

Going forward with ICANN: the African Region Perspective

A presentation and discussion session at ICANN Lisbon 2007

The Africa gathering in Lisbon was attended by over 30 participants representing 20 African countries; most participants sit on and contribute to different constituencies of ICANN; the meeting was also graced with the participation of Vint Cerf, Chairman of ICANN and Paul Twomey, President and CEO, ICANN. During the meeting, an agreement was signed between .CI and ICANN.

Presentations were made on the following topics:

- Current ICT technical and policy situation in Africa
- GAC regional overview
- ALAC and Africa
- ccTLD regional overview
- GNSO overview

The ensuing questions and answers session provided an opportunity for further stock tacking of the African participation and contribution to ICANN to date, and elaboration on a way forward.

The following transpired from the discussions:

Africa and ICT development

The meeting noted that there are many good prospects as to ICT development in Africa; a signal of this is the growing African ICANN community, the participation of which has been increasing. There are many African internet associations in operation that are called the AF* (read Af stars: AfriNIC, AfTLD, AfrISPa, AfREN; Afrisoc....) which account for the constant engagement of more professionals in building the African internet architecture.

Also, it was noted that ICT related initiatives abound in Africa with many e-government, e-health and e-learning programmes/projects being implemented. Furthermore, there is a growing awareness from all parties on the importance of investing in ICT to further African development. Finally, the growth of the mobile telephony in Africa has been tremendous and is likely to push towards a wider development of ICTs in the region.

Challenges

Many challenges still remain:

- Lack of a critical mass of professionals
- Need for a better informed participation to ICANN and related foras

- Lack of organisation of an Internet industry to sustain continuous participation to international fora
- poor and unequal ICT infrastructure developments with lack of IXPs
- Poor management and dissemination of ccTLDs
- Unclear sector regulation
- Need for an African platform for knowledge sharing
- language barriers to overcome

Perspectives

For an African enhanced and effective participation to ICANN and other related fora, the following orientations and actions will be required:

- The AF* need to be further strengthened to spearhead the struggle for reaching a critical mass of network operators, ICT related business and other policy and strategy specialists;
- A mentorship system to be designed to promote the incubation of sound leadership ; past and current representatives in different ICANN governance structures should be the channel for building such a system;
- Connecting IT professionals to policy makers in Africa with the view to foster cross fertilisation and sound decisions as to development of ICTs in the continent;
- Organize the African Internet business community so that trust and confidence be built;
- Revive the AFRICANN discussion list to be used as a platform for knowledge sharing across all the subsets of the Africa Internet community: AfriNIC to start the new list as soon as possible;
- ICANN to assist in designing and circulating a ‘monthly’ pager to be contributed by all stakeholders and targeting the African decisions makers as well as the African Internet business and industry.