
ICANN80 | HLGM – Session 4: Support the Development of Meaningful Connectivity in Africa
Sunday, June 9, 2024 – 16:30 to 18:00 KGL

BAHER ESMAT: Okay. Welcome back. May I ask everyone to take their seats? We now begin Session 4. This session will focus on meaningful connectivity in Africa. And I'd like to invite to the stage our moderator for this session, Ms. Katuuku Gloria, Acting Director for Planning, Research and Development at the National Information Technology Authority of Uganda.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Good afternoon. I hope the coffee will not keep you sleepy, rather keep you awake. Allow me to welcome you all to the fourth session that is focusing on support to the development of meaningful connectivity in Africa.

I will not take long, I will just invite our panelists to the stage. And then we'll have Mr. Mactar Seck, Chief of Section Innovation and Technology, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, as the expert on the subject. Next, Dr. Catherine Adeya, ICANN Board Member, is our panelist, please come to the stage. Mr. Emmanuel Manasseh, Acting Region Director for Africa International Telecommunications Union. Ms. Thelma Quaye, Chief Digital Infrastructure Skills and Empowerment Officer, Smart Africa. Mr. Serge Sanou, Chair Africa Top Level Domain Organization. Dr. Aminu Maida, CEO, Nigeria Communications Commission. Well, we will continue while we wait for Dr. Aminu Maida

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to join the stage and we'll have the subject matter experts take us through. Over to you, Mr. Mactar.

MACTAR SECK:

Thank you very much. Good afternoon. Can I have the presentation, please? We are going to talk about an important subject, digital divide and meaningful connectivity. What's happened in Africa and how we can bridge this digital divide to advance also this meaningful connectivity. I'm going to go through to the current situation in the continent. Please, the presentation.

As you know, Africa is lagging behind in several areas on digital infrastructure, digital technology. We discussed this since this morning, the low connectivity of the continent. We are now at 37% connectivity and among the 2.8 billion people offline in the world, approximately 900 million are from Africa, who represent 63% of our population.

We have also another big challenge for this digital divide. When we talk about digital divide, we have also the issue of digital ID. We have 500 million of the continent without any legal form of identity. If you don't have this digital ID, you are not part of this digital information. You can't have access to the admin service, to the social service, e-government service.

Another point also, it is digital skills. We have a big gap on digital skills in the continent. 80% of our students doesn't have any basic skills on STEAM. Another point also we can highlight, it is the cost of the telecommunication service or the digital service, very high, three times.

And also, the infrastructure, the coverage also, it is a big problem in the continent.

And when we talk about this digital divide, this comes with several issue. And when we look at globally in the African continent, we can summarize digital divide by five key elements. You have to be poor, one. You are a woman, second. You have low literacy is third. Four, you live in the rural area. And fifth, it is the issue of infrastructure. It is a five key issue we have to sort it out to bridge the digital divide in the continent.

Next slide, please. It is related also to the cost, the economic capacity of our citizens. And why the challenge? Are several challenges we have to sort it out. And I hope during the discussion, we'll come up with some solution. We already discussed since a long time this issue of digital divide. I think we have several panelists here from several institutions. We are working to bridge the digital divide. We are going to hear from them how they overcome the challenge of infrastructure.

When you talk about infrastructure, it's not the digital infrastructure. We also talk about electricity. As you know, 80% of the 700 million people without any access to electricity are from Africa. When you talk about also digital, on the challenge, you have the issue of affordability. The cost is very high. The issue of digital literacy, how we are going to increase, how we are going to build the capacity of our new generation. Because by 2050, 70% of the African population will be under 35 years. And we need to build the capacity of this young generation in digital

skills. Because currently, 90% of the new job will be from digital or will require digital component.

Another point is the policy. We have now the emerging technology, AI, blockchain. What kind of regulation we should put in place? What kind of policy we should put in place? We need to promote innovation. We need this balance between regulation and innovation. It is something we have to look at. What kind of approach we should have for the policy regulation? Another point we have to discuss it is the cybersecurity. We have to secure the cyberspace. As you know, African country, the cybersecurity costs 10% of the GDP of Africa. We need to find a solution for that, to propose some solution to overcome this cybersecurity issue.

Another point, very important, it is collaboration, how we can collaborate across Africa. We have several organizations working on the same subject in the continent. We need all to join our effort to work together to make this support more efficient in the continent. How we can work with ICANN, how we can work with ITU, how we can work under the framework of the IGF. Fortunately, we are going to have the digital compact to be adopted in September 2020, this year, in New York. And it will be the only framework for the world for the digital we want. And I hope we are going to find a way to work together.

And now we come to sort out this challenge. And it's where the mindful connectivity is crucial to bridge the digital divide. Mindful connectivity means a lot of things. I think in the previous panel, they discussed a lot on the mindful connectivity for access, affordability, equipment, all these issues. I think the panel will discuss on this mindful connectivity,

what we need in the mindful connectivity in Africa. It is something very important if you want to bridge the digital divide. How we can provide access to all with affordable price and also, how we build the skill of African population. How we can connect the rural area. I think we need to discuss all this in this next panel.

