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Title Promoting freedom of expression with OSS in Chad

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Author Tina Gasperson

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Budding young journalists in the African nation Chad now have access to open source tools, thanks to [Five Minutes to Midnight](#), a organization "devoted to promoting human rights and international issues among the world's youth."

[Rafigui](#) is a youth organization in Chad's capital, [N'Djamena](#), that gives young people the opportunity to publish news, features, and interviews about the political and social issues they face. The first two issues of the Rafigui newspaper were handwritten, because the journalists had no way to type or print their stories. Later the group had access to an Internet café, and received funding from UNICEF and other organizations to have the newspaper printed, but Rafigui still lacked its own printers and computers with the appropriate software.

FMM founder Wojciech Gryc, a 20-year-old University of Toronto student, and his friend and fellow FMM worker Emanuele Lapierre-Fortin found out about Rafigui when Lapierre-Fortin met one of the volunteers for the organization at a local conference. They stayed in touch, and when FMM decided to expand its operations and help other youth groups, Rafigui seemed a natural choice for a pilot program to promote the use of open source software in print-based projects, such as newspapers and magazines, that are youth-led or that give youth a way to express their views on human rights.

"Rafigui was a good partner because they are an established organization that could benefit from increased technical support and access to computers," Gryc says. "About 1,500 people buy their magazine, [and they] are committed to learning about software and computers."

FMM dubbed its Chad outreach project "[The Article 13 Initiative](#)," (A13I), taking its name from Article 13.1 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states, "The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice."

A13I solicited donations from various sources and received enough money and equipment to provide six computers and a laser printer for Rafigui. Gryc created CDs with Fedora Core 4 and other open source software they thought Rafigui would need. In December 2005, Gryc and Lapierre-Fortin flew to Chad to begin 40 hours of training workshops for about 20 Rafigui volunteers and staff. The duo taught both open source software philosophy and technical information about how to use Fedora Core 4, the GIMP, OpenOffice.org, Scribus, Inkscape, and digital camera operation. They also provided separate evening classes for instructors to learn more challenging skills, such as navigating the Linux file system, burning CDs, and using the terminal.

Gryc says the Rafigui people were very receptive to learning about OSS. The workshops were successful, but not without challenges.

"Linux is difficult for most people," he says, "which shouldn't come as a surprise. This

problem is exacerbated when there is a lack of Internet access." Linux needed a lot of dependent packages that were only available online. "Going back and forth between our laptops and the cyber café, which had notoriously slow Internet connections, yielded few beneficial results, and installing software that we didn't bring pre-downloaded onto CDs was nearly impossible." He says, however, that other OSS tools like OpenOffice.org and the GIMP were not only useful, but also easy to use.

"We'd like to create a live CD that would allow people to boot Linux without having to worry about major installation issues," he says. "They could also use these at a cyber café -- many allow you to restart a computer."

While most Chadians don't own a computer, two bits of technology that many have access to are cell phones and USB keys, which hold personal data they can pull up at Internet cafés. "We're trying to leverage this knowledge by seeing what [OSS] information could be put on such mobile devices and be used by people with irregular computer access," Gryc says.

FMM has started other projects and is planning workshops in other areas. It recently helped launch a youth-driven newspaper in Nairobi, Kenya, providing the group with Ubuntu live CDs. "We also have partner organizations in Nepal and Ghana," Gryc says. "Our goal is to run workshops in two or three organizations next summer, focusing on open source software and media creation. We're currently fundraising for these trips."

FMM is continuing its relationship with Rafigui, mostly via phone and email, to provide troubleshooting and ongoing training. The organization is also working with [Journalists for Human Rights](#) and the [Tactical Technology Collective](#) to "develop a media kit and tool kit for developing nations" that want to learn more about using open source software to facilitate publishing.

Links

1. "Five Minutes to Midnight" - <http://www.fiveminutestomidnight.org/>
2. "Rafigui" - <http://www.rafigui.net/>
3. "N'Djamena" - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/N'Djamena>
4. "The Article 13 Initiative" - <http://i2r.org/fmm/a13i/>
5. "Journalists for Human Rights" - <http://www.jhr.ca/>
6. "Tactical Technology Collective" - <http://www.tacticaltech.org/>

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