start

my project, but the lab at the MIT where I used to work let me keep using one of their computers to do this work. I started writing pieces of the GNU system, and then other people started helping. They found computers wherever, they joined individually, and the network worked well, after all.

*And what happened to the Free Software movement then?*

A number of different things, as you could imagine. We achieved our initial goal of having completed the operating systems, so that computers could be used without having to put any proprietary software on them.

Another success was [that] we had a lot of users. Then we discovered, by surprise, that free software was technically superior to the non-free alternatives, since the users helped improve it and make it suitable for their needs. This had both good and bad effects. We had lots of users, which in one sense looks like success; but it also brought many users to chose us just because the software doesn't crash.

The result is that our values are getting forgotten. Many [users] don't even recognize

there is an issue of freedom at stake here. They don't know that there is a freedom that they could choose to keep or to give up. So that's the big problem we face now, relating our intentions to people using our software.

There's something more at stake here than just having powerful reliable software. There's an issue of ethics. There is an issue of domination versus subjugation of people. When a software developer makes every user promise not to share with anybody else, all the users are in a solitary confinement, they are unable to cooperate.

*How does GNU relate to Linux? What is the difference between 'Open Source Software' and 'Free Software'?*

When I launched the development of this operating system in 1984, I called it GNU. In 1991 the system was mostly ready, that is, most of the pieces were ready. One important piece was missing: the kernel. At that point, just as we were starting the kernel, Linus Torvalds wrote a kernel also. He got his kernel working sooner, and he gave it the name Linux. He made it free software using the GNU General Public

License. At that point, people put together the GNU system and Linux to make a complete system. Although this system is much more GNU than it is Linux, somehow the error caught on of calling the system

"Linux", and the result is many people think that Linus Torvalds started the whole thing.

Now, this could be annoying for us, but perhaps [it] would be no more than annoying, if Linus Torvalds shared our same philosophy. He does not; he has different views.

We did this for freedom. We did this to give computer users the freedom to cooperate, to help themselves and help each other. For us this is a political issue; computer users deserve this freedom; we wanted to make it possible for computer users to have this freedom.

Linus Torvalds doesn't share our views. He's entitled to have his own views, but we want our work to go to the credit of the views that motivated us to do our work. People think that "Linux" system was

developed because Linus Torvalds wanted to learn about kernels. They don't realize that this was the result of an idealistic political movement that had been working for many years before Linus Torvalds got involved.

The right way to call this system is GNU/Linux, because it's a combination of GNU and Linux.

The Free Software movement organized and developed this system for ethical reasons. The term Open Source was coined [subsequently] in 1998, and it was employed by people specifically to avoid talking about our ethical principles. It was not the Open Source movement that developed this system, although

some people who are linked with it participated.

*There are certainly several alternatives or avenues. Why did you choose to work with systems like Unix?*

I did not choose to work with Unix; I chose to make a compatible replacement for Unix. Unix to us was unacceptable because it is not free software, but the design of Unix was a good one to follow, because Unix was portable. I knew it would take years before we could have an entire operating system developed, and I didn't know in that time which computers that were being developed would become popular.

If I developed a non-portable system, designed to one particular kind of computer, maybe by the time I had finished that computer would be obsolete and the whole thing would be worthless. So we had to make a portable system.

At that time the technology for developing portable systems was rather new, and Unix was the only successful one. I suppose there were others than that, but Unix was the one which really had a user base, that had a design that did work. Unix also had a few good ideas, but that was a secondary consideration. We liked the hope that we could make a portable system that way. This concept of compatibility with Unix was important because Unix users could easily switch. Users don't like to have to face many changes. Had we

made a system that was not compatible with some popular system, we would probably have few users.

*How do you see the response to the free software movement in developing countries?*

It varies tremendously from country to country. In some countries there are people who resonate with the idea of freedom, and of winning their independence from those who dominate them. In other countries people only think about how much money they can make. The most positive responses that I found have been in Brazil, and with some extents in other parts of Latin America, and in India. In Brazil I see many people who really understand that is not just an issue of price.

As regards India, they make a connection between this and other social movements that still resonate in that country.

I also start seeing a South-South cooperation, for instance between people in Brazil and people in Argentina. There are some people trying to make broader contacts. The free software movement is global, and as soon as we have a package, people will around the world will use it. There were people in several continents working on GNU in the mid eighties, especially from Australia, Japan, and Europe.

The involvement from South Americans came a bit

later, but for several years now there have been major contributions coming from Brazil. A University in Brazil just developed a free software package for running a university's library, which is a very nice thing to have.

There are free software developers in India as well, developing significant packages. There is someone developing a workflow package, for instance. They want to make a business of adapting this workflow package to the needs of various offices; they say "OK, we will configure this for you and then you'll have total control over everything."

*What is the impact of Free Software in developing countries?*

The most important reason why software should be free is for the sake of users' freedom and their way of life. You shouldn't be told that you could have this information but you can't share it.