Today, we discussed with ICANN. We have several points we would like to raise. So, with ICANN today, it's not only ICANN, but between ICANN, UNECA, African Union, we have Smart Africa, and all other organizations supporting the continent. If you want to advise this meaningful connectivity, we have to work together with ICANN on policy development. How we can develop on capacity building also, on the ccTLD, also this policy on DNSSEC, the security of the DNS, also we have to work on the security, is something very important, as well as start all the engagement.

How we can bring more African population, African tech community, African decision maker, policy maker, to understand better the role of ICANN and how we can support this African country to bridge this digital divide through have a better access of internet for the prosperity and the welfare of the African population. It's possible, but we need to discuss and to be very frank, to identify the African problem and find solution for Africa. We have a lot of problem on the internet sector. We have the issue of AfriNIC, we have some domain name, country domain name, we have to sort it out, and we need to discuss seriously on that, and we are ready to work with ICANN and other organization to sort out this problem.

And I'm going to conclude by what we offer as United Nations Economic Commission for Africa to bridge this digital divide and improve, advance this meaningful connectivity. We work on several area of the United Nations. On infrastructure, we support African country to expand their broadband infrastructure, how they can develop their DNSSEC, how they can develop this digital public infrastructure.

We work on regulation, how to support them to develop the new regulation and this new emerging technology, how we support them to develop their digital ID program, how we support them on how we build their digital skills to bridge this gap on digital skills. We work with them to help them to develop other research innovation. We have one concept called Origin. It is a concept to identify African problem, and we develop innovative solution to sort out this African problem.

Of course, on capacity building, now we are developing several center of excellence. We developed one in Congo Brazzaville for AI, artificial intelligence center. We are developing now one in Rwanda on the STEAM center and also the cyber security center in Lome, Togo. All this. And also, we have a lot of partnership with several organizations. Smart Africa, African Union, and also we are going to have one partnership with ICANN. It is some key area I would like to share with you. And I think our distinguished panelist today will touch upon all this issue, very important for the African continent. Thank you very much.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Thank you very much, Mr. Mactar. You can take your seat. And our fellow panelists today, you've heard about meaningful connectivity and

how it's very important to bridge the digital divide. What are the main challenges African countries are facing in terms of digital divide? And what is needed in order to ensure digital inclusion? I'll start with you. Over to you.

CATHERINE ADEYA:

Thank you very much. And Mactar, we've had interesting discussions with you in the past on this. And if somebody saw my presentation right now, they would think we sat in the same room. So it will comfort you to know that Mactar has already discussed some of the challenges.

But what's interesting-- First of all, Government of Rwanda, thank you so much for the welcome. It's always good to be back here. And with the question you're asking me, I appreciate that in the 20+ years I've worked on the ICTD space in Africa. This has been the same question that has been asked but dealt with in different ways. And Mactar, in the 1999 UNECA ADF, the topic was on challenges and opportunities for Africa in the digital era. We are discussing that now, but maybe in different ways.

So, some of the challenges that remain. At that time, we're talking about fiber optics and everything we need to lay. Right now, we're still talking about inadequate infrastructure. We're talking about limited electricity supply, high costs of connectivity. But all this are now being ring-fenced under the keyword meaningful connectivity.

Then there's been a talk about inadequate policies or misaligned policies and regulations, which are often not backed up by budget. I

think Senator Catherine Mumma said that they can appropriate the budgets if they understand what is required to reduce the digital divide. But sometimes they don't get that connection. They want meaningful connectivity even as legislators, but they don't know what they need to do to budget for that.

She also talked about the tech community is not moving in tandem with the people who are making policies. And I still find this a huge challenge and a huge gap. But my fellow Board member this morning, Wes, he's a techie, and he summarized it very well, saying there needs to be more dialogue between technologists and policy makers. And ICANN has started that, and I think the legislators appreciate the meeting you had yesterday. And it clearly needs to be a whole government approach and not just ministries of ICT.

And finally, one of the challenges that remains is the sustainability of community-owned digital access. The issues in the rural and remote areas and the underserved lacking reliable internet connectivity needs to be dealt with in a completely different way. So, some of the solutions, I think Mactar has summarized them, the holistic approach, and so I'll just pick one. And I think we need to provide more dynamic policy and regulations. Also, challenging the legislators to help the digital ecosystem to thrive.

For example, a policy that enables investors to manufacture or assemble phones in Africa, which is then easier to export through the AFTA, the Africa Free Trade Agreement. Some of these need to be more

reinforced, so I'm just picking one, although I had five solutions. Mactar summarized the rest of them. Thank you.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Thank you very much. Indeed, there's need for the technocrats and the policy makers to sit and talk together as they develop these policies. Mr. Emmanuel Manasseh, what are your thoughts on these challenges that are affecting us in terms of digital divide?

EMMANUEL MANASSEH: Yeah, thank you very much. Can you hear me?

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Yes.

