

# **FOSS POLICY (IN AFRICA) THE NEED FOR LONG AND COMPLICATED ANSWERS**

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**"For every complex problem, there is an answer that is short, simple and wrong."**

**H. L. Mencken**

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**FOSS Policy in developing countries is a complex issue - there are no simple answers.**

**1. Avoid simple answers - they do not work**

**2. Start small to understand your local context and environment**

**3. Use an appropriate framework to link your objectives with effective strategies for implementation**

## 1.1 No simple answers ... background

- **Danger of the *optimism trap***
- **With or against us? How about both?**
- **Economic questions are not solved**
  - Value creation alternatives
  - Competition - profits - motivation
- **Migration not simple / maybe costly**
- **Clarify the argument for government intervention**
- **What is a FOSS policy? Which one?**
- **FOSS is many things - A need for more concise definitions**

## **1.2 African realities: not simple**

- **More urgent issues: water, health, ...**
- **Lack of infrastructure**
- **Feasibility of a gift economy:  
FOSS contribution possible without  
direct financial compensation?**
- **Donation dependence**
- **Lack of awareness and skills**
- **Corruption engrained in procurement  
processes**
- **Cost / lack of connectivity**

## **1.3**

# **FOSS Policy in Africa**

- **7 countries with FOSS references**
- **No legislated FOSS policy (but lots of activity)**
- **Small pilot implementations**
- **Lack of coordination**
- **Example South Africa**
  - **Strategy: Level playing field**
  - **Awareness: Go Open Source campaign**
  - **Government support: Meraka OSS Center**

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## **2.1 Start small / simple recommendations**

- **Increase connectivity**
- **Implement merit-based procurement**
- **Use public funds to create public goods**
- **Address governance responsibilities**
- **Focus on generic skills in education**
- **Support open standards**
- **Encourage FDI linked with training and capacity building**
- **Leverage new bargaining power**
- **Include all parts of the local IT industry**

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## **3.1 Start with your objectives ...**

- **Reduce government IT expenditure**
- **Reduce capital expatriation**
- **Increase access to ICT / reduce the digital divide**
- **Create (strengthen) local IT industry**
- **Move from software consumer to software creator**
- **Unlock enabling potential of ICT**
- **Ensure national security**
- **And more ...**

## **3.2 ... then choose a policy option**

- 1. Aggressive support**
- 2. Level the playing field**
- 3. Hands-off approach**
  
- 4. Buy local**
- 5. Open standards**

## 3.3 How to choose the right policy option

- **Goal: Development of local IT industry**
- **What is the right policy?**
  1. **Procure only FOSS + training, etc.?**
  2. **Ensure equal (preferred) treatment and increase awareness?**
  3. **Do nothing and see what happens?**
  4. **Procure only *local* software?**
  5. **Mandate open standards for all software used by government?**

## **3.4 Again, no simple answers**

**Same goal:**

**Development of local IT industry**

**Different strategies**

- **South Africa: Level playing field**
- **China: Procurement preference for local software**

## **3.5 Use an appropriate framework ...**

- **12 *Real Access* criteria:**
  - **Technical**
  - **Economic**
  - **Legal and regulatory**
  - **Socio-cultural**
  - **The missing links  
(political will, etc.)**

## **3.6 ... to understand the local context**

- **Skilled labour**
- **Internet connectivity**
- **English proficiency**
- **Local IT industry**
  - **Multinational PS footprint**
  - **Multinational FOSS activities**
  - **Local FOSS community**
  - **Local proprietary software industry**
- **Existing legal frameworks / IPR**

**For more information**  
**<http://www.bridges.org/FOSS>**

**bridges.org**