One secondary effect of having the freedom to study, modify and redistribute software is that, if you are an organization in a poor country, you can redistribute copies around to lots of people, to all the branches of your organization. Using proprietary software this cannot be done without paying out a large amount of hard currency to very rich companies in other countries.

Suppose you are a school system in India and you are

trying to put computers into schools to encourage computer literacy. If you did this using Windows and other proprietary software, you would have to spend a couple of thousand dollars per computer. But if you are using the GNU/Linux system, you can just make copies yourself and pass them around to every school. You can also tell the students, "if you like the software, take a copy home". People don't have to do this kind of sharing underground, in fear of the information police; they can openly share with each other. This has tremendous benefits. Schools can put in more computers under a certain budget available. Instead of spending one-third on computer hardware and two-thirds on software licenses, they can spend all that on computer hardware. Our software tends to be more efficient too, so they can maybe get smaller computers, or older, cheaper computers. They can go to companies and say, "Can we buy from you the computers you are replacing?" and they can install them. So there can be tremendous savings.

That doesn't even end there. If the students go to school and they learn to use the typical proprietary software, they are going to be needing that [afterwards]. It becomes a terrible bind, and they know they cannot afford it. So they either end up not using computers, or they copy

it illegally, in which case they have to live in constant fear of the information police. In Argentina, the equivalent of the Business Software Alliance sent out a mass mailing suggesting that if they used unauthorized copies they would end up getting raped in prison. That shows that they will stop at nothing.

Proprietary software companies squeeze money out of people who can't afford anything. So the schools, by making this decision between proprietary software and free software, are also deciding whether to

direct their whole society into a rut which is deeper and deeper and more painful every year. If they send people towards free software they are sending their country towards independence, towards a kind of IT development that they can sustain, that will tend to encourage the development of local skills and talents.

There is another benefit of free software, specifically in education. In any school they are going to have a certain fraction of people who would like to learn everything about how the computer works inside, and become system administrators or software developers. The way they get to learn that is by doing it.

Free software encourages the students to learn everything including by making improvements. This is the way I learnt. The way I learnt to be an excellent operating system

developer was not by writing an entire operating system myself, because at the beginning I couldn't possibly have done that. What the beginner can do is take an existing large program, figure it out, or figure out part of it, and then add new features to it, and new features can be fairly small, especially compared with the initial program. In this way you can gradually learn how to do these jobs well, and you can undertake bigger jobs.

Allowing students to do this is absolutely essential.

The great thing about free software is that if you put this in front of everybody and say, "If you want to tinker with it, tinker with it", you don't even have to work hard, you don't have to give classes in

it. Some of the people will figure it out.

*Do you know of any countries that are following this approach?*

In Rio Grande do Sul, in Brazil, they are planning to put GNU/Linux machines in front of a million school children this year.

*How do you think the World Bank could facilitate the work of*

*the free software community, and to help transfer the benefits of free software to developing countries?*

The most important thing to do is show decision makers the benefits of free software, and the trap proprietary software can represent for their country.

Secondly, when they look around and see what can be done with the existing free software, if they see that with free software they can do ninety percent of what they need, and there's a gap of ten percent, you could provide funding to develop the free software for that ten percent. Once developed, all such projects will be able to be used right away in other countries. You could also encourage them, when they're getting your funding for a project, to make it a free software-based project, so that whenever any software be developed it can be available for other projects.

*There is an increasing pressure in countries about intellectual property and software development. What do you think about it?*

Let's not use the term "intellectual property", because that is a term that encourages people to be biased, and secondly it encourages broad simplistic thinking. "Intellectual property" isn't really any one thing, it's a catch-all for disparate areas of law such as copyright, patents, trade-



marks, trade secrets, and so on. If you try to think about "intellectual property", you can't even understand what these laws say, because you're looking at such a broad level that you can't see anything anymore.

Not only that, but you can't even see the public policy issues, because those issues arise from the details of what copyright or patent law restricts. The public policy issues that I see are completely different (for copyrights and for patents); they come from the individual specifics of those laws, which have nothing in common.

*How does the Free Software movement interact with regulators and policymakers?*

The first thing I would urge them to do, most of all, is not to adopt any regulatory framework prohibiting us from developing free software. We, of course, appreciate when governments help us to pursue our activity. Governments have historically been supporting the development or the use of knowledge: for example, scientific research.

So it makes perfect sense for governments to provide research subsidies to develop free software. However, the most important thing is not to adopt any laws that prohibit the development of some kinds of free software.

The United States has two kinds of laws now that prohib-

it the development of some kind of free software. One of them is the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, that prohibits free software for several important jobs.

One of them is playing a movie on a DVD. We are not allowed in the U.S. to distribute free software that can save a movie that you could use to play a DVD that you have bought. It's legal for you to play that DVD, but we're not allowed to give you free software to do it. [See [www.digitalspeech.org](http://www.digitalspeech.org) for more information.]

