



*Casting a Wider 'Net.*

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# The WiderNet Project

## Backgrounder

### MISSION

The WiderNet Project works to deliver educational resources to underprivileged individuals and communities worldwide and improve their digital communication.

### FOUNDING

The WiderNet Project was founded in 2000 by Professor Cliff Missen. As a Fulbright Scholar studying in Nigeria in 1999, Missen had firsthand experience with the frustrations caused by a lack of Internet access while teaching at the University of Jos. While at the University, Missen created the first version of an off-line digital library after requesting that a UI graduate student send him websites on a CD-ROM. Upon returning to the University of Iowa, Missen founded The WiderNet Project to provide training and research in low-cost, high impact uses of information technologies in developing countries.



From that initial compact disc, the WiderNet Project continued to work to overcome digital communication obstacles, eventually placing materials onto a hard drive through a process of copying Web sites with permission, and then uploading materials to a server at partner institutions. The project was dubbed the eGranary Digital Library because the digital library holds seeds of knowledge just as African granaries store seeds for next year's crop. Beyond the eGranary, WiderNet regularly conducts digital technology training for technicians, end-users and decision makers in order to build crucial human capacity in these under-served areas. Building human capacity enables the communities we work with to

become independent and self-sufficient using Information and Communication Technology (ICT).



## THE INFORMATION DIVIDE

WiderNet staff and volunteers work continuously to bridge the information divide that exists between developed and developing countries worldwide, and between people with steady access to online information and those with poor digital communication resources. Through numerous workshop and training opportunities, WiderNet provides participants and subscribers with the specific tools and training they need to empower them in their respective field.

Information poverty - an individual's or group's inability to access information that would otherwise inform their choices - has always played a role in the long history of human civilization, but never so much as in our current high-speed digital world. Currently, seven out of eight people worldwide cannot access the Internet due to lack of hardware, high connectivity costs or low bandwidth.

90% of the 1.1 billion households not connected to the Internet are in the developing world.

Fixed broadband services remain expensive in developing countries, accounting for 30.1% of average monthly incomes compared to 1.7% in developed countries.

In the developing world, 31% of the population is online, compared with 77% in the developed world.

\* U.N. Telecommunication Development Bureau, ICT Data and Statistics Division. *The World in 2013: ICT Facts and Figures*. Geneva, 2013.

## WHY INFORMATION ACCESS MATTERS

Digital communications technology can accomplish many feats, namely:

- Revolutionize human communication
- Provide a voice to billions of individuals who have hitherto been unheard
- Promote innovation adaptation
- Traverse age-old geopolitical boundaries
- Globalize our education to the point where our students are just as likely to collaborate with someone half a world away as in the next dorm room and to broaden teaching and research opportunities for all people

Open and anonymous online discourse has rapidly become one of the driving forces in political change around the world. The Internet has become an indispensable tool for enabling human rights across the globe. In a May 2011 report, the United Nations Special Rapporteur went so far as to call internet access a human right in and of itself. In this day and age, social movements thrive due, in large part, to the Internet's ability to allow agents of change to communicate, exchange ideas, learn new practices, organize and publicize everywhere, instantaneously.





Breakthroughs in digital communication technologies are poised to break down the digital divide that has been growing over the past couple of decades. Already, it's estimated that three times as many people currently have access to email than ever had access to telephones. We've finally come upon a decentralized communication technology that promises to scale to virtually every economic class. The impact of these changes on the political, economic, cultural, and private lives of the entire human race - connected or not - will be the critical issues of the next few decades.

## Our Work

### SOLUTIONS

The WiderNet Project provides a comprehensive approach to information and communications technologies (ICT) in developing nations with these programs:

#### **eGranary Digital Library**

A digital library that provides Internet resources off-line to institutions lacking adequate Internet access. This innovative project downloads millions of pages from the Internet onto hard drives that are then installed on Web servers across the developing world, giving schools low-cost access to much of the world's knowledge

#### **Corrections Off-line Education Platform**

An off-line education information server designed specifically for incarcerated populations. The focus of the collection is resources for vocational training, GED & high school completion, and re-entry skills, especially in information technology, English language & information literacy

#### **Health-in-Hand**

A collection of millions of digital resources (training materials, continuing education, and clinical reference resources) collaboratively compiled by health experts around the world and can be delivered on a wide variety of devices. The program provides low-cost hybrid solutions that make the most of a mix off-line and on-line information access, stand-alone handhelds and networked devices, solar and grid powered technologies, and resources collected from around the world as well as from local creators

#### **Decision Maker Program**

Technical, financial and organizational coaching for high-level administrators/decision makers who are installing their institution's first ICT infrastructure.

#### **Technician Training Program**

Training program for computer technicians using low-cost 'on-seat' training methods so that each participating institution can train multiple technicians to install and maintain their computers and networks



## Computer & Book Donation Programs

The collection, restoration and shipping of used computer and networking hardware to increase available references, research capabilities and computer literacy in laboratories and classroom

## University Linkages Program

Development of courses linking US students with their peers in developing countries

## Courses Program

Classes offered on issues relating to computers and networks, Policy Planning, Enterprise Management, Technician Training and Classroom Technology in developing countries. Correspondence courses are offered on such topics as the benefits of teaching via the Internet and the digitization of library materials

## OUR REACH

Across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, we work to promote technology among communities, schools, prisons and clinics. Since 2000, The WiderNet Project has provided over 5,600 people with specialized information and communication technology training, refurbished and donated networking equipment, including more than 1,600 computers, to universities and invented and delivered eGranary Digital Libraries, replete with more than 32 million education resources, to over 700 institutions in 48 countries across the world.



WiderNet employs Field Associates (FA) in developing countries, including, but not limited to, Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Uganda and Bangladesh. Each FA possesses years of experience and acquired knowledge in information technology and computer training. They provide our subscribers with everything from pre-sales advice to on-site installation and hands-on training for their new equipment as well as troubleshooting follow-up visits – all to bring technology to some of the most underserved portions of the world.



## TESTIMONIALS

"The WiderNet Project and the eGranary Digital Library are two of the best things to happen to Nigeria."

*Ahmadu Bello University – Nigeria, Digital Library Issues workshop participant*

"We're able to provide computer skill training to hundreds of children in poverty without spending nearly as much on monthly internet service."

*Joseph Burdick, Restoration Gateway Uganda*

"Obviously it is an exciting learning/research masterpiece. In fact every day I use it, I get so glued to a wide range of academic information devoid of the distractions associated with the Internet. And more so, I am not bothered by the fact that our library has no Internet connection for now. Our learners just progress with their work so comfortably."

*Christopher Agwu, Library Principal Technical Officer II, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria*



"eGranary Digital Library has been a great bridge in the digital divide for us at the University of Jos in Nigeria. It has served the purpose of bringing the Internet to our doorsteps....We have it up and running on our intranet with no bandwidth cost and it's accessible at the speed of lightning! What better motivation for academics! The eGranary holds great promise for developing economies where bandwidth and the cost of Internet access is high." *Dr. Stephen Akintunde, Deputy University Librarian, University of Jos - Jos, Nigeria*

"Installation of the eGranary at the EP Basic School in Ashaiman, Ghana, has expanded the boundaries of the traditional libraries and encouraged students to go beyond static texts and explore the rich digital environment provided by eGranary." *Mohit Agrawal, Engineers Without Borders*

## Connect

### CONTACT US

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