

## **Report on my Trip to Mauritius:**

### **Youth Engagement Summit (YES): 4 – 6 December 2013**

#### **By Bob Ochieng**

I attended the above function to represent Pierre & ICANN upon the invitation by the organizers, Extensia, a leading community of major ICT players active in Africa, and hosted by the government of Mauritius.

For the first time in history, youth are more in tune with new technology than their elders, earning them the name ‘digital natives.’ At first glance, many think that youth are easily distracted, play too many games, prefer online interaction rather than face-to-face, suffer from attention deficit disorder, and are unaware of online security risks

Further research, however, reflects that youth today are more creative, expressive, globally oriented, connected, mobilised and entrepreneurial than ever before. Youth in recent times have created successive waves of startups, which became ICT giants: Microsoft, Yahoo, Google, and Facebook were all created by college students and in some cases even college dropouts! So can the next Facebook or Google come from the youth of Africa?

The ‘YES Africa’ summit puts Youth at the center of Africa’s ICT development agenda. The event was officially opened by the ICT Minister for Mauritius and attended by:

- Fixed, Mobile and ISP Service Providers
- Regulators
- Private sector industry captains
- Youth leaders and innovators from Africa and
- 5 different Government Ministers

The inaugural YES summit featured two sets of discussion topics: high-level snapshots of what Africa’s ministries, mobile operators and educators are doing for their online youth, as well on-the-ground insights with case studies and workshops

The conference profiled the activities of ICANN, AfriNIC, \*Hubs / \*Labs, UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF) and Wikimedia Foundation in the region. Country profiles were presented from across the continent, featuring Mauritius, Rwanda, Kenya, Namibia, Egypt, Sierra Leone, Angola, and The Gambia.

Solution showcases featured the works of five companies, and workshops were conducted on big data, open content, mesh networks and digital entrepreneurship. Incubators and awards schemes have been developed across the region as ways of incentivising youth in the digital arena.

## **My Presentations / Participation**

ICANN was privileged to participate in this great event with such a knowledgeable audience. I had a chance to present in 5 different sessions in the two-day event. My message covered the following topics:

### **1. Key note address (Speech)**

I read out Pierre's speech, which had been prepared in advance. In the speech, we highlighted the following key areas:

- Africa the most youthful continent today
- The engagement between youth and ICT must be nurtured, encouraged and developed
- ICANN Africa Strategy
- Youth Unemployment, a major challenge for today's youth
- The emergent of a \*Hubs and \*Labs across Africa and the opportunity it brings
- Branding Africa for Africa's Identity

The full speech is attached with this report.

### **2. Cyber-Security. (Presentation)**

Here I underscored the importance of embracing DNSSEC in our registries and ccTLDs in promoting cyber security, and why this is core in our Africa Strategy. I also took the opportunity to introduce the role of ICANN in the Internet ecosystem (Elaborating on what we call Internet Critical Resources, our Vision and Mission) and I was amazed at the sheer lack of awareness and involvement by our folks on Internet related issues and ICANN activities by extension.

Most participants really had no idea on what ICANN is or does! A number of questions seeking clarifications on what ICANN does came from the floor plus questions on why DNSSEC uptake in Africa is still very low compared to the rest of the world (I showed the DNSSEC deployment map) (*I have attached my Presentation*)

### **3. Internet Governance (Workshop)**

This was a very crucial session attended by at least 60 participants including 3 Government ministers (Angola, Namibia and Sierra Leone). I took the audience through the current Multi-stakeholder Model of Internet Governance where different entities in and around the Internet ecosystem are involved in managing different aspects of the Internet including the bottom-up policy making process around the Internet and ICANN.

I stressed that ICANN does not make Internet Policies as an organization while urging the audience to start participating in IG processes through the established channels including signing up on 1net.org (*More on the attached presentation*). I also used this opportunity to passionately urge the youth, Governments and private sector players to

embrace *African content, African Identity, buy African domains, build Africa – though African domains!*

This session generated a heated debate and questions during the Q&A part. Some of the critical questions raised included:

1. If ICANN is promoting local ccTLD development and Africa local content, how can ICANN help those ccTLDs that are currently under private businessmen who have refused to relinquish them to governments? (Asked by Namibia GAC rep and Mauritius delegates)
2. Africa still sees ICANN as US centric, governed by US laws, how does this affect ICANN mandate as a neutral player in the Internet Governance ecosystem, doesn't this affect some of the decisions ICANN makes? (Sierra Leone Delegate)
3. What are the best practices for the ccTLD management, how far should the government get involved? (Asked by Burundi delegates)
4. Many ccTLDs are awaiting feedback from ICANN board on their re-delegation applications, is there anything we can do as Africa staff to fast track such processes? (Delegates from Zambia)

I later posted these questions on the GSE list and received very helpful insights from the GSE team.

#### **4. Digital Entrepreneurship (Workshop)**

This summit was focused on the youth and innovation. This workshop was another opportunity to give a background of what ICANN is doing through the Africa Strategy and specifically the current focus on promoting digital entrepreneurship especially around the DNS industry.

Participants were very active and I loved the attention of the government ministers present who raised their hands to request if I was able to visit with them (Namibia and Sierra Leone) and awaken their respective Governments and youth on the Importance on IG and promote youth innovation!

I realized that the biggest challenge we face today in Africa especially in the DNS industry is lack of awareness. Our folks from both divides (Private and public sector) still lack this knowledge and it will require a sustained campaign by ICANN in collaboration with relevant stakeholders to change this position.

#### **5. Workshop Outcomes**

The Last session on day 2 was a brief report from the various presenters especially on the workshops to brief the audience on outcomes of respective workshops. I therefore took this opportunity to reiterate the importance of *African Branding* (through our domains) and the need to start following and participating in IG processes if Africa in order to be heard at the global table. I also noted that fighting Cyber security needs greater cooperation and collaboration between the public and private sector

## **Conclusion and Key Takeaways:**

- Many countries are seeking ICANN support to help them recover their ccTLDs from private operators currently holding them (e.g. Mauritius, Namibia, Uganda, Sierra Leone)
- We need to develop a synthesized document which explains delegation / redelegation issues.
- We need to come up with a best practice note on ccTLD management
- ICANN is still unknown across the greater divide in Africa and this should be an opportunity for us to continue with our outreach missions and attend more forums in Africa.
- Follow up with Namibia, Sierra Leone and Angola on possible meetings in their countries.

Overall, this meeting offered a real opportunity for ICANN to elaborate what we do and to engage with the community. Our message was very welcome and the organizers – Extensia are keen on inviting us to the next event (Innovation Africa Digital Summit) in The Gambia in March 2014.