
ICANN86 Seville | PF – Africa Space
Wednesday, June 10, 2026 – 10:00 to 11:15 CEST

PIERRE DANDJINOU

Good morning. Hope you can hear me. Thank you very much. We do have a challenge here. We only have one hour. And bear with me, we're having a few issues in setting up the whole thing, but now we can get started. Happy to have you around again at this Africa Space. Always a pleasure to meet with you, and, in fact, to be reporting back to you in terms of our achievements over the past six months.

My name is Pierre Dandjianou, VP in charge of Stakeholder Engagement, specifically in Africa. And today, we're having kind of a quick meeting to be reporting back to you in terms of what we do call the Africa Strategy, the strategy that you actually help us develop. But also, which is one of the what we might call the tool that we use as ICANN to deliver the many objectives that we agreed on in our documents.

And we'll be having our welcoming remarks, and we do have our executives, we have a Board member, and I would like to really recognize all of you, and thank you very much for attending to this, because it's also good to also hear from you what you might be expecting from the community here. So, thank you very much.

Note: The following is the output resulting from transcribing an audio file into a word/text document. Although the transcription is largely accurate, in some cases may be incomplete or inaccurate due to inaudible passages and grammatical corrections. It is posted as an aid to the original audio file but should not be treated as an authoritative record.

Of course, Sally Costerton, which is our Director, also will be giving her remarks. Board member Catherine will be representing the Board here. And then for our technical engagement, Adiel Akplogan, whom you know, he is on his way, he'll also joined us. So, with that if, I would like to hand over to Sally. Sorry for that. So, Catherine will start first and then we'll continue. So, Catherine, please.

CATHERINE ADEYA

Welcome all of you. Here in the African space, today I want to start off by honoring the memory of a great African, my colleague on the ICANN board, representing the ASO, Alan Barrett. This is a man who played a foundational role in shaping the Internet in Africa and beyond for 30 years. Alan had an unwavering dedication in all he did. Africa was always close to his heart. And if you remember, he was always here in the Africa space.

Africa was close to his heart, and in our deliberations in the Board and beyond, Alan always thought of Africa. So, I would like you to join me and stand up for a minute of silence to honor Alan's memory. And I'll say in Zulu, hambakale, Alan, go well. Thank you. So, we say hambakale, hambakale, Alan. Go well. And we also want to remember somebody else. It's not the longevity of life that we look at, but the deeds and the impact somebody has left behind.

Arinola Akinyemi is no longer with us, but ICANN has had the privilege of benefiting from her dedication as a tireless advocate for small businesses, widening access in the digital economy, and

more recently, she served diligently as a delegate to the to the NomCom, a steady contributor to the GNSO.

Let us take a moment to reflect on the privilege of knowing Ari, as some of us knew her, Arinola, keep her family and her friends in prayer. So, join me again, let's stand up for a minute of silence as we remember Ari. Thank you, everyone. And I don't think I want to say anything after that.

PIERRE DANDJINOU

Thank you, thank you very much. And obviously, Alan was one of the doers in our community. And may his soul rest in peace. Now I'll hand over to Sally for her welcoming remarks, please.

SALLY COSTERTON

Thank you, Catherine. Thank you for those very lovely words. I think they were very meaningful and it's very difficult for us to carry on in ways without these people but we have each other and it is always a great pleasure for me to be here with you. We are doing so much important work in Africa.

It keeps on growing, we keep on going, we have a lot more to do, but your hard work and your dedication in this Africa space, those of you who are in Africa and are Africans, but so many others from our community who participate in your work and I hope support you, I want you to know that this is an incredibly important priority. It's one of our organizational goals for ICANN. Our Coalition for Digital Africa, our work in Africa, remains a very high priority.

So, this session is partly to understand from each other, to catch up, what have we been doing, what have we achieved, but also to hear from you. So, I don't want to take too much time because I know time is short. But this has been a period where we've had a deep commitment to implementing the ICANN community's mandate, particularly with regard, as you know, to the work we've done ahead of the opening of the next round of New gTLDs.

And for those of you who don't know me, I lead ICANN's Stakeholder Engagement and Pierre works with me in that work with his team. And many of you led by his team and helped by his team have helped to raise awareness in Africa about the opportunities that this new round offers to African entrepreneurs and communities and individuals, and particularly the work around the Applicant Support Program where we have engaged in a very extensive outreach program to try to get to as many communities and groups as we can to explain to them how ICANN can help them to get into this exciting new world of becoming a registry.

So, we shall see over the coming weeks and months how that goes and how many Africans apply for top-level domains. We've continued to implement the plan, our FY26 plan, which many of you have contributed to. We've closed a series of important flagship projects under the CDA. And I wanted to give you just a couple of examples before we go to the presentation of the plan, which I'm very proud of.

