

OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE BOOSTS THE ECONOMY

The InWEnt programme *it@foss* is promoting open-source, license-free and therefore low-cost software (Free and Open Source Software, FOSS) in its partner countries of South-East Asia. Such software products can be developed and maintained by domestic firms in the local languages. This has a direct and positive impact on the economies and public administrations of the developing countries and also prevents software piracy. However, many countries lack developers with knowledge of FOSS. In addition, many decision makers are not yet aware of these innovative software solutions. InWEnt offers solutions by providing FOSS training courses, regional networks, and dialogue conferences. For instance, in September 2005, an international conference in Vietnam for the first time addressed the application of open-source software in public administration. 300 IT experts, government representatives, and entrepreneurs discussed the subject “COSGov Vietnam – Building Cooperation in the Field of Open-Source for eGovernance”. Another example is Cambodia where, with support from InWEnt, system administrators and developers are trained in free software in the local Khmer language.

— Responsible Division: Business Development and Infrastructure

BRIDGING THE TECHNOLOGICAL GAP

Modern cutting-edge technologies are absolutely necessary for businesses to be competitive and, therefore, for the sustainable economic development of a country. Innovative technologies increase productivity and lower costs. But that's not all: they can also help to develop appropriate country-specific solutions. Businesses in the private sector and national economies can skip entire development cycles and thereby move towards the future. All of this does, however, require the systematic promotion of technology and the accessibility of key innovations such as information and communication technologies. InWEnt's capacity building has been supporting this process.

The organisation seeks to establish the structures needed for the efficient and sustainable advancement of technology within the target countries with the aim of promoting local research and development institutions that can make an effective contribution to technological progress. InWEnt's typical approach of linking German expertise with local support in the respective partner countries creates networks between North and South which are essential to a sustainable technology exchange.

Information and communication technologies have undergone tremendous change over the past fifteen years. The Internet has become accessible in many countries, new methods of electronic data processing have been developed, and mobile telephony has manifested itself as a worldwide phenomenon. Industrial societies are being transformed into information societies. Knowledge and learning have become central prerequisites for economic and social development. In many countries, information and communication technologies have permeated all walks of public and private life: from a digital economy via electronic government to the computerisation of the public health sector.

During the past few years, the world has become

divided into countries that benefit from the lead provided by technology and those that have been bypassed. Bridging this digital divide is one of the topics that the German Federal Government has included in its Programme of Action 2015, making it an integral part of its development cooperation.

Currently, many of the countries on Germany's development cooperation agenda are improving their infrastructure to enable the use of ICT. Network access points are being created, hardware procured, and mobile communication networks developed. However, the knowledge of how to extend these technologies to a wider population is frequently lacking, for instance, how to use it to make small businesses operate more efficiently or to reform public administrations. In addition, individual population groups and rural areas are often excluded. InWEnt therefore specifically focuses on the training of experts in these countries who will then implement the information and communication technologies in the respective sectors and serve as multipliers within their home countries and regions.

Here, capacity building means strengthening the pertinent sectors in the partner countries through relevant key information and communication technologies. Be it open-source, license-free or low-cost software (Free and Open Source Software, FOSS), local information, or e-Learning – the ambition is to achieve sustainable economic and human development by making information and knowledge accessible to all. InWEnt's particular approach considers information and communication technologies to be cross-sectoral and it proceeds accordingly. Information and communication technologies are used as instruments for engendering positive change on the broadest possible level. In conjunction with the Federal Foreign Office (AA), the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology (BMWi), and a multitude of international partners, InWEnt is working to implement the Action Programme 2015 of the Federal Government.