What is Africa Strategy Working Group?

At the 45th meeting held in Toronto, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) unveiled the Africa Strategy Working Group (ASWG) interim plan.

The interim plan is expected to underscore ICANN's new approach to Africa under new president and CEO, Fadi Chehade. Africa is one of the five regions of ICANN but has not been actively participating because of low internet penetration issues and poor growth of internet business models.

The working group was formed in June this year, at the request of Chehade, and is comprised of a group of leading experts on Africa technology and policy. The group is tasked with developing a 3year strategic plan with clear goals for Africa, which will be incorporated into the wider ICANN strategic plan.

By December this year, the Working Group is expected to:

- Develop a strategic plan for ICANN's activities in Africa addressing the needs for presence in Africa, Africa participation and representation in ICANN

- Determine how best to reach out to governments, private sector, civil society, academia and others from Africa for increased participation of Africans in ICANN. Governments have a significant influence in internet development in Africa.

- Identify education and technology needs of the region that ICANN may be able to assist with.

- Formulate an ICANN regionalization program to Africa and why, when and how to accomplish it.

- Develop a clear 3 year strategy and a concrete plan for the first 12 months with clearly stated objectives, timelines, role/responsibilities, governance and metrics by which we can measure success.

According to the outline presented by Pierre Dandjinou, a member of the Working Group, the foreseen threats are, governments involvement, weak ICT infrastructure, unstable political economy, resistance of governments to multi-stakeholder model, poor or inadequate representation of ICANN in Africa and linguistic barriers among other challenges.

The recommendations from the SWOT analysis conducted on the civil society, business and government are that; Africa should be treated as a specific internet ecosystem, build African entrepreneurship in the domain names area and increase current translation of ICANN'S document in different languages.

Also, there is need to set up an internet foundation for developing countries (Africa), promote business development incubators, ensure a physical presence to conduct outreach to policy makers, establish ICANN's ambassador program in all regions of Africa to ensure adequate representation and commit to a study on feasibility of a domain name industry in Africa.

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