So, we have really expanded our partnership with the Lusophone countries, the Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe with the cemented in the partnership, our new partnership with LUSNIC, an enormous focus on capacity development projects in these countries. This is so critical to get our stakeholders, our government stakeholders, our new participants, comfortable and clear about what they can benefit from becoming part of ICANN.

More Root Zone signing under the DNS set track. Four new countries active. Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Nigeria, ongoing support to Cape Verde and Uganda and Ivory Coast to the second level. This is exciting to see. New L-root servers, these are ICANN's mirror L-root servers, I think most of you know, have increased with two more incidents in the recent time frame in Libya, hosted by ISOC Libya, and one instance in South Africa, hosted by DNS PTY. And with regard to our IXP work stream, we've supported restarting or strengthening with our partners, five national IXPs in Benin, Gabon, Madagascar, Malawi and Rwanda, producing measurable increases in technical capacity and resilience and local interconnection.

We're really happy that we can see these concrete steps forward of the work we're doing together in ICANN and with our technical ecosystem and government partners in Africa. This is an increasingly important part of showing how ICANN can support Africa's rapid digital growth and its unique digital transformation journey. Thank you for that. Let's keep going together. We're

making fantastic progress. It's an enormous continent and there is always a lot more to do. With that, back to you, Pierre.

PIERRE DANDJINO

Thank you very much, Sally. And I would like to really thank you for the support that we have, the team in Africa. And thanks very much for your, how should I say, interest in what we are doing and we really appreciate that. Adiel is on the way because he was actually in another meeting, but he will be coming here soon. So, I think I will just let Catherine, her part, before we start with the presentation. So, Catherine.

CATHERINE ADEYA

Thank you. Yes, I was supposed to have given some welcoming remarks, but I wanted just a moment of silence for myself as well. But we welcome you all to this African space, and it's always a joy to see so many of you. But I wanted to also recognize my colleagues who are here in the board. Raul from Uruguay is here in the Africa space. Christian Kaufmann representing the ASO AC. I wouldn't say where you come from. And Dave.

So, you can see more and more board members are coming in. The Africa space is recognized and it's important. And we are looking forward to hearing about the key achievements in your 2026 implementation plan. I've seen a lot that's happening in Africa. I've attended a few events. And ICANN is getting more and more known, and we still have an opportunity to do much more.

And, of course, looking forward to your FY2027. I don't want to repeat what Sally has said, but please know Africa is very much in the agenda even in the board meetings. And all the work that is happening here trickles down to the board, so trust me, we are heard. So, let's take this opportunity. Thank you very much. And Pierre, you can go on.

PIERRE DANDJINOU

Thank you, Catherine, for those words. And now we'll be having a quick presentation on the achievement of FY26. And then we'll have also an opportunity to hear from you, any questions or comments you might have. I think the presentation should be up now, but one or two things to say quickly about what we are delivering in Africa.

Just to bear in mind that we do have what we call the Africa Strategy for 2026 to 2030, which is a five-year plan, which basically is at par with the ICANN Org strategy itself. And we do have a few objectives. And the good thing here is that that strategy, you contributed to it last year. So, whatever is there is what you required us to do, and we've been doing this.

And the second part of it is the Coalition for Digital Africa, which also came as a vehicle for us to be delivering concrete activities in Africa. So, two-pronged approach to what we are delivering in Africa, what we call the Africa Strategy and also the CDA. I hope the presentation up there, but maybe quickly to say that whatever we

are doing, of course, follow the different objectives that have been set up there.

And hopefully, one of the objectives, of course, boils down to -- It's coming, come here. So that quickly comment this and not take much time. But suffice to say that we do have this, we selected four of those objectives out of 15 of them. And basically, for us, it boils down to the whole technical aspect of the thing. We concentrate on the DNS, for instance.

Most of the things we do basically is about the DNSSEC, about the security and safety of the whole domain name system in Africa. We will be working with African ccTLDs to make sure that this is managed properly. We have a few figures that five countries over the year have been able to actually sign their zone file.

We are now proceeding to support the validation process of all of this, taking some time, taking some expertise. But the good thing is that now we are having a very interesting proportion of African ccTLDs that has signed their zone file. We now need to further work with the ISPs to be able to broaden the scope of this. Welcome.

The other thing is that we were able to also establish what we do call the copies of the root servers. You certainly know about them. The instances were quite important. Apart from the big sort of installation that we had in Nairobi and also Egypt, which are kind of clusters or servers, we are now having some sort of individual ones in different places.

