
DO INTERNATIONALISED DOMAIN NAMES (IDNS) INCREASE ACCESS TO INTERNET?

Nomsa Mlambo
27 June 2017

AGENDA

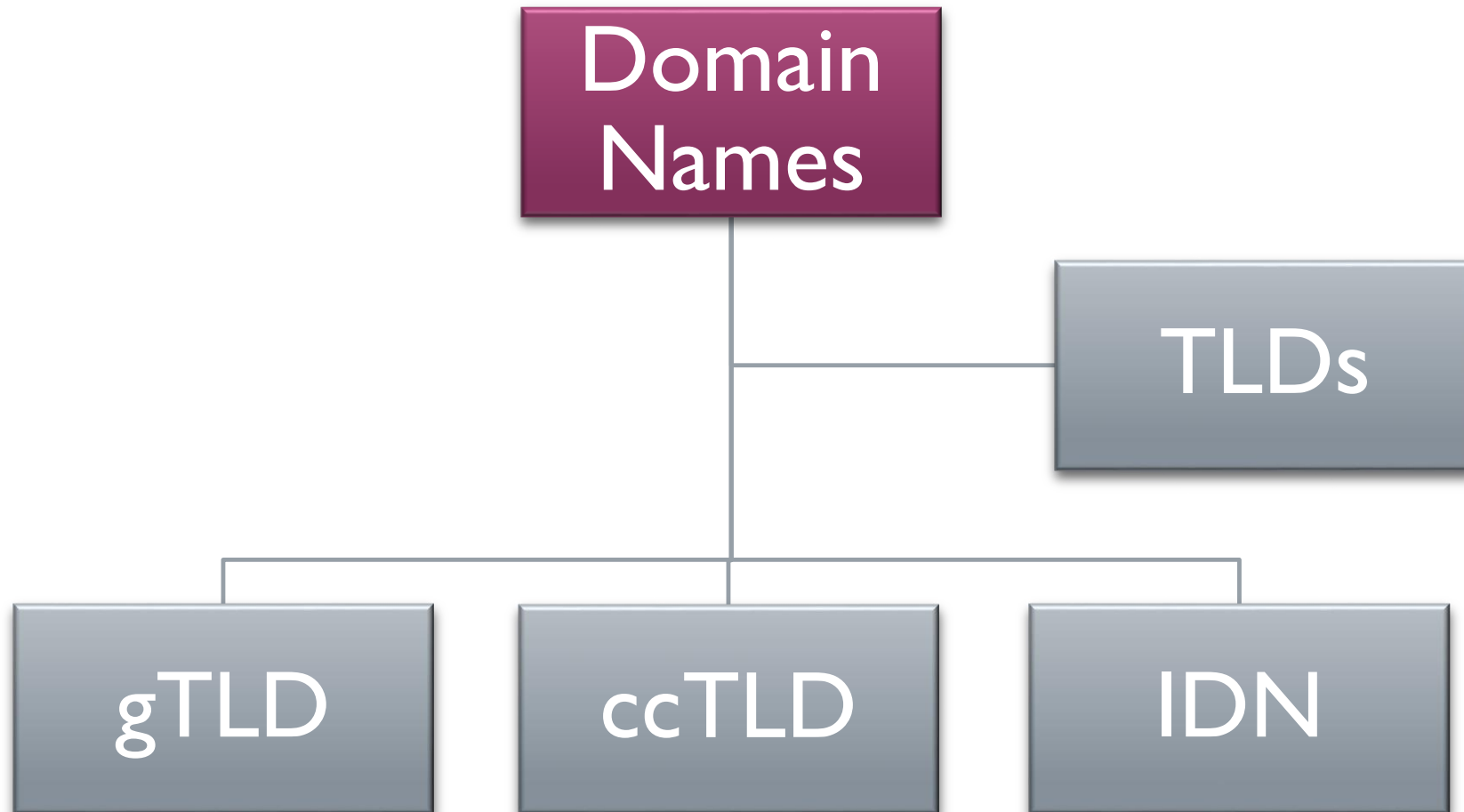
- The world of domain names
- Types of domain names
- Navigating an “English” internet
- What are IDNS?
- IDNS in Africa
- Emerging Questions and Challenges

THE WORLD OF DOMAIN NAMES

Domain names translate IP addresses into names and numbers we can understand and remember easily.



