

Emerging African Internet Institutions

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IN THE PAST FEW YEARS BOTH THE PUBLIC AND Private sectors of the African continent have been preoccupied with establishment of basic high-speed Internet connectivity and development of human resources. The goals have been largely achieved, with the exception of about half a dozen countries, most of which are on the verge of attaining full connectivity. Some of the countries on the continent have continued expansion of the Internet onto regional capitals and to rural communities. Several applications also have been experimented with, including telecenters and business centers and business centers as vehicles for attaining a semblance of universal access.

While the physical interconnections were being developed , governments were creating enabling environments in support of the telecommunication sector in general. Governments in the region have accomplished this primarily by liberalization or privatization of national PTT's. Governments have articulated that limited competition and foreign participation in the sector bring investment, technical, and management expertise into it.

In the meantime, professionals in the industry on the African continent also were developing institutions that focus on Internet-specific issues. The purpose of this article is to summarize what is publicly known about those burgeoning institutions. There are at least seven institutions at various stages of development. The institutions and their relationships are shown on the following page in figure 1.

The African Networking Symposium (ANS) is a meeting place for all of the various organizations to discuss issues, test ideas, present results, and obtain feedback. The first official meeting of the ANS took place as part of ISOC's annual conference at INET '97. At INET '98, the success of the ANS was recognized and the programs was expanded to become the Developing Countries Networking Symposium. The concept of ANS itself, however, lives on as a forum for African Internetworking exchange, wherein ideas and other groups are nurtured.

The African Regional Network Information Center (AfriNIC) is the Internet numbering authority for the region. The AfriNIC Regional Registry is counterpart to APNIC, RIPE and ARIN. It is the most developed of all the emerging institutions on the continent.

It is expected that African organizations that currently obtain Internet protocol address space from RIPE or the InterNIC will in the future obtain IP address space from AfriNIC. AfriNIC will allocate IP address space to members and non members, following the same policies and guidelines for each.

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AfriNIC will charge – according to a fee structure – for services of allocating address space and maintaining databases. AfriNIC is governed by a board of trustees with an advisory council and has an executive director.

The African Internet Group (AIG) is an association of past and present students of ISOC Networking Technology Workshop, formerly known as the Developing Countries Workshop.

The movement has been in existence since INET '95 in Hawaii. Its effectiveness lies in its ability to maintain continuity and bring focus to the experience of Africans during acquisition of the technologies. The mission was, clearly, to effect technology transfer to the continent. At maturity, the AIG has the potential of becoming the African Internet Association, because there are several hundreds of the workshops.

African Chapters (AC) is a loosely coordinated organization of ISOC chapters located in the African region. The idea for it was first put forth at the INET '98 birds-of-feather meeting of chapters. The African chapters will share ideas on programs, experiences, promotional schemes, and exchange programs among the chapters.

As part of the evolving structure of the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA), it became necessary that ccTLD holders reach consensus on their role in the proposed Naming Council of the new IANA. Over 100 ccTLDs signed on to a proposed worldwide TLD (wwTLD) group and were organized naturally along continental regional lines. The African group is the AFTLD.

The African Internet Service Providers (AFISP) in attendance at the World Bank –sponsored Global connectivity conference held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 1998 resolved to organize themselves into a commercial group known as AFISP.

The grouped to focus on regional ISP needs, including interconnects, as well as to become a lobby group for addressing tariffs and related issues.

As is well known, having technology is easier than organizing people to make full use of the technology presents.

The African Information society initiative (AISII) is a program of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. The African ministers of state have signed a commitment to the program , aimed at creating the environment for developing an information society. There also is strong focus on needs to increase teleden

Table 1. Contact Information:

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