This year, we had, I think, six of them, six countries that received, and we also launched a second part of this one to be having maybe four additional countries over FY27. So, this is for the [00:17:41 – inaudible] instances, and you will see that when you are really focusing on this, you are kind of ameliorating the accessibility from the different places.

A good thing with the servers, for instance, the cluster was that the impact was quite straightforward in terms of the data traffic that we did have, reducing the mileage of this data traffic, which usually go up and then back down to Africa. You can see that at least from Kenya, we observed that one, that now the local data now is being sort of trafficking locally, which is why we did this.

The other thing is also about the ISPs program that we launched with ISOC. We concluded this one last October, and we are also in the process of having certainly another batch of these ISPs. ISPs are quite also important on national levels and it's about internet exchange points that many countries are requesting for.

So, that is also one of the concrete things that we are able to achieve. Details anyway are there, and then you have, I can see the links, over there on the strategy, so I'm not going to get into details, we don't have much time. Maybe one of the highlights, I would also like to give here is what we started recently, working with ITU and ATU, Africa Telecommunication Union, to really develop capacity, and basically for government, also for the regulators, GAC

members, and my colleagues from GE. Laurent is around, will be talking about this one.

We also do have partnership with Smart Africa. Certainly, there are things to be cited there that we are doing closely with them. So, I'm already talking about the CDA, which is this vehicle that we started three years ago, which specifically is delivering a few things in Africa. But the basic of it is about partnership. We are not doing these things alone. We are now partnering with 12 different institutions and organizations that are sharing the views or the vision that we have for this CDA.

It's basically about what we are calling the accessibility, because in Africa this is the first thing to talk about. And also, the inclusion or inclusiveness of the whole thing, that's why we have a big focus on universal acceptance. Many capacity development workshops have been conducted. And thank, by the way, to you for your contribution to the UA days that we did have. These are good operations. These are kind of raising awareness.

But now we want concretely to be doing a few things with you. Let me quickly cite also what has been done with the Association of African Universities, whereby we are in touch with almost 400 universities and research centers in Africa to make sure that the system is at par with the universal acceptance. But one thing to note also is this curricula that we developed. And I would like to thank our colleague, taking care of the universal acceptance functions within ICANN.

And I see the director around. So, now we are having pilots in four universities in Africa to deliver this UA curricula. And it's something that's going to make a difference. The next layer is going to be UA for business and industry in Africa. The concept paper is there and we are already trying to have the appropriate partners to be able to get into that one. Because now you are talking about the software, the engineering system, and all of this which also could benefit Africa.

Apart from that, we also have been working on supporting your different meetings in Africa. We are part of the Africa Internet Summit, for instance, that we do sponsor, that we contribute to the IGF, the regional one, for instance, and the continental. We are really supporting and we also welcome your contribution to all of this. One thing I would like to say before I stop and give you the possibility for intervening is that the CDA, for instance, the Coalition for Capacity Development has become one of our flagships, I would say initiative.

And we are blessed that this is happening in Africa because it really helps us really show what we can deliver within ICANN and what concretely can really make a difference in the different places. Of course, we would like to be also having more and more partners around this and also hearing more about you. One or two things basically about the strategies that we are about to launch, the FY27 operation plan, the strategy, we will let you know exactly what you have.

We will give you the different sort of references to that strategy document so that you can really follow up with us. But most importantly, I would like you to also be participating. I see some of you are participating. For what we did with ITU and ATU, which is a great example on how different institutions are joining forces around this idea of ICANN to really impact the digital transformation in Africa.

I think Laurent will have time to just share with you what we started and with countries now coming forward with their own sort of requests. He will have one or two minutes to touch upon this also. Most of the things we do also, we rely on the support of our colleagues from technical engagement. And welcome to Adiel, who is going to have also a few minutes to make his remarks. Let me stop here and of course, let Adiel quickly provide his remarks before we now enter into questions and answers part of our quick meeting here. So, Adiel, please.

ADIEL AKPLOGAN

Thank you, Pierre. Thank you for inviting me and sorry for being late. I was caught in another meeting at the last minute. It has always been a pleasure for me and my team to support the Africa strategy when it comes to technical aspects of the strategy overall, focusing mostly on capacity building and supporting different stakeholders in the region to improve local resilience but also improve participation and visibility at the global level.

Over the past few years, we have, based on the strategy that comes from the region, refocused our engagement on the technical side specifically from the capacity building and support side to getting closer and closer to actors on the ground. Working with the Global Engagement Team, Pierre's team, we have been able, over the past years, to improve the way we support local operators, starting from the CC to ISPs.

