ICANN Africa Regional Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025

1 July-2020 -30 June 2025

1 July 2020

ICANN

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Background Information

1.1 Introduction

This draft document presents ICANN's Africa Regional Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025, in an effort to align the regional strategy with ICANN's Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025. The document was prepared by the community, taking into consideration feedback from diverse stakeholder groups in a bottom-up manner. It presents community solutions to some of the current challenges, and an action plan to be executed by ICANN organization and the community. The regional plan follows the five objectives identified in the ICANN Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025, but approaches them from a regional perspective, referencing some of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Each strategic objective has specific objectives, goals, targeted outcomes, action steps, and strategic risks.

DISCLAIMER: This document was drafted before the global COVID-19 pandemic, the community had the opportunity to review it during the Pandemic and noted that there is a significant possibility that the pandemic would indeed impact the implementation of the same plan. However, the full extent of the impact could not be determined conclusively. Additionally, such an impact would not only be limited to the Africa region but would reflect on the overall ICANN organization and may necessitate an overall review of the plan in the near future.

1.1.1   Background

ICANN org's first Africa strategy was drafted in 2012 by the Africa Strategy Working Group (ASWG) and adopted by the community in 2013 during the "Multistakeholder Internet Governance and the Domain Name System (DNS) Industry in Africa (MIGWORKS)" event in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Over the past eight years of ICANN's presence in Africa, guided by the ICANN Africa Strategic Plan FY16-20, tremendous progress has been made through initiatives focused on reviving the regional DNS industry, fostering capacity development, and promoting active regional participation in the wider Internet governance.

The plan encompassed ICANN's overall activities in Africa; which focused on capacity development in the DNS businesses and country code top-level domains (ccTLDs), support for the security of the African DNS, and engagement with all regional stakeholders including governments, private sector, academia, and civil society.

The strategy identified eight objectives, translated into more than a hundred projects rolled out in the last eight years. The overall goal of the strategy was the transformation of Africa into a contributor to the Internet and an emerging market for the domain name industry.

A detailed implementation report that includes lessons learned can be found here. We strongly believe that with the renewed energy and commitment from all stakeholders and ICANN leadership as we transition into a plan for fiscal years 2021-2025, Africa will rise to occupy her rightful place in the Internet ecosystem in the very near future.

1.1.2   The African Region

Africa is a diverse continent in many ways, and the second most populated continent in the world. Despite its high population, it has the lowest Internet penetration rate in the world, and unique challenges when it comes to Internet access and usage. At the same time, as highlighted in the BCG report "Greasing the Wheels of the Internet Economy", published in 2014, Africa was, and is still, not short of e-friction challenges such as the high cost of Internet connectivity and a low level of digital literacy relative to the global standards, especially the developed world.

This regional plan is cognizant of the many challenges Africa faces, including lack of DNS industry awareness, capacities, skills, and limited local and regional resources. It emphasizes capacity development to empower African governments and Internet stakeholders especially the business sector to address these challenges by leveraging ICANN's technical expertise and resources, with the African community's support.

2 Methodology

After the launch of ICANN's Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025, an open call was made to the community to join the new African Strategy Working Group (ASWG 2020). Several community members applied and a team of 25 from diverse countries was formed in January 2020. Their goal was to develop the draft Africa Regional Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025 and align it with ICANN's Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025.

Upon the selection of team members (see Annex A), a preliminary meeting was held, during which the following were agreed upon:
- Subgroups of five to be formed, with each group focusing on one ICANN strategic objective.
- Selection of chair, vice chair, and rapporteur of the working group.
- All group members to study the current Strategic Plan, shared by the Global Stakeholder Engagement (GSE) Africa team.
- A core group to work on consolidating presentations of the five groups into one draft document.
- First draft of the document to be shared with the entire ASWG before submission to ICANN org for public comments.
- Members to be acquainted with the ICANN66 session outcomes on ICANN's Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025 and the implementation reports of the current ICANN Africa Strategy.

The following timelines were also agreed upon:
- Final draft of the document to be presented to the GSE Africa team by 24 February 2020.
- Final Africa Regional Plan for FY 2021-2025 to be shared by the end of June 2020.

