FAIR and ICT4D

Cases for writing a masters thesis

The FAIR Project

FAIR Denmark is small volunteer based NGO that seeks to combine a humanitarian goal of reducing the digital divide, with an environmental goal of reusing computers.

In our society, we replace our laptops, stationaries, mobile phones and tablets within a few years. Our *gadgets* that are seen as slow and outdated from our high tech perspective, but in Malawi, this equipment can become a source of development, improving society for one of the poorest countries in the world.

FAIR Denmark, together with our local partner NICE, works to make this waste a resources. Our pilot project consists of 250 computers, installed at four secondary schools and one district center. These centers gives over 4000 students and 200 teachers the possibility to actually touch computers in Computer Studies classes. It gives them access to open source information, such as 30,000+ programs, Wikipedia, Khan Academy and a lot of other material. It gives them the possibility to actually learn to work with computers, to access and use digital resources and the possibility to become part of the information age...

Why write a Master Thesis with FAIR?

FAIR is probably not the usual master thesis partner. We are a grass root organisation entirely made up of volunteers, our office is also our warehouse and we don't have any titles or pre-determined areas we want you to fill out. Instead, we provide a case for students seeking experience with grass root development. Maybe you want to provide pragmatic solutions to complex problems or to improve the possibilities of cooperation across both distance and culture or maybe you just wish to see the world from different perspective than corporate and capitalist globalization.

Within the the FAIR Project, we work with several different issues. Some of these are:

- Can IT really reduce poverty and increase democracy in one of the world's poorest countries?
- How can we build partnerships with diverse actors, to use resources in better and smarter ways?
- What are the consequences of transferring technologies across geographical, economical, environmental, social and cultural boundaries?
- How can free and open source software and information be used in development?
- Are FOSS a better solution to bridge the digital divide than proprietary software?
- Providing a solution for companies seeking to build true Corporate Social Responsibility?
- Organising

FAIR has its headquarters in Nord Vest neighboorhood of Copenhagen.

Our projects are in the central region of **Malawi**, around the capital of Lilongwe
- Robert Blake: Secondary boarding school for boys near Dowa
- Chinsapo: Secondary community school outside Lilongwe
- Mponela: Dowa Secondary school, boarding school for boys, day school for girls
- Nsaru: Secondary regional school

- Mchinji: Community center jointy operated by the district council and a group of volunteers. Mainly serves civic education purposes, but also offers secondary school classes.

We are primarily funded by Danida through the Project Advice and Training Center (Projektrådgivningen)
Our local partner in Malawi are the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE)
We have partnerships with Syd Energi, Aberdeen Asset Management, Lindorff, Mercantec, Aleris Hamlet
We work primarily with open source and open access, such as Edubuntu, Django, Wikipedia, Khan Academy, Project Gutenberg.... and many more...

Challenges

These are just ideas of how to work on a thesis using FAIR as a stepping stone, while shedding light on areas of interest to FAIR...

Supporting knowledge transfer and real ICT4D: Which new challenges occur when a school that never had computer access undergoes a transition in which computer access is very rapidly incurred? How are the teachers able to benefit? Which arguments pro computer access can be applied from different key actors' perspectives?

Culture and IT: Malawians have a strong culture, quite different from Western culture, in which most digital products have been designed. This is a challenge both in terms of software design, and educational materials. But open source, and open access may be a key tool.

Making the most of a refurbished computer: How can hardware continue to operate for an extended life period and be of value in the most optimal way? Knowledge of its new context (ie. Malawi) is heavily required, because a variety of technical, educational, and cultural factors are at play.

Development effects of computer access: ICT4D means that development improvements can be seen in areas such as democracy, knowledge of human rights, education and general access to information that can be vital to local businesses etc.

The waste of Western digital/consumer culture: Why is it that companies and consumers are replacing their digital products so often? And to what environmental and societal cost? And how is the situation in Denmark? Little is known about the mountains of electronic waste in Denmark... the dark side of technological advancements.

Literature

The Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries
http://www.ejisdc.org/

ICT4D http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_and_communication_technologies_for_development

http://www.ict4d.org.uk/

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