Joint AFRALO-AfrICANN Meeting
ICANN 80 Policy Forum

Wednesday, 12 June 2024, from 13 :45 -15 :00 Kigali local Time (11:45-13:00 UTC)

Kigali, Rwanda

-=- Statement -=-

TOPIC: "Bridging the Digital Divide: Empowering Africa Through Multilingual Internet Infrastructure"

We, the members of the AFRALO ICANN Community, who actively participated in the ICANN80 meeting with the joint AFRALO/AfrICANN meeting held on Wednesday, 12 June 2024, in Kigali, Rwanda, engaged in a comprehensive, robust discussion on *"Bridging the Digital Divide Empowering Africa through multilingual Internet infrastructure," and after an exhaustive discussion resolved as follows:*

That:

1. The digital divide refers to the gap between those with access to modern information and communication technology (ICT) and those without. Thus, the digital divide underscores unequal access to digital technologies, including smartphones, tablets, laptops, and the internet, thereby creating a division, inequality, and inequity of access to information technologies and its resources.
2. This divide is pronounced in Africa, with many regions lacking reliable internet access and the digital literacy needed to utilize online resources effectively.
3. One crucial aspect of bridging this divide is the development of a multilingual internet infrastructure.

A multilingual internet[1] will close the knowledge deficits beyond translation or transliteration within government or non-government websites, thereby giving a voice to Africans in their own languages.

---

[1] [How can we achieve a multilingual internet?](#)

Additionally, the multilingual internet promotes localized content, which means that more Africans could come forward, document their own stories, upload, and positively occupy the space.

Recognizing Africa's diverse linguistic landscape, with over 2,000 spoken languages, it is essential to ensure that the Internet infrastructure is accessible and inclusive for all. Multilingualism on the Internet is not only a matter of cultural preservation but also a catalyst for socio-economic development and digital inclusion. Therefore, we are committed to advocating for a multilingual Internet infrastructure that can help close the gender digital divide, bridge the digital divide, and empower every African, regardless of their linguistic background.

To achieve the above goal, we hereby make the following recommendations:

1. **Promotion of Local Language Content:**
   - Encourage the creation and dissemination of internet content in local African languages. This includes supporting local content creators and fostering partnerships with educational institutions, cultural organizations, and stakeholders like the telecommunication industries in Africa for their buy-in and support, especially in creating an enabling environment through their digital networks.
   - Develop initiatives to translate existing digital resources into multiple African languages to enhance accessibility.

2. **Support for Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) and Universal Acceptance (UA):**
   - Advocate for the adoption and implementation of IDNs to allow users to register and use domain names in their native scripts and languages.
   - Advocate and support the adoption of Universal Acceptance "that every top-level domain (TLD) should function within all applications regardless of script, number of characters or how new it is"[2]
   - Provide technical and financial support to local registries and registrars to implement and manage IDNs effectively and for UA adoption.

3. **Capacity Building and Education:**
   - Conduct training activities and workshops to build the capacity of local communities, content creators, IT professionals, and internet end users in multilingual web development and digital literacy.
   - Collaborate with educational institutions to integrate multilingual digital literacy into curricula at all levels of education.

---

[2] (see [Wikipedia](#)).

- Collaborate with ICANN's Global Stakeholder Engagement - Africa team to help in building technical capacity for the adoption of Universal Acceptance.

- Collaborate with ICANN Universal Acceptance Steering Group (UASG) to build technical capacity and educational initiatives on Universal Acceptance
- Develop capacities and skills across Africa by engaging all stakeholders, including governments, businesses, the technical community, the DNS industry (including hosting providers and Internet service providers,) educational institutions and end users.
- The need to find the balance between various initiatives and implement train the trainer programs to ensure sustainable and widespread knowledge dissemination.

Following the conclusion of the two AFRALO ICANN80 roundtable discussions, the following additional recommendations were made :

1. **Building Legislative Capacity**: ICANN can assist policymakers and legislators by enhancing their understanding and ability to advocate for necessary policies in Africa. This support includes highlighting essential policies to benefit the private sector.
2. **Raising Awareness and Infrastructure Expansion**: With the next billion internet users projected to come from Africa, it is crucial to raise awareness and increase the number of root server instances. This will address questions of accessibility and the implications of connectivity.
3. **Improving DNS Infrastructure:** The DNS infrastructure is heavily dependent on the underlying internet infrastructure. Enhancing this by creating more exchange points, increasing cross-border links, and expanding the number of root server instances and resolvers will significantly strengthen the DNS system.
4. **Engage in Capacity-Development Programs :** Participate in and support programs designed to enhance the skills and knowledge necessary for UA adoption.
5. **Foster Collaboration :** Continue our valuable partnership with the Association Of African Universities (AAU) to leverage their expertise and resources in promoting UA.

Conclusion

We recognize that bridging the digital divide through multilingual internet infrastructure requires a concerted and collaborative effort from all stakeholders. AFRALO is committed to advocating for and working closely with ICANN and other key stakeholders to ensure that the Internet becomes a truly inclusive and empowering tool for all Africans. By promoting multilingualism, we can unlock the full potential of the digital economy and ensure that no one is left behind in the digital age.

We call upon ICANN, governments, private sector entities, and civil society to join us in this vital endeavor to bridge the digital divide and empower Africa through a multilingual internet system.

Together, we can create a more inclusive, accessible, and equitable digital future for Africa.

Drafting Team Composition:

1. Levy syanseke,lsyanseke@gmail.com
2. Karsan Gabriel , invincible.karsan@gmail.com
3. Mutegeki Cliff Agaba , mutegekicliff@gmail.com ,Co-Penholder
4. Ernest Mafuta, ernestmafuta@gmail.com
5. Gabdibé GAB-HINGONNE, gabdibegabhingonne@gmail.com
6. Omar Shuran , omar@isoc.ly
7. Bendjedid Rachad Sanoussi ,rachadsanoussi@gmail.com
8. Remmy Nweke , remmyn@gmail.com
9. Dave Kissoondoyal , dkissoondoyal@gmail.com
10. Samwel Kinuthia Kariuki, samkih1@gmail.com
11. Sètondji Hervé Hounzandji , herve.hounzandji@gmail.com
12. Raymond Mamattah , mamattah.raymond@gmail.com
13. Moustapha Abakar Abdramane ,moustaphaabakarabderamane@gmail.com
14. Peterking Quaye ,peterkingq@gmail.com
15. Pastor Peters Omoragbon: petersomoragbon@gmail.com
16. Hadia Elminiawi, helminiawi@gmail.com