

## .AFRICA – A summary of the online discussion

### Background

The Internet sector is experiencing incredible growth in Africa. In this context, one of the emergent issues is the creation of a **.Africa** domain which will include web names dealing with continental issues that may more easily reflect the identity of Africa (e.g. [www.travel.africa](http://www.travel.africa)). The issues concerning the introduction and management of a **.Africa** domain name were discussed at two EU-ACP supported [workshops on Internet Governance and ICT Policy](#). The first was held in Addis Ababa (6–8 April 2011) and the second in Pretoria (12–14 April 2011), under the framework of DiploFoundation's capacity building project [Capacity Development Programme in ICT Policy and IG for ACP countries](#). Diplo, taking the initiative, created an online discussion forum involving Diplo alumni, the broader Internet community, governments, international organisations, civil society, the media, and others interested in the introduction of a **.Africa** domain.

This paper summarises the important reflections and opinions of about 120 inputs in to the various discussion threads. While most of the 52 contributors were from Africa, but others came from all over the world. Contributors focused on six key issues related to the **.Africa** domain:

1. Why **.Africa**?
2. The involvement and benefit for all
3. Application and set-up
4. Policy issues
5. Alternatives and iDNs
6. Developing capacity and awareness building

The summary was prepared by Jean Paul Nkurunziza of Burundi Youth Training Center and ISOC Burundi, who moderated the online discussion on behalf of DiploFoundation.

The integral discussion including all online contributions is available at:

<http://discuss.diplomacy.edu/dotafrika/>

*These discussions raised many questions and dilemmas that needed greater thought and the involvement of a broader community of interested contributors.*

## 1. Why .Africa is needed

With regard to the social, cultural, and economic aspects of establishing a **.Africa** domain, many ideas raised pointed to the fact that **.Africa** would be an important symbol of the unity of the African continent. It would also help the African continent retrieve its identity within the emerging knowledge society era.

From an economic point of view, contributors are convinced that **.Africa** will enhance the creativity of African youth leading to socio-economic development, it would bring new business horizons to the African market at large, and it would be an advantage for diverse African organisations, allowing them to avoid other generic TLDs, thus increasing online business and financial incomes into Africa. On this point, some contributors raised the issue of the sustainability of the **.Africa** domain. One solution would be to learn from the experience of other continental domain names set up earlier such as **.Asia** and **.eu**.

On the other side, another contribution raised the fact that Africa has so much to offer and the audio visual potential is probably greater than North America and Europe combined.

We should then take care of **.Africa**. With proper planning and effective take-off, it will position Africa as a hub for international interest. It has huge potential regarding the number of users: one billion people share that identity – a big economic and financial potential.

Speaking of potential, one intervention raised the fact that it is a very powerful concept that goes beyond the actual geographic limits of the African continent. Large Diaspora communities from Latin America and North America, for instance, consider themselves African, so they would also be involved in the **.Africa** debate.

## 2. How do we manage .Africa with the involvement of and benefit to all?

One contributor wondered if **.Africa** would become a threat to national domains (ccTLDs). Another idea noted that African ccTLDs are not yet strong and would need to be strengthened before thinking about a continental domain. Yet another belief is that **.Africa** would affect the uptake of ccTLDs.

An opposite view stated that a model should be found to make **.Africa** boost ccTLDs by trying to use experience from other continental domains. Clearly, ccTLDs sold at a higher price than **.Africa** might be affected. Then, the best approach for ccTLDs would be to work side-by-side with the **.Africa** registry. In that situation, **.Africa** would complement the ccTLDs. We can note that **.eu** didn't kill European national ccTLDs, so we may say that **.Africa** will not kill African ccTLDs; it will, in fact, strengthen Africa's position on the Internet governance scene beyond the identity issue.

With regard to ensuring that the benefits associated with **.Africa** accrue to Africa and Africans, the first principle would be to involve all interested stakeholders (governments, private sector, civil society, academic, local communities) and this should be done in a transparent manner.

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In this and other discussions, the African Union was frequently mentioned as the ‘umbrella organisation’ which could ensure continental participation. Together with the African Union, the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) was frequently mentioned as an important continental contributor. One participant suggested that it would be important to involve the AFTLD, which is a representative of all African TLDs. Representatives of local communities, as well as village chiefs should also be involved.

To be effective, broad consultations should be transparently conducted, at first online and then face to face, to allow contributions from interested stakeholders. The registration process should be as flexible as possible. The pricing must be within the reach of the average African citizen.

### 3. Application and set-up of a .Africa domain

It was noted that ICANN has an elaborate mechanism allowing authorised entities or individuals to apply for any domain name, so the .Africa domain would comply with that mechanism.

Concerning the entity that should be responsible of its management, contributors said that preference should be given to an African entity and that all mechanisms to build in human capacity should be explored, if necessary. But, it was noted that the human resources for this task are available in Africa.