3 Strategic Objectives for FY 2021-2025

Taking into account the evolving nature of the global Internet and DNS, the ASWG 2020 agreed that all five strategic objectives listed in ICANN's Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025 are relevant to Africa.

Under each ICANN strategic focus area, the following were identified:
- Strategic Objective
- Regional Goals
- Targeted Outcomes
- Action Steps
- Strategic Risks

3.1 Security

Africa, as a key ICANN region, is committed to supporting global initiatives to help secure the Internet.

3.1.1   Strategic Objective

Strengthen the security of the DNS and the Root Server System.

3.1.2   Regional Goals

- Promote the adoption of Domain Name System Security Extensions (DNSSEC) in Africa.
- Help reduce the gap in cybersecurity skills in the region.
- Support public-private partnerships and initiatives for the protection of critical Internet resources.
- Promote the implementation of open Internet standards in the region.
- Improve the stability and resiliency of the Internet in Africa.
- Provide technical expertise to initiatives aimed at establishing legal frameworks in Africa to combat DNS-related cybercrimes.
- Identify and mitigate security threats to the DNS through better engagement with various stakeholders and root server operators.

3.1.3   Targeted Outcomes

- Improved security of the core Internet infrastructure installations in Africa.
- Reduced gap in cybersecurity skills in Africa.
- Reduced security threats to the DNS.
- Availability of interjurisdictional legislations and enforcement measures for cybersecurity.
- Improved stability and resilience of the DNS infrastructure across the region.
- More regional engagement with the community on security and emerging related topics of the DNS.
- Better promotion for a systemic approach to interconnection in Africa to help lower the connection costs for the end users.
- Harmonized policies on domain names in Africa.

3.1.4   Action steps

- Train relevant stakeholders in Africa to strengthen DNS operations and DNSSEC implementation.
- Incorporate DNSSEC training in the Africa Internet Summit sessions to increase awareness.
- Support regional efforts to reduce the gap in cybersecurity skills.
- Support programs to implement basic cyber hygiene.
- Develop and publish security guidelines for the Internet's unique identifiers.
- Collaborate with regional stakeholders such as Africa Computer Security Incident Response Teams (AfricaCERT), African Network Information Centre (AFRINIC), African Network Operators Group (AfNOG), Research and Education Networks (RENs), etc. for capacity development and outreach efforts.
- Contribute to the efforts in understanding the African cyber landscape and cyber trends.
- Support public and private partnerships and initiatives geared at the protection of critical Internet resources by partnering with national and regional computer emergency response (CERT) teams.
- Support capacity development initiatives with Internet service providers (ISPs), registrars network operators, and other relevant stakeholders on DNS-related issues.
- Promote open Internet standards such as DNSSEC, Transport Layer Security (TLS), DNS-Based Authentication of Named Entities (DANE), Domain-based Message Authentication, Reporting & Conformance (DMARC), Domain Keys Identified Mail (DKIM), Sender Policy Framework (SPF), and Internet Protocol version 6 (IPv6), etc., for Internet security.
- Support programs that facilitate the adoption of open Internet standards in Africa.
- Promote the deployment of more L-Root server instances in Africa.
- Support initiatives to strengthen Internet exchange points (IXPs), the African IXP Association (AFIX), and other platforms for sharing experiences and learning among the IXPs and operators.
- Identify and support programs and initiatives, which promote the adoption of cybersecurity agreements that can improve the stability and resilience of cyberspace.

- Participate in global events such as conferences and capacity development workshops within ICANN's remit.

3.1.5 Strategic Risks

- Low community trust in utilizing the Internet to its full potential.
- The regional risks becoming global threats as cybercriminals can find it easy to launch attacks targeting other regions.
- Decreased regional economic development as lack of trust in e-commerce increases.

3.2 ICANN Governance

In ICANN's bid to improve the effectiveness of its multistakeholder model, Africa will strive to engage and implore regional constituencies to embrace inclusivity, diversity, and participatory principles of good governance. This will help build cohesive communities in the region and beyond, working towards achieving ICANN's mission, vision, and objectives.

3.2.1 Strategic Objective

Improve the effectiveness of ICANN's multistakeholder model of governance.

