Internet Society Report Points to Rapid Internet Growth in Africa; Outlines Path to Further Expansion

Report highlights benefits of Internet governance multistakeholder model

[**Tunis, Tunisia – 2 June 2015**] – In order to better understand what African nations need to do to reap the full benefits of the Internet, the Internet Society today released the study "Internet Development and Governance in Africa," http://www.internetsociety.org/doc/internet-development-and-internet-governance-africa. The report, issued at the Africa Internet Summit 2015 in Tunis, Tunisia, provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of the Internet in Africa and highlights the importance of the multistakeholder model of Internet governance as an essential part of Africa's Internet ecosystem.

In light of the rapid growth experienced by the continent in the past ten years, the report finds that the time is right to maximize that potential.

"As Africa's user base grows, the need to coordinate and manage the growth and development of the Internet becomes increasingly important," said Dawit Bekele, Internet Society Regional Bureau Director for Africa. "If Africa has to make the progression towards a digital economy to reap the full benefits of the Internet, it needs to transition from basic connectivity to interconnectivity of networks and to interoperability of systems, and enable the development of applications and services that drive economic and social well-being."

The report highlights steady adoption of this transformative technology since the introduction of the Internet to Africa in 1991, reaching just over 20% continent-wide, but these aggregate indicators mask glaring disparities in Internet development levels from country to country. Morocco has Internet penetration rates above 50%, while other African countries have penetration rates just under 2%. The majority of countries have Internet penetration below 10%--well below the 20% threshold found to be critical for countries to reap economic benefits.

IXPs
One of the ways, identified by the report, to improve the interconnectivity of networks is to establish Internet eXchange Points (IXPs) at the local level. Africa now has more than 30 IXPs and is well on the way to achieving the goal of at least one IXP per country. The establishment of IXPs can catalyze the build-out of terrestrial infrastructure which in turn would make access to the Internet cheaper and faster.

One example of this effort is the East African Backhaul System (EABS), which will serve Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi. Through this infrastructure, the landlocked countries of Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi have established backbones that gain access to submarine fiber almost at the same price as that of the coastal countries.

Digital Broadcasting
An area that could be transitioned faster is the migration from analogue to digital broadcasting, which offers more opportunities to increase Internet access by freeing up unused spectrum. By June 2014, only 19 countries had started on the digital transition and by December 2014 only three countries (Tanzania, Rwanda and Mauritius) had completely switched off their analogue signals. As such, the majority of countries will not meet the ITU's June 2015 deadline.

IPv6
Another recommendation contained in the report is that the transition to and adoption of IPv6 in Africa should be accelerated. By ensuring that there are enough IP addresses to cater to current and future expansion of the Internet, IPv6 will enable the Internet-of-Things (IoT) or the Internet of Everything (IoE), which refers to the ability to connect to the Internet anything capable of having an IP address. Statistics show that South Africa and Egypt account for 97% of the uptake to date, which means all other countries are lagging behind with regards to IPv6 adoption.

Internet Governance
As Africa's infrastructure and user base grows, the need to coordinate and manage the growth and development of the Internet becomes increasingly important. Several institutions and processes have emerged over the last 15 years, each playing a role in strengthening Africa's Internet ecosystem. Africa has embraced the multistakeholder model of Internet governance, which enables policymakers to draw from the expertise of the relevant stakeholders to develop sustainable Internet public policy approaches that can meet the policy challenges of the digital age.

This year has seen several significant milestones for Internet governance and development. Among these, the African Union has launched its Agenda 2065, which outlines development objectives for the next 50 years, and the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals, which end in 2015, will now be replaced by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Further, the UN General Assembly will make a determination on whether or not to extend the mandate of the Internet Governance Forum, an outgrowth the World Summit on the Information Society, which marks its 10th anniversary this year.

 "The growth in Internet access in Africa since 2005 can be attributed in part to the strengthening of existing institutions, the emergence of regional and national IGFs and the increased commitment of African governments to ICT development," concludes the report. "As Africa continues to make further strides in building its Internet economy, the multistakeholder model will continue to be an important element of helping Africa reach a critical mass of access and usage that can translate into sustained economic benefit."

About the Internet Society
The Internet Society, http://www.internetsociety.org, is the trusted independent source for Internet information and thought leadership around the world. It is also the organizational home for the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF). With its principled vision, substantial technological foundation and its global presence, the Internet Society promotes open dialogue on Internet policy, technology, and future development among users, companies, governments, and other organizations. Working with its members and Chapters around the world, the Internet Society enables the continued evolution and growth of the Internet for everyone.

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