



*Speech for opening ceremony of the
IDLELO 2 Conference on Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) -
Achieving development goals through community software (23.02.2006)*

*by Balthas Seibold, Senior Project Manager, ICT for development,
InWent gGmbH, Capacity Building International, Germany*

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Introduction to InWent and its approach to ICT and FOSS

Thank you for the introduction, Prof Thairu,

Dear Mr. Amoussougbo, Regional Advisor on ICT initiatives, Economic
Commission for Africa (UNECA),

Dear Sir Daniel, President and CEO, Commonwealth of Learning (COL),

Dear Mr. Shuttleworth, Canonical/Ubuntu,

Dear Ms Borat, Manager, Open Source Programs, Google,

Dear Mr Thatcher, Region Technology Officer, Microsoft EMEA,

Dear members of FOSSFA, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, let me say that it is an honour for me to speak after such
distinguished icons of the FOSS movement and of the world of international
cooperation. As they have said almost everything on the goals of our meeting
and on the promises of FOSS for Africa, I will try to be very brief.

I will just give you a short introduction on why we at InWent Capacity
Building International from Germany see “free and open source software”

(FOSS) for development as an important pillar of our strategy. I will also introduce to you our flagship programme in the field of ICTs in Africa: [it@ab](#) - The Southern African Knowledge Network on “Information Technology in African Business”.

Let me begin by saying that InWent is very pleased to collaborate with FOSSFA, UNECA, the directorate of e-government of the Government of Kenya and all the other partners on this most timely initiative. The World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis has shown again that innovative approaches to technologies can have an impact on poverty reduction and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In this context, Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) clearly has the potential to play an paramount role.

InWent therefore supports a number of initiatives in FOSS in Southeast Asia though our [it@foss](#) programme and in Africa through [it@ab](#), funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

Notably, since 2001 we have trained IT specialists of seven SADC countries, inter alia on the use of FOSS. They are part of the Southern African Knowledge Network on “Information Technology in African Business” ([it@ab](#)) supported by InWent.

It was as early as 2000, when InWent started to establish the network in order to support the participation of small and medium-sized companies, institutions and governmental bodies in local business development as well as regional business cooperation in SADC. Today, about 30 organizations are part of the network - many of them are present in this room.

As a majority of members of the [it@ab](#) network are very active in the field of FOSS, we saw this conference as a very important step to connect the African private sector and policy makers.

This is why we are proud of the fact that we could bring twenty-five delegates from six SADC countries to IDLELO2, namely from Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique, South Africa and Namibia. These participants are both from companies and organizations of the [it@ab](#) network and from the public administration side.

In addition to our African partners from the [it@ab](#) network, we have also worked towards getting FOSS-experts from other continents such as Europe and Asia to this event in order to share strategies, experiences and potentials for exchange. Clearly, InWent is also looking forward to exploring further synergies and cooperation with all key players of Idlelo2 who are present in this gathering..

I do hope that together we can achieve one of the goals of idlelo2, which is close to InWent's heart: to stimulate a local Open Source Software Industry in African countries which yields concrete results – and results means in this context: business, exchange of knowledge, networking and capacity building – all in the framework of the attainment of international development goals, including the MDGs.

IT-specialists trained in Germany

In this context, I am also very glad to see some faces here in the room that I know well from Germany. Over three years, InWent has trained more than 60 young dedicated IT-specialists of companies and organizations of the [it@ab](#) network. They spent one year in Germany for an advanced IT-training course on “business related IT-consultancy”. The whole training was taught through FOSS (Linux KDE, FOSS server & applications etc.), and heavily focused on FOSS-solutions in fields such as e-learning, e-security and web content management. And now some of these experts are here to contribute to this conference as we will be discussing technical and business solutions in the field of FOSS.

(In addition to the training in Germany, [it@ab](#) in cooperation with InWEnt has organized regular capacity-building activities in Africa and fostered virtual cooperation over the past 5 years. Let me just mention our last event, a two days international conference on “Smooth integration of Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) into existing software environments” held in Lusaka, Zambia in last September.)

InWEnt as the capacity-builder

In fact this is what InWEnt is all about: Our organization stands for human resource and organizational development within the framework of international cooperation. Our services such as the [it@ab](#) trainings cater to new managers, skilled and executive personnel as well as to decision makers from businesses, politics, administrations and civil societies worldwide. Overall InWEnt trains about 55,000 persons per year. So the “skills development” mentioned by Mark Shuttleworth in his speech is the core of our mandate.

(Let me add one piece of information concerning our ownership structure - for those among you, who are not familiar with us: InWEnt’s shareholders are the Federal Republic of Germany represented by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Carl Duisberg Gesellschaft representing the German business community and the German Foundation for International Development representing the German federal states.)

FOSS and its potential to localize development

Let me finish by adding one point to the deliberations of the last speakers on the potential of Free and Open Source Software. For me the most interesting characteristics is the move from selling code to selling services, which is associated with the drive towards FOSS. This move towards a service industry can in turn be equated with a wider shift from an Information Society to a Knowledge Society: In a knowledge society, know-

how, services and interaction become key dimension of social and economic development, and not any more products or marketing.

Therefore FOSS has the potential to lead to a global commons of software, while at the same time unleashing local entrepreneurship in Africa and giving back code and knowledge to communities. FOSS therefore represents a clear win-win situation in which general societal objectives such as openness, independence, cultural diversity and inclusion can be reconciled with economic goals such as low cost and high quality of software, security and business development.

So let me wish us much success in our deliberations within the next days. Let us prove that

- a) FOSS can be a driver for low-cost, high-quality software made by Africa for Africa
- b) FOSS can be a competitive edge for African businesses such as the companies and organizations of the [it@ab](#) network and
- c) that all of this will indeed bring us closer to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Before ending, I would like to thank wholeheartedly the organizers of this event from FOSSFA who turned idlelo2 into reality.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Information and Contact

Balthas Seibold is a senior project manager at InWent - Capacity Building International, Germany. Responsible for programmes on “ICT for Development”, he develops and implements capacity building projects in Asia, Africa and the Middle East within the department of Sustainable Business Development. Previous work stations include UNESCO’s bureau of strategic planning, GTZ and the UNDP.

InWent - Internationale Weiterbildung und Entwicklung gGmbH

Balthas Seibold - Senior Project Manager – Information and Communication
Technology,
Division for Business Development & Infrastructure

Phone: +49-228-4460-1253

Fax: +49-228-4460-1113

E-Mail: balthas.seibold@inwent.org

Websites: www.inwent.org and www.it-inwent.net