Another kind of law that prohibits some free software is what happens when patent law is applied to software ideas. When there are patents on software ideas, we free software developers run into the danger of getting sued for this or that little part of a program that we have written. Without software patents, typically if you write

the program yourself, you can't get sued for that. With software patents, you are in danger all the time of getting sued for writing a program yourself.

So it should be made clear that operations that involve at some point the computational display of data are not in themselves patentable. The physical processes that you might happen to implement using a computer system could be patentable as physical processes, but the computing and displaying of the data should not be patentable, and carrying out activities and communicating with people, and making decisions based on data (if it's decisions you're making), should not be patentable.

There's then a third area: the area of reverse engineering. Nowadays, computer hardware manufacturers often refuse to publish the directions to operate the hardware. They sell you hardware and don't tell you

how to use it. Instead, they will offer you a non-free program to run the hardware. We can't use that non-free program, since it's not free; if you are using that, you are not using free software anymore. We want the right for free software to give commands to that hardware. In order to do that we need the specs for the hardware.

Some hardware developers want to make it hard for us to find the specs. We ask them to cooperate — some cooperate, but some refuse.



*Richard Stallman is the founder of the Free Software movement*

When they refuse, we have to try to figure out the specs by experimenting with the hardware, or by disassembling their non-free programs, and one way or another we figure out how to use this piece of hardware and write a free program to do it.

*How do you deal with the issue of compatibility?*

We try very hard to work with compatibility. The main obstacle is when companies prevent us from doing so. Microsoft is doing various things to try to stop us from being compatible with some of their interfaces and formats. They do that in various ways. Sometimes by keeping details secret, so we have to show how to figure them out. Sometimes, using patents.

Microsoft put their specification on a website, but before you're allowed to see it you have to click 'yes' to a license that says you are not allowed to publish any of the details. Which means, for instance, that you're not allowed to write a free program to communicate using that specification, because that would constitute publishing the details. This is one of the ways they try to prohibit free software.

Governments should adopt policies in which such licenses are not legally binding. They should say that if you are making information available to millions of people, potentially, then it counts as public knowledge,

and any kind of non-disclosure agreement for it is void.

Non-disclosure agreements used be meant for small numbers of people. When you have a situation where a website is offering to the millions the possibility of learning important information under a non-disclosure agreement, you invite a situation where millions of people know the information, and it's not considered public knowledge.

*What would be the solutions to avoid the mistakes made in the past?*

Most countries don't have software patents, so the important thing is they shouldn't adopt them. Most countries do not have something like the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, but I should point out that the WIPO Copyright Treaty is something similar to the Digital Millennium Copyright Act. So all countries should refuse to sign the WIPO Copyright Treaty, and it would be a good idea to form a counter-treaty, in which countries commit to each other that they will not sign the WIPO Copyright Treaty. Countries have to start uniting against U.S. pressure.

*How do you see the role of the private sector in using free software?*

It makes sense for hardware companies to encourage free software. Companies that use software can get tremendous benefits from using free soft-

ware because there is free market for support. Everyone is free to study how a program works, any programmer can learn about it and then offer support for a fee. Individual consultants can do this, as well as businesses.

*How do you envisage the future of the Free Software movement in the market?*

We are not in a market. We're developing free software that encourages people to cooperate, because that makes possible an ethical way of life. So this is not a mere business, and whom we are talking to is not a market. We are talking to citizens. We encourage people to think as citizens, not as consumers or producers. There is something more important in life than economics, and that's what we are about, primarily.

Unfortunately, I can't answer your question, because you are asking what is going to happen in the future and I don't know. We are in a political battle, a battle for freedom versus a state of domination, and none knows who is going to win. I hope that we win.

To learn more about Free Software, please visit [www.gnu.org](http://www.gnu.org). Other thoughts, articles, songs, pictures, playful anecdotes, and much more by Richard Stallman are available at [www.stallman.org](http://www.stallman.org).

## Learning Lessons From ICT Stories

*infoDev and IICD in the Netherlands are host to the ICT Stories Project, an initiative promoting the sharing of stories on how ICTs can help fight poverty and promote economic and social development. This year the international ICT Stories jury selected four winning stories from over 100 stories that were entered. The winning writers were brought to Washington DC in June 2002 where they presented their stories to audiences during the INET 2002 conference and at the World Bank.*

*This year's winning stories include an internet radio program in Nepal; an e-commerce initiative thriving in Kenya; a project connecting villages in India through a self sustainable franchising system; and a project supporting networking among NGOs in Africa.*

### **Ecosandals.com**

Roselyne is one of the approximately 400,000 residents of Korogocho, Kenya. Korogocho is known as one of the poorest areas of Kenya, with high unemployment rates, rampant violence, poor public services and housing. Roselyne would wake up each morning and set out in search of some way to earn money. Like many of her Korogocho peers, only on her luckiest days would bring home as much as a dollar. Today, Roselyn is one of the 27 employees of Ecosandals.com ([www.ecosandals.com](http://www.ecosandals.com)), a rubber sandal manufacturer, based in Korogocho. This job provides her with a steady income, as well as a training, computer literacy and a reliable working environment.

