

The Open Swahili
Localization Project (2004-2005)
Lessons Learned

IT +46
May 2008

The project in brief

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- In Tanzania (Dar es Salaam) but for **all Swahili Speakers**
- Joint effort UDSM and IT +46
- Funded by Swedish SIDA

Challenges



- The concrete tangible challenge
 - OpenOffice.org
 - Firefox
 - Technical Glossary
 - Spellchecker
 - Technical Dictionary
- The ultimate goal
 - Document a working and replicable methodology to localize open source software with the “community” in Africa

Lesson Learned 1

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The “code”

Lesson Learned 1



- Working with Open Source...
 - *Open Source Software releases the underlying programming code available to the users so that they may read it, understand it, make changes to it, and build new versions of the software incorporating their changes.*

Lesson Learned 1



- Is also about
 - **Transparent development** (we share also our mistakes!)
 - Building and **Sharing results** with a community (welcome anyone to join!)
 - **Giving away** as the "reputation mechanism"

Collision with traditional education/business models

Lesson Learned 2

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The “tools”

Lesson Learned 2



Localization as a “pure” technical issue:

- Displaying characters in native languages
- Inputting characters in native languages
- Handling file formats written in popular encodings
- Printing out characters in native languages
- Using characters of native languages for file names and other items

Lesson Learned 2



- Displaying messages by the program in native languages
- Formatting input and output of numbers, dates, money.
Swahili Locale
- Classifying and sorting characters!!! Bantu languages (prefixes).
- Using typesetting and hyphenation rules
- Adapt graphical interfaces to local preferences

Lesson Learned 2



- Localization **is not** just a “pure” technical issue.
- Localization requires a big amount of “related” **tools and processes** to support the work.

Lesson Learned 2

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- 35% Management
- 25% New tools development
- 25% “Translation itself (the typing...)”
- 15% Dissemination

Lesson Learned 3

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The “policy”

Lesson Learned 3

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May 2008

The role of Open Source in ICTs for a Multilingual Knowledge Society

13

Lesson Learned 3



- Having the software is required but not sufficient!
- “Media coverage” does not guarantee more than just that...
- The software **needs to reach the people!**
- You need to have a strategy for dissemination!

If we only knew then...

Learning from mistakes.

- We need a Method, open method, Method
- We need Tools, open tools, tools
- We need Community, open
Community, Community

We need a network

Conclusions of this work period



- Localization is done in isolated areas and in unsustainable forms
- Mostly by African working overseas and other interested parties
- Lack of sustainable network
- Lack of skills
- Lack of awareness

If we could do it all over again..

Planning a Localization Project

Planning Localization

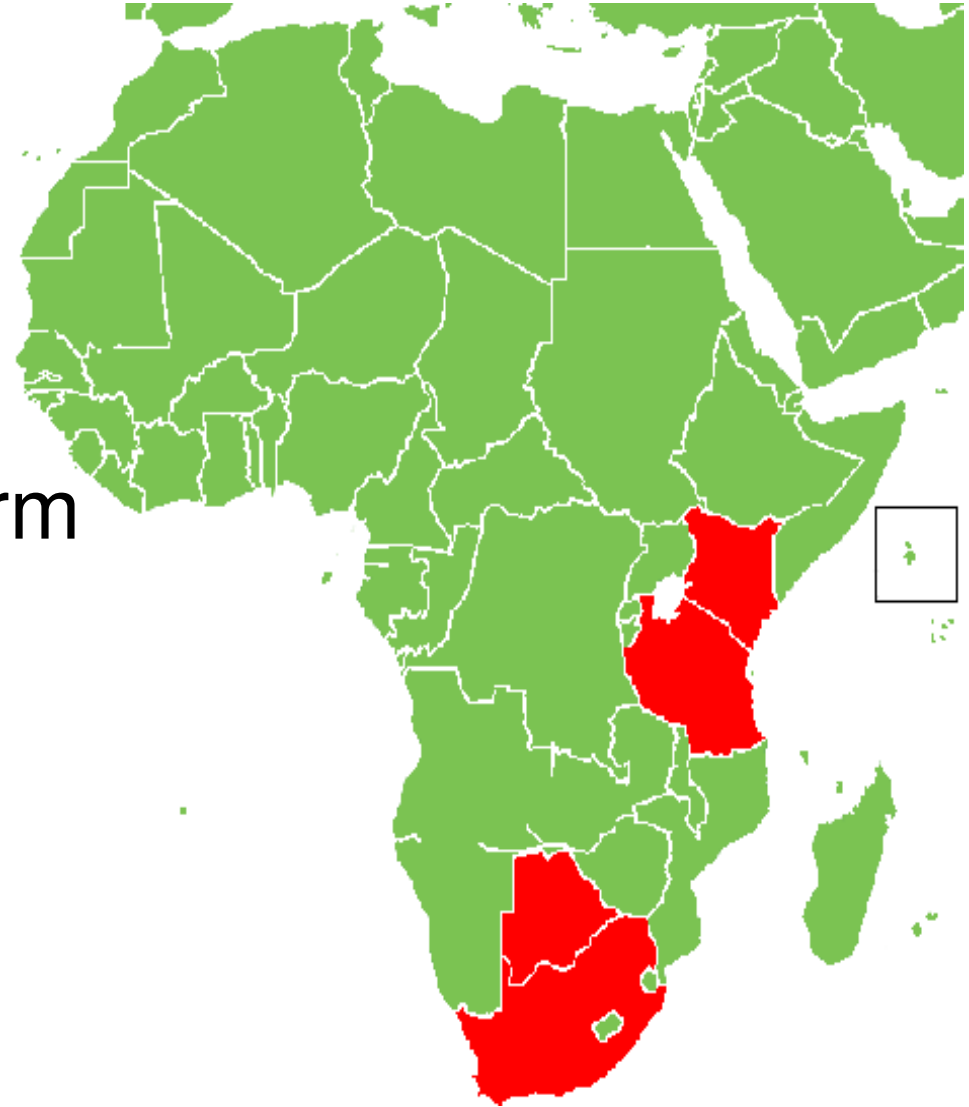
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- Having a **general "goal"** is not enough to make things happen.
- Having the **experts** is not enough to make things happen.
- Having the **funding** is not enough to make things happen.
- Having **FOSS** is not enough to make things happen.

Planning Localization

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You need ALL of it...
... and a good long-term
sustainable plan



Planning Localization

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Remember....

35% Management

25% New tools development

25% Translation itself (typing), QA

15% Education and Dissemination

L10n in Developing Regions ⁺⁴⁶

Typical Working Scenario

- No IT glossary
- No Online resources
- No (freely) available grammar or spellcheckers

L10n in Developing Regions

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Typical Working Scenario

- Low level of computer literacy
(users/consumers rather than developers)
- Restricted access to Internet or e-resources
- Strong presence of proprietary software