

REPORT OF THE UGANDA INTERNET GOVERNANCE ONLINE DISCUSSIONS 2009

Introduction

This report presents a synopsis of the online discussions held during April and May 2009 as part of the lead-up to the 2009 Uganda National Internet Governance Forum (IGF). The discussions were primarily conducted on the I-Network discussion group.

The Objectives of the online consultations were to:

- Raise awareness in Uganda of the Internet Governances (IG) issues at the global level;
- Review last year's country positions on IG in light of new developments; and
- Build national consensus and new positions regarding IG issues

As was the case last year, the national IG online discussions were part of a regional exercise, which will culminate into the second East African Internet Governance Forum (EAIGF). This report will inform discussions at a face-to-face IG meeting in Kampala, Uganda, during August 2009, and together with the deliberations of that meeting will feed into the 2009 EAIGF. The idea of the IGF is to popularise IGF issues and to galvanise critical regional issues, which are then elevated to the global Internet Governance Forum.

Status of the internet in Uganda

According to Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), the Regulator, an increasing number of Ugandans are accessing the Internet. In a recent market update, the Regulator reported that there was continued growth in mobile wireless internet access, with a total of 214,293 active accounts reported by the end of December 2008 compared to 166,621 in the previous quarter. Fixed line internet subscription was estimated at 22,000; while the number of internet users was estimated to be 2.5 million.¹

Most internet users in the country continue to suffer low speeds and high costs. There are also constant complaints about other aspects of the quality of services offered by some providers. A reduction in costs and an improvement in the surfing experience are highly anticipated by consumers, as a result of the landing of the marine fibre at the east coast of Africa.

Key issues emerging from the discussions

The Uganda online IG discussions were guided by some of the issues which emerged at the national face-to-face consultations last year and others that came up at the EAIGF in Nairobi. The discussions also took cognisance of the developments and discussions which had been held by the internet/ ICT fraternity in the months preceding the discussions.

¹ Uganda Communications Commission, *Market Review December 2008*, published 2009; see ucc.co.ug

A key objective of this year's IG discussions was to focus on consolidating the understanding of the priority issues and to state positions that may have been previously ambiguously defined.

To recap, during the discussions of 2008, the main issues identified included improving access and affordability, control of the national code top-level domain ccTLD (.UG), interception of communication and its implications on freedom of expression and on the 'public good'; control of spam and pornography; the need for cyber laws; and promotion of local content/Ugandan languages on the Internet.

From the 2009 discussions, the following emerged as some of the major issues in Uganda:

Issue 1) need to continue the IGF debate

One of the issues that were discussed was whether Uganda needed to continue debating IG issues. This was partly to establish whether the Ugandan ICT community considered it a useful exercise to continue with such discussions, or felt enough had been said on the issue. Secondly, in the face of the past three global Internet Governance Forums, debate has been ongoing on how to proceed with the debate, including the global meeting, and other policy and advocacy efforts.

As far as the Ugandan discussions were concerned, opinion was expressed that at the global level debate was continuing about the need for equitable distribution of IP resources, and for other entities besides ICANN to play a bigger role in how the internet is 'managed'. If Uganda did not actively continue to discuss IG issues and to attempt to represent its interests in such ongoing debates at the international level, no organisation or country would take up the elaboration of those interests.

Some discussants said the debate in Uganda had to continue because it was important for stakeholders in East African to identify priority issues common to the region, which would then be presented to the global IGF.

There was also opinion from many contributors to the effect that the debate had to continue because the issues which had been identified as critical for Uganda were still outstanding. But, to many contributors, the focus should not be so much on who 'manages' the internet as it should on making the internet more accessible, affordable and useful to the majority of Ugandans.

Issue 2) Promoting Access

There was animated debate on what the Government was doing to promote access, as this remains one of the key challenges. In view of the impending landing of the marine cable at Mombasa, and availability of fibre bandwidth in Uganda, discussants wanted to know what was being done by the Government, as well as the private sector and NGOs, to promote the effective utilisation of fibre bandwidth once it becomes available.

Much of the debate centred on the role of the Government, and most contributors felt the Ministry of ICT and other Government departments ought to have done more in way

promoting ICT literacy, piloting ICT4D programmes, enhancing access, and creating fertile ground for the fibre bandwidth to be utilised effectively once it became available.

While the Government was in the process of building a National backbone, there weren't many other tangible things which it had done to enable e-Government and the uptake of (marine) fibre.