EMMANUEL MANASSEH: First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the administration of the Republic of Rwanda for hosting this important meeting in the beautiful city of Kigali. Meaningful connectivity and access to affordable and secure ICTs is a prerequisite for sustainable digital inclusion.

I would like to start with the statistics so that we can see the magnitude of this issue we're discussing. As we navigate the terrain of the 21st century, we all stand at the forefront of addressing an invisible yet significant barrier, the digital divide. According to the recent studies,

there will be 230 million digital jobs in sub-Saharan Africa by 2030. And that by 2040, Africa will have the largest workforce in the world.

Data statistics show that only 37% of the population in Africa have access to internet, compared to the global average of 67%. And the issue is, even in the area where internet connectivity is available, many do not have access to smart devices such as computers, laptops, and tablets, which limit their ability to participate in the digital economy.

In 2022, we're in the same city of Kigali, where ITU held the meeting of the Telecommunication Development Conference. And at that time, we had 2.9 billion people connected in the world. And we came with Kigali Action Plan, which said affordable connectivity, digital transformation, enabling policy and the global environment, resource mobilization and international cooperation, and inclusive and secure telecommunication at ICC for sustainable development priorities. These were set as a priority for 2022-2025 for ITU. And it also came with the Africa Regional Initiatives, which talks about implementation and expansion of broadband infrastructure, and say connectivity for emerging technologies.

One of the key issues that I want to talk about is to bridge the gap. First of all, collaboration and partnership are cornerstones of the ITU works to connect them, connecting and leaving no one behind. Through the ITU Partner to Connect Digital Coalition, which you heard of it in the morning as well. Also, we have the Giga project, which aims to connect all schools by 2030, working together with UNICEF. With each collaboration, we are crafting a future where connectivity is a bridge to

opportunities and a step toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goal.

However, what I want to say, and I've been saying, to bridge the connectivity gap requires significant investments. And this investment should equally consider addressing a shortage of reliable electricity, which hampers the establishment of maintenance and essential communication. Still, there are 600 million who have no access to electricity. Without stable and accessible source of power, it becomes challenging to fuel and sustain the necessary infrastructure for connectivity.

So, beside collaboration, this is the key point in partnership, I believe that strong political will at the highest level, together with enabling policy in the global environment, are crucial for achieving universal and meaningful connectivity. Thank you for now.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Thank you very much. Indeed, investment is very key to bridging the digital divide. Ms. Quaye, what are your thoughts that we need to do in order to ensure digital inclusion? And what are the main challenges that African countries are shedding more light on?

THELMA QUAYE: Thank you very much. And thank you for having us. So, Dr. Catherine mentioned this topic being discussed as far back as 1999. I don't want to tell you where I was in 1999. You'd guess my age. But I will try to

elaborate on what Mactar has said, what everybody else has said, through my own life experience.

Basically, what are the realities? We've heard about the macro actions that has to be done, the macro challenges. So, I love shea butter. And for those who know, shea butter is nature's own pomade for your skin. And it's grown in abundance in northern Ghana, and I come from Ghana. So, because of the way I wanted, and because I live here in Kigali, whenever I get the chance to go to Accra or Ghana, I like to go up north to buy a sizable amount.

So, on one such trip up north, I met a lady called Aisha. Aisha is a trader. She's in her mid-20s. She has a child. The highest level of education Aisha has is her secondary school. Of course, after secondary school, she couldn't find anything to do, so she went into shea butter trading. And her market is just her immediate market, so she takes it to the local market. She makes roughly \$2 a day. The highest sales she would make on the best day would be around \$5.

And she has a phone as well, so sometimes when I want to reach her, I need to call her. She seldom connects to the internet because it's too expensive. Her phone is a smart feature phone, and so if you wanted to reach her, you either need to text her or you need to call her. So, I've struck a relationship with her. And on few days when she's able to afford internet or the money to buy internet, she uses it mostly on social media or movies.

Now, Aisha's story is very, very similar across board. What am I trying to say? The challenges of affordable internet that has been said is a

stark reality. It's real. The challenges of accessible or meaningful internet, but also even education. And the main point I want to make here is creating different pathways of education for our youth. Beyond internet, beyond giving them internet, which everything has been said, we need to be able to create different pathways of education for our youth.

Imagine that 90% of sub-Saharan Africans after high school are not able to get access to tertiary. So where are they? What are they doing? These people are automatically cut off from socioeconomic gains. And I believe we are talking about internet here for the benefit of socioeconomic for these people. And so, we need to think of digital inclusion not only as internet connection, but also varying the education pathways we give to our youth, giving them more opportunities to be able to leverage the economy that internet brings.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Thank you very much. I'll take it to Mr. Serge Sanou. Of course, we cannot underestimate the affordable internet and how critical it is. What are some of those challenges that African countries are facing from your perspective, especially as the Chair of African Top Level Domain Name Organization? Thank you.

SERGE SANOU: Thank you very much. I will switch into French. Thank you very much. I would like first of all to thank the Rwandan government and ICANN for organizing this most important meeting in Kigali around the question

of the internet. The AFTLD Association, Africa Top Level Domain Organization, that I am a chair of, is an association of African ccTLDs. And in order to answer your question, which has to do with strengthening connectivity in Africa, I would like to talk about three initiatives that we have currently within the AFTLD.

