

## Inveneo Provides Sustainable Solutions for Development

*Inveneo is a nonprofit social enterprise that develops sustainable products and solutions to deliver the life-changing benefits of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to individuals and organizations in rural and remote areas of the developing world.*

### Background

Inveneo was founded on the belief that ICTs such as computers, the Internet, and IP telephony have the power to transform people's lives through improved healthcare, education, social justice, and economic opportunities. After gaining first-hand exposure to the challenges that hinder ICT adoption in remote areas of the developing world, such as power constraints and harsh environmental conditions, Inveneo's co-founders Mark Summer, Kristin Peterson, and Bob Marsh developed a business model for a social enterprise that would help overcome these obstacles by delivering scalable and sustainable technologies and solutions to rural and remote communities.

"Coming from a technology background, we saw a big need for ICT solutions that could support the efforts of NGOs working in some of the most difficult-to-reach places in the world," explains Kristin Peterson, Inveneo co-founder and chief development officer. "Many of these organizations had issues with getting the right type of technology to help them accomplish their objective, so we decided to focus our efforts on making sure they didn't need to be experts in technology to deliver their services better, faster, cheaper, and to more people."

### Innovative Computing and Networking Solutions

After conducting an initial pilot in Uganda, Inveneo launched their first low-power, highly-affordable and accessible hardware and software solution in 2006. The systems developed by Inveneo are designed to help organizations such as schools, governments, NGOs, and private enterprises deliver vital services to the rural poor such as education, healthcare, economic development, crisis relief, and telecenters. To help offset connectivity issues and environmental challenges, Inveneo's solutions incorporate cost-efficient and sustainable features such as open-source software and operating systems, ultra-low-power computing, and long-distance wireless connectivity.

Despite the effectiveness and adaptability of these solutions, Inveneo soon discovered that installation and support requirements were increasing total project costs significantly and even minor issues were causing substantial downtime due to travel requirements. In 2006, they piloted a local partner training model to help overcome these challenges.

### Inveneo Certified ICT Partner Program

The Inveneo Certified ICT Partner (ICIP) program was established to train and certify local ICT entrepreneurs to deploy and maintain Inveneo ICT systems. In addition to reducing total project costs by approximately 60 percent and improving the quality and timeliness of service, the program helps promote local economic development while helping to ensure the sustainability and scalability of Inveneo's solutions.

In addition to benefitting organizations that serve rural and remote countries, the ICIP program provides economic opportunities for certified partners, who can generate approximately US\$2500 a

month in revenues. This provides an opportunity for substantial income generation in countries where millions of people live on less than \$1 per day. As partner businesses grow, they can hire additional staff, thereby improving local employment prospects and economic conditions within the ICT industry.

The ICIP training begins with one week of advanced classroom instruction on applied theory and problem solving. The curriculum covers networking, long-distance wireless, open source desktop and network management, VoIP system design, and power solutions. This is followed by a week of applied training, which allows participants to deploy an actual solution. By combining classroom training with field training, Inveneo hopes to ensure that partners are ready to implement and service rural projects on their own.



Newly-certified ICT partner Dr. Kavishe holds a Wi-Fi antenna at the Millennium Village in Ruhira, Uganda. Image source: Inveneo

After completing the two-week certification program, which is offered free of charge to qualified ICT entrepreneurs, participants receive discounts on equipment, and access to ongoing training and business support through an online portal.

In 2007, Inveneo received a Cisco® Impact Grant to expand their ICIP program and certify partners in Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, and Tanzania. Shortly afterward, Cisco invited Inveneo to join a collaborative effort to support the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) commitment to poverty alleviation in Sub-Saharan Africa. At the end of 2007, Cisco provided another grant to help Inveneo expand their operations into approximately 15 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Ethiopia, Cameroon, and Nigeria.

“Inveneo is a strong partner in our CGI efforts because of the effectiveness of their innovative programs and also their willingness to collaborate with other grantees,” says Peter Tavernise, senior program manager for the Cisco Foundation. For example, Inveneo is working with another CGI partner, Habitat for Humanity, to establish connectivity solutions and services within Habitat villages. “It’s great when a grantee is open to that type of strategic partnering for a greater value-add,” says Tavernise.

### **Social Impact**

As a result of funding received from Cisco and other organizations, Inveneo was able to train 22 partners in nine countries by July 2008. Since 2006, Inveneo and their certified partners have completed more than 75 projects in Sub-Saharan Africa. “Sixty percent of these projects have either been led by local partners, or completed in partnership with them,” says Peterson. These projects reach more than 100 communities and directly or indirectly benefit nearly 400,000 people by enabling improved education, healthcare, relief, microfinancing, and other critical services. By the end of 2009, Inveneo hopes to certify more than 100 local ICIPs and jointly complete projects that reach up to three million people in rural areas of the developing world

To learn more, please visit [www.inveneo.org](http://www.inveneo.org).