

# ICANN80 POLICY FORUM 2024

10th and 13th of June, Kigali- Ruanda



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## ICANN80 POLICY FORUM.... ... WE WERE THERE!

Rwanda hosted the ICANN Policy Forum for the first time in its capital, Kigali. It is a country whose (very) recent past is marked by violence, discrimination and human tragedy. The marks of the genocide that decimated the country in 1994 are still visible today. In a country with a population of around 14 million people, were shown an Internet penetration rate of just over 30%. Digital is starting to be a priority among many others, but the road is still long. Even so, Rwanda captivated us with its organization, sense of community and, above all, humanism, reflected – and only as an example – in the mantra that seems to guide the course of the country, and the lives of Rwandans, and that deserves reflection from all of us: **“Forgive, to continue”**.

It was between the 10th and 13th of June that Kigali hosted the 80th edition of the Policy Forum, which had 109 sessions, 1581 participants (957 in person and 624 online), representing 123 countries/territories.

Numbers aside, this edition of the Policy Forum was undoubtedly marked by the announcement of the **new President and CEO of ICANN**, Kurt Erik “Kurtis” Lindqvist, an industry leader, with more than



30 years of career in the ISP's (Internet Service Providers) market and extensive experience within the ICANN community. Kurt Erik will succeed the interim President, Sally Costerton, and will take office on December 5, 2024. By this time, the new President will have one year of implementing the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan ahead, but will also have the draft version new Strategic Plan 2026-2030, whose pillars, objectives and proposed KPIs were presented in this meeting, in the session “ccNSO: What Are ccTLD Relevant Aspects in FY26-30 Strat Plan?”.

What we interestingly observed - and which we will try to demonstrate below - is that the strategic pillars of this Plan are, in fact, very aligned with the main issues addressed and widely debated during the Policy Forum, and which, naturally, mirror those that are current and future domain name industry concerns. The draft of the **ICANN Strategic Plan**, now presented to the community for discussion, begins by presenting a new, simpler and more concise vision, which combines the organization's core function with its fundamental purpose. *"As the trusted steward of the Internet's unique identifier systems, ICANN is dedicated to strengthening the single, globally interoperable Internet for all".*

The first pillar of the 2026-2030 Strategic Plan proposal is – as expected – ***"Sustain and promote ICANN's Multistakeholder Model, an inclusive Internet Governance model"***.

The defense of the multistakeholder model (MSM) of Internet governance was a constant throughout the Policy Forum, with several sessions dedicated to debating this important topic for the technical community, including the session organized by the GAC "Navigating the Multistakeholder Approach: The ICANN Community's Role in Global Internet Governance", which left a positive feeling of *deja vu* given the debate that took place during Net Mundial+10<sup>1</sup>, and

the ccNSO session "How ccTLDs Contribute to a Better World", during which Sally Costerton warned for the need not to take this model for granted and recalled that ccTLD's have a crucial role in defending the MSM within their communities. This role materializes, for example, in participation in international and national discussions on the topic, clarifying decision-makers about its importance and highlighting how the good and correct functioning of the Internet depends on it. In this regard, it was also during this session that the paper [\*"Towards WSIS+20: The GDC, SDGs, and Why They Matter to ccTLDs"\*](#), prepared by ICANN's ccNSO Internet Governance Liaison Committee (IGLC) was formally presented to the community, and which describes the steps that ccTLD's can take to participate in ongoing global digital governance processes, particularly those triggered within the United Nations (UN), within the scope of WSIS+20 and the Global Digital Compact (GDC). .PT was one of the writers of this paper. This framework, combined with the (multistakeholder) nature, mission and responsibilities of an organization such as ICANN, fully justify, in our opinion, the option for this first pillar.

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<sup>1</sup> See article [\*"Netmundial: 10 years later"\*](#)

The second pillar of the proposed Strategic Plan 2026-2030 is ***“Enhance Organizational Excellence”***, through the focus on financial sustainability, the assumption of environmental responsibility, and the promotion of the presence and global impact of ICANN's activity. The importance of complying, by 2030, with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), launched by the UN, was a constant in several sessions of the Policy Forum, through which ccTLD's, gTLD's and registrars had the opportunity to share the initiatives they have been developing, and which they will continue to promote, to contribute to achieving the SDGs. The French registry emphasized the support of around 1.5 million euros to 87 national initiatives, between 2012 and 2023, largely focused on training young people and SMEs. It was clear that the community is increasingly aware of its environmental responsibility and the importance of its contribution to changing the status quo and, for this reason, “ecological responsibility” could not fail to appear in ICANN's Strategic Plan. On the other hand, the latest data related to the global domain name market<sup>2</sup> reveals a gradual, transversal and constant deceleration in the number of new domain names registered and the revenue generated, consequently, for both ccTLD's and gTLD's. This circumstance is no longer timidly assumed by the main DNS players, and there is now a recognition that the trends that the market reveals will require this community to adapt and be more agile to guarantee



its financial support in the short and medium term.

