

WIRELESS HOTSPOTS LAUNCH

Africa Hall Dining, 30th March 2010

Remarks by Dr. Nora Mulira (Director DICTS)

Your Excellency the Swedish Ambassador to Uganda,

The Vice-Chancellor Makerere University

Deans, Directors

Policy makers

Our students

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Directorate for ICT support (DICTS) the central ICT support and implementing unit at Makerere University, I would like to welcome you to this milestone occasion where we are launching the Makerere University wireless hotspots. We are formally launching and publicising the various internet access sites installed by DICTS over a wireless local area network (MAKAIR).

Our coming together to launch the hotspots demonstrates the results of a long mutual collaboration with the Swedish development Agency, SIDA and its research arm SAREC. In 2000 Sida/SAREC recognised the importance of ICT as an integral facilitator for research, learning and instruction in higher institutions of learning.

Sida's support to Makerere University has therefore focused on the development of ICT and the library with resulting funding of about 80% of the University ICT infrastructure. This support, ideally started with the definition of an ICT Policy and Master plan in 2000, development of the 16km of fibre backbone on the 4 campuses, internet kiosks, computer networks, automation of the library (to date access to 12,000 journals) and capacity building with partner faculties/departments. The wireless hotspots are part of this ICT infrastructure support

This ceremony also demonstrates the high priority that Makerere attaches to ICT as a vehicle in achieving its mandate, as well as the renewed vigour to proactively communicate our developments to valued stakeholders.

Rationale

This SIDA funded initiative targets the limited number of ICT facilities within the Faculties available for student access. The limitation is both in time (computer labs are open only during day time), space (small computer labs) and number of available computers (1:20). The location of the hotspots has been designed such that students can

comfortably work at any time of the day, particularly in the night when resources (particularly Internet bandwidth) are abundant.

This service will go a long way in realizing the student-centered learning environment that Makerere envisions, where ready and timely access to relevant educational resources and ease of communication promote the role of the student in the learning network.

Implementation of the wireless hotspots

The establishment of the hotspots began with pilots in DAG Hammarskjöld in 2006 and Africa hall in 2008. The campus wide roll out in 2009/2010 has established a number of wireless hotspots targeted at increasing student access to a variety of network services provided through its backbone network. Wireless hotspots have been established in the environs of the following halls of residence: - Lumumba, Mary Stuart, Africa, Livingstone, Nsibirwa, Nkrumah, Mitchell, CCE, DAG Hammarskjöld, and University Hall. Additionally, other student centric locations covered are: - Main building, Main Library, Senate building, Freedom Square, Faculties of Science, Technology, Computing and IT, Arts, Agriculture, Social Sciences, IACE.

The roll out came with delays, partly because DICTS was pushing the envelope. Many of the potential solutions recommended by local providers were not appropriate and sustainable for such a large user base and dispersed campus like Makerere University while taking into account our resource constraints. After multiple iterations and countless hours, we are happy to report that we now have a suitable and sustainable solution that has been adopted by the university.

Extending the service to Hostels

The service is available to Hostel students and those residing off campus for the duration they are on campus until late evening. DICTS is investigating ways of availing the hotspots to students in affiliated hostels at night when they are off campus.

Usage of hotspots to date

The service is now available to all registered University students and staff who have a wifi-ready device. For security purposes and to ensure that only authorized users access the network, an authentication system has been implemented that requires one to login with his/her Makerere email “username” and “password”. Students and staff are therefore encouraged to obtain a Wifi-ready laptop/computer and a Makerere email account (for those without) if they are to make use of this service.

At the operational level, DICTS has put in place a monitoring and maintenance mechanism that will ensure that the hotspot infrastructure is always available and minimizes outages.

Monitoring

Usage of the wireless hotspots has been monitored for the first time in March 2010 to establish a performance baseline. Indicators show a promising growth in adoption even

before student and staff sensitisation campaigns are conducted. Outstanding indicators show the technology oriented faculties like FCIT, Technology as the early adopters. Over the last month, on average:

Daily users: about 397 (last day 499), Devices connected per day: 800-900

Monitoring statistics are indicative of areas where more work is required to enable more students access through acquisition of access devices, increase adoption and usage from non typical technology faculties and increased use outside peak (lecture/office) hours.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we acknowledge with gratitude once again the funding of Sida /Sarec for the university ICT infrastructure in general and the hotspots we are launching today, in particular. We also acknowledge Makerere's progress in utilising ICT for research and education which has sustained this partnership. Thank you to the DICTS implementation team led by Deputy Director for the research conducted to derive and implement this suitable solution. Thank you, Your Excellency, and our guests for gracing this important launch.