ICANN open house

By

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me. It is a pleasure to be with ICANN again and to say few words to this very diverse audience of

friends of ICANN and the African ICANN community

I understand this is a new forum to reach out to partners and new members to improve ICANN engagement with Africa. A much welcomed intervention, an open house, the ICANN engagement forum. I hope we have a successful forum

The "ICANN Africa engagement project" started

long time ago at the inception of ICANN in 1998 and continues as work in progress.

It is tempting to think that life started when we each arrived but in this case the house was there and we whipped people into the "house our fathers" built. How well we have done or are doing maybe part of the outreach communication at this forum

I'll like to share a brief history of Africa region at ICANN, explore some difficulties in implementing our practices and regionalization then make some suggestions

I have been fortunate to have been involved in international ad hoc committee (IAHC) events leading up to establishment of icann. It was evident there were few other, if any, participating in the

process then. The problem
was evident

At one of first icann meetings
in 1999 in Singapore the
situation was even more grave
with practically no Africans
engaged. We were just not in
the industry

We tried our best to pull
additional people in. This, in
itself would become the
Achilles heels of the African
ICANN community later. We

knew that, information and knowledge gaps impact effectiveness of our participation and so we always planned side meetings at ISOC and ICANN events to inform and coordinate.

Participation gradually increased but at ICANN 42 meeting in Dakar in March 2011 there was a turning point. At this meeting African governments rose up and issued a communique

demanding ICANN address a number of concerns all pointing to weak engagement and demand for inclusion. A new chairman of ICANN, Steve Crocker, was appointed in Dakar

It was at ICANN 44, June 2012, in Prague that an incoming new CEO, Fadi Chehade, inherited the need for regionalization of ICANN. With the chairman having previously heard first hand

from African governments and a new CEO with commitment to Africa, the stage was set for better engagement with Africa

At an African focus meeting, Fadi challenged the African community to self organize and develop a strategy for enhanced integration into ICANN and for improved ICANN presence in Africa.

Africa responded with a volunteer steering committee

and produced an Africa ICANN draft strategy ultimately leading up to regional engagement programs at ICANN, Africa region staff and an office in Nairobi, Kenya. Not bad but it took time and it's little for Africa

Africa is big and has many needs and opportunities for ICANN as well

We will be critical in reflection but lighthearted and will be

looking for the pain points in the puzzle

We shall do this by examining our practices and how regionalization is working

The practices
Working with interconnected networks requires that all interested parties have a chance to contribute to the one internet. This is necessary for shared policies, technical standards or norms of the

Internet. This community approach to decision making harnesses the diversity and interdisciplinary expertise required to address complex problems. But we each must stay in our roles to work

Too often we don't stay in our roles and we find every one playing "experts" which weakens the multi stakeholder approach while denying the needed diverse expertise

It is becoming clearer that the bottom up approach for public policy decisions also brings benefit as it's getting difficult to find all expertise in one government or one organization

In the meantime in African context, the predominant decision making approach is top down hence the multi stakeholder approach has struggled to gain acceptance in the region. On one hand

governments feel they are responsible for public policy of Internet and happy making decisions, including on shutdowns in top down manner. On the other hand, when African Internet actors, who should know better, assume roles in organizations that practices multi stakeholder approach, we instinctively see a want to apply top down practices. Clearly, top down is strong in our region and bottom up

approach is an uphill battle. This community approach to decision is not well understood and we have a lot of work to do

It seems that the selfless sacrifice to community, the shared vision to develop Internet urgently in Africa we pursued in early years, is waning and personal interests and sense of property, job and territory is gaining

If we were to ask the African participants how many of them have any identifiers, names or numbers, we might be surprised that few are investing in developing DNS. If ask about DNS business it get worse...

Incidentally, the loudest voices among us might well be the least investors. We should show our shared interest by investing and adding to the Internet directly, not by lip

service. We have to be "hands on" literally. Take bull by the horns. Come on, be a sport and become a real stakeholders. It's permission less so why are we not doing it? Is it economy? Or priority? We can afford to buy beer but not domain name, not hosting, no content..we are just not participating enough. One recalls in recent past, the excuse for not having many Registrars was insurance requirements…but when

relaxed, did we get more Registrars after insurance removed? But every business knows has to have insurance?