The project was started in 1995 by an American and a Kenyan, and was based on the idea of producing high-quality rubber

sandals by recycling tires. In 2001, the project went online. Within a month of the Ecosandals.com launch, the Korogocho sandal-makers were receiving orders from around the globe. The Project grew six-fold and now employs nine young mothers in addition to 18 young men. All sandal-makers have access to the Internet and are involved in directly marketing the sandals to customers globally.

As the manager of ecosandals.com points out, "the project addresses poverty using the Internet and the creative hands and minds of some of the most materially poor young adults on earth. The young adults all of whom have dropped out of school for lack of fees, would otherwise spend much time picking through trash dumps seeking anything of value. Instead, residents who join the Project are put to work, developing and making

enhanced used-tire sandals, while learning basic computer, math and language skills as well as online marketing. Sandal-makers earn a minimum of 30% of profit on each sandal sale. As a single pair of sandal sells online for as much as 1600 shillings (\$20), 30% of profits makes a serious impact on the life of sandal-makers like Roselyne".

Ecosandals.com is one of the Competition 2002 winning stories and was a finalist in 2001.

The story was written by Ms. Becky Wachera, Executive Director of Ecosandals.com, and can be found on the Stories website ([www.iicd.org/stories](http://www.iicd.org/stories)). It was presented by Ms. Wachera and Mr. Matthew Meyer.

### **Connecting India Village by Village**

This winning story tells about the Drishtee initiative, which is bringing internet connectivity to remote areas of India by the use of a successful and self-sustainable business organization model.

Drishtee ([www.drishtee.com](http://www.drishtee.com)) is a platform for rural networking and marketing services for enabling e-governance, education and health services. It is a state-of-the-art software which facilitates communication and information interchange within a localized intranet between villages and a district center.

A network of kiosks, serving villages or a group of villages, has been established under the initiative. Kiosks are owned by a local villager.

As highlighted by the author of this story, "Village entrepreneurs are trained to handle user-friendly software. The unit revenue earned by this kiosk owner is a few cents per transaction, but the volume of the operations and an intrinsic demand enable viability very early in the operation. This individual, educated to 10th Grade or above, becomes a role model and a messenger of valuable information for the villagers. With a minimum size of 800 families as a prerequisite for a kiosk's viability, a total of 100 such kiosks or more can be successfully set up within an average Indian District. A small fraction of the combined total revenue of such centers is enough to interest a local businessman to act as a channel partner and invest for the operational cost at the outset. This partner performs the role of a franchisee and adds value in scouting for kiosk owners, developing relations with District government, and maintaining the entire network of operations within the district."

The project has been envisaged to cater to social, economical and developmental needs of the villagers through an innovative G2C (Government to Citizen) model. The services it enables include access to government programs and benefits, market related information, and private information exchanges and transactions. Using a tiered franchise

and partnership model, Drishtee is enabling the creation of approximately 50,000 Information Kiosks all over India within a span of six years. These kiosks would potentially serve a market of 500 million people, with aggregate discretionary purchasing power of Rs. 100 billion. To enhance the economical viability of the Kiosks, the Kiosk owners are also given licenses to sell government judicial stamps. Powers of petition writer are also delegated to them. In less than two years, Drishtee has successfully demonstrated its viability model in over 90 kiosks across five Indian states.

The story was written and presented by Mr. Satyan Mishra of Drishtee and can be found on the Stories website ([www.iicd.org/stories](http://www.iicd.org/stories)).

### **Marrying Radio with Internet in Nepal**

Radio Sagarmatha was the first community FM radio station in South Asia. Radio Sagarmatha is located in Nepal and is run by group of environmental journalists. In this country, both in urban and rural areas, radio is broadly considered the most



*Gaurab Raj Upadhaya from Radio Sagarmatha, Nepal*

ubiquitous form of media. Radio Sagarmatha is also the only station in Asia bringing the Internet to the people through the radio.

"Taking the information resource of the Internet to people through radio was an idea that originated over cups of tea", explains Gaurab Raj Upadhaya in his story. "With aim at providing newer means of information to the public at large, the Internet radio program was designed to act as an interface between the users and the Internet."

The first broadcast of the program was made in March 2000. The response from the public was so favorable that since then, the program is now broadcasted every Friday, with a duration which has increased from 15 to 30 minutes.

As Gaurab Raj Upadhaya remarked, "In March 2000, we started thinking about doing an Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) show on the radio. Public radio was a new concept and there were no rules. Jitendra Raut, senior producer at Sagarmatha at that time, liked the idea and immediately found a 15 minutes slot on Fridays. We named it "Sagarmatha Site."

Initially, the Sagarmatha Site program was composed of three segments. It started with the "browsing on the radio" section, where generally a web-site was presented. The "Sabdartha" section ("meaning" in Nepali) followed, addressing specific requests for information and hints about internet browsing. In the third part of the program, an experienced Internet user was gen-

erally invited to talk about how to get valuable information from the Internet.

