

DIALOG | africa

Journal for Africa and the Middle East

Alumni networks and alumni associations ► African network getting stronger ► Zambian honey and essential oils ► Changes in InWent's Regional Office

MAIN TOPIC

ICT – The key to development

For any country in the world, information and communication technologies (ICT) are a crucial factor for success in the development of the economy and the society as a whole. InWent has established the IT network it@ab to provide the SADC region with consultancy services to businesses and to promote co-operation with Europe.

it@ab
for excellence in ICT

Since 2000, InWent has provided training to IT and software specialists in Africa and Asia in the framework of the so-called it@inwent programme. The programme is based on three main pillars: It aims to strengthen the capacities of IT sectors by training and networking multiplier institutions such as IT businesses and IT educational institutions, and promotes business clusters related to ICT. In this context, ICT innovations such as local content or free and open-source software (FOSS) (see box on page 2) are promoted to advance economic, political and social development. On the basis of the UN Millennium Development Goals and other international development goals, the focus is on using ICT as tools for poverty reduction by fostering access to knowledge for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), educational institutions and governmental bodies.

Several hundreds of IT experts have been trained so far. The multiplication of expert knowledge on open source products offers

three advantages: The software is inexpensive for its users, it can be adapted to their particular needs or working conditions and provides local IT specialists able to maintain the operating systems with an income.

it@ab – a network of stakeholders

The Southern African Knowledge Network it@ab was established to facilitate cross-border co-operation of IT institutions and specialists within Africa. Today the network includes about 30 institutions, companies and organisations in the field of IT in Africa. The network aims to get small and medium-sized enterprises, institutions and governmental bodies in the field of E-Business development and IT training, involved while promoting co-operation among local and regional businesses. More than 30 institutions with some hundred IT experts and software programmers in seven SADC member states have been brought together under the network's umbrella since 2001 and serve as multipliers for the exchange of innovation and technology. it@ab mainly consists of IT consulting firms, IT training institutions, business promotion agencies and universities in Angola, Malawi, Mozambique,

Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia. The variety of institutions across all sectors is an important factor in the sustainability of the network.

Training young experts in Germany

The professionals within the it@ab network offer what is most needed for the advancement in their region today: Expert and targeted knowledge in the field of business-related IT and E-Commerce. The IT stakeholders have strong ties in the business environment of their countries and the African region. ►

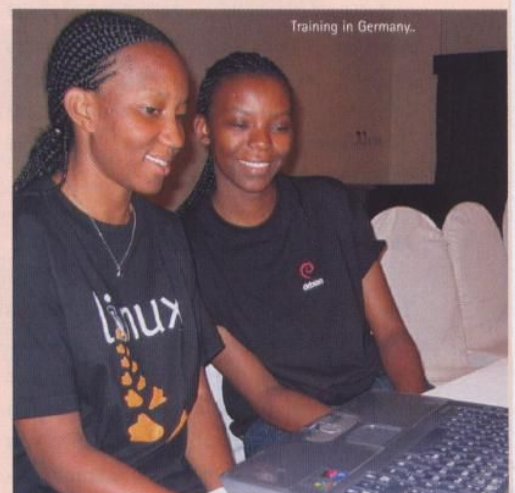


Photo: InWent



Photo: InWent

Participants of the training "Business Related IT-Consultancy".

InWent has supported the initiation of the it@ab network with workshops on E-Business, marketing and content management/Internet publishing for senior staff within the region. Moreover, three comprehensive 12-month education programmes for junior consultants of the network partners have been held in Germany since 2002.

In all, over 60 young IT specialists in junior managerial positions with at least two years of professional experience were selected by their employers, all partners in the it@ab network, to spend a year of advanced training in Germany. At the same time, E-Projects of these partners were supported during the training. Among others, the IT training included classes in IT project management, internet technologies, E-Business and its applications, web publishing and many other issues. In addition, the experts received three weeks of international management training to prepare them to use their new knowledge in their respective home countries and workplaces.

Alumni network of future IT multipliers

The third and last group of IT specialists finished their training by the end of 2005. But the end of the training programme marked the start of continuous learning. In June, the first it@ab alumni workshop was held for the alumni of the IT training programme in co-operation with the it@ab-part-

ners in Mozambique. All former participants of the it@ab training programmes in Germany since 2002 were invited to join the workshop. It is hoped that this event has sparked sustained networking among all it@ab alumni and helped to foster FOSS knowledge transfer and the sharing of IT know-how. The objectives of the advanced training

have been developed in close consultation with the alumni. One of the main goals of the workshop was to intensify the interaction and exchange among all it@ab alumni and their institutions as well as to institutionalise such networking through practical measures. In addition, the alumni exchanged and communicated their IT know-how and shared their experiences on ICT-related projects with local and regional approaches. Another focus was the conception and adaption of IT business models and projects as well as building of technical skills with a focus on Free and Open Source Software (FOSS). The workshop was financed by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development within the framework of InWent's advanced Training Programme "Business-related IT Consultancy".

By Anna Jacobsen/Mirjam Leuze



Information

Software that speaks your language

Open source software offers an inexpensive and flexible alternative to commercial software products for countries in the southern hemisphere. Unfortunately, "Free and Open Source Software" (FOSS) is not very well known.

Driving a car that exactly fits your needs as long as you please without any payments – a dream? Yes, but there is something just like it: Excellent software available on the Internet, free of charge and with open source code. This means that anyone experienced in computer programming can change the programs to his own convenience. These programs are called "Free and Open Source Software", in short FOSS.

Tried and tested examples include the operating system Linux or the program "OpenOffice", a software package with all important office applications including word processing, spreadsheet capabilities and a presentation tool. Microsoft and Macintosh software shares the greatest part of the global market, but many of the programs in circulation are pirate copies. In contrast, open source software is not only free of charge and legal but the open source code also makes it possible to flexibly adjust the software to include distinctive cultural features and individual needs. This is of special interest to families of language like Khmer or Zulu, who often are ignored by great suppliers due to the little economic power of their users. Other than with protected software products, it is easy for IT Specialists to translate and transform open source software, turning FOSS into a tailor-made solution for the needs of SMEs, governments and institutions of the Southern African region.

More information on it@inwent and its networks can be found at www.it-inwent.org and www.it-ab.org.