

FOSSFA Conference roots for Knowledge Economy

The Free Software and Open Source Foundation for Africa (FOSSFA) recently hosted the Third African Conference on Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) and the Digital Commons "Idlel 3" at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD II) in Dakar, Senegal, from 16 - 20 March 2008.

According to FOSSFA current council Chair, Nnenna Nwakanma, "Idlelo", a Southern Africa word meaning common grazing ground, captures the essence of FOSSFA's existence as well as the fundamental objective of the conference, which was a rallying point for FOSS expertise, exchange, showcasing, innovation, training and projects.

"This conference," she added, "is a platform for FOSS practitioners, developers and advocates as well as governments to showcase results, share experiences, exchange challenges, review progress on the continent in diverse domains and chart a way forward for the following years."

"Making the Knowledge Economy Work for Africa"

Placed under the Chairmanship of Habib Sy, Senegalese Minister of Infrastructures, Land Transport, Telecommunications and ICT and the patronage of Geraldine Fraser-Moloketi, South African Minister of Public Service and Administration, the third edition of Idlelo brought together participants from across the continent and other parts of the world under the theme, "Making the Knowledge Economy Work for Africa"

The Plenary sessions and exhibition hosted at UCAD II were exclusive occasions for participants to build and share experience in the use of FOSS in government and administration, in Education and in many other social sectors like Health. On e-administration and governance for example, participants assessed Seneg Cote d'Ivoire and South Africa's experiences in deploying FOSS in public administration in terms of opportunities and challenges.

"Idlelo 3 is an excellent opportunity for us to contribute to and benefit experiences from FOSS users, developers and localizers who came to expose results of innovations obtained since the last Idlelo," said Kuassi Houmavo, President of Association Togolaise des utilisateurs du Libre (Atul).

Hands-on training

Besides, participants got intensive hands-on training on current FOSS tools in several professional domains like education, media, certification, volunteering, gender mainstreaming and Health.

Ken Lohento, PANOS Institute for West Africa New Technologies Programme Coordinator said that his organisation deemed it necessary to participate in the present edition of Idlelo because the model of open society based on free software and open source appears to be a common shared value between the two institutions. According to him, for Africa to get maximum advantage of all this, it's important to go beyond the primary consideration of free software and engage in the development of software engineering at human resource level.

Professor Derek Keats, Information Technology Manager at Western Cape University, South Africa, said Idlelo is worthwhile since one of its key success factors is to bring a diversity of people together on free

software and open source. "However," he mentioned, "our challenge now is to do things to involve people free and open software particularly in understanding the value of it to them."

FOSSFA is Africa's first Non-Governmental FOSS organisation, the vision of which is to promote the use of FOSS and its model in African development. FOSSFA supports the integration of FOSS in national policies, coordinates, promotes and adds value to African FOSS initiatives, creativity, industry, expertise, efforts and activities at all levels. The foundation partners with development organisations who share these goals towards a participatory and gender-mainstreamed sustainable development and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals in Africa.

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