And ISPs have been one group that we have worked more with. As you know, one of the aspects of ICANN technical capacity building is around DNS operation, DNS resilience, and including that was DNSSEC. Over the past year, we have focused on signing the ccTLD in the country, but to involve the ISPs, we also focus on the validation aspect because it's good to sign, but if nobody's validating, it doesn't make any sense.

And those two aspects have been working together hand-in-hand in the way we engage. Based on that more proximity approach last year, we have run more than 42 different capacity buildings, hands-on capacity buildings in the region. And on top of that, we have had over 60 one-on-one engagements with different operators to work with them to either solve some of the issue they're having in implementing validation that's from the ISP side or with ccTLD in their journey to sign their zone.

And around 10 to 15 percent of those engagements were done under the CDA umbrella where all the rest were direct engagement with the community. Our approach to the DNS in the region is

beyond just the DNSSEC and signing and validation, as I mentioned, but looking globally at the DNS ecosystem and how we can work with different actors, including government actors in country, to ensure that the DNS infrastructure, locally, regionally or sub-regionally, are well designed, operationally resilient, providing a stable digital environment for economies in the country.

And that approach has helped us broaden a little bit the way we approach the DNS resiliency issue. So, when we go to country, not only we talk with the operators, but we also talk with regulators, we talk with government representatives to explain the importance of the DNS, because the DNS is one of the areas that nobody really looks at. But if you look closely, it is one of the critical components of the local infrastructure.

We have also launched, a few years ago, an initiative, the kindness initiative, that we have been using as well as an umbrella of this approach, whereby kindness provides a framework with different best practices that operators can implement.

So that gives us also the opportunity to address the DNS issue more broadly. One of the challenges or the priorities we are trying to tackle now that the maturity level is improving is to move from signing the TLDs to the second level domain, meaning allowing people who actually registered their domain name to also sign, because that's where the gap is now. Now, ccTLDs are signing, but that's not it. Now, when you sign, the actual users of the domain

name are those who are using it to provide service, and they are the ones that signing is critical for.

So, helping those ccTLDs to move one level down the chain and automate that, because it's when you add automation that it makes it more easy for people to do that. So, those are the areas where we will be focusing on working with those ccTLDs that are already signed. I think Pierre mentioned how successful the work that we did through CDA was to get some countries to sign.

So, the next level will be to help them provide the DNS service to their registrants and ensure that they have a reliable infrastructure to automate the signing, to monitor it, and to be able to react quickly when there are incidents. We have been working with other partners in the technical ecosystem as well, the RIR, AFRINIC, ISOC, and others as well, in order to build a bridge between all those different communities around, again, a very resilient and interoperable Internet infrastructure in the region. I will stop there, and we'll be happy to answer any specific questions in that area.

PIERRE DANDJINOU

Thank you. Thank you very much, Adiel, for that. Of course, we don't have much time for the way forward because I really want this to be quite lively and that you'll be having your 10 to 15 minutes for your questions. But suffice to say that we also, in the pipeline, a few projects, one of them is about no internet measurements that we would like to be conducting, of course, in partnership with ISOC and others, AFRINIC and others. That is in the pipes right now.

Maybe in terms of engaging with government, there are a few specifics that we didn't realize. Maybe one minute, Laurent, you wanted to quickly reflect on what we started recently with ITU and ATU. And then the floor will be for our member circle.

LAURENT FERRALI

Yes, thank you very much, Pierre. Yes, indeed. In February 25th, we organized a joint webinar with ATU, ITU, and ICANN. It was a high-level webinar because Dr. Cosmas Zavazavas was on this webinar from the ITU side. From ATU side, it was John Omo, Secretary General. From the ICANN side, Pierre Dandjinou and Janis Karklins. Following this webinar, we had two main objectives for this webinar.

The first one was to showcase what ICANN and the CDA partners achieved over the last three years and launched a call for expression of interest. Following this call, we received six requests. So, six requests have been addressed to ITU and ICANN and ATU. These six requests are mostly about capacity building, and they are covering 30 countries. We received a request from the Economic Community of South Africa State.

We received a request from our colleagues from the CTO who are in the room. Thank you, Leonard. We received a request from Senegal, IRTP. Thank you, Abu Bakri, who is in the room as well. And we received a request from Côte d'Ivoire, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria, NCC.

And we are planning to organize the capacity building activities requested before the ITU Plenipot 2026. Som before the end of October, we will have, I think, ICANN and partners, ITU and ATU, we'll be able to deliver the capacity building activity requested. Thank you.

PIERRE DANDJINOU

Thank you, Laurent, for our specific engaging with governments. And now the floor is yours, and we would like to be hearing from you. We do have 15 minutes for that. So, yes, please kindly introduce yourself.

