The Arabeyes Manifesto

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This document outlines the ideas and philosophies behind the Arabeyes project.

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Introduction

Arabeyes[1] is an Open Source voluntary *Meta-Project*[2] aimed at Arabizing the Unix environment by providing the necessary interface, tools, and underlying engine(s). It is aimed at providing a centralized knowledge-base of anything that deals with Arabic linux/unix software as well as a means to contribute to the standardization effort through various means.

The lack of standards in the world of Arabic Computing is of great concern to the Arabeyes project. In fact, a quick look at the Arabic keyboards on the Internet would give a clear indication of the severeness of the problem. There are at least five different keyboard mappings and no clear standard. Demanding standards, creating and implementing them are all items that fit under Arabeyes' umbrella and charter. Standards nowadays encompass many details which have to be sifted though and studied in great detail in order to start comprehending their affects on the Arabization effort. Arabeyes is committed to the assistance of that effort as well as in putting forth suggestions and presenting solutions pertaining to our communal needs via open discussion of the facts and effects.

Arabization projects are currently scattered across the Internet with no means of integration and/or cooperation. Arabeyes is meant to fill that gap, and become a central location for all Arabization efforts.

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[1]Arabeyes as in Arabize :-)
[2]A collection of programs complementing one another, like the GNOME project for instance.

That includes hosting and tracking all available Linux/Unix Arabic software. Arabeyes also aims to develop its own tools and utilities which are necessary to provide for a basic computer interface (at both the console and GUI levels).

Arabeyes also aims to present an open forum for discussion in order to "spread" the knowledge and give an opportunity for the "haves" to share with the "have-nots". Arabeyes' utilization of CVS (Concurrent Versioning System) is meant to prolong the lifecycle and existance of the projects as well as to attract and incite onlookers and developers to jump-in and modify code (direct involvement).

Raising computer and Linux/Unix awareness in the Arab world is one of the reasons Arabeyes exists today. The up-and-coming student generation needs to know of the existence of Arabeyes (and the Open Source movement) in order for them to acquire the various necessary tools as well as to give them a forum to learn, teach and participate. We are also raising awareness within the Open Source community about Arabization issues.

Finally, Arabeyes seeks to garner the respect of their peers (other Open Source projects) and their communities.

How We Want to Do It

This is not the first attempt to bring Arabic support to the Unix environment. However, with better planning, excursion and a bit of ingenuity Arabeyes is planned to extend well beyond past successes and avoid previous failures and mistakes. Arabeyes, its contents and projects will live-on irrespective of maintainer, location or sponsorship -- that in itself is a shift in previous paradigms.

Unix and The Free Software Foundation

Unix systems have great potential in the fields of stability, scalability, and speedy development cycles. In fact, a quick look at the history of the Linux operating system would show that in one decade it was able to present itself as a serious system, developed by computer enthusiasts and professionals alike, over the Internet.

The Free Software Foundation (launched in 1984) provides a complete Unix-like operating system which is *free*. The concept of free software is a new one to the Arab world (in fact, the compliance with international copyright laws is relatively new worldwide). Free Software will allow for accelerated development (which has not been possible with in-house closed-source projects), and a transparency which will give incentive to excel and compete productively.

The costs endured by educational institutes could be drastically cut by using better and free software. This provides for a good foundation to more secure systems (not limited to schools) - as the dependence on foreign software is kept to a bare minimum.

Development Style

The Arabeyes project complies with the Open Source concepts and ideals. In fact, the adoption of the open source licenses is a fundamental part of the project's philosophy.

The utilization of a CVS Repository (which is world-accessible) provides developers with:

• An easy way of maintaining code and other miscellaneous project items.

• Adding and improving upon existing work concurrently.

• Ensuring a long lifespan for the project, regardless of commitment of the oringinal developers.

Mailing list(s) are setup so questions and related issues can be addressed and discussed. General Arabic Linux/Unix FAQ's3 and specific-project FAQ's are provided to serve as a first-place-to-look for those with questions.

Decisions are taken by the 'core' team. This *core* group is made up of key individuals who are contributing to the project on a multitude of ways.

Arabization Approach

It is hard to take a linear approach when it comes to Arabization. Some of the important things that need to be tackled are:

- Fonts

  The wide variation of fonts and lack of compliance with existing standards only makes the Arabization process more challenging. The issue of fonts must be addressed seriously and quickly.

- Libraries

  GTK/Pango and Qt provide varying Arabic support. Currently Qt3 seems to be promising.

- Console/Interface

  The console level, Akka provides Arabic support to input/output in Arabic. This allows for use under the lynx browser (text-based web browser), and other minimal console usages.

- Mail/Chat/Spell/other Applications

  Basic applications will have to be addressed to round a person's daily needs.