3.2.2 Regional Goals

- Increase African involvement and participation in ICANN's bottom-up, consensus-based decision-making processes.
- Increase collaboration and engagement among stakeholders from Africa in the policy-making structures of the ICANN ecosystem.
- Increase understanding of ICANN's mission, vision, objectives, and the multistakeholder model of governance within Africa and its allied constituencies.
- Improving the effectiveness of ICANN's multistakeholder model of governance building on best practices from the mechanisms put in place by processes such as the IGFs (African IGF, sub-regional IGFs, national IGFs and others)
- Raising awareness and informing the African community of the critical importance of its presence and participation in discussions within the ICANN community notably under-represented groups such as women and youth.
- Resourcing and leveraging the Nairobi Engagement Centre to identify major stakeholders and initiate sustainable outreach programs including through existing community grassroot networks like Volunteers from RALOs as well as digital communication channels.

3.2.3 Targeted Outcomes

- Increased African participation and involvement in ICANN's policy development processes.

- Manifestation of a strong and effective multistakeholder model of governance across all ICANN constituencies in Africa.
- Implementation of policies that advocate diversity, inclusivity, accountability, and transparency in the decision-making processes within the ICANN community and stakeholders in Africa.
- Better understanding of ICANN's mission, vision, objectives, and the multistakeholder model of governance within Africa and the allied constituencies.
- Creation of vibrant multistakeholder Internet communities in Africa.
- Increased participation from Africa in all global ICANN events and meetings.
- Increased community trust in the ICANN multistakeholder model of governance.

3.2.4   Action Steps

- Support diversity in working groups and review teams.
- Further promote openness, inclusivity, and clarity in the policy development processes.
- Encourage more Africans to contribute at every stage of policy development process.
- Create awareness and understanding of the multistakeholder model through trainings and outreach programs with all regional stakeholders.
- Further promote exemplary leadership within all structures of the ICANN ecosystem.
- Encourage Africa's representation at the technical and governance levels of ICANN leadership.
- Create simple training models that foster learning and understanding of ICANN's policy development processes and governance model, putting the region's language diversity into perspective.
- Further support youth-centered programs such as Nextgen and the Africa regional off-shoot "ICANN youth community forums."
- Support local initiatives related to the Internet's development by facilitating the provision of resources such as people, grants, and logistical support.
- Consider holding a biannual forum for a concertation between ICANN and the African Internet community.

3.2.5   Strategic Risks

- Loading the community with too many responsibilities leading to community burnout.
- Stakeholder-specific interests preempting Internet policy or governance discussions, thus impairing the ICANN multistakeholder model.
- Diverging interests inherent to ICANN's multistakeholder model, and a perceived lack of global representation fueling doubts about ICANN's effectiveness.
- Community and organizational priorities competing for scarce resources.
- The costs of implementing ICANN's multistakeholder model becoming unaffordable.
- Perceived or actual delays in decision-making fueling doubts about ICANN's ability to address serious global issues in a timely fashion.
- Lack of enthusiasm and motivation of community actors, and the lack of buy-in from other key players such as governments and the private sector.

3.3 Unique Identifiers System

Many of the upcoming Internet users will be from Africa. This could lead to significant growth of users and more demands on the Internet's unique identifiers.

3.3.1   Strategic Objective

Evolve the unique identifiers system in coordination and collaboration with relevant parties to continue serving the needs of the global Internet users.

3.3.2   Regional Goals

- Raise awareness and encourage the deployment of latest standards and protocols of the Internet's unique identifiers.
- Promote adoption of IPv6 throughout the region in collaboration with AFRINIC and other relevant institutions.
- Raise awareness about Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) and encourage the development of script-specific Label Generation Rules (LGR) for integration into the Root Zone LGR in Africa.
- Raise awareness about the new generic top-level domains (new gTLDs) and keep the community informed about the next round of applications.
- Promote ICANN's role as it relates to the unique identifiers within the community.

3.3.3   Targeted Outcomes

- Better recognition and understanding of ICANN's role as it relates to the unique identifiers within the community.
- Increased adoption of IDN TLDs across Africa.
- Increased IPv6 adoption in Africa.
- Increased number of systems that are Universal Acceptance (UA) ready, with Email Address Internationalization (EAI) systems configured.
- Wider engagement from the regional community in the unique identifiers' development and advancement in Africa.
- Healthy DNS infrastructure in Africa that is stable and secure.
- Increase in the number of research and studies by African universities on the use of Internet resources and compliance with the Internet standards and best practices.
- African community that is well informed about the new round of the new gTLD applications.
- Increased number of Universal Acceptance ambassadors in the region.

