

# LifeStations

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LifeStations are a new and innovative use of an old technology that has the potential to empower even the most remote communities across Africa to fight poverty and master crucial life skills.

Early generation video games consoles in European and American homes are being superseded; many thousands now lie forgotten and unused in cupboards.

This project will investigate whether these consoles can be recycled and repurposed, using open source software, to become robust, intuitive and, viral, knowledge sharing devices for people in Africa – with a near zero requirement for an institutional support infrastructure.

The LifeStation approach will begin by building on the interactive multimedia capabilities of the original PlayStation One – in its day, the most popular games console in the world.

LifeStation will enable people to address the most basic of human needs, using a robust console that has been re-engineered to serve their needs using a variety of languages and graphic styles. They will give a new way to access basic information and interactive instruction about health and hygiene, basic education (such as reading and counting), and small business skills that will help them fight poverty and improve their basic quality of life.

This is possible because games consoles can go where PCs cannot! Games consoles do not require prior usability or technical knowledge; are better able to survive maltreatment by users; can work with poor electricity supplies including car battery power, and, can be plugged into any TV monitor (including Black and White). Even more importantly as robust consumer products, they do not require the same level of local technical expertise and support.

Designed to work in remote communities and in child-headed households, we also believe that this approach will work in even more hostile environments, such as refugee camps.

A LifeStation is designed to help people on the margins of networks (technical, social and knowledge). They will provide basic instruction and advice within the local context (using appropriate language and design), to answer the most basic of human information needs:

- The mother who asks 'Why is my child sick?'
- The farmer who wants to know how to grow more food
- The child who wants help with their schoolwork
- The child-headed household at risk from dysentery (still the world's biggest killer of young children), and, needing to know how to improve hygiene in the home

So, once a range of suitable content has been gathered together onto CDs, these consoles will be made available in a number of complementary ways:

- 1] To local aid workers who want a more robust information appliance to take with them on their travels
- 2] To community owned businesses and/or micro-enterprises. They can be encouraged to make a living by distributing Life Stations freely in their communities (paid on a commission basis). Having thus seeded the market, there is the opportunity for a rental business providing localised CDs to their user base.
- 3] To vulnerable individuals and groups - via a network of implementing partners and local delivery agents
- 4] To local content creators – at the community level

5] To the children & young people of Singazenzela

Does this sound like something you want to get involved with? Can you help with the technical practicalities? Have you got suitable content to trial? Please let us know.

There is a password protected Lifestation wiki covering the technical issues at:  
<http://lifestation.meraka.csir.co.za><sup>1</sup>

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