

**Joint AFRALO-AfrICANN Meeting
ICANN 77 Policy Forum**

Wednesday, June 14, 2023 from 17:45 to 19:00 UTC (75 min)-----

Statement

TOPIC: Improvement of African Participation in ICANN

We, the African ICANN Community members participating in the ICANN 77 Policy Forum in Washington DC, June 12-15, 2023 and attending the joint AFRALO/AfrICANN meeting, on June 14th 2023, discussed “**Improvement of African Participation in ICANN**” as an important topic for AFRALO. We are making this statement on the participation of the African community in the multistakeholder model of the ICANN ecosystem and to suggest ways by which African participation can be improved.

Africa is still playing catch up in comparison to the rapid development and growth of the Internet when it comes to global digital inclusion, with the effect that the region lags behind in terms of access to modern information and communication technologies.

The effective participation of the African stakeholders such as government, private sector companies, civil society, technical community, end-users, academia etc in the work of ICANN is one that cannot be undermined. This stems from the fact that Africa has the most youthful population. According to a UN Report¹, as of 2022, 70% of sub-Saharan Africa is under the age of 30. This high number of young people on the continent creates a unique opportunity to foster Africa’s development. The effective participation of the African community in the policy development processes within ICANN, would mean that Africans are contributing to the development of the Internet, which is undoubtedly, one of the most important global resources of our time.

ICANN has in recent times demonstrated its commitment for the cause of the African community through the work of the Africa stakeholder engagement team and also by launching the Coalition for Digital Africa initiative. These efforts are well appreciated by the community at large.

Despite all the good efforts and the achievements stated above, we still need to urgently take proactive steps and adopt a more pragmatic approach to improve

¹ <https://www.unv.org/Success-stories/reflections-volunteerism-and-youth-employment-africa#:~:text=Africa%20has%20the%20youngest%20population,a%20challenge%20for%20the%20continent.>

Africa's participation in ICANN's work. This will ensure that Africans are fully engaged and are at the table contributing meaningfully in shaping the policy development of the global internet.

Below are the recommendations from the African community in order to improve the participation of Africans in ICANN:

1. **Africa to have a dedicated seat on the ICANN Board:** We reckon the efforts done to make the ICANN Board as diverse and inclusive as possible. However a situation may arise when there is no representation from Africa on the board. Therefore conscious efforts should be made to ensure that Africa has a fair representation on the ICANN Board at all times. We demand that there should be a specific ICANN Board seat created for only Africans. This will ensure that Africa is represented on the ICANN Board at all times
2. **Rotate ICANN meetings among the 5 regions:** The ICANN meetings are held in the 5 regions of the world. However we demand that the organization and hosting of ICANN meetings be done in a rotating manner between the five continents. This will ensure that Africa gets the opportunity to host ICANN meetings each two years. In doing so the African region will also benefit from the related ICANN meeting activities such as NextGen programme and physical attendance in meetings.
3. **Special visa assistance for Africans to attend ICANN meetings:** We thank ICANN for providing funded travel assistance to participants throughout the world. Many Africans, who get funding to participate in ICANN meetings, have problems securing the required visa on time. Sometimes, the embassies have waiting times as long as one year. In this case, because of visa issues, most Africans miss out on the opportunity to participate in ICANN meetings. Therefore, we suggest that:
 - a. ICANN org Travel Support should use the international reputation of ICANN to reach out to the host country and request them to inform all their embassies in Africa about the meeting.
 - b. Special attention should be given to the Africans who need additional support with regards to visa issues.
 - c. A Dedicated Travel Support staff should be assigned, who possibly can be an African and understands the woes of Africans with regards to visa issues to provide support to Africans to overcome the visa issues.
 - d. Consider the Visa process as a main criteria when designating ICANN meeting hosts.
 - e. Provide financial support in the form of stipend and hotel in home country for Africans who belong to programmes like ICANN Fellowship, NextGen or any AC/SO groups who have no option but to participate in the meetings virtually, as a result of visa issues.
4. **Support youth engagement programs:** We recognize the importance of youth participation in shaping the future of the internet and promote youth engagement

programs within ICANN. We recommend more mentorship initiatives, internships, and fellowships specifically targeted at young Africans interested in DNS governance. We encourage the inclusion of youth representatives in ICANN's working groups and policy-making bodies, ensuring their perspectives are heard and integrated into decision-making processes. To achieve the above ICANN should consider having a program for African youths, so that this platform can be used to spread the word about ICANN.

5. **Expand outreach efforts in local languages:** Recognize the linguistic diversity across Africa and expand ICANN's outreach efforts by:
 - a) Provide information and resources in local languages.
 - b) Translate key ICANN documents, guidelines, and educational materials into widely spoken African languages to enhance engagement.
 - c) Bringing more end user groups to the ICANN community by encouraging more ALSs and individual members to become part of AFRALO and the At-Large community, allowing diverse participation across the continent
6. **UA Ambassadors:** The UASG should intensify efforts to have a lot more relevant UA ambassadors within the region and country if required. This will help reach indigenous Africans who are not easily accessible via regular awareness campaigns online due to language barrier or logistical difficulties. It will also help drive the efforts of bringing the next billion people online and bridging the existing digital divide within Africa, which is a bedrock for digital inclusion.
7. **Support women engagement and participation:** To enable more diversity, equity and inclusion in ICANN's works and policy-making bodies, conscious effort should be made taking into account the specific activities of African women in their community. Internet Governance (IG) knowledge and ICT adoption are still relatively low for most African women. Thus, ICANN should look at celebrating the few African women in the community so as to encourage the participation of others. ICANN should consider providing more opportunities for African women in the IG space to be part of the ICANN community through initiatives such as a mentor/mentee platform where intending participants can be paired with female role models in the ICANN community. This will make it easier for newcomers who want to pursue participation in ICANN, but are restricted due to gender limitations and lack of awareness. In the light of this, there can be an initiative for participation and travel support to ICANN meetings and other regional initiatives, specifically for African women in the community. Regional representation should be monitored to ensure that there is gender parity within the space at leadership, capacity development and engagement level.
8. **Increase awareness of ICANN:** Increase the understanding of ICANN's mission, vision, objectives, its relevance to the African internet industry and opportunities/benefits of active participation. This can also include how the multistakeholder model of governance within Africa and its allied constituencies

relates to ICANN. Efforts must also be made to strengthen engagement between ICANN, African governments, African members of Parliament, civil societies and like minded institutions for example the African Union Commission (AUC), African Telecommunications Union (ATU) etc. Furthermore, some technical advisory committees like SSAC and RSSAC have a weak participation from the African region, hence, it will be useful to start some specific programs that will help to increase the number of participants from the African region in those technical ACs.

The participation of the African region will assuredly be enhanced, if a little more effort and attention could be paid to the region as suggested in this statement. Long live AfrICANN, Long Live Africa, Long Live AFRALO.