The first activity that we are working on is organizing the stakeholders. In reality, in order to strengthen internet connectivity in Africa, I think that there is something that is crucial. It is to use the term collaboration of the different stakeholders. On that, AFTLD always contributed to the organization of different events in Africa. You know the Africa DNS Forum as an example. But the new initiative that we are working on is strengthening this for the different ccTLDs so that the different countries have national TLDs.

And we have made quite a bit of progress over the past five years. We have national TLDs in Benin, in South Africa, in Kenya, in Chad, in Cameroon, and in Ghana. So, this shows that we still have progress to do. But the goal is to promote discussion and exchanges about the internet at the local level. To strengthen connectivity also means that we can discuss at the local level about those most important issues in order to respond to the needs of the different stakeholders in the different industries.

Outside of those initiatives, we also have been working on an infrastructure over the past few years, and that is the African Domain Name Observatory. It is a platform that collects the ccTLD data in order to have a reliable data registry so that we can act based on what we

collect, so based on those databases. It's an important initiative that we didn't work on alone. We worked with international partners. And I would like to also thank the main partner, the AFNIC, the French AFNIC Association, that helped us to work on this project, both technically and financially.

The third initiative that I would like to mention here is the Coalition for a Digital Africa, the CDA project that you all have heard about. At that level, the AFTLD is an important partner on a third pillar to strengthen capacity, to develop capacity. What we bring in this process that was started with ICANN in order to build capacity is that we work with African registries. We have two sessions, two training sessions. We did one here in Kigali yesterday. So those are training sessions to discuss marketing, business, strategy.

And we have selected two people out of 10 countries that were selected, we ended up with 20 people in Kigali who followed the training. And we hope that this training will help build capacity of the staff in the different registries. There will be another training that will occur in about a month in Nairobi in Kenya. And that training will be much more technical. And it will have to do with technical issues related to the operation of registries. And it will target African registries.

So, this is an important project that we work on with many partners. In the coalition, we have more than 10 partners. And I would like to also thank the French AFNIC that I mentioned earlier, who contributed to this training. So, thank you for supporting our coalition and for

supporting the AFTLD in its activities. I will stop now. Thank you very much.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Thank you very much. I will take it to Engineer Babagana. Please, sorry, the pronunciation of your name.

DIGIMA BABAGANA: No problem. Thank you very much. My name is Engineer Babagana Digima. I'm representing my Executive Vice Chairman and CEO, Dr. Aminu Maida, who has asked me to extend his apologies for not being able to make it today. I'll go to the points.

Most of the discussion that has been done today has actually looked at most of the challenges that we are facing in Africa in terms of how do we provide a meaningful connectivity. We've mentioned many of them. Infrastructure, power, digital literacy, affordability and accessibility, cyber security, language barriers. But we also have duplication of efforts that we are making, like Dr. Adeya has said almost two decades ago, we are talking about getting fiber to locations, and we are still talking about it today.

Unfortunately, Africa is a very large continent, is the second largest continent in the world. You can fit the whole of North America and Europe into the landmass of Africa. So, this gives you a picture of how large Africa is. And of course, we are also burdened with the fact that most of these technologies that we are talking about do not come from Africa. 99.5% of it are foreign, so we have to spend money to get the

fiber optics, we have to spend money to get the equipment, and we are poor in that regard.

But we are also unfortunately destroying as we are building, because the situation we found ourselves now in Africa, we are at the point we are developing our cities, so you build fiber optics today, perhaps in the next three, five months a road construction may come up, another infrastructure will need to be laid, and we end up destroying it. As a case in point, in Nigeria in 2023, last year, we had over 59,000 fiber cuts in one year, which is huge. You put in the infrastructure, and then a few days later, you get to cut it, and somebody has to pay for it, and you're wasting more time trying to do that, fix that. So those are some of the challenges that are inherent in Africa.

But it's not all challenges. We also have success stories in terms of how do we get to a certain point that we can say, yes, we are developing Africa in terms of closing the digital divide. Fiber is one way to go about it, but we also have to rethink as Africans. We can take fiber to some points, and perhaps we look for other technologies like fixed wireless to take broadband to the rural areas, which could be much cheaper than us having to roll fiber all the way. Africa is larger, like I've mentioned, it will be an immense effort, because you won't get the return on investment.

And one area that we have achieved success in Nigeria is of course, we look at the private sector. The private sector is the biggest contributor to telecommunications in Nigeria. And for government, the policies should be that we should have a liberal economy, we should liberalize,

we should make sure that the sectors that affect, or the sectors that enable digital connectivity have been liberalized, and that's one of the success factors, and I think we will build on that maybe later as time approves. Thank you.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Thank you very much. To avoid more time, I would like to go to you, Doctor. In what ways does ICANN's effort converge with the needs and priorities of African nations concerning internet governance and digital infrastructure advancement?