The program evolved with several experiments, including live browsing of the Internet from the studio. The latest addition to the program has been the radio quiz. This new slot in the program is aimed at gauging the amount of listeners' participation. "The effects of the radio quiz has been tremendous", Gaurab Raj Upadhaya remarks. "The project continues to evolve, and now a few friends have been regularly contributing indirectly through referrals and by sharing expertise. When we started the program, we had never thought it would come so far. Yet, the definite result has been the proof of concept. Taking ICT to the people doesn't necessarily mean that you need to put a computer in every village. What you actually need to take is the information that can make a difference. ICT is not an end in itself, rather it is a tool that needs to be adapted for local use. The radio show has proven this concept."

The story was written and presented by Mr. Gaurab Raj Upadhaya of Radio Sagarmartha and can be found on the Stories website ([www.iicd.org/stories](http://www.iicd.org/stories)).

### **Kabissa - Space for Change in Africa**

Organizations throughout Africa share very similar needs for affordable Internet services and training on how to use computers and the internet. Kabissa ([www.kabissa.org](http://www.kabissa.org)), meaning "complete" in Kiswahili, was cre-

ated to ensure that non-profit organizations throughout Africa, working mainly in human rights, health and socio-economic development in Africa, would have a presence on the web. Through an efficient and simple online procedure, organizations can request web space on the Kabissa server, as well as email accounts. Kabissa also offers access to net resources via e-mail, as well a social justice newsletter delivered on a weekly basis via email. Pambazuka News provides African viewpoints on important advocacy issues as well as direct, timely access to essential news and information relevant to Africa - complete with direct links to hundreds of online resources each week.

As Kim Lowery, the author of the Kabissa story, remarks, African non-profits also access the Internet in a variety of creative ways which Kabissa is in a position to respond to. Fantsuam Foundation, for example, has its project in a village several hours by bus from Abuja where power and phone lines do not yet reach. They travel once a week to the British Council office in Abuja where they collect their email and copy it to a diskette to take with them, and likewise send email messages they have prepared from a diskette they brought from the village. Periodically, Fantsuam have their entire email mailbox sent to them in the form of Outlook Express folders burned onto a CDROM disk. This is a particularly motivated and inspired group of people - nevertheless all African non profits,

even those far enough along to have their own Internet-connected computers, need quick access to their email mailbox when they are on the road or when the power goes out and they need to go to the cybercafé down the street. In response to this need, we set up a comprehensive webmail post office and a type of mail server (IMAP) which allows them to store their email in folders on the server."

The response to Kabissa has been considerable, taking into account that the organization now serves over 300 members from 32 African countries. There are currently 348 domains hosted on the Kabissa server, and 48 publicly available mailing lists hosted on Kabissa (newsletters, networks, discussion conferences, working groups). The Pambazuka Newsletter has over 7500 subscribers.

As Kim Lowerly explains, "At Kabissa, we don't pretend to have all the answers. But there are thousands of organizations out there who, in their own way, with their own expertise, are working to improve the lives of people in Africa. Together all these organizations can make an incredible impact. Our job is to make sure that these organizations have the technology at their fingertips to be as effective as possible so that they can get on with their work."

The story was written by Ms. Kim Lowery of Kabissa, and can be found on the Stories website ([www.iicd.org/stories](http://www.iicd.org/stories)). It was presented by Ms. Lowery and Mr. Tobias Eigen.

# Surfing the Web Faster

*How fast is your internet access? You may not have the resources to upgrade the speed of your internet connection, but there are some simple ways that you can surf the internet faster if a slow connection is causing frustration.*

*In this section of the eXchange, Pamela Street of infoDev shares some of her tips on how to improve the performance of internet connections, including in poor network environments.*

## Turning Off Graphics

The first and simplest way is by changing the preference in your web browser which will stop graphics and other types of media such as sound from being downloaded when you visit a web page. Graphics are the main reason why web pages take a long time to download. By doing this, you will not view the page as the designer intended with pictures and logos, but you will most likely get the text information you really need.

To do this using Internet Explorer, go to the Tools - Internet Options menu. On the "Advanced"

tab look for the "Multimedia" options. Here you can turn off images "pictures" as well as other bandwidth busters such as animations, sound, and videos. You can always turn these options back on as you need them as you are browsing by undoing the changes above. In Netscape, you can find the options under the Preferences menu.

## Surf When Others Aren't

Another option, if your web access time is flexible, is to surf the internet when web traffic is lowest. On average, this tends to be during the night-time hours and on

weekends, but can also depend on the browsing habits of those you share local bandwidth with.

One way to determine if your slow connection is local, regional, or global is by visiting a useful website called the Internet Traffic Report. This website gives a real-time index of how fast the internet is running globally and regionally. It also provides a "Traffic Index" for the past 24 hours so you can see current trends in traffic. The website can be found at [www.internettrafficreport.com](http://www.internettrafficreport.com)

Another interesting site is the Internet Weather Report [www.internetweather.com](http://www.internetweather.com).

