



SOLVING MEANINGFUL PROBLEMS

by Matt Wastradowski

Yaw Anokwa had just wrapped up his master's degree in computer science in June 2007 when he felt like something was missing. "I got to a stage in my life where I wasn't working on meaningful problems," he says.

Anokwa found that meaning in Rwanda, where he spent six months in late 2007 as a volunteer with Partners in Health, a global-health advocacy organization that treats HIV and tuberculosis patients. As a tech-minded volunteer, he set up and maintained the organization's computer systems and managed patient data.

The Ghana native and self-described "wandering do-gooder" soon discovered an opportunity to make an even bigger difference. While in Rwanda, Anokwa found that almost all of the work Partners in Health did was done the old-fashioned way: on paper. With thousands of patients requiring regular care and medicine, keeping their records and prescriptions organized became an unbearable chore. "You can't do that on paper," Anokwa says. The revelation led him to marry two of his biggest passions: technology and giving back.

Thus inspired, Anokwa returned in 2008 to the University of Washington, where he pursued a doctorate degree in computer science and helped launch a project called the Open Data Kit. Anokwa, along with a team that included future business partner Carl Hartung, '03, '12, developed the

free set of tech tools to help organizations generate and manage data collection through smartphones and tablets.

With Open Data Kit, Anokwa saw the chance to replace cumbersome and easily lost paper forms with sleeker, quicker and more useful technical tools. Open Data Kit has since been used to fight wildfires in rural Montana, monitor elections in Egypt, help nurses diagnose illness in Kenya and track climate change in the Amazon rainforest. "It's really shocking," Anokwa says. "It's astonishing to know that you put some time into the project and it has this kind of impact."

Its popularity led Anokwa and Hartung to launch a new Seattle-based company, Nafundi, in late 2011. The pair established Nafundi to consult with and problem-solve for the growing list of Open Data Kit users. The company name is Swahili for "with a craftsman," and Anokwa feels the name fits. "That's how we see our work," he says.

Hartung has known Anokwa since March 2006, when they met as computer science students, so he had no reservations about continuing the duo's Open Data Kit work with Nafundi. "He's good at figuring out what people need in order to be successful and helping them achieve that," says Hartung. "He's an incredible personality, loves networking and trying to figure out how we can help more people." ■