

RIGHTING THE FOSS GENDER IN-BALANCE IN AFRICA

Africa Source II was an eight-day hands-on workshop aimed at building the technical skills of those working with and within NGOs on the continent. It took place in one of the most beautiful parts of the Kalangala Island on Victoria Lake during the beginning of January 2006 in Uganda.

Africa Source II focused on how technology, in particular Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) can be integrated into the project work of NGO's. Over a hundred thirty NGO Support Professionals and NGO Staff working at the local level across the region were present at this meeting. Together with a handful of field leaders from Africa, Europe, North America and Asia, we explored how technology can best serve the non-profit sector in Africa both in terms of access and content. At this conference, the female participants were 20% of which 8% were from SADC region. As the case with [it@ab](#), only 27% of the IT Specialists are women.

This gender imbalance is a major problem that needs to be addressed during conferences like these. South Africa's Anna Badima expressed this concern to the organisers of this event. The organisers of Africa Source II welcomed the concern and promised to take this issue into account in future events.

Anna Badimo is the co-founder of LinuxChix Africa, which was formed in 2004 and launched in February 2005. LinuxChix Africa is an NGO, which is taking on a very serious job of empowering women in Information Technology, and extending their participation in the world of Free and Open Source Software in particular. Its objectives are, to contribute towards building technical Linux skills among African Women, to advocate for the use of FOSS in development with a focus on the potential contribution of FOSS for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and to encourage and facilitate the active participation of African women with computing/Linux skills in software projects.

[It@ab](#) Female IT Specialists had the opportunity to meet **LinuxChix Africa Founders and members** and join LinuxChix Africa during the Africa Source II Conference in Uganda. One of the benefits of this group is skill sharing. [It@ab](#) Chix (female IT Specialists/LinuxChix members) together with other LinuxChix members took this opportunity to join hands in advocating women in IT from our respective countries to join this group, as we have all the skills and knowledge of FOSS. At the same time, some of the [it@ab](#) projects focused on informing young school-going girls to take Information Technology as their career of choice are being implemented. Skill sharing is one of the most important things as [it@ab](#) and we want to take it even higher.

As women, we should organize ourselves by building a network of partnership with other organizations that has the same interest regardless of gender. It is our role to advocate the use of FOSS in development with a focus on the potential contributions of FOSS that can make our communities achieve the Millennium Development Goals. With a lot of ICT based women Enterprises being established among communities, a lot of women lives will be empowered.

Furthermore, the tendency of avoiding difficult tasks and left them for men should be eliminated among women. We need to be courage enough to take up high position as men. It is high time that women should be part of software development projects, localization, content development and hardware engineering. Knowledge and skill sharing should be our priority.

“As the rules of the game change we have an opportunity to change our circumstances” – Mark Shuttleworth – Africa Source II

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<http://www.africalinuxchix.org>

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