3.3.4   Action Steps

- Raise awareness about the unique identifiers and help build DNS technologies and security in the region:

- o Inform the community about ICANN's role as it relates to the unique identifiers through workshops, sessions, and webinars.
  - o Proactively plan for changes in the use of unique identifiers and develop technology roadmaps to help guide ICANN activities in Africa.
  - o Promote the adoption of DNSSEC and other new DNS technologies through webinars, workshops, and publications.
  - o Encourage the adoption of DNS protocols and standards such as Registration Data Access Protocol (RDAP), and extension mechanisms for DNS (EDNS).
  - o Collaborate with relevant parties such as academia to help the community grasp and embrace new technologies.
  - o Support the deployment of more ICANN-managed root servers in Africa.
  - o Raise awareness about safeguards to mitigate DNS abuse risks.
  - o Support research and measurements projects targeting the DNS industry in Africa through greater engagement and collaboration with the academia.
  - o Support the establishment of a regional Internet Resources and Domain Names Observatory.
- Support the migration to IPv6:
  - o Develop governmental capacities on IPv6 and promote migration into IPv6 by supporting national IPv6 transition strategies.
  - o Partner with African Network Information Centre (AFRINIC) in supporting operators (GSM, ISP, etc.), Research and Education Networks (REN), Network Operator Groups (NOG), and independent networks in the implementation of IPv6 and the IPv6 deployathons.
  - o Strengthen the technical skills of engineers for the deployment of IPv6 in their networks.
  - o Support sessions, workshops, webinars, and publications on IPv6 awareness and implementation.
- Increase awareness around UA and IDNs:
  - o Raise awareness on UA and IDNs through local initiatives in collaboration with the Universal Acceptance Steering Group (UASG).
  - o Promote a framework for active dialogue among the various UA stakeholders.
  - o Support outreach to raise awareness about the best practices for UA.
  - o Raise awareness and encourage the adoption of the IDN implementation guidelines at the second level to minimize cybersquatting and consumer confusion.
  - o Conduct technical workshops and activities that support the implementation of EAI and IDNs.
- Inform and support the community on the new gTLDs:
  - o Conduct awareness-building programs and seminars to keep the community informed about the new round of gTLDs.
  - o Support applicants in the ICANN registrar accreditation process in order to increase the number of ICANN-accredited registrars in the region.
  - o Support applications for new gTLDs in African languages and IDNs.

3.3.5 Strategic Risks

- End user dissatisfaction with the Internet services due to the slow pace of Internet technology evolution in the region.
- Lack of clear strategies to improve UA that may hamper adoption of IDNs in the region, affecting Internet penetration and usage.

3.4 Geopolitics

Addressing issues around geopolitics is very important, especially when it comes to ICANN's critical role within the Internet ecosystem. Some African governments still believe that this role should not be left to ICANN. Therefore, there is a need to create awareness about ICANN and the DNS, and to better empower African governments as key players in the geopolitics of the Internet.

3.4.1 Strategic Objective

Address geopolitical issues impacting ICANN's mission to ensure a single, globally interoperable Internet.

3.4.2 Regional Goals

- Identify and address global challenges and opportunities within ICANN's remit by further developing early warning systems, such as ICANN org's Legislative and Regulatory Reports.
- Build alliances in the Internet ecosystem and beyond to raise awareness and engage with global stakeholders about ICANN's mission and policymaking processes.
- Foster better engagement between ICANN and African governments and institutions for example the African Union Commission (AUC) and the African Telecommunications Union (ATU).
- Support recognition and acceptance of ICANN's role by African governments.
- Build a more engaged ICANN in Africa.
- Promote a single global Internet.

3.4.3 Targeted outcomes

- Reduced Internet disruptions caused by political bickering.
- Increased endorsement and assertion by African governments of cybersecurity, privacy, and data protection legislations that maintain the global Internet.
- Creation of regional conventions as well as national legislations.
- Additional engagement activities in the region.

