

Technology in Africa

By Edward S. Marek

Your Dot Com for Africa

First, an SOS Village, then a digital village, then creative kids growing into creative adults.

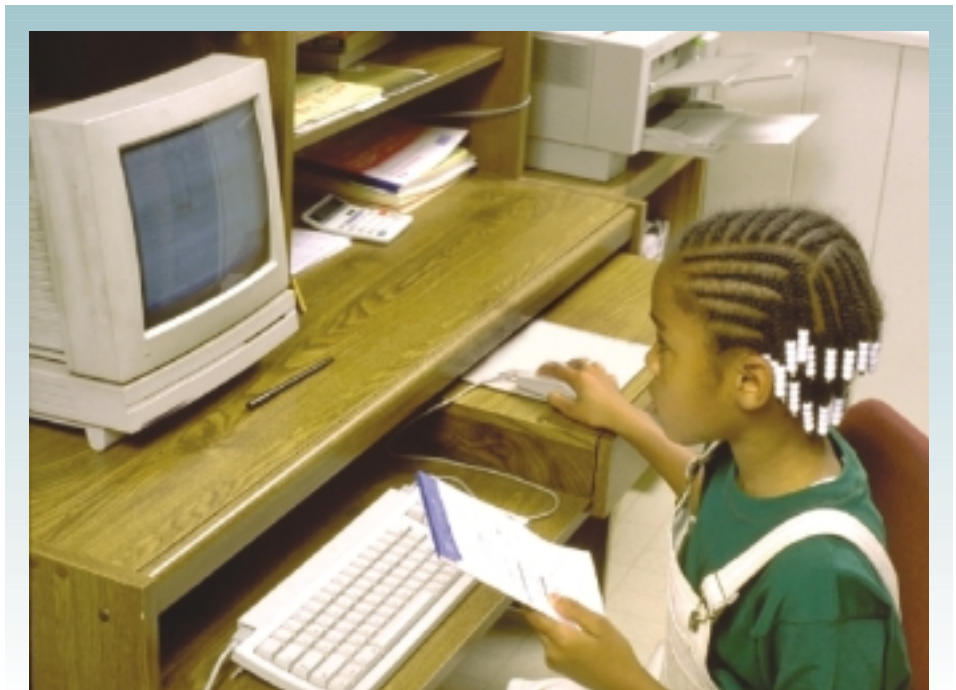
What happens when you combine community and private sector eagerness to get youngsters into the Information Age, with community and humanitarian interest in finding near-real world living conditions for children who have lost their families or whose families could not take care of them, with software piracy and a lot of hard-working, caring people? You get digital villages at SOS villages and kids who might now have a chance to run Microsoft someday! That's what's happening in South Africa, and elsewhere.

First, Microsoft, in collaboration with other companies and local communities in South Africa, is deploying what it calls "Digital Villages" to provide disadvantaged communities with access to modern-day information technology (IT). Second, we have a concept called SOS Villages where villages are built and parent models are provided for South African children. And finally, bringing both concepts together, Microsoft is deploying its Digital Villages to the SOS Villages. The one we will look at is at Umtata, in Southeast South Africa. Mingled in this is an effort by Microsoft to fight against software piracy, and that linkage is interesting.

A group of private sector compa-

nies, including Microsoft, has mapped out an ambitious program whereby previously disadvantaged communities in South Africa will gain access to the latest information technology. The objective is to streamline individual investments into communities and address IT needs as a single unified

Africa was established in Chiawelo, Soweto by Bill Gates. Digital Villages are already operational there and in Orlando, Cape Town, and Kimberley. Microsoft is setting up two others in Cape Town and Gauteng, equipped with 10 PCs each acquired during the company's recent anti-piracy "Come



body. The key project is the establishment of Digital Villages, which are community centers where the local community will have access to the latest computers and basic IT training courses.

Digital Villages

The first digital village in South

Clean" campaign.

The Digital Village in Alexandra, Johannesburg, is a partnership between Microsoft, Hewlett Packard, and the Eastern Metropolitan Local Council (EMLC). Microsoft contributed the software and licenses, training fees, and subsidized part of the salary of the center manager.

Hewlett Packard contributed 20 computers, a printer, and paid for the installation fees. The EMLC renovated the Center, and installed security (burglar alarms, doors and windows) and is also subsidizing part of the salary of the Center Manager.

Microsoft South Africa's Rabie Ridge Digital Village, a community based center for teaching the unemployed and the previously disadvantaged IT and business schools, has taken the liberty of 10 PC's from Microsoft South Africa, as well as a laser color printer from Hewlett Packard.