LEONARD OBONYO

Thank you very much, Pierre and team. My name is Leonard Obonyo from the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organization, CTO. We are grateful for the work that ICANN is doing in the Africa region. The majority of the CTO members come from the African continent. Since we joined the Coalition for Digital Africa, we've been able to work with ICANN on a number of issues.

Like Laurent mentioned, last week we had a webinar with ICANN and ITU on capacity building. We realized a lot of our members are still not participating fully or effectively in the GAC processes. And through this webinar, there was a lot of awareness to encourage GAC participation and also in technical capacity building. Thank you.

PIERRE DANDJINO

Thank you very much. Anyone else? Yes, please, madam.

TINUADE OGUNTUYI

Good morning and thank you. Tinuade Oguntuyi from Nigeria, ICANN86 Fellow. I really appreciated the part where you mentioned the work of the GSC, especially contributions to ISOC and helping with internet exchange points. I can say that from a Nigerian perspective, we are about two terabytes now in ISP traffic and I know South Africa, Kenya and maybe some other countries.

But I remember recently, I was doing a course with Diplo, Diplo Foundation, and we had to explore some of the CSOs on the call, African countries and what ISP is like for them. I was so worried to see, I guess it was Cape Verde or something, they had just five members on the ISP and their traffic was really low. And I thought to myself, if ISPN, where I'm coming from, we have over 100 members, these are also Africans, why are they still traveling this far?

Like you said, because we want to promote more people to use local content, and with traffic traveling, we are actually not achieving this. I am just saying that what is ICANN also doing to help? Because I know, yes, we have achieved in some area, but truly there are still a number of countries in Africa that haven't even gotten there. Perhaps it's technical capacity building that needs to be maybe intensified.

Maybe we should also look at that. I also wanted to talk about, I don't know if this completely relates, but because we are in the African space and I'm speaking as a Fellow, while I came as an ICANN Fellow in Dublin, ICANN84, The same issue we faced as Africans, especially when it comes to visa issuance, I'm saying I don't know if it's within this context, but I'm bringing it up so that we also know this is our reality.

We had a number of Africans that were denied visas, and these are actually opportunities. Yes, I know we say it's hybrid, but walking in the corridors, talking to people, yesterday Mr. Adiel was addressing us, I could stand up, meet him, get his card. But maybe somebody joining remotely, not even having a good internet connection, will not be able to experience this and they are putting a lot of work.

Same with this ICANN86. In fact, the Paul Muchene awardee couldn't come because they denied her visa. She appealed and nothing. And I mean, it's a growing concern. And I think personally, I should bring it to the fore. Thank you so much.

PIERRE DANDJINOU

Thank you very much. We will be having appropriate answers to you. Let's take questions first and then, yeah, please.

FIONA ASONGA

Morning, everyone. Dr. Fiona Asonga from TESPOK Kenya. I would like to challenge ICANN just in view of the last statement that the

last speaker presented on the floor, we have an office for ICANN in Nairobi. What is the strategy for ICANN on making sure that that office is well resourced so that it's able to provide the African region with all the services that we need for Africa because our visa issues are unique for our region and they are not even the same across the board.

Different African countries are handled differently and therefore attention needs to be paid to the different countries, and even when we look at issues of connectivity and everything happening within our African space, it's not uniform. How does ICANN propose to support the region? What is the strategic plan for supporting the region in everything that we need to do within the ICAN space through that office? Thank you.

PIERRE DANDJINOU

Thank you very much. Okay, yeah, I mean, these are quite interesting questions, and then the answers also are going to be given to you. So, Sally and Catherine offer to provide some responses to that. Thank you. Sally, you want to start?

SALLY COSTERTON

Okay. Thank you for very important questions. Thank you for raising these issues. Thank you. There are two related but separate points. One is about the ability of African ICANN community members to get visas to come to ICANN meetings. This is the point you raised. And the second, which Fiona raised, is the role, what

can we do through our team in Nairobi to provide broad support in different areas to our community members, which would include visas.

So, I'll take the visa issue first, because it is different. Some of you, many of you know in the room, my team also includes the ICANN meetings team and we spent a lot of time looking for venues around the world, increasingly now, I'm happy to say, further in advance, which I know everybody wants, where we can do an ICANN meeting. And some of you will know that it may surprise you, how difficult it is to find a suitable location for an ICANN meeting, anywhere, that allows us to also rotate around the world so that we take ICANN meetings to our regional stakeholders.