- Desktop (GUI)

  The desktop environment is envisioned as the most challenging and least "must-have" chain in the link. Gnome/KDE/etc arabization will be addressed as a by-product of all the underlying work that needs to happen to augment the list above.

Volunteers and Sponsors

Since we rely on voluntary work, financial sponsorship will go directly towards the project and not individuals. All donations (if and when) will be strictly used on software/hardware on a need-basis for Arabeyes projects. Monetary exchanges will be made available to donors upon request.

Goals

Long Term

1. Increase the number of competent Arab programmers/developers. This will increase the availability and enlarge the pool of employment candidates in the future.

3FAQ stands for Frequently Asked Questions.

2. Generate corporate interest in the use and development of Arabeyes and Unix.

3. Motivate programmers-to-be to develop native Arabic software

- Target younger generations (schools/universities)

- Professionals

4. Retain knowledge base:

   Knowledge will remain within the Arabeyes project, and accumulate as more (and different) people contribute, regardless of how long they remain committed to the project's development.

5. Spread free software awareness in the Arab world

   a. Re-introduce concepts of *volunteerism* and sharing within a different context (computers)

   b. Campaign for use and development of free software

6. Arabic Linux/Unix distributions money making opportunities - in distribution, product support, and sales of technical books.

Short Term

1. Provide a usable Arabic Unix interface for basic computing needs

2. Become a central hub for Arabization efforts

3. Raise awareness,

   - about this project

   - about the need of external support

4. Recruit developers, designers, etc.

5. Find sponsorship in the form of moral, technical, and/or financial support.

Benefits

- Average user:

  For the average user, Arabeyes will provide a usable productive system in which he/she can use Arabic and Arabized software.

- Small-company:

  For the small start-up company, a free and secure system will provide for a good financial decision,

without the worries of restrictive commercial licenses.

- Big corporations:

  The big corporations have a lot to gain. Other than finding a cheaper alternative to proprietary closed-source commercial software, they will find an increasing number of competent programmers and developers who are well acquainted with the issues relating to Arabic software.

- Governmental offices:

  Governmental offices and establishments have all the benefits of the big corporations with an edge when it comes to security. In-house development of security-related applications and sensitive data is more feasible with a larger number of Arab developers.

- Arab programmer society:

  The Arab programmer society can find a means to communicate, share, teach and learn from one another. The currently fragmented society will find it more productive when all the efforts are combined. It will also benefit from having a larger audience, and a louder voice.

- Arab community in general:

  The community will benefit by being able to use (with the option of improving upon) free native Arabic software with no license restrictions of use. This will provide the foundation for an accelerated development in free Open Source Arabic software and in the computer industry in general. Arabeyes will also generate hope and propel Arab aspirations to excel in technological feats.

What YOU Can Do

Documentation

Documentation is one of the most important aspects of any project. In fact, it may be more important than the code. That being said, we have two parallel documentation efforts which you can pick from:

- Translation - there is a vast number of Linux/Unix documents, FAQ's, and HOWTO's that need to be translated. If you think you would like to translate, and know both Arabic and English with moderate computer knowledge then this may be for you.

- Current Projects - Arabeyes projects will need proper documentation too. This can be done in both languages. So, if you don't feel that you have the edge of both languages, this may be for you.

Participation

The simple act of participating by voicing your opinion, trying a product, and/or reading about others' experiences is a form of help that we dearly appreciate. Participation is a key factor which may determine the success of Arabeyes. The more you learn, the more you can help others as they learn. Utilize our mailing list(s) for that purpose and don't hesitate to ask.

Development

We are always looking for competent developers and programmers. Students are of particular interest to Arabeyes, as they carry the curiosity and enthusiasm both of which we need. Computer enthusiasts and

professionals are also needed for their experience and expertise. If you feel that you have the skills then you definitely have a place in our team.

Organized Pressure

Large existing Open Source projects need to be pressured in an *organized* manner to address the issues of Arabization. By organized pressure, we mean an organized campaign on newsgroups and mailing lists asking questions, enquiring about development status, and demanding more attention. That of course, *must* be done in a civilized manner with an orchestrated agenda accompanied with discussions on mailing list(s) a priori.

Computing Needs Survey/Research

Numbers, numbers, numbers! Statistics of computer usage in the Arab world are very important to present real numbers when confronting the business world. If you have experience in this kind of research and/or have conducted this type of surveys then we most certainly can benefit from your findings.

Recruitment

If you are not sure you fall under any of those categories, but know someone who does, spread the word! Your 'word-of-mouth' is much more valuable than you may think. If you own and/or operate a web site, please mention us. We need all Arab cadre we can summon.

Sponsorship

If you are a company, educational institution, or even a large corporation then you have a lot to offer. We need all forms of support you can offer, ranging from (but not limited to) technical, financial, and even moral.