

When Linux fails

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Recently I was able to visit the Ontario Linux Fest. I love shows like Ontario, as they're run by amateurs, not by professional show companies.

I do listen to the talks at smaller shows. Amateur shows are a labor of love, and it shows. The line up of speakers at the Ontario show was fascinating. One talk in particular caught my eye, by Ian Howard, called "Free and Open Source Software in Africa - Emerging Opportunities for Linux".

Ian had gone to Africa as part of an organization called Geekcorps, dedicated to promoting IT use in developing nations. He worked on a range of projects in Mali, a West African nation which like most African nations is very undeveloped as far as IT is concerned.

At first glance Free and Open Source software should be perfect for places like Mali. The local economy is poor, and average salaries make proprietary software an unimaginable expense for most people there. Yet the place is overrun with copies of Microsoft Windows.

Ian's group first worked on a custom Linux distribution called "Kunnafonix", designed for local radio stations. However, installation of Kunnafonix was resisted by many of the local organizations they had to work with.

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