Information Access for Development:
Weather Information Access for Rural Ghana*

Invited talk abstract

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ABSTRACT

With very low internet penetration, over 64% of Africans have no internet access. In recent years, urban Africa has improved in terms of internet access with 3G and 4G available in some cities. Rural and suburban Africa however still has virtually no access to internet services. Issues of illiteracy, numerous local languages and the lack of infrastructure are the foremost barriers that keep these people unconnected although information needs such as market prices and weather forecasts might be relevant to these communities. These conditions are similar for most countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Information of this nature, available on the internet or elsewhere, can be accessed by proxy rather than directly.

The widespread availability of mobile phones and radio access in rural areas suggests attention should be concentrated on these technologies because it is important to use what is readily available. This research delves practically into how ICTs can provide rural communities with regular access to up-to-date information, from the world wide web, peers or organizations, which is relevant to their needs.

The study will use an adapted living-labs approach for requirements engineering, which will involve all stakeholders, especially the end-users and institutions that deal with rural communities, in the development of a system that is usable by the illiterate, accessible in their own language(s), requiring inexpensive equipment for the system design and already existing and/or inexpensive equipment for the end-users. The research will also look at the various ways of creating technical sustainability, possibly with training and the development of communities of local developers.