One intervention noted that the African Union has launched a call for interested parties to apply.

A multistakeholder consultation process should be put in place in order to agree on the entity that should be given the responsibility of managing a .Africa domain. One intervention suggested that the AFTLD would be a good manager, taking into consideration its long experience with ccTLDs.

From an operational and technical point of view, .Africa’s registry should be an Africa-based NGO/NPO based in an African hub city. The technical data centres should be based in Africa, with disaster recovery sites scattered across Africa and other continents. This also includes servers and their replication, plus the need for adequate bandwidth. To better popularise .Africa, Africans should start working on increasing the numbers of ICANN-accredited registrars based on the African continent.

The application fees for .Africa are USD\$185 000, and USD\$25 000 annually. Some participants raised the issue of who would cover these fees. One position expressed that Africans should organise themselves to cover these fees. Another position is that some organisations such as African Union, UNECA, AFTLD, and AfriNIC, should reach out to various stakeholders, especially at the international level, to lend a hand. One intervention noted that African representatives within ICANN are lobbying for a reduction of the application and annual fees. It should be highlighted that .Africa can have an important impetus for the future development of the Internet in Africa. .Africa should be used for facilitating broader developmental objectives of the continent.

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#### 4. Practical policy issues related to the establishment of a .Africa domain

All necessary policies should be put in place to allow its fast growth. It has been suggested that all sovereign African countries would be represented in the management of the .Africa domain. As noted earlier, African communities from Latin and North America should be also involved. And there will be a need for close cooperation with other continental TLDs, such as .Asia and .eu. This would help address capacity building issues.

Economic models for the delegation and re-selling of .Africa domains should comply with ICANN's procedures and general practices. There are models, such as the Brazilian one, which could help in the management of .Africa. ICANN's procedures and general practices should also be applied to address any copyright issues arising in a .Africa domain.

With regard to content liability issues, it is good to note that Africa has a rich oral tradition opposed to a written literature, which is today's nerve of the World Wide Web (e.g. YouTube story telling). Thus, we would have to find a mechanism of patenting the products of this tradition.

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#### 5. The language perspective – IDN for .Africa

Other main languages spoken in Africa must be allowed to have the .Africa in French ( .Afrique), in Portuguese, Spanish and the ones using non-Latin scripts such as Arabic, Amharic, etc. To address the issue of the wide variety of languages in Africa, the solution would be to take into consideration the main language communities. It would also be advisable to check the experiences from .Asia on that issue.

#### 6. Capacity development and awareness building

The question is to find the best way to develop the capacities (technical, institutional, human, etc.) for sustainable management of a .Africa domain. It has been said that Africa has great technical and human resources and that it's just a question of harnessing those resources. However, there is a need for capacity building and this is where Africa needs to set up strategic cooperation with organisations such ISOC, DiploFoundation, ICANN, and the UN. Capacity development must focus on African-driven initiatives.

It was proposed that a more aggressive communication strategy be set up to communicate the need for a .Africa domain by explaining its benefits to the citizens of Africa. We need to involve African traditional media to conduct that awareness campaign. Awareness and outreach activities must target senior officials, civil society organisations (as they are close to the communities), the business sector, and academic communities.

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A sensitisation campaign should be conducted before targeting the first African

governments so that they realise the importance of this key resource and advance its agenda. A sensitisation campaign should also target the business sector and civil society prior to the establishment of **.Africa**. The African Union, as an intergovernmental institution, should play a prominent role. We need to learn from the experiences of other regions and continents. This would allow Africa to realise the critical success factors for their success by benchmarking with institutions such as Centr.

## In conclusion

It is important to say that all those involved in the discussions have emphasised that a **.Africa** domain needs to be implemented. In addition to supporting the African identity in the digital era, it would also enhance African unity and be an excellent factor for economic wellness for Africans. It has been noted that the concept of being African is powerful. As an illustration, one can recall the strong continental support from the African public for the success of the Ghanaian team during the last World Cup 2010.

**.Africa** can also be an important channel for increasing online visibility of some rich but yet unused potential of the African culture, such as the promotion of storytelling and oral culture found throughout Africa. Huge economic and cultural potential can ensure economic sustainability of the **.Africa** domain.

Potential risks should be addressed by setting up a transparent and multistakeholder management of a **.Africa** domain by relying on the most successful practices from other regions and continents. To strengthen the **.Africa** domain, the need for an awareness and outreach campaign directed at different stakeholders was noted. Also, a **.Africa** domain should include the IDN feature and allow the existence of **.Africa** in non-Latin scripts as well as accepting its use in other languages spoken in Africa.

Technical and human capacities for the management of a **.Africa** domain are available on the continent. In most cases, we will need to put them into an efficient organisational context. We must ensure capacity building when it is needed. The reliance on experiences from other regions and countries will be essential

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