



A cybercafe in Kampala. Picture: Morgan Mbabazi

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CHARGES: Despite the stability and reliability of Uganda's domain, the issue of affordability is still a major complaint by Internet users

Regulator seeks control of Uganda's domain name

By **ESTHER NAKKAZI**
Special Correspondent

If you want to register a domain name with a Ugandan country code, .ug, the man to speak to is Charles Musisi, an Internet entrepreneur who has managed the country's domain names over the past decade.

However, Mr Musisi is now engaged in a dispute with the industry regulator, Uganda Communications Commission, over the right to manage the domain registry.

UCC officials want to take over the administration of the registry in order to make domain names cheaper and to increase Internet use in Uganda.

There are currently about 50,000 Ugandans who regularly use the Internet and at least 100,000 have email accounts.

"We think the regulator should be in charge of administration of the domain names to make them cheaper and to achieve universal access of the Internet in the country, UCC's corporate affairs manager Fred Otunnu said.

But Mr Musisi says there is no need to take from him the administration of the domain, a responsibility he got from the US-based Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA), because he has neither mismanaged it nor failed to effectively serve the local internet community.

"I do not own Uganda's domain name; I am just a trustee, doing a good," said Mr Musisi, who is the managing director of Computer Frontiers International (CFI). "The domain is sound, reliable, stable and not restrictive in use."

Records show that Uganda is the largest registry in East Africa with 4,000 .ug registered domain names compared to Kenya's .ke which has 3,000 and Tanzania's .tz which has 800. Uganda also remains the third largest on the continent after Egypt (.eg), which has 50,000 and South Africa's .za, which has 300,000.

"As the designated managers, we have done our best operating the core function of maintaining the .ug domain.

"We have built a robust automated registry system that responds to requests timely and we operate the primary database with accuracy, robustness and resilience," said Mr Musisi.

Information Technology experts say if UCC takes over

the administration of the domain name, it will be meddling in an area outside its mandate.

"In fact, governments are discouraged from becoming direct internet domain administrators. UCC should stick to policy matters," said an IT expert in Kampala.

UCC regulates and promotes development in the communications sector.

Domain name administration has been successful in places where the private sector is the administrator such as Australia, Canada and Kenya.

However, in some cases like Nigeria, the government has gone ahead to buy the domain name from the private administrator in public interest.

Local Internet players say they backed Mr Musisi because he created the .ug domain name in 1995 under Uganda Online, which is now under CFI, prior to UCC's formation in 1997.

"CFI has carried out this role for over 10 years in an equitable, just, honest, and competent way and ICANN has several times cited them as one of the best in Africa," said Daphine Kakonge of

According to Mr Musisi, CFI hardly breaks even because they have to pay for connectivity and staff

Women of Uganda Network.

Despite the stability and reliability of Uganda's domain, the issue of affordability is still a major complaint by some of the stakeholders who claim Mr Musisi charges a lot of money for the domain names.

The prices are \$30 per year for new registration or \$60 for 2 years and renewals are \$30, \$55, \$80, \$100, \$120 for successive years.

There is an educational discount under the .ac.ug and .sc.ug second level sub-domain categories at a rate of \$12.5 per year.

"Even if domain names were given free, one would still need to connect to the backbone," said Mr Musisi.

According to him, CFI hardly breaks even because they have to pay for connectivity and staff.

"We need to sell at least 100 domains or renewals to be profitable," he said.

IANA operates under ICANN and works on a first-come-first-served basis. It is responsible for the overall co-ordination and management of the Domain Name System (DNS), and the delegation of portions of the name space called a cctld, which in Uganda's case is .ug. ICANN ensures that the addresses on emails work so that they can be sent easily.

"If there are issues of security concern, then UCC can take it over, but do they have the capacity to administer it? They should have compelling reasons, such as security, to regulate it," said legislator, Johnson Nkuhe.



Mr Musisi