Some may also recall we pressured RIR, Afrinic, to give special program for universities but the uptake was marginal? Every network needs IPs…in some examples, the Telcos have colonized the campus or NREN network

So please, don't accept excuses on face value and would be more effective to seriously interrogate from people not really in the industry but in the African community

Community decision processes can only be based on merit which requires having requisite capacities and dedication to a cause. When don't have it accept it and understudy someone to grow.

The processes do take time and can't be done well without strong commitment

A comment on openness. It was the openness at global forums that made space available for emerging internet economies, Africa included. It is for similar reasons that all our institutions also seek to be open to gain from experience of other regions. To be sustainable and self determination, the local should

provide leadership in decisions and be the doers. Admittedly, if it's decided and done for us we might make fast progress but we would have learned little and will continue to be dependent. I can give all the advice needed but you are going to have to do it yourself

Africa regionalization
ICANN is richly blessed with variety of constituencies, supporting organizations and

liaisons. There have been some good initiatives we will hear about today but we have not felt these communities in our countries or at regional level. Where are Africa's businesses, ISPs, RALO, Lawyers, DNS operators, Technical service providers, DNS security experts etc.? Maybe, they meet somewhere else and we should go where they are

Much of ICANN operational activity is global yet the effects can be in national realm. The local community is often looking to outside to address needs thereby missing chances to develop

It seems everything is happening at global and perhaps representation at global may not be sufficiently grounded at the edge. As we have no national activities to benchmark, things can

become opaque and the risk of capture increases

I mentioned an Achilles heel earlier. At the start, we recruited any one showing interest and we were in no position to discuss requirements, matching skills and role. We might have matured people too early because of gaps. We may be able to improve the match of Africans to roles, reduce the capacity deficit and

aggressively talent search into ICANN.

Another surprise was that while we were seeking volunteers to contribute we often found out people are actually seeking employment instead. This makes voluntary work very difficult in the region. We are of course happy about employment but that leaves a vacuum especially when employer gagged them and unable to freely participate in local community. Err, they

should give financial or other resources back to community that created them

In the brief history we touched on a volunteer steering committee that drafted the initial Africa ICANN strategy. That group was dissolved thereafter and staff proceeded with what they could negotiate with management. In hindsight, that committee should have remained and provided community oversight

on regional strategy development and initiatives at ICANN

Suggestions
ICANN, a champion of decentralization is quickly becoming centralized and so we welcome programs to further decentralize ?

Incidentally, I am first ICANN atlarge director for African

region, one of few elected by community, and would be keen to experience in-country or in-subregion atlarge activities. We have not seen that yet. We can say the same about all the supporting organizations and GAC at RECs for example.

Governments are important in this region and their participation in these discussions is necessary. Also, government venture into

ccTLD operation can pose
stability challenges to DNS

We need to work with other
organizations to develop a
strong hands on technical
community in Africa else all
tech ops would end up
outsourced out of region with
unsatisfactory implications

In going local, we like to see
the DNSSEC roadshow back
and executed by African local
engineers to form a new

community we need. We will like public interest at ICANN investing in local technical and educational capacities. Africa is a special region with particular deficits. Hence, if ICANN and others, were to only hires from Africa but do not invest back in creating additional local capacity would that be sustainable?

Access to infrastructure still remain a challenge. Is it the opportune time for a new

grand collaboration, to develop secure and stable internet access as a right to Africa?

Africa has shown that can do quite a bit of Internet but a concerted push will yield results

Now that Africa can boast of three research and education network operators, would it not a good time to invest in university curriculum reforms to be more networks oriented?

Though we knew at the beginning that the quality of education was most important we had urgency to deploy networks

Does the ICANN fellowship program deserve another look? Perhaps doing less of pull and assess any one who shows up and more of pushing good people to come in to the house. Remember the incentive to travel may attract Committee hopping and

perhaps, the more feeble participation during pandemic, suggest we might not have it right and have to do things differently and more local

Finally, an active and diverse participation is essential for successful multi stakeholder community decisions. We need more of this community retained knowledge for better "change management" in Africa

The changing nature of the technology and DNS industry is going to make it harder for Africa to keep up and we need to do something decisive, not business as usual

Once again, I wish the forum success and thank you for your attention