



**It is with great sadness that AfriConnect announce the unexpected death of Mark Bennett, the Founder and Managing Director of AfriConnect following a short illness in Lusaka, Zambia.**

He started this company in 1997 in Comberton, Cambridge UK, having set up ZamNet, Zambia's first ISP in 1995 before most people hadn't heard of the Internet. This developed from his role as Director of the Computer Centre at UNZA (University of Zambia) since 1985.



AfriConnect started providing consulting services to NGO's and academic institutions in respect to leveraging innovative communication technology to inform and educate. Progressing from dial-up modems through ISDN, LANs and wireless to the use of VSAT connections brought these ideas to practical use across Africa.



A key project for Africa was the introduction of the Multilateral Initiative on Malaria Communications (MIM) under the auspices of the National Library of Medicine in Maryland. Mark was their technical leader and as a result a large network of organisations MIMCOM ([www.nlm.nih.gov/mimcom/mimcomhomepage.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/mimcom/mimcomhomepage.html)) was born. This had the object of enabling African scientists and malaria researchers to connect both with one another and sources of information through the Internet and resources of the World Wide Web, This led them to create new collaborations and partnerships. Several of these institutions have brought significant innovations to the treatment of Malaria and other endemic diseases throughout Africa.

Thus AfriConnect started to bring Marks ideas into practical use.



Bringing communication to the villages, schools and hospitals in Zambia became key to achieving those ideas. Thus AfriConnect Zambia came into being in 2005, setup and run initially from here in the UK and then growing as iConnect ([www.icconnect.zm](http://www.icconnect.zm)) into Zambia's largest ISP using the latest WiMAX 4G technology. In the initial stages Marks ideas of bringing a low cost model to this, then relatively unconnected, country often meant being an early adopter of leading edge technology. Perseverance in delivering solutions, growing the marketplace across the country and demonstrating commercial viability meant that AfriConnect Zambia was eventually sold to Vodacom in 2010.

After two years transitioning AfriConnect Zambia, Mark moved on to setup two local Zambian operations both involving education, naturally. Top Floor Zambia became the leading training company for senior and middle management and underpinning workforce development using both world-class trainers and the best in e-learning capabilities ([www.topfloor.co.zm](http://www.topfloor.co.zm)).

All the time Mark's focus on child education using e-learning saw further fruition with the setting up of iSchool Zambia ([www.ischool.zm](http://www.ischool.zm)) where child-centred hands-on interactive learning was made possible.

Developing small tablets that could survive the rigours of village life, perhaps without electricity was vital. This resulted in the fully-preloaded ZEDuPad tablet - designed to be a low-cost low-power device (which can be charged off solar) that will work in any environment. It is loaded with multi-media content across the entire Zambian primary school curriculum and in eight of the local languages, plus English. It is set to revolutionise education in Zambia.



Of course, most of Africa needs similar capabilities so Mark was in the middle of expanding iSchool.zm to other countries when he passed away suddenly on 10 February 2015.

**Mark leaves us with many precious memories and his vision of a bright future for health and education in Africa and beyond. Our thoughts and condolences go out to his family and all who knew him.**