TYPES OF DOMAIN NAMES



NAVIGATING AN ENGLISH SPEAKING INTERNET

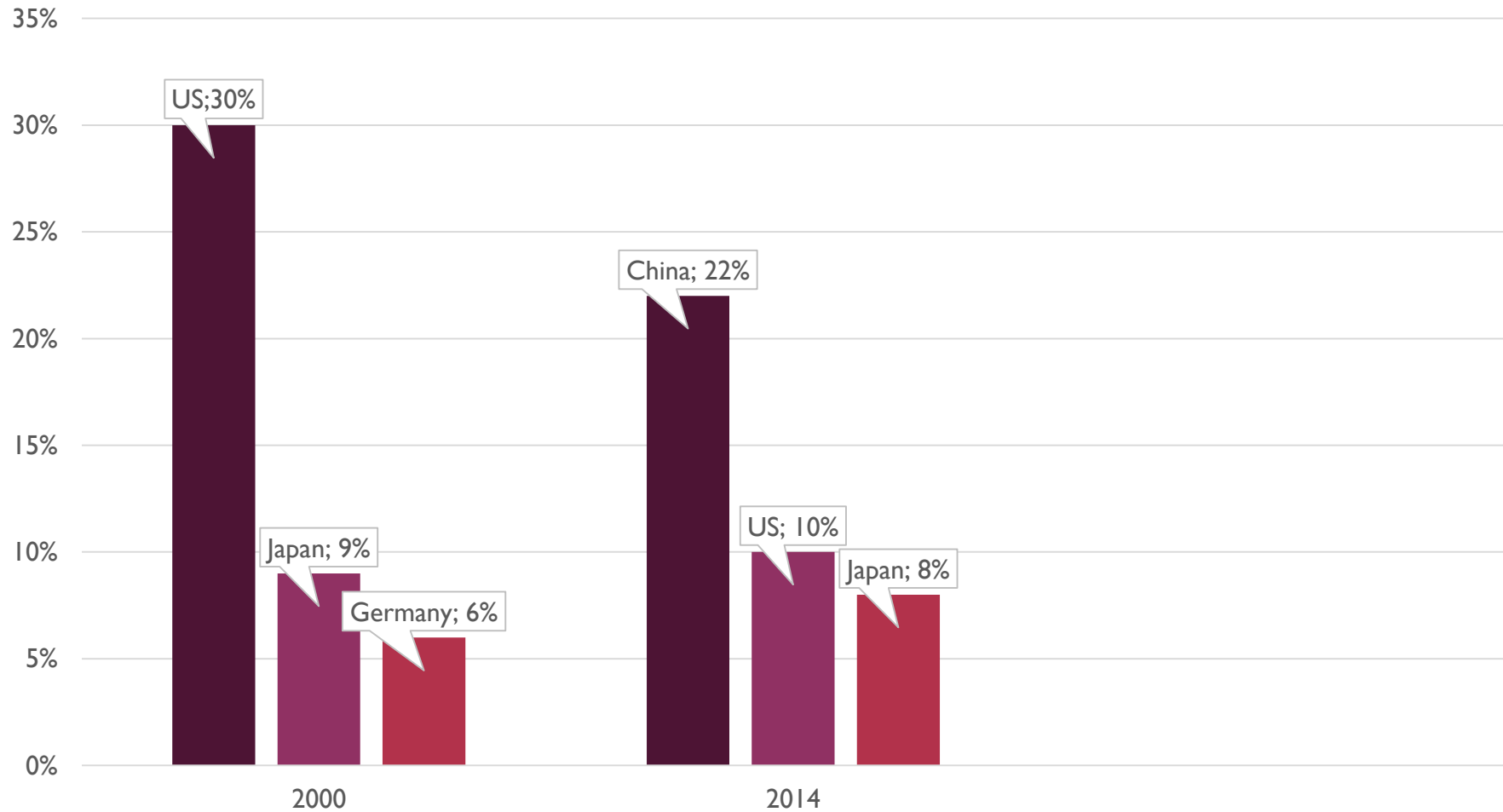
Rank ↕	Language ↕	Native speakers in millions 2007 (2010) ↕	Fraction of world population (2007) ↕
1	Mandarin (entire branch)	935 (955)	14.1%
2	Spanish	390 (405)	5.85%
3	English	365 (360)	5.52%
4	Hindi ^[a]	295 (310)	4.46%
5	Arabic	280 (295)	4.23%
6	Portuguese	205 (215)	3.08%
7	Bengali (Bangla)	200 (205)	3.05%
8	Russian	160 (155)	2.42%
9	Japanese	125 (125)	1.92%
10	Punjabi	95 (100)	1.44%

WHAT ARE IDNS: STORY

In Internationalized Domain Name (IDN) is a domain that uses script outside of the Latin alphabet. For example an IDN will use the Arabic alphabet or the Hindi alphabet. Before 2009 domain names could only use the Latin alphabet, with no accents or symbols. This meant that the internet was largely compatible with English and thus more accessible to English speakers.

“...IDNs are viewed by many as a catalyst and a necessary first step to achieving a multilingual Internet. According to UNESCO, in 2008 only 12 languages accounted for 98% of Internet web pages; English, with 72% of web pages, was the dominant language online. Recent reports indicate that other languages are growing rapidly online... Supporters of IDN believe that enabling users to navigate the Internet in their native language is bound to enhance the linguistic diversity of the online population, and that IDNs are strongly linked to local content.”

TOP 3 COUNTRIES BY % OF TOTAL GLOBAL INTERNET USERS



WHAT ARE IDNS: EXAMPLES

.org

.uk

.net

.com

.ke

كوم.

.商店

.қаз

الجزائر

سورية

IDNS IN AFRICA – POTENTIAL IMPACT

- IDNs have had an impact on the number of internet users and have aided the increase of access to internet. In 2000, the top 3 internet countries were US, Japan and Germany, in 2014 the top 3 countries were China, US and India (after the implementations of IDNs). So what could IDNS do for the African continent? A large population of North African countries use Arabic as their first language, yet only Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco have ccTLD IDNs. If IDNs have the power to increase usage of the internet, their implementation should be a top priority for North African countries.
- Whilst many Sub-Saharan countries use the Latin alphabet (for French, English, Swahili etc.) IDNs represent an opportunity to change the perception of the internet. The internet is sometimes viewed as an English tool, for English speakers. Whilst an increase in IDNs may not directly affect those that use the Latin alphabet, it does affect the cultural and social norms that dominate the internet governance space.

EMERGING QUESTIONS & CHALLENGES

- IDN implementation has implications for other aspects of internet use such as emailing and file transfer protocol
- Some languages such as Chinese and Arabic have variant characters, making universal implementation difficult
- Bi-directional domain names require users to change script when typing an address and can confuse the hierarchy of the Domain Name System
- How useful are IDNs for the African context? Do they encourage internet access and the production of local content?