Interview with Rosalía Morales (.cr)

Joke Braeken: Today I am talking with Rosalía from Costa Rica. Welcome, Rosalía! Could you quickly introduce yourself?

Rosalía Morales: Sure! Thank you so much. Glad to be here and sharing a little bit of what we do here at NIC Costa Rica. I am the executive director of NIC Costa Rica. We manage the .cr ccTLD.

Joke Braeken: I understood that .cr is a small ccTLD. How does the organization look like? Do you have many staff members?

Rosalía Morales: NIC cr is indeed a small organization. We're currently 15 people on staff. We have about 20,000 domains. To be precise: 22,000 domains at this point. We are a small ccTLD. However, we work together with a lot of organizations, locally and internationally.

We try to get involved in projects that have a big impact, even though our size is small. There are many ways through which we impact the local ecosystem here in Costa Rica: First, we have close alliances with the government, so we help them in any issue related to the DNS or to cyber security. So we're part part of the National Cyber Security force here in Costa Rica. So when there is a cyber security threat, or an emergency, we always contribute with our knowledge of the DNS to try to help with the investigations taking place. We manage all the domains related to the government.

We also train the staff of different ministries and law enforcement agencies in charge of digital crime. We try to keep that knowledge in the engineer's task force that works with the government.

Moreover, we have the Internet Governance Council, which we created with the help of others in the ccNSO. The Government Council involves the multistakeholder model, including members from the academia, from civil society companies, government, chambers. So we have people from all over the local ecosystem that have
an impact on - or are interested in - the development of the Internet in Costa Rica. We have meetings where we discuss key issues that are affecting our country and our government policy or the national Internet industry. We have interesting in-depth discussions, which aim to help Costa Rica to define its position in the global Internet Governance

Forum. This has happened for more than 10 years. Even during the Dubai moments, not sure, if you all remember, that were very critical in the future of the Internet. This Governance Council was very important and key in defining our position of a free and open Internet. And it still is. That all takes place in our organization, and we're in charge of organizing and leading discussions.

We also organize the local IGF. We get in touch with all universities, to allow lots of students to participate with international agencies involved in the organization of the local IGF. We lead this effort every year. That also strengthens our alliances with other key actors in the ecosystem that might not be part of the technical community, but they're very important in providing access and having open debates about a free and open Internet. We are in constant participation in different events and different committees here in Costa Rica, but also in the ccNSO and other international organizations related to the Internet. We combine our local technical knowledge and help our local community and seize any opportunity to have an impact in Internet policy abroad or join forces with other countries regarding technical projects.

Joke Braeken: Sharing information and best practices is in line with what the ccNSO does, giving ccTLDs an opportunity to learn from each other. ccTLDs might be inspired by by all the the aspects that that you just addressed!
Some of the themes that you mentioned, such as cyber security, defending the multi stakeholder model... Those aspects also have a natural home within a committee within the ccNSO, the Internet Governance Liaison Committee. IGLC organizes sessions on topics of interest to a global audience, or on aspects with a region-specific focus. Is NIC Costa Rica closely following the activities related to WSIS+20?

Rosalía Morales: Absolutely. The question is, how does it impact our ccTLD? The discussions regarding cyber security measures are sometimes interwined and have an impact on how we work locally. Our country at this point has taken a very neutral position and has been more of an observer than a leader in this discussion. But we are closely following to see how it can affect us. And in the past meeting (ICANN78), the ccNSO has given us a chance to see how other regions of the world have interpreted the different perspectives that are being debated, and how they're foreshadowing how that might affect their ccTLDs. This has given us a lot of input.
To see how that relates to our reality and how we can move forward with that. But those discussions tend to move relatively slow. But when they move, they have a very important impact in whatever you

do. So you need to follow them. It can become very, very critical for the Internet ecosystem and those who are involved in the ccNSO.

I was thinking before this meeting how the ccNSO has helped us as a ccTLD in what we do. It is actually crucial in what we do, because it gives us as an opportunity to have a sense of what's going on in the world. Sometimes you're so involved in your country and managing your own infrastructure, that you lose sense of what's going on around the globe.

And sometimes, you get so engaged in issues that you feel are something that only pertains to your organization. When you go to a ccNSO meeting, you get a holistic global perspective, and you realize how sharing experiences can help you out.

I think the biggest projects that we have carried out in our organization related to Internet governance and technical projects, have all been created hand-in-hand with other ccTLDs. And the relationship has flourished, thanks to the ccNSO. So it has definitely had an important impact in what we do.

NIC Costa Rica is also the administrator and the hub of the Costa Rica Internet exchange point, and that project has become big. It has grown specifically after the pandemic, and has helped create a more stable and resilient web here in Costa Rica. The project was launched because of the help of many ccNSO leads: .br and .cz particularly helped us out, but there were many others who provided input and help. CIRA (.ca) has helped us with the growth and and later stages of the project. Without them and our ccNSO contacts, it would have been very hard to carry out and follow up afterwards.

I previously spoke about the Internet Governance Council. We created this council about 11 years ago. When we launched it, we talked with ccTLDs from Mexico, from Peru, from Brazil… We got their input regarding best practices, what has worked and what hasn't worked. Thanks to their input, we were able to create our own version of the Governance Council. Also, regarding DNS hosting, we received help from the technical community within the ccNSO, including Brazil (.br) and Germany (.de) and others, and CIRA (.ca) has helped us a lot regarding our cybersecurity strategy. The key projects and areas that impact how we operate and the projects that we lead have all been initiated in discussions in the ccNSO.