The third pillar of the Strategic Plan 2026-2030 proposal is ***“Collaborate with relevant stakeholders to evolve the Internet's unique identifier systems”***, contributing to digital inclusion through the promotion of Universal Acceptance (UA) and a culture that promotes innovation, competition and freedom of choice for consumers, constantly following technological developments.

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<sup>2</sup> [CENTRstats TLD Report](#)



Multilingualism and UA – technical compliance best practice, which advocates that all valid domain names and email addresses, regardless of script, language or character length, should be equally used by all applications, devices and systems that connect to the Internet - were addressed in several sessions of the Policy Forum, revealing a high level of interest and concern among the community regarding digital exclusion motivated by the (technical) exclusion of different languages and alphabets of the Domain Name System (DNS) and email system. As an example, in the session “At-Large AFRALO<sup>3</sup>: Building a Multilingual Internet: Opportunities and Challenges”, the results of a survey carried out among members of this organization were presented, which revealed that 59.3% consider that UA is fundamental to ensuring a level of equitable treatment in the sphere of domain names, 44.4% consider that the current technical infrastructure of the Internet poorly supports UA, and 63% consider that UA is essential to guarantee the digital inclusion of millions of users in Africa. In recent years, ICANN has launched several projects and initiatives that aim, precisely, to disseminate and defend UA among the top-level domains, but there is clearly still a long way to go, so the definition of this strategic objective seems aligned with the needs of the DNS community. One of the purposes of this initiative is precisely to increase the number of registrations, be more competitive, and reach new audiences. The

barriers result from the fact that the registries have other priorities, but also from the fact that the relevance of the UA is clearly unknown.

In terms of collaboration, ICANN has largely invested in the African continent, with the launch of the **Coalition for Digital Africa**, of which LusNIC is an active part, bringing African Lusophone countries to the technical training actions developed in this context.



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<sup>3</sup>African Regional At-Large Organization.

The fourth and final pillar of the proposed Strategic Plan 2026-2030 is **“Strengthen the security of the unique identifier system”**, which presupposes a reinforcement of the shared responsibility for guaranteeing the security and stability of the DNS, for example, through identifying and mitigating (cyber)security threats. This strategic pillar is fully aligned with the changes advanced by ICANN, and in force since last April, to the Registry Agreements (RA) and Registrar Accreditation Agreement (RAA), which standardized the concept of DNS Abuse – use of DNS for the dissemination of malware, phishing, pharming, botnets and/or spam, when it serves as a mechanism for propagating other forms of DNS Abuse - and new responsibilities for mitigating qualified DNS Abuse situations were introduced. As well explained in the session “ccNSO: The RA & RAA Amendments, What Can ccTLDs Learn?”, with the recent review of the RA and RAA *“registrars must promptly take the appropriate mitigation action(s) that are reasonably necessary to stop, or otherwise disrupt, the registered name from being used for DNS Abuse, while registries must take the appropriate mitigation action(s) that are reasonably necessary to contribute to stopping, or otherwise disrupting, the domain names from being used for DNS Abuse”*.

It should be noted, however, that there was no intention by ICANN to include *“online illegal content”*, in the concept of DNS Abuse, which so



many advocates should be included here. Recognizing its powers and limitations, as well as those of registries and registrars, ICANN gives strong indications of wanting to continue to move away from assuming responsibilities in terms of identifying and removing illegal content online. This understanding was even reiterated in Kigali in a very important announcement by the ICANN board that has decided that its bylaws do not allow it to enforce any contractual commitments that involve content regulation and put an end to the proposal presented by some candidates for the new round of delegation of gTLD's, which intended to allow governments in the

In the **contexto dos gTLD's**, the second round was presented in this edition, the registration phase of which is estimated for the second four months of 2026. At this moment, the support program for the registration process, ASP (Applicant Support Program), has already been prepared, without restrictions of access at a geographic level, although largely directed towards the Global South. In financial terms, an update on the value of the application is expected, which is estimated to be around 200,000USD.

However, as conveniently highlighted in the “Geopolitical, Legislative, and Regulatory Developments Update” session, cybersecurity, the protection of industrial property rights online and the defense of consumer rights in the digital environment continue and will continue to be among the most “hot topics” of the current global legislative and regulatory issues, especially for ccTLD's which, as well mentioned in one of the sessions in Kigali, *“for ccTLD's managers the necessity to balance internacional standards with local realities is paramount”*. For all that has been said, we do not believe that any other solution is possible other than the inclusion of these themes in ICANN's next Strategic Plan.

As we had the opportunity to mention, the first draft of the FY26-30 ICANN Strategic Plan was presented in Kigali and has already been

submitted for comments and contributions from ccNSO members. *The Board Strategic Planning Committee (BSPC)* will then review this first draft, considering the contributions already received, and will submit a new version for public consultation, between July and September, when all interested parties will have the opportunity to comment on ICANN's strategic pillars and objectives for the next four years. The Plan should be adopted between December 2024 and January 2025, however, even after its adoption, it will continue to be reviewed, and its execution analyzed annually, thus seeking to ensure greater transparency and efficiency in its application.

Continuaremos atent@s!

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Note: ICANN80 [“GAC Communique”](#), published on 17.6.2024.

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