I won't talk about the elements of that now, but you can see more on our website, and if anybody wants to have a separate conversation with me about that, I'm very happy to arrange that. Now, one of the criteria we have, we have eight key criteria for agreeing a location, saying it's suitable. Now, the obvious one is there has to be a venue that we can use, and ICANN's meeting requirements are very unusual because we run so many sessions in parallel.

So, a lot of conference centers who have big spaces, but they're not designed to take multiple streams. And you'd be surprised, there's far fewer of those than you would imagine. I'm looking at Aziz there because he was hosted us in Marrakesh. And even there, we only had one hotel and that is now being redeveloped. So, it's tough.

But once we found a location and it's in a country in the right region, then the second criteria is, are we going to be able to get visas for our delegates?

We also look at flights. If we look at the pattern of our attendees and we obviously know a lot about that, we have a lot of data going back for a decade about the pattern of ICANN travel to ICANN meetings, of delegate travel to ICANN meetings, and we look at the different flight schedules and options, and we try to ensure that we don't pick a venue where we minimize the amount of changes that people are going to have to make on flights.

So, now I want to address the visa issue, Now, we talk to the local, assuming we addressed all those other issues, how are we going to make sure that we can get visas? Now, some countries offer us far fewer -- start again, some countries are much better than others at offering broad-based visas and you want those two things to go together. So, you've got to have the right location. You've got to have the right flight access and the other eight criteria.

But you have to then be able to be confident that your local government is going to be able to issue, and this is what I know Catherine is going to talk about now, a host letter. So, the key to this is, unfortunately, ICANN as an organization has no agency to issue visas. We have nothing. We can work with the local government and we need to try and find locations with governments that have as broad a base as possible and a history of

offering visas to different African countries or different countries around the world. But we can't control that process.

What we do do, and I've just been talking to one of our future hosts who's here at the meeting actually, to say can we talk about how we draft the host letter? Because I know, and Catherine is going to talk about that now from her perspective, that is absolutely key, they have to issue a letter. And it has to be relevant for you, it has to work in your country, so maximize your ability to be granted a visa.

The final thing is, what we do do, is we will set up with our host a close partnership with the immigration ministry of the country. Because our host is usually, not always, but a government agency, a ccTLD operator, as they are here. But they are not usually the part of the government that is controlling immigration, which is the bit that issues the visas.

So, in Mumbai, for example, last time, we had extensive meetings, not in Mumbai, but in Delhi with the ministry, but also with the immigration ministry, so that we maximize the government, the host government's overall understanding of what was needed, and we need to do this as far in advance as possible. So, I'm going to ask Catherine to comment on that, and then I'll take your question about the office, Fiona.

CATHERINE ADEYA

Okay. I know your pain because I go through it as well. So, one of the things that I can tell you is I've raised it. It's actually even right at the boardroom now. And we are going to be working closely also with Sally's team. I think to the point that Fiona gave, different countries have different challenges. So, for example, it's easier for a Kenyan to get a visa than a Nigerian in some of the situations. And this is what we are trying to talk about.

So, it's issues of timely documentation. Sometimes it takes even two to three months to get a visa appointment. And I think some of you have been raising and you're getting the letters two weeks to the time, a month to the time. So, some things just have to change in terms of timeliness, host letter quality. What kind of letter are you giving us to take to the embassies?

And that's the other thing we're going to be talking about. And nobody expects ICANN to issue visas. ICANN doesn't, but ICANN should facilitate and facilitate in the way that it's easy to take your documents and somebody will say, oh, you're an ICANN-funded traveler? This is what you need. Hotel bookings and everything else in a timely manner.

So, the issue that is here is timeliness, quality of the letter, and the assistance to get across the line not too late. So, it's at the board level, and I've committed to be one of the people leading this discussion, working closely with management. So, we feel you.

SALLY COSTERTON

Thank you. So, we are deeply aware of the issue. Thank you, Catherine. And this is an ongoing discussion. Fiona, to your broader question, where we have people on the ground in a region, and in this case, we're talking about Kenya, it is in Pierre's region. So, the way the organization provides support is through our coordination between here, well, not here, but the engagement team in Nairobi and Pierre's team in Africa generally, helping the whole organization to understand through me.

I mean, I sit on ICANN's executive team, I report to the CEO, to make sure that we understand specifically what are the priority needs of our community members. So, Catherine's, we've talked about visas, we know that's one. Now we handle that globally and regionally and every country, so we have a support, a facilitation service which we provide you with through our travel support team at an individual level to do what Catherine's saying in terms of actually taking the papers and actually facilitating the process.

Now, the other types of requirements, they depend, some of them are general, so for example, coordinating meetings is one, but it is what I will make sure, based on this conversation, that you and I and Pierre are really clear specifically about what services you feel maybe you're not getting and we can share because we have access to the organization's resources Obviously.

