

Who are FAIR?

FAIR is a fast growing Nordic organization located in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Eritrea with the HQ in Oslo (Norway).

Through donations of new and used ICT-equipment, network installations, comprehensive educational programs with close follow-ups and related services, as well as extensive information campaigns about the information gap between north and south, FAIR positions itself as one of the leading organizations striving to bridge the global digital divide.

FAIR is currently in cooperation with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Norwegian Ministry of the Environment and the Eritrean Ministry of Education, as well as several NGO's.

FAIR also co-operate with The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and the Ministry of Education in Kenya.

When FAIR sends computers to Eritrea, at the same time it wants to include support to make the computers functional. Since the working operative system for FAIR is Linux, unlike the preferred operative system for Eritrea that is Microsoft windows operative system, here comes the problem. Using Linux system would make inconvenient for FAIR and its partner in Eritrea to work cooperatively. For FAIR to send computers as aid to Eritrea is the primary aim. To include the operative system is supplementary. Nevertheless, for FAIR to send computers and to use the working system Linux is two faces of a coin.

What is FAIR doing?

FAIR is; as its name imply, which says;

Fair Allocation of Infotech Resources.

Taking in consideration the huge difference gap between the developed countries and the under developed countries the information technology difference is widening at the same time. While developed countries are using computers in education system, collecting taxes, transaction of money, payment of bills and other necessary activities the under developed countries are fattening with paper works. This time we can obviously understand that as the wealth of this world is unfairly distributed the information technology is as well not fairly distributed. To make information technology fairly distributed, organizations like FAIR are established by voluntarily people who are concerned about the fate of the under developed countries. What they do is they gather used computers and new ones from charity organizations and make the computers functional before shipment to destined countries.

Fortunately enough, Eritrea is chosen as one country to benefit from this opportunity by FAIR. To tell the story how it happened, actually the group who are working in FAIR has little knowledge about Eritrea and their first choice was Ivory Coast. But NORAD a Norwegian organization that deals with development program abroad suggested to FAIR instead to work in Eritrea. And that is how they came to know Eritrea.

The president of FAIR, Mr. Knut Foseide, visited Eritrea twice and he laid the foundation for further cooperation. For this matter as starting point is a school in Massawa. Now, the

responsible person assigned to work for Eritrea is Mr. Vegard Munthe and he is going to visit Eritrea at the beginning of April, this year. His mission is to facilitate the release of the 20 tons shipment of computer utilities which already is docked in the harbor of Massawa. In this container it is said that there are more than 400 computers.

According to Mr. Vegard, their system is; they use the computers as buffer zone while using a huge server that each computer uses as its base. This is called a thin-client solution.

In this case, their system is effective and the size of the computers is not that much significant. The important thing is the size and the efficiency of the server. Here in Norway, FAIR uses Linux as their operative system. They have good reasons in doing so.

1. As long as the system is established for educational purposes, using Linux doesn't make any problem as an optional to windows. A student learned in Linux system it won't be difficult to adopt it in windows. A person who can drive OPEL car can drive as well a Mercedes car.
2. While to install windows demands license, Linux is not. Therefore, when FAIR sends computers as a gift to other country it cannot break international laws by installing windows. The safest way is to install Linux which is free.
3. In Eritrea, mostly it is windows 98 used. But Linux is more stable than windows 98.
4. Countries like South Africa and Namibia are using Linux and they are integrating it with their system. In Eritrea, in the future, if Tigrigna is aimed to integrate it with computers Linux would be much easier to use as a medium as Linux has a simple mechanism to convert from English language to other languages. For this case Mr. Vegard has good explanation.

The Eritrean authorities prefer to have windows than Linux operative system. In my opinion, I wish to have an alternative system as well. A student to have a knowledge of Linux doesn't make it a handicap of windows system. The problem here is FAIR by itself works with Linux. Since it is an help organization it wants to use an operative system which is free. If Eritrea insists to us windows operative system then the alternative for FAIR is to send the computers but not the support inside Eritrea. What is the support we are talking about? It is hiring Eritrean experts to teach students by collaboration with Norwegian computer experts. The maintenance and functionality support of the computers. All this can be done by FAIR if the system they are intended to support is the same with their system. The ambition is great and the help is not limited only to schools. In addition to that they want to cooperate in other sectors as well.

It is important to understand that GNU/Linux is used all over the world, by universities and companies alike. And large international software companies like IBM and Novell sell GNU/Linux operating systems and support for them, and use only GNU/Linux systems themselves.

Here what we have to understand is, Eritrea can use the help of FAIR not as an over all solution to its computer system. Which with time is going to be solved universally. Until that good time comes to narrow the difference in information technology which is unfair this time it is wise to work hand with hand with FAIR as an initial step towards fair allocation of information resources. For more information about FAIR you can refer the following link.

<http://www.fair.no/english/home.htm>

God bless Eritrea

Tesfamicael Yohannes

Oslo, Norway