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**Conference Room 5 - United Nations Conference Center**

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

*Report on the online discussions on  
Internet Governance*

## **African Discussion List on Internet Governance**

As part of its activities for the Tunis phase and within the context of the UN ICT Task Force African Stakeholders Network<sup>1</sup> (ASN), the Regional node to the UN ICT Task Force, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa<sup>2</sup> (ECA) organized a discussion list on Internet Governance for contribution to the UN ICT Task Force Global Forum on Internet Governance to be held in New York from 25-26 March 2004. Below is a summary of the discussions.

### **First week: Global Internet Governance related issues**

#### **Questions raised**

How does the current management of the Internet affect the political, economical and cultural equilibrium of the world? What do you think are the advantages and drawbacks of an intergovernmental model - where several governments together on an equal footing would be in charge of defining the rules of the IG - and the multistakeholder model - where the governance players would be representatives from the private sector, civil society organizations or users association? What would be the "ideal" model?

#### **Contributions and comments**

- Some participants raised the importance of understanding the historical patterns to better understand the current shaping of the institutional and political framework of the current governance system.
- The large range of actors intervening in the international management of the Internet does not simplify things.
- Some participants noted that "The fruits of WSIS are being realized and the Internet Governance contributions will definitely facilitate policy-making that will yield a better IT environment for tomorrow. We should have in mind that we need to cater for the future generation by making the policies sustainable".
- The role of the different stakeholders: it was emphasized that Governments have an important role in defining and establishing the enabling environment in which e-development can occur. A participant stressed that "An enabling environment supports and encourages economic and non-economic activities that increase society's well-being. With the rise of the new economy, the enabling environment must be reviewed to ensure that progress within the new world setting can be achieved. Governments must remain focused on improving access levels and quality of telecommunication and electricity infrastructure and education".

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<sup>1</sup> [www.unicttaskforce.org](http://www.unicttaskforce.org)

<sup>2</sup> [www.uneca.org/aisi](http://www.uneca.org/aisi)

- From the perspective of a representative of the private sector, a participant emphasized that members of the Internet community and governments need to work together to gather the necessary conditions, in particular focusing on: "Lowest possible regulation level and enable competition, effective exchange of information between public and private sector , maintaining several technical possibilities to adapt to the Internet users' choice and last but not least the private sector must develop "services/content", that will interest Africans in order to create revenue from the Internet".

## **Second week: Africa and Internet Governance**

### **Questions and issues raised**

How is Africa affected and / or is benefiting from the current internet governance system? What are the other public policy issues that you think are priorities for Africa ( IP matters on IP networks, cyber squatting, consumer protection, cyberspace regulation, security and privacy concerns etc.). Do you think that these issues affect particularly the gender digital divide in most of our African countries? How best do you think African countries can tackle these issues. Can you give examples on how national e-strategies/ NICI plans have addressed IG related issues? What would be the role of regional political platforms such as the NEPAD?

### **Contributions and comments**

Participants noted the need for a broad understanding and definition of Internet Governance to proceed from there to determine what Africa's role should be.

A participant from a regional development bank suggested that Internet Administration issues, Technology Management, Regulatory Environment and Digital inclusion should be seen as the main elements of discussion for Internet Governance.

Focusing on the technical administration/coordination of Internet and looking at how Africa is affected/or benefiting from current IG system, participants pointed out that the un-preparedness of most African countries as far as Internet Governance is concerned is mainly due to lack of access to Internet itself and problems related to the domain names management. Unavailability of local registrar in Africa and the lack of support to AfriNIC was also mentioned as one of the reasons for domain names management problem. In this regard, it was noted that Africa should be offered the opportunity to have IP allocation that meet its needs since the continent is still the only one receiving its IP addresses from other regional registries, with limited size allocation.

On the other hand, participants noted that the efforts of the South African Government to pass legislation to address the increased use of electronic communications in a Government and business environment despite numerous challenges, which may be considered of higher priority.

It was finally suggested to take stock of best practices in some African countries like Kenya in ccTLD management as a model to raise awareness and capacity building of African Governments and policymakers in this issue.

On the role of regional political platforms such as NEPAD, it was suggested that regional institutions should make sure that best practices in managing the ccTLDs are spread and that they should support capacity building activities for policy makers to efficiently organize African participation & contribution in the international policy making forums.

Regarding public policy issue related to Internet governance, some participants suggested to look first on what was available in the areas of ICT in Africa, what are the changes needed, and how it would be possible to provide access to accurate and timely information, and use that information for change.

Some participants noted that the two inseparable components: “technical” and “policy” should be equally considered when the issue of Internet Governance is raised. They also stressed that since ICANN welcomes working with the WSIS, this would be an opportunity to deepen our understandings of Internet Governance and learn from the countries which are ahead in the process.

Regarding IPR related international regulation - bilateral and multilateral - it was mentioned that a number of political and diplomatic efforts have enabled the inclusion of IPRs in multilateral trade negotiations such as the Trade related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) of the WTO. The TRIPs agreement has by far been a major turning point in the protection of IPRs at the international level by fixing standards in patents, trademarks, protection of designs that affect the knowledge society... In the context of the current global knowledge based economy, African countries are indeed facing new challenges due to the strengthening of IPRs and its international regime. It was noted that ensuring an equilibrium between promoting innovation and knowledge on one side and ensuring access to information & knowledge on the other side is indeed a dilemma for a sustained African Information society.

How can we strengthen the emergence of a software industry in Africa. It was suggested that ASN should also consider hearing what the other players have to say on this.

An issue on proprietary software vs. open source was raised. Some participants discussed the importance of open source in Africa, which fits to IPR related issues. They promoted the use of open Source by stating that open source will enable developing countries develop capacity in ICTs and also most of the other commercial applications.

### **Third week: Recommendations**

1. The UN ICT Task Force African Stakeholders Network (ASN) should devise ways of continuing the Internet Governance consultation process as it permits to create a continuity of ideas; and also as this would enable people to share experiences and views to enable the African continent to get sustainable solutions in a global context.
2. Internet Governance as applied to developing countries, especially Africa is not only about Internet administration/coordination/policies, it is also about the ICT governance in general, and should be considered as such in a holistic approach.
3. The Working Group on Internet Governance should insist on the necessity for a better understanding of the ICT paradigm by decision makers, especially in their ability to help leapfrog if the conducive environment is created. In this regard, capacity building and awareness raising programmes for policy makers are essential to enable them apprehend the stakes and challenges of Internet Governance in order to act in an appropriate manner.
4. The Working Group should emphasize on need for training of professionals in order to build in-house capacities for both technical and business aspects of Internet Governance.
5. The Working Group should devise ways and means for an increased and informed participation of developing countries in global ICT policy making forums.
6. National ICT policies should mainstream IG issues in their activities.
7. All stakeholders must be part of the process at national, regional and international levels to make Internet Governance a reality.
8. The WSIS regional preparatory meetings should organize workshops on Internet Governance, whereby all stakeholders should be able to voice concerns and also share best practices on making Internet Governance a reality within specific countries and regions.