CATHERINE ADEYA: Well, that's very academic, but I'll respond to it. And just before I respond also to what ICANN is doing, maybe just to qualify a little bit quickly. The reason I was raised in 1999, what I mean is technology. With technology comes obsolescence, with obsolescence things keep changing, so the challenges of yesterday are not the challenges of tomorrow. So even as we talk now, there'll be a new challenge, but a lot has happened in Africa, and I was very happy to also witness the landing of the cables those many years ago.

But the work that ICANN is doing in Africa, I think our Chair Tripti already shared quite a bit of their efforts in Africa this morning, and I'll just flesh out one or two items. I think the one thing I forgot to discuss earlier will align very well with what ICANN is also doing. And one of the challenges that continues to remain, I call it digital illiteracy, because people have

complained a lot about lack of relevant content in accessible languages. And that comes in in some of the work that ICANN is doing.

So, you've heard about the Coalition for Digital Africa. I won't speak about all the other work in Africa, I'll just speak about the Coalition, and some people in this room, of course, organisations are already partnering to expand the internet in Africa. So, ICANN does this by promoting innovation and entrepreneurial efforts to strengthen the internet infrastructure in Africa. So meaningful connectivity that we are talking about today is one of the pillars of ICANN's Coalition for Digital Africa.

For example, the universal acceptance projects and those on internationalised domain names are meant to promote inclusiveness and ownership. So that's under the CDA projects. And a key initiative under meaningful connectivity, again under the Coalition for Digital, is making email systems and other communication platforms within higher education institutions ready for universal acceptance and email address internationalisation. And I know this is being done through AAU, the Association for African Universities, and I know some people have commented on that, but it was just one approach to get in because there are many students, but I'm sure that will be a continued discussion.

And for the legislators, I know somebody asked me about universal acceptance, and I know there's still so much for you to learn and you'll continue to learn, but universal acceptance in a nutshell just ensures that all domain names and email addresses can be used by all internet-

enabled applications, devices, and systems. And this is really a fundamental requirement for making the internet truly accessible for everyone.

So, for example, under universal acceptance, it will help communities around the world access the internet in their own local languages and scripts. So, in Africa, I know one of the languages is Kiswahili, and soon people will challenge what about the other languages. It's in the process.

And the final one. So, I'm just showing you ICANN is doing a lot, because you asked me. If you have time, please go look at the Africa Domain Name Industry Study of 2023. It's a very useful resource because the recommendations there also bring in some of the things that we are discussing here, like strengthening regional internet infrastructure. Thank you.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Thank you very much, Dr. Catherine. I know that we are receiving a lot of insights, but due to time, I would request that we limit our discussion to just-- Because everything has really been highlighted and discussed. Ms. Thelma, Smart Africa has been at the forefront of promoting digital information across the continent. Can you share some of the few initiatives that you consider successful from this group?

THELMA QUAYE: Absolutely, I will share. Smart Africa currently has 34 projects we are working on, grouped in four programs. But specifically, to the

challenges that have been raised by my fellow panelists and the subject matter expert, I'll name three of them, and also aligning to the story of Aisha.

So, the first one is on affordability and meaningful connectivity. So, what we are doing, very akin to what the telecoms do for the irrefutable right of use, we are trying to work with about 11 countries to aggregate data, and based on those volumes, we hedge prices with service providers.

Internet cost is a game of numbers, so if we're able to assure that a certain volume would be coming for the next 10 years or so, we are able to negotiate prices down. And we've simulated this, and we've seen we can reduce prices from as low as 50% to as high as 90%, which is a lot, and that's something that is currently ongoing.

We are also tackling digital skills through the Smart Africa Digital Academy, tackling government agencies. There was a mention here on how lawmakers or regulators do not understand the technology. So that is what SADA is committed to do, and we've collaborated with a number of organizations here to be able to build that capacity and knowledge.

And lastly is cross-border trade. I know I've run out of time, but again, if Aisha had a platform to be able to trade beyond her locality, she would be able to grow her market. I know East Africans love shear butter, and if Aisha had that cross-border trade digital platform, she would be easily able to export her trade. So, this is also something that we are working together with AFCTA and many more, but I ran out of time.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Great initiatives. Mr. Serge, how is Africa's top-level domain organization working to enhance the digital ecosystem within Africa?

SERGE SANOU: Thank you. So, what I can say is that there are many challenges in Africa, but as I mentioned earlier in my presentation, we must be prepared to collaborate and to exchange, to establish partnerships, partnerships with different organizations at the international or local level. That is crucial. Without true partnerships, it is difficult to reach the goals that we are setting for ourselves.

So, I think that we want to establish partnerships with different organizations, organizations that will support our initiatives. And I did mention earlier the CDA project and our work with different partnerships. In the coalition, you have more than 10 partners. ICANN is actively involved in the coalition. But I think that the door is still open. We want more partners in order to work on specific questions, because at AFTLD, the idea is that we want registries to develop themselves through local initiatives, through capacity building that we provide to them.

