New app powers better sanitation in developing world

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A new mobile phone app developed by a University of Nottingham researcher is changing the lives of millions of people in Africa by giving them the power to instantly report problems with poor sanitation.

More than a third of the world's population lacks access to adequate sanitation facilities which perpetuates disease and high rates of child mortality. Now a new competition, the Sanitation Hackathon sponsored by the World Bank, is challenging researchers in communication technology to design innovative software, which can address real-world problems in health and sanitation.

Mark Iliffe is a doctoral researcher at the University's Horizon Digital Economy Research Institute. His new web and mobile app, Taarifa, has been chosen as one of 10 finalists in the competition and is already changing lives in countries like Uganda and Tanzania. The community

developing Taarifa is wide ranging, bringing together academics, humanitarian developers and community members to develop the Taarifa platform.

Improving the flow

Taarifa is an open source web application for information collection, visualisation and interactive mapping. It allows people to input and share their own sanitation problems using SMS, web forms, email or social media. The reports can be monitored by local authorities and acted upon to carry out repairs, improvements or new infrastructure, giving citizens the power to affect changes in their own communities.

Mark said: "Taarifa creates positive feedback loops, engaging communities with NGOs and governments, but is developed by a core of humanitarian volunteers and developers. This gives a capacity and potential for rapid development and innovation to solve sanitation and other issues."

Mobile power to drive change

Jae So, manager of the Water and Sanitation Program at the World Bank said: "Over 2.5 billion people worldwide lack access to proper sanitation, yet over one billion of these people have access to a mobile phone. The key is to use rising access to mobile phones and other communications technologies to generate solutions to entrenched challenges such as limited access to toilets, weak supply chains for sanitary products, or limited feedback mechanisms that citizens can use to voice needs and complaints."

About the Sanitation Hackathon

The World Bank's Sanitation Hackathon is a yearlong strategic process that to date has involved:

- Extensive consultations with communities on sanitation sector needs, and with experts to define the problems.
- Two-day hackathon events held simultaneously in 40 cities around the world, with over 1,000 mobile app developers participating.
- Over 700 concepts identified with 70 teams registering on the Sanitation HackatHome website.

The Grand Prize Award winners will be announced on 19 April 2013 on the eve of the World Bank's Spring Meetings.

More information: sanitation.hackathome.com/

Provided by University of Nottingham

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