Questions were also raised to the effect that whereas the ICT Ministry had so far spent a \$30 million loan for the 1st Phase of the National Backbone, it was not clear how this was utilised, and what the cost-benefit of the 1st Phase was. It was also suggested that there was a lack of effective communication on the part of the ministry regarding the benefits of that project and the plans going forward. There have been questions on how the national fibre would be managed and how it would fit into private sector infrastructure, for instance.

One discussant said that Ugandan ICT fraternity was not too effective at articulating its interests to government. He wrote: "Governments are political machines which like teenagers will follow the fad of the moment. If you notice other issues our governments tend to follow are issues which are supported by donor dollars. IG currently has no donor dollars so for us to bring it to the top of our politicians' minds we have to find how we can creatively give it a spin that makes it politically acceptable and attractive... We have to devise the right incentives to get our politicians to understand what has to be done for Uganda but also Africa to build a sustainable and wholly inclusive ICT environment that embraces and empowers the masses."

Issue 3) Affordability

Extending the reach of infrastructure that guarantees quality and cheaper access is a good point in expanding accessibility. But cost of service is not determined by only infrastructure; there is for instance taxation, labour costs and so on.

It was observed that while implementation of the RCDF policy has generally improved rural access and it is praised as a success worldwide, there were limitations which needed to be revisited to expand and guarantee access for the majority. The very poorest are not yet reached because the policy follows a market model which does not maximise social returns and benefits. "Moreover this policy is totally gender blind, unlike the national ICT policy. In short ICT policies need to be (re)examined in relation to access to the poor and women. Research for instance is showing that men can limit women's use of mobile telephony due to household gender relations," one discussant submitted.

There were also electricity (power) issues. The rural electrification programme still has some hitches and even if it worked, the general supply of electricity power in Uganda is deficient.

Issue 4) Critical Internet Resources (CIRs):

The discussions also dwelt on what Uganda's key CIRs? Those identified included; management of the dot UG and IPv6 transition in Uganda:

a) Management of .UG

The issue of the management of dotUG, the Uganda Country code Top Level Domain, again drew animated discussions. Last year, the national IG workshop agreed that a committee be formed to continue discussions on who should control of the .UG ccTLD, but apparently nothing has been done towards actualising that suggestion.

Opinion was generally divided into two categories. There were those who preferred that the status quo maintained, and then those who proposed changes. In brief, the arguments were as follows:

i) *maintain status quo:*

- “It is not easy to just switch management of such a critical operation into the hands of incompetent Ugandans.”
- “With the level of incompetence at which we Ugandans operate, not even the so-called overseeing board will have the time especially since it would be on a volunteer basis.”
- The current managers have done a splendid job managing the basics of the .UG domain space, at least from the point of view of those of who consume the services. I have listened hard over the years, but failed to understand what the detractors mean by [trying to make the management of .UG] "more transparent" or "more responsive to the concerns of stakeholders".

ii) *Reform management of .UG:*

- The current managers should be allowed to continue but the Government can have one or two staff of the ICT ministry to ensure that the service is provided in the best way possible.
- The Regulator can impose guiding terms of service on the private managers just like they have already done with the telecom companies.
- “The .UG, like any other top-level domain, is too precious to be left under the management of a single entity/ individual. This has nothing to do with the competency or otherwise of the entity/individual. It should be seen from a Risk-perspective angle. In the (un)likely event that such an entity winds up, auctions .UG or simply decides they are moving from managing domains to managing matooke what happens to .UG? By putting the .UG management under an institution, you are basically mitigating such and other risks.” .UG is a national resource (electronic real estate) with high public utility so it need some public say
- As to whether we should follow the Kenyan model, I don’t think it is the best for Uganda. However, as Ugandans, we can come up with a hybrid and formulate something which is best suited to us.

- For sustainability of the resource at a future date, is it not good to place it in some broader institutional framework? Many times it is risky to entrust a resource of high public good in the hands of an individual or private entity.
- For such a business like owning a .UG registry where forever you can never have competitors, it is quite dangerous for an individual (company) to have that much power and control.
- Having a regulatory team would be a great idea ...and perhaps made up of the top web hosts in Uganda since after all they understand the issues at hand

b) Uganda Internet Exchange Point

On the issue of the IXP, it was noted that currently the UIXP is only being used to route local traffic only, and that unless this changed, the landing of the marine cable would not make much difference as connectivity between IXP members (ISPs) is already cable. But note had to be taken that the IXP was doing a good job regarding the routing of local traffic. Individuals could not do much to benefit from the IXP, but if they had a say, they could advise their ISP to join the IXP although most of the ISPs are already members.

c) IPv6 readiness in Uganda

The focus of this topic was on what has been done to prepare IPv4 transition to IPv6: readiness in upgrading to IPv6; critical examination of steps to be initiated for migration to IPv6; and compatibility between two versions—whether network hardware can be modified or needs to be manufactured afresh.