And then let's tackle the issue of financing as well. And so, with those partnerships, AFTLD would like to contribute to different projects so that those stakeholders can benefit from them. One of the indicators that enable us to measure the evolution of the domain names in Africa is the number of registrations. We double-check that the information

that we deliver delivers an impact, an increase in terms of domain names.

In terms of potential changes as well, at the level of governance, we look at that because it is a fundamental aspect. It has to do with strategy, with the development of the registry. It has to do with marketing. So, all of these issues of capacity building is what we focus on at AFTLD in order to promote the development of the internet in Africa. Thank you.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Thank you very much. Indeed, there is need for local initiatives as we promote digital divide, digital inclusion. Mr. Engineer Babagana, Nigeria has significant steps in improving digital connectivity. Can you share some initiatives? Let's limit ourselves to what is very variable to this high-level meeting. Thank you.

DIGIMA BABAGANA: Thank you very much once again. Like you've mentioned, there are several initiatives that we have undertaken. Just to give a sense of idea, for instance, we have eight submarine landing stations cables that have landed in Nigeria with over 370 terabytes capacity per second. We have about a dozen data centers in Nigeria. One of them is Tier 4. Some of them are Tier 4 design. Several of them are Tier 3.

We have Internet Exchange Point of Nigeria, which is one of the biggest success stories that came out of the Tunis, WSIS Tunis. And it was established specifically by Nigeria, with the, of course, sole intention of exchange of data within Nigeria. And we have, at the moment, they

have reached over 560 gigabits of data transfer last year. And currently they are around 600, and they are hoping to reach 1 terabyte by the end of this year.

So, this is one of the success stories, and this is one of the things we are saying about public-private partnership. And, of course, we have established CSIRT for computer emergency and incidence response. And we've also undertaken a lot of transparent spectrum auctions. Currently for 5G, we have done some licensing, even for satellite providers. Just last year and this year, it has become the third largest ISP in Nigeria. So, you can see we have a lot of things that is all boiled down to how you design your partnership with the private sector. So that partnership is the key for us. Thank you.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Thank you very much. Indeed, we need partnerships as we bridge the digital divide. Mr. Emmanuel Manasseh, what is ITU's perspective? What are the main barriers to achieving meaningful connectivity in Africa? And what are those initiatives that are currently in place to address these challenges?

EMMANUEL MANASSEH: Thank you very much. As you said, the main barriers to achieve inclusion, number one, as I said when I was giving the statistics, was the fact that still most of the devices, smart devices, are not affordable. So, because most of the devices are not affordable, even in place where there is internet connectivity, not everybody is benefiting from internet.

But we heard also about digital skills. Skills is very critical for bringing people online. They need digital life skills, but also you see most of the people, they want products and solutions made in Africa, solving pressing needs of the Africans. That needs advanced digital skills to make sure that we have the right and fit for purposes skills that adopt and take the new and emerging technologies and provide solutions that fit the Africans.

But another important thing which has been said regarding digital inclusion, and I want to speak on that is, I believe that connectivity is key, but true digital inclusion transcends connectivity. It is about putting people at the center of the digital technologies, empowering people to leverage technology for growth. Allow me to mention this, that without customized digital content, digital infrastructure has little to do.

Availability of local content and services that are relevant to the users are critical for digital inclusion. People go online because they expect the internet to be useful and interesting. Thus, relevant local content and services that respond to the demands and needs of users drive digital adoption and growth. So together we should strive to customize digital content and services to echo the unique voices of different cultures, ensuring the digital landscape is varied and the culture we strive to connect. Thank you.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Thank you very much. I would like to request that our panelists, what has been your takeaway? Just two cents to this, what are your two takeaways to this connecting the digital Africa? Thank you.

DIGIMA BABAGANA: Thank you very much. I think two takeaways is number one, of course, is the issue of infrastructure. We must look at it not only from the perspective of the public sector, but also from that of private sector. So, we need to look at how we deploy infrastructure. We have to make effort to make sure that we don't deploy and destroy.

So, it has to be a design from the onset that keeps that in mind. And then secondly, the issue of putting people at the receiving end. So, we don't deploy without having people who will make use of that. So, our people have to be able to get some useful content from the Internet, basically. Thank you.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Thank you. Since we've gone all the way, let's continue with Mr. Serge Sanou. Your two cents.

SERGE SANOU: Thank you. I think that in terms of strengthening Internet connectivity in Africa, we need to first strengthen infrastructure. But more importantly, I think that collaboration should be strengthened between the different stakeholders in order together to be able to define projects that truly have an impact on the development of the Internet in Africa.

My organization, as well as others, we are prepared to help each other mutually. But we need to agree on the levers, on what we need to stress. Those levers that we need to use in order to guarantee sustainable development of the Internet on the continent. In Africa, the Internet is evolving slowly, as we said, due to the difficulties that we are faced with. But I think that nonetheless, we can make up for lost time if we do collaborate. Thank you so much.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Thank you for those two takeaways. Over to you, Ms. Thelma.

THELMA QUEYA: Thank you. So, my key takeaway will be the fact that ensuring that we are closing the digital divide goes beyond giving people Internet. We need to give people equitable opportunities through education, through skills, through all the ways that they can leverage the Internet for socioeconomic benefits. Thank you.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Over to you, Doctor.