Five other Digital Villages have been established, in partnership with several of Microsoft's partners:

- Soweto Digital Village in Chiawelo. Established in partnership with Africare, Intel, CompuComp, Pinnacle, Mustek, and Hitech. The center has 35 computers and more than 1000 registered members.
- Orlando Digital Village. Established in partnership with Africare and Intel.
- Kimberley Digital Village. Established in partnership with Africare, Intel, and De Beers Mines.
- Paarl in the Eastern Cape, established in partnership with Old Mutual and Datavia.
- Cape Flats. Established in partnership with Kodak and Africare.

Microsoft South Africa has announced that it intends to open another Digital Village in the Cape area in Khayelitsha. In addition,

Microsoft South Africa has now announced that it will assist in the

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—Mark Hill
*Managing Director,
Microsoft South Africa*

opening of the Umtata SOS Digital Village at the Umtata SOS Children's Village.

The software piracy linkage

There is an interesting linkage here, between Microsoft's anti-piracy efforts and the Digital Villages. In April 2000, we noted a report by Justin Arenstein, reporting for African Eye News Service that an undercover probe revealed that South African dealers were selling up to R600 million (nearly \$1 million) worth of pirated software, mostly made by Microsoft. The unnamed companies included five Cape Town dealers, two in Durban, one in Johannesburg and two in Pretoria.

While the problem in South Africa is not the greatest experienced in the world, it is significant. The problem, for example, is far worse in the United States. But Microsoft South Africa Managing Director Mark Hill describes it this way for his country:

Software piracy is a major problem in this country and it makes an indelible impact on the economy. During the 1999 calendar year, for instance, a total of 14,770 jobs were lost as a result of this scourge.

Hill acknowledged that "Microsoft is sometimes seen to be clamping down hard on software piracy." That has certainly been true in the United States, where Microsoft has been running software integrity campaigns and filing lawsuits.

In the case of South Africa, a program was launched that is similar to one employed in the United States, which is to use funds recovered from clamping down on piracy to fund

computerization of schools. That is, the Digital Villages are financed by funds recovered from anti-piracy efforts.

A Case Study:

The SOS Village concept, and Umtata, an area in the Cape Town.

A place called the SOS Village at Umtata is one of the latest to benefit from the Microsoft program. We decided to take a closer look at what is happening there, and frankly we found it exciting.

We first have to introduce you to an organization called SOS Children's Villages, or "Kinderdorf" in German. Its mission is to provide a permanent family environment for children who have lost their parents or whose parents are unable to care for them, added Mark Hill.

Eight to ten boys and girls of various ages grow up as brothers and sisters in SOS families. Each SOS family lives in a house of its own. The head of the family is the SOS mother. She provides the children entrusted to her care the affection and sense of security they need to ensure their sound development.

Children of any race, nationality and creed are accepted by SOS Children's Villages. They are accepted from infancy to the age of eight years, solely according to their need for care and the ability of the Village to provide any needed specialized care. They stay until they are able to begin independent life. Older teenagers may be placed in youth homes, which

support them in taking their first steps to independence. Wherever appropriate, the SOS Children's Villages maintain contact with the child's biological family.

About 15 houses are grouped together as a SOS Children's Village, which forms a community and provides an extended family for the children.

The SOS Children's Village is supervised by a village director, who supports the mothers and represents a father figure to the children. The children grow up in conditions very similar to those in a normal family. They attend public schools and are encouraged to integrate with the surrounding community.

Since its start in 1949, over 35,000 children have grown up in SOS Villages. SOS has grown to more than 1350 projects in over 125 countries, becoming the largest private childcare organization in the world.

Umtata is one of these SOS villages, one of the newer ones. It turns out Umtata is located near where former President Nelson Mandela was born, and SOS Villages wanted to put up a new village on behalf of Mr. Mandela.

A group of organizations got together and formed a consultative committee. The committee went to Port Elizabeth and Pietermaritzburg to see actual SOS villages in operation, and then approached the government and obtained a grant of land. But that land was taken over by squatters, so a new parcel was obtained in a more stable area, where there was a teacher train-

ing school on one side, and the Umtata International School (K-12) on the other side. SOS arranged for fencing.

Now, buildings are going up, and the local community is happy to see development taking place in the area. The construction project has provided 90 jobs to the local community. After an immediate search of the five local districts, 90 children who could be helped were found, and expectations are to readily fill the full capacity of 150 children, with ten children in each of fifteen houses.

Besides the fifteen houses, plans include a kindergarten, library and primary school, in addition to a clinic at least partly staffed by volunteers and professionals from the community. SOS and the local community are also in discussion about the possibility of supporting a secondary school in the community.

Now, as part of this emerging new community, Microsoft will install a computer village to help these kids not only grow up in a community with houses and "foster parents," but they'll also grow up in a technology community.