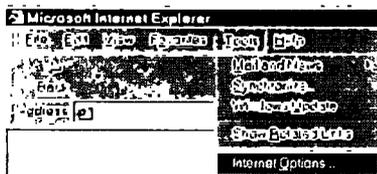
Look for the particularly interesting rotating world map, which shows global latencies, or delays in internet traffic.

## Web2Mail

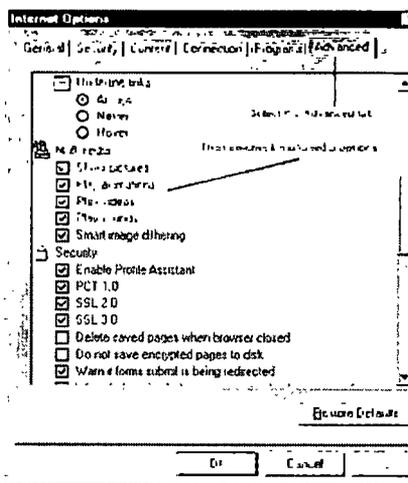
Finally, if you need to get information from a specific web page, and you have access to email, you can get the webpage delivered to your mailbox using Web2mail ([www.web2mail.com](http://www.web2mail.com)). Web2mail is a free service which delivers content from the web to you by email, in HTML or in text formats, and can include graphics by request. You can even do a search of the web by this email service.

There are several popular versions available in addition to Web2mail, including the Bellanet's Web-to Email ([www.bellanet.org/email.html](http://www.bellanet.org/email.html)) or Kabissa's server ([www.kabissa.org/members/www4mail/](http://www.kabissa.org/members/www4mail/)).

1 Select Tools, then Internet Options from the Internet Explorer menu



2 Then select tabs in the Options window to make various changes



## Carlos Braga on the Development Gateway Foundation

*After leaving his position as infoDev Manager in June 2001, Carlos Braga joined the Development Gateway as its Director. The Development Gateway Foundation is a not-for-profit organization whose objectives are to reduce poverty and support sustainable development through the use of information and communication technologies (ICT).*

*In this interview with the eXchange, Carlos tells us about the creation and the future activities of the Development Gateway Foundation.*

*Exactly a year ago you left infoDev to join the Development Gateway. What happened since then, and what is the status of the Development Gateway today?*

The Gateway, in terms of the portal activity, has evolved significantly, not only in getting new partnerships but also in terms of the amount of information, traffic and interests, and particularly new services. For instance, every day on the DG Market, ([www.dgmarket.org](http://www.dgmarket.org)) which is the e-procurement component of the Gateway, you can find 25,000 procurement opportunities, establish a profile of your interests, and request to be notified every time a procurement opportunity involving those countries and goods/services appears. In this sense, it is a very comprehensive platform for information and also for supporting business opportunities in the developing world. It covers not only World Bank procurement but also procurement

from the European Commission and several other regional development banks, such as EBRD, ADB, etcetera.

So, there are new services, like the DG Market, then there are services that were significantly expanded, for instance the AIDA database, which is by now the largest database of development projects in the world, with roughly 400,000 activities. This database gives you a good idea of what is going on, as well as the history of bilateral and multilateral financing projects in developing countries. Last but not least, in terms of the Country Gateways, there has been a significant extension in cooperation with infoDev. By now, there are

41 country gateways in different states of implementation, but this network is certainly improving in terms of the quality of the experiments and is one of the areas we consider very promising for the future.

*What is the level of consultation for the portal?*

The gateway is a portal in the sense that it points to several other directions. We have roughly about 100,000 visitor sessions at this point in time, and it's growing steadily.. More than a half a million documents are downloaded every month, and what is particularly promising is the engagement of people in the communities associated with the different topics. Right now there are more than 10,000 people around the world registered with the Gateway that receive on a daily or on a weekly basis alerts about new content that has been added to the gateway.

*What is the user profile of the Development Gateway?*

One of the issues with respect to this initiative is that it has a very broad coverage. We have users among the policy makers, from development agency staff mem-



DEVELOPMENT  
GATEWAY

bers, who use the Gateway to obtain information on projects, and to download significant documents — be it on poverty, or e-government — and so on.

Private companies come specifically to get information on procurement information. Agents active in the development community come to get information on projects. Students come to get information on statistics and use the Gateway as an interface that facilitates access to critical sources. The community is very wide. One of the issues we have been focusing on is, not only on the usability of the Gateway (including the adoption of user-friendly interfaces) but also in terms of how to allow these different communities to identify in a more effective way, how the Gateway could become more useful to them. We are also working within the World Bank itself, to explore how the Gateway can provide information for its staff members involved in the preparation of Country Assistance Strategies, etc.