CATHERINE ADEYA: And since I'm last, I'll give two takeaways. It will be quick, and I'll give one takeaway to them. So, the two takeaways summarizing everything you've said. I think somebody said it, to avoid duplication of resources, where we can have more coordinated efforts towards the same goal. Especially I think UNECA and the rest can help in this, to make some

comparisons within Africa. Where the African countries you can learn from, let best practice be shared more.

And the one takeaway I'll give you is I would like to encourage you to go to the ICANN website, and please read our blogs, look at what is there, see what we're doing in Coalition for Digital Africa, and follow us very keenly. That's my takeaway for you.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Thank you very much. I know that we have Manasseh online. Your two cents, Mr. Manasseh.

EMMANUEL MANASSEH: Yes. The first one is strong political will, together with enabling policy in the global environment. And the second is collaboration, investment in digital infrastructure, access, and content. Thank you.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Thank you very much for those great insights into the meaningful connectivity. I would like now to open the discussion to the floor. And I have some interventions that have been given. I'll start with Bangladesh. Over to you for your intervention.

MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN: Hi. I'm here at this site. This is Brigadier General Mustafizur from Bangladesh. We have heard a lot about Africa, the possibilities, the potentiality. I had the opportunity to serve in Africa as I am from

military. I served in UN peacekeeping mission. I had the opportunity to serve in Sierra Leone, Congo, Ivory Coast, and visit many other African countries. I have seen the difficulties. The country is enormously big, but the population is less as compared to the size of the country.

So, what the need is the development of infrastructure, the main takeaway for Africa. But for that, one of the speakers said the collaboration. About the collaboration, I can give one example of my country that before 40 years, when we constructed our railway line, at the same time, we put the fiber optics cable with the railway line. That became the main backbone. With that backbone, with that fiber of railway, we started our mobile communication.

And similarly, whenever we constructed the power grid line, we laid the fiber optic cables with the power grid line. That became a very important backbone for our country. And similarly, whenever we are constructing any highway, we are constructing the fiber optics cable, so that the road communication, as well as the telecommunication backbone is constructed simultaneously. So that takeaway I can give you. Thank you very much.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Thank you very much. Indeed, we cannot over talk about collaboration. So, another intervention that we have is the European Union. Mr. Pearse O'Donohue.

PEARSE O'DONOHUE:

Thank you very much indeed. Thank you for that very interesting and insightful panel, which is very informative for us. Where it became clear that universal connectivity is an essential driver to achieve the objectives of digital transformation and of course, therefore, the SDGs. But it's essential that connectivity be based on the open internet model. As evidence has shown, that this model drives human-centric economic development.

Now, key to the success of the open internet is its decentralized architecture which is built on open standards and protocols, and it's underpinned by a multistakeholder internet governance model. The realisation of the open internet thus requires a comprehensive approach that goes further than investing in technology and connectivity.

While, of course, we recognise that that is a prerequisite, as has been made clear from this panel, it must also focus on areas such as open internet digitalisation, investment in skills and competences and capacity building. So, the European Union is fully committed to partner with Africa and support its journey towards reaping the benefits of connectivity and of the open internet economy.

In terms of digital infrastructure, the EU Global Gateway Initiative supports the Africa-Europe Investment Package, and that's €150 billion in total for digital, green, sustainable growth and jobs, health systems and education, which aims to accelerate universal access for all in Africa to reliable internet networks safely and securely wherever they live. That is, we hope, a contribution to meaningful connectivity.

This goal will be achieved through facilitating projects in submarine and terrestrial cables, as well as cloud and data infrastructures, and also supporting regulatory frameworks that promote a digital transition that puts people at the centre in line with the principles of trusted connectivity. From a skills and competence perspective, through projects such as the Policy and Regulation Initiative for Digital Africa, PRIDA, the EU is helping to strengthen the ability of African stakeholders to participate actively in global internet governance.

And then in 2023, last year, the EU also launched the Global Initiative for the Future of the Internet, GIFI, which is a multistakeholder process aimed at promoting the open internet. Several activities of this project will take place in Africa, and will include organisational events, one which took place yesterday here in Kigali, the promotion of best practices, and also communication about the benefits of open internet and the multi-stakeholder approach.

So, to conclude, the Coalition for Digital Africa and the European work from different angles, and we do so in all humility, understanding that we must learn from our African partners. We have different mandates, but we share the same objective of strengthening Africa's participation in the open internet economy. Thank you.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Thank you very much, European Commission. Japan, for your intervention. Thank you.

NOMURA EIGO:

Okay. Thank you, Chair. As discussed, the internet is a foundation for many innovative services, essential for the future development and social inclusion. The spread of the internet enriches people's lives. Japan has been developing its information and communication infrastructure, which now provides access to mobile and fixed broadband services in almost all areas of Japan. It has also developed a competitive environment in the telecommunications market.

