

The logo for FOSS4G 2006, featuring a stylized red and white graphic that resembles a ribbon or a stylized letter 'G'.

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FOSS in developing countries, the case of GRASS in Rwanda and Tanzania projects

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The lack of water is one of the most important problems in many African countries. To guarantee the best results in projects trying to solve this problem, the improvement of water availability must be accompanied by an improvement of water quality and a correct environmental monitoring. The use of technologies suitable to the countries object of the intervention and the application of technical solutions tailored to the local people ability are crucial and directly involve the software solutions adopted to help water management projects. In this paper the use of GRASS in different projects in Rwanda and Tanzania is discussed focusing on the potential that FOSS GIS has showed not only as tool to manage data, but also as an instrument to spread digital technologies and to educate local people to software use. The possibility to use GRASS has been investigated also by means of direct contacts and courses given to selected personnel coming from Africa. The direct contact has allowed the organization of courses tailored both in the choice of the right software solutions for the tasks at end and in the choice of the lectures' topics. The participation of the people to education is fundamental to obtain the best result and to address them to try the solution of free software. In this way FOSS experimentation is a choice and not an imposition and they may be able to compare it to commercial solutions and to test if FOSS can be a suitable alternative. The need to tailor software solutions to special projects can be carried out also by means of special editions of linux and GRASS Live DVDs and installation DVDs. This kind of DVD can be created exactly with the applications needed by the African partners whose advices can be taken into account to transform the installation in something more familiar and addressing their most important issues they need. Tailored installation DVD can also help to overtake the lack of Internet connection, a problem that often limits the spreading of FOSS in African countries.

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