*Could you tell us about the Development Gateway Foundation? What are its activities, and who are the supporters of the Foundation?*

The Development Gateway Foundation is a non-for-profit organization incorporated in the District of Columbia. It now has 'founding members' which are governments and organizations that have committed at least five million dollars over a three-year period, which includes the gov-

ernments of Australia, Germany, Japan, Italy, and The Netherlands, that made a contribution on behalf of Mali, South Korea, India, Pakistan and the World Bank group. In addition, there are several other countries and organizations that have contributed at a lower level, companies like Softbank, Bloomberg, and Transnational Computer Technology, and countries like Canada and Switzerland.

In this context, the Foundation has raised roughly 52 million dollars, part of which are in-kind contributions. The board of the Foundation has already convened twice, and has elected Dr. Mamphela Ramphele as the president of the Foundation. The Foundation is now looking for a CEO. John McArthur, the former dean of Harvard Business School, is acting as interim CEO but we expect over the next three months to identify a permanent CEO and then he/she will be in the position to establish the Secretariat of the Foundation. Many developments have taken place over the last few months, for instance, the appointment of K.Y. Amoako, the secretary general of UNECA, as the chairman of the Editorial Committee of the Gateway ( he also has a seat in the board of the Foundation), and decisions leading to the beginning of new initiatives, for instance, the first round of grants the Foundation is going to provide focusing on country gateways.

That's the structure of the Foundation. Its four main programs are: First, the portal,

which is the core activity of the Foundation. Second, the establishment of a network of research and training centers. Two of them are already in the process of being established. One is in India and it is going to focus on research activities. The institution that has been chosen to host the center is the National Center of Software in Bangalore. The other center is going to be established in South Korea. The Korean Information Society Development Institute will host the activities, which in this case, will focus on training. We are now in discussions with Pakistan, that has also committed to the Foundation, and will support a local research and training center. We are in negotiations with China, and hope that they will join the Foundation shortly. The third activity of the Foundation is the so-called ICT Forum. It is a 'think tank' capability of the Foundation which will become operational once the CEO is chosen. The fourth activity will regard grants and investments. The first round of grants will be announced in May.

*As regards this grant funding facility, how will it work, and what kind of projects will be selected and funded?*

The characteristic of this grants window of the Foundation is that it will be very much focused on activities that complement the core activities of the Foundation, meaning the portal and the research and training centers. So in this sense, initially at least, the expectation is that the

rounds of grants that the Foundation is going to launch will be focusing for instance on the implementation of country gateways. The division of labor with *infoDev* is that *infoDev* plays the role - as it is the tradition for *infoDev* - for the planning phase, the innovative phase, when you are trying to establish the conditions for an initiative like a Country Gateway. The Development Gateway Foundation now enters to fund those that have passed this phase in the implementation phase. The expectation is that in the future, as the research and training centers become operational, ideas, courses, and content that may be developed through the research and training centers are not only going to be disseminated through the portal but also may lead to additional projects that once again can be funded through the grants of the Development Gateway Foundation.

Here there is one difference which illustrates why *infoDev* operates in the broad space of ICT for development and receives all types of ideas in its core program, while the Gateway is focused on activities that complement these core activities of the Foundation.

*So from time to time you will announce request for proposal with a specific focus?*

Yes, in May there will be an announcement for Country Gateways implementation plans that builds upon the efforts that were initiated through *infoDev*, through the planning grants.

*And what will the average size of the grants be?*

The announcement, which has not yet been released, opens the possibility for grants of up to 250,000 dollars for this round. It may be bigger in the future. There is no limit at this point in time, but typically based on the business plans that we have received, and the kind of resource requirements that we understand our typical country gateway has, we believe that this next round will probably see grants in the order of magnitude between and 150,000-250,000 dollars range.

*How does the Development Gateway initiative interact with the World Bank ICT initiatives on the one side, and with infoDev on the other?*

In terms of the interaction with *infoDev*, this has already been happening from the very beginning. *infoDev* has played a critical role in supporting the country gateways during their planning phase. The expectation is that in the future this division of labor - in terms of *infoDev* focusing on the planning grants, and the Gateway focusing on the planning phase - may continue, but there are many other possibilities to be explored. Many of the donors of the Foundation are also donors of *infoDev* and there are obvious synergies to be explored. More broadly, the Gateway works very closely with the Global Development Learning Network ([www.gdln.org](http://www.gdln.org)) in terms of exploring the possibili-

ties of the Gateway being a support platform for courses that are conveyed through the GDLN teleconference facilities. Right now there is an experiment going on with respect to HIV/AIDS mother-child transmission. The course that is using the GDLN facilities is being complemented by website materials that are disseminated through the Gateway. We expect to expand this significantly starting from next fiscal year, as the cooperation with certain donors, for instance Australia, who have decided to put a lot of emphasis on e-learning in its own country gateway, so we are exploring how to promote this integration. With the Global Development

Network ([www.gdn.org](http://www.gdn.org)) for example, we also have a partnership, in the sense that some of the agencies that are members of the GDN play the role of a topic guide in the Gateway. One example is GRADE ([www.grade.org.pe](http://www.grade.org.pe)), a Peruvian institution, which is the topic guide for the topic of 'Poverty' on the Gateway and it is a member of GDN, and the process of selection was made in cooperation with the GDN Secretariat. With respect to World Links for Development (WorLD), they are the topic guide, in partnership with the Commonwealth of Learning, for the e-learning partnership of the Gateway. In this framework, we are now also exploring synergies with the African Virtual University. We are creating the possibilities for the platform to be used to advance the agendas of these initiatives. The most important area for co-

operation, however, is exactly in the data that can be used to support operational work. This is a work in progress, but it is a priority for us.