So, if there are gaps in that provision, we need to know what they are. Now, we may not be able to support all of them. We have budget limitations. You understand that. But my priority is that we

understand if there are gaps in being supported and that we know how to address them and that we're having a conversation about that. Okay. Thank you.

PIERRE DANDJINOU

Thank you very much, Sally. There was also a question about ISPs, and Adiel will be responding. But we also have people participating remotely. So, can we check whether we do have anyone up there who wanted to?

UNKNOWN SPEAKER

Thank you, Pierre. Yes, we do have a few questions.

PIERRE DANDJINOU

Okay, yeah, go ahead, yeah.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER

We do have a few questions in the chat and three hands raised. One question is from Marie Makasha [ph] asking the primary barriers to internet access in Africa center on a steep affordability gap driven by high data costs relative to income and expensive entry-level smartphones alongside critical infrastructure shortages like unreliable electricity grids and a lack of fiber connectivity in rural areas. Furthermore, a massive usage gap exists where individuals living within network coverage remain offline due to low digital literacy and a scarcity of localized indigenous language content.

The digital divide is worsened by restrictive government regulations, localized social media taxes, and political internet shutdowns, creating pronounced urban, rural, and gender disparities across the continent. Could the panel make comments upon Internet barriers to access in Africa? The second question is from Stephen Ducky.

Can the team give an update on the ICANN Grant Program in Africa? We only have those two questions and three hands raised. So, I'd like to give Zeinab Mohamed the chance to ask her question. Zeinab.

ZEINAB MOHAMED

Hello, can you hear me? Hello? Can you confirm if you can hear me? So, I will try to be quick to save the time of the panel. This is Zeinab Mohamed, I am a university lecturer from Sudan, and a former ICANN NextGen and a member of ICANN ISOC, Sudan chapter.

My question is how the collaboration of ICANN with other related organizations can help in situations like, for example, we face it in Sudan afterwards, there will be a lot of denying services because of the conflicts that have been going, and that's unfortunately resulting in the shutdown of many services that is essential for the everyday lives. And we acknowledge the effort that has been done through ICANN in the Africa region, but I would like to know if there is more to be done during such situation. Thank you.

PIERRE DANDJINOU

Thank you, Zeinab, but I'm not sure whether we really understand what you said. Could you just type this in the chat eventually or send your response to us? You do have our -- yes, please, and then we will respond earlier on. Do we still have one? And then we go to Adiel. Yes, please.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER

Yes, we do have two more hands raised on the Zoom. Maybe, Pierre, you can guide if they can also give their questions or just write in the chat. Then we continue.

PIERRE DANDJINOU

Thank you very much. If you can just put this on the chart and then we'll go back to you. There was a question on ISPs and the governance issue. Please, Adiel, if you want to.

ADIEL AKPLOGAN

On the question of the ISPs, I think the ISPs are important and they play a very critical role for the residents, but also improving access to local content in countries. ICANN, through particularly in Africa region, through CDA has a track that address exchange point working with ISOC. ISOC is very much at the forefront of promoting exchange points in the region, and we support that initiative because it allows us to deploy the DNS infrastructure in a more stable environment.

What I will say around that as well is that it's hard to compare two countries or different countries around the traffic that they get at the exchange point and the number of people that connect because it all depends on the design in the local infrastructure.

But what we'll keep saying and keep promoting through our engagement initiative is the importance to look at the Internet infrastructure and its resilience, its efficiency more globally, looking at the different elements, including the exchange point, and putting the emphasis on the fact that operators in countries have to learn how to work together because that's also an important aspect of it.

ICANN can push as much as it can through different partnerships, but if there is no vibrant ecosystem at the local level, it's hard to implement some aspect of that, and the exchange points are one of them, right? Operators have to agree to pair locally, have to understand the economics of pairing at the local level.

And there are other initiatives like the Africa Pairing Forum that now has been regionalizing and even localizing, which is a good forum for ISP actually to learn and actually to hear from people who have been working in the pairing environment, because understanding the importance of ISPs comes from understanding the economics of pairing.

So, promoting as well as operators or as actors in different countries, promoting the pairing forum, I think it's a way of encouraging more development of pairing. In my intervention

earlier, I talked about what we are doing. I want also to highlight something that we have been promoting and where we will need support from you as well is that, as you know, we have a research department that works a lot on different aspects.

One of the research work that we have done recently is the use of open resolver globally. And that study has given us some interesting data points. And one of the things that we have been doing also in collaboration with Pierre's team is to attend local events and being able to talk to ISPs directly. Why? Because we are measuring some aspect of how ISPs and how local users are reacting or interacting with public resolver.