That being said: the ccNSO Cocktail needs to continue! It leads to wonderful friendships and wonderful projects.

Joke Braeken: That is a very nice success story especially for .cr, but also for the ccNSO! Thank you for sharing.

You mentioned previously that capacity building is important for .cr, and you referred to examples such as capacity building trainings for government and legislative authorities. Do you also target end-users in your capacity building efforts?

Rosalía Morales: definitely. We do capacity building and have a social responsibility approach, which sometimes overlap. Our capacity building efforts are technical, related to the DNS. Since we have the Internet Exchange Point, our engineers are also knowledgeable in issues related to to Internet traffic. We do IPV6 workshops, routing, and have other different technical capabilities.

When doing outreach, we do not only target the government agencies, but also universities and even the private sector, including chambers. They know where to find us when they need us. We work together with other organizations in trying to promote the digital economy and the inclusion of SMEs in the e-commerce world. There is a huge digital divide in developing economies, and we try to help companies make that transition to become digital. Some of them start right away selling online. Some have been in business for more than 40 years, but never sold online. So we try to help to make that possible. We work together with the Ministry of Economy and Commerce in providing free capacity building tutorials where we teach people and companies how to make their website, and how to establish their domain name. There are basic tools to sell online. Our engineers can assist, or we collaborate with companies to help companies make that step into the digital economy. We are currently signing a deal with the Ministry of Economy. We expect this around the month of February or beginning of March. We will start the capacity building for more than 2,000 SMEs and micro companies that currently do not have any digital presence. And we're trying to help them understand the basics and provide them with free domains so that they can start working with that.

I previously mentioned cyber security. We work with cyber security agencies here in Costa Rica. We learned that one of the top cybercrime cases that happened in Costa Rica included child pornography and abuse. It really affected us, and and we try to do something about it. So we asked the digital enforcement agency to train our staff to learn more about the statistics. What are the weaknesses in our current infrastructure and knowledge base? What is leading to these horrible crimes? We created online courses, promote them in the press, and we do in person capacity building for children from 6 to 18 years old. We go to schools, public schools specifically, as they tend to be the ones that do not have resources. We raise awareness about the risks of being online, via mobile devices or computer, or other forms of online presence,

including games that they completely disregard or don't even understand.

We also try to do this with parents, which is the hardest part because the parents often don't see any value in these teachings. But actually, they are the first person a child will approach if something happens. Sometimes even before the teacher. We try to at least make them aware about the dangers the children are exposed to, how they can prevent them, and how important it is for them to be there when children reach out with questions regarding their online presence or communications. In short: our capacity building efforts range from highly technical tutorials for government and companies, to tutorials and chats and activities with schools. We use cartoons - that we actually make in house! - to teach children the dangers of being online. We address all age groups, from plus 6 onwards. We try to identify the weaknesses in our current ecosystem and do something about them. We try to get involved and help.

Joke Braeken: It is a wide range of of activities, especially for such a small team! You mentioned 15 staff members? Impressive. On top of of everything else that comes along with running a ccTLD. What you referred to has a high impact on the local Internet ecosystem. Is there anything that that you would recommend to your fellow ccTLDs, for the year ahead?

For those listening to the recording afterwards: this chat is taking place on the 24th of January 2024. We just had the the ICANN meeting in Hamburg. One of the topics under discussion was WSIS+20. It will continue to be a hot topic also for ICANN79, the upcoming meeting in San Juan. So back to my original question: Any tips for ccTLDs?

Rosalía Morales: I greatly enjoy participating in the ccNSO and having the opportunity to talk to other ccTLDs about the different initiatives they do outside just the administration of the top level domains. I know that is our core. It is very important to have best practices and to excel in that area. But there is more in what we do: ccTLDs work to create stability and resilience of the Internet globally. In our case in.cr, we love what we do. It is the passion, and it's part of what keeps our staff working in our organization, working for our cause. We work in an industry where engineers are constantly being driven out to work in other tech companies. And that's something I think all ccTLDs worldwide struggle with: Top engineers are in great demand for careers worldwide. But when you combine the technical work with something that comes more from the side of social impact and a worldwide approach… To create, to have a mission, to have this free, open, and stable Internet. That changes the mindset of the engineers, and they start to

become passionate about what they do, beyond just their day-to-day work. We involve them in the different activities that we have and the products that we lead. We offer a perspective that is very hard to get anywhere else. Where else can you combine a highly technical knowledge including daily challenges from a technical perspective, while at the same time having this engagement with a local and international community, in helping create this platform that is available to all humanity? Trying to combine those two. That is a tip and and an advice that I would give all ccTLDs. Many of them are already carrying it out, but just to to take a step back and value. What do you do? I love opportunities where we share news about our projects and our involvement in other projects, outside of the DNS. We can have impact. And as a secondary effect, it will help your organization as a whole, to have people that are very engaged in what they do and hopefully, stay committed to our organizations in the long run.

One last thing to add is the importance of participating in person in the ccNSO meetings. Information-sharing happens during sessions, but also in the hallways and during the dinners. It just gives you a completely different perspective of the ways you can get involved and work together with with other countries and make things happen. Just saying how important it is to participate in the ccNSO overall, and hopefully when you get a chance, even in person.

Joke Braeken: Thanks much for those insights, which show the passion that you have yourself. Is there anything in in your view that I should have asked you, but didn't?

Rosalía Morales: No. But if there any questions, feel free to share my contact information. I will be more than happy to share more about what we do.