

Meraka Institute to host Soweto's First Open Source Workshop and set up satellite Centres

The [Meraka Institute's Open Source Centre \(OSC\)](#) will host Soweto's first ever Open Source Workshop on 13 August 2005. The workshop, to be attended mainly by computer enthusiasts who run their own computer-related businesses in that area, will be held at the Funda Centre.

"Most of the invited attendees at the workshop only have a vague idea about Open Source. Therefore, the aim of the workshop is to formally expose them to Open Source and let them see how they can incorporate the Open Source model into their current business offerings," says Ntsika Msimang of the Meraka Institute's OSC.

It is also envisaged that the workshop will create a network of local Open Source specialists, who will serve as a support-base for other newcomers in this field. "For example, if a local school is running Open Source Software, they will have the services of an Open Source specialist on their doorstep," says Msimang. "As such, more jobs will also be created," he adds.

In addition, the National Institute for Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation of Offenders (NICRO), which currently runs a well equipped computer training facility, has also been earmarked to house the Meraka Institute's first satellite OSC in Soweto. NICRO will be partnering with DIPALO, a non-profit organisation providing affordable training in computer literacy courses and computer hardware assembly to underprivileged youth, to provide Open Source training. The two organisations have already begun a process to develop an OpenOffice based ICDL training manual. Their activities will be coordinated with the Meraka Institute's OSC.

Proponents of Open Source Software (OSS) have always positioned it as one of the essential components of a strategy to address the digital divide. According to Msimang, however, "there seems to be a disturbing trend emerging which reveals that our message seems to be getting through to everyone else but women and underprivileged communities." He continues, "The irony here is that open source seems to be engineering its own digital divide and the idea of creating satellite centres is to reverse that trend by targeting the communities that we deem are the ultimate beneficiaries of bridging the digital divide." Building satellite centres also falls in line with the current UNDP funded initiative of extending the reach of open source benefits to regions in the continent where open source has not yet made an impact. That initiative is currently being spearheaded by the Meraka OSC.

A similar centre is being earmarked for the HP i-Community centre in the Mokgalakwena district, Limpopo.

Enquiries: Ntsika Msimang, at e-mail: NMsimang@csir.co.za

News supplied by Tlhogi Mokhema