And what we are seeing, we want to talk to those ISPs to actually understand what we are seeing and why things are reflecting the way we see it. Because we can measure from outside, but being able to have on the ground practical explanation of what is happening is important. So, that is an opportunity to also work with our research team, for those who are interested in research, to advance our understanding of the environment.

I will finish by saying not everything is black in the region. We have success, and I think we also need to celebrate some of the success. Over the past four years, on the DNS environment, we have seen more than 30% growth, both in signing of ccTLDs, adoption of DNSSEC, and also validation. I think those are things that are encouraging, to see that even it may look slow, but the region is getting better and better, the maturity is coming because we all

start understanding how critical those infrastructures are on our economic development.

PIERRE DANDJINOU

Thank you, Adiel. Now we are at risk of being put out of this room, because we passed the hour. Yes, yes. Let's take two quick questions. Yes, we start with you.

LAURENT NTUMBA

Thank you very much. My name is Laurent Ntumba. I am a board member of AFRNIC and chairperson of ISPA DRC. First, I need to thank the community and ICANN for supporting AFRNIC on everything you see in the last past years. And we want to thank you on that and ask you to continue to support because it's not finished. We need to continue. We are on the way.

Actually, in this room, we are three board members here. It's Africa also. But my concern today is ISP in Central Africa. As you know, that Internet in Africa is especially working from the private sectors, and I agree on the way you say you need to talk directly with ISP because the ISP is the one that will make the internet working in that region. Very important. And my concern is let us try as also AFRNIC starting to build capacity, but ICANN, let us build capacity in Africa.

Because the government is working, but Internet is a private sector, is ISP, and we need to focus on that way, build capacity, so we will have the real problem, and we can face that problem, and give

solution. And you see that after a few years, we can have a very good resolution. Today in Central Africa, as ISPA DRC, we have three exchange points, but we get support from ISOC to build that and other support.

But it's really very important. Today we have too much capacity building locally. Just asking the community, asking ICANN to support this kind of effort, especially in Central Africa where we are very late, and if you see, using the research, you will see that in Africa, our region, we have less than 5% of resource. So, please, let us build capacity. Let us see if we can have more resource and push the people to work and see the future. Thank you very much.

PIERRE DANDJINOU

Thank you very much. And then the very, very last one, and we'll close. Over there, please.

SAMWEL KARUIKI

Thank you very much. My name is Samwel Kariuki, and I am ICANN86 Fellow. And I would like to ask, due to various challenges we face in Africa, particularly political challenges, what is the role of ICANN in preventing split Internet, particularly in conflict-affected zones or countries? Thank you.

PIERRE DANDJINOU

Straightforward. Anyone want to pick it? Adiel, quickly, maybe in two minutes, we should be finishing.

ADIEL AKPLOGAN

Yeah, on the split Internet, I think there has been a few sessions at previous ICANN meetings to talk and explain our stand on split Internet. As you know, ICANN mission is very limited. We care very deeply about the fragmentation of the underlining infrastructure of the Internet, which means for us, the namespace. space, right?

We want to make sure that the name space remains uniform, remains unique, and that's why we work very hard with different stakeholders to make sure that the DNS run properly so to contain. Beyond that, of course, we know that there are issues in countries where there are temptations to shut down, to close.

Those are different kinds of splits or fragmentation that directly does not touch on ICANN mission, but when we engage locally, we keep advocating for a single interoperable internet, not just because we want the internet to work like that, but also it is an important aspect to support a digital economy.

We think that everyone, every government in every country are very keen about developing their local digital landscape economy, so, keeping the internet open, keeping the landscape interoperable is important to maintain that. That's what I could say at this stage around that, but I don't know if anyone wants to add anything.

PIERRE DANDJINOU

Thank you very much, Adiel. These are quite interesting questions. I would just like also to say that we are having this Africa Internet

Summit in 10 days, those questions also I know are going to be discussed. So, please, you may wish to kind of go to this forum as well. Any words? Okay. So, thank you very much for your time, and our apologies for the interpreters, and we are finished now.

And for the question that we could not really, either because we couldn't understand or we couldn't follow them, please you can always send them to us and we will respond accordingly. So, thanks very much, and a few information we'll be sending them to you. And like Adiel said, also as you know, our remit is something which -- I mean, the DNS is fine for us. The shutdown and all of these things is not precisely what we deal with for instance. For that, let me close.

Yes. Oh, okay. Another specific session which is going to be the group photo outside. So, please, let's make sure that we have this photo outside. Are you taking us? Okay, please. Sorry. Oh, yes. Yeah, there's a group photo just outside. Please. So, thank you.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]