

First Mile, First Inch concludes round of dissemination meetings

Members of the First Mile, First Inch (FMFI) project have just returned to South Africa after a dissemination workshop held in Maputo, Mozambique. The purpose of the workshop was not only to disseminate research results but also to strengthen linkages between scientific research and evidence-based policy-making.

The FMFI project, which resides within the Meraka Institute, is a multidisciplinary series of projects exploring the technological and social consequences of least-cost telecommunications implemented in remote schools, clinics and telecentres. The Meraka Institute is managed by the CSIR.

The event in Maputo was attended by the FMFI partners in Mozambique (Centre for Informatics, Eduardo Mondlane University, the Mozambique Information and Communication Technology Institute (MICTI), the Catholic University of Mozambique (UCM), SchoolNet Mozambique, the Ministry of Education and the Higher Polytechnic and University Institute (ISPU)). Ajay Makan of the Meraka Institute emphasises the value of the event in bringing together partners to engage with policymakers and regulators who attended the event. "It provides a neutral forum to explore issues of mutual concern and interest to all parties," he notes.

Outcomes, both successful and challenging, of four Mozambique FMFI and one FMFI project in Angola, were discussed at the workshop.

- The first FMFI project in Mozambique identifies and develops models and low-cost 'shoestring' technologies to overcome impediments to progress. The project involves production of cantennas (DIY antennas made from inexpensive components and a tin can) and the testing and application of these cantennas at telecentres.
- The Schoolnet project in Inhambane, which was originally intended to support one secondary school and its immediate neighbours, now benefits a large and growing section of the community, despite geographic challenges.
- The FMFI project in Pemba is managed by UCM and seeks innovation ICT solutions to boost schools and shorten distance learning.
- The ISPU project in Quelimane makes available an e-learning application to secondary schools.
- Angonet, initiated by Development Workshop, supplies ICT services to non-profit and community organisations.

Key outcomes of this workshop include the possibility of replicating successful models, the necessity for a bottoms-up approach, the need for regulatory changes, the importance of internet access for learning and ongoing issues of sustainability.

Two workshops focusing on health and mesh networking technology were also held in East London and Pretoria, respectively, during October 2007.