

## Bridging Africa's Rural Digital Divide Kilosa Rural Services and Electronic Communication (KIRSEC)<sup>1</sup>

by Mark Farahani

### Kilosa Rural Services Cybercafe in Tanzania

Kilosa Rural Services and Electronic Communication (KIRSEC) is a rural ICT business which was launched late in 2004. The business is unique in the sense that it is operating in a rural area and is aiming at bridging farmers to the world so as to share different learning lessons concerning marketing information in particular.

KIRSEC provides various services: internet access, VoIP, scanning, photocopying, lamination, digital photography, postal runner e-mail services, a farmers' online forum, local networking/bandwidth sharing, and has its own website ([www.kilosaruralservices.com](http://www.kilosaruralservices.com)). KIRSEC is in partnership with local and international supporters from Canada, Switzerland and England. The business is owned and managed by locals and is called FARAHAN'S ROMBO.



### The Postal Runner Email Service

This is how our postal runner e-mail service works, bridging remote farmers in Kilosa District. The shop has a special account ([kirsec@yahoo.com](mailto:kirsec@yahoo.com)) which is open to everybody, only the password remains at the shop. The account is logged in thrice a day to access the flow

of e-mails. Farahan's Rombo staff help people with uploading and downloading their e-mails. This gives everybody the chance to access the internet. For example: those who don't have an e-mail account or do not know how to access the internet; those who are disabled (perhaps blind); those who can't read and write; the young and old, male and female alike.

Farmers in remote regions discuss their challenges, under a tree or at their homes as a group, in their local/mother tongue. They can then send questions or comments to the internet to join in discussions with other farming groups for example through [linkinglearners.net](http://linkinglearners.net). Someone translates their message to our national language and then into English. Once the translation is approved by the group, someone has to run to KIRSEC and ask for typing and uploading. If the group is new then they have to open their account and pay. If they already have an account you just tell the attendant at the shop that this is a message from group X, and then he/she uploads and charges them. The business is the same for incoming relevant email by downloading and printing and sending it back to the group. The translator does the same to the group for discussion and hence the online chain and circle discussion continues in that way. In case of an urgent incoming email the shop attendant has to send an SMS to the group if mobile access is available.

KIRSEC is now testing out another business opportunity: solar equipment rental. We have started with one village as a trial. The objective of this business is to enable farmers to launch village information kiosks using solar power. People can then recharge their mobile phones at the local kiosk rather than going into town and pay some money so that the kiosk can operate sustainably. Through this business the farmers can earn money, topping up their farming business in particular during the off season. Through these kiosks they can also sell other services such as information on marketing etc.

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