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Our Net in Britain

The Dutch town of Nuenen pioneered co-operative models for NextGen broadband. Read how CBN is partnering the inventors to bring innovative community broadband to Britain

Community broadband in Africa

Kibera is the largest slum in the world. Read how UK experiences are being translated to create African community broadband

Bridging the digital divide

UK Online reports show the digital divide remains. Community broadband is recognised in awards for helping bridge the gap

Our Net comes to Britain

The Dutch Ons Net (Our Net) project in the Eindhoven region has been making waves on the European telecoms scene for some time. Set up as a co-operative Ons Net has attracted higher levels of local support and take up than any comparable project anywhere in the world. Using this support the Ons Net co-op has built a 'next generation' fibre-optic broadband infrastructure offering very high speed Internet, TV and completely new community services - in an area that the private sector deemed uneconomic. It is a truly remarkable achievement.

CBN has studied Ons Net in detail and in 2006 formed a joint venture with the project's founders, aiming to adapt and promote the model in the UK.

Despite persistent 'notspots' Britain did well in the roll out of first generation broadband services, and community schemes played a valuable (and recognised) role. But the UK is now at a crossroads. As more services move on-line and those services, particularly video, demand ever more 'bandwidth' the UK's infrastructure is creaking. In April 2007 the Broadband Stakeholder Group, a government-sponsored industry body, published a report showing that with the existing telecoms infrastructure only 50% of the population can benefit from higher



broadband speeds. An ideal commercial opportunity? Not quite, BT and other industry players are wary of making significant investments in new fibre cabling - up to £15bn on some estimates - whilst demand is uncertain.

This is where the 'Our Net' co-operative approach can score a major success. Aggregating local demand effectively lowers the commercial risk of new infrastructure deployment - and gives the community more control over their local telecoms, Internet and community services. The success of community schemes in the roll out of first generation broadband services shows that this can work very well indeed.

CBN has been banging this drum for over 12 months now - and finally it has paid off with our first commission to examine the feasibility of a local Our Net co-operative project in the West Midlands. Others look likely to follow soon in the North West, Yorkshire and Scotland.

If you want to find out more about our plans for OurNet.coop in the UK, or you think your area could benefit, contact Malcolm Corbett, M.Corbett@broadband-uk.coop

Ons Net is at www.onsnetnuenen.nl

Community Broadband comes to Africa

Kibera, next door to Nairobi, is one of the world's largest slums. More than a million people live in an area of little more than 2 sq miles. Poverty is endemic, HIV/Aids rife, education and employment low, and yet Kibera exhibits a dynamic and engaging community.

CBN has joined forces with Kicoshep, a local community project, to adapt and transfer the knowledge of community-run broadband



schemes built up in the UK to Kibera. Our aim is to create a model for community broadband co-operatives that can be deployed throughout the region.

One of the key reasons slums develop is that the rate of urbanisation far exceeds the ability of city authorities to build basic infrastructures; they then become entrenched as the local economy falls ever further behind the neighbouring city. While the lack of reliable

telecommunications may not be as life threatening as the absence of sanitation, nevertheless it hampers efforts to improve the lives and health of local people. Community broadband can help by delivering affordable infrastructure quickly, and with all the economic benefit remaining where it is needed.

A key part of the project is to build a pilot network in Kiberato support the pioneering work of the local schools and NGO's. Kicoshep's programme of local engagement has fired-up the community with many groups eager to help build the broadband co-op and take advantage of Internet connectivity. News travels fast and the huge potential of the project has attracted interest from the UN and several major technology companies - after all if community broadband can be delivered in Kibera, it can be delivered anywhere. But as yet this interest has not translated into hard

cash.

Thanks to Comic Relief and funding from their Education for All programme, the initial development work took place in Spring 2007. Now we are at the stage of technical build-out and thanks to generous donations by CBN members in the UK we have almost enough kit to build the pilot. Next we plan to raise funds for local technical support, helped by CBN experts in the UK. Just £1,000 pays for a local techie for 6-12 months.

This is a great project and a joy to work on, so if you want to help, or donate, contact Adrian Wooster, a.wooster@broadband-uk.coop

Kicoshep is at www.kicoshepkenya.org

Bridging the Digital Divide

A recent report by UK On-line Centres shows that the Digital Divide remains a persistent problem in the UK. Despite rapid take up of first generation broadband services, overall access to the Internet remains stuck at around 60%.

Community broadband schemes pride themselves on their inclusive approach to service provision and this is often recognised in local and national awards. In May 2007 South Witham Broadband in Lincolnshire was a finalist in the European 'Bridging the Broadband Gap' awards in Brussels. October sees the award of 'Silver

Surfer of the Year' to Richard Jackman, part of the great team that founded Martley Mesh in Worcestershire. The award will be given by the Rt. Hon. Stephen Timms MP, instigator of CBN and newly appointed minister for telecoms at the Dept for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Affairs.

The UK Online report is at www.ukonlinecentres.com/readingroom/research

Martley's website is at www.martley.org.uk

CBN

The Community Broadband Network has a track record of delivering innovative, community-based broadband solutions in areas that are geographically hard to reach (remote, rural areas) that suffer from urban deprivation. There is an increasingly important role for community broadband projects even after traditional operators have provided vanilla services into an area. Many member projects give something back to their local community, and are constantly innovating and evolving their service to the needs of their community.

CBN supports, promotes and develops community-owned broadband schemes.

- We have directly helped around 100 projects throughout Great Britain
- We have over 200 members regularly contributing
- We develop strategic thinking in Next Generation services and architectures
- We work with partners to deliver advanced and exciting community services



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