It was reported that AfriNIC was currently involved in a massive IPv6 evangelisation programme, and was doing IPv6 workshops around Africa, with a plan to visit each country in two years' time. Besides the Ipv6 workshops held by AfriNIC, another workshop had been held earlier in 2008, where about 60 civil servants responsible for IT in the government. This was a two day workshop held at the Uganda Management Institute and was organised by the Ministry of ICT. Training was performed by local engineer members of the East African Network operations group EANOG. A group of network engineers setting up a regional version of AFNOG to localise some of the trainings done at the Annual African network.

But it was questioned whether Uganda had a clear IPv6 strategy laid out, and whether any work had been done beyond the workshop. To which no clear strategy has been yet laid out. It was suggested that regarding readiness, end-users might need to push their ISPs and network operators to provide them IPv6 connectivity; in turn, the ISPs might start the transition once they realise demand for v6 connectivity from their customers.

Issue 6) Cyber-Security and trust

With the Internet being increasingly accessed on mobile phones, protection of children from pornography has become a more critical issue. Under the proposed Computer Misuse Bill, Clause 20 concerns child pornography. Children need to be protected from bad content online and it was not clear whose role it should be. For instance, it is a common phenomenon to

receive unsolicited text messages and emails and with the increasing usage of ICTs by children especially in schools, these could fall into the hand of suspecting children.

Some discussants felt that phone network companies should be encouraged to trace the source of unsolicited text messages, which might be of adult nature. Such suggestive messages are currently sent as spam to Ugandan phone subscribers.

Other views were that the beginning point on child protection is to develop relevant content for kids on-line. "So long as there is no relevant content, people whether adults or kids will go for whatever is there. I can not see how 'bad content' is going to be erased or prevented from being on the net in the near future. It is big business with big names and some governments collect huge taxes. But we can provide useful content to 'occupy' our children on-line, and teach them to deal with 'good' and 'bad' (content) in whatever way," one contributor wrote..

It was also pointed out that Child Protection is not about erasing or preventing this content from being on the internet, but rather making sure it is not viewed by children.

The forum also discussed the issue of developing a national cyber-security strategy and establishing a national *Computer Security Incidence Response Team (CSIRT)/Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT)*. It was felt that as more people begin to develop and host publicly accessible content locally, the CSIRT/CERT would be necessary. It was argued that since most of Uganda's content is safe because it is hosted elsewhere with people who have experience with issues like security and reliability. Change in this trend cases of continuous breaches of all sorts, website defacement and DNS hacks are on the rise.

A participant said a well organised CSIRT/CERT with a proactive model would go along way to help administrators who are many times only preoccupied with getting things to work (as opposed to security details), by continuously issuing Security Alerts, Tips, How-to's et al. It was also pointed out that since individual computer security starts with the individual, professionals in the field should lead the way by telling people they work with about the do's - maintenance on the networks, building secure websites, and if not sure, by asking peers on advice.

Issue 7) IG and gender

Discussions also went further to explore the gender issues in Internet Governance and how these could be addressed. It emerged that there were varying views on how gender issues should be addressed in ICTs. One discussant said: "modern ICT has very little manual work and thus the original barriers of entry which were mainly out of choice have drastically reduced. So from that perspective and what I see today, I think the gender issues are minimal compared to other more critical issues. We have more and more females joining the ranks and flying high that I believe anymore attempts to force a balance will have a negative effect."

However, another discussant seemed to refute this, saying that gender-related ICT issues were enormous. This discussant said that results showed that men still dominated use of the internet, public access points like cafes, school-based telecentres and private computer centres. Even when there were some "success" stories about telecentres, women still faced

constraints of mobility, time limitations and affordability to utilise them fully. Gender issues at the policy level also still existed. For instance, the Rural Communications Development policy is for instance totally gender blind and out of tune with the ICT policy and the constitution that provides for gender mainstreaming.

Discussants thus recommended that a lot has to be done at the policy implementation level to encourage greater gender balance in ICT, and that funds such as the RCDF can contribute enormously to this if their implementation and use are fair and prudent, targeting specific policy initiatives.