*What are the challenges you consider 'crucial' for the Development Gateway's future success?*

The challenges are many, there is no doubt this is a very dynamic field. The question of being relevant is always a challenge. The Gateway has some unique offerings, like the AIDA database and the DG Market, the e-procurement component. The integration of these unique offerings with content is what will make the experience more relevant from the clients' point of view. No doubt in the web area, for you to capture attention, you not only have to add relevant content, but you also have to make a significant effort in terms of marketing, and this is an area where we have just started. We are trying to get additional partnerships with respect to content development, with different actors that are very active in this area, offering information that is relevant for development, and that is the main challenge for the next year. So, in general, the main challenges are to improve the quality of the content that the Gateway offers, to maintain the system's feasibility from the point of view of its cost and sustainability, and on top of all of this, to make the platform more relevant and better known around the world.

### **The Development Gateway Launches the ICT for Development Topic Page**

In cooperation with *infoDev*, the Development Gateway initiative recently launched a topic section on ICT for Development. The section offers a rich base of information resources targeted at the international development community, particularly ICT project practitioners, policy makers, organizations and communities working on ICT for Development issues, and the donor community. The growing list of resources includes a broad set of documents on ICT programs and projects, lessons learned, best practice and case study reports, calendar of international events, interviews, news, statistics and data.

Launched in April 2002, the topic page already has put together about 1,600 items and 900 subscribers.

The information is organized according to specific areas, including key issues, applications, developments by country or region, types of resources, and much more. The page features knowledge bases and information on special areas of application such as education, agriculture, enterprise development, environment, and health. It also shares reports on regulatory issues, universal access, technology, national and regional initiatives, and funding opportunities. The page also includes the AIDA project database, which covers over 5,500 ICT projects and initiatives being carried out by a large number implementing agencies.

The project database is searchable by country, topic or other customizable criteria.

According to Rafael Hernandez, guide of the ICT for Development page, "the topic page is becoming a specialized and very dynamic space for information sharing across regions, countries, organizations and individuals on current and emerging ICT for Development issues which are of particular relevance to developing countries. This is a collaborative effort between several people and organizations, and we are very glad to see a growing number of visitors and organizations working on ICT issues, many of which have expressed their feedback as well as their interest in contributing with information resources".

Please visit the Development Gateway ICT for Development page at: [www.developmentgateway.com/node/133831/](http://www.developmentgateway.com/node/133831/)

## infoDev is...

...a global grant program managed by the World Bank on behalf of public and private Donors who support it.

*infoDev* pools intellectual, technical and financial resources from public and private partners. It aims at reducing poverty through the use of ICT in areas such as market development, education, health, government, commerce and environmental protection. *infoDev* promotes efficient markets in communications and information infrastructure. It innovates through small-scale projects with a potential for replicability; disseminates best practices, lessons learned from its own activities and from other experiences relevant to the development community; and supports special initiatives such as the promoting a regional connectivity, or helping address the millennium computing bug, or Y2K problem.

*infoDev* provides a framework for initiating a range of new development ideas to be field-tested. Project proposals can be submitted by government agencies, private companies, academic institutions or non-governmental organizations. Since its creation at the end of 1995, *infoDev* has received 1145 proposals for projects in all parts of the developing world, 209 of which have been funded so far (excluding grants under the Y2K Initiative).

Donors are governments, or other public and private organizations from developing and developed countries. Current donors are:

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Government of Denmark  
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Government of Germany  
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Government of the United Kingdom  
Government of the United States of America  
The World Bank.

All Donors are members of the Donors' Committee, which governs the program and decides on its strategy and overall orientations. ICO Global Communications, who has co-financed an *infoDev* project, has an observer status at the *infoDev* Donors' Committee. A group of six international independent experts, the *infoDev* Technical Advisory Panel,

advises the Donors' Committee and the management of the program. The World Bank contributes to the program financially, and provides logistical support and facilities at the World Bank's Headquarters in Washington, DC.

The most recent information on *infoDev* can be found at [www.infoddev.org](http://www.infoddev.org), together with links to *infoDev* projects. *infoDev*'s site also gives access to working papers and reports, and other documents *infoDev* produces or collects, and makes available as reference material to the *infoDev* community.

*infoDev* participates in the Global Knowledge Partnership.

## infoDev eXchange

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For information on the Program and on the contents of this newsletter please contact the Executive Editor, Ms. Elena Scaramuzzi, at +1 (202) 458-7331 or visit *infoDev*'s website ([www.infoddev.org](http://www.infoddev.org)).