

Joint AFRALO-AfrICANN Meeting ICANN68 – Virtual Policy Forum

Tuesday, 23 June 2020

Statement

Topic: Enhancing the resilience of the ICANN community in the face of calamities

We, the African ICANN community members participating in the ICANN68 Virtual Policy Forum and attending the Joint AFRALO-AfrICANN meeting on Tuesday, 23 June 2020, discussed measures that can be taken to enhance the resilience of the ICANN community in the face of natural or man-made disasters and calamities like pandemics, earthquakes, cyclones, floods, wildfires, wars and others.

We conducted a survey among our African Regional At-Large Organization (AFRALO) members to ascertain the challenges they are facing due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, especially how it has impacted their engagement in ICANN activities. Our objective was to assess and have a fair measure of engagement and business continuity within the ICANN community when confronted with uncertainties.

1. Among other issues, the survey revealed the challenges confronted by the respondents with Internet connectivity around access, cost, quality and speed, that hindered their participation in ICANN activities during the pandemic.
2. Respondents noted poor Internet connectivity at home compared to the office which made working from home a herculean task coupled with having to share the bandwidth with other members of the family.
3. Respondents noted fatigue and difficulty in balancing work and volunteer commitments, especially during ICANN virtual meetings and working group calls.
4. Respondents in rural areas experienced challenges with constant supply of electricity from the national grid or alternative sources like power generators yet, could not access Internet cafés due to government restrictions on movement from the lockdown during the pandemic.
5. As desirable as the dial-out options to attend ICANN calls or meetings are, inequalities exist in access to the Zoom meetings due to the costs related to data purchases, thereby making the experience and the calls less interactive as participants miss out on chats and items being shared on the screen during the calls.

We would like to make the following comments:

First, we would like to commend the ICANN org and Board for their leadership in managing the challenges that affected the ICANN community in the face of calamities similar to the ones experienced in Puerto Rico in 2018 and the ongoing Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

We acknowledge the contributions of the ICANN Board, org and community for the efforts that have been made in the past to minimize the impact of calamities on the ability of community members to actively contribute to policy development processes in their respective communities.

While we applaud the efforts made by the ICANN org and Board, we find them to be inadequate in the developing countries. We therefore call upon ICANN org and the Board to investigate the impact of calamities on the ability of community members to effectively contribute and participate in the policy development processes and come up with mechanisms and recommendations that will mitigate any negative impacts that calamities may cause on community members in future calamities.

Recommendations

We recommend the following key steps to assist in enhancing the resilience of the ICANN community against the impact of calamities and their effect on the ability of community members to contribute to policy development processes:

1. Commission a study to ascertain the impact of calamities on policy development processes across the ICANN organization as well as various Supporting Organizations (SOs) and Advisory Committees (ACs).
2. In consultation with various SOs and ACs, develop mechanisms that would mitigate the impact of calamities on the community's participation in various policy development processes.
3. Develop guidelines that would guarantee continuity of policy development processes across various SOs and ACs during calamities.
4. With the increasing need to rely on the Internet as a means of livelihood, more effort needs to be put towards keeping the Internet secure, stable and accessible. ICANN org needs to put more efforts towards ensuring the accessibility, security and resiliency of the Domain Name System (DNS) through intensifying and reinforcing Universal Acceptance campaign efforts.
5. Support community awareness actions and provide more resources for better participation of community members in ICANN-related activities.
6. And finally, support local communities with local strategies for building resilience.

Thank you!