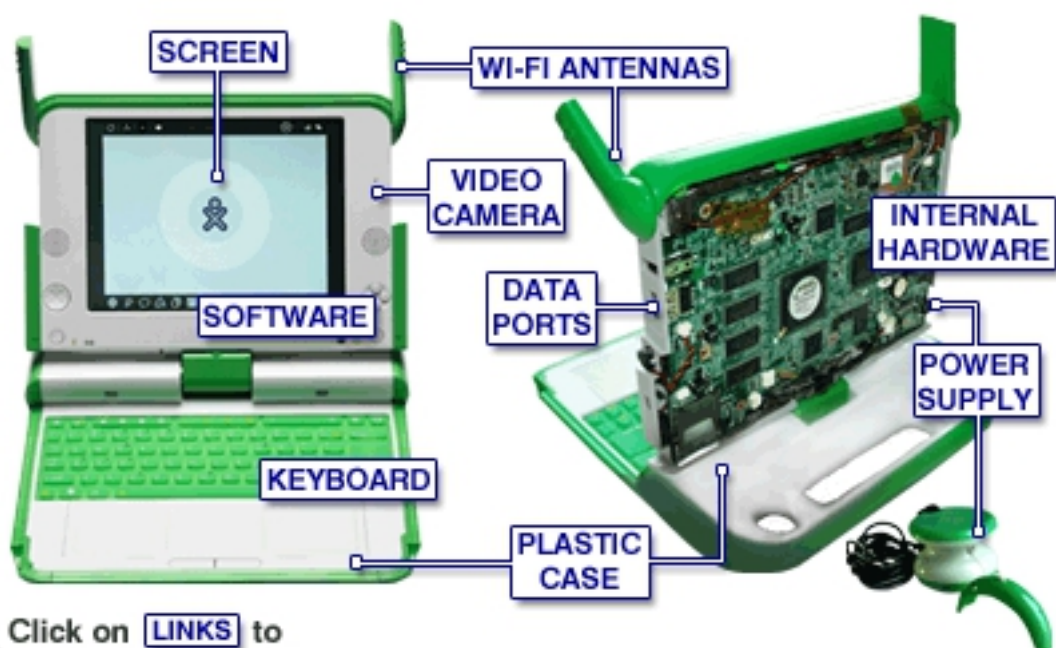




With all the misery in the world, I think this project is actually quite heart-warming. The X O laptop (AKA the \$100.00 laptop), is the brainchild of Nicholas Negroponte from MIT and former United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan.



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IMAGE SOURCE: Mike McGregor

It is designed for children in the majority world. The first machines started rolling off the Changshu production line yesterday. Interestingly these machines use all open source software - not a whiff of M\$ Windoze. And the emphasis has been on toughness, low power consumption and actually engaging the kids in the computing process.

The operating system is a special version of Linux based on Red Hat. This will run on microprocessors that require comparatively little electricity compared to ones running say

Windows Vista. The screen has a special monochrome mode so it can be seen in strong sunlight and in this mode uses hardly any power. They have no mechanical hard disk. Instead data is stored on a chip similar to a camera card. This cuts the power consumption considerably. And the machines can be powered by a number of different sources, including a hand crank.

The so-called "Sugar" user interface arranges programs in a donut shape so that users can see clearly how much memory is left. The little "bunny ears" on the side of the lid form part of a peer-to-peer wireless networking system. My favourite part is there's a special button allows the kids immediately to view and edit the source code of all the main software. I'd have loved that as a kid!

The plan is to roll out over 100,000,000 of these to kids all over the majority world. Naturally the plan has its critics. Arguments range from "Fresh water is more important than computing power phones. " to "Kids really want mobile " allegedly from someone in the Microsoft camp.

Obviously, fresh drinking water is essential to life. But the long term benefits of education are considerable and I have high hopes for this project.

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