These experiences and knowledge are also shared with African countries, and policy briefings and training for regulators are being provided upon request. Furthermore, with support from JICA, Japan International Cooperation Agency, we also held training sessions for regulatory officials in Japan.

We recognize that Africa is geographically diverse, and that there are many areas where the digital divide still remains due to various reasons. Therefore, Japan is conducting demonstrations and other initiatives that contribute to eliminating the digital divide in African countries. For example, in Rwanda, this country, telecommunications service combining satellite communications and Wi-Fi was demonstrated, as well as distance education. And one company, SoftBank, conducted the world's first successful 5G communications test from the stratosphere using a high-altitude platform station hub last October.

In Kenya, a network using innovative optical cables, which can be installed efficiently and at low cost, is being demonstrated. In other countries, we are demonstrating telemedicine and ICT-based agriculture solutions. We hope that our technology and knowledge will

contribute to the realization of the development of meaningful connectivity in Africa.

Last but not least, TICAD 9, an international conference on African development, its 9th meeting will be held in Yokohama, Japan, in August of next year. TICAD celebrated its 30th anniversary last year. We expect to continue to build closer ties between Africa and Japan. Thank you for your attention. Thank you.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Thank you so much. It is great to learn all these initiatives that are happening across the region, and this is a good session that we can learn and tap into as we bridge the digital divide across our continent. India, please, the floor is yours for your intervention.

SUSHIL PAL: Thank you. India accords highest priority to the development of meaningful connectivity in Africa and is fully committed to partner with Africa to achieve this. India has been supporting meaningful connectivity to Africa through various projects.

We initially launched the Pan-African e-network project to set up fiber optic network to provide satellite connectivity and also telemedicine and tele-education services. And later on, this particular project was handed over by India to the African Union Commission, which has placed the network hub in Dakar, which is under the custody of government of Senegal.

We strongly believe that the meaningful connectivity could be achieved only through the skill building and capacity building in the community. Therefore, on October 19, we launched another project on e-learning and telemedicine, namely [Indian language - 01:04:20]. And I'm happy to report that by June 2023, 14,000 scholarships have been awarded to the students who enrolled in various disciplines, including computer applications, business administration, commerce, healthcare, tourism, humanities, and arts, et cetera.

Further, in August 2023, India made a commitment of \$2 million to Africa Digital Financial Inclusion Facility, housed and managed by African Development Bank to boost digital financial inclusion across Africa by breaking down the barriers to growth and accelerate the financial inclusion in Africa. And further, to take the meaningful connectivity forward, we have also entered into a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the field of digital public infrastructure, which are population-scale solutions for digital transformation with countries like Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Kenya in October and December 2023. Thank you so much.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Thank you very much. India, Egypt, please take the floor for your intervention.

EGYPT: Thank you. Good evening, everyone, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to extend my gratitude to Rwanda for hosting the fifth version of the

High-Level Government Meeting in the beautiful city of Kigali, and to ICANN for the opportunity to join this esteemed discussion.

It's my pleasure to join you today on behalf of Engineer Mohamed Shamroukh, NTRA Executive President, and to convey the greetings of Dr. Amr Talaat, Egypt's Minister of Communication and Information Technology, who wanted to be with us today but couldn't make it due to other commitments. Allow me to share with you a few remarks on meaningful connectivity, the topic of our session today.

The digital divide is still huge, and with the fast-developing technologies maybe even widening, today 66% of the world's population use the Internet. However, in Africa, the average is just 40%, making it the least connected region. Only 55% of those in Africa use the Internet, and only 61% owns a mobile phone. In terms of gender parity, Africa continues to lag over other regions by a sizable margin where the ITU, roughly four in ten men and three in ten women, use the Internet. Moreover, while progress has been made in deploying infrastructure to cover 40% of Africa's population, in most countries less than 15% of this connection is at a level that would ensure meaningful connectivity.

In that respect, following Egypt's 2030 vision for a robust digital infrastructure, the government of Egypt is working on deploying nationwide fiber optics networks, has connected 93% homes with fiber, and has increased internet speeds by 12-fold since 2019, additionally. The government of Egypt is deploying ubiquitous state-of-the-art mobile networks, high-speed connectivity through a presidential

initiative called Decent Life, aiming at improving the daily life condition of 58 million Egyptian citizens.

Furthermore, the government of Egypt has facilitated a cooperation agreement between Telecom Egypt and ICANN, establishing in Cairo the second ICANN managed root server system in Africa. The new installation is linked to growing fiber optics network and set to connect to 18 submarine cables by the end of 2025. The IMRS project enhanced security, resilience, and flexibility of the internet infrastructure in Africa, advancing digital transformation efforts and contributing to the continent's economic and social development. Thank you.

GLORIA ATWINE KATUUKU: Thank you very much, Egypt. Allow me to take this opportunity to thank our subject matter experts for taking us through the support and development of meaningful connectivity, and our panelists, Dr. Catherine, Mr. Emmanuel Manasseh, Ms. Thelma, Mr. Serge Sanou, and Engineer Babagana. I thank you so much. And allow me now to hand the microphone back to our masters of ceremony. Thank you so much.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]