3.4.4   Action steps

- Help create awareness around the implications of interruptions in the Internet as a universal commodity.
- Further engage with AUC, UNECA, ITU Africa Regional office and ATU, and work with the governments, Information and Communication Technology ministers, regulators, and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) on issues within ICANN's remit.
- Explore ways for AUC to restate the Internet as a critical tool for development and specifically to realize the "Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa 2020-2030" endorsed during the AUC Summit in February 2020.
- Engage with governments through various forums and create awareness around the implications of legislations on the Internet, promote best practices for ccTLD management and governance.
- Provide technical input to the legislations and regulations that touch on ccTLD governance best practices.
- Work with AUC, RECs, and African stakeholders to defend and promote ICANN's objective of keeping one, global Internet.
- Promote the universal acceptance of domain names.

3.4.5   Strategic Risks

- Increased Internet disruptions by African governments leading to questions about a global Internet.
- Challenges to the Internet's universality, such as positions taken by nations as well as regions asserting sovereignty, preferred content policies or even applications. Negative impact on Internet usage caused by the taxes imposed by some African governments on social media platforms using over-the-top (OTT) technologies.

3.5 Financials

There is a need to build the DNS industry within the region to improve the revenues from Africa. According to the Africa DNS Market Study 2016 commissioned by ICANN, most registrars and ccTLDs in Africa are barely breaking even, and their capacity to contribute to ICANN's revenues even voluntarily is limited. Not much has changed since.

This trend can only be reversed through intentional efforts and investments both by ICANN and other partners to build these businesses' technical and commercial capacities and put them on the path to sustainability and growth. Additionally, A paradigm shift to engaging further with Business Associations and Chambers of Commerce in this regard would be explored.

3.5.1   Strategic Objective

Help ensure ICANN's long-term financial sustainability.

3.5.2   Regional Goals

- Foster domain name registration in Africa.
- Create an optimization modeling for engagement and outreach to track growth.

3.5.3   Targeted Outcomes

- Higher number of registered domains from Africa.
- Building of partnerships with organizations to support funding for DNS development and innovations in Africa.

3.5.4   Action Steps

- Work with registries and registrars in Africa as well organizations such as the AFTLD and AfRegistrars to educate African business owners on the benefits of an online presence and domain names.
- Encourage registries and countries to better manage their ccTLDs to ensure adoption and growth of the national domain name markets.
- Partner with organizations to support DNS development and innovations in Africa. This should include plans by ICANN and registries to fund Internet governance initiatives within their remits.

3.5.5   Strategic Risks

- Lack of sufficient funds to carry out ICANN activities within the region.
- Shortage of ICANN org members in the region.
- Closure of the Nairobi Engagement Office.

4 Conclusions

This draft document has outlined key areas of the ICANN Africa Regional Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025. We hope that the plan will help ICANN achieve its goals in Africa. The work and commitment by all members of the Africa Strategy Working Group 2020 and the community are deeply appreciated.

5 Annex A – Members of the Africa Strategy Working Group 2020 (ASWG)

MANAGEMENT TEAM

Name	Country	Position
Abdulkarim Oloyede	Nigeria	Chair
Muriuki Mureithi	Kenya	Vice-Chair
Robert Nkambwe	Uganda	Secretary
Patricia Akello	Uganda	Chair Sub-Committee
Isaac Maposa	Zimbabwe	Chair Sub-Committee

MEMBERS OF THE ASWG

Name	Country
Paulos Nyirenda	Malawi
Wisdom Donkor	Ghana
Alan Levin	South Africa
Dessalegn Mequanint Yehuala	Ethiopia
Hadia Elminiawi	Egypt
Judy Okite	Kenya
Caleb Ogundele	Nigeria
Jean-Robert Hountomey	Togo & US
Wafa Dahmani	Tunisia
Justin Rugondihene	Rwanda
Bram Fudzulani	Malawi
Akanho Yazid	Benin
Ousmane Ly	Mali
Arsene Tungali	Democratic Republic of Congo
Dawit Bekele	Ethiopia
Luc Missidimbazi	Congo
Francis Olivier Cubahiro	Burundi
Abdeldjalil Bachar Bong	Chad
Michel Tchonang Linze	Cameroon
Balbine Manga	Cameroon

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