

The Fourth Meeting of the Committee on Development Information (CODI). 23 - 28 April, 2005, Addis Abeba, Ethiopia

**Welcoming speech at the Open Source Workshop during CODI IV
by Aida Opoku-Mensah, OIC of DISD**

Addis Ababa, 24 April 2005

Ambassador Makan Moussa Camara,
Gurus of Open Source software,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Colleagues,

I am glad and honored to welcome you all to what should be a stimulating and informative workshop, which will be dealing with a very important and timely issue.

The open source software is attracting a lot of attention not just in the computing community, but also in the media, academia and, political arena. In many countries there are political initiatives trying to get public support for Open Source software, e.g. by paying direct subsidies to open source projects, by standardizing open source software development activities in government agencies, or by requiring schools and universities to replace proprietary software by open source software whenever this was possible.

Some countries such as Argentina, China, Brazil, United States, France, Germany, Spain, Korea, Mexico and United Kingdom have already formulated national level policies for the development and usage of open source. Even in Africa some countries are forging ahead with OS policies.

International organizations such as OIF, UNESCO, ECA have decided to stimulate the debate and high level sensitization on OSS policy issues towards policy African policy makers. Indeed it is not enough to train OSS users and developers but appropriate policy environment and leadership should also back them.

The increasing worldwide interest in championing the uptake and adoption of open source software can be attributed to the benefits it offers which includes lower total cost of ownership and most significant of all the free nature of its software which allow users the freedom to run, copy, distribute, study, change and improve the software.

The opportunities open source software brings at international level may include greater competition in the software market, expanded options, and reduced costs and risks.

But these benefits cannot be realized without the availability of the necessary skills in the continent. Therefore, developing a local skills base is the strongest possible response we need to concentrate on.

The economic benefits of open source software are enormous, and I am sure that the presenters will touch on some of these aspects. Already you will have presentations of several key issues and applications including FOSS and enterprise development in Africa, research on FOSS, security issues, UNESCO's OSIDAMS for data management, etc.

You will also discuss progress on deploying FOSS in Government and policy issues in several African countries, including Madagascar, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Ethiopia as well as planned activities on forthcoming major conferences on FOSS including RALL2 and IDLELO2.

ECA, in the framework of the African Information Society Initiative (AISII) is closely following the developments in open source software and is working with partners to support member States in this area. This workshop, which is supported by both ECA and OIF is part of our various activities on the issue. It follows the workshops on FOSS issues held during CODI III and ADF IV. ECA believes that open source software is an especially useful tool to allow developing countries to leapfrog into the information age. In this regard several developing countries including Korea, China and Argentina have decided to move their entire Government systems to Open Source Software.

The Information Technology Centre for Africa (ITCA) will be one of ECA's vehicle for the promotion of the development and usage of OSS in Africa.

We believe that this workshop will help us develop a more informed understanding of the economic opportunities of OSS to Africa. What we expect from this workshop in the coming days is therefore a rational and factual discussion to come up with recommendations on issues surrounding the economic value of open source software to be presented for CODI which will make recommendations for adoption by the Conference of African Ministers of Finance and Economic Development scheduled to take place in May 2004 in Abuja.

I cannot conclude without recognizing the invaluable cooperation between ECA and OIF on ICT for development issues (ADF 3, Bamako2002, CEMAC, ADF 4, Accra2005 and today CODI 4) and our close collaboration with FOSSFA.

I am sure that you will find this workshop stimulating and instructive.

I wish you a successful workshop and fruitful stay in Addis Ababa.

Thank you.
