

# Joint AFRALO-AfrICANN Meeting

## ICANN 82 Community Forum

Wednesday, 12 March 2025,

Seattle, USA, Local Time (15:00 - 16:00)

**-- Statement --**

### **TOPIC: "Promoting African Digital Identity in the Next gTLD Round: Addressing Challenges and Leveraging Support Mechanisms"**

#### **Preamble**

We, members of the AFRALO ICANN Community, who actively participated in the ICANN82 meeting in the joint AFRALO/AfrICANN meeting held on March 12, 2025 in Seattle, engaged in a comprehensive, and robust discussion on "Promoting African Digital Identity in the Next gTLD Round: Addressing Challenges and Leveraging Support Mechanisms" and after an exhaustive discussion noted as follows:

#### **Background and Context**

1. The previous round of the New gTLD Program revealed a significant disparity in applications from different regions. Out of approximately 1,930 applications worldwide, only 17 were submitted by applicants based in Africa. This striking contrast highlights the existing challenges and barriers faced by African entities in participating in the global digital landscape.
2. Of these applications, very few new gTLDs were ultimately delegated to African applicants, representing a very small proportion of the total delegation. This underscores a clear underrepresentation of the African continent in the namespace, representing about 0.2% of the total of 1351 new gTLDs awarded worldwide. This reinforces the need for targeted interventions to correct this imbalance.

#### **Recognition of ICANN's Efforts**

We recognize and applaud ICANN's launch of the "Applicant Support Program (ASP)." The ASP aims to facilitate access to the application process for the next round, providing assistance and training to communities and businesses seeking to apply for a new gTLD, especially in underrepresented regions. Our African community is called upon to increase local awareness of the ASP as an essential tool to enable African communities and businesses to actively and effectively participate in the second round of the New gTLD Program. We urge the African community, especially all At-Large Structures (ALS), to play an active role in this awareness-raising.

## **The Importance of African gTLDs**

The successful introduction of new gTLDs can be essential to promote African cultures, languages, and heritages on the Internet, creating a more inclusive digital space that reflects the diversity of the continent. In addition, these gTLDs can also serve as catalysts for African innovation and entrepreneurship, providing unique online identifiers that are locally relevant and creating a secure online environment.

## **Promoting the African Identity in the next round of gTLDs**

Promoting the African identity in the next round of gTLDs requires a strategic approach that addresses the financial, technical, and policy challenges while leveraging all the support mechanisms available.

Below are some key strategies and recommendations

1. **Enhance awareness and capacity building:** Work with ICANN's Global Stakeholder Engagement (GSE) for Africa and the Technical team to educate African stakeholders on the benefits of owning a domain name, provide training and workshops on domain name management, registry operations, and cybersecurity, and encourage local businesses and linguistic communities to participate in domain names related discussions.
2. **Promote new gTLDs as part of the digital transformation initiative:** Engage with the African Union and national governments to encourage investment in African gTLDs as part of the digital transformation initiatives.
3. **Leverage possible partnerships:** Encourage and support African communities interested in establishing their own gTLDs to seek partnerships with existing ccTLDs, gTLD registries, infrastructure providers, and International organizations. These partnerships can provide essential infrastructure, financial assistance, mentorship, and help build local expertise.
4. **Community TLDs:** Advocate and encourage a multistakeholder approach for establishing and sustaining a registry in Africa, where multiple stakeholders contribute to the development and sustainable operations of a registry
5. **Advocate for more IDNs:** Encourage more IDNs in African scripts to support African languages, culture and heritage
6. **Encourage UA adoption:** Enabling IDNs enhances users' experiences and digital engagement, which encourages communities to establish domain names in their native scripts, creating demand for new gTLDs.
7. **Prioritize Linguistic and Cultural Diversity:** New gTLDs should be considered as a vehicle for celebrating and preserving the richness of Africa's linguistic and cultural diversity. We urge

ICANN to establish criteria that favor applications promoting African languages, scripts, and cultural expressions.

8. **Improve the Responsiveness of the ASP:** ICANN must ensure that the ASP is designed and implemented to specifically address the challenges faced by African applicants, and that information is easily accessible in different forms and in different languages. This requires a localized and proactive approach, potentially including training, financial assistance, and personalized advice that considers the realities of each African sub-region. Greater allocation of local human resources to the ASP is essential to provide tailored support for applicants across the region.
9. **Strengthen the Impact of the ASP through Training:** Enhance the support provided by the ASP through the dissemination of educational and training materials, as well as in-person workshops, tailored to the different contexts in Africa, with a focus on community engagement and capacity building. We recommend targeted training to strengthen the financial and legal skills necessary for the application process.
10. **Empower African At-Large Structures (ALS):** We strongly urge ICANN to support African ALSs in their role as catalysts for raising awareness and promoting the ASP. This includes providing them with resources and training to actively engage their local communities and potential applicants. This on-the-ground knowledge of the different situations across the continent is essential to ensure the success of the ASP
11. **Streamline the Application Process:** We recommend that ICANN streamline the application process, ensuring that it is user-friendly, affordable, and inclusive, especially for MSMEs and communities with limited resources. The complexity and cost associated with the application process should not be a barrier to participation.
12. **Advocate for a More Equitable & inclusive Outcome:** Given Africa's underrepresentation in the previous round, ICANN should actively work to ensure that the application evaluation process does not perpetuate existing prejudices and biases, and aims to increase the number of gTLDs delegated to African applicants. While it might be too late in the process for this round, the true diversity of the program is going to happen when we lower the threshold for participation in it

## Conclusion

The next round of the New gTLD program is a unique opportunity for Africa to strengthen its digital presence and assert its identity on the global stage. By overcoming the obstacles of the previous round and fully utilizing support mechanisms such as the Applicant Support Program (ASP), Africa can play a more active role in the domain name ecosystem. It is essential that this process is inclusive, accessible, and equitable to reflect the rich cultural and linguistic diversity of the continent. Increased African participation will not only foster innovation and economic development but also contribute to a more representative and balanced Internet

Lastly, while launching a new gTLD requires huge investments, Africans do not have to do this alone. Leveraging all possible support is the key to success

#### **Drafting Team Composition**

Aziz Hilali, [abdelaziz.hilali@gmail.com](mailto:abdelaziz.hilali@gmail.com), **Pen Holder**

#### **CO- Pen holders:**

Amina Ramallan, [aminaramallan@gmail.com](mailto:aminaramallan@gmail.com)

Barrack Otieno, [otieno.barrack@gmail.com](mailto:otieno.barrack@gmail.com)

Ernest Mafuta, [ernestmafuta@gmail.com](mailto:ernestmafuta@gmail.com)

Gloria Frimpomaah Amofah-Adjekum, [gloria.amofah-adjekum@ghanasig.org](mailto:gloria.amofah-adjekum@ghanasig.org)

Hadia Elminiawi, [hadiaminiaw@gmail.com](mailto:hadiaminiaw@gmail.com)

Hervé Sètonджи Hounzandji, [setondjih@gmail.com](mailto:setondjih@gmail.com)

Houda Chihi, [houda.chihi@gmail.com](mailto:houda.chihi@gmail.com)

Malick Alassane, [alkomalick@gmail.com](mailto:alkomalick@gmail.com)

Omar Shuran, [omar@isoc.ly](mailto:omar@isoc.ly)

Patrick Kiiza, [kiizapattick6@gmail.com](mailto:kiizapattick6@gmail.com)

Remmy Nweke, [remmyn@gmail